

Hosea 7:1-7

The LORD gives the reasons why the Israelites are insensitive to His call. They have plunged so deep into depravity that their evil deeds encircle them. Their lust for evil is like fire in an oven, which awaits the opportune moment to burst forth.

This commentary takes the position that Hosea 6:10 ends the previous section and Hosea 6:11 begins a new thought which goes together with Hosea 7:1.

In Hosea 6:1-10, God asserted that the curses prescribed in the covenant Israel agreed to abide by would be fully implemented, per the terms of the agreement. But beginning in Hosea 6:11, God turns to a new thought; God has in mind a restoration for Israel.

Hosea 6:11 states, *Also, O Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you When I restore the fortunes of My people.*

God's judgment on *Judah* will only last for a time. In the future there is a *harvest appointed* by God. This is a positive turn, with famine ending and productivity resuming, because God will *restore the fortunes of His people*. That this *harvest* is *appointed* means that it is because it would happen at the appointed time. The people of *Judah* would be cut down like grains gathered in their seasons (Jeremiah 51:33). But God has also *appointed* a time to *restore the fortunes of His people*. That the time is *appointed* means that Israel's restoration is certain. This is also according to the terms of the covenant agreement (Deuteronomy 32:35, 43). God will never reject those who are His (Romans 8:38-39). This includes His people, Israel (Romans 11:1-2).

Having called Israel to repent without success (Hosea 6:1-10), the LORD turned to assert that He will *restore the fortunes of My people* beginning with uncovering their sin and wrongdoing. God says *when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, and the evil deeds of Samaria* (vs. 1). Before the cancer can be treated, it must first be diagnosed/exposed. Step one in the healing process for Israel is to have its *iniquity* be *uncovered*.

The word translated as *iniquity* refers to guilt caused by sin (Numbers 14:19). It stands in parallel to the Hebrew word for *evil deeds*, which, in the plural, suggests an abundant evil. Together, *iniquities and evil deeds* suggest that Israel—represented here by her most prominent tribe (*Ephraim*) and her capital city (*Samaria*)—was committing *evil* continually. But it appears the evil was not being appropriately recognized. Perhaps this was because Israel continued to participate in activities of worship to Yahweh. But God rejected this worship, because it was not attended with a heart of service toward God, as evidenced by the Israelites loving one another (Amos 5:21-24).

As a skilled physician, God desired to *heal* Israel, that is, to forgive the people and *restore* their *fortunes*. He longed to bless His people both spiritually and materially. He had urged them to repent, that He might stave off implementing the covenant curses placed upon them for their

disobedience, per the terms of their covenant (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). However, God's attempts to bless and restore the people were hindered by new outbreaks of transgressions and wickedness.

Having now asserted that Israel's restoration was *appointed*, and therefore certain, God returns to the task at hand, which is to cause Israel's *evil deeds* to be *uncovered*. This uncovering of *iniquity*, and the subsequent related consequences are necessary steps toward Israel's ultimate healing.

The *evil deeds* took the form of the Israelites exploiting and abusing one another. The people of God went through the motions of religious worship but refused to walk in the light of God's truth. Rather than speaking the truth and doing what is right, *they deal falsely* with one another. This violated God's covenant command to not bear false witness to one another (Exodus 20:16).

Israel's hostility to God resulted in exploitation and violence (Hosea 4:2). This kind of behavior always leads to chaos in society. Because the people refused to obey the divine precepts by which they could live righteously (in harmony with God's design, which is for neighbors to love one another) then their culture was soiled by their sinful deeds: *the thief enters in, bandits raid outside* (vs 1).

Thus, the land of Israel had become a corrupt and dark place, one that was filled with social injustice, wickedness, and violence. This is the natural by-product of adopting the pagan philosophy that sought divine power to exploit others to gain benefit for oneself. This was in direct contrast to God's commands for Israel to take responsibility for the welfare of others (Leviticus 19:18). God promises (and logic supports) that a society of mutual care will be filled with human flourishing.

In the Bible, theft and robbery are regarded as despised practices, not only from the standpoint of the victim who suffered injury or whose belongings are stolen, but also as a violation of God's commandment "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19). But in Hosea's days, theft and robbery were common practices as they occurred within and without. The *thief* secretly broke into buildings and stole people's belongings, and robbers waited outside to do harm to others.

While the Israelites practiced wickedness and lived an unrighteous life, they apparently thought their Suzerain (Ruler) God did not take notice of their transgressions: *They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness* (vs 2). They apparently had rationalized that God would not implement the disciplinary provisions of their broken covenant – perhaps because they thought their worship practices would appease God (Amos 5:21-24). Accordingly, they were treating the true Creator God as though He were just another deity to appease. Perhaps this is why they were mixing in pagan worship practices with their worship ceremonies devoted to Yahweh (Hosea 4:12). They considered all the gods to be transactional.

The term *heart* in the term *do not consider in their hearts* refers to the thoughts of the mind. It is used here to describe Israel's incorrect thinking concerning their Suzerain (Ruler) God. Indeed,

the Israelites missed the mark in their understanding of God. They thought He would not *remember all their wickedness*.

Romans 1 sets forth a progressive consequence that sin takes, as God gives those who sin over to the natural consequences of their sin. He gives them over to their lusts (Romans 1:24) which progresses to degrading passions which we might call addictions (Romans 1:26) and finally to a “depraved mind”—an inability to reason well (Romans 1:28). Perhaps in this case, Israel’s sin had progressed to the point where their ability to rationalize their own behavior had cancelled out common sense.

In the Old Testament, the verb *remember*, as in the phrase *remember all their wickedness* (vs. 2) often occurs within a covenantal context (Genesis 9:15; Leviticus 26:42; Ezekiel 16:60). Here in Hosea, it is associated with God’s covenant relationship with Israel (Deuteronomy 8:18). The covenant promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Therefore, for God to *remember* the wickedness of the people would be to enforce the terms of the covenant and hold them accountable for their evil actions.

Moreover, the LORD said, *Their deeds are all around them* (vs 2). In Hosea 5:4, the *deeds* of the people prevented them from returning to their Suzerain (Ruler) God to whom they had pledged to follow. Here also, sin ensnared the people, causing them to become blind and to remain unresponsive to the LORD. Their *deeds* were not isolated incidents. Rather, their wickedness encircled them; exploitation, abuse, and violence had become the norm. And God saw it all, their deeds were ever *before My face* (vs 2). This means God constantly observed this abundance of wickedness.

The Israelites hearts had hardened; they rationalized that the LORD would not see their transgressions. Yet, the LORD is all-knowing. He saw Israel’s wicked deeds. As He said, *they are all before My face*. The truth about God is that “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).

This is what Israel failed to realize. She did not *remember* that God would take notice of all her actions, but God did. Israel’s wicked *deeds* were plain as day before the Suzerain God. Her transgressions met Him face to face.

Sadly, Israel’s political leaders were no different from the common people. Instead of opposing wickedness and falsehood, the leaders delighted in them. So, *with the people’s wickedness they make the king glad, and the princes with their lies* (vs 3). *Wickedness* and *lies* of the nation thus seemed to become a way of entertaining the political leaders. Or perhaps the *wickedness* and *lies* were executed on behalf of the leaders, as an integral part of them exploiting the people of Israel, and maintaining their power over them.

In verses 4–7, the LORD tells us that the entire nation of Israel was corrupt. The setting for these verses is likely the political turbulence that transpired in the northern kingdom of Israel after the death of King Jeroboam II (793 BC–753 BC). The book of 2 Kings tells us that during a time period (estimated to be 752 BC to 732 BC), six Israelite kings occupied the throne and four of

them were assassinated (2 Kings 15). Violence and bloodshed was applied in order to gain status and power. And those who employed violence and bloodshed to gain power then exploited those over whom they ruled. They led a nation that was full of injustice and lawlessness. This was the exact opposite of the behavior they agreed to follow when they entered into the covenant agreement with their LORD (Exodus 19:8). The covenant/contract required them to love their neighbors as themselves, and serve the best interest of their fellow citizens.

The LORD then makes clear that the Israelites were *all adulterers* (vs 4). The covenant agreement Israel agreed to at Sinai was a wedding agreement. Israel become as a wife to God. So when most of the nation broke His covenantal laws, it was like a wife committing adultery, in that they broke their covenant with God.

This is why the book of Hosea opens with God asking Hosea to “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD” (Hosea 1:2). The image used throughout Hosea is a wife who said “I do” to her vows, then abandoned them to chase other men. In the same way, Israel said “I do” to her vow to follow and obey God’s laws (Exodus 19:8). God’s law can be summed up as requiring Israel to honor Him as their one and only God and ruler. That would lead Israel to trust that His ways are for their best, leading them to follow God’s laws, which Jesus said could be summed up as loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

This was a sad situation because Israel was chosen by God to serve as a “kingdom of priests” to represent Him on earth in order to bring the other nations to Him (Exodus 19:4–6). By loving their neighbors, Israel would create a model nation based on mutual cooperation. Each person could apply themselves to creativity and investment, without worry of being deceived or exploited. This would create a society full of flourishing. God promised to add divine blessings to the natural consequence-blessings from honoring His ways (Deuteronomy 28:12). But Israel had abandoned her calling. She had sunk to the level of her neighbors, where the strong exploited the weak for their own sensual pleasure.

God’s covenantal relationship with Israel was like a marriage agreement that requires faithfulness from both parties. However, Israel failed in her mission because she gave allegiance to other gods, and followed their self-serving ways. She repeatedly broke the laws and lived in complete rebellion to God. As a result she lived an adulterous lifestyle, relying on foreign gods as moral justification for debauchery.

Israel’s passion for adultery is here compared to *an oven heated by the baker who ceases to stir up the fire from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened* (vs 4).

In ancient Israel, the *oven* was a cylindrical structure made of burnt clay two to three feet in diameter. It was used for baking food, especially bread (Leviticus 2:4). A *fire* was built on pebbles in the bottom of the *oven*, and bread was baked by either placing the dough against the *oven* walls or upon the heated pebbles.

In this comparison, the *oven* apparently represents the heart of the people, while the *fire* represents their sensual lust. The analogy seems to be that the people’s lust for behavior that is

adulterous to God is just like a baker's smoldering *fire*. The baker's fire is left burning at low heat while the baker kneads the dough, then perhaps goes to bed or rests and waits until the yeast has leavened before turning up the flame to bake the bread. The idea seems to be that Israel's lust continually burns, even when not apparent. They are just waiting to be stirred up by opportunity to sin, primed like coals. The evil plot was already burning in their hearts. It simply awaited to burst forth at the appropriate time.

That image is expanded with another. The LORD through Hosea further stated, *On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine. He stretched out his hand with scoffers* (vs 5).

The phrase *on the day of our king* likely refers to a special celebration where the king was the guest of honor. This could be either an occasion celebrating the coronation anniversary of the king or his birthday. During the celebration, the *princes*, whose assignment was to protect the king, became drunk (*heat of wine*), making the king vulnerable.

Then, the king *stretched out his hand with scoffers*. He lost his common sense and entered into close contact with lawless men, those who mocked him (Proverbs 21:24). Instead of rebuking the conspirators, the *king* encouraged their evil deeds until finally he himself fell victim to their crafty plans to *consume their rulers* with violence (v. 7). Evil men who desire to exploit others will naturally assassinate those who stand in the way of expanding their exploitation. Greed's only desire is always "more." When we seek "more" we can, by definition, never be satisfied, for "more" is always that which we do not possess.

The rationale for such a wicked behavior among the conspirators was because their hearts were not right with the LORD: *For their hearts are like an oven as they approach their plotting. Their anger smolders all night, in the morning it burns like a flaming fire* (vs 6).

The term *oven* is used again by God to explain the behavior and actions of the conspirators. In this verse, it is associated with the word *smoldering*, which is the process of burning slowly with smoke but no flame. This is usually done at night. This appears to repeat the same basic image as in verse 4, where the baker goes to bed while the dough rises, allowing the oven fire to smolder. In the same way, *anger smolders all night* until the time is ripe. Then *in the morning*, when the bread has risen (in the analogy) the baker stirs up the fire to bake the bread. In like manner, when the Israelites have opportunity to execute their *plotting* against their fellow citizens, and their rulers, they then enact their plans.

Due to its low heat, *smoldering* can easily go unnoticed. This was the manner in which the conspirators executed their plans. Their hot passion was likened to an *oven fire*, which burned slowly at night only to burst forth *in the morning*. This could represent that the conspirators planned their wicked actions secretly and awaited the opportune moment to pounce on their victims.

As He continued to speak about the conspirators, the LORD used the *oven* imagery once again and stated that *all of them are hot like an oven* (vs 7), which has been heating up for several

hours while the bread dough rises. Such a hot *oven* would be destructive. The conspirators were just like the *oven* because their heated passions caused them to *consume their rulers* (vs 7).

The political instability was so bad that *all the kings have fallen* (vs 7). As already mentioned, Israel had a series of kings in a short time. Here are a few instances of the violent end of several assassinated kings from 2 Kings 15:

- “Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him [King Zachariah] and struck him before the people and killed him, and reigned in his place” (2 Kings 15:10)
- (After only one month of rule) “Then Menahem son of Gadi went up from Tirzah and came to Samaria, and struck Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria, and killed him and became king in his place” (2 Kings 15:14).
- “Then Pekah son of Remaliah, his officer, conspired against him [King Pekahiah] and struck him in Samaria” (2 Kings 15:25a).
- “And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him and put him to death and became king in his place” (2 Kings 15:30a).

Yet, even though these kings suffered from intrigue and instability, the LORD declared, *None of them calls on Me* (vs. 7). The cycle of violence could end. The downward spiral of the nation could be stopped. What was needed was for the nation to call on their LORD. But they did not. As God had promised Israel through Solomon:

“If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”
(2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

The people of God ignored His saving power to deliver them because they had gone deep into depravity. But God always desires to rescue His people. As He says in the psalms: “Call on Me on the day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will honor Me” (Psalms 50:15). Israel’s failure to call on God resulted in chaos and anarchy. The northern kingdom of Israel was deteriorating into a culture of exploitation, where deception and violence reigned.

This passage makes clear that sin is a fatal disease. Scripture promises that the result of sin is always death. This was true in Genesis, when God instructed Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge, or he would experience death (Genesis 2:17). The Apostle Paul stated the principle while exhorting the believers in Rome not to use their freedom in Christ to sin, because the consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

When not cured, sin can act like an oven fire. It may smolder but will eventually flame up and cause severe damage in our lives. The good news is that there is a cure for sin. God can heal our spiritual malady if we genuinely call on Him (Psalms 50:15). He is an ever-present help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). God desires that we cast our cares upon Him, because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

Biblical Text

**¹When I would heal Israel,
The iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered,
And the evil deeds of Samaria,
For they deal falsely;
The thief enters in,
Bandits raid outside,**

**²And they do not consider in their hearts
That I remember all their wickedness.
Now their deeds are all around them;
They are before My face.**

**³With their wickedness they make the king glad,
And the princes with their lies.**

**⁴They are all adulterers,
Like an oven heated by the baker
Who ceases to stir up *the fire*
From the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.**

**⁵On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine;
He stretched out his hand with scoffers,**

**⁶For their hearts are like an oven
As they approach their plotting;
Their anger smolders all night,
In the morning it burns like a flaming fire.**

**⁷All of them are hot like an oven,
And they consume their rulers;
All their kings have fallen.
None of them calls on Me.**