

Our Heavenly Father's Love for the Church

Let us turn to our Bibles to Hosea chapter 11, Hosea chapter 11, and these touching verses in the midst of a very stark and strong collection of sermons and exhortations from the prophet upon the wicked nation, especially of the northern tribes. We come to these verses here that I hope will touch your heart. Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, Hosea chapter 11, verses 1 through 1 through 11.

When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. As they called them, so they went from them. They sacrificed to the baals and burned incense to carved images.

I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.

He shall not return to the land of Egypt, but the Assyrians shall be his king, because they refused to repent, and the sword shall slash in his cities and devour his districts and consume them because of their own counsels. My people are bent on backsliding from me, though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt him. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel? How can I make you like Adma, and how shall I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within me.

My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man, and the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come with terror.

They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion when he roars, and then his sons shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria.

Let us pray. In these hearts, heartfelt words, God, through the mouth of the Prophet, we know is an expression of your desire towards your people then, and I hope, Lord, that we see that it's also your desire towards us today. We too struggle, we too sin, both individually and collectively, in varying degrees, God, and sometimes it's so bad that we wonder what you think of us.

And here we have the words of hope and the words of mercy of your covenants of faithfulness to an unfaithful people, God. If this is true for them, then it is certainly true for us today. Help us, God, to learn anew and to be encouraged and drawn unto you that our Heavenly Father, you, God above, love your church.

Amen. So in the midst of the warnings as we've read over and over again in the first ten chapters, seems to dominate the theme of his ministry, exhortations and threatenings even from the Prophet Hosea, guided, of course, by the Spirit of God, we come to a tender part of the book. The Lord, in spite of persistent and deep transgressions, we even read it here in verse 7, my people are bent on backsliding from me, like they're determined to run the opposite direction.

He appeals to them out of love and compassion. He calls upon their shared past, showing how much he cared for them of old, such as do earthly parents to wayward children. It is not always a thundering of punishment, but often mixed with overtures of love and pity.

But this urging of the Lord was not only for the sake of the Old Testament Church, but for us today, for we too are the people of God. Although we no longer walk and talk like the Jews of old, we are still one church. For any who are walking off the path of holiness, this is a good reminder that we are called to him not only with thunderings, but with the bands of love, everlasting love.

Our Heavenly Father's Love for the Church

The first point, excuse me, verses 1 through 4. Our Heavenly Father's love for the church, for Israel, which of course was the Old Testament expression of the church. It's a beautiful picture of family, of a father loving his children, of a special care and consideration. When Israel was a child, when you were a child, he's saying to them, I loved him.

I called him out. That is, of course, he protected and watched over them until they got to the land of promise. His love towards the church of old is a two-fold love in this sense.

There's a special corporate love insofar as he speaks to them publicly, and the world sees and knows and understands that the Jews are special, the Old Testament saints are special. We are called as well. We are set apart.

We are special and set aside that way, corporately speaking, publicly speaking. But clearly in the church today, as well as back then, there were both what? Regenerate and unregenerate people. In the public expression of God's covenants, the outward covenant or the outward church, the outward kingdom, the different ways of describing this.

People who were pretending to be Jews, but were not true Jews, as Paul describes elsewhere, taking the covenant blessings anyway. God gave him the blessings. They all got it, right? They also got the curses and the punishment.

Even the elect had to suffer under these things. And yet God's goodness was still upon them, even though he knew their hearts, very much like Jesus. He knew the hearts of his audience, and he still blessed them at times with his words and certainly with the food and the good things of this world.

But he does it ultimately for the sake of the elect among them. So within this special arrangement of the visible church of the Old Testament and New Testament, same principle, same institution, there's a twofold part, the outward and the inward. I'd like to, you know, I'd liken it to the American situation.

We do this in everyday life. We know, we're like, okay, are you a, you know, are you a real American? Are you just pretending to be an American? Are you a real citizen? Are you just pretending to be a citizen? You know, you're really interested in this club that we're in, that

we've done, or it's just kind of a game. You're just kind of here because your parents make you become part of the club.

Whatever kind of institution that we have, even in our family, sometimes we have family members who betray us and show that they really don't care about being a family member. I pray it's never happened to you, and they curse you and run off. You find out they really were not really of us.

Their heart was far from us. The same kind of thing here. And so my point being we shouldn't be surprised at this understanding of the church.

The church is not a pure institution in the sense of we're all wheat, and there's no tares, to use the picture of Christ. The wheat and the tares are mixed amongst us. This is how it's always ever be and will be until we get to heaven.

And this beautiful picture here, and this language of God, the Father here, speaking to them, is to them collectively, and you know, you are distinct and set apart, but especially for the elect amongst the elect. So Israel is elected as they're set aside, and amongst them is a remnant of the remnants. A special electing love of God through Christ, given to his people.

Romans 2.28 is a nice summary of this doctrine and teaching that's there in the Old Testament and summarized very clearly in the New Testament. And Romans 2 just gets to the heart of the matter very quickly. Romans 2.28. This is Paul speaking to the Jews causing problems or confusion there in the city of Rome, and explaining to them what's clearly the case, that not all Jews are Jews, not all circumcised Jews are Jews.

There's an elect within the elect, and that's how God has always ever done it. And so not all the Jews even here are born again or regenerate, and yet God still has mercy upon them. That's an important thing to remember.

And it's a good thing. I mean, we want to raise our kids. We want to bring people in to the church and the kingdom of God, and you might say, well, maybe they're not saved.

Well, they're gonna still have wonderful blessings. Isn't that a good thing? I think so. But they'll have the blessing of their preached word, especially.

They're called out of Egypt. This language here, you may recall, and out of Egypt I called my son. Well, first of all, refers in the immediate to their collective past, of course.

They, as the people of God, called out and drawn and protected from the land of Egypt, Exodus 4.22. Then he shall say to Pharaoh, right? Moses speaks to Pharaoh, thus says the Lord, Israel is what? My son, my firstborn. So I say unto you, let my son go that he may serve me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed, I will kill your sons, your firstborn.

Already early on in the history of redemption, the history of the Old Testament Church, God describes his people, collectively, outwardly, the church as his son. As someone special to him, this relationship of a father to a son, a spiritual family with God being the head. A tender picture.

An emphatic picture, as he says here. The implication, of course, is what would you do if your son was held captive in slavery? You'd fight for him. So he tells Pharaoh, you better let him go.

You're in trouble. He is my son. That language is already there.

They're especially chosen above all the nations preserved since Abraham, as we know, in 1800 B.C. to the time of Jesus. The high point often referenced very, very often in the Old Testament, the high point of God's love and care for the people of God. Is the deliverance from Egypt and calling and echoing back to that, he's saying, look how much I care for you.

The implication being, why are you running away from me? Why are you backsliding from a man, from a God who cares for you as a man to his son or a father to his son? To paraphrase Deuteronomy. Now, this is referred to as Christ as well in Matthew 2.15. Matthew 2.15, we read, And when he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, out of Egypt I called my son. There's that famous New Testament reference.

This is the passage that he's tying it to that Christ represents Israel. He is the true son. They are, as it were, a derived, we are derived sons from the great archetype, Jesus Christ being the son, the capital S. And of course, he is a son who never fell away.

He is a son that never backslid, who fulfilled and did all that we could never do and would never do, our Lord and Savior. Yet even after the call from Egypt, they did what? We know the stories. They pine for the food of Israel and they pine for the gods.

Excuse me, of Egypt and the gods of Egypt as well. They burn incense to carve images, we read here in verse two. They even sacrificed the bales already.

Common, common problem over and over again, there already after they were delivered. It's quite amazing how hardened many of their hearts were. As we know, it wasn't all of them, but enough of them that God, through the prophet, says basically, like they say in the south, y'all, just all of you.

This is a persistent problem amongst you. But he continues here, God does, even after he reminds them, you were still unfaithful to me, but I'm what? Still faithful to you in spite of your sins. You see how glorious this is? I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms.

Little Evie, not long ago, learned how to walk. And what do we do? We grabbed her by the arms and walked her around so that she would learn. What is that but a picture of caring for one's little child? God caring for the child, for the church.

We are like baby, a baby to him. Infants compared to his majesty and his greatness and his justice and his love and his power. And he did it nevertheless.

He stooped down to our level, this description here. The Old Testament God here is not this vengeful God only, an angry God all the time, but a God of love as well. I know lots of people, historically, we talked a little bit about that, Marcion and the like, who were saying we got the Old Testament God is always angry all the time, knows no love and compassion.

What book was he reading? Clearly not Hosea or large swaths of Deuteronomy, in fact. And the Psalms, of course. Bands of love, verses three to four here.

I taught them to walk like a child, but they did not know that I healed them. They're kind of clueless, as it were. They did not know.

They didn't, in other words, acknowledge with grateful hearts, I think, is what he's saying indirectly. Because clearly they went back to the bales and offered burnt incense to carve images after God fed them in the wilderness with water and food and miracles. Over and over again.

I drew them, nevertheless, is the implication here, I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love. He gets no recognition for what he has done, although they did not know I healed them, protected them, preserved them is the idea here. But I still cared for them with gentle cords and bands of love.

The Lord's love was strong, is strong, like bands or strong ropes and cords wrapped gently around them, around us. Why? To draw and to woo them. Even feeding and taking care of them.

The picture of them as an ox, right? And I was to them as those who took the yoke from their neck, the burden off their shoulder. And he stooped down and fed them, taking care of the animal. I'm sure a number of you have had animals or grew up with animals, I think, in my conversations with you.

And kind of treat them like part of the family sometimes. Maybe they did that. Maybe they had their favorite ox sometimes.

But clearly the picture here is the greatness and the majesty of God coming down to the low level of feeding an animal when a servant and a slave or a child should be doing it. That's the picture of love and compassion for the church, for you. That he draws you with cords of love, of an everlasting love, and feeds you his word.

And teaches you like a toddler to walk in his ways, brothers and sisters, in your life, even here and now. He draws you to him with the sacraments, with the preaching, with the word of God, that you would live a life of repentance and cling to Jesus forever and ever. This text is for you.

He taught Ephraim. This is another name for Israel, often, although emphasizes the northern tribes. But, of course, it's all the tribes, even Judah.

Judah comes up a little later in these verses because they start following the ways of Israel, the ten tribes of the north. But God nevertheless had compassion, continues to have

compassion. Did he not send prophet after prophet? It's one of the interesting things going through 1 and 2 Kings in the Wednesday night Bible study.

You see, God kept caring for his people and warning them and bringing these preachers of old. Because he cared for them. He loved them. And he has a band of love around them and draws them to him. Even though they resist like stubborn donkeys, as we read elsewhere.

Our Heavenly Father's Discipline of the Church

Secondly, our Heavenly Father's discipline of the church, verses 5 through 7. So he quickly changes the way he speaks.

But he doesn't stay in these verses, as you notice. Verses 5 through 7. He says, he shall not return to the land of Egypt. So God's not going to discipline them by bringing them back to Egypt.

He brought them out of Egypt. Verse 1, and out of Egypt I called my son. They're never going back to that way.

God's going to use someone else instead to discipline them, which is the Assyrians. And so they're going to have a new king, which is a shame to them, of course. They ought to have their own Davidic king.

The northern tribes dropped that in their rebellion and had Jeroboam as their king. And from then on out, they just went downhill one generation after another. And so one way or another, the Lord's going to discipline them.

And the implication clearly is, yes, I stooped down and fed them. I took the yoke off of them. But I'm still going to discipline them.

They still can't get away with what they're doing. Any more than a father would do with his son. He's still going to discipline them, even though he loves them.

He may tamp down on his full discipline and his full wrath, to be sure. But it's still going to happen. There's still going to be punishment there.

To show them, therefore, that they were what? Captives of sin the whole time. That's the picture of Egypt, of being in captivity anyways. The Assyrians, the Babylonian captivity, the like, are all grand pictures reminding them, this is what it's like not following God.

You're bound in iniquity. You're under the dominion of others, of sin, of Satan and his kingdom. Because Satan rules the world in the sense of there's paganism everywhere.

It's always, of course, under God. God ultimately rules. And they're not going to learn their lesson, unfortunately.

But God's going to give it to them anyways. The elect will. It's still for the elect, ultimately.

They will learn their lesson. They will be humbled. And this is the coming fall of Samaria, right? We've seen this, hints of it.

Now the name is even more explicit, the Assyrians. So be here. They're going to be your king.

You're not going to win. You're going to have another rule over you. And 722 BC is right around the corner, the fall of Samaria, the capital of the northern tribes of Ephraim and the ten tribes.

And destruction will be thorough because they refuse to repent. And the sword shall slash into cities, devour his districts, and consume them because of their own counsels. They made their own plans.

They wanted to go their own way. And God's going to give them the results of their bad decisions, their sinful decisions, their rebellion, their consistent, stiff-neckedness, and their backsliding from him. They have no one to blame but themselves, in other words, for being invaded, for they would not repent and cry out to God for mercy after having one prophet after another.

Remember, it's not just Hosea. Amos and Elijah and others are there calling them out to repent. And it continues lastly here to describe them before he changes direction to the prophet.

My people are bent on backsliding from me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt him. Backsliding is simply turning away from their covenant obligations, turning away from Christ.

Love to him and belief in him is the greatest obligation, of course. And other obligations, the proper way of worshiping him and loving their neighbors and the like. We saw in chapter 7 and elsewhere, they weren't even doing that.

They call out for help, but clearly with unrepentant hearts because they have no praise or honor to God. None at all exalt him, although they call out to the Most High. So in other words, their mouth is speaking, but their hearts are in another direction altogether.

Their hearts are not into it. They have been worshiping Baal the whole time, so clearly it wasn't a true repentance. It's just talk.

So God is concerned about the heart ultimately and not just, oh Lord, help us. They want the help. They don't want to be punished by the Assyrians and dragged away to another country any more than you want to be dragged away to another country.

But that's it. Not because they dishonor God, not because their hearts are broken by their sin and they cry out for mercy. They just don't like the consequences.

That's clearly evidence of not having a truly repentant heart, but a superficial repentance and thus actually a backsliding. Backsliding here, this word is mentioned a few times in the Old Testament, especially in Jeremiah. It's kind of interesting.

Jeremiah writes about it mostly in chapter 3. And we read there, then I saw for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery. I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

And so it continues on in that vein to warn them and say, stop pulling back from me. Backsliding, that is, you can see from the translation that we're going backwards away from God and the path of holiness. And other prophets like Jeremiah give the same kind of warning here.

Backsliding is a problem, is a danger. Hosea mentions it again in chapter 14, verse 4. I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely for my anger has turned away from him.

There you have good news. He knows what kind of stubborn people they are, but he will love them anyways in spite of them turning the other way. Backsliding doesn't have to mean never repenting, but describing present apostasy and turning away from what is going on before them that is following in the covenant, being in the church or whatever else that may look like in action.

And he's describing by the word backsliding, in other words, a sum total of the wicked worship and lifestyle there in the North. But it's never too late to turn around and repent. That's why the words are here.

If it was too late, he'd be done talking to them. That's it. Judgment's here, it's over.

Clearly, there's always a time to repent. So even when we talk about people who have backslidden or even if we say that person is apostatized, we should not mean it's ever hopeless for them. We can't ever say someone's non-elect in those kinds of circumstances.

We don't read people's hearts. We can just simply say and pray to them and call them out and hope that they will change and repent as long as they're alive. As far as I'm concerned, we have hope and we should pray for our family members and others who have turned away from the covenant and gone their own way and backslidden.

Our Heavenly Father's Mercy for the Church

Our Heavenly Father's mercy for the church. God has not stopped there. Verse 8 through 11, the third point.

How can I give you up, Ephraim, after describing such ungrateful people who turn away from God, don't have sincere hearts, crying out for mercy? How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? Again, wonderful, beautiful words of love and care. We read how personal the message is. How can I, God, give you up, Ephraim? How can I, the

Lord and Father above, hand you over, Israel, hand you over to the Assyrians, of course? He's clearly using human language and grabbing at their heartstrings, saying, look, this is the kind of compassion and love I have for you in spite of your wretchedness towards me and your basically hate, some variation of hate, however you want to describe it.

It's clearly not love. Towards the one who took care of them as a little baby and taught them the walk and the things of God. You see the care and compassion of our Lord for them here, for you, as he speaks to you as well, brothers and sisters? God cannot, in other words, it's clearly rhetorical.

He cannot give them up. He cannot hand them over to utter destruction is the implication, as we know. He says it here, my sympathy is stirred.

My heart is churned within me. God is not a man that he has emotions and yet he uses emotional language to show to you the kind of love that he has, an everlasting love that never changes, brothers and sisters, to wake us up. And to encourage us.

Adma, you'll probably have in your footnotes there what the city or the place of Adma and Zeboam is. You're not going to know what they are. I wouldn't know what they are either.

But you'll find out there in your notes that they are cities that were destroyed alongside Sodom and Gomorrah. So it's an allusion to that terrible punishment and destruction. God here, in the opening verses, and here in these closing verses, eight and following, clearly presents himself and is showing us that he is like a heartbroken father to a stubborn, rebellious child.

Come back to me. Look what I've done for you. I love you.

And that's good and proper for us to say this to others who are in the covenant. Remember, they're in the covenant. These aren't just random, uncircumcised people across the world.

I don't think you should speak this way to them. They may or may not be God. When they're baptized and brought in and you see them grow up or get older in life and just turn away, this is the kind of language I think you can use.

God used it in the Old Testament, clearly. It's covenantal language. And so those of you and friends of yours, Christians and the like, who struggle with assurance, for example, read these words.

Use these words. I mean, look at the context. Pay attention to what's going on.

The rebelliousness, the stiff-neckedness, the persistence and backsliding, he says. It's like you're bent on it. You're just like, forget you, God.

I'm going to go the opposite way just because. Right? We've seen the rebellious teenagers. You've probably seen the movies.

Maybe you did it yourself when you were younger. You say, why did I say black? You say, hello, I say goodbye. There's a song about that.

Everything's the opposite. It's like, why? Why do you want to do that? In that case, just the way the song works out, there are opposites. But the teenager does it because he just wants to be difficult.

Or the adult, and that'd be a teenager. I'm using the stereotypical teenager. God cared for them and spoke this way to them.

He speaks this way to us, brothers and sisters. Our confidence of redemption should be in his love, that he cared for you when you were but a spiritual child. And are still, in many ways, of course, all of us are children to God.

And there's strength of our Lord in verse 9. I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath. Yes, it sounds like I use strong language. Of course you do.

The father's going to say, you keep this up. You're going to die. You're going to ruin your life.

You're going to go off a cliff someday because you've been taking the drugs and you've been living a wild lifestyle. Son's like, what? You're just exaggerating, dad. And sometimes the father is because he's trying to make a point.

He's trying to wake him up and scare him. And God does that as well in the language of Hosea. But we see here clearly God tempering and tamping down on the absolute language that you would read elsewhere.

We have read in Hosea as though that's the end. There's no more hope. They're gone.

They're lost. They're not. God said, I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath.

That is the fullness of my wrath. Nor again, destroy Ephraim. I will not come with terror.

That is the fullness of terror. Clearly there's terror there. God just says, you're going to lose it.

And they did. They lost the city. That's kind of terrifying.

He means the fullness of it. I could have had greater judgment upon you, but I have not done it. It's what he's saying here.

And that too is an expression of his love, of the restraint of our God and his compassion upon wretched sinners. He withholds the fullness of this punishment. The deserved punishment of a father upon a rebellious son.

If you persist in sin, if we persist in sin, the Lord is indeed merciful, but he still will discipline you. Although it probably won't be as bad as it could be. It kind of feels really bad.

You lose your city. You lose your king. You lose your country.

You lose your livelihood and you're gone. But it was better than going to hell. God does this as the maker of all, and he will not destroy Ephraim.

And why will he not destroy Ephraim? That is the Jews of the North. For I am God and not a man. I mean, this is simply what he says.

What does that mean? That's kind of, where did that come from? What's the connection here? I think the connection, of course, is again how he often speaks implied. That is, he is not a man who would break his word, who would not keep the covenantal faithfulness that he said he would keep for them. That's what he's saying.

So the destruction is not full and total in this regard. Both externally, of course, with respect to the body, there's still going to be the church of Judah in the South. And of course, with the elect.

And I will not come with terror. I already mentioned that, that he means, of course, the fullness of terror, the absoluteness of terror, but ever calls men and women to repent. The revival of God's people, verses 10 through 11, they shall walk after the Lord.

He will roar like a lion when he roars, then his son shall come trembling from the west. He shall tremble like a bird from Egypt. Clearly a picture of a great reformation of his people.

They will walk after the Lord. An echo from Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Ezekiel 36, 26 and following, we read, a new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you.

And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and what? Cause you to walk in my statutes and you will keep my judgments and do them. They shall what? Walk after the Lord, God of the covenant.

The picture there, the word walk, of course, doesn't mean a physical walking, but a spiritual walking that is obedience of following him with your heart and your mind and your soul, your emotions, your will, all being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit through the power of regeneration, of a great regeneration by the spirit. So that they would obey him and love him and follow him. That's what he's describing here in the simple words, they shall walk after the Lord.

The same language of Ezekiel, they shall walk in my statutes, which is another way of saying walk after the Lord. Earlier in Hosea 3, 5, we read afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their King. They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in what? The latter day.

So there's a picture and a prophecy earlier on in Hosea of this revival of returning to God, many being turned back to our Lord and Savior. And it's described as what? The latter days. Remember that sermon in Hosea 3? I'm sure you can all just whip to it in your memory right now.

But I went over and explained how that phrase there, latter days, is the end days or the end times that we live in now, that God is bringing his elect, not just from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. And it's interesting here that he says, then his son shall what? Come from the West. Where has Christianity grown especially? In the West, Matthew Henry reminds us.

I showed you the picture there in Sunday school class of the growth of the church. It's all along the Mediterranean side. It moves what? West into Gaul and taking over all of Europe by God's grace.

You have a little bit of some kind of Christianity, mostly Nestorianism, which is a variation of heresy out there in the East of Persia, near India. They didn't do very much as we know. What kind of churches you know that's out there right now? Hardly anything.

A prophecy of perhaps a direction in which the spirit will move as only the spirit is and can do. So the latter days are now where wherever the Gentiles convert, there was another fulfillment of the gathering in of the elect. And God is described in this calling of his people and that they walk to him and they are drawn to him.

His son shall come to him what? After he roars like a lion, the roar of the lion of Judah, the gospel call going forth to the four corners of the world through his preachers, through his apostles. And when the Lord speaks, what? His people hear and they are drawn to him, drawn to him by bands of love and the power of God. And how are they drawn? They are drawn by trembling.

The trembling people are quaking from Egypt, from Assyria, like little birds, perhaps just describing how serious and excitable they are in coming to the Lord. Or I'm inclined to think it's description as well of godly fear of quaking before the Lord that he is their father and they are wayward children coming to him as the parable son asking for mercy that they know they do not deserve. Godly fear.

The gospel call includes repentance and there should be a godly fear as part of repentance. This is what is required of all of us and all who hear his word. In other words, they're coming out of exile.

That's going to come upon them when the Assyrians take him over in 722 with repentant hearts. And it's not just them. It's the entire world now with the dissolving, as we know historically, of the Jewish people at the time, the Jewish people as a collective entity known as Israel in the Old Testament sense and the worship therein.

The temple is gone. It was destroyed in 70 A.D. The priesthood is gone. They can't even trace their lineage back there anymore.

There's a lot of question about that still. God's like, it's no longer significant anymore. So any future prophecies from here on out are about the spiritual Israel ultimately.

The church of the New Testament era in particular. They're coming home in this beautiful picture here. Verse 11, they shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria.

And I will let, excuse me, and I will let them dwell in their houses, says the Lord. The other half of 11 is on the other page here. And I will let them dwell in their own houses.

Clearly a picture of peace and security and being drawn into the kingdom of God ultimately. Tranquility and beauty and hope. It's a wonderful picture that we have here.

Brothers and sisters, those who feel the weight of sin upon them, more than normal at times. Ignore the lies of the devil. Keep your eyes upon Christ.

For our Heavenly Father loves the church and not just the church in general, but his people in particular, you, with a love that we see. And he cares for you and providence in your life with the patience and the long suffering here that we see of them of old and all the more for us today when Christ has already come, drawing you with his everlasting band of love in the gospel call. Let us pray.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may these words help comfort our souls and indeed strengthen us and encourage us to carry on that you indeed love us with an everlasting love. With Lord, you draw us with gentle cords, God, and you've taken the yoke off our shoulder and stooped down and fed us the gospel of Jesus Christ. May this continue to warm our hearts, humble us and strengthen us to carry on this week.

We pray by your love through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.