

# HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

by S. Franklin Logsdon

**"For Israel hath forgotten his maker."** (Hosea 8:14)

**"My people have forgotten me days without number."** (Jeremiah 2:32)

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## CHAPTER NINE -

### THE ULTIMATE OF FORGETFULNESS (Hosea 8)

THE PLAGUE OF UNBELIEF continues. The provocations multiply; and, with their increase, the portents of judgment loom more ominously on the horizon. The pages of Israel's history are replete with exhibits of almost unbelievable cases of rebellion. The chapter before us adds unsightly strokes to the developing portraiture of their spiritual delinquency.

Transgression, sin and iniquity - three expressions for infractions of divine statutes - are mentioned twenty-four times in ten chapters, iniquity totaling fourteen in this number. Since iniquity speaks of corruption in the nature, or inward perversion, it is not difficult to understand why there was such bold transgression (rebellion against law) and evident sin (moral and spiritual failure) on the part of the people.

Sin distorts, diverts, degrades and destroys. We must admit that it fills our asylums, crams our workhouses, demoralizes our youth, blights the nation, breaks homes, spoils happiness and stocks the cemeteries.

Describing His people in an era of declension, JEHOVAH asserted: "**Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good . . . they are altogether become filthy**" (Psalm 53:1, 3). Under such circumstances, it seemed most fitting for the LORD to inquire, "**Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?**" (Psalm 53:4). The thought would seem to be that those with knowledge could not possibly so behave. But these people in Hosea's day did have knowledge, and their flagrant disregard of it makes the case against them all the more serious.

Now the command is given to "**set the trumpet to thy mouth**" (v. 1), although it is not to be blown at once.

But, as a musical director raises his baton for the downbeat, so the trumpet is in readiness to sound the alarm. Then judgment will come with the swiftness of an eagle (v. 1) swooping down upon its prey with deadly aim. The provocation is summarized:

(1) "**They have transgressed my covenant.**"

(2) They have "**trespassed against my law**" (v. 1).

The former concerned relationship; the latter, regulations. GOD set His love upon the people (Deuteronomy 7:7) long before He imposed legal obligations upon them. He was known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob only as the Almighty One - the omnipotent One who is able to deliver. Then, through Moses, He becomes known as JEHOVAH (Exodus 6:3), the covenant-keeping GOD who with inviolate righteousness and unaffected faithfulness shows mercy, keeps judgment and redeems.

Upon Him were these indignities being heaped. They transgressed the love-covenant, crossed over, got out of bounds, acted contrary to the solemn and sacred principles involved in it. They trespassed against GOD's law - the code designed to control conduct. The word "trespass" here means to act covertly or treacherously, that is with an utter disregard for the sanctity of and the binding responsibility involved in these authoritative directives.

This explains why the trumpet alarm was about to sound.

Israel's desperate reaction is hinted in the excited salutation of verse 2, "**My God.**" When the foundations begin to crumble (Psalm 11:3), when the secular supports desert in the crisis, this is invariably the intuitive outburst. It is, therefore, not necessarily an indication of reverent address, the kind which is acceptable to the Most High GOD. the LORD JESUS CHRIST gives us a sobering corroboration: "**Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity**" (Matthew 7:22, 23).

These ancient people made bold to assert, "**We know thee**" (v. 2). It was however, only a theoretical appreciation. It was intellectual, not experiential.

At a somewhat later date, the LORD put a lie to their empty profession.

Said He: "**My people is foolish, they have not known me**" (Jeremiah 4:22). Their words were nothing more than the attempt of a disobedient child to intercept the chastening rod.

There is convincing evidence that the people were destitute of discernment. For instance: "**Israel hath cast off the thing that is good**" (v. 3). It was not a process of quiet premeditation during which the relative merits of GOD's way and the way of the heathen were carefully weighed in order to arrive at a proper decision. No. They did not "**try the spirits whether they are of God**" (I John 4:1). They did not sit down to figure out the cost before they began building on the sand. GOD's way was ignored.

It came about through a subtle dispossession by preoccupation. The "**thing that is good**" was

gradually replaced by the thing that was bad, and GOD was crowded out. Because of this the prophet was forceful in his warning that a wicked enemy would fast pursue on their heels (v. 3) to plague them.

What is a "cold war" or a "war of nerves" in comparison with the stark reality of a vicious attack by a ruthless enemy? Possessions stolen, houses burned, children tortured, women ravaged, the infirm beaten and killed - these inhumanities in variations of brutality being but the heel prints of an invading army.

Nothing is more depressive than the sight of a helpless populace making a desperate dash to escape such miseries, drawing along with them their little ones so incapable of comprehending the meaning of it all, laboriously bearing a few belongings with which to start anew somewhere, sometime - all the while wondering where, if any place, they will rest their weary bodies in the dismal night ahead. The trumpet is at the mouth. Its shrill blast may sound at any moment.

And where is the shelter in this storm? Where is the place of refuge? Where is the one who will be a present help in the day of trouble? "**Israel hath cast off the thing that is good**" (v. 3) for the thing that is not good. Now its worthlessness is to be proved. Shall their idols rise to the occasion? No. "**Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off,**" they are informed in the midst of their frustration (v. 5). What a bitter fact to face! As a red herring can divert the scent to deceive the thoroughbred hound, even so the golden calf was the derail for Israel's pitiful detour into idolatry.

"**Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols,**" the LORD reminds (v. 4), for He had seen them turning the tithes which were rightly His into the treasury of idolatrous enterprises. Their indulgences now deal them a destructive blow. They themselves furnished the instrument which occasions the dilemma - "**that they may be cut off**" (v. 4).

It is further proved that spiritual disease does not localize itself in one area of the life, but pervades the whole economy.

- They were wrong in the field of worship.
- They were at fault as well in the sphere of politics. "**They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not**" (v. 4), is the divine revelation.

Disowning the LORD in their devotions, they disregarded Him in their actions. There was an utter collapse of the spiritual structure; and "**where there is no vision [of GOD], the people perish**" (Proverbs 29:18). What they planned was without divine counsel (Proverbs 1:25); what they did was apart from divine authorization - "**I knew it not**" (v. 4), saith the LORD.

In the light of their deep involvements in unholy alliances and unspiritual procedure, a logical question is raised, whether by the LORD Himself or by the prophet: "**How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?**" (v. 5). That is to say, being bent upon backsliding as they were (11:7), having invested so heavily of their gold and silver in idols (v. 4), having defied the infinite GOD in their politics, having rejected the commands of the LORD, having hardened their hearts against the prophet's message, how long would it require for them to extricate themselves? How long before they would detach themselves from unrighteousness?

Since the word "innocency" means "clearness" or "cleanness," how long ere they will come clear or clean of this filthiness? Confession of guilt and renunciation of ungodly practices could quickly rectify the situation if they were willing and earnest, but they were not so inclined. In saying, "**Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone**" (4:17), the LORD was revealing how difficult it is to recapture those hearts which have been taken by idols.

While the people were JEHOVAH's, their doings were not His. In verse 6, He lays the whole blame at Israel's door for the present state of affairs, disclaims any attachment to it, and promises utter destruction of their idols.

"**They have sown the wind, and [now] they shall reap the whirlwind**" (v. 7). The gradual development of spiritual adultery may seem mild and harmless, but punishment for it is severe.

They had been adding the fuel but did not anticipate a conflagration. Waywardness allows little or no opportunity for thoughts of possible judgment.

Crop failure is mentioned once again. The corn will not grow sufficiently tall to have a stalk on which the ear can appear. The bud shall not fructify. And, perchance, there should be some produce, the marauding troops of invading armies will make quick riddance of it (v. 7).

"**He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity**" (Proverbs 22:8). Now, the prophetic camera is projected toward the inevitable - captivity. "**Israel is swallowed up . . . among the Gentiles**" (v. 8). The covenant people are viewed in captive hands, subdued, oppressed, detested. How charitable of the HOLY SPIRIT to speak of them as being to the Gentiles merely "**as a vessel wherein is no pleasure**" (v. 8) And of course this is true. At the same time, they were hated and despised, a thorn in the flesh of their conquerors. They were "**swallowed up**" but proved to be no more palatable to their captors than was Jonah to the "whale."

Desperate attempts were made to procure economic aid and military assistance from Assyria (v. 9), and this headstrong persistence is likened to a "**wild ass**" (v. 9). Where was their GOD? Why did they not appeal to Him? They were far from GOD in their manner of life, and their stiffneckedness (Exodus 33:5) was but the proof of their impenitence. They would not humble themselves; they would not renounce their sins. They preferred in their dire distress to solicit aid of their pagan neighbors.

"**Alone by himself**" (v. 9) is an apt characterization of Israel. "**Lo, the people shall dwell alone**" (Numbers 23:9). When did they have a nation to call their friend? Which nation today is willing to stand as a friend of the revived state of Israel? JEHOVAH was their friend, but they deserted Him. Then, as now, obedience was the shining pathway of friendship with the Almighty.

Examining further the false premises on which Israel sought in vain to build her welfare, the LORD states that "**Ephraim hath hired lovers**" (v. 9). This is arrogance rather than romance. There is no hint of the romantic in the immediate context. All is dark and gloomy. They were driven into a corner. With their backs to the wall they sought to buy friendship, to solicit the favor of the Gentiles. Desperation without faith takes reprehensible turns at times. The price is

always more than can be paid.

The elders of Jabesh tried to bargain with Nahash, the Ammonite, as they sought a compromised peace, or even a moratorium on the abuse which plagued the people of Israel. Without deliberation, Nahash gave his reply: "**On this condition will I make a covenant [treaty] with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel**" (I Samuel 11:2). The conqueror at the conference table dictates the terms. These were stiff indeed. It is ever apparent that the spiritual enemy strikes first at the vision.

How different when we seek the LORD! Those who ask bread of Him do not receive a stone. If a fish is requested, they do not get a serpent. If it is an egg they seek, they are not the recipients of a scorpion (Luke 11:11, 12). But when Israel turned to her Gentile neighbors for help, a burden was draped about their shoulders. A heavy tribute was imposed by the Assyrian king (v. 10); and, instead of relief, the burden was increased.

Esau bartered his blessing for a morsel of meat, then carried his burden with tears unable to find a place of repentance (Hebrews 12:16, 17). The thirty pieces of blood money were the heaviest weight Judas Iscariot ever attempted to carry. He sold his peace of mind for the tarnished silver which brought him nothing but unavailing remorse (Matthew 27:3, 4).

When the hand of faith reaches heavenward, it is supplied with lovingkindnesses and manifold grace. But when the hand of unbelief is stretched forth to the enemies of the LORD, the deposit sooner or later eats at the soul as does a canker. The world may extend its hand to the Christian, but woe to him who clasps it! Israel had forgotten that GOD put a difference between them and the heathen (Exodus 11:7).

The "altars" which Ephraim made were the progenitors of sin, the forerunners of judgment and the monuments of disaster (v. 11). The "**altars shall be unto him to sin**" (v. 11) means that, apart from destroying them, which Ephraim was loath to do, there was nothing whatsoever that could be done with them that would not be tainted with sin. There is no possible function in connection with idolatry that could produce anything else. They walked into these blasphemous practices with their hearts closed, but with their eyes open. They wittingly did the very thing which JEHOVAH specifically forbade them to do, when He said, "**Thou shalt have no other gods before me**" (Exodus 20:3).

The great things which GOD had spoken to these people (v. 12) should have overwhelmed their hearts with gratitude. They should have exclaimed continually with the psalmist: "**Thy testimonies [O LORD] are wonderful**" (Psalm 119:129). They should have confessed with Job: "**I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food**" (Job 23:12). Instead they drifted so far and so long that the Word of the LORD was "**a strange thing**" (v. 12).

They continued to offer sacrifices with a semblance of proper procedure, but it was totally unacceptable to the LORD (v. 13). It was empty, formal, heartless and undevout. The reaction of the LORD was clear, forceful, condemning. "**Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth**" (Isaiah 1:14). And because of this iniquitous display of corrupt hearts, the LORD told Hosea, "**they shall return to Egypt**" (v. 13).

As they built heathen temples, fenced cities became necessary (v. 14). Idolatry meant a turning from GOD; and a turning from GOD meant a turning from divine protection. As they turned their backs upon JEHOVAH they faced their enemies.

- Their idols filled their hearts but did not guard their frontiers.
- The walls they built about their cities were, in the face of divine judgment, as futile as a few sand bags against a tidal wave.
- They trusted more in these feeble defenses than they trusted the LORD, so GOD permitted Sennacherib to burn all Judah's fenced cities except Jerusalem, and to plunder the palaces thereof.

Reviewing the incidents recorded in this one chapter alone, what is the reader's impression of these people, the children whom JEHOVAH had nourished and brought up (Isaiah 1:2)?

Our conclusion must coincide with that of the Biblical statement: "**Israel hath forgotten his Maker**" (v. 14). This is the ultimate in forgetfulness.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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