

Lesson 22

Hosea 5:6

6 With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them.

This verse is very telling. It reminds us of something we said earlier – Israel had not forgotten God in the sense that they no longer knew who God was. Instead, Israel had forgotten God in the sense that they freely mixed the worship of God with the worship of Baal. They had not become atheists; they had become polytheists.

They knew about about God – but they did not know God. And that same danger remains today. As God's people, we must not just know about God – but we must know God. And if we ever wonder about the difference between those two things, we look at the book of Hosea for an answer to that question.

No one could accuse these people of not seeking God (in some sense, at least) because, in fact, that is what we see them doing here in verse 6 – “they shall go to seek the Lord.”

But God was no longer where they were looking. They would not find God because God had withdrawn from them.

But I thought that if you seek, you shall find?

Yes, that is true (Matthew 7:7), but the key word in that verse is the word “seek.” And we can’t understand Matthew 7:7 apart from Matthew 6:33.

Matthew 6:33 – “But **seek first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

If I am seeking a million different things, one of them God, then I should not expect to enjoy the great promise of Matthew 7:7. The seeking that Jesus is talking about is seeking first.

Here in verse 6, we see people with their flocks and their herds seeking their many gods so that they can placate them with sacrifices and offerings to get even more flocks and even more herds. They saw God as just another god on their shelf full of gods. These people were not in any sense seeking God first.

Again, there is a lesson here for us there. Do we also have a shelf full of gods? Perhaps the great god of **medicine** and the great god of **technology** and the great god of **luck** and the great god of **politics**? Yes, the gods have changed – but have the people changed?

What we are seeing here in verse 6 is the inevitable outcome of a people who ignored the warning of Exodus 34.

Exodus 34:12–16 – Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (**for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**),

lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

"For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." But they did worship other gods, and the one true God, whose name is Jealous, withdrew from them and left them alone with their false gods.

They sought God, but they did not find God. And again, we see in that sad description a sobering lesson for our own day. We cannot expect to seek God and find God if we are unwilling to first lay down our idols.

For those seeking God first, idolatry is not just a problem – idolatry is **the** problem.

Exodus 22:20 – Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

Matthew 6:24 – No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

1 Corinthians 10:14 – Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 John 5:21 – Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Hosea 5:7

7 They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD; for they have borne alien children. Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields.

The people were faithless to God, and, as a result, verse 7 tells us that they had born alien children.

What is meant here by “alien children”? We have several possibilities.

- These “alien children” could be illegitimate children or children of prostitution that were born those playing the whore. We should recall the possibility that one or two of Gomer’s own children may fall in this category – as well as the certainty that Hosea’s listeners certainly thought as much given the names of his children (Not Loved and Not Mine).
- These “alien children” could be children with a parent (likely a mother) who was not Jewish. In our study of Ezra we saw that Judah would later have this same problem, which led to the command in Ezra 10 to expel the foreign women and their children from the city.
- These “alien children” could be children who were alien to God because they had never been taught about God. Such children were raised to be children of Baal rather than children of God. Like Hosea’s own child, God would call them “Not Mine.”

We can be sure that there were many children in each of these three categories, so I’m not sure we have to choose only one possibility. The text

could be inviting us to see all three of these situations.

But if we did choose, I think we should lean toward the third possibility – that these children had not been raised by their parents to know God. We are reminded that this had long been a problem for God’s people.

Judges 2:10 – And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. **And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.**

We are also reminded of the *Shema* (for the Hebrew word, “hear”) that has been recited by Jews for centuries as a daily prayer.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 – Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.** You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

God’s plan of redemption depended on parents teaching his word to their children.

Deuteronomy 4:8–9 – And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all

the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

Deuteronomy 6:20-21 – When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’

But that was no longer happening in Israel. The parents were no longer teaching, and the children were no longer asking. The people had born “alien children.” They were alien to God, to the word of God, and to the ways of God. They did not know what God had done for them.

In the second half of verse 7, we read, as one commentary notes, a phrase that has long “mystified interpreters” – “Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields.” What does that mean?

This phrase is often seen as a reference to the sacrifices to false gods that were made at the time of the new moon, but in that case we would more likely expect the “new moon” in verse 7 to be consuming livestock for the sacrifices rather than consuming their fields.

Other suggestions are that the text of the phrase “new moon” has been corrupted and should instead be the phrase “red blight” or the phrase “someone else” (playing on the word “alien” in the first half of the verse). But I think it is a bit lazy for a commentary to immediately conclude that the text must have been corrupted just because that

commentator is having trouble understanding what the text means!

So how do we figure it out? As always, let's start with the context. The same phrase "new moon" was used earlier in this book.

Hosea 2:11 – And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.

And there we saw that the "new moon" was sometimes used to describe the true worship of God (2 Chronicles 2:4, Ezra 3:4-5). But now the people had mixed the true worship of God with the false worship of Baal. They had turned their back on God, but they had not turned their back on the rituals of God.

I think the reference to "new moon" here in verse 7 should be understood in that same context. And we see something similar in Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:13-15 – Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations – I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

What Isaiah says in 100 words, Hosea says in 10 words. The people's false religious ceremonies dedicated to their false gods would be their downfall.

But why is that downfall described as a loss of their **fields**?

I think the answer is **darkness**. The fields would be devoured by darkness.

As we know, a “new moon” occurs when the moon is between Earth and the sun, and the side of the moon facing toward us receives no direct sunlight. A new moon is the opposite of a full moon. And so the phrase “new moon” means **darkness**.

We will see something similar later in our study of Joel.

Joel 2:10 – The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

Joel 3:15 – The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

I think the punishment in verse 7 is that darkness would envelop the land.

And that punishment certainly makes sense for the crime of failing to teach your children to know God because darkness is exactly what they (or we) should expect when they (or we) fail to teach their (or our) children about God.

What will this congregation be like 50 years from now? What will be happening within these walls 50 years from now? What will be taught from this pulpit 50 years from now?

Luke 18:8 – When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

The answers to all of those questions depends on how well we teach our children. Will we be followed by a generation that knows God? It is our great task to see that the answer to that question is yes.

Here in Hosea we see an example where the answer was no, and we see the great darkness that came as a result of that failure.

Hosea 5:8

8 Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!

This is a difficult verse, so let's proceed carefully. Let's start by looking at the three cities mentioned in verse 8.

As we said earlier, Beth-aven is Hosea's sarcastic nickname for Bethel using the Hebrew word *aven* meaning vain or empty. And so, the three cities in verse 8 are Gibeah, Ramah, and Bethel.

And we have already looked at Bethel. But what about Gibeah and Ramah?

Gibeah (not to be confused with nearby Gibeon) is frequently mentioned in the Bible and was the location of a very dark and disturbing event.

In Judges 19–20, a Levite was taken into a home in Gibeah, but he was then threatened with sexual

violence by the locals, called “worthless fellows” in Judges 19:22. They instead assaulted the Levite’s concubine, and she died.

They assaulted her, and then she died. Does that mean that they killed her? The answer to that question is not entirely clear.

Judges 19:27–29 – And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. **He said to her, “Get up, let us be going.” But there was no answer.** Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home. And when he entered his house, **he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces,** and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

Judges 20:4–5 – And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and **they violated my concubine, and she is dead.**”

I think the text leaves open the possibility that the Levite killed his own concubine after she was assaulted.

In the aftermath, the men of Israel banded together as “one man” to exact justice on the wicked men of Gibeah. A great battle took place with heavy losses on each side.

This strange event would have been immediately in the mind of any Jew who heard someone refer to Gibeah. And, in fact, I think we will see a

reference to this strange event later in Hosea 9:9 – “they have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah.”

As for Ramah, following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Ramah seems to have served as a staging point for Jews leaving for exile into Babylon.

Jeremiah 40:1 – The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.

And, today, of course, when we think of Ramah, we think of Jesus.

Matthew 2:16–18 – Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

And that prophecy from Jeremiah 31:15 points us back to someone else we see here in verse 8 – Benjamin.

Genesis 35:16–20 – Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his

name Ben-oni; but his father called him **Benjamin**. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.

But why do we see these three cities here in verse 8? That background is interesting, but does it help answer our question? Perhaps not. There may be a simpler answer.

If we look at the map from the Lesson 19 handout, we see that these three cities are located almost in a straight line directly north of Jerusalem with Gibeah being the southernmost city and Bethel the northernmost.

That observation has caused many commentaries to conclude that verse 8 is describing a military expedition from Judah that moved north through these cities.

But before we also reach that conclusion, let's look a bit more closely.

What about the horn, the trumpet, and the alarm that we also find in verse 8?

Are these horns and alarms being sounded as part of an **offensive** military campaign or instead as part of **defensive** warfare? We can't say for sure, but again the **order** of the cities might suggest an offensive campaign heading north out of Jerusalem.

What about the phrase at the end: "we follow you, O Benjamin!" What does that mean?

Literally, the phrase is, "Behind you, Benjamin!" Some suggest it was a traditional battle cry for mounting an attack, perhaps reflecting the fact that Benjamin had a tradition of military leadership.

Psalms 68:27 – There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

But the Hebrew phrase could also mean, "Benjamin is behind you" or even, "Look out behind you, Benjamin!" All three of these cities were located in the tribe of Benjamin. Here is how one commentary describes the phrase:

By the time of Hosea the phrase may have become a formulaic battle cry with no specific assertion of Benjamite leadership. . . . We probably are on the safest ground if we take the line as a war cry that, in the course of time, became divorced from a concrete historical setting, somewhat like "Remember the Alamo!"

If a specific military event is being described here, then which event is it?

Is it a war between Judah and Ephraim over these Benjamite cities – or is it a war in which Judah and Ephraim are fighting together against some outside enemy?

The most likely candidate is the Syro-Ephraimite invasion of Judah in which Syria and Ephraim combined forces to invade Judah after Judah refused to help them in their fight against

Assyria. We read about that invasion in 2 Kings 16 and in Isaiah 7.

2 Kings 16:5-7 – Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. At that time Rezin the king of Syria recovered Elath for Syria and drove the men of Judah from Elath, and the Edomites came to Elath, where they dwell to this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.”

And, yes, that battle is a possibility for what we see here in verse 8, but that interpretation does have some problems.

First, the order of the cities in verse 8 suggests that Judah was the aggressor, but Judah was on the defensive in 2 Kings 16:5.

And, second, it was Judah that turned to Assyria for help in the Syro-Ephraimite war, but later in Hosea 5:13 we will see Ephraim turning to Assyria for help.

So where are we? I think we have two possibilities. Either verse 8 is describing some specific military event, or verse 8 is instead a general reference to the people’s reliance on their military power to save them.

I lean toward the latter given the brevity of verse 8, the context of verse 8, and the difficulty in finding a specific military event that fits.

Taken together with verse 7, I think Hosea's message is simple: you have born alien children, and neither your false religious rituals nor your supposed military might will save you from the coming Assyrians.

So, I think the best way to understand verse 8 is that God is (perhaps, sarcastically) telling the people not to rely on their own military power.

And why do I say sarcastically? Because of that final slogan: "We follow you, O Benjamin!" I think the glory days of Benjamin were long over, and so I think most of the people would have heard some sarcasm here.

In modern terms, I think Hosea is saying: "You can shout 'Remember the Alamo' all you want to and act like you are going to charge into battle – but it matters not. The Assyrians are coming, and there is nothing you can do to stop them."

Hosea 5:9–10

9 Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure. 10 The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.

Who or what is Ephraim? I thought we answered that, and we did, but we need to ask it again!

As we said, during the civil war in the northern kingdom, Menahem's faction (based in Samaria) was called Ephraim, and Pekah's faction (based in Gilead) was called Israel.

But what about **after** that civil war? What about the 8 years of Pekah's reign after he killed Pekahiah? Was Pekah's kingdom still called Israel?

I think Isaiah helps us with that question.

Isaiah 7:1-2 – In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and **Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel** came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, **“Syria is in league with Ephraim,”** the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

After Pekah took control of the northern kingdom by murdering Pekahiah in Samaria, Pekah stayed in Samaria.

Isaiah 7:9 – And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

So whether Ephraim refers to Menahem or Pekah depends on **when** we ask that question! If we ask it **during** the civil war, then the answer is Menahem. If we ask it **after** the civil war, then the answer is Pekah. Either way, Ephraim is used to describe the king who was presently reigning in Samaria.

The focus here on just Ephraim and Judah might suggest that we are now located in time after the civil war, but I think we will see later in verse 13 that the civil war has not yet ended. I think the events in Isaiah 7 are most likely future to the events in Hosea 5, but there is some

disagreement on that issue. Let's leave it as an open question until we see some more evidence.

The first half of verse 9 is telling us something we already know – there was no good side in this civil war, and so the “winner” of that conflict will become a desolation in the day of punishment. That is, Assyria was coming, and Assyria would not care who won or lost that civil war.

What about that second phrase? “Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.” What does that mean?

We know that at this time there not many tribes left. Verses 9–10 mention only two tribes, or more precisely, only 1.5 tribes, with Ephraim being a half tribe.

I think the focus of this phrase at the end of verse 9 is not just on the tribes that were left in the land, but is instead a call for the people to think back to the days when there were in fact 12 tribes in the promised land from God.

I think this short phrase is a rebuke – both a rebuke for how far the people had fallen from their glory days when they trusted in God, and also a rebuke for their lack of unity as the one people of God. They had gone from 12 tribes to 1.5 tribes – and that tribe and half-tribe were at war with each other!

And if Judah thought that it was going to miss the fireworks, then it needed to think again: “The princes of Judah have become like those who

move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.”

The princes of Judah here are the leaders of Judah, and those leaders are described here as being like those who move the landmark. What does that mean?

If the previous verse was describing a military excursion of Judah into Israel, then this verse would likely be referring to Judah’s encroachment into the northern territory – that is, Judah effectively moved the boundary between the two kingdoms when Judah invaded the north.

But there is a problem with that view – it does not fit well with what we know about the history of the time. In short, we don’t really have any evidence that Judah was planning to invade and take territory from the north.

Instead, history tells us that Judah was facing the opposite problem – Judah was being invaded by Ephraim and by Assyria.

And, if we want to be really precise, the text does not say that the leaders moved the landmark – the text says that the leaders **have become like** those who move the landmark.

So that leaves us with another question – what does it mean to be like someone who moves the landmark? As it turns out, we have an answer to that question: they are cursed.

Deuteronomy 27:17 – ‘Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

People who move landmarks are not good neighbors. Instead, they are just common thieves, looking for any and every way to profit off of their neighbors.

And what about Judah – was Judah a good neighbor?

I think the first statement in verse 10 is answering that question with a resounding **no!** And I don't think we have any basis to read much more into the statement than that.

And what is the result? What is the punishment? Verse 10 tells us: “upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.”

And once again Hosea uses 10 words to tell us what Isaiah said in 100 words.

Isaiah 8:6-8 – Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, **and it will sweep on into Judah,** it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

We know that Assyria invaded **Israel**, but did Assyria also invade **Judah**? Yes, it did (as we see on the handout for Lesson 22 – but note that Assyria did not reach Jerusalem!).

But did Assyria also carry off and scatter Judah like it did with Israel? No, Assyria did not. And we looked at the remarkable reason for that failure in our introduction.

As we recall, King Hezekiah (the fourth king of Judah mentioned in Hosea 1:1) rebelled against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7).

And, as a result, the Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Judah in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18:13).

And, as he had done with Ahaz, the prophet Isaiah came to deliver God's word to Hezekiah. But, unlike Ahaz, Hezekiah listened to that word from God, and Hezekiah prayed to God for deliverance (2 Kings 19:19).

And, as a result, one of the most amazing things, not just in the Bible, but in all recorded history, happened.

2 Kings 19:35-36 – And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.

God did not allow Assyria to do to Judah what Assyria had done to Israel.

So, yes, Assyria did attack Judah, but no, Judah did not suffer the same fate as Israel.

The final phrase here in verse 10 is likely pointing to that Assyrian attack as well as the later punishments that came upon the leaders of

Judah from Babylon. "Upon them I will pour out my wrath like water."