Hosea 10:2-12

This haftarah to the story of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16 predicts the downfall of the Northern Kingdom - consisting of the 10 tribes, called "Israel," "Ephraim" or Samaria.

Background

After the death of King Solomon, the northern kingdom of Israel rebelled and broke off from a united monarchy around 930 B.C. That left the tribe of Judah and Benjamin in the much smaller southern kingdom of Judah, in the territory surrounding Jerusalem.

So, the rebellion of the Northern Kingdom is compared to Korah's rebellion.

Just as Korah discounted God's establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, Jeroboam I, the first ruler of the newly seceded northern kingdom of Israel, established two sanctuaries to rival the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem: Dan, along his northern border, and Bethel, along his southern border not far from Jerusalem. He commissioned the construction of two golden calves and installed one at each shrine. He also ordained a new priesthood and established a pilgrimage festival on a date of his own choosing.

Hosea refers to the counterfeit sanctuary at Bethel as Beth Aven - House of wickedness or "self-exertion," which is the root of the Hebrew word "aven."

Hosea ministry began during the reign of Jeroboam II (reigned c. 786–746 B.C.) and lasted until near the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 721 B.C.

Hosea 10:2 - "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images."

"divided"= châlaq - divide by lot, distributing - as in constantly making deals; "smooth" and thus deceitful; to despoil (to divide up conquered riches)

The word also means to "flatter" in the sense of flattering oneself through self-deception.

"break down" = behead

Divided Allegiance

To hesitate in the face of evil, to try to remain neutral, to stay in grey, to be neither hot nor cold - is spiritually dangerous. "now shall they be found faulty" i.e. they will be treated as if they are guilty. You can't serve both God and Mammon.

The problem was they hedged their bets:

- 2 Kings 17:32 - "So they 'feared' the LORD, and [but] made unto themselves of the
lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places."

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" because it pushes us to declare ourselves on the Lord's side, like the Levites did at the sin of the Golden Calf.

- Exodus 32:26 - "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him."

The double-minded and those of a "divided heart" are never able to take action and cross over.

- James 1:8 - "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

- James 4:8 - "...purify your hearts, you double-minded."

- Psalm 119:113-114 - "I hate those who are double-minded, But I love Your law. You are my hiding place and my shield"

- 1 Kings 18:21 - "Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word."

- Revelation 3:15-16 - "'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."

- Matthew 6:22 - "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

This is all similar to the people's attitude toward Korah. If he prevailed, and it was beneficial to them, they would side with Korah.

Hosea 10:3 - "For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD; what then should a king do to us?"

The king - originally appointed through their own self-will - would be defeated (see 10:7). "As for a king, what will he do for us?" Anarchy is always the result. "Our kings have come and gone but we're still in this dire situation."

They groan for their losses, their sufferings, their fears, but do not repent.

Hosea 10:4 - "They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field."

NET - They utter empty words, taking false oaths and making empty agreements.
Therefore legal disputes sprout up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of a plowed field.

"justice that springs up as hemlock" means injustice was rampant.

**Hosea 10:5** - "The inhabitants of Samaria will lament over the calf idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it; its idolatrous priests will wail over it, because its splendor will be taken from them into exile."

"idolatrous priests" = the *Chemarim* - "black ones" sad, ascetic priests who go about in black attire as if in mourning

Beth Aven = House of self-exertion, wickedness

"âven" - from an unused root perhaps meaning properly, to pant (hence, to exert oneself, usually in vain; to come to naught

- **Matthew 7:21-23** - "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"

Jesus here quotes a psalm:

- **Psalm 6:8** - "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (ʼaven); for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping."

**Hosea 10:6** - "Even the calf idol will be carried to Assyria, as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be put to shame because of its wooden idol."

The Jews (Seder Olam Rabba, c. 22. p. 60, 61.) have a tradition, that, in the twentieth year of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglathpileser king of Assyria came and took away the golden calf in Dan; and, in the twelfth year of Ahaz, another king of Assyria (Shalmaneser) came and took away the golden calf at Bethel

"wooden idol" = ʻêtsâh - advice or counsel (don't know where KJV got wooden idol).

**Hosea 10:7** - "As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water."

"foam" = *qetseph* - wrath, foam, splinter, twig

The king, once so powerful a figure, is now inconsequential and as short-lived as foam, a bubble or a twig swept away on the water.

**Hosea 10:8** - "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."
The last phrase became a byword for unrepentant self-destruction in the face of God's judgment.

At Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans:

- **Luke 23:29-30** - "Look, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore, and breasts that never nursed.' At that time 'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"'

And at Christ's coming to rule:

- **Revelation 6:16** - "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:"

**Hosea 10:9** - "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them."

This recalls for them the strange and brutal affair of the Levite and his concubine at Gibeah in Judges 19. Like the tribes of the Northern Kingdom, they were indifferent to the making of idols (Judges 17), and the bloody crime precipitated a war in which thousands were killed. God's coming judgment would be even worse.

**Hosea 10:10** - "It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows."

Like heifers untamed, and bound in a yoke to plough, do not make and keep in one furrow, but turn out to the right or left, and make cross furrows; so it is intimated that this was the reason why the Lord would correct Israel, and suffer the nations to gather together against them, and carry them captive, because they did not plough in one furrow, or keep in the true and pure worship of God; but made two furrows, worshipping partly God, and partly idols. - *Gills Exposition*

Instead of two "furrows" the Septuagint has "in chastising them, or when they are chastised for their two iniquities," meaning the two golden calves.

**Hosea 10:11** - "And Ephraim is as a heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods."

One interpretation: Like a heifer taught to bear the yoke, and to plough; but learned it not, as the Targum; does not like it; chooses to tread out the corn where it can feed upon it, its mouth not being then muzzled, according to the law. Ephraim or the ten tribes were taught to bear the yoke of the law, and yield obedience to it, and perform good works; but did not like such a course of life.
Ephraim will be "ridden" by Assyria. Eventually, Judah and Jacob (the rest of the tribes) will also be subjected to hard labors by Babylon.

But there's an alternate way of interpreting this verse:

The tender and gentle methods God took with these people to bring them to obedience to his law. Ephraim being teachable like a heifer, he took hold of her fair neck, and stroked it to encourage her, and accustom her to the hand, and to the yoke; and then put the yoke of his law upon them, add trained them up in his institutions, and used also gentle methods to keep them in obedience; and also set Judah to "plough", and Jacob to "break the clods", prescribed for them; and employed them in good works.

Despite this, they rebelled. But there is still time to repent:

**Hosea 10:12** - "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

The Targum: "O house of Israel, do for yourselves good works; walk in the way of truth; establish for yourselves the doctrine of the law; behold, at all times the prophets say to you, return to the fear of the Lord; now shall he be revealed, and bring righteousness to you."

- **Galatians 6:7-9** - "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

"break up your fallow ground" -

- **Jeremiah 4:3** - "For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds."

- **Deuteronomy 10:16** - "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn."

- **Colossians 2:11-12** - “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism”