

Hosea 9:15-17

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The LORD states that Israel's bad leaders and wicked behavior will cause her to be dried up like a tree whose growth depends on a strong root system. Because of her wickedness, Israel will be exiled and wander among the nations.

In this final section of chapter 9, the LORD shifted His attention from Israel's incident at Baal-peor (9:10) to her wicked deeds at *Gilgal* ([See Map](#)). He began by saying, *All their evil is at Gilgal* (vs 15). The city named *Gilgal* was located near Jericho. It was the first place where the Israelites encamped in Canaan after crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 4:19).

However, in Hosea's days it had become a center for wickedness and transgression, as the people of Israel offered false devotion to God (Amos 4:4). For this reason, God stated, *Indeed, I came to hate them there!* (vs 15). The Hebrew word translated *I came to hate them* is also translated as "unloved" as in Genesis 29:30-31 when Leah was loved less than Rachel.

This means that God was displeased with the people's behavior at *Gilgal* because there they offered false worship to Him and practiced wicked deeds. God never has nor never will stop loving Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7-8, Jeremiah 31:3, Romans 11:28-29). But God hates evil, and is greatly displeased when His people walk in self-destructive sinfulness. This is the case also in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

God judges sin. With respect to our relationship with God, God nailed all the sin of the world to the cross with Jesus (Colossians 2:14). For all who believe in Him, they are born anew into God's family, which is a relationship that can never be lost (John 3:3, 14-16). However, sin still has adverse consequences, and God's wrath pours out on it, often by allowing sin to run its natural course (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

And because of the wickedness of the people's deeds, God said, *I will drive them out of My house!* (vs 15). The language here is that of a husband who divorced his wife for infidelity (Hosea 1-3, Deuteronomy 24:1-3). So, like a husband who has divorced his unfaithful wife and expelled her from his house, the Suzerain God would drive Israel out of the land of Canaan.

God would *love them no more* (vs 15). He would withdraw His presence and protection from them, and they would become hopeless. This is in contrast to the statement in Hosea 3, where He says:

"Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes."
(Hosea 3:1)

In this passage from Hosea 3, God still loves Israel.

And again as God stated through the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied to Judah prior to their exile to Babylon:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.
“Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!”
(Jeremiah 31:3-4a)

In this Jeremiah passage, God’s love is said to be “everlasting.”

It seems that in Hosea 9:15 that the picture is that the faithful husband is putting out the unfaithful wife from the house. The wife is being divorced. They will no longer dwell together. Hence the description that God would *love them no more*, meaning their fellowship is broken, and for a season God would no longer bless them as a part of the covenant (Ezekiel 16).

In other verses, God promises that when there is repentance, God will take Israel back, and restore covenant relationship. The adverse consequences of Israel’s defeat and exile are required as a part of their covenant agreement with God (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). However, the covenant also provides that when Israel is disciplined, it will eventually be restored (Deuteronomy 32:36, 43).

The reason listed here for Israel’s defeat was rebellion: *All their princes are rebels*. Israel’s leaders were rebellious because they rejected God’s laws. Kings were assassinated, and the assassin became king (Hosea 8:2). Instead of trusting in God, the leaders trusted Egypt and Assyria. Instead of choosing one and sticking with them, they destabilized Israel by flitting back and forth between Egypt and Assyria (Hosea 7:11).

Instead of serving the people of Israel, the leaders exploited them (Hosea 5:1). Instead of leading the people and training them in righteousness, the leaders led them to ignorance, and set a bad example (Hosea 4:4). As a result of the lack of training and the poor leadership of the people, the land fell into a pagan culture of mutual exploitation. The land filled with deception, and violence (Hosea 4:1-3).

We might infer that the leadership of Israel followed the “low pressure system for leaders” that leads to a cultural storm for whomever they lead. When the leaders stand for nothing but their own power and appetites, then they only look for affirmation (like false prophets). They will not listen to the truth (as from the true prophets). So they blame (perhaps blaming God for their own failures).

And they seek relief, perhaps in pagan worship practices. The practice of Baal worship provides a moral justification for exploiting others and chasing their appetites (particularly sexual perversions). Further, the pagan diviner’s wand and idol feedback will always justify the passions of the petitioner. In the case of Israel, that took the form of mutual exploitation, manipulation, and violence (Hosea 4:2).

God called the leaders of Israel to be strong and differentiated leaders. He called the Levites to teach the people, and lead them in righteousness (Deuteronomy 33:8, 10). He called each father of each household to teach their children to love God and love their neighbors continuously, all day every day (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-39). God called His leaders to be courageous to do all God had commanded, and to believe that His way was for their best (Joshua 1:7, 23:6, Hebrews 11:6).

A good leader creates a climate for a creative, supportive culture of human flourishing. This begins with a leader having a commitment to a mission. God desired the leaders in Israel to be committed to follow His covenant ways, and fulfill the mission to be a nation of priests, showing a better way to the surrounding nations (Exodus 19:6). Instead, they became followers of the surrounding nations. As a result, God would take away their witness, and give them over to their foreign lovers.

Therefore, God returned to the destruction of Ephraim's lineage mentioned earlier (vv. 11–13) and said, *Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they will bear no fruit* (vs 16). Like in the previous verses, *Ephraim* is used ironically here as a stand-in for the entire northern kingdom of Israel because it is the largest tribe. *Ephraim* provides an ironic twist since it means “doubly fruitful” (Genesis 41:52). The great irony is that the once doubly fruitful land would become fruitless.

The imagery used here is that of a plant whose growth depends in large part on a strong *root* system. If the root is *dried up*, and withers from a lack of water or is torn from the ground, the plant will soon dry up and die (Job 8:16–19). Similarly, the population of *Ephraim*/Israel would be reduced due to barrenness. Israelite women would be under such physical duress that they would be unable to bear children (*bear no fruit*) (Hosea 9:14).

God added to the severity of Israel's judgment when He declared, *Even though they bear children, I will slay the precious ones of their womb* (vs 16). The picture here could be of invaders ripping the children from the womb of their mothers (Hosea 13:16). It is noteworthy that God considers unborn children as *precious ones*. The pagan practice of child sacrifice was something God particularly condemned (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5). This is because it is God who forms us in our mother's *womb* (Psalm 139:13-15).

Following God's statements, the prophet Hosea closed the chapter with a summary on Israel's future condition in exile. He said, *My God will cast them away because they have not listened to Him; And they will be wanderers among the nations* (verse 17).

Israel's wicked behavior caused God to *cast them away* into exile. This is per the terms of the covenant agreement into which Israel entered (Exodus 19:8, Deuteronomy 28:25, 36). Like Cain (Genesis 4:12, 14), Israel would become a fruitless wanderer as an exile *among the nations*. This means Israel will no longer live in the land, until her time of exile is complete. This all took place because she had disobeyed God's covenantal laws. Israel has *not listened to God*. His law was so unknown by them that it seemed as something strange (Hosea 8:12).

Most things in life we do not control. We do not control our genetics, or our historical circumstances, such as the time of our birth. We cannot make choices for others. But we do control three things: who we trust, the perspective we choose, and the actions we take. The lesson we can take from this chapter is that it greatly behooves us to choose a perspective that God is our Maker, and knows what is for our best. Therefore, we ought to listen to Him, and trust His ways. It is in this manner that we can gain the greatest experience from life.

The world promises life (1 John 2:15-16). But it delivers death (Romans 6:23, Galatians 6:8). Jesus asks us to lay down our lives, putting to death our own self-seeking appetites, for that is the way to the greatest possible experience of life (Matthew 16:24-25). There are two roads in life, one that leads to death (that the world tells us leads to life) and one that leads to life (that the world tells us leads to death). Who we trust, and the perspective we choose will affect our decisions, which will determine whether we gain blessings and fruitfulness in life, or futility and loss.

Thankfully, those who have believed are declared righteous in God's sight (Romans 4:3). That cannot be lost, because it is apart from any deeds (Romans 4:5). However, our actions have consequences, so it behooves us to listen to God, and adopt a perspective that is true. In this way we can renew our mind, and be transformed (Romans 12:1-2).

Biblical Text

**¹⁵ All their evil is at Gilgal;
Indeed, I came to hate them there!
Because of the wickedness of their deeds
I will drive them out of My house!
I will love them no more;
All their princes are rebels.**

**¹⁶ Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up,
They will bear no fruit.
Even though they bear children,
I will slay the precious ones of their womb.**

**¹⁷ My God will cast them away
Because they have not listened to Him;
And they will be wanderers among the nations.**