

# The Minor Prophets #9

## Hosea

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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I remember a time when I thought all those references in the Bible and the prophecies in particular to adultery and harlotry were talking about spiritual adultery. The idea was Israel was married to God and she went off after other gods, thus it was spiritual adultery. I can actually recall preachers speaking of them in those terms. It came as a bit of a shock to me when I started researching this issue and found there was a lot more flesh involved as well as spirit. It was jarring, and it still is jarring when you read the Bible and encounter words like whoredom, prostitution, and harlotry, and at that, I think the scriptures actually tone down the reality more than a little. After all, God knew the Book was going to be read by families and even by children, so there are some things and some places you just wouldn't go.

### **Unfruitful Works Of Darkness**

It's like Paul said in the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Ephesians "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them for it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."

So I don't think it should be terribly surprising if we don't find it described in any kind of gruesome detail what people were doing that the prophets were talking about.

I have been pretty forthright in telling you what sort of things that went on. I don't think I have even come close to the sort of things that were actually being done by the Israelites and worse stuff being done by their neighbors. I can give you a clue how bad it really was in Israel, when Hosea and Amos were working. You can tell how evil Israel had become by the punishment that God visited on them because God is just. I can say with confidence that those things that God did to them, the punishment, the chastisement that descended on them did not happen to them merely because they burnt incense to some other god. Just because they walked into a pagan temple, lit a little fire and burnt a little incense and smelled it in a pagan temple. No, that's not why God did the things he did to them, all that was, was the opening move in the things they went on to do. Disaster befell Israel and Judah then in two stages, the first was the Assyrian invasion that carried Israel captive away beyond Babylon to the region we now call Iran. That invasion reached all the way to Jerusalem, destroyed many cities in Judah, but Jerusalem itself did not fall. It was another 140 years or so before Jerusalem would fall. But the warning of that is still contained in Hosea's prophecy.

Hosea 4 verse 15: "Though you commit adultery, O Israel, don't let Judah go down that road, don't go to Gilgal, don't go up to Bethaven."

Now you should know Bethaven in Hebrew means 'house of vanity' and it's a play on words on the prophet's part, he's talking about Bethel and calling it instead of the house of God which is what Bethel means, calling it the house of vanity.

### **Northern Kingdom Of Israel**

Hosea 4 verse 15, "And don't swear, as surely 'As the LORD lives!' I don't want to hear any of that coming out of you people. {16} "The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How on earth can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow. {17} Ephraim is joined to idols, leave him alone."

Oh man, what a thing for God to say. Here is His people, one of the sons of Joseph and He says, "He is joined to these idols." And that's what happened to the kingdom of the north. Once Jeroboam the first cut them off from going to the Temple to worship God, cut them off from the holy days that God had established, they turned, as surely as anybody ever would, to a different religion and once they had done that, God's approach was, walk away, leave them alone.

Verse 18, "Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution, their rulers dearly love shameful ways, {19} A whirlwind shall sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame."

Moving on in Hosea 5: "Hear this, you priests!, Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, oh royal house! This judgment is against you. You have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread out on Tabor. {2} The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them."

That word 'slaughter' on the page is disturbing, because what it's talking about is murder, killing people, they were knee deep in it, and God was going to discipline all of them.

{3} "I know about Ephraim, Israel is not hidden from me, Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt."

I think the choice of words is accurate and that is what Ephraim had done. I don't think very many Bible readers realize that the worship of Baal involved temple prostitution, that it involved sex. It often involved selling children into sex slavery to serve in these pagan temples. This is what they did, and he said, "Ephraim you have turned to prostitution." You have left the family. It's no longer a question of a man and his wife and raising their children to adulthood and seeing their grandchildren, you've just turned away, into prostitution.

## **Promiscuous Behavior**

It is used here and also in the broader sense, to promiscuous behavior, shacking up as it used to be called, nobody is getting married and nobody is making any commitments and nobody is really in love. They are just, in sex, if that's what you might call it. I think I heard there are more couples in this country now living together than there is who are married. That's hard to get my mind around, that people basically are just not bothering with marriage any longer. In a way that's appropriate, if they don't love each other, then there is certainly no reason to make a lifetime commitment to one another, but sex without love is a destructive thing.

## **Prostitution**

The prophet continues in Hosea 5 verse 4, "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart, they do not acknowledge the LORD."

Israel had gone into a way of life that made it impossible for them to return to God. It cut them off from repentance and there was no way back. In fact in all the history of the northern tribes of Israel, because of the fact that Jeroboam the first, had set them off on this road of turning them away from the worship of God, in his way, in his time, there was simply no way back for them.

A spirit of prostitution is an interesting term, it really seems in a way to be descriptive of the age in which we now live. They just don't acknowledge God at all in their lives and people seem to be just selling themselves into sex slavery even though they are free to walk away from it at any time. Once they have gone down that road they never are really free again.

Verse 5, "Israel's arrogance testifies against them, the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them; {6} When they go with their flocks and their herds to seek the LORD, they will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them."

You know, this is one of the most terrible things you could say about a people, that God has just gone away, He's not going to hear your prayers. He's not going to be with you. He's not going to protect you and you are just on your own. How does it happen? Well it happens when people turn their back on God and walk away. When they won't acknowledge him, they turn their back and walk away, God turns his back and walks away. I guess we all know to ask ourselves, "Am I really ready to be out here on my own, all by myself?"

He went on to say in verse 7, "They are unfaithful to the LORD; they give birth to illegitimate children. Now their New Moon festivals will devour them and their fields."

You know I don't have the latest figures on this but not so long ago, fully one third of all babies born in this country were born to single moms, illegitimate children. Among African Americans the figure was sixty percent, and these numbers seem to be rising in both white and black communities. What is interesting, is how in the face of all this, with all the illegitimate

babies being born and all the sex going on outside of wedlock with the spirit of prostitution possessing this land, people still have their religious festivals. Now he said, "Their new moon festivals will devour them." For some strange reason, then and now, the people saw no disconnect between their immorality and religious observances.

### **Sound The Alarm Of War**

Hosea 5 Verse 8: "Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah, raise the battle cry in Bethaven," remember that's 'house of vanity.' "Lead on O Benjamin. {9} Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning."

Essentially what He is saying here is, "War is coming." The sounding of the trumpet, the horn and the battle cry, someone is coming and we are going to have to stand up and fight.

"Lead on Benjamin, {9} but Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain; Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones."

Do you know what that means? In those days it was a kind of survey. Today we put iron stakes in the ground, back then they put up big stones to mark the boundaries. This is where this property begins and this is where the other one ends. So these people were the leaders mind you, government people, who were like people who go out there and move the boundary stones stealing land.

I can't help it, I read that and I think of a time we are in right now, where the Supreme Court has upheld the right of city governments to take your property away from you, if they need it for some reason. It's being taken in some cases for nothing more than the fact that the city needs a larger tax base and this is really a tragic thing. Here they are, the people that are suppose to protect us, protect our rights and carry on the rights of government, and they are the very people who are taking away the people's land. God doesn't like this very much.

### **God Will Pour Out His Wrath**

God says in Hosea 5 verse 10, "I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water." So all I can say is brace yourself. {11} "Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols."

You know it's a funny thing, they are oppressed and trampled over and they go to court to try to get something done. They go to court to try to get their rights protected and get walked on and they're still intent on pursuing idols.

As for me, well, {12} "I'm like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah."

I'm just something they would like to get rid of. Ephraim equals the house of Israel as a whole. They were the leading tribe, and so when he says Ephraim He's talking about all of those ten northern tribes and of course Judah is the house of Judah.

Now as a nation goes down this road, like they have, sooner or later there's a place when they realize something's wrong and so in verse 13 it says, "When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah finally realized his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria and sent to the great king for help."

This is classic, here we are, we see that something is wrong and we know we're sick as a people so what are we going to do? Are we going to turn back to God, no, nope?

Ephraim went to Assyria and said maybe they can help us out. "He's not able to cure you, he's not able to heal your sores," and so in a strange way Ephraim brought himself to the attention of the Assyrians. It's entirely possible that if they had not made this stupid mistake that the Assyrian captivity might not have come to pass.

### **Does It Take Misery For Us To Find God?**

God goes on to say in Hosea 5 verse 14, "I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away, I will carry them off with no one to rescue them. {15} Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt, they will seek my face, in their misery they will earnestly seek me."

Isn't that the way of a man, that it is only in our misery that we finally seek God.

You know in the years of counseling and talking with people I have had one growing impression down through these years. There are not very many people that turn to God when things are going well.

In times of prosperity, everything is working in your life, you have kids, you have grand kids, everything is fine. Everyone's in good health, your business is booming, making lots of money. It's not a time when someone goes into self examination and says, "Maybe it's about time I should spend some time thinking about God." No, not really. There comes a place where God will turn his back and go away until you face up to who you are and what you have done. Only then is there a way back to God.

I think there is a personal lesson in this, until we admit our guilt, God will just go away, and it's not very likely that we're going to seek God until misery drives us to do so.

### **Israel Wished To Repent**

Hosea Chapter 6: Israel now seems to speak. "Come, let us return to the LORD: He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us, He has injured us but He will bind up our wound. {2} After

two days He will revive us and on the third day He will restore us that we may live in his presence."

Now finely, somebody says, "Hey let's turn back to God." But there's something strange about this 2 and 3 day business in this prophecy.

I first stumbled on it when I was thinking about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. If you remember the story, Jesus learned that Lazarus was sick and He did not immediately go to him, He kept right on where He was carrying on with what He was doing. The disciple's seem to be kind of surprised by what he was doing. It turns out that what Jesus was doing was deliberately waiting until Lazarus not only had died but had been dead for three days before He showed up on the scene. Why?

People believed that the spirit of the man stayed around the body for three days after death and that only when the body began to decompose would the spirit finally leave and they considered this person finally dead. There were people who were thought to have been dead in the past who had revived. This is one of the things I think is behind the old wakes that people use to do. We want to be sure this guy is dead, so don't put him in the ground quite just yet.

So to demonstrate His power over death, Jesus delayed till it was clear that Lazarus was graveyard dead. If he hadn't, people would say, "Oh well, Lazarus just came to." This also explains the three days and three nights in the grave issue with Jesus Himself that he said; "*I will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matthew 12:40). Why? Well because after about thirty six hours somebody might say, well He just revived, He came to, and He was not really dead. So that 3 days and 3 nights are more important, I think, than most people realize.

Israel feels that God will restore them on the third day even though they are themselves dead, and so they say. {3} "Let's acknowledge the Lord; let's press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises he will appear, he will come to us like the winter rains and the spring rains that water the earth." And God says, {4} "What am I going to do with you, Ephraim,? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew, it just disappears, {5} So I'm going to cut you into pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth, my judgments flash like lightning upon you."

### **God Desires Mercy and Acknowledgment**

Then God says something really fascinating in Hosea 6 verse 6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."

Now what's interesting about this to me is, you would think that a burnt offering could be considered an acknowledgment of God. What am I doing this for if not because of God? But no, it is nothing more than a religious observance. It is a going through the motions, and in

Israel's case, the offerings were on the wrong altar to the wrong god in addition to that. What God wants is mercy, not sacrifice. God wants acknowledgment which is a conscious deliberate awareness. God want acknowledgment rather than some kind of sacrifice.

{7} "Like Adam, they have broken the covenant, they were unfaithful to me."

Somehow I had never really realized that Adam had a covenant to break but when you think about it from where Hosea is and you go back and look at the story again you can begin to see it.

Genesis 2 Verse 16, "The LORD commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it because in the day you eat thereof you shall surely die."

We think that Adam merely broke a commandment here, but apparently, it was more than that. God told him not to do it and he did it. Later on, we find that because he didn't keep Gods commandment he was exiled out of the Garden of Eden. The problem is that the sin of the first couple was not merely they had done what they were told not to do. They broke the covenant which implied that Adam had agreed to God's instructions and then went contrary to them. So it wasn't just a matter of eating of the tree, it was a matter of breaking the relationship with God.

### **The wickedness of the House of Israel**

Hosea 6 Verse 8, "Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood."

The image that comes to mind is that it is horrific and that is of a murder with a knife where the blood spurts all over the place and wicked men walk though it and then they walk out the room leaving footprints and every footprint is bloody. Here is a city that is just stained with bloody footprints.

{9} "As marauders lie in ambush for a man so do bands of priests."

How in the world could that be? You have to remember that when Jeroboam the first changed the worship system up in the northern kingdom of Israel, he set his altar in Bethel and another one in Dan, and the people began to worship in these places and in the temples of Baal instead of going down to Jerusalem. He made priests of the lowest of the people.

Continuing in verse 9, "They murder on the road to Shechem committing shameful crimes. I have seen horrible things in the house of Israel; there Ephraim is given to prostitution, and Israel is defiled. Judah for you a harvest is appointed."

And whatever the symbolism of that is, it doesn't sound good.

Hosea 7 Verse 1. "Whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people, whenever I would heal Israel, every time I move to do something for Israel the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria are revealed. They practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets, {2} but they don't realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them, they are always before me."

We really need to think about this as a people, of the increasing banditry, the violence, the crime, the prostitution, the unpaid prostitution in our society. The realization that all of this sin bids fair to sweep over us like a tsunami if we don't do something, somehow, somewhere, to change this pattern.

He said, {3} "They delight the king with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies. {4} They're all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the time he kneads his dough until it rises."

Does God have to do anything there? These people were on fire and frankly anyone watching our television would certainly think that must be the case with us.

Verse 5, "On the day of the festival of our king, the princes become inflamed with wine and he joins hands with the mockers. {6} Their hearts are like an oven, they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night, and in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. {7} All of them are hot as an oven, they devour their rulers, all their kings fall and not one of them calls on me."

Most of the last handful of kings of Israel were assassinated by their successors. Did you know that? I think one out of the last six may have died in his bed as a normal guy would. It's a tragedy, and this is what they did.

Here we are, in the 21st. century and our princes are devouring our rulers, they are devouring one another. Listen to their rhetoric, listen to the way they talk about one another. Look at the way they try to destroy one another politically, it is an assassination without knives.

"Ephraim," verse 8, "mixes with the nations, Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over (so it gets burned on one side.) {9} Foreigners sap his strength, and he doesn't even realize it's gone. His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he doesn't notice."

You know as a kid, I remember back in WWII worrying about something because somehow or another in school, I had heard every big empire in the history of the world eventually fell. I wondered if this is going to be it for us? Is this the war we will lose? Is this the end for us? It wasn't, but I look at our country today and I have to say our hair is sprinkled with gray and nobody seems to realize, that our culture, our whole democracy and the things that we are doing is graying, growing old and fading. I don't know how much longer it can last.

"Israel's arrogance," {10} "testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the Lord his God or search for him."

In spite of what I said before about Israel's return to God, I can only conclude it was a meaningless, it was not sincere and neither is ours.

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