

A Lesson from History

Pastor Drew Webb

Hosea 9-10

July 30, 2023

This morning we're continuing in Hosea 9-10 - it's found on page 755 if you are using one of the Bibles there in front of you.

I distinctly recall those dreaded words no child wants to hear: "just wait till your dad gets home." That was the last thing any of us boys wanted to hear. We did not want to have our rear ends meet 1 of his 2 paddles. One was probably about 1/4" and had a nice little snap to it. The other was literally a 1" thick piece of oak and well it didn't snap as much as it would thud against our behinds.

You see we wanted nothing to do with this coming judgment so we would immediately respond in remorse. We shed crocodile tears. We were often putting on the biggest act we could because we wanted mom to see how sorry we were.

Sometimes we even begged mom to spank us right then and there. There was no need to put it off. Let's just get the punishment done and over with. Oh, but when that happened we had to make sure not to laugh! We would go through all the motions - and emotions - to make sure that we could avoid the punishment. On many occasions our repentance was not real!

Hosea 9 and 10 continue what chapter 8 began - prophesying judgment against the people of Israel. As Pastor Mark pointed out a few weeks ago, the Israelites were guilty of not knowing God; they had turned from Him to follow their own path thinking they knew better than God. This judgment, however, isn't for punishment's sake, but is intended to bring about repentance - a turning back to Him.

We won't be reading the entirety of these 2 chapters, rather we'll be looking at a few specific sections that convey some of the deeper meaning God is communicating to His people through Hosea.

Chapter 9 opens with an announcement that the people will be taken off into

captivity. The abundance they had been experiencing was about to come to an end and their land would become like wilderness because of their great iniquity. Their behavior was crooked. They had lived in sin and so God would be giving them over to that crooked behavior. As Pastor Scott said last week: “We are free to choose our actions. We are not free to choose the consequences of our actions.” They made their bed and now they would have to lie in it.

But it wasn’t always this way!

Hosea 9.10 gives us a little insight into God’s heart for His people: **Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers.**

A few weeks ago our family was hiking in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California, near Lake Tahoe. One particular place we were hiking was called Desolation Wilderness. **(picture)** We had hiked up this mountain and as we neared the peak we had a view towards the back side of the mountain where there was essentially nothing and my first thought was, “this sure is desolate.” There were some trees and lots of rocks there, but it certainly wasn’t conducive to sustaining much life. Finding fruit in a place such as that would have been unfathomable and a joy to behold in such a forlorn place. Of course, before time even began God knew how He was going to fix the relationship between He and man, but when He chose the Israelites - it was as though He had found grapes in the wilderness - and he took delight in His people.

A History Lesson:

However, God’s delight seemed to be at its end with the pronouncements of judgment so He used some history illustrations from the past to help the people understand how bad things were. We need this history lesson because it sheds a bit of light on what is actually happening in the text **PLUS - we look back** at history in an effort to not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Hosea 9.9 reads: **They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah...**

Hosea 10.9 From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned...

The obvious thing we should be wondering is... what happened at Gibeah? What is being referred to when it says **the days of Gibeah**? Well, it's most definitely not something children learn about in Sunday School! The happenings of Gibeah are found in the book of Judges, in chapters 19-21. We certainly don't have time to read it, but here's the basic rundown of what transpired there.

Map: <https://ibiblemaps.com/gibeah-destroyed-alternate/>

There was a Levite in the northern territory of Ephraim who had taken a concubine from Bethlehem, which is in the south. He was traveling through Jerusalem with the concubine, a servant of his, and some donkeys. The servant suggested staying in Jebus, which is Jerusalem, but the Levite insisted on not doing so because Jebusites were foreigners who didn't belong to the people of God (19.12). The Levite insisted on pushing on to Gibeah, a town of Benjamin, before nightfall. There they happened to meet a man who was also from the tribe of Ephraim. This man invited them into his home so that they wouldn't need to spend the night in the dangerous open square.

In a scene not too dissimilar to what happened to Lot while in the city of Sodom the men of the city started beating on the door and asking for the man to send out the Levite so they could "know him" - and they weren't talking about using their minds! The man rightly said no to this request, but, also similar to the situation in Sodom, the man offered his daughter and the Levite's concubine. Eventually the Levite - remember, this is a priestly figure - took his concubine outside so they could do what they wanted with her. She was raped all night and as dawn broke they released her and she stumbled back to the door.

In the morning the man rose to get on his way, apparently presuming she'd be long gone so he was surprised to see her laying there at the threshold of the door. He told her to get up so they could leave, however, there was no response because she had already passed. He loaded her body onto the donkey and proceeded the rest of the way home. When he got there he cut the body up into 12 pieces and sent the pieces throughout all the territories of Israel as a sign of how bad things had become since the days of Egypt.

The people of the tribe of Benjamin found out, of course, and confronted the man about how this had happened. He explained that the leaders had committed an abomination - essentially absolving himself of any wrong doing. The men of Israel, therefore, united against the tribe of Benjamin and defeated them in a battle over several days (20.24-36). Suddenly the men of the north had a change of heart and were distraught over having killed 25,000 men from the tribe of Benjamin, basically eliminating the tribe, so they came up with a new plan for how to rectify this situation. The plan wasn't exactly on the up and up and even encouraged kidnapping women in order to make them wives. As chapter 21 ends it has those famous words: **everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** This was what happened at Gibeah.

God's word through Hosea is that the people had become **just as corrupt** as the people involved in the situation in Gibeah: the Levite, the master of the house, the men of the northern country - they were **all corrupt** and the Israelites had **equaled** that level of corruption with their own actions.

Next we look back at **Hosea 9.10** again: **Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. (NEXT SLIDE) But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.**

Baal Peor or Beth Baal Peor is where Moses read the Law to the people and officially called Joshua to be his successor (**Deuteronomy 31**). Moses was also buried in this area.

Map

Ba'al seems to be a somewhat general term referring to the pagan god that was worshiped in the Middle East and Peor means openings, referring to bodily cavities. Thus Ba'al Peor is "God of the Openings" and Beth Ba'al Peor is "House of the God of Openings."

Ba'al is conceptualized and named slightly differently throughout the different regions of the Middle East, but one thing is for sure - this god, likely

represented by a bull, was a god of fertility and as such its worship involved engaging in sexual immorality.

You will likely remember what happened when Moses went up on Mount Sinai to meet with God and receive the 10 Commandments. The people had recently experienced God's miraculous power through the 10 plagues - each plague intentionally addressing an Egyptian god and subsequently leading to their Exodus from Egypt and crossing the Red Sea.

However, they weren't content to only worship Yahweh. Moses had been up on the mountain for quite some time and they didn't know what had happened to him so they turned to Aaron and told him to make them gods to go before them. Aaron then took the rings of gold that the people donated and crafted a golden calf. The people immediately declared that this calf was representative of the gods who brought them up out of Egypt. The next day as part of their worship they ate, drank, and participated in orgies. When Moses came down the mountain he was incensed and asked Aaron what had happened and Aaron just played stupid and told Moses he didn't know how the golden calf came to be!

Hosea was telling his generation that they were just like these people who were worshiping the golden calf. They had consecrated themselves to Ba'al (Hosea 9.10) and they had become detestable to God, just like this false god that they couldn't stop worshiping. This is what worship was like at Ba'al Peor.

Lastly is Gilgal

Hosea 9.15 - Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal...

Gilgal was practically a holy city. Map: <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/elisha2>

This city near Jericho was an important location from the time Israel first entered the Promised Land. It was a major camp for Joshua throughout much of the campaign of conquering the Promised Land.

Not only did Joshua camp there, but Samuel spent a bit of time there as well. After Saul led an army to victory over the Ammonites Samuel and a group of people went to Gilgal to proclaim and crown Saul as king (1 Samuel 11.12-15).

Elijah and Elisha also had dealings with Gilgal. It was an important place to the Israelites and God had used it in their past, however, the Israelites were perverting the ways of that city. **Hosea 10.1** reads **1 Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.**

The people were experiencing abundance and they were attributing that to their false gods. As they would experience great harvests and seasons of plenty they would take their financial resources and build more altars and make the pillars of their temples nicer. They were perverting the worship of Yahweh, the one True God, with the ways of the false gods. It seems that they may have even thought they were on the right path. Sometimes sin is obvious, but some sin is more subtle and sneaks up on you. You may think you're doing fine, but, in reality, you're blind to what is actually happening.

I can't help but think of the season that I've recently gone through where I had unintentionally hurt some people and I had **NO CLUE** about it. I literally thought everything was fine, but I was **blind** to the fact that I had greatly hurt others.

Hosea 9.4 reads: **They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices shall not please him. It shall be like mourners' bread to them; (NEW SLIDE) all who eat of it shall be defiled; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD.**

The Israelites were quite syncretistic and had combined some of the externals of Yahweh worship with some of the trappings of pagan idol worship. They were making sacrifices and taking oaths, but they had lost their way. They thought that their sacrifices could please God but that couldn't have been farther from the truth. Their hearts were not right with God and the abundant crops they had harvested were attributed to Ba'al, rather than acknowledging Yahweh as their Provider. No religious rituals - offerings of wine, bread, or other sacrifices - were going to make things right when their hearts had strayed so far away and they were perverting Yahweh's places of worship with Ba'al worship.

A Glimmer of Hope

In spite of this Yahweh offers them a brief glimmer of hope. **Hosea 10.12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.**

Yahweh has called each of us to something greater. He wants to release you from whatever it is that you are holding onto - whatever it is that is holding you in bondage. The advice to Israel was to sow righteousness. They were to live in accordance to God's commands and make their hearts and lives right with Him.

When we sow righteousness and make our hearts right with Him we receive the greatest treasure of all - steadfast love. The people had broken their covenant promise with God. There was no reason logical reason to save them and God owed them **NOTHING!** Yet, if they would turn back to Him He would be right there to receive them!

Sometimes people will talk about running far away from God. However, no matter how far you've run He's always **just a single step back**. If you turn around and start moving back towards Him He's right there! That is God's loyal, faithful, and steadfast love.

The soil of their hearts had been left untended for a long season so God told them to get ready. He said **break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD**. To break up the fallow ground is to begin the process of preparing the ground for the planting season. God says "break up the soil of your hearts, prepare it for the sowing of seed; prepare it to receive what I have to say and give to you. Prepare to walk in righteousness."

They needed to give up their waywardness. They needed to commit to sexual fidelity. They needed to commit to the sanctity of children's lives. They needed to truly seek the Lord. They weren't to just give Him lip service like they had back in Hosea 6 when the people made a half-hearted attempt to return. Now God was calling them to actually do the work of seeking Him. Go back to the Torah and learn again of Yahweh's character, ways, and call on their lives.

So how does this apply to us? Well, God wants all of our lives. The sacrifice God desires is a broken and contrite heart (**Psalm 51**). Centuries later the Apostle Paul would write that **we are the sacrifice** - we are living sacrifices. Offering a life lived for God is our only reasonable act of worship Paul says.

I don't think any of us are engaging in pagan idolatry practices, but we can still wander a long ways from God if we're not careful. If we aren't intentional about seeking God then it might be that we find ourselves in a season where the soil of our hearts has become hard and cracked.

Modern-Day Idols

So the question this morning is **What things have you given yourself over to? What things have become your idols? Or what areas might pose a weakness for you if you aren't attentive to it?**

As we close this morning I want to list a number of modern-day temptations - things that compete and vie for our hearts' attention.

- **Status:** whether through your vehicle, home, or the neighborhood or town you live in
- **Media:** TV, surfing, Netflix, Social Media...all the different ways we consume media
- **Money:** If I only made a little bit more then life would be better.
- **Acceptance:** if everyone likes me then I'll know I'm loved
- **Vanity:** looking good - in all its various forms can become an idol
- **Romance:** this one is for the young people, in particular. Be careful that you don't commit yourself to a Disney version of what your future will be like. When we idolize things like romance our hearts can get lost in places that you hadn't intended. I would add that this can also include books. Guard your minds. Guard your hearts. Trust in God's ways and He'll work things out for His glory. - along similar lines...
- **Sex:** I believe we have younger generations today that have idolized sex. Many young people are so wholeheartedly committed to sex and getting it in any way that they can that they've begun to redefine it and engage with it on their own terms - not God's terms. The conversations in our home that we have about sex are lightyears ahead of the conversations

that we had when I was growing up. Parents: start teaching your children about God's design early. The enemy will do everything he can to throw them off course, but if they understand HOW and WHY to control their bodies they will have a head-start when the pressure is on.

- **Success:** I want that promotion and nothing matters to me as much as getting that top position so everyone can see how hard I've worked and how much I deserve this.
- **Busyness:** When we're busy we don't have to worry about doing what God calls us to
- **Comfort:** I suspect this could strike a bit close to home for many. In a recent survey among pastors the top idol in churches was comfort with security coming in second. We want to be comfortable - this is natural. We don't want life to be hard. This isn't a sin, but if we start to idolize this comfort then it can be a sin and get in the way of us being obedient to God.

I suspect that something on that list resonated with you. If that is the case I encourage you to, first of all, confess that thing to God if you haven't already, and second, ask for God's strength to overcome that idol and to walk in purity of heart before Him. When we live with our lives sold out for Him He can do great things through us - we need only surrender to His will for our lives.

~Let's all bow our heads and close our eyes~

- Surrender your will to Him. Ask God to show you if there are any idols in your life. Seek to change one area of your life and surrender it to Him.
- Seek a tender heart that is sensitive to the things of God.
- No matter how many times you've failed Him you're never too far gone!

Further thought/reading/application:

- What am I trusting in, God or worldly entities and items?
- Am I worshiping in integrity with my heart matching the externals of my worship?
- What things have you given yourself over to? What things have become your idols?
- What actions do I need to take to prepare my heart - to break up the fallow soil of my heart?
- How am I seeking Him? Is there one change I can implement that make a difference in my life?