

"LESSONS FROM HISTORY"

I. Introduction

- A. Listen to one famous author's reflections on America: "Our people went to America because that was the place to go then. It had been a good country and we had made a... mess of it... Let the others come to America who did not know that they had come too late. Our people had seen it at its best and fought for it when it was well worth fighting for. Now I would go somewhere else." [Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, 285]
1. These words were not written last week.
 2. They were written by Ernest Hemingway nearly eighty years ago.
 3. In some ways our nation has improved since those days, but in many other ways it has experienced significant decline.
 4. In fact, it is becoming more and more difficult to envision a very promising future for the United States of America.
- B. The same was true of Israel's northern kingdom back in the eighth century B.C.
1. Judgment was hanging over the nation.
 2. God sent Hosea to announce that judgment.
 3. At the same time, Hosea also preached a message of hope, assuring Israel of God's love and calling them to return to the Lord.
 4. In this passage, Hosea recalls several events from Israel's history to show them how they should respond to his message of impending judgment.

II. Hold Fast like Jacob

- A. Our text begins with something that we saw back in chapter 4.
 - 1. The Lord is bringing an indictment against his people.
 - 2. The Hebrew word translated as “indictment” is a technical term that appears often in the prophetic books.
 - 3. It is used in contexts where the prophets are functioning as God’s prosecutors, bringing a lawsuit against Israel for their breach of the covenant.
 - 4. This is what is taking place in this passage.
 - 5. God is bringing suit against his people for their covenant unfaithfulness.

- B. One of the things that we see very clearly in this covenant lawsuit is that the Lord is just.
 - 1. He will punish Jacob according to his ways.
 - 2. He will repay him according to his deeds.
 - 3. God never lets sin go unpunished.
 - 4. He is perfectly upright and perfectly just.
 - 5. The punishment that was about to fall upon Israel was the wages due to them for their sin.
 - 6. This reminds us why we need a Savior.
 - 7. Apart from Christ we are all objects of God’s wrath.
 - 8. Apart from Christ, we would be repaid according to our deeds.
 - 9. But God put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

10. When our faith rests upon Jesus, we can be confident that we are no longer the objects of God's wrath because Jesus bore that wrath in our place on the cross.
- C. In verse 2, the whole nation of Israel is referred to as "Jacob."
1. This is certainly appropriate given that the nation got its name from Jacob.
 2. 'Israel' was originally the name that God gave to Jacob after he strove with him at the Jabbok River.
 3. The point that Hosea is making by referring to Jacob here is to show Israel that they are just like Jacob, both in terms of their character and in terms of God's dealings with them.
 4. The first aspect of Jacob's life that Hosea mentions is how he grasped the heel of his twin brother Esau as they were emerging from their mother's womb.
 5. This was how Jacob got his name, which means, 'he is at the heel.'
 6. This name was prophetic of how Jacob would so often cheat and take advantage of others.
 7. For much of his life he pushed others out of way to get what he wanted.
- D. But something happened to Jacob when he was making his way back to the land of Canaan.
1. Jacob had to flee Canaan because of the wrath of his brother Esau, whom he had cheated out of his birthright.
 2. To escape, he went to Paddan-aram to live with his uncle Laban for twenty years.
 3. On a night when he was all alone while he was making his way back to Canaan, God came to him in the form of a man and

wrestled with him.

4. Jacob strove with God and prevailed that night.
5. Of course, this doesn't mean that Jacob prevailed by virtue of his physical strength.
6. No man could ever prevail with God in that sense.
7. Instead, Jacob prevailed by virtue of his tears of repentance.
8. He was humbled by God, and he pleaded for a blessing.
9. Jacob had finally met his match.
10. Here was an opponent whom he could not manipulate.
11. The heel-grasper realized that all he could do was cling to the Lord in faith.
12. God wrestled Jacob to point of submission.
13. This is what God was about to do with a remnant in Israel.
14. And God does the same thing in the lives of all of those to whom he grants saving faith.
15. He causes us to see we have to give ourselves up and cling to him in faith.

E. Hosea also refers to how Jacob met God at Bethel.

1. This is only the second time in Hosea that Bethel is called "Bethel", a name that means 'house of God'.
2. Most of the time, Hosea calls Bethel "Beth-aven," which means 'house of wickedness.'

3. Bethel is spoken of in a positive sense here because Hosea is emphasizing how God came to Jacob at Bethel and promised that he would bring him back to the land of promise.
4. At Bethel, God revealed himself to Jacob by his name the LORD, which is 'Yahweh' in the Hebrew, God's covenant name.
5. God also revealed himself to Jacob as God of hosts, God of the heavenly armies.
6. These names emphasize that God will not fail to keep his promise.
7. He is bound by his character as the covenant-keeping God.
8. He has the armies of heaven at his disposal to ensure that his purposes are fulfilled.
9. The promise that God gave to Jacob at Bethel is for all who share Jacob's faith.
10. This is why Hosea says, "there God spoke with us."
11. Just as Jacob eventually returned to Canaan in fulfillment of God's promise, so also will a remnant respond to Hosea's call to return to the Lord in repentance.

III. Remember Your Pilgrim Identity

- A. In verse 7, Hosea refers to the northern kingdom as a dishonest merchant who uses false balances.
 1. There is a play on words here.
 2. In Hebrew, the word "merchant" is same word as 'Canaanite'.
 3. Hosea is saying that Israel had become as wicked as the people they supplanted.

4. They had been conformed to the pattern of the Canaanite world.
 5. This is a perennial danger for God's people.
 6. If we are not being transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will be conformed to the pattern of the world.
- B. The thing that is especially tragic about Israel's condition is that they are oblivious to it.
1. They think they are doing just fine.
 2. They say, "but I am rich."
 3. They see their material prosperity as sign of God's blessing.
 4. They think that their wealth will keep them safe and secure.
 5. We all have a tendency to think along the same lines, even though history has proven time and time again that material prosperity often leads to decadence and decline.
- C. God reminds Israel of the true source of the prosperity that they were enjoying.
1. He was the one who brought them out their slavery in Egypt.
 2. Their prosperity was not something that they had produced.
 3. It was given by God.
 4. When they came out of Egypt they had nothing.
 5. They were a nation of pilgrims.
 6. Now, they will again dwell in tents, like they do during the feast of tabernacles.

7. But this time it will not be a mere commemoration.
8. Now they will actually live in tents as they are carried off into exile.
9. Their standard of living is about to drop dramatically.
10. God is going to discipline his people.
11. This is what God does when his children place their confidence, comfort, and security in the things of this world.
12. He does what is necessary to remind us that all that we have comes from him and that we are utterly dependent upon him.

IV. Listen to God's Prophets

- A. In the last part of our passage, the Lord shows his people why they need to listen to his prophets.
 1. The prophets were God's spokesmen.
 2. Their messages and visions were not their own invention but were given by God.
 3. This is why the Old Testament prophets often preface their oracles with the statement, "Thus says the Lord."
 4. It is a serious offense to ignore God's Word, yet that is precisely what Israel was doing.
 5. As we saw back in chapter 9, they looked upon Hosea and his fellow prophets as fools and madmen.
 6. People do the same thing today.
 7. There are many who do not see the Bible as authoritative at all.

8. We need to remember that this does not change the fact that the Bible really is the inspired Word of God.
- B. After mentioning the judgment that will fall upon Gilead and Gilgal, cities that were centers of immorality and idolatry in the northern kingdom, Hosea recalls another event from the life of Jacob.
1. Hosea points out that Jacob went to the land of Aram, where he served his uncle Laban for a wife.
 2. That was a time of exile for Jacob.
 3. He was driven out of the land of promise.
 4. The same thing was about to happen to Israel.
 5. God wants his people to know that they will not be cut off forever if they cling to his promise.
 6. They need to listen to God's word and respond to it in faith and repentance.
 7. This is why Hosea says in verse 13, "By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded."
 8. The prophet to whom that verse is referring is Moses.
 9. Just as God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt through his servant Moses, he also delivers people from the consequences of their sin through the words that he has spoken in holy Scripture.
- C. The passage ends on a sobering note, underscoring what will happen if God's Word is not heeded.
1. Verse 14 says, "Ephraim has given bitter provocation; so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds."

2. Ephraim provoked God by refusing to listen to his Word.
3. The consequences of that refusal are always fatal.
4. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Heb. 2:1-3)
5. May God grant us grace, that we would pay much closer attention to what we have heard.
6. For it is only by clinging to his Word of promise that we can prevail with him.