

Introduction to Hosea Chapter 9

Do Not Rejoice: The End of the Feasts, the Watchman Silenced, and the Days of Punishment

Hosea chapter 9 is the chapter of the ended celebration. The opening prohibition — Do not rejoice, O Israel! Do not exult like the peoples — sets the tone of the entire chapter with an immediacy that is almost shocking in its directness. The people are apparently in the midst of a harvest festival, the kind of agricultural celebration that the covenant life was designed to produce and that the Baal worship had contaminated. And the prophetic word interrupts the celebration with the declaration that the basis for the celebration has been forfeited: the threshing floor and the wine vat will not feed them, and the new wine will fail them.

The chapter moves through three interconnected movements. The first (verses 1–9) is the declaration of the ended celebration: the exile is coming, the feasts will cease, the prophet whom the people have called a fool will be vindicated, and the days of punishment will arrive. The second (verses 10–14) is the historical retrospect — the tracing of the unfaithfulness back to its origin at Baal-peor, where the fathers first committed the idolatry that has characterized the people ever since — and the consequent curse on the fertility that the Baal worship was specifically designed to secure. And the third (verses 15–17) is the Gilgal indictment and the divine expulsion: because of the wickedness at Gilgal, the love of the covenant God has turned to hatred, the leaders will be killed, and the wandering among the nations will be the consequence of the disobedience.

The most pastorally significant feature of the chapter is the treatment of the prophet in verses 7–8. The prophet who speaks the word of the LORD in the days of punishment is called a fool by the people: the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad. The rejection of the prophetic word is itself the evidence of the depth of the iniquity: the community that calls the genuine prophet a fool has lost the capacity to distinguish the word of the LORD from the rantings of the unstable. And the watchman of Ephraim who should be with his God is instead a fowler's snare on all his ways — the person whose function is to warn the community of the approaching danger has become the instrument of the community's entrapment rather than its protection.

The historical retrospect of verses 10–17 is among the most theologically significant passages in the chapter for the canonical reading of Hosea. The founding of the unfaithfulness at Baal-peor — the incident at Shittim in Numbers 25 where the Israelites committed sexual immorality with Moabite women and worshipped the Baal of Peor — is the original moment that established the pattern of the spiritual adultery that the entire book has been describing. The fathers who consecrated themselves to the shameful thing and became detestable like the thing they loved are the theological ancestors of the Ephraim who has been doing the same thing in every generation since. The curse on the fertility — no birth, no pregnancy, no conception — is the most comprehensive reversal of the blessing that the Baal worship was designed to secure: the very productivity that the fertility cult promised to produce is the very thing that the LORD's judgment will remove.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Hosea chapter 9 as people who know what it is to celebrate in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons — to rejoice like the peoples who do not know the covenant God, to exult in the harvest of the threshing floor and the wine vat without the acknowledgment of the One who gives the harvest and the wine. We know what it is to participate in the feasts and the celebrations of the covenant life while the covenant content that makes the celebration genuine has been drained away. We know what it is to be the community that calls the genuine prophet a fool, that cannot distinguish the word of the LORD from the rantings of the unstable, because the capacity to hear the prophetic word has been disabled by the depth of the iniquity.

Lord, let the do not rejoice of verse 1 be the word that clarifies the basis of the genuine celebration. We do not want to rejoice in the harvest of the threshing floor and the wine vat while forgetting the One who gives the harvest. We do not want to exult in the abundance of the covenant gifts while attributing the gifts to the Baals of our own age. Let the ended feasts and the ceased celebrations of the chapter be the formation of the understanding that the genuine celebration is the celebration of the covenant God who gives the gifts, not the celebration of the gifts without the Giver.

And let the historical retrospect of verses 10–17 — the tracing of the unfaithfulness back to Baal-peor, the founding moment of the pattern that has characterized every generation since — be the formation of the generational self-awareness that recognizes the patterns of the fathers in the practices of the present. We carry the inheritance of Baal-peor in our own flesh. Let the recognition of the pattern produce the return that the pattern has prevented in every generation that did not recognize it.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hosea 9:1–9

Do Not Rejoice: The Ended Celebration, the Silenced Watchman, and the Days of Punishment

- (1) Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people:
for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God,
thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor.*
- (2) The floor and the winepress shall not feed them,
and the new wine shall fail in her.*

*(3) They shall not dwell in the LORD's land;
but Ephraim shall return to Egypt,
and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria.*

*(4) They shall not offer wine offerings to the LORD,
neither shall they be pleasing unto him:
their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners;
all that eat thereof shall be polluted:
for their bread shall be for their soul,
and shall not come into the house of the LORD.*

*(5) What will ye do in the solemn day,
and in the day of the feast of the LORD?*

*(6) For, lo, they are gone because of destruction:
Egypt shall gather them up,
Memphis shall bury them:
the pleasant places for their silver,
nettles shall possess them;
thorns shall be in their tabernacles.*

*(7) The days of visitation are come,
the days of recompence are come;
Israel shall know it:
the prophet is a fool,
the spiritual man is mad,
for the multitude of thine iniquity,
and the great hatred.*

*(8) The watchman of Ephraim was with my God:
but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways,
and hatred in the house of his God.*

*(9) They have deeply corrupted themselves,
as in the days of Gibeah:
therefore he will remember their iniquity,
he will visit their sins.*

The Context

The Do not rejoice, O Israel, exult not like the peoples of verse 1 is the most direct address to the present moment in the chapter. The people are gathered at a harvest festival — the agricultural celebration that the covenant life was meant to produce and that has been contaminated by the attribution of the harvest to the Baals rather than to the covenant God. The prohibition of the rejoicing is not the prohibition of the joy itself. It is the prohibition of the wrong kind of rejoicing: the exultation like the nations, the celebration that attributes the agricultural abundance to the fertility cult rather than to the covenant God who gives the harvest. The you have played the whore, departing from your God of verse 1 is the reason for the prohibition: the community

that has played the whore at the threshing floors — where the Baal worship's fertility rites were performed — has forfeited the basis of the genuine celebration.

The threshing floor and the wine vat of verse 2 will not feed them — this is the first statement of the ended provision that the covenant violation has produced. The agricultural gifts that the covenant God has been giving, and that the Baal worship has been misattributing, will be withdrawn. The new wine will fail. And the consequence of verse 3 is the exile: they shall not remain in the LORD's land; Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria. The unclean food of Assyria is the food of the exile — the food eaten outside the land, outside the covenant community, in the condition of the captivity that the covenant violation has produced. The dietary laws of the covenant that distinguished the covenant community from the surrounding nations will be impossible to maintain in the exile. The exile is the end of the covenant distinctiveness that the dietary laws expressed.

The question of verse 5 — what will you do on the day of the appointed feast, on the day of the feast of the LORD? — is the most pastoral question in the section. The feasts of the LORD were the calendar of the covenant life: the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles — the annual celebrations of the covenant God's redemptive acts and agricultural provision. In the exile, these feasts will be impossible to observe in the way the covenant required. The community that has been stripped of the land, the temple, the sacrificial system, and the covenant infrastructure will be left with the question of verse 5: what will you do on the day of the feast? The question is the question of the community that has lost the covenant framework that gave the feasts their meaning.

The prophetic rejection of verses 7–8 is the most directly self-referential passage in the chapter. The prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad — this is the community's assessment of Hosea himself. The prophet who speaks the word of the LORD in the days of punishment is the one whom the community has dismissed as unstable, whose warning has been categorized as the rantings of the madman rather than the word of the covenant God. And the watchman of Ephraim — whose function is to warn the community of the approaching danger — has become a fowler's snare on all his ways. The one who should be protecting the community has become the instrument of its entrapment, which is the reversal of the prophetic function as complete as the priestly reversal of chapter 4.

The comparison to the days of Gibeah in verse 9 is the most historically specific reference to the depth of the corruption in the section. Gibeah was the site of the most horrific crime in the book of Judges — the gang rape and murder of the Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah (Judges 19), which produced the civil war that nearly destroyed the tribe of Benjamin. The comparison of the present corruption to the days of Gibeah is the comparison to the lowest moral point in the entire history of the covenant community. The deeply corrupted themselves of verse 9 is the assessment of the depth to which the iniquity has reached.

Plain American English

Don't celebrate like the other nations do, Israel! You have been unfaithful to your God and have loved the payment you receive at every threshing floor. But the threshing floor and the winepress won't feed you anymore, and the new wine will dry up. You won't be able to stay in the LORD's land. Instead, Ephraim will go back to Egypt and eat food that is ritually unclean in Assyria. They won't be able to pour out wine offerings to the LORD there, and none of their sacrifices will please Him. Their offerings will be like the bread eaten at a funeral — everyone who eats it becomes unclean. They can eat it to stay alive, but it can't be brought to the LORD's house. So what will you do when the days of the festivals come? When the time for the LORD's appointed feasts arrives? Look — even now they are fleeing the destruction. Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. Their treasured silver will be overtaken by weeds, and thorns will grow up in their homes. The days of punishment have arrived. The days of payback have come, and Israel will know it. People are calling the prophet a fool and saying the man of the Spirit is crazy — and they say this because of your great sin and deep hostility. The prophet who was supposed to be God's watchman for Ephraim has become a trapper's snare everywhere he goes, with nothing but hostility in the house of his God. They have sunk deep into corruption, just like in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their sin and punish them for it.

Key Observations

“Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God”: This signifies **The Prohibition of the Wrong Rejoicing Is the Pastoral Interruption of the Celebration That Has Lost Its Covenant Foundation — the Joy That Exults Like the Nations Is the Joy That Has Forgotten the Covenant God Who Is the Source of the Harvest.**

The rejoice not of verse 1 is not the prohibition of joy as such. It is the interruption of the specific kind of rejoicing that has lost its covenant foundation: the exultation like the nations, the celebration that attributes the agricultural abundance to the fertility cult rather than to the covenant God who gives the harvest. The nations rejoice in their harvests without the covenant knowledge of the God who provides them. Israel's rejoicing like the nations is the evidence that the covenant knowledge — the da'at Elohim that should distinguish the celebration of the covenant community from the celebration of the surrounding peoples — has been lost. The harvest is real. The celebration is genuine. But the you have played the whore at the threshing floors reveals that the celebration has been offered at the altars of the wrong worship rather than at the table of the faithful husband. The prohibition is the interruption of the wrong joy so that the right joy can be recovered.

“What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the LORD?”: This signifies **The Question of the Exiled Community Is the Most Pastoral Question in the Section — the Community That Has Lost the Covenant Framework Has Lost the Context Within Which the Covenant Celebrations Have Their Meaning.**

The question of verse 5 is addressed to the community that is about to lose the land, the temple, and the institutional infrastructure of the covenant life. The appointed feasts — the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles — were the calendar of the covenant life, the annual recitation of the covenant God's redemptive acts and the covenant community's dependence on His provision. In the exile, the performance of these feasts in the way the covenant required will

be impossible. The question is not a theological puzzle about the logistics of the festival calendar. It is the pastoral question about what the covenant life looks like when the community has been stripped of the covenant infrastructure that has been sustaining the covenant forms. The question will be answered, in the history that follows, by the development of the synagogue and the rabbinic tradition — the re-formation of the covenant community around the Torah rather than the temple. But in the moment of Hosea’s prophecy, the question stands as the most urgent pastoral challenge of the exile.

“The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity”: This signifies **The Rejection of the Genuine Prophet as a Fool Is the Most Complete Expression of the Community’s Incapacity to Hear the Word of the LORD — the Depth of the Iniquity Has Disabled the Faculty of the Prophetic Discernment.**

The prophet is a fool is the community’s assessment of Hosea himself — the dismissal of the genuine prophetic word as the rantings of the unstable and the mad. The community that has been formed by the spirit of whoredom of chapter 5 and the deceitful bow of chapter 7 cannot distinguish the word of the LORD from the word of the unstable: the depth of the iniquity has disabled the faculty of the prophetic discernment. The for the multitude of your iniquity is the explanation: the community’s incapacity to hear the prophetic word is not a matter of intellectual limitation or cultural conditioning. It is the moral consequence of the depth of the iniquity. The community that has gone deeply into the corruption of verse 9 — as deeply as in the days of Gibeah — has lost the moral and spiritual formation that enables the recognition of the genuine prophet. The fool and the madman of the community’s assessment is the word of the LORD that the community has forfeited the capacity to recognize.

“They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah: therefore he will remember their iniquity”: This signifies **The Comparison to the Days of Gibeah Is the Most Extreme Available Benchmark for the Depth of the Corruption — Gibeah Was the Lowest Moral Point in the History of the Covenant Community, and the Present Condition Has Reached That Depth.**

The days of Gibeah — the gang rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine by the men of Benjamin in Judges 19, the crime that nearly destroyed a tribe of Israel and produced the most devastating civil war in the pre-monarchic period — are the most extreme available benchmark for the moral depth of the present corruption. The comparison is not casual. It is the deliberate invocation of the nadir of the covenant community’s moral history as the standard against which the present condition is being measured. The deeply corrupted themselves is the statement that the present iniquity has reached the depth of the worst thing that happened to the covenant community in its entire history. And the therefore he will remember their iniquity is the covenant consequence: the divine memory that chapter 7 identified as the diagnostic reality that the community was not considering has been activated at the level of the most severe available benchmark.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Examine the Basis of Your Celebration — Is the Joy of the Covenant Life Grounded in the Covenant God Who Gives the Harvest, or Is It the Exultation Like the Nations That

Has Lost the Covenant Knowledge of the Giver: The rejoice not like the nations is the diagnostic question for every form of the covenant community's celebration. The joy of the covenant life is the joy of the community that knows who gives the harvest — the faithfulness, the steadfast love, and the knowledge of God that enables the community to receive the agricultural gifts with gratitude directed at the covenant God rather than at the Baals who were worshipped to secure them. The contemporary church's celebrations — the harvest festivals, the Thanksgiving observances, the seasonal celebrations of the Christian calendar — are the genuine article when they are directed at the covenant God who is the source of the gifts being celebrated. They become the wrong rejoicing when the celebration of the gifts displaces the worship of the Giver, when the exultation in the abundance of the Christian life loses the covenant knowledge of the One whose abundance it is.

2. Receive the What Will You Do on the Day of the Feast Question as the Most Urgent Pastoral Challenge for the Community Losing Its Institutional Infrastructure: The question of verse 5 is addressed to a community that is about to lose the institutional infrastructure of its covenant life. It is the question for every community of faith that is navigating the loss of the cultural, institutional, and infrastructural supports that have been sustaining the forms of the covenant life: the church building, the denominational structure, the cultural standing, the institutional resources. What will you do on the day of the feast when the feast can no longer be observed in the way the infrastructure has been enabling? The question is not despair. It is the invitation to the re-formation of the covenant community around the substance rather than the form — the Torah rather than the temple, the living knowledge of God rather than the institutional performance of the knowledge's forms.

3. Take Seriously the Warning That the Depth of the Iniquity Disables the Capacity for Prophetic Discernment — the Community That Cannot Distinguish the Genuine Prophet from the Fool Has Lost Something More Than an Opinion: The prophet is a fool is the statement of the community whose incapacity for prophetic discernment is the moral consequence of the depth of the iniquity. The contemporary church that cannot distinguish the genuine word of the LORD from the comforting therapeutic message that confirms the existing preferences, that calls the genuine prophetic confrontation of the covenant violation an unloving overreach while celebrating the smooth words that supply the itching ears of chapter 4 — this church is in the condition of verse 7. The incapacity for prophetic discernment is not the product of intellectual limitation. It is the product of the moral condition that has been formed by the depth of the iniquity. The recovery of the prophetic discernment requires the recovery of the moral formation that enables it.

How This Relates to Today

The rejection of the genuine prophet as a fool and a madman in verses 7–8 is one of the most consistently repeated patterns in the history of the covenant community. The prophet who speaks the word of the LORD in the days of punishment — who names the specific covenant violation, who interrupts the wrong celebration, who declares the consequences that the community is not considering — is the one whom the community most wants to silence. The contemporary equivalent is the pastor, the theologian, or the prophetic voice that names the specific forms of the contemporary covenant violation — the assimilation to the therapeutic culture, the political captivity of the church, the manufactured religious experience that substitutes for the living

encounter with the covenant God — and is dismissed as unloving, unbalanced, or culturally disengaged. The multitude of your iniquity that produces the dismissal of the genuine prophet is the iniquity that the genuine prophet is naming.

The question of what will you do on the day of the feast is also one of the most urgently relevant questions for the contemporary Western church that is experiencing the loss of the institutional infrastructure that has been sustaining the forms of its covenant life. The decline of the mainline denominations, the erosion of the cultural standing of Christianity, the financial pressure on the institutional church, the loss of the buildings and the programs that have been the vehicles of the covenant community's life — all of these are forms of the what will you do on the day of the feast question. The answer is not the recovery of the institutional infrastructure. It is the re-formation of the covenant community around the substance — the *hesed* and the *da'at Elohim*, the faithfulness and the steadfast love and the knowledge of God — that the institutional forms were always meant to express and that can sustain the covenant life when the institutional forms are no longer available.

*Key Lesson: *The first section establishes the chapter's governing pastoral concern: the prohibition of the wrong rejoicing that has lost its covenant foundation, the ended provision that the covenant violation has produced, the urgent question of what the covenant community will do when the institutional infrastructure of the covenant life has been taken away, and the most damning assessment of the depth of the iniquity: the prophet is a fool, the watchman has become a snare, and the corruption has reached the depth of the days of Gibeah — the nadir of the covenant community's entire moral history.**

Hosea 9:10–14

Baal-Peor and the Grapes of the Wilderness: The Founding of the Pattern and the Curse on the Fertility

*(10) I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness;
I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time:
but they went to Baal-peor,
and separated themselves unto that shame;
and their abominations were according as they loved.*

*(11) As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird,
from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception.*

*(12) Though they bring up their children,
yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left:
yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!*

*(13) Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place:
but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer.*

*(14) Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give?
give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.*

The Context

The historical retrospect of verse 10 begins with one of the most tender images in the book: I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness, I saw your fathers as the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season. The finding of Israel is the Exodus — the act by which the covenant God discovered the people who would become His covenant community. The grapes in the wilderness and the first fruit on the fig tree are images of the unexpected delight of discovery: the sweetness of the finding, the pleasure of the first fruit that has been anticipated and has not disappointed. This is the divine account of the covenant's beginning from the perspective of the faithful husband: the joy of the finding, the tenderness of the first discovery, the delight in the people who were meant to become the covenant community.

But they went to Baal-peor. The pivot of verse 10 is one of the sharpest in the book. From the tenderness of the finding to the immediate departure: the fathers who were discovered with the joy of the first fruit immediately went to Baal-peor, the site of the apostasy at Shittim in Numbers 25 where the Israelites committed sexual immorality with Moabite women and worshipped the Baal of Peor. They consecrated themselves to shame — the Baal of Peor became the object of their devotion as completely as the covenant God was meant to be — and they became detestable like the thing they loved. The consecration to the shame is the most concentrated statement of the transformative power of the object of devotion: the person who consecrates themselves to the detestable thing becomes detestable in the same measure as the thing they have consecrated themselves to.

The consequence of verses 11–14 is the most comprehensive reversal of the fertility blessing in the chapter. The glory of Ephraim — which is the children, the next generation, the fruit of the fertility that the Baal worship was designed to secure — will fly away like a bird: no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. The curse on the fertility is the most precisely targeted available response to the specific form of the idolatry: the Baal worship was the fertility cult, designed to secure the agricultural and biological productivity that the covenant community needed. The LORD's judgment removes the very thing that the idolatry was designed to produce. The fertility that the Baals were worshipped to secure is the fertility that the covenant God's judgment removes. The irony is precise and devastating.

The prayer of verse 14 is one of the most theologically startling moments in the book: Give them, O LORD — what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. This is the prophet's own prayer, addressed directly to the LORD in the middle of the prophetic speech. The prayer for the miscarrying womb and the dry breasts is the prayer for the judgment that will prevent the birth of children who would only be brought forth to the murderer of verse 13. It is the compassionate prayer of the prophet who has understood that the births that the judgment will prevent are the births of children into the condition of the covenant-violating community that is about to be conquered and destroyed. The prevention of the birth is, in the prophet's understanding, the mercy that spares the children from the devastation that is coming.

Plain American English

I remember finding Israel like grapes growing in the desert — it was like seeing the first ripe figs of the season at the start of harvest. But then your ancestors went to Baal-peor and gave themselves over to that shameful idol, becoming as disgusting as the god they loved. So now Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird — no more pregnancies, no more births, no more children being conceived. Even if they do manage to raise children, I will take those children away until none of them are left. And how terrible it will be for them when I turn away and leave them! I can see that Ephraim, like Tyre, is established in a pleasant place — but Ephraim will bring his children out to the slaughter. O LORD, what should you give these people? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that cannot nurse.

Key Observations

“I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness: I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time”: This signifies **The Divine Account of the Covenant's Beginning Is the Account of the Tender Delight of Discovery — the Faithful Husband's Joy in the Finding of the People Who Were Meant to Be the Covenant Community.**

The grapes in the wilderness and the first fruit on the fig tree are images of unexpected sweetness and anticipated delight — the finding of something precious in a place where it was not expected, the first taste of the fruit that has been anticipated all season. The I found Israel is the divine account of the Exodus discovery from the perspective of the faithful husband: the joy of the finding, the pleasure of the first discovery, the tenderness of the beginning of the relationship. This retrospect of the covenant's beginning is the most effective available context for the devastation that the pivot of verse 10 produces: the tenderness of the finding makes the but they went to Baal-peor the more devastating. The delight that the LORD describes in the discovering of Israel makes the immediate departure to the Baal of Peor the more inexplicable and the more painful. The finding was tender. The going was immediate. The contrast is the measure of the grief.

“They went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved”: This signifies **The Consecration to the Shame Is the Most Concentrated Statement of the Transformative Power of the Object of Devotion — the Person Who Consecrates Themselves to the Detestable Thing Becomes Detestable in the Measure of the Consecration.**

The and their abominations were according as they loved is the theological principle of the transformative power of the devotion. The object of the devotion shapes the character of the devoted: the person who loves the shameful thing becomes shameful in the measure of the love, the person who consecrates themselves to the detestable thing becomes detestable in the measure of the consecration. This is the Old Testament statement of the principle that Paul articulates in 2 Corinthians 3:18 — we are being transformed into the image of what we behold. The fathers at Baal-peor were transformed into the image of the shame they consecrated themselves to. And the principle is as operative in the present as it was at Baal-peor: the contemporary believer who consecrates their devotion to the cultural idols — the prosperity, the approval, the pleasure, the achievement — is being transformed into the image of what they are beholding, in the measure of the devotion they are giving it.

“Their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception”: This signifies **The Curse on the Fertility Is the Most Precisely Targeted Available Consequence — the LORD Removes the Very Thing That the Baal Worship Was Specifically Designed to Secure.**

The removal of the fertility — no birth, no pregnancy, no conception — is the most precisely targeted of the covenant curses in the chapter because it directly addresses the specific function of the idolatry being judged. The Baal worship was the fertility cult: the worship of the deity who was believed to control the agricultural and biological productivity of the land and the community. The Baals were worshipped specifically to secure the births, the pregnancies, the conceptions that the community needed for its continuation. The LORD’s judgment removes the births, the pregnancies, the conceptions that the Baals were worshipped to provide. The irony is the most precise available: the judgment removes exactly what the idolatry was attempting to secure, through the mechanisms of the idolatry’s own specific domain. The Baals cannot protect the fertility that the LORD’s judgment removes.

“Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts”: This signifies **The Prophet’s Prayer for the Judgment Is the Compassionate Prayer That Seeks the Lesser Suffering as the Prevention of the Greater — the Miscarrying Womb That Spares the Children from the Destruction That Is Coming for the Community.**

The prayer of verse 14 is among the most theologically difficult moments in Hosea because it is a prayer for what appears to be a devastating curse — the miscarrying womb and the dry breasts. The key to understanding the prayer is the context of verse 13: Ephraim will bring his children out to the murderer. The prophet who prays for the miscarrying womb is praying for the mercy that prevents the birth of children into the condition of the community that is about to be destroyed. The prevention of the birth is the compassionate prevention of the greater suffering: better not to be born than to be born to the murderer who is coming. The prayer is not the prayer for the punishment of the mothers. It is the prayer of the prophet who has understood the full scope of the coming destruction and who finds the prevention of birth to be the lesser of the available compassions. The prayer is the most morally complex moment in the chapter.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Read the Historical Retrospect of Baal-Peor as the Formation of the Generational Self-Awareness That Recognizes the Founding Pattern in the Present Practice: The tracing of the unfaithfulness back to Baal-peor is the formation of the generational self-awareness that understands the present condition as the continuation of a pattern that was established at the founding of the covenant community’s wilderness experience. The contemporary church that understands its own patterns of unfaithfulness — the accommodation to the surrounding culture, the misattribution of the provision, the worship of the wrong objects with the right language — as the continuation of the Baal-peor pattern that has characterized every generation of the covenant community since the wilderness is the church that has the most accurate self-understanding available. The pattern is ancient. The specific forms are contemporary. The recognition of the pattern is the beginning of the address of the specific forms.

2. Take Seriously the Principle That the Object of Devotion Transforms the Devoted in the Measure of the Devotion:

Their abominations were according as they loved is the most practically significant theological principle in the section for the formation of the deliberate life. The person who devotes the energy of the attention, the investment of the time, the direction of the desire toward the object of the devotion is being transformed by the devotion into the image of what is being devoted to. The formation of the character is the formation of the devotion. The contemporary believer who wants to be formed in the image of the covenant God — in the faithfulness, the steadfast love, the knowledge of God — must attend to the object of the devotion with the urgency that the transformative principle demands. What you love, you become. The Baal-peor principle is the warning and the invitation simultaneously.

3. Receive the Curse on the Fertility as the Theological Demonstration That the LORD Addresses the Idolatry at Its Own Specific Claim — the Judgment Always Removes What the Idolatry Was Promising to Provide:

The removal of the fertility that the Baal worship was specifically designed to secure is the pattern of the divine judgment that addresses the idolatry at its own specific claim. The God of the covenant does not simply impose generic punishments on the covenant violator. He removes the specific thing that the specific idolatry was promising to provide, demonstrating that the Baals cannot protect what the LORD's judgment removes. The contemporary application is the recognition that the contemporary idols — the prosperity that promises significance, the approval that promises belonging, the achievement that promises identity — will be addressed by the divine judgment at the level of their specific promise. The God of the covenant removes what the idols promised, demonstrating that the idols cannot protect what the covenant God's judgment removes.

How This Relates to Today

The I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness of verse 10 is one of the most tender passages in the entire book, and its tenderness makes the but they went to Baal-peor the more devastating. The covenant God who describes the joy of the finding — the delight in the unexpected sweetness of the discovered people, the pleasure of the first fruit that has not disappointed — is the covenant God whose grief at the departure is in proportion to the joy of the finding. The contemporary believer who reads this passage and does not feel the proportion of the grief to the joy has not understood the character of the covenant love that Hosea is revealing. The love that found Israel with the delight of the grapes in the wilderness is the love that grieves the Baal-peor departure with the grief of the faithful husband whose first joy has been immediately abandoned. The grief is as deep as the joy was high.

The abominations were according as they loved — the transformative principle of the devotion — is also one of the most important theological observations in the section for the contemporary church's understanding of spiritual formation. The church that has been formed primarily by the devotion to the therapeutic culture — to the values of the self-development, the emotional health, the personal fulfillment that the surrounding culture treats as the highest goods — has been transformed in the measure of that devotion into the image of those goods. The church that has been formed primarily by the devotion to the political project — the conservative or progressive agenda that the political moment treats as the most urgent cause — has been transformed in the

measure of that devotion into the image of the political project. The formation is always proportional to the devotion. The abominations are always according as they loved.

Key Lesson: **The historical retrospect of Baal-peor establishes the founding of the pattern that has characterized every generation of the covenant community since the wilderness: the finding with the tenderness of the grapes in the wilderness, followed by the immediate departure to the shame, followed by the transformation into the image of the shame according to the measure of the love; and the curse on the fertility — no birth, no pregnancy, no conception — is the most precisely targeted of the covenant curses, removing the very thing that the Baal worship was specifically designed to secure and demonstrating that the Baals cannot protect what the LORD's judgment removes.**

Hosea 9:15–17

Gilgal, the Hatred, and the Wandering Among the Nations: The Divine Expulsion and Its Consequence

*(15) All their wickedness is in Gilgal:
for there I hated them:
for the wickedness of their doings
I will drive them out of mine house,
I will love them no more:
all their princes are revolvers.
(16) Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up,
they shall bear no fruit:
yea, though they bring forth,
yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb.
(17) My God will cast them away,
because they did not hearken unto him:
and they shall be wanderers among the nations.*

The Context

The all their wickedness is in Gilgal of verse 15 is the final specific site of the covenant violation in the chapter, following the threshing floors of verse 1, the Baal-peor of verse 10, and the road to Gibeah of verse 9. Gilgal was one of the most sacred sites in Israel's covenant history — the place where the first Passover in the land was celebrated (Joshua 5:10–12), where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away (Joshua 5:9), where Samuel anointed Saul as king (1 Samuel 11:15), and where the LORD rejected Saul because of his disobedience (1 Samuel 13:8–14). The multivalent associations of Gilgal make the all their wickedness is in Gilgal both a geographical and a theological statement: the place of the most foundational covenant renewals has become the place of the most comprehensive covenant violations.

The for there I hated them is the most shocking statement in the chapter and one of the most theologically demanding in the entire book. The God who has been described throughout chapters 1 through 3 as the pursuing, wooing, betrothing faithful husband now declares a hatred. The hatred is not the opposite of the love that has been the constant of the book — it is the covenant term for the covenantal rejection that the sustained and comprehensive violation has produced. In the covenant framework, love and hatred are not primarily emotional states but covenantal stances: the love is the covenant commitment, the hatred is the covenantal withdrawal from the commitment that the covenant violation has produced. The I will love them no more is the most extreme expression of the Lo-ammi of chapter 1 — the covenant relationship has reached the point of the divine expulsion.

The driving out of my house of verse 15 is the expulsion from the covenant community — the removal from the land that is the covenant God’s house, the place of His dwelling with His people. The all their princes are revolvers is the political dimension of the expulsion: the leadership that has been the instrument of the covenant violation is the leadership that will be expelled. And the Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up of verse 16 continues the agricultural imagery of the chapter: the root that is dried up cannot produce fruit, and even the fruit that is produced will be destroyed. The slaying of the beloved fruit of their womb is the darkest statement of the judgment in the chapter — the children who are born will be taken even before they can be raised.

The closing verse — my God will cast them away, because they did not listen to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations — is the summary consequence of the entire chapter. The wandering among the nations is the condition of the exile: the dispersed people who have been driven from the covenant land and who are without the covenant infrastructure that gave their life its shape and meaning. The wandering is the condition that the Exodus was designed to end — the people without a home, without a land, without the covenant framework that organized the covenant life. And the because they did not listen to him is the simplest available statement of the reason: the covenant God spoke through the law and through the prophets, and the people did not listen. The wandering is the consequence of the not listening.

Plain American English

All their evil is concentrated in Gilgal — that’s where I began to hate them. Because of their wicked actions, I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no longer. All their leaders are rebellious. Ephraim has been struck down — their roots are withered and they can’t produce fruit. Even if they do have children, I will kill their precious offspring. My God will reject them because they have not listened to him, and they will become wanderers among the nations.

Key Observations

“All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them”: This signifies **The Sacred Site That Has Become the Locus of the Comprehensive Covenant Violation Is the Site Where the Covenantal Love Has Turned to Covenantal Rejection — Gilgal Is the Place Where the**

Most Foundational Covenant Renewals Have Become the Most Comprehensive Covenant Violations.

The Gilgal that was the place of the Passover in the land, the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away, the place of Saul's anointing and rejection, is the place where the all their wickedness has concentrated. The sacred site has become the most accurate geographical location of the covenant violation: the place most associated with the covenant renewal has become the place most associated with the covenant violation. This is the pattern of the religious perversion that the book has been tracing throughout: the sacred becomes the profane, the instrument of the covenant renewal becomes the site of the covenant violation, the place of the reproach rolled away becomes the place of the reproach accumulated. And the for there I hated them is the covenantal response to the concentration of the wickedness at the site of the most sacred memories: the love that was most fully expressed in the covenant renewals of Gilgal has been turned to the covenantal rejection by the comprehensive violation of everything that those renewals established.

“I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more”: This signifies **The Driving Out and the Love No More Are the Most Extreme Available Expressions of the Covenant Consequence — the Expulsion from the Covenant Land and the Withdrawal of the Covenant Love Are the Divine Actions That the Sustained Violation Has Produced.**

The I will love them no more is the most theologically demanding statement in the closing section and must be read within the full theological context of the book. The love that has been the constant of Hosea — the go again of chapter 3, the allure of the wilderness and the new betrothal of chapter 2, the I would redeem them of chapter 7 — is the love that is now declaring its withdrawal at the level of the present covenantal expression. The love no more is not the permanent extinguishing of the covenant love: the book will return in its later chapters to the promise of the restoration. But it is the most severe available expression of the present covenantal withdrawal — the Lo-ammi and the Lo-ruhamah of chapter 1 taken to their most extreme form in the actual expulsion from the house of the covenant God. The driving out is the enacted consequence of the sustained violation. The love no more is the covenantal expression of the withdrawal that the violation has produced.

“They shall be wanderers among the nations”: This signifies **The Wandering Among the Nations Is the Reversal of the Exodus Settlement — the People Who Were Brought into the Rest of the Covenant Land Are Driven Back Into the Restless Wandering of the Pre-Exodus Condition.**

The wanderers among the nations is the exile stated in its most existential terms: not the geographical displacement alone but the condition of the rootlessness, the homelessness, the restlessness of the people who have been driven from the rest of the covenant land into the wandering of the nations. The Exodus had brought the wandering to an end: the people who had been the homeless slaves of Egypt were given the land, the rest, the settled covenant life that the covenant God's provision established. The wandering among the nations is the reversal of the settlement — the removal of the rest and the return to the wandering that the Exodus was designed to end. And the because they did not listen to him is the simplest available statement of the reason: the Torah that was given as the guidance for the covenant life, and the prophets who spoke the word of the LORD, were not heard. The covenant God spoke. The people did not listen. The wandering is the consequence of the not listening.

“My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him”: This signifies **The Because They Did Not Listen Is the Final Summary of the Chapter’s Entire Indictment — the Covenant God Spoke Through the Law and the Prophets, and the Failure to Listen Is the Root of Every Form of the Covenant Violation That the Chapter Has Described.**

The because they did not listen to him is the simplest and the most comprehensive statement of the reason for the wandering. The covenant God has not been silent: He gave the great things of the law in chapter 8:12, He sent the prophets whose word the community dismissed as the rantings of the fool in chapter 9:7, He has been speaking through Hosea throughout the book. The covenant community has not been without the word. It has been without the listening. And the not listening is the root of every form of the covenant violation that the chapter has described: the wrong rejoicing, the departure to Baal-peor, the consecration to the shame, the wickedness at Gilgal. Every specific form of the covenant violation is the specific consequence of the failure to listen to the covenant God who has been speaking. The wandering among the nations is the consequence of the not listening to the word that would have guided the community into the rest that the wandering has replaced.

What This Means for Us Today

- 1. Recognize the Pattern by Which the Sacred Site Becomes the Locus of the Comprehensive Violation — and Examine the Sacred Sites of Your Own Community’s Life for the Presence of This Pattern:** The all their wickedness is in Gilgal is the warning that the sacred site is not protected from becoming the site of the comprehensive violation by its sacred history. The place of the covenant renewal is the most susceptible site for the covenant violation because the sacred history can be invoked as the cover for the present violation — the language of the Gilgal covenant renewal can be used to legitimate the practices that Gilgal has become the site of. Examine the sacred sites of the community’s life: the worship service, the sacraments, the theological tradition, the institutional history. Are these sites of the genuine covenant renewal or have they become the sites of the comprehensive violation that their sacred language is covering?
- 2. Understand the Wandering Among the Nations as the Existential Consequence of the Not Listening — and Cultivate the Listening That Produces the Rest That the Wandering Has Replaced:** The wandering among the nations is the existential condition of the community that has not listened to the covenant God who has been speaking. The contemporary believer who is experiencing the restlessness, the rootlessness, the homelessness of the spiritual wandering — who cannot find the rest that the covenant life is designed to produce — may be experiencing the consequence of the not listening that verse 17 identifies as the cause of the wandering. The remedy is the listening: the attentive engagement with the law and the prophets and the apostolic word that the covenant God has given as the guidance for the covenant life, sustained through the following on to know the LORD that chapter 6 identified as the condition of the genuine knowing. The listening produces the rest. The not listening produces the wandering.
- 3. Read the I Will Love Them No More Within the Full Theological Context of the Book’s Pursuing Love — It Is the Most Extreme Expression of the Present Covenantal Withdrawal, Not the Permanent Extinguishing of the Covenant Love:** The I will love them no more is the most theologically difficult statement in the closing section, and it requires the full

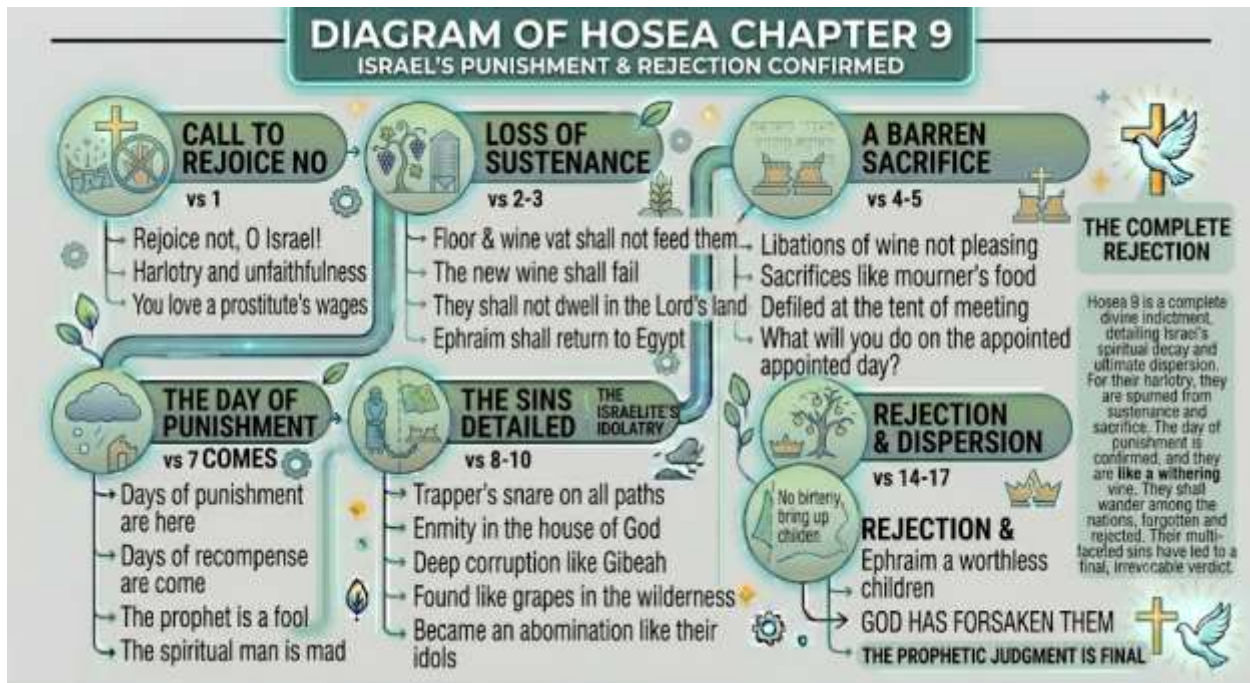
canonical context of the book to be read rightly. The same book that declares the I will love them no more of verse 15 also declares the I will heal their apostasy and love them freely of chapter 14. The love no more is the most extreme available expression of the present covenantal withdrawal — the Lo-ammi taken to its most severe form. But it is not the permanent extinguishing of the pursuing love that chapters 1 through 3 established as the character of the covenant God's relationship with His people. The wandering is not the final condition. The return and the restoration of chapter 14 are coming. The love no more of chapter 9 is the most severe expression of the discipline; the love freely of chapter 14 is the most gracious expression of the restoration.

How This Relates to Today

The wanderers among the nations of verse 17 is one of the most existentially resonant images in the chapter for the contemporary believer who experiences the spiritual restlessness of the covenant community that has not listened to the covenant God's word. The contemporary Western church's experience of institutional displacement, cultural marginalization, and theological disorientation — the experience of being a community that no longer has the settled sense of its place and its purpose in the surrounding culture — is the contemporary form of the wandering among the nations. And the because they did not listen to him is the diagnostic that the wandering community needs to hear: the wandering is the consequence of the not listening to the word that would have guided the community into the rest that the wandering has replaced. The remedy is not the recovery of the cultural standing. It is the recovery of the listening.

The all their wickedness is in Gilgal is also one of the most important warnings in the chapter for the contemporary church's relationship to its own sacred history and tradition. The church that invokes the sacred history of its founding, its reformation, its revival, its doctrinal tradition as the justification for the present practices without examining whether the present practices are consistent with the covenant content that the sacred history embodied is the church whose wickedness has concentrated at Gilgal. The sacred history is not a blank check for the present practice. It is the standard against which the present practice is to be evaluated. The Gilgal that was the place of the covenant renewal becomes the place of the covenant violation when the language of the covenant renewal is used to cover the practice of the covenant violation.

Key Lesson: **The closing section of the chapter declares the most severe consequences of the comprehensive covenant violation: the wickedness concentrated at Gilgal, the covenantal love turned to covenantal rejection, the expulsion from the house of the covenant God, the dried root and the slain fruit, and the wandering among the nations that is the reversal of the Exodus settlement — all grounded in the simplest and most comprehensive statement of the reason: because they did not listen to him; and the I will love them no more, read within the full theological context of the pursuing love that the book has established, is the most severe expression of the present covenantal withdrawal, not the permanent extinguishing of the love that chapter 14 will declare as the love freely given in the restoration that the discipline is working toward.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 9 having received the most urgent pastoral challenge of the book: do not rejoice like the nations, for you have played the whore from your God. We have heard the tender account of the finding — I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness, I saw your fathers as the first fruit on the fig tree — and the devastating pivot: but they went to Baal-peor. We have heard the abominations were according as they loved — the transformative principle of the devotion that forms the character in the image of the object of the love. And we have heard the wandering among the nations that is the consequence of the not listening that has characterized the covenant community from Baal-peor to Gilgal to the days of Hosea's prophecy.

Lord, let us not be the community that calls the prophet a fool. Let us not be the community that cannot distinguish the word of the LORD from the comfortable message that confirms the existing preferences. Give us the prophetic discernment that the depth of the iniquity has disabled in the community that verse 7 describes, and give us the moral formation that enables the discernment — the formation of the hesed and the da'at Elohim that is the only basis for the genuine recognition of the genuine prophetic word.

Let the abominations were according as they loved be the formation of the deliberate devotion that chooses the object of the love with the awareness that the devotion transforms. We do not want to become the image of the shame we consecrate ourselves to. We want to become the image of the covenant God whose character the covenant relationship is designed to produce.

Let the devotion be directed at the right object with the urgency that the transformative principle demands: what we love, we become. Let us love what we want to become.

And let the wandering among the nations be the formation of the desire for the rest that the listening produces. We are tired of the wandering. We want the rest of the settled covenant life — the rest that the Exodus was designed to produce, the rest that the following on to know the LORD generates in the community that listens to the word that guides the covenant life into the settled home of the knowledge of God. Let us listen. The listening produces the rest. The rest is the covenant life that the wandering has been denying us. We want the rest. We will listen.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is the true rest, who said Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest, who is the end of the wandering that the not listening has produced and the beginning of the settled covenant life that the listening to His word generates — Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone