

November 4

Scriptures: Read Hosea 8, 9 & 10

Key Verse: "... it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you."
(Hosea 10:12)

Overview

In chapters eight through ten, Hosea focuses upon the judgments that would soon come upon Israel and the reasons for them. Their doomsday would be so soon that Hosea asks them to prepare to blow the trumpet (ram's horn) in warning of the enemy's quick approach. On that terrible day, Hosea prophesies that they will call out to God and claim to know Him, when all they really know is merely historical information about Him. They did not know God in a personal way, and because of their abominations and defiance of the good Law of God, they were, in fact, denying Him (8:1-3; cf. Titus 1:16).

The people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel lived as though God did not exist. Every important decision, such as who would be king, was decided upon without consulting the Lord. Rather, they consulted the unhearing idols and used pagan means of divination. This contributed to the reason why every king of the Northern Kingdom was ungodly and led the people to sin, just as Satan wanted it. The Lord's will, however, would be accomplished. Their idolatry would cause them to be "cut off", and their calf worship would be forcibly abolished when the enemy came (8:4-6). Even at that time they would not turn to God with sincerity; rather, they would mourn when their worthless calf idol (at the idolatrous centre in Beth-el) was carried off to Assyria as a trophy of war for "King Jareb" (10:5-6; meaning "the fighting [contentious] king", possibly a nickname for Tiglath-pileser III; cf. 5:13). At that time of God's wrath, they would rather die by having the rocks fall on them than to live and experience the judgment of God (10:8b; cf. Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:16-17; 9:6).

God would bring them just retribution (the "whirlwind") for sowing that which is vanity. It was truly in vain for them to put their hope in a man-made idol or in political alliances with their heathen neighbours. Nothing could prevent the plan of God when it came time for their punishment. From the very beginning God had given them all they needed to live happily, including His all-important Law, but they disregarded it (8:12). When God's Word goes unheeded and is ignored, it surely leads to decay and anarchy, as well as to further divine judgments.

Hosea prophesied Israel's captivity and return to bondage (their former condition in Egypt; 8:13b; 9:3; 11:5) at a time when Israel was prosperous and such thoughts would have been far from their minds. Soon, however, they would lack food and wine (9:4) and they would be scattered among the Gentiles and forced to do hard labour (8:8; 9:3, 17; 10:11). In light of the calamities to come upon Israel, when even the little children would not be spared from the enemies' swords, Hosea prays that God would not give them any children who would live to see that day (9:11-14).

Because Hosea, the "watchman of Ephraim", proclaimed the soon coming "days of punishment" and "recompense", he was treated with enmity and called a "fool" and "insane". Hosea reveals

that this contempt for him came because of their great iniquity and corruption (9:7-8). He likens them to the corrupt men of Gibeah who received their just punishment; only a remnant of them remained. So too, since Israel was equally corrupted and deserving of punishment, only a remnant would escape (cf. 9:9; 10:9; Judges 19-20).

In continuing to stress their guilt in chapter ten, Hosea reaffirms the idolatrous hold that was upon Israel ever since the early days in the wilderness. At that time, the children of Israel were seduced into worshipping Baal at Baal Peor with the Moabite women (9:10; Num. 25). The more they increased in riches, the more they increased their number of pagan altars (10:1). The Lord had made it clear to them that when they entered the Promised Land they were to break down all the pagan altars. There was to be only one altar, and it was to be His altar, located in the place where He had chosen to put His Name (cf. Deut. 12:2-14). These clear and precise instructions from God, however, were defiantly disobeyed, for their hearts were not loyal to Him. Therefore, God Himself would not only see to it that Israel's king was destroyed, and thus the nation (10:3, 7, 15), but that all the pagan altars would be broken down (10:2). The destroyed pagan altar at the idolatrous centre of Beth-Aven (Beth-el) would become overgrown with thorns and thistles (a sign of the curse upon the earth).

After expressing the impending judgment, Hosea desperately calls the people to repentance. Rather than sowing vanity by trusting in things other than God, and thus reaping iniquity and lies (10:13), Hosea urges them to sow righteousness, for only then can one reap that which is good in the "mercy" (loving-kindness) of God. Hosea tells them to break up their fallow ground — to soften their hearts — so they might be open and yielding to the Lord, for only then can the Lord rain His righteousness upon them (10:12; cf. Jer. 4:3-4). The exhortation is just as imperative today: seek the Lord while it is still day.

Prayer

Lord, soften our hearts and those of our loved ones, that we would receive and partake of Your mercy and loving-kindness. We know that we are undeserving of it, but we are grateful that You have accepted us into Your favour.