

# Lesson 33

## Hosea 9:11-12, Continued

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!

### One final comment about verses 11-12.

These two verses show us an example of something we have already seen once before in Hosea – a **pseudosorites**.

The word “sorites” refers to a series of propositions in which each conclusion is taken as the subject of the next. It is a chain of syllogisms (A implies B, and then B implies C).

But here we do not have a sorites, but we have a pseudosorites, a false sorites. What do we mean by that?

What we mean is that in the second statement, the subject is not the conclusion of the prior statement (as we would expect with a sorites), but rather is the opposite of the conclusion of the prior statement (which is why it is called a **pseudo**sorites).

Look again at verses 11-12:

- No birth, no pregnancy, no conception!

- Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left.

Those verses do not have the form: “X will not happen. And because X will not happen, it follows that Y will happen.” That would be a sorites.

Instead, those verses have this form: “X will not happen. But even if X did happen, Y would happen.” That is a pseudosorites – a *false* sorites.

And we have already seen another pseudosorites in Hosea.

**Hosea 8:7** – The standing grain has no heads; it shall yield no flour; if it were to yield, strangers would devour it.

But if there will be no children, then why are we told what would happen if there were children? And if there was no yield of flour, then why are we told what would happen if there was a yield of flour?

That we are asking those questions confirms that we are looking at a pseudosorites here in Hosea 9:11–12 and also earlier in Hosea 8:7.

And what is the answer to those questions? The answer is that a pseudosorites is just a rhetorical device. It is used to help the speaker persuade his audience. And that is how it is being used in Hosea – to better convey the message of doom.

## Hosea 9:13

13 Ephraim, as I have seen, was like a young palm planted in a meadow; but Ephraim must lead his children out to slaughter.

Commentaries tell us that verse 13 is “extremely difficult” in Hebrew.

As with other difficult texts, many translations solve the problem by changing the Hebrew text so that it becomes easier to translate. (That solution to the difficult Hebrew text reminds me of those students who, when asked a difficult question on an exam, simply create and answer an easier question instead! We need to look for our keys where we dropped them – not where the light is better!)

If we look just at the original Hebrew, then we have a few possible meanings:

- “Ephraim! Just as I saw of Tyre (that it was a fig tree) planted in a meadow, so too, Ephraim [is] to lead out his children to the slayer.”
- “Ephraim! As when I provided for Tyre (that it be) planted in a meadow, so too Ephraim (is) to lead out his children to the slayer.”

When we see those translations, we can see why most translations opt for the easier path. But that easier path requires us to change the Hebrew text, which I think we should avoid unless absolutely necessary.

Also, when we look at those translations of the original Hebrew and compare it with the ESV, we

can see just how far apart they are – the ESV translation makes no mention of the city of Tyre! But other translations do mention Tyre:

**Hosea 9:13** (ASV) – Ephraim, like as I have seen Tyre, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring out his children to the slayer.

So what is verse 13 saying?

I think verse 13 is saying that both Ephraim and Tyre had been placed in very favorable conditions (“planted in a pleasant place”). But now both Ephraim and Tyre were sending their children to the “slayer,” that is to Baal.

By referring to Baal as the slayer, the text is making the point that this god of fertility was really a god of death. Rather than giving the people life, Baal was giving them death.

And, as for Tyre, archaeology confirms that both the city of Tyre and the Phoenicians who lived in that city were notorious for practicing child sacrifice.

In fact, the Phoenicians created the settlement of Carthage in North Africa. And here is a description of what two of those archaeologists found in Carthage:

“[Carthage contains] the largest cemetery of sacrificed humans ever discovered. Child sacrifice took place there almost continuously for a period of nearly 600 years ... . Using the density of urns in our excavated area as a standard, we estimate that as many as 20,000

urns may have been deposited there between 400 and 200 B.C.”

And those same urns containing the remains of sacrificed children in Carthage have also been found in the city of Tyre. Here is how one article describes that find:

“The American University of Beirut published a study in 1991 analyzing artifacts and remains discovered in Tyre that may point to child sacrifice. Of interest are two ... urns whose closest parallel, according to the authors, were found in [Carthage], dated to the eighth century BC. Several of the urns contained human bone fragments, many of which appear to have been incinerated at high temperatures...”

So what then is verse 13 saying? One commentary suggests that it can be paraphrased this way:

“Ephraim! Just as I saw of Tyre that it was well situated like a fig tree planted in a meadow, and yet it became a place of child sacrifice, so too Ephraim, although it was equally well situated, will give its children to the ‘slayer’ – first to their god, Baal, and then to the Assyrians.”

And Tyre and Samaria had something else in common – both of those cities fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.

## **Hosea 9:14**

14 Give them, O LORD -- what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Starting back in verse 11, the text has been focused on children, and that subject remains our focus here in verse 14.

And that focus should not surprise us. Baal was the god of fertility, and the people looked to Baal for healthy crops and healthy children. Yes, those things were blessings from God, but the people were not thanking God – instead they were thanking Baal.

And what should the punishment be for that sin? What is the suitable punishment for a people who receive gifts from God but who then thank Baal for those gifts?

That is Hosea's question in verse 14: "Give them, O LORD -- what will you give?"

And the answer? The answer is that God would take back his gifts. "Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts."

If they think Baal is the god of fertility, then let's see if Baal will give them healthy crops and healthy children. Let's see what that lifeless piece of stone will provide for them. The people are about to find that out.

So far in Hosea we have seen a number of reversals. Good things that happened to Israel or that were promised to Israel at the beginning of their history have now been reversed at the end of their history. Here in verse 14 we see another such reversal.

Verse 14 is a reversal of the great blessing that Jacob gave to Ephraim's father, Joseph, in Genesis 49.

**Genesis 49:22-25** – Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

“Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.” That is the opposite of what we see here in verse 14: “Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.” That blessing for Joseph from Genesis 49 has now been reversed for Ephraim, Joseph's son.

## **Hosea 9:15**

15 Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels.

We looked at the history of Gilgal in Lesson 19 when we looked at Hosea 4:15 (“Enter not into Gilgal”). Let's review what we said in that lesson.

Gilgal (likely meaning Circle of Stones) was a place of great significance in the spiritual history of Israel.

- It was in Gilgal that Joshua set up his first base of operations after crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 4:18–20).
- And it was in Gilgal that the people were circumcised prior to their first passover in Canaan (Joshua 5:7–9).
- It was in Gilgal that the kingdom was renewed under Samuel and King Saul (1 Samuel 11:14–15).
- The people of Judah welcomed David back at Gilgal after the war with Absalom (2 Samuel 19:15).

So, yes, Gilgal had great significance for God's people, but that significance had long been forgotten by the days of Hosea.

In fact, we also see warnings about Gilgal in Amos (who, we recall, was the southern prophet who preached in the north at the same time as Hosea).

**Amos 4:4** – Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days.

**Amos 5:4–5** – For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing.”

As one commentary described Gilgal, “it went from being a shrine for pilgrims to a center of apostasy.” Gilgal had an illustrious history for the people of God – but that had all changed. Gilgal had experienced a reversal.



Now, having reviewed the history of Gilgal from its honorable past to its ignoble present, here is our question: **does Gilgal remind us of anything?** Is there anything else that we have seen in Hosea that had an illustrious past but that was now dishonorable?

And, of course, the answer is yes – the city of Gilgal reminds us of the nation of Israel. And, in fact, that is the point of verse 15.

As it turns out, every evil thing in Israel was preceded by that same evil thing in Gilgal. “Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal.” Both Gilgal and Israel had fallen from a great height.

The next phrase from God in verse 15 hits us with a jolt: **“there I began to hate them.”** What does that mean? I thought God so loved the world! I thought God hated the sin but loved the sinner!

First, that phrase in verse 15 does not contradict God’s love for the world. What is happening here in Hosea 9 is happening **because** of God’s love for the world, not in spite of that love. We know that God loves everyone because the Bible tells us that he does (John 3:16) and because the Bible shows us over and over again that he does.

But, second, verse 15 tells us very plainly that God began to **hate** Israel at Gilgal.

So, putting those two points together, we know that this hatred in verse 15 somehow coexists with the love that we know God has for each person.

How, then, do we figure out what is meant by the hatred in verse 15? We look at the context.

The context of the book of Hosea is the life of Hosea – it is Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and the three children that Gomer then had – Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine. And the context is how those events that Hosea experienced in dealing with Gomer mirror the events that God experienced in dealing with Israel.

Think for a moment about a relationship that breaks down. It might be a marriage relationship, or perhaps it is a business relationship. But think about a relationship that starts out great but ends in a dissolution of that relationship.

When did that relationship change? When did it stop being a great relationship? I suspect that for many and perhaps for most such relationships there was some specific event that was the tipping point.

Prior to that specific event, the relationship could be described as great, but after that specific event, it could no longer be described that way. The relationship may not have ended with that event – but that event was the beginning of the end for that relationship.

I think that is what happened in God’s relationship with Israel, and I think verse 15 is telling us where that event happened – in Gilgal. “There I began to hate them.” That is where the relationship changed.

The text does not tell us what happened or when it happened, but the text tells us where it happened. But, with the location as our only clue, can we figure out what happened and when? Perhaps we can.

Listen to this event from the life of King Saul that happened in Gilgal, and think about what it has in common with the themes we have seen in Hosea.

**1 Samuel 15:12-21** – And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.” Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.” And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in

**burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.** For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. **Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.**"

Don't those final statements by Samuel to King Saul remind us of things we have read in Hosea?

**Hosea 6:6** – For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

**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.

Doesn't that sad event from the life of King Saul mirror some of the key themes of Hosea? A lack of knowledge of God? A rejection of the word of God? A misunderstanding of the worship that God demands? Disobedience prompted by earthly desires?

Was that event in the life of Saul perhaps the point where God knew that his relationship with Israel had gone off the rails? Was that when God began to hate them?

We know **where** that happened, but we are not told **when** that happened. But perhaps 1 Samuel 15 shows us **when** it happened.

And whether it happened in 1 Samuel 15 or at some other time in the history of Gilgal, the fact that it happened at all is incredibly sad.

We are talking here about the chosen people of God – a people whom God had rescued out of Egyptian bondage, a people who had been given the great law of God, and a people who had received the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

God's relationship with that people could not have started off any better, but now that relationship was over. Rather than being God's special chosen people, God now said they were not loved and not mine. And here, God goes further – not only are they not loved, but they are hated.

What is the saddest statement in the entire book of Hosea? Perhaps it is this one: "there I began to hate them."

And verse 15 continues:

"Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels."

I think the second half of verse 15 confirms what we just said about the first half of verse 14.

- We are looking here at a breakdown in a relationship between God and his people similar to a breakdown in a relationship between a husband and wife – "I will drive them out of my house."
- The hatred in verse 15 is describing the breakdown of that relationship – "I will love them no more."
- And the focus on Gilgal points back to the disobedience of Saul, Israel's first king – "all their princes are rebels."

## Hosea 9:16

16 Ephraim is stricken; their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death.

Verse 16 echoes verses 11–13, and what we said about those verses also applies here.

Ephraim is stricken. Why? Because everything that Ephraim sought from Baal is being taken away by God. Rather than receiving fertility, the people are receiving failed crops and dead children.

We were just jolted by a statement from God in verse 15, and now we are jolted again by a statement from God in verse 16:

“Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death.”

It is statements such as that one that cause some to conclude that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of New Testament. But we know that is not correct.

There is one God, and God’s nature is unchanging. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. And God is both a God of wrath and a God of love in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Those today who argue that the God of the Old Testament is not a God of love need to read the Old Testament.

**Psalm 36:7** – How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

**Lamentations 3:22–23** – The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

And, likewise, those who argue today that the God of the New Testament is not a God of wrath need to read the New Testament.

**Colossians 3:5–6** – Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

**Revelation 6:15–17** – Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

We need to **know** God. That is, perhaps, the key message of the book of Hosea. And if we think that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament, then we do not know God.

**1 John 4:8** – Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

And that is always true of God. God is always love. And if we are ever having trouble understanding something about God (such as here

in verse 16), then that should always be our starting point: God is love.

So, with that as our starting point, how do we explain the incredible harshness of the punishment that we see in verse 16? "I will put their beloved children to death."

And the answer? The answer is this: God is love!

God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus, his own Son, to the world to die on a cross so that we could be saved.

And the disobedience of Israel was a threat to God's plan. God needed his chosen people to be faithful and to remain faithful so that God could fulfill his promises to Abraham and to David. But the people were not faithful. They were disobedient, and they had cast God and the law of God behind their back.

If God was not love, then he might have overlooked their disobedience. He might have just given up on his earlier promises. He might have said, "I tried, but the people were disobedient, and so I will just give up on this world."

But that is not what happened. Why not? Because God is love.

God had given up on Israel, but God had not given up on his plan to bless the world. God still had Judah, and so perhaps God punished Israel as harshly as he did so that Judah would learn a lesson.



Whatever the reason, we know that what God did here was done out of his love for this world. And how do we know that? Because God is love!

## **Hosea 9:17**

17 My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations.

What is the first thing someone must do to be pleasing to God? What is the first thing we must do if we want to know God? What is the first step in the plan of salvation?

The answers to those three questions are all the same – God wants us to listen to him. The first thing God wants from us is our attention.

**Deuteronomy 6:4** – Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

**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.

**Luke 8:18** – Take heed therefore how ye hear.

**Luke 9:35** – And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

**Mark 4:23** – If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.

**Romans 10:17** – So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

But the people of Hosea's day were not listening to God. They were reacting to Hosea the same way as God had told Isaiah that they would react to him.

**Isaiah 6:10** – Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

They, like those who stoned Stephen, had stopped up their ears.

**Act 7:57** – But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

And what was the result? What was the result of not listening to God? What was the result of not listening to the prophets sent by God? What was the result of not listening to the law of God? Hosea tells us here: "My God will reject them."

The first half of verse 17 is a restatement of a key theme in this book.

**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.

People think they can ignore God forever, but they cannot. God will always have the last word, and no one can ignore God forever.

Why were the people here being destroyed? Why had they been rejected by God? Why were they no longer the people of God? Why were they no longer

loved by God? Because they had not listened to God. That is the answer we find here in verse 17.

And, yes, it is possible to listen to God and then reject what you heard. And, yes, that would lead to the same result. But in most cases those who listen to God with the right heart will turn to God and obey God. And in all cases the first step to pleasing God is to listen to God. Here the people had refused to take that first step.

Verse 17 ends with another one of those incredibly sad statements that we have been seeing with greater and greater frequency in this book: "they shall be wanderers among the nations."

Israel had started off as wanderers. In fact, Jacob is called "a wandering Aramean."

**Deuteronomy 26:5** – And you shall make response before the LORD your God, '**A wandering Aramean was my father.** And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.'

And then, after the exodus from Egypt but because of their sin, God made them wander for 40 years.

**Numbers 32:13** – And the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them **wander in the wilderness** forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD was gone.

But that all changed when they reached their promised land.

**Joshua 21:43** – Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and **they settled there.**

And now? We see yet another great reversal. Once again we see God putting them back where and how he found them.

God has evicted them from their promised land, and so once again they will be wanderers among the nations. They will not have any land to call their own.