

The Minor Prophets #10

Hosea

by: Ronald L. Dart

It's painful watching history repeat itself. It's even more painful to realize you can't do much to head it off, but there's nothing new under the sun and the prophets of old must have felt much the same way. It was harder for them because God immersed them in what was happening and He used them as object lessons.

Jeroboam's Role In Separating Israel From The LORD

How on earth can a people come to such a sorry past; well it takes time and a long series of bad decisions. For Israel of Hosea's day, the first bad decision had been made for them by their king Jeroboam the first who turned them away from their God Jehovah. Jeroboam decentralized worship, changed the liturgical calendar and set up priests of his own choosing, rather than God's priests. He made priests of the lowest of the people. It took over 200 years for the effects of this to finally come home to roost. In the mean time, Israel prospered and the more they prospered they systematically forgot who gave it all to them.

God says in Hosea Chapter 7 verse 10, "Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him."

LORD

There is something you will often miss when reading though the Bible. When you see the word LORD in small caps, wherever you see it in the Bible, it's out of deference to the divine name of the Hebrew word 'YHVH'. The Jews in their translation of the Old Testament go out to this same convention because they don't want to put the name Yahweh or Jehovah, as the case may be, in the same text. They didn't want people pronouncing it and taking His name in vain. That's the whole idea behind it and the King James translation followed it, for the most part, and everyone else has ever since.

What it says is, Israel arrogance testifies against him and despite all this he does not return to Jehovah his God and search for Him. Why is that important? Well, because men had become confused about who God was, especially in Hosea's time. They were following Baal all over the place and Baal wasn't the only god. Their practices in the service of these gods was absolutely detestable and so it was a conflict of gods that Hosea is dealing with here.

Prophecy of the Downfall of Ephraim

God goes on to say in Hosea 7 verse 11, "Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless, now calling to Egypt, now going to Assyria, {12} When they go I'll throw my net over them, I'll pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I'll catch them."

(Note: Ephraim is another name used for the northern ten tribes of the House of Israel.)

The picture that is being drawn for us is of a country, who frankly, while they are extremely prosperous, and at the height of their prosperity, are really beginning to decay and they no longer have, or what shall we say, the intestinal fortitude, to fight their own battles and go out against their own enemies and defeat them. So what do they do, they call the Egyptians and say "Will you come and help us," or they call the Assyrians and say "Will you come and help us." The problem is because of those relationships they call themselves to the attention of powers like Assyria and eventually bring them down on their own head.

God says, {13} "Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them, but they speak lies against me."

This is one of the first things that happens, people start lying; in order to explain why they're not going to start following God. They start looking for excuses and they can't face the truth.

God says, {14} "They don't cry out to me from their hearts, even though they wail on their beds. They gather together for grain and new wine and they turn away from me."

And I thought this might be, so I looked this up and I found this one commentary that suggested this as well. What it is saying is that, these people are assembling together for a handout, as in welfare, and at the same time they were rejecting the God who gave them everything they could possibly need. I guess what they were doing, was beginning to look to the state, to the government, to take care of them, instead of looking to God.

God says in verse 15, "I trained them, I strengthen them, but they plot evil against me, {16} They don't turn to the Most High, they are like a faulty bow."

If you can imagine, if you have never really shot a good bow and arrow, you may not realize this. With a good strong bow you have to put a lot of pressure on that thing to get the string back against your lips and all lined up to fire. Now if you can imagine with a good strong bow it's just about the time you get it back there that it breaks. That what he's describing, they're like a faulty bow, they break under pressure.

"Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words and for this, they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt."

There are times when, I think these prophets are reading our newspapers because we're in a situation now to where we are being ridiculed all over the Arab world, hated, ridiculed, made fun of and dismissed by people who say, "America can't do anything about it."

God says in Hosea 8 verse 1, "Put the trumpet (shofar) to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law."

They broke the covenant with God, and because we are following the same track, it might be useful to reiterate why it is happening to us?

Examples of Cause and Effects

I find myself being drawn again and again to the one Chapter in the Bible that explains cause and effects. It's a little long but it deserves our careful consideration. It is a full statement of cause and effect for a nation. What we need to listen for are the conditions that have been reflected in our own world? It's important, not just for us to know what happened to Israel and why, it's important to know what is happening to us and why?

The Chapter is Deuteronomy chapter 28 and verse 15, God says: "It shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command you this day, that the LORD your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth."

In the heyday of Israel this came to pass. It was a long hard climb but in the days of King David, Israel was such a world power, that David could disarm the kings of what is now Iraq and when the Syrians came to try to help them, he dominated Syria and put garrisons in Syria and shut them down as well. In fact David had very little trouble from the big kingdoms of the world, and the only people that bothered him were the little tribes of Moab.

Our Covenant With God

Now you might think that we, 21st century America, have no covenant with God, I'm not so sure. Do you remember how the Declarations of Independence begins? "We do hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." The signers declared that the guarantor of our rights was our Creator, not the state, not the king, not themselves, not the people. GOD guaranteed our rights.

Having made that statement, we naturally set out with a kind of implicit covenant with God on the direction we are going to go. I believe we started the great American enterprise in a covenant of sorts with God. The law of God formed the basis of our legal system, some people like to deny it, but it's true. We declared in our "Bill of Rights" that congress shall

make no law respecting the establishment of religion or restricting the free exercise thereof. Now the reason for that is simple enough, it is, to protect faith.

Os Guinness in a speech he gave some time ago, made this statement, he said; "It is so obvious in the framers if you read their writing, it's like going to Switzerland and missing the Alps."

First, freedom requires virtue. If freedom has to be guarded by laws it will eventually to be lost.

Second, virtue requires faith of some sort, this is the simple reason the framers argued there has to be religious liberty.

Third, faith requires freedom. He said, "If you keep that triangle perpetual, then freedom has a chance of defying the odds and staying alive."

But he concluded that the odds were really against it. We have done well enough in the matter of not establishing a religion, but increasingly, we are restricting the free exercise of the Christian faith.

Obey God And Be Blessed

Let's continue in Deuteronomy 28, and hearken back to the good years. "It shall come to pass if you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, if you do all the commandments I command you this day, the LORD your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth and all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you will listen to the voice of the LORD your God."

I like the wording of that, these blessings will overtake you.

You know, here you are, you're motoring down the freeway, you're not trying to catch up to them, but they overtake you, they catch up and they pick you up and carry you along, if you will just listen.

Verse 3, "Blessed shall you be in the city, blessed shall you be in the field, {4} Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the fruit of your ground, the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep, {5} Blessed shall you be in your basket in your store, your food shall be blessed, {6} You will be blessed when you come in, you will be blessed when you go out. {7} The LORD will cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before your face. They will come at you one way, and flee before you seven different ways."

And you know what, it's been a lot like that in the past. If you just take a look at the United States of America, Great Britain, and the English speaking parts of the world and compare it to the rest of the world for the last, what, 500 years, it's just been different.

"The LORD," verse 8, "shall command a blessing upon you in your storehouses, in all that you set your hand to, he will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you."

In fact, we have almost come to a place where the government has to pay farmers to not grow stuff.

"The LORD," verse 9, "will establish you as a Holy people to himself, as he has sworn to you, if, you keep the commandments of your LORD your God and walk in his ways."

We're not talking about some far out religious thing, we're talking about the Ten Commandments and we're talking about just the way to order your life, to love God and to love your neighbor. How hard is this?

God said in verse 10, "If you do this, all the people of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you."

And that phrase "called by the name of the LORD," basically means they will know that you are in covenant with Him and they'll be afraid of you.

Even as your wife, may be called by your name, or as you are called by your husband's name, He said, "People will know that you as a people are in covenant with me."

Verse 11, "And the LORD will make you plenteous in goods, in the fruit of your body, the fruit of the cattle, the fruit of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you, { 12 } The LORD shall open unto you his good treasure, a heaven to give the rain in your land in due season, to bless all the work of your hand and you shall lend unto many nations and you shall not borrow."

Wow! Has there ever been a nation that has lent more to other nations than we have? As far as borrowing, we borrow a lot from ourselves to be sure and we run into debt, but in the balance, we are lenders to the world not borrowers.

"And the LORD," { 13 } "shall make you the head not the tail; you will be above only and not beneath, IF." Here's that word 'if' again. "If, you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you this day, to observe and do them. { 14 } Just don't go aside from these words that I command you, to the right hand, or the left hand to go after other gods to serve them."

In Israel, it took a long time for the bitter fruits of breaking the covenant with God to come home to roost and because they were still prospering they assumed that they were just fine.

In the words of Hosea, Hosea 4 verse 7, "As they were increased, so they sinned against me."

I can't help but to think back to the words of Jeremiah when he had to migrate down to Egypt along with a lot of other Jews who were afraid and ran away from Jerusalem. They got down to Egypt and they were making cakes to the queen of heaven, worshiping the queen of heaven, doing the same things, the same stupid things that got them into captivity in the first place. Jeremiah warned them and they came back and said; "We're not going to listen to you, back in those days when we worshiped the queen of heaven and we did all these pagan things that we are doing here today, it was better with us then." They completely lost any idea of cause and effect or the relationship between what they were doing and what brought it on them.

Now what we have read here, so far, is the positive side of the cause and effect relationship. What happens when we cross over the peak and start down the other side?

What Happens When You Don't Obey God?

Deuteronomy 28 Verse 15, "But it shall come to pass if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe and to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you."

And once again, the language is instructive. The use of the word 'overtake', here we are barreling down the road as fast as we can go and right behind us running a little faster than we are, is a set of curses coming our way and they are going to catch up with us.

Verse 16, "Cursed shall you be in the city, cursed shall you be in the field, {17} Cursed shall be your basket that be in your store, {18} Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the fruit of your land, the increase of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep, {19} cursed shall you be when you come in and cursed shall you be when you go out."

Now these things don't come at you all at once, it starts and it builds.

Abortion

Take this one as an example, "Cursed shall be the fruit of your body." I never imagined, you know, the first time I read this, it was a long time ago and it was before the Supreme Court's decision, Roe v. Wade, and once that decision was handed down everything changed. Now we're doing it to ourselves, the greatest curse upon the fruit of our body is abortion. There are, I think, two things at work, one is the natural decay that results when a people have no God who is real. In other words, it is the absence of protection that we get from God, that allows all kinds of bad stuff to come our way. The other thing at work arises from the active justice of God because God cannot just ignore what we have done, God cannot ignore the way we treat children, God cannot ignore the way we treat the poor, He cannot ignore all the unborn fetuses that are being killed. What is it, approaching 40 million now?

So here's what God says in Deuteronomy 28 verse 20, "The LORD shall send upon you, cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that you set your hand to do, until you're destroyed, and you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doing, for you have forsaken me."

What Is Sin And Wickedness?

Now you need to make a distinction in your own mind on a couple of words. One is the word 'sin', which just simple means, we miss the mark. Sometimes we intend to do it and sometimes we just didn't realize.

The other word is 'wickedness' and wickedness is malicious, it's deliberate, it's vile, it is the worst kind of human doings.

The judgment of God is coming because of the wickedness of our doings, because we have turned our back on God.

Continuing to read in, Deuteronomy 28 verse 21, "The LORD shall make the pestilences cleave to you until he has consumed you from off the land that you are going in to possess, {22} The LORD will smite you with a consumption, a fever, inflammation, extreme burning and with the sword, blasting and mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish, {23} The heaven over your head shall be brass, the earth under you shall be like iron, {24} The LORD shall change the rain of your land to powder and dust: from heaven it will come down upon you, until you are destroyed."

I shudder at the thought of the justice of God on behalf of the little children who never had a chance at life.

"And," {25} "this is because of the way you have abandoned God, broken his laws, and because of the wickedness of your hands, "The LORD will cause you to be smitten before your enemies, you shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them, and You shall become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth."

You know that's not true of us in history, we have been able to fight and win but somehow when we got to Vietnam everything changed. We got back on track in the first Gulf War and when Tommy Frank's boys went right through the Iraqi armies like a knife through hot butter. In any case, things seemed to be changing for us then.

He goes on to say in verse 26, "Your carcass shall be meat to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the earth and no man shall drive them off. {27} The LORD will smite you with the botch of Egypt, with hemorrhoids, with the scab, with the itch, whereof you can't be healed. {28} The LORD will smite you with madness, blindness, astonishment of heart, {29} And you shall grope at noonday, like the blind gropes in darkness. You shall not prosper in your ways, and you shall be only oppressed and spoiled for evermore and no man will save you."

When you think about this, none of this is very surprising. When you begin to lose your way, when you have no idea of what makes the difference between what is right or wrong, when you have no moral standard to create virtue, where do you go from there? Madness, blindness, depression, astonishment of heart and you wind up groping around like a blind man when it's high noon outside.

Karma

Well the Chapter goes on and I'll leave it to you to read it yourself but I wanted you to understand where Hosea was coming from in his prophecy. Bad Karma is coming down on Israel and Israel at the time that Hosea arrived was not far past the peak. Karma, you know is a word that has migrated into our language from Hinduism and its simplest definition is this, the force generated by a person's actions, in other words, what goes around comes around or whatever you sow you shall also reap, you sow the wind you reap the whirlwind, in other words your own doings are going to come down on you.

It Takes More Than Lip Service To Please God

Hosea continues in Chapter 8: "Put a trumpet (shofar) to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law. {2} Israel cries out to me, O our God, we acknowledge you! {3} But Israel has rejected what is good, and the enemy will pursue him."

When I read this sort of thing I have to realize that these were people who thought they were all right with God. They thought they were acknowledging God and God says that "It's a matter of the lips, you can say this all you want, but I can't see it, in the way you treat one another and the way you live your life."

"These people," {4} "set up kings without my consent, they choose princes without my approval, and with their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction."

You know, if we were to say we need a prayer room at the voting station, we would be somehow or another violating the Constitution of this country, for a person to be able to say I want to pray before I vote on the President of The United States or my Senator, or my Congressman. We don't consult God, we just get on down the road.

Now verse 5, "Throw out your calf idol, O Samaria! My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity? {6} Ah, they're from Israel! A workman made it, and it is not God; But the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces. {7} They sow the wind, they reap the whirlwind."

If you ever wondered where that little expression comes from that has past into our language, it's from Hosea Chapter 8 Verse 7. "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind."

Continuing in verse 7, "The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up."

The "stalk" is talking about grain in the field. It "has no head" and will not be able to produce any flour.

Verse 8, "Israel is swallowed up, now she is among the nations like a worthless thing."

It happened to Israel in spades, in the extreme and, I think, it looks a lot like that is going to be in our future as well.

"For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild ass wandering alone. Ephraim has sold herself to lovers. {10} Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king." At this point we're talking about the king of Assyria. "Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, they have become altars for sinning."

You know there was only supposed to be one altar, in Jerusalem, at the Temple. It was suppose to be a defense against following these pagan gods that would take them down the wrong road. But, Israel had to do it her way. Until next time.

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