

Lesson 32

Hosea 9:7, Continued

7 The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

Last week, we looked at the first half of verse 7, which is the easy part of the verse. Now, with the phrase at the end of verse 7, we have reached the difficult part of this verse. What does that phrase mean?

“The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.”

Is Hosea telling the people that he is a fool? No. I think the opposite is true. I think the people are calling Hosea a fool. I think Hosea is quoting them here.

And after all that we have seen in this book about Gomer and about her three children and about their strange names, we might even understand why some of the people might have called Hosea a fool. But Hosea was not a fool – Hosea was obeying God and was speaking the words of God to the people.

Even today, when we obey God and proclaim the word of God, some will think us a fool. But those

who are really foolish are the ones who disobey God and who ignore his word.

Romans 1:21 – For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

I think the people thought Hosea was a fool and a mad man, and I suspect they not only **thought** that, but they also **said** that.

And, I suspect that view of the prophets as being crazy was not limited to Hosea. If so, then the phrase we see here in verse 7 may have been a popular taunt directed against all of the prophets of God by the people: “the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad.”

If that is what is going on here, then what is Hosea saying in verse 7?

I think what Hosea is saying is this: “Yes. You’re right! The prophets are crazy. But you have driven us crazy with your great sin and your great hatred!”

In short, I think what Hosea is doing in verse 7 is taking a taunt that he had likely heard many times from the people and is turning that taunt around to use against those who were saying it. “If I am a madman, as you say, it is because of your great iniquity and your great hatred!”

And I think that view of this verse is confirmed by the next verse.

Hosea 9:8

8 The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God; yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God.

Verse 8 confirms what we already knew – the prophet of God was no fool! Yes, he may have been called a fool and a madman, but he was neither. Instead, verse 8 tells us that the prophet is “the watchman of Ephraim with my God!”

But what does that mean? What is a “watchman of Ephraim”?

We can let another prophet answer that question for us.

Ezekiel 33:7 – So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

One of the primary roles of a prophet in the Old Testament was to be watchman for the people.

The prophets would look for warning signs of danger and then blow their trumpets to awaken and warn the people. That is what a literal watchman did, and that is what the prophets figuratively did when they relayed the warnings they received from God to warn the people about the errors of their way and the punishments that were coming if they did not repent.

Hosea, like Ezekiel, was certainly a watchman. In fact, Hosea was Israel’s final watchman. But, as

with the prophets that preceded Hosea, his warnings were ignored.

When the people were awakened by Hosea's trumpet call, they just rolled over and went back to sleep. That is the attitude we have seen from Ephraim all throughout this book.

The reference to "my God" in that opening phrase of verse 8 tells us that Hosea is using the word "prophet" to include, not only himself, but all of the other prophets sent from God to warn the northern tribes.

They were all watchman of Ephraim with my (Hosea's) God. They were not fools. They were not madmen. They were prophets sent by God to warn the very people who were now calling them fools and madmen.

And here is the **key question** of verse 8 – would a prophet sent from God be a **blessing** for such a people? No. A prophet sent from God would be a **snare** to such a people.

And that should not surprise us at all. Why not? Because God says that he himself would be a snare to such a people.

Isaiah 8:13-15 – But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, **a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem**. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; **they shall be snared and taken**.

Yes, that “snare” in Isaiah 8 was directed to Judah, but we already know that the people of Israel were worse than the people of Judah. So if God would be a snare to Judah, we know that God would also be a snare to Israel.

But we also know that the word of God can be a blessing for the people.

Luke 11:28 – But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

What is the difference? How can God be both a blessing and a snare? How can a prophet sent from God be both a blessing and a snare?

The verse from Luke 11 just answered that question: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God **and keep it!**”

It all depends on the listeners. Whether Hosea was a blessing or a snare to someone depended on how that person received Hosea’s message.

Earlier we read Ezekiel 33:7, where the prophet was called a watchman. Let’s read that verse again, but let’s also read verses 8 and 9.

Ezekiel 33:7-9 – So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. **But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.**

If you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his way, then what? Then that warning would not be a blessing for that person, but instead would be a snare.

A person who receives a warning from God and then ignores that warning is worse off than if he had never received that warning at all. An ignored warning is not a blessing, but instead is a snare.

2 Peter 2:21 – For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Blessing or snare? It all depends on the listener. And I think Paul later made that same point.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 – For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

The message was the same. But for some it was a message from death to death, while for others it was a message from life to life.

Here it is the prophet from God who is the snare. I think the KJV translation of verse 8 is better than the ESV: “The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: **but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways**, and hatred in the house of his God.”

God sent Hosea as a final warning to Israel, and if the people had heeded Hosea, then he would

have been a great blessing to them. But the people did not heed Hosea, and so instead of being a great blessing to Israel, Hosea was the final nail in Israel's coffin.

What about that last phrase in verse 8? "And hatred in the house of his God."

The "his" in that phrase is the same as the "his" in the previous phrase – they both refer back to the prophet.

So what then is this hatred in the house of the prophet's God?

To begin, I think the "house of God" here refers to the land of Israel rather than to the temple (which was located in Judah rather than in Israel). We came to that same conclusion back in Hosea 8:1 when we looked at the bird "over the house of the Lord" that was either a vulture or an eagle.

If that view is correct, then verse 8 is telling us that there is hatred in the land. And that does not surprise us at all.

In fact, it was because of that hatred that Hosea was a snare rather than a blessing. The people hated Hosea (calling him a fool and a madman), and the people hated God (rejecting God in favor of Baal, Assyria, and Egypt).

So what is verse 8 saying? I think it is saying this:

"The prophet is not a fool but rather is a watchman sent by God to warn you. But because

you are filled with hatred toward God and toward the prophets of God, those warnings will be for you, not a blessing, but a snare.”

Hosea 9:9

9 They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins.

Just how bad were the people of Ephraim? Where would they be placed on a scale of 1 to 10?

Verse 9 answers that question, and verse 9 tells us that the people at this time could not have been any worse. They were as bad as they could possibly be.

That was how far they had fallen. Some have said that there is no bottom to bad, but this people had managed to prove that saying wrong! They had reach rock-bottom when it came to evil!

And how does verse 9 tell us that? It tells us that by comparing these people to the people in the days of Gibeah.

What happened in Gibeah? We looked at that question back in Lesson 22 when we considered Hosea 5:8, which also mentions Gibeah, but let's review what we said.

Gibeah was the location of a very dark and disturbing event in Israel's history.

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

violence by the locals, who are called “worthless fellows” in Judges 19:22.

But instead of assaulting the Levite, those worthless fellows instead assaulted the Levite’s concubine, and she died. And, as we said back in Lesson 22, the text seems to suggest that the Levite himself killed his concubine after she had been assaulted.

The Levite then cut her body into twelve pieces and sent the pieces to the tribes of Israel to provoke their outrage. His plan worked so well that it led to a civil war and even more grotesque atrocities.

What verse 9 is telling us is that the people of Hosea’s day had fallen to the level of perhaps the most corrupt example from Israel's history.

Gibeah was bad, but things were even worse now than in the days of Gibeah. Why? Because the wickedness now was all across the entire land rather than just limited to the single small town of Gibeah.

And notice who was to blame here.

“They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah.”

The people had not been corrupted by some outside force. Verse 9 tells us that the people had “deeply corrupted themselves.”

And what would happen as a result? “He will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins.”

The people may not have known God, but God knew them. And God knew what they had done. And God would remember what they had done. And the punishment for what they had done was coming very soon.

Adam and Eve tried to hide from God, and people have been trying to do the same thing ever since. But no one can hide from God.

Jeremiah 16:17 – For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes.

Hebrews 4:13 – And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hosea 9:10

10 Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

Verse 10 begins with two metaphors that each make the same point: Israel in her youth was a source of special delight to God.

It would be rare to find edible grapes in the desert, but if such grapes were ever discovered

they would provide a wonderful feast for the weary desert traveler who found them.

Likewise, the very first fig crop of the season would have provided a wonderful feast for people who had not seen any figs at all for almost a year.

These metaphors would have immediately resonated with the people who were listening to Hosea. They knew very well what it meant to find grapes out in the desert. They knew very well what it meant to pick and eat the first fig of the season.

And so they knew very well what they had once meant to God. When God had first found them, it was like finding grapes in the desert. When God first saw them, it was like seeing that first fig of the season.

In the first half of verse 10, God is looking back with fondness to the time when Israel was young. Yes, we know that Israel had always had its problems, but God is remembering the good times here in the first half of the verse.

But those good times had not lasted very long. That is what we see in the second half of verse 10.

“But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.”

We don't know precisely the time God has in mind in the first half of verse 10 when he remembers the good times, but we do know the timing of the

second half of verse 10. We read about the incident at Baal-peor in Numbers 25.

Numbers 25:1-9 – While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, “Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.” And Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor.” And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

That is from Numbers 25. Who do we see in Numbers 24? We see Balaam. Balaam is an obscure character in the Bible, but he is mentioned in eight books of the Bible, including three New Testament books. He has been described as a false prophet who spoke the truth!

And what had just happened in Numbers 24? Balaam had failed in his efforts to bring a curse down upon the people.

And so what did the people do in the next chapter, Numbers 25? They brought down a curse

upon themselves at Baal-peor by having sexual relations with the sacred prostitutes of Baal.

This historical recollection in verse 10 about Baal-peor serves three purposes.

First, this history reminds the people that, although there were some good times in their relation with God, those good times had not lasted very long. These events in Numbers 24–25 had occurred before the people ever reached the promised land.

Second, this history reminds the people of the drastic action that was required to stop immorality and idolatry. The plague at Baal-peor did not end until Phinehas used his spear.

Third, this history is a reminder of the importance of good leaders, and a reminder that, at this time in their history, the leaders were all evil. Back in Numbers 25 the people had Moses as their leader. But here in Hosea 9 there was no Moses. The leaders were all corrupt.

When the people were in Egyptian bondage, God had raised up Moses to lead them. But now, when the people were heading back to bondage, God was just letting them pick their own leaders. There would not be a second Moses for them **at this time**.

And why do I say “at this time”? Because God was planning to give them a second Moses, but he would not appear for another seven centuries.

Deuteronomy 18:15 – The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you,

from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen.

Verse 10 tells us that the people in the days of Hosea were like the people in Numbers 25 who “consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.”

The “thing of shame” in verse 10 is Baal. In Hebrew, the word “shame” is *boset*, and that is the same word that the Bible sometimes uses in place of the name Baal. For example, Ish-baal (meaning, man of Baal) in 1 Chronicles 8:33 is instead called Ish-bosheth (meaning, man of shame) in 2 Samuel 2:8.

As for that final phrase (“and became detestable like the thing they loved”), I think a better translation is that “they become vile, like their love.”

As one commentary explains the Hebrew, “the infinitive construct does not refer to a person or thing that was loved but to the act of loving itself.”

“That is, their love was itself vile; the more they loved the cult and its prostitutes, the more depraved they became. There was a direct relationship between how far a man became involved with Baal Peor and how apostate and decadent he became.”

Their love was itself vile, and the more they loved, the more depraved they became.

Their love was itself vile. That is a very different message from the message that we hear

from the world today. How do people today justify so-called homosexual marriage? What do they say?

Well, here is what President Obama said when the Supreme Court decision was announced: “No matter ... how and who you love, America is a place where you can write your own destiny.”

But that was not always what he said on that subject. Here is what Obama said when he was running for president and still needed votes:

“I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now, for me as a Christian – for me – for me as a Christian, it is also a sacred union. God’s in the mix.”

And while we are on that topic, Joe Biden voted for the Defense of Marriage Act, which President Clinton signed into law in 1996. That act defined marriage as being only between a man and a woman for purposes of Federal law.

I’m not sure which is a sadder commentary on our times – that these men have all changed their views as quickly as they change their socks – or that these men had to change their views to get elected by the same people who elected them the first time. In less than 20 years, they went from having to **oppose** gay marriage to get elected to instead having to **support** gay marriage to get elected. That is a society in free-fall!

And what does the Bible say? We just read it in Hosea: “They become vile, like their love.” And we also read it in Romans.

Romans 1:26–27 – For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

But how did we go from talking about Baal to talking about so-called homosexual marriage? Isn't that quite a leap? No! That's not a leap at all! It shows us that the worship of Baal hasn't gone anywhere! It is still all around us nearly three millennia after Hosea.

Before we move on, let's say one more thing about Baal-peor. The Psalmist retells that history in Psalm 106.

Psalm 106:28–30 – Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed.

And what does the Psalmist then tell us just a few verses later?

Psalm 106:36–38 – They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.

We could certainly look here at the connection, not just between Baal worship and homosexuality, but also between Baal worship and abortion. But instead let's just pause to note what one

commentator called “the hideous paradox of the fertility cult.”

A major reason why people turned to a false fertility god in the first place was to give them healthy children, but that same false god then consumed those children in ritual sacrifice.

And just how evil was that? It was so evil that God himself never thought mankind would ever do such a thing!

Jeremiah 32:35 – They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, **nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination,** to cause Judah to sin.

The worship of Baal hasn't gone anywhere, and neither has the worship of Molech. And many people serve those false gods just as much today as did the people did in Hosea's day.

Hosea 9:11–12

11 Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird -- no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! 12 Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them!

What is Ephraim's glory?

We have asked that question before, and each time we have looked at two possibilities – either it is what Ephraim's glory should have been or it is what Ephraim's glory actually was.

We know what Ephraim's glory should have been – their glory should have been God.

But we also know what Ephraim's glory actually was at this time – their glory was themselves, their false gods, and their foreign alliances.

So which is it here? What is the glory in verse 11 that will fly away like a bird? I think the end of verse 12 answers that question. "Woe to them when I depart from them!"

I think that God is the glory of Ephraim in verse 11 that will fly away like a bird. God will leave them far behind – just as they had left God far behind.

And what would happen when God did that? Verse 12 tells us: "Woe to them!"

And these verses also give us a more detailed answer to that question: they would not have children, and even if they did, the children would not survive.

We should remember here why the people turned to Baal – they thought Baal was the fertility god. They believed that it was Baal who gave them conception, pregnancy, and birth. They were thanking Baal for their healthy, thriving children.

But they were wrong. Those blessings were from God rather than from Baal, and now God was flying away from them like a bird.

And the result? No birth. No pregnancy. No conception. No children.

Should we be concerned that God is striking their children in verse 12?

On one hand, we might argue that God is not striking their children, but rather is just leaving the people on their own when it comes to their children. And so famine and warfare and exile would then take their expected toll. That is, we might argue that God is playing only a passive role here – but that is not what the text says.

Verse 12 is both specific and active: “**I will bereave them** till none is left.” That statement does not leave much room for the view that God’s role here with regard to the children is only passive. In verse 12 God seems to take an active role – I will bereave the parents until none of the children is left. Should that concern us?

There is a subtle point here, but it is an important point that we should not miss.

Did children suffer as a result of this punishment from God? Yes, they did.

Were those suffering children being punished by God? No, they were not.

This is the same point that we find in Ezekiel 18.

Ezekiel 18:2-4 – What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘**The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the**

children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

Ezekiel 18:20 – The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

The point there is not that the son would not suffer at all, but rather that the son would not suffer for the iniquity of the father.

Sin has consequences – and those consequences often extend to those who are innocent of that sin. We certainly see that today, and it has always been true.

And, I think that fact helps us reconcile what we just read in Ezekiel 18 with what we find in Exodus 34.

Exodus 34:6-7 – The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Were the children in Exodus 34 being punished for the sin of their father? No. They were not. Ezekiel 18 tells us they were not.

Were the children suffering as a result of the sin of their father? Yes. I think Exodus 34 is telling us that would happen. And that was part of the punishment of the parents – God was telling them that if you sin, then not only will you suffer but your children will also suffer.

Think about the great flood. Why did God destroy the earth with a flood?

Genesis 6:5 – The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Did children die in that great flood? Yes. Were those children being punished by that great flood? No.

And we see the same thing here in Hosea. Did children suffer in the famine and the exile? Yes. Were those children being punished by the famine and the exile? No.

So, yes, sometimes God struck children when he punished their parents. We know that God did that in the great flood, and I think we also see God doing that here in Hosea. Later, we will see it again.

Hosea 13:16 – Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

And, yes, suffering is suffering, and I suspect the subtle distinction we are making here might well have been lost on the children who were

suffering. But it was not lost on God – God knows the difference between those who are suffering because of their sin and those who were suffering because of others' sin.

And God is a righteous all-knowing all-powerful judge. We can be certain that whatever God does is right.