

HOSEA SPEAKS TODAY

Study 1.

Listen to this description of society, written in 1974. I'm quoting from a book, but I've left chunks out and changed some of the more obscure terms to something a bit more understandable.

"The period *is* one of considerable material and political prosperity. Despite the apparent prosperity, however, there *is* a moral and spiritual decline, and the shadows of impending trouble *are* already gathering on the horizon.

"The spiritual condition of the people *is* deplorably low. ... This *is* largely due to the adoption of (multi-faith practices).

"Every commandment of God *is* broken, and that habitually. falsehood, adultery. blood shedding; deceit to God *produce* faithlessness to man; excess and luxury.... Adultery *is* (considered normal practice). Those who *are* first in rank *are* first in excess priests *love* and *share* in the sins of the people; ... Remonstrance *is* useless: the knowledge of God *is* willfully rejected; the people *hate* rebuke."

Would you agree that's a fair description of society?

Material prosperity, but spiritual poverty
Trouble brewing on the horizon (Iraq perhaps?)
God's commandments broken without a thought
Adultery considered the norm (or at least divorce and free sex)
Religious leaders found to be practising the same sins as the people (paedophile priests?)
People not wanting to know about God

I omitted to tell you I changed the tense. The original; was written in the past tense describing the society in Israel of about 750 years before Christ, (in an Introduction to a Commentary on Hosea, by Fred Tatford¹). But I find those conditions so like our society is Britain in 2002 AD that it's quite frightening - especially when you consider that Israel was destroyed less than half a century later [722 BC] under the judgment of God - judgment for those very sins described!

That's why I believe we can profit from an understanding of what Israel's prophet Hosea had to say, and I've called this series of 4 Bible studies "*Hosea speaks today*".

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

1. Israel at that time was split into in 2 parts
 - The northern kingdom, with 10 tribes, that retained the name "Israel"
 - The southern kingdom, with 2 tribes, that took the name of the larger tribe "Judah"
2. Hosea was called as a prophet primarily to the Northern tribe, which at that time was the more godless of the two.
3. Hosea had to tell people of God's anger, but he was also able to talk about God's tender love and mercy.
4. We don't know much about Hosea as a man, but we can be sure he was man who had truly laid his life down for God, because he ne committed his marriage and family life to God as powerful visual aids to drive God's message home

¹ Fredk A. Tatford, Prophet of a Broken Home, 1974, Eastbourne: Prophetic Witness Publishing House.

I. PARABLE FROM FAMILY EXPERIENCE (Chs. 1-3)

A. A DIFFICULT MARRIAGE (Chapter 1)

1. Some people are called to live a life of singleness & chastity for the sake of their devotion to God. How many people do you know who have been told by God to marry an unfaithful woman simply to get God's message across? **[READ 1:1- 3]**

The Lord called Hosea to a marriage which was a reflection of the relationship between Himself and the nation of Israel.

The Lesson: Israel, which had been called to an exclusive relationship with the Lord (Exodus 19:5; Lev 26:11-13; Deut 14:2) was being unfaithful to the Lord (v2).

“Prostitution” and “unfaithfulness” appear often in descriptions of Israel's sin, invariably referring to their consorting with heathen nations & religions

2. The Lord told Hosea what to call his children - with names that would carry a message: **[READ 1:3-9]**

(a) **Jezreel** (1:4), meaning "*God sows*".

The Lesson: God sows punishment.

The message of the name was made even more powerful because it was also the name of a Valley where a century earlier Jehu had slaughtered members of the royal family who were faithless to God & all who worshipped Baal (see 2 Kings 9:30 - 10:11).

(b) **Lo-Ruhamah** (1:6), meaning "*Not loved*" or "*Not shown mercy*".

The Lesson: Israel will not receive mercy, not because God is unmerciful, but because they were unrepentant.

(c) **Lo-Ammi** (1:8), meaning "*Not my People*".

The Lesson: Israel had broken the Covenant which bound them to the Lord as His people (see Lev 26:11-39).

The message being of course that no one can go on living in defiance of God indefinitely:

- God's patience in His mercy far outlasts any human patience
- But the time will come when God has to say “Enough is enough!
- Israel might plead “But we are your chosen”,

Professing Christians might plead “But we are your children”, but in great sadness God will have to say “*I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!*” (Luke 13:27)

At this point in the prophecy we see something of the heart of God because, before He gives Hosea details of the punishment, he is to tell the people something of the Nation's restoration when the punishment is ended. **[READ 1:10 - 2:1]**

God doesn't want to punish - in fact it breaks His heart to do so, but it becomes necessary. God's punishments are a means to an end and God's desire is that the end should be a **blessing**.

Question: Do you think Rom 8:28-30 is relevant here?

B. GOD'S DISCIPLINE (Chapter 2)

The rebuke and announcement of punishment that follow are given as though Lo-Ammi is to be the speaker:

Hos 2:2-13 are a graphic description of punishment on the nation. It starts with a call to repentance: *"Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts"* (v2), Followed by a list of how God will discipline if they are unrepentant (vv 3-13).

(i) Note the methods of God's discipline:

- ▶ Rejection by the Lord - *"She is not my wife"* (v2).
- If God seems far away, has he had to turn His back rather than face our sin?
- ▶ Things not working out / failure / frustration
- *"I will block the path"* (v6) / *"She will chase after her lovers but not catch them"* (v7).
- ▶ Blessings lost - *"I will take away my grain"* (v9).
- ▶ Shame - *"I will expose her lewdness"* (v10).
- ▶ Lose the opportunities of joyful worship - *"I will stop all her celebrations"* (v11).
- If it gets hard to rejoice in worship, could it be because we are not right with God?

All this Discipline leads to Despair, until one can see no way forward other than to turn to the Lord, so leading to a Decision to repent. God never overrides free will to bring us to Him but works out our circumstances to bring us to a point of decision.

(ii) The purpose of God's discipline: after discipline will come **restoration** (2:14-23).

I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt (vv14f).

Note where God takes his chastened ones to speak of blessing – to the desert (the wilderness). Those periods of spiritual dryness maybe times when God will speak afresh after a while.

C. RECONCILIATION (Chapter 3)

Gomer has in the meantime left Hosea, and through her adultery has become enslaved to another. Hosea is told to love her and to buy her back out of slavery

1. To be loved despite her unfaithfulness. **[READ v1]**

The Lesson: God loves His people, though they are unfaithful to Him.

2. She is to be bought ("redeemed") out of slavery. **[READ v2]**

The Lesson: God will redeem His people. As we know, we are not redeemed without cost - it cost God a lot more than silver & barley!

3. She is called to repentance. [READ vv3-5]

The Lesson: The redeemed are called to walk in righteousness. **-So are we!**

Question: What do you think Hosea's marriage experiences tell us of God's love?

To think about: How much am I a product of a society that is out of tune with God's will?

Hosea Speak Today - Study 2

II THE STATE OF THE NATION (4:1 - 7:16)

We have seen that God was displeased with his people and warned them he will need to discipline them. So far we've only touched on the reasons for His displeasure, but from Chapter 4 onwards we get a much fuller picture of what was wrong.

It's easy to look at the sins of society and say "tut-tut, It's not always so easy to see that we ourselves are part of that society and must bear some responsibility if things are wrong. We might not (I hope we **don't!**) participate in the sins that are rampant, but as Christians we are called to be 'salt' and 'light' to our society, so it might be good to ask ourselves "Is the salt of our example strong enough to make others think before acting? "Is the light of our witness bright enough to reveal the Christian way?"

A. MORAL DECAY (4:1 - 7:16)

1. God's Charge Against Israel (4:1-14). **[READ 4:1-2]**

(v1) Things Missing: faithfulness; love; acknowledging God (more accurate: 'knowledge of God').

(v2) Things Amiss: cursing; lying; murder; stealing; adultery; unrestraint; bloodshed.

Perhaps the problems of v2 come about because of what's missing in v1, especially the lack of knowledge of God? Is there no longer straightforward Christian religious education in our schools? Is it no longer the expected thing to go to Sunday School or to be in church on Sunday, or to read the Bible?

Without the knowledge of there being a God who tells us what's right & wrong and who sees what all we do, then, like the people in time of Judges "*Everyone does what is right in their own eyes*" (Jud 17:6)

2. However, we must not be too quick to cast the stone on others **[READ v4]**, Verse 6 tells us why people were lacking knowledge of God **[READ v6]**. Those who had the responsibility of spreading the knowledge of God ('priests') were not doing so. Who are they in today's society I wonder? **(READ I Peter 2:9 & Rev 1:6)**

So those who **did** have knowledge of God - the priests - were not only failing to teach it, but actually **rejecting** it.

3. Verses 10-14 tell of the people generally being unfaithful to God.

4. Verse 15 is a warning to Judah not go the same way as Israel **[READ v15]** (Gilgal & Bethaven had become places of idol worship). They were a bad influence on their brothers in Judah.

Judah did go the same way, just a few generations later and fell under God's judgment about 200 after Israel. But it was already beginning because of Israel's bad influence "*Judah also stumbles with them*" (5:5). Judah failed to heed warnings of history. "It's a wise man that learns by his mistakes": It is a wiser man who learns by other people's mistakes! But a more pertinent lesson for you & me as individuals is to make sure nothing in our behaviour is a bad influence on others.

5. There follows what is perhaps the saddest verse in the Bible: "*Ephraim is joined to idols - leave him alone*" (v17).

“Ephraim” was the name of the largest tribe in the Northern Kingdom and was sometimes used by the Lord as a affectionate name for Israel as a whole. But dear though the nation was to the Lord, the time came when He had to leave them alone

Many a parent has known this with disobedient children, have told them repeatedly, shown them, coaxed them, disciplined them, even punished them ... but they still do it! They’ve come to the conclusion with a heavy heart there is nothing more they can do, other than leave them to make their own way and to learn from their mistakes.

I would rather learn from God’s discipline than be left to learn from bitter experience. At least God disciplines in love and mercy, whereas **Life** doles out experiences without feeling & Satan without mercy.. There’s a reflection of this in Paul’s instructions on church discipline (in 1 Cor 5:5), to put an unrepentant offender out of fellowship.

We see this in action in the next chapter of Hosea, verse 6 [READ 5:6]. God has left them alone, with no one to turn to and no one to pray to (though He will always hear the prayer of genuine repentance). We more earnestly want something we do not have, especially if we once had it then lost it. We can take God's presence for granted and not appreciate Him. He might draw away for a time if this happens - so that we appreciate Him more and seek after Him.

6. Too far gone to repent - their hearts hardened by wilful sin. *"Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God"* (5:4).

Each time God's will is rejected it has a hardening effect on the heart until it's too hard to hear & repent. See an example of that in Pharaoh when Moses asks “Let my people go.” Eight times Pharaoh hardened his heart, and each time he grew more entrenched. Five times it says *“The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.”* It was not that God was making Pharaoh stubborn - God doesn’t override free will - but God’s **law of cause and effect** comes into play. As muscles are hardened by repeated pushing against a force, so the heart is hardened by repeated pushing against God’s will.

B. SHALLOW REPENTANCE (Ch.6)

When Chapter 6 opens it appears that Israel are in repentance, but it soon becomes apparent their repentance is only skin deep. [READ 6:1-3]

1. Presuming on God's easy mercy. Have you noticed what is missing here? (READ1 John 1:8f) There is no confession. There is no acknowledgement of guilt here. They are not sorry for their sin - only for their suffering. God wants to forgive, but He can only forgive what we will first admit. That was the problem with Pharisees in Jesus' time. They wouldn't admit to being at fault, so they were unable to receive God's forgiveness. Contrast the prostitute who anointed the feet of Jesus, of whom He said *“Her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much”* (Luke 7:47).

2. Can’t you just hear God’s sigh in verses 4-6? [READ vv 4-6]. Their love for Him and His way is *“vanishing like the morning mist & the dew”* (v4). God saw only superficial, outward correctness with no inner reality. Some might see just what’s on the outside, but God sees deeper *“The sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria revealed”* (7:1).

C. THE SINS GOD SEES (Ch.7)

1. There were evils that prevent God blessing them as He desired (vv 1-2) *“Whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed”* (v1). God wants to bless, but we can prevent Him from doing so by our unrepentance.

2. Sins in the highest places (vv 3-7). Colluding kings; lying princes; adultery; drunkenness; mockery - none of the leaders praying to God. If only governments would seek God in the decisions they make that affect the lives of millions, what a difference it might make to their decisions!

3. Unholy alliances (vv 8-9). *“Ephraim mixes with the nations”* (v8a); *“Foreigners sap his strength”* (v9a). There is nothing wrong with nations working together, but not when it involves compromising faith & commitment to God.

4. Arrogantly doing their own thing (vv 10-16). *“Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him.”* In verse 14 they are moaning at God's discipline instead of lamenting sin: *“They do **not** cry out to me from their **hearts** but wail upon their beds.”* After punishment they will be ridiculed by those to whom they once boasted. *“They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt”* (v16).

5. There are three graphic Illustrations God uses in Chapter 7:

(i) A half-baked loaf. *“Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over”* (v8). One-sidedness - profession without reality. This might appear fine at first sight but not under God's closer examination. Be careful! Don't neglect any part of your life, but bring every part to the sanctifying fire of the Holy Spirit.

(ii) Prematurely grey. *“His hair is sprinkled with grey, but he does not notice”* (v9). They were weakened by dependence on other nations, without realising their weakness. Our spiritual strength is sapped by living too close to the world Thought: Grey hairs come one by one; so do worldly ways and attitudes if we live too close to the things of the world.

(iii) A confused, senseless, dove. *“Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless - now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria”* (v11). They were going in any and all directions for help except to where it matters – to Egypt, Assyria; but not to God (history reveals they were either let down or subjugated as a result). Warning: Don't be a senseless dove; live close to The Dove of the Holy Spirit and know from Him which way to go.

Question: When we looked at Ch 6 vv 10-16 we saw that Israel were “arrogantly doing their own thing” Can you see ways in which people in today's society are doing the same - doing what *they* reckon is right rather than what God says is right?

Hosea Speak Today - Study 3

When God gave the Commandments to His people on Mt Sinai, He summed up the behaviour He expected from them in the words *“Be holy, for I am holy”* (Lev 11:44).

We’ve seen something of the people’s failure in that regard as we’ve read God’s verdict on their behaviour in Hosea Chs 1-7. The next two chapters tell us something of the **result**. Such behaviour cannot go unpunished, or else it will never end. When God punished a nation, it’s generally referred to as ‘Judgment’.

III THE JUDGMENT TO COME (Chs. 8 & 9)

1. Three Figures of Judgment

(a) **Bird of Prey** - hovering ready to attack. *“An eagle is over the house of the LORD”* (v1). Judgment was imminent. Notice the false claim in v2 *“Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!’”* (NIV says *“acknowledge you”* - though the Hebrew *“yada”* is more often translated *“know”*) Does that remind you of something said by our Lord? **[READ Matt 7:21-23]**

(b) **Whirlwind** - result of the evil sown. *“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind”* (v7).

Paul wrote to the Galatians: *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap”* (Gal 6:7). It’s **the law of cause and effect** - the results are seen in the next two verses **[READ vv8f]**. Israel’s leaders had turned to the strong nation - Assyria - to help against their enemies, and- formed alliances with this heathen nation. But Assyria had taken advantage and taken control - Israel was *“swallowed up”* (v8), *“worthless”* (v8) and *“enslaved”* (v9).

(c) **Destroying Fire** (both literally and metaphorically) *“I will send fire upon their cities that will consume their fortresses”* (v14). Verse 11: *Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning*. Altars had been built to put away sin, but they had been used instead to worship idols (*“sinning”*).

I wonder how often good intentions have turned sour as they’ve become opportunities for sin. A pastor has got alongside a lonely woman to help her - & ended up committing adultery; a fundraiser has raised money for a good cause, and stolen the proceeds; someone might do something successfully for the Lord & become proud of their success But the main punishment that was to come upon Israel if they did not repent was that of...

2. Exile (9:1-6). Their existence as a nation had all been down to God’s blessing in 3 ways:

- (i) Forming them as a distinct people, within Egypt.
- (ii) Giving them a unique law, which was a revelation of His will for their lives.
- (iii) Giving them the Promised Land.

They had lost their distinctiveness, by consorting with heathen nations. They had spurned God’s law, and thus His will for their lives. Was it any surprise they should no longer be allowed to stay in the Promised Land?

Verse 1: *“Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations.”* Meaning: Others may rejoice without God, in their ignorance, but not God’s people who have turned from God having once known Him. Surely a ‘backslider’ can never be truly happy (see Hebrew 4:4-6).

Verse 3: "Egypt" -is used here as a figure of bondage. As they once had been in bondage to Egypt, soon they would be in bondage to Assyria.

Note in this passage (9:1-6) all the things they will miss in exile.

- Prosperity from rich vineyards (v1).
- Kosher food (v3).
- Worship acceptable to the Lord (v4).
- Holy days & festivals (v5).
- Treasures/silver (v6).

3. This punishment was Coming Soon (9:7-9). *"The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand"* (v7), though the prophet is not welcomed for saying so. *The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God* (v8).

Thought: If you are considered a fool for speaking up for the Lord, you are in good company! For those who don't receive Him, the return of our Lord will be a day of judgment & not of blessing, and the Bible tells us that in the last times, people will scoff at those saying He will return. **[READ 2 Pet 3:3-10]**

4. In the remainder of the Chapter the Lord laments how the people that had been His Delight had Become a Disappointment (v10) and their glory will *"fly away like a bird"* (v11)

Don't disappoint the Lord!

Chapter 10 alternates between telling some of the reasons for disappointment and the resultant punishment.

IV THE NATIONAL FAILURE (Ch.10)

There are a least 8 failures described in the Chapter ...

1. Failure of True Spirituality with the increase of prosperity. **[READ 10:1-2]**
(The altars were to idols, not the Lord).

Seems to be in inverse proportion - the greater the prosperity the poorer the spirituality. It does not have to be so of course, but Jesus does warn us it is hard for rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mat 19:23. The heart of a prosperous person is torn between the material world and the spiritual.

2. Failure to follow God's Rule. **[READ v3]**

Their present kings did not follow God's rule, & didn't how to rule. The less our politicians revere God, the less wisdom they will have to rule. In exile they would have no kings of their own - only those of Assyria

3. Failure to Get on with One Another - multiplicity of lawsuits. **[READ v4]**

Those out of relationship with the Lord will soon be out of relationship with one another.

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" said Jesus (John 13:35).

4. Failure to Keep the Covenant of faithfulness to the Lord (vv 5-8).

5. Prolonged Failure [READ v9]

"Days of Gibeah". Refers to an incident in the days of Judges, early in the nation's history. Gibeah was where rapists killed a concubine and the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out in vengeance, (see Judges 19 & 20).

6. Failure to Learn from an Easy Life. [READ v11]

Threshing was the easier more pleasant task given to a less-experienced ox (it could eat as it worked). Ploughing was a harder, more gruelling work, with fewer rewards; meaning life in the "land flowing with milk and honey" had not produced a righteous and holy people, so they will be trained by a harder life in exile.

The Lesson: learn from the easier lessons of life, lest you need to be put through harder ones.

7. Failure to Sow Right Seed - an agricultural parable. [READ vv 12-13a]

God always loves us, but we cannot receive all of that love without the necessary formula on our part ...

- Seed	+	work	+	rain	=	fruit
- Righteousness	+	our own work ⁽¹⁾	+	God's righteousness	=	God's love
- Wickedness	+	deception (own strength & not God's)			=	evil

⁽¹⁾ "Work out your own salvation" (Phil 2:12)

v12 - "Unploughed ground" = hard hearts.

8. Failure to Trust in the Right Things (vv 13b-15). They were trusting in:

Their own strength & military might (v13) .

What should they have trusted in? (Ans: The strength of the Lord).

Fortresses (v14).

What should they have trusted in (Ans: The Name of the Lord "A strong tower" - Prov 18:10).

Question: What do think the Lord might find disappointing about our nation, with its long Christian heritage?

To think about: Is there anything the Lord might find disappointing in ME? Is there anything I can do about it?

Hosea Speak Today – Study 4

V GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS REBELLIOUS PEOPLE (11:1-11)

There were a long of stern words to be said to Israel & Judah in the 8th Century BC, and God raised up prophets to say them. Each had their distinctive, as you would expect. Hosea's distinctive is that God reveals more of His heart of love. The stern words & the warnings are there - but they are said with a heavy heart and expressions of love.

The first 11 verses of Chapter 11 are such a passage

1a. Loved from the Start "*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son*"(v1). **Where have you seen those last few words before?** (Ans: Matt 2:15).

Those words had a prophetic as well as a historic association.

1b. But His love was rejected. **[READ 11:2-4]** 1 John 4:19 says "*We love Him because He first loved us*" That **should** be the response to God's love - but sadly it is more often not the case.

2a. Love Punishes (vv5-7). This would come in three ways:

Exile ("*Return to Egypt*" - metaphorically / "*Assyria will rule over them*").

Conquest.

God not answering their prayers (see Is 1:15).

2b. But love Feels the pain (vv 8-9). **[READ 11:8]**

- v8 - "*Like Admah ... like Zeboiim*" were cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut 29:23).

2c. And love restores **[READ 11:10-11]**

God's discipline of those He loves is meant to be redemptive, not destructive. **[READ Heb 12:5-11]**
God's discipline does not destroy us: we destroy ourselves if we fight it rather than respond to it.

God will roar, not in anger, but to call His children.

The end of verse - 10 "*Com(ing) ... from West*" - seems strange. Israelites thought of the West as the coast, & the expression "*from the west*" meant coming from overseas. Assyria, where most people went into exile, was in **NE**, and reached **overland** - & people didn't return from there. But in 1948 Jews came from overseas - from the West - back to Israel. Perhaps there is a greater fulfilment yet to come?

The next chapter (starting with the last verse of Ch 11) is a sad tale of deceit ...

VI ISRAEL'S DECEITFULNESS (11:12 - 12:14)

1. Deceiving God (or trying to), or perhaps deceiving themselves, with their Lies: *“Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, the house of Israel with deceit”* (11:12)

The Lord is trying to get through to them with truth, but they would rather listen to lies and to live a lie. It is sometimes easier to listen to a lie than to the truth, when the truth hurts! Satan is happy to provide them in abundance. *“The father of lies”* Jesus called him (John 8:44). Lies like ...

“I can do what I like, because God will forgive me anyway.”

“That commandment of God doesn't apply today.”

“God doesn't do those things today.”

“God doesn't care.”

The trouble is, we can live in a lie so long that we believe the lie rather than believe God.

2. Deceiving nations (12:1). *“ ... He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt”* (v1).

This is a reference to the treaty King Hoshea (not to be confused with the prophet Hosea) made with Assyria, only to break it a short while after by courting favour with Assyria's enemy Egypt (see 2 Kings 17:3-4). It was the trigger that caused King Shalmaneser of Assyria to attack & take exiles. It just goes to show how foolish men can be if they trust in their own wisdom & reject God's!

3. Deceitful by Nature (12:2-6). Hosea refers to the founder of the Israel - Jacob - known to be a deceiver from the day he stole his brother's birthright (Gen 25).

If only they had followed Jacob's good points instead of his faults, grasping after God, as Jacob had grasped his brother's heel (v3) and struggling with God to seek His blessing, as Jacob had struggled with the angel (v4).

4. Deceiving Themselves (12:7-14).

(i) Thinking themselves secure in wealth (often obtained dishonestly). **[READ 12:7-8]**

(ii) Thinking themselves secure from God's punishment. In verse 9-14 the Lord reminds them they had never been without prophetic warnings. He mentions two places - Gilead & Gilgal - where idolatry was known to be rife. Put together, the message is: *“I've told you enough times idolatry will be punished. Now look at how much of it is going on - don't think you're going to get away with it”*

Thought: In what am I putting my security?

VII SIN'S LOSSES (Ch.13)

When Satan tempts us to sin, he gives the impression we'll gain something. “Eat the fruit, Eve, and you'll gain knowledge of good and evil”; “Bend the truth a bit and you'll get what you want”; “Buy those dodgy goods and you'll make a lot on the deal”; & so on.

What actually happens when we disobey God is that we **lose** something. Chapter 13 is a record of what Israel once had or could have had, but had lost through their disobedience:

1. Loss of Respect. [READ Hos 13:1-2] Ephraim is used here literally - the tribe rather than the nation as a whole. Their founder had a special blessing from Jacob, who crossed his hands and blessed Ephraim with his right hand to symbolise his descendants would receive a greater blessing than his older brother Manasseh (Gen 48:14), and the Tribe of Ephraim became the leading tribe in Israel, respected by the others.

But now they exceeded the others in their sin and lost their respect, Now they had fallen as low as the heathen nation around them, offering human sacrifice to false gods and worshipping idols. Probably they lost the respect of those nations too. People follow the sins of others to gain their respect, but it actually has the opposite effect.

2. Loss of Future. *“Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing-floor, like smoke escaping through a window”* (v3). Exile was to see the end of them as a people. It was only the Southern Kingdom (Judah) that returned from exile, possibly with just a few descendants of some isolated individuals from the North who escaped to the South before the Assyrian invasion.

3. Loss of God's Care. [READ Hos 13:4-9]

God their protector becomes the attacker
God their saviour becomes their destroyer
God their helper becomes their adversary

The animals of prey used as illustrations in vv7-8 (the lion, the leopard & the bear) could be references to the nations which attacked Judah, the animals being their national symbols. I'll leave you to work that out if you are interested.

4. Loss of Leadership (vv 10-11). *“So in my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I took him away.”* (v11). The fulfilment of this was when King Hoshea was captured. [READ 2 Kings 17:4]

Verses 10-11 refer to the time when Israel pestered Samuel for a king and God gave them Saul (1 Samuel 8:5-7 & 11:15). It revealed a spirit of independence, which was still with them in Hosea's day - even more so. God's perfect will was for them to be led by Him, through godly priests & charismatic leaders - human king were a poor substitute - but now they would have neither.

5. Loss of innocence - *“His sins are kept on record”* (v12). The nation's sins have not been forgotten. Their punishment will surely follow.

6. Verses 13 and 14 are difficult to interpret and, if the variety of translations is anything to go by, difficult to translate. Verse 13 could refer to the Loss of the fullness of life - like a baby staying in the womb and not entering into life. The pain of discipline brought forth no birth of righteousness.

The earlier part of v14 seems to be holding out a hope of salvation, even at this late stage, if only His people would repent: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”* “ But where there is no repentance, then the losses become even greater....

7. Loss of God's Compassion - *“I will have no compassion”* (v14). God's compassion is wonderful to know & to receive, but it does not extend to condoning sin; indeed it cannot, without compromising God's holiness. Our only hope for eternity is that a Holy God rules in a holy heaven.

With His compassion withdrawn, God releases his constraint on the powers that are waiting to pounce on Israel with the resultant slaughter & cruelty they bring. God doesn't send evil. On the contrary - in His mercy He restrains evil. But if we reject Him - then we reject his compassion & mercy and open ourselves to those forces of evil from which His compassion shields us.

That's a sad section, but there still remained one hope. The final chapter is an

VIII APPEAL FOR REPENTANCE (Ch 14)

1. Final Appeal .[**READ Hos 14:1-3**] Confess & seek His forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9).

There are three ingredients of the "sinner's prayer" in verse 2 & 3 ...

(i) Confession: *"Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips'"*

(ii) Faith, in God being the only hope of salvation: *"Assyria cannot save us"; "For in you the fatherless find compassion"* (v3).

(iii) Repentance: *"We will not mount war-horses." We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made"* (v3).

Note: *"That we may offer the fruit of our lips"* (v2) means giving God praise & honour. The forgiven soul is a praising soul.

2. God's Blessings to the Repentant (vv 4-8).

(i) Repair of sin's damages (v4) .*"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely."*

(ii) Unconditional love (v4) . *"for my anger has turned away from them."*

(iii) Refreshment (v5). *"I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily."*

(iv) Blossoming life and spiritual growth (vv 5-6). *"Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his young shoots will grow. His splendour will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon."*

(v) Made a blessing to others (v7). *"Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the corn. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon."*

(vi) God's care - no feeling of need for idols (v8) *"O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him."*

(vii) Fruitful lives (v8). *"I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me."*

What a choice!: Chapter 13 - Continue in sin and lose so much
or Chapter 14 - Repent and receive so much

It doesn't take a lot of wisdom to make the right choice, does it? But the heart of man is so perverse, and his eyes so blinded by Satan that he invariably makes the wrong choice.

The concluding verse sums it up beautifully:

v9 *Who is wise? He will realise these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.*

Question: In what ways do you think society is suffering the loss of God's blessings because of their failure to acknowledge Him and follow His ways? (Refer to the list of losses in VII)

To think about:

- (i) Am I suffering loss of God's blessings because of my failure to acknowledge Him and follow His ways?
- (ii) Do I always act & think wisely?

FOR FURTHER READING AND STUDY

1. Hosea 2:3-23, listing the results of unrepentance followed by the results of restoration after punishment. Though these are addressed to a nation, can you see in any ways in which they might speak to the individual? (For further study on the effects on the Nation of Israel see Romans 11, Jer 30 & 31; Ezek 36:27-28 & 37).
2. Contrast the blessings of repentance in Chapter 24 with the losses of wilfulness in Chapter 13.
3. What has the book of Hosea got to say about the backslider?
4. Read whatever commentary you have available on Hosea
5. (Only if you want a real challenge!) Can you discern any difference between the prophecies of Hosea and those of Amos?

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