

Folly of Trusting in Man

Hosea 5:1-15

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Hosea 4:10-19 (NIV)

"Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, royal house! This judgment is against you: You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. ²The rebels are knee-deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. ³I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt. ⁴"Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord. ⁵Israel's arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them. ⁶When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them. ⁷They are unfaithful to the Lord; they give birth to illegitimate children. When they celebrate their New Moon feasts, he will devour their fields. ⁸"Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven; lead on, Benjamin. ⁹Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain. ¹⁰Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water. ¹¹Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols. ¹²I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah. ¹³"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores. ¹⁴For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. ¹⁵Then I will return to my lair until they have borne their guilt and seek my face—in their misery they will earnestly seek me."

v1 – Who is being rebuked here?

When God saw the sinful state of the nation of Israel, He saw that it was because the leaders did not lead in a godly way. It would be tempting for the priests to blame the people, but it was really the fault of the spiritual leadership (priests) and political leadership (house of Israel) of the nation.

What is the significance of Mizpah?

Mizpah means "watchtower" or "lookout" and is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 31:45–49. Mizpah is where Jacob and Laban parted ways. Laban's parting words gave the place its name when he said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today. . . . May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other" (Genesis 31:48–49).

- Israel and Judah also parted ways

What is the significance of Tabor?

Mount Tabor is a dome-shaped mountain in the Jezreel Valley 6 miles east of Nazareth and 11 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Rising less than 2,000 feet above sea level, Mount Tabor appears loftier than it actually is in the otherwise flat Jezreel Valley. Mount Tabor played a prominent role in Israel's history, marking a boundary between the tribes of Issachar (Joshua 19:22), Naphtali (Joshua 19:34), and Zebulun (Joshua 19:12).

- This also represents the division of the tribes.

Why would the split of Israel from Judah be a snare and a net?

Division is a tactic of Satan to do damage to the people of God. In Israel's case, they had no godly kings and the people grew further from God as time went on. Israel also went into captivity about 100 years before Judah.

v2 – What characterizes those who rebel against God?

They are knee-deep in slaughter. The godless are all in a death cult; they are of their father, the devil...

John 8:44 – *You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.*

How was Satan a murderer from the beginning?

He deceived Adam and Eve who died spiritually immediately when they were tempted to disobey God. They also eventually died physically as a consequence for their sin and all their descendants after them were born in sin with a human spirit dead to God.

v3 – How are Israel & Ephraim distinguished?

Ephraim was unfaithful to God prostituting themselves to idols and Israel is corrupt. Since Ephraim was the largest, most dominant tribe in Israel, it is often used in Scripture to refer to Israel.

- So, this is another way of saying that Israel is both given over to idolatry and is corrupt.

v4 – Why was Israel unable to return to God?

Their deeds committed them to remain ungodly. They do not know the Lord and are committed to their idolatry. Unlimitedly, it is their pride that causes people to double-down in their ungodly path.

v5 – What proof was there that Israel was unable to return to God?

Their arrogance... Like all rebellion, Israel's rebellion was centered on pride. They arrogantly thought that what God said didn't really matter compared to their own opinions and desires.

Who was stumbling in their sin?

All the Jews; the Israelites, Ephraim, the leaders of the Israelites, and also Judah... so all of God's people.

v6 – How is it that Israel would seek the Lord and not find Him?

When God promised to leave rebellious Israel alone (Hosea 4:17), it means that when they make superficial gestures of repentance, they will not find Him.

- Their repentance was superficial because they do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God.

How do people convince themselves they are seeking God when they really are not today?

They do just a superficial investigation. For example, a man might say, "I grew up in the Baptist church and couldn't find God there. So, I went to the Methodist church and couldn't find God there. Then I went to the Pentecostal church, but couldn't find God there. Now I'm at the Presbyterian church and can't find God."

- You may imagine you have searched hard after God, but that is an illusion.
- The truth is that you are running away from God.

A superficial search for God causes a person to back away when they really start getting close to God.

Why would God withdraw Himself from those who seek Him?

We can be so set in our sin and rebellion that God just leaves us to ourselves.

- Usually, we don't even notice at first, but when we call upon the LORD and do not find Him, then we start to see the result of pushing God away.

v7 – How was unfaithful Israel giving birth to illegitimate children?

Their sin of being unfaithful to God was passed on to their children. Unfaithful Israelites were not the plan of God; thus they were not true Israelites.

What were the New Moon feasts?

The new moon marked the beginning of a new month on the Hebrew lunar-based calendar. It was a time when the Israelites were to bring an offering to God (Numbers 28:11).

Why would God devour their fields when they observed the New Moon feasts?

The Israelites were observing the New Moon festivals outwardly, even though their hearts had turned cold toward God. They readily parted with their bulls and lambs and goats, but they would not give up their sins.

God had severe words for such hypocrisy:

Isaiah 1:13–14 – Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them”

What is the significance of Gibeah?

The most prominent Gibeah was a central city in the territory assigned to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:28) located about five miles north of Jerusalem. Gibeah of Benjamin was also the hometown of Saul (1 Samuel 10:26).

What is the significance of Ramah?

Ramah is the name of several different cities in Asher, Naphtali, Benjamin, & Simeon. Ramah means "height" or "high" and is often applied to military strongholds. Ramah of Benjamin plays the most prominent role...

- where Deborah ruled as judge (Judges 4:5)
- the birthplace, hometown, and burial site of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1, 19–20; 25:1).
- the ideal refuge for David when fleeing from Saul to meet up with Samuel (1 Samuel 19:18–19).
- King Baasha of Israel built a fortress there to stop people from entering or leaving Judah. But King Asa, king of Judah, dismantled Baasha's fortress when Syria threatened Israel (1 Kings 15:17–22).

What is the significance of Beth Aven?

Beth Aven means "house of wickedness" in Hebrew; it is a critical reference to "Bethel," which means "house of God." Bethel was also a worship center established by Jeroboam for the people of the Northern Kingdom.

So, what battle cry should be sounded in Gibeah, Ramah and Beth Aven?

That Israel and Judah should unite in turning back to God.

What is the significance of the references to Benjamin here?

It harkens back to the first king of Israel, Saul of Benjamin when Israel and Judah were united. That is what God desired for them and that will be the case when God brings Israel back to the land of Israel following the Diaspora...

Isaiah 11:12 – *He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*

v9 – How is it Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning?

Because God has withdrawn Himself from them, they will find no help or refuge when the Assyrian army attacks. They will be made desolate.

To whom does God declare what is certain?

To the tribes of Israel directly and to all mankind by extension. Prophecy is certain because:

Isaiah 46:9-10 – *I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’*

v10 – What issue did God have with Judah’s leaders?

The political leaders of Judah were corrupt and cheaters. They were the kind of men who would change property boundaries to their advantage if they thought they could get away with it.

What boundary lines were Judah’s leaders shifting?

They were not shifting physical property lines but spiritual lines established by God... changing the boundary between right and wrong, between true and false religion, between the true God and the idols.

Why would this rebuke of Judah be put in here in the midst of Israel’s rebuke?

We can imagine a citizen of Judah reading Hosea’s prophecy and being a bit smug that their neighbor to the north was so roundly rebuked. God reminds Judah that she has her own sin to deal with.

v11 – Back to Israel’s rebuke, why was Israel oppressed and trampled in judgment?

NKJV: *he walked by human precept* NIV: *pursuing idols* – Ephraim sinned by living by man’s standards and opinions instead of God’s. We can’t walk by human precept unless

we first reject God’s precepts, and that was exactly what Israel did.

v12 – How would God be like a moth to Ephraim?

God will be the one who eats away and corrodes what Israel and Judah have. They will not be blessed, and they will not increase.

v13 – Why did Ephraim turn to Assyria?

Israel was foolish enough to trust in man, her eventual conqueror, instead of trusting in God. Choosing *King Jareb* (NKJV) instead of the LORD would be foolish and end in ruin.

- ‘Jareb’ is not a known Assyrian’s name but means ‘warrior’.
- Ephraim had sickness (weakness) and needed help and Judah would be no help because of their sores (weakness).

Would Assyria be any help to Israel?

Quite the contrary... Israel’s going to Assyria revealed their weakness causing them to be conquered.

v14 – What does it mean that God would be like a lion to Ephraim and Judah?

God’s judgment would come against Israel and Judah in subtle ways (like a moth... like rotteness). But it would also come in obvious, unmistakable ways. Both a moth and a lion bring destruction, just in different ways.

What is the significance of the distinction between a lion to Ephraim and a young lion to Judah?

Both will meet with devastation but Judah’s will be later than Israel (about 100 years later).

What does it mean that God will take Israel and Judah away?

They would be exiled from the land by their conquerors: Assyria in the case of Israel and Babylon in the case of Judah.

v15 – What was God’s objective in disciplining Israel and Judah?

In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me: The goal was not destruction, but restoration. Sadly, it is often only in our affliction that we earnestly seek the LORD.

- Why not seek the LORD now, before affliction forces you to?

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- Rebelling against God puts us in league with Satan.
- Pride is the source of rebellion; be humble.
- Unity is important to God; Satan seeks division.
- God always seeks restoration; be restored!