

DECEMBER 6

So, today you begin and end 2 John, the 24th book of the New Testament and you continue in Hosea, the 28th book of the Old Testament. That is a major achievement on your part.

Regarding Hosea, remember where he comes in the history of Israel. Solomon had introduced idolatry, spiritual adultery, into the veins of Israel at the end of his reign. God broke the kingdom into two parts, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The north went completely bad, right from the beginning. There were no godly kings; and in order to keep the people from going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship, they set up two golden calves, allowed anyone to be a priest, encouraged the worship of all gods and mixed these other worship cultures with what was left of the worship of Yahweh. God tried to win the people back through the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, but these men only confirmed that Israel was completely lost. Time wise, Elisha has just died and now Hosea comes with thirty years of sermons on spiritual adultery and an object lesson regarding that adultery, his own marriage to a vilely unfaithful woman. Hosea's marriage became a cultural phenomenon and his sermons were a final warning for people to return to God. Those who heard the Lord went to Judah during the ministries of Micah and Isaiah and the reign of King Hezekiah. Those who remained rebellious to God became totally corrupt. They went into exile with the Assyrians and were lost.

Again, you might want to look at the chart "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," to see this in perspective.

Hosea 4-5

Hosea is organized into sermons of punishment and salvation. Today in Hosea we only get the punishment and one verse of hope and salvation. The hope that God gives that will offset the punishment declared today is in 5:15-6:3 tomorrow.

Hosea 4

Vs. 1-3 Notice that this description of guilt is on all of the people, all of the children of Israel. Notice what God says is missing, and notice what is there. Without knowing the Lord in truth, *there is no faithfulness or steadfast love*. They had mixed pagan worship into the fabric of everything. There was no more knowledge of what was really true. More than that, there was not a pure view or understanding of God. These people had become as corrupt as the people whom Israel had to drive out of Canaan. What was actually worse is that they had had the knowledge of God, but had given it up to pursue gods that were more to their liking.

V. 2 These are all violations of the Ten Commandments. Swearing is invoking a curse against others using the Lord's name, a violation of the third commandment. In Milwaukee, growing up, that's how we greeted people. You would have thought it was a commandment to use His name to curse people.

V. 3 This sounds like the curse on nature and the groaning of creation from Romans 8.

Vs. 4-14 It seems to me that this block of verses is aimed at the priests and prophets. Their corruption in vs. 1-11 led to the resultant corruption of the people in 12-14. We have seen in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel how God holds the leaders responsible for the downfall of the people and the culture. It is hard for us to grasp this, but the worship of Yahweh was mixed with paganism. Not only did Jeroboam bring in the golden calves, but Baal worship was mixed with pseudo-worship according to the law. Remember that Baal and other forms of fertility worship had a very strong sexual component to them, in the "worship experience" itself. How could you compete with that? The worship itself was for them to gain blessing and prosperity for themselves, and then the actual "worship experience" kept them coming back for more. There were priests who were broadminded and knew of Yahweh and though they brought in elements

of Judaism, they met the people at the calves, not the tabernacle or temple. They were priests, but they were utterly lost, like so many representatives of "Christian" religions today who conduct services, but do not know God, are teaching error and are bound for an eternity without God.

Notice in some of the wording how God will say, *you have forgotten...I also will forget.*

V. 6 This sounds like Jesus' "woe" on the scribes/lawyers, *Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.* (Luke 11:52)

It is hard to imagine a culture this thoroughly corrupt (except for a small remnant of people), but some of our cultures in the west are getting there.

Vs. 15-19 Judah is warned here, but the point is that the rebellion in the north is so deep that the cure will require something even deeper. King Hezekiah paid attention to warnings like this.

V. 16 This is interesting. A lamb that follows its shepherd is easy to care for and obedient. Israel is no longer like that. In the German Bible, instead of *a stubborn heifer*, it is a mad or crazy cow.

Hosea 5

Vs. 1-14 This is the declaration of judgment, beginning again with the leaders, religious first, and then political.

V. 4-7 This is a very sad diagnosis of why the problem with those people was incurable. It seems that because they had so redefined truth and what it meant to know and worship God, that even when they tried, they did not seek Him, but rather their own lusts. Verse 5 shows that Judah became part of this. Notice in v. 7 how pagan ritual and bearing children through Baal worship is linked to the new moon festivals. Keep this in mind when we read 2 John.

V. 8 Apparently the people of Benjamin led the way in some of this.

V. 10 Removing a landmark was like rewriting the truth. You didn't know where the right or wrong was any more.

Notice the images of the moth/dry-rot and lion and that both of them will strike Ephraim and Judah. What are the differences in the destruction these two very different destroyers bring?

V. 15 This verse is the first verse of the section promising hope and restoration. Though this restoration wouldn't come to that generation that would be destroyed, eventually the people of Israel, in their distress, would earnestly seek the Lord. Until then, God would remain distant from them, waiting.

Even today as disciples in the harvest, we know that not everyone will respond to the offer God is making. Making them respond is not our job. Some are not ready now and some never will be ready; but some are ready now to come to Christ and to follow as disciples, who will make disciples. We simply present the message.

2 John

This short letter by John was probably written in the same timeframe as 1 John, but here John was planning to visit this church and so he kept his message brief. The things John mentions are very similar to 1 John and seem like his way to give this church some basic guidelines and things to think about until he arrived.

Vs. 1-3 The *elect lady* is a church and the *children* are its members.

Notice how often John uses the word *truth* in this introduction. It sets the tone of the entire letter. Just like we saw in Hosea, once the truth is compromised and reinvented, there is no longer a basis for knowing God or knowing what is right or wrong in a culture. Paul often told Timothy to guard the truth and said that the church was the pillar and defender of the truth. The more you

read your Bible, the more the Spirit entrusts to you and the better equipped you are to protect the truth and pass it on to others.

Vs. 4-6 John rejoices that there are people following *the truth*. He takes the idea of truth and transfers it into the order to follow the truth, a commandment. He then says the commandment to follow is to *love one another*.

I'm not sure if there was a situation within the church that needed to be dealt with, but I have a sense that when we become so warfare oriented in defending the truth, we can lose our love for those who know Christ. In fundamentalism I've seen this. I've seen a great defender of the truth become hard of heart and make enemies of his friends by harping about the uses and meanings of words. When we get to Revelation, we'll read about the church of Ephesus as a church that fought hard to defend the truth, but lost their love for Jesus. Ironic and sad.

Vs. 7-9 We recognize this teaching about antichrists and deceivers not only from 1 John, but from what we've read in Daniel. Your translation has *the* before both *deceiver* and *antichrist*, but these are not **the** antichrist, just little imitations of the one who will come later.

V. 8 Note that what will be lost is *full reward*, not salvation. I was reading again this morning how Jesus told His disciples to seek the reward the Father offers us. These rewards are all summed up in seeking Him and making Him our treasure. I'm finding out that it is harder than I think to be wholly satisfied in Him and seeking Him. I need to work on finding everything I need in Him and let the rest rot. That's hard to do in the west between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when everyone wants us to buy stuff and we equate holiday happiness with shopping and eating.

V. 9 If we don't abide in the teaching of Christ, we operate without God, without the leading and direction of His Spirit. We see this all the time, as Christians we know, or who are public figures, get themselves into trouble. For a disciple, simply and humbly abiding in Christ is important. Following Christ in the harvest is important. To live without abiding in Him is not how we want to live. If we leave the truth, if we disobey, if we get drawn into sin, then we step away from God and His truth, following our pride and passion. We don't lose our salvation, but we do dishonor God and give Satan something to use to reproach the name of our Savior. That's the point here.

Note that the result of mixing truth and error is what we are reading about in Hosea.

Vs. 10-11 This is the same as being unequally yoked with unbelievers, or what Paul talks about regarding associating with Christians living in sin (2 Cor. 6:14). You still love them, but your relationship to them is one of restoration, not acceptance. And beyond that, there are people and false teaching that need to be dealt with strongly. If you saw someone pouring poison in a well, the time for being politically correct and winsome would be over.

V. 12 This was enough to get the people thinking, but John was on his way and would continue in person.

V. 13 John means that the believers where he wrote this were greeting the believers to whom he was writing.

Psalm 125

As you read these opening verses and think of what we read in Hosea, you wonder what went wrong. These people were certainly singing the right words. But it all comes down to obedience to the truth. If the truth gets eaten away by false teaching or by our redefining truth to our passions, then we remake God in our own image. In that sense, God becomes lost to us.

This is why we are in the Word, firsthand submitting our hearts and minds to His truth. In this way we learn who He truly is, and He defines us. And that's a good thing, because in Him and in His truth we are unmovable. We abide in Him regardless of what life throws at us as we follow Him in the harvest.

Vs. 1-2 This was the psalmist taking the eternal view of Jerusalem as God's chosen city. This is true, but will only be realized during the Millennium.

Vs. 3-5 All of this has an "earthly" ring to it; that is, these are earthly consequences, not necessarily dealing with heavenly salvation. The Lord brings justice to the righteous. He blesses the upright who follow Him. Those who turn away from the Lord wind up like those who don't know the Lord at all, at least on earth.

Proverbs 29:9-11

So, what do you think God is warning us about with these three proverbs? It is far easier to read these proverbs than to heed them. Wisdom eventually teaches you that you can't reason with this type of person and that you just need to keep silent and/or walk away with your "pearls." (Matt. 7:6)