

Lesson 40

Last week we looked at Hosea 12:3–4, and we had three main questions about those two verses.

First, we looked at what the Bible (outside of Hosea) tells us about Jacob, and second, we looked at what Hosea tells us about Jacob in these two verses.

We are now ready to look at our third question.

Question #3: Why did Hosea say these things about Jacob?

It is clear that Hosea is reminding the people about these events from the life of Jacob to teach them a lesson – but what lesson?

And notice in verse 4 how skillfully Hosea brings his history lesson back to his own day and time. Look at the final word in verse 4: “There God spoke with **us**.” Not just with Jacob, but with **us**.

God had also spoken with the people of Hosea’s day when God spoke with Jacob at Bethel. And what did God say to them?

The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, **and I will give the land to your offspring after you.**

The people listening to Hosea were the offspring of Jacob. They had been promised the land by God at Bethel – but now God was throwing them off that land! What had happened?

I think that question is the reason we have these two verses. To answer that question is why Hosea has given us this history lesson.

And so what is the answer to that question? Why were the people being evicted from the land that God had promised to them at Bethel?

The answer is simple. It was because, **like** Jacob, the people were striving with everyone, including God, but **unlike** Jacob, the people were **not** weeping about what they had done and were **not** seeking God's favor.

Yes, they (along with Jacob) had received that promise at Bethel, the house of God, but now they had fallen so far that Hosea refers to Bethel, not as the house of God, but as Beth-aven, the house of emptiness or wickedness.

But who thought God would ever take back the land? Who could have ever predicted such a thing? Anyone who reads Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:63 – And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. **And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.**

It seems that all roads in Hosea lead us back to Deuteronomy 28! When it comes to the history of the northern kingdom, Deuteronomy 28 and Hosea are like bookends.

Yes, God promised this people at Bethel that they would receive nations, kings, and land. But those promises were **conditional**, and we find the

condition in Deuteronomy 28 – faithfulness to God. We see that condition in the very first verse.

Deuteronomy 28:1 – And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

The people of Hosea’s day were faithless, and so rather than receiving the blessing of Deuteronomy 28:1, they would receive the curse of Deuteronomy 28:63 – “You shall be plucked off the land!”

Hosea 12:5

5 the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name:

Do you remember what we said about the final verse in Chapter 11?

That verse ended with the phrase “Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One,” and we wondered whether that phrase was a compliment of Judah or a criticism of Judah. And, despite the ESV translation, we concluded that it was a criticism.

And the specific criticism was that the priests of Baal in Judah were trying to be very clever. They were using vague words such as “El” that could refer to God or could refer to a false god depending on the context, and those clever priests were hoping that their vague statements

would be acceptable to both the followers of God and the followers of Baal.

I think verse 5 confirms that we were on the right track with that understanding of Hosea 11:12.

Why? Because here Hosea reminds us of the name of the one true God who met with Jacob at Bethel and who talked with “us” at Bethel.

“The Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial name.”

Or as we read in the ASV:

“Even Jehovah, the God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial name.”

There is no ambiguity in that verse. There is no generic description of deity in that phrase. There is no deliberate and deceptive vagueness in that statement.

No follower of Baal would ever hear that phrase and think that Hosea was talking about Baal. No follower of God would ever hear that phrase and wonder who Hosea was really talking about.

As one commentator describes verse 5:

“It is a grand name that calls to mind all the majesty and power of God... This was the name of the real God of Israel, the God who found Jacob and transformed him, and it is the name by which this God should be remembered. The implication is that this is the God whom the Israelites have not discovered.”

In the first half of verse 5, we find **“the Lord, the God of hosts.”**

Although this is the only verse in Hosea where we find that phrase, we know that the people were very familiar with that description of God. And how do we know that? We know that because the phrase “the Lord, the God of hosts” is used nine times in the book of Amos and twelve times in the book of Isaiah.

As we recall from our introduction to Hosea, Isaiah and Amos were prophesying at the same time as Hosea. But, unlike Hosea, Isaiah and Amos were from the south.

Also, Isaiah was sent to the southern kingdom, unlike Hosea, who was sent to the northern kingdom. And Amos, like Hosea, preached to the north even though Amos, unlike Hosea, was from the south.

The people listening to Hosea had also likely listened to Amos, and perhaps they had even heard about Isaiah and his message. If so, then they were already very familiar with this name for God – “the Lord, the God of hosts.”

And why was that particular name so important at this time? Because the Lord, the God of hosts, was at this time preparing to send a host against Israel!

God (not Baal) is the God of armies! And that difference was about to become evident to all when the Assyrian army showed up at the command of God as prophesied by the prophets of God to do

the will of God. Baal could neither send nor stop an army.

Amos 3:13-15 – “Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord GOD, **the God of hosts**, that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end,” declares the LORD.

Baal, the so-called god of fertility, was in reality not a god of anything, including fertility and hosts. That is why Bethel (the house of God) became instead the house of emptiness when Baal moved in.

In the second half of verse 5, we find **“the Lord is his memorial name.”**

I think we could paraphrase that statement this way: “Jehovah is his name – and you had better remember it!”

As we saw at the end of Hosea 11, the priests it seems had been playing some games with the name of God by using vague generic titles that could apply to God or could apply to Baal.

And I think that is one reason why Hosea has been reminding them here about who God is through this history of God’s interactions with Jacob.

And that view is confirmed by the phrase we find here at the end of that historical review – this is the one true God! This is God Almighty! His

name is Jehovah – and you had better remember it!
No more words games!

By using the phrase “memorial name” in verse 5, Hosea is pointing us back to one of the great texts of the Bible.

Exodus 3:13–15 – Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ **This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.**

The Hebrew word (“zeker”) translated “remembered” in Exodus 3:15 is the same Hebrew word that is translated “memorial name” here in verse 5.

In the great model prayer of Matthew 6, the very first thing that Jesus told us to pray for is that God’s name will be hallowed and honored. And not only were these people not praying for that, they themselves were not doing that!

Instead, they were playing games with God’s name – they were dishonoring God’s name by trying to appeal to God and to Baal with the same generic terms for deity.

The people needed to remember who it is they were dealing with. They needed a history lesson to remind them about the Lord God Almighty. And so Hosea has just given them one.

It is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob who said to Moses: "This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

The people did not know God, and they would soon be destroyed because of their lack of knowledge. We saw that back in Hosea 4:6, and we have been seeing it ever since!

Hosea 12:6

6 "So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God."

Hosea reviewed the life of Jacob to show that Israel had inherited Jacob's worst traits but had not inherited any of Jacob's best traits. Like Jacob, the people were striving with everyone, including God, but unlike Jacob, the people were not weeping and seeking God's favor.

Here in verse 6, Hosea tells the people what they need to do if they want to be like their ancestor Jacob. Here Hosea reminds them of Jacob's good points.

What did the people need to do? They needed to return to God and look to God for help. And if they are returning, that means that they had left God for someone else – and that someone else was Baal and the evil fertility cult of Canaan.

The Hebrew word used here for "return" implies an abandonment of where they had been. They were not

just to leave Baal, but they were to abandon Baal.

And there is a lesson there for us. When we leave a sinful situation, we should not leave any doors cracked open through which we can later return to that situation. If we return to God with the thought that we might later return to that sinful situation when we grow tired of God, then that is not faithfulness; that is not loyalty. Instead, that is what these people had been doing – swapping back and forth from one god to another as they looked for the best offer.

That is not what God wants from his people, and we see that right here in verse 6: “hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.”

Hold fast. Wait continually.

Those phrases are not describing a people that swaps gods back and forth looking for the best offer. Instead, those phrases are describing the constancy and loyalty and faithfulness that God demands.

When we leave Baal, we don't leave the door cracked open, but instead we abandon Baal, and we hold fast to love and justice, and we wait continually for God.

That is what Jacob did, eventually. But the people in Hosea's day had not done that. But, again, even now, at this late point in their history, God was giving them an opportunity to repent.

And what did they need to do? Verse 6 tells us.

The phrase “hold fast to love and justice” was a shorthand way of saying that they needed to do all that God required in the Law of Moses, but especially “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

And the phrase “wait continually for your God” describes an attitude of faith that seeks security in God rather than in wealth or position and that perseveres in faith even when circumstances are difficult.

In the context of Jacob’s example, the message is that if Israel would repent, they they would be like Jacob in the best sense rather than in the worst sense.

Hosea 12:7

7 A merchant, in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress.

Yes, Ephraim should have displayed the best traits of Jacob, but they had not. Instead, they were displaying the worst traits of Jacob. And I think that if we asked Hosea to describe those worst traits with a single word, that word would be **deception**.

Back in Hosea 11:12, we were told that “Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit.” And then Hosea rehearsed the life of Jacob, which we know included great deception in his dealings with Isaac and Esau.

There was also deception with Laban – although Laban gave back as good as he got!

And so perhaps we are not surprised here when Hosea compares Ephraim with a dishonest merchant. As one commentary describes it:

The rigged scales of the merchant are proverbial for loathsome dishonesty in trade. This kind of fraud, a way of cutting any corner to get ahead, is in the worst traditions of the Israelite merchant's ancestor, Jacob.

Ancient dealers sometimes kept two sets of weighing stones, one for buying and one for selling. The Law of Moses forbid that practice.

Deuteronomy 25:13 – You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small.

And elsewhere we are told how God feels about a false balance – it is an abomination.

Proverbs 20:23 – Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good.

But why? Why is a false balance so bad?

It is because a false balance includes within it many different sins including dishonesty, greed, arrogance, fraud, and oppression of the poor and weak. As verse 7 describes this merchant, “he loves to oppress.”

There is some word play here in verse 7. The Hebrew word translated “merchant” is the same Hebrew word that means “Canaan.” The implication is clear – rather than following God and removing

the Canaanites from the land, Ephraim had followed Canaan and removed God from the land. And, as a result, the people were now just like the Canaanites.

I also love the word play that we find on this point in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 11:1-2 – A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight. When pride comes, then comes **disgrace**, but with the humble is wisdom.

The root of the Hebrew word translated “disgrace” in Proverbs 11:2 literally means **lightness**. What that proverb is telling us is that both the false weights and the dishonest people who use those false weights are claiming to be heavier than they really are!

Hosea 12:8

8 Ephraim has said, "Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin."

I think Hosea is still comparing and contrasting the people with their ancestor, Jacob. Why do I think that? Because the Hebrew word translated “wealth” here in verse 8 is the same Hebrew word that was translated “maturity” back in verse 3.

Also, Hosea just looked at what happened to Jacob at Bethel, and we know that Hosea now refers to Bethel as Beth-aven – not the house of God, but the house of emptiness or wickedness. And why is that important here? Because the Hebrew word

translated “iniquity” in verse 8 is very similar to the Hebrew word “aven” in Beth-aven.

What we see in verse 8 is that **ancient** Ephraim had a **very modern** opinion of themselves: “Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin.”

“I have only myself to thanks for everything I have, and everything I do is right!” Yes, the attitude that we see here in verse 8 is a very modern attitude. The world, it seems, has always been full of self-made men who can do no wrong!

The attitude that we see in verse 8 is the attitude of the rich merchant who has just cheated a poor person by using false weights.

“I am rich” – meaning that he is above the law.

“I have found wealth for myself” – meaning that he can do whatever he wants to do in his quest to get whatever he wants to have.

“In all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin” – meaning that no one will ever be able to prove that he did anything wrong. He is confident that he will get away with it.

And, yes, that rich merchant might very well escape justice in a land filled with injustice and partiality – but that rich merchant will not escape the justice of God.

And those people today who have this same attitude need to learn that same lesson.

These rich merchants may have deceived the poor, but they were also deceiving themselves. These rich merchants may have mocked the poor, but God is not mocked.

Galatians 6:7 – Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Hosea 12:9

9 I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast.

What is your **least** favorite holiday?

If we directed that question to the people of Hosea's day, I suspect they might all have given us the same answer – their most disliked holiday might have been the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. For the kids it might well have been their favorite holiday, but perhaps not so for the parents.

Why? What was so unlikable about that particular feast? The answer is that it involved leaving your comfortable home for a week so that you could instead live outdoors in a tent!

Leviticus 23:42-43 – You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

As the Handout for Lesson 40 shows, the Feast of Tabernacles came on the 15th day of the seventh month, Tishri, which was typically around the end of September or early October.

The Feast was primarily agricultural and celebrated the gathering of the harvest. In John 7:37 it is referred to as "The Feast." The Rabbis said that "he who has not seen Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what rejoicing means." (So perhaps the feast wasn't as bad as it seems!)

Apart from its agricultural significance, the Feast of Tabernacles also commemorated the exodus from Egypt when the Israelites dwelt in tents and tabernacles. The people built booths or tabernacles with walls made of branches and thatched roofs and dwelt in them seven days. The Hebrew word for booths is Succoth from which the feast gets its Hebrew name.

On the first day of the feast 13 bulls were offered, 12 on the next day, 11 on the third, and so on until 7 were offered on the seventh day – making a total of 70 offerings. The rabbis taught that the number 70 depicted the number of nations in the world, which looked forward to a time when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together.

One of the most important rituals of this feast was the pouring of water in the temple. A specially appointed priest was sent to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water from the pool. This was poured by the high priest into a basin at the foot of the altar amidst the

blasting of trumpets and the singing of the Hallel (Psalm 113–118).

It was at the end of such a celebration that Jesus announced that he was the real source of living water in John 7:37–38.

The significance of this pouring was twofold. First, it was a symbolic and ritual prayer for abundant rain. Second, it looked toward the outpouring of God's spirit upon all nations as mentioned in Joel 2:28 and which Peter in Acts 2 says was fulfilled during the first century.

One thing to notice about this feast was its connection to agriculture and to water. Both of those things were gifts from God, but now the people were thanking Baal for both of those things.

And yet the feast continued. They were still going through the motions even after they had exchanged God with Baal!

The mention of this feast in verse 9 is a reminder of why they had been given that feast in the first place. The intent of the feast was for the people to remember what their lives had been like after they left Egypt and before they settled down in the promised land. The feast was designed to make them remember what God had done for them and to be thankful.

But the people were not thankful. They did not remember what God had done for them.

In Hosea 2:11, we saw that the people were still keeping the appointed feasts – but we also saw

that they had forgotten the meaning of those feasts.

We saw that they had mixed the feasts of God with the worship of Baal. Most likely, this seven day feast of thanksgiving to God had instead become just a seven day campout during which they worshipped and thanked Baal.

And why had they done that? Because they did not know God.

That is why verse 9 starts the way it does: "I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt." Yes, verse 9 actually starts out with God introducing himself to the people!

When God the Son came to this earth, he was not recognized by many of his own people. I think we see something similar here with God the Father. His people are so far from him that, not only don't they know him, but they don't even recognize him.

And so God has to remind them who he is and what he did for them. "I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt."

Verse 9 is one of the saddest verses in Hosea, which (as we have said) is perhaps the saddest book in the Bible.

Ezekiel tells us that Judah followed the example of her "sister Samaria" and as a result experienced this same sad situation.

Ezekiel 23:35 – Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten me and cast me

behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.

When people forget God and cast the word of God behind their back, the inevitable result is lewdness and whoring.

We see that fact with Israel here in Hosea, we see that fact with Judah in Ezekiel, and perhaps even today in our own world we can see some modern examples of that fact.

And, as we said, even though this feast was a very joyous occasion, I suspect that no one over the age of 12 really looked forward to that seven day campout!

And why do I think that? Because the threatened punishment in verse 9 is that God was going to turn that seven day holiday into a permanent holiday! You think living in a tent is bad for seven days – just wait until you do live in a tent for the rest of your life!

Their ancestors had been homeless wanderers for many years – and verse 9 tells them it was going to happen again. And we know that it did happen again – Israel was carried off by Assyria and scattered so that the people once again became just homeless wanderers.