

Hosea

Chapter 12

Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence; they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.

12:1 *wind*. See 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)

The LORD's Indictment of Israel and Judah

2 The LORD has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. 3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. 4 He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us—5 the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name: 6 “So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.” 7 A merchant, in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress. 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.” 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. 10 I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables. 11 If there is iniquity in Gilead, they shall surely come to nothing: in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls; their altars also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the field. 12 Jacob fled to the land of Aram; there Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep. 13 By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded. 14 Ephraim has given bitter provocation; so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

12:2 *indictment*. God's punishment for sin is equitable. (TLSB)

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)

took 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). (CSB)

12:4 *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, THE God of hosts*. Paralleled in Am 3:13; 6:14; 9:5. (CSB)

memorial name. 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 *love*. Hebrew *hesed*; “mercy.” (CSB)

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

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

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)

false balances. Or, dishonest scales. (TLSB)

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

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

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 feast. 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)

12:11 *iniquity in Gilead.* Gilead was overrun by Assyria in 734–732 B.C. (2Ki 15:29). (CSB)

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 the furrows of the field. Israelite farmers gathered into piles the stones turned up by their plows. (CSB)

stone heaps. 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)

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 ... provocation.* Despite warnings. (CSB)

bloodguilt. 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)

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)