

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

HOSEA 7-10

The liberal assumption today is that humanity has progressed, or evolved, and is more sophisticated than in years gone by. Moderns are far more enlightened than their ancient counterparts. *But this isn't true.* It's certainly erroneous when it comes to how we view sex.

The idea of sexual intimacy as nothing more than a biological function, *a physical act*, is a modern invention. The ancients viewed sex in a much more sophisticated, *even spiritual way*. They understood its impact on the human psyche and gave it higher value.

They considered sexual intimacy as holy or sacred.

Even the pagan cults saw sex as an act of worship.

To engage in sexual intimacy was to become one with your partner, and to invite the gods to participate with their blessing. This is why nearly all the pagan temples employed sex workers - prostitutes called priestesses - to engage in sex as a religious ritual.

The act of sex was seen as a spiritual experience. You became one with the other person, and their god.

And this is why our God also saw idolatry in sexual terms. When an Israelite worshipped an idol, Yahweh considered it adultery. That person was being unfaithful to Him. *Infidelity* and *idolatry* went hand in hand.

This is the background to the story of Hosea.

To illustrate Israel's spiritual betrayal of the true God, Yahweh had the Prophet Hosea marry a prostitute.

As his wife, Gomer, was unfaithful to Hosea, Israel had ignored its vows to God and went to bed with idols.

Gomer, like many sex workers today, ended up a human slave. In fact, she was being sold in the market, when Hosea heard, rushed in, made the highest bid - then covered her nakedness, and ushered her home.

And according to the custom of the day, this made Hosea's wife, Gomer, *his* slave. His wife became his servant. The prophet can now do to her as He pleases.

I read of a woman in Georgetown, Guyana who found her husband in bed with another woman. Her husband physically attacked her. She took him to court.

The judge punished the man by sentencing him to be his wife's slave for two weeks. He told her, "For two weeks your husband is at your beck and call. He is your slave. Anything you want him to do he has to do."

Husband... wife... what would you do if your spouse was made your slave for two weeks? Would you make them pay you back for the way they've treated you?

What form of slow, painful torture would you devise?

How would you seek to make their life miserable?

I've heard forgiveness defined as "Having the ability to repay a hurt, yet foregoing my right to do so."

This was the situation between Hosea and Gomer.

She was his slave now. He could do to her whatever he pleased - and guess what he did? *He **forgave** her!*

True forgiveness is having it within your power to pay someone back for the evil they've done, and instead show them mercy. One author defines it, "**Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me.**"

If you haven't discovered it yet, the biggest key to a successful marriage is learning to bury the hatchet.

Husbands and wives have to forgive!

It's been said, "**Every marriage is made up of two sinners. A good marriage is made up of two forgivers.**"

Understand, next to the cross, nowhere in Scripture is God's forgiveness displayed more vividly than in the story of Hosea. In the final eight chapters God is going to bring judgment on the nation Israel, but realize it's coming from the mouth of the Prophet Hosea, and the Israelites knew *his story*. He stood for forgiveness.

Because of the man who was preaching, the people understood God's motivation. It was clear to Israel that God's intention was to *convict* and not to *condemn*.

Note how Chapter 7 begins, God says, "**When I would have healed Israel...**" This should stand out in bold print. God "**would've healed**" - He *wanted* to heal.

God's desire was to comfort not cripple, justify not judge. But *a skilled doctor* has to have *a stilled patient*.

The patient has to cooperate with the doctor. And this is what Israel refused to do. They wouldn't repent.

“Then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have committed fraud; a thief comes in; a band of robbers takes spoil outside.” God would've healed Israel if they'd shown the slightest urge to confess and turn from their sin.

But instead the people's sin came out of the closet. They sinned brazenly, and openly, and unashamedly.

And this has happened in post-Christian America. People today are no more wicked than they've ever been, but at one time our society maintained a moral consensus. Social mores suppressed certain sins.

But no longer. Any kind of moral consensus we once had has been replaced by a public tolerance of anything and everything. We care more about the *sinner's rights* than preserving *society's righteousness*.

This has allowed every form of perversity to come out of the closet. It's polluting our culture. The lifeblood of society, *the arts and media*, are now infected and people are exposed to a steady diet of wickedness.

God would heal our nation, if we would repent!

Verse 2, “They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face.” His own people forgot God. And it's surprisingly easy to do.

We get caught up in the swirl of this world.

The *pressing* consideration drowns out the *eternal* consideration. Tragically, Israel had forgotten God!

Verse 3, “They make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies.” When a nation refuses to be ruled by God, they destine themselves to be ruled by man. *Thus, the king is made glad!*

For 250 years America was protected by our pledge. “One nation under God...” puts everyone in their place. The president, judiciary, congress answer to God. But when God is pushed to the fringes, powerful men and their lies take over. Kings rejoice in their wickedness.

In the rest of Chapter 7 the Prophet Hosea uses four analogies to describe the nation Israel: a heated oven, a cake unturned, a silly dove, and a deceitful bow.

Verse 4, “They are all adulterers. Like an oven heated by a baker - He ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened. In the day of our king princes have made him sick, inflamed with wine; he stretched out his hand with scoffers.

They prepare their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait; their baker sleeps all night; in the morning it burns like a flaming fire. They are all hot, like an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings have fallen. None among them calls upon Me.”

The heated oven was an idiom for unbridled lust - selfish, sensual desires that burn out of control.

The baker's oven was a brick fireplace heated with wood or grass. He stoked the fire then cooked on top of the fireplace.

When the baker went to bed, and no longer used his oven, of course, the fire die out.

But Israel is described as a fire that fuels itself. Even when the baker goes beddy-by the oven still burns hot.

Their sinful appetites burned out of control. And this is the problem with lust and vice. It burns beyond its boundaries. A lust is never satisfied. It fuels itself.

Whether it's a lust for power, or money, or sex, or alcohol, or fame. Lust is a monster and each time you feed it, its appetite increases. The lust requires increasing degrees of titillation. Israel had become like a self-stoking oven. It wouldn't die out on its own.

Notice, Hosea specifically mentions Israel's kings. He writes, *"all their kings have fallen."* From 1 Kings we learn that of the nineteen kings who reigned in northern kingdom all nineteen were wicked before the Lord.

Throughout their 200 years of existence nine dynasties ruled over Israel. Intrigue and sabotage and assassination were headlines in Israel. God didn't promise to bless the northern kings as He'd promised to bless the descendants of David in the south.

Notice too Hosea mentions that the kings of Israel were addicted to wine. John Fielding once referred to alcohol as *"the liquid fire by which men drink their hell beforehand."* If you've ever been linked to an alcoholic you won't consider Fielding's words an exaggeration.

Alcohol numbs a body, clouds a mind, desensitizes a spirit. Solomon writes in Proverbs 31, *"It is not for kings to drink*

wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the Law, and pervert justice...”

Verse 8, “**Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples..**” Generally speaking God is not into mixtures.

Deuteronomy 22 instructs Israel, “You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled. You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.”

In the wilderness it was the mixed multitude that kept wanting to retreat to Egypt, rather than trust the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6 draws on a prohibition not to plow with ox and donkey in the same harness. It uses that law to warn against not being yoked with an unbeliever.

Witness to non-Christians - interact with them as you look for an open door - but don't create ties that can't be vacated. Develop bonds with an unbeliever - share in their destiny - and God can't judge the unbeliever without you getting caught in the friendly fire.

Be an influence on unbelievers, but don't get entangled. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:17, “**Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.**”

Don't become bound to the unbeliever in such a way that'll force you to make concession to their values. You stay free so you can live totally for the Lord.

The second idiom Hosea uses to describe an unrepentant Israel is “**Ephraim is a cake unturned.**”

Across the Middle East bedouins will make little pancakes on a hot griddle. They cook one side, then flip it over. If not, it's charred on one side and gooey on the other. *Israel was like a pancake that wasn't flipped.*

She kept repeating her mistakes. She never turned from her evil. She never changed. She kept following in the sin of Jeroboam despite God's constant warnings.

If you're resistant to change - a creature of habit - set in your ways - it's always business as usual you're going to struggle in the Christian life. For too many of us it's "Come weal, come woe, my status is quo."

This is an attitude that's deadly. Recall the last words of a dead church, "We have always done it this way."

Following God necessitates change. As I grow in Christ I'm exposed to *new truth* and convicted of *old habits*. Christian maturity requires maintaining an attitude of repentance and a willingness to change.

The Holy Spirit is the author of new life. To walk in the Spirit we have got to be flexible. It's been said, "When you're through changing, you're through." It's true, the Christian life is a process of constant change.

Hosea says in verse 9, "Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it."

In essence, it's been a long time since Israel had looked in the mirror and evaluated her condition. She's got some gray hairs she never noticed before.

“And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, but they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all this.” At the time Hosea is writing, Assyria was already preparing to attack Israel. Border skirmishes and espionage had weakened Israel’s resistance. God’s people should’ve repented, but they were oblivious.

Verse 11, “Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense - they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.”

Remember “Ephraim” was the strongest tribe in the northern kingdom, so the nation went by its name. And here it’s described by the third idiom, “*a silly dove.*”

There is an eastern proverb that says, “There is nothing more simple than a dove.” Doves are dumb.

They're confused by the many noises around them. They fly to and fro uncertain of which voices to trust.

And such was Israel. They were flighty rather than faithful. Like a dove they were busy flying back and forth from *Nineveh in Assyria to Memphis in Egypt.*

They tried to ally themselves with the superpowers of the day, rather than trust in the eternal superpower.

All superpowers come and go, except one, God!

“Wherever they go, I will spread My net on them; I will bring them down like birds of the air; I will chastise them according to what their congregation has heard.”

The dumb doves will be caught in God’s snare.

“Woe to them, for they have fled from Me! Destruction to them, because they have transgressed against Me! Though I

redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against Me. They did not cry out to Me with their heart when they wailed upon their beds. “They assemble together for grain and new wine, they rebel against Me...” They offered obligatory offerings, but their heart was far from God. *He listens to our heart.*

Verse 15, “Though I disciplined and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against Me; they return, but not to the Most High; they are like a treacherous bow. Their princes shall fall by the sword for the cursings of their tongue. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.” Here’s the fourth idiom describing Israel - “*a treacherous bow*” or literally *a warped bow*.

Israel was a bow incapable of shooting straight.

It reminds me of the afternoon my son, Zach, came home with a BB gun he’d bought from his friend for \$15. I hated to tell him he'd been ripped off, but he had.

I made Zach look down the barrel of the gun. It was as wavy as a piece of taffy. At least he was smart enough to have negotiated a money back guarantee.

This was Israel. Her barrel was bent - her bow was warped. It wouldn't shoot straight even if John Wayne was pulling the trigger... And this is the problem with unregenerate people. Humans are governed by a sin nature. Even when they try to do right, their aim is off.

There's no way to fix a warped barrel. You replace it with a new one. This is what Jesus does in us. He cuts out the old sinful nature and He replaces it with a new nature - one that loves Him and that loves others.

Chapter 8, “Set the trumpet to your mouth!” A “shophar” or “ram’s horn” was used to sound an alarm.

Hosea is saying alert the nation to battle. The voracious Assyrians are coming to invade your land.

“He shall come like an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law.” The “he” was the famous general, Shalmaneser. And like an eagle diving upon its prey, Assyria will swoop down on sinful Samaria.

“Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!’ Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him.”

This sounds eerily like the words of Jesus in the last days, when many will say to Him, “Lord, Lord...” But Jesus will say, “Depart from me for I never knew you.”

If I wanted tickets to the Braves opening game and I went to the new stadium and told the cashier, “Hey, I know Freddie Freeman.” - that wouldn't get me very far, because Freddie Freeman doesn't know me.

And likewise, the question that decides your ticket to heaven is not, “Do you know the Lord?” - it's “Does the Lord know you?” Here, Israel shouted, “My God, we know You” but in her heart she had rejected the good.

“They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge them. From their silver and gold they made idols for themselves - that they might be cut off.” Again, the northern kingdom was born when Jeroboam rebelled from Judah. He set up a rival kingdom with a rival religion. They

established kings God never sanctioned, and used their silver and gold to make idols that God had to eventually cut off.

“Your calf is rejected, O Samaria! My anger is aroused against them - how long until they attain to innocence? For from Israel is even this: a workman made it, and it is not God; but the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.” Part of Jeroboam’s rival religion were two golden calves in the north and south of Israel, Dan and Bethel. It was supposedly the worship of Yahweh, but not in the way that He had prescribed.

It was a worship of convenience. Rather than travel to the Temple in Jerusalem and present their sacrifices to the Levitical priests as God had commanded, Jeroboam established a local alternative. His religion was complete with its own altar, sacrifices, priesthood.

And we need to be careful we don't make the same mistake. Its easy to tailor a convenient worship.

We come to church when its convenient. We serve when its convenient for us. We give when its convenient. We witness only when its convenient.

It seems there are some people who come to church or get involved only when there's nothing else they'd rather do. *Where's the commitment? the sacrifice?*

Paul tells us in Romans 12:1, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Our whole lives should be a sacrifice to God - it’s our reasonable, logical service.

Yet Israel manufactured a religion of convenience, not sacrifice. Verse 7, “They sow the wind, and reap the

whirlwind.” And this is exactly what’s happened in America. In the 1960s and 70s we sowed the seeds of relativism and humanism - now today we’re reaping a whirlwind of social anarchy and moral bankruptcy.

It’s ironic, the generation that once advocated free sex and love now has a skyrocketing divorce rate.

You reap what you sow. In fact, sometimes you reap more than you sow! You plant a kernel of corn, but you reap a whole ear of corn. Often the wind creates a multiplication of the harvest. The effect is amplified.

He goes on, **“The stalk has no bud; it shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the Gentiles like a vessel in which is no pleasure.”** Later the Babylonians will defeat Judah. Their policy was to resettle conquered foes in Babylon.

But the Assyrians had a different policy. They scattered their defeated people among many nations.

This is why Hosea tells the ten northern tribes they’re about to be swallowed up among the Gentiles.

Verse 9, **“For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers.”**

God saw Israel’s peace treaty with Assyria as a betrayal of Him. It was adultery. Infidelity to God.

Yes, though they have hired among the nations, now I will gather them; and they shall sorrow a little, because of the burden of the king of princes. Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, they have become for him altars for

sinning. I have written for him the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange thing.” God gave them His law - His Word - yet they considered it “*a strange thing.*” It’s sad to go to a church where no one brings their Bible. God’s Word is like a UFO - an unidentified object. As Hosea says there are “*great things*” in the Bible. And yet sadly there are still some Christians who don’t even have a clue.

“For the sacrifices of My offerings they sacrifice flesh and eat it, but the Lord does not accept them.” They’re religious, but it doesn’t come from their hearts. “Now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. They shall return to Egypt.” It’ll end where it all began. Eventually, God’s people will be taken back to Egypt.

And this does happen to Judah in the days of Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

Verse 14, “For Israel has forgotten his Maker (what a sad pronouncement), and has built temples; Judah also has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send fire upon his cities, and it shall devour his palaces.”

Chapter 9, “Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples, for you have played the harlot against your God. You have made love for hire on every threshing floor. The threshing floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.”

Apparently, Israel enjoyed a season of prosperity, prior to God’s punishment. Hosea says they loved the harvest. They spent more time at the threshing floor counting their money, than on the Temple floor seeking the Lord. Yet in the end their

prosperity won't feed them. Riches will fail. God will bring judgment on Israel.

“They shall not dwell in the Lord’s land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and shall eat unclean things in Assyria. They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him. It shall be like bread of mourners to them; all who eat it shall be defiled. For their bread shall be for their own life; it shall not come into the house of the Lord.

What will you do in the appointed day, and in the day of the feast of the Lord? For indeed they are gone because of destruction. Egypt shall gather them up; Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their valuables of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.”

When we go to Israel, the ruins of Samaria are off-limits. Today Samaria is near Ramallah on the West Bank. Tensions are too high for tourists to visit.

But the area of Samaria has some of the most magnificent views in the region. From the mountains of Samaria you can see westward to the Mediterranean, east across the Jordan Valley, north to Mount Hermon, and south to Jerusalem. It's no surprise the kings of Israel made Samaria their capitol. But Samaria is also a sad place to visit today, since all you see are the ruins and devastation caused by the people's sin.

Verse 7, “The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come. Israel knows! The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is insane, because of the greatness of your iniquity and great enmity.

The watchman of Ephraim is with my God; but the prophet is a fowler's snare in all his ways - enmity in the house of his God. They are deeply corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins." Israel knew God's judgments were upon them, but they listened to the false prophets rather than the faithful watchmen, like Hosea.

This is what will happen in the end times when God pours out His judgment on the earth, the world's scholars and experts will suddenly appear as fools!

They'll suffer an insanity brought on by their sin.

Verse 10, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season." To find grapes in the desert or early figs would be unanticipated blessings. There was a time when Israel brought God great pleasure.

"But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved." "*Baal Peor*" was a notorious site of Israel's seduction. It was set up by Balaam (Numbers 25). Israel yielded to lust and went to bed with idols and women who worshipped them.

The story was a preview of their idolatrous future.

"As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird - no birth, no pregnancy, and no conception! Though they bring up their children, yet I will bereave them to the last man." A once fruitful Israel will become barren.

“Yes, woe to them when I depart from them! Just as I saw Ephraim like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place, so Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer.”

Ephraim, a formerly pleasant place, will become a slaughter-house. The inhabitants of the northern kingdom will be butchered by the cruel Assyrians.

“Give them, O Lord - what will You give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts!” Verse 15, “All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them.

Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more. All their princes are rebellious.” These are heavy words.

God says in Gilgal, He “*hated*” the Israelites. He’s driven them from His house. “*I love them no more.*”

In Jeremiah 31:3 the Lord tells all the families of Israel, “*I have loved you with an everlasting love.*” Yet here He says He no longer loves her. *What's the deal?*

Notice in Jeremiah the word “*love*” is a noun. It’s an object. His love is everlasting. It never wavers. It stays constant. God will always love us. Think about it, God even loves the inhabitants in hell. His heart is for us.

But here in Hosea, the word “*love*” is a verb, it shows action. God will no longer treat Israel to his love.

Put it together, and what God is saying becomes clear. God loves Israel - He always has and He always will - but because of the people’s sin there comes a point where God can no longer show His love! God loves everyone, but ultimately if

you refuse to embrace His Son, Jesus, God stops extending His love.

When God says, *“I will love them no more,”* it’s one in a string of heavy statements God makes in Hosea.

Hosea 4:17 is another such verse, *“Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.”* Add to that, 5:6, *“He has withdrawn Himself from them.”* These are dire verses.

Don’t think God ever gave up on His people, but He did give them over to their own choices. In essence, He said, *“If you want to serve idols; then let them save you.”* God never stopped loving His people and longing for them, but He did leave them to their gods of choice.

The last two verses in Chapter 9 sum up what happened to Israel. *“Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. Yes, were they to bear children, I would kill the darlings of their womb.”* My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations.”

The expression, *“wandering Jew”* has now been used for the last 2700 years. It’s an official English phrase. For 27 centuries scattered, homeless Hebrews have wandered the globe without a nation of their own.

In the Charles Dickens novel *“Bleak House,”* an orphaned Jewish boy is told by a policeman to stop loitering and move on. The boy replies with tears in his eyes, *“I’m always a-moving on, sir. I’ve been a-moving on since the day I was born. Where can I possibly move on to, sir?”* The calloused constable replies, *“My instructions don’t address that*

question. I've been told you're to move on, and I've told you 500 times."

Over the centuries, on occasion, the Jewish people thought they'd found a home - only to have the constable of prejudice uproot them and send them on their way. How they've survived through the centuries is *a miracle - it's nothing short of the hand of God.*

Even though it seemed God had forsaken them, He hadn't. The Lord was working to insure their survival.

And now today, He has provided a permanent home.

The modern state of Israel is finally a place where the Jews can move on to... Even today, God has not given up on Israel. One day God will rename them "Ammi" - not "Lo-Ammi." They'll be His people again.

Which leads us to a more "where you live" kind of question... **Has God ever given up on you?**

And I'm sure the answer is "No." God is faithful!

In fact, when God gives up on you and your quirky habits, insensitivities, shortcomings, failures, and sins; then you can give up on your spouse, or son, or friend, or fellow believer, or neighbor, or coworker. There may be much to *work out*, but be very reluctant to *walk out*.

Chapter 10, **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. Their heart is divided;**

now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars.”

Notice, the dangers of a divided heart! Israel of old tried to worship both their gold and God, but couldn't.

Jesus told us we can't serve two masters.

Often the blessings control more of our time and attention than the Blessor. This shouldn't be. *When the blessings distract from the Blessor, God will remove the blessings.* Here, He'll break down their altars.

“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?” In the final days of the NK, her kings were puppets of Assyria. Hosea asks even if we had a king what would he be able to do for us? *Assyria ruled.*

“They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant. Thus judgment springs up like hemlock in the furrows of the field.” Hemlock was a poisonous plant. The worse thing for a farmer to have happen to him is to see hemlock sprouting in his fields.

And likewise, God's judgment will sprout up in Israel.

Verse 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.” “*Beth-Aven*” was a satirical name for “Bethel.”

“Bethel” means “*house of God.*” It received its name in Genesis 28. It was there that Jacob saw a ladder reaching into the heavens and had an encounter with God. The place

was formerly known as “Luz,” but Jacob renamed the place “house of God” or “Bethel.”

Thus, when King Jeroboam erected the golden calves he placed one in Bethel. This meant in Israel the “house of God” had become “a center for idolatry.”

Here Hosea refers to the city not as Bethel, “house of God,” but as “*Beth-Aven*” or “house of emptiness.”

And when the altar at Bethel is destroyed by Assyria the people will mourn and the priests will shriek.

For the people, the idolatrous altar was a place of memories. Where they sacrificed, met with friends, and dedicated their kids... To the priests, the altar was their livelihood, their profession... *But God is taking it away!*

“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.” The name “*Jareb*” is also a play on words. The Assyrian king was **Shalmaneser** not Jareb, but “*Jareb*” means “**Deliverer**.”

It’s ironic that what the Jews trusted in to deliver, in the end conquered them, and took their golden calf.

Verse 7, “As for Samaria, her king is cut off like a twig on the water. 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!” In Revelation 6 this is also the same desperate cry men will scream in the Great Tribulation, during its final judgments.

They'll say to rocks and mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who will be able to stand?"

Verse 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." The reference to Gibeah takes us back to Judges 19-20.

The tribes of Israel rose up in response to a terrible evil done by the men of Gibeah. They wanted to rid the land of such evil - yet there was still iniquity in Israel.

Israel tried to rid itself of sin, but God says in verse 10, "When it is My desire, I will chasten them. Peoples shall be gathered against them when I bind them for their two transgressions." Israel's two transgressions refers to the two idolatrous calves in Bethel and Dan.

"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."

The job of grinding the grain at the threshing floor, was always an easier job than plowing hardened fields.

If Israel had been obedient to God and plowed under her sin, she would be reaping now - instead she's *still* plowing, she's starting over... And that sums up many a Christian's experience. Because we take short cuts and try to do things our own way, we find ourselves constantly having to start over, rather than bearing fruit.

Ephraim was a like an ox who relished threshing out the grain and working the harvest - but God fitted her for a plow to do the work He really wanted her to do. You can't enjoy the harvest without plowing the fields.

Which brings us to the very famous verse 12, **“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.”** And **“*break up your fallow ground!*”** is still God's word to us!

We need to put the plough of repentance to the stubborn, calloused areas of our life where we know we need to change. Turn over the brittle ground until it becomes soft and fertile. Then God will plant His seed into your heart, and it will rain down righteousness!

There can be no real reconciliation between God or man if we're not willing to do the work of repentance.

Several years ago I borrowed my Dad's rototiller to plant some grass in my backyard. Two years later I could see the areas I tilled under, and the areas where I just threw out seed on the hard clay. There's no grass in the untilled areas. But the patches where I worked the ground there you find the strongest stand of grass.

And repentance is like tilling your yard.

Its back-breaking, time-consuming, pride-punishing work, but it's worth it. Too often we make a superficial confession followed by a plea for a pardon, rather than taking the time and making the effort to really discover why I fell to that temptation in the first place.

What foothold did Satan have in my life? What weakness and character flaw was he exploiting? At what was I not trusting God and relying on myself?

To break up the fallow ground is to see my sin in all its ugliness. To see what it is that's really hurting me.

It's also to feel the hurt I'm causing those around me.

Even more so, its to sense the pain I'm bringing to the heart of God. It's learning to see my sin as God sees it. **When Hosea tells us to break up the fallow ground he is saying its time to get serious about sin.**

Verse 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."** Trusting in our own way is the opposite of repentance. To repent is to turn to God.

"Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle - a mother dashed in pieces upon her children." **"Beth Arbel"** means **"house of God's ambush."** We're not certain, but at some point, the Assyrian general Shalmaneser may've launched a surprise attack and slaughtered some Israeli troops on or near the Arbel in the Galilee.

The Arbel is one of my favorite places in Israel. It's a mountain on the southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

I believe it was a place where Jesus escaped to pray... It would've been a perfect place for an ambush.

The chapter closes, “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 armies of Israel will be ambushed and it’s king utterly destroyed.