

Punishment and Repentance

Let's turn to our Bibles to Hosea chapter 9. We're back to Hosea, Hosea chapter 9. And so Hosea is after the book of Daniel. It's the, I think it's the largest of all the minor prophets. Let's listen intensively to the word of God.

Hosea chapter 9 verses 1 through 10. Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples. For you have played the harlot against your God.

You have made love for higher on every threshing floor. The threshing floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her. They shall not dwell in the Lord's land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt and shall eat unclean things in Assyria.

They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to him. It shall be like the bread of mourners to them. All who eat it shall be defiled, for their bread shall be for their own life.

It shall not come into the house of the Lord. What will you do in the appointed day and in the day of the feast of the Lord? For indeed they are gone because of destruction. Egypt shall gather them up.

Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their valuables of silver. Thorns shall be in their tents.

The days of punishment have come. The days of recompense have come. Israel knows the prophet is a fool.

The spiritual man is insane because of the greatness of your iniquity and great enmity. The watchman of Ephraim is with my God, but the prophet is a fowler's snare in all his ways. Enmities in the house of his God, they are deeply corrupted as in the days of Gibeah.

He will remember their iniquity. He will punish their sins. I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness.

I saw your fathers as the first fruits of the fig tree in its first season, but they went to Baal Peor and separated themselves to that shame. They became an abomination like the things they loved." Let us pray. In these opening words, God, of judgment upon the Old Testament church, may we understand and see the depth of their sin and wickedness and violation of the covenant that you have bestowed upon them through Moses, our Lord and Savior, and look up to our own lives and to our own churches and to our own day and age to understand how you use punishment and repentance, Lord, together, that the punishments and judgments in this life is to draw us unto you and away from wickedness.

And so this is actually an expression of your love and care for the Old Testament church, warning them in strong, no uncertain terms. And may, God, our hearts be moved accordingly as well. We pray.

Amen. As we know, the punishments and warnings of the Lord God are not for His sake, but for Israel's sake, for the church's sake, for our sake even today. The impending punishments here highlighted in these verses is given to the people, shouted to the people with loud implications that now is the time to repent, to turn from their sins.

And these verses are part of, as you recall, a larger collection, this entire book, in fact, that already records calls of repentance. It's good to show again that warnings and impending judgments are given to drive the Old Testament church unto the Lord with hearts of repentance and mourning, although, in other words, the explicit call here in these verses is not here. There's no call, hey, repent, turn away, turn away, I call unto you.

You have that elsewhere in Hosea, because it's part of his ministry. It's part of a package, and preaching doesn't preach the whole book. You'd be here for several days, or all day or something.

So, remind you again, that's assumed here. And these warnings and these threatenings from God above, what's behind it is repent, have a contrite heart, flee from your wickedness, and embrace the Lord God. And as such, these verses are here for us as well.

Not that our sins are the same as theirs, to be sure. Rather, they illustrate God's method in dealing with hard-hearted members of the covenants. And so, we pray that this sermon would help our hearts stay pliable to the grace of our Lord and Savior.

Time of Mourning as a Time of Repentance

The first point, the time of mourning as a time of repentance. And so, verses 1 through 6, do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples, for you have played the harlot against your God. He's admonishing them to take the matter seriously.

When in deep transgression, some people rationalize everything is okay, they don't take the call of repentance as something serious, therefore. And of course, this could allude here, they rejoice into their boisterous worship, the days of fasting, ignoring God's commands, and reveling in sinful doings. As you may recall, I'm going to talk about a little bit of that in a few minutes here.

And they may be thinking to themselves, why should we not have fun? Prophets like Hosea have been talking about destruction and woe for generations now. And here we are, still blessed by God. As you recall, one of the sub themes in the book of Hosea is we are blessed, we have good food, we have prosperity, so God must be on our side.

But he makes it clear here, you have played the harlot against your God. You've been unfaithful to Him. So, this is an indirect allusion, of course, to breaking the covenant, which was there explicitly in the first couple of chapters, that you have broken the covenant, you have been unfaithful, like an unfaithful wife.

And here he's more explicit, using a stronger word. Now, they have played the harlot both literally, that is to say, physically and spiritually. In Hosea 4.14, you may recall, it mentions temple prostitutes.

And so there they have an unfaithful worship, man-made inventions, and mixing things together that ought not to be mixed. And now you can see why the word harlot and the like are used. That's a horrendous, heinous thing to do in the house of God.

You ask yourself, that's incredible, that's a serious sin that they did back then. Can you imagine that happening today? Okay, pastor, are you going with this? I just read, like Friday night or Saturday, it must have been Saturday because we had lost internet all day Friday. A German church with a pole dancer.

What more do I need to say? There's nothing new under the sun. This is where we are. And it's quite something to behold.

And God, God is not pleased. And so there is a time to say what? There's harlots in the church. That's not nice language in America.

I've run across this a lot. We have a lot of conflict with the younger and older generation and reform circles. And the young men are like, we're tired of soft-coating sin because it's not winsome.

It's too offensive. It makes us stand out too much. And the men are like, well, what's wrong with that? I mean, look how bad things are in Europe, in Germany there.

And these churches that we have, surely it's going to happen here, probably already has happened here. I just haven't looked up enough news sources. They spiritualize sin in this case by mixing these two together, this temple prostitution, which is a double offense before God Almighty, not only a violation of the seventh commandment, but the second and third by desecrating His worship.

And this is why God is very strong with His language to the prophets. The result of this is four or are four punishments here. And of course more, but in this particular list, they break it up to four punishments versus two to three and following.

The threshing floor and the wine press shall not feed them. And the new wine shall fail her is the first one. That is the earthly blessings will fail.

Wine is an expression of prosperity back then. Look, we have it. The rich people have access to it.

This is good stuff. We've got the best of the wine, but God says, your blessings will fail you. Cotton Mather of early New England in the 1600s had this famous saying, at least famous for his time, religion brought forth prosperity and the daughter destroyed the mother.

And that's we're seeing here during the time of Hosea, they had much prosperity and it has destroyed their religion. They no longer thought of God as the source, in fact, of their

blessings. Hosea 2a, for she did not know that is specifically the Northern tribes, that's the focus of Hosea, right? With Ephraim being the center stage, for she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine and oil and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

They honor Baal instead of God Almighty, Jehovah, for the blessings upon them. God is certainly offended by that. Similarly, we may have blessings today in America and our lives that we don't thank the Lord as we ought to.

Perhaps we thank ourselves and pat ourselves on the back like how holy and good we are. Second punishment, verse 3, they shall not dwell in the Lord's land, in Jehovah's land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt and shall eat unclean things in Assyria. So that's clearly a picture of what? Being led into captivity.

They're no longer in God's land, they're being kicked out of the promised land. All that is familiar and safe will be gone and eradicated. Assyria will conquer them as we know, leading most of them to the north where Assyria is, northeast, but some would likely flee to Egypt as well in the south.

There's always scragglers or somebody who goes a different direction. Either way, it's not a good thing. We don't want to go back to Egypt.

Maybe it's an illusion here, the idea of Egypt to... Remember how bad it was in Egypt and how you're under a foreign control, your forefathers were? It's going to happen to you again. It's a punishment, it's not a good thing. It's a curse to wake them up that, look, you're not in the promised land anymore, you thought you were chosen, you thought you were special, and you thought therefore because of this I can get away with my sins, I'm kicking you out.

We do this to rebellious children, right? You're out of the house, it's the last straw. You've wrecked the car, you've taken all the money out of the banking account we trusted you with, or whatever the problem is, you're kicked out, you're out on the street. That's what God is doing, this kind of serious punishment because of their serious sins.

A reminder again, we can have a grasp of how bad things are by how much punishment and the type of punishment the Lord uses upon the church of old. The third punishment, verse four, they shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him. It should be like bread of mortars to them, and all who eat it shall be defiled, for their bread shall be for their own life, it shall not come into the house of the Lord.

Living in a foreign land means no more access to Jewish worship, the sacrifices and the priests will be gone, any offering will be a pale shadow of what it was before. And thus you read there at the very end of verse four, it shall not come into the house of the Lord, because they're not going to be in the land of the Lord. There's a consequence for being kicked out.

And here I want to focus on the middle of verse four, it shall be like bread of mortars to them, that is, the sacrifices, and thus ceremonially unclean, because the idea here, I think, the bread of mortars, as commentators I looked at, I believe it refers to the funeral feasts.

We read here, and one commentator, as funeral feasts, whereof we read in Jeremiah 16 and Ezekiel 24, made there eaten in heaviness by those who were polluted by the dead, and therefore altogether unfit for sacrifice, since God loves a cheerful service and will not have any of His come off heavily, that is with mourning, or of course being near or touching the dead, as the case may be. But whatever he is alluding to here, it's clearly not a good thing that their sacrifices are ineffectual, that they are basically meaningless, and that's further punishment upon them.

The means of grace fall flat, is one thing the Spirit may do to bring people to their senses. Mourning is coming, however, that is sadness, whether they like it or not. You want to rejoice? I tell you, don't rejoice, because instead you're going to be like eating the bread of mortars at a funeral, at the death of others, in this case the death of your own nation.

And this is a sad thing to behold, because it is a punishment upon you. And then the fourth one, verses 5 through 6, what will you do in the appointed day, in the day of the feast of the Lord? For indeed they are gone, because of destruction, Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them, and the like. Here, their worship days, their holy days, their time that they supposedly give to the Lord will be taken away from them as well.

The northern tribes, their main focus of Hosea again, and he's hearkening to their false worship and holy days, probably the northern version of the Feast of Tabernacles, a celebration of the end of the season of harvest and a prayer for more rain to come. We read of this in 1 Kings 12, you may recall, verse 32, Jeroboam, right? You have Jeroboam in the north, Brehoboam in the south, they divide the nation after Solomon. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar.

So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made, and at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. He made his own parallel Jewish religion with priests and sacrifices and a special place in the whole nine yards. And God's like, you're going to lose that as well.

What will you do the appointed day and the day of the Feast of the Lord? You're not going to do anything because you're not going to be in the land of promise. You're going to be under the heel of your enemies. And so you're not going to be able to have these days of feasting, the day of Feast of the Lord that is a celebration.

It's supposed to be happy times, brothers and sisters, these days of celebration in the Jewish economy. And they even explicitly say you're supposed to have extras for the poor among you so that you all rejoice together because it's a communal public act. God's like, that's all going to go away.

I'm taking it from you because you have persisted in generation after generation of wickedness and violation. So this is, again, allusions to captivity and fleeing the promised land of judgment to come in the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Egypt represents, again, their oppressed past.

But at the same time, it also is the case that some Jews ran to Egypt to flee the Assyrian Empire. But even in Egypt, they're not going to find security as we read here. They will lose their freedom and their freedom being gone, their worship is gone.

Memphis here alluded to, mentioned explicitly, Memphis shall bury them as one of the chief cities of Egypt, a major burial place for their leadership. And so they're going to be buried there instead of in the promised land, which of course is a picture of judgment. They will die, in other words, in captivity in a foreign land.

They will lose their wealth. We read in the latter part, nettles shall possess their valuables of silver, thorns shall be in their tent because they're going to be abandoned. And what's going to fill it but dust and tumbleweed and thorns and thistles and weeds? They won't have their possessions.

They're gone. They wanted their lusts and desires, their false worship, and God's like, fine, you can have it and I'll take your blessings. I'll take your possessions.

They're going to be all gone. The northern tribe, in other words, is being called here to repent before it's too late. Rejoicing in their sin just makes the matter all the worse.

Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples because you have no reason to rejoice. You have every reason to what? Repent in sackcloth and ashes instead. But they would not.

As the Lord brings harsher and harsher punishment upon them, they should weep and mourn instead and eat the bread of mourners. And today the same is still true with us. The Lord still punishes nations.

He still punishes churches through natural cause and effect of bad decisions. We may cling to our wealth and loathe to lose any of it in the market and our possessions and the like. We don't want to lose our ease.

And that influences not just us, we as Americans in general, but even in the church. It's a temptation for us. We must be aware of this.

Let us not follow the path of the northern tribes with false worship. I don't think I need to go down that path. We already saw one of the worst examples of that in Germany.

It's astounding. Besides this morning, that's pretty bad too. God's not pleased.

And it's hard to wrap our head around that sometimes because it seems, at least in one case here, not so bad per se. At least it's not Santa on a pole, right? But it is bad. As God says, I didn't tell you to do that.

Don't dress up what I've given you. I just want simple worship because it's just there to assist you in spiritual worship. That you don't get sidetracked by the visible, the audible, the excitement of the flesh.

Because this is what God's time, it's not your time. It's his time for us to focus on him, to think of him, to praise him, to bring our prayers before him, to hear him speak to us through the pastor and to draw us unto him. That's why the Lord will vindicate his honor.

Day of Punishment as Day of Repentance

I think he is doing it in America. Day of punishment is as well as a day of repentance. Verses seven through 10, the imminent punishment upon them, verses 7a, the days of punishment have come.

The days of recompense have come. Israel knows. It's there.

It's imminence. The kingdom of God is at hand. Christ tells us over and over again here.

He's saying the punishment here is at hand. Punishment and recompense have come even at the door knocking upon them. This in Hosea's lifetime, as we know, they will be invaded and the Samaria will fall.

The city and the region, the whole northern tribes in 722 BC. Israel follows a number of years later, that is the southern tribes Judah and Benjamin, because as we know, they follow the path of their sister in the northern tribes. They like what's going on here.

We're going to see more of that in 2 Kings, unfortunately. Israel knows, he tells them. He reminds them.

Hosea does, God does through the prophet Hosea. You're not ignorant. You have been warned.

And that makes your persistent rebellion all the worse for you. Time and time again, and they would not. And again, this wasn't the final straw.

It comes in 70 AD. So this is before 722. So 700 over, almost 750 years later, almost, over 750 years, 770 plus 22.

They finally are wiped out. There's no longer a Jewish nation. They're gone.

They're scattered across the entirety of the world. And even to this day, although they have their little slice of land now there in Israel, most of the Jews aren't there. And that's the way God designed it.

They're not going to come back except to the church, if any repent. That old way of doing things, the temple is gone. The sacrifices are gone.

And they've rationalized it for 2,000 years in various forms of Judaism to explain the way what Moses requires. You can't explain it in a way. It's God literally saying, you don't have it.

You don't have a religion anymore. And what do you have now is made up basically. You can claim the Old Testament.

You have a number, warn you right now, you have a number, you know this, Jewish commentators that are on the right, we say politically on the right, very broad category. I'll grant that. And lots of them are basically secular to one degree or another, but they'll talk religiously and they'll talk about the Torah and everything else.

And they don't mean what you understand the Jews to understand. What I'm going through in this text, for example, this is Jewish stuff, which is very much Christian as you see it. Oh, this is the same stuff we have, the same gospel, same Lord and the same master, the same law.

But they don't have that today. They've played around a lot of God's law in modern Judaism. It's not the same as Old Testament.

That is the best of Old Testament Judaism is what I'm saying. So Israel knows, Israel back then knew. The depth of the sin is illustrated here in picking on and focusing in on the false prophets, verses 7, the latter half of verse 7, so 7b and to verse 9. We read, the prophet is a fool.

The spiritual man is insane or a babbler because of the greatness of your iniquity and great enmity. Their hatred and sin is expressed in the fact that they have these prophets who are dangerous and wicked, such prophets, in fact, that are like a fowler's or a bird's snare in all his ways. They are dangerous.

They're a trap. The prophet and the spiritual man are clearly parallel ideas here. There's that great Hebraic synonymous parallelism that you have in the poetry.

And a lot of the prophets have some poetic forms, although it's not poetry per se. And you see that here. The prophet is the same thing as the spiritual man.

And there's two ways of describing this man. He's both foolish and insane, basically saying the same thing two different ways. There's something wrong with these people, this kind of leadership, these prophets.

The word mad means babbler, the one who makes no sense. The word fool here is one of three Hebrew words, this one being the worst of them, which is one who is a stubborn fool, a despiser of wisdom, not like a child. When you think of a child being foolish, we have that in English as well.

They have a separate word for that. Well, sure, they're a simpleton. You may have that translation of some English.

They're just kind of a simpleton. You kind of have pity upon them and you know they're not really on top of it. That's not what this means.

This means not a joker, not a simpleton, but rebellious and persistent and stubborn in their sins. These officers therefore reflect the greatness of Israel's iniquities, the effects thereof,

their great enmity, that is, hatred. That word is used twice, again, in the latter part of verse 8, enmity in the house of his God.

And I don't think he's saying hatred in general. He means their kind of hatred, Israel's hatred, hatred for his worship, maybe even hatred for God and certainly hatred for one another. Their sins are great.

Other sins are small, to be sure, yet they're all judged by our great Lord God in heaven. Even so, the greater transgression requires the greater repentance. Here being public officers, they ought to have a public and clear repentance.

The prophets ought to have fruits of repentance and evidence therein. And yet, as we know, they do not. That's why they fall in 722 BC.

Today, church leaders who lead the people astray have a greater sin upon them as well. That's why he focuses upon them. And he's saying, look, even the best of you are but fools and insane.

That's the idea here. Because leaders in all societies, not just Jewish societies, are supposed to be the best among us, people you look up to. And he's saying, this is how bad it is.

These men of God, so-called, we would say in our vernacular, these so-called prophets are but fools and full of hate, apparently, full of hate. They are great enmity, even in the house of God, in the worship of our Lord and Savior. Deeply corrupted, verses 8-9.

And the watchman of Ephraim is with my God, but the prophet is a fowler's snare in all his ways. Enmity is in the house of God. They are deeply corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah.

So he's not done describing how bad their wretchedness is before him. The prophets here, verse 8, of course, are supposed to be watchmen on the tower, warning God's people. But here he uses it ironically.

We clearly get this idea because here he describes the prophet as a stubborn fool, as one who babbles, and as those full of hatred, as well as a fowler's snare, that is, they're tricky. So clearly here in the middle, he's not saying, well, you're also good guys who watch on Ephraim's tower with my God, but rather they are watchmen, but they're not really doing their job. You call yourself watchmen, air quotes.

That's what's being described here in verse 8. They're pretending to be God's watchmen, but they are liars. They are full of enmity and great iniquity. They are a fowler's snare, a bird's snare, a bird's trap in all his ways, a trap deceiving the simple Jews.

Paul warns us about this in Ephesians 4, verse 14. Where he encourages and tells them, look, God has given you prophets and preachers and evangelists for the edification of the body, for the building up of Christ, that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men and the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. That's some serious description there, isn't it? He says,

you've got to watch out for these people in the New Testament as well as here in the Old Testament.

Here the prophet has, that is Hosea, has a colorful description, a fowler's snare. These men, these prophets are a fowler's snare in all his ways. You can't trust them for anything.

He's up to no good. He's a con artist, we would say, a con man. That's what you have, a beautiful description, a beautiful, a perfect description, a good description there in Ephesians 4, verse 14.

Trickery of men, these traps, these games they play, word games, and the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. They're not doing it out in the open and they are making plans behind the scenes. It's just a game to them.

It's an opportunity to make money, for example, perhaps, and things like that. Whatever the case is, they are dangerous. They're a danger to the church and God calls them out for it.

What kind of leaders are you? Calling yourself prophets? You're wicked men. God does not forget any of these things. He sees all of this.

And this leadership he describes as being thoroughly compromised, deeply corrupted, verse 9, as in the days of Gibeah. So pastor, what happened in Gibeah? I'd rather not go into details. You can look up Judges 19 through chapter 21, Judges chapter 19 to 21.

All I will say is this, a town attacked a Levite's concubine. That's what he's alluding to. That's a pretty serious thing when you go back to that chapter.

It's a horrific act. Showing the depth of depravity of those who claim to be God's people. The northern leadership, this is a simple description of them, and picking again the best of the best, the prophets, and they are but fools.

God does not forget. He will remember their iniquity and He will punish their sins if they do not repent, as we saw there in Psalm 83. He prays that they would have a hard time and God would wipe them away such that they seek God's face there in the latter part of those verses.

If they do not seek God's face, they're washing away, they're being annihilated, would be a thorough annihilation to the other parts of hell, even though they are God's chosen people. He will visit the sins with judgment one way or another. And he hearkens to them in verse 10 as he finishes off this little section here.

I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness. I saw your fathers as the first fruits of the fig trees in its first season. So it's a picture of God's care upon them.

As one commentator says, he esteemed them and delighted in them in this way, as finding a fruit in a desert, which is a kind of a rare thing obviously in the wilderness, and delighting in them when no one else would, would be the implication. And God therefore what caring for them. I was there for you from the beginning, and thus it's an indirect plea of the father for

repentance, that the Lord indeed had mercy and can and will continue to have mercy upon them if they would but repent.

He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, Ezekiel tells us. That is, he's not a gleeful thing like a masochist or something like that, but it will and shall be done if they do not repent. And we do the same thing with our kids.

I don't, you know, enjoy spanking my kid when she was younger and disciplining kids, but I do it because it has to be done. It's important because I love them and I care for them. Instead, so you see a contrast here, implied contrast.

Look, I found you. I found you. Isn't that significant? They didn't find God.

God found them. God took them from the wilderness, the wilderness of their sins and of judgment and of oppression in Egypt and took care of them and made them grow in the new land and they rebelled and spat in his face. Instead, they went to Baal Peor and separated themselves to that shame.

So they followed the path of their forefathers yet again. So this is in Numbers 25, Numbers 25, the first part of that chapter. So it's an historical allusion.

That's why a good commentary will have a little cross reference there and you can find that where they commit a spiritual and physical unfaithfulness to God in the desert. It's a, and it's an incident that Paul picks up in 1 Corinthians 10. So in other words, they returned to the sins of their fathers several generations earlier.

This is, I don't know, 750, 730 BC and Moses in like 12 to 1300 BC. It's like, we're going to keep doing it. Well, you didn't learn your lesson the first time from Numbers 25.

They didn't. They were hardened in their sins. And in doing this, they become abominable, just like the thing they love.

They become that which they follow, that which they adore. They became, we read at the end of verse 10, an abomination like the thing they love, this false worship. And this is true for everyone.

You become like what you love. And that's why we ought to love and cling to Jesus to become more like him by his grace and his mercy. We must never lose sight of that.

It's never too late to repent. This time here in which he tells him not to rejoice, but rather you're going to eat the bread of mourners. And here that punishment has come upon you and recompense is here, knocking at the door.

Now is the day and now is the time to repent. The Jews of old should have learned this lesson, but they would not. We may need the wake up call ourselves as churches, as families, as individuals here in America.

And if we do not wake up, the Lord will bring punishment to us as well to wake us up. This is why he does it. This is the lesson we see here, certainly not to follow in their footsteps, but to know that God uses this for a reason, for a purpose, because it hasn't happened yet.

He could just not said a word through Hosea and the Assyrian army just come down and wash them away as a tsunami across Japan. But he doesn't. He has mercy upon them.

Just the fact that he opens the mouth of the prophet, he spends years pleading with him, tells you God is offering them a time to repent, isn't he? And the punishment is to warn them, is to stick, to scare them back into the kettle, into the security of the pastures of the Lord where he has the fence of Jesus, who is our gate. Brothers and sisters, let us, we pray, ever follow him and listen to his word and submit to his hand if he does indeed punish us as a father punishes because he loves his children. Let us pray.

Our God and Savior, we do pray and ask, Lord, that we would examine ourselves as individuals, families, and churches, and not just our individual church, even our denominations, Lord, across this nation, for we have much to deal with. Certainly, I believe that we've seen. We're thankful, God, nevertheless, that your grace is upon us, that we don't have some of the heinous sins, but even so, God, we still have sin.

And it's still a serious lesson we ought to learn here that you do and you will discipline us, that is, you will punish us as a father who punishes a difficult child. And may we submit, therefore, to this God and not follow the path of Israel, we pray by your grace and your spirit upon us. Amen.

Amen.