

Lesson 21

Hosea 5:1-2

1 Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. 2 And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.

When we ended last week we were about to look at the second phrase in verse 1: “For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.”

Once again, Hosea does not hold our hand. Hosea expects us to know all about Mizpah and Tabor.

But before we look at Mizpah and Tabor, let’s look at the word “you.” The judgment is for you because you have been a snare and a net. Who is “you”?

I think “you” in the second half of verse 1 must be the three groups who were commanded to listen in the first half of verse 1 – the priests, the house of Israel (likely the wealthy elite), and the house of the king (likely Pekah).

But why Mizpah? Why Tabor? Those are excellent questions, and I wish we had equally excellent answers! Here is how one commentary addresses those questions:

It is best to begin by acknowledging the limitation of the evidence... At the same time, we may suppose that the geographic references meant something more specific to the prophet's contemporaries than they do to later readers.

The short answer is that we don't know for sure, but, of course, there is also a long answer. Let's start with Mizpah. And our first question about Mizpah is which Mizpah?

The map on the handout for Lesson 19 shows a Mizpah that was a city in the tribe of Benjamin located in Judah just across the boundary from Israel. Most commentaries think that city is the Mizpah in verse 1 because of its connection with Benjamin, which is mentioned just a few verses later in Hosea 5:8.

But why would that Mizpah be mentioned here? What is special about that city? There is a beautiful song in our songbook that might help us answer that question:

O Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise;
Teach me ever to adore Thee;
May I still Thy goodness prove;
While the hope of endless glory,
Fills my heart with joy and love.
Here I raise my Ebenezer...

What is Ebenezer, and how is it related to Mizpah?

1 Samuel 7:11-12 – And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. Then

Samuel took a stone and set it up between **Mizpah** and Shen and called its name **Ebenezer**; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us."

Notice the phrase "Till now!" That phrase is very ominous – especially so for Israel in the days of Hosea.

It was near Mizpah that Samuel raised the Ebenezer stone to commemorate Israel's victory over the Philistines. But those days were now over. The Philistines were coming back in the form of a new enemy – the Assyrians, and it was God himself who was bringing them back.

Why? Verse 1 tells us why – it was because the leaders had forgotten what God had done for the people at Mizpah and had instead set up a snare in Mizpah to capture the people – most likely in the form of a false shrine like we saw earlier in Gilgal and Bethel.

Yes, Samuel had raised the Ebenezer stone so that the people would remember, but the people had forgotten anyway.

That is the most likely reason why Mizpah is mentioned here. It fits well with the context, and it continues the same message that we saw earlier with Gilgal and Bethel. The people had forgotten what God had done at those cities.

But, there is another possibility. Mizpah of Benjamin is not the only city named Mizpah. There is also a Mizpah of Gilead.

Mizpah of Gilead was where Laban overtook Jacob after he fled with Rachel and Leah in Genesis

31:49. Mizpah of Gilead was also where the judge Jephthah was met by his daughter after he had promised to sacrifice the first thing he met when he arrived home in Judges 11:34.

If you look at the map from Lesson 19, you will see Gilead located across the Jordan from Ephraim, and, although Mizpah of Gilead is not shown on that map, it was located near Mount Hermon (shown near the top of that map).

And, as for context, we see that (as with Benjamin for the other Mizpah) Gilead is also mentioned nearby to Hosea 5:1.

Hosea 6:8 – Gilead is a city of evildoers,
tracked with blood.

And if we are correct that Israel under Pekah was based in Gilead, then anyone listening to Hosea would have thought of Gilead each time Israel was mentioned.

But why would this particular Mizpah of Gilead have been mentioned in Hosea 5:1?

Again, we might go back to the civil war between Menahem and Pekah, where the Manahem faction is called Ephraim and the Pekah faction is called Israel. The revolters or the rebels in verse 2 would most likely be the pro-Assyrian faction based in Ephraim.

But what is the connection between that civil war and Mizpah of Gilead?

We don't know for sure, but we do know that Pekah appears to have been a Gileadite because the men

from Gilead assisted him when he overthrew the house of Menahem in 2 Kings 15:25.

If the Mizpah in Gilead is the Mizpah in verse 1, then it was most likely the site of some (now unknown) intrigue that occurred between Israel and Ephraim during this period.

So which one is it? That is very hard to say because each of those two possibilities is supported by a different surrounding context.

I would give the edge to Mizpah of Benjamin (as shown on the Lesson 19 handout), but Mizpah of Gilead is also a possibility.

And what about Tabor? Why is Tabor also mentioned in verse 1?

Tabor was not a city, but rather was a mountain located far to the north overlooking Jezreel. Mount Tabor is highlighted on the handout for Lesson 19.

So what happened at Mount Tabor?

- Mount Tabor is mentioned in Joshua 19, where Joshua shows that the tribes of Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali all border Mount Tabor.
- Mount Tabor is also the place in Judges 4:6 where Deborah tells Barak of God's command to gather an army, and it is the place from which Barak descends with his 10,000 men to do battle against Sisera and his army in Judges 4:14.
- In Judges 8:18, Mount Tabor was the location where the kings of Midian murdered the

brothers of Gideon, leading to their own deaths at the hand of Gideon.

- Mount Tabor is not mentioned in the New Testament, but, since at least the fourth century AD, it has been suggested as the place of the transfiguration of Christ.

None of those events involving Mount Tabor stands out as a reason for why we find Tabor in Hosea 5:1.

I think the most likely reason is that Mount Tabor was one of the high places at which the people offered their false worship to their false gods. By those false practices, the priests were catching people in their net, just as verse 1 describes.

Verse 2 says: "And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them."

As we said, these revolvers or rebels are most likely the followers of Menahem, who are I believe referred to in Hosea as Ephraim. We know that civil war ended with their slaughter when Pekah overthrew them and took control of the entire kingdom.

And, again, that may have already happened given the past tense in verse 2 – or that past tense may be an example of the "prophetic past tense."

And, as we have said, neither side in this civil war was good – both sides were evil. We see that here in verse 2, where tells us that he was going

to discipline them all, including Pekah and his followers.

And it mattered not which side was pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian – their opinion of Assyria did not matter to the plans of God. Assyria was coming whether they liked Assyria or not.

Hosea 5:3

3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled.

In verse 3 we see a very good example of what we were just talking about with regard to Israel and Ephraim, and I think we also see more evidence for the view that the rebels in verse 2 were the pro-Assyrian faction led by Menahem. And we also see confirmation that both sides in this civil war were evil.

“I know Ephraim.” What does that mean? It means that God knows exactly what Ephraim is doing. Ephraim may have thought that its schemes and plots were secret, but they were not. God saw and knew everything they were up to.

But there is also a sense in which God did **not** know Ephraim. As with our knowledge of God, God’s knowledge of us has multiple levels.

On one level, God knows everything about us because God is omniscient – God knows everything that is knowable. But there is another level in which God does not know those who are not his people. It is the same level for which Jesus

would later say, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23).

Amos 3:2 – You only have I known of all the families of the earth.

John 10:14-15 – I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

In verse 3, God knows Ephraim in the sense that he knows exactly what they are plotting. But God does not know them as his people because they were no longer his people.

"Israel is not hidden from me." What was true about Ephraim is also true about Israel. God knows all about their schemes and their plots. God knows all about their sins and their false gods and their false worship.

Hebrews 4:13 – And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

And what was it that God knew about Ephraim and Israel? God knew that Ephraim had played the whore and that Israel was defiled.

As for Ephraim having played the whore, we know that both Israel and Ephraim had been guilty of spiritual adultery with their false gods, but there was another sense in which Ephraim had played the whore – Ephraim had played the whore with Assyria.

As we have said, Ephraim was the pro-Assyrian side of the civil war between Menahem of Ephraim

and Pekah of Israel. And Menahem had been looking to Assyria rather than to God for his approval and for his reward.

2 Kings 15:19-20 – Pul [Tiglath-Pileser] the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power. Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.

Ephraim had led all of Israel into idolatry, and Ephraim had led all of Israel into a civil war. As a result of both, Israel had been defiled. Again, there was no good side in this civil war – both sides were evil and defiled. Both sides had rejected God.

And just because verse 3 says that Ephraim had played the whore and that Israel was defiled does not mean that Israel had not also played the whore or that Ephraim was not also defiled. In fact, we know from elsewhere that those things were also true. For example, we know from Isaiah 7 that Israel later played the whore with Rezin of Syria just as Ephraim was now playing the whore with Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria.

Hosea 5:4

4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD.

I like how one commentary begins its comments on this verse:

“The Bible holds two truths in tension: first, that repentance is always a possibility, and second, that corruption can so enslave a soul that repentance becomes a practical impossibility.”

People often go into a life of sin seeking freedom, but that is not what they find. Rather than becoming free, they become slaves to their sin. And, as slaves, they lose their freedom. Although they are free to repent and return, they are effectively unable to do so because of their chains and enslavement.

Yes, the truth will set us free (John 8:32), but the truth is that “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34).

That is what verse 4 is saying here: “Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.” And we see that same teaching in the New Testament as well.

Hebrews 6:4-6 – For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Hebrews 10:26-27 – For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment,

and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

1 John 5:16-18 – If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life – to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. **All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.** We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

Romans 6:12 – Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, **to make you obey its passions.**

2 Peter 2:19 – They promise them **freedom**, but they themselves are **slaves** of corruption. **For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.**

That was the sad state of Ephraim and Israel – they had reached the point where their own deeds would not permit them to return to God. They were slaves of sin, obeying its passions and having been overcome by it.

Was there no hope at all?

There must have been some hope for at least some of the people because Hosea had been sent as a final warning of what was about to happen to them – but sadly it seems that there was no more hope remaining for most of the people.

Yes, there was hope in the Messiah who was to come, and Hosea often reminds them of that fact – but that hope was for their descendants (such as the woman at the well in John 4). The Messiah was

not coming in their immediate future. Yes, the Messiah was coming, but Assyria was coming first.

And what about today? Is it possible for someone to become so far entrenched in sin that no hope remains? Are Ephraim and Israel still with us today?

We must continue proclaiming the gospel to everyone – even to those we might think will never listen to us. Like the prodigal, sometimes the most fertile field is those who have reached rock bottom in their lives.

But with that said, John's statement that we read a moment ago is both very difficult and very sobering: "There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that." That is a very sad state, and perhaps we see that sad state here in Hosea – "Ephraim is joined to idols; **leave him alone**" (Hosea 4:17). "Their deeds do not permit them to return" (5:4).

And why had Ephraim and Israel reached that sad state? Verse 4 reminds us: "For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD."

They lacked faithfulness, and they lacked knowledge. That reminds us of their description in Hosea 4:1 – "There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land."

In this book of Hosea, we see the **love** of God, we see the **justice** of God, and we see the **wrath** of God. But we also see the **sadness** of God.

That the chosen people of God should ever reach such a low state as we see here is one of the saddest events ever recorded, and we see God's great sadness on full display in this book.

But God had a plan to cleanse and restore his people. God had a plan to get them back! And we also see that wonderful plan on full display in this book.

Hosea 1:10 – And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

Hosea 5:5

5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt;
Judah also shall stumble with them.

Verse 5 provides perhaps the best confirmation yet that Israel and Ephraim are being treated as separate entities in Hosea.

Also, verse 5 brings us back to the court scene we saw earlier in this book – Israel's pride is testifying to Israel's face.

What is Israel's pride?

We know what it **should** have been. The same Hebrew word translated “pride” in verse 5 is translated “majesty” in Exodus 15:7.

Exodus 15:7 – In the greatness of your **majesty** you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

God was the true pride of Israel, and if the “pride of Israel” in verse 5 is a reference to God, then verse 5 is telling us that God is testifying to Israel’s face.

But I don’t think that is what is going on in verse 5.

Instead, I think the “pride of Israel” in verse 5 is describing, not what **should** have been Israel’s pride, but what was Israel’s **actual** pride at this time – themselves, their alliances, and their false gods. And it is these terrible sins that are testifying in verse 5 against Israel.

I think we see two things in verse 5 that always go together – pride and stumbling.

Proverbs 16:18 – Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Obadiah 1:3-4 – The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.

In verse 5, Israel has the pride, but all three stumble – Israel, Ephraim, and even Judah.

We have two immediate questions – why is only Israel described as having pride, and why do all three stumble?

As for the first question, just because Israel is said to be proud does not mean that Ephraim and

Judah were not also proud. And, in fact, we know they were.

Isaiah 28:1 – Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!

Jeremiah 13:9 – Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

So why is Israel singled out for pride here in verse 5?

Israel's pride is most likely singled out here because Israel's pride was greater at this time than the pride of Ephraim and Judah.

Although we usually think of Judah as having the upper hand during the days of the divided kingdom, that was not true toward the end of the divided kingdom. In fact, Judah became a vassal state of Israel after King Amaziah's failed campaign against Jehoash.

2 Kings 14:13-14 – And Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for four hundred cubits, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. And he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.

And so it is easy to see how Israel's pride could have been greater than Judah's pride at this time.

As for Ephraim, if the civil war is still in view here, then perhaps Israel had just emerged victorious. As we said earlier, the past tense in verse 2 may indicate that Ephraim had now been defeated. If so, that victory may have filled Israel with pride.

That explains why verse 5 says that Israel was proud. But why does verse 5 then say that all three – Israel, Ephraim, and Judah – stumble?

First, as we said, all three were proud even though only Israel is said to be proud here, and so all three may have stumbled because of their pride.

But second, note the phrase in verse 5: “Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt.” Whose guilt, and which guilt?

And for whose guilt, there is some disagreement over whether the verse should be translated “his guilt” (ESV) or “their guilt” (KJV). I favor the KJV on that issue given the plural pronoun at the end of the verse, but we can also see how Ephraim could stumble because of Israel’s guilt. When there is sin in the camp, the entire camp suffers.

Proverbs 14:34 – Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

As for Judah, many commentaries think that final phrase was added by a later editor, but I disagree. Judah has already been mentioned in this section, and so we should not be surprised at all to see Judah mentioned again. And even if

this reference to Judah did come as a surprise, that would hardly be reason to attribute it to a later editor in a book that is filled with surprises!

I think what we have at the end of verse 5 is a prophecy (from a prophet!) about the future of Judah. Judah was also going to be filled with pride, and Judah was also going to stumble. Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us all about it. But, unlike Israel, Judah would get back up after it stumbled. Judah would return to God.

But the sad fact is that Judah followed the bad example of her sister, Israel. We see that situation described in Ezekiel 23.

Ezekiel 23:1-4 – The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled. Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 23:36-39 – The LORD said to me: Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my

sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house.

Judah followed the bad example of Israel, and Judah was destroyed by Babylon just as Israel was destroyed by Assyria.

But Judah was not scattered forever. Instead, Judah returned from that exile to rebuild the city and rebuild the temple and restore proper worship of God. And, as a result, Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem to welcome Jesus – the Son of God, the Son of Abraham, and the Son of David – into the world.

The Civil War – A Review

Now that we have looked at Hosea 5:5, let's circle back and look again at the civil war in the northern kingdom. Although there is very little we can say on that topic with complete certainty, we have by now seen quite a bit of evidence for such a conflict, and Hosea 5:5 is perhaps the strongest evidence we have seen – it is clear that Israel and Ephraim were separate entities at this time in history.

So let's put all the evidence out on the table and see if we can piece it together in a way that makes sense.

First, we know that there must have been some overlap between the 20-year reign of Pekah and the reigns of the other northern kings. Otherwise, the reign of the final king, Hoshea, would extend beyond the fall of Israel in 722/723 BC.

We looked at all of those chronological details in our introductory lessons, and we concluded that, most likely, the first 12 years of Pekah's 20-year reign overlapped the 10-year reign of Menahem and the 2-year reign of his son, Pekahiah (who was assassinated by Pekah). What that means is that the civil war lasted 12 years and was between Pekah (Israel) and the house of Menahem (Ephraim).

Second, and perhaps surprisingly, we know that Pekah was an officer under Pekahiah.

2 Kings 15:25 – And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his [Pekahiah's] captain, conspired against him with fifty men of the people of Gilead, and struck him down in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house with Argob and Arieah; he put him to death and reigned in his place.

How do we explain that?

First, Pekah was most likely an officer under Pekahiah's father, Menahem, and was then "inherited" in a sense by Pekahiah. We know that Pekah certainly had no particular allegiance to Pekahiah given that he assassinated him!

Second, I think we can use some informed speculation to figure out what most likely happened in the lead up to that civil war.

Who was the king just prior to Menahem? The answer is Shallum, who reigned for only a month before Menahem killed him.

So, who was Shallum? 2 Kings 15:13 tells us that Shallum was "the son of Jabesh," but that Hebrew phrase can mean either that Jabesh was his father

or that Jabesh was the city where he was from – and I think the latter makes more sense here. Jabesh was a town in Gilead (Judges 21:8). (See Jabesh–Gilead on the handout for Lesson 21.)

If that is correct, then what do we have? We have a king from Gilead who reigns for one month before he is assassinated and replaced by Menahem in Samaria.

And how do we suppose Gilead would have reacted to that event? Perhaps they were considering a rebellion against a new king they viewed as illegitimate.

And who do we think the new king, Menahem, might have sent to Gilead to put down that brewing revolt? Perhaps he would have sent a captain who was from that area – and perhaps that person was his captain, Pekah. And perhaps Pekah, upon arriving in Gilead, decided – not to put down that rebellion – but rather to join and lead that rebellion.

I know there are many “perhaps” in that suggested sequence of events – but it does explain the evidence that we have, including the evidence that Pekah was a captain in the house of Menahem.

Another possible explanation for how Pekah was a captain under Pekahiah is that the two warring factions came together during a period of detente in which Pekahiah had the upper hand – but I favor the view that Pekah was an actual captain early in Menahem’s reign.

But how do we know that Pekah was connected to Gilead? When Pekah killed Pekahiah and began to rule over the entire northern kingdom, where did he get his co-conspirators? They all came from Gilead (2 Kings 15:25).

And why would Pekah rebel against Menahem? What made Pekah think he could win all by himself? The answer is that Pekah was not all by himself – he had an ally: Rezin the king of Syria.

We read about that alliance between Pekah and Rezin in 2 Kings 15:37 and in Isaiah 7. They tried to get King Ahaz of Judah to join with them against Assyria, but Ahaz instead turned to Assyria for help – which ended up being very bad news for Rezin.

2 Kings 16:8-9 – Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin.

And, during the reign of Pekah, Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, conquered the northern provinces of Israel, Gilead and Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali.

2 Kings 15:29 – In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria.

And as a result of that great loss, Hoshea (the final king of Israel) conspired against Pekah, killing him and reigning in his place (2 Kings 15:30). And nine years later, it was all over for Hoshea and for Israel.

2 Kings 17:6 – In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Finally, we see a bit more evidence for this view on the handout for Lesson 21.

On that handout we see two inscriptions from the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser – one about King Menahem and the other about King Pekah.

But the Assyrian king does not refer to Menahem as a king or by using the usual Assyrian designation for the kingdom of Israel (Omri-land, named after Omri, the father of King Ahab). Instead, the inscription just reads “Menahem of Samaria,” which is more evidence of a divided kingdom at that time.