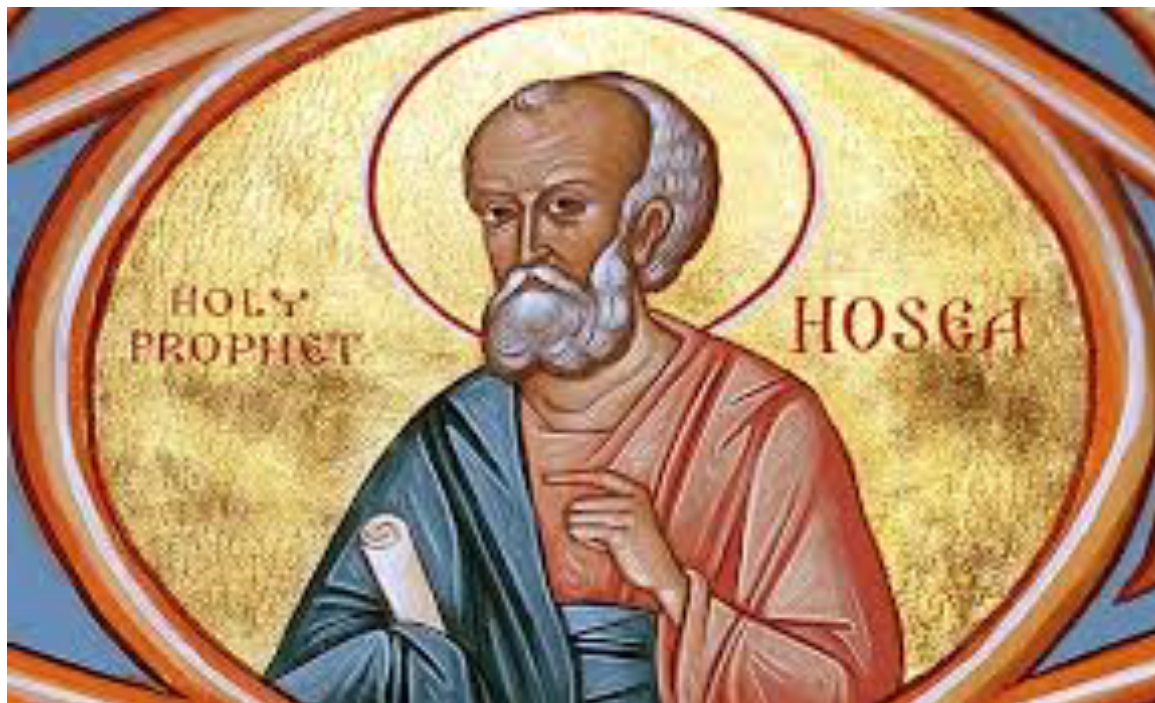


05. Hosea 5-9



Hosea 5:1-7

Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For you are responsible for passing just judgments. Indeed, you have been a snare for Mizpah, a net spread upon Tabor, a pit dug deep in Shittim. I will punish all of you. I know Ephraim, Israel is not hidden from me. Because you, O Ephraim, have played the whore, Israel is defiled. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is at work in their midst, so that they do not know YHWH. Israel's pride testifies against him; Ephraim stumbles over his guilt. Judah also stumbles with them. With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek YHWH, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt faithlessly with YHWH, for they have borne illegitimate children. The new moon will see their fields devoured.

Hosea 5:8-10

Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; look behind you, Benjamin! Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure. The princes of Judah have become like those who remove the landmark; on them I will pour out my wrath like water.

The danger is from the south. Gibeah is 5ks north of Jerusalem; Ramah a further 3ks, and Bethel ('Beth-aven', see 4:15) a further 8ks. All three towns are in Benjamin. In 734 Tiglath-Pileser III had conquered Philistia and the Mediterranean coastline of Israel. Israel entered into an alliance with Syria (Aram) and tried to force Judah to join. In 733 the Assyrians invaded and conquered Gilead, Galilee, and the Valley of Jezreel. Israel, reduced to the highlands of Ephraim and Manasseh, had to withdraw from Judah. What we witness in verse 8 appears to be Judah's counter-attack.

Hosea 5:11-13

Ephraim is oppressed, justice is crushed, because he was determined to go after vanity. Therefore I am like an infection to Ephraim, and like rotteness to the house of Judah. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound.

Pekah has been assassinated and Hoshea, the new king, is paying tribute to Assyria.

Hosea 5:14-15

For I am like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I myself will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue. I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favour.

Hosea 6:1-5

“Come, let us return to YHWH;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day (Exodus 19:11-16) he will raise us up,
that we may live in his presence.

Let us know, let us press on to know YHWH;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he is coming to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.”

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?

What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your covenant love is like a morning cloud (fickle),
like the dew that goes away early.

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the
words of my mouth, and my just judgment goes forth as the light.

Hosea 6:6 (see Matthew 9:13; 12:7)

For I desire covenant love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:7-11

But at Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me. Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. As robbers lie in ambush, so does the band of priests. They murder on the road to Shechem, they commit a monstrous crime. In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there, Israel is defiled. For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.

Hosea 7:1-4

Whenever I restored the fortunes of my people, whenever I would heal Israel, the corruption of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds of Samaria; for they deal falsely: the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside. But they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness. Now their deeds surround them, they are before my face. By their wickedness they make the king glad, and the officials by their treachery. They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven, whose baker does not need to stir the fire, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.

Is verse 4 commenting on the assassination of King Pekah by Hoshea, and Hoshea's looking to Assyria rather than to YHWH? This required a replacement of the court officials who had supported Pekah's anti-Assyrian stance. The new regime are called 'adulterers' because they are unfaithful to the covenant.

Hosea 7:5-9

On the day of our king the officials became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers. For they are kindled like an oven, their heart burns within them; all night their anger smoulders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen; none of them calls upon me. Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Foreigners devour his strength, but he does not know it; grey hairs have caught up with him, but he is unaware.

Cake in the oven needs to be turned. Ephraim shows no signs of real conversion ('turning'). Even the 'grey hairs' caused by sudden fright have not brought them to their senses.

Hosea 7:10-12

Israel's pride testifies against him; yet, for all this, they do not return to YHWH their God, or seek him. Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria. As they go, I will cast my net over them; I will bring them down like birds of the air; I will discipline them according to the report of their wickedness.

Pekah looked to Egypt. Now Hoshea is looking to Assyria. Israel is too stupid to know where its real security lies. They flutter around heading first in one direction, then in the other. YHWH will catch them in his net. They will have to pay the price of their infidelity.

Hosea 7:13-16

Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!

Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me!

I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me.

They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds;
they gash themselves for grain and wine; they rebel against me.

It was I who trained and strengthened their arms,
yet they plot evil against me.

They turn to that which does not profit;

they have become like a defective bow;

their officials shall fall by the sword because of the rage of their tongue.

So much for their babbling in the land of Egypt.

Hosea 8:1

Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of YHWH, because they have broken my covenant, and rebelled against my law.

This agitated summons is focused on the 'vulture', Assyria. Skirmishes with Judah are no longer the concern. The historical setting is the massive invasion of 733. The 'house of YHWH' refers to the land (YHWH's land, 2:8). Hosea immediately names the cause of the catastrophe: 'they have broken my covenant (see 6:7) and rebelled against my law' (see 4:6). Salvation for Israel can come only from YHWH, and so through being faithful to the covenant.

Hosea 8:2-4

Israel cries to me, “My God, we – Israel – know you!” Israel rejects the good; the enemy shall pursue him. They made kings, but not through me; they set up princes, but without my knowledge. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.

Cries to YHWH in the cult (see 6:1-3) are of no use when, at the same time, ‘Israel rejects the good’. In rejecting what is good Israel forfeits the blessings that come only from YHWH.

The looming catastrophe will not be avoided by revolution that assassinates one king, Pekah, and replaces him by another, Hoshea (see 7:3-7). Not only do they make their own kings without regard to YHWH’s will, they make their own gods!

Hosea 8:5-6

Your calf is rejected, O Samaria My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? 6They are from Israel! An artisan made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces.

The calf of Samaria (the idol set up in the royal sanctuary of Bethel, 1Kings 12:29) is highlighted because the second calf, that of Dan, has already been lost with the occupation of Galilee by the Assyrian army. Though, like the golden calf of the wilderness journey, it was worshipped in the cult as a god (see Exodus 32:4,8; 1Kings 12:28), Hosea declares that it is made by a craftsman: 'it is not God'.

Hosea 8:7

They sow the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind.
The standing grain has no heads, it shall yield no meal; if it were to yield, foreigners would devour it.

Hosea 8:8-12

Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations as a useless vessel. For they have gone up to Assyria. A wild ass wanders alone; Ephraim has bargained for lovers. Though they bargain with the nations, I will now gather them up. They shall soon writhe under the burden of the king of princes. Indeed Ephraim multiplied altars to expiate sin, they became to him altars for sinning. Though I write for him the multitude of my instructions, they are regarded as something alien.

Hosea appears to be familiar with a written form of Torah. Is this a comment on the first stages of what was to become the Book of Deuteronomy?

Hosea 8:13-14

‘Though they offer choice sacrifices, though they eat flesh,
YHWH does not accept them.

Now he will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins;
they will return to Egypt.

Israel has forgotten his Maker, and built palaces;
and Judah has multiplied fortified cities;
but I will send a fire upon his cities,
and it shall devour his strongholds’.

The ‘choice sacrifices’ are the communion sacrifices in which part of the animal was burnt in sacrifice and the rest was shared in a meal that was celebrated as a communion with God. YHWH will not accept them. They must face judgment, and ‘return to Egypt’ – a powerful symbol for a returning to slavery and a complete undoing of the history of salvation that began when YHWH liberated them from Egypt.

Hosea 9:1-6

Do not rejoice, O Israel! Do not exult as other nations do; for you have played the whore, departing from your God. You have loved a prostitute's pay on every threshing floor. Threshing floor and oil press shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them. They shall not remain in the land of YHWH; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food. They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to YHWH, and their sacrifices shall not please him. Such sacrifices shall be like mourners' bread; all who eat of it shall be defiled; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of YHWH. What will you do on the day of appointed festival, and on the day of the festival of YHWH? For even if they escape destruction, Egypt shall gather them, Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.

Isaiah 9:7-9

The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have come; Israel cries, “The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!” Because of your great iniquity, the hostility is great. The prophet is a sentinel for my God over Ephraim, yet a fowler’s snare is on all his ways, and hostility in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah; he will remember their iniquity, he will punish their sins.

Mention of ‘Gibeah’ recalls the horrible treatment of the Levite recorded in Judges 19-21. Things are no better now, says Hosea. God cannot let their iniquity go unpunished.

Hosea 9:10-14

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I discovered your ancestors (see Deuteronomy 32:10). **But** they came to Baal-peor (Deuteronomy 4:3; Numbers 25:1-5), and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved. Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a flock of birds – no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them until no one is left. **Woe to them indeed when I depart from them!** Once I saw Ephraim as a young palm planted in a lovely meadow, but now Ephraim must lead out his children for slaughter.

Give them, YHWH – what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

The prophet intercedes. Better no children than children to endure the threatened punishment!

Isaiah 9:15-17

Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal; there I came to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. **I will love them no more**; all their officials are rebels. Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will kill the cherished offspring of their womb. Because they have not listened to him, my God will reject them; they shall become wanderers among the nations.