

Lesson 27

Hosea 7:8

8 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.

When we ended our previous lesson, we were looking at the first half of verse 8, and we saw that the people of Ephraim had mixed themselves with the surrounding peoples in three ways: religiously, culturally, and politically.

As for their political mixing, the people of Hosea's day had embraced the politics of the surrounding peoples by entering into foreign alliances and vassal relationships with them.

They had placed their trust in foreign powers rather than in God. They thought Assyria or Egypt would protect them and save them.

Jeremiah 17:5 – Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.”

When we ended last time, we were looking at the question of whether that sort of mixing with politics is still a problem today – and we saw that it is still a problem today.

And as for how the church should operate in the world of politics, I think we find our best example in the New Testament. In the first century, Christians were a religious minority lacking any worldly power or political influence

- and yet they turned the world upside down!
(Acts 17:6)

How did they do that? What did they do? Perhaps we should also ask what did they **not** do?

The unchallenged assumption today among many in the wider religious world is that all will be well if we can just get the right person into office - and yet where do we find such a hope as that anywhere in the Bible?

“Did Jesus ever suggest by word or by example that we should aspire to acquire, let alone take over, the power of Caesar? Did Jesus spend any time and energy trying to improve, let alone dominate, the reigning government of his day? Did Jesus ever work to pass laws against the sinners he ministered to? Did Jesus worry at all about ensuring that his rights and the rights of his followers were protected? Does any New Testament author remotely hint that engaging in this sort of activity has anything to do with the kingdom of God?”

History tells us that the best thing the government can do for the church is to ignore it and be indifferent to it. In that situation, we are best positioned to do the work of God. That was the relationship between Rome and the church very early in the church's history.

But, later, that relationship changed as Rome began to actively persecute the church. But even while the church was faced with that persecution, the church continued to grow and the word continued to spread. In fact, in some ways, that persecution by Rome helped the church. How? Because the persecution weeded out those who were

half-hearted and insincere. Persecution helped the church remain pure in its early days.

But again, that all changed when later, under Constantine, Rome quit persecuting the church and instead embraced the church.

When we look at the history of the early church, what we find is that Rome did the most damage to the church, not when Rome **ignored** the church or when Rome **persecuted** the church, but later when Rome **embraced** the church – when it suddenly became fashionable to be a Christian. That is when the worst apostasy began.

We need to be very fearful of any embrace by worldly powers. We must never mix our governance by God with the politics of this world. Our salvation comes from God and from God alone. Politics will not save us. We must not rely on it, and we must not place our trust in it.

Psalm 146:3 – Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

Lamentations 4:17 – Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save.

Yes, we can be involved in politics and perhaps we must be involved with politics, but we must never **trust** in politics, we must never **embrace** politics, we must never be **changed** by politics, and we must never allow politics to **hinder** our work for Christ.

At its best, politics is just a **tool** for us to use in **saving others** by more freely proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

The people of Hosea's day did not look to God for salvation, but instead they turned for their salvation to the worldly powers of their day. They trusted in the arm of man rather than in the arm of God.

Let's look next at the second half of verse 8.

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.”

What does that mean?

George Adam Smith: “How better describe a half-fed people, a half-cultured society, a half-lived religion, a half-hearted policy, than by a half-baked scone?”

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.” That phrase looks back to the illustration of the baker that we saw earlier. And, again, the picture is that of a king who is asleep on the job.

The king should have been leading the people toward God, but he was not. Instead, Ephraim was a cake not turned – Ephraim was a cake that was forgotten about and neglected by its baker.

“Unfortunately, the state is like an unflipped pancake on a skillet, a product easily recognized as unserviceable and inedible. It has, furthermore, an interesting profile, cooked on one side and raw on the other. No one starts the task of cooking pancakes with such a result in mind; a badly cooked cake is the result of something going awry in the cooking process.

This is apparently what the simile of the cake intends to say about the diplomatic processes in which Ephraim is mixed up.”

And the lesson for us today is clear – we need to guard against being half-baked Christians charred on one side and soggy on the other side! A half-baked cake is not good for anything.

Hosea 7:9

9 Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not.

Verse 9 continues the metaphor of the cake that we saw at the end of verse 8, and by that metaphor verse 9 shows us two areas in which the king’s neglect of his duty was evident.

The first thing we see about that cake in verse 8 is that foreigners were eating it. And I think we can see two ways in which that happened.

First, foreigners were taking away the material resources and agricultural resources of the nation.

2 Kings 15:20 – Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria.

But, second, as we have already seen, the foreigners were drawing the people away into their foreign religion and into their foreign ways.

And, of course, as verse 9 tells us, that metaphorical devouring of the cake was a devouring of the strength of the people.

They looked to foreign powers for help and for salvation, but all those foreign powers cared about was what they could get for themselves. By carrying off the material resources and by drawing the people further away from God, those foreign alliances weakened rather than strengthened the nation.

And this weakening was all happening right under the nose of the king – but, as verse 9 tells us, “he knows it not.” The king likely thought he was saving the nation with his appeal to Assyria or to Egypt, but the opposite was true.

“Gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not.” What does that mean?

It could mean the these troubles were making the king’s hair turn gray (as the ESV and many commentaries suggest), but that doesn’t really make sense for at least two reasons.

First, a gray head was highly regarded in ancient Israel.

Proverbs 16:31 – Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Proverbs 20:29 – The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.

Second, it is not clear how the present situation could have caused the king’s hair to turn gray

when the king “knew it not.” It is hard to get gray hair from worrying about something that you don’t even know about.

I think a better way of viewing this phrase is that it is describing a gray fuzz of mold that appears on the bread. The Hebrew phrase is “sprinkled with gray,” which could refer to sprinkled hair but could also refer to something else that is sprinkled, such as mold.

That view makes more sense from the context because it continues the bread analogy we have been seeing.

If the sprinkled gray in verse 9 does refer to sprinkled mold, then the second half of verse 9 is again showing us the weakened state of the nation and is again casting the blame on a weak king who was not doing his job but who was instead letting that unturned cake sit around until it was covered in gray mold.

Hosea 7:10

10 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him, for all this.

We saw this same phrase back in Hosea 5.

Hosea 5:5 – The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.

And I think the meaning here is the same as it was there. The pride of Israel **should** have been

God, but it was not. Instead, Israel's pride was themselves, their foreign alliances, and their false gods. And it is those terrible sins of pride that are testifying against the people here in verse 10.

And after hearing that testimony, did the people return to God or seek God? No. They did neither of those things despite all of the testimony against them.

Earlier we saw Gomer not returning to Hosea, preferring instead to have sexual alliances with other men. Here we see Israel not returning to God, preferring instead to have foreign alliances with the surrounding nations.

Long ago, God had yielded to their demand for a king, but he had warned them what would happen.

1 Samuel 8:18 – And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.

That verse does not tell us **to whom** the people would cry out – and I think we see why here in Hosea 7. Yes, the people were crying out because of the terrible kings who were reigning over them, but they were **not** crying out to God. They were not seeking God.

And something else 1 Samuel tells us is that their misery was self-inflicted. They had been warned much earlier what would happen when they chose kings for themselves, and now it was happening.

Hosea 7:11-12

11 Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria. 12 As they go, I will spread over them my net; I will bring them down like birds of the heavens; I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation.

Doves were commonly found in the area and were trapped for food. When they were baited, the doves tended to remain fixated on their pursuit of food, and the doves would remain near a source of food even when suspicious activity by trappers was very nearby. Other birds would leave the food behind and fly away from the threat, but not the doves. And while the doves were feeding, the trap would spring and the net would drop.

Hosea tells us that Ephraim is just like that dove – silly and without sense! Ephraim was ignoring the traps that were placed all around them.

The dove could have easily escaped the danger simply by flying away, but the dove did not. Likewise, Ephraim could have escaped the danger by returning to God, but Ephraim did not. Both Ephraim and the dove were completely fixated on what they were seeking – heedless of the nearby danger and the nearby way of escape.

It is interesting that God is both the danger and the way of escape for this silly dove.

In verse 10, we saw how God was the way of escape – they could have returned to God or sought God, but they did not. So, as a result, God became

the danger in verse 12 – not Egypt, and not Assyria, but God. God says: “I will spread my net. I will bring them down. I will discipline them.”

But, of course, as we have already seen, God could use Assyria and Egypt as tools to punish Israel. Either Assyria or Egypt could be viewed as the net spread by God to trap Ephraim.

The last line of verse 12 is very obscure.

I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation.

What does that mean?

The NIV translates that line as: “When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them.” But I agree with the commentator who describes that translation as “an imaginative attempt to tie this line to the fowler imagery, but [one that] is difficult to justify.” And I don’t think a good imagination should be at the top of our list for qualities we want to see in a Bible translator!

The short answer as to what the end of verse 12 means is that no one knows for sure.

Most likely, the “report” made to “their congregation” is the report of some diplomatic failure with Assyria or Egypt that comes back to the governing assembly of Israel. It is possible that the “report” itself included penalties against Israel for whatever failure had occurred

– and perhaps, as with the net, God is using those penalties to punish the people.

Another commentary suggests that this final line refers to God's decision (using Assyria) to destroy Israel once the news of her deceptive alliance with Egypt became known, and that is also a possibility.

Let's look at what happened with that Egyptian alliance.

Egypt is mentioned by name 13 times in the book of Hosea. We saw it first back in Hosea 2:15, where God looked back fondly at the days of Israel's youth when she first came out of Egypt.

Here in verse 11, we see the second of those 13 times Egypt is mentioned. What that means is that almost all of the mentions of Egypt in the book of Hosea are found in the second half of the book. Why?

I think the answer is the significant role that Egypt played in the final days of Israel prior to the Assyrian invasion. As we know, Hoshea was the final king of Israel, and we read about his disastrous alliance with Egypt in 2 Kings 17.

2 Kings 17:1-6 – In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he

had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The final straw for Assyria when it came to Israel was Hoshea's decision to seek help from Egypt rather than to continue in its vassal relationship with Assyria. That decision turned out to be the end for both Hoshea and for his people, Israel.

But we should pause and ask a question about those verses we just read from 2 Kings 17. Who was So, king of Egypt?

That question is a very complicated question that we will not spend too much time on, but the Handout for Lesson 27 shows some of the difficulties in answering it.

I have mentioned Immanuel Velikovsky before. He argued that the standard Egyptian chronology is off by as much as 600 years, and he presents a great deal of evidence to support that view. Much of that evidence is from the Bible, and he shows that the alignment between the Bible and Egyptian history is much improved after his proposed corrections to Egyptian chronology are applied.

We see such an example here. In 1 Kings 14 we find a record of an Egypt king (Pharaoh Shishak) carrying away treasures from Jerusalem, and again in 2 Kings 17 we find King Hoshea withholding

tribute from Assyria and apparently giving it to an Egypt king (Pharaoh So) instead.

In Egyptian reliefs we likewise find two instances in which Egypt received treasures from Palestine, and those two examples are shown on the handout. The example on the left is from the reign of Thutmose III, and the example on the right is from the reign of Shoshenk.

Velikovsky's proposed solution was simple – the two different examples from Egyptian archeology correspond to the two different descriptions in the Bible. But for that solution to work, the standard Egyptian chronology must be adjusted. And, in my opinion, the best evidence for applying such an adjustment is that it causes the Egyptian records to align much better with the Biblical record.

If Velikovsky is correct, then Pharaoh So in 2 Kings 17:4 was Pharaoh Shoshenk, and Pharaoh Shishak of 1 Kings 14 was Pharaoh Thutmose III.

If Velikovsky is not correct, then Pharaoh Shishak of 1 Kings 14 was Pharaoh Shoshenk, and the Egyptian records are not much help in identifying Pharaoh So.

Hosea 7:13

13 Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!
Destruction to them, for they have rebelled
against me! I would redeem them, but they speak
lies against me.

Verse 13 is a lament over Ephraim's refusal to repent and return to God. They have strayed from God, they have rebelled against God, and they are lying about God. As a result, they will experience woe and destruction, and they will not be redeemed by God.

As we recall, Hosea redeemed Gomer after she was faithless to him, but God will not redeem Ephraim. The earlier event in the life of Hosea and Gomer showed us what God wanted to do – he wanted to redeem Ephraim as Hosea had redeemed Gomer – but that was not going to happen because Ephraim was lying about God.

What we see in verse 13 is a beautiful portrait of God's love. Despite all that Ephraim had done and was still doing, look at what God says in the final line of verse 13 – "I would redeem them!" Even now, it was still God's will that Ephraim be redeemed. Even now, God did not want to give up on them.

That has always been God's will for mankind – God wants to redeem us all. And that remains true no matter how far we stray from him or how much we rebel against him.

Ezekiel 33:11 – Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.**

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**

1 Timothy 2:3-4 – This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And the only explanation for why that is God's will is the love of God.

Romans 5:8 – But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And what were these lies about God in verse 13 that prevented Ephraim from being redeemed?

Given the context of chapter 7, the focus here may be on the priests who were advising the political leaders and who were leading the people into apostasy. If so, then these lies were lies about God being spoken by the priests to the leaders and to the people. And these lies by the priests were lies that were then being believed and repeated by the leaders and by the people.

And what were the lies? We have already seen them. The priests were saying that the people could mix the worship of God with their false worship of their false gods and still be pleasing to God. And the priests were advising the leaders to look elsewhere for their salvation – to Egypt and to Assyria rather than to God.

And why were those lies believed? Because the people did not know God! What we are seeing here is the fulfillment of what God said earlier in chapter 4.

Hosea 4:6 – My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge,

I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

The priests had rejected knowledge, and as a result, both they and the people they led astray would be rejected and forgotten.

To be pleasing to God, we must know God – not just know about God, but know God. That knowledge of God was lacking in the days of Hosea, and we can see the sad outcome.

And why was that knowledge lacking? I think Nehemiah answers that question.

Nehemiah 9:26 – Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and **cast your law behind their back** and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies.

They did not just neglect God's word; they deliberately cast it behind their back! Their ignorance of God was a willful ignorance. They did not want to know God. And why not? Because they preferred to continue sinning, and so they cast away the word of God.

John 3:19–20 – And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

They hate the light, and so what do they do? They cast the word of God behind their back. Jesus encountered people with the same attitude:

John 8:43 – Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.

And I think the order that we see in verse 13 is important. First, they strayed. Then they rebelled. And then they lied.

At first they wandered off the true path onto a false path, then they deliberately remained on that false path, and finally they lied about God to make others believe that their false path was actually the true path.

And is the sequence of apostasy any different today? First, they wander away. Then they deliberately remain away. And finally they justify what they have done by lying about God.

Hosea 7:14

14 They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds; for grain and wine they gash themselves; they rebel against me.

This is a difficult verse, but I think what we are seeing here are examples of how the people had chosen Baal over God. Rather than crying to God from the heart, they rebelled against God and served and worshipped Baal.

“They wail upon their beds.”

We don't have many details about the various rituals the people practiced in their false worship of Baal, but we can infer some details

about those rituals based on the condemnations that we read in the Bible.

For example, in Ezekiel 8, the prophet was given a tour of the temple in a vision so that he could see the abominations that were occurring there. And one of the abominations that he saw was women weeping for Tammuz.

Ezekiel 8:14-15 – Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these."

Tammuz was a Sumerian god of vegetation who was thought to have died and become god of the underworld. Ishtar was his wife, and the people believed that she would follow after Tammuz into the underworld, which caused the vegetation to die in the summer and winter.

The weeping and mourning in Ezekiel 8:14 was a longing for the return of earthly abundance. The people believed that the eventual revival of Tammuz caused the return of spring and brought fertility to the land.

The cult associated with Tammuz included these weeping rituals witnessed by Ezekiel as well as fertility rituals celebrating the return of spring.

Yes, Ezekiel 8 is describing Tammuz rather than Baal, but I think we can safely say that when you have seen one false fertility god, you have seen them all!

And I suspect that the same pagan rituals that we see in Ezekiel being practiced in the worship of Tammuz were also being practiced in the worship of Baal.

And I think we see some evidence of that right here when we see the people wailing upon their beds in verse 14.

We know they were not wailing about their sin because, as this same verse tells us, they were still rebelling against God. And while they might have been wailing about the judgments coming upon them, I don't think that is what is happening here. Why not? Because of the next description we see in verse 14.