

DECEMBER 7

Hosea 6-9

So, if you understand God's pattern in Hosea, He gives a pronouncement of judgment followed by a declaration of salvation and hope for the millennial future of Israel. Since we're reading a one-year Bible this pattern is broken. For example, today we will begin with the salvation and hope declaration from yesterday's judgment.

Just for your information, the third cycle of judgment/salvation is: 4:1-5:14 (judgment) and 5:15-6:3 (salvation). Today we'll begin a fourth cycle of judgment (6:4-11:7) and salvation and hope (11:8-11). Tomorrow we'll finish Hosea and it will end with hope.

You might not get all of the imagery or nuances from Hosea or the other minor prophets, but at least when you get to heaven and you bump into these guys, you can say you read their books. And for here and now, the Spirit will give you what you need, this year and in the years to come.

One thing to think about as you read this is that what we have written here were probably different sermons or messages that Hosea gave to the people. Can you imagine what it would have been like to hear this stuff? At first some people might have made fun of him because his wife was a whore, but once they understood that she stood as an image for the people, I'll bet the snickering ended. After all the years of God working with Israel, heroically trying to win the people back, God is expressing through Hosea what it has felt like trying to lead these people, and mankind in general.

Yet, in the end there is salvation; therefore, it is very intriguing that Hosea is quoted in a couple of interesting places in the New Testament having to do with God's plan of redemption.

Hosea 6

Vs. 1-3 This is the hope from the previous declaration of judgment we read yesterday.

V. 1 Notice how God had just talked about tearing Ephraim and Judah like a lion, but now God will bind up what He has torn.

V. 2 This is an interesting reference to being raised *on the third day*. I'll bet that is exactly what it means.

V. 3 This is a spectacular verse that will be on the lips and in the hearts of that generation in the Tribulation that turns to the Lord. You might wonder how this supernatural change will come upon Israel. Compare Isaiah 55:10-11 with this verse.

Vs. 4-11 Judgment for Ephraim (the northern kingdom) and for Judah (the southern kingdom).

V. 6 Notice what God really wanted. This is the same as the first commandment, to love God. Also, this is quoted by Jesus to the Pharisees of another adulterous generation at Matthew's party in Matthew 9:13, *Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'* For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

V. 11 This could be pointing to the fact that Judah came out of their exile, or it could be referring to the place of eminence this tribe will have when the Kingdom is established.

Hosea 7

This seems to be exclusively written to the northern kingdom. Notice that God mentions their lack of crying out to or seeking the Lord. This is a sign of the depth of their blindness, especially when you consider that the ministries of Elijah and Elisha were exclusively to the northern kingdom. Along with this lack of crying out was their hopeless religious confusion. They thought that crying out involved burning incense on hills and "bowing down" to Baal.

Vs. 1-7 They were totally corrupted, like bread that was totally leavened.

V. 7 Not one king of the north was a godly man. Notice that none of them called upon God.

Vs. 8-10 Notice that you can see a pattern, in that this block begins with a declaration about Ephraim and ends with their lack of returning or seeking or knowing God. So, what does God focus on here?

Vs. 11-13 What is God's focus here? What do you think God meant that they spoke lies against Him?

Vs. 14-16 This seems to summarize this lack of seeking God. Notice v. 14. They cry out to God, but what they really desire is a return of wine and grain. They are not crying out for Him or to Him alone. I think that's a lot like us. If someone asked us what could happen that would really make us happy and feel good, it would look like a million dollars, recognition, computers, cars, media stuff, a house, etc. Could any of us be happy in a hut with the presence of God, but no food that we knew of for the next day - no job, no insurance, just the presence of God? Especially in the west, our spirituality is thinner than we think. We would be crying out like these people and our desire wouldn't be for God per se; it would be for the "stuff" of God.

Hosea 8

The emphasis of this part of God's judgment seems to be how the people outwardly claimed to know God, but never followed His Word.

Vs. 1-3 This is interesting because it is saying that the sign of judgment is in the sky above them. Crying out with idolatrous and adulterous hearts seems to be the focus. The more I read what Jesus said, the more I find Him telling people not just to hear what He said, but to do it.

Vs. 4-6 They chose their own kings and gods according to their desires. How could they say they knew God?

Vs. 7-10 The first part of this verse is famous. They would not only reap what they sowed, but God would punish them by intensifying what they wanted. If they wanted to go away from God, He would show them the result. Without His care and protection, there would be no food. Not only that, the countries to which they ran for help would use and disappoint them.

Vs. 11-14 What a funny contrast, even though they were sacrificing, they didn't understand God or His Word.

V. 14 This is what the people sought instead of God to make them feel secure. God would remove everything, until eventually, He was all that remained for them.

Hosea 9

At the root of their rebellion was the satisfying of their needs. Again, it is interesting how much teaching Jesus gave to His disciples on not being anxious about life, seeking Him first and being rich toward God.

Notice how often the mention of wine, food and offerings is mixed together. They were religious, but if God is only a tool for us to get fed and have comfort and satisfy our desires, our desires are really our god. And God isn't fooled by our religiousness.

Vs. 1-3 This is what drove their religion and their actions, a prostitute's wages, food and clothing. Notice that Ephraim returned to Egypt looking for help, but was dragged away to Assyria. Even those who ran to Egypt for help were eventually confronted and killed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

V. 4 God is not mocked. He wouldn't accept their worship.

Vs. 5-6 In fleeing the Assyrians, the Egyptians would take them and abuse them.

Vs. 7-8 In the day of their need, their lying prophets were no help to them.

Vs. 9-10 The seeds of their corruption were seen back in their history. Gibeah was the town in Benjamin, at the end of Judges, filled with homosexual men who killed the traveler's wife. This launched a civil war.

Baal-peor came while the people were still being led by Moses in the wilderness, when the presence of God was visible in the cloud and the manna was being given every morning. Sin is a spiritual disease in us that defies every rational thought.

Vs. 11-17 Notice that this is all directed to Ephraim, the northern kingdom, and the result will be exile. As far as we know, these people were lost to Israel forever. There were some of the people, the remnant, whom God might have kept track of, but it seems from Chronicles, that the only Israelites who survived from all of the tribes were those who heeded warnings like this and moved south into the land of Judah. Those people went into exile with the southern kingdom into Babylon and were restored to Israel.

When you read what God says about Israel, you realize that they are representing all men. We are all fallen and we are all this sinful. Sin is awful and utterly awesome in us. Sin will dominate us if we desire anything other than God, and the only way we can desire God is through Jesus. In Jesus we are forgiven, and the Holy Spirit gives us a newly created life, residing in us so we can follow Christ. Israel tried to fulfill their desires and passions and sort of give lip service to God. Sin is too powerful for that kind of life and deception. This is the same for us even as Christians. If we desire anything more than Jesus, it takes over. When Jesus told His disciples to take heed and beware of all coveting of anything, He wasn't being religious, but vitally real. He was trying to protect them and us. The reformers said "Sola Scriptura" (only the Scriptures). As disciples our cry has to be, "only Jesus." Our focus on Him and following Him in His Word and in the harvest is the only way we can really live to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind. Paul told Timothy this in 1 Timothy 6:12, *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.* If we don't take hold of it, something else takes hold of us.

3 John

V. 1 From v. 5, it appears that Gaius was a respected man in the church and had some influence in terms of leadership and making disciples.

Vs. 2-4 Probably as a result of Gaius, there are people walking in the truth. This guy is someone John knows and trusts.

Vs. 5-8 As in all the churches, there were traveling preachers and workers who were passing through and going on to other lands. The gospel was new and there was a world to reach. Gaius was one of those people who supported this work, in spite of false teachers.

Vs. 9-10 Here is the reason this is being sent to Gaius and not the entire church. Diotrephes was stopping the church from supporting outsiders. Under Diotrephes, the church was becoming an isolated fortress. It appears that Diotrephes was overly conservative and held a very self-centered, authoritarian view of leadership. In the early church, there was a spectrum of error, but most of the deep problems faced by Paul came from the very conservative, exclusive, law-driven side of the church. It seems that Diotrephes was so law and authority-oriented, that he didn't even recognize the authority of the apostle John.

Vs. 11-12 This is the other reason John is writing Gaius personally, so that he would welcome and help Demetrius. In fact, some think it was Demetrius who carried this letter.

Vs. 13-15 Again, this letter was intentionally short because of the need for Demetrius to be helped, and because John was hoping to come personally and tend to the situation.

We are used to seeing Paul having to defend himself and his apostleship, but even John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was not counted as worthy by a guy like Diotrephes. Sometimes the church is just more fun than you can stand. Thankfully we know the Lord of the church.

Psalm 126

This song, sung by the worshippers coming to Jerusalem, could have been written during many periods of Israel's troubled history. Since the psalm is talking about the fortunes of Zion being restored and the city being a testimony among the nations, it could be that this song was sung by those who returned from the Babylonian exile with Zerubbabel.

Vs. 1-3 I can't imagine what it was like for these people who returned, or even for a man like Daniel, to know that the Lord had allowed the people to return to Jerusalem. It was a miracle.

Vs. 4-6 These verses sound like what Jesus said to His disciples in John 4:36, *Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.* Today we work in the harvest following Him, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, choosing to hunger now, being poor now and mourning now for this lost world. Someday we will fully understand the work that He did through us, by making disciples and bringing in the sheaves, and we will rejoice.

Proverbs 29:12-14

I guess if I had to put all three verses together, I would camp on v. 13. The poor man and the oppressor owe God faithfulness, since He gives both of them their life and understanding. In God, they are both equal and so, I guess, the oppressor ought to be humbled.

To deny our debt of gratitude would be v. 12, with the result that light leaves the land and it is ruled by darkness, like in Ephraim, the northern kingdom.

To respond in faithfulness to God is v. 14, with the result, as God showed to David, that God will further bless that faithfulness. Our real faith and trust in God is seen honoring God in the small things. The Lord notices. (Luke 16:10)