

HOSEA—WEEK 4

THE EMBARRASSMENT



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.*

God is fed up and turns His back on Israel (even Judah). This is about as painful a wake-up call as can be. Their pride and their silly reliance on sacrifices is laid bare. Even after they are restored, the memory of their sin will linger.

Israel needs to see their sinfulness in a way they’ll never forget.

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Thank you.

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Hosea, Week 4 — The Embarrassment
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1 Hosea 5:6–11 (NKJV)

*“With their flocks and herds
They shall go to seek the LORD,
But they will not find Him;
He has withdrawn Himself from them.
They have dealt treacherously with the LORD,
For they have begotten pagan children.
Now a New Moon shall devour them and their
heritage.*

*“Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah,
The trumpet in Ramah!*

*Cry aloud at Beth Aven,
‘Look behind you, O Benjamin!’
Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke;
Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is
sure.
“The princes of Judah are like those who remove
a landmark;
I will pour out My wrath on them like water.
Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment,
Because he willingly walked by human precept.”*

“You want to live the secular life? Fine then, you can have the secular life, but count me out.”

*With their flocks and herd
They shall go to seek the LORD,
But they will not find Him;
He has withdrawn Himself from them.*

And getting along with the neighbors might get a little rough. *Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah! Cry aloud at Beth Aven, ‘Look behind you, O Benjamin!’ Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke.*

God tried to warn you—but no. Israel (AKA Ephraim) just has to learn the hard way,

*Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment,
Because he willingly walked by human precept.*

Being disciplined by the LORD is no picnic, but it can be curiously comforting. Feeling the wrath of God also means feeling the presence of God.

But Israel’s punishment includes not feeling the presence of God. Yikes.

That’s the essence of what makes hell hell.

When things seem to be going wrong, look for God’s hand. Some of the most important miracles are the ones that start out looking like anything but a miracle—the things that go wrong in amazing ways.

But they’re clues. If it looks supernatural, maybe it is supernatural. Just because it’s unpleasant doesn’t mean it can’t be God’s doing. He’s always up to something. The challenge is to figure out what.

Discern the LORD’s will, and you’ll find great peace—and growth.

2 Hosea 5:12–15 (NKJV)

“Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, And to the house of Judah like rotteness.

*“When Ephraim saw his sickness,
And Judah saw his wound,
Then Ephraim went to Assyria
And sent to King Jareb;
Yet he cannot cure you,
Nor heal you of your wound.
For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
And like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, even I, will tear them and go away;
I will take them away, and no one shall rescue.
I will return again to My place
Till they acknowledge their offense.
Then they will seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”*

God has abandoned Israel (Ephraim) and Judah to their own secular ways. Without Him, everything starts to decay, like rotteness and being moth-eaten. So when they see themselves wasting away, what do they do?

Resort to a secular remedy of course. They appeal to a neighboring king for help.

Seriously? The king in Assyria? Since when is he interested in helping you? Since when is he capable?

*Yet he cannot cure you,
Nor heal you of your wound.*

God’s going to wait this one out. Eventually, they’ll come to their senses.

Because of our sinful nature, people are incredibly slow to come around, even when the evidence is clear. This is illustrated perfectly in a disturbing cliché:

“I was taught in science class that fields don’t evolve because people change their minds; fields evolve because people die.”

Big changes often take generations. That’s not a problem for the LORD.

One of the great truths of scripture is that God is patient. He has all the time in the world.

Time is just another one of His creations.

3 Hosea 6:1–6 (NKJV)

*“Come, and let us return to the LORD;
For He has torn, but He will heal us;
He has stricken, but He will bind us up.
After two days He will revive us;
On the third day He will raise us up,
That we may live in His sight.
Let us know,
Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.
His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter and former rain to the earth.*

*“O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?
O Judah, what shall I do to you?
For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud,
And like the early dew it goes away.
Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And your judgments are like light that goes forth.
For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt
offerings.”*

One of the great lessons of Christianity is that the essence of being a Christian is in the being, not the doing. Our works are evidence of our faith, but they aren't what faith is. The LORD concludes today's passage with this concept.

*For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

Of course, we don't do burnt offerings anymore. Our offerings are acts of service and mercy. Good.

But knowing God is what matters.

This connects to Jesus' statement, *“I never knew you.”* Since Jesus knows everything and everyone, this must be a statement about personal connection. Matthew 7:21-23 and Hosea 6:6 teach the same lesson.

Our relationship with God is the key. Everything else is just a sign of how the key is doing.

In Hosea's time, Israel was committing all kinds of sins, but thought that “buying indulgences” by slaughtering animals on the altar would fix it. God was not impressed.

In Jesus' day, and in ours, people think that good works prove holiness. Maybe, but they can all be an act or even just a habit. Disciplining myself to do all the right things is useless if my connection to the Master is broken. Only He knows which of the things that look good are the ones that advance His agenda.

So, how do we make that connection?

Mainly by not trying to make the wrong connection. When we pray (which is the act of connecting) how do we view our relationship with the person on the other end of the line? Are we there to get help? Or to get directions from the boss?

But boss isn't a strong enough word. Even King or Lord is too simplistic. God *invented* kings.

*“As at Adam, they have broken the covenant;
they were unfaithful to me there.
Gilead is a city of evildoers,
stained with footprints of blood.
As marauders lie in ambush for a victim,
so do bands of priests;
they murder on the road to Shechem,
carrying out their wicked schemes.
I have seen a horrible thing in Israel:
There Ephraim is given to prostitution,
Israel is defiled.*

*“Also for you, Judah,
a harvest is appointed.*

*“Whenever I would restore the fortunes of my
people,
whenever I would heal Israel,
the sins of Ephraim are exposed
and the crimes of Samaria revealed.
They practice deceit,
thieves break into houses,
bandits rob in the streets;
but they do not realize
that I remember all their evil deeds.
Their sins engulf them;
they are always before me.
“They delight the king with their wickedness,
the princes with their lies.*

God really lays Israel out in this passage. He accuses them of some pretty nasty stuff.

But then He shifts gears and talks of restoration—with a twist. The restoration won’t be all fun and games. In a way, it’ll be the worst part.

*whenever I would heal Israel,
the sins of Ephraim are exposed*

When they’re restored, *Their sins engulf them; they are always before me.*

They’re restored, but they’re hit with a boatload of shame.

This is an essential part of the gospel. Forgiveness is not acquittal. Jesus never said, “You are without sin.” He said, “*Go now and leave your life of sin.*”

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” — John 8:11b (NIV)

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. – Hebrews 8:12 (NIV)

God says He will remember our sins no more. That doesn’t mean we’re supposed to forget them. Peter, Paul, and many other saints never forgot their past failings.

But they weren’t hobbled by them; they were energized by them. Forgiveness made them fearless. They had nothing to hide or to hide from.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. — 1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV)

5 Hosea 7:4–10 (ESV)

*They are all adulterers;
they are like a heated oven
whose baker ceases to stir the fire,
from the kneading of the dough
until it is leavened.
On the day of our king, the princes
became sick with the heat of wine;
he stretched out his hand with mockers.
For with hearts like an oven they approach their
intrigue;
all night their anger smolders;
in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.
All of them are hot as an oven,*

*and they devour their rulers.
All their kings have fallen,
and none of them calls upon me.
Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.
Strangers devour his strength,
and he knows it not;
gray hairs are sprinkled upon him,
and he knows it not.
The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
yet they do not return to the LORD their God,
nor seek him, for all this.*

This passage likens Israel’s infidelity to an oven, which sustains its fire. *They are like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire ... all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.*

Israel’s passion for infidelity is self-sustaining, even as everything collapses around them.

*All their kings have fallen,
and none of them calls upon me. ...
Strangers devour his strength,
and he knows it not
gray hairs are sprinkled upon him,
and he knows it not.*

Even as they grow old and weak, they still don’t get it. That’s pride. They want to be the lord of their lives.

*yet they do not return to the LORD their God,
nor seek him, for all this.*

They cling to their pride with all their might. They won’t let go until all their strength is gone.

This is why recovery ministries speak of “hitting bottom.” When someone won’t let go of their pride, the only solution is to destroy it. When their whole life is in ashes, their pride will be in ashes too.

Then, like the prodigal son, they wake up, and restoration can begin.

The worst moment in their whole life is actually the best one.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Ever seen something seemingly “supernaturally bad?”
2. What’s the slowest answer to prayer you’ve seen?
3. How is our concept of God inadequate?
4. How do guilt and forgiveness interact in your experience?
5. Have you ever had a pride killing moment?