

# HOSEA—WEEK 6

## TIMING



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.*

Things are coming to fruition in their appropriate time. The memory of God’s hand in fleeing from Egypt has faded and the result is idolatry. The latest golden calf project will end embarrassingly, and that will initiate a time to seek the Lord.

But, in ultimate timing, Israel will be wanderers among the nations.

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Hosea, Week 6 — Timing  
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1 Hosea 9:13–17 (NKJV)

*Just as I saw Ephraim like Tyre, planted in a  
pleasant place,  
So Ephraim will bring out his children to the  
murderer.*

*Give them, O LORD—  
What will You give?  
Give them a miscarrying womb  
And dry breasts!*

*“All their wickedness is in Gilgal,  
For there I hated them.  
Because of the evil of their deeds*

*I will drive them from My house;  
I will love them no more.  
All their princes are rebellious.  
Ephraim is stricken,  
Their root is dried up;  
They shall bear no fruit.  
Yes, were they to bear children,  
I would kill the darlings of their womb.”*

*My God will cast them away,  
Because they did not obey Him;  
And they shall be wanderers among the nations.*

Israel’s plans are backfiring perfectly. They sacrifice to Baal gods of fertility, so God will:

*Give them a miscarrying womb  
And dry breasts.*

They pray to Baal gods of the harvest and:

*Their root is dried up;  
They shall bear no fruit.*

But it gets worse. The children who are born have a grim future.

*So Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer. ...  
I would kill the darlings of their womb.*

Still, that’s nothing compared to the LORD kicking them out of the Promised Land.

*Because of the evil of their deeds  
I will drive them out of My house ...  
And they shall be wanderers among the nations.*

That’s really bringing the hammer down. Everything else is just a slap on the wrist.

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What makes this even more chilling is that this prophecy is still being fulfilled today. Some Jews do live in the Promised Land, but they are surrounded by insane enemies. As I write this, Iran is at the top of the news, but not long ago it was Hamas. And Hezbollah isn’t exactly laying low.

The prophecy was fulfilled far beyond anyone’s imagination.

2 Hosea 10:1–6 (NKJV)

*Israel empties his vine;  
He brings forth fruit for himself.  
According to the multitude of his fruit  
He has increased the altars;  
According to the bounty of his land  
They have embellished his sacred pillars.  
Their heart is divided;  
Now they are held guilty.  
He will break down their altars;  
He will ruin their sacred pillars.  
  
For now they say,  
“We have no king,  
Because we did not fear the LORD.  
And as for a king, what would he do for us?”*

*They have spoken words,  
Swearing falsely in making a covenant.  
Thus judgment springs up like hemlock in the  
furrows of the field.  
  
The inhabitants of Samaria fear  
Because of the calf of Beth Aven.  
For its people mourn for it,  
And its priests shriek for it—  
Because its glory has departed from it.  
The idol also shall be carried to Assyria  
As a present for King Jareb.  
Ephraim shall receive shame,  
And Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.*

In the study of Hosea 8:1–6, we noted that Israel had built many altars for sacrifice, though there’s only supposed to be one—plus they had made another calf-idol! Now we see them building even more altars. They’ve also started up some nonsense with *sacred pillars*.

The altars and sacred pillars will be destroyed, but God has something special planned for the calf. It will end up being *carried to Assyria as a present for King Jareb*, who turns out to not be a great ally.

*Ephraim shall receive shame,  
And Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.*

That will bring this whole idiotic calf project to a fitting end.

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God has a way of mocking bad ideas. It’s painful to watch a pet project fail spectacularly, but, compared to other forms of punishment, it can actually be quite gentle. Losing a golden calf is small potatoes compared to the suffering that’s coming. Still, it serves a great purpose by getting everyone’s attention.

There’s something about embarrassment that freezes the moment in our memories. In a curious way, it feels more painful than it actually is. Remember, repentance is the goal. Embarrassment is the perfect tool for that.

It seems that God wired that emotion into us for this very purpose. We don’t see it in the animal kingdom. Dogs do something with their eyes that looks like shame, but the experts say that’s not what it is.

The LORD’s mercy is a thing of wonder. His goal is to teach, not to inflict pain. He even installed a special emotion in us to help with this.

3 Hosea 10:7–10 (NKJV)

*As for Samaria, her king is cut off  
Like a twig on the water.  
Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,  
Shall be destroyed.  
The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars;  
They shall say to the mountains, “Cover us!”  
And to the hills, “Fall on us!”*

*“O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah;  
There they stood.  
The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity  
Did not overtake them.  
When it is My desire, I will chasten them.  
Peoples shall be gathered against them  
When I bind them for their two transgressions.*

Gibeah is where a Levite’s concubine was raped (see Judges 19:22-26). This is one of the iconic examples of depravity, God sets it up as an example of the unjust being overtaken.

But this passage isn’t so much about justice as it is about timing. These prophecies aren’t predictions; they’re announcements of choices.

*When it is My desire, I will chasten them.  
Peoples shall be gathered against them  
When I bind them for their two transgressions.*

The *two transgressions* are the physical sin like what happened in Gibeah and the spiritual sin that has been the focus throughout Hosea.

God will discipline Israel for these things in His own due time.

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God’s timing seems slow to us, and it’s reasonable to wonder why it isn’t faster. In teaching children or training animals, reward and punishment work best when done promptly. So, why doesn’t God punish quickly?

Because God isn’t like us. We need reward and punishment to work with maximum efficiency because getting children and animals to conform to our will is a challenge.

But not for God. He has no problem getting every atom in the universe to conform precisely to His will.

He’s not in a hurry. He’s got agendas way beyond our understanding.

4 Hosea 10:11–15 (ESV)

*Ephraim was a trained calf  
that loved to thresh,  
and I spared her fair neck;  
but I will put Ephraim to the yoke;  
Judah must plow;  
Jacob must harrow for himself.  
Sow for yourselves righteousness;  
reap steadfast love;  
break up your fallow ground,  
for it is the time to seek the LORD,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon  
you.*

*You have plowed iniquity;  
you have reaped injustice;  
you have eaten the fruit of lies.  
Because you have trusted in your own way  
and in the multitude of your warriors,  
therefore the tumult of war shall arise among  
your people,  
and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,  
as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of  
battle;  
mothers were dashed in pieces with their  
children.  
Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,  
because of your great evil.  
At dawn the king of Israel  
shall be utterly cut off.*

This passage begins lovingly, but with a creepy twist. *Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck.*

This doesn't mean no one will die. It just means Israel (a remnant) will survive. Everyone dies eventually anyway; that train left the station long ago. Israel will survive though, by God's grace.

But Israel is about to dawn into repentance. The LORD uses a plowing metaphor to show their evil and their coming back to righteousness. First their plowing was wrong, but they got the right feedback.

*You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice;  
you have eaten the fruit of lies. ...  
At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.*

Eventually they'll figure it out.

*Sow for yourselves righteousness; ...  
for it is the time to seek the LORD,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.*

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But notice what this doesn't say. It doesn't say, "*seek the LORD, that he may come and rain blessings upon you.*" If they really get it, they won't do righteousness to get blessings; they'll do righteousness for righteousness' sake.

What they'll get is a Messiah.

5 Hosea 11:1–7 (NKJV)

*“When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
And out of Egypt I called My son.  
As they called them,  
So they went from them;  
They sacrificed to the Baals,  
And burned incense to carved images.*

*“I taught Ephraim to walk,  
Taking them by their arms;  
But they did not know that I healed them.  
I drew them with gentle cords,  
With bands of love,  
And I was to them as those who take the yoke*

*from their neck.  
I stooped and fed them.*

*“He shall not return to the land of Egypt;  
But the Assyrian shall be his king,  
Because they refused to repent.  
And the sword shall slash in his cities,  
Devour his districts,  
And consume them,  
Because of their own counsels.  
My people are bent on backsliding from Me.  
Though they call to the Most High,  
None at all exalt Him.”*

The key to the whole problem with Israel is in the middle of this passage.

*I taught Ephraim to walk,  
Taking them by their arms;  
But they did not know that I healed them.*

Right after crossing the Red Sea, no one wondered who it was that parted the waters. They had no illusions that it was just luck, or the Baals, or whatever. They knew it was the LORD.

But now it’s not so obvious. They know about the LORD from the scrolls and from the teachings of their elders, but they can’t see Him. So their *bent* towards disbelief makes them skeptical. Thus, each generation loses a bit more of the faith.

This is where, “*My people are bent on backsliding from Me,*” leads.

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Nowadays, this backsliding bent is part of our individual walks. Our faith is strengthened by answered prayer, or other glimpses of Him, but in between those boosts, our faith gradually decays.

In “*The Screwtape Letters*” by CS Lewis, Screwtape calls this “undulation.” Electrical engineers call it a reverse sawtooth wave pattern. I call it my life. Even when I’m on a long-term growth path, 99 percent of the time I’m losing ground. The growth comes in bursts, then I revert to my normal state of backsliding.

But here’s the kicker—it’s all good. Amazingly, this is one of God’s main methods for growing His people. Backsliding leads to low points, and those low points are the secret sauce. Whether in my spiritual bottoms, or in Israel’s captivity in Assyria, these “times that try men’s souls” are key.

It seems that I’m ready to grow only when I’m angry at myself.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is the theological role of modern Israel?
2. Have you seen embarrassment be useful?
3. Ever had a sense of God's timing?
4. What is your motive for doing these studies?
5. Are you frustrated by undulation in your walk with God?