

Hosea

Chapter 12

Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt. ² The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. ³ In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. ⁴ He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there— ⁵ the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown! ⁶ But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always. ⁷ The merchant uses dishonest scales; he loves to defraud. ⁸ Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin." ⁹ "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed feasts. ¹⁰ I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them." ¹¹ Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field. ¹² Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her he tended sheep. ¹³ The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him. ¹⁴ But Ephraim has bitterly provoked him to anger; his Lord will leave upon him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.

12:1 *wind*. See 8:7; Ecc 1:14. (CSB)

Israel's spiritual eating and drinking is frivolous, empty, and undiscerning. (TLSB)

east wind. See 13:15; Job 15:2; 27:21; Isa 27:8; Jer 18:17. Pursuing the wind symbolized Israel's futile foreign policy, which vacillated between Egypt (2Ki 17:4; Isa 30:6–7) and Assyria (cf. 5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 2Ki 17:3). (CSB)

a covenant with Assyria. Reflects Israel's vain pursuits to establish alliances with heathen nations such as Assyria. (TLSB)

oil is carried to Egypt. Olive trees did not grow in Egypt, so Israel exported olive oil to secure an ally against potential threats from Assyria in the east. (TLSB)

11:1–12:1 Even as the Lord continues to speak of His unrequited love and longing for Israel, His firstborn, He anguishes over the people's unceasing iniquity and willful disobedience. Unfortunately, many today follow the lead of Hosea's generation, closing their ears to God's Law and imagining that judgment will never come upon them. Hear the Father's roar! Tremble and return by faith in Christ, who bore God's judgment for us and for our peace. • Heavenly Father, I believe. Help me in my weakness and unbelief, for the sake of Your only-begotten Son, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

12:2 *charge*. See 4:1. (CSB)

God's punishment for sin is equitable. (TLSB)

A contest to be decided in a court of law, by a formal suit. (Kretzmann)

Jacob. Israel (see 10:11). The Lord indicted both kingdoms—all the descendants of Father Jacob. In their deceitfulness, Israel and Judah were living up to the name of their forefather (see NIV text note). (CSB)

Synonymous with "Israel" (cf Gn 32:28), of which Judah is a tribe (cf 10:11). (TLSB)

12:3–4 Various episodes of Jacob's life are recalled in order to encourage Israel to struggle with God in a good way, that they remain rightful heirs of the promise given to the patriarch. (TLSB)

12:3 *In the womb*. See Ge 25:26; 27:36. (CSB)

Recalls Jacob's struggle with Esau before the twins were born and alludes to the historical fact that Israel is ever contending and striving—even with God—just as its forefather Jacob did. (TLSB)

Showing subtlety even before he was born. (Kretzmann)

grasped his brother's heel. God's covenant people here relived the experiences of Father Jacob and now had to return to God, just as Jacob was called back to Bethel (Ge 35:1–15).

12:4 *struggled with the angel*. See Ge 32:22–28. (CSB)

Is thus identified with God, and the ancient conception of Him as the Angel of the Lord, the revelation of the Son of God in the Old Testament, is correct. (Kretzmann)

he wept. Jacob fervently asked for the angel's blessing. (TLSB)

Bethel. See Ge 28:12–19; 35:1–15. In Hosea's time, Bethel was the most important royal sanctuary in the northern kingdom (cf. Am 7:13). (CSB)

Jacob received a dream from God at Bethel, after which he erected a sacred pillar or stone as a place of worship (Gn 28:18–22). (TLSB)

12:5 *LORD God Almighty*. Paralleled in Am 3:13; 6:14; 9:5. (CSB)

Most exalted Ruler of the universe. (Kretzmann)

NAME OF RENOWN – Who had revealed Himself to the patriarchs as the God of salvation. (Kretzmann)

In addition to revealing Himself gloriously as the “God of hosts,” the Lord also revealed Himself personally to the patriarchs, promising that through Jacob’s descendants all the earth would be blessed (Gn 28:14). The faithful of Israel were continually to reinforce their community’s faith in the promises given their forefathers, i.e., memorialize the Lord who had revealed Himself to them. (TLSB)

12:6 BUT – Because the God of Israel, who had revealed Himself in the words of the prophets, was the God of the covenant known to the patriarchs. (Kretzmann)

love. Hebrew *hesed*; “mercy.” (CSB)

justice. See Am 5:15, 24; Mic 6:8. (CSB)

Observing the demands of brotherly love and justice over against their brethren. (Kretzmann)

wait continually for your God. An OT phrase meaning “patiently trust Him to act.” (TLSB)

In fearing Him, trusting Him, and loving Him above all things; for the summary of both tables of the Law is here understood. (Kretzmann)

12:7 merchant. As Hosea had played on the meaning of Jacob in v. 2, he here uses a wordplay on Canaan (the Hebrew for “merchant” sounds like Canaan) to charge that Israel was no better than a Canaanite. (CSB)

Rather, “Canaan,” the name here applied to the northern kingdom, since, like a dishonest merchant, he sought greatness by deceit and oppression. (Kretzmann)

false balances. Or, dishonest scales. (TLSB)

12:8 I am very rich. Riches brought a sense of self-sufficiency (cf. 10:13; Dt 32:15–18). (CSB)

not find in me any iniquity. Like a dishonest merchant, Ephraim (Israel) was confident that her deceitfulness (cf. 11:12) would not come to light. (CSB)

“all my gains shall find no transgression in me which would be sin.” This blindness toward their own guilt and the culpability of their sin was the big misfortune of the Israelites, for it hindered them from feeling sorry for their transgressions. (Kretzmann)

Ephraim was so steeped in sin that its people had convinced themselves that they had acquired their wealth justly. (TLSB)

they. Likely other nations. (TLSB)

12:9 *I am the LORD your God.* See 13:4; cf. Ex 20:2. (CSB)

tents. As during the desert journey long ago (cf. 2:14–15). (CSB)

By referring to the historical events of the exodus, God reminded Israel that He had elected them as His children, caused them to become a great nation, and then freed them from their servitude. The Lord was prepared to make Israel again “dwell in tents,” just as during the 40-year sojourn in the wilderness. (TLSB)

appointed feasts. Probably the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:42–44), which commemorated the desert journey. (CSB)

Feast of Booths, which commemorated Israel’s nomadic journey through the wilderness. (TLSB)

12:10 *spoke to the prophets.* See 6:5; Am 2:11; Heb 1:1. There had been ample warning. (CSB)

visions. Revelations (see Nu 12:6–8; Am 1:1). (CSB)

Not only had God provided ample warning through the sermons of the prophets, but He had also multiplied His disclosures to Israel in other forms of speech and literature. Iren: “God the Father is shown forth through all these [operations], the Spirit indeed working, and the Son ministering, while the Father was approving, and man’s salvation being accomplished” (ANF 1:489). (TLSB)

parables. Containing messages of warning from God (see 2Sa 12:1–4; Ps 78:2; Isa 5:1–7; Eze 17:2; 24:3). (CSB)

All this surely showed the interest which the Lord had in His people and should be an inducement to them to return to Him with a repentant heart. (Kretzmann)

12:11 *Gilead wicked.* See 6:8–9 and notes. Gilead was overrun by Assyria in 734–732 B.C. (2Ki 15:29). (CSB)

"If Gilead," representing the eastern half of the northern kingdom, "is worthlessness and iniquity," if it has reached the depths of moral ruin, then physical annihilation will certainly follow. (Kretzmann)

Gilgal. See 4:15; 9:15. The Hebrew contains a wordplay between “Gilgal” and “piles” (Hebrew *gallim*). Rather than assuring safety, the altars themselves would be destroyed. (CSB)

on a plowed field. Israelite farmers gathered into piles the stones turned up by their plows. (CSB)

stone heaps on the furrows. When they plowed their fields, Israelite farmers gathered the stones that they uncovered and piled them in the depressions. God warns that He will reduce altars used for idolatrous worship to mere piles of stones, resembling such landfill. (TLSB)

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12:12 Jacob fled from Esau to Paddan Aram (Ge 28:2, 5), serving Laban seven years for each wife (Ge 29:20–28), and then continued as Laban’s herdsman (Ge 30:31; 31:41). (CSB)

Jacob tended flocks for Rachel’s father, Laban, in exchange for her hand in marriage. (TLSB)

The purpose of this reference being to remind Israel of the labor and misery which their forefather endured in comparison with the blessings which the Lord was pouring out over his descendants. (Kretzmann)

Aram. Located northeast of Canaan in contemporary Syria. (TLSB)

Israel. Synonymous with “Jacob,” who received his new name after he wrestled with God (Gn 32:28). (TLSB)

12:13 *prophet.* Moses (cf. Nu 12:6–8; Dt 18:15; 34:10). (CSB)

Israelites were led out of Egypt by God’s greatest OT prophet, Moses. (TLSB)

cared for him. As Jacob had cared for Laban’s flocks, so the Lord cared for Israel during her desert wandering. Earlier leadership by the prophet Moses stands in contrast with Israel’s present disregard for prophets (cf. 4:5; 6:5; 9:7). (CSB)

guarded. Jacob’s tending of Laban’s flocks is contrasted with God’s shepherding of the Israelites through Moses’ leadership. (TLSB)

12:14 *Ephraim ... provoked him.* Despite warnings. (CSB)

bloodshed. Cf. 1:4; 4:2; 5:2; 6:8. This may refer either to violence against the prophets or to human sacrifice (cf. 2Ki 17:17). In legal passages (Lev 20:11–27), “their blood will be on their own heads” describes guilt. The prophet made a contrast between past divine preservation and present divine anger that would bring punishment. (CSB)

repay. See Isa 65:7. (CSB)

So that it would be charged to his account and kept there. When men refuse to repent and scorn all the efforts of the Lord aiming at their deliverance from sin and guilt, the

Lord leaves them to their fate and to the punishment which they invited upon themselves. (Kretzmann)

12:2–14 Rather than follow the example of their forefather Jacob, who in faith strove with God and so received a blessing, the Israelites of Hosea’s day set themselves in a fight against the Lord and so inevitably fell under a crushing defeat. This leads us to ask, “Are our spiritual struggles borne of faith or of unbelief?” Sadly, there are times that our spirits knowingly fight against the Lord and His Word rather than battle against our true enemies: sin, death, the flesh, and the devil. In such times, the Gospel’s promise calls to us: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself” (2Tm 2:13). • Give me discernment, O Lord, so that when I lash out in anger and despair, I do not make You my enemy. Because You lived, died, and rose again for me, teach me to know You as my ally. Amen. (TLSB)