

Hosea 9:1-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hos/hos-9/hosea-91-6/>

Hosea urges Israel not to rejoice with pagan feasting of prostitutes during their plentiful harvest because the Suzerain (ruler) God will send them into exile in the land of Assyria, where they will remain. Those that escape to Egypt will do so in haste, leaving behind their silver treasures and tents, which will be destroyed by weeds and thorns.

As the harvest season was approaching, the prophet Hosea warned the Israelites, saying, *Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations!* (vs 1). The setting for this verse seems to be the time that should have marked the Feast of Booths, which was to be celebrated seven days after the grain and grapes had been processed, placed in containers, and stored away (Deuteronomy 16:13).

Israel was supposed to celebrate this harvest festival with great joy as she gave thanks to God who blessed the fruit of her labor (Deuteronomy 16:14). But here in Hosea, Israel was instead rejoicing with *exultation like the nations* (vs 1). The *exultation of the nations* apparently refers to the celebration practices of the neighboring pagan nations, who celebrated harvest with pagan debauchery.

Hosea describes *For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God* (vs 1). Israel had demonstrated her infidelity by trusting Baal—the Canaanite fertility god—to provide for her needs instead of trusting the LORD her God (Hosea 2:7–8). She had acted as an unfaithful partner to God. That is why God instructed Hosea to take a wife of harlotry, as an illustration that Israel's breaking of their covenant with God is like a wife breaking her marital vow (Hosea 1:2, Ezekiel 16:15).

Israel's infidelity to God is well illustrated in the next sentence, where Hosea said Israel had *loved harlot's earnings on every threshing floor*. The phrase *harlots' earnings* refer to gifts to a harlot in return for her service (Hosea 2:12). In Israel's case, those gifts were agricultural products such as wheat, vines and figs, food, water, wool, linen, oil, and drink (Hosea 2:5–12). The picture seems to be of the farmers in Israel at the time of harvest bringing harlots to their nightly feasts, and paying them with produce from the harvest.

Rather than enjoying the harvest in gratitude, as they were supposed to do (Deuteronomy 16:14), instead they are squandering it on prostitutes. It is likely that the prostitutes are part of the pagan worship practices, which would indicate that they are engaging in the pagan practices. In the Feast of Booths, they are supposed to sleep in booths to remember they were delivered from Egypt and dwelt in temporary dwellings while in the wilderness, and every seven years they are to hear the full reading of the Law (Leviticus 23:43, Deuteronomy 31:10). There seems to be no evidence that the lessons from that festival are being practiced. Instead they were practicing sexual immorality, as was the custom in Egypt and Canaan (Leviticus 18).

Israel would lose all these gifts because she erroneously attributed them to Baal. She completely neglected the fact that it was the LORD her God who provided for her. She had *loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor*.

The *threshing floor* refers to a hard, level surface on which the grain is removed from the harvested plants. It was one of the essential installations within the farming areas of Israel. After the cereals had been cut, they were to be separated from the kernels before they could be ground into flour. It seems that the custom was to thresh late into the evening, and sleep at the threshing floor during harvest (Ruth 3:2-4). Here it seems apparent that Israel sponsored orgies during the harvest. They were likely crediting Baal with the harvest, while indulging in sex parties.

Consequently, the Israelites would be deprived of all these plentiful harvests. God promised that if they would rejoice and have gratitude with God, remembering that it was He who delivered them from Egypt and to the Promised Land, then He would ensure a bountiful harvest (Deuteronomy 16:15). But Israel was not being grateful to God. Instead they were breaking their covenant by following pagan gods and practicing pagan culture. Therefore God would invoke the penalty in their covenant agreement, and dry up the productivity of the land (Deuteronomy 28:18).

The *Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them, And the new wine will fail them* (vs 2). The term *wine press* can also be translated as wine vat. God's point in referring to the *threshing floor* and *wine press* is that the harvest seasons would yield no *grain*, and there would be no grapes to produce *wine* (Deuteronomy 28:18). Instead of living in material prosperity, the Israelites would experience crop failure. Both the *threshing floor* and *the wine press* would be empty due to lack of crop production.

On top of this, the Israelites would not *remain in the LORD's land* (vs 3) because they wrongly attributed the produce of the land to Baal, and followed the practices of Baal (including cultic prostitution). The Suzerain (ruler) God granted the land of Canaan to Israel in fulfillment of His promises with her forefathers (Genesis 17:8).

But Israel was to obey God's covenantal laws in order to enjoy the benefits of the land, and remain in the land. Failure to submit to God's authority and follow His covenant commands, as they promised to do (Exodus 19:8), would result in Israel's removal from the land. She would be scattered "among all the peoples, from *one* end of the earth to the other" (Deuteronomy 28:64).

During the days of Hosea, this curse for disobedience to the covenant became a reality. As the prophet declared, *Ephraim will return to Egypt, and in Assyria they will eat unclean food* (vs 3). The phrase *return to Egypt* is metaphorical for returning to living under the yoke of a master. In this case the master will not be Pharaoh, but *Assyria*.

The term *Ephraim* refers to the largest tribe in Israel, and here stands for the entire nation. It means "doubly fruitful" (Genesis 41:52). It is used ironically to apply to the northern kingdom of Israel because the people would not continue to live in the fertile land of Canaan, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17).

Like in the previous chapter, the name *Egypt* is used symbolically to indicate that Israel's future exiled condition would be like that which she experienced in Egypt. Such an experience can be summarized in two words: oppression and labor (Exodus 1). But Israel's destination for exile in Hosea's days was *Assyria* (2 Kings 17:6). There she would eat *unclean foods* because she would live in an unclean, pagan land. This would happen because Israel had defiled herself (Hosea 6:10). She had ignored God and intermingled with pagan nations, adopting their culture of exploitation, and forsaking God's love-your-neighbor culture (Hosea 7:8, Matthew 22:37-39).

Confined in the land of Assyria, the Israelites would not be able to offer acceptable sacrifices to the Suzerain God. They *will not pour out drink offerings of wine to the LORD and their sacrifices will not please Him* (vs 4). Drink offerings were often accompaniments of animal sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-46). According to the book of Numbers, "one-fourth of a hin," approximately one gallon, of wine, was to be poured out into the altar fire for each sacrifice (Numbers 15:4-5).

In exile, however, *drink offerings* and animal *sacrifices* would either not occur or if they did they would not *please* God. The Hebrew word translated as *please Him* is often used to indicate something taken in pledge to secure a loan or a vow. The idea seems to be that if they did sacrifices while in exile, it wouldn't get them released from exile. There would be no "early release" or "parole" from their exile. They would go there and serve their "full term."

That Israel's sacrificial worship would not restore their fellowship with God that they might reenter the land is further explained by Hosea's vivid comparison in which he said, *Their bread will be like mourners' bread, all who eat of it will be defiled* (vs 4). In ancient Israel, a house in mourning, having had contact with a dead body, was regarded as "unclean for seven days" (Numbers 19:11).

During the period of the people's uncleanness, *their bread could be for themselves alone, but was not to enter the house of the LORD*. This might indicate that Israel would not come back from exile, as there will be no *house of the LORD* in their place of exile. Historically, Samaria was not restored. This is unlike the southern kingdom of Judah, which was promised a return after 70 years in exile (Jeremiah 29:10). In the future, all of Israel will be restored, and Jesus will be welcomed as their Messiah (Romans 11:26-27).

The idea seems to be that the Israelites would still be able to eat their food while in exile, but they would not be able to offer any of their meals to the LORD their God, for such an offering would be ceremonially unclean (Jeremiah 16:7, Ezekiel 24:17). Hosea used this picture to characterize Israel's life when she would be taken captive by the Assyrian empire.

Anticipating Israel's upcoming judgment, Hosea asked her, *What will you do on the day of the appointed festival and on the day of the feast of the LORD* (vs 5)?

The phrases *appointed festival* and *feast of the LORD* are likely used synonymously to depict the Feast of Booths, which seems to be the setting for the passage in chapter 8 (v. 1). This festival was at the time of harvest. Hosea then answers his own question regarding this time of harvest:

*For behold, they will go because of destruction;
Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them.
Weeds will take over their treasures of silver;
Thorns will be in their tents.*

The people of God would not be able to celebrate their most important festivals because they will be in exile, *for behold, they will go because of destruction*. They will leave the land because it is devastated. It seems that some will try to escape to Egypt, but they will not prosper there. *Egypt will gather them up*, then *Memphis will bury them*.

The city named *Memphis* is located just twenty miles south of modern Cairo, on the west bank of the Nile River. It served as the capital of Lower Egypt during much of Egypt's history. It was a famous Egyptian burial site. God's people would die and would be buried there in *Memphis* because of their disobedience to Him. The picture seems to be that *Egypt* will collect them, then *Memphis* will bury them as they die.

As far as their belongings, it seems that they leave in haste, leaving behind their silver and their tents. Presumably these things would slow them down. Then *weeds will take over their treasures of silver; thorns will be in their tents* (vs 6). The picture seems to be of Israelites fleeing in haste, leaving behind their *treasures of silver*. But Israel/Samaria will be so uninhabited that no one will take the silver. Rather, *weeds will take over their treasures of silver*. And their *tents* won't be occupied, so apparently there won't be a sufficient population to inhabit the *tents* left behind. The tents will just be overtaken with *thorns*.

Biblical Text

**¹Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations!
For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.
You have loved *harlots'* earnings on every threshing floor.
²Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them,
And the new wine will fail them.
³They will not remain in the Lord's land,
But Ephraim will return to Egypt,
And in Assyria they will eat unclean *food*.
⁴They will not pour out drink offerings of wine to the Lord,
Their sacrifices will not please Him.
Their bread will be like mourners' bread;
All who eat of it will be defiled,
For their bread will be for themselves *alone*;
It will not enter the house of the Lord.
⁵What will you do on the day of the appointed festival
And on the day of the feast of the Lord?
⁶For behold, they will go because of destruction;
Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them.
Weeds will take over their treasures of silver;
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