

Hosea

Chapter 5

Judgment Against Israel

“Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house! This judgment is against you: You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. ² The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. ³ I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt. ⁴ “Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD. ⁵ Israel’s arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them. ⁶ When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them. ⁷ They are unfaithful to the LORD; they give birth to illegitimate children. Now their New Moon festivals will devour them and their fields. ⁸ “Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven lead on, O Benjamin. ⁹ Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain. ¹⁰ Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water. ¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols. ¹² I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah. ¹³ “When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores. ¹⁴ For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. ¹⁵ Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.”

5:1 Israel’s religious and political leaders will be held particularly responsible. The sentences they ought to have meted out to the wayward ones committed to their care will then be laid on them. (TLSB)

priests ... Israelites ... royal house. The three groups addressed were all responsible for maintaining justice, but it miscarried at their hands. (CSB)

snare ... net. Devices for catching animals and birds, here used as metaphors for those who by economic and legal devices took cruel advantage of innocent people (see Job 18:8–10; Ps 140:5; Pr 29:5; La 1:13). (CSB)

Mizpah. Either (1) Mizpah in Gilead east of the Jordan (Ge 31:43–49) or (2) Mizpah in Benjamin (1Sa 7:5–6; 10:17). (CSB)

Locations of pagan shrines. (TLSB)

Tabor. A mountain at the southeastern edge of the Jezreel Valley. Reference must have been to well-known events that illustrated Israel's corruption. (CSB)

5:2 *revolters.* Hbr *setim*, difficult to translate. Means "mutineers" or "rebels," but may also refer to Shittim (near the mouth of the Jordan River), where Israel agreed to serve Baal of Peor (Nu 25:1–4; cf Hos 9:10); Shittim would join Mizpah and Tabor (v 1) as the third site of Israelite apostasy. (TLSB)

Literally, "and into the corrupt doings of excesses they have sunken deeply," so that the leaders, in their open rebellion against the Lord have carried their transgressions to extremes and beyond. (Kretzmann)

discipline. A significant word in the prophets for God's corrective action against his people (see Isa 26:16; Jer 2:30; 5:3; 7:28). (CSB)

5:3 *Ephraim.* Israel, the northern kingdom. (CSB)

NOT HIDDEN FROM – He was well acquainted with the spirit which possessed them. (Kretzmann)

prostitution. See 1:2; 4:10, 18. (CSB)

5:4 Though the Lord has already tried to rescue His people and stands ready to forgive (e.g., 2:14–23), Israel remains immersed in rebellion. (TLSB)

Their deeds. See 4:9; 7:2; 9:15; 12:2. Persistent sin can make repentance impossible (see Jer 13:23; Jn 8:34; Ro 6:6, 16). (CSB)

spirit of prostitution. See 4:12. (CSB)

So that the service of idolatry occupies all their thoughts. (Kretzmann)

not acknowledge the LORD. See 4:6; Isa 1:2–4. (CSB)

For under the circumstances the knowledge of the true God is impossible for them. (Kretzmann)

5:5 *arrogance.* Stubborn rebellion against the Lord (see Dt 1:43; 1Sa 15:23; Ne 9:16; Job 35:12; Ps 10:2; Eze 16:56–57). (CSB)

"Majesty" or "excellence," but also pride in the negative sense (e.g., Ps 59:12; Pr 8:13; Is 16:6). (TLSB)

testifies. In the case God presented against his people. (CSB)

his face. Israel makes no attempt to hide its willful sin from God; we might call this sin “bald-faced.” (TLSB)

his guilt. Singular. Includes all the people of the wayward tribes. (TLSB)

stumble. Experience calamity (see 4:5). (CSB)

5:6 *seek the LORD.* Go to him with prayer and sacrifices (see 3:5; Am 5:4–5). (CSB)

Israel might halfheartedly try to appease God, but He will not be deceived (cf 1Sm 15:10–23). (TLSB)

not find him. Offering sacrifices in their situation was useless (see 2:7; cf. Isa 1:10–14; Am 5:21–25; Mic 6:6–8). The Lord would be “found” by Israel only when she turned to him with integrity of heart (see 3:5; 5:15; Dt 4:29–31; Jer 29:13). (CSB)

withdrawn. Though God promises that He will eventually gather and restore His people (2:14–23; 11:8–9; 14:4–7), He will remain withdrawn from them so long as they remain rebellious. This recalls not only the names of Hosea’s children (No Mercy and Not My People) but also other threats of withdrawal (e.g., Dt 31:16–18). (TLSB)

5:7 *unfaithful.* See Jer 5:11. (CSB)

illegitimate children. Children they had prayed to the Baals for and had credited to their fertility rites. (CSB)

Those who have abandoned the Lord and sacrificed to Baal have relinquished their birthright. This again recalls the symbolic name of Hosea’s second son (Not My People). (TLSB)

New Moon. Usually a festive occasion (see, e.g., 2:11; 1Sa 20:5, 18; Am 8:5; Col 2:16), but now a time of judgment. Or the meaning may be that one month would be sufficient to accomplish their punishment. (CSB)

New-moon sacrifices are equated with impending judgment. (TLSB)

The new moon will devour them." Their hypocritical festal offerings were so little appreciated and acceptable in the sight of God that, instead of bringing them deliverance, they were rather a cause of their ruin. Many a person will find out that his self-appointed worship of God will bring down upon him the wrath of the Lord instead of His mercy. (Kretzmann)

5:8 Some interpreters suggest that the Aramean (Syrian)-Ephraimite (Israelite) war (2Ki 16:5–9; Isa 7:1–9) forms the background of this oracle. (CSB)

trumpet. Made of a ram’s horn, which here sounds the alarm that an army is approaching (see 8:1). (CSB)

Hbr describes a trumpet blast that commenced hostilities and served as a call to arms (Jsh 6:4–5). At other times, it summoned the people to a celebration (Nu 10:7). (TLSB)

Gibeah ... Ramah ... Beth-aven. Towns in southern Israel on the road from south to north. (TLSB)

Gibeah. Two miles north of Jerusalem. (CSB)

Ramah. North of Gibeah. (CSB)

Another city located on an eminence, both of them most suitable for giving signals on account of their lofty situation. (Kretzmann)

Beth Aven. See note on 4:15. (CSB)

Bethel, on the border of the northern kingdom. (Kretzmann)

lead on, O Benjamin. Thought to be the Benjamite war cry (see Jdg 5:14). (CSB)

That is, the danger is coming, the enemy is close behind. (Kretzmann)

5:9 EPHRAIM – The entire country of the ten tribes. (Kretzmann)

waste. See Jer 25:11, 38. (CSB)

day of punishment. Likely refers to the Syro-Ephraimite war that pitted Israel against Judah, weakened the northern tribes, and led to defeat by the Assyrians in 722 BC. *punishment.* Hbr *yakach*; can mean “to decide,” “to reprove,” or “to reason” (cf Is 1:18). (TLSB)

5:10 *princes.* Royal family and military leaders. (TLSB)

move boundary stones. Judah had seized Israelite territory (1Ki 15:16–22; see Dt 19:14; 27:17; Pr 22:28; 23:10; Isa 5:8; Mic 2:2). (CSB)

Namely, by removing the boundary between the worship of the true God and idolatry, which should have been kept apart forever. (Kretzmann)

my wrath. See 13:11. (CSB)

In an overwhelming degree, in proportion to the greatness of their offense. (Kretzmann)

5:11 PURSUING IDOLS – it thought good to follow idol-images, it clung to the calf-worship of Jeroboam throughout its existence. (Kretzmann)

filth. Uncleanness and consequent destruction. God will judge Israel esp for its drunkenness and sexual sins (cf 4:18). (TLSB)

5:12 Dissolution caused by inner corruption. (TLSB)

moth ... rot. Both consume (see Job 13:28). (CSB)

moth. Calling someone “moth-eaten” emphasized that person’s fragility (Is 50:9; 51:8). *dry rot*. Caused by worms or fungi, applied to decay in the bones (Pr 12:4; Hab 3:16). (TLSB)

Both of these being figurative of destructive powers, which steadily eat into the very marrow of things. (Kretzmann)

5:13 *sickness ... sores*. Metaphors for the national wounds the two nations had suffered at the hands of their enemies (see Isa 1:5–6; 17:4, 11; Jer 30:12–13). (CSB)

The Northern Kingdom would see the judgment that God brings on them. (TLSB)

turned to Assyria. Assyrian records tell of the tribute paid to Tiglath-Pileser III by the Israelite kings Menahem and Hoshea (cf. 2Ki 15:19–20; 17:3). (CSB)

To appease Assyria and protect their power for a brief time, the kings of Israel would pay tribute to Assyria (2Ki 17:3). (TLSB)

great king. Specific reference unclear, though it almost certainly refers to one of the Assyrian rulers of the late eighth century BC, to whom Israel turned for help. The reference may be intentionally general in order to condemn the futility of turning to a pagan king. (TLSB)

not able to cure. The alliances were worthless. (CSB)

5:14 *lion*. See 13:7. The Lord might use human agents (Isa 10:5–6), but he would be responsible for Israel’s punishment, from which there was no escape (see Isa 5:29; 42:22; Am 9:1–4; Mic 5:8). (CSB)

Though Israel and Judah were right to dread Assyria’s might, the Lord is the real power they should have feared. (Note the contrasts with God’s likeness to the silent moth in v 12.) Ironically, 11:10 compares the Lord with a lion that leads, gathers, and defends Israel. (TLSB)

Who takes hold of his prey and tears it to pieces. (Kretzmann)

I, even I. The impending destruction of Israel and Judah, though coming by the hands of other nations, will, in fact, be the result of the Lord’s will. (TLSB)

5:15 *go back to my place*. God threatened to withdraw from Israel until, out of desperation, she truly repented. This idea sets the stage for the prophet’s next theme. (CSB)

Pictures a lion retiring to its den after the hunt. Due to the people's ongoing apostasy, God's place is now far from Israel. (TLSB)

SEEK MY FACE – This is a truth which is found also in other passages of the Bible, namely, that men seek out the Lord when they are in trouble, they pour out a prayer when His chastening is upon them. Cp. Is. 26, 16. (Kretzmann)

When Israel repents, God will welcome her back. This good news prepares for 6:1–3, where Israel is encouraged to return to a gracious Lord (cf Lk 15:11–32). (TLSB)

Ch 5 God warns Israel and Judah that putting their hope in foreign kings is useless. As long as they continue in idolatry, they may seek God, but they will not find Him; only in repentance can they be healed. We similarly try to play both sides of the fence, claiming to be children of God while living as friends of the world. It is a great comfort, therefore, to know that the Lord stands as near as the word of Absolution. • Lord Jesus, spare us from the judgment we deserve, for we admit that we, too, have turned to other gods. Accordingly, work in us true repentance, return us to You, and lead us to Your side by Your gracious Son. Amen. (TLSB)