

EPHRAIM FEEDETH ON WIND

TEXT: HOSEA 12:1-14

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). What he meant was that life lived apart from God was vanity; it was emptiness; it was a tragic waste of time.
2. Hosea has the same thing in mind when he says, "Ephraim feedeth on the wind" (12:1). Feeding on wind is a vivid description for pursuit of empty and vain things which are without profit and have no lasting value.
3. In the context of the book of Hosea, feeding on wind figuratively depicts the futility of running to Assyria and Egypt for help (12:1b). This has been a major theme throughout the book of Hosea (cf. 5:13; 7:11; 8:9, 13; 9:3, 6; 10:6; 11:5, 11).

I. EPHRAIM FEEDETH ON WIND BY NOT TRUSTING IN GOD

1. "Ephraim feedeth on wind" (12:1), that is, rather than getting right with God, Ephraim was feeding himself with vain hopes of assistance from man.
2. "The east wind" (12:1) blows across the hot Arabian desert. It is parching, scorching, and destructive. In leaving God and following idols, Ephraim "fed on" what is unsatisfying, and chased after what is destructive.
3. This is a reference to Israel forging alliances with their heathen neighbors, particularly Assyria and Egypt.
4. Israel was guilty of duplicity. While they made an alliance with the Assyrians, they were at the same time exporting (olive) oil into Egypt, Assyria's enemy (12:1b – probably as a bribe).
5. Hosea 12:2 says, "The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah..." Judah, like the northern tribes of Israel, also followed a devious course of deception, particularly under wicked King Ahaz. Therefore, the LORD also had a "controversy with Judah" (12:2; cf. 4:1).
6. According to the Bible, there is an unalterable law that God always judges men according to their "doings" (12:2).
7. Proverbs 24:12 says God shall "render to every man according to his works."

8. The book of Ecclesiastes ends with this statement, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14).
9. Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."
10. Romans 2:6 says God "will render to every man according to his deeds."
11. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."
12. Revelation 20:12 says that at the Great White Throne Judgment, the dead will be "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."
13. In the final chapter of the book of Revelation, the Lord says, "And, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

II. ISRAEL FEEDETH ON WIND BY NOT PREVAILING WITH GOD

1. Hosea now turns from Israel (called "Jacob" in 12:2) the nation to Israel (Jacob) the man (12:3). Jacob "took his brother by the heel."
2. Genesis 25:26 says, "And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob."
3. Jacob's name literally means "Heel-gripper" or "Supplanter." Even "in the womb," Jacob wanted to be the firstborn (12:3).
4. "By his strength he had power with God" (12:3) refers to Jacob's wrestling with the angel of the LORD, i.e. the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. Gen. 32:24-28).
5. The LORD told Jacob, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."
6. Just as Jacob prevailed by trusting wholly in God's power, so also could his descendants if they would turn back to God.
7. Jacob's strength lay in his weakness (cf. II Cor. 12:9, 10), and he prevailed only when his thigh was put out of joint by God. It was then that he learned to depend wholly on God.
8. The point here is that Jacob's descendants needed to learn to depend wholly on God – and not on the Assyrians or the Egyptians.

9. "Yea, he had power over the angel" (12:4), i.e. he had power once he acknowledged his human weakness.
10. "He wept" (12:4). In the Genesis account we are not told that Jacob wept. We are told in Genesis 32:26 that Jacob "made supplication, saying to the angel, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."
11. When Jacob could no longer wrestle, he resorted to weeping and supplication, thus prevailing with God and receiving the honor of being named "Israel," which means "Prince of God."
12. The angel of the LORD found Jacob in Bethel (Hosea 12:4).
13. Genesis 28:19 says Jacob "called the name of that place Bethel."
14. Then later, we read in Genesis 35:15, "And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel."
15. "And there He spake with us" (Hosea 12:4). In other words, God spoke to Jacob's descendants in Jacob before they were born. We see the same idea in Hebrews 7:9, 10.
16. Note the contrasts here: Jacob prevailed with God, but his descendants were degraded by idols. God found Jacob at Bethel, but Jacob's descendants turned Bethel into Beth-aven ("house of vanity") – cf. Hosea 10:5, 15.
17. The LORD is His memorial (12:5), i.e. the LORD'S name, which endureth for ever. Psalm 135:13 says, "Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations."
18. People make memorials to great men. For example, on Memorial Day we remember those brave men who died in battle defending our country. People name buildings, streets and highways, airports, hospitals, schools, churches and so forth after famous men.
19. That is good (if the men were honorable men), but more importantly, the LORD is our "memorial" (Hosea 12:5).
20. The point here in Hosea 12:5 is that we do not need images or pictures or statues to remind us of God. His very name, Jehovah – "the self-existing One" expresses His nature (cf. Ex. 3:13-15).

III. EPHRAIM FEEDETH ON WIND BY NOT TURNING BACK TO GOD (12:6a).

1. God expects His children to "keep mercy and judgment" (12:6).
2. Micah 6:8 says, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"
3. "And wait on thy God continually" (12:6b).

4. Psalm 27:14 says, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."
5. Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him."
6. Psalm 40:1 says, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry."
7. Though the Israelites were originally shepherds and farmers, they soon became known as dishonest merchants and swindlers who "loved to oppress" (12:7).
8. Unfortunately, this reputation remains even to this day.
9. They were known for using "the balances of deceit," i.e. false balances (cf. Amos 8:4, 5; Micah 6:11, 12).
10. Oftentimes when people start making a lot of money they tend to forget about God (12:8; cf. 13:6).
11. Our Lord said to the church of Laodicea, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." (Rev. 3:16, 17).
12. Ephraim became rich, complacent, and deluded – even convincing themselves that "none iniquity" could be found in them (12:8).
13. Even though Israel bragged that no iniquity could be found in her, God saw things much differently (cf. 4:8; 14:1).
14. God would judge them for their folly and self-deception. Their punishment would be the destruction of their cities and their homes, so they would have to live in tents again, as they did "in the days of the solemn feast," i.e., the Feast of Tabernacles (12:9; cf. Lev. 23:34).
15. "The solemn feast" (12:9) was commemorative of Israel's redemption out of Egypt. But the tent-dwelling Hosea speaks of would be attended by intense misery and sorrow, on account of their wickedness and refusal to repent.
16. When the farmers plowed the fields, they piled the rocks in big heaps. Just as there were numerous "heaps in the furrows of the fields," so there were plenty of idolatrous altars all over Gilead and Gilgal (12:11).
17. Once again, Hosea returns to the story of Jacob, drawing again a parallel between Jacob and his descendants (12:12). Jacob had to flee into Syria to escape from his brother Esau (cf. Gen. 28:1-7). He "served for a wife" (Rachel) and "for a wife he kept sheep."
18. Genesis 29:20 says, "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

19. Just as God allowed Jacob to return to the Promised Land, He would allow his descendants to return also. They would soon go into captivity, but God would still watch over them – there was still a glimmer of hope.
20. Israel is still "preserved" (12:13). This is one of the many proofs that the Bible is the Word of God. The Israelites have been scattered all over the world, and have been reviled, persecuted and nearly exterminated by Haman, Antiochus Epiphanes, Hitler, and other tyrants. Today they are being attacked by the various Muslim terrorists.
21. Yet they are still "preserved" and have not lost their unique identity.
22. I read that Queen Victoria asked her Jewish prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, "Can you give me one verse in the Bible that will prove it is the Word of God?" He replied: "Your Majesty, I will give you *one word* – Jew. If there was nothing else to prove the truth of the Bible, the history of the Jews is sufficient."
23. Mark Twain, an admitted skeptic, wrote this in 1899 in *Harper's Magazine*:
"The Egyptian, Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away. The Greek and Roman followed, made a vast noise and they are gone. Other peoples have sprung up, and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out and they sit in twilight now or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal, but the Jew. All other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"
24. One preacher said that the Jews are like Jonah in the belly of the whale – undigested. Throughout the centuries, the Jew has wandered among the nations but has remained undigested, unassimilated, and unamalgamated.
25. Ephraim provoked God to anger "most bitterly" (12:14). They shed innocent blood, even sacrificing their little babies to Molech and Baal (cf. II Kings 17:5, 6, 17, 18).
26. Their "reproach" (12:14) still remains and will remain until the end of the Great Tribulation when a remnant of Israel will finally repent of their sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION:

1. Israel was guilty of duplicity. While they made an alliance with the Assyrians, they were at the same time exporting oil into Egypt, Assyria's enemy (12:1b – probably as a bribe). This refers to olive oil, not to fossil fuel!
2. Our government is doing the same thing today with Egypt, Israel, Syria, Red China, Russia, and so on. It was wrong back then when Israel did it, and it is wrong today when the USA does it.
3. By the way, apparently this is the main reason Russia has invaded Ukraine. Over half of the EU's gas and oil consumption is imported from outside the EU, and a large percentage of it comes from Russia.
4. A large portion of this Russian oil bound for Western Europe passes through Ukraine. And twice in the past decade, in 2006 and 2009, Russia stopped natural gas shipments to Ukraine during disputes over gas prices. That resulted in gas and oil shortages in some European countries.
5. What we are seeing unfold in the Ukraine could lead up to the fulfillment of the prophecies recorded in Ezekiel 38 & 39.
6. Cf. Hosea 14:9.