

(Verse 7-8)

Isaiah the prophet spoke the words “cry aloud and spare not.” Hosea is a good prophet of God doing God's will in his preaching. In verse seven he announces that “*the days of visitation are come, the days of recompense come.*” How much clearer could Hosea preach? What was Israel's response to his preaching? They said “*the prophet is a fool.*” “*The spiritual man is mad.*” Stand for God in this wicked age and call sin by name, and warn of God's impending judgment and you, too, will be labeled a *fool and a mad man*. I am reminded of what Festus said of Apostle Paul in Acts 26:24 “*And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.*”

Verse eight refers to Hosea as “*the watchman of Ephraim.*” That's what preachers are- they are watchmen over the souls of humanity to warn them of the enemy called the Devil and the sin he spreads. In the days of old, cities had watchmen who watched over the city around the clock. The watchmen positioned themselves on the wall of the city or in a tower so they had good visibility. When they saw the enemy coming, they blew a trumpet to warn the people to prepare for the invasion. Preachers and prophets through time have been watchmen over humanity. Many have faithfully sounded the trumpet and been called fools for doing it.

Verse eight describes that a snare was laid to destroy Hosea. Traps were placed to catch him and remove him and his voice from preaching to the people. “A fowler” catches birds with a snare, which is a trap. Most often the fowler used a net as a snare. Israel wanted the voice of Hosea silenced. Planet Earth today does not want to hear God's message from the mouth of His preachers. However, we must still “cry aloud and spare not.”

(Verse 9)

If we look back to Judges chapters 19 and 20, we see the details of what happened in the city of Gibeah. I will not take time to tell the full account but will ask you to turn and read those two chapters in Judges. Briefly, the men of Gibeah sexually abused and violated the concubine of a Levite who was their guest in their city. It caused a civil war between Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was almost taken to the brink of annihilation during this conflict. God severely judged the city of Gibeah and the people of the tribe of Benjamin for the gross wickedness done unto the concubine. So, God, through the mouth of Preacher Hosea, reminds Israel of the incident at Gibeah. God lets Israel know that the tribe of Benjamin had to pay for SIN, and therefore, they likewise will pay for SIN. Romans 14:12 reads “*so then every one*

of us shall give account of himself to God.”

(Verse 10)

When the Lord first knew Israel in the wilderness, or desert, it was like finding fresh grapes in the desert! He viewed Israel with great excitement as a gardener would view the first ripe figs of the season on the fig tree. You that are farmers, aren't you glad when the first vegetables ripen? This was a time of excitement for God. God was proud of Israel at that moment. Finding grapes in the wilderness was unusual and a special delight. That is how Israel began in their relationship with God. Israel was a delicacy!

That soon changed, however. In Numbers chapter 25 we find Israel encountering Baal before entering the promise land. You may read from Numbers chapter 25 that the people slipped into the pagan worship of the local idol. God looked down in shame as Israel bowed to a false God. Their sweetness was soured by their sinfulness. What about America? Was America once a nation like unto grapes found in the desert? Was America once likened to the first ripe figs of the season? Has the sinfulness of America soured its sweetness?

(Verse 11–14)

Ephraim means “double fruitfulness.” This tribe was large in number. Yet, as verse 11 describes, a flock of birds may be great in number, but they can diminish quickly when they fly away. Have you driven along a country road and seen the ground darkened with a flock of birds only to see them scatter as you approach? Though Ephraim may be great in number, quickly the number will diminish. God will send barrenness in conception. He will cause the womb to prematurely give up its fruit, that is, miscarry. He will take the life of the infant and child. It is God who is in control of life at all stages. Verse 12 tells us that, even though newborn children arrive, God will “bereave them.” Bereave means, of course, life has been taken and there is mourning for those dead. The children always suffer with the adults just as the innocent always suffer with the guilty. How many babies died in Egypt because of adults? How many babies and toddlers died in Hosea's day from the judgment of God because of the wickedness of the adults? Verse 13 tells us the Assyrians would mass-murder precious children in Israel.

In verse 14 Hosea had a special request of God. Because of the violent manner in which the Assyrians would treat pregnant women and children, Hosea prayed that his people would be childless. He prayed to God that mothers would miscarry babies. He prayed that where a baby was born the mother's breast would be barren, and the baby would die as an infant from starvation rather than face the brutality of the coming invasion of the

Assyrians. Woe be this day in the nation Israel! What a compassionate man Hosea was to pray such a prayer for the sinful people of Israel!

(Verse 15-17)

The place of Israel's greatest crimes was at Gilgal. Gilgal is a place of remembrance, for it is where the people of Israel set up the memorial stones in river Jordan after they crossed from their wilderness journey. It was at Gilgal that the first Passover was celebrated after the Exodus from Egypt. At Gilgal, the rite of circumcision was renewed, and the reproach of Egypt was cast away. In Gilgal, Israel first paid the firstfruits of the promised land. Unfortunately, Gilgal, the place of great blessing, was turned into a place of hatred from God because of the wickedness of the people. In the same place where God so graciously loved and blessed Israel, there became a place of hatred by God toward their wickedness.

Verse 15 describes the wickedness of the elders and leaders of Israel. We read "*all their princes are revolters.*" Israel rejected God's plan of judges and turned to Saul as king. It seems that Israel came to a place of persistent disobedience. Sin was no longer a problem to them, but a pleasure. God gives the verdict in verse 17 that He will "*cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him.*" "*They shall be wanderers among the nations.*" This describes Israel being scattered and taken captive among the various nations of the world. Israel is still a scattered nation today, but to a great extent they have re-gathered. The re-gathering will continue until the Lord's second coming.

Chapter 10

Before we begin our verse-by-verse discussion of chapter 10, let us read the key verse of chapter 10: verse 12 reads "*sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.*" The worst disease that can infest a child of God is *hard-heartedness*. When Christians get hard-hearted, they become difficult, discouraging, and depressing people. They live a life of spiritual defeat. Sadly, there are many hard-hearted Christians today. Bear this in mind as we approach chapter 10. Have you ever been hard-hearted? Are you hard-hearted at this time in your life?

(Verse 1)

The grapevine is a common figure for Israel. Hosea tells us in verse one "*Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.*" The word "empty" does not mean void of fruit. The Hebrew word also had the meaning "luxurious." Israel was a fruitful vine that spread far and wide, but they emptied their fruit in

the wrong fashion. The fruit of the vine was misused. Verse one tells us Israel used the fruit “*unto himself*” and to “*altars.*” Please be reminded these altars were not altars to God. They were altars to idols. So, Israel was greatly blessed of God with abundance of fruit, but the blessings for the fruit and the thanksgiving that was due God for the fruit, they gave to idols! What a shame!

Their priorities were wrong. Let us heed the warning- unthankfulness and selfishness will cause your heart to harden. Don't you dare ever forget where your blessings come from. Your income is not yours- it is given by God. God gave you the home you live in. The Devil did not do that for you. Mark 6:52 reads “*for they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.*”

It has been said there are three levels of gratefulness and each level indicates growth and maturity in your Christian life:

Level I- being grateful when you are blessed. This is easy, but it is urgently important. Did you thank God for your food this morning?

Level II- being grateful for future blessings to come. This requires more maturity than level I. Level II requires faith. Thanking God for blessings not yet received?

Level III- being grateful during a trying time. This level requires the most faith and great maturity. Few people ever reach this level of spiritual growth. We must all confess it is hard to give God gratitude in the midst of battles, trials, tears, and pain. It is hard to thank God when you cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. The apostle Paul, mature in the Lord, said in Rom 5:3 “*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.*”

A person only grateful when things are going well in life is at Level I. This person needs spiritual growth. We need to be grateful to God when we don't *feel* like thanking Him. We need to be thankful to God when we are happy and when we are sad. We need to be thankful to God when it is sunny and when it is cloudy. God has been better to me than I have to Him. If all I have is taken today, I will die ahead of the game.

Before we leave verse one, one emphatic statement is in order: the first symptom of a hard heart is ingratitude toward God. Hardness of heart began in the life of Israel when manna fell from heaven at the beginning of their wilderness journey. Yet, they grumbled instead of thanking God for the manna.

(Verse 2)

We must look at the word “divided” as it means something quite different than we are accustomed to. It means to be “deceitful

and hypocritical but smooth.” Proverbs 5:3 speaks of the lips of a strange woman as smooth: *“for the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil.”* Israel was guilty of lying to God. God tired of it. He said “I will break down their altars and spoil their images.”

Sin was getting easier for Israel. Their lying tongue was becoming well-oiled. It was getting easier to bow to idols. When you dabble in sin for any period of time, you will find as time progresses it gets easier to sin. Matthew 24:12 reads *“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”* The Devil will squirt WD-40 (oil) on your sinful ways. Folk, in this verse two, we have just learned another sign of a hardened heart- sin gets easier. Our attitude toward sin gets more permissive. In verse one we learn that the first mark of a hardened heart was ingratitude toward God. Not long after Israel’s sin of grumbling about manna in the wilderness journey, they turned to the golden calf and worshiped it. Sin breeds sin. God said to Cain when he had slain his brother Abel *“sin lieth at the door”* Genesis 4:7.