

## THE BOOK OF HOSEA

### Lesson 12, Chapter 7

There's a reason that Hosea is the first time I've created a commentary on an Old Testament book of prophecy. While, personally, in those books I find hope, promise, and validation of my faith, on the other hand I'm not sure of how broad the audience for it is because prophetic works also can be somber, serious, and the severe side of God is put on full display. So-called New Testament Christians, and especially the more Evangelical branches of it, prefer to focus their prophetic understanding on the Book of Revelation, and tend to further sharpen that focus to such things as the Rapture, the return of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, and the new Heavens and Earth. Why? Because...at least on the surface... these things all sound quite joyous and uplifting. The drawback with the mindset of only being interested in the pleasant things of the Bible prophecies is that it diminishes or ignores what is also prophesied concerning what leads up to them. Unpleasant things. Chaotic things. Evil and dark things. So, when one begins to do a serious and thorough study of any of the several books of prophecy, quickly we find that they deal mostly with the unpleasant, the chaotic, the dark and the evil. The result often is that the passages are skimmed over, the reader relieved to be done with them in order to move on to the happier things. Who wants to spend hours, days, weeks, even months reading of doom and gloom?

The crux of the issue is for us all to recognize that God did not inspire the Prophets to write these things down to depress us. Rather, they are to meant warn and to announce God's displeasure, but also that in the end there is hope. Much more than simply being a divine rant, those prophetic words were usually fashioned in the hope that the recipients might open their ears, become aware of their sin and wrongdoing, repent, and (in a case like Hosea's prophecy) make actual tangible preparations for what is coming. While we'd all prefer to only address the many exhilarating things in the Bible, the reality is that (for our own good) we need to hear and heed how God views our individual religiosity and our behavior. We need to know about the hard times ahead, and not simply race forward in an unguarded exuberance assuming that somehow, as Believers, we'll be exempt from the troubles. And yet, as we read throughout the Bible, we find that human nature has always been such that the majority of humans will ignore these warnings and continue life seeking our own agendas, establishing and

living out our own values and priorities, assuming that all will be well. God's people tend to wobble and toddle forward in history acting as though we are unaware of what is going on all around us that confirms what the Prophets have told us. God sees our ignorance and inaction in response to His warning as faithlessness. After all, if you knew for certain that in one week your grocery store would run out of food, would you sit on your hands and do nothing? If you knew for certain that tonight a thief will attempt to break into your home, would you go to bed and sleep peacefully without taking preventative action? So, indeed, when God is warning us through His Prophets, it is guaranteed that what He is telling us about will happen. If we take no action, and make no response, then clearly it means we don't believe God.

Open your Bibles to Hosea chapter 7. We're going to re-read the chapter.

### **RE-READ HOSEA CHAPTER 7 all**

We concluded our previous lesson by reading all of 2Kings 15 because it lays out the sad, murderous history of a series of Israel's kings who were assassinated, which is being prophesied in Hosea chapter 7. It turns out that such an instability of rapid turnover of the government leadership was, and remains to this day, the very visible death throes of a nation. This chapter describes how Israel runs to and fro to the region's most powerful nations...Egypt and Assyria (enemies of one another) ... seeking allies against their sister kingdom, Judah. Verse 2 rather sums up the fantastic reality that Israel had become so degenerate in their mindset and worship, that it never occurs to them that the real problem between them and Yehoveh is their own wickedness. They think this is all about politics and economics and the ambitions of kings and emperors.

For the sake of study, it's not a bad idea to see this chapter as broken into 4 segments. Segment 1 is verses 1 and 2 that speaks of the crime tidal wave that has struck Israel... a general societal breakdown. Segment 2 is verses 3 – 7, and is about Israel's corrupt government and its domestic agenda. Segment 3 is verses 8 – 12 that reflects Israel's disastrous international policies. And segment 4 is verses 13 – 16 that warns of the consequence of all this wickedness and unfaithfulness that is present throughout every level of Israelite society: the destruction of Israel as a nation and the disappearance of them as a people.

As concerns Ephraim/Israel's domestic agenda, verse 3 explains that the kings of Israel revel in their evil, and their government minions tell the people lies to bring about the king's aims. Let's pause for a moment, here. I don't often talk politics in my lessons, but the subject of this section of Hosea *is* politics so it is unavoidable. Are we not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessing throughout the Western world (at least) our national leaders on a determined campaign to glorify what God calls evil and immoral, and damning what God calls good and moral? Just as with the kings of Israel that swore that the evil and idolatry they were teaching and practicing was actually God's will, so do so many modern political leaders on the one hand profess some Christian affiliation or at least a Christian-based moral philosophy, but on the other virtually disavow or even mock God's commands and God's truth. Even that isn't sufficient for them; they feel they must celebrate and insist that others join them in advocating for every immoral and perverted thing. And what do these leaders' officials and representatives do? They lie about their true agenda (today it is called "spin" to make it sound normal and legitimate) if they think the people they govern aren't quite ready to accept it; or they lie about the agenda's true goal and purposes. So, says verse 4, this makes them all (all of Israel's political leadership) adulterers (in Hosea this is a metaphor for idolators). And just to remind you: what is idolatry? Fundamentally it is remaking God into our image in whatever way we might attempt it.

Beginning with verse 4 Hosea introduces a new metaphor to help describe Israel's corrupt leaders: an oven and the baking process. We run into a problem, however, because so much of the next several verses are in bad repair in the oldest manuscripts, so translating them necessarily takes some amount of educated speculation. This is the reason that we can find some wildly differing translations of these verses in various Bible versions. Therefore, I defer to some of the best language scholars that specialize in the ancient (not modern) Hebrew and other Semitic languages, who are at the same time well versed in ancient Hebrew and Middle Eastern cultures. Among those are S.M. Paul and Mayer Gruber. There is almost no choice but to attempt to reconstruct these verses from a thought-for-thought approach rather than from a word-for-word literal translation because the text is so damaged that it's quite hard to, at times, know exactly what all the letters are as written in those ancient scroll fragments.

S.M. Paul says that here is how (in the modern English language) that we should understand the gist of verse 4. "All of them (the political leaders) are continually engaged in adultery. Like a stove fired by a baker who desists from stoking only from the kneading of the dough until its leavening." Now, for we moderns, even this is a bit difficult to understand; and that is because we don't know about the ancient baking process. Further, Paul says that the first few Hebrew words are likely an expression and so ought to be taken to mean: "All of them are raging like a blazing oven". Either way, we get the idea of the behavior of Israel's political leaders is likened to a hot oven. So, before we proceed, I'll explain the ancient oven and the process for baking bread (then this verse will make a little more sense to us).

The ancient oven was made of fired clay, and had a kind of beehive shape to it. It had a door placed either at direct ground level, or alternatively a bit elevated. It almost always had a stone floor. A fire would be built inside the oven and allowed to burn until the oven was about as hot as it could get. Then the baker would stop adding wood and let it burn down until there was nothing left but glowing coals. These coals remained inside the oven during the baking process, so you can imagine what a smokey flavor everything (including bread) that was baked in it took on. The idea was that now that the interior walls of the oven were super-hot, the hole at the top of the oven (the chimney that allowed the needed airflow for the fire to burn properly), would be sealed to help retain the built-up heat. Interestingly, the way the bread was typically baked was not so much in loaves, but rather as a flatbread. So, a flattened dinner plate sized chunk of dough was pressed against the interior wall of the oven. There, stuck to the wall, it would bake for a while; in a few minutes the half-baked dough would need to be turned over and re-stuck to the oven's inner wall to complete the baking process.

Making the bread dough mixture involved adding yeast (usually), and then some amount of time allowed for it to rise (1 – 2 hours) before it was ready to be baked. I say "usually" adding yeast because the bread mixture itself that regularly involved adding oil would rise some amount on its own without the addition of yeast (it was a natural process that occurs when water and oil is added to the ground wheat, just as happens with pasta). The trick was to prepare the fire, and to ready the amount of dough, with the kneading process being the moment the

yeast is added, so as to co-ordinate it all. Bread that had risen too much was sometimes nestled in among the coals, instead of being stuck to the sides of the oven. With this delicate baking process in mind... something that took much skill and experience...let's continue.

Now that verse 4 has set up the oven metaphor, verse 5 moves on to talk about how some of Israel's kings would be assassinated. Mayer Gruber has reconstructed this verse, amending the way it has in the past been translated (and those translations, as all must necessarily be, were based on what the missing letters were assumed to be), because as traditionally translated it comes out mostly non-sensical. His reconstructions are very reasonable and likely, and he's probably quite close to the sense of it because he operates with the theme of assassination of royalty that is being expressed. He says it's better to read it: "The days on which they made our kings sick by means of poison instead of wine. He (meaning any of the series of Israelite kings at this time) stretched out his hand to mocking persons (this means the people who handed him the poisoned wine)".

In the end, this verse is explaining that drunkenness was par for the course in the royal court, that the kings were lushes, and that those who backed a different and rival potential king took advantage of these drunken parties to spike the wine with poison.

Verse 6 again injects the oven and baker metaphors. S.M. Paul offers what he thinks is a better solution to this awkward sentence. He says it should be read: "Truly their inwards are like an oven, their hearts are like a blazing fire within them". The CJB translates it "who ready themselves like an oven while they wait for their chance". Other versions use different words but they all generally amount to the same thing: the jealous passions of these political assassins are blazing hot (like an oven) in waiting for the right moment to seize power through murder. This verse concludes with "their baker sleeps through the night and then in the morning it bursts into flame". The idea is that these governmental leaders are so consumed in their desire for power that whether they are awake or asleep they cannot stop plotting and conspiring. Power has become the sole goal of their existence and nothing else matters.

Verse 7 concludes this segment about the corrupt and power-mad government leaders, and want-to-be government leaders, with this summary. The out-of-control fervor of various government officials could end in nothing else but their personal destruction, to be followed by national destruction. While this was not a particularly new circumstance within Israel's government, it was the extreme nature of the disregard for ethical, moral behavior that is in view. Despite its relatively small size in the region, what had allowed Israel and Judah to remain free and independent was their dedication to seeing to their own security and not depending on others for it. This very much reflects modern Israel's understanding of what is necessary for its own continuance. But now, in the era Hosea is prophesying about, this has changed. Israel and Judah are constantly warring against one another, Israel fears it cannot stave off Judah, and so they go to Assyria for help. We might say they each tried to make a pact with the Devil. God says: "All of their kings have fallen; none of them calls out to Me". And here is the molten core of this entire Book of Hosea: rather than humble themselves and call out to Yehoveh for help, they take matters into their own hands. They decide that a manmade political solution that involves close ties with pagan nations is the way to assure their continuing existence. But there is one thing that always needs to be made clear in matters like this, and not much has changed over the millennia. Government leaders are often willing to give up national treasure and sovereignty provided the conquering nation will allow them to retain their lucrative positions. When Israel does finally make alliance with Assyria it is at a cost of enormous amounts of tribute paid to them, in return for allowing the king of Israel to remain in power. Any idea of a solution that involved the best welfare of the common people was purely an illusion.

It is hard to overstate how deluded and degenerate Israel's leaders had become. How did they finally arrive at such a state of mind...something bordering on insanity? It began with a civil war soon after Solomon died, and thus united Israel became divided into 2 separate kingdoms in a selfish act that completely ignored God's creation of this 12-tribe confederacy. When King Jeroboam became the leader of the Northern Kingdom, in another selfish act he decided he didn't want his citizens traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship and sacrifice because he would be ceding some level of control and money to Judah. So, he built his own Temple in Samaria, set up multiple worship sites using convenience as the tool to attract his citizens to use those worship sites rather than having to travel

all the way to Jerusalem. This necessarily involved setting up a separate religious system with its own priests because it wasn't possible to follow the Law of Moses if he cut his people off from Jerusalem because that was the one and only worship center God allowed. The proper observation of their orthodox Hebrew faith centered in Judah. It was the classic slippery slope; and the thing you learn early in life is that the further down that slope you slide, you gain speed. Eventually things are moving so fast you lose all control, unable to change direction, and crashing becomes inevitable.

I call on you, again, to look at the world around you and not so much to recoil in horror or indifference, but rather to pay sober attention. Make what you are learning in Hosea real and personal in your life; that's why it was placed there. The similarities between ancient Ephraim/Israel and most of our planet at this time in history is eerily close. What I've been describing to you is not allegory or hyperbole; it is borne out by recorded historical fact. God has given us an opportunity to learn the truth, prepare spiritually, and ready ourselves and our families physically **and tangibly** for what is inescapable. Corruption and immorality are now baked into our societies; we may be able to chip away at it at times, but we are not going to drive it out. We can fix it within ourselves, but not by our own methods and standards. God says: seek Me. Especially if you are a God worshipper, seek Him. It's when we don't, and instead we turn to ourselves or to trendy, popular means to be soothed of our concerns and anxieties that we move even further away from God... but don't even recognize that it's happening because it can feel good to us. However, eventually the distance between us and the Lord becomes so great that it can no longer be easily bridged.

Verse 8 opens the segment of this chapter that is concerned with Israel's kings' absurd and ruinous venture into international diplomacy and geopolitics. It opens with calling again on the oven and baking metaphor to make the point. Essentially, Ephraim is the bread dough and the peoples (the gentile nations) are the yeast... the leaven... with the two being mixed together to form a batch that you essentially can't take back apart. What does leaven regularly symbolically represent in the Bible? Sin. Because these gentile people necessarily worship other gods, they automatically stand against Yehoveh; this is sin. So, Ephraim by mixing with the gentiles is mixing himself with sin. Ephraim is described as a

cake half-baked, or more literally, not turned. Recall what we learned about the baking process, and the dough being stuck to the oven wall; about halfway through the process, the half-done dough must be turned over. Now, there is an interesting alternative translation that S.M. Paul suggests. Recall that even should we have all the alphabet characters for the verses, they are all consonants. So, two (or more) different Hebrew words can be spelled identically. The only way to know the difference among them is a combination of context and how they are vocalized... how they are spoken...what they sound like. It is in speaking those words that we add in the vowel sounds. Therefore, employing some different vowel sounds with the same Hebrew letters, the same phrase can legitimately be: "Ephraim shall be kneaded among the nations". This works just as well. Really, although there is some nuance between the two thoughts, they result in the same thing. Israel will be physically blended in with the nations (the people are exiled into the foreign nations) just as they had already for a century been blended in with the nations religiously and politically.

Prior to Israel's exile the mixing was a purposeful leader-led one as a result of Israel's frantic search for hopeful partnerships and alliances with various foreign countries, for what Israel believed was its survival. So, they looked to pagan leaders for their salvation, instead of to Yehoveh. What this led to, however, was a loss of their identity. I've spoken on a number of occasions about the key biblical concept of identity and its central role in religious faith. Their first loss of identity came with a weakening association with Yehoveh. Then with their sister Kingdom Judah. And finally with the land itself. Look around us. America is losing its identity, and I regularly read about the battle for identity within many European nations; some people wanting to retain their historical identity and others wanting to blend it with whatever comes as a show of tolerance and diversity. In every case, this push away from their traditional identity began with a weakening association with God. Remove God from the equation, and we lose the basis for what binds us together as a culture and a society: our ethics, morals, legal system, values and virtues. Before there is any misunderstanding in no way am I speaking of ethnicity. Our identity as Americans, for instance, has no foundation in ethnicity; we are the proverbial melting pot of ethnicities. Israel's identity as Israelites and as the seed of Abraham finally ended when they were dispersed into the nations where the bulk of them would no longer have any idea



of their ancestral heritage. This was a total loss of one's identity, and the gain of an entirely new one... and not for the better.

As verse 9 says, it is Israel's want of association with people who don't fear or worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that leads to this. But even more frightening is that they don't even realize that this loss of identity is happening to them. The first half of verse 9 continues to employ the oven and baking metaphor, but the second half adds in the metaphor of an aging and dying person, signified by speaking of gray hairs appearing. Yet neither the people nor their national leaders recognized it. Each was too busy chasing their personal ambitions or simply living their lives. By the late 730's B.C. Israel was dying at an alarming rate as an identifiable and set-apart people. When one identity can't be distinguished from another identity, there no longer in reality exists two identities, but only one. I'll step out on a limb a bit now, risking some blowback. Church, I ask for us to consider with sober introspection if institutional Christianity has not either already lost its identity, or is dangerously (perhaps fatally) infested with Hosea's gray hairs and so is speeding towards a loss of identity. Can you tell the average Believer from the average secular person simply by observing them? Can you spot the person who claims belief in Christ from a person who is ambivalent about the God of Israel, or expressly non-believing? Or believes in another god, altogether? The Church's identity, today, seems more and more based on those little fish symbols on cars, or cross icons or even Stars of David hung around our necks. Or how big the Christmas and Easter celebrations are. But if those things were removed, could our identity with God be spotted by how we live, behave, and the choices we make?

How about Church and Christian organizations? Other than for signage, vocabulary, and certain claims, are many much different from any typical business group? I'll answer that by saying that most certainly some are. But sadly, many that are certain they are doing righteous work and are safely within God's sheepfold aren't, any more than was Ephraim/Israel. Far too much paganism and materialism and personal kingdom building has crept into the orthodox biblical faith, and as a result our all-important identity with God is at great jeopardy. The push within the Church body today is not to be separated from the world, but rather to be as much part of it as possible, in the hope of a wider popular acceptance. Do we seek the Lord to help us, or to guide us? Do we

turn directly to the Bible to find the moral code to apply to our lives? Or, do we turn to secular people for their advice and rescue, and to ever-changing civil and criminal law codes as the determiners of right and wrong, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical? No one...nor is God... expecting our complete physical separation from the world; He also didn't expect that from Israel. But He did expect that the associations we create would lead to the world being attracted to the God of Israel, and not the people of God being attracted to the ways of the world.

Twice, now, we've seen the phrase "but Israel didn't know". So, it's not that Israel had malice aforethought, and or even ever seriously considered that what they were doing was evil and the cause of their loss of peace with God, which in turn has been the cause of their political and economic disasters. Rather their ignorance was because of their refusal to examine themselves in light of God's moral code... in the light of the Law of Moses...and of the redemptive change that could come by seeking Him.

Verse 10 is:

**CJB Hosea 7:10** *The pride of Isra'el testifies in his face, but in spite of all this they haven't returned to ADONAI their God or sought him.*

This sounds a bit awkward mostly because of what "testifies in His face" means, and exactly what "the pride of Israel" is attempting to communicate. "Face" is a Hebrew way of speaking of a person's (or God's) presence. Gruber says this means "Israel's pride has been humbled before his eyes". Whose eyes? I think that perhaps we ought to see this as a perfectly parallel thought from Hosea 5:5.

**CJB Hosea 5:5** *Isra'el's arrogance will testify in his face; Isra'el and Efrayim will stumble in their crimes...*

Most translators and commentators feel quite confident that the meaning in Hosea 5:5 could be best expressed as saying that Israel's arrogance testifies against him. That is, their arrogance reveals their poor character. Therefore, I think we ought to take Hosea 7:10 the same way; Israel's pride testifies against him and reveals his true character. Just like the clumsy thief who falls out the 2<sup>nd</sup>

story window or stumbles trying to run off with his ill-gotten gain, thus thwarting his criminal efforts, so we ought to interpret the meaning of "Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their crimes". It is more an expression of being exposed and failing in their efforts rather than actually stumbling and falling down.

Verse 11 is interesting because it incorporates yet another new metaphor... doves. Ephraim is likened to a foolish dove because they bounce around between Assyria and Egypt trying to find help. As a boy, living in a farm area that grew much grain, there was an abundance of doves so I often went dove hunting with buddies. I'm a little ashamed to say that doves are pretty easy targets. They just don't seem to have the sense of caution that other game birds have. They'll fly into these fields of grain, particularly after harvest, and they are so interested in gorging themselves on the plenty that you could just as easily walk up and club them with the butt of your gun as to shoot them. You almost have to shoo them to get them to fly to make any sport of it (after all, for boys the big boom was mostly what it was all about). So, yes, from that standpoint doves are silly with no mind. Through Hosea God says that's what Israel has become like. They see, but they don't comprehend the grave danger they are in. They listen, but they don't hear the rumblings of catastrophe. And whatever their reaction and efforts it always seems to be making the wrong choice.

What this is referring to is Israel flipflopping from one hoped for alliance to another. One minute Egypt looks attractive; the next Egypt's enemy Assyria looks pretty good. One king makes an agreement with Assyria, the next breaks it. It is worth it to look again (as we did a few lessons ago) to the opening verses of 2Kings 16 to explain this in actual historical terms.

**CJB 2 Kings 16:1-9** *It was in the seventeenth year of Pekach the son of Remalyah that Achaz the son of Yotam king of Y'hudah began his reign. <sup>2</sup> Achaz was twenty years old when he began to rule, and he reigned sixteen years in Yerushalayim. But he did not do what was right from the perspective of ADONAI his God, as David his ancestor had done. <sup>3</sup> Rather, he lived in the manner of the kings of Isra'el; he even made his son pass through fire [as a sacrifice], in keeping with the abominable practices of the pagans, whom ADONAI had thrown out ahead of the people of Isra'el. <sup>4</sup> He also sacrificed and offered on the high places, on the hills and under any green tree. <sup>5</sup> Then Retzin king of Aram and*

***Pekach son of Remalyah, king of Isra'el, came up to fight against Yerushalayim. They put Achaz under siege, but they could not overcome him. <sup>6</sup> It was at that time that Retzin king of Aram recovered Eilat for Aram and drove the Judeans from Eilat; whereupon people from Edom came to Eilat to live, as they do to this day. <sup>7</sup> Then Achaz sent messengers to Tiglat-Pil' eser king of Ashur with this message: "I am your servant and your son. Come up, and save me from the king of Aram and the king of Isra'el, who are attacking me." <sup>8</sup> Achaz took the silver and gold that was in the house of ADONAI and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a present to the king of Ashur. <sup>9</sup> The king of Ashur heeded him- the king of Ashur attacked Dammesek and captured it; then he carried its people captive to Kir and killed Retzin.***

What this is explaining is that in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Pekah as king of Israel, which was the same time that King Achaz began his reign as the king of Judah, that Pekah made an alliance with Retzin, king of Aram (Syria, not Assyria) and together they went down to Judah to fight Achaz. The king of Syria not only helped Israel win, but Syria also acquired for themselves the important Red Sea port city of Eilat that had been part of Judah. That resulted in yet another people, the people of Edom, coming to Eilat to live. After that disastrous loss, the king of Judah, Achaz, sent a message to the king of Assyria, Tiglath Pileser, offering allegiance if he would come and help him defeat Israel and Syria so he could take back territory. But that alliance with Assyria was hugely costly such that Achaz had to raid the Temple treasury to pay the demanded tribute. Assyria agreed, attacked Damascus, Syria, and killed their king. On and on it goes. Israel (and Judah, too, for that matter) making alliances only to have a short-term victory replaced by their ally now siding with someone else against them. Indeed, Israel was like a silly dove.

Verse 12 continues with the bird metaphor, by God saying He'll throw a net over Israel the same way hunters throw a net over doves to capture them. As Israel's ambassadors are going to the gentile nations for their alliances, God will throw His net over them to capture them. I'm convinced this captivity is symbolic for the captivity Israel will soon face by means of their exile. The reason for this particular symbolism of birds and nets might not be obvious. It is that from the outset, God has repeatedly told Israel that even though they think they are suffering their misfortune at the hands of an enemy that was simply too big and

strong for them, in fact it is God Himself that is directly causing this. It may seem as though Assyria is the one throwing the net over Israel (capturing them), but in fact it is Yehoveh doing it as a consequence of their idolatry and unfaithfulness to Him.

Verse 13 moves us into the 4<sup>th</sup> and final segment of Hosea chapter 7; God telling Israel that the destruction of Israel's government and nation cannot be stopped or even slowed down. Saying "Woe" is a term of divine judgment. "Woe to Israel" is pronounced because they strayed from their God. Destruction is Israel's punishment because God is more than offended; Israel has wronged Him. He continues with the rhetorical question "Should I redeem them?" when they have treated Him in such a treacherous way. However, the Greek Septuagint version of this verse (as reflected literally in the KJV) is NOT "should I redeem them", but rather "though I have redeemed them". That is, the first way is asking, should I rescue Israel from Assyria? And the second way is, I have already rescued Israel (no doubt from Egypt) long ago in the time of Moses, and yet now they tell lies against Me. Although there is ambiguity, I am fully inclined to go with the second way. God is utterly indignant that after all He did for Israel in redeeming them from Egypt's grip, they have continually mistreated Him by their unfaithfulness ever since. Israel's history from Mt. Sinai forward was one of them constantly flirting with idolatry; it's only that Ephraim/Israel has raised the bar by turning idolatry and perversion of their formerly orthodox Hebrew faith into an art form.

Verse 14 is another of those that as it has been typically rendered for centuries, actually doesn't make a lot of sense. What is Israel doing that they would be wailing from their beds? Ginsberg has a wonderful solution that I like, but we must back away and rise to 30,000-foot view to see it. The entire Book of Hosea speaks in terms of Israel's adultery, and even the first 3 chapters use Hosea and Gomer's marriage as a sexually charged symbol of the adulterous Israel. So, Ginsberg says it makes more sense to see verse 14 from that context and perspective. Thus, he says it should be translated as "They did not cry to me with their throats while they were making noises upon their beds". Don't let the "cry from their throats" throw you. It's that in ancient biblical Hebrew, the word *lev* (heart) that actually means mind or from a descriptive standpoint, the heart as the seat of emotions and thoughts, is also occasionally used to mean "throat". We can find this same use of the word *lev* in Isaiah 33:18 and 59:18, in Psalms

19:15 and 49:4 and in a few other verses. So, the throat is used as the organ of speech. Following the theme of adultery, then we have the men who are having sex with prostitutes laying on the prostitutes' beds making noises of ecstasy, instead of using their voices (their throats) as they should to cry out to God for His mercy and help.

Further, the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of verse 14 says that these men also slash themselves for the sake of corn (meaning grain) and wine. What this is speaking of is sacrificing to the Baals and the manner in which Baal worshippers often will do things to themselves to show sincerity by literally cutting themselves and bleeding. So, they are sacrificing to the Baal's, cutting themselves, and in addition to the wailing of ecstasy they now wail in pain. We read of these same sorts of pagan worship practices in Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel.

We'll stop here for today, conclude chapter 7 next time and also open chapter 8.