

HOSEA—WEEK 3

THE COMING DISASTER



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is “The Prophet Hosea” by James Tissot (1836–1902), on display at the Jewish Museum, New York.

These passages begin with Hosea rescuing Gomer from slavery, gloriously displaying grace, but it’s all downhill from there. Israel chooses ignorance. Prostitution reigns, even among the daughters of Israel. The men even sacrifice with temple prostitutes.

The rot starts at the top, from the priests down to the revolters. It’s all rooted in pride.

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Hosea, Week 3 — The Coming Disaster
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1 Hosea 3:1-5 (NIV)

The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”

For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

One of the hallmarks of sin is how it makes you want to say, “Time out. How is it even possible that ...?”

This time it’s, “How is it even possible that Gomer’s relapse into prostitution led to her being for sale as a slave?” The text gives no explanation at all; it’s just assumed to be normal.

It is normal. Prostitution and human trafficking go hand-in-hand. That’s how it works, even today. This is a chilling glimpse into the nature of sin.

Sin isn’t a collection of individual behaviors that pop up on occasion; it’s an interconnected web of evil. It manifests itself in different ways in different situations, but it’s one thing.

Prostitution isn’t that different from slavery anyway. It’s certainly no one’s idea of liberty.

In today’s passage, we see that they aren’t separate. While there are many slaves who aren’t prostitutes, prostitutes are almost always less than free.

Time out. How is it even possible that Gomer would want to go back to that?

How is it even possible that the Israelites, given their glorious history, would worship the Baals?

Sin never ceases to amaze. The network of evil has a way of sucking people in. It sucks in people like you and me, too, often in ways we’re unaware of.

Sin sucks in the victims. It sucks in the human traffickers (who don’t realize they’re just pawns). It even sucks in our leaders.

For example, in California, sex with an underage prostitute is only a misdemeanor.

Time out.

What?!

2 Hosea 4:1-6 (NKJV)

*Hear the word of the LORD,
You children of Israel,
For the LORD brings a charge against the
inhabitants of the land:*

*“There is no truth or mercy
Or knowledge of God in the land.
By swearing and lying,
Killing and stealing and committing adultery,
They break all restraint,
With bloodshed upon bloodshed.
Therefore the land will mourn;
And everyone who dwells there will waste away
With the beasts of the field
And the birds of the air;
Even the fish of the sea will be taken away.*

*“Now let no man contend, or rebuke another;
For your people are like those who contend with
the priest.
Therefore you shall stumble in the day;
The prophet also shall stumble with you in the
night;
And I will destroy your mother.
My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.”*

Notice that “*knowledge*” occurs three times in this passage. Knowledge (or lack of it) is the root of the problem. Israel isn’t just lazy or selfish; they’re lost. Their compass is broken.

*There is no truth or mercy
Or knowledge of God in the land.*

Doing wrong is bad; not knowing right from wrong is worse. In the US legal system, it’s the definition of insanity. Worse yet, this was Israel’s choice.

*Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.*

Ouch. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*

But all is not lost. They’re still “*My people.*”

Knowledge isn’t just one aspect of faith. It’s at the core.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. — Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

Faith isn’t just thinking, “It’s true!”

It’s knowing it.

3 Hosea 4:7-13 (NIV)

*“The more priests there were,
the more they sinned against me;
they exchanged their glorious God for something
disgraceful.*

*They feed on the sins of my people
and relish their wickedness.*

And it will be: Like people, like priests.

*I will punish both of them for their ways
and repay them for their deeds.*

*“They will eat but not have enough;
they will engage in prostitution but not flourish,
because they have deserted the LORD*

*To give themselves to prostitution;
old wine and new wine
take away their understanding.*

*My people consult a wooden idol,
and a diviner’s rod speaks to them.*

*A spirit of prostitution leads them astray;
they are unfaithful to their God.*

*They sacrifice on the mountaintops
and burn offerings on the hills,
under oak, poplar and terebinth,
where the shade is pleasant.*

*Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution
and your daughters-in-law to adultery.”*

Just watch this fish rot from the head first. God begins by noting the priests *feeding on the sins of my people*. They eat the sin offerings brought to the temple. Thus, they *relish their wickedness*.

Next, the LORD explains where this leads. Lacking guidance, the people lose discernment; *old wine and new wine take away their understanding*. Their senses dulled, they slip into sorcery and hedonism.

My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner’s rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray.

It’s all fun and games, as long as none of the nastiness hits too close to home.

Fat chance. *Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery.*

The chickens are about to come home to roost.

This is strong stuff. The message is sure to be met with skepticism.

But when the prophecy is fulfilled, the people will recoil in horror—and remember. Hopefully, they’ll also remember that this isn’t really about prostitution; it’s about offending God with their unfaithfulness.

One of the principal themes of the Old Testament is that we’re slow learners. Notice all the psychological tricks that God has been using in this book. First, He sets up the analogy of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him and Gomer’s unfaithfulness to Hosea.

Next, He has Hosea buy her out of slavery and take her home, rescuing her. Then, He generalizes the lesson with the prophecy that Israel’s daughters will turn to prostitution. Could He get any clearer?

Unfortunately, the point is that Israel still won’t learn.

4 Hosea 4:14-19 (NIV)

*“I will not punish your daughters
when they turn to prostitution,
nor your daughters-in-law
when they commit adultery,
because the men themselves consort with harlots
and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes—
a people without understanding will come to
ruin!*

*“Though you, Israel, commit adultery,
do not let Judah become guilty.*

*“Do not go to Gilgal;
do not go up to Beth Aven.*

*And do not swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives!’
The Israelites are stubborn,
like a stubborn heifer.
How then can the LORD pasture them
like lambs in a meadow?
Ephraim is joined to idols;
leave him alone!
Even when their drinks are gone,
they continue their prostitution;
their rulers dearly love shameful ways.
A whirlwind will sweep them away,
and their sacrifices will bring them shame.”*

Israel’s sin isn’t literally prostitution and adultery; it’s analogous. God is illustrating that analogy through Hosea and Gomer—and now through Israel’s daughters.

God *will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution* because it’s not what’s significant. Still, this “insignificant” thing will horrify the parents. If that doesn’t get their attention, nothing will.

So God uses the shrine prostitution to connect the literal prostitution (which has their attention) to the figurative prostitution of Israel chasing after other gods, which God has been trying to get them to pay attention to. He’s not going to *punish your daughters* because what the men do is worse.

Consorting and sacrificing with shrine prostitutes makes regular prostitution look like jaywalking.

Our criminal justice system measures crimes in terms of their impact on people. “Sins against God” carry no weight.

Thus, the significance of spiritual sins is not in our face. Separation of church and state yields important benefits, but there are costs too. We marinate in a culture whose priorities are strictly secular.

We know that loving God is the greatest commandment, but that’s not the message we see. We’re bombarded with updates on crime, politics, the economy, the weather, not to mention all the sales pitches and click bait. It’s mostly meaningless, but “don’t touch that dial!”

That’s why we need daily devotions.

Otherwise, we live and breathe only spam.

5 Hosea 5:1-5 (ESV)

*Hear this, O priests!
Pay attention, O house of Israel!
Give ear, O house of the king!
For the judgment is for you;
for you have been a snare at Mizpah
and a net spread upon Tabor.
And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter,
but I will discipline all of them.*

*I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from me;
for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;
Israel is defiled.
Their deeds do not permit them
to return to their God.
For the spirit of whoredom is within them,
and they know not the LORD.
The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt;
Judah also shall stumble with them.*

Israel's infidelity trickles down, from the top (*O priests*), to the bottom (*the revolvers*). But who are the revolvers?

No one seems sure, though they must be revolting against the good. There's also a lot of speculation over what it means for *the revolvers* to *have gone deep into slaughter*. Whatever it is, it must be very evil. Some think it means child sacrifice.

But God makes it clear that His punishment will also range from top to bottom.

I will discipline all of them.

This is all rooted in the ultimate sin—pride.

*The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt;
Judah also shall stumble with them.*

Yikes. Even Judah will get sucked into this nightmare.

No matter what goes wrong, everything always seems to trace back to pride. C.S. Lewis called pride “The Great Sin.” “It was through pride that the devil became the devil.”

Just think how insidious pride is. There's no safe haven where pride can't get in. No matter how good things are, no matter what you've achieved, you can always become proud of that.

And that pride is a greater sin than the failures you managed to avoid. Is there any way to avoid this trap?

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. — Proverbs 3:5–6 (ESV)

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Do you pity prostitutes?
2. What must you "know" to be a Christian?
3. When have you been painfully slow to learn?
4. Have you noticed an increase in spam lately?
5. Where do you see the worst pride?