

Let us begin with this 16th lesson with a moment of review from the previous lesson. In verses one and two of chapter 10, we began to look for causes of hardheartedness in the lives of Christians. Verse one gave us the first cause- *ingratitude*. Israel was reaping bountifully like a healthy vine, but they were not thanking God for the blessings they received. Instead, they took the blessings as being theirs in a selfish way, and they shared the blessings with idols. Verse two gave us another reason hardheartedness develops- living a *hypocritical* life toward God. Their hearts were “divided.” They were living a double-standard which God never accepts.

(Verse 3)

The king of Israel is spoken of in verse three. At the time of Hosea’s preaching, Jeroboam was king of Israel. The people had a bad attitude toward leadership. They spoke “*we have no king.*” This was their way of saying “what is the use in having a king for he does us no good.” Do you have a problem with authority in your life? If so, you may be developing a hard heart. Israel’s attitude was “what’s the use.” That is an attitude of indifference. Indifference was accompanied by a spirit of independence. The truth is, in their heart they did not want leadership. Indifference and an independent spirit are signs of the development of a hard heart.

Looking back through the history of Israel, they have rejected many forms of government. They rejected God, a theocracy. Then, they rejected Moses, the prophet and lawgiver. They then rejected Joshua as their spiritual and military general. Then, they rejected the judges, judicial government. Then came kings, monarchy, which they rejected. Now, in the time Hosea is preaching, it seems they want anarchy, which is no government! Sinful people who are rooted in rebellion against God make terrible *citizens*. Why is America so difficult to govern? *Citizens* now have indifferent and independent spirits which say “no one is going to tell me what to do.” God help the President of this nation. God help the Congress of the United States of America. Our country would be just fine if so many of its citizens weren’t rotten. Likewise, our schools would be just fine if it wasn’t for rotten parents sending rotten students to the school. Don’t blame the schools and the government- they are just made up of *citizens*. Our government, our schools, and our churches are a product of what lies in the hearts of the people. God does not dwell in government or schools. He abides in people. It is not “what is wrong with our country.” It is what is wrong with our people.

Indifference and an independent spirit will harden your heart toward God and the needs of others.

(Verse 4)

Israel is guilty of “*swearing falsely in making a covenant.*” Disloyalty to God breeds disloyalty to fellow man. When people become hardhearted toward God, they treat people the same way. Israel’s words were now worthless. Their promises were empty. Their agreements were powerless. Lying and cheating became the “norm” as it is in this day in which we teach this lesson.

God hates lying. Failure to keep your word is a step toward developing a hard heart. Corruption in conversation and disloyalty in covenants and agreements are not pleasing to God. If you say you will do it, do it. If you say you are going to pay it, pay it. If you say you will be there, be there. Israel’s lying ways led to poison in the field. God’s judgment for their untruthfulness caused hemlock to spring up in the field. When you plant a crop of wheat, do you want hemlock trees to spring forth? Liars cannot prosper. Could this be why you are not prospering? Do you tell the truth or do you tell lies? Many folk are not prospering because they are liars. They borrow from banks with a promise to repay and they don’t repay, so they are liars. They rent a house with a promise to pay the rent monthly, and they don’t pay the rent so they are liars. Can you understand this? How can I make it simpler? Lying has just about ruined this society. It has crept into the churches. It is okay to lie about attendance. It is okay to lie about tithes and offerings. The Bible says it is better not to make a vow than to make a vow and break it.

“A man is only as good as his word.” Have you ever heard this statement? If you lie, you are of little use to God. The practice of lying and cheating leads to a hard heart.

(verse 5-6)

Bethaven was a place very near Bethel. Bethel means “the house of God.” The patriarch Jacob put down the stones at Bethel and called it the house of God. Bethaven means the “house of idols.” If Israel were in fellowship with God, we would be speaking about Bethel in verse five. Instead, we speak of Bethaven, the house of idols. Idols had been set up at Bethaven in the form of calves. The people worshiped calves at Bethaven. But, “*the people thereof shall mourn over it.*” Verse five begins by saying, Israel “*shall fear because of the calves of Bethaven.*” Idols will fail you! The idols Israel trusted at one time are now bringing fear into their hearts. Sin will fail you. Idols will fail you. The ending of verse five tells us “the glory of those idols is now departed.” Gone!

God may tolerate sin for a season, but not forever. Drugs will fail you. Alcohol will fail you. When the doctor looks you in the eye and says your liver is consumed and irreparable because of

your drinking, you will know alcohol failed you. When you are in a straitjacket at a rehabilitation center, you will know drugs failed. The anchor of your soul must be the Lord God Almighty. He is the anchor that never failed. Only God has the power and might to stabilize a soul.

Israel's idol calf was stolen and taken as a present to the king of Assyria, Jared. Assyria is the nation, of course, that will eventually overrun and brutalize Israel. Most likely, Jared destroyed the calf in a ceremony of celebration over having conquered the idol of Israel. The Devil and the bottle will celebrate when they have ruined you. The Devil and the demon of gambling will celebrate when you are broke. "Ephraim shall receive shame" when their God, the calf, is taken away and given as a present to the enemy king. "*Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel,*" referring to the previous chapters wherein we saw all Israel turn to their own enemy, Assyria, for advice instead of turning to God and God's messenger. How would it feel to ask counsel of someone and that someone turn on you as your enemy?

(verse 7)

When you get hardhearted toward the Lord, the unwise decisions you will make can shorten your life. God shows us this principle by using our own parents as an example: Ephesians 6:1-3 "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*" When the Assyrians invaded Israel, the King of Israel, Hoshea, was swept away by the flood of soldiers which broke into the Northern kingdom from Assyria. The Lord likens how swiftly our life can vanish by painting a picture of foam upon water. If you have ever been to a body of water such as a lake, or a pond, or the ocean, you sometimes notice foam on the water. It is there and gone almost instantaneously. It floats on the water moved about with ease by the wind and current. It has no substance for it is mostly bubbles made of air. I am reminded that all it takes to end my life is for God to remove my air! Proverbs 10:27 "*the fear of the Lord prolong the days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.*" Ecclesiastes 7: 17 "*be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before the time?*" Sin can shorten your life.

(Verse 8)

Israel now turns to the awful notion of suicide. Suicide is a dreadful thing. Of all the ways to die, it seems to be one of the most horrible. Suicide indicates total depravity- all in life failure.

"*The high places also of Aven*" indicate the high places of wickedness and idolatry. The sinful altars of Israel are denoted

here. These sinful altars will be destroyed. *“The thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars.”* The altars will vanish covered by an overgrowth of weeds, of thorns, of thistles. When this happens, the last hope of the people in their false god has ended. The people will then become suicidal. *“They shall say to the mountains, cover us; and to the hills, fall on us.”* The people wish to die. They are empty; they have nothing left to live for. What a disgrace! We only need to remember that Israel was at one time the apple of Jehovah God’s eye. Yet, look at them now! What shame and reproach sin can bring! Their false gods failed them. The calves to which they prayed did not hear them. Now, say the people, we wish to die! I trust no one listening or reading this lesson reaches the utter despair of suicide. Stay with God, and He will stay with you.

As a point of reference, we will look at other places in the Bible where folk wanted suicide to be their end:

Luke 23:30 *“then shall they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us; and to the hills, cover us.”*

Revelation 6: 16 *“and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”*

Revelation 9:6 *“and in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it: and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.”*

Jeremiah 8:3 *“and death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the Lord of hosts.”*

When the time of the tribulation comes upon planet Earth men will once again beg to die, as Israel did in the time of the Assyrian overthrow. In future days, folk will run to the mountains and beg the mountains and rocks to fall on them to spare them from the wrath of God. Are you saved? If not, and you are living at the time of the coming of the Lord for His church, you are about to enter the worst time in the history of humanity. Be saved today- please.

(verse 9-10)

We had reference to the place called Gibeah in previous chapter 9. You may read about the awful incident of sin at Gibeah in Judges chapters 19 and 20. The sin committed was gross. A civil war broke out between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the nation Israel. Verse nine reminds us that in that battle the children of Israel prevailed over the children of iniquity. However, Israel did not learn from the incident at Gibeah. Verse nine says *“oh Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah.”* Why do men not learn from sin? That is a great question for which there may be

no answer. From the sin at Gibeah unto the time of this man of God's preaching, Israel's sin compounded.

(Verse 11)

The Bible speaks often about treading, as in treading the corn. Ephraim is likened to a heifer on the treading floor. The ox or heifer that treads the corn was commonly free to eat of the corn or whatever crop was being treading. The animal was not muzzled. Often, it was hooked to a sled which the animal dragged over the harvested crop. They were free to snatch an occasional mouthful of the grain. Sometimes the animal got fat from overindulgence. Such was the case with the Northern kingdom. God had no muzzle on Ephraim. God had few restrictions on Israel. God blessed this nation with many blessings. But they overindulged, never accounting that their blessings were from God. They had comfortable circumstances and easy employment.

However, God tired of their foolish sinning. By God's judgment, Israel will lose God's blessings and the comfort they once enjoyed. They are now stubborn and rebellious. Harsh treatment from God is required. Their freedom is over. The good life has come to an end. The lights have gone out at the party. God is about to bind the heifer in a yoke and force it to do hard labor. The Lord says in verse 11 *"I will make Ephraim to ride: Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods."* Remember the slave labor conditions that Israel was in when they were in Egyptian bondage? How can we forget? Now, God will put a saddle on the heifer and make her carry a load. God will hook Judah to the plow and make her till the ground. I saw many ladies in Africa with a crude tree limb with a stone tied to the end of the limb beating the clods. They were preparing the ground that the crops could be planted. This is my vision of the servitude that Israel will find itself under when the Assyrians come and put them in slavery. Sin doesn't pay. Working for Satan is never fun. It is always a burden.