

Lesson 38

A Review of Some Terminology

The names Israel, Judah, and Ephraim mean different things at different points in history.

- Is Ephraim pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian? It depends on when we ask.
- Is Ephraim the same as Israel or different? It depends on when we ask.
- Are there two kingdoms or three kingdoms? It depends on when we ask.
- Was Pekah the king of Israel or the king of Ephraim? It depends on when we ask.

First, they are the names of people. (See the numbered items on the Handout for Lesson 38.)

The patriarch Jacob was also named Israel, and he had twelve sons, which included Judah and Joseph. Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Second, Israel became the name of the entire nation, which was divided up into twelve tribes.

Because Levi did not get a tribal allotment, Joseph's allotment was divided between his two sons so that the number of tribal regions would remain 12. That means there was a tribe named Judah, and another tribe (actually a half-tribe) named Ephraim. This was the situation during the days of the judges and the days of the unified kingdom under Kings Saul, David, and Solomon.

Third, when the kingdom was divided after Solomon, the northern kingdom retained the national name Israel (likely because it also retained most of the tribes).

The southern kingdom was named Judah because Judah was the largest tribe in the south. Benjamin was also a southern tribe at this time, but the southern tribe of Simeon had by this time already been absorbed into Judah. When the book of Hosea opened this situation was still in place.

Fourth, there was civil war in the north when Menahem became the pro-Assyrian king of Ephraim based on the west side of the Jordan River and Pekah became the anti-Assyrian king of Israel based on the east side of the Jordan River. During this twelve year period, there were three kingdoms: Judah, Ephraim, and Israel. Part of Hosea takes place in this time period.

Fifth, after Menahem's son, Pekahiah, was killed by his rival, King Pekah, the civil war ended and we once again had only two kingdoms: Judah and Israel.

But two things then happened: (1) Pekah moved his throne to Samaria in Ephraim (where Pekahiah had ruled), and (2) Assyria soon took most of the land that was east of the Jordan (where Pekah had ruled).

And so, the nation of Israel could rightly be called Ephraim because the tribe of Ephraim was just about all that was left and the government was located in Ephraim. This was the situation

when Samaria was besieged by Assyria and when Israel was finally defeated. The end of Hosea is focused on this time period.

So, to what do Israel, Judah, and Ephraim refer? It depends on when we ask!

Hosea 11:10-11

10 They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; 11 they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.

Last week we saw that verses 10-11 have shifted forward in time and are describing **future** blessings that were in store later for Ephraim or Israel.

Our first question this week is this: What future blessing are these verses describing?

We know the answer to that question. We have already seen it in this book of Hosea. The future blessing promised for Israel was the same future blessing promised for all the world – Jesus!

When did Israel repent? When was Israel saved? When did Israel go after the Lord? When did God roar like a lion? When did Israel return?

Again, we know the answer to those questions – those things happened when Jesus came in the first century to bless the entire world.

Jeremiah tells us the same thing:

Jeremiah 23:5-6 – Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.** And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

Jeremiah 30:3 – For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel** and Judah, says the LORD, and **I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.**

Those things occurred when Christ established his new covenant, which we read all about in the next chapter of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31 – Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

But did God roar like a lion at that time? Yes, he did.

Revelation 5:5 – And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; **behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered,** so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Verses 10-11 are a wonderful prophecy about Christ and about the church of Christ. And, in particular, these verses are a wonderful prophecy about the blessings that lay in store for Israel in the Lord’s kingdom.

Yes, God still had a special plan for Israel – but it was the same special plan that God had for

everyone. And that special plan was the gospel of Christ through which God offered entry for all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, into the kingdom of Christ.

And those who believe that God has some special plan today for the Jews that is different from God's plan for everyone else – they should pause and think about what they are saying! If God needs a plan that is different from the gospel of Christ – then what does that say about the gospel? Is the new plan better than the gospel? How could it possibly be better? Or is the new plan inferior to the gospel? Then why do we need it? The gospel of Christ is the only plan anyone needs!

In these verses we see the scattered northern tribes enjoying that great blessing. They turn to God, and when God roars they all come trembling from wherever they had been scattered – from the west, from Assyria, and from Egypt. And God returns them to their homes.

What we see here is a **new exodus**. God is once again leading his people out of bondage. And when did that new exodus happen?

Galatians 5:1 – For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Despite all that they had done, God was still planning to bless Israel – but those blessings were for the future generations of Hosea's listeners, and those blessings would not be

enjoyed until the time came when God blessed the entire world through the Messiah.

And we see an example of the fulfillment of verses 10–11 when we turn to John 4 and read about the Samaritan woman at the well, who was a descendant of Hosea's listeners.

John 4:25 – The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Yes, Hosea may be the saddest book in the Bible. But even the saddest book in the Bible has a happy ending – and we see that happy ending prophesied here in verses 10–11 and fulfilled in John 4.

Before we leave these verses, let's look more closely at the promise we see at the end of verse 11: "I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD."

Is this a **literal** return or a **figurative** return?

The explanation we just considered interprets that phrase **figuratively**. That is, the people would not literally return to the land of Israel, but rather their descendants would return to spiritual Israel when they obeyed the gospel and were added to the Lord's church.

Romans 11:24 – For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural

branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Galatians 6:15-16 – For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Under that view, God never promised to literally return the scattered Israelites of the northern tribes back to their homeland. Yes, many Jews returned to Palestine in 1947, but that return was not the result of any promise made by God.

Yes, we do see promises of future blessings for Israel in Hosea and elsewhere in the Bible, but those promises were fulfilled when Jesus came and brought the great world-wide blessing that had been promised to Abraham long before.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 – Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Acts 3:24-26 – And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

But how do we respond to those who argue for a literal fulfillment of this promised return?

Some argue that this promised return happened in 1947, while others argue that it will happen at or near the end of the world. They say that the return will be a literal return to physical land. How should we respond to that?

Very often, those who argue for a literal return will tell you proudly that they are simply taking the Bible to mean what it says. You will sometimes hear them use the phrase "rigid literalism." They will brag that they take everything in the Bible literally, and they will criticize us for doing otherwise. How should we respond?

I think a very good way to respond is to first point them to what the Bible has to say about rigid literalism. Yes, most things in the Bible should be understood literally, but not everything – and the Bible is very clear on that point. Rigid literalism is the wrong way to approach the Bible. The Bible itself tells us that.

But where does the Bible tell us that? To answer that question, we need to turn to a book in the New Testament written by the Apostle John – but that book is not the book of Revelation (the most figurative book in the entire Bible), but instead is one of his other books – the gospel of John.

There is a frequently recurring theme in the book of John, and that theme is this: we should **not** interpret the Bible with a rigid literalism.

Over and over again in the book of John we see people who are interpreting the words of God with a rigid literalism, but who are told that their rigidly literal view is completely wrong!

John 2:19-21 - Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

John 3:3-4 - Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

John 4:13-15 - Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

John 4:32-34 - But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

John 6:51-52 - "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will

give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

John 7:33-35 – Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

John 8:21-22 – So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?"

John 11:11-13 – After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.

John 13:8-9 – Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

In each of those nine examples, someone interprets the word of Christ with what can only be called "rigid literalism," and in each case that interpretation is wrong.

And I find it very interesting that those inspired examples are from the pen of the same apostle who gave us the most figurative book in the Bible – the book of Revelation. Do you think

that perhaps John was trying to tell us something about that other book?

Yes, most of the Bible should be understood literally – but not all of the Bible. And how do we know that? We know that for many reasons, but one reason comes from the nine examples we just looked at from the book of John. And those nine examples are a good starting point if you ever find yourself discussing the Bible with a rigid literalist.

Hosea 11:12

12 Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.

Yes, a happy ending was promised, but no, that happy ending was not promised to the people of Hosea's own day. Instead, it would be a happy ending for their descendants when they heard and obeyed the gospel.

But here in verse 12 Hosea takes us back once again to the people of his own day. "Ephraim has (now back to past tense) surrounded me with lies." To whom does the pronoun "me" refer?

It could be Hosea himself, in which case verse 12 would be describing all of the false shrines and false worship that Hosea no doubt saw all around him.

Or it could be God, in which case verse 12 would again be describing all of the false shrines and

false worship that the people had built in the land given to them by God.

But how had those things “surrounded” God? I think the example of Bethel that we have already seen several times answers that question – Bethel means House of God, but we know that Bethel had instead been turned into a House of Wickedness. They had surrounded God with lies in his own house!

Verse 12 also uses the phrase “house of Israel,” and we have talked before about that phrase. Either it refers to the land of Israel or perhaps it refers to the leadership of Israel. Either way, the point is the same – all of Israel was filled with lies and deceit.

And so, while God had blessings in store for Israel, those blessings would not come for this rebellious generation. Instead, those blessings would come to future generations who would hear and obey the gospel.

But what about the future people who heard the gospel but rejected it? They would also be rejected just like their rebellious ancestors had been rejected.

Matthew 21:37–41 – Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to

other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.

That's the first half of verse 12 – the easy half. Let's now look at the second half of verse 12 – the difficult half!

“But Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.”

And our first question is this: Is verse 12 **complimenting** Judah or **condemning** Judah?

The answer is easy if we look only at the ESV translation, but the ESV is not the only translation. While verse 12 is certainly a compliment of Judah in the ESV, in other translations it is certainly not.

- (NIV) And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.
- (NEB) And Judah is still restive under God, still loyal to the idols he counts holy.
- (NCV) And Judah turns against God, the faithful Holy One.

So which is correct? Is Judah being complimented or criticized?

Back when I taught engineering, I would always tell my students that, after answering an exam question, they should always pause and ask themselves whether their answer makes sense before moving on to the next question. Let's ask that same question here.

Based on the context, what would we expect to see about Judah in verse 12? A compliment or a

criticism? Well, here is what we see just two verses later:

Hosea 12:2 – The LORD has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds.

If Judah is walking with God and still faithful to the Holy One, then why is Judah being indicted by God only two verses later? I think the answer is that the ESV translation of verse 12 is wrong. I think the other translations are correct in at least one respect – I agree with them that verse 12 is a criticism of Judah.

But what then is going on here at the end of verse 12? Why is it so difficult to translate? And which translation is correct?

The difficulty comes from the Hebrew words used in verse 12 that are thought by many (including the ESV) to refer to God – “El” translated “God” and “Qados” translated “Holy One” in the ESV.

Those words are sometimes used in the Bible **not** in reference to God. In fact, absent context, those two words are ambiguous.

Exodus 34:14 – For you shall worship no other **god** [El], for the LORD [Yahweh], whose name is Jealous, is a jealous **God** [El].

Zechariah 14:5 – Then the LORD [Yahweh] my God [Elohim] will come, and all the **holy ones** [Qados] with him.

Psalms 89:7 – a **God** [El] greatly to be feared in the council of the **holy ones** [Qados]...

As we see in those examples, the word El can refer either to God or to false gods, and the word Qados, when not used of God, is often translated as the plural phrase, "Holy Ones."

So what then does verse 12 tell us? That Judah still walks with God and is faithful to God? Or that Judah still walks with Baal and is faithful to this group of holy ones, which they likely think includes Baal?

Let's put ourselves in the place of someone in Judah who was perhaps hearing that statement from a priest – "Judah still walks with "El" and is faithful to the "Qados." How would that person understand that phrase?

If that person was a follower of God, and if the priest offered no further explanation about what he meant, then I suspect that person might hear the phrase this way: "Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One."

But if that person was a follower of Baal, and if the priest offered no further explanation about what he meant, then I suspect that person might hear the phrase this way: "Judah still walks with Baal and is faithful to all the gods."

In short, that phrase can be understood in two ways – and, absent further explanation, that phrase would most likely be understood by a listener to mean what that person naturally expected it to mean.

So what if there were two people listening to that priest at the same time – one person who was

a follower of God and one person who was a follower of Baal? How would those two people interpret that phrase? Would one of them be upset by it?

The answer is very possibly no. They both would be fine with what the priest said. The Baal follower would hear the praise of Baal, and the follower of God would hear the praise of God – even though they are both hearing the exact same words from the exact same person at the exact same time!

So what can we say about the words used here in verse 12? I think we can say that they are ambiguous – they could refer to God or they could refer to false gods. **And I think that ambiguity is deliberate!**

Remember, Baalism was at an earlier stage in Judah than it was in Israel. The false priests in Judah likely sometimes found themselves in front of a crowd that included both worshippers of God and worshippers of Baal. And those priests didn't want to make either group mad. And so what was the solution? Deliberate ambiguity!

Just don't say anything clearly. Instead, use vague language that can mean one thing to one group and another thing to another group. And don't let either group ever pin you down on what you believe!

“Well, I'm sure glad that doesn't happen anymore!” If only that were true!

Is baptism in water necessary for salvation?

- “There were no unbaptized Christians in the first century.”
- “Baptism is an important part of the Christian experience.”
- “Everyone who follows Christ should be baptized.”
- “Baptism is how we celebrate Jesus.”
- “Holy Spirit baptism is how we get the Holy Spirit!”
- “Baptism is an important part of our religious heritage.”
- “We have always taught the importance baptism as part of the Stone–Campbell movement.”
- “Baptized is required to join our church.”
- “Baptism has always been part of our tradition.”
- “Baptism is our truth.”

As a lawyer, I have the same reaction to each of those answers: **Objection! Non-responsive!**

Is baptism in water necessary for salvation?

That is a yes or no question, and any teacher responding with anything other than a yes or no is, I suggest, being deliberately and dishonestly evasive.

And such a person is very likely tap-dancing around that question so that he can appeal to two different crowds, with half the crowd hearing “no, baptism is not necessary” and the other half hearing “yes, baptism is necessary.”

Deliberate dishonest ambiguity has always been the favorite tool of false teachers. They have to keep everyone happy, at least up to the point when they drop the inevitable bomb! I suspect that many of us have seen it done!

Those who purport to teach God's word should always endeavor to do so with great clarity and should never do so with dishonesty.

2 Corinthians 2:17 – For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:2 – But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

So, back to the end of verse 12, is that phrase a compliment of Judah or a criticism of Judah? And the answer is ... Yes! It depends on what you want to hear!

I think the text is sarcastically quoting the priests in Judah who were making vague statements about God ["El"] in an attempt to appeal both to those who came to worship God and to those who came instead to worship Baal.

In short, Judah was following the evil example of Israel, but Judah was not as far along in their apostasy as Israel was. And so the priests could not yet just boldly write "Temple of Baal" on the front door. Instead, they had to be really clever

and really careful about what they said until the time was right.

So, no, verse 12 is not a compliment of Judah – and that certainly should not surprise us.

And one final question about verse 12: How does the text make this point about the ambiguous priests of Judah? It does so by being ambiguous right back at them! And I suspect those priests had some puzzled looks on their faces when they heard their own vague statement quoted right back at them by Hosea! They thought they were all being so clever!