

Lesson 26

Hosea 7:2

2 But they do not consider that I remember all their evil. Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face.

When we ended last week, we were about to look at the second half of verse 2.

“Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face.”

Not only did God know all of their evil deeds, but those evil deeds were right before God’s face. I think there is a dual meaning there.

First, that those deeds were before God’s face is a reminder that God knew what they were doing and that God cared about what they were doing.

But second, that those evil deeds were before God’s face is a reminder that those sins had been committed openly for all to see.

The people were not ashamed of what they had done. They were not trying to hide themselves from God in the garden. Instead, they were doing these things out in the open right in front of God’s face and everyone else’s face as well.

“Now their deeds surround them.”

The word used there is often used to describe an army besieging a city. These sins were

surrounding and engulfing the people, and, like an invading army, their sins would overcome them and destroy them.

They may soon have thought that they were surrounded by Assyrians, but actually they were surrounded by their own sins. They had brought this disaster down upon their own heads.

Hosea 7:3

3 By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery.

If you are like me, you are looking forward to the part of Hosea where everything stops being so difficult – where we can leave all of those translation difficulties behind, and we can enjoy some smooth sailing for a while. We are not there yet, and I'm starting to doubt we will ever find that in Hosea.

Here is how one commentary opens its discussion of Hosea 7:3–7.

This is without question among the most vexing texts in the Hebrew Bible. The language is extremely obscure, and even its main point is not entirely clear.

So, with that as our challenge, let's get started!

“By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery.”

That reference to a king and to princes gives us a theme of these difficult verses – they appear

to be focused on the intrigues of court life in the palace of a king. Verses 3, 5, and 7 all refer to kings, rulers, or princes.

In verse 1, we found ourselves in Samaria. Now, here in verse 3, we find ourselves inside the palace. (An excavated wall from the palace in Samaria is shown on the handout for Lesson 26.)

What about verses 4 and 6? As we will soon see, those two verses give us the other main theme of this difficult section – bakers and ovens! But let's hold off on that theme until we get to the next verse.

So back to verse 3 – “by their evil they make the king glad.” **Whose** evil and **what** evil?

We have some clues in the text.

First, whoever they are, it seems from verse 7 that they will play a role in the eventual fall of this king. They are making the king glad here in verse 3, but in verse 7 they will be devouring their rulers.

Second, whoever they are, they appear to have access to the king. We are not looking at ordinary people here – ordinary people could not gladden the king for the simple reason that the king knew nothing about them and cared nothing for them.

And third, whoever they are, we will see in verse 6 that they do their work with intrigue.

So, putting those clues together, I think the people making the king glad in verse 3 are most likely the members of his royal court.

This royal court would have included priests and military officers. These palace officials had the ear of the king and were in a position to topple that king through intrigue and power plays. And perhaps the priests alone are the plotters here given the gang of priests we saw earlier in Hosea 6:9.

And the land must have been filled with such people! As we said in our introductory overview, following the death of Jeroboam, the northern kingdom very quickly had four more kings, two assassinations, and a civil war! If we include Jeroboam himself, then the people had five kings within about a year's time! There must have been a great deal of plotting and intrigue going on.

But how do they make the king **glad** by their evil? And how do they make the princes **glad** by their treachery?

I think that is where the intrigue from verse 6 will come in. They make the king glad by joining in with the king in his debaucheries, but that also serves to get them close to the king so that they can plot against him.

And likewise, they flatter the princes to make them glad, but that flattery is really treachery because it allows them to gain the confidence of the royal family and keep themselves free from

suspicion. "These flatterers are my best friends! How could they ever be plotting against me?"

One thing that will really shine through in these verses is that they are not very complimentary of the king! The words "clueless," "corrupt," and "indolent" come to mind as we read about the king in these verses.

One thing we know for sure about the king's gladness in verse 3 is that it does not last very long. This king will have fallen by the time we get to verse 7.

And that context confirms our view about verse 3 – that although this king is made glad here, he should not have been glad at all because his court officials were plotting against him. They were making him glad just to distract him from what was really going on.

Hosea 7:4

4 They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.

"They are all adulterers." Who are **they**?

We have three choices. Either it is the court officials in the palace of the king, or it is the king himself along with his princes, or it is all of the above.

I suspect all of the above were adulterers. But I think the focus here is on the court officials.

Why? Because of what we will see in the second half of this verse.

But before we get there, let's ask another question: why the focus here on adultery? Back in verse 1 it seemed like the major problems were lying and stealing. Why do we suddenly see adultery here in verse 4?

The answer is that spiritual adultery is a major theme, and perhaps the major theme, of the book of Hosea. We saw **literal** adultery with Gomer, and then we saw **spiritual** adultery with Israel and Ephraim.

And where did that adultery originate? Right at the top. Right from the palace of the king. And I suspect that was true of both the literal adultery and the spiritual adultery.

We see that same theme in Jeremiah. There the adulterers were so bad that they made God wish he had a vacation home where he could go to get away from them!

Jeremiah 9:2 – Oh that I had in the desert a travelers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men.

Political adultery could also be in view here by those who were unfaithful to the king. Their loyalties were with someone else.

And, as we said before, in verse 4 we see another theme of this difficult section – bakers and ovens!

But these are not literal bakers and literal ovens. Instead, these bakers and ovens are being used here as an illustration for adultery. And we see such illustrations elsewhere.

Proverbs 6:27-29 – Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.

The oven of a baker would have been much larger than an ordinary oven in someone's home, and particularly so for the king's baker. But the picture here is not of a hot oven baking bread. The picture instead is of a baker who quits stirring the fire and who quits kneading the dough.

So what can we say about such a baker? What we can say is that this baker is notable, not for what he is doing, but for what he is not doing. He is **not** stirring the fire, and he is **not** kneading the dough.

Earlier we said that the focus in verse 4 is likely on the court officials. Why? Because they are being compared to the neglected oven of this inactive baker.

I think this baker is the king, and the adulterous officials plotting against the king are illustrated by the baker's heated oven.

And the king is clueless. The king is not doing the things a baker should be doing. He is not tending his oven, and he is not tending the

bread. In short, this king did not know what those priests were cooking up!

And while the king is asleep, those plots are rising just like this dough. And, while the king sleeps, the evil in the land is also rising just like this dough. This is a king who does nothing while evil (like leaven) spreads through society and through his court.

Hosea 7:5

5 On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers.

The “day of our king” in verse 5 just means in the day time. In verse 6, we will see what happens at night and in the morning.

So what happens in the day time? What happens is that the princes (and presumably the king as well) spend the day drinking until they become sick from the wine.

I think we are intended to see here a royal family that is being kept drunk and diverted so that they are unable to recognize the plots that are forming all around them.

The phrase “he stretched out his hand with mockers” is better translated as “his hand draws mockers.”

Sometimes a leader will surround himself with the very best people he can find, but very often a leader will surround himself with the very worst

people he can find. That is what this king is doing here. And these mockers will soon be his undoing.

Proverbs 29:12 – If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.

What are we seeing in these verses? What we are seeing is a description of a political world that has abandoned God and the word of God. What we are seeing is an evil do-nothing king who has surrounded himself with drunken adulterers who spend their days plotting his assassination.

“With such a fever running at every level of society, it was no coincidence that Israel’s last three decades were a turmoil of intrigue, as one conspirator after another hacked his way to the throne, only to be murdered in his turn. Of the six men who reigned in those thirty years, four were assassins, and only one died in his own bed.”

It has been rightly said that the people of a nation tend to get the leaders they deserve, and I think we see that here with the leaders of Israel. And perhaps we have also seen some modern examples of that sad fact.

Hosea 7:6

6 For with hearts like an oven they approach their intrigue; all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.

In verse 6 we see the ovens again, but this time the focus is not on the baker but instead is on the ovens themselves. And those ovens are being

compared with the hearts of the mockers that we saw at the end of verse 5.

These mockers approach their intrigue just like an oven that smolders all night and then blazes forth in the morning as the day begins. The anger of these mockers is like the fire that is heating this oven.

But why are the mockers angry? Do mockers really need a reason to be angry? And, more to the point, can we separate their mockery from their anger? Don't they mock because of their anger? Have you ever met a happy mocker?

It has been said that when a wicked man comes to the depth and worst of sin, he first despises, and then he mocks. The mockers from verse 5 are first **smoldering** with anger and then **blazing** with anger in verse 6.

In verse 4, the burning oven was a symbol for the burning lust of adultery, but here the same burning oven is a symbol for the burning lust of power. In each case, the key word is "lust." The lust of man is like a constantly smoldering oven that occasionally blazes forth like a flaming fire.

We again see here an indication that the baker (the king) is asleep on the job. Any baker who wanted his bread ready in the morning would have had to get the oven blazing long before the morning arrived. But here the oven doesn't blaze until the sun rises, which tells us that this

lazy baker is not very attentive to what is going on around him.

Hosea 7:7

7 All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me.

All of these mocking, adulterous plotters are as hot as an oven. Their plots and their adulteries are raging like a burning oven – but the baker is asleep on the job.

And so what happens? Where we might now expect to see fresh bread being devoured, we instead see rulers being devoured. The king has gone from being the baker to being the bread.

“All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me.”

Even though we saw the “king” (singular) back in verse 3, I think this verse tells us that the text here does not have a specific king in mind, but is instead a description of what occurred with many kings. The rulers (plural) are devoured. The kings (plural) have fallen. None of them (plural) call upon God.

And, again, we are reminded of the history of the time. The people who were listening to this illustration from Hosea had lived through five kings within about a year’s time! And they had seen two assassinations (Zechariah and Pekahiah) and a civil war!

Proverbs 28:2 – When a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue.

I think this section in Hosea is describing what all of that intrigue had in common – smoldering and burning plots from the evil people with whom the king had surrounded himself, combined with smoldering and burning lusts that prevented the king from seeing what was going on around him.

And what could the king have done instead? The king could have called upon God, but he did not. None of them did. And, as a result, the leaders fell and the people suffered.

Proverbs 29:2 – When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.

Proverbs 16:12 – It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness.

And what we see here with these plotting mockers is that they have put themselves in the place of God. Later in Hosea 8:4, God will say, “They made kings, but not through me.” The people made their own kings with no thought for what God wanted, and the nation was suffering as a result.

Hosea 7:8

8 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.

Verse 8 presents a terrible indictment of both the people and their leaders.

First, Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples. What does that mean?

The picture here is of flour that is not mixed with oil (as in Exodus 29:2), but that is instead polluted by being mixed with other things.

What that illustration means is that the people had not separated themselves from the peoples of the land, but had instead mixed themselves with those peoples.

That is not God's will for his people – not then and not now.

Leviticus 20:23–24, 26 – And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. ... You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

Deuteronomy 7:3–4 – You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

Psalms 4:3 – But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

Jeremiah 10:2-3 – Thus says the LORD: “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, for the customs of the peoples are vanity.

2 Corinthians 6:17 – Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you.

1 Peter 2:9 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Revelation 18:4 – Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

And how had the people disobeyed God’s commands? How had they mixed themselves with the surrounding peoples? In at least three ways. They had mixed themselves religiously, culturally, and politically.

They had mixed themselves religiously.

In Hosea’s day, the people had adopted the false gods and religious rituals of the surrounding peoples.

We have already discussed the problem of syncretism, in which two religions are mixed together to create a new religion. The people had done that by mixing the true of worship of the one true God with their false worship of their

false gods. In doing so, they had rejected God while keeping the rituals of God.

The same thing happens today when people mix the worship of God with the philosophies and politics of this world.

They had mixed themselves culturally.

In Hosea's day, the people had adopted the values of the surrounding peoples. Very often, such compromises were required to maintain peace with the powerful nations that surrounded them.

And, I think the picture we see here of a burning oven is of a slow gradual process that made it hard for the people and their rulers to see what was happening. And isn't that always the way with compromise?

Think about our own recent history. In 1939, a single four-letter word in the movie "Gone With the Wind" became a national scandal. Today, 85 years later, God's name is regularly blasphemed in our homes by that same Hollywood crowd in ways that defy belief and even imagination – yet few raise any objection.

James 2:7 – Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

There is always a danger that the people of God will be changed by the world. But we are called to change the world, not to be changed by the world.

Matthew 5:13 – You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

Like salt, we must be in the world, but not of the world (John 17:16).

Like salt, we must be noticed for the difference that we make.

Like salt, we must never just blend in unnoticed like salt that has lost its taste.

They had mixed themselves politically.

In Hosea's day, the people had embraced the politics of the surrounding peoples by entering into foreign alliances and vassal relationships.

And this was why they no longer looked to God. This is why, as we saw in verse 7, the kings were not calling upon God. They had placed their trust in foreign powers rather than in God. They thought Assyria or Egypt would protect them and save them.

They had rejected the governance of God for governance from the surrounding nations and from themselves. They had mixed themselves politically so that they were no longer the people of God.

Is that sort of mixing still a problem today? Absolutely it is.

We see a mixture of religion and politics very often today. And, yes, if done right so that we function like salt in the politics of our day,

that could lead to an improvement of our politics and our politicians, but that is almost never how it is done and almost never what happens.

"When religious leaders enter into electoral politics, it is more likely that religion will be debased than that politics will be elevated."

How should the church operate in the world of politics? I think we see a very good example in the New Testament. In the first century, Christians were a religious minority lacking worldly power and political influence – and yet they turned the world upside down! (Acts 17:6)

How did they do that? What did they do? Perhaps we should also ask what did they **not** do?