

## The Book of Hosea

### Chapter 5

**5:1 Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For the judgment applies to you, For you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread out on Tabor.**

In Hosea, chapter 5, the prophet Hosea preaches against the whole people, but especially against their leaders—the priests and rulers. The priests and rulers were the source of the evils that prevailed. The priests did not stand for true worship, but caved in to the demands of the people for a corrupt, superstitious form of false worship that had “an appearance of wisdom.” And the chief men and rulers became corrupt in every way. Seeking dishonest wealth and material gain, the false prophets perverted the law and everything that once had been pure among the people.

The leaders wrongly thought that they were exempt from God’s judgment. Yet, the truth was that their unfaithfulness would bring God’s judgment upon them. Though they despised God’s judgments, He would be their avenger. The message was clear—this is your last chance to repent before God’s judgment comes on you.

Both the priests and the king’s counselors were like snares and nets. As hunters spread their nets and snares on Mount Mizpah and on Tabor, so the people have been ensnared by them.

The Lord desires all, including kings and rulers, to be ruled by His Word. How do we prove our obedience to the Lord? We prove that we obey Christ, by submitting to His Word. Neither kings nor church leaders may do as they please; rather, they must submit themselves to God and His law.

God holds leaders especially responsible for their faithfulness or lack of faithfulness. That is why James warns “Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

**5:2 The revoltors have gone deep in depravity, But I will chastise all of them.**

The people had completely hardened their hearts. They flattered themselves with their own deceptive teachings. They mocked God and His Word. The Israelites were so obstinate in their superstitions, that they despised all counsels and all admonitions. They strongly resisted every instruction from God’s true prophets.

What was their sin? They worshipped not according to God’s command and law, but turned aside and followed their own devices, as could be seen in their sacrifices.

John Calvin warns that when men adopt “false forms of worship or such as are invented [by men], nothing then is holy or acceptable to God, but an abominable filth.” Not only had they turned aside to perverted forms of worship, but they had become obstinately fixed in them. They refused to be torn away from their idols.

God says, “I will chastise all of them.” John Calvin writes, “When I sent my Prophets, they could not bear to be admonished, because my word was too bitter for them.”

Reproofs are not easily endured by men. We indeed know, that those who are ill at ease with themselves, are yet not willing to hear any reproof: every one who deceives himself, wishes to be deceived by others.”

**5:3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot, Israel has defiled itself.**

Hypocrites may vainly excuse themselves and claim that they are immune from God’s judgment. When God reproves them and brings to light their sins, they defend themselves with vain and frivolous excuses. But here God testifies that men are greatly deceived when they think they can hide themselves from God’s tribunal.

Despite Ephraim and Israel’s attempt to excuse themselves, they shall not escape God’s judgment. He is not ignorant of their sin and their rebellious hearts. Let us learn from Hosea’s words to beware of spreading a veil over our own sins, for God’s eyes penetrate through all such excuses.

Why does God mention Ephraim? From that tribe came the first Jeroboam, who was the first ruler of the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel. Ephraim thought himself to be superior to the other tribes, but now God mentions him by way of reproach. It is as if God says, “Fight with me if you so desire, but it will profit you nothing. My ears are stunned by your lies. After you have pleaded your own case, acting as rebellious traitors, the fact will still remain that you are destined for My judgment.”

“You have played the harlot, Israel has defiled itself.” Although they flatter and deceive themselves, God meanwhile condemns them and refuses to hear their excuses. Although Israel and Ephraim gloried in their superstitions, God called them abominable and polluted, for they had turned aside from His Word.

**5:4 Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, And they do not know the LORD.**

It is as if God told the prophet Hosea to leave them alone. Why bother? They will not receive wholesome instruction, for they are entirely given up to destruction. God had commanded Hosea to reprove the people, but his labor seemed in vain. They were fixed in their superstitions and false beliefs. They wanted to do what was right in their own eyes, not God’s eyes. “Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know the LORD.”

They do not know the one, true God. The people ought to have returned to God on their own. Knowing their hardheartedness, God in His rich mercy and grace sent the prophet Hosea to them to reprove them and call them to repentance. Still they would not turn; they would not listen. They fiercely resist God’s admonishment and wholesome instruction. Is not this a strange and monstrous madness? They have no shame or fear.

**5:5 Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him, And Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also has stumbled with them.**

Having condemned the Israelites for departing from the true God and obstinately refusing every instruction, God adds that His vengeance was near at hand.

Israel shall find what happens to those who resist God and His prophets. Their pride was seen in their resistance to the teaching of God's Word. John Calvin writes, "they were so swollen with pride that they thought wrong was done to them whenever the Prophets reproved them." God needed no other witness to convict Israel than her own pride. He warns that those who worship Him according to their own inventions and superstitions will be condemned.

Note that when he says that "Judah also has stumbled with them," he refers to the wayward people of Judah, not the true believers who worshipped God according to His Word.

**5:6 They will go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them.**

The people sought to pacify God with their sacrifices. Yet, in doing so, they would not find Him. God seeks true repentance. Since there was no *true* repentance, He withdrew Himself from them.

God wanted the people to consecrate or set apart themselves to the LORD. Yet, they only wanted to go through the motions of outward religion, sacrificing animals to the Lord, while their hearts and lives remained far from God. They did not want to obey God and keep His commandments. By their actions, they mocked God.

God warns us in Galatians 6:7-8: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

**5:7 They have dealt treacherously against the LORD, For they have borne illegitimate children. Now the new moon will devour them with their land.**

The Israelites had violated God's covenant. God had covenanted with Israel to be her Father and Husband. But He required from Israel such obedience as a son ought to show toward his father. He required from Israel such faithfulness as a wife owes to her husband.

Hosea now charges the people with unfaithfulness and treachery. They had despised the true God and prostituted themselves to idols. Sadly, their children were just as bad as they were. There was no longer any hope for repentance.

In a fixed and short period of time, the Israelites will be devoured, along with their land, when God pours out His judgment upon them.

**5:8 Blow the horn in Gibeah, The trumpet in Ramah. Sound an alarm at Beth-aven: "Behind you, Benjamin!"**

The prophet Hosea preaches as a herald, who declares and proclaims war. John Calvin comments that "the truth itself ought . . . to storm not only our ears, but also our hearts and be more powerful than any trumpet." Yet, the sad truth is that we often do not listen. So the Lord called his servant Hosea to preach like a herald, blowing the trumpet and proclaiming war throughout the whole kingdom of Israel—in Gibeah, in Ramah, at Beth-aven.

God does not threaten in vain. His reproofs are not jokes. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."

All ministers of the Gospel are God's heralds. We call all men to peace and promise that God is ready to grant us forgiveness, if we seek Him with all our hearts. But if we reject God's mercy and despise His grace, a most dreadful judgment awaits us, for God is armed for vengeance.

**5:9 Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke; Among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure.**

God warns Ephraim and Israel that He will reduce them to nothing. God would no longer show His patience to the rebellious nation. He would destroy and completely blot out the northern kingdom of Israel.

This is how God's true prophets preached. They often threatened, then they gave hope of pardon and promised salvation. After having chastised the people they turn abruptly to preaching grace and offering salvation, testifying that God will be merciful to those who are truly repentant.

**5:10 The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary; On them I will pour out My wrath like water.**

The prophet Hosea blames the princes of Judah for the fact that the people have fallen away and departed from God. The leaders ought to have ruled the people and kept them in obedience to God and His law. Their failure to lead and maintain the pure worship of God destroyed the whole order of things. God will judge the leaders more harshly than the common people, for they by their bad examples corrupted the whole people and caused the whole nation to sin.

**5:11 Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, Because he was determined to follow *man's* command.**

Why is Ephraim or Israel oppressed? Why will he be crushed in judgment? It is because "he was determined to follow man's command" rather than God's command. The Israelites had no excuse, for they had not been compelled by force or fear to follow superstition. Rather, they were prompt and ready to obey and follow man's command, for they had no fear of God and no true religion. They were determined to follow the teachings and commandments of men. They were determined to follow their culture and their denominational teachings, regardless of whether these teachings and practices were in accordance with what God prescribes in His Word.

Anyone who turns away from obeying God's commandments and maintaining His pure worship is in danger of God's judgment. God warns us to keep His worship pure and entire, neither adding to nor subtracting from that which He has commanded us to do in His Word.

Although Jeroboam had originally commanded the Israelites to worship God in a false way, the people willingly embraced this perverse worship. The people ought to have firmly resisted this wickedness. Yet, instead, they willingly allowed themselves to be drawn away from the true worship of God. They wanted to fit in and follow what everyone else was doing. God warns that this broad road leads many to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

**5:12 Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim And like rotteness to the house of Judah.**

God will judge both kingdoms—the northern kingdom of Ephraim, or Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. God compares Himself to the little worms that gnaw wood and consume cloths. Rotteness compares God to a slow corrosion that would consume the people, bit by bit.

Sometimes God chastises us in order to save us or sanctify us, while other times He renders us more inexcusable. The Lord desired for the people to repent. Yet, their hearts were so hardened that they would not. They did not sense their slow decay. Instead, they continued to slide down the slippery slope that leads to destruction.

**5:13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, Or to cure you of your wound.**

Instead of turning to God, Ephraim turned in vain to Assyria and sent to King Jareb for help during his affliction. He looked for an easy remedy, but there was no cure for his disease. Only God is able to heal and cure us of our disease of sin and idolatry and the painful effects it wreaks on our souls. God calls us to trust in Him alone to be our Great Physician.

The Israelites turned to other human beings to relieve their pain and heal them from their disease, instead of trusting in God who alone can save.

**5:14 For I *will* be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.**

As the Israelites remained hardened against God and placed their trust in men for their salvation, they provoked and inflamed God's wrath against themselves. No longer is He pictured as a moth; now He is a lion. God declares that as a lion tears to pieces its prey, so He will utterly destroy the rebellious Israelites and ravage the unbelieving citizens of Judah as well.

**5:15 I will go away *and* return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.**

God will abandon the Israelites, His covenant people, until they acknowledge their guilt and repent, turning from their wicked ways and seeking His face with penitent hearts that desire to obey Him and serve Him only.

All of us are reconciled to God in this way. We must repent of our sins and place our faith in Christ alone.

Sometimes it takes great affliction to drive us to repentance---severe illness, the death of a loved one, financial ruin, or other great trials. There are many things God can use to afflict us. Yet, even these afflictions show God's kindness and mercy to us. How much worse it would be for God just to leave us alone in our rebelliousness. Instead, affliction may cause us earnestly to seek Him, to acknowledge our sin and guilt, and to turn to Christ for mercy and forgiveness.