

# Hosea 9-11: Israel Will Meet with Destruction

## Introduction

As we move into chapter nine of Hosea, God's message to the people is that they will experience great tribulation and distress at the hands of Assyria. Because of their great sin, they would be thrown out of the land of promise and made captives in enemy territory. This would end all reasons for rejoicing. Some believe that 9:1 gives us insight to the relief the people felt after the withdrawal of the Assyrians for a few years during the reign of Menahem. 2 Kings 15:20 says that Tiglath-pileser withdrew his troops after Menahem agreed to pay tribute to Assyria. While there is little doubt that the people did not like paying tribute, that was much better than having enemy troops moving to and fro throughout the land. Is this the rejoicing that Hosea mentions in 9:1?

In their worship to idols Israel had begun to believe that the gods were blessing their nation with good harvests and material blessings. The more material blessings they received the more they worshipped the Baals. Hosea says that God would take away the material blessings they coveted. *Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them, And the new wine will fail them, 9:2.* Because of their gross spiritual adultery, the people would *not remain in the LORD'S land.* They were about to lose the possession God gave them. In 9:3, when God mentions that *Ephraim will return to Egypt,* He does not mean that they would literally return to Egypt. The people would become as they were in Egypt: slaves held in captivity against their will. Previously in this study, we have noted the extreme brutality of the Assyrians. Life as a slave in their country was no picnic. They often boasted of the cruel treatment they dished out on their captives. While in captivity, Israel would be forced to *eat unclean food.* They would lose all privilege to worship freely. They would be unable to offer sacrifices that were acceptable to God, and worshipping Him would only stir memories of what had been. Gone would be their feast days and the great joy that was often associated with them. These things were part of the high cost of idolatry and the sin associated with it.

In verses six and seven we see that Israel would suffer a complete loss of hope. All the things they held dear would be taken over by their enemy. All the wonderful homes, palaces, and cities would be grown up. Hosea says, *The days of punishment have come, The days of retribution have come...* He speaks of them as already happening. Indeed they were. By this time Assyria had already been on the march subduing over half their country. Their king had been reduced to puppet status and all the prestige that had been associated with the kingdom had disappeared. Only too late would they realize that the false prophets who had been "prophesying" smooth words were fools. In its waning days Israel had only wanted to hear that which was pleasant. Turning deaf ears to the genuine prophets of the Lord they rushed headlong into destruction. God was going to remember their iniquity and *punish their sins, 9:9.*

## Great was their fall

God mentions how He first found Israel: *Like grapes in the wilderness*. They were something that had been greatly desired, but they soon devoted themselves to Baal. The reference to *Baal-peor* is a reference to the events in Numbers 25 when the Israelites joined themselves to the religion of Moab. What we worship does influence us. As Israel gave themselves over to lust and wantonness, it was reflected in every aspect of their life. *And they became as detestable as that which they loved, 9:10.*

Along with their destruction, Israel would find its population greatly diminished. Ancient Jewish culture valued childbirth and looked upon it as a blessing from God, Psalm 127:3-4. Now there would be no birth, *no pregnancy, and no conception! 9:11*. If a child was managed to be brought up, it would be fatherless. This great woe was coming because God withdrew His presence from them. This stands in direct contrast with what God wished for His people. He had wanted them to be a wonderful, secure, prosperous, and godly nation. But instead of being raised for honor, *Ephraim will bring out his children for slaughter, 9:13*. The Assyrians would march in and kill those they did not take into captivity. Verse fourteen is most likely an interjection by Hosea himself where he asks God to pour out His judgment against the people. They deserved the punishment they were going to receive. In verse fifteen Hosea mentions Gilgal. Gilgal occupies a very notable place in Jewish history. It was a place where God bestowed numerous blessings on the people as testimony to His mercy and grace. But now acts of evil were committed in this place. See Hosea 4:15; 12:1 and Amos 4:4; 5:5. Because of this, God would *drive them out of My [His] house! 9:15*. What was prophesied in verses sixteen and seventeen came to pass. The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom were absorbed into the Assyrian nation and were scattered throughout the Middle East. Their national identity was stricken and the nation they remembered was cast into history forever.

## **Israel's gods would be unable to deliver them**

God had richly blessed Israel. The bounty of their harvests was not arguable. But as their harvests increased, so did their sin against God. Instead of recognizing where the blessings came from, they gave the glory to the idols they served. While they may have claimed to serve the Lord, their actions proved otherwise. God was going to *break down their altars And destroy their sacred pillars, 10:2*. As calamity began to spread, is 10:3 a forecast of their recognition that they would realize the folly in their actions? The kings they installed without God's authority were powerless to stop the aggression. Some would only realize too late that they had put themselves in this position because of their spiritual adultery. Their kings were worthless, speaking vain words. Could this be in reference to Hoshea, the last king of Israel who ruled only because Assyria installed him in that position? What Israel sowed it was now reaping. *And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field, 10:4.*

In Hebrew *Bethel* meant "house of God." In Hosea 10:5, the name Bethel is changed to *Beth-aven*, which means "house of vanity." The center of their worship was going to be vacated and there was nothing the "calf-god" could do to stop the march of the enemy. In fact, the golden calf would be carried off to Assyria and paid as tribute to the king (*King Jareb*). All the worship they offered to the calf profited them nothing. They would be reduced to shame. A day was coming when the king and his court would be destroyed and the high places around Bethel (*Aven*) would be destroyed. Where once men had paraded around singing praises to their idols, *thorns and thistles* would grow up on their altars. The wording in the

last part of 10:8 is extremely sad. As the people suffered greatly, they would cry out for a quick death rather than continue to experience the life of torture they endured. This same language is used by Isaiah in Isaiah 2:19 in describing the desire of the inhabitants of Judah as they are destroyed by the Babylonians. In Luke 23:30, Jesus also described the reaction of those dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem in this way. Finally, in Revelation 6:14-16, the punishment of those who persecuted saints in the first few centuries after Jesus' death is described in this way.

## Israel had a long history of sin

The days of Gibeah are a reminder of the incident in Judges where a concubine of a Levite was brutally raped, Judges 19. Hosea has already refreshed the memories of his audience with a mentioning of the tragic event in Hosea 9:9. This generation (that of Hosea's day) was just as guilty as those who sinned in Judges. They were going to be severely chastised by the Assyrians. What is the *double guilt* Hosea mentions in 10:10? Some feel it is in reference to their stubbornness in having man-made kings over them and for completely rejecting God by turning to worship man-made objects.<sup>1</sup> In 10:11, Hosea likens Israel to a young heifer who *loves to thresh*. While this metaphor might go missed by American audiences who are for the most part separated from agrarian societies, it rang home to the people of Hosea's day. Young heifers that were trained to thresh the grain were treated with kindness and would have enjoyed their work because of the obvious benefit: they got to eat as much as they wanted. The role Israel was used to playing was about to be abruptly changed. God was going to harness them (both Judah and Israel) and subject them to the work of slaves as punishment for their ungodliness.

## A call to repentance

Going from here to the end of the chapter, Hosea calls on his people to repent. They did not have to suffer this terrible fate if they would just turn to God. They were called to *Sow with a view to righteousness and reap in accordance with kindness*, 10:12. If they would turn to the Lord quickly, He would come to *rain righteousness on you [them]*, 10:12. This was a people who needed to repent with the quickest urgency. But this was a people who had bought into the lies they told themselves. They were living in an alternate reality. They trusted in themselves, their military, their fortresses, and their alliances. This was a people who would not listen to the calls to turn back to God.

Beth-arbel was located west of the Sea of Galilee. *Shalman* was probably a shortened form of Shalmaneser,<sup>2</sup> and could be referring to an invasion by Shalmaneser IV in 773 B.C. Or the Shalmaneser could be referring to Shalmaneser V who was reigning at the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Whenever this battle took place, it was one that contained incredible human cruelty; *mothers were dashed in pieces with their children*, 10:14. This was going to happen to the Israelites because of their great wickedness.

## God loved Israel, but they continually showed their ingratitude

Again, we get the idea of God's extreme hurt over Israel's conduct. God loved Israel. He loved them so much He took them out of bondage in Egypt to their own land where He could raise and nurture them. *Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; But they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of a man, with the bonds of love... I bent down and fed them*, 11:3-4. God was constantly

moved with love, care, and compassion for them. As we read these verses, it is not hard to be reminded of the parent-child relationship. Parents often do so much for their children—more than the children realize. This was the case with God and Israel. God shows His dismay over all of this in verse two: *The more they called them, The more they went from them; They kept sacrificing to the Baals And burning incense to idols.*

While the first part of 11:5 may appear to contradict other references to Egypt and slavery, we know that the earlier references were metaphors. As the people were slaves in Egypt before God rescued them, so they would be again—but not in Egypt. This time Assyria would be their master because they refused to return to God. Here are a people who were *bent on turning from* [God], 11:7. They would be destroyed and consumed by their enemies.

Chapter eleven not only opens with God's emotion being poured out, but it closes with it as well. Because of the punishment God was bringing upon them, His *heart is [was] turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled*, 11:8. The idea of reducing Israel to nothing was heart-wrenching for God. God did not delight in what He was about to do. Admah and Zeboim were cities in the area around Sodom and Gomorrah which were destroyed when God rained down judgment in Genesis 19. See also Deuteronomy 29:23 which references these cities. In fact, Deuteronomy 29:24-26 fits in quite well with Hosea's writing since what was prophesied so many centuries before was about to take place.

God was not going to annihilate His people. While justice needed to be poured out, God would, through His mercy and grace, allow a remnant to continue living to carry on the promises made to Abraham and David. After the period of chastisement, God's people would follow Him. As they were released from slavery, they would return to live with Him.

## **Lessons for Today**

### ***The high costs associated with sin***

Israel had always counted on their place with God and His constant protection from enemies. But because of their gross sin and immorality, they would pay the ultimate price. God would turn His back on them as the Assyrians march in destroying their culture, cities, and nation. They paid the highest cost for the pleasure and status of worshipping idols. Let us always remember that sin always pays us back in ways we never expected or could have imagined at the time of the temptation.

### ***We must always remember the source of our blessings***

They had achieved much for themselves—a good economy, a place on the world stage, a strong military, and bountiful crops. All of this would be stripped away. In fact, everything that they would associate with a national identity would be completely destroyed by the Assyrians. The country forgot God. What about us? How strong is our consciousness of God and the extent of His blessings upon us?

### ***Sin can place us in an alternate reality***

The most dangerous lie is the lie we tell ourselves. Israel deluded itself into thinking that everything was O.K. and that there was no cause for alarm. Even if the enemy did attack, surely their fortresses would

hold. Surely their armies would fight back the enemy. Surely those Assyrians didn't really mean to destroy them. This alternate world of reality would soon come crashing down upon them. How many souls are deluded today and headed down the path away from God—all while telling themselves everything is O.K.

### ***God does not enjoy punishing mankind***

Chapter eleven is one of the most moving passages in all of the Old Testament. Here we see a side of God that should impress us with the extent of His grace, mercy, and love. God is not some distant, aloof being who does not feel a connection to His creation. He felt a genuine hurt and His heart was moved at the thought of allowing them to be punished. In the New Testament we are told that God does not wish that anyone be lost, but He desires all men come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9.

### **For discussion**

1. Would Israel literally return to Egypt as part of its punishment from God? If not, what does the wording in 9:3 mean?
  
2. As Hosea wrote the words of his prophecy, had the judgment of God already begun to take place? See 9:6-7.
  
3. In what way does what we worship have an effect on us? See 9:10.
  
4. Consult a study Bible and note some of the great events that took place at Gilgal. What had become of Gilgal in the days of Hosea?
  
5. In Hebrew Bethel meant: “\_\_\_\_\_” Beth-aven meant: “\_\_\_\_\_” Describe the irony in the usage of Beth-aven in describing the central place of worship for the northern kingdom.

6. What do the days of Gibeah refer to?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Israel is called on to repent in 10:12. Why is the sense of urgency so great in these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Describe the cruelty that took place at Beth-arbel.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Describe God's feelings when considering how He was going to chastise Israel. Why is it important to see this side of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Where were Admah and Zeboiim?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. Would God destroy His people?

(Endnotes)

- 1 Both Hailey and Smith take this point of view. Hubbard points out that this is similar to Jeremiah's "two-sins" (2:13).
- 2 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 263.