



5 | HOSEA 5

SHINING A LIGHT ON LEADERSHIP

God can change a culture if the leaders will repent.

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Call to Worship: *I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.
I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.—Psalm 9:1–2*

Introduction

Our message today is from Hosea 5 on page 752 of your pew Bible. The title of our message today is “Shining a Light on Leadership”.

Hosea felt the culture of Israel crumbling around him. Remember God told the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute as a picture of God's love for Israel. Hosea went after Gomer, and in Hosea 5, God is going after Israel.

In Hosea 4, Hosea's first recorded sermon, God took Israel to divorce court. God laid out his case (through Hosea) and showed how he had every legal reason to divorce Israel and depart from her. Yet, like Hosea, he had no intention of doing so. He would stick with Israel.

In Hosea 5, God gives the pathway back to relationship with him. God has a message for Israel through the prophet Hosea: the leaders need to listen to God and repent.

HOSEA'S MAIN POINT

Leaders can turn the tide of a corrupt culture if they will be bold and repent.

There is a way to turn around a morally corrupt culture. It's going to take some bold leaders to stand up and repent. This is the message of Hosea 5.

This is the message we need today. What can we do to change our towns and cities? God whittled down his people to 120 people in an upper room, and he used them to change the world. He can use you to change the world. Let's listen to Hosea's message.

1. A MESSAGE TO LEADERS (5:1-7)

We have much training for the engineer of a train or the driver of a forklift. We have training for truck drivers, machine operators, soldiers, cooks, and everything else under the sun. But what kind of training do we have for those who lead people with eternal souls? This message is for every Christian. We are called to be leaders in our culture and stand for the Gospel. We need to understand the weightiness and seriousness of leadership.

Those in Hosea's day had lost sight of the preciousness of those they were to serve. They lost sight of God. They were listening to the culture instead of listening to God.

GODLY LEADERS LISTEN TO GOD (5:1)

Hosea opens chapter 5 with a warning to the passive leaders of Israel. The downfall of a society always begins with **self-serving leaders**. Leaders are first and foremost must listen to God. The leaders in Hosea's day were listening to their culture.

5:1 | Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.

The **priests** are called out to “**pay attention.**” They are the leaders of the “**house of Israel**” who are to listen. All in the royal court and “**house of the king**” in the northern kingdom are to “**give ear.**” Why? Because “**the judgment is for you.**” The leaders of Israel are ultimately responsible for leading God's people away from God.

LEADERS LISTEN TO GOD AND LEAD TO VICTORY!

Mizpah and **Tabor** were once bastions of faithfulness. **Mizpah** was the place the prophet Samuel cleansed Israel from idolatry and put up an Ebenezer stone, a sign of spiritual victory, since the Lord “helped” Israel be done with idols of Baal and Ashtaroath. It was a turning point from the apostate time of the Judges.

Tabor was the place of the victories of Deborah and Barak. Instead of leading Israel to victory in the Lord, the priests and kings of Israel laid a **snare** and **spread a net** upon the people of God by serving themselves.

Kidner says: “If many an ordinary hilltop had its Baal shrine, wooing dozens of frequenters away from the true faith, the shrines on high places as famous as Mizpah and Mount Tabor would seduce their hundreds.”¹ Standards had shaken. Leaders had fallen. Holiness was gone. The Spirit of the Lord was grieved. They did not take their task seriously.

LEADERS LISTEN TO GOD AND SERVE GOD'S PEOPLE

Instead of **servicing the people**, the leaders of Israel served themselves. Remember Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).

Are you a servant-leader? Mom and dad, is your home a Tabor and a Mizpah, a place of God's help and victory? Are you leading your children to Christ, or are you putting traps and snares in their pathway?

When your child wants to spend time with you, try to say yes most of the time. Your work and responsibilities will still be there tomorrow, but your children won't always be at home with you.

LEADERS CONFRONT THE CULTURE (5:2)

Those priests in Hosea's day are really lazy shepherds – nothing more than “**revolters**” willing to neglect the sheep and even lead them to slaughter.

5:2a | And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.

ISRAEL'S LEADERS JOINED THE CULTURE

The meaning of **revolters** is very strong. It means “those who turn aside” from their own conscience and lead God's people away from God, leading them to perish for lack of knowing the Lord (4:6; 5:4). We have a name for those kinds of people: **sociopaths**. Sadly they are more and more in leadership both in the church and in the world.

We must open our eyes and see that God gave these self-serving priests to Israel as a judgment. What does that mean? It means they are going to sell everyone out for their own comfort until they are wiped out of the land, and God is going to replace them with

¹ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 57.

something else. God is going to take these people out of the land in order to prepare something better, something greater. For them, **he basically whittled them down to 120 people in an upper room** and then through these Spirit filled people, he turned the world upside down. Imagine what the Lord could do with us if we remain faithful.

A HIGH PRICE TO PAY

Instead of standing against the culture, the leaders of Israel were leading the people **deep into the slaughter**. The people of God did not stand up against their corrupt leaders, so they instead paid a high price.

These priests in Israel are self-serving men: completely willing to let the sheep perish as long as the leaders prosper. They are “**deep**” into what God calls a “**slaughter**” of the innocent people of Israel, **likely through the slaughter of innocent infants being sacrificed to pagan gods**. The priests, leaders and the king himself is guilty and will be held accountable.

We have a similar **slaughter** today. God's judgment is already upon our culture. Romans 1 says that when God judges a culture **there is a handing over to a depraved mind**. And what we have is such a slaughter in our country and in our world today all over the civilized West is like a **death cult**. We are literally **killing ourselves** where you abort the young, you destroy marriage, you kill off the elderly, and the sick and the infirm. What kind of future does a culture like ours have that does these things? God has handed us over to judgment. But let's remember the optimism of Hosea. He's going to judge Israel in order to clear the way for something better: for Christ. He's judging our country, and it can only lead to destruction, but God has something better for us. There will be revival. There will be awakening. There will a desperation that leads us to Christ.

I believe a similar judgment of God, such as in Romans 1, is upon our nation. God has given our nation which was once broadly Christian influenced, but is now headed to the slaughter. We are well on our way to destruction.

We must be like those 120 in the upper room. God always uses a faithful remnant that refuses to bow the knee to Baal. He will use us if we are faithful to turn the world upside down for Christ. There is a darkness that envelopes the earth in the last days, but there is at the same time great revival and awakening. Our cry and prayer ought to be awaken us Lord. Keep us faithful in the midst of the slaughter.

GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO HOLD LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE

5:2 | ... I will discipline all of them.

Here's a reason God's people need to hold people accountable. A leader can lead a country or a congregation into sin, but all the people pay the consequences. You must insist on living a truly revived Christian life.

God says, “**I will discipline all of them**” (5:2b). The idea of this word “discipline” is to fether in order to correct all Israel. The word (*musar*) often refers to “instruction designed to correct bad behavior, using painful means” (*cf* Isa 26:16; Jer 5:3; Job 5:17; Prov 3:11).² The word though very strong is one of fatherly correction and instruction.³ It

² George M. Schwab Sr., “Hosea,” in *Daniel–Malachi*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VII, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 204.

³ Mackay, 160.

is clear from this language that the Lord is referring to the soon captivity of Israel. God is merciful and will redeem them, but not without much pain. The glory must depart first. God's people will lose their freedom. They will be placed in captivity, far from the glory of God's presence, far from their homeland of Israel. Yet this too is a mercy. "It's going to hurt, but you will learn of Me. You will know Me intimately as a result." What a merciful God we serve!

But don't allow the church to get to this point, where it invites God's discipline. **Don't be like Israel of old that followed self-serving leaders.**

LEADERS CANNOT HIDE FROM GOD (5:3)

5:3 | I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled.

We have something in common with Israel. We think we can manage our sin by running from God. Can we really hide from God? Hosea warns Israel that this kind of strategy is self-defeating since sin hardens the conscience, making it impossible to return to God.

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (Psa 139:7-8).

GOD DOESN'T FORGET YOU

One of the things we tell ourselves when we attempt to run away from God is that if we forget him he will forget us. He won't leave you in your sin. When you sin, he is there. God does not forget us. On the contrary, he knows all things, including all we are and do, and this is frightening⁴ and comforting. God sees you. You cannot hide from him. He is shining a light on you. He is after you.

Don't run from God! Don't cover and hide your sin. Bring it out into the light.

WALK IN THE LIGHT

Christians are those who walk in the light! Who knows about your sins? Of course God knows, but if you really are a godly leader you will not hide your sin.

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:6-7).

We can't conceal our sins! We need to bring them to God and to a brother or sister that is close to us.

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." (Prov 28:13).

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 48.

LEADERS NEED THE LORD (5:4)

5:4 | Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD.

Leaders need the Lord to turn people from their sins. Only God can change the heart. Here we have a picture of total depravity. God stretches out his hands all day long (cf Isa 65:2; Rom 10:21), but people do not want to repent because **their deeds do not permit them to return to God**. By nature, we are all as Ephesians says, “children of wrath” enslaved to Satan, the world, and the passions of our flesh (Eph 2:1-3).

Worldliness is compared in Hosea to spiritual prostitution. Truly “**Ephraim played the whore**” (5:3). Jeroboam I set up an alternative altar at Bethel and Dan that was an architectural replica of the Temple at Jerusalem. Upon the altar was a golden calf that was set up in defiance of God’s decree that his name would be in Jerusalem. Of course, Jesus tells us **serving two masters is impossible** (Mt 6:24).

Worldly people think they can repent anytime, but God warns Israel that this is not the case: “**Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God**” (5:4). They think they can return to God whenever they want, not realizing that sin hardens the heart. **The more we indulge with sin, the more impossible it is to return to God.**

How do you turn a people to God whose deeds do not permit them to turn to God. You have to introduce them to the Lord. You need to pray for them, weep for them. George Whitefield used to stand in the Boston marketplace in Massachusetts and weep for people. He would say, “I weep for you because you cannot weep for yourselves.”

Are you that kind of leader that weeps for souls? Do you “stand in the gap” when no one else is there? Leaders are bold to point those around them to Christ. Open your eyes to the harvest!

THE RESULT OF BAD LEADERSHIP (5:4B-7)

What is the result of bad leadership? If we decide to go along with the culture, what happens? It’s clear: a generation that does not know they Lord.

A People who don’t know the Lord (5:4b)

5:4b | They know not the LORD...

Israel is cut off from knowing the Lord not because God had neglected to show them mercy. It was not that God had refused to help them. It’s because they loved the idols of this world more than the satisfying walk with the one true God. Whoredom blinds people. Worldliness is a killer more dangerous than Hitler or Stalin. The blindness of worldliness destroys our only hope: knowing the Lord. When we choose the world, we reject the Light of the world. We choose blindness. The great scandal for those who know the truth but do not obey it is that they will stumble.

A People enslaved to sin (5:5)

5:5 | The Pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.

The “pride” of Israel “testifies” against it (v. 5)—yet another witness to the guilt of the accused. The sentencing portion of the trial is stated here in part: Israel will fall and will take Judah with it.⁵

Gomer was brought to the slave market as a slave, probably with her hands tied. She's being led by an owner who is selling her. So God, the Glory and **Pride of Israel** uses a slavery analogy. Both northern and southern kingdoms will **stumble** in their guilt. They'll be led about as slaves because of their guilt and sin. They could be free in the Lord, but here's a powerful truth: choose sin, choose slavery. Sin is a miserable slavery isn't it?

Historically, the Lord is referring to their utter downfall. **Ephraim** (northern Israel) in 722BC will be destroyed forever by the Assyrians. Because of this **stumbling**, multitudes of Jewish people from the northern tribes will swell the borders of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah will have to massively expand the walls of Jerusalem. Yet even Judah will eventually fall to the Babylonians and be hauled away from God's land as slaves to Babylon beginning in 605 BC.

If you don't hold leaders accountable, and you decide to follow them into sin, it will lead to enslavement.

The cost of idols is infinitely higher than the cost of serving God. “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov 13:15), much harder than obedience to God. God allows his children to stumble in order to humble them so that they might seek him again.

A People without Fellowship with God (5:6)

The people of Israel will not let go of their idols. They think God is with them, but he has withdrawn his presence from them. Israel's sins are so serious that the Lord refuses to commune with them.

5:6 | With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them.

In Bethel and Dan, the people would seek the Lord **with their flocks and herds**. They were worshipping the golden calf in honor of Yahweh. We might say in our day, “How absurd.” Yet, there are people in churches all over the world who love the world in their heart, but have a religious spirit that is antichristian. God is not impressed with religious worship. We can teach the Bible faithfully, raise our hands in worship and still **not find** the Lord.

How fearful to be living the Christian life and not even realize he has withdrawn his presence from you. One day we **go to seek the LORD, but we will not find him** (5:6a). Those who will not **serve God with their whole heart** may look for the Lord. They may seek him half-heartedly, but they will never ever find the Lord in that condition. Why? **He has withdrawn from them** (5:6b) because God always hides himself from half-hearted people.

What is the requirement for finding God?

The requirement for finding God is *whole-hearted seeking*: “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer 29:13; cf 5:15).

⁵ Schwab, “Hosea,” in *Daniel–Malachi*, 205.

They could not find God because God will not be found by a person with a divided heart. If we want to find the Lord, there has to be a complete forsaking of idols. If you forsake the world and walk with the Lord, he tells us that you will “receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” (Mk 10:30). You will be able to say: “I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go...” (Song 3:4).

A People without Faith in God (5:7a)

The great loss in spiritual adultery is a great hardness of heart. If we give up the Lord of angel armies, what do we have left? Idols that cannot satisfy is all we have. These idols are not passive, but bring a hardness to the heart.

First, those who have a hard heart lose their ability to discern the Lord's presence. They try to return to the Lord without forsaking their idols, and he withdraws from them (5:6). What's the verdict?

5:7a | They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord.

The Israelites knew of the Lord, but they would not return to him in the way he has designed, by grace through faith. **They dealt faithlessly with the Lord.** They were so caught up with themselves and the world, they could not discern the Lord's presence anymore, so they wanted something tangible to worship. They would not forsake their golden calves and serve the Lord exclusively. They constantly heard the prophets, but would not tear down the high places where the idol groves were. Now that the Israelites' sin and their unbelief were such a fixed habit of mind and heart, they lost their tenderness and discernment. They had become hard-hearted.

Origen of Alexandria, Egypt first said, “**The same sun softens the wax and hardens the clay.**”⁶ The same word of God that can set you free forever, can also be your prison if you neglect it and ignore it. Remember what we hear in the book of Hebrews: “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:3). John Owen that such people become “sermon proof and sickness proof.” They don't feel the sickness of their sin as much.

God's people had become calloused. In spite of the convicting preaching of Hosea and Amos, and in spite of the fact that they saw the judgment of God already beginning to occur, yet they were passed being affected by the Word of God. They could not repent. They could not leave their sins, nor did they want to.

Are you growing in your faith? The Bible says in **2 Peter 1:5-7**, “Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” You are either growing in your faith as a leader or backsliding. Don't become faithless!

A People without a Future in God (5:7b)

The people of Israel had started families with pagan women. This was a common problem for God's people in the Old Testament. They would not turn back to God because

⁶ Origen of Alexandria. trans. by G.W. Butterworth. *On First Principles or De Principiis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1936), 175.

of family pressure. They had foreign wives with whom they have **borne alien children**. They thought they were too far in to turn back to God.

5:7b | For they have borne alien children. Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields.

They don't want to lead their families in the worship of Yahweh. Further, they don't want to give up their **new moon** pagan festivals. Because they hang on to their pagan practices, **the fields** will be devoured by the Assyrians in 722BC. The image is that the **new moon** devours the fields. Hang on to idols, and you will be devoured by them. Idols don't satisfy. In fact, in the end, they leave you impoverished.

For leaders who follow God and are willing to stand alone and be separated unto God, he gives a promise:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer 29:11).

2. THE MERCY OF LEADERS (5:8-11)

5:8 | Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!”

What are we to do as leaders? Leaders are to sound the warning. The horn is an instrument of mercy. It warns beforehand of danger. Israel needed to repent or God would send the Assyrians to judge them and haul them away in slavery or slaughter, and in 722 B.C. that actually happened.

Northern Israel is judged in 722B.C. and never comes back to the land. They become the mix breed Samaritans. Yet there is still mercy here. Jesus goes through Samaria in his earthly ministry and saves a woman at the well, who evangelizes her whole town. Hosea's generation never recovered. They were hardened. **They were sermon proof and sickness proof**. Let us hear the word Hosea has for us.

THE BOLDNESS OF MERCY

We need to be leaders that are merciful toward God's people. Sometimes people will say, “That preacher is so **unkind** to preach about hell.” Or, “How can that pastor preach so boldly, it seems **rude!**” Is it rude for a **doctor** to tell his patient he has cancer? Is it unkind for an architect to tell his client there's a swamp on the land, and it's unbuildable?

Leaders need to give a clear message of warning. To warn God's people is merciful and kind. That's what we see here in Hosea 5:8, the mercy of warning someone about the dangers of continuing in sin.

THE MERCY OF COURAGE (5:8)

Leaders are called to be bold in preaching the Word of God. Paul wrote to Timothy:

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

When leaders have the courage to blow the trumpet of warning, it is such a mercy.

5:8 | Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!"

God is so merciful to give the church leaders that will “blow the trumpet”. He called on Hosea to “blow the trumpet”. As leaders we can't be uninvolved. We can't pretend like our culture is ok. It's not ok. And we have to speak up. We are all called to “blow the trumpet.”

Benjamin is named because that is the tribe where Jerusalem is. Leaders are to follow Benjamin – in other words, they are to follow the true worship of God at his temple in Jerusalem, in the tribe of Benjamin.

A call is issued for the **leaders to blow the trumpet** and shout, citing specific military installations and strongholds (5:8). This rhetoric invokes the panic of an invasion, the anticipation of imminent battle.⁷ In the role of watchman (*cf* 9:8; 8:1), the prophet shouts the battle alarm, calls for both kinds of trumpets to sound the danger signal, summoning all sentinels to lift the cry of warning (*cf* Josh 6:5).⁸

The ram's **horn** shofar and the silver bugle **trumpet** were to be blown in Gibeah, Ramah and Beth-aven. These cities all straddle the border of the two kingdoms and were the “axis of evil” in Hosea's time. The three cities were once bastions of faithfulness, but are now ground zero for Baal worship.

Gibeah was the place where a prophets' school was located, and where Saul began to prophesy and reside after that. It was such a holy place, Samuel refers to it as “Gibeah of God (Elohim, 1 Sam 10:5).

Ramah is the place of Rachel's burial.

Beth-aven (house of wickedness) is a nickname for Bethel (house of God). It's no longer the house of God, but the house of wickedness because it is the city of golden calf worship that replaced the worship of God at Jerusalem, where God placed his name. The three cities form a triangle in the tribe of Benjamin, near Jerusalem. These three towns were leading and complicit in the golden calf worship.

Leaders must be bold and call sin what it is: it is moral evil and rebellion against a holy God. Sin always leads to misery. It is unkind not to warn people that sin leads to a life of chaos and fear and anger. The only remedy is to repent and turn to Christ.

THE MERCY OF CORRECTION (5:9-10)

God is so merciful to give the church leaders that will warn the church of correction and chastening. Leaders and pastors who say “peace, peace” all the time are lying to you. Those who say, “God wants you to be rich and prosperous” are wrong. They don't read the Bible carefully. God is going to correct his children. He'll bring them to desolation on this earth if that's what it takes to bring them to holiness.

We can't back down as leaders from bringing correction. Paul said, “We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (1 Thess 5:14).

⁷ Schwab, 208.

⁸ David A. Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 131.

Correction of False Peace (5:9)

5:9 | Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

The people are not worried about God's correction. God says to the people he loves: "I'm going to cut you down." They are **prosperous**, and **they equate success and prosperity with God's blessing**. Ephraim (Samaria) is so prosperous right now in Hosea's day, more than in the days of David and Solomon. This is the richest times in Israel's history. But God mercifully tells them that he's going to strip them of everything. They can't imagine being cut down and brought to **desolation**.

Don't confuse success and prosperity with God's blessing. Wake up and repent and live for Christ. You may be thinking, as a Christian, "God's not going to chasten me." Listen, just because God is patient, doesn't mean his correction won't arrive. "**Whom the LORD loves he chastens**" (Heb 12:6, NKJV). If you have your days of sinning, you will have your days of correcting, even if God has to bring you so low, to an utter desolation. If you've committed your life to Christ, he'll have you, body and soul.

Correcting False Worship (5:10)

5:10 | The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.

Why is the Lord condemning the **princes of Judah**? Haven't they been faithful? Actually, they have not. King Ahaz of Judah is has followed after those who moved the ancient landmark of God's Temple to Bethel and Dan and erected golden calves.

Ahaz was overcome with the glory of his monarchy and in 732 he went to Damascus to swear homage to Tiglath-Pileser and his gods. While Ahaz was in Assyria, he took an interest to an altar which he saw there, he had one like it made in Jerusalem, which, with a corresponding change in ritual, he made a permanent feature of the Temple worship. Changes were also made in the arrangements and furniture of the Temple, "because of the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs 16:18). Furthermore, Ahaz built an astrological observatory with accompanying sacrifices, after the fashion of the pagan kings of his day. In other ways Ahaz lowered the character of the national worship. Ahaz offered his son as a human sacrifice by fire to Moloch (2 Kgs 16:3), a practice condemned by God's law (Lev 18:21).

Idolatry is a worship problem. King Ahaz was willing to "**move the ancient landmark**" of worship in the Jerusalem Temple. He wasn't exactly like the northern tribes (**Ephraim**) who moved the worship of God to Dan and Bethel, but he still changed the worship of God to be like the pagans, offering his sons in human sacrifice (2 Chron 28:3). How do we move the ancient landmark of true worship to the living God?

There is a great cost when we twist the worship of God. For this reason, God's judgment is coming. He says to the **princes of Judah**, "**I will pour out my wrath like water**" (5:10). Even some of the leaders in the faithful southern kingdom will be affected. We don't want to get too close to idolatry. The Assyrians will utterly destroy northern Israel. Thousands of refugees from the north will enter into Jerusalem, and later Hezekiah will have to enlarge the walls of the holy city. Yet most will be lost – either killed or enslaved – forever blended into another land and culture, never to return. Judah is warned that God's wrath against idolatry can pour on them too.

Wise and godly people will not play with sin, or temptation, or the world, or unbelief.

THE MERCY OF GOD'S CRUSHING (5:11)

Sometimes God shows his mercy by crushing us to bring us back to himself. If we see a brother or sister pursuing sin, and God brings crushing trials into their life, we need to see what a mercy this is. When things get difficult and hard and crushing, it often keeps us from pursuing sin and **filth**.

5:11 | Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth.

In the days of Hosea, northern Israel delayed in repenting, and was “**crushed in judgment**” under the foot of Assyria. She did everything she could to compromise, being **oppressed** (*lit* “exploited”) as a vassal state, a slave of Assyria.

Israel didn't realize she was enslaved to Assyria and under God's **judgment**. Israel was immensely prosperous at this time. This is why the kings of northern Israel as well as King Ahaz of Judah would literally travel to Assyria and pay homage to their pagan gods. It seemed like the more they went after **filth**, the easier life was, for a while.

Israel didn't feel “crushed in judgment”, but the fact is she was a slave of Assyria. The kings of Israel went to Assyria in 732 B.C. to pay homage the Assyrian gods. Little did they know that a mere 10 years later, northern Israel would be utterly sacked by the Assyrians, **crushed** by the **judgment** of God.

Sin will take you farther than you want to go. We must be swift to repent, or we will be “**crushed in judgment**”, that is, disciplined by God. The crushing God describes for northern Israel is not one of condemnation, but of **correction** (*cf* 5:15). God crushes to correct. He tears us that he might heal us (6:1).

As a leader, we must not put band-aids on God's crushing. We need to let God have his full work of humbling that sinner or saint.

We also need to be of a blameless character. We must not go after filth but set the example for the believer.

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).

3. MOMENTS FOR LEADERS (5:12-15)

A godly leader will recognize certain moments and use them for the kingdom. That's what Hosea is doing.

MOMENTS OF HARDSHIP (5:12, 14)

5:12 | But I am like a **moth** to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah....
¹⁴ For I will be like a **lion** to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

The Lion and the Moth

God here is said to be like a **lion** and a **moth**. Donald Grey Barnhouse commented on this unusual way of God's love.

This is the progress of God's love. He will not let us lose ourselves without exhausting all of the resources of his love. The **moth** may have eaten valuable possessions, but we can turn the rug around, we can put the couch against a wall where the ravages cannot be seen, we can move a lamp so that the light will not shine upon the destruction. Then he is forced to send the **lion**. With no warning at all, great trouble springs upon us like a beast of prey. Fear grips us. Our blood runs cold. Happy are we, if we realize that this is the Lord of love, who calls us to turn from the path where lions lurk and to run to the path of his will where no enemy can assail us.⁹

The unraveling of the northern kingdom of Israel is coming “**like a moth**” who eats holes in clothing. Here, God describes himself like a moth. Like a moth, God will eat away at the things we treasure on earth because he wants us to seek him.

If we don't respond, he will send in **lion** like things that will utterly humble us. When a person or a society is falling apart, or if there is some sort of life crisis or difficulty, as leaders, we need to help people see God's activity as a moth. He's bringing pain so that we will deal with our sin before it gets worse.

MOMENTS OF HEALING (5:13)

Leaders don't panic and go to the world for answers. We set a blameless example and take responsibility. We take time to seek after God so we won't be tempted to seek after the world.

5:13 | When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound.

What a mercy that “**Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his wound**” (5:13). But Ephraim and Judah are like the man in the letter of James who “is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like” (Jas 1:23-24). Instead of seeking the Lord, Israel “**went to Assyria and sent to the great king**” for this spiritual disease. Who is this “**great king**”? One cannot be certain, but there were two great kings who ruled in Hosea's day: Tiglath-Pilezer III and his son, Shalmaneser V. Hosea is saying, you should have gone to see the doctor, but instead you went to the circus. Will you be distracted at the circus from your pain? Yes. But you will eventually die. You need help that the world cannot give. The world cannot help you. You must seek the Lord. Isaiah cried out— “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” (Isa 55:6).

Many people attend a church for some time but still delay to answer the Lord, still delay to come. All day long he stretches out his hands and says: “Come unto me, and I will

⁹ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Let Me Illustrate: Stories, Anecdotes, Illustrations* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1967), 20.

give you rest" (Mt 11:28). "Learn of me," he says. "Look unto me and be saved all the ends of the earth" he says (Isa 45:22). Yet there are so many who hear these beautiful words and will not seek the Lord for help. Many in the church today would rather seek relief in the world: entertainment, worldly pleasure, even alcohol and substance abuse. True believers seek the Lord. Those pretenders among God's people who insist on seeking relief in the world will ultimately be torn up and carried off in their own misery. The longer you continue to delay in accepting the mercy and salvation which he has offered you, the longer God will hide his face.

MOMENTS OF HUMILITY (5:15)

God is merciful. If you seek him, he will return. But you have to humble yourself. He says:

5:15 | I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

God's visible presence, the glory cloud, was so great that in the days of Solomon, at the building of the Temple, it is said that "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God" (2 Chron 5:14). But now, in the days of Hosea, God determines it is time to remove his presence from earth and **return again** to his **place** in the heaven of heavens. Earth was originally designed to be a Temple for God with Eden as his garden Temple. But since that time, beginning with Adam and Eve, God removed himself from his garden Temple. After the flood of Noah, Yahweh intended on dwelling with Abraham's family in the city where his name would be written (Jerusalem), and promised Solomon at the inauguration of the Temple: "I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time" (1 Kgs 9:3).

Augustine said, "Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility."

Certainly, if the Lord abandoned his own city for a time in order to chasten his people, he will chasten those who truly know him (Heb 12:6). God may hide himself from you in response to your stubbornness and pride. As Robert Murray McCheyne once put it: "God has last knocks."¹⁰ Oh, how do you know, my friend, that this is not his very last knock on the door of your heart and that failing to get you to open the door today, he may never come to knock again? Seek him now.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

You need to **acknowledge your guilt** and **seek his face**. It is when you seek him earnestly in your distress that you will find him! If you don't seek him now, the reality is, you may never find him.

To be fully committed to seek the Lord earnestly with "all our hearts" means 100 per cent commitment. It means seeking his face and what gives him glory. It means rooting

¹⁰ Robert Murray McCheyne. "Christ a Merciful High Priest" in *Works*, vol 2 (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 56.

out anything that is bad – ruthlessly tearing down the high places and getting rid of the other gods in the midst of our own lives.

Conclusion

We as leaders need to lead the way. This passage is addressed to priests, and in the New Testament, we are all priests of the living God. We all have the ministry of reconciliation.

Are you living a blameless life? Are you qualified to be a leader in this church? The qualifications for a Christian leader is merely to be living a consistent Christian life for the Lord.

THE CHURCH SIGN

The first time I visited this church at night, I couldn't see the sign. The lights were out. I passed the place up. I could see.

When we designed a new sign, I made sure it was all lit up so people could see. Are you light for this world so that people can see Jesus? Turn to him now anew and afresh and surrender.