

Mid Week • Hosea 5-14

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, we ended our study with Hosea 4.

I had hoped we'd be able to cover all 14 chapters in one night by summarizing a good part of the book, but we ran out of time and so we'll cover chapters 5-14 tonight

Let's do a little recapping as we pick it up at chapter 5.

It's a time of peace and prosperity in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Though the nation has fallen away from the Lord to the worship of Baal, they have thought they could also maintain a *semblance* of loyalty to Yahweh by worshipping him in the form of a golden calf.

It was their first king, Jeroboam, who had made the cities of Bethel in the south and Dan in the north centers of the worship of Yahweh in the form of this idol.

The people mouthed the name of Yahweh and pretended that they were worshipping Him, but they were also worshipping Baal.

God did not tolerate such divided loyalty – and His judgment was about to be poured out on Israel in the form of the invasion of the Assyrians.

Hosea's ministry, as we saw last time, was to live out his message in the form of a troubled marriage.

Because Israel was like a willful and errant wife who was committing spiritual adultery by worshipping Baal – God told Hosea to marry a prostitute.

This would shock and scandalize his neighbors and family, and by doing so, frame the backdrop of his message.

Her immoral ways of leaving him to pursue unworthy lovers would be a picture of the way Israel had forsaken God to seek after unworthy idols.

In chapters 1-3, we read the sad story of Hosea and his adulterous wife.

Then in chapter 4, the prophet turns the corner and begins to apply that story to the nation of Israel and their relationship with God

CHAPTER 5-7

In Chapters 5-8, God describes Israel's willful rebellion.

1 “Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, Because you have been a snare to Mizpah And a net spread on Tabor.

2 The revoltors are deeply involved in slaughter, Though I rebuke them all.

Mizpah and Tabor were two cult-centers devoted to the worship of Baal, just as Bethel and Dan had supposedly been devoted to the worship of Yahweh.

It was the leaders, the priests and royal court that had condoned this idol-worship, and God holds them *responsible* for leading the nation into apostasy.

Idol worship was like a snare, a trap used to catch a bird.

The bait was the offer of prosperity and power, but it ended up being the means of death.

Friends – idol worship, in whatever form it takes, never delivers on its promise.

It's a cheat, a trap that the enemy of our souls devises to ensnare us.

Certainly we don't worship some totem or statue as they did in the ancient world – but idolatry is alive and well in the modern world.

Please don't think that people in the ancient world were as unsophisticated as to think that a hunk of wood or a lump of stone was in itself a god.

They understood these things to be symbols, representations of spiritual beings who held forth the promise of some kind of blessing.

Asherah was the goddess of fertility and promised abundant flocks and many children.

Baal was the god of the storm and so represented both power in battle and prosperity in the form of abundant crops due to the seasonal rains.

Molech was a vicious god of power and promised advancement to

those who worshiped him.

But the price was steep, to worship Molech, you had to offer your newborn infant as a blood sacrifice.

The people worshiped these gods and the others of the pagan nations around them not because they were inspired by awe or loving devotion.

They worshiped them because they wanted something *primal*, like power, prosperity, and pleasure.

These gods sanctified and excused their baser instincts and gave permission to the expression of their own immorality.

But no one loved Baal or Molech or Asherah – they merely used them to *selfish* ends.

The people of our day may not bow down before a statue of Baal or dance round a pillar of Asherah – but they live their lives and center their energies around the pursuit of the same things the people of the ancient world did – power, prosperity, and pleasure.

The idols of today take the form of position and possessions.

Just as in the days of old, people think that if they could only climb to some higher place, or add a few more zeros to their bank account, or accumulate this or that toy – THEN they would be happy and achieve satisfaction.

They spend their time, their energies, even their wealth in the pursuit of happiness.

But it's a snare because the more they live for these things, the more frustrated they become until they arrive at the end of life, looking back over the years as a fruitless and wasted existence.

The reason why is because life is not about the accumulation of things or the elevation to some position.

Life is the gift of God he gives us so that we can know and enjoy Him.

The only genuine satisfaction a man or woman will *ever* find is found in knowing God.

Any and everything else that people pursue as the main goal and priority of their lives is an idol and a snare.

3 I know Ephraim, And Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled.

4 “They do not direct their deeds Toward turning to their

God, For the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, And they do not know the LORD.

5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also stumbles with them.

The focus of His address here is the tribe of Ephraim which was the *lead* tribe of the north.

They provided the majority of the kings that sat on the throne of the northern kingdom.

It's a bit provocative to realize that God identifies the northern ten tribes by the name of the lead tribe – Ephraim.

What's provocative about this is that this reminds us that God often looks at and judges a people on the basis of their leadership.

Think of the Jews of Jesus' day – we read that the common people heard and received Him gladly, but the leaders opposed Him, and based on that corrupt leadership, Jesus was handed over to the Romans and executed.

The result was the loss of their nation to the Romans just 30-some years later in one of the most brutal military campaigns in all history.

If God does indeed deal with nations on the basis of their leaders, then it behooves us to pray fervently for our government and cultural leaders!

At the end of chapter 5, God foretells the eventual restoration of the nation.

Jump on down to v. 15 . . .

15 I will return again to My place Till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”

Even though Israel has been rebellious and strayed from the Lord since her inception as a nation, God will *not* utterly forsake His covenant with her.

When she is brought to repentance in the midst of her exile, He will move to restore her.

In chapters 6 & 7, Israel makes a feint at repentance.

Having heard of God's coming judgment of them for their apostasy, they feign a move toward righteousness – but God knows it is only a sham, merely an attempt to avoid trouble.

He rejects their pretense and reaffirms His judgment.

The proof of their divided heart is in chapter 8 – though they profess repentance, they never move forward to change their behavior.

They continue to visit the idols of Baal and Asherah that litter the landscape.

CHAPTER 8

1 “Set the trumpet to your mouth! *He shall come like an eagle against the house of the LORD, Because they have transgressed My covenant And rebelled against My law.*

The house of the Lord here is the nation of Israel for they were supposed to be the dwelling place of God.

The eagle is the nation of Assyria whom God will use the sword to execute His judgment.

2 Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!’

3 Israel has rejected the good; The enemy will pursue him.

4 “They set up kings, but not by Me; They made princes, but I did not acknowledge *them*. From their silver and gold They made idols for themselves—That they might be cut off.

5 Your calf is rejected, O Samaria! My anger is aroused against them—How long until they attain to innocence?

6 For from Israel *is* even this: A workman made it, and it *is* not God; But the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

When the judgment of God begins to fall, the people will start acting all holy and pious, mouthing the name of God as though they had been faithful to Him all along.

But God tells them He will not be moved by such fake

demonstrations of piety – He knows what’s in their hearts. Though they say His name with great reverence, their pagan altars and idols still exist throughout the land.

7 “They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bud; It shall never produce meal. If it should produce, Aliens would swallow it up.

Hosea speaks here of the inevitability of reaping what is sown; the law of sowing and reaping.

This is a principle well established in scripture and given greatest expression in Galatians 6:7-8 . . .

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Israel had been sowing vanity and emptiness in all it’s religious endeavors and political alliances.

For generations they had been worshiping Baal and Asherah in the hopes of attaining prosperity.

But Baal and Asherah are non-entities and the prosperity they were enjoying was nothing other than the grace and goodness of God, though to Him they were not thankful!

So, their years of sowing the wind, sowing emptiness and vanity would now come back in the form of a twister, a whirlwind that would tear up the homes and fields.

It’s the law of sowing and reaping that you plant tiny seeds and reap a bigger harvest.

So it would be for Israel – they had sown rebellion, they would reap exile.

But there is a flip side to the law of sowing and reaping.

Just as the harvest is always larger than the sowing – that is true for sowing in righteousness as well!

That’s why Paul tells the Galatians – “He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

The investment of ourselves in the sowing of the Word and prayer will result in a rich harvest of good.

Every time we look to the Spirit instead of the flesh, we drop another spiritual seed into the spiritual soil that will spring forth into spiritual life.

8 Israel is swallowed up; Now they are among the Gentiles Like a vessel in which *is* no pleasure.

The nation has lost its place of prominence in God's plan and is like a common pot in a room full of pots.

9 For they have gone up to Assyria, *Like* a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers.

10 Yes, though they have hired among the nations, Now I will gather them; And they shall sorrow a little, Because of the burden of the king of princes.

Instead of trusting in God, Israel had entered into fruitless alliances with other nations, thinking these would ensure their protection. They would not – those they had allied themselves would turn to attack them.

11 “Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, They have become for him altars for sinning.

12 I have written for him the great things of My law, *But* they were considered a strange thing.

13 *For* the sacrifices of My offerings they sacrifice flesh and eat *it*, *But* the LORD does not accept them. Now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. They shall return to Egypt.

14 “For Israel has forgotten his Maker, And has built temples; Judah also has multiplied fortified cities; But I will send fire upon his cities, And it shall devour his palaces.”

CHAPTERS 9-10

In chapters 9 & 10, God describes the judgments He will bring on

them for their rebellion.

He will disperse them among the nations and will strip away the prosperity that they were hiding behind during the days of Hosea.

In verse 12 of chapter 10 we find a poignant plea from the Lord . . .

**12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy;
Break up your fallow ground, For *it is* time to seek the
LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.**

Again we have the picture of sowing and reaping.

And here is God's plaintive cry – stop sowing the wind and start sowing righteousness so that you can avoid the whirlwind and judgment and instead reap mercy!

But even before they began sowing, they needed to break up the ground of their hearts that was hardened by sin and rebellion.

It's of no use to scatter seed on soil that's hard; the birds will come and eat it or the sun will beat down on it and cook the life right out of it.

Seed must be scattered on soil that's been turned by the plow and made ready.

Over and over again in Scripture, both the OT and the New, we read of God's appeal to soften our hearts.

We are constantly exhorted to check the condition of our hearts and make sure that they are tender toward God.

In Proverbs 4:23 we read – “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”

Living in this world, contrary as it is to the plans and purposes of God, if we aren't careful, our hearts can become hard.

We're immersed in this world, surrounded by its pressures – and unless we make time regularly to bring ourselves into the Lord's presence, we will inevitably find our hearts being seduced and captured by the world.

Without even realizing it, we can slip away from the Lord till our hearts have become hardened to the Lord and we don't care any more.

Most of us tonight know what it's like for our hearts to become hard toward God, for our passion for Him to cool and be distracted to other things.

We end up going to church out of routine, but even though we're sitting in the seat, our minds are somewhere else.

It isn't long till other things become more important than going to church, and soon our attendance is only infrequent or ends altogether.

How's your heart tonight?

Is there passion there for God?

Does your love for Him burn bright or has it cooled?

What do we do when we realize our passion's faded and our hearts have started to get hard?

We come before the Lord in humble repentance and ask Him to forgive us and restore the heat, the passion, the light and love that are all the right things we ought to have and feel for Him.

Let's do that right now, shall we?

CHAPTER 11

- 1** "When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.
- 2** As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images.
- 3** "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them.
- 4** I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped *and* fed them.
- 5** "He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king, Because they refused to repent.
- 6** And the sword shall slash in his cities, Devour his districts, And consume *them*, Because of their own counsels.
- 7** My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt *Him*.

What made Israel's apostasy all the worse was that while they worshiped Baal, they also thought they could keep up the *forms of worship* to Yahweh as well!

They visited the golden calves Jeroboam had set up in Bethel and Dan and thought that by *mouth*ing God's name, that somehow meant they were still faithful to Him.

They had long since rejected his Word and Law, but had devised their own ideas on what it meant to worship God and so be approved by Him.

But God said it was all a sham and didn't impress Him at all.

This should speak volumes to the fuzzy-headed idea so common today that so many people have.

They *reject Christianity*, but think that because they believe in God, they're fine!

They think all they have to do is acknowledge *a Creator* and that appeases Him!

It's the God you see represented on the program *Touched by An Angel*, where everyone goes to heaven except Idi Amin, Stalin, and Hitler.

It's the God of the lowest-common denominator – “just believe in His existence as *entrance requirement* to glory.”

God was not impressed with Israel's professed belief in His existence.

The devil believes in God, but fat lot of good it does him!

Unless *belief* is coupled with *obedience*, it's empty and accomplishes nothing.

That's precisely what James means when he says faith without works is dead.

- 8 **“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.**
- 9 **I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I *am* God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror.**
- 10 **“They shall walk after the LORD. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, Then *His* sons shall come trembling**

from the west;

11 They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, Like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses,” Says the LORD.

Though God will judge Israel, that judgment will not utterly annihilate them.

It will be used to *correct* them and once they’ve been disciplined, then He will restore them.

12 “Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, And the house of Israel with deceit; But Judah still walks with God, Even with the Holy One *who is faithful*.

Hosea’s ministry was mainly to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Judah in the south hadn’t fallen as far into sin and rebellion as the north.

And for that, her judgment would be *delayed* until she caught up to wicked Israel.

CHAPTERS 12-13

In Chapters 12 & 13, God goes on to list more ways Israel had perverted itself and turned from Him.

CHAPTER 14

The book ends with God’s appeal for Israel to repent and return.

- 1 O Israel, return to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity;**
- 2 Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; Receive *us* graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.**
- 3 Assyria shall not save us, We will not ride on horses, Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘*You are our gods.*’ For in You the fatherless finds mercy.”**
- 4 “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him.**

- 5 I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily,
And lengthen his roots like Lebanon.**
- 6 His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an
olive tree, And his fragrance like Lebanon.**
- 7 Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; They
shall be revived *like* grain, And grow like a vine. Their
scent *shall be* like the wine of Lebanon.**
- 8 “Ephraim *shall* say, ‘What have I to do anymore with
idols?’ I have heard and observed him. I *am* like a green
cypress tree; Your fruit is found in Me.”**
- 9 Who *is* wise? Let him understand these things. *Who is*
prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD
are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors
stumble in them.**

Many of the people of the northern kingdom, when they saw the growing idolatry of their neighbors and realized that there would be no reform movement that would keep the nation faithful to God, fled to the southern Kingdom of Judah and lived there.

About a 150 years after Israel fell to the Assyrians, the southern kingdom followed in the evil example of her northern sister and also fell into idolatry.

The *Babylonians* then did to the south what Assyria had done to the north and carried them away captive.

All 12 tribes were deported to Babylon – where they learned to loath the worship of idols.

And as is foretold here, the Jews *never had a problem with idolatry again.*

Though the Jews returned and resettled their land after the Babylonian captivity, they were forever hassled by foreign powers, finally to be displaced from their land in 70 AD, up to the mid 20th century.

Then in 1948, Israel was once again declared a nation – and ever since, God has been re-gathering them in their land.

They have turned what was either virtual swampland or desert wilderness into one of the richest and most agriculturally rich

nations of the world.

Today Israel is the largest producer of flowers sold in Europe and is the world's 3rd largest citrus producer.

What we read about here in Chapter 14 is coming to pass in our own day.

But the most important prophecy of this chapter is Israel's *spiritual* return to God!

That will happen when Jesus comes again and may very well commence during what we call the Tribulation when God turns His Spirit back upon the nation and people of Israel.