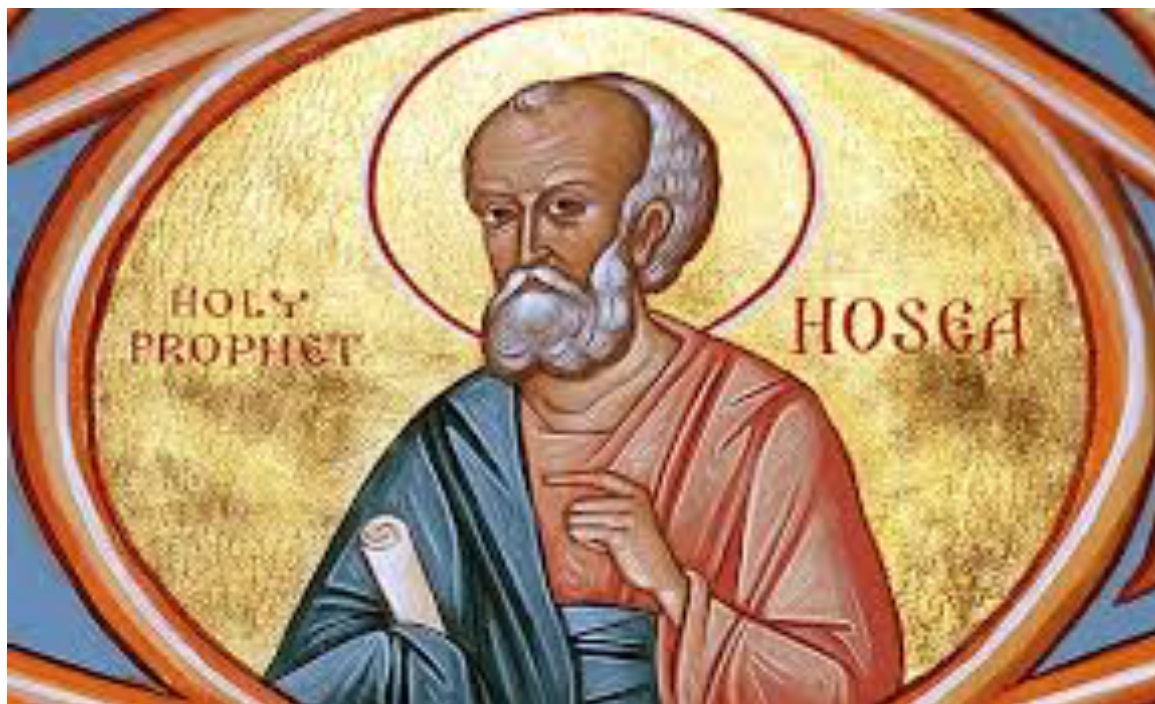


10 Hosea 10-14



Hosea 10:1-6

Israel was a luxuriant vine that yielded its fruit. The more fruit he produced, the more he supplied for the altars. As his country improved, he improved his pillars. **Their heart is false**; now they must bear their guilt. He himself will break down their altars, and destroy their pillars. Indeed, now they will say: “We have no king, for we do not fear YHWH, and a king – what could he do for us?” Uttering words. Committing perjury. Making treaties. So justice springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field. The inhabitants of Samaria worship the calf of Beth-aven (Bethel, as ‘house of wickedness’). Indeed, its people shall mourn for it, and its idolatrous priests exult because of its splendour. Indeed, it departs from it. The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king.

Hosea 10:7-8

Samaria is destroyed. Its king is swept away like a twig on the surface of the water. The high places of Aven, of Israel's sin, will be destroyed. Thorn and thistle grow on their altars. They will say to the mountains, "Cover us", and to the hills, "Fall on us."

There is no escaping the devastation. Such will be the horror of it that people will long for death rather than have to endure it.

Luke 23:28-30

Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'

Revelation 9:6

In those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

Hosea 10:9-11

Since the days of Gibeah (see 9:9) you have sinned, O Israel. Nothing has changed. Will not war overtake them in Gibeah, because of the transgressors? I will come to punish them; nations shall be gathered against them when they are punished for their double iniquity. Ephraim was a trained heifer that loved to thresh. When I passed by and noticed her fair neck, I wanted to harness Ephraim. Judah must plough; Jacob must harrow.

YHWH found Ephraim. He noticed her fair (strong) neck and judged she would be of use, so he wanted to harness her to cultivate his land (Canaan).

Hosea 10:12-15

Sow for yourselves justice; reap covenant love.

Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek YHWH,
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

You have ploughed wickedness, you have reaped injustice,
you have eaten the fruit of lies. Indeed, you trusted in your power
and in the multitude of your warriors. Thus the tumult of war shall
rise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,
as Shalman (only here) destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle
when mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.

Thus it shall be done to you, O house of Israel, because of your great
wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.

King Hoshea of Israel was taken captive in 724 by Shalmaneser V
before the siege of Samaria (see 2Kings 17:4)

Hosea 11 : YHWH's faithful love

Hosea 11:1-7

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they strayed from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and sent up the smoke of sacrifice to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I cared for them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like one who lifts an infant to his cheek. I bent down to him to feed him.

He turns to the land of Egypt (727, King Hoshea, 2Kings 17:4), but Assyria is his king. For they refuse to return to me. The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. My people are bent on turning away from me. To the high god (Baal) they call, but he does not raise them up at all.

Hosea 11:8

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

With the coastal area lost to Tiglath-pileser III in 734, and Gilead and Galilee, as well as the Valley of Jezreel the following year, and now with Shalmaneser V attacking the highlands, it is not surprising that Hosea would compare the situation to the utter annihilation of the cities of the Dead Sea area (see Deuteronomy 29:23). Surely, YHWH would not allow things to go that far! He loves Israel too much.

Hosea 11:9

I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not human, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

Being God 'the Holy One', YHWH's decisions are not linked with those of Israel. His will, his intentions, transcend the decisions and indecisions of people. He must chastise in order to prevent Israel hurtling to its own destruction, but his chastisement is always with a view to repentance, not annihilation. Even if Israel does not repent, YHWH's decision is his own to make and to carry out. YHWH will be faithful to his commitments, even if Israel is not.

Hosea 11:10-12

They will go after YHWH, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says YHWH. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One.

The future will be determined, not by Israel's infidelity, but by the fidelity of YHWH (compare 3:5). The exiles will come back, filled with awe at the power and fidelity of their God.

As a true prophet, Hosea must warn the people. But, again as a true prophet, his focus is always on YHWH, declared here to be a God of love who is faithful, however foolish his people have been and continue to be.

Hosea 12:1-2

Ephraim herds the wind, and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence. They make a treaty with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt. YHWH has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and repay him according to his deeds.

Hosea 12:3-6

In the womb Jacob tried to supplant his brother (Genesis 25:26)
and in his manhood he strove with God (Genesis 32:22-32).
who proved himself lord and prevailed.
He wept and sought his favour .

YHWH met Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-32),
and there he speaks with him (Genesis 32:26)

YHWH the God of hosts, YHWH is his name!

But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to covenant love
and just judgments, and wait continually upon your God.

Hosea 12:7-10

Canaan (= Israel as 'trader'), in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress. But Ephraim says, "Ah, I am rich, I have gained wealth for myself; in all of my gain no offence has been found in me that would be sin." But I am YHWH your God from the land of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of meeting. I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets I will proclaim destruction.

Israel's guilt is reinforced by the fact that YHWH has constantly communicated his will to them through the prophets, to whom they obstinately refused to listen. YHWH is still speaking to them (notably through Hosea). They continue to ignore his warnings.

Hosea 12:11-14

In Gilead there is iniquity, they shall surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls, so their altars shall be like stone heaps on the furrows of the field. In Gilead there is iniquity, they shall surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls, so their altars shall be like stone heaps on the furrows of the field. Jacob fled to the land of Aram, there Israel became a servant for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep. By a prophet YHWH brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was tended. Ephraim has given bitter offence, so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him and pay him back for his insults.

Again Hosea draws on the legends attached to Jacob (see Genesis 29:15-30). Hosea stresses two aspects of the story that he sees as relevant to what Israel is doing. Firstly, Jacob left YHWH's land and fled to Aram (seeking help from a foreign power). Secondly he did it 'for a wife'. We are back with the metaphor of YHWH's unfaithful spouse.

Hosea 13:1-3

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel; but he incurred guilt with the Baal and died. And now they keep on sinning and make a cast image for themselves, idols of silver made according to their understanding, all of them the work of artisans. “Sacrifice to these,” they say. People are kissing calves! Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes away early, like chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window.

Verse 1 remembers the time when Ephraim (which includes the royal city, Samaria) was the dominant power in the northern and southern kingdoms. The expression ‘he died’, and a number of other allusions in chapter 13, suggest a time after Hoshea had been taken captive by Shalmaneser V, and perhaps even after the beginning of the siege of Samaria. This suggests the year 724 for this oracle, at the end of Hosea’s prophetic ministry.

Hosea 13:4-6

I have been YHWH your God ever since the land of Egypt;
you know no God but me, and besides me there is no saviour.
It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.
When I fed them, they were satisfied;
they were satisfied, and their heart was proud;
therefore they forgot me.

In verse 4 YHWH proclaims that he is Ephraim's only God and saviour. Israel is reminded of YHWH's care for them in the long wilderness journey (compare Deuteronomy 8:11-20; 6:12-19). Instead of relying on YHWH, however, they grew proud and forgot him.

Hosea 13:7-11

So I became like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them. I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you? Where now is your king, that he may save you? Where in all your cities are your rulers, of whom you said, “Give me a king and rulers”? I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.

The Hebrew Bible shows two reactions to kingship. One sees it as YHWH's response to the people's request. The other is more critical, and sees kingship as a rejection of the lordship of YHWH. Hosea seems to be aligning himself with the second view. It is likely that the king whom YHWH 'took away in my wrath' is Hoshea, taken into captivity by Shalmaneser (see 2Kings 17:4).

Hosea 13:12-14

Ephraim's iniquity is bound up; his sin is kept in store. The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for at the proper time he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb.

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?

Shall I redeem them from Death?

O Death, where are your plagues? (Bring them on!)

O Sheol, where are your scourges? (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

The womb that was to give birth is a tomb from which there is no redemption. YHWH appears to be calling on Assyria, called here 'Death' and 'Sheol'(the underworld land of the dead), to do its worst. The time for 'compassion' is over. YHWH is handing Ephraim over to the death-dealing power ('plagues' and 'scourges') of Assyria.

Hosea 13:15-16

Indeed, though he may flourish among rushes, the east wind comes, a blast from YHWH, rising from the wilderness. His fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched. It shall strip his treasury of every precious thing. Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

In 725 King Hoshea had turned towards Egypt. This seemed to bring hope as Ephraim 'flourished among the reeds'. However YHWH is behind the 'east wind'(Assyria) which is drying up all sources of life in Ephraim.

Hosea 14:1-4

Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God.
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
Take words with you and return to YHWH;
say to him, “Will you not take away guilt?
Accept the word. We offer the fruit of our lips.
Assyria will not save us; we will not ride upon horses;
we will no longer say ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.”

I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.

Hosea 14:5-9

I will be as dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily,
strike root like the forests of Lebanon.

His shoots will spread out; his beauty will be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.

They will again live beneath my shade, they will flourish as a garden;
they will blossom like the vine,
their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon.

O Ephraim, what have you to do with idols?

It is I who answer and look after you.

I am like an evergreen cypress; your fruit comes from me.

Who is so wise as to understand these things?

so discerning as to know them? Indeed, the ways of YHWH are right.

The upright walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.