

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)

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CHAPTER TEN -

THE SUPERFICIAL JOY OF THE PEOPLE (Hosea 9)

"Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people."

THUS THE CHAPTER BEGINS. And this is more than a word of caution. People are not, as a rule, rapturous on the eve of predicted sorrow; that is, if they place any credence at all in such a report. A convict would not shout for joy on the threshold of his execution. Tragedy has often knocked abruptly at doors, on the inside of which gaiety and revelry held sway; as for instance, the sacrilegious party of Belshazzar (Daniel 5:3, 4, 5, 30). Or, in more recent times, the sinking of the Titanic.

There were apparently intermittent periods of prosperity during the sixty years of Hosea's prophesying. Yet at such times, the people showed no disposition to hear the voice of GOD's Word (Jeremiah 22:21). They were bent upon gorging their depraved souls at the table of the gods as long as the opportunity lasted. The LORD warned that such revelry must be curbed. When He said, **"Rejoice not, O Israel,"** it was unmitigated rebuke, as when an earthly father speaks firmly in reproof of an ironic grin on the countenance of the son whom chastening.

Although described as **"a whoring from thy God"** (v. 1), they nevertheless expected an abundance of harvest on their threshing floors. It rather strains the intellect in an attempt to comprehend why those who have no love nor time for GOD expect Him to give them rain for their fields, sunshine for their pleasure, and health to pursue their course away from Him. This was the status quo in Israel.

It was painfully disillusioning, but little believed, when the prophet told them pointedly that their fields would not produce (v. 2). And not only so, they would not be in the land at harvest time. They would be banished either to Egypt or Assyria under conditions similar to those which

prevailed in the Egyptian bondage of their forefathers. (The reader may want to compare Hosea 8:13; 9:3; 11:5 with Deuteronomy 28:36.)

The salient feature about verse 3 is the firmness of divine address, occasioned by the people's levity. He tells them bluntly, instead of feasting on the clean food (Kosher prepared) of their own, they would be subsisting on the (ceremonially) unclean food of their captors.

Verses 4, 5 and 6 have to do with worship; and since it is stated that "**they are all** [spiritual] **adulterers**" (7:4), their observances could not be acceptable. This fact is reaffirmed in verse 4. The "sacrifices" were but imitations of the Levitical design, and likened unto "**the bread of mourners**." While this expression is idiomatic of uncleanness, it has a simple connotation which must not be overlooked. The food of a mourner is never enjoyed. It is never satisfying.

He only eats because necessity drives him or the insistence of others induces him. This is obviously characteristic of an unspiritual man attempting to do something for GOD when his heart is not in it. His articulate thoughts, which betray his real attitude, are summed up in these words: "**What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?**" (Malachi 3:14).

All who espouse unorthodoxy, in spite of outward appearances and in spite of motives and intentions, are certain to corrupt themselves by their very involvement. They neither please GOD nor profit themselves, "**for their bread for their soul shall not come**" by imitation or pretense, even though they are in "**the house of the LORD**" (v. 4).

Religious devotion can be strong enough to survive the most prohibiting conditions. It burns in the heart of man with much intensity, ignoring threats, even defying death itself. But what will Israel do regarding the feasts of the LORD? How can they observe the solemn occasions (v. 5)? In fellowship with JEHOVAH or out of fellowship, orthodox or unorthodox in their living habits, they nevertheless observed with meticulous regularity the "special" days of worship as they occurred.

The answer to this question has already been given: "**I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts**" (2:11). Conditions in captivity would render worship impossible. As in the Babylonian captivity, where they hanged their harps on willow trees and sat songless by the rivers, even so will they find themselves in utter despair.

Because of the brutality of the invaders, augmented perhaps by famine, deaths occurred in great numbers. The Egyptians gathered up the bodies and buried them at Memphis (v. 6). This confirms the fact that at least some were deported to Egypt. Memphis was a city of Egypt situated on the western bank of the Nile. The name itself is a compound of two hieroglyphics meaning "haven of the good," "tomb of the good man," or "the abode of the good."

What an ironical suggestion! Instead of being good, GOD termed them iniquitous and adulterous. The eulogistic funeral address of the deceased cannot improve his condition. As many of them go down to their death rebelling against GOD, they leave little but mockery in the homeland as a monument to their unspiritual activities.

The "**pleasant places** [of idolatry]" into which they poured their money (silver) become covered with thorns and thistles (v. 6). How important to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven where corrosives of passing time cannot corrupt!

Now the day of reckoning has come. Israel knows that this is the wrath of GOD being visited upon them (v. 7). The prophet Isaiah asked solemnly: "**And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help?**" (Isaiah 10:3).

"**The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad**" (v. 7) is a twofold characterization, the second part standing in apposition to the first. The definite article identifies a particular prophet. This points, then, not to the foolish false prophets who led them astray, but to the man of GOD who prophesied what they now recognize as having come to pass. The terminology is but a reflection of what they thought of the prophet who brought them the true facts. They considered him a fool for being a preacher of judgment to come. They looked upon the spiritual servant as being "mad," narrow-minded, fanatical. It is precisely the accusation which Festus hurled in the face of the apostle Paul: "**Thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad**" (Acts 26:24).

The reference to "**the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred**" refers to the degree of their idolatry and the extent of their punishment therefore. If the sentence meted out by the Judge of all men seemed stiff, let it be known that the provocation could not permit of anything less severe. There is no question but that they were held in derision and treated with much hatred by their captors, but only GOD could assess the seriousness of their transgressions. He is just.

In their disillusionment, knowing now that it is the hand of JEHOVAH upon them in chastening, they appraise the situation with an admixture of commendation and contempt - esteem for the true prophet, and bitterness for the false prophet. The former they know now to have been a "**watchman of Ephraim**" - one concerned about their spiritual welfare, or, as Church leaders are termed, those that "**watch for your souls**" (Hebrews 13:17).

They know now that he had been with their GOD (v. 8). The prophet for whom they have now such pronounced dislike is the one who (personally or representative of many) encouraged them in their waywardness. "The prophet" of verse 7 and "the prophet" of verse 8 are distinguishable by opposite descriptions in the context. The false prophet proved in the end to have been a snare. Instead of being a spiritual force in the assembly, he is now recognized as having been a scourge (hatred) "**in the house of his God**" (v. 8).

He who looks upon the heart declares: "**They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah**" (v. 9). Gibeah means "a hill"; and the unfavorable references to it may associate it with "**the high places**" (II Kings 12:3; 15:4, 35) which were so nauseating to the LORD who, remembering their perversions, will punish these leaders properly (v. 9).

From the beginning it was not so. There was a time, the LORD recalls, when His people were as refreshing to Him as a cluster of luscious grapes would be to one in a wilderness, or as tree-ripened figs are delicious to the taste of the hungry. How sadly has the complex of these

covenant people changed "**Woe to the crown of pride** [an overestimation of self], **to the drunkards of Ephraim** [intoxicated with idolatry], **whose glorious beauty is a fading flower**" (Isaiah 28:1).

Then the LORD, who did not refrain from publicizing all the sad facts concerning His people (Isaiah 1:2), puts His finger on one specific, filthy type of perversion: "**They went to Baal-peor, and separated** [involved] **themselves unto** [in] **that shame**" (v. 10). The character of this "shame" is discoverable; but, as the HOLY SPIRIT here does not define it, even so commentators are loath to make definite statements concerning it. It involved a degrading practice with young, unmarried women.

The record states: "**And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads** [presumably of those involved] **of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun**" (Numbers 25:3, 4). GOD moved with vigor to end this scourge.

While Isaiah spoke of Ephraim's glory "**fading**" (Isaiah 28:1), Hosea states: "**As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird**" (v. 11). Swift, intense, general, this judgment of the LORD was to plague their posterity at conception, during gestation and at birth (v. 11). And should children be reared, they would die untimely deaths (v. 12). Rebellion against GOD, with its tragic results, gives the offspring of Ephraim no brighter future than to be the victims of murderers (v. 13).

In verse 14, the prophet seems to interrupt the LORD with something of an involuntary, expulsive outburst:

"**Give them, O Lord-**." And then, words fail him. Moses too under similar conditions was hard pressed in laying bare his heart of concern before the LORD. Moses said:

"**Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin.**" And he too lacked utterance. If compassion is sorrow excited by the distress or misfortune of another, both Moses and Hosea were eminently compassionate.

"**Give them, O Lord-**," the prophet begins to plead.

Then abruptly his petition changes to inquiry: "**What wilt thou give?**" In substance, he is saying, "Under these circumstances, what could you possibly give?" Then, as the vision of slaughtered children strikes him, he pleads:

"**Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts**" (v. 14). He makes bold to request that the LORD miraculously prevent the birth of children. The request cannot be granted, but the prophet is in no wise reproved for his sincere intercession, as the LORD moves on to further condemn the lusts and abominations of the people.

Going back to the head waters of this polluted stream of licentious acts, JEHOVAH points to the place where He was first dethroned from the hearts. "**All their wickedness is [begun] in Gilgal,**" He says, "**for there I hated them**" (v. 15).

That is, He hated what they did. And what did they? There the leaders revolted; there they spurned the love of GOD. As a consequence, they must be driven from the land (v. 15). Blight will cover their fields; and the mortality rate of infants will be appalling (v. 16).

"**My God will cast them away,**" Hosea concludes in his own heart, as though he were reasoning, "GOD means what He says." And it is all because they would not hearken unto the LORD (v. 17). Who knew this better than Hosea, for he had communicated the LORD's message to them. He was a witness to the fact that they stopped their ears and hardened their hearts.

What essentially is the difference between the "stocks" (standing wooden idols, 4:12) which the Israelites espoused, and the unsightly totem poles which missionaries find today among the heathen? The fact that the actors in the former case were cultured and refined, and those in the latter ignorant and superstitious, does not alter the sad truth that both worshiped at the same profitless shrine. Israel's guilt was the blacker because she sinned not only against light but also against love.

What is to be the future of these dispersed people thrust from the land by the just judgment of GOD? "**They shall be wanderers among the nations**" (v. 17). "**I will scatter you among the heathen [Gentiles], and will draw a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste**" (Leviticus 26:33).

This was the prophecy. History records its fulfillment.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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