

X. “Break Up Your Fallow Ground”

08-Feb-04

Hosea 10:1-15

Bentley Chapters 16-17

Theme: Instead of a divided heart, we must have a plowed heart that seeks the Lord and abides in Christ.

Key Verse: Hosea 10:12 – Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

Review

Hosea chapter 9 is all about the consequences of sin. It is a catalogue of lost opportunities, lost blessings. It outlines the judgment for the corrupt religion and the immoral lifestyle in “post-Christian” Israel. The framework for Hosea’s presentation was the remembrance of three places and the historical events that occurred there: Gibeah, Baal-Peor, and Gilgal. Like a hall of shame, Hosea names these places to remind the people of past national sins, but more importantly to emphasize that they are as guilty and as worthy of punishment as their ancestors.

The final verse of chapter 9 is a commentary by the prophet Hosea on the catalogue of lost blessings and sums up the whole chapter: “My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations” (8:17). How could Hosea come to any other conclusion? In verses 1-3, God had declared that Israel would “not dwell in the Lord’s land” but go into captivity. They had lost their *inheritance*. In verses 4-6, God had declared that Israel would “not come into the house of the Lord.” Because they were in the land of captivity, they would be perpetually unclean and could not properly worship God. They had lost the *true worship of God*. In verses 7-9, the people had declared that “the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is insane.” Because they have rejected Hosea and his message, they had lost *insight into God’s Word*. In verses 10-13, God had declared that His glory had departed Ephraim “like a bird” flying away. “Ichabod” – the glory of the Lord has departed. Because of their spiritual and physical adultery, they had lost the *glory of God*. In verse 14, Hosea attempts to pray for the people, but he scarcely knows how to pray a *prayer for the lost*. In verses 15-16, God declared that “I will love them no more.” Because of their wickedness and rejection of Him, God is rejecting the people. They have lost *the love of God*. The sins of the past at Gibeah, Baal-Peor, and Gilgal symbolize the current moral state of the country. And so, Hosea sums it all up in verse 17 – the people have lost *the nation*: “They shall be wanderers among the nations.”

The nation of Israel had everything – they had God’s word and worship, they had His glory and love, they had his inheritance and blessing. And yet, because they chose to chase after other gods, because they desired to be like the nations around them, they lost everything. In the short-term it must have made sense to them. Just a little compromise here, just a little shortcut there. No one would be hurt. Everyone would have a lot of fun. And yet the price they paid was much too high for whatever enjoyment they gained. They lost their inheritance and everything that went with it. This is the fate of the post-Christian society when they reject God for other pursuits. The long-term consequences of sin vastly outweigh any perceived short-term benefits.

Introduction

In previous chapters, Hosea has been analyzing and describing the people’s sin in various ways. Hosea chapter 10 continues to look at the main themes we have already seen: corrupt religion leads to societal decay and ultimately judgment. Hosea does this in chapter 10 by using a lot of

Minor Prophets: Hosea

agricultural language and metaphors. It's like an "I Spy" of farming terms. Today, as we go through the chapter look for:

Vines full of fruit in the very first verse,
Thorns and thistles – a sign of the curse;
Hemlock like weeds that grow up in a field,
Grain that the rain in due season does yield;
A glory-less calf, a heifer for keeping,
And fields for plowing, sowing, and reaping.

Exposition

A. A Divided Heart (10:1-8)

Hosea re-introduces the ideas of corrupt religion and societal decay in verses 1-4. Then in verses 5-8, he deals with these two problems.

1. A Wild Vine (10:1-4)

"Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself; according to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars; according to the bounty of his land they have embellished his sacred pillars" (1). The chapter starts out with quite a contrast from the end of chapter 9. In chapter 9, we were left with a fruitless plant with dried up roots. But here we have a luxuriant vine producing a multitude of fruit. The vine of course is Israel, planted by God in the Land of Promise: "You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land" (Ps. 80:8-9). There's only one problem with this vine – it produces bad fruit, and it produces a lot of it! It is selfish fruit, man-centered fruit, fruit that leads to corrupt religion and the failure to worship God properly. The altars and sacred pillars that are proliferating here are pagan centers of worship.

The root cause of their problem is described in verse 2 as a *divided heart*. "Their heart is divided; now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars" (2). Israel has a deceitful heart, a heart that has a divided loyalty. Boice explains: "The word translated 'deceitful' [or divided] in Hosea 10:2 literally means 'smooth.' Applied to a person's speech, we would translate it as 'oily,' 'slick' or 'double-tongued.' The idea is that the people went through the motions of doing one thing when actually they were intent on doing something else." The people of Israel were two-faced. They appeared to worship God, they appeared to be sincere in their worship, they had an outward conformity of sorts; but they had a deceitful heart, a divided loyalty. They were drawn to the other religions around them. They compromised their faith. They established religious practices and policies that departed from Scripture. And God says He will judge them and remove their idolatrous practices.

In verses 3-4, we see how this divided heart goes from corrupt religion to societal decay: "For now they say, 'We have no king, because we did not fear the Lord. And as for a king, what would he do for us?' They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant. Thus judgment sprang up like hemlock in the furrows of the field" (3-4). What does it mean when they say "We have no king"? It could refer to their practice of assassinating king after king in the last 30 years of the nation's existence. Thus, it could refer to the internal politics of the day.

However, I believe that this defiant cry has a much deeper and troubling focus. It is paired with the phrase "because we did not fear the Lord." The first phrase and the second phrase express parallel ideas. "No king" and "no fear of the Lord" are synonymous. When the people say "we

Minor Prophets: Hosea

have no king,” they mean that they have rejected God. We’ve already seen this idea in Israel’s history, when the people asked Samuel to give them a king. “And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them’” (1 Sam. 8:7).

This is a high-handed sin, a sin of raising your fist against God, a sin of defiance. The classic example of this occurs at the trial of Jesus: “But they [the Jews] cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘*We have no king but Caesar!*’” (John 19:15). The chief priests said, “We have no king but Cesar.” No king but Caesar. They rejected Christ. They rejected God the Father. They rejected everything they should have stood for as leaders of the Church.

This idea of rejecting God as king is reinforced by Hosea reminding us again for the third time in his book that they are covenant-breakers (cf. 6:7; 8:1). They swore an oath of fealty to God as their king, but they couldn’t wait to be forsworn. They couldn’t wait to reject God as their king and raise up fruit for themselves, not for God. And so God declares judgment will come, like poisonous weeds in a well-maintained field.

Israel had no need of God as their king. They rejected His Lordship over their lives. This was displayed in the corruption of their religion and it flowed out into their lifestyles. They certainly didn’t live like they were accountable to a heavenly king. They worshiped fertility, sex, material goods, and pleasures of this world, but they didn’t acknowledge that all these things were gifts from God on high. Their entire world consisted of this life and themselves. God had no place. Sound familiar? Once again, Hosea has described the post-Christian society. I’m afraid that our culture is little different. But what really scares me is the thought that the evangelical Church is increasing becoming more and more like this as well. How much of what churches do today is truly for the Lord, and how much of it is for the cult of personality that grows up around charismatic (with a small “c”) pastors and teachers? How many churches today are more interested in social justice than in preaching the gospel? How many churches would agree with the high priests and say, “There is no king but Caesar”? Does the Church today bring forth fruit for God or for itself?

2. *A Captured Calf (10:5-8)*

In verses 5-8, Hosea deals with the issues raised in verses 1-4. First, we see God deal with the idolatrous worship of Israel: “The inhabitants of Samaria fear because of the calf of Beth Aven. For its people mourn for it—because its glory has departed from it. The idol also shall be carried to Assyria as a present for King Jareb [the great king]. Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel” (5-6). We’ve already come across this golden calf of Samaria before in Hosea 8:5-6 and Beth Aven before in 4:15 and 5:8. Remember, Beth Aven is Hosea’s derogatory term for Bethel. Instead of the “house of God,” the nickname means “house of iniquity,” for that is what it had become. Since the days of Jeroboam I, the house of Israel had worshipped golden calves at Bethel and Dan as “representations” of the true God of heaven. Every king after Jeroboam I followed in his footsteps and promoted this idolatrous worship, and every single one of them was condemned by God for doing so.

In Hosea chapter 8, God says he was going to break the golden calf of Beth Aven: “Your calf is rejected, O Samaria! ... The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces” (8:5a, 6c). Here in

Minor Prophets: Hosea

chapter 10, God says he is going to deport the golden calf of Beth Aven: “The idol also shall be carried to Assyria as a present for [the mighty king]” (6a). Remember “King Jareb” (first seen in 5:13) is better translated as “the mighty king,” referring to the king of Assyria.

In 9:11, we saw the glory of Ephraim fly away like a bird. Hosea had already warned Israel that God would “turn their glory into shame” (4:7b). The glory of Israel had departed before: “Then she named the child Ichabod [lit. “No glory”], saying ‘The glory has departed from Israel!’ because the ark of God had been captured” (1 Sam. 4:21a). Remember last week we talked about how this lost glory referred to the loss of the presence and care of the Lord. It means that He is no longer present in the midst of His people. It means that the covenant relationship (“I will be their God and they will be my people”) has been broken. But here in 10:5, the picture of lost glory is almost sarcastic: the “glory” of the golden calf of Beth Aven has departed, because it has been deported to Assyria. The golden calf is no longer present in the midst of its people. The golden calf had no choice in the matter – its glory is given as a present to the king of Assyria.

The really sad thing about this picture is that the people mourn and grieve about the loss of the calf’s glory and presence, but they don’t mourn and grieve about the far greater loss of God’s glory and presence. They need to sort out their priorities. Kidner says: “This is the mourning that springs from disappointment and wounded pride rather than repentance; a ‘worldly grief’ that leads nowhere, rather than the godly grief that ‘leads to salvation and brings no regret’ (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10).”

Hosea deals with the second issue – the matter of kingship – in verse 7: “As for Samaria, her king is cut off like a twig on the water” (7). Because Israel had rejected God as their King, God is now rejecting their king. The phrase “cut off” is used 30 times in the Pentateuch and refers to separation from God. In most cases, the one who is cut off can be restored. For example: “But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be *cut off* from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean” (Num 19:20). However, for high-handed sins, being cut off is tantamount to death: “But the person who does anything presumptuously [defiantly, lit. with a high hand], whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be *cut off* from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and broken His commandment, that person shall be completely *cut off*; his guilt shall be upon him” (Num. 15:30-31). This law is followed by a case study in which a Sabbath-breaker is stoned to death, thus indicating that being “cut off” for the high-handed sin means death. So, their self-reliance on politics rather than God will not save them in the coming storm. They will be as helpless as a twig in a river.

Further judgment comes upon Beth Aven, that idolatrous center of worship in verse 8: “Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle shall grow on their altars” (8a). So, neither calves nor kings could save Israel from God’s judgment. It was coming as sure as the curse upon the ground in Genesis 3 – “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both *thorns and thistles* it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field” (Gen. 3:17b-18). Thorns and thistles speak of the curse on the ground. This reference in Hosea 10:8 is the only other place in the Old Testament where this combination is found. Thus, Hosea is making a strong point toward the curse of God on their foolish, manmade religion.

Minor Prophets: Hosea

Hebrews 6:7-8 gives us a New Testament perspective: “For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful to those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessings from God; but if it bears *thorns and briers [thistles]* it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned” (Heb. 6:7-8). Israel is the vine planted by God to bear fruit unto Him. Instead, it bore fruit for itself (1). Instead of a lovely fruitful grapevine, Israel’s worship of idols was like hemlock, poisonous weeds in an otherwise useful field. The only fruit from Israel’s false altars was thorns and thistles. As such, Israel was rejected and cursed by God, cut off from His presence.

Their fate is so bad that “they shall say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on me!’” (8b). Jesus picks up this thought on the way to Golgotha as he warns of the terrible judgment to come on Jerusalem: “For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!’ Then they will begin ‘to say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”’” (Lk. 23:29-30). John also refers to this passage in Revelation: “And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and *said to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us* from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Rev. 6:15-17).

That is the question facing Israel, facing us. When the great day of the wrath of the Lord comes, who is able to stand? Israel could not stand. They preferred to be buried by the mountains rather than face the wrath of God. And so they were carried away by Assyria into oblivion in 722 BC. Jerusalem could not stand. After rejecting Christ, they were rejected by God and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. And one day, every man, woman and child will face the Lord in the day of judgment. Who are we to think we can stand in the face of God’s wrath, apart from the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ? As the book of Revelation goes on to point out, only those whose robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb are able to stand in the presence of God (Rev. 7:9, 14). That is our hope and comfort. Israel had a divided heart – a heart torn between God and self. We need to have a heart wholly committed to God. Jesus Christ gives us that new heart. Let us be “whole-hearted” Christians, because a “half-heart” is a divided heart that leads to destruction.

B. A Plowed Heart (10:9-15)

Hosea goes on to show that the divided heart of Israel has been that way for a long time, although it did not start out that way. He goes on to exhort Israel to plow their hearts and bring forth fruits of righteousness, rather than the fruits of selfishness we’ve already seen. Unfortunately, Hosea ends the chapter with the same message of judgment that we’ve already heard.

1. Sins of the Past (10:9-10)

“O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah; there they stood. The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them” (9). Israel has had a divided heart for a long time. We’ve already encountered Gibeah before in Hosea 5:8 and especially in Hosea 9:9. Remember, Gibeah was the site of the terrible sin against the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19. A Levite and his concubine were traveling and spent the night at an old man’s house at Gibeah, because it was not safe to spend the night in the open square. A crowd of perverted men from Gibeah demands the Levite leave the house so they can know him carnally. For whatever

Minor Prophets: Hosea

reason, the Levite does not go out, but he gives the crowd his concubine. They “knew her and abused her all night until morning” (Jdg. 19:25), leaving her dead. The Levite then dismembered the concubine’s body and sent pieces of it along with a message to the other tribes of Israel to avenge this behavior of the men of Gibeah. What followed in Judges 20-21 is a civil war against Benjamin, home tribe of Gibeah.

The sin of Gibeah happened 400 years before the time of Hosea. Israel’s heart has been divided and sinful for a long time. As Boice puts it, “God goes back to this horrible period to portray vividly how He regards Israel’s sin, saying, ‘Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel, and there you have remained’ [9a, NIV]. That is, ‘Don’t think of what happened at Gibeah as an exception to your normal moral conduct. That is the level on which you have been operating constantly.’” You are no better than the men of Gibeah. You are sinners whose hearts are deceitful.

Israel has had a divided heart for a long time, but God says that He is in control of the timing. “When it is My desire, I will chasten them. Peoples shall be gathered against them when I bind them for their two transgressions” (10). Judgment is coming, “*when it is My desire.*” Israel continues sinning, but God is in control of Israel. They can do nothing that God does not allow them to do. Does this absolve Israel of guilt and make God responsible for their sin? Of course not! God is 100% sovereign, and Man is 100% responsible. That is Biblical math. And Hosea is reminding us again that even if we should choose to sin for a season, God controls the weather! Hosea again tells us that God will use peoples or “nations” (NIV) to carry out His chastisement against Israel, even though he does not name Assyria again by name, as he did in verse 6.

It is unclear what the “two transgressions” referred to here are. Hosea may be referring to corrupt religion and political unfaithfulness, the two broad categories of sin that we have been following in Hosea. It may refer to the old sin at Gibeah and the current sin of Israel. Or it may be a poetic way of saying that Israel is not just guilty, but doubly guilty and therefore their judgment is doubly assured. Regardless of the specific meaning, the overall message is clear: God is in control and brings judgment upon sin at the specific time determined by the good pleasure of His will. This was true for Israel. And it is true for every sinner. We all will have to make an account of ourselves at the final judgment. Paul writes: “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live,” says the Lord, “Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10b-12).

2. *A Trained Heifer (10:11-12)*

“Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain; but I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull a plow. Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods” (11). Notice that God is referring to all of His people – Ephraim, Judah and Jacob (both kingdoms). In Hosea 4:16, Israel was called a stubborn calf. Now she is called a “trained heifer.” The life of a heifer that threshes grain is fairly easy. “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (Dt. 25:4). The work is light and the food is good. God is saying that early on in His relationship with Israel, he treated them like a trained heifer. Life was good – God’s yoke was easy and His burden was light (cp. Mt. 11:30). God gave them all the material blessings they could need or want. All they needed to do was to be faithful to Him. But they have rebelled against the loving demands of God, and so now the yoke will become much heavier. Instead of threshing grain, they will be

Minor Prophets: Hosea

forced to pull a heavy plow and break up the hard earth. God is in effect saying, “I’ve been patient with Israel; just as they were grapes in the wilderness and became a wild vine with false fruit (9:10; 10:1), they were once a trained heifer who had the easy life threshing grain, but now they will feel the yoke of slavery and be forced to work hard plowing the rocky fields.”

Hosea then transforms the picture of plowing a field into one of plowing divided hearts: “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you” (12). Bentley explains: “God now told them that their hearts needed to receive the seed of the Word of God. That seed would not take root within them and produce fruit unless the conditions were right. Their hearts and their thoughts were, at that time, very hard indeed. They required to be softened, and made willing and ready to receive and obey God’s Word. They needed to prepare themselves to receive the Word of the Lord. In order to bring them to their senses, Hosea issues this clarion call: ‘It is time to seek the Lord.’”

Of course, this is not the first time that Israel has heard this exhortation. Way back in the wilderness, Moses warned the people of the consequences of chasing after other gods, of failing to be faithful to the covenant: “And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.... But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Dt. 4:27, 29). Soon after Hosea’s call, the prophet Isaiah issues the same exhortation to the people of Judah: “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Is. 55:7).

Hosea calls us to break up our fallow ground – the hard rocky soil of our hearts – in order to receive the seed of the Word of the Lord. This is the same message as the Parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:3-9; 18-23). In the parable, the Sower plants seed on the road, in the stony ground, among the thorns, and in good earth. These soils represented the response of people’s hearts to the Word of God. What kind of heart do you have? Do you have a divided heart, a heart whose loyalties lie with God on the surface, but with the world in reality; a divided heart that rejects the Word of God outright or is easily choked by the thorns of this world? Or is your heart hard and stony, its unplowed soil rocky and unreceptive to the Word of God? Or is your heart properly plowed, the fallow ground of your heart prepared to receive the Word of God and produce fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold? Hosea exhorts us to break up our fallow ground, to plow our hearts, to prepare ourselves to receive the Word of God. For when righteousness is sowed, mercy is reaped, and God will rain righteousness upon us. The alternative is grim. If we do not break up the fallow ground of our hearts, we will be like the wild grapevine producing useless fruit such as the hemlock of verse 4 or the thorns and thistles of verse 8.

3. *A Disastrous Harvest (10:13-15)*

Of course, you know what is coming in the rest of this chapter. The clouds had momentarily rolled back as Hosea offers his listeners a brief ray of sunshine with the call to sow, reap, plow, and seek. But the storm clouds return, and the storm against Israel is renewed. In striking language exactly opposite the call of verse 12, Hosea proceeds to condemn the people for their sins: “You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies” (13a). Instead of sowing righteousness, they have plowed wickedness. Instead of reaping mercy, they have reaped iniquity. Instead of receiving the rain of righteousness, they have eaten the fruit of lies. Instead of a bountiful harvest, they have earned a disastrous harvest.

Minor Prophets: Hosea

The rest of the chapter enumerates the sins of the people, and again we see our old favorites of corrupt religion and societal decay. “Because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle—a mother dashed in pieces upon her children. Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly” (13b-15).

Destruction is coming, Hosea warns again. He refers to a historical battle, the plunder of Beth Arbel by Shalman, as an indicator of the horror of that day. We are uncertain to exactly what incident Hosea is referring to. “Shalman” may be a reference to Shalmaneser of Assyria, either Shalmaneser I who invaded Israel during the reign of Jehu, or Shalmaneser V, who invaded Israel during the days of the last king Hoshea. If this is the case, the battle of Beth Arbel would be fresh upon the minds of Hosea’s readers, as vivid as 9/11 is for us, and it would need no further explanation.

The reasons Hosea gives for this destruction are the same as reasons he has already given in his prophecy. The reference to Bethel (15) refers to the idolatrous religion of the golden calves that Hosea denounces in vv. 5&8. This corrupt religion is called “great wickedness.” We also see the second major sin of societal decay – dependence on self rather than on God. Israel trusted in their own strength of arms and fortresses. Hosea has already pointed this out in 7:15 & 8:14. Because of their motto “in us we trust,” God will be removing their king – he shall be “cut off utterly.” So once again, Hosea condemns Israel for their rejection of God and their self-reliance; their reliance on their king, their strength, their fortresses, anything but on the God who was their true fortress, strength, and King.

Conclusion

Hosea chapter 10 continues banging the same drum: Israel’s two main sins of corrupt religion that leads to societal decay results in judgment. Israel is like a wild vine that produces wicked fruit. They no longer worship God properly, regard Him reverently, or obey Him faithfully. Their hearts are divided and deceitful (1-4). So God is coming in judgment to destroy their idols, remove their kings, and punish their sins (5-8). This message is nothing new. Israel has been behaving this way for a long time, over 400 years since Gibeah. But God is patient. He has waited all this time patiently before bringing judgment, because He is in control of the timing (10). Just as they were once grapes in the wilderness and became a wild vine with false fruit, they were once a trained heifer who had the easy life threshing grain, but now they will feel the yoke of slavery and be forced to work hard plowing the rocky fields (11). God says, “I’ve been patient and given them plenty of time to seek the Lord (12), but they have wasted the time and plowed, reaped, and eaten wickedly (13). Therefore, you will be destroyed. Your reliance on strength of arms and fortresses is futile – your king will be overthrown. Bethel, the center of your corrupt religion will also be destroyed (14-15).” Corrupt religion leads to societal decay and results in judgment.

If we are all sinners, how can we avoid the inevitable slide into judgment that Hosea portrays? “How can we who are marred by sin actually live to God?” Boice reminds us of the answer: “The answer comes from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, who put Himself forward in the fifteenth chapter of John not as the degenerate vine that Israel had become because of her divided heart, but as that ‘true vine’ to which those who are His have been joined. Union with Christ is the secret of all fruitfulness, and this means that the essential element is new life.”

Minor Prophets: Hosea

Listen to Hosea: “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you” (10:12). How do we do this?

Listen to Jesus: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (Jn. 15:4-8).

Next week: Lesson 11 – “Out of Egypt I Called My Son” – Hosea 11:1-11 – Bentley chapter 18

Close in Prayer.