

(This is another fairly long lesson! However, you will learn so much and be drawn closer to the Lord as you pray and then do the lesson. It will bless you!)

Israel's Vulnerability!

God brought Israel into a land 'flowing with milk and honey'. God is good to his people and never provides for them in a [stingy or miserly] way. 'Fertility' is his specialty. He knows how to give life and energy of every kind. The people of Israel were like a luxuriant vine in their prosperity. Quite recently they had had a taste of how prosperous the land could be, for the days of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25) were affluent and easy, although the poor did not get much of a share of the affluence.

But affluence did not result in Israel's gratitude to God. They simply became more self-confident in their idolatrous ways. The more its fruit increased the more they used their wealth to increase the altars to pagan deities. The more the land prospered, the more they adorned 'sacred stone', upright standing stone pillars erected in honor of a god.

Their sin was misusing God's gifts. When sinners incur no judgement but rather get prosperous it ought to lead them to gratitude. The goodness of God leads us toward repentance (Romans 2:4). But more often than not a hard and impenitent heart is fortified in its godlessness. There is self-deception in this, 'Their heart is deceitful' (Jeremiah 17:9). WE deceive ourselves into thinking the goodness of God is indifference. There may be a lengthy time-gap before God acts but the idolater is 'storing up wrath' (Romans 2:5). Soon the implements of idolatry will be broken down.¹

1. What did Israel's increased fruitfulness/prosperity result in them doing (v. 1)?

2. Read Matthew 19:16-24 along with Matthew 6:24; Matthew 13:22; and 1 Timothy 6:9-10.
 - a. Why do you think that prosperity caused the nation of Israel to turn away from God and turn to other gods (v. 1-2)?
 - b. Read Jeremiah 17:9. What makes wealth (money, material possessions) so deceptive?
 - c. How was the rich young ruler deceived by his wealth and what was the result?

From earliest days Israel had been gripped with the conviction that God was a king. The arrangement of the camp of Israel in the wilderness was like that of an army with the tabernacle as the royal pavilion at its center. The ark within the tabernacle was God's throne. Samuel regarded the demand for a king as wicked because 'Yahweh your God was your king' (1 Samuel 12:12). Now the vision of God's kingship has so faded that **they are not acknowledging Yahweh as king at all**. Again, their view of God is that of a prosperity cult; 'what does he do for us?' is their only question. Evidently, they felt Baal might do better than Yahweh and it was to the pagan god that they were giving the title 'king'. **They no longer viewed Yahweh as having power over their enemies, or over the forces of nature, or over the destiny of the nations.**

In the words 'We do not acknowledge a king' the parallel line shows that God is the king concerned. The people valued human kingship, both that of Israel and that of Assyria, but they virtually renounced the kingship of Yahweh. **When the people of God are in serious decline they doubt God's power. They forget their own history in which God has acted powerfully, and they begin to look to other entities as the source of strength and the hope for deliverance.**ⁱⁱ

3. Read carefully the sentences above that have been emboldened. Israel's wealth and prosperity caused them as a nation to lose sight of God. Their so-called religion was man-made, in that, they built their own altars in Dan and Bethel. They no longer traveled to worship Yahweh in Jerusalem where the Ark of the Covenant resided in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of God. As their wealth increased, they built more altars to false gods all over Israel. Compare America to Israel, the northern kingdom, by the following accusations:

- a. They are not acknowledging Yahweh as king at all (list some ways that we have pushed God out of society, government, schools, etc.):

- b. They no longer viewed Yahweh as having power over their enemies, or over the forces of nature or over the destiny of the nations (consider our trust in NATO and the United Nations instead of God; the theory of global warming):

- c. When the people of God are in serious decline, they doubt God's power (Is America in decline economically, morally, spiritually, and militarily?):

- d. They begin to look to other entities as the source of strength and the hope for deliverance (what has our nation turned to for strength and hope):

4. Read Romans 3:18.

- a. What results when people “do not fear the Lord” (v. 3-8 cf. Isaiah 59:7-9)?

- b. If you were to poll a large sample of Americans, including church members, and ask them how they feel about God, what type of response do you think you would hear? (“I don't fear God at all because I don't really believe in God”; “I don't really think about God”; “I have a great deal of reverent fear of God because I know that He is holy and just and I am not”)

- c. How do you feel about God?

d. What do you think it will take for America to once again have a healthy fear of God?

5. Focus on Hosea 10:4-8.

Hosea fixes his attention on two northern towns. The first was Bethel, nicked-named Beth-Aven, ‘house of Wickedness’, found in 10:8 [in the NASB and KJV] in a short form, ‘Aven’ Bethel, or Aven—Wickedness—was known for its idolatrous sanctuary in which gods were represented by statues of calves, representing God or the gods. The other town was Samaria in which there was one particular deity. Hosea calls it ‘The Resident’. **God was meant to ‘dwell’ or ‘reside’ among his people** (Numbers 35:34) but Samaria’s ‘Resident’ was an idol. Evidently in the capital city there was one particular god whom the people revered. **Soon he will be carried off by the Assyrians. His people will mourn over him.** The professional priests who have made a living out of idolatrous religion will grieve. **The idol was evidently quite gorgeous to look at.** There were people who ‘rejoiced over its splendor’, but the god will be exiled just as will the people. He will become a novelty in the collection of the king of Assyria, an antique for his friends to admire.ⁱⁱⁱ

Read carefully the sentences above that have been emboldened. **Compare America to Israel, the northern kingdom,** by the following accusations which are also emboldened:

a. Read Exodus 33:11; John 14:16-18; 15:14-15; Romans 8:15-16. **God was meant to ‘dwell’ or ‘reside’ among his people** (Compare the impersonal nature/relationship conveyed in ritualistic religiosity or “church-ism” to the personal nature/relationship found in true Christianity):

b. **Soon he** (the false idol) **will be carried off by the Assyrians. His people will mourn over him.**

From the 1950’s until now, most mainline denominations have lost more than 50% of their membership; For many years, more churches have closed than new ones have opened, and there is no reason to expect this trend to change in 2025. In fact, Thom Rainer says he expects 15,000 churches to close in a single year for the first time ever.^{iv}

- Is it fair to say that God is carrying off our idols of religiosity and “church-ism” given what is happening to these churches? Explain your answer.
 - Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. What do you think the solution is to the on-going decline in American churches?
- c. **The idol was evidently quite gorgeous to look at** (How is religiosity/churchism attractive to people as opposed to real Christianity)? See Matthew 3:1-2, 17; Acts 3:19).

6. Focus on Hosea 10:9-15.

The thread of argument in this section goes through six steps. (i) Israel has persisted in sin since the days of Gibeah (10:9a); (ii) war is God’s way of chastening (10:9b); (iii) Israel had great potential for serving God, since God had provided sufficient resources for national righteousness (10:10-11); (iv) even now Hosea calls the nation to seek God (10:12); (v) but Israel has sowed bad seed (10:13) and (vi) total destruction is near at hand (10:14-15).^v

The Incident at Gibeah

The sin of Gibeah refers to a particularly heinous event recorded in Judges 19-20, which led to widespread moral outrage and a brutal civil war among the tribes of Israel. **The incident is often cited as an example of extreme moral corruption and societal breakdown.**

- **Judges 19:1-30:** A Levite and his concubine travel through Gibeah, a city in the territory of Benjamin. They are offered hospitality by an old man. However, during the night, some men of the city, described as "wicked men," surround the house and demand to have sexual relations with the Levite (Judges 19:22). This egregious sin is reminiscent of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19). To protect himself, the Levite sends out his concubine to them. The men abuse her throughout the night, and she dies from the assault (Judges 19:25-28).
- **Judges 20:1-48:** In response to this atrocity, the Levite dismembers the concubine's body and sends the pieces throughout Israel to rally the tribes against the perpetrators. The tribes demand justice, but the Benjamites refuse to surrender the guilty men. This leads to a civil war, resulting in the near annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin.

Key Themes and Lessons

- **Moral Decay:** The incident at Gibeah is often seen as a stark illustration of the moral decay and lawlessness that can arise when there is no central authority or adherence to God's laws (Judges 21:25: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.").
- **Justice and Retribution:** The collective response of the Israelite tribes demonstrates a desire for justice, though it also highlights the potential for excessive and destructive retribution.
- **Consequences of Sin:** The sin of Gibeah and the subsequent civil war serve as a warning about the far-reaching and devastating consequences of unchecked sin and moral corruption within a community.

The sin of Gibeah remains one of the most graphic and tragic narratives in the Bible, underscoring the importance of justice, community responsibility, and adherence to divine moral standards.^v

7. In verse 9, Hosea refers back to the sin at Gibeah and he says, "You have sinned O Israel and there you have remained"
 - a. What happens when a nation continues in its sin and wickedness (Remember the riots that broke out in America in 2020?)
 - b. What happens when we continue in our sin (v. 9-10; James 1:14-15)?
Explain your answer.
8. Recall the covenant God made with Israel back on Mount Sinai found in Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

The Offer of Life or Death!

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹ This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- a. Read Isaiah 55:6-7. What is Hosea appealing for God's people to do in verse 12?

- b. In this context, what do you think it means to "break up your unplowed ground" (v. 12; Psalm 51:16-17; Ezekiel 36:26)?

- c. Read Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:4, 14-15; and Acts 2:38; 3:19-21.
 - What message did John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter preach when they first started preaching?

 - What message do you believe needs to be heard all over America (2 Chronicles 7:14)?

2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people, who are called by my name...

will humble themselves and pray and seek my face ...

and turn from their wicked ways...

then I will hear from heaven...

and I will forgive their sin...

and will heal their land.

9. Read verse 13. Sin and its deadly consequences. Hosea had pleaded with the Israelites to obey God and live righteously. They desperately needed to repent and turn to the Lord so they might experience times of refreshing. Instead, they continued to sow seeds of wickedness. Now they were about “eat the fruit” of their evil ways!
 - a. What did Hosea warn time and time again was about to happen (v.14)?

10. Focus on verse 14-15.

“As Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle...” “Thus will it happen to you, O Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.”

According to John MacArthur, “Shalman (v. 14) was probably Shalmaneser V, king of Assyria (727-722 B.C.), who played a role in Israel’s demise. Although the location of Beth Arbel is uncertain, the memory of the heinous crimes committed there was vividly etched into their minds.”^{vi}

Read 2 Kings 17:7-23 and carefully take note of all the egregious sins committed over and over again by the Israelites from the time of king Jeroboam I (960-938 B.C.) until the time of king Hoshea (713-722 B.C.). For over 225 years the Israelites lived in a state of total rebellion against God and His commands and laws. They sowed to the wind. Now, they were about to reap the whirlwind. God is long-suffering. But His patience has a limit.

- a. From 2 Kings 17:23, what was the lasting consequence of Israel’s refusal to repent?

- b. What is the one unpardonable sin (Mark 3:28-29)? (Hint: consider the role of the Holy Spirit.)
- c. How can you make sure that you have not committed this sin (Acts 3:19-21)?

Think/Grow/Live

1. There were warnings by the prophet Hosea (and many before him) about what would happen to the people of Israel if they continued in their sin. Why do you think they did not heed these warnings?
2. What stops you from turning away from sin?
3. What can you do to make a lasting change in at least one area of your life where sin seems to have dominated you?

ⁱ Eaton, 148-149.

ⁱⁱ Eaton, 149-150.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eaton, 152.

^{iv} A Look Ahead at the Headwinds of 2025, Bill Whitt: <https://churchrenew.org/a-look-ahead-at-the-headwinds-of-2025/> accessed on February 6, 2025

^{iv} Eaton, 152.

^{iv} A Look Ahead at the Headwinds of 2025, Bill Whitt: <https://churchrenew.org/a-look-ahead-at-the-headwinds-of-2025/> accessed on February 6, 2025

^{vi} What was the sin of Gibeah? <https://chatgpt.com/c/4134808d-3e5b-450d-9811-10ea5e1dbf73>, accessed via Chat GPT on July 19, 2024.

^{vii} MacArthur, 84.