

DECEMBER 8

Well, these are the last days...of December. If you've been keeping up, you might be exhausted. If you haven't been keeping up, hopefully you're thinking that January 1 looks good for a new beginning. I know there are Christmas parties and church things, shopping and traveling. But if you do have time to catch your breath somewhere in the day, I'd encourage you to keep reading. Tomorrow we begin Revelation. Revelation is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing for reading it and heeding it. And besides, if you have a couple of quiet times between now and the end of the year, you won't feel like such a spiritual schlep when you regather your nerve endings when the kids head back to school, and you begin another year in the Word. Trust me, if you struggled reading your one-year Bible this year, next year you'll do much better.

By the way, you will be finishing two books today and beginning two new books tomorrow.

Hosea 10-14

Our last day in Hosea. As you're reading though all of this, keep making observations and looking for associations either in the text or between things said here and other parts of the Bible. Keep yourself awake and observant.

Hosea 10

Notice that it seems this is all exclusively aimed at the northern kingdom.

V. 1 This is total irony, to take God's blessing and make idols for ourselves. We've all stopped doing that, right?

V. 2 The breaking down of altars was done by King Josiah. You remember who he was, right?

Vs. 3-6 These people didn't need God as their king. They felt content and self-sufficient. Even today, if we're feeling good, do we really "need" anyone? God would remove that arrogance from them.

V. 5 This altar at Bethel was one of two that Jeroboam set up, so the people wouldn't go to Jerusalem to worship. After all, he thought, didn't Israel worship a calf in the wilderness? And if it was in the Bible, then it must have been biblical, right? This is what determined the dark path of the northern kingdom. To be fair though, it was Solomon, the wisest guy in the world, who introduced idolatry into the united nation's bloodstream. The joke here is that the Assyrians threw Israel's "god" on a wagon and carted it away.

Vs. 7-8 God would humble this people by taking away His blessing. Interestingly, Jesus quoted v. 8 to the women of Jerusalem as He walked through the streets to His crucifixion in Luke 23:28-30. Also, the people of earth will say this during the Tribulation in Revelation 6:16.

Vs. 9-10 This is referring to Judges 19. Again, the events at the end of Judges were big things. The event in Gibeah was a poison that never left the veins of Israel. There was also another interesting story in Judges 18 and as a result of that story, guess which tribe of Israel is not represented in the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4-12. Those little stories had huge results because they showed a poison that had infected the people.

Vs. 11-12 God had pampered Israel, but God would refine Israel through hard work, hoping Israel would turn to Him. This is rare in Hosea to find God calling out to the people in the middle of His pronouncement of their sins and their judgment. It must have been because of the imagery of sowing and reaping and seeking the Lord (instead of Baal the fertility god) for their needs. Even in this final hour, God was pleading with the people to seek Him.

Vs. 13-15 Bethel means "house of God." During the times of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this place had good connotations. Can you remember a showdown at Bethel where God pronounced judgment? It was in 1 Kings 13, just after the northern and southern kingdoms were established.

A man of God was sent to pronounce judgment on King Jeroboam and the northern kingdom. Now, 200 years later, this is the final fulfillment of what God said. Who says God isn't patient? He tried everything to give the people a chance to repent and come to Him.

Hosea 11

This chapter laments the northern kingdom's seeking help from Egypt.

V. 1 Guess where this verse is quoted. Look at Matthew 2:15. In the history of Israel this was a great moment, as well as in the history of salvation.

V. 2 This makes me think of that generation of Israel that rejected Jesus. The more He called them, the more they rejected Him.

Vs. 3-7 Verses 3-4 are contrasted to vs. 5-7. God tried to help and heal them, but they rejected Him and would be subject to cruelty and slavery. Notice in v. 4 how God bent down to them and how in v. 7 the people bent themselves away from God. As God has said before, their calling out to God was for themselves and their appetites. It was not from true repentance or a sincere desire to draw near to God.

This ends this long portion of God declaring the people's sin and His judgment on them. Just to keep this in perspective, remember that God is showing how all mankind responds to Him.

Vs. 8-12 Now comes the promise of hope and salvation.

V. 8 The cities mentioned here are obscure, but flip the page and look at Jude 7. These were the *surrounding cities*. Kind of cool, huh?

God's compassion is tender. This is either the image of a man to his child, or because this is Hosea, the image of a man to his unfaithful wife whom he still loves.

V. 9 So how is God going to change them without coming to them in wrath? Look at Isaiah 55 (particularly vs. 8-11) and you get an idea of what God is alluding to here, and what His resources are to transform the hearts of people.

Vs. 10-11 He has used both of these animals before in a negative sense. Now God is saying when they hear His roar they will be glad and will seek Him for shelter and protection. This time the dove will have sense and seek Him.

V. 12 As we've seen in Ezekiel, those in the southern kingdom were also idolatrous, but God rescued the majority of those people from exile. I think their faithfulness was seen in that they still had men like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel & Co., and others who sincerely worshiped God. The northern kingdom was devoid of godly leaders.

Hosea 12

V. 1 This seems to stand alone as a rebuke to Ephraim (the northern kingdom).

Vs. 2-6 There will be punishment for Judah, and thereby God will, in symbol, punish all of Jacob. Notice God's summary of Jacob's life from the book of Genesis. God didn't miss anything. Jacob was a liar and a thief, but there was faith found in him. God will nurture that ember of faith in Judah, representing Jacob, and they will return to God. These people are the ones God brought out of exile, and they are the seed of those who will be present when Jesus establishes His kingdom.

Vs. 7-9 For Ephraim's dishonesty and injustice, God will lead him again into the wilderness. The Feast of the Tabernacles, near the Day of Atonement, was to have made the people remember their humble pilgrimage through the wilderness. Israel, united or divided, never held this feast, living in tents or booths, until the days of Nehemiah. (Nehemiah's celebration of the Feast of the Tabernacles, in Nehemiah 8:14-18, was still over 250 years in the future). They may have held the feast, but they didn't live in tents and makeshift huts as they were told to do.

When Jesus told His disciples, *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh* (Luke 6:21), He was sharing this same principle. If we forget our salvation and saturate ourselves in the things of this life, we forget His love and care. And we can make idols out of all of His blessings.

Vs. 10-14 Because of Ephraim's provocation God will humble them, as He humbled Jacob by making him work for someone craftier than he. God will guide them by His prophets.

Hosea 13

Vs. 1-3 Ephraim was an exalted and respected tribe which carried the birthright given by Jacob. Joshua was of Ephraim. But the people of Ephraim were foolish and led the nation into idolatry.

Vs. 4-14 Actually, it was God who exalted Ephraim. So, since God gave and was not thanked, but rejected, God will now humble the people. Notice that in v. 4 God ransomed them out of Egypt. Then in v. 14 He says He will not ransom them now.

Vs. 4-8 Because they used God's blessing for their own sin and pleasure, God would become an adversary and make them live in fear and awareness of their danger. It doesn't matter what your position is or if you have a bag of gold, if you live in fear.

Vs. 9-13 In 1 Samuel 8, the people rejected God and demanded a king of their own liking. God gave them a king that reflected their hearts, King Saul. That wasn't very pretty. It led Israel into further confusion until God appointed David, a man after His own heart.

V. 14 Notice that this is a famous verse quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55. In Hosea, death will consume Ephraim, but in 1 Corinthians 15:55, because of Jesus, death no longer has any power.

Vs. 15-16 Back to the thought of Ephraim being exalted among his brothers. That is ended now, once for all.

Hosea 14

This is the final message of hope and salvation

Vs. 1-3 God not only encourages them to return in repentance, but He tells them what to say.

Vs. 4-7 God promises them restoration.

Vs. 8-9 This is an interesting challenge from the Lord. It sounds like the appeals of wisdom in Proverbs, but more like the challenges in the book of Revelation to take heed to the message of the book. Look at Revelation 22:10-21, and compare Hosea 14:9 with Revelation 22:11.

Jude

So, meet another of Jesus' brothers. Jude wrote with apostolic authority, so he must have been a respected leader in some circles. Like James, this letter is filled with images and references to Old Testament history.

Vs. 1-3 Although he had planned to write a letter encouraging these people about their salvation and growth in Christ, he found it necessary to warn them to put up a strong fight against false teachers.

V. 4 There was a line of teaching, seen even in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, that since God is interested in saving our spirit, and since the body is fully kaput, one should feed the spirit. Whatever the body does doesn't count. This led people to embrace the kind of spirituality we've been reading about in Hosea where you give lip service to God on Sunday and then let your body and its desires lead your life the rest of the week.

When we live in a way that is dishonoring to Jesus, we deny Him by our lifestyle and choices. Since the faith has been delivered to us, it is vital that we guard and protect it, especially from hypocrisy.

V. 5 Here is one example of apostasy, the children of Israel being led out of Egypt. Paul refers to this in practically the same way in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, including the reference to Jesus.

V. 6 Although these angels had great privilege and power, when they overstepped God's command and will, they were put in prison. This, I believe, is a reference to what happened in Genesis 6:1-5.

V. 7 The area around Sodom and Gomorrah had been like the garden of God, and apparently Lot was a witness to them, but they didn't heed the word and they were destroyed.

Vs. 8-13 These teachers are compared to those who had great privilege and went astray, and Jude described them in very graphic terms.

Vs. 8-10 These people were arrogantly involved in defying the spiritual forces, ranting against demons. I've heard of people doing this in such a proud way that it makes you wonder why Satan doesn't just whack them since they are so proud and unbalanced in their attitudes; but actually, Satan probably likes it. This gives these teachers a following among the unsteady, but the true spiritual attitude is the one Michael showed.

V. 9 The event Jude is referring to here is not in Scripture, but it was a part of Jewish tradition. Apparently there was some truth to it. God did, in fact, hide Moses' grave; and He did it for a reason.

V. 11 Notice the apostates and false teachers shown here. Cain, the firstborn son of Adam, is known for a half-hearted sacrifice and murderous jealousy against his righteous brother. Balaam was a prophet of God who taught the enemy how to corrupt God's people, bringing God's judgment on them. Korah was a Levite who incited a rebellion against the men God was using to lead the people of God. All of these people had a position of respect before God which they misused to their own destruction and the destruction of others.

Vs. 12-13 They bring nothing to the church but hidden danger. They are empty and deceitful.

Vs. 14-15 Both in the oral tradition of the Jews and then written in the non-biblical book of Enoch (110 B.C.), it was said that before Enoch was taken (about 65 years before the birth of Noah) he pronounced judgment on his generation, that is, that generation mentioned in Genesis 6. Some think that Enoch will be one of those two witnesses in Jerusalem in the book of Revelation.

V. 16 Here is Jude's final description of these people. They are not just teachers; they are complainers. Look again at 1 Corinthians 10:9-10, where Paul mentions some of these same things.

Vs. 17-19 These warnings appear in John, in Peter and in Paul's letters. John, Peter and Paul said these guys would come. Jude says they have arrived.

Vs. 20-21 Just as Paul challenged Timothy so often, the people were first to make sure they were close to the Lord, following His Word.

Vs. 22-23 Then they were to minister to the weak and doubting and to those lost in error, some of whom were unbelievers. In doing so, they were to keep themselves clean.

Vs. 24-25 Focusing on our Lord is what keeps us from stumbling and makes us able to bring glory to God. This is one of the greatest blessings in the New Testament.

For us as disciples this all reminds us that making disciples keeps us focused on protecting the truth and entrusting it to the next generations who will go beyond us.

Psalm 127

As the worshipers approached Jerusalem, this song reminded them of the foolishness of toil and anxiety when only God can bless us. Then it brought them to focus on the true blessing God gives - our children, both physical and spiritual.

Vs. 1-2 These verses talk about our striving where only God can give us success.

Vs. 3-5 These verses tell us where our real passion and labor of love should be.

Proverbs 29:15-17

How funny that these proverbs appear with this psalm today. It seems interesting that v. 16, about the increase of wickedness, is sandwiched between two verses of parents loving and investing in their children. And yes, the rod, reproof, and discipline are love. It works for the Father, and we would be remiss to dismiss discipline, reproof and the rod. See Hebrews 12:6-8.