

Lesson 31

Hosea 9:1-2, Continued

1 Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors. 2 Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them.

"You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors."

That short phrase brings to our minds all that we have already seen in the book of Hosea, going all the way back to God's first command to Hosea.

Hosea 1:2 – When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

There was a reason why the worship of Baal was so popular – it combined agricultural prosperity with sexual license.

Sexually immoral acts were part of the worship of Baal and were supposedly practiced to bring harvests. But, of course, that was just the excuse. We know the real reason why the people did these things – they did them just to gratify their own evil lusts.

Is that still a problem today? Let me rephrase that question and be more specific – is that

still a problem today with people who continue to think of themselves as Christians?

The answer is certainly yes in the denominational world. And to see that, all we need to do is open this week's newspaper. (Can anyone doubt that the 2700 year old book of Hosea is still relevant today?)

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church is meeting right now in Charlotte, North Carolina. And up until this week, here was the Methodist Church's official position on sexuality:

"Sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage."

But that all changed this past week. Here is the new position of the Methodist Church on sexuality as approved by 75% of those voting:

"We affirm human sexuality as a sacred gift and acknowledge that sexual intimacy contributes to fostering the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of individuals and to nurturing healthy sexual relationships that are grounded in love, care and respect."

That new statement has a lot more words than the old statement, but the thing to notice is not the words they added, but rather the words they left out. Monogamous? Gone. Heterosexual? Gone. Marriage? Gone.

And, in case anyone had any doubts about where they were headed with that new statement, the next thing they did was to repeal their ban against ordaining active homosexuals into their

clergy. And that proposal passed with 93% approval.

When we see that, it becomes very clear that the worship of Baal is still around today. The world is still full of people who call themselves the people of God but who are instead really the people of Baal. There are still many people around today who have loved a prostitute's wages on all the threshing floors.

But why is that true? The answer to that question is also still the same. Why did the Methodists make that change? Why did they draw a line through "monogamous, heterosexual marriage"? Why are they ordaining active homosexuals?

Can there be any other answer than the one we saw earlier with the people of Hosea's day? They did it to gratify their own evil lusts.

They are among "those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:10). And yet they claim to be the people of God – as did the people of Hosea's day. Remember what they said in Hosea 8:2 – "To me they cry, 'My God, we ... know you!'"

"You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors."

That phrase here at the end of verse 1 certainly refers to the immoral acts that the people literally did on the threshing floors in their worship of Baal, but I think that phrase also refers to Israel's political prostitution with the foreign nations that surrounded them – the

nations from which they adopted those false gods, and the nations in which they now placed their trust.

Israel wanted to be just like those nations – but they would not be just like them. Instead, Assyria would invade them, and Egypt would laugh at them. And God would reject them as his people.

And as for those today who believe they can gratify their evil lusts and be pleasing to God, they need to listen to Jesus' warning.

Matthew 7:21 – Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

And what is God's will when it comes to sexuality? Nothing in the Bible is clearer than the answer to that question.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 – For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

And with that final phrase, Paul brings us back to a primary theme of the book of Hosea – knowledge of God.

And the Methodists or anyone else can vote on that all day long. The entire world can take a vote – and God could lose that vote 7 billion to nothing! It wouldn't make any difference. The truth is not determined by the vote of man.

Romans 3:4 – Let God be true though every one were a liar.

Hosea 9:3

3 They shall not remain in the land of the LORD, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.

The jump from verse 2 to verse 3 may seem abrupt to us.

We were just looking at a failed harvest – how is it that we suddenly find ourselves looking at a military defeat? It might seem to some like there should have been a few more verses in between verse 2 and verse 3!

But that view of verse 3 is the modern view of the situation.

In our world, a famine is bad, but we don't automatically associate a famine with a military defeat. But in the ancient world, a failed harvest was not just bad – it was devastating. And most often, other nations would show up to take advantage of the weakness that always followed a failed harvest.

I think we see that fact all the way back in Deuteronomy 28, a chapter to which the text of Hosea has frequently alluded in reminding the people that the curses they were now experiencing were curses that had been promised long ago to those who broke their covenant with God.

Deuteronomy 28:38–41 – You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for

the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but **you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes**, for the worm shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, **for your olives shall drop off**. You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, **for they shall go into captivity**.

There is that same abruptness that we see here in Hosea 9! In Deuteronomy 28, we see a failed harvest in verses 38–40, and then what do we see in the very next verse? We see military invasion and captivity.

That was the way of the ancient world – and that was also the way that was promised to those who broke the covenant. Famine followed quickly by captivity.

But where would they go? Egypt or Assyria? The answer is both.

Some of the people literally returned to Egypt when Hoshea, the final king of Israel, switched his allegiance to Egypt. God had led them out of Egyptian captivity at the beginning of their history, and now at the end of their history they were looking to Egypt (rather than to God) to rescue them from Assyria.

So, yes, when verse 3 tells us that “Ephraim shall return to Egypt,” we know that Ephraim literally did just that when they returned to Egypt for help rather than returning to God.

But, as we have already seen, Ephraim also **figuratively** returned to Egypt. To any Jew, Egypt meant one thing – bondage. They had been in

Egyptian bondage for centuries before God rescued them.

And now, they were about to go back into bondage – not Egyptian bondage this time, but Assyrian bondage as verse 3 tells us: “they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.” And that literal return to Assyria was a figurative return to Egypt.

And whether it was Egypt or Assyria, one thing was absolutely clear: “they shall not remain in the land of the LORD.”

God was evicting them from their promised land. They had broken their covenant, and so God was removing them from the land. We may have problems with squatters today, but not so with God! God knows how to deal with squatters! “They shall not remain in the land of the LORD!”

Hosea 9:4

4 They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices shall not please him. It shall be like mourners' bread to them; all who eat of it shall be defiled; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD.

As we have already seen, while the people had rejected God, they had not rejected the rituals of God. They were still going through the motions even after they had left God for Baal. We saw that back in chapter 8.

Hosea 8:13 – As for my sacrificial offerings, they sacrifice meat and eat it, but the LORD does not accept them.

And here we see the same thing. They offer their sacrifices, but God does not accept them.

But why? Why does God not accept their sacrifices?

Jesus answered that question when he spoke to the woman at the well – a woman who, as a Samaritan, was a descendant of the very same people who are being described here in Hosea 9:4. And what did Jesus tell that Samaritan woman?

John 4:23–24 – But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The people here in Hosea 9 were going through the motions. To an outside observer who could not see into their hearts, it might have even looked as if they were actually worshipping God – but they were not.

Their hearts were far away from God. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” And these people were doing neither – they were not worshipping God in spirit, and they were not worshipping God in truth.

But it sure looked to others like they were! Perhaps it did – but how we look to others is not the test and has never been the test.

1 Samuel 16:7 – For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

2 Corinthians 10:18 – For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Galatians 1:10 – For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Here in verse 4 we see the only view that mattered – how God viewed their sacrifices: “Their sacrifices shall not please him.”

And, in fact, those sacrifices that were meant to remove their defilement were instead having the opposite effect – “all who eat of it shall be defiled.”

The bread they offered to God was unclean – just like “mourner’s bread.” Anyone who ate bread near a dead body was unclean – and both they and that bread were unfit as an offering to God.

Deuteronomy 26:14 – I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me.

The sacrifices offered by the people in Hosea 9 were just like bread that had been eaten while someone was mourning or that had been offered to the dead. It was unclean, and the people were unclean.

And what was the best evidence of that? Verse 4 tell us: “for their bread shall be for their hunger only.”

That bread they were offering to God was really just bread that they were offering to themselves. It was for their hunger only.

And isn't that still today the surest sign of false worship?

Turn on the TV some Sunday morning and tell me what you see. Don't you usually just see a big audience sitting back and watching the show? And don't you see a show that is intended only to satisfy that audience and keep them coming back for more? A big show intended only to gratify their lusts?

“For their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD.”

When we gather to worship God, we are not the audience! God is the audience. And when we gather to worship God, our goal is not to please ourselves. We are here to please God.

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” That was true in the days of Hosea. That was true in the first century. And that is still true 2000 years later. That has always been true.

And Jesus did not say that we should worship in spirit and in truth. Jesus said that we must worship in spirit and in truth. That is the only worship that God will accept.

Hosea 9:5

5 What will you do on the day of the appointed festival, and on the day of the feast of the LORD?

We know that the people had turned their back on God. But what if we could go back in time and ask them?

Would they agree that they had turned their back on God? Would they admit that they were just going through the motions? Almost certainly, no. They would not agree with or admit to any such thing.

Instead, they likely believed that they were right with God. Yes, they had mixed the worship of God with the worship of Baal, but God was still in there somewhere!

They hadn't turned away from God, they would argue. They had just added a few things to the worship of God. They were still keeping the appointed festivals and feasts, as verse 5 tells us. They hadn't taken any festivals for God off the calendar. All they had done was add a few festivals for Baal to the calendar.

And how, we might wonder, could anyone possibly think that is okay? How could anyone possibly believe that they could worship both God and Baal and still be pleasing to God? How? Because they did not know God – that's how!

If they knew God, then they would know what God had said.

Exodus 34:14 – For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

And if they knew God, then they would love God.

Deuteronomy 6:5 – You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

That they neither loved God nor even knew the first thing about God or about the law of God tells us what the book Hosea has already told us over and over – they lacked knowledge of God, and they were being destroyed by their lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

But the ceremonies were still going on! The festivals and the feasts were still taking place! Wouldn't those ceremonies be enough to appease God and keep all of those bad things from happening?

No. They would not. And that is what we see with this question here in verse 5: "What will you do on the day of the appointed festival, and on the day of the feast of the LORD?" What will you do?

Would a famine care about their festivals and their feasts? Would the Assyrian army care about their festivals and their feasts? Would God care about their empty festivals and their empty feasts?

Those ceremonies would not save them! Not from a famine, not from an Assyrian, and not from the wrath of God.

The people had forgotten the reason for those ceremonies – they had forgotten the one who was behind those ceremonies – and that lack of knowledge of God meant they had no one to which they could turn when the troubles came. And the troubles were coming very soon!

Hosea 9:6

6 For behold, they are going away from destruction; but Egypt shall gather them; Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.

Here in verse 6 we see another reason why those ceremonies would not save them. Yes, those ceremonies were empty and vain, but they were also impossible to keep! Why? Because very soon the people would not be there to keep them!

What we see in verse 6 are refugees who are going away from destruction – either destruction from the famine or destruction from Assyria, but most likely, at this time, destruction from the famine. As the food disappeared, so did the festivals and the feasts – and eventually so did the people.

And where did the people go? Here we see them going to Egypt. But why? Why is Egypt mentioned here in verse 6?

Some of the people undoubtedly fled to Egypt looking for food, but there may be another reason

why Egypt is mentioned here. A reason that points us far back in the history of the Jews.

Genesis 12:10 – Now there was a **famine** in the land. So Abram went down **to Egypt** to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Genesis 41:57–42:3 – Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the **famine** was severe over all the earth. When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” So ten of Joseph's brothers **went down to buy grain in Egypt**.

The Jews had a long history of heading to Egypt when famine struck. We see that happening early in the history of Israel, and we see that happening again here near the end of their history.

And how would that turn out for the people? Would they be saved by Egypt?

Verse 6 answers that question with good news and bad news. The good news is that Egypt would accept them – but the bad news is that Egypt would also bury them.

“Memphis shall bury them.” The city of Memphis was located on the west bank of the Nile River about 12 miles south of Cairo. (See the map on the handout where the city of Memphis is highlighted in yellow.) For most of the period of Biblical history, Memphis was the capital of Egypt and the residence of the pharaohs.

“Memphis shall **bury** them.” Once again there is an important historical allusion here that we shouldn’t miss.

As we know, about all that was left of Israel at this time was the tribe of Ephraim. And who was Ephraim? Ephraim was one of the two sons of Joseph, who was himself one of the twelve sons of Jacob.

And where was Jacob buried? **Not in Egypt!**

Genesis 47:29-30 – And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. **Do not bury me in Egypt**, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.” He answered, “I will do as you have said.”

And where was Joseph buried? **Not in Egypt!** At least not now!

Genesis 50:24-26 – And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, **and you shall carry up my bones from here.**” So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus 13:19 – **Moses took the bones of Joseph with him**, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.”

Hebrews 11:22 – By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

Jacob was not left in Egypt. Joseph was not left in Egypt. The Jews in the days of Moses were not left in Egypt. Later in this very book we will find a prophecy that the Messiah himself would not be left in Egypt (Hosea 11:1).

But what about the people here in verse 6? They will be left in Egypt! They will die there, and they will be buried there.

In that short statement (“Memphis shall bury them”) we can see God telling them that they are no longer his people. Unlike Jacob, unlike Joseph, unlike the Jews in the days of Moses, and unlike the Messiah – **they will be left in Egypt!**

“Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.”

The people had turned to Baal because they thought Baal was the god of fertility. And what did they receive in return? They got back only nettles and thorns! They wanted crops, but they got weeds.

But what does it mean that the nettles would possess their silver and the thorns will be in their tents?

The Hebrew is difficult, but I think the message is clear: they would lose their possessions and their homes.

In fact, that they are living in tents tells us they have already lost their homes – and now they are going to lose even their tents as well! In short, very bad times were ahead for them.

Their silver would be possessed by nettles – either meaning that the silver would be left in the wilderness or possibly being used as a metaphor for the robbers who would take that silver away from the people as they traveled to Egypt.

And the tents that the people lived in while they traveled would be left behind when they fled from those robbers or when they died.

And, as for that silver, we again see an important historical parallel here that we should not overlook. What happened when the people left Egyptian bondage?

Exodus 12:35–36 – The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

When the people left Egypt, they plundered the Egyptians. And now? Now, when the people return to Egypt, the Egyptians will plunder them.

What we see in verse 6 is yet another reversal for Israel.

- Instead of leaving Egypt, they are returning to Egypt.

- Instead of not being left in Egypt, they will be left in Egypt.
- Instead of plundering the Egyptians, the Egyptians will plunder them.

This entire text from Hosea can be viewed as a reversal of the exodus. God is putting this people back where he found them!

That flight from Egyptian bondage was in many ways the beginning of their history as the people of God, and now at the end of that history (at least, for the northern tribes) we see a reversal of the exodus.

Hosea 9:7

7 The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

Here is how one commentator introduces his comments on verses 7–9:

“Once again Hosea has taxed translators to the limit with his elliptical style, a style that is at the same time both allusive and elusive.”

So perhaps we should proceed with some additional caution!

Let’s start with the easy part – what are the days of punishment and the days of recompense that are said in verse 7 to have come?

I think we already know the answers to those questions. The days of punishment and the days of

recompense are the days of famine and warfare that the people were at this time already experiencing.

Their crops had failed. Their appeal to Egypt had failed. Their reliance on Assyria for safety had failed. And verse 7 confirms what we have already been told – these events were happening as a punishment sent by God. These events were the curses that had been promised in Deuteronomy 28 for those who broke their covenant with God, as these people had done.

And in a book in which knowledge is a central theme, that third phrase in verse 7 is chilling: **“Israel shall know it!”**

Israel may not have known God – but Israel would know the punishments sent by God! Israel would know the days of recompense!