

VII. *Cooking and Flying Lessons*

18-Jan-04

Hosea 7:3-16

Bentley Chapters 10-11

Theme: Hosea exhorts us to return to the Lord God Most High; we are to return to our loving Husband.

Key Verses: Hosea 7:7, 11 – ⁷They are all hot, like an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings have fallen. None among them calls upon Me. ... ¹¹Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense—they call to Egypt, they call to Assyria.

Review

Last week we looked at Hosea chapter 6 and the first two verses of chapter 7. Hosea 6 picks up on the themes introduced in chapters 4 and 5. The chapter starts out with an apparent “song of repentance.” However, as we discussed, this repentance is incomplete; it is a repentance that does not count. Although they used Biblical words such as “return” and “acknowledge”, there is no reference here to their sin. Israel shows no grief over their sin, no commitment to turn away from their sin and forsake it. Their remorse is over the impact that God’s chastisement is having on them. They treat God as a “forgiveness machine,” a tool to be used rather than a Lord to be worshipped. If they pull the right lever, if they mouth the right words, then everything will be all right. A hollow understanding of God is a characteristic of a post-Christian society. For repentance to be real, we must turn away from sin, forsake the sin, turn toward God, and acknowledge Him and His righteousness with the aim of restoring a right relationship with Him.

We can tell that the repentance is not real, because the rest of the chapter reiterates the charge that God first brought against His people in Hosea 4:1 – “There is no *faithfulness*, no *love*, no *acknowledgement of God* in the land” (4:1b, NIV). Their love for God is like the morning mist – it does not last or stand the test of time. This fleeting love leads to vain religion. They try to substitute empty religious rituals for a meaningful knowledge of God and a relationship with Him. God says, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God more than burnt offerings (6:6, NIV). True knowledge of God comes through confession of sin, practice of righteousness, and a transformation of the heart. We need to be careful to worship God with our hearts, and not just “go through the motions.”

Hosea illustrates the lack of faithfulness with a contemporary example of covenant breaking. It seems that a group of priests had committed terrible crimes on the road to Shechem, including murder. Not only have these priests failed in their duties to conduct worship properly and to instruct the people in the correct knowledge of God, but they are flagrantly breaking God’s commandments and leading the nation into gross sin. These wicked priests of Hosea’s day were like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. And they are like those in our day that profess allegiance to God, but prove through their actions that their hearts are far from Him. The Pharisees lived outwardly moral lives. They were the local “paragons of virtue.” But that didn’t stop Christ from looking at their inward heart and finding it as dead as a whitewashed tomb. Christ desires mercy and not sacrifice. He desires the right attitude of a submissive heart rather than the externals of religion: of Sunday school attendance and tithing, of Bible study participation and teaching. Those external things *are* important to the extent that they impact the heart. Is your heart right with God today? When you sin, do you confess your sin and turn away from it? Or do you have a repentance that does not admit your sin, a repentance that does not forsake your sin, a repentance like that in Hosea 6, a repentance that does not count?

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Introduction

Today in Hosea chapter 7 the focus will be on a series of four images. The first two, the burning over (3-7) and the half-baked bread (8-10) have to do with cooking. The second two, the senseless dove (11-14) and the broken bow (15-16) have to do with flying (the bow relates via flying arrows). So, this morning we are going to have some cooking and flying lessons. The common thread in all of these images has to do with this question: Where do they turn? To whom do they call? Hosea calls us to return to the Lord God Most High, to call on His name, to return to our loving Husband (overall book theme). However, as we'll see this morning, Israel was turning everywhere but toward God, they were calling on anyone but the Lord. And thus they were like a burning oven, half-baked bread, a senseless dove, and a broken bow.

Exposition

A. Cooking Lessons (7:3-10)

1. The Burning Oven (7:3-7)

The first image in this chapter is that of the burning oven. This simile is intertwined with a story that the image helps to explain. First, let's try and understand the image of the burning oven in verses 4, 6, and 7, and then we can begin to apply it to the story to which it relates.

The picture is of a wood-fired oven used by a baker to make bread. "Like an oven heated by a baker—he ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened" (4b). Likely this oven was a brick or adobe oven or kiln with a shelf in it for baking, with the coals down below. The fire in the oven is prepared, and then the fire is banked to smolder overnight, slowly heating the oven in preparation for the morning baking after the kneaded dough has finished rising. The dough is likely left in this warm (but not hot) oven to rise overnight. In the morning, the baker will stir up the coals of the fire in order to bake the bread. However, there is a problem with this picture. "Their baker sleeps all night; in the morning it [the oven] burns like a flaming fire" (6b). It seems as if while the baker sleeps, the fire, which should have been damped down, begins to intensify so that by morning it is blazing. The dough which should have been rising in the warm oven has now been consumed by the fire in the burning oven.

This picture of the burning oven is applied to a story of political intrigue. It seems that the villains of the story (the "they" of verses 3&4) are likely still the wicked priests that we looked at last week in 6:7-7:2. There does not seem to be any indication of a change in subject. In fact, the wicked plot portrayed here in this passage on the burning oven seems consistent with the murderous band of priests on the road to Shechem. This company of priests has gotten into the confidence of the king and the royal court. "They make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies" (7:3). Perhaps the "Shechem Road Affair" was instigated by the king himself. Maybe the king and these priests were co-conspirators. Whatever the political situation, it seems as if they were as close as a den of thieves. And then somehow there was a falling out.

In verse 4, we see the oven imagery applied to these priests: "They are all adulterers. Like an oven heated by a baker—he ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened" (4). Here, the priests are called adulterers. Adultery, of course, is a common theme in Hosea and refers both to physical and spiritual infidelity. In this case, it may refer to their infidelity to the king, as they conspire to assassinate him against their vows of fealty. The conspirators are

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likened to this oven. They appear to have their emotions banked and under control, but as the night passes, their passions will blaze out of control.

The setting of the plot is given in verse 5. “In the day of our king, princes have made him sick, inflamed with wine; he stretches out his hand with scoffers” (5). The NIV translation gives us a bit more information: “On the day of the festival of our king ...” (5a, NIV). The setting is apparently a party or festival thrown by the king. Perhaps it is a celebration of the anniversary of his coronation. In any event, the wine flows freely, and the king’s chief counselors (princes) get drunk. Undoubtedly the king has had too much to drink as well; he is deprived of both the advice of his would-be counselors and his own sense of sound judgment. All seems to be going according to plan. While the scene descends into debauchery, the conspirators screw up their nerve: “They prepare their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait; their baker [or their anger] sleeps all night; in the morning it burns like a flaming fire. They are all hot, like an oven” (6-7a). Eaton describes the scene: “The would-be assassins entertained the king. As the night wore on, the king became more helpless but the assassins became more wildly ambitious. By the early hours of the morning they were in a burning rage against the king. In his drunken foolishness the king was welcoming the friendship of those who were about to kill him.”

With the passions of the conspirators blazing up into a raging inferno like the burning oven, they leap into action: “They are all hot, like an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings have fallen” (7ab). The assassination has been accomplished; the king has fallen. It is not clear if this story relates to a specific incident in Israel’s history, or simply characterizes the last 30 years of the nation’s existence. In those last 30 years, Israel had six kings, four of whom were assassinated and replaced by their assassin.

If this story does relate a specific historical incident, it may be the assassination of Pekahiah by Pekah in 740 BC. “In the fiftieth year of Azariah [Uzziah] king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Pekah the son of Remaliah, an officer of his, conspired against him and killed him in Samaria, in the citadel of the king’s house, along with Argob and Arieah; and with him were fifty men of Gilead. He killed him and reigned in his place. Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (2 Kgs. 15:23-26). Notice that Pekah killed Pekahiah in the citadel of the king’s house, along with several others who may have been chief advisers. Pekah also had fifty men of Gilead with him. They may be the band of murderous priests that plagued the Shechem Road near Adam in Gilead. To get that many men that close to the king in his own palace may very well have taken the type of intrigue described in Hosea 7. Through this act of treachery, Pekah became the penultimate king of Israel.

No matter who is the unfortunate king or kings of Hosea 7, the remaining question is this: What is the bottom line of the burning oven imagery? Hosea gives the answer at the end of verse 7: “None among them calls upon Me” (7c). What a sad end to a sad story! I’m not exactly sure who the “none” of this conclusion is referring to. It may be the kings of Israel, the ones who have fallen, the ones who did evil in the sight of the Lord and followed in the sins of Jeroboam I who caused Israel to sin. It may be the priestly conspirators, who chose direct political action to remove the king rather than relying on God to deal with the situation. It may be a blanket statement referring to all of Israel. Irregardless of the specific “who,” it is clear that “all” in this story are guilty: “None among them calls upon Me.”

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Once again, we see that God's people have completely lost sight of God. They are so involved in partisan politics to solve their problems that God is not even on their radar screen. Perhaps this band of murderers had lent their political support to King Menahem, who had seized the throne by murdering Shallum one month after Shallum had murdered Zechariah the son of Jeroboam II. While they supported Menahem, his son Pekahiah may have proved to be a disappointment. Since they couldn't control Pekahiah, they supported Pekah in his murderous plot. Perhaps when the political winds changed again with the incursions of Assyria into Israel, they switched support to Pekah's murderer, Hoshea. Regardless of the politics, the important point to see here is that politics has trumped faith. Who do they call on to solve their problems? They call on Menahem or Pekahiah or Hoshea. Anyone but God.

Today, while we may claim to play political hardball, we usually go out for character assassination rather than just plain old assassination. But the lessons here are the same. Who do we call on to solve our problems? "If we could just get more conservative justices on the Supreme Court, then we could overturn *Roe v. Wade*." "If we could have this president or that senator, or those congressmen, then we could reinstate the Ten Commandments, prayer in school, faith-based programs, etc. etc." I'm not saying it's wrong for Christians to be involved in politics. We should claim politics for Christ, just as we claim all spheres of life for our Lord. But it is when we substitute political action for prayer that we begin to lose our way. A post-Christian society has no need of God in the arena of ideas – all problems can be solved without divine intervention. But it is divine intervention that is most needed. We need to pray and pray continuously for God's grace in our country and in our church. Let it not be said of Covenant PCA that "none among them calls upon Me."

2. *The Half-Baked Bread (7:8-10)*

The second cooking lesson is in verse 8: "Ephraim is a cake unturned" (8b, NKJV); "Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over" (8b, NIV). The picture is of the same oven as described previously, this time with a piece of pita bread baking in it. The cook leaves the bread unattended, and the bread is never turned over to cook evenly on both sides. As a result, the bread is undercooked dough on one side and burnt to a crisp on the other. The bread is inedible, it is worthless, it is not fit for any purpose except to be discarded. In the vernacular, it is "half-baked." Ephraim is like this half-baked bread.

Why is Ephraim half-baked? Verse 8 tells us: "*Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake unturned*" (8). Israel was called out by God to be separate from the nations, to be set apart, to be holy. "Be holy as I am holy" (Lev 19:2). That was their calling. But they rejected it. They wanted to be like the other nations. They wanted to blend in, have the same culture, the same religion, the same values. This is not a new desire in the history of God's people; they always wanted to be this way. For example, the prophet Samuel is asked by the people of Israel, "Now make us a king to judge us *like all the nations*" (1 Sam. 8:5b). Samuel thought he was being rejected by the people, but God tells him differently: "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7b). The history of Israel from that point onward (and even from before) was the struggle between staying separate from the nations and becoming exactly like the other nations. Ultimately, they got their desire. As the old saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it!" Their distinctive God-ordained culture was subsumed into the pagan world around them. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria, deported, and mixed up with the other nations, forever losing their cultural identity.

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The Church of Jesus Christ has the same calling as ancient Israel. Christ prays as follows: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (Jn. 17:15-16). The apostle John tells us: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn. 2:15-17). We are called to be in the world but not of the world. We are called to live a different lifestyle than the pagan culture around us; we are to be separate and holy, as God is holy. Sad to say, in a post-Christian society, the culture of the Church is often indistinguishable from the culture of the world. The Church wants to look like the world in order to be appealing to it, but usually it works the other way. The culture of the world looks appealing to the church, and the Church begins to be assimilated, losing its distinctive character, its separation, its call to holiness. It becomes a half-baked loaf of bread.

How does this slide happen? We see the answer to that question in verse 9 as the metaphor is extended: “Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it” (9). Gray hair is usually respected in the Bible, but in this case a more accurate translation of the term would be a “fungus” or “mold.” Not only is Israel half-baked, but they are moldy too! Like the moth that brings rotteness (5:12), Israel is moldy, decaying, rotting away. Again, the decay is caused by their fascination with pagan culture. But the cultural decay is happening so slowly as to be imperceptible. “Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it.” They are unaware of the decay. It is a long slow descent into the abyss.

This is what happens to churches and denominations that go liberal. The decay doesn’t happen over night. Rome took hundreds of years of internal decay before it fell from within. The northern kingdom of Israel lasted over two hundred years before the Assyrian captivity. And many churches and denominations take decades to fall away from the truth into liberalism. It happens slowly, imperceptibly; a small compromise here, a minor concession there. And little by little, bit by bit, the decay happens. Each individual decision seems the right thing to do. There is a PLE – perfectly logical explanation – for every step. And yet, the end result is a sapping of the spiritual energy, strength, and vitality of the church, as it embraces the pagan culture of the world that surrounds us. Let us be clear – the PCA is not immune to this slow slippery slope. We need to be constantly alert to guard the purity of our confession, of our worship, and of our faith. Or we could wake up one morning to find that we too are a useless moldy, half-baked loaf of bread.

What is the bottom line result of this moldy, half-baked bread? It is the same as with the burning oven. “And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, but they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all this” (10). Israel is too proud, too arrogant, too self-sufficient to return to God. Instead, they attempt to emulate the nations around them. “Assyria is strong,” they say. “Let’s be like them.” But the end result is the opposite: their strength is devoured. In their zeal to be like the other nations, they have lost the one thing that sets them apart and above the other nations. They are no longer separate, set apart, holy. Let us learn from ancient Israel. We need to beware of the slippery slope of compromise with the world. Let us constantly be turning and returning to the Lord in prayer, in confession of sin, in submission to His Word. The moral

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culture and character of the Church of Jesus Christ needs to be separate and distinct from the world, or else we are no better than a rotten piece of half-baked bread.

B. Flying Lessons (7:11-16)

1. *The Senseless Dove (7:11-14)*

Thus far we have had two cooking lessons – the lesson of the burning oven and the lesson of the moldy, half-baked bread. The burning oven showed us that relying on internal politics instead of on God will not save us. The moldy, half-baked bread showed us that imitating the culture of the pagans around us instead of staying separate and holy like God will not save us. The next two images will give us some flying lessons. We see the first of these in verse 11: “Ephraim is like a silly dove, without sense” (11a). The message of the senseless dove is that relying on international diplomacy rather than God will not save us.

Normally, the image of a dove in scripture is a symbol of peace. We think of the dove with the olive branch in Genesis 8:11 symbolizing that God’s war with creation was over. But the dove has a different meaning here. Ephraim is pictured as a senseless bird, flitting from one extreme to the other in search of safety and security. We would say that Israel has become “scatter-brained” or “bird-brained.” “Having forsaken God, who was her only true source of national security, Israel now does not know where to turn” (Boice). In this case, Israel is trusting in first Egypt and then Assyria for safety and security. “They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria” (11b).

The problem, of course, is that regardless of which foreign power they turn to, it will not save them. In fact, they are running away from the very one who is salvation. As a result, the metaphor extended and God becomes a dove hunter who will capture the dove to inflict punishment upon it. “Wherever they go, I will spread My net on them; I will bring them down like birds of the air; I will chastise them according to what their congregation has heard. Woe to them, for they have fled Me! Destruction to them, because they have transgressed against Me! Though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against Me” (12-13).

The first time we encountered Assyria in Hosea (5:13), it was a stand alone reference. But here in 7:11 Assyria is paired with Egypt. Indeed, Assyria is closely related to Egypt in most of the other references to it later in the book of Hosea. At first, this might seem odd, since at this time Assyria and Egypt were most definitely very different politically. And yet, thematically, or better said, theologically, there is a definite connection between these two places. If you remember our study of Abraham last summer, I noted that there were two main kinds of exoduses in Scripture: northern and southern. You either have to take an exodus from the south, from Egypt or Philistia, or north from Babylon, from Assyria, from Ur of the Chaldees. The exodus pattern in Scripture is a bigger type that foreshadows the victory of Christ over sin and His leading us free from the kingdom of sin and darkness into His kingdom of light. And in order for there to be an exodus, there has to be a captivity. All mankind are slaves in the kingdom of sin and need to be redeemed. This was pictured for us in the great Exodus, where Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to service to the Lord at Mt. Sinai.

So here in Hosea, the references to both Assyria and Egypt recall to us the great themes of captivity and the need for redemption through exodus. They had previously been redeemed in the Exodus, but they had backslidden to the point of needing a new redemption (cp. vs. 13b). The northern kingdom of Israel is a captive of their own sin, their own lust, their own physical and spiritual harlotry. Their political policies on international affairs may have them vacillate between supporting Assyria and supporting Egypt, but ultimately the picture is one of captivity

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to sin, pictured by Egypt and Assyria. You'll notice that the last line of verse 16 talks about the derision of captivity in the land of Egypt. Again, this is a theological picture of captivity requiring an exodus. In history, the northern kingdom is in fact taken captive by Assyria (not Egypt) and deported from the land, but theologically, either Egypt or Assyria would represent the same principle: Israel was a captive of sin and needed to be rescued by exodus. Unfortunately, the northern kingdom of Israel never received such an exodus. In God's providence, it was reserved for the southern kingdom of Judah, after their captivity to the northern power of Babylon some 150 years later.

Again, the bottom line statement for the senseless dove is the same as for the two cooking lessons: "They did not cry out to Me with their heart when they wailed upon their beds. They assemble together for grain and new wine, they rebel against Me" (14). Their senseless foreign policy did not solve their problems. It only hardened their hearts against the Lord. Rather than crying out to the Lord, they wailed for their pagan gods, perhaps on the beds of the fertility-cult prostitutes. Rather than assembling together in godly Worship of the creator, all they are interested in is satisfying their physical hunger. The lesson for us is to rely upon Christ for redemption, rather than on worldly powers. Remember, in a post-Christian world the pressure is on the church to turn to anything else, everything else, but God. We need to return to our God, our redeemer, our loving Husband.

2. The Broken Bow (7:15-16)

The final lesson we have in Hosea chapter 7 is in verse 16: "They are like a treacherous bow" (16b). I've called this a "flying lesson" because the purpose of the bow is to shoot arrows which fly through the air." A bit of a stretch, perhaps. Anyway, the picture is of relying upon strength of arms in battle, only to have the weapons fail in the midst of the struggle. The picture of the broken bow thus points out the futility in relying upon our own strength to save us. Whatever strength Israel had was given to them by God, and yet they chose to use it in a futile attempt to rebel against the Lord. "Though I disciplined and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against Me; they return but not to the Most High; they are like a treacherous bow" (15-16b). Again we see this constant refrain – "they return but *not* to the Most High." Israel turns everywhere but the one place they need to go – to the Lord Most High.

Again, the application to the church is quite clear: if we rely on our own strength instead of the Lord's, we will snap like a faulty bow. If we want the church to grow, we need to do so through prayer and faithfulness to the word, not slick advertising, watering down the gospel, or entertaining instead of worshiping God. We need to commit ourselves and our church to the Lord through prayer. Anything less is relying on our own strength, and we are doomed to fail.

The final word to Israel is not pretty: "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the cursings of their tongue. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt" (16cd). In a vain attempt to save themselves, the kings of Israel fall one by one. The end result is a return to captivity. Although the text says "this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt" the historical ending was a scattering in Assyria. But theologically the thought is the same – a return to physical captivity, picturing their slavery to sin and their rejection of the Lord God.

Conclusion

In the two cooking lessons and the two flying lessons, we've seen a variety of ways in which Israel – and the post-Christian church – turns to survive. The burning oven speaks to internal

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politics or power struggles. The moldy, half-baked bread speaks to assimilation into society. The senseless dove speaks to reliance upon external powers. And the broken bow speaks to reliance upon our own strength. All of these strategies are doomed to fail. In every case, we are to call upon God; we are to return to the Lord.

I've stated the theme for Hosea chapter 7 as follows: "Hosea exhorts us to return to the Lord God Most High; we are to return to our loving Husband." In this chapter, God is not referred to as "Husband." However, I've chosen to include the term "Husband" in the theme for this chapter, because returning to God as our loving Husband is the overall theme of the book of Hosea. In chapter 7 He is called "the Lord their God" (10) and "the Most High" (16). But of special note are the personal pleas of God in chapter 7. "None among them calls upon Me" (7). "They have fled from Me! ... They have transgressed against Me! ... They have spoken lies about Me" (13). "They did not cry out to Me ... They rebel against Me ... They devise evil against Me" (14-15). Ultimately, it comes down to a personal relationship with a personal God. God is not a mechanical instrument to be used or manipulated. He is not some "cosmic deity" to call upon only when needed. He *is* the Lord God. He *is* the Most High. But He is also a "*Me*" that communicates with us. He is knowable. Hosea urges us to know the Lord. We must know Him personally and intimately, as a wife knows a husband. We must call on Him; we must return to Him; we must return to our loving Husband.

Next week: Lesson 8 – "Sow the Wind and Reap the Whirlwind" – Hosea 8:1-14 – Bentley chapters 12-13

Close in Prayer.