

HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

by S. Franklin Logsdon

"For Israel hath forgotten his maker." (Hosea 8:14)

"My people have forgotten me days without number." (Jeremiah 2:32)

Moody Colportage Library 386

COPYRIGHT @ 1959

by

THE MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE CHICAGO

CHAPTER ELEVEN -

THE VINE THAT WITHERED (Hosea 10)

THE READER WILL HAVE OBSERVED how the descriptive metaphors abound in the Book of Hosea. The people have already been referred to in such figures as a backsliding heifer (4:16), a treacherous dealer (5:7), a sick man (5:13), adulterers (7:4), a cake not turned (7:8), and a silly dove (7:11). Now we are told that **"Israel is an empty vine"** (v. 1).

The word "fruitful" might better fit the picture. Jacob set an imposing precedent for business acumen, and his descendants have become famous for their dexterity in successful enterprise - in finance, in business, in industry. They have had through the centuries an almost uncanny ability to prosper even in the midst of adversity. Handicap only challenges their initiative. Thus, in the days of Hosea, in spite of the famines and plagues, they found it possible to produce - so much so, in fact, that they were referred to as a luxuriant vine.

The complaint of the LORD was not that they were fruitful, but that they were selfish. They used their income for self-enjoyment, and that of a very corrupting nature. As their fruitfulness increased, their altars multiplied and their **"goodly images"** became more numerous (v. 1).

This is the usual course. More wealth, less worship; more substance, less submission. There are notable exceptions, of course, but this seems to be the general pattern, since the deceitfulness of riches is prone to drown devotion to GOD.

The spiritual implications become more apparent in verse 2. Their hearts were divided. Their idols had wrought havoc. The nefarious influence of idolatry had deflected the affections of the people from the LORD. This explains why they did not cry unto Him with their hearts (7:14). Many kinds of heart conditions are mentioned in the Scriptures. The heart may be pure, upright, clean, wise. Or, it may be panting, burning, rejoicing.

Again, it may be smitten, wounded, proud, sick. It may be either whole (Psalm 9:1), or it may be divided (v. 2). A double heart is a deceitful heart. It attempts to embrace divergent interests, to espouse opposite ideologies. The Galatians subscribed to both Judaism and Christianity.

It was Hosea's responsibility to inform his people that their guilt would be discovered; that their altars of shame would be broken down; that their idolatrous images would be destroyed (v. 2). He announced further that the day would come when they would be forced to lament, "**We have no king**" (v. 3). The reason, he emphasized, would be very clear. They will confess, "**We feared not the LORD**" (v. 3). The kings whom they desired, demanded and followed, led them to a disastrous end. They had no deliverance to offer the people in the hour of distress.

How different it was with their forefathers who had a godly king! "**And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented** [bitter of heart], **gathered themselves unto him** [David]; **and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men**" (I Samuel 22:2). But here is a people in a dark hour without a king to help and without even their false means of worship. The secular supports are gone. They must fall back either upon GOD or upon nothing. And how can they fall back upon Him whom they have rejected? Their kings "**[swore] falsely**" in pledging allegiance to the Assyrian monarch while making a treaty with the Egyptians.

"**Thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field**" (v. 4). The second invasion of Shalmaneser is imminent, and this instrument of divine chastening would be bitter indeed. It is likened unto hemlock, a poisonous plant which grows in waste places along banks, under walls. It is said to be fatal to cows when they eat it. In humans it causes paralysis, convulsions and death. It is presumed to be the poison administered to Socrates. And the word "**furrows**" is not the word we meet in verse 10. Here it means "to accumulate," as water filling an excavation during a severe downpour of rain. Yet, in spite of the terrifying aspects of the prophecy, there was no perceptible concern about the message which Hosea faithfully presented to them.

The prophecy anticipated the mental attitude and heart reaction of the people of Samaria when the invaders would seize the (golden) calf of Beth-aven. There would be (superstitious) fearfulness and mourning (v. 5) as the idol over which the priests rejoiced was carried away. There is no lasting pleasure in anything that is not ordained of the LORD. "**The world** [with all its vaunted pleasure] **passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of GOD abideth forever**" (I John 2:17).

The worthlessness of idols is seen in that instead of protecting its worshipers from deportation, the calf itself is carried away by the heathen, much to the dismay and shame of Israel (v. 6). But not only was the idol of no help in their hour of need, their king likewise is utterly unable to give assistance. He is cut off "**as the foam upon the water.**" He is as unstable and as useless as bubbles whipped up by lashing waves on the surface of the sea.

A striking enemy aims to destroy points of vital interest. The "**high places**" were very close to the hearts of these idolatrous people. This spiritual perversion raged like a forest fire out of control, but the enemy will soon destroy these idols at Aven (Bethel). Aven means emptiness;

Bethel, the house of the LORD. What had been the house of the LORD had become a place of vanity. And this is precisely what happens in any day when the people conduct themselves contrary to GOD's Word. Apostate Christendom has yet to learn the truth of this lesson.

The gold and silver they had invested in idols would prove a total loss; and the lack of them would leave only a dismal void in their hearts. With nothing to gratify, they would prefer death to life. They would look to the mountains and plead for them to fall on them, and cover them, and hide them from the wrath of GOD (cf. Hebrews 10:31; Revelation 6:16-17).

"O Israel," the LORD laments through the prophet, "**thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah**" (v. 9). In that day of civil strife, the people of GOD, instead of allying themselves against the "**children of iniquity**," fought against each other. "**And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin**" (Judges 20:20). This was approximately 650 years before, thus suggesting the indescribable longsuffering of the LORD. There can be no alternative at this time. Divine judgment must fall. Both Israel and Judah must become fellow sufferers in captivity. They must trudge along together in the path of hardship since they fell together in the same condemning sin.

As a yoke of oxen, each in his own furrow, bearing an identical burden in the same field, they must feel the goading of their captors.

There should be no element of surprise in this announced judgment. The people are reminded of the lengthy duration of their wicked ways. They had been warned continuously. "**Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them**" (Malachi 3:7). Throughout their history there was ever a bold disregard of divine warning. JEHOVAH does not need to justify the rod, but He does clearly reveal the necessity for it.

We remind that the word "**furrows**" in verse 10 is to be distinguished from the references in 10:4 and 12:11. Its primary meaning here has to do with alienation and breach of promise. This being true, and since "bind" means to be "put in bonds," and "two" means "dual," it may better read, "They shall put themselves in bonds by their duality [divided heart, v. 2], their double lives alienating them from GOD."

They will actually eat the fruit of their own ways (Proverbs 1:31). They will reap what they have sown.

- Pharaoh drowned babies and was himself drowned in the Red Sea.
- Haman made a gallows and died thereon.
- Adonibezek amputated the thumbs and great toes of seventy kings only to suffer like treatment (Judges 1:6).

"**God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap**" (Galatians 6:7).

Verse 11 is a preview of their experience in captivity. It pictures the hard labor to which the people will be subjected, and shows how Ephraim will attempt to escape the more severe toils. Since treading grain on the threshingfloor is less strenuous than ploughing the soil, through clever manipulation he thought he could spare himself the greater hardships. Then too as the

heifer, privileged by no muzzle, could eat the corn, Ephraim hoped to inveigle from his captors some degree of privilege.

"**Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught**" would indicate knowledge by experience. But quickness of wit and clever intrigue will avail nothing in this instance. This is divine judgment. GOD says, "**but I passed [the Assyrian yoke] over upon her fair neck**" (v. 11). Those who are bold in their rebellion against GOD entertain vain thoughts. "**With our tongue will we prevail**" (Psalm 12:4) is a sample of their wishful thinking. Ephraim's hopes of escaping severity will be dashed to the earth. The Assyrians will prove themselves harsh taskmasters.

In spite of their increasing indignities, their undiminishing indifference, and the approaching zero hour of judgment, divine compassion leaps the barrier of their obduracy and grants the people one further opportunity to repent. "**Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy**" is the gracious entreaty. With what excited passion Hosea pressed this challenge upon them! But they would have none of it. Their faith had been shattered. Idolatry had taken its toll.

They either placed no credence in what GOD said, or they lacked confidence in the accuracy and sincerity of the prophet. They either felt that judgment would not actually come, or if it did they would survive somehow. They displayed no concern. It is difficult indeed to analyze the attitude of obstinate unbelievers. "**Everyone turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle**" (Jeremiah 8:6).

Thus the offer of GOD was spurned.

"**Break up your fallow ground,**" the prophet exhorts (v. 12). "**Fallow ground**" was ploughed soil, neglected to the point that the sun had baked it and the thorns had cluttered it (Jeremiah 4:3), making it unfit for sowing.

The imagery would indicate some effort expended in the right direction, then interrupted before the proper end was accomplished. Every age has those who make some move toward spiritual enterprise without getting beyond the initial step. "**Ye did run well; who did hinder you?**" (Galatians 5:7), Paul demanded of the Galatians.

With Ephraim the semblance of orthodoxy was faint indeed. The heart was divided; the worship was idolatrous. A "breaking up" was necessary. This could have been accomplished by their seeking the LORD as Hosea pleaded (v. 12). This would have stayed the judgment. The LORD would have come and rained righteousness upon them (v. 12).

Perhaps in any other realm, the cause would have been given up as lost. However, the prophet ceases not to warn. "**Ye have plowed wickedness; ye have reaped iniquity,**" he continues to point out. It was a harvest of superstitions and vices. The proof of their perversions could not be denied. They subscribed to the false; they were about to suffer for their folly. Trust in their idols and confidence in their standing armies would only mock them in their misery.

Their pseudo saviors were helpless to spare Samaria from the hand of Shalmaneser. The case of Beth-arbel was but the predeveloped picture of the ensuing calamity at Bethel. The mother being dashed in pieces upon her children (v. 14) explains how the idols which they had begotten would

be the cause of their downfall. The king of Israel (Hoshea) would be captured readily; indeed as quickly as the dawn is put to flight by the rising sun (6:4; 13:3). Those whose trust is not in the LORD have no safe refuge (Proverbs 18:10).

~ end of chapter 11 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
