

God Rebukes His Wayward People Israel

Hosea 12

Hosea 12 - *"Ephraim feeds on the wind, and pursues the east wind. He daily increases lies and desolation. Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried to Egypt. ²"The Lord also brings a charge against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will recompense him. ³He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. ⁴Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us - ⁵that is, the Lord God of hosts. The Lord is His memorable name.*

⁶ So you, by the help of your God, return. Observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually.

⁷ "A cunning Canaanite! Deceitful scales are in his hand. He loves to oppress. ⁸ And Ephraim said, 'Surely I have become rich; I have found wealth for myself. In all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that is sin.'

⁹ "But I am the Lord your God, ever since the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast. ¹⁰ I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets." ¹¹ Though Gilead has idols - surely they are vanity. Though they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal, indeed their altars shall be heaps in the furrows of the field.

¹² Jacob fled to the country of Syria; Israel served for a spouse, and for a wife he tended sheep. ¹³ By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved. ¹⁴ Ephraim provoked Him to anger most bitterly. Therefore his Lord will leave the guilt of his bloodshed upon him, and return his reproach upon him."

Background Notes

"Ephraim feeds on the wind, and pursues the east wind" (v1). Ephraim was another name for the northern kingdom of Israel. Hosea's ministry was centered there during the reign of King Jeroboam II, in the 8th Century B.C. What is the idea in "feeding on wind" and "pursuing the east wind"? The next few paragraphs are from an article I wrote some years ago:

In Hosea 12:1 Israel is pictured as "feeding on wind." What does it mean to feed on wind? Did you ever try a wind sandwich? Wind doesn't satisfy your hunger or nourish your body. There are no nutrients or sustenance in wind! The people of Israel were feeding their souls with all the things of 'the good life,' and feeding their spirits with the words of false prophets. They were feeding on wind.

Hosea's day was much like today. There was plenty of exterior material prosperity, but the heart of the nation was morally and spiritually bankrupt. Instead of turning back to the Lord to satisfy their spiritual hunger, Israel continued to stuff themselves with the allurements and attractions of the surrounding pagan nations. They filled themselves with the all-too-appealing words of the false prophets. But all of it was wind. They ended up empty and starved.

In addition, Israel “pursued the east wind.” The east wind is the terrible and dreaded *sirocco* that blows in from the desert east of Israel. It comes with scorching and devastating heat. Instead of trying to escape or seek protection, Israel is pictured as actually chasing this destructive wind!

How was Israel pursuing the east wind? The rest of verse 1 gives an example. Israel was double-dealing with the great foreign powers of that day. She made a peace treaty with Assyria, but at the same time she exported oil to Egypt, Assyria's archrival. How's that for foreign policy? Playing both ends against the middle for security was as foolish as chasing the sirocco for tranquility! Instead of turning to the Lord for peace and security, Israel turned to the foreign powers that would ultimately destroy her. It wasn't long before Assyria swept in like the east wind and thoroughly wiped out the northern kingdom of Israel.”

God had certainly given His people plenty of warning. *“I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions. I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets” (v10).*

In fact, God used Hosea's marriage to Gomer as a prophetic parable. As Gomer ran away from her marriage and committed adultery, so Israel turned away from God and committed spiritual adultery with the idols of the foreign religions.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's people should follow Jacob's good points.

“The Lord also brings a charge against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways. According to his deeds He will recompense him” (v2).

In Hosea 12, God rebuked His wandering people by comparing them and contrasting them with the patriarch Jacob.

Notice again - Hosea's ministry included the southern kingdom of Judah. So the “Jacob” in verse 2 includes **all** of Israel – both the northern and southern kingdoms. They are called Jacob, not only because all of the Jewish people in both kingdoms were Jacob's descendants, but also because they were compared and contrasted to the patriarch Jacob in the rest of chapter 12.

Jacob was definitely not the godliest person you'll meet in Scripture! He deceived his elderly father, and he stole the birthright and blessing from his older brother Esau. Jacob had a lot of rough edges. He had to go to the “school of God” for many years, and learn many difficult lessons. But in spite of all his rough edges, Jacob had an appreciation for spiritual things. He learned the lessons God taught him - and he graduated from the school of God! Hebrews 11:21 says

that *“By faith, Jacob, when he was dying, worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”* But the nation of Israel never learned the lessons God provided for them, and they did not graduate from the school of God.

After Esau threatened to kill him, Jacob fled to Aram, or Syria, and he learned the lessons that God had for him there (v12). But the nation of Israel never learned the lessons that God had for them. Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, and he was broken and brought to tears - yet he prevailed, and he found favor with the Lord (v4). However, the nation of Israel was never broken and brought to tears. Twice- both before and after his time in Aram - Jacob walked and talked with the Lord at Bethel (v4). But the nation of Israel never had a Bethel experience. In fact, it was at Bethel that Israel set up one of the golden calf idolatrous shrines. What a contrast between Jacob and the nation of Israel!

Part of the teaching of this passage for us today is that we should follow Jacob's good points. Like Jacob, we all have rough edges, and we need to learn difficult lessons in the school of God. Maybe, like Jacob, we need to learn not to cheat. We need to learn not to deceive and manipulate others. Like Jacob, let's learn these lessons. Let's come back to Bethel and worship the Lord. God's people should follow Jacob's good points.

2. God's people should not follow Israel's bad points.

God had brought Israel out of Egypt, and by His grace He had preserved them through the prophet Moses (v13). Think of the ministry of Moses on behalf of the nation of Israel! But Israel did not respond with love, thanksgiving and right living. Instead they corrupted mercy and justice (v6). They became just like the cunning and cheating Canaanites whom the Lord had conquered for them (v7). They did not give God the credit for their material wealth - they took the credit for themselves (v8). They were blind to their sin and iniquity (v8). They set up idols on the east side of the Jordan River in Gilead, and on the west side of the Jordan at Gilgal (v11).

As a result of their sin and rebellion, they provoked the Lord to anger (v12), and thus the Lord would have to judge and punish His people. The Assyrians would destroy their cities, and they would dwell in tents again (v9), just as they did in the wilderness. They also lived in tents or booths for the Feast of Tabernacles - but now living in tents would be no festival or celebration. Their pagan altars would become heaps of stones in the fields (v11). Israel was guilty. She would not escape the consequences of her sin (v14).

Do you see the obvious teaching for us? God's people should not follow Israel's bad points! If we do, we will reap sorrowful consequences.

Let's just take one example. During this time, the northern kingdom of Israel was quite wealthy, but one of Israel's bad points was that they proudly took credit themselves for their prosperity. *“And Ephraim said, ‘Surely I have become rich. I have found wealth for myself’* (v8). They didn't give God the credit for their material wealth. However, in spite of their material prosperity, they were spiritually and morally bankrupt.

Are we like Israel? They took credit for their material blessing, and didn't give God the credit. Do we give credit and thanks to God - or do we take credit for our successes and prosperity? 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, *"And what do you have that you did not receive. Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"* Whatever you have – brains, good looks, athletic ability, creative talent, or spiritual gift – all these things were given to you. And you're taking credit? And you're self-satisfied and proud?

Let's not make the same mistake that Israel made. Let's not forget to give credit and humble thanks to the Lord! God's people should not follow Israel's bad points.

Practical Application

Let's not feed on wind!

Are you feeding on wind? There's a lot of "wind" that is peddled as satisfying "food" in our culture today - and there are a lot of people who are intent on selling as much of this junk food as possible to us.

What about the junk food that's available on TV or on the internet? Are you munching on that worthless wind? Think of the enormous amount of time and energy we can waste on our houses - and our hobbies – and even on our careers! When all is said and done, how much of this time is consumed on eternally useless "wind"?

If you're not a believer - feeding on wind can distract you and keep you from Christ. Why is it that you will not come to Christ? It may be because you're feeding on wind. You're thinking it's giving you sustenance and nourishment, but ultimately it's nothing but wind. The only place to find fulfillment and satisfaction is with Jesus Christ. Come to Christ today!

When believers feed on wind, they waste their precious lives. Feeding on wind will result in spiritual starvation, stunted spiritual growth, sadness, and emptiness. It may also result in loss of reward (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

I trust all of you have an appetite for the solid food of the Word of God! Let's not feed on wind!