

Hosea

Chapter 10

Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones. ² Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones. ³ Then they will say, “We have no king because we did not revere the LORD. But even if we had a king, what could he do for us?” ⁴ They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field. ⁵ The people who live in Samaria fear for the calf-idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendor, because it is taken from them into exile. ⁶ It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be ashamed of its wooden idols. ⁷ Samaria and its king will float away like a twig on the surface of the waters. like a twig on the surface of the waters. ⁸ The high places of wickedness will be destroyed— it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, “Cover us!” and to the hills, “Fall on us!” ⁹ “Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel, and there you have remained. Did not war overtake the evildoers in Gibeah? ¹⁰ When I please, I will punish them; nations will be gathered against them to put them in bonds for their double sin. ¹¹ Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; so I will put a yoke on her fair neck. I will drive Ephraim, Judah must plow, and Jacob must break up the ground. ¹² Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. ¹³ But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength hand on your many warriors, ¹⁴ the roar of battle will rise against your people, so that all your fortresses will be devastated— as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed to the ground with their children. ¹⁵ Thus will it happen to you, O Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.

10:1 *Israel*. The nation personified and called by the name of its ancestor. (CSB)

vine. A frequent metaphor for Israel (Dt 32:32; Ps 80:8–11; Isa 5:1; Jer 2:21; cf. Jn 15:1). (CSB)

prospered. The prosperity during the period of Jeroboam II (793–753 B.C.) was probably in view. (CSB)

more altars. Again, Israel is compared to a luxuriant vine (cf 9:10). The more the people’s fruit increased, however, the more altars they built to worship Baal.

pillars. Stone pillars or columns marking places that Baal was worshiped. The Lord hated such pillars (Dt 16:22). (TLSB)

10:2 *Their heart is deceitful.* Israel formally called to God (8:2), but they dishonored him by pagan worship. (CSB)

DESTROY THEIR SACRED STONES – Some years later, the Lord used King Josiah of Judah to destroy these altars and pillars (2 Kgs 23:14-15). (TLSB)

10:3 *We have no king.* Such would soon be their condition when Assyria destroyed the nation. (CSB)

The people of Israel had no fewer than six kings within a period of c 20 years during the ministry of Hosea. This rapid succession no doubt prompts their cynical question. The basic problem, however, is not their lack of a king. Rather, it is their failure to fear the One who truly is King, the Lord. (TLSB)

The man whom they selected for the position against the Lord's will was unable to help them, in their emergency. (Kretzmann)

10:4 *They make many promises.* The last kings of Israel were notoriously corrupt and deceitful. (CSB)

empty oaths. Covenants, or contracts, between two parties were typically sealed with a binding oath (e.g., Eng: “so help me God”). In Hosea’s day, such oaths had become hollow. (TLSB)

poisonous weeds. These contrast to the luxurious vines mentioned in v 1, which yielded delicious fruit. Poisonous weeds, on the other hand, diminished the harvest and caused illness and even death for those consuming them. (TLSB)

Cp. Amos 6, 12. Since they themselves were not clear on what was right, their hazy notions reacted in a most unfavorable manner on themselves, like a poisonous weed overgrowing a field. (Kretzmann)

10:5 *Samaria.* The royal city of Israel. (CSB)

calf-idol of Beth Aven. The idol that Jeroboam set up at Bethel (see NIV text note; see also 1Ki 12:32–33). (CSB)

idolatrous priests. Foreign word for “priest,” not Hbr, is used here to emphasize that these were rogue priests who served Baal. (TLSB)

rejoiced ... departed. Up to this point, the people rejoiced and gave glory to Baal while worshipping his image. Soon, however, mourning rather than rejoicing would be heard, since the calf would soon be removed. (TLSB)

10:6 Ephraim. Israel, the northern kingdom. (CSB)

10:7 carried to Assyria. The calf would be carried off to Assyria with other Israelite treasures as tribute to the Assyrian monarch. (TLSB)

the great king. King of Assyria, either Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) or Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC). (TLSB)

The last king to rule in Samaria was Hoshea (732–722 BC). The Assyrians locked him up in prison for failing to pay tribute (2Ki 17:4). (TLSB)

like a twig on the face of the waters. The king is swept away, powerless to resist. (TLSB)

10:8 high places. See 4:13–14. (CSB)

The Canaanites usually chose high places, such as prominent hills, for the worship of their god Baal. Many in Israel did the same. (TLSB)

Thorn and thistle. Weeds would overgrow the altars on the high places once the Israelites were carried off into captivity. (TLSB)

Cover us!... Fall on us! Cries of utter despair; quoted by Jesus (Lk 23:30) and alluded to in Rev 6:16 (see Isa 2:19). (CSB)

People facing divine judgment will actually ask to be buried by a mountain rather than face the full fury of God's wrath. Jesus quotes these words while speaking to the weeping women on the road to Calvary. This cry also accompanies the opening of the sixth seal and judgment that follows. (TLSB)

That is the cry of the unbelievers, of the enemies of God, when they see the judgment approaching them, when it is too late for salvation. Cp. Is. 2, 19; Luke 23, 30. (Kretzmann)

10:9 Gibeah. As war came on Gibeah, so war and captivity would come on Israel. (CSB)

war against the unjust. Shalmaneser V became king of Assyria in 726 BC and attacked Israel a few years later. He put King Hoshea into prison and captured the capital, Samaria, in 722 BC after a three-year siege (2Ki 17:3–6). People as far away as Gibeah felt the effects of this crushing blow. (TLSB)

When such an abominable atrocity happened in the midst of the people of God, cp. chap. 9, 9; Judg. 19,22. (Kretzmann)

10:10 double iniquity. Israel's failure was complete. Cf v 15. (TLSB)

10:11 *trained heifer*. Up to now Ephraim (Israel) had been as contented as a young cow that ate while threshing grain. But now God would cause Israel (here called both Ephraim and Jacob) and Judah to do the heavy work of plowing and harrowing under a yoke—a picture of going into the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. (CSB)

loved to thresh. Threshing grain was easy work for an ox and opportunity for mouthfuls of fodder. (TLSB)

I spared her fair neck. Refers to the Lord's long-suffering and patience with Israel. Thus far, He had not made the yoke of the covenant onerous ("a pain in the neck," we say). (TLSB)

yoke ... plow ... harrow. The days of the Lord's forbearance are over. Henceforth, He will expect His people to shoulder the full weight of the covenant, even though they will chafe under its yoke, and toil so as to produce the fruit He desires. (TLSB)

10:12 Bern: "This knowledge is taught, not by the reading of books, but by grace; not by the letter, but by the spirit; not by learning, but by the practice of the commandments of God.... You see that the light of knowledge cannot be duly attained, except the seed of righteousness [first] enter the soul, so that from it may grow the grain of life, and not the mere husk of vainglory" (*SLSB*, p 162). (TLSB)

reap the fruit of unfailing love. If Israel would only do what was right ("unfailing love" translates the Hebrew word *hesed*; see note on 6:6), she would be blessed by God. (CSB)

In showing the true love toward all men and thereby being assured also of a benignant acceptance on the part of God. (Kretzmann)

break up your unplowed ground. Be no longer unproductive, but repentant, making a radical new beginning and becoming productive and fruitful. (CSB)

righteousness. God's covenant blessings that in righteousness he would shower on his people if they in righteousness were loyal to him, their covenant Lord. (CSB)

10:13 *deception*. Israel had been living a lie—and by lies (see 7:3; 10:4; 12:1). (CSB)

Root failure of Israel was a lack of trust in the Lord. This resulted in the false worship of Baal, general lawlessness, and a reliance on human resources for national security. (TLSB)

10:14 *tumult of war*. Punishment for Israel's failure to keep the covenant. (TLSB)

Shalman devastated Beth Arbel. The event is otherwise unknown, as are the names mentioned. Atrocities against civilians were common in ancient warfare (cf. 9:13; 13:16; 2Ki 8:12–13; Ps 137:8–9; Isa 13:16; Am 1:13; Na 3:10). (CSB)

Shalman. No other mention of a person named Shalman in the Bible or in other historical records; it may be a shortened name for the Assyrian king Shalmaneser. *Beth-arbel*. Location unknown, though possibly in Gilead, east of the Jordan River. (TLSB)

dashed in pieces. Imagery of the horrifying atrocities that accompany the tumult of war. Cf 13:16. (TLSB)

10:15 *great evil*. The worship of the golden calf (1Ki 12:27–29). Again and again, Israel broke the First Commandment, the root cause of all subsequent sins. (TLSB)

At dawn ... cut off. People normally look forward to dawn with the hope of a new beginning. In this case, however dawn marked the end: the king would be utterly cut off. (TLSB)

Chs 9–10 Hosea alternately speaks about Israel’s past and future. He reminds the people of how faithfully the Lord has treated His children. At the same time, however, Hosea warns Israel of impending judgment as a result of the nation’s apostasy. We need to hear similar prophetic exhortations today, not only to prevent us from slipping into thanklessness, but also to check our inclinations toward willful sins and outright rebellion. The prophetic word we need to hear most, however, is that in Christ God has rained down righteousness upon us, forgiving all sin, and thus we have the very hope of glory. • May all Your past faithfulness, O Lord, continually strengthen our conviction that on Judgment Day You will speak for us, not against us. Then we will eagerly long for the day when You will finally and completely free us from sin, death, and the devil. Amen. (TLSB)