

Consequences for Wayward Believers

Hosea 10

Hosea 10:1-11 - *“Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself. According to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars. According to the bounty of his land they have embellished his sacred pillars. ² Their heart is divided. Now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars. ³ For now they say, “We have no king, because we did not fear the Lord. And as for a king, what would he do for us?” ⁴ They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant. Thus judgment springs up like hemlock in the furrows of the field.*

⁵ The inhabitants of Samaria fear because of the calf of Beth Aven. For its people mourn for it, and its priests shriek for it - because its glory has departed from it. ⁶ The idol also shall be carried to Assyria as a present for King Jareb. Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.

⁷ As for Samaria, her king is cut off like a twig on the water. ⁸ Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars. They shall say to the mountains, “Cover us!” And to the hills, “Fall on us!”

⁹ “O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah; there they stood. The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them.

¹⁰ When it is My desire, I will chasten them. Peoples shall be gathered against them when I bind them for their two transgressions. ¹¹ Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain but I harnessed her fair neck. I will make Ephraim pull a plow. Judah shall plow. Jacob shall break his clods.”

Background Notes

Hosea's prophetic ministry was primarily directed to the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th Century BC, when King Jeroboam II was on the throne. The northern kingdom is often referred to as Ephraim (as in verse 11), because Ephraim was the largest and most powerful tribe in the north. The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was the city of Samaria (v5&7).

Verse 5 says that the inhabitants of Samaria fear because of “the calf of Beth Aven.” After the reign of King Solomon the united monarchy divided, and the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I, set up two idolatrous golden calf shrines – one in the far north at Dan and the other at Bethel, near the border with the southern kingdom of Judah. The “two transgressions” in verse 10 may be a reference to the two idolatrous shrines.

Verse 5 referenced the calf shrine at Bethel, but notice how Hosea changed *Bethel* (meaning “house of God”) to *Beth Aven* (meaning “house of wickedness”) because of the idolatrous shrine. When the Assyrians conquered Israel, the calf idol was carried away as a present for Jareb, the great king of Assyria, probably Tiglath Pileser III (v6).

Verse 7 is very descriptive. *“As for Samaria, her king is cut off like a twig on the water.”* How many of us, as kids, used to throw twigs into fast moving streams of water and watch as they were rapidly carried away? King Hoshea, the last king of the northern kingdom, was swept away like a twig in a stream when Assyria came in like a flood. In fact, this whole unbiblical line of kings in the north, who were not from the line of Judah, would be cut off forever (v15). This prophecy has literally come true.

One more background note. I'll never forget experiencing the literal fulfillment of verse 8 on one of my early trips to the Holy Land. As an amateur would-be archaeologist, I traipsed all over the top of Tel Dan before it was excavated, knowing that somewhere below me were the ruins of one of Jeroboam's golden calf shrines. I was wearing shorts, and my legs were bleeding because the top of ancient tel was covered with thorns and thistles. It was living proof of the fulfillment of Hosea 10:8 – *“The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars.”*

Doctrinal Points

1. Wayward believers continue to go downhill.

As God's people, Israel was to bring forth spiritual fruit for the Lord, but instead they brought forth fruit for themselves. *“Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself. According to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars. According to the bounty of his land they have embellished his sacred pillars” (v1).*

The more material prosperity Israel enjoyed under Jeroboam II, the more they increased the number of idolatrous altars, and adorned their idols. Like Israel, our country enjoys material prosperity, and we believers must ask ourselves – am I spending time and money to increase and “adorn” idols in my life? Think it through.

Israel's word as a nation could no longer be trusted (v4). As God's people today, can our word be trusted?

Israel had gone so far downhill morally and spiritually that the people and the priests actually mourned for their calf idol when the Assyrians carried it away (v5). Would we be devastated if the Lord were to remove the idols we cherish?

In verse 9 God said that Israel had sinned from the days at Gibeah. Again, as in chapter 9, Hosea referenced the shameful event in Judges 19-20. More than 300 years had gone by since those days, but Israel had persisted in her immoral ways, and now the nation was ripe for judgment. Their idolatrous altars would be broken down (v2). Their king would be taken away (v3). Their fields would be poisoned (v4). Their glory would be changed to shame (v6).

The Assyrian invasion would be so sweeping that the people would cry to the mountains to fall on them, for death would be preferable to the cruelty of the Assyrian armies (v8). Verse 8 reminds us of Revelation 6:16, and the tribulation period of the last days.

In God's own time and way, He would discipline His people (v10). Just because they were getting away with sin in Hosea's time, that didn't mean they had escaped God's discipline. What a lesson for us! Maybe you're involved in sinful activity, and you think that no one knows, and you're getting away with it. But God has His own time and His own way of discipline.

God would have to put a heavy yoke of exile on Israel's neck (v11). Threshing is easy work and you can eat the grain as you work. But Israel continued to go downhill so they would have to do the hard work of plowing under the heavy yoke of exile.

Notice that the southern kingdom of Judah was also denounced (v11). All of this has obvious application for God's people today. The divided or deceitful heart (v2) doesn't remain static - it continues to go **downhill**. Let me ask you: Do you have a divided heart? Don't think that you can remain a comfortably low plateau as a believer, and just rest there. No way. Wayward believers continue to go downhill.

2. Wayward believers eat the fruit of lies.

Hosea 10:12-15 - *"Sow for yourselves righteousness. Reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you. ¹³ You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way in the multitude of your mighty men.*

¹⁴ Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle - mother dashed in pieces upon her children. ¹⁵ Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly."

The "Shalman" of verse 14 is probably either Shalmaneser III or Shalmaneser V. Both these Assyrian kings invaded Israel. Their cruel and atrocious activities included slaughtering innocent mothers and children.

Why were the people of Israel were *"eating the fruit of lies"*? *"Because you trusted in your own way in the multitude of your mighty men" (v13)*. They were trusting in themselves, and not in the Lord. Israel would reap what she had sown. She had sown wickedness; she would reap injustice. She had believed lies; she would eat the fruit of lies.

Does this have any application for us today? You bet it does! Galatians 6:7 states God's moral principle - without exception - *"Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."*

If you believe the lie that everything began with a Big Bang, you will eat the fruit that there is no ultimate meaning or purpose or value to human life. Are you eating the fruit of the lie that this world can satisfy you with all its things and

pleasures? Our culture is eating the fruit of the lie that “true freedom” comes when all restraints on behavior are eliminated. Look at the bondage and disease that comes when departing from God’s standards for sexual activity.

Unfortunately, even many of God’s people buy into these lies. Wayward believers eat the fruit of lies.

Practical Application

Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord.

This practical application comes right from verse 12: *“Sow for yourselves righteousness. Reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord.”*

This is God’s gracious call to repentance, and His promise of blessing - right in the midst in the message of judgment!

This has an application for unbelievers and for believers.

If you’re not a Christian: how long are you going to wait? *“Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord.”*

Break up your hard heart. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, *“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* Why wait? The Lord loved you enough to die for you, to pay for the penalty of your sin. Open up your hard heart. It is your time to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

The application for believers is obvious. Many Christians have hard hearts - and bitter hearts. Is that true of you? Have you lost your first love for the Lord? You’re doing your own thing. You’re trusting in yourself. Your life is not going well, and your heart is bitter. You have no joy. You have wandered away from the Lord, and you know it.

What’s the solution to your problem? Let the “plow” of God’s Word break up the hardness of your heart and return to the Lord. Open your heart, and begin to worship the Lord! **Word and Worship.** That’s the solution to your problem, wayward believer! *“Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord*