

Hosea

Chapter 5

Punishment Coming for Israel and Judah

Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. 2 And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them. 3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled. 4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD. 5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them. 6 With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them. 7 They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD; for they have borne alien children. Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields. 8 Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin! 9 Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure. 10 The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water. 11 Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth. 12 But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah. 13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound. 14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue. 15 I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress 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 ... Israel ... house of king. 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 me – He was well acquainted with the spirit which possessed them. (Kretzmann)

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

not know 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 *pride.* 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)

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

follow you, 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)

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

5:11 *filth of idols.* 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)

went 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 *return again 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)