

Hosea's Sermons Against Idolatry and Immorality

Hosea 5

Hosea 5:1-7 - *"Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, because you have been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. ² The revolters are deeply involved in slaughter, though I rebuke them all. ³ I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; for now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry. Israel is defiled. ⁴ "They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord.*

⁵ The pride of Israel testifies to his face, therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity. Judah also stumbles with them. ⁶ "With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him. He has withdrawn Himself from them. ⁷ They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, for they have begotten pagan children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage."

Background Notes

The prophet Hosea preached and prophesied for at least forty years. In fact, some commentaries believe he ministered for over fifty years! That's a long time!

Hosea's ministry was primarily directed to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Although the times were good economically, the nation was spiritually and morally bankrupt. The northern kingdom of Israel had gone downhill right from the start, when the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam I, set up his own system of worship. This pagan worship included two idolatrous golden calves shrines, one at Dan and one at Bethel, and his own false priesthood.

Over 150 years had gone by since Jeroboam I's reign, and Israel's involvement in gross idolatry and immorality had increased. For this they would be judged and punished. Hosea was one of the prophets called by God to announce this judgment on Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. **There is a limit to God's patience.**

Verse 6 is a very sad verse: *“With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him. He has withdrawn Himself from them.”*

Israel had passed the limit of God’s patience. The people were thoroughly ensnared in idolatry. They had set up pagan shrines throughout the land. Two of the shrines are mentioned in verse 1 – Mizpah and Tabor.

The slaughter (v2) probably refers to the horrible extent of social injustice in Israel. The harlotry (v3-4) refers to the gross immorality that was rampant - even in a supposedly “religious” context. Israel had sunk to practicing the perverted fertility rites of the foreign pagan gods. The illegitimate children (v7) may refer to children born of this cultic sexual activity. Israel had dealt treacherously with the Lord (v7). Not many years later after Hosea spoke these prophetic words, the Assyrian Empire devoured the northern kingdom of Israel.

There is a limit to God’s patience - then and today. Do you think that you can toy with God and do your own thing, then finally decide to turn to the Lord on **your** terms and on **your** time schedule? Don’t count on it! A hardening process may close your heart. ***There is a limit to God’s patience.***

And don’t think you can hide your sin from God! *“I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me”* (v3). Just as Israel could not hide from God, so you cannot hide from God. Your life is an open book before God. He sees everything! If you need to get into a right relationship with God, don’t put it off. There is a limit to God’s patience!

2. There is suddenness to God’s judgment.

Hosea 5:8-15 - *“Blow the ram’s horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah! Cry aloud at Beth Aven. ‘Look behind you, O Benjamin!’⁹ Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.¹⁰ “The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I will pour out My wrath on them like water.*

¹¹ *Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked by human precept.¹² Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rottenness.¹³ “When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. Yet he cannot cure you, nor heal you of your wound.¹⁴ For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away. I will take them away, and no one shall rescue.¹⁵ I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face. In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”*

Verse 12: *“Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rottenness.”* The attack of a lion is different than the attack of a moth. The attack of a moth is slow and progressive. Already that kind of decay and destruction was happening in Israel.

But the attack of a lion is sudden and when you least expect it. Verse 14: *“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away. I will take them away, and no one shall rescue.”*

This all came about right on schedule, exactly as Hosea had prophesied, when the armies of Assyria attacked and overran Israel. Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom, fell in 722BC. Their appeal to King Jareb (another name for King Sennacherib of Assyria) was to no avail (v13). The figure of “wind” back in Hosea 4:19 emphasizes how suddenly Israel was removed: *“The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.”*

And Hosea 5:8 emphasizes how suddenly Assyrian took over: *“Blow the ram’s horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah! Cry aloud at Beth Aven, ‘Look behind you, O Benjamin!’”*

Again Hosea used a play on words. Bethel (“house of God”) was changed to Beth Aven (“house of evil”). God was sending a warning that judgment would come - and it came suddenly. Notice how that is emphasized in verse 8. Gibeah, Ramah and Bethel were on the border between Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In essence, verse 8 was saying, “Benjamin, from the southern kingdom of Judah, look behind you! Sound the battle cry! Already the Assyrians have swept through the northern kingdom and are at your doorstep.” Oh, how suddenly God can bring judgment!

The northern kingdom of Israel was sometimes known as “Ephraim,” because Ephraim was one of the largest tribes in the north. Both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were denounced for their sins here in Hosea 5.

Verse 10: *“The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out My wrath on them like water.* What’s all that about? Some of translations use the term “boundary stone.” In ancient Israel - and even in many places today – stones, or piles of stones, marked property lines, or the boundaries of family property. At night, when no one was looking, the stones could be moved to steal property. This evil practice is applied in a figurative way to the leaders of Judah. They were removing the boundaries that distinguished between right and wrong.

Does this sound familiar? The leaders of our nation are doing the same thing: political leaders, educational leaders, social leaders, and - of course - the media are moving the boundaries. They are re-defining what is right and what is wrong. Everything is now relative. The question is no longer what is “right” - but what are “my rights”? The boundary stones are being moved. It’s an evil practice. How long will God tolerate such evil? It will be judged - and there is suddenness to God’s judgment.

This certainly has a personal application as well. Proverbs 29:1 says, *"He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."*

Is it possible that you're still not a Christian? Maybe you go to church week by week, and you're going through the motions of living a "good" life, but you know in your heart that you're still not a true believer. According to the Bible, you are under the judgment of God for your sin. You could die this week. We never know the day of our death. Hebrews 9:27 says, *"It is appointed for man to die once and after this, the judgment."* Why not receive Christ as your Savior today, right now, before it's too late?

Remember, there is suddenness to God's judgment!

Practical Application

Thank the Lord for His appointed afflictions!

Verse 15: *"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face. In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."* This verse describes both the present status and future salvation of Israel, just as we saw back at the end of chapter 3. Here we have it again - the good news and the sad news.

The sad news is that at the present time, Israel has not yet returned to the Lord as a nation, and the Lord is still "withdrawn to His place."

However, the good news is that the nation of Israel will turn back to the Lord in the future. And note – this will happen *because of their afflictions* - both now, and in the coming tribulation period that is known as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7).

God can use afflictions to turn people in the right direction. Are you undergoing trouble or difficulties or afflictions in your life, and you don't understand why? Maybe the Lord is trying to get your attention! He longs to save you if you're not a believer – and His desire is to bless you if you are a believer.

Why not turn to the Lord today - or return to the Lord today? And then thank the Lord for sending those afflictions! God can use our afflictions for His purposes, to turn you around.

Remember, thank the Lord for His appointed afflictions!