

Waiting on God

Let's turn to our Bibles to Hosea chapter 11. Hosea chapter 11, we have this awkward division here, verse 12, and then we go to chapter 12 itself, to verse 6. Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, Hosea chapter 11, verse 12 and the following. Ephraim has encircled me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit.

But Judah still walks with God, even with the Holy One who is faithful. Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind. He daily increases lies and desolation.

Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried to Egypt. The Lord also brings a charge against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways. According to his deeds, he will recompense him.

He took his brother by the heel and the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought favor from him.

He found him in Bethel, and there he spoke to us. That is, the Lord of hosts. The Lord is his memorable name.

So you, by the help of your God, return. Observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually. Let us pray.

We read here, God, again, of course, of the admonition of the northern tribes, but also of Judah. Lord, and how it's tied to the past of Israel, with Jacob, and the struggle therein, and how he finally got the blessing of the Lord, and they are called therefore, and so are we. That by your help, God, that we will return, that we will repent, and turn away from anything that we are struggling with, with respect to sin, the world of flesh, the devil, and to observe mercy and justice, and to wait upon you continually.

May that be our life, to always wait, God, upon your word and your truth, when to move and when not to move, God, and in all things to be satisfied, and to live a life of repentance, we pray. Amen. So, again and again, the prophet hammers Israel for their sins.

This is probably because his audience was also shifting over the years. He perhaps moved from about in the regions as well. He was there for many, many years.

Many of the prophets were. Proclaiming the impending doom. So these are collections of the things they said, and there's indications they said other things as well.

And so naturally, there would be a repetition of themes and ideas. But, as we have read over time, it is interspersed as well with calls of hope. Here we read of two positive things.

First of all, Judah's walk with the Lord. And secondly, the hope of return, or repenting, waiting, he describes it, upon the Lord. So let's look a little more carefully here at those two points, and the other ones as well.

Weakness of Israel

First of all, the weakness of Israel, verse 12, into verse 1 of chapter 12. Lies and deceits, described here in the prior verse, to show us why often it's set apart. Ends with the good news that he will let them dwell in their houses, says the Lord.

Write a picture of revival there, the last few verses. 12 does a sudden turn and change, of course. Ephraim has encircled me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit.

That's a pretty serious charge. The me, of course, is most likely the Lord God Almighty, not Hosea. Hosea isn't really concerned about that.

He's concerned about God's honor. And like so many lies, they encircle the Lord with the lies, that is, as though he were surrounded. Whatever they say, they're lying about God.

It's deceit about what he is, and what he will be doing. What he is, or who he is, using Baal, for example, instead of Jehovah. Or combining Baal with Jehovah.

That's clearly a lie. What he requires, creating their own worship. That's also a lie.

Surrounding God, on the left hand, on the right hand. Everything they say about the Lord God of the covenant is about lies. Because they have this shadow religion that's something like the southern tribes, but not really.

And it's sinking further and further, as you recall, in 1 and 2 Kings, and Wednesday night, into more and more outright paganism. And so this overlaps that time period, here with Hosea. And he's warning them, Assyria is coming.

Because you would not repent. You're going down. And they never recover from God's judgment.

Maybe you've heard about the Lost Ten Tribes. That kind of talk. This is where it comes from.

Or, perhaps, the description here of surrounding the Lord with lies is a description of their praise and worship. Around the altar, or something like that. Again, with lies.

Baal. False days of worship. False priests.

These are not the Aaronic priesthood, for example. And lies in their heart, especially. And in particular, it seems the leadership has gone down this path, sadly enough.

Again, the history over and over again of 1 and 2 Kings is the kings. And how the kings led the way in false worship to appease the people. Jeroboam, the first king of the northern tribes, he did it to keep them from going to Jerusalem.

Going to the southern tribe. Instead of being satisfied with God's will. That, yes, there'll be two nations.

They almost had a civil war, remember, and God stopped them. But there should only be, what? One religion. Jeroboam's like, no, we'll make two religions.

That's terrible. That's heinous. That's very wicked.

The history shows there were no good kings in the northern tribe, save perhaps Jehu. And he had a lot of problems as well. Counter example here, on the flip side.

But Judah still walks with God, even with the Holy One who is faithful. Still walks with God. Of course, that's relatively speaking.

They're not perfect any more than we are perfect. But they hadn't, at various times in their history, fallen to rank idolatry. The northern tribes just stayed and wallowed in, generation after generation.

They had their sins, and they even had their bad kings. I think we worked it out, about 43% or something of them are good kings. Almost 50%.

It's always higher than I always realize over time. They had a number of good things. A number of good formal examples, at least outwardly.

The temple, the Aaronic priesthood, and the Holy Days. They had the right ones. Jesus was correct, talking to the woman at the well, and he's like, you guys are arguing back and forth, but the Jews have the true worship in Jerusalem.

But at the end of the day, Jerusalem is going to disappear as well, because Christ is the great temple, of course. The Jews, that is, the non-Samaritans, the southern tribe that survived, they had the temple, they had the Aaronic priesthood, they had all the right and correct, at least formally, ways of worshiping and honoring God, as instituted in his word. Even if they were formal and not from the heart, it was better than what you had up north.

Perhaps also, this is an allusion, as some commentators think, to the time of Hezekiah, that we just started reading about last week in Wednesday Night Bible Study. The guy, the king there, in chapter 18 of 2 Kings, who tore down all the false worship, he even tore down the high places, which is really something. You remember, every time there's a description of a good king, he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, except that he let the high places remain.

Every time, he let the high places remain. Those are the other places of worship, that before they had the temple, in which they would gather before the Lord, right before the temple was created, before God's like, okay, this is what you're going to have under Solomon, that he told them about in Deuteronomy. It finally gets erected in Solomon's time.

Between that time, where are they going to worship? Bethel was one place. Other places as well, because it wasn't as restricted. Abraham worshiped God wherever he could.

He stopped and had an olah, a burnt offering before God, because wherever God is, we can worship him. We know this in the New Testament. They knew that in the Old Testament, but it was restricted in God's providence there to the temple to teach them a lesson.

Only he can restrict it that way. Not us. We can't tell other people where to worship as such, only by convenience, as it were, providentially.

But here, God's like, you've got to do it. You've got to stop going to the high places. That's why it's significant.

Stop it. I tell you where to worship, and you're ignoring me. You think you're better than I am? Of course, part of the danger might have also been, on top of that, is where a lot of the Baal worship was as well.

The danger of mixing the false worship of the local tribes. But he had torn those down as well. He went up there, and I guess he got his soldiers, and they just tore it all down.

It's finally destroyed. The great revival of Hezekiah's time, perhaps during this time of Hosea, because they certainly did overlap. Hosea is using them, in other words, the southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, as a counterexample.

You've got problems, Ephraim. You encircle me with lies. On the other hand, Judah here, they've got the right thing.

They've got the right worship. In fact, there's probably a revival going on right now under Hezekiah. Why don't you be like your other sister? You have that imagery there, and the prophets of the older and younger sister, northern and southern tribes there.

Perhaps this is what's going on here, an implicit backhanded reprimand. You should be more like Judah. Stop your sinning and follow the Lord God Almighty.

Which God is this? So he ties it here. Judah still walks with God. Which God? Even with the Holy One who is faithful.

Why this description? God has a lot of names and descriptions in the Bible. I had a list once, a long time ago, when I was a charismatic, and I lost it. I wish I didn't lose it.

I don't know where it went. All the times you move, things disappear, as you know. And it had a list, all the names of the Lord God.

The Hebrew descriptions there, and I've been looking for something along those lines online, and haven't found one that I think covers everything yet, but we'll see. And this one here is here for a reason. The Holy One.

What does Holy One mean? We would get the idea of saint from that. Someone separated, set apart for a holy purpose, and the like. That's the picture here.

Exalted, set aside, greater than the rest of us. And not just as nature asks us that he's infinite and independent, of course, and almighty, which we are not. That makes him holy and separate as to his existence.

Yes, but in his dealings with the sons of men, that holiness is tied to this. The Holy One, and that is holiness in the sense of faithfulness. The Holy One who is faithful.

He's not like a man who will lie. That sets him apart. That makes him holy.

So the emphasis here is upon his faithfulness, because they are unfaithful, yet God still remains faithful. They break the covenant, yet the Lord God Almighty does not break the covenant. His love is even greater than them.

He is not like a man, we read that in verse 9 of chapter 11, but rather he is holy and faithful and consistent and pure. And the remnant will survive, as he had prophesied in verse 11. I will not execute, we read in verse 9, the fiercest of my anger.

I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man. The Holy One in your midst, and I will not come with terror. So there you have it again, the Holy One in your midst, that is, I am faithful and I will keep my word.

He could have said, I am the faithful one, that's true, but the Holy One highlights that he was true and pure, and he will indeed keep his word, unlike the rest of them who are unholy. Now we have a false hope here, verse 1. Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind. Again, you have these, right, all these interesting natural metaphors using nature and describing the moral condition of the people of God in the Old Testament often, and one of the best ways to understand those is through the text itself, through the descriptions and words before or after the metaphor to give you an idea of what they are going after in this kind of description.

And you see that here in the remainder part of verse 1 where he continues, he daily increases lies and desolation. Also, they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt. That is, they are dealing with foreign powers, remember the context is they're about to be invaded by Assyria, so they're trying to buy off Assyria or pay off Egypt in oil, not crude oil, but precious oil, right, ointments and the like, to come protect them.

Even Hezekiah, right, second Kings. And so, therefore, the description of Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind is that what they are striving for is to no avail, because feeding on the wind, of course, is to eat nothing. It's empty air.

And so that alludes to their false hopes for getting foreign help. They're gonna go to Assyria, they're gonna go to Egypt, but they might as well eat the air because you're gonna get nothing out of it. That's the picture.

And of course, they were told not to trust in others, that God Himself would preserve and protect them, that He is their, what, high fortress. That's the military picture. The great castle of sorts, as it were, designed militarily to defend you, and you want the high grounds.

We all know this. Gotta have the high ground to protect yourself. It's harder to attack that.

It's easier to rain down rocks and arrows upon your enemy. God's like, I'm your high tower. I'm your defense.

I'm your protection. But they keep going after foreign powers to preserve them when He should not be. And that's the error here.

This is the problem that they keep falling into. They're not trusting in God. They will not rely upon Him.

We also feed on false hope upon the air or the wind whenever we ignore the Word of God and seek out other counsel than what is clearly here in black and white in His Bible, like things that it tells us in the Proverbs. You're supposed to save for a rainy day, avoid bad company, things like that. It's there.

But sometimes you're just like, I don't really wanna, I think I'd rather just listen to someone else and give me another thing that I like to hear that my lusts desire. That's the danger that we have. And so the Lord God, therefore, will bring punishment upon us.

But we shouldn't follow that path at all. So although we're not told as a nation state per se never have any cooperation or help from another nation, this is a matter of common sense and natural law. We decide these things depending upon that God's 10 Commandments are what's needful for our culture to protect ourselves, to defend ourselves, to maintain prosperity and the like, unlike the special promises of Israel.

Even so, a lot of application here are having false hope, not putting our reliance upon God's Word and how He describes and tells us how to live as believers. And so that leads us here to point two. A charge against Judah.

Weakness of Judah

So now we have a change of tune, which of course could be over time, because this is a compilation of the things that they've said over time as well, verses 2 to 4. The Lord also brings a charge against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways. Now in this description here, which continues on to describe the life of Jacob and then end with the call of hope of repentance to return to the Lord to observe mercy and to observe justice, also will include, by implication, Ephraim. That is, the northern tribes will be hearing the same prophecy because Hosea's whole domain is up there in the north.

This too is a lesson for them, in other words. Now one thing you notice here in verse 2, the Lord brings a charge against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways. You see almost a parallelism, perhaps an extended parallelism, where you have the same idea now pushed a little further out to explain the original poetic way of speaking.

The Lord, that is the God of the covenant, brings a charge against Judah, the southern tribes, and will punish Jacob. Jacob is another name for Israel. He's not referring to... Jacob's in heaven now, so he's not going to punish him.

He's going to punish the seed of Jacob, his offspring here, according to his ways. So that's the description here. Genesis 32, 28, And he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.

So the name Jacob means heel holder, because he grabbed the heel as a kid. That is one who's aggressive, and he was, and sneaky. And Israel means God prevails, or he prevails, the one who gets the victory.

So even during the time of Hezekiah, of course, if this is the case, and Judah still had their faults, and they still needed to be reminded not to be haughty, the Lord reminds us not to be haughty when we are prosperous, and God is working in us, as we read in Ephesians 2, 10, His good pleasure of good works and obedience in His kingdom. When prosperous, when we don't have a lot of hardship, just like under Hezekiah's time, and reforming, even during the reforming times when false worship is overthrown, and God's name is glorified as it ought to be, having the temple, having the Aaronic priesthood, nothing fake about what they have there, God's instituted holy days, not the made-up ones of our brothers and cousins up north, the temptation may be to become, what do we say, too big for your britches, right? And maybe that's what's going on here as well. Even the best churches today, brothers and sisters, can still have and do have sins and weaknesses.

We must remember this. We have the Lord's day, we have worship, we have the preaching of His word by His blessing, yet we must ever be humble and ever cling to Jesus, and not become too big for our britches, seeking greater conformity to His law, and ever reforming in the best sense of the word. Sometimes that phrase is used, they talk about semper referenda, that is always reforming as an excuse to bring in sneaky, bad practices and doctrines into the church of God.

What I mean by that is always trying to be more obedient and faithful to God's word that's already there. That's a little different, isn't it? Matthew Henry describes this description here of the charges against Judah in the context of the blessings they already had, at least outwardly and formally, right? The temple, the whole worship system and the like. Quote, man's being in the right in some things, in the main things, will not exempt them from correction, and therefore should not exempt them from reproof.

For those things wherein they are in the wrong, and they are in the wrong in some matters there in Judah, apparently not observing mercy and justice, right? So again, sometimes it's not always clear, why is God bringing a charge against Judah? I thought he was happy with them earlier, and indeed he is, to some extent, insofar as God has given them the worship. But verse six tells us, they are called to return to him and to observe mercy and justice. That which he specifies that they ought to do is telling you they're not doing it.

Mercy and justice, specifically amongst the people of God, more than likely, they are not exercising even in the southern tribes. We are called, therefore, in our lives, in the lives of our family and our churches, to stay rooted in his word, to stay humble, to avoid the siren

calls of worldly lies and to have worldly hopes. Rather, we should pray for our churches to stay holy in the main, a bit more than the main, but even to grow in obedience in the small things.

Now, from here, after he brings a similar idea of a charge, like he says about the northern tribes, I have a charge against you, and I will indeed punish you for it, he describes the life of Jacob. This extended metaphor, almost like a parable, but it's a real historical event, so it's a summary of the life of Jacob, their founding father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as a lesson they are to take to heart, that as Jacob, the picture here is that Jacob did not give up on the Lord, but even fought with the angel of the Lord, remember, to gain a blessing, indeed a gift, so the Jews of Hosea's day should not turn their backs, but engage with the Lord with humble hearts and not give up until they are blessed with salvation, repentance, and Christ. Sometimes the Puritans have title sermons and descriptions of the Christian storming heaven, and that's a similar idea here, not that you are saved on your own in your own arrogance, but rather you are so needy and desiring of redemption that you won't give up until you have the full confidence of faith and hope in Jesus.

And that's perhaps part of the picture here, certainly specifically the idea of returning, repenting, observing mercy and justice and the like to be determined in their minds and their hearts to turn back to the Lord their God, to be faithful to him. And so Jacob here then, from this perspective, becomes a positive example of not giving up, because although I know early on he seems like he's quite the scoundrel, later on he's not. But he still has a lot of the same characteristics, he still will not give up.

And we are called not to give up either. So the conclusion of verse six is, so you, by the help of your God, return to the Lord God Almighty instead of Baal. And that connection is where? Where's the connection here of God speaking to them? It's here in the connection between Jacob and Bethel, that he found him in Bethel, the house of the Lord.

That's what that word means. And there he spoke to us, so he turns around and makes the application not just to Jacob, but to the Jewish nation several hundred years later. Well, maybe a hundred years later, that God is also going to speak to them words of blessing if they repent, if they return and follow his ways as they are called to do.

And there he spoke to us at Bethel, the house of God. But at Hosea's day, what was the house of God named, if you recall? You may not remember. I almost forgot, I knew it was a different name, I didn't remember the exact ending of the name.

It's Beth-Aven, same at the beginning, Beth-El. You can hear El, you hear God in that word, right? You probably remember that, E-L, God. Beth-Aven means the house of iniquity because they turned it into false worship, terrible worship.

And so there's a play on words there in Hosea. And this probably alludes to that as well. God was found by Jacob at Bethel.

You too can find him here, even though it's Beth-Aven for you, but if you just repent and return, it could be the house of Bethel instead, being the implication. So it's a beautiful

picture there and a play on words. To turn back from your sins, to go to the true Bethel instead of Beth-Aven, to wait upon God for deliverance for their sins.

Waiting on God

And therefore, verses 5 and 6, to wait upon him, that is the Lord. There he spoke to us. Who spoke? An angel? No, the Lord God of hosts.

The Lord is his memorable name. This is the God with whom we have to deal with. The Lord God of hosts, the covenant God of Israel, is a God of might and power, and he has the might and power.

Why this picture and imagery of might and power? Because you have an enemy coming down and bearing down upon you from the north. He's breathing down your neck. You're going to get wiped out.

That's scary stuff. The Lord of hosts of heaven and of earth. Everything is at his beck and call for the good of his people.

For us today as well. He's the Lord of hosts for us. And although we don't expect to have lightning from heaven to strike down our enemies, as we saw in the story of Hezekiah and Jerusalem being surrounded, the Lord has other ways in which to preserve and protect his people in providence and history.

The Lord remembered here, we read, the Lord is his memorable name, verse 5b, that is the Lord, I often say, the covenant keeping God. The root there is I am that I am out of Exodus 3, as you recall, when Moses sees him at the bush. Because what God is emphasizing is he is not changing.

I am that I am. And I said I was going to take Israel out of Egypt, and I will raise up a leader, you're that leader, and you will go tell them that I am has sent you, the one who is faithful, faithful to his word, which we know to be the covenantal word. And hence the connection to covenantal faithfulness, his own nature, does not change.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so his word is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And this is good news for those who return, for those who repent.

And that's something we should always remember. His name is memorable for us, a high tower and a protection for us. And thus I call the repentance here, verse 6, so you, by the help of your God, return.

Because this God does not change. This God is a loving God with long suffering that lasts from generation to generation. You have but to call out for help, to return to him, to repent, both Israel and Judah, wherever you may be, even here today, brothers and sisters.

The Lord will be gracious and even become your help by the help of your God. Because without him, you cannot even change, as we know. He has long suffering, he is patient, he is kind, and not just then, but even today.

For all of us, it's never too late to repent. That's the picture here. Never give up.

Jacob didn't give up. He wanted the inheritance, he wanted the promise, even though his brother threw it away. Works of repentance we describe here of what the returning to the Lord God looks like.

Not just outwardly, hey, just come back to Jerusalem, you got the Aaronic priesthood, get rid of the old priesthood and the Ephraim area, well, here it's probably Judah as well. You guys can't rely upon that. It's always with the heart repentance comes forth.

Therefore, God demands evidence for the world to see, because, of course, he knows what's in the heart. The rest of us, however, do not. They are called to what? Observe mercy and justice and thoroughly to wait upon the Lord.

Mercy and justice, two things clearly they were not doing to their fellow Jews, probably lying and adultery and the like that we saw in the northern tribes. The southern tribes end up following them over time, as you saw there in 1 and 2 Kings. And, of course, with respect to the Lord God, to stop unholy worship, worship in the high places, instead of Jerusalem, for example, to trust in the Messiah and not offer their children to Moloch, which they did in the southern tribes just before Hezekiah.

They were really low there, and they came back up again in great glory by God's grace and reformation upon the children of Israel. But here, lastly, the theme I've chosen for, to highlight here in these verses, is to wait on your God continually. The impending doom that they have is always here in the background of the prophet Hosea.

Assyria is knocking on the door. They almost took Jerusalem. He bragged about it, the Assyrian king, locked up King Hezekiah as a bird in a cage.

Well, he didn't take over the cage, he just locked him in the cage. He never took Jerusalem, but it sure is pretty scary for Hezekiah and the people of God. He'll probably come back, and Hezekiah is scared about it, too.

He calls out to Isaiah, remember? He asked Isaiah, we need help, God, we need help. The Lord will bring punishment upon Israel, even upon Judah, and Hezekiah felt it in his time. Hosea tells him, therefore, to what? Wait on your God, wait for what? What's he saying? What are you waiting for? Waiting for deliverance, that's the point.

Waiting for help to fight the Assyrians, to be protected from their enemies. And how is this done? That they not run out ahead of his word, but to slow down, wait for God in his time, and in his way to deliver them. That's the picture here.

And to have that as your life goal continually, because it's easy to become impatient. We want things done our way quickly and now. How does God do these things, and how do we

wait? We wait for his time, deliverance for their bodily protection, of course, and for our soul, with respect to sanctification in particular, takes lots of time.

It's not always immediate, but it will happen in his time. The prophet would speak, and the people had to wait, often. And they would wait, and wait, and wait.

We may have to wait ourselves today, and wait, and wait, and wait for funds, for a better job, and we keep praying, and we keep waiting, and things haven't changed. That means we just have to wait. But also our soul.

Again, we pray for patience, we pray for sanctification, we pray for obedience, and love for him and for one another, and that may take time. It's God's timing, not ours. All we are called to do is persevere in this.

And so what I'm painting here, then, is not a picture of a passive waiting, although that may be part of it, but a waiting with respect to God's word that we do what he tells us to do, and keep doing it, and wait upon his answer to what we are doing, and not just sitting back as couch potatoes. That's not the picture here, because we are called to what? Observe mercy and justice! Waiting upon his answer to deliver them in his time. And of course, he delivers not only in his time, but in his way.

When Hezekiah was locked up in Jerusalem, surrounded by the host of enemies, the greatest empire of his time, the Lord sent a rumor, and redirected that army away from Jerusalem. So he works through the everyday actions of Providence. There was no miracle.

He was being invaded by another enemy. He went after the Egyptian king, or the soon-to-be Egyptian king, or the king of Cush, and the like. And God does that today.

And again, it can be very frustrating, because we like to have miracles. I know I would. I, as you know, grew up a charismatic.

I'd be great. God's like, no, I work through ordinary Providence. Things come about, and you find out, I got a good contact.

I don't know where he came from. He gave me a good job. Where did that come from? Well, were you praying? Yes, God answered your prayers.

That's how it works. That's waiting for him, while doing what you're called to do in that waiting time. That's what he means.

And of course, he has this supernatural way, that is, I mean, the way of the Church, insofar as it comes from Heaven, the institution of the Church, the ordinances that he's given us, the means of grace that we know of, that we use so that we can grow as believers. Those are the ways that he has given us. Nature, common sense, and the things of the Church.

The call to wait upon the Lord our God is a call of faith and trust. That's what's going on here. It means not going off on our own, on our own wisdom, on our own desire, out of frustration, out of impatience.

Rather, walking when he says walk, and staying when he says stay. May we, brothers and sisters, rain in our hearts, hold it back, to continue to wait upon the Lord our God, and to follow him, and not run out ahead of him. Let us pray.

Our Lord, help us in this regard to indeed come to you, where you have spoken to us in the house of God, that is, from Heaven especially, Lord, that you've given us Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, that you are the great I Am, and that you have given us your word of Jesus Christ, and you will give us help that we can always return, always living a life of returning, of repenting and observing mercy and justice. Give us strength, we pray, to that end, our God, especially if we are tempted to walk away from following you. We ask this by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.