

QUIZ

1. How and why do people become like the person or thing they love?
2. In what did Ephraim glory? and how did God take it away?
3. How was Israel like Tyre?
4. What happens when men reject the love of God?
5. Does the new nation of Israel established by the U.N. mean the "wanderings" of the Jews are over?

REPROVING—
ISRAEL FELL INTO ANARCHY

TEXT: 10:1-11

- 1 Israel is a luxuriant vine, that putteth forth his fruit: according to the abundance of his fruit he hath multiplied his altars; according to the goodness of their land they have made goodly pillars.
- 2 Their heart is divided; now shall they be found guilty: he will smite their altars, he will destroy their pillars.
- 3 Surely now shall they say, We have no king; for we fear not Jehovah; and the king, what can he do for us?
- 4 They speak vain words, swearing falsely in making covenants: therefore judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.
- 5 The inhabitants of Samaria shall be in terror for the calves of Bethaven; for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof, that rejoiced over it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.
- 6 It also shall be carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.
- 7 As for Samaria, her king is cut off, as foam upon the water.
- 8 The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.
- 9 O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood; the battle against the children of iniquity doth not overtake them in Gibeah.
- 10 When it is my desire, I will chastise them; and the peoples shall be gathered against them, when they are bound to their two transgressions.
- 11 And Ephraim is a heifer that is taught, that loveth to tread out the grain; but I have passed over upon her fair neck: I will set a rider on Ephraim: Judah shall plow, Jacob shall break his clods.

QUERIES

- a. How is the heart of Israel "divided"?
- b. Who is king "Jareb"?
- c. What were the "two transgressions" binding Israel?

PARAPHRASE

Israel is prospering like a luxuriant grape vine sagging under the weight of much fruit. But the more prosperous I make her, the more she devotes herself to heathen altars and pagan idols. Her heart is smooth and treacherous. She is guilty and must be punished. God will destroy all her altars and idols. Surely under the circumstances of the coming judgment they will cry out We do not fear Jehovah—now we have no king—but what is the difference? No king could help us now! Their talk is empty—they make promises they never intended to keep. On account of this they are sowing the poison of anarchy and destruction within their own land. The people of Israel will moan over the destruction of their national shrines and gods. The priests will perform a ritual dance, imploring their idols to save them. But this idol—this calf-god thing—will be carted off *helplessly* into captivity with Israel as a present to the great Warrior King of Assyria. Israel and her calf-god will be disgraced. The advice and programs Israel thought were so politically and religiously wise will appear to be so foolish to her then. The proud monarchy of Israel vanishes like a splinter upon the surface of this water which is carried away by the current without leaving a trace behind. Those majestic and expensive idol-altars of Aven at Bethel where Israel sinned will crumble. They will be so deserted thorns and thistles will grow up in their place. And the deluded people, forsaken by their helpless gods, cast off by the Lord, stand in awe and terror as they see God's judgment coming upon them—they cry for the mountains and the hills to cover them and hide them from the wrath of Jehovah. Ah, Israel, since the days of Gibeah you have persisted in the same sin as the Gibeahites; but whereas those sinners were punished and destroyed by the war, you still live on in the same sin without having been destroyed in a similar war. When it is according to my purpose, I will punish Israel. The Gentile nations will be arrayed against them. Their two transgressions, apostacy from Jehovah and separation from the royal house of David, will haunt them all during their punishment. Israel is accustomed to pleasant, productive, profitable labor, like the heifer that loves to tread out the grain because she is allowed to eat at her pleasure. But it will soon be different. I will seize her and

harness her by a heavy yoke to the plow and harrow. Yes, Judah too shall be put to hard labor in captivity, just like Israel.

SUMMARY

Israel's prosperity was only a veneer giving an outward appearance of well-being. Inside she was corrupt, lawless, idolatrous and in the throes of anarchy.

COMMENT

v. 1 ISRAEL IS A LUXURIANT VINE . . . The KJV has it, "Israel is an empty vine . . ." Practically all scholars of the Hebrew texts consider this "a palpable inaccuracy." Lange says, "a thriving vine." Keil says, "a running vine." The translators of both the ASV and the RSV translated "a luxuriant vine." Hosea was probably using satire or irony in so addressing Israel. Israel waxed prosperous, it is true, in spite of national calamities. But what kind of fruit was Israel producing? Fruit of its own choosing, of its own pleasure, instead of the fruit for which God looked. The figure of the vine is an old and familiar figure (cf. Psa. 80:8ff; Isa. 5:1-10; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:1ff; 17:6ff; Jn. 15:1ff). In Jesus' day the great gate of the Temple, the outer gate, had emblazoned upon it a golden vine. It was the symbol of national life. Isaiah tells us (Isa. 5:1ff) what fruit God expected to find on His vine (the covenant people). God expected justice and righteousness but found instead oppression and iniquity. God was not judging them because they were prosperous—but because they misused their prosperity. They were selfish. They spent it on their own pleasure—on vain and ungodly practices. The more their wealth increased, the more they spent on idolatry and sensuality. More wealth, less dependence upon God and more self-worship. Hosea uses more irony in calling their pillars "goodly" pillars. They were probably obelisks erected to pagan deities. They were probably very artistic and expensive. According to their prosperity they had built themselves ornate idols; God was lost, mislaid, and instead of Him there were ornate pillars, obelisks, stones. This certainly strikes a familiar note. America has become a "luxuriant vine," but she produces fruit unto herself. She has forgotten God and built altars to "power," "reason," "progress," "humanism" and is no longer dependent upon the Creator.

v. 2 THEIR HEART IS DIVIDED . . . The Hebrew word *chalag* should be translated "smooth, treacherous," rather than "divided." Jeroboam was very solicitous for the care and convenience of his dear people (I Kings 12:27-28); all the while he was thinking of his own desires to set up

and secure an apostate nation. The people were happy to follow the same deceit—professing with their lips to belong to Jehovah but rejecting His law and worshipping idols. The "spirit of harlotry" was in Israel's heart (Hos. 5:4). If it were not so tragic it would be amusing to behold Israel trying to deceive Jehovah. Surely they would be aware of the many times in their past history when every man and woman who tried to deceive God was inevitably caught!

v. 3 SURELY NOW SHALL THEY SAY, WE HAVE NO KING . . .

As Pusey points out, "These are the words of despair, not of repentance; of men terrified by the consciousness of guilt, but not coming forth out of its darkness; describing their condition, not confessing the iniquity which brought it on them." Israel had rebelled against the kingship of God and asked for a king of their own (cf. Hos. 8:3-4). God gave them Jeroboam. Now, after all the years of gradual political, moral and civil decay and degeneration—to the point of anarchy—surely they will be compelled to confess that they no longer have a king. Yes, they confess it! They also admit that they have no fear of Jehovah. But that is not such a problem as the present king they do have. If we had a king like the Jeroboams, they probably wail, we might hope for better times; but now? The king we have now; it's all his fault. Their hearts are not only deceitful, they are deceived! This is the oldest trick of sin and Satan—deceiving man into blaming others for the consequences of their own sins! When man blames others for his sins, he is in no mind to repent.

v. 4 THEY SPEAK VAIN WORDS . . . JUDGMENT SPRINGETH UP AS HEMLOCK . . . No man's word could be trusted (cf. Jer. 9:5-9; Micah 7:5-7). Their deceitful, smooth, treacherous hearts manifested themselves in their business dealings. What a man is down deep within his heart soon appears in his deeds (cf. Mark 7:21-23). These people of Israel were conducting their business like the Pharisees of Jesus' day (cf. Matt. 23:16-22). Honor, duty, justice, righteousness, truth have all long since ceased to be. Law and order ceases to be right. Might becomes right. Judges are bribed; debtors are sold into slavery; covenants are broken. Right has been made to be wrong and wrong has been made to be right, (cf. Isa. 5:20-23; Micah 3:2). Right has degenerated into bitter wrong—justice is so perverted it covers the land like the poisonous weed hemlock (cf. Amos 5:7). Hemlock, the reader will remember, was what Socrates was forced to drink to induce his death. There was plenty of so-called justice in the land—but what kind of justice? Judgments as bitter and fatal as hemlock, (cf. Hab. 1:4).

v. 5-6 . . . SAMARIA SHALL BE IN TERROR FOR THE CALVES OF BETH-AVEN; . . . IT ALSO SHALL BE CARRIED UNTO ASSYRIA . . . These two verses, although predicting the behavior of Israel at the time of her captivities in the future, are exact representations of how she reacted. First, Israel was concerned for the safety of her national temples, obelisks and calf-idols. What was to become of them. Then, as the reality of the captivity came immediately upon them they began to wail, perform ritual dances, imploring their idol to help them. But their gods were deaf and dumb. There were no answers; no actions. The Assyrians defeated Israel, plundered her spacious buildings from the smallest to the greatest, and the calf-god of Israel they carried off helpless and silent to be given to the Assyrian king as a present. The calf-god of Israel appears to have been included in the Assyrian pantheon of gods and placed in the temple of Marduk (cf. II Kings 18:33-35; 25:13-16; Ezra 1:7-11). Cyrus, king of Persia, restored all these gods to their original homes. Israel is disgraced! Shame and ridicule is now her lot. Why has all this happened? Because Israel trusted in her own pride—in her own vain counsel. She would not listen to the law of God nor to His prophets. She made kings after her own desires; she made gods according to the lust of her heart; she joined herself to pagan countries for protection and became their vassal. Now all this shameful self-counseling is paying its wages—shame!

v. 7 AS FOR SAMARIA, HER KING IS CUT OFF, AS FOAM UPON THE WATER . . . Not only is her calf-god useless to help her, Israel's king cannot help. The word translated "foam" would have been more literally translated, "splinter, or small stick." The king was like one of those little sticks or straws which float in countless numbers on the surface of the ocean or streams, give the image of lightness, emptiness, a thing too light to sink, but driven impetuously and unresistingly, hither and thither, at the impulse of the torrent which hurries it along. Hoshea, their last king, was just so easily swept by the flood which broke on Israel from Assyria.

v. 8 THE HIGH PLACES . . . OF AVEN . . . SHALL BE DESTROYED . . . "Aven" is a pun. "Aven" means, "worthless, vile, useless." Bethel, seat of their idolatrous worship, was called Beth-aven. Here, "Aven" probably also means Bethel. "High place" is from the Hebrew word *bamah* or *ramah* and means simply, "elevation." We quote here from *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, edited by Merrill C. Tenney, pg. 354:

"It seems to be inherent in human nature to think of God as dwelling in the heights. From earliest times men have tended to choose high places for their worship, whether of

God, or of the false gods which men have invented. In Canaan these high places had become the scenes of orgies and human sacrifice connected with the idolatrous worship of these imaginary gods; and so when Israel entered the Promised Land they were told to be iconoclasts as well as conquerors. . . . (Num. 33:52). These figured stones bore upon themselves crude carvings, sometimes more or less like geometrical figures, or else talismans, or other signs presumably understood by the priests and used to mystify or terrorize the worshippers. Israel partly obeyed but largely failed in this work . . . Later some godly kings like Hezekiah (II Chron. 31:1) destroyed the high places, while others like Manasseh relapsed and rebuilt them (II Chron. 33:3). After Manasseh had been punished and had repented, he was restored to his throne, and resumed the temple worship, but the people 'sacrificed still in the high places, but only unto Jehovah their God' (II Chron. 33:17). Through Manasseh's early influence, the people had gone so far into apostasy that they could not repent, but through the godliness of Josiah, especially after he had heard the law read (II Kings 22:8-20), the judgment was delayed till after the death of Josiah."

The "high places" came to be specifically noted for *idolatrous* worship. So the title was transferred from the elevation to the sanctuary on the elevation and so came to be used of any idolatrous shrine, whether constructed on an elevation or not (cf. II Kings 16:4; 17:9; II Chron. 21:11; 28:4; Isa. 36:7; Amos 7:9; Micah 1:5; 4:1; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:32; Ezek. 6:3-6; 16:16; 20: 29; 43:7, etc.). All these places in Israel were utterly destroyed and made desolate and deserted when Israel was taken captive. Weeds and thorns grew up where thousands once performed heathen religious rites in the name of Jehovah. Their ruins are there today to be seen and pondered! The deluded, shamed people, forsaken by their helpless gods and impotent kings shake with terror as they see God's judgments coming upon them. Clothed in the filthy garments of sin, they are totally unprepared to meet God (cf. Amos 4:13). There is no place to hide when the Day of the Lord comes (cf. Amos 5:18-20; 9:2-4). They cry out for the mountains and the hills to fall upon them and cover them from His terrible wrath (cf. Rev. 6:16). Only those who have washed their robes white in the blood of The Lamb will not be ashamed on that final great and terrible Day of the Lord! Have you been washed, my brother? Prepare to meet thy God!

v. 9 . . . THOU HAST SINNED FROM THE DAYS OF GIBEAH . . . From the very days when the people of Gibeah sinned against the concubine of the Levite (cf. Hos. 9:9), Israel has continued in the same sin. But whereas those sinners were punished and destroyed by war, you still live on in the same sin without having similarly been destroyed.

v. 10 WHEN IT IS MY DESIRE, I WILL CHASTISE THEM . . . Yes, the wheels of God's justice grind slow, at times, but very fine! When the time comes within the omniscient plan and purpose of God for it to be, He will punish Israel for her sins just as surely and completely as He punished the Gibeahites! God never acts without intelligent, fore-planned purpose. Every event of history has a time and a place foreknown in the purpose of Almighty God and man can neither hinder it nor speed it. Furthermore, God uses whatever secondary agents He desires in carrying out His purposes. In Israel's case He chose to use "the peoples," or Gentile nations, to carry out His wrath upon this recalcitrant nation (cf. Isa. 10:5ff).

The "two transgressions" of Israel which will cling to them and bind them like seaweed strangles a drowning man are: (a) Their idolatry; (b) Their making kings according to their own desires. These two specific rebellions against the Holy God will haunt them and plague them all the rest of their days as they "wander" over all the face of the earth.

v. 11 AND EPHRAIM IS A HEIFER THAT . . . LOVETH TO TREAD OUT THE GRAIN . . . Having been trained and provided for by the Lord, growing fat and sleek, Ephraim (Israel) loved to "thresh." Like the young ox, walking leisurely over the corn, permitted to eat her fill (Deut. 25:4), Israel loved to do work which to him seemed pleasant, productive, profitable, neglecting and forgetting the training of his Master; resenting His instructions when they ran counter to his own desires; shirking the arduous duty of self-discipline (Deut. 32:15-18) demanded by Jehovah. "Passed over her fair neck," says Keil, means "rushing in upon a person." The actual idea is that of putting a heavy yoke upon the neck. No longer will Israel be treated like a privileged and petted heifer, but she will be yoked to a plow to do servile, exhausting labor (in captivity). So Judah, too, because of her sins will be taken captive. Israel (like Jacob) will be driven out of their homeland into exile, into hard labor of slavery.

QUIZ

1. What is the meaning of likening Israel to a "luxuriant vine?"
2. What are the "goodly pillars?"
3. Why did Israel cry, "We have no king . . . what can he do for us?"
4. Why is "judgment springing up like hemlock?"
5. How and why did the people "mourn over" their calves of Beth-aven?
6. What are the "high places" of Aven?
7. Whose "desire" is spoken of in verse 10?
8. How is Israel like a "heifer" that loves to tread out the grain?

REMONSTRATING—
RENOVATE "FALLOW GROUND"

TEXT: 10:12-14

- 12 Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Jehovah, till he comes and rains righteousness upon you.
- 13 Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies; for thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.
- 14 Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces with her children.
- 15 So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: at daybreak shall the king of Israel be utterly cut off.

QUERIES

- a. Why is it "time" to seek Jehovah?
- b. Who were Israel's "mighty men"?
- c. Who is "Beth-el"?

PARAPHRASE

Sow seeds of righteousness among your fellow men and you will reap loving kindness in turn. In order to do this, however, you will have to turn over the hard and weed-infested soil of your sinful hearts. And do not delay for the time to seek the Lord is now—it is ever present. He will come and shower you with blessings of mercy and grace. In the past you have sown wickedness and reaped the consequences

of your iniquity—falseness, shame, vanity. You trusted in your own rebellious ways and in the false security of your army. Because you still insist in doing this a war shall come to your people and all the fortresses which made you feel so secure will be destroyed. Shalmaneser destroyed Beth-arbel giving you an example of his cruelty against even women and children. And now, because you did not heed the warning but continued in your wickedness, Shalmaneser shall do the same to the whole land of Israel, even to Bethel, and your king will perish with unexpected suddenness!

SUMMARY

A last hour call to repentance and reformation of life is given. Unheeded, it calls forth inevitable destruction at the hands of Shalmaneser.

COMMENT

v. 12 SOW . . . RIGHTEOUSNESS, REAP . . . KINDNESS . . . BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND . . . Sowing and reaping are favorite Oriental and Semitic figures of speech to use in expressing spiritual and moral conduct (cf. Job 4:8; Psa. 126:5; Jer. 4:3; Matt. 13:3ff; Lk. 8:5ff; Prov. 6:14, 19; 11:18; 22:8; Hos. 8:7; Jn. 4:36-37; I Cor. 9:11; II Cor. 9:6, 10; James 3:18, etc.) Here, it is evident, the prophet is exhorting the people to "sow deeds of righteousness" toward one another, in order that they may "reap kindness" from one another. Some commentators, in their attempt to belittle the idea that man must do righteous deeds in order to be pleasing to God, have misinterpreted this text by saying, "It is not a man-made righteousness, but that righteousness which the Lord is ready to grant abundantly as a gift of His grace to all that seek Him and His righteousness . . . Hence, sow toward righteousness—seek the Lord and His righteousness, prepared for you without any merit on your part by the Lord and sent by Him as freely, graciously, and abundantly as the rain from heaven." Now we agree that man can never earn or attain, through his own meritorious deeds, the righteousness which God's Holy Law demands. Man *must*, however, respond to the revealed will of God by *doing* righteous deeds in order to come into covenant relationship and remain in covenant relationship with God through Christ. Faith in God can be efficacious *only* if it issues forth in an obedient life of righteous deeds. "My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (cf. I Jn. 3:1-24). There is only one way to be righteous. By the powerful motivation of faith in God through Christ to *do* the

righteous will of God as it is revealed in His word! There is only one way to reap kindness—that is to actively sow righteousness. To do this, the people of Israel must have a change of mind, a change of heart, a conversion—they must “break up the hard, weed-infested soil of their sinful hearts.”

How is this “fallow ground” to be broken up? By “seeking Jehovah” with the whole heart, (cf. our comments on Hosea 6:1-3). Jeremiah gives the same exhortation in Jeremiah 4:1-4. God will not “rain righteousness” down upon men until they have done something about their relationship to God’s commandments! God’s love, mercy, faithfulness, power, have all been demonstrated and revealed. God’s covenant terms have all been revealed. Now it is up to man to willingly, actively make the proper response.

The time for man to make such a response is always “Right Now” with God. It is always “Today” with God! For the man who chooses to live by faith in God it is also always “Today!” The man of God lives always in the present tense—yesterday is past and unreclaimable, tomorrow is future and only God knows tomorrow, and so Today is the day of salvation (cf. Heb. 3:7-19; II Cor. 6:2; Jas. 4:13, etc.). Men must seek the Lord while He may be found (cf. Isa. 55:6-9), and call upon Him while he is near by forsaking their wicked ways and returning to His commandments!

v. 13 YE HAVE PLOWED WICKEDNESS . . . REAPED INIQUITY . . . EATEN THE FRUIT OF LIES . . . Israel not only sowed wickedness, they cultivated it! They actually nurtured evil like a farmer would a crop of grain by cultivating and fertilizing it. But what was their harvest? Crime, anarchy, distrust, immorality, falsehood, all flourished in high places and low places. Their whole society was built on the crumbling foundation of lies. They deceived others, were deceived by others, but worse than all the rest, they deceived themselves and knew they were doing so all the time! You see, they trusted in their own counsel by which they deliberately deluded themselves; they trusted in their military and economic prowess which they knew from history was not equal to the power of God. How relevant the prophets are for twentieth century society!

v. 14 THEREFORE SHALL A TUMULT ARISE AMONG THY PEOPLE . . . Tumult is the word used to describe the noise and din of war. Right in the middle of their prosperous but decadent unconcern shall suddenly come war. They will suddenly be besieged and invaded by a foreign power. Their so-called impregnable fortress will be torn asunder.

Their cities and villages will be burned and plundered. There will be many thousands slain, thousands of others taken captive and deported to a far away land. Their invaders will be the cruel, blood-thirsty Assyrians who destroyed Beth-arbel (very likely the modern Kirbeth Irbid, about six miles southwest of Magdala in Galilee). Their king will be "Shalman" who is to be identified as the Shalmaneser II of Kings 17:3-6. Not even women and innocent children will be spared.

v. 15 SO SHALL BETH-EL DO UNTO YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR GREAT WICKEDNESS . . . And all this destruction and blood-letting is a consequence of Israel's stubborn rebellion against a merciful God. Their rebellion is manifested most openly at Bethel where the temple and altar to the golden-calf is located and where the nation made pilgrimage constantly to bow down before its idols. All this will bring sudden, swift ("at daybreak") destruction of the ruling monarch and of the nation. Israel will perish suddenly! She will be taken away quickly—there will be no long, extended expiration or wasting away. Her oblivion will come rapidly and completely!

QUIZ

1. How does Hosea intend Israel to "sow righteousness?"
2. How is "fallow ground" to be broken up?
3. To what extent did Israel "plow" wickedness?
4. What were the consequences of plowing wickedness?
5. Who is "Shalman" and what did he do to Israel?
6. Where is Beth-arbel?
7. How long did it take for Israel to disappear from history?

RECOGNIZING GOD'S COMPASSION REMONSTRATING—

TEXT: 11:1-9

- 1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.
- 2 The more the prophets called them, the more they went from them: they sacrificed unto the Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.
- 3 Yet I taught Ephraim to walk; I took them on my arms; but they knew not that I healed them.