

Doubling Down on Sin

Let us turn to Hosea chapter 7. Hosea chapter 7 verses 1 through 10. Hosea 7 1 through 10. We're continuing through the book of Hosea, the prophet that covers a lot of matters, but there is of course some repetition because the sins persist in his lifetime.

Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, Hosea chapter 7 verses 1 through 10. He ceased to stir the fire after kneading the dough until it is leavened. In the day of our king, princes have made him sick, inflamed with wine.

He stretched out his hand with scoffers. They prepared their hearts like an oven while they lie in wait. Their baker sleeps at night.

In the morning it burns like a flaming fire. They're all hot like an oven and have devoured their judges. All their kings have fallen.

None among them calls upon me. Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples. Ephraim is a cake unturned.

Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it. Yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it. The pride of Israel testifies to his face, but they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this.

Let us pray. Gracious God above, as we read these verses here, Hosea 7, our Lord, may we contemplate and meditate upon these things to see if our hearts are hardened at times, if we have rather doubled down upon sin in our life as the Jews collectively have done here. God, through the Prophet Hosea, calls them out for this, Lord.

We read here, Lord, of the list of sins affecting them, not just the rank and file, but the leadership, the judges and the kings and the like. Ephraim himself as a nation has mixed itself with the pagans, Lord, and have brought down their power and their might because of this. Gracious God and Savior, help us to go through this text, to apply it to our lives, and to be aware around us, Lord, how much that it does reflect.

Perhaps, God, we shall see even the Christian churches of America, our Lord, and to that end that we would pray with a right understanding of what to pray for, for our fellow saints and churches. We pray for the blood of Christ. Amen.

So in these set of verses, we read of the sad state of the northern tribes. They're reveling in their transgressions, even as the Lord's mercy is stretched out towards them. We read there in verse 1, it has been a while, even years, if you think about it, given the marriage and the number of children Hosea had, we read there in the opening chapters, yet they ignored the prophet and continued to forget the Lord their God.

In other words, they are doubling down on sin. Like a petulant child or the stereotypical teenager, young and old, rich and poor, kings and servants alike are all bent and directed towards wickedness. The doubling down is not only described here, offered before us as a list of sins in these verses, but also, it seems to me, in this two-fold refrain, even the third

refrain by implication, twice in these texts it states, none sought the Lord or none called upon him.

Verses 7 and 10. That is to say, they did not go to the Lord their God and repent. They are persisting in their rebellion.

The third verse, verse 2, is a little more implied, where we read, they do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness. In other words, they didn't come to mind, to their own minds, that the Lord their God sees all these things, for he knows and sees all things. And he will bring it to mind, and he will bring judgment, therefore they should have repented.

So let's read a little more carefully here to see what the doubling down of sin looks like, and the evil fruits that flow from it, and of course, the call here, in verses 7 and 10, a backhanded call, that they ought to repent. Indeed, all of us should live a life of repentance. Verses 1 through 2, they rejected the healing of the Lord, or the potential healing of the Lord God Almighty, when I would have healed Israel.

Rejected Healing

Then and there, the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, and continues on here to unpack that theme of their doubling down of sin. The Lord God's mercy here, we read, after they have sinned year in and year out, across the tribes, both northern and southern. The false worship, the false gods, we read, the hatred of the fellow believers and neighbors, when the Lord mocked and chided them, that they ought to love their neighbor, for I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than bold offerings.

Chapter 6, clearly they did not think that way. Widespread lack of mercy and care, and gross negligence of the ordinance of the Lord God of the covenant, and in spite of all that, persistent, ongoing rebellion, the Lord God would have healed them. He was there, coming to them, and they ran from him, like Adam and Eve in the garden.

They would have none of it, brothers and sisters. And we know it's not just during Hosea's time. Year in and year out, generation after generation, we read through the Old Testament, of their stiff-neckedness, right? They don't want to do what they were called to do.

The picture is of an ox, right, with the bar across his back, directing and guiding him. They're like, no, we want to do it our way. And here we read the details of what that looks like during the time of Hosea.

He would make them whole. I would have healed Israel, made them whole, brought them back into his favor. How? Well, through repentance, of course.

Every cry of the prophet, every warning through the miracles, was to bring them back to Lord God Almighty, to flee their wretched lifestyle and thought, word, and deed, and embrace the Lord that is the Messiah to come, and the God of the covenant, with humble

hearts. However, Israel rejects the mercy, and then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered. It's exposed, becomes very clear to all, and to God especially, of course.

And they're not embarrassed, is the implication here. The mass of the Jews, in other words, would have none of it. They did not want to repent, and come back to the Lord their God.

They were bent on the love of lust, sin, described, as we'll see a little later here, as a heated oven, churning over and over again towards wretchedness and wickedness, of debauchery everywhere, all times, all people. Their moral nakedness, they were uncovered, not just for the eyes of God, but publicly. Everyone knew it.

Not like America today, we all kind of know what's going on in Hollywood. No one really wants to say it until it becomes obvious. I'm sure that couple that was there at the Coldplay concert, at their company, he's the CEO, if you don't know about this, and she's the head of HR.

Oops, HR's supposed to teach you to be good little boys and girls at work. Their co-workers knew something was up. I can almost guarantee it.

It wasn't just one night stand. This has been going on for a while. This is common.

People know these things. It is expelled, although we all pretend otherwise. In Samaria, here we read, the iniquity of Ephraim has uncovered the wickedness of Samaria.

So you have that parallelism that you often have in the prophets and the poetry, and of course, there in the prophets, they use a lot of poetry-like way of speaking. So there are parallel ideas here, Ephraim and Samaria. Ephraim's one of the tribes there, the main tribe up north, and Samaria, if you happen to remember this, is there as the region and the capital of the north.

That's what we know of there in the New Testament of the Samaritans during the time of Christ. That hadn't evolved to that type of religion yet. There was a subpar religion during the time of Christ, the Samaritans, but here we have this.

It was developed, as you recall, under Omri. We went over that fact last Wednesday night, the Bible study, 1st Kings 16, 15 and 16, that this new king comes along and he moves the headquarters there to Samaria. He bought the hill, and that becomes a new place from 900, roughly, BC on into the time of Christ.

That's what he's referring to, the northern tribes, in the center of the northern tribes, where the king resides there. The exposed wickedness, we read, a short summary here, for they have committed fraud. A thief comes in, a band of robbers takes spoil outside.

This is how they're described in the various other sins as well, the prior chapters of stealing from one another, taking what they want, when they want it, and they continue there in verse 2, hoping against God's judgment. They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness. They're not meditating upon this.

They're not thinking to themselves, you know, wait a minute, God's watching. This isn't good stuff. They're so engrossed in their wretched lifestyle, day in and day out.

There's no thought of God in their minds, is what this is a picture of. It's a really sad picture. They're exposed wickedness.

They do not consider these things at all. In other words, they think they can get away with it. It's another way of saying this.

They're convinced themselves that they have been spared judgment. As you recall, there are other parts of the book of Hosea where they are prosperous in their implication, and their thinking is, I'm prosperous. That means God likes me.

If God likes me, what I'm doing is just fine. It's such crass thinking, of course. We know how ridiculous that is, but sometimes we fall into that trap ourselves.

Everything seems hunky-dory, and if everything's hunky-dory and happy and prosperous, it doesn't always wake us up. Whoa, whoa, pay attention here. This is not good.

It lulls us to sleep at times. That's what happened to them. They were lulled morally to sleep.

So they're convinced that they have a prosperous and safe life, and the Lord of the Covenant will not judge them. He will not even pay attention, apparently, but their sins shall find them out. Now their deeds have surrounded them.

They are before my face. It cannot escape the omnipresence of the Lord and the omniscience of the Lord of His all-knowing knowledge of all things of the hearts of men. The Jews of Hosea's day cannot get away with it.

They're known by God completely, inside and out. He is the Creator, and they are the creation. He knows exactly what's going on, and they should be embarrassed because they do not consider or contemplate with the heart of repentance.

Those comfortable with their sins are not thinking about God. They're thinking about their sins. They're thinking about their enjoyment of sin.

In their mind, they're having a good time and don't want to ruin it with thoughts of God. So in other words, repentance or a change of heart is far from them, but the Lord God, He is not far from them. He is there immediately before them, and they're wretchedness, He observes.

He's aware of it. It's the language here, before my face. Typical Hebraism.

Embraced Lusts

We continue on to the second point, they embrace lust, where we have more particulars, more graphic illustration here of the kind of sins that they're imbibing upon, verses 3-7.

They make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies. There's adulterers, there's wine, and there is apparently the killing and overthrowing of judges and kings.

The latter part, verse 7. So they, we read, they make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies. Who's the they? You think, well, all the other Jews. Well, if you stop, slow down a bit, you realize, wait a minute, a typical king is not going to be hanging out with other Jews.

So many commentators believe it's other courtiers, right? People in the court, advisors and the like, who were there with and around the king, and assistants, and those who help around the kingdom there, with the king. They are the ones that are before the king, and he rejoices in their wickedness. That's a terrible description here that we have.

That the kings here, of this time and age, were enjoying what was going on. They were made glad. The kings are glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies.

Their own lies, the lies of the people, and they rejoice in these things. As well, the kings and the highest leaders of the land, are just like the basest, and the most wretched of the Jews. They're all equally morally repugnant before the Lord God Almighty.

And that he's going into details here of the prince and the king, and he does it again in verse 7, with judges as well, shows the corruption is in all layers of society. Where you have the greatest responsibility, and the greatest knowledge, is supposed to be in the office of the king and the judges, and that they have fallen as far as everyone else. Even further, because to whom much is given, much is required.

And they delight in the wicked acts of their servants, because after all, birds of a feather flock together. We see the same thing in American politics today, of all kinds of parties, where they reinforce and promote what they believe is the right life, and the good life in society. And some of it does overlap, by God's grace.

Christianity, that Coldplay couple were embarrassed. They lost their job. That's a good thing.

We could be in a society where they don't really care anymore, but at least they care. That's something. But even then, we recognize that that's just but a shadow of the true substance of godliness that we desire in this country, in our own lives.

And that it reflects, to some extent, what we see here during the Jews' time themselves. Where, in verse 4, I mean that ties right in, the adulterers. The adulterers apparently were everywhere.

Adulterers, breaking up marriages. And here, this metaphor, the extended description, like an oven heated by a baker, describing their inward passions and desires to go after other people's spouses. No embarrassment whatsoever.

Utterly astounding. And so the word picture here reinforces this idea. And over and over again, they have these lusts and desires.

But it doesn't stay that way. He keeps the picture of a baker through these verses. And then down by verse 7, we come across again, they're hot like an oven, except it's no longer about adultery.

Their lust is redirected towards taking down judges and kings. So whatever their lust is, their basest desires are, or whatever the objects of what it is, he's focusing here upon their heart, not their actions as much. It breaks forth in different types of wicked actions, to be sure, but all starts where? In the soul of man, in his mind, in particular.

And their mind, and their will, and their emotions are growing hot and hotter day by day, is this ongoing description of verses 4 through 7. It's quite graphic that way. With gusto and zeal, in other words, they seek to fulfill their wicked desires, whatever that may be. And here, he highlights and emphasizes the adultery, and the like, and then wine, and then half-baked politics I talk about in verse 8. I want to stop here for a second as we talk about adultery.

I haven't found any numbers in the Christian churches about adultery. It'd be kind of an odd. You could probably pull it off if you had churches actually keep records, but they don't usually keep good records on average in America.

About, you know, discipline cases, one of them would be adultery. But fornication is something that's a little easier, and I found some statistics on that matter in the American churches. Over 80% of those 18 and older have had premarital sex with one person.

These are people claiming to be Christians. And over 50% had three or more partners. This is a poll from 2013 to 2015, and 2015 to 2017.

You may be tempted to think, we're not like the Jews. Dude, those are bad statistics. And recently I ran across one of some churches related to us, and the polls don't look too happy with that either.

The point of the polls, however, is it helps us get a pulse of the church. Because you live in ignorance. I don't know what's going on.

I don't know what's going on in people's lives. This gives us a good idea. It may not be accurate to a large degree, but it's something, especially when it's consistently year after year.

Year 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017. The numbers are still there. What's going on? Something must be there.

There must be a trend. There's a problem in the American churches. And although we don't have the crass idolatry that is actual images in the Protestant circles as such, we still have a lot of these other problems.

Adultery? Or fornication, more precisely. I pray adultery isn't that bad. I just don't know.

Drunkenness, verse 5. In the day of our king, princes have made him sick and inflamed with wine. So the word drunk isn't there, the verb, but clearly that's the idea. He's inflamed with wine.

What does that mean? He's drunk. He's out of his mind. This makes him stretch out his hand with the scoffers.

So he ends up doing foolish things with foolish men. That's what drinking does. It makes you a fool.

It makes you do terrible things because you're out of your mind. Solomon, as we know, warns against kings at the end of Proverbs about wine to avoid getting drunk. Maybe even stop drinking altogether when you are a leader in society and you're surrounded by people who are given into drinking or, in Colorado, drugs and more drugs.

Marijuana and now mushrooms, I found out. Psychedelic mushrooms. Breads and circuses.

It's absolutely terrible. Do you know how hard it is to preach to someone who's drunk? It's virtually impossible, humanly speaking. You talk to them, they go to sleep, and they drink it off.

They don't even remember what happens half the time. And they're making a whole society, a whole group of people in America, in Colorado in particular, that way. They make easy access to this stuff.

Not good at all. Not good for kings, of course, because it will impair their judgment. They'll do bad and dangerous things and the like.

They'll stretch out their hands with scoffers, those who mock other people. We don't want presidents doing that. We don't want judges doing that.

We don't want sheriffs doing that. We continue on here. They prepare their heart like an oven while they lie in wait.

Their baker sleeps all night. That is the baker of their unbidden, their perpetual desires, their flamed lust of their hearts. It's described as a baker inside of them.

In the morning it burns like a flaming fire. Sure, they're asleep at night. We read this, for example, in Micah 2 and 3. They go to bed at night, but they're contemplating even at night evil plans.

So when they get up in the morning, they can exercise those plans. It's a similar idea here. Sure, they're asleep at night.

There's not a lot of passion because they're out cold. But they're zealous in the morning to drink, to commit adultery, or here to lie in wait, to ambush other people. That there is used in the prior chapter, 6 verse 9, as a band of robbers lie in wait for a man so the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem.

Even the priests are murdering and lying in wait and ambushing people. That's how bad it was back then. And so here it's probably the idea of a band of robbers or something, as we read in verse 1, for they have committed fraud.

Why? A thief comes in, a band of robbers, to take spoils. So he reverts back to that sin again. Or maybe, I think, it's political assassinations.

Verse 7, they have devoured their judges and all their kings have what? Fallen. And we know some of the kings have fallen by political assassination. Again, back in chapter 15 of 1 Kings.

And 14, with the other kings there, Bashar and the like, this is how Omri came to power. Was all this machinations, political power plays. And people killing and killing one another in the northern tribes.

It was very unstable for a very long time. Recalling the history of the northern tribe compared to the dynasty of the southern tribe where God had a special promise of protection to Judah and Benjamin. That they kept having the sons and the grandsons and the great grandsons of David and they did.

And they ruled longer and they had a lot more security, that is stability, down in the south. In the north it became more and more chaotic, more and more tottering and pieces of them were taken by foreigners like the Assyrian army, as I mentioned before in prior sermons. Eating and devouring a little bit here and a little bit there of the northern tribe until the final fall of Samaria itself.

So the political really slides into that, it seems to me. Verse 7, they are all hot, they are zealous again. In this case, not for other people's spouses, but they have devoured the judges and all the kings have fallen.

Judges and kings being devoured or fallen by power. So that is clearly a reference to politics and the like. Again, 1 Kings mentions coups and falling down and taking over of one after another.

Bashar took down Nadab in the north and Zimri took down Nadab's son or Absalon's betrayal of his own father. Political chaos from what? Uncontrolled passions like an oven heated by a baker. It just keeps going on and on, they are all inflamed with wicked desires.

And we see that today in our situation. Remind you again, the Old Testament situation was what? The church and the state, that is membership in the nation state of Israel, membership in the church were the same. And so there wasn't formally a mixing of politics in the sense that priests were still priests doing priestly things and the kings couldn't do priestly things.

Clearly a division of function and authority, that's true. But, so far as they are interwoven, because they live in both worlds, they wear both hats. Ours is a little different today, we wear both hats, but we don't really think of it this way.

Because we have a lot of members who aren't members of the church. So I have to talk about politics to give you illustrations today. We see lots of passions in politics.

Men who don't control themselves, they want power. Or whatever else they want, prestige. Take that picture and bring it to the Old Testament.

Just realize back then all the kings professed to be believers in the Messiah. They were members of the church, unlike today. That's the parallel.

None call upon God. So here we have, as it were, a sub-theme, verse 7 at the very end there. None among them calls upon me, the Lord God of the covenants.

None pray to him for mercy and forgiveness. It's a sorry state of affairs. And that's a danger for us as well.

We must ever pray, brothers and sisters, never hold back. And be aware that we have sinned. To be aware of these sins and reflect upon ourselves, our daily activities.

It keeps us humble. It keeps our eyes on Jesus. It keeps us strong against sin.

We must ever pray. Now perhaps when he says here, they never called upon me, he means they never actually prayed. But we have indications, of course, they actually went to worship throughout Hosea.

And gave sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. Although in the name of Baal, perhaps. So there was prayer, I believe.

It just wasn't prayer of repentance and prayer to the God of the covenants. It's a fake prayer, as it were. Whatever the case is, it was not towards him.

They weren't looking for mercy, in other words. And were not fleeing from their own wretchedness. And that brings us here to the third point.

Half-Baked Politics

Half-baked politics. Verses 8 through 10. When Ephraim has mixed himself among the people, what? Ephraim is a cake unturned.

One side is cooked, the other side is not. In the American parlance we say, half-baked. What is this describing, then? Ephraim has mixed himself.

Aliens have devoured his strength, verse 9. And so he's devoured by strangers. That is, mixed either socially or politically or both. We know they are already mixed religiously in their worship, which is to their shame.

In other words, they had foreign alliances. We know that. Probably a tribute, bribes, or treaties.

Which, of course, end up taking an economic toil. As I point out, Assyria comes along. And they had an agreement with Assyria, but then Syria turned on them.

And took up some of their land. They may redirect national resources and military might. This is another way of describing them being devoured in their strength.

Having gray hair. Having gray hair can mean one of two things. One, you're familiar there in the Proverbs.

The gray hair is a picture of one with experience. One with age. And the two go together.

And ideally he is a mature man and the like. Right? Or here, gray means lack of vitality. You're losing your strength, buddy.

You're getting old. That's what he's saying here. Nationally speaking.

Economically speaking. And, of course, also spiritually speaking. Their power is being drained out of them.

Because they are mixed with the pagans. Aliens have devoured their strength. They are cake unturned.

They are half-baked. Their treaties and alliances were not well thought out. They only did half as much as they thought they would.

And did twice as much damage. Half-baked efforts only work for a little bit. For a little time, at the end of the day, often makes it even worse.

And that's what this description here is of them. He plays off the idea of the oven, of course. And turns around and uses the metaphor of them being cooked themselves by their own passions.

And even half-cooked at that. Now there is, of course, a place for national alliances. If a fellow Christian nation, like in the old days, Britain and the U.S., had agreements with one another.

If it's necessary by dint of bad circumstances, like, I don't know, being attacked. And someone's going to give you help as a nation. But here, of course, the Jews had a special relationship.

There is a difference in the Mosaic economy. Not only with respect to the worship and the temple and the priesthood. But also some of the other particularities of their moral life as their national life.

Which is, God told them, you're not supposed to mix alliance with the pagans on your nuclear bomb. On your protection. So it's a special test in that way.

A special privilege. Because we're not given that. God's not telling us, you know, once you guys become a Christian nation, like you were in 1776, then you should not worry about having armies or chariots.

You're not supposed to count your men. David did that. Count your chariots or anything else like that.

Don't do that, America. No, we don't fall under that at all. That's not given to us.

So there's that one difference. And because of that, here it becomes especially a big problem. They're supposed to depend upon God.

We read of that, again, in 1 Kings. Where the southern king, Asa, was disciplined by God through the prophet who told him, you know, one time you trusted me when the Ethiopians came and I delivered you. But now that the northern tribe is coming after you, you're scared spitless, you want to make an agreement with the pagan nation of Damascus.

Remember that? He's not supposed to do that. That's a sin, in fact. Whereas for us it wouldn't be a sin.

It might be even a sin if we didn't get help from Damascus, if it's bad enough. Because we follow a more natural way of doing things. We're not given a supernatural shortcut through common sense approach to maintain national security.

So I want to mention gray hairs here, of course. It means you've lost your strength and vigor. And again, in verse 10, they do not return to the Lord their God.

No, seek Him for all of this. Even in spite of all this stuff, they will not come back to the Lord their God. And their maker.

After rampant, unrestrained lusts that leads to political chaos, half-baked politics, overthrown judges, drunken kings, widespread infidelity, and clearly curses upon a nation where aliens have devoured their strength. Because over and over again, the picture of aliens and strangers taking away and ruling over you is a curse. And it is even without the Old Testament, we know this.

But, in this last verse, but they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all of this destruction, this moral chaos in their life, the economic and sociopolitical instability. I have in mind a picture of someone sitting in a room, comfortable with a pot of coffee at the table, smiling while looking around at the room, at the six-foot flames devouring the wall and the ceiling. And saying, this is fine.

That is exactly what it is. This is fine. Everything is okay.

Brothers and sisters, it is not fine for them. It is not fine for us. When I see these statistics in the American churches, of infidelity, of believing things like evolution, of being confused about Jesus being the only way to heaven.

This is not fine at all. This is terrifying. This is sad.

We need to examine ourselves and our lives and our families. That we are sensitive to the Spirit's convictions. That we have the Word of God and we treasure the Gospel of our Lord and Savior.

That we read and pray and praise to Him. We have weekly public worship and exhort each other and warn each other. Because we too can fall this way.

But also, at the same time, not to just become ingrown, but to be aware and have a heart of compassion for others who are struggling with these things. And other churches to pray for them in this nation. That pastors would be faithful.

Hosea is warning the people of God. And that judges and presidents would repent themselves and flee to the Lord God Almighty. And that Christians would not forget their need to live a life of repentance.

That we, unlike the Jews of this day, we would seek the Lord our God. And we would call upon Him while He is near. Let us pray.

Our God and Savior, help us to continue to grow in the light of this truth and exhortation. That we would, Lord, follow You. To call upon You.

To seek You. To return to the Lord our God when we do have sin. For we will sin.

When we have our struggles. For we will have struggles. Gracious God.

But at the same time, may we pray. Warn others. Perhaps as little Hosea as ourselves.

Although we don't have the divine office. But when they come across our path and we see things are bad. And they open up to us, Lord.

May we have the courage and the strength to warn them as well. They should repent and follow the Lord our Savior. And we should walk hand in hand, God.

In unity towards Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.