

"God Finishes What He Starts"

Hosea 10-11

The message of judgment on Israel in the book of Hosea, can often cause us to lose sight of the thread of reminders of the love of God for His people that Hosea weaves in and out of his message. God's "hesed" lovingkindness, covenant-keeping, never-will-I-leave-you-never-will-I-forsake-you love permeates the book. Even though God will send the northern kingdom to Assyria (the main warning in Hosea) and the southern kingdom to Babylon later (a background warning in Hosea), God promises to bring them back, establish them in their land and bless them abundantly, because He started the covenant with them and He plans to finish it according to the Bible.

What the apostle Paul said about the church in Phil. 1:6,

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

... is a reminder for us also of God's covenant-keeping, never-will-I-leave-you-never-will-I-forsake-you love. God doesn't promise He'll do something and not complete it, even though He patiently and painstakingly takes a long time to finish. As we move toward the end of Hosea, God's love becomes clearer and His commitment to His people, in spite of their sin, is not weakened but strengthened. Ch. 10:1 begins,

Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones.

The image of Israel as God's vine is not unfamiliar. Isaiah 5 explains that God planted Israel as His vine looking for fruit but it did not produce the fruit God desired. In Is. 5:7 God states,

⁷ *The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.*

Even though Israel failed at times to produce the fruit God desired, the reality is however,

God Desires to See Fruit from His People **(Ch. 10)**

'Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit ...'

God blessed Israel many times over their history. Even when they weren't walking with Him – like here in Hosea during the days of prosperity under King Jeroboam – God was still blessing them. Like Israel did then,

Yet we often are unsatisfied with God's provision (v.1)

We want more or we want to use God's blessings for selfish purposes. Israel brought forth fruit for himself and used it to not glorify God but to build more altars for pagan worship. Why? Because they didn't thank God for His provision. They were worshipping Baal and God, committing spiritual adultery, and by building more altars a) showing they thought idol worship was behind their blessing;

and ii) built more altars so by making more sacrifices to Baal that would result in more blessings because Baal was the supposed god who controlled weather.

If everything we have comes from God [Rom. 11:36 'For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things ...] then what we have is enough. He blesses us with more than enough so we can bless those who have needs. That's how God works. 'I bless you', God says, 'so you can be my blessing to others. Especially when both of you acknowledge I'm the one behind it.' We worry about not having enough. What we have we often aren't completely satisfied with. We need to learn what Paul learned,

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

What Paul did in Christ's strength was he learned to be content no matter what. This is an issue of trust between us and God. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.' Israel historically saw God provide miraculously time and time again. He won't abandon us. He knows what we need. Stop going to the Baals of our culture that promise prosperity and success. Instead go to God and say thank you Lord. Who needs my help?

² *Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones.*

³ *Then they will say, "We have no king because we did not revere the LORD. But even if we had a king, what could he do for us?"*

⁴ *They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field.*

⁵ *The people who live in Samaria fear for the calf-idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendor, because it is taken from them into exile.*

⁶ *It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be ashamed of its wooden idols.*

⁷ *Samaria and its king will float away like a twig on the surface of the waters.*

⁸ *The high places of wickedness will be destroyed— it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"*

⁹ *"Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel, and there you have remained. Did not war overtake the evildoers in Gibeah?"*

¹⁰ *When I please, I will punish them; nations will be gathered against them to put them in bonds for their double sin.*

The image of God as the vinedresser and Israel as the vine is not new either. Even Jesus will use this image in John 15 for the same purpose:

God will prune away what hinders growth (vv.2-10)

And He'll start with the golden calves. They will become a payment to Assyria, much to the shock and tears of Israel's priests! Israel will be ashamed of its wooden idols because the calves were probably made of wood overlaid in gold. The gold would probably be melted down and the wood burned. And you worshipped this thing? When exile happened, few people were left in the land. The abandoned altars would be overgrown with weeds and thorns, a monument to their failure to rescue themselves. The Assyrians were brutal captors, torturing their prisoners. Putting hooks in the noses of

survivors and tying everyone together and marching them back to Assyria. King Manasseh had this experience in 2 Chron. 33:11.

In Jesus' analogy of God as our vinedresser He said,

John 15:2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful

God is always looking for the evidence of spiritual growth in His people. The struggles we face might very well be part of the pruning process so that our trust level grows and our reliance on God develops patience, love, kindness ... the characteristics of Jesus Himself in us. That's what conformity to Christ means, we show we are like Jesus more a little each day.

God does this

So we will reap a righteous harvest (vv.11-15)

God continues in v.11,

¹¹ *Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; so I will put a yoke on her fair neck. I will drive Ephraim, Judah must plow, and Jacob must break up the ground.*

¹² *Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.*

¹³ *But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors,*

¹⁴ *the roar of battle will rise against your people, so that all your fortresses will be devastated— as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed to the ground with their children.*

¹⁵ *Thus will it happen to you, O Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.*

God said He first treated Ephraim (Israel) with a gentle yoke. Like a heifer threshing grain, eating some it while threshing. But now God has to tighten the yoke because they must do the hard work of breaking up ground that has laid fallow for many seasons. It's hard. It's tough. We can't sow righteousness until we break up our hard-hearted attitudes so that there's room for God's attitudes to be planted in our hearts.

That's why Peter says in 1 Pet. 2:1,

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Remove hatred, envy, bitterness, impatience, arrogance which hardens our hearts. Ask forgiveness, start over like a baby drinking milk so we can grow up in our salvation. When we taste the fruit of right thinking we'll produce the fruit of right living. And it tastes good. And we shouldn't want to return to bitterness and anger and impatience and arrogance. When we sow righteousness we reap the godly characteristic of unfailing love; forgiving those who hurt us, loving those who hate us.

God rebukes Israel who planted wickedness in their hearts and relied on the strength of their armies to secure them victories against Assyria, only to experience massive defeat. Under King

Pekah who tried to enlist Egypt's help against Assyria, both would be totally defeated (v.14). And ultimately Israel will lose her kings (v.15). We may easily read this and not give it much thought, but Israel has had no legitimate king since 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar deposed Jehoiachin from the throne and gave him a one way, all expenses paid trip to Babylon. The next king to rule on the throne of David as reaffirmed by the angel Gabriel is Mary's first born, the Son of God Jesus Christ. It's important to note Gabriel affirmed Jesus' rule on David's throne which is an earthly throne from Jerusalem. And now in Ch. 11 we start to see some more positive promises reaffirmed by God for Israel. God desires to see fruit from His people

Because God Has a Great Future Planned **(Ch. 11)**

11 *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*

² *But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.*

³ *It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them.*

⁴ *I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.*

Inevitably every prophet of Israel who calls wayward Israel back to God,

Reminds them of God's continual love for them (vv.1-4)

God initially sent Jacob's 12 sons and families into Egypt for protection and preservation. But over time as they grew, Egypt became a threat. So God rescued Israel out of Egypt miraculously through the Red Sea miracle. Hosea uses parental language describing God raising Israel up from infancy as a loving parent, removing the bondage of slavery and feeding them in the dessert. Israel, why are you worshipping Baals? They did not choose you like God from all the nations for no other reason than He loves you.

Notice the imagery of salvation in the Old Testament is God's adopting to Himself those He calls by His grace. Israel had no qualifications that endeared herself to God any more than you and I have any qualifications that endear us to God today. By grace are you saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Any time we drift away or disobey God we need to remember how we got saved. How God called us by His grace and drew us to Himself.

You know that v.1 is quoted by Matthew in Matt. 2:11 when he writes of Joseph receiving a dream from an angel telling him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's vengeance. *"And do was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet 'Out of Egypt I called my Son.'"*

Hosea was not predicting Jesus would do this but Matthew under the Spirit shows that Jesus typifies Israel, who also was taken to Egypt for protection and preservation, so that God could bring Him back to the land. And the first major event recorded after Jesus' baptism is the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, which Jesus God's Son triumphs over the enemy and now is able to accomplish God's plan of salvation. Israel was to be the light to the Gentiles but failed, Jesus, the Son of God and Israel's Messiah, accomplishes God's purpose for His people.

In vv.5-9 we see God's heart breaks for His people Israel, who continually want to rebel against His commands,

- ⁵ *“Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?
⁶ Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.
⁷ My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.
⁸ “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.
⁹ I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.*

While God says Israel's trust in Egypt to rescue them from Assyria will fail miserably in vv.5-7, we hear His heart cry out for them in vv.8-9 where God promises He will not wipe out His people completely. A man would show no mercy, but God is not a man; He is a God who keeps His Word always.

And here's an important biblical principle to always keep in mind when reading prophecies of judgment,

God takes no pleasure in discipline (vv.5-9)

We see this clearly in Ezek. 18:23 where a few years later God warns the southern Kingdom that Babylon is coming to take Judah away.

²³ *Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?*

And in the New Testament we also read in 2 Pet. 3:9

⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Too many people have an erroneous view of God as a wrathful, vengeful God, waiting to pounce on us when we sin. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. God did not wipe out Israel; if He had His promise of Jesus' coming could not come true. God has not reneged on His future promises to Israel because if He has then Jesus can't rule on David's throne.

God completes His work and fulfils His promise (vv.10-11)

¹⁰ *They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.
¹¹ They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes,” declares the LORD.*

And when we put these verses together with other prophecies about Israel's return, this isn't just return from exile (because Israel still didn't follow God any better) but of future day yet to come when Jesus returns and establishes His rule. Amos 9:15,

- ¹¹ *“In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be,*

¹² *so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,” declares the LORD, who will do these things.*

He who began a good work in you *will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

And that work in us is to conform us into the image of His Son. Perhaps, we have our own fallow ground to break up so that the seeds of righteousness can find their way into our heart so that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control can come forth. We reap what we sow. Israel reaped destruction and punishment because they refused to return to the Lord by softening their hearts.

God is looking for fruit in you and I. Jesus said the same

This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:8)

If bitterness, anger, unforgiveable, impatient and unkind words and actions come out from us then its clear what kind of thoughts we’re planting in our mind. That’s not going to change overnight. We’ve got to return to the Lord, confess our sin, renew our minds and retrain our minds to think Godly, not worldly.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. [Rom. 12:1-2]

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If you have any comments or questions please contact us at olivet@rideau.net