

Hosea 10:9-15

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The LORD announces judgment on Israel because she has been guilty of rebellion and gross immorality since the days of the gruesome episode of wickedness in Gibeah. God exhorts Israel to cease its exploitative and violent wickedness, and start loving one another, as they had promised to do in their covenant with God. Israel has trusted in her military/political establishment rather than trusting in the LORD, and will now be destroyed by a superior force.

This section reiterates the truth about Israel's guilt and rebellion. But here the text switches from a focus on Bethel, one of the sites where Jeroboam placed a calf-idol for Israel to worship (1 Kings 12:28-29) and focuses more on Gibeah. Gibeah was a Benjamite city located between Samaria and Judah (Hosea 5:8, 9:9). The Suzerain God looked back to history and addressed Israel directly in these terms: *From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel* (vs 9). The reference to *Gibeah* is likely an allusion to an event recorded in the book of Judges.

The story involving *Gibeah* took place during the period of the Judges. Israel was self-governing for about 450 years before they had a king (Acts 13:19). Being self-governing, each person did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6). God had made His covenant agreement with the people of Israel (Exodus 19:8). So each person was responsible to obey the covenant agreement. But at the time of this story involving *Gibeah*, Israel had already fallen far away from the "love your neighbor" culture required by God in its covenant with Him, as this story illustrates.

In the story, a Levite dwelling in the area of the tribe of Benjamin owned a concubine. The concubine fled her home and sold herself and became a prostitute. The Levite pursued her and retrieved her, to take her home. But on their journey home they stayed overnight in the Benjamite city of *Gibeah*. While spending the night in *Gibeah*, some men of the city sought to have the Levite's host turn him over to them that they might sexually abuse the Levite man. This would of course be in gross violation of God's covenant with Israel.

Consistent with middle-eastern custom that placed great responsibility on hosts to care for their guests, the Levite's host refused. But after much debate with the insistent and wicked men, they settled for the Levite's concubine, who was abused "all night until morning" by the mob (Judges 19:25). The next day the Levite discovered that his concubine had been so thoroughly abused that she was dead.

So, in order to emphasize the magnitude of the crime, and the wickedness to which Benjamin had sunk, the Levite "took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel" (Judges 19:29). This action led to a civil war that nearly annihilated the Benjamite tribe (Judges 19-21).

Here in Hosea, the LORD told Israel that *there* in Gibeah *they stand*, meaning that the moral and spiritual condition in Israel was the same as that shameful incident which took place at *Gibeah*.

And because of this wickedness, the LORD asked a rhetorical question that indicates that this wickedness will be similarly judged, asking *Will not the battle against the sons of iniquity overtake them in Gibeah?* (vs 9). This rhetorical question anticipates a “yes” answer from Israel. The disobedient people of God could only expect judgment from God, as required by their covenant agreement (Deuteronomy 28:15-68), and as evidenced in history, such as at the inciting incident of the Levite in *Gibeah*, resulting in the evil men of Benjamin being devastated by the other tribes.

Following the rhetorical question indicating the looming devastation of Israel, the LORD spoke in the first person to announce judgment on His rebellious people: *When it is My desire, I will chastise them* (vs 10). The verb *chastise* has the idea of discipline. It is often used for human training or instruction (Proverbs 3:11-12, Psalm 94:12). Scripture indicates that God’s chastisement is executed upon those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:5-6). God desires to stamp out cultures of wickedness, where a gang of men would exploit strangers to satisfy their sexual appetites. God’s will is to replace the evil culture with a culture of mutual collaboration, a “love your neighbor” culture.

Israel’s sins demanded correction. Israel’s leaders refused to correct and instruct the people (Hosea 4:4), so God would now discipline them, because they are His people, and because it was a provision in their agreement (and God always keeps His word). Now the time for His discipline had arrived, and He would gather nations to attack His disobedient people.

God states, *And the peoples will be gathered against them when they are bound for their double guilt* (vs 10).

The word *peoples* in the phrase *the peoples will be gathered* refers to pagan nations that the LORD would use as His tool to invade and defeat Israel. Israel will be judged in a similar manner to how the tribe of Benjamin was judged in the incident at *Gibeah*. The words translated as *double guilt* are literally “two eyes” in the original Hebrew. Other translations render it as “two transgressions” and “double iniquity” likely because the context refers to foreign nations executing judgment against Israel.

The *double guilt* might refer to Israel’s continuous and unrelenting sinful patterns committed *since the days of Gibeah* (see vs 9). Israel’s sinful patterns would end abruptly as the LORD would use pagan nations to bind them and take them captive.

The LORD now uses agricultural imagery to assert to Israel that her life of relative ease is about to become a life of difficult toil. The LORD makes two contrasts:

- The image of comfort and ease, of *a trained heifer that loves to thresh*, compared to
- The image of difficulty and toil, of a cow that will have *a yoke* and be tasked to pull a *plow*

The northern kingdom of Israel is referred to here as *Ephraim*, which was the largest of the northern ten tribes, and the tribal area in which the capital city of Samaria resided. Israel is like *a trained heifer that loves to thresh* (vs 11). A *heifer* would enjoy the work of threshing (separating

out the grains) not only because it was a comparatively easy task, but also because the animal had the opportunity of the reward of grazing while working. The animal would be unmuzzled and could eat while threshing. So for the *heifer*, threshing would be even easier and more pleasant than grazing in the field.

Consistent with the “love your neighbor as yourself” culture promoted in Israel’s covenant with God, His law also contained a “take good care of your animals” provision. Verse 11 refers to a requirement in the covenant that the ox must not be muzzled while working in the threshing operation (Deuteronomy 25:4). Like a *heifer that loves to thresh*, Israel/Ephraim has been living in relative ease, coasting on the inertia of God’s blessings from prior generations.

However, all her easy days were coming to an end, because the LORD promised to *come over her fair neck with a yoke* (vs 11) to impose on her to perform extreme arduous work. Israel is about to go into exile, where it will experience forced labor and difficulty in basic living. They will have a similarly difficult life in Assyria as they did while living as slaves in Egypt (Hosea 9:3). What is today a *fair neck* (from lack of having to pull a plow) is about to become a calloused neck, from hard labor.

Even Judah was included in the LORD’s judgment. God made this clear when He stated, *I will harness Ephraim, Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself* (vs 11). The words *harness*, *plow*, and *harrow* all refer to the metaphor of an animal hooked to a plow ([See Image](#)). The *harness* allows the farmer to direct the oxen. And *harrow* is a translation of Hebrew words that literally say “break his clods” referring to the tilling of the soil. Plowing was hard work for the animals. God’s point is that the Israelites would perform arduous work to make a living.

Ephraim represents the northern kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes. *Judah* represents the southern kingdom while *Jacob* appears to represent the entire nation. Israel’s judgement will come first; Assyria conquered Israel in 722 BC. But Judah’s judgment followed, as Judah fell to Babylon in 586 BC. Thus *Jacob*, all of Israel, will be judged, according to the terms of the covenant agreement Israel entered into with its God Yahweh (Exodus 19:8, Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

Yet, amid His pronouncement of judgment, the Suzerain God issued a call to repentance using three important statements:

- *Sow with a view to righteousness,*
- *reap in accordance with kindness; and*
- *break up your fallow ground* (vs 12).

First, the LORD asked Israel to *sow with a view of righteousness*. The word *righteousness* has to do with aligning actions with God’s design. It entails walking according to God’s precepts, which are for our good (Deuteronomy 6:24, Hosea 8:12). When we align our actions with God’s design, we function in harmony with one another; God’s design is for neighbors to love one another. To *sow* is to plant. Then we *reap* the fruit of what is sown (Galatians 6:8). God calls Israel to repent, and to begin living by His covenant ways.

Second, if they *sow with a view to righteousness* then they will *reap in accordance with kindness* (vs 12). The word *kindness* is “*hesed*” in Hebrew. It can also be translated as steadfast love or loyalty. The fruit (or result) of walking in righteousness is a culture of love and loyalty. Thus Israel would then obey the two greatest commandments, to love God with all our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-39).

Third, God commanded Israel to *break up your fallow ground* (vs 12), that is, her untilled soil. This might be a metaphor for a hardened heart. *Fallow ground* is like the rocky soil of Jesus’s parable of the sower and the seed, where God’s word cannot take root (Luke 8:5-8). Israel was to change her ways. She was to live according to God’s ways, not her own. Israel’s failure to break up her *fallow ground* and listen to God’s word would preclude her from sowing *righteousness*, according to the precepts of God’s word (Hosea 8:12). Thus Israel would then reap God’s abundant blessing (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

Therefore, God urged the people to do what is good, *for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you* (vs 12).

God’s appeal to Israel to repent shows that it was late, but not too late. Israel had not yet reached a point of no return with the Suzerain God. She was given a chance to alter her course and reengage the LORD in obedience, keeping her covenant promise to do all that God commanded (Exodus 19:8). This appeal to repentance offered hope to Israel, but it is a hope that required Israel to *seek the LORD* with a genuine heart and make a radical change in her conduct.

It is notable that Israel was asked to *seek the LORD* in a prolonged manner. There was not an allotted time limit. Israel was simply asked to *seek the LORD* until such time as *He comes to rain righteousness on you*. Seeking the LORD leads to walking in righteousness (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:16-17).

Sadly, Israel did not listen to God’s command. She failed to respond properly. Instead of living a righteous life, Israel practiced iniquity. So, God rightly declared, *You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies* (vs 13). This continues the plow-sow-reap metaphor. Instead of plowing a ground that represented a heart that would receive God’s word, then sowing righteousness and reaping love and loyalty (vs 12), Israel has instead *plowed wickedness*.

This indicates that Israel actually put work into cultivating and sowing even more wickedness. The resulting harvest from planting more *wickedness* is that they have *reaped injustice* and *eaten the fruit of lies*. To live in *injustice* is to live out of alignment with God’s design. God designed His creation to live in harmony with one another, with humans reigning over the creation with a loving hand, bringing all into harmony (Psalm 8). However, Israel has followed the first generation of humans, who rebelled against God’s ways and filled the earth with violence (Genesis 6:11). *Injustice* occurs when people seek to exploit one another, instead of serving one another in love.

The *fruit of lies* refers to the consequence (*fruit*) of actions taken based on an untrue perspective (*lies*). Sin always claims that choosing our own way will lead to life (1 John 2:15-16). But this is

untrue. All sin leads to death (Romans 6:23, Deuteronomy 30:17-20). However, the truth sets us free (John 8:31-32).

Israel produced bad fruits. She plowed wickedness and reaped injustice and deception (*lies*). All this happened, the LORD declared, *because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors* (vs13). Israel failed because she trusted that she knew what was best for herself. Each person gets to control who they trust, what perspective to choose, and what actions to take. In this section of Hosea 10:9-15, we see that Israel chose:

- To trust that she knew what was in her best interest better than God did (vs 13)
- That she had ample diplomatic cunning and military strength to protect herself (Hosea 7:11, 10:13)
- To take actions that sowed wickedness and reaped injustice, violence, and deception (Hosea 10:13, 4:2).

Thus, her failure to trust God led her to experience shame and destruction, pursuant to the terms of the agreement Israel made with God, that Israel proceeded to ignore (Hosea 8:12).

Therefore, the LORD resumed His oracle of judgment and said, *A tumult will arise among your people and all your fortresses will be destroyed* (vs 14). Israel's fortifications (fortresses) would *be destroyed*, and there would be great uproar (*tumult*) among the people. The picture of Israel's destruction is further emphasized by an historical illustration of a brutal battle, which could have been familiar to Hosea's audience. God compared this coming *tumult* to the time when *Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed in pieces with their children* (vs 14).

Although this historical event could have been familiar to Hosea's audience, both the identity of *Shalman* and the site of the battle remain unclear to us. Some see *Shalman* as the Assyrian king named Shalmaneser III, who may have campaigned as far as Israel during his 841 excursion against Damascus, the capital city of Syria. *Beth-arbel* could be a place near the Sea of Galilee. Although lost to us, this battle was well remembered because of the great atrocities committed against women and children.

War is always brutal, but at this battle *mothers were dashed in pieces with their children*. In like manner, Israel would be devastated. As the LORD said, *Thus it will be done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness* (vs 15). Hosea prophesied that just as the battle where *Shalman* destroyed *Beth-arbel* and *mothers were dashed in pieces with their children*, so it would be with Israel at the hands of Assyria.

The place named *Bethel* is likely mentioned here because it was at the heart of Israel's wicked deeds. It was the place of immorality and idolatry, where Jeroboam placed a calf to worship, replacing trust in Israel's covenant God Yahweh with an idol (1 Kings 12:27-29).

Thus, *Bethel*, which is here used to represent the apostasy of the northern kingdom of Israel, would experience devastating defeat. And since Israel trusted in her military and political

strength, her king would also fall: *At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off* (vs 15). The phrase translated in NASB *at dawn* is variously rendered in other translations as:

- “When that day dawns”
- “In a morning”
- “At daybreak”

The indication seems to be that a new era will begin, and in that new era there will be no more *king of Israel*. The rulers have been corrupt, with one assassin taking the place of another (2 Kings 15:10, 14, 35, 40). So now they will be *cut off*. Historically, once Israel was exiled to Assyria, no other king has sat on the throne of Israel. In the future, Jesus will resume the reign, as the rightful heir, the Son of David (Matthew 1:1, 2 Samuel 6:12-16).

Biblical Text

**⁹ From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel;
There they stand!**

Will not the battle against the sons of iniquity overtake them in Gibeah?

¹⁰ When it is My desire, I will chastise them;

And the peoples will be gathered against them

When they are bound for their double guilt.

¹¹ Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh,

But I will come over her fair neck *with a yoke*;

I will harness Ephraim,

Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself.

¹² Sow with a view to righteousness,

Reap in accordance with kindness;

Break up your fallow ground,

For it is time to seek the Lord

Until He comes to rain righteousness on you.

¹³ You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice,

You have eaten the fruit of lies.

Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors,

¹⁴ Therefore a tumult will arise among your people,

And all your fortresses will be destroyed,

As Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle,

***When* mothers were dashed in pieces with *their* children.**

¹⁵ Thus it will be done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness.

At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off.