

Hosea 9:10-10:15
The Covenant Love of God And The Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction

A. Structure of 4:1-14:9:¹

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

II. 9:10-17 - Israel's Infertility

A. **10-12 — Yahweh's Departure**

1. 10 — Yahweh was fond of Israel like someone finding grapes in the dessert/wilderness.² This wasn't something that would have been expected. They were also like the first-fruit of the season, which would have brought great satisfaction to those who were anticipating the harvest. Yahweh was delighted in His people.
2. With the introduction of Baal-Peor the tone of the passage changes. **What happened in Baal-Peor?**

Numbers 25:1-9 answers that question. Israel was traveling to Canaan through the land of Moab. On their way Balaam pronounced four oracles blessing Israel (instead of cursing). In chapter 25, some of the people went to Baal-Peor and yoked themselves to the Ball of Peor (25:3). One went so far as to bring a foreign women to his tent in the sight of all Israel, which lead to Phinehas spearing them. The plague went throughout the people and killed 24,000 of them. In the end, they became as detestable as the idols the loved.

- B. **11-12 — What is the “glory” that fly's away here?** The glory here is the presence of Yahweh. When Yahweh leaves like a startled bird, suddenly lifting into flight, the glory of Israel will depart. The consequences of Yahweh's departure are seen in 11b and 12a. The fertility that Israel experienced was never a result of Baal, it was given to them by Yahweh — the One they had rejected. They've already seen that Yahweh is in control of the land, now they see that He is in control of the womb.

- C. **13-14** — Israel is compared with Tyre because they both began in favorable circumstances. However, because they pursued Baal worship, eventually their children would face slaughter at the hands of their enemy.³

1. **14 — In light of the context, why would Hosea make this request?** Coming off the heel's of verse 13, there seems to be a merciful tone to this statement. If they don't have children, then their children will not face slaughter. At the same time, this just reinforces what's already been made so clear — that without Yahweh the people are barren.

¹ Michael Barrett, 19.

² “Wilderness” also reminds the reader of Israel's time in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. It describes the early stages of Yahweh and Israel's relationship.

³ At some level this could refer to child sacrifice, but the Text does not make that clear.

- D. **15-17** — What we see in verse 15 is striking. Yahweh makes the claim that all their evil resides in Gilgal. Hosea has said that Gilgal needs to be avoided in 4:15 and is a place where idolatry is taking place in 12:1. **In other words, it illustrated the central issue with Israel, their idolatrous heart.**

Yahweh's hate for them and their sin lead to their rejection and to the barrenness.

By turning to Baal, Israel had lost everything.

E. What is the dominant theme throughout this section? Why is it so significant?

1. Children were an important part of Israelite society.
2. They looked to the gods of the land to provide fertility (both with crops and the womb). Their infertility was a reminder that God is truly in control.
3. A reverse of the Abrahamic blessing (Gen 15:5)
4. Fertility was a result of obeying the covenant (Deut 28:4).

III.10:1-8 — From the Prophet, a vine and a bull

- A. 1-2 — Israel's prosperity becomes part of the conversation again here. We saw their prosperity in chapter 2, yet, we saw famine in Chapter 8. It's difficult to know if Hosea is working in a chronological manner. Throughout his book. Hosea points out the result of their prosperity. They began to multiply their alters.

Consider with me for a moment the phrase "he improved his pillars." These pillars were part of their pagan worship, and they invested in them resources to improve them.

What might be an example of how false religion makes their religiosity attractive, polished, but yet it be so far away from what God desires?

The consequence of this building is that Yahweh will destroy those alters and they will bear their guilt. We've seen this already in Hosea; prosperity will lead toward complacency and self-dependence. The statement "their heart is false" reveals what we have been seeing all along. On the surface they want to go through the motions, but in reality their heart was never in it (7:14).

- B. 3-4 — **Is this a rejection of one of the kings of Israel, or of Yahweh?** The statement, "We do not fear the LORD," seems to indicate that their main rejection is of Yahweh as their king. In response to verse 3, Smith writes, ***"That is, the people reject God as their divine king and sovereign ruler. They do not fear or call on him for help because they do not think he can do anything to change their situation."***⁴

Furthermore, Hosea emphasizes that they share words, but those words are empty and vain. We've seen that their worship is empty because their heart is not in it. When Israel expects to find good fruit in their land, they instead will discover poisonous weeds of judgment. Judgment is coming, and like a weed it will spring up.

⁴ Smith, 149.

- C. 5-6 — **The failed calf.**⁵ The Israelites tremble in worship of this calf/idol. However it turns to mourning because their “god” has been taken into exile.

Not only has Hosea and Yahweh successfully demonstrated that Yahweh was the only God of fertility (both of the ground and the womb), but now he demonstrates the helplessness of this idol by it being taken away. Compare this with the glory that has departed from Israel in 9:11-12.⁶ In contrast, this lifeless idol had no control over its destination. Thus, they are ashamed (“Their response is not anxiety, but shame because their carefully crafted belief system has failed.”⁷).

- D. 7-8 — **What do you think Hosea means when he says the king is like a stick in the water?** That the king is like a stick on the water demonstrates that he will be taken away without any control. He will come to destruction (certainly pertaining to captivity). Destruction is coming and is inevitable. The altars they once used are now overgrown, and they seek to be destroyed by the hills and mountains so that they can escape the coming judgment.⁸ Even Beth-Aven (shown as “Aven”), one of the major cultic centers, is overgrown. Baal has utterly failed them. These cry’s from the people are seen in other passages pertaining to eminent judgment (see Luke 23:30 and Revelation 6:16).

Note: “When Jeroboam I set up the golden calves after the death of Solomon (1 Kings 12:28-33), they were supposed to represent Israel’s God Yahweh, who brought them up from Egypt (modeled on Aaron’s calf in Ex. 32). But since Baalism pictured Baal as a bull calf, the common people thought Israel’s calf and Baal’s calf were the same god. This led to their acceptance of Canaanite religious and more guidelines and a rejection of the holy God of the Bible. When the captive people finally see the impotence of Baal and the uselessness of faith in this idol, they will want to die (10:8b). It will seem better to be crushed by falling rocks dislodged from the side of a mountain by an earthquake than to suffer in captivity and be haunted with the stupidity of their belief in this false god.”⁹

IV. 10:9-15 — War Is Coming

- A. 9-10¹⁰ — This is the third reference we have seen in regards to Gibeah. Now, Yahweh references it as a way of saying where they are still at spiritually (“there they have continued”). As in Gibeah, there was immorality and violence. There was also a tribe (Benjamin) that thought they were safe from the civil war coming at them. In a similar way, the people may have thought that they were safe from judgment. Garrett summarizes the point nicely, *“These two verse describe Israel as a nation with a violent history and which now relies on military power for security, and ‘Gibeah’ symbolizes this trait.”*¹¹

⁵ Some would say that they are not mourning the departure of their idol, but rather their mourning, trembling, and rejoicing are all connected to Baal worship. Garrett, 209-210

⁶ While this is similar, it needs to be clear that the term for “depart” 9:12 is different from in 10:5.

⁷ Garrett, 210.

⁸ Chisholm, 41.

⁹ Smith, 150.

¹⁰ Double iniquity according to Garrett, is apostasy and militarism, 216.

¹¹ Garrett, 216.

Yahweh explains that at the right time discipline will come on Israel. No doubt there were times in Israel's history that they were pleasing Yahweh. Yet, the implication here is that they never really left the original problems. They have the same mindset that Benjamin did in Gibeah.¹²

- B. **11-12** — The NASB helps clarify this verse somewhat. *“Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh, But I will come over her fair neck with a yoke; I will harness Ephraim, Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself”* (NASB). The idea of “with a yoke” is not actually in the Hebrew, nor is the idea of “spared” (ESV). It makes more sense in the context to take the NASB. The point seems to be this: **For a time Israel enjoyed threshing grain without a yoke on their neck. Now, they would face judgment and be forced to carry one, so that they can plow and harrow.**¹³

Hosea turns the corner, however, from judgment to pursuing Yahweh. They must plow and break up the unplowed ground. As with Jeremiah 4:3 it seems clear that breaking up the fallow ground relates to the heart. **In this case they need to repent and turn to Yahweh.** They need to sow righteousness, for it is time to seek the LORD. Yahweh is calling Israel to pursue righteousness.

C. 13-15

1. 13 — Unfortunately they did not sow righteousness, but they sowed iniquity. The issue is that they had trusted in their own abilities and their own ways. Their dependence on military power is unmistakable. Israel assumed they did not need Yahweh, they assumed that their ways were right and good.
 - a) This is certainly the same danger we can fall into. We assume that our way is right, but do we consider that we might be walking dependent on our own wisdom rather than God's wisdom.
 - b) What are some examples of how we trust in our own ways rather than in God's ways?**
2. 14 — Therefore...destruction! We don't know exactly who is referenced by the name “shalman” or “Beth-arbel” but the point is very clear. Judgment is coming on Israel because of their great wickedness and that judgment will be severe.
3. 15 — Bethel, as has been described in other places, was a place of spiritual significance for Israel. Jacob saw the stair case to heaven there. Here it is described as being the place of great evil. The judgment coming means that the king won't live long enough to even see the beginning of the battle.

¹² Ibid, 214.

¹³ See McComiskey and Hubbard.