

V. *The Moth and the Lion*

04-Jan-04

Hosea 5:1-15

Bentley Chapter 8

Theme: God withdraws His presence from His sinful people until they repent.

Key Verses: Hosea 5:12, 14-15 – ¹²Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rotteness. ... ¹⁴For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. ¹⁵I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.

Review

Last week we looked at Hosea chapter 4. The chapter starts out with an indictment of Israel in God's courtroom. It then proceeds to lay much of the blame for the corruption of Israel's religious and cultural life at the feet of the priests, and in particular one priest who have rejected the knowledge of God. The chapter then proceeds with a more detailed description of the corrupt religion and corrupt lifestyle of Israel, culminating in the ominous whirlwind imagery of 4:19. Judgment, in the form of Assyrian invasion, is hovering over the horizon like a tornado, ready to sweep Israel away. Corrupt religion leads to corrupt living.

Hosea chapter 4 has given us a portrait of the post-Christian society. The decay starts at the top, when Christian leaders stop teaching the Christian faith. Within a few generations, rejection of knowledge by the leaders leads to a general lack of knowledge within the church. A post-Christian society has no truth or mercy or knowledge of God, and this leads to all sorts of gross violations of the law of God without any concern or consideration. What drives a society in a downward spiral? When Christian leaders fail to teach the truth, Christianity becomes empty and meaningless. When we compromise the worship of God for convenience, culture, or comfort, our religion is corrupt and useless. When religion is in vain, people seek to fill their lives with meaning from pursuits of pleasure, possessions, and power, but all to no avail. Welcome to the post-Christian society.

And so, Hosea 4 has two warnings for us. The first is to follow the exhortation given to Judah: we are not to succumb to the spirit of the age, to compromise Biblical truth with a culture that is diametrically opposed to it. In modern terms, this is a warning not to follow other denominations into sin. Just because the Episcopal Church has chosen to embrace the sin of homosexuality, we must not follow suit. Just because other denominations have chosen liberalism and jettisoned Biblical authority, we must stand firm for the truth. Just because other churches no longer believe in sin or the need of redemption through Jesus Christ alone, does not mean that we can abandon the Savior.

The second exhortation is to seek out and require faithful, Biblical leaders. Eaton exhorts us this way: "What sort of leader is God looking for? He is looking for humility, so that 'greatness' can come into a person's life without it leading him into sinful carelessness. He is looking for leaders who do not corrupt, but rather uphold, the worship and service of God. He is looking for those who will implement biblical standards, those who will be free from love of gain." Let us look for and require these types of leaders. Because godly people will have godly leaders, while corrupt people will have corrupt leaders. As Hosea reminds us, "Like people, like priest."

Minor Prophets: Hosea

Introduction

On the Food Network, one of the most popular chefs is Emeril Lagasse. If you've ever watched him cook, then you've probably heard him say, "Bam! Let's take it up a notch!" This morning, that is what God is saying in Hosea chapter 5. In chapter 4 we had covered the long slide of the corruption of Israel's religious and cultural life. At the end of chapter 4, there was a hint of trouble on the horizon – that devouring whirlwind of Assyria. This morning, that whirlwind comes closer. Our first section (5:1-7) continues the same themes of Israel's corrupt religion and culture. But God takes it up a notch in two ways: by letting us see more of the consequences of their actions and also by (surprise!) including a word of condemnation against Judah for the first time. Bam! In the middle section (5:8-11), the horizon expands to warfare, and it looks like a "civil" war between the house of Ephraim and the house of Judah. The background for this section and the rest of chapter 5 is apparently the Syro-Ephraimite war of 734-733 BC, of which I'll describe in fuller detail a bit further on. And in the third section (5:12-15), we have our first appearance of the Great King of Assyria. What had started out as a domestic issue has now grown from a local war into an international incident. "Bam! Let's take it up a notch!"

Exposition

A. Domestic Affairs (5:1-7)

1. Mizpah and Tabor (5:1-2)

In verse 1, the word of God comes to the priests, the people, and the rulers of Israel. The mention of the priests connect this section (1-7) back to chapter 4. Hosea is continuing to describe the corrupt religion that leads to the corrupt culture of Israel. Hosea continues to ground his judgment in historical places of Israel. "Because you have been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor" (1b).

Mizpah is the place where Jacob and Laban made a treaty and marked it by a stone pillar (Gen. 31:49). Mizpah is also associated with the judge Japheth (Jdg. 10:17-11:34) and the Benjamite war (Jdg. 20:1-21:18). Mizpah was the place of the public announcement of Saul's anointing to the kingship of Israel (1 Sam. 10:17). And Mizpah was the third city on Samuel's judging circuit (the other two being Gilgal and Bethel, already mentioned in Hosea 4:15).

Mount Tabor was a "large, flat-topped mountain which still dominates the land to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee." It is associated in Israelite history with the victory of Deborah and Barak over Jabin the Canaanite and his forces led by commander Sisera (Jdg. 4:6-14).

Mizpah and Tabor were places that were famous in the history of Israel; but now they were infamous. Kidner puts it this way: "To get caught up with what was done there was to wander into a trap, like some hapless bird or beast. If many an ordinary hilltop had its Baal shrine, wooing dozens of frequenters away from the true faith, the shrines on high places as famous as Mizpah and Mount Tabor would seduce their hundreds. A modern prophet would scandalize even the faithful if he started naming the equivalents of apostate Mizpah and Tabor. Among the theological faculties where would he begin? Where would he end?"

In verse 2, God announces His judgment: "The revoltors are deeply involved in slaughter, though I rebuke them all." The NIV translates the verse: "The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them." Eaton translates it this way: "Rebels have gone deep in depravity, but I am a chastisement to them all." Eaton says, "The main theme of the unit is the determination of

Minor Prophets: Hosea

God to be ‘Chastisement’ to the people. ‘I am a chastisement,’ says God. The abstract noun almost makes it a title, ‘I am Chastisement.’” Here is God taking it up a notch.

Verses 3 and 4 get to the heart of the matter. In chapter 4, one of the key themes was lack of knowledge. “There is no knowledge of God in the land” (4:1). “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” because the priests “have rejected knowledge” (4:6). Here in 5:3, we learn that lack of knowledge on the people’s part does not mean a corresponding lack of knowledge on God’s part. “I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me” (3a). This contrast is further developed in verse 4, where again it is said “and they do not know the Lord” (4b).

Boice puts it this way: “In chapter 4 the chief complaint against Israel was that she had abandoned her knowledge of God. God desired her to have such knowledge; it is the greatest of all spiritual blessings. But Israel had chosen sin instead, and the knowledge of God that she once possessed had vanished. Like Hosea’s wife, Israel had been running from God, attempting to put this former knowledge behind her. But although she had forgotten Him, He had not forgotten her. Now He comes to remind her of this holy knowledge (5:1, 3). But here is the problem. We can hide from others. We can even do a good job of hiding from ourselves. But how do you hide from the omniscient One? We cannot. We cannot hide from God.”

2. Defiled Deeds (5:3-4)

What does God know about his wayward wife, the nation of Israel? He knows their deeds, He knows their heart, and He knows the emptiness of their religion. First, He knows their deeds in verses 3-4: “For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled. They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord” (3b-4). Again, we have the theme of harlotry, both physical and spiritual. The legacy of Gomer lives on in Israel. But see how Hosea takes it up a notch. What is the consequence of their corrupt religion, of their corrupt lifestyle? They are separated from God, with no apparent hope of returning. The NIV puts verse 4a this way: “Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.” Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. Even if they had a thought of repentance (which they don’t), they are so ensnared in their sin (cp. the Mizpah snare and Tabor net of v. 1), that there is no way out. They have slid so far down the ladder of sin that they can’t come back. Remember Romans 1? “God gave them over ... God gave them over ... He gave them over.”

We need to take this warning seriously. Some may have the attitude of “It’s okay if I sin now for a season; later I’ll repent and God will forgive me.” This is a dangerous mindset. Don’t assume that you have time to repent later – because later may never come! Repentance requires heeding God’s voice. But the Israelites had lost their knowledge of God and they couldn’t hear His voice. Their sinful deeds did not permit them to repent, to return to their God. They were trapped in the snare of sin.

3. A Proud Heart (5:5)

Second, God knows the heart of Israel – it is full of pride: “The pride of Israel testifies to his face; therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity” (5a). A proud heart is not one that will humble itself in repentance and return to the Lord. Israel’s wicked deeds are reinforced by an arrogant heart. What is surprising in verse 5 is that God includes Judah in this indictment of Israel. In 4:15, Hosea warns Judah not to follow in her sister’s footsteps. But here in 5:5, it appears as if she has done so: “Judah also stumbles with them” (5b). The lesson for us here is

Minor Prophets: Hosea

not to presume that we are right with God while our neighbor is not. Our responsibility is to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. When we take our eyes off our Savior, we are sure to stumble as well.

4. Empty and Vain Religion (5:6-7)

Third, God knows that the religion of Israel is empty and vain (6-7). This is really where it starts. Useless religion leads to empty living. God is not fooled by the Israelites practice of organized religion. They bring their herds and flocks to “seek” the Lord, but they are looking in all the wrong places – they cannot find Him (6). God has withdrawn His presence from His people because of their treacherous dealings, because of their sin (7a). One example given of their treachery is the begetting of pagan children (7b). This may refer to illegitimate children through physical harlotry, or it may refer to legitimate children who should have been raised in covenant homes, but were being raised as pagans! Either way, it was so offensive to God that observance of the regular New Moon worship festivals resulted in further judgment upon Israel (7c). This is reminiscent of Paul’s warning on the Lord’s Supper: “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:29). Rather than drawing us closer to God, if we come with an arrogant spirit and a wayward heart, our very acts of outward piety may actually serve to condemn us!

Let us not underestimate the importance of orthodox worship with a humble spirit. We are to “seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Is. 55:6). Hosea chapter 5 illustrates for us the danger of presuming we can do that whenever we want. If we fall into sin, we may not “want” to seek Him; furthermore, the Lord may not want to be found. In a post-Christian society, there is very little of seeking and finding the Lord. Yes, there may still be “pomp and circumstance,” outward religiosity, but there is very little inward faith. The mere outward exercise of religion does not mean that our hearts are in the right place. Amos puts it this way: “Behold the days are coming,” says the Lord God, ‘That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, not a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’” (Amos 8:11). In a post-Christian society, there is a famine of the Word. This was the case in Hosea’s day, and it is the same in ours. Let us examine ourselves and repent.

B. Sound the Alarm (5:8-11)

We have an abrupt scene change in verse 8-11. The battle alarm has been sounded, and the verses apparently describe a conflict between the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The likely background for this section and the subsequent one is the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war of 734-733 BC. Earlier parts of Hosea’s prophecy seemed to be set in the “affluent and indulgent” age of Jeroboam II. But now, things are quickly unraveling. The *pax Jeroboam* is history. Past sins are coming home to haunt Israel as she quickly slides in the space of a single generation from comfort to oblivion. The setting of these verses seems to be in that time period of the last years before the end of Samaria.

After the death of Jeroboam II in 753 BC, Zechariah and Shallum ruled only briefly before Menahem came to the throne in 752 BC. Menahem reigned for 10 years, and it was during his reign that Israel began paying tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (2 Kings 15:17-22). Menahem’s son Pekahiah reigned for 2 years before he was killed by Pekah (2 Kings 15:23-26). Pekah reigned for a total of 20 years, likely 12 years in Gilead across the Jordan and then a further 8 years in Samaria. During his reign, he conspired against Assyria with Rezin of Damascus. Pekah and Rezin felt that they needed the help of Ahaz of Judah in their anti-

Minor Prophets: Hosea

Assyrian conspiracy. Ahaz refused and sent money to Assyria for help. Pekah and Rezin attacked Ahaz of Judah in the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war of 734-733 BC (cp. 2 Kgs 16:1-9). Tiglath-Pileser came to Judah's rescue, subduing most of Israel, including Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali. The cream of the citizenry was taken captive to Assyria. Then Tiglath-Pileser ravaged Damascus in 732 BC and killed the king Rezin. Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea who took over the throne as lackey of the Assyrians (2 Ki. 15:30; 17:1-4). All of this, apparently, was in response to Ahaz's desperate overture.

“Verses 8-9 are a formal and dramatic announcement of judgment, which begins with battle alarms that warn of a northward march through the cities of Benjamin toward the territory of Ephraim. The three towns mentioned lie in a line that stretches almost due north from Jerusalem. They are listed in a sequence that suggests an invasion from the south” (Hubbard). Gibeah, associated with the sordid tale of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19, is also the hometown of Saul (1 Sam. 10:26). Ramah was the hometown of Samuel (1 Sam. 7:17). And of course we've already come across Beth Aven, or Bethel in Hosea 4:15, an important place of worship that had been corrupted by Jeroboam I and his golden calves. Hubbard explains: “If the theory is correct, the occasion is the Syro-Ephraimite war when Ahaz of Judah apparently took advantage of Samaria's preoccupation with the Assyrian troops of Tiglath-pileser to try to retake the portions of Benjamin that Jehoash of Israel had wrested from Judah three generations earlier (2 Ki. 14:8-14). The outcome of the battle, deleterious for Ephraim, is announced in verse 9. Ephraim, the once proud territory, now reduced to a remnant by Tiglath-pileser's incursions, is due for complete desolation.”

In verse 10, Judah is accused of land-grabbing, pushing into Ephraimite territory while Israel was preoccupied with Assyria. “The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark” (10a). The NIV puts it this way: “Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones” (10a). Hubbard explains why this is sinful: “With a zeal born of frustration and opportunism, Judah marched north to snatch back their own territory and, apparently, much more. Moving boundary markers to expand, by force or deceit, one's own allotted holdings, was an intolerable offence in ancient Israel (Dt. 27:17).” And in verse 11, we see poor Ephraim, “oppressed and broken in judgment.” She is now beginning to reap what she has sown, through the hands of both Judah and Assyria. But there is still more to come.

Judah took advantage of her sister state, Israel. While it is true that the northern kingdom did press the conflict first, trying to engage Judah in her rebellion against Assyria, that did not give Judah the right to despoil her northern neighbor. God looked upon Judah's actions with disfavor, proclaiming that he would “pour out My wrath on them like water” (10b). Just a word of application here. We should not rejoice when other Christian denominations or individual churches are suffering, declining, falling away from the true faith. We should not circle around them like vultures, hoping to pick off a few members for our own congregation. Instead, we should weep when the cause of Christendom is pushed back, on whatever front. Likewise, we should rejoice in the successes of other denominations and other local churches when they are growing in faith and in the proclamation of the Word. Our loyalty is to the cause of Christ.

C. Foreign Affairs (5:12-15)

The final section of chapter 5 contains significant parallelism in naming judgments against both Ephraim (Israel) and Judah. “Therefore I will be to *Ephraim* like a moth, and to the house of *Judah* like rotteness. When *Ephraim* saw his sickness, and *Judah* saw his wound ... For I will be like a lion to *Ephraim*, and like a young lion to the house of *Judah*” (12, 13a, 14a). This

Minor Prophets: Hosea

parallelism should be carried over into verse 13b as well: “Then *Ephraim* went to Assyria, and [*Judah*] sent to King Jareb (the great king)” (13b). Note that in the Hebrew *melek yareb* means “the great king” and is referring to the king of Assyria by title rather than name. In Chapter 4 we saw a warning to Judah not to follow in Israel’s footsteps. But here in chapter 5, she is doing the same thing, and reaping the same result.

In 12-15, there are two similes used to describe God’s judgment upon the houses of Ephraim and Judah. God first says that He is like a moth and then He says He is like a lion. God as a lion is a familiar image – after all, Christ is the lion of Judah. But moth imagery is not nearly so common. If I had asked you what God is like in the Bible, you might have listed many things, including a lion, but I doubt anyone would have said that God is like a moth! The words “moth” and “moth-eaten” occur only 6 times in the Old Testament and 4 times in the New Testament. In general, they refer to destruction or decay. For example:

Job 13:28 “Man decays like a rotten thing, like a garment that is *moth*-eaten.”

Is. 51:8 “For the *moth* will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation.”

Mt. 6:19-20 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where *moth* and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither *moth* nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Hos. 5:12 “Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a *moth*, and to the house of Judah like rotteness.”

Hosea 5:12 is the only time in Scripture that God likens Himself as a moth. What is He referring to? God is saying that He is bringing decay, rotteness, and corruption to His people. If they refuse to heed Him and to acknowledge (know) Him, then they are on the path to decay and destruction, as surely as a moth-eaten garment has no useful function. This is Romans chapter 1 all over again. Because of their sin and rebellion, God is giving them over, giving them over, giving them over. Israel is on a path of inexorable decay, and Judah is not far behind.

Israel and Judah were still alert enough to recognize the symptoms of decay. The golden age of Jeroboam II had passed, and it wasn’t too hard to figure out that there were problems arising. Verse 13a shows us that Ephraim and Judah were able to detect the problem. “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!” they may have said. However, the second half of verse 13 is very telling, because it shows how Ephraim and Judah were thinking. When they had problems who did they run to? To the great king. The great king of Heaven and Earth, the Creator of all things? No! To the “great king” of Assyria. The secularization of God’s people is virtually complete. Spiritual problems are seen as requiring political answers. Instead of returning to God as they should, they look for political allies to help. And the irony of the situation is that God is raising up Assyria to be the judgment against His people for their religious apostasy. Ephraim is running away from God and into the arms of her God-appointed destroyer!

Eaton puts it this way: “Israel is happy to turn to Assyria which is nothing more than a cruel and oppressive colonizing power. Yet the people will not turn to Yahweh who years before had rescued them from oppression and was famous for delivering his people from crisis after crisis. The mistake consisted in Israel’s thinking that it was its *situation* that needed help. The nation was surrounded by enemies. ‘We need a great king to be on our side’, they felt. They felt that they *themselves* were basically all right. They simply needed a great king to ensure their safety

Minor Prophets: Hosea

in a threatening world. It did not occur to them that their problem was not their situation but themselves! We are our own biggest problem. Assyria would not be the answer. They needed, not Assyria, but God's favor. To walk into the arms of the king of Assyria would be like a mouse looking to a cat for protection."

"So today, people turn to pleasures, money, sexuality and affluence, and then suddenly when their gods let them down, they think the answer is in economics or in a new political party— or whatever" (Eaton). When we see problems in the church or in society, where do we turn to for help? To a political party? To a particular candidate? To a grass-roots coalition or campaign? To the Internet? To God in prayer?

The second simile is used in verse 14: "For I will be like a lion to Ephraim; and like a young lion to the house of Judah" (14a). The lion is also a destroyer, but not nearly as subtle as the moth. "I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue" (14b). God is going to tear Israel apart, and like Humpty Dumpty, no one will be able to restore them. This literally happened to the northern kingdom through the invasion of Assyria, culminating in the destruction of Samaria and deportation in 722 BC. Judah almost came to an end through Assyrian aggression in 701 BC, but God intervened under the ministry of the prophet Isaiah and King Hezekiah to provide miraculous deliverance against Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:13-19:37; Is. 36-37). However, the root of the problem is not that Assyria is coming like a roaring lion; it is that God is the angry lion. It is the wrath of God that needs to be addressed.

The final word comes in verse 15. As a lion retires to his lair, God also withdraws to wait for their distress to prod them to repentance (Hubbard). "I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense, then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me" (15). In many ways, this is the worst word of judgment yet. As Boice describes it: "He leaves us. He turns away from us. He abandons us to precisely what we want (15a). I can think of no more horrible judgment than to be abandoned by God in the very depths of our wretchedness and misery. Yet that is our hope, for even at this point God is being good to those who are His. He will hide His face. We will grope in our darkness. But even this, dreadful as it is, exists only "until" we admit our guilt and turn to Him (15b). Thus it is that even in the darkest hour there is a glimmer of hope and love in God's judgments." So, we have a word of hope in closing. God withdraws His presence from His people, but there is hope in the word "till." God will remain hidden *until* there is repentance.

Conclusion

In closing, let me read to you some excerpts from a long article in the *International Herald Tribune* dated Tuesday, October 14, 2003. It is entitled "Secular Drift Pulls Europe Away from U.S.: Christian Churches in Europe Find it Hard to Fill Seats."

"Like many Italians in decades and childhoods past, Giampaolo Servadio used to go to Roman Catholic Mass every week. He even served as an altar boy. But last Sunday morning, as Roman church bells tolled around this city of storied cathedrals, he followed a different ritual: he went running. It struck him as a better use of his time. 'The church seems really out of step,' said Servadio, 39, mentioning issues like birth control and questioning the very utility of prayer. 'I don't see how something like a confession and a few repetitions of the 'Hail Mary' are going to solve any problems.'

Minor Prophets: Hosea

“This week Pope John Paul II is to celebrate his 25th anniversary as the head of the Roman Catholic Church, which is both Europe’s and Christianity’s largest denomination. It has been a quarter-century of enormous changes, and few have been more significant, for his church and mainstream Protestant denominations, than the withering of the Christian faith in Europe and the shift in its center of gravity to the Southern Hemisphere. Christianity has boomed in the developing world, competing successfully with Islam, deepening its influence and possibly finding its future there. But Europe already seems more and more like a series of tourist-trod monuments to Christianity’s past. The preamble of a new, unfinished constitution for the European Union omits any mention of Christianity or even God among the cultural forces that shaped Europe, although the pope and other Christian leaders raised vehement objections.

“The secularization of Europe, according to some political analysts, is one of the forces pushing it apart from the United States, where religion plays a potent role in politics and society, shaping many Americans’ views of the world. Americans are widely regarded as more comfortable with notions of good and evil, right and wrong, than Europeans, who often see such views as reckless. ‘Americans still take biblical and religious arguments very seriously, and therefore give a credence to the Zionist project that Europeans don’t.’ For many Americans, the frequency with which President George W. Bush invoked morality and religion in talking about the fight against terrorism was neither striking nor discomfoting. ‘But in Europe, they think he must be a religious nut.’ Europeans, more than Americans, are aggressively challenging traditional Christian teaching by providing civil recognition for same-sex couples. Despite stern opposition from the Vatican, the French, Belgian, Dutch, and German governments have granted same-sex couples legal entitlements and protections, and Britain is considering it too.

“In France, which is predominantly Catholic but emphatically secular, about one in 20 people attends a religious service every week, compared with about one in three in the United States. They show up to mark milestones in their and their loved ones’ lives. But they pay minimal heed, between those visits, to their churches’ exhortations and admonitions. A priest in Lille, France recently had done pre-nuptial counseling for six couples; proof, he said, that young adults still wanted Catholic weddings. But he sadly conceded that all the couples had been living together for a while. ‘They say it without blushing.’ He added that he did not expect to see the couples much once they moved on to their honeymoons. At Holy Sacrament, like many other congregations, the regulars tend to be much older. ‘If you ask the average European the basic credo or statements of the Christian Church, most of them don’t know.’ Most Italians seem not to listen to the Vatican, even though about 85 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholic and the pope resides smack in the middle of the country.

“By some estimates, more than 25 million people in England identify with the Church of England as their denomination. Only 1.2 million actually go to one of the church’s services every week. Other Protestant denominations are in the same shape. ‘In Western Europe, we are hanging on by our fingernails,’ writes one English clergyman. ‘The fact is that Europe is no longer Christian.’ This is something of an overstatement. However, for most, Christianity has evolved into an amorphous spiritual inclination rather than an exacting creed.

“There are many suggested reasons for Europe’s drift, which happened gradually, over decades, as the Continent grew wealthier and better educated. One is a modern European cynicism about big institutions, grand ideologies, and unfettered allegiances, manifest not only in partly empty churches but also in weakened support for labor unions and political parties. The process of urbanization moved Europeans from quiet places where the church was at the center of life to

Minor Prophets: Hosea

chaotic bazaars where it got lost in the din. “There’s Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age spiritualism, consumerism. With all these competitors, it’s harder for the church to sell.” But in the United States, to name one country, many of the same dynamics have not prompted a similarly pronounced estrangement. “Some experts say that in Europe, suspicion of major denominations may run higher because religious leaders directly wielded political power in the past. Others say the unchallenged supremacy of state-based faiths in Europe – like the Lutherans in Scandinavia and Anglicans in Britain – perhaps turned out to be a curse. ‘Monopolies damage religion. In a free market, people get more interested in the product. It is true for religion just as it is true for cars.’

“Christianity’s greatest hope in Europe may in fact be immigrants from the developing world, who in many cases learned the religion from European missionaries, adapted it to their own needs and tastes, then toted it back to the Continent.

This article is a chilling description of a post-Christian culture in Europe. They are further down the slippery slope than is the United States. By analogy, Europe is Israel to the USA’s Judah. Let us not rejoice in our own relative superior position, but let us pray for our brethren overseas.

Next week: Lesson 6 – Repentance That Does Not Count – Hosea 6:1-7:2 – Bentley chapter 9

Close in Prayer.