

HOSEA—WEEK 5

FLEEING FROM HAPPINESS



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.*

This section displays the profound sadness of Israel’s rejection of the LORD. They could have had it all.

But no. They want to “have it my way.” That embarrasses God and makes Him sad.

Israel will have plenty to cry about too.

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Thank you.

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Hosea, Week 5 — Fleeing From Happiness

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1 Hosea 7:11–16 (NKJV)

*“Ephraim also is like a silly dove,
without sense—
They call to Egypt,
They go to Assyria.
Wherever they go, I will spread My net on them;
I will bring them down like birds of the air;
I will chastise them
According to what their congregation has heard.*

*“Woe to them, for they have fled from Me!
Destruction to them,
Because they have transgressed against Me!
Though I redeemed them,
Yet they have spoken lies against Me.*

*They did not cry out to Me with their heart
When they wailed upon their beds.*

*“They assemble together for grain and
new wine,
They rebel against Me;
Though I disciplined and strengthened their
arms,
Yet they devise evil against Me;
They return, but not to the Most High;
They are like a treacherous bow.
Their princes shall fall by the sword
For the cursings of their tongue.
This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.”*

This is a litany of brutal criticisms. A dove, while notably gentle, is dim-witted. Ephraim (representing all of Israel) is likened to a dove because they vacillate between allying with Egypt and with Assyria. It’s all just senseless panic. Israel seems to insist on being at enmity with God.

*Destruction to them,
Because they have transgressed against Me!
Though I redeemed them,
Yet they have spoken lies against Me.*

Even worse, in their chasing after other gods, they engage in the barbaric practice of ritual self-mutilation.

So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. — 1 Kings 18:28 (NKJV).

They’re so inept their neighbor laughs at them. *This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.*

The Egyptian disrespect for them translates into disrespect for the LORD.

This is why you don’t have to be legalistic to want to behave like a Christian. There’s a difference between doing things for yourself and doing them for the team.

Christians should behave themselves, not because they’ll earn points towards getting into heaven, but because people are watching and will judge our faith by our actions.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, — 1 Corinthians 5:20a (NKJV)

Embarrassing our Lord is a form of taking His name in vain.

2 Hosea 8:1–6 (NKJV)

*“Set the trumpet to your mouth!
He shall come like an eagle against the house of
the LORD,
Because they have transgressed My covenant
And rebelled against My law.
Israel will cry to Me,
‘My God, we know You!’
Israel has rejected the good;
The enemy will pursue him.*

*“They set up kings, but not by Me;
They made princes, but I did not
acknowledge them.
From their silver and gold
They made idols for themselves—
That they might be cut off.
Your calf is rejected, O Samaria!
My anger is aroused against them—
How long until they attain to innocence?
For from Israel is even this:
A workman made it, and it is not God;
But the calf of Samaria shall be broken to
pieces.”*

Time out. They made another calf-idol?

Of all the stupid things Israel might do, making another calf-idol is the one that has to be out of the question. They’ve done a lot of dumb stuff, but this is their signature “do not do this” thing. It’s like Japan bombing Pearl Harbor again. No way.

Yet, here they are being cut off for the idols they made. How can this be?

If you’re clinging to the hope that they didn’t actually do this—that “*your calf is rejected*” is just a figure of speech—give it up. 1 Kings 12:28 details how they made two gold calf idols.

The whole book of Hosea is a portrait of the lunacy of sin. The whole Old Testament is a portrait of the lunacy of sin. We’re seeing jaw-dropping stuff happen again and again because that’s the point.

Israel has rejected the good;

It’s like they don’t want to be happy.

Why do people so often seem to push their self-destruct button? When everything’s going well, we can’t seem to simply let it be. A lot of literature follows this theme. Here’s one.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thorn_Birds

There’s something going on here that lies at the heart of how sin ruins lives. It’s all rooted in how sin began—refusing to let God be God. Happiness, by itself, seems to make people stir-crazy.

We’re not happy with being happy if we can’t control it.

3 Hosea 8:7–14 (NKJV)

*“They sow the wind,
And reap the whirlwind.
The stalk has no bud;
It shall never produce meal.
If it should produce,
Aliens would swallow it up.
Israel is swallowed up;
Now they are among the Gentiles
Like a vessel in which is no pleasure.
For they have gone up to Assyria,
Like a wild donkey alone by itself;
Ephraim has hired lovers.
Yes, though they have hired among the nations,
Now I will gather them;
And they shall sorrow a little,
Because of the burden of the king of princes.*

*“Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin,
They have become for him altars for sinning.
I have written for him the great things of My law,
But they were considered a strange thing.
For the sacrifices of My offerings they sacrifice
flesh and eat it,
But the LORD does not accept them.
Now He will remember their iniquity and punish
their sins.
They shall return to Egypt.*

*“For Israel has forgotten his Maker,
And has built temples;
Judah also has multiplied fortified cities;
But I will send fire upon his cities,
And it shall devour his palaces.”*

There’s something creepy about this verse.

*Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning,
they have become to him altars for sinning.”*

What is this saying?

For starters, Ephraim was only supposed to have one altar for the sin offering. Why build more?

To handle the caseload, of course. Atoning for sin has become a big business in Israel. They’re just balancing supply and demand.

They’re so efficient at processing sin that they’ve become like altars themselves.

If this is reminding you of indulgences, or of Jesus clearing the temple, you’re on to something.

But don’t think of this as someone else’s descent into factory-level processing of sin; it’s universal. Most of us just don’t have the resources to pull it off on a grand scale.

We tend to see God as different from the Lord revealed in scripture. We want a God who’s always forgiving and never condemning. We want the cross to be a permanent “Get Out of Jail Free” card.

Freedom in Christ is one of the most important concepts in Christianity.

But it’s still possible to abuse it.

4 Hosea 9:1–6 (NKJV)

*Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples,
For you have played the harlot against your God.
You have made love for hire on every threshing floor.
The threshing floor and the winepress
Shall not feed them,
And the new wine shall fail in her.
They shall not dwell in the LORD's land,
But Ephraim shall return to Egypt,
And shall eat unclean things in Assyria.
They shall not offer wine offerings to the LORD,*

*Nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him.
It shall be like bread of mourners to them;
All who eat it shall be defiled.
For their bread shall be for their own life;
It shall not come into the house of the LORD.
What will you do in the appointed day,
And in the day of the feast of the LORD?
For indeed they are gone because of destruction.
Egypt shall gather them up;
Memphis shall bury them.
Nettles shall possess their valuables of silver;
Thorns shall be in their tents.*

For the nation of Israel to come around, they're going to have to be horrified by what they've done. God is setting that up in this passage by describing how profoundly unhappy they'll be.

Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples.

Even though they see themselves (correctly) as God's people, they'll be the least happy folks in the neighborhood.

When this comes to pass, they should get the point—if they remember the words of Hosea.

Accurate prophecy gets people's attention. False prophecy should get their attention too, though not in a good way. But that hasn't been the rule of late. Bad predictions are now so common that few people even notice. Good predictions tend to drown in all the noise and thus get forgotten.

One of the best evidences of the truth of scripture is what it says about human nature. The Bible "predicts" that people acting sinfully—stupidly selfish—will be the norm.

Stupid selfishness is everywhere for everyone to see, just like the Bible says it would be. That validates the Bible. Does it convert anyone?

Not really. People cling to the belief that we're basically good, despite the evidence. A neutral observer would instantly conclude that the Bible's description of human nature is on the money.

But folks **need** the theory of good people to be true. The alternative is just too painful.

"There are none so blind as those who will not see." — John Heywood (paraphrasing Jeremiah 5:21)

5 Hosea 9:7–12 (NKJV)

*The days of punishment have come;
The days of recompense have come.
Israel knows!
The prophet is a fool,
The spiritual man is insane,
Because of the greatness of your iniquity and
great enmity.
The watchman of Ephraim is with my God;
But the prophet is a fowler's snare in all his
ways—
Enmity in the house of his God.
They are deeply corrupted,
As in the days of Gibeah.
He will remember their iniquity;
He will punish their sins.*

*"I found Israel
Like grapes in the wilderness;
I saw your fathers
As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season.
But they went to Baal Peor,
And separated themselves to that shame;
They became an abomination like the thing they
loved.
As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a
bird—
No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception!
Though they bring up their children,
Yet I will bereave them to the last man.
Yes, woe to them when I depart from them!"*

No one's sure exactly what, "*The prophet is a fool, The spiritual man is insane,*" means, but the bottom line is, "*Israel knows!*"

They've been warned. Now, "*The days of punishment have come; The days of recompense have come.*"

But the point of this passage isn't God's coming judgement; it's God's heart. That's the point of the whole book. That's why God told Hosea to love an unfaithful woman in the first place.

*"I saw your fathers
As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. ...
Yet I will bereave them to the last man.
Yes, woe to them when I depart from them!"*

How sad. Israel could be living the dream, but they threw it all away.

God doesn't just want us to know His heartache; He wants us to feel it. We can because of His image in us. We know heartache because we love. Hosea's pain is easy to understand—and feel.

Heartache is a popular theme in literature and in music. Some great songs are bittersweet looks at "the road not taken." Here are two of my favorites. They're just about life and love and can't begin to do justice to the pain depicted in the book of Hosea. They don't even focus on sin as the root cause of the heartache, but the second one has some incredible finger picking.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU8hlYbNH-Q>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpdGvlVGZmk&list=RDLfGkOZetpi0&index=5>

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What has embarrassed the church the most?
2. Have you seen people who weren't satisfied with simple happiness?
3. Do people take the forgiveness of the cross too far?
4. Do you hear the claim that people are basically good?
5. What's your favorite sad song?