

Hosea 7:13-16

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The LORD pronounces woe on Israel. The nation will be destroyed because she has strayed from God and broken her covenant promise. Now the covenant provisions for breaking her promise will be enforced.

Having described His exposure of the people's sin, setting up their ultimate redemption, and the unresponsiveness of the people of Israel to His call, as well as the results of her ignorance (vv. 1–7 and vv. 8–12 respectively), the LORD proceeded to pronounce *woe* (vs 13) on them.

The term *woe* (“’ôy” in Hebrew) was used in ancient Israel as a mourning shout at funerals (Jeremiah 34:5; 1 Kings 13:30). Here, the Suzerain God used it to suggest doom on His covenant people. This judgment is a result of Israel breaking their covenant/contract with God to serve Him only, and in serving Him only to love their neighbors as themselves. Instead, they were serving themselves (and pagan idols) and exploiting and harming their neighbors (Hosea 4:2). Accordingly, God will invoke the cursings provision of the covenant contract for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

The reason God pronounced judgment on the Israelites was because *they have strayed from Me*. Despite God's efforts to restore and heal the Israelites (v. 1), they ran away from Him. Their evil deeds did not allow them to return to the LORD because they had gone too far into their moral depravity (Hosea 5:2-4).

God continued His complaint and said, *Destruction is theirs*. Again, the reason for the people's destruction is clear from God's own words: *for they have rebelled against Me!* (vs 13).

The verb translated *they have rebelled* refers to willful disobedience. It is a lack of respect for someone in authority, whether humans (Numbers 16:41) or divine (Numbers 20:24). The Israelites rebelled against their Suzerain (Ruler) God. They did so willfully. In doing so, they violated the terms of His covenant. In spite of Israel's rebellion, God was willing to forgive them, but they dealt falsely (v. 1). God gave them multiple chances to repent, but they would not listen; they persisted in their stubbornness (Hosea 4:6).

The stubbornness and willful rebellion of Israel is made clear in the next sentence, in which the LORD said, *I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me* (vs 13). This indicates that if Israel was only ignorant, God would *redeem them*. But Israel is willfully speaking *lies against* God.

The verb *redeem* (“padah” in Hebrew) stresses the idea of a ransom price to be paid to free someone or something (Deuteronomy 7:8). In biblical times, a person could *redeem* someone or something from legal, political, economic obligations (Leviticus 27:28–33), or even from a death penalty (1 Samuel 14:45) by presenting something of equivalent value. Here in Hosea, the Suzerain (Ruler) God is portrayed as Israel's redeemer, capable of saving His people from any

danger. God is able to stretch out His mighty hand to rescue His people from any threats. He states that this is His desire. However, Israel has gone too far in their rebellion against God to allow for such mercy.

Instead of acknowledging their sinful conditions and asking for forgiveness, the Israelites denied the truth about God and His power and looked for security elsewhere. They spoke *lies against* their covenant God, the one who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and was willing to *redeem* them from the Assyrian threat. But this would not happen because Israel *rebelled against* their deliverer. In short, God's mutual agreement with Israel was imbalanced. God desired to do good to His people, but they rejected the offer.

God was faithful to Israel, but they were unfaithful to Him. This is why the book of Hosea opens with God asking Hosea to take a "wife of harlotry" (Hosea 1:2). It is an illustration to Israel showing the extent to which they have broken their covenant promise to Him, when they agreed to fully follow the Lord's commands on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:8).

To illustrate Israel's rebellion, the LORD said that they offered insincere or hypocritical prayers to Him: *They do not cry to Me from their heart when they wail on their beds* (vs 14). The implication of the rest of verse 14 is that instead of requesting provision of God, they are instead relying on their ability to appease or bribe pagan gods in order to gain provision.

He says, *For the sake of grain and new wine they assemble themselves*. The inference is that they are assembling themselves to petition of the pagan gods to give them *grain* and *new wine* (indicating a good grape crop). This is inferred by the statement *They turn away from Me* (vs 14).

The NASB margin offers a second option to translated the clause *they assemble themselves*. It could be translated as, "they gash themselves." This reading has been suggested by the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). This seems to fit the context better in light of the previous statements regarding wailing. The idea would be that the people of God wailed and cut themselves to convince Baal (the fertility god) to move in order to give them *grain and new wine* (agricultural products). We see the prophets of Baal wailing and cutting themselves in the episode with Elijah (1 Kings 18:28). The people were more interested in turning to Baal for grains and new wine than in seeking God.

But turning to Baal was a foolish decision and a clear sign of rebellion on Israel's part because the LORD (not Baal) was always the one providing and sustaining them. He not only provided food for the people, but also gave them strength to fight their foes in order to be victorious.

God made it plain that it was actually He who was sustaining Israel, *Although I trained and strengthened their arms They devise evil against Me* (vs 15). The LORD gave Israel the necessary skills and strength to fight the enemy during their times of combat (2 Kings 14:25–28). But Israel did not recognize this reality. There was no gratitude. Instead, Israel repaid God's provision with hostility: *They devise evil against Me*. Their wickedness served as a personal attack upon their Suzerain (or Ruler) God. They did harm to the LORD by turning away from Him in favor of Baal.

Why would they do such a thing? It is likely because Baal worship provided a moral excuse for them to seek sensual pleasures, as prostitution and sexual perversion was an integral part of Baal worship. It also provided moral justification to exploit others (the opposite of God's command to love their neighbors as themselves). Further, the pagan religions offered the illusion of control, holding that the people could manipulate divine powers in order to get their way (Jeremiah 44:17). It seems that the fallen human nature prefers to imagine that we can manipulate deities to get our way. This lack of reality leads to ruin.

The reality was that the people's decision to turn to pagan Baal worship did not play in their favor: *They turn, but not upward* (vs 16). The first part of verse 16 can be translated, "They turn back—not to the Most High." Israel is seeking divine aid, but not from the Most High God. Instead they are consulting wooden idols and forces of darkness (Hosea 4:12-13).

Their evil deeds caused them to make unwise decisions because *they are like a deceitful bow*, one that is twisted or faulty (Psalms 78:57). Like a faulty *bow* that fails to help warriors on the battlefield, Israel's decision to abandon God in favor of wooden gods and divination would lead to shame and destruction. *Their princes will fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue* (vs 16). Israel will no longer be ruled by fellow Israelites.

The Israelite rulers will *fall by the sword*. They relied on their own strength, so they will fall to another nation. This is because of the *insolence of their tongue*. Apparently the Israelite rulers were quite full of themselves, thinking they could prevail against greater powers. In the case of Assyria, this might be because they had sought refuge in Egypt. Verse 11 tells us that Israel flitted back and forth like a "silly dove" between Egypt and Assyria, relying on each for protection at various times. When they fall to Assyria, Egypt will not protect them.

And *this will be their derision in the land of Egypt*. Because of Israel's disobedience to God, shame will cover their faces. Egypt would mock them when they left Assyria and turned to Egypt for help. Apparently Egypt was glad to accept their payment of tribute, but when Israel called upon them to deliver them from Assyria, they did not show up. Thus, the *insolence of the tongue* of Israel's rulers will lead to their fall.

The Bible has a consistent pattern of warning us that pride leads to destruction. We see this in the Garden of Eden, when humanity fell because we wanted to have knowledge apart from God (Genesis 3:6). We see it in Habakkuk 2:4, which contrasts pride as the opposite of gaining righteousness through a walk of faith:

"Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith."
(Habakkuk 2:4)

Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted in Romans 1:16-17, the theme verse for the book of Romans, which largely argues why it is vastly in believers' best interest to walk in faith, believing that God's ways are for our best. Paul argues that walking in sin leads to severe adverse consequences, consequences he describes as "death" (Romans 6:23) and slavery (Romans 6:16). Death is

separation, and sin separates us from all that is good. In the case of Israel, their sin is tearing apart their society, filling it with deceit and bloodshed (Hosea 4:2).

Peter states that:

“GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

(1 Peter 5:5b-7)

When believers in Jesus choose to walk in faith, believing that God’s ways are for our best, then we gain immense benefits, including:

- The opportunity to gain the most from life, which comes from knowing God and Jesus Christ through a walk of faith (John 17:3).
- The opportunity to please God, which is the source of our greatest joy and reward (Hebrews 11:6).
- The opportunity to reap the reward and experience eternal life (the maximum experience of life) (Galatians 6:8).

Israel had this same basic opportunity, through obedience to their covenant relationship with God. They entered into what could be thought of as a covenant of marriage with God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:8). God promised them great blessings if they would follow in His commands, which Jesus summed up as loving God with all our being and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Moses described this path as a path that leads to life (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

But Israel instead chose the path that leads to death (Deuteronomy 30:17). One form of death (separation) they experienced was exile from the land. This exile occurred because of their unfaithfulness to God and their covenant promises to Him (1 Chronicles 9:1). This picture is consistent throughout scripture—God’s people will always be loved by God; He will never reject them. But His people have a basic choice that will determine what sort of life experience they will have, and the consequences of those choices are an experience of life and peace versus an experience of death and exploitation.

Biblical Text

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¹⁴ And they do not cry to Me from their heart

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