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The Book of Hosea, A Survey, Part 13

The Peril of Worldliness

Hosea 7:8-10, “

In this survey of the book of Hosea, it is hard to leave the prophecy without an examination of the Hosea 7, for not only is the message important, but the passage serves as an important transition to our study of Isaiah.

The face of warfare is changing, and yet so few see it. This world is not only at war with various enemies but In Christ we are at war. Ephesians 6 calls us to stand firm against the devil. 2 Corinthians 10 charges us to destroy speculations and the high places raised up against Christ. 1 Timothy 6 calls us to fight the good fight of faith. Yet of all types of warfare we might face as Christians, the most deadly is worldliness.

We see this in Hosea 7. Here God confronted His people on account of their unholy alliance with the world. May God give us the grace to respond to this exhortation appropriately, looking to ourselves

lest we too be tempted.

The Foolish Choice

Hosea 7:8a, “Ephraim mixes himself [this is a culinary term used of the mixing of flour with oil] with the nations.”

Once again, the focus here is Ephraim which as we have seen was the strongest and most influential tribe of the twelve. And what is it that Ephraim had done? They had crossed a boundary established by God and so intermixed themselves with the world. Specifically when threatened by Assyria, they turned their focus and trust to political alliance rather than trusting God. In 793 Jeroboam II became king in Israel. Under his regency, the northern Kingdom entered into its golden age — economically, socially, culturally, and politically.

In terms of its sovereignty, Jeroboam II extended the borders of Israel to what they were under David! This became a source of great pride amongst the Israelites. In fact, so secure was the nation, Israel no longer employed a standing army. God’s people were free to give themselves to a life which went way beyond simply eking out a living or just trying to survive. This era, in God’s providence, corresponded with a decline in Assyrian power such that this eventual world power was not a threat.

Yet all that changed toward the end of Jeroboam’s reign. When we get to the mid-8th century, Assyria was on the rise. In fact the threat of its power was being felt in Palestine such that the northern kingdoms of Palestine, Syria and Israel, deigned to form a coalition to oppose Assyrian expansionism.

And it is that which constitutes the foolish choice of Israel in our text. Rather than trusting God for national protection, Israel turned to Syria at first (and later Egypt) for protection. Such worldliness would prove costly!

You say, “Politically this might have been a foolish decision, but how is this worldliness?”

To answer this, it is important that we be mindful of the different spheres of service in which we live. For example, Israel as a nation was created by God such that its well-being was housed in their national service and fidelity to God. In the event of war or external aggression, God’s people were to look to the Lord alone for their protection, in other words, there were to be no alliances! This didn’t exclude the vehicle of secondary means by which God’s people took up arms to protect themselves. However when faced with battle, the man of God was to fight in reliance upon the Lord alone.

Now when it came, as another example, to the child of God living in exile, the calling was vastly different than their calling as a nation.

Jeremiah 29:4, 7, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.”

This would remain the calling of God's people from this point forward. Paul even exhorted the believers in Ephesus this way:

1 Timothy 2:1-2, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity [no doubt this was taken from Jeremiah]."

Truly, God's people in the exile were to live in reliance upon God, but this did not mean that they weren't to be a blessing in the land in which they lived. They were to

- Abide by the laws of the land.
- When violated, submit to the local governing authority.
- If they could hold office, they were not barred from doing so (think of Daniel).
- They were to pray for their leadership and seek to bless the nation.

None of this constituted compromise when it came to God's people. And we maintain this distinction in the realm of medicine today. We believe that the primary way God would have us deal with illness is the secondary means of medicine, diet, or a physician's care. Yet none of this is to be done in such a way where our reliance and faith is in a doctor, a diet, or medication rather than God. So, when we are sick, we take a pill or when we are injured, we may undergo surgery.

Now depending on the particular realm in question, there are differing callings and responsibilities. Now, and this is important, worldliness occurs when the child of God blurs the line between responsibility and faith, and looks to the world for that which ought to come from God; whether that be in his work, leisure, relationships, and the like!

This is what Israel had done during the ministry of Hosea! Rather than look to the Lord for their security and protection as a nation, they entered into an alliance with Syria hoping that therein they would find their protection and security. What was the result of this compromise?

The Consequence of Worldliness

Hosea 7:8b, "...Ephraim has become a cake not turned."

In this particular section of scripture (Hosea 7-8), God entered into a lengthy rebuke of Israel on account of the foolish political choices they had made as a nation (Hosea 5:8-7:16). As such, God used in this section a variety of metaphors to describe what Israel had become as a result, such as:

- A senseless dove (v. 11),
- A loose-strung bow (v. 16)
- Futile farming (8:7)
- A useless pot (8:8)
- A wild donkey (8:9)
- A shepherd of the wind (12:1).

Now the metaphor used in our text is that of “a cake not turned.” The bread of life, the staple which God’s people daily ate, was a large pita shaped loaf of bread cooked on a flat stone which was placed over a fire. The dough would be separated into large balls which were then flattened and placed on the hot, stone surface. In this way, a large pita-shaped loaf of bread would be produced to feed the typical family.

Yet as in our day, at times there were kitchen mishaps which resulted in the baker neglecting the loaf and failed to turn it over. The result was a burning of one side of the bread and a raw other side.

Picture this in your mind. This side is black and so hard; the other is moist and somewhat doughy. Israel had become this way because of their worldliness. Understand the metaphor as it related to the world, their unholy alliance would burn them! As it related to the Lord, the rebellion on account of the alliance would retard their relationship. This was the idea in Hosea’s mind; notice his explanation. On account of their worldliness, Israel was being burned.

Burned by the World

Hosea 7:9, “Strangers devour his strength, yet he does not know *it...*”

In the attempt to protect themselves from Assyrian aggression, Israel entered into a political alliance with Syria and then Egypt. Now with any alliance, there always was the requisite “duty” that had to be paid. The nation would have to pay a heavy tribute in terms of money. That was an acceptable part of any alliance. Then there was the compromise that would occur when it came to their religion. Think of it! If a god was behind any and all nations (as it was believed in Hosea’s day), then to form an alliance with a nation was to welcome the worship and so religious practices of that nation lest you offend their deity. Such would have been the case in Israel with the Syrians and then the Egyptians.

The consequence of any political alliance was

- (1) A draining of resources and
- (2) The compromise of a nation’s faithfulness to their god.

This was the acceptable and anticipated result of an alliance. It couldn’t be avoided! Yet think with me on this as it related to Israel and the Assyrian threat. What would have happened if rather than forming this alliance with Syria, Israel went it alone and so was conquered by the Assyrians?

- Duty would have to be paid to Assyria in the form of taxes.
- The religion and so the gods of Assyria would have to be adopted in Israel.

Do you see the folly of Israel’s alliance with Syria? It cost them the same as if they were conquered by a foreign power! Their strength was devoured, but instead of it being taken by force, it was freely given! That is what is behind the statement, “Strangers devour his strength, yet he does not know it!”

This always is the folly of worldliness. Worldliness robs the child of God of his strength in such a way one does not realize it. For example, if President Obama passed a ruling which imposed a pagan liturgy upon us in our worship, we’d be pretty upset. In fact, there is no doubt many of us would be

martyrs willing to give our life for the truth of God's word. Yet imagine if we submitted? Truly our strength as a holy people would be compromised! Yet, our nation and our churches have done this over the past fifty years. We have adopted the goals and the practices of Baal with the adoption of multiculturalism, a result of world alliances our government has formed to protect the peace. These multi-cultural practices are rampant today in Evangelical Christianity! No wonder as a people we have become impotent in our service and influence upon society! Yet that is the cost of worldliness; the unwitting devouring of our strength!

- The young Christian boy or girl compromises their faithfulness and so takes on the dress, attitudes, and outlook of the non-believer all in the name of friendship. Yet little do they know that by doing so they forsake THE Friend of sinners, one who will stick closer to them than any brother, Jesus Christ!
- The wealthy American Christian accomplishes in just a couple of hours what in ages past took all day, and so have a large amount of free time on their hands. Rather than using it to serve the Lord, bless God's people, and so know the joy of the Lord (3 John 4), they spend it on their lusts.
- Rather than know the peace of God on account of prayer, so often we take matters into our own hands and so become crippled by fear and anxiety.

These and more are the unwitting costs of worldliness! Oh Christian, in the words of John, "Guard yourselves from [these] idols" (1 John 5:21)! And yet there is another consequence that accompanies worldliness; growing cold toward God.

Growing Cold Toward God

Hosea 7:9b, "...gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, yet he does not know *it*"

This term "gray hairs" can be misunderstood. I thought these were a good thing in Scripture (cf. Proverbs 20:29). Why would God speak despairingly of them here? Is this saying: *"If you compromise your faithfulness, I'll give you gray hairs!"*

The "gray hairs" is not a reference to the hairs that grow on one's head, BUT the hair that quickly grows on uncooked bread... mold!¹ And such would be the result of a loaf of bread unturned: on the bottom it would be burnt; on the top, if kept just a few days, gray hairs of mold would soon appear.² It would have been a repulsive sight.

From this we see that a "moldy walk" is the result of worldliness! And so on the one hand we get burned by the world. On the other, our relationship with Christ becomes "raw," "uncooked," and so conducive to the mold of declension and apostasy! In Revelations 3, Christ exhorts the Laodiceans whose struggle as a church was with worldliness.

Revelation 3:15-16, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."

When the Christian falls into worldliness, their walk with Christ becomes lukewarm! This was the case

in Laodicea. Though Christians in that church had been awakened to

- The horror of the wages of sin.
- The calling of God.
- The importance of His worship, prayer, and Bible study.

The gospel was preached there by Paul! Yet spiritually and emotionally they had become indifferent! No doubt you would have heard: “Read the Bible? Engage the culture? Disciple my wife and kids? That’s just not me!”

Now the crime here is that in time the worldly Christian begins to think that their lukewarmness constitutes “normal Christianity” with the result that they miss their God given calling to something more; and yet they don’t even realize it! Accordingly, they are content to be shallow in their walks and bored with Christ. That is what was behind Hosea’s exhortation, “...gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, yet he does not know *it!*” And that brings us to the devastating result of worldliness.

Worldliness’ Devastating Result

Hosea 7:10, “though the pride of Israel testifies against him, yet they have neither returned to the Lord their God, nor have they sought Him, for all this.”

What is “the pride of Israel” in this text which “testifie[d] against Ephraim”? To understand it we turn once again to the historical context. Israel’s response to the threat of Assyria was to enter into a political alliance/coalition with the nation to the north of them, Syria. In order to make a long story short the coalition not only failed, but it was the catalyst which brought Assyria into Palestine at this time in which this foreign nation began conquering bits and pieces of the land. The city of Hamath in Syria was the first to fall in 738 B.C.

In response, both the kings of Syria and Israel began paying tribute to Assyria. In fact, Israel taxed 60,000 of its landowners 50 shekels a head (cf. 2 Kings 15:19-20)! Then came Gaza in Philistia in 734 B.C.

Following their capturing of the city of Hamath, the Assyria general had to return home and solidify his power which is why it took so long for him to return. Yet when he returned, Gaza fell. Next came Gilead of Israel, as well as Galilee and Naphtali in 733 B.C.

Damascus then fell in 732 B.C. in which Rezin was killed and the leadership of the city shipped to Kir (cf. 2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:5; 9:7). Now if you are mindful of the geography of the northern kingdoms in Palestine at this time, you are correct in thinking that all that would have been left in the entire region, much less Israel, was the territory of Ephraim (which was located in the hill country around Samaria)!

In this context the reference, “the pride of Israel” refers to the territory and expansion which Israel enjoyed under Jeroboam II and from which Israel concluded that God most certainly was well-pleased with them! Now get this, Ephraim was witness to the annihilation of the nation of Israel on account of its worldliness! Would Ephraim now turn from its sin? Would they turn back to God in devotion, love,

and commitment? No! Their worldliness had blinded them to this option...

Hosea 7:9b, “yet they have neither returned to the Lord their God, nor have they sought Him, for all this.”

In spite of the devastation of Israel, Ephraim remained hard hearted and closed to God! Rather than returning to the Lord in humility, devotion, and prayer, the remnant of Israel amazingly looked south, to Egypt for their protection! Egypt of course was all too willing to help, for the more nations which were in the way of Assyria meant a great buffer for Egypt. Accordingly, Egypt offered minimal help and aid which in the end could not stop the destruction and deportation of Ephraim which occurred in 722 B.C.

Worldliness is such a great danger to the child of God. From it you no doubt will be burned by what you desire and cold toward the Lord, but further your mind will be blinded to the simple solution:

- Unconditional trust and devotion to Christ.
- Longing to serve the Lord.
- Being content with the knowledge that God accepts me.

In fact, this is the theme of this entire section addressing Israel’s foolish political allegiances. Though God could deliver His people from their sin and the resulting situation their sin had put them in, nevertheless:

- v. 7b: “...none of them calls on Me.”
- v. 9b: “...yet he does not know *it*”- twice stated!
- v. 10b: “...yet they have neither returned to the Lord their God, nor have they sought Him, for all this.”
- v. 13b: “...I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me.”
- v. 14a: “And they do not cry to Me from their heart...”
- v. 14b: “...they turn away from Me.”
- v. 15b: “...yet they devise evil against Me.”

Do you see both the solution for worldliness as well as its awful cost? The solution is going back to your first love and so turning from self-love and a longing for the protection, security, comforts and praises of this world to a longing for Christ! The awful cost is a blinding which prevents us from seeing our dire condition. Theodore Laetsch wrote this:

The loss of the knowledge of God deprives an individual and a nation of the ability to recognize their true nature and the impending judgment. They cannot understand the signs of the times, are unable to read the hand-writing on the wall, because they do not realize that by turning away from God, from His Gospel, from His law, they have cut themselves off from the Fountain of life and are on their death march. (Laetsch, 1956 Edition, p. 56)

G. Campbell Morgan added this:

Signs of decadence, which are patent to others, are undiscovered by ourselves; and we go on, and on, and on, the victims of ebbing strength, spiritually and morally becoming degenerate, without knowing it! We are blind to the signs which are self-evident to onlookers. There is no condition more perilous to our highest well-being than this of unconscious decadence. (Morgan, 1999, p. 57)

So what ought we to do? I'm going to make three suggestions:

- (1) Strengthen the hands that are weak (Hebrews 12:12a)- is there a spiritual discipline that you have let lapse? Strengthen in your life the practices of godliness: prayer, bible study, refreshing others with the word, Biblical fellowship.
- (2) Make straight paths for our feet (Hebrews 12:12b)- are there pitfalls in your daily life? Elements or practices which more often than not cause you to stumble? Flee from these things!
- (3) Return to your first love (Revelation 2:5)- Christ and Him crucified. Family of God, if worldliness blinds us to our fallen condition, then there is no greater antidote than cultivating a heart of steadfast devotion to the Lord, a life a prayer, and the practice of daily fellowship with Christ in His word.

If we are going to be a people with an uncommon faith, these must not simply be a list of good advice, but the passion and practice of each and everyone of us!

End Notes

¹ Some commentators have suggested that the "grey hairs" of this text are those which arise on account of extreme stress. While the translation affords this possibility, the context would look rather for a cooking denotation (cf. "mixed" v. 8) and so "mold."

² Francis Anderson in his commentary on Hosea put it this way, "The picture of vv. 8-9 can be completed if we recognize that [the Hebrew] here designates, not grey human hair, but the hairs of mold on food... the analogy here continues the cake reference of v. 8b and the general pattern of culinary language..." (*Hosea*, ABC, p. 467).

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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