

## Hosea 12-13

### The Covenant Love of God and the Idolatry of His People

#### I. Introduction

##### A. Structure of 4:1-14:9:<sup>1</sup>

1. 4:1-6:3 — Evidence of ignorance of God and statement of hope
2. 6:4-11:11 — Evidence of disloyalty to God and statement of hope
- 3. 11:12-14:9 — Evidence of faithlessness to God and statement of hope**

- B. Let's not forget that all that we've covered so far demonstrates how serious God is taking their idolatry. He is making the case against them of their depth of sin and providing an explanation for why they will be facing judgment.<sup>2</sup>

#### II. 12:1-14 — Israel's Deception and Yahweh's Plea

##### A. 11:12-12:1 - The falsehood of Judah and Israel

1. 12 — Hosea begins by pointing out the deception in Israel. That their lies surround God demonstrates that deception characterizes Israel.<sup>3</sup>
2. This verse can be taken several ways. Either Judah is pleasing Yahweh (ESV) or they are following the gods (NASB/NIV). Most would see this in the negative light, which fits the context better. If Hosea wrote, "Yahweh" here instead of "god"<sup>4</sup> it would certainly help clarify. Here are the two views

- a) The Positive View: *El* (God/god) and *Qedoshim* (holy one) are present in 11:9 in reference to Yahweh, so it would seem that they are in reference to Him here as well. This view then argues that Judah is following Yahweh.
  - (1) Two differences: First *Qedosh* is singular in 11:9 whereas it's plural here. Second, the word "roam/still wander" tends to hint toward apostasy.
- b) The Negative Views:
  - (1) The word "roam/still wander" tends to hint toward apostasy. Thus it could be a translation like "Judah is also unruly against God, Even against the Holy One who is faithful." NASB
  - (2) Or some take the terms *El* (God/god) and *Qedoshim* (holy one) as referring to something other than Yahweh. Thus, "and Judah still wanders with deity, and is faithful with the holy gods."<sup>5</sup> In this view the terms *El* and *Qedoshim* could be generic as we have seen elsewhere thus intentional ambiguous.
    - (a) Consider also the statement in 12:2, "**The LORD has an indictment against Judah.**"

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Barrett, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, 172.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, 172.

<sup>4</sup> It's important to remember that the term God in the OT is typically the generic *El*, which can refer to either Yahweh or any other god depending on the context.

<sup>5</sup> Garrett, 230.

3. **12:1 - What do you think Hosea means when he says they feed on the wind?** They have sought the emptiness of feeding on the wind all day long and will suffer accordingly. This feeding on the wind illustrates their pursuit of help from foreign powers. Ephraim has formed some type of alliance with Assyria and Egypt, and in that pursuit they have assumed they would find substance, but they rather deceive themselves. Through this Hosea demonstrates the foolishness of their actions.

B. 2-6 — **Jacob the Supplanter and Jacob the Recipient.** Hosea introduces Jacob<sup>6</sup> as an illustration. Like Israel is described in 11:12-12:1, Jacob was also deceptive. Repeated throughout these verses are references to past events with Jacob in Genesis. They are not necessarily in order chronologically, but thematically. Hosea is making a point, and Garrett summarizes that point the best, **“For Hosea the lesson is that Jacob the supplanter, the one who struggled for everything, was transformed into Israel the suppliant, the recipient of grace.”**<sup>7</sup> We see this transition the clearest as we move from verses 3-4a and then 4b.

1. 5 — Hosea’s inclusion of this verse could be that this is the God that Jacob found.<sup>8</sup> It also contrasts the ambiguous titles given in 11:12 and serves to emphasize that Israel had watered down their understanding of the God of Israel.
2. 6 — With emphasis placed on “you,” Hosea calls Israel to become recipients of God’s grace. It’s so remarkable to read that Yahweh is willing to help them return. He does not leave the returning up to their efforts, because it would never be sufficient. They could never arrive where they needed to be. Their restoration would be a complete act of His grace. **Israel must not follow the Jacob who strove and deceived to get his birth right, but the Jacob who was the recipient of grace, and wait upon Yahweh.**

C. 7-8 — **Ephraim’s false confidence** — Ephraim is described as a merchant with false balances. The term “merchant” can also be translated “Canaan” which implies a negative connotation of this merchant. **The false balances were Ephraim’s means of acquiring wealth and resulted in oppressing those around them. Ephraim’s self assessment is that no one can point out the sin in how they acquired their wealth.** These two verses describe the hardness of Israel’s heart. These two verses are tightly connected to the previous section because it demonstrates that Israel continues to live in a way that is consistent with the old Jacob — that is they continue to live deceptively.<sup>9</sup>

D. 9-11 — **Yahweh’s pursuit of Israel and their failure to respond**

1. 9 — We see Yahweh looking back to the origin of their covenant relationship. The statement of Egypt would bring back a number of memories for Israel. Yahweh promises that there will come a time when he brings them back to dwell in tents as they do in the feasts of booths. The Feasts of Booths was a reminder of the dessert wandering time in Israel’s history. Yahweh would strip away the many distractions from their lives.

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<sup>6</sup> Adding to the context of deception, Jacob (ya`aqob) “means the heel ‘grasper,’ a play on the word ‘deceive’ (‘aqab).” Smith, 173.

<sup>7</sup> Garrett, 238.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>9</sup> Garrett, 240.

2. 10 — Yahweh’s warnings to Israel were many. Though at times they may have been difficult to understand (“parables”), it was no doubt that Israel failed to understand. They understood that they were living wrongly, in other words, they were without excuse.
3. 11 — **What is the answer to Hosea’s rhetorical question?** There is clear understanding that Israel’s sin is present throughout the land. It is assumed that there is sin present in Gilead, which means that they will come to nothing. The sacrifices at Gilgal are likely of the idolatrous sort. Where they once had altars set up for their pagan sacrifices there would be piles of rubble.

E. **12-13 — In these two verses we see a parallel. Garrett offers three ways:**<sup>10</sup>

1. Aram and Egypt were initially places of safety. Jacob escaped to Aram from his brother. Jacob and his family moved to Egypt for safety from the famine.
2. Jacob and Israel both worked as slaves.
3. Jacob and Israel both were essentially kicked out of the land. Jacob when his flocks grew and Israel when the plagues came.
4. 13 — the prophet is none other than Moses. Moses could also be included in the initial group discussed in verse 10.

- F. 14 — Without question, Ephraim had provoked Yahweh through their calloused idolatry, and the result was that they would face judgment. No longer called Yahweh, using the name “adoni,” Yahweh is seen more as a master to his slave than as having a personal relationship with His people.

### III. 13:1-16 — The End Has Come For Israel

- A. 1-3 — In these verses Hosea presents an overview of Ephraim. They had position and power enough to cause others to tremble. Yet, they pursued Baal and have reached the end result; death. They are careful and skillful in how they make their idols, and despite how good they look, they will vanish like a vapor.
1. 1 — In one sense, this verse summarizes the essential problem in Ephraim (and the whole Kingdom). They have worshiped Baal and any other god but Yahweh. **In what sense have they died?** Garrett writes, **“Hosea already looks upon Ephraim as ‘dead,’ that is, as having passed into history and with no more hope of recovery or return.”**<sup>11</sup>
  2. 2 — We can’t ignore their religious commitment to their idolatry, **but why are they making more idols? Could it be that Israel believes they will be saved through them?** They are pursuing these idols for life when death is the only outcome.<sup>12</sup> At the end of verse 2 there is much scholarly debate. Most would render this as the NASB does, **“Let the men who sacrifice kiss calves!”** This would appear to be the best translation of this sentence.<sup>13</sup> That they kissed calves demonstrates their commitment to these idols (1 Kings 19:18).
  3. 3 — **What is the result of their idolatry according to verse 3?** Just like the morning mist, or the dew on the ground, or the chaff that swirls, or like smoke going out of a window, they will vanish and be no more. All of these things exist for a brief time and are gone because of things outside of

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<sup>10</sup> Garrett, 246.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 177.

<sup>13</sup> See Garrett, Chisholm, McComiskey, and Stuart.

their control. These illustrations demonstrate the insignificance of Ephraim in the hands of the Almighty God! They will face judgment for their sin.

- B. **4-8 — Israel rejects Yahweh.** What we see in these verses is an abbreviated history of Israel and what went wrong. What began with Israel being taken from Egypt by Yahweh ended with them rejecting Yahweh and facing the consequences.
1. 4 — Israel was called by Yahweh to be His people and was brought from the land of Egypt. **Yahweh is placed in contrast to the gods that Ephraim made in verse 2.** There are a couple different ways the second line can be understood. First, in the sense that they did not know any god except Yahweh. Second, in the sense that they were not supposed to know any god but Yahweh. Within the context of the beginning of the history of Israel, it would seem best to take the second approach. **They were not supposed to know any God but Yahweh, He alone was their true Savior.**
  2. 5 — Here Yahweh is depicted as “knowing” Israel.<sup>14</sup> Here we see that Yahweh lovingly took care of them all the way through the desert wanderings.
  3. 6 — Yahweh blessed them with great provisions and good things to enjoy. This time of prosperity and success did not lead them to give thanks to Yahweh and to depend on Him more, **rather it led Israel to forget Yahweh.**
  4. 7-8 — What the author does here is remarkable. He uses language that really is grotesque and alarming to any reader in any century. **Through this picture he draws the reader in and demonstrates in human terms the extent of the fury of Yahweh over the idolatry of His people.**
- C. **9-11 — Israel has no where to turn.** They will face destruction, because they have turned away from Yahweh, the one who is described as their helper. In this case their helper is working against them to destroy them, which demonstrates how vulnerable they are. Verse 10-11 explains that Israel had dependent on a king to defend them from their enemy, but here we see Yahweh taunting them and taking their king away. This could be a reference to the many kings that Israel went through because of assassinations and the like. Verse 11 should be read in the future rather than past tense. In other words, Yahweh is going to give them a King (of Assyria) and take their king away.<sup>15</sup>
- D. **12-14 — Not a single sin of Israel has been forgotten.** Yahweh will not lose sight of what they have done, and all of the sin will be punished.<sup>16</sup> **Think about the image that Hosea is drawing up for us in verse 13. What’s he talking about?** In 13 we see that at the time appointed Israel does not come forth. **The point that Hosea seems to be making is that Israel is unwilling to come out.** Some suggest that this is their unwillingness to come out to a “new national life.”<sup>17</sup> **They are bringing death to themselves and their mother by not coming out.**
1. 14 — In a passage that’s main thrust is the destruction of Israel, Hosea introduces verse 14 to jolt his readers. On the surface (especially in the ESV) it seems as though this is negative toward Israel. In other words, it seems as though Hosea is assuming a negative answer to the seemingly rhetorical

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<sup>14</sup> Garrett suggests that we should see in this verb “know” the understanding of a husband knowing a wife. The same “know” that is in verse 4.

<sup>15</sup> See Garrett and Smith.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart, 206.

<sup>17</sup> McComiskey, 223.

questions. This is a view held by many. However, the later two statements beginning with “where...?” are a means of taunting death and Sheol. That being the case, it makes the most sense to translate the first to phrases as statements, not questions. In other words, the NIV gets it right here. **“I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”**<sup>18</sup>

2. The abrupt change at the end of verse 14 back to judgment is not inconsistent with the rest of Hosea (see 10:12 for example).

E. **15-16 — Because of their rebellion, Israel will fall.** In brief terms, though there were times of flourishing, Israel would face drought. Though they had times of prosperity, they would face poverty. The conclusion to the accusations and judgments of Israel ends on a very sobering note. **Because Israel has forgotten Yahweh and rebelled against him, because they committed idolatry, Israel’s woman and children would be slaughtered. All would fall by the sword, but Hosea makes sure we know that those who are innocent and helpless will also suffer greatly.**

#### IV. Application

- A. 13:4-6 reminds us of what God had done for Israel. Consider for a moment the importance of God’s past works of grace in our lives should have on the present. How does the past faithfulness and grace of God impact us in the present? How should we respond to it?
- B. Though we see glimmers of hope in this passage, there is no question that sin is taken seriously. How do God’s actions toward Israel change the way that we view all the sin in our lives — especially the “petty” sins?

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<sup>18</sup> See Garrett, Smith and McComiskey.