

Ephraim's Great Sin

Introduction

As we move into the last section of Hosea, the attention returns to the sins of Ephraim. This tribe (which represented the northern tribes as a whole) pursued *the east wind continually*. Feeding on the wind and pursuing the east wind were symbolic language describing actions that were made in vain. An east wind was often associated with destruction. It was never good. This was a nation that was going to be destroyed because of its lies and violence. No thought was given to God, and as Assyria approached, they made alliances with them. The covenant with Assyria was made during the reign of Menahem when he agreed to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileser. As the alliance with Assyria faded, Israel looked to Egypt for assistance. To sweeten the deal, they sent oil to Egypt during the reign of Hoshea, 2 Kings 17:4; Hosea 12:1. Not only did God have a case against the northern ten tribes, but He also had *a dispute with Judah*, 12:2. Although Judah would be in existence for around another one hundred forty years, they too would pay for their rebelliousness.

Beginning at the end of verse two, God reminds His people of Jacob. Jacob was the ancestor of both Israel and Judah, and he would be well known to them. Hosea recalls that Jacob took hold of his brother Esau by the heel in the womb. Later Jacob would wrestle with an angel and prevail. Jacob sought God and found Him. Jacob's experience at Bethel was spiritual. It moved him closer to God, and it is where he began a real, meaningful relationship with God. It is at Bethel where Jacob was given the name "Israel." The point of reminding the people of Jacob is that if they would approach God in prayer, they could experience the same blessings Jacob enjoyed. They needed to look to God. *Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually*, 12:6. If the people would just return, God would relent from His certain destruction and punishment on the nation. Even to the last possible moment, God holds out for the repentance of those He loves.

But Ephraim (Israel's) heart was far away from returning to God. They enjoyed oppressing others. False standards of measurement (12:7) and dishonest business practices had become the norm. Because of these practices, they had become rich. Amid all the wealth they found they forgot God. He had enabled them to obtain the wealth, Deuteronomy 8:17-18. They were proud of the way they had obtained their wealth: through fraud and deceit. This had become "business as usual." No wrong was seen in it whatsoever. What does this say about the level of morality in their society? God says they would be abased. They would be made to *live in tents again*, 12:9. God had continually blessed them with physical necessities. He had spoken to them through the prophets. He had nurtured them for over seven hundred years. His patience had finally reached the bitter end. The Lord was going to *leave his bloodguilt on him and bring back his reproach to him*, 12:14.

Spiritual death

As we move into chapter thirteen, we see that Israel had no more spiritual life remaining. At one time Ephraim was a powerful tribe, wielding much influence upon the other eleven tribes. But Ephraim had also fully embraced the worship of Baal, and because of that, he died spiritually. They multiplied their sins upon themselves by the great efforts they exerted to construct idols from silver. Special craftsmen were employed to set up these idols and many hours of labor were expended. For what? Did these idols have power? Could they bless the people? Could they protect Israel from the enemy? These idols which were constructed by men would *be like the morning cloud and like the dew which soon disappears, Like chaff which is blown away from the threshing floor And like smoke from a chimney*, 13:3. The idols would be powerless against the one, true God. Just as dew evaporates in the morning sun, so would the people as they succumbed to the great enemy who would overtake their land.

There are more touching words in verses four and five where God reminds His people of the special relationship He had with them since taking them from the land of Egypt so many generations before. The relationship He had with them was personal in nature. He reminds them of the covenant they made with Him, promising not to have any other god besides God. *For there is no savior besides Me*, 13:4. God had sustained them through the wilderness. He had given them food and water in a land of drought. After bringing them in the land, they were able to settle down. Their dependence on and need for God lessened, and they soon became puffed with pride and forgot God. Because of this, God, the one who had been their shepherd, would now be as a lion and leopard to them, lying in wait by the wayside. He would encounter them by surprise. The people would be devoured, that is, destroyed.

The kings the people raised up and trusted were now powerless against the enemy. As we move through Hosea's ministry, this fact becomes more and more evident as the Assyrians insert puppet regimes before completely taking over the nation. The kings could not turn the tide against the enemy. Verse eleven is especially interesting and goes a long way in describing God's feelings about having kings over the nation. God gave them the kings they wanted but did not happily do so. And their sins were not forgotten. In fact, all the kings of the Northern Kingdom were evil and rebellious. Their deeds would be repaid with the judgment of God. Verse thirteen is especially descriptive of the problems facing the nation. Israel was as a woman who was having difficulty in childbirth. This was a common figure of speech in Old Testament literature. Both the mother and child were in danger. Ephraim was in danger of grave punishment.

Complete destruction

Israel would be annihilated. *Compassion will be hidden from My sight*, 13:14. God had finally reached a point where His compassion had run out. The reference to the east wind is made again, and more language of destruction is listed throughout verses fifteen and sixteen.

Everything that was precious to the nation would be plundered, her soldiers would be taken out and their children and women would die violent deaths. It is an unpleasant scene as chapter thirteen concludes.

Hope for the future

Hosea calls for the nation to repent. They needed to return to the Lord. They had stumbled because of their great iniquity. If they would follow through and work deeds of repentance, God would forgive them. But this had to be genuine repentance. Dependence upon God was necessary. They would need to completely reject their idols. In their immediate future, if they repented, God would *heal their apostasy and love them freely* because God's *anger has turned away from them*. In this was a sense of urgency. If they were to experience these promises, repentance had to come now! God promises to replenish their physical needs, 14:5-7.

God reminds His people once more of the futility of idols. God was the one who looked out for them. He blessed them with their physical necessities, not Baal. Those who were wise would understand this. They would know that *the ways of the Lord are right And the righteous will walk in them...*, 14:9. Those who rejected this wisdom would stumble.

For discussion

1. What did it mean to feed on the wind and pursue an east wind?
2. What does it say about the character of God in holding out for their repentance to the last possible moment? Are there any applications for our generation?
3. Describe the business practices of Israel during the days of Hosea.
4. How does Hosea describe the futility of worshipping idols? Did they have any real and lasting power?
5. What kind of relationship had God desired to have with Israel?

6. Once Israel received the Promised Land and became prosperous, they forgot God. They looked to their blessings and refused to give glory to God. Describe how we can fall into the same trap today.

7. How significant is 13:14? Is God's compassion unending? Why is this important for us to know

8. If Israel was going to repent, how long did they have to do it? What would happen if they genuinely repented?

9. What if they rejected the wisdom offered in the book of Hosea?

10. My study of Hosea has profited me by: