

Hosea 11:12-12:14
The Hard Way or the Easy Way
December 31, 2023
Sermon 12

Good morning church! I hope you and your family had a wonderful Christmas! I am praying for a year of growth and blessings on your family in 2024.

I absolutely loved our season of advent and I am also excited to get back into the book of Hosea.

To give you an outlook of where we are headed as a church as far as our Sunday mornings go through the rest of the winter, we have about 3 chapters left in Hosea, one of which will be this morning and 2 in January.

When Pastor Steve is in the pulpit he will be preparing our hearts to "Walk in Faith" and "Welcome the Presence of the Lord," while I finish up Hosea.

In February we will begin an 8-week sermon series through the book of 1 Thessalonians. I encourage you take some time to start reading through this book to familiarize yourself with the text prior to us getting there.

As I mentioned we have three chapters left in Hosea. The last time I preached in Hosea was at the end of November as we covered chapter 11.

Recap on Hosea 1-3

If you recall chapters 1-3 was this amazing, redemptive love story between Hosea, a prophet and Gomer, a prostitute who was married to Hosea but chose to go back to her wayward life shortly thereafter. Hosea pursued his wife despite her adulterous lifestyle. Hosea was committed to Gomer. He loved Gomer and therefore he sought her out.

Hosea didn't force Gomer to love him but rescued her from her captors that ensnared her because of her sin. He purchased her back. Can you imagine the incredible humility it took to look her captor in the eye and purchase his own wife back?

Hosea 3:1-2

¹And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." ²So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.

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The sum total of all that he paid was more than what he had in silver. He also gave up barley which between the silver and the barley that he paid to purchase Gomer back was 30 shekels of silver or a half of a year's wages.

We concluded that chapters 1-3 was not a hypothetical metaphor but was an actual storyline that God put in place to get the attention of the Israelites who were in many ways living an adulterous lifestyle themselves. The Israelites are God's people. God blessed them, rescued them and gave them supernatural victories over their enemies. Despite this the Israelites turned to other gods, gave lesser gods credit for the things that the Lord had provided for them, engaged in temple prostitution and made a mockery of the Lord by building statues and altars to worship false gods.

The Lord was very patient with the Israelites but as it says in

Hosea 4:7

The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame.

We see this shame take root as we endured through the judgement that came upon the Israelite people by the Lord in chapters 4-10. It was so challenging to go through those chapters week after week that I wondered if people were going to keep coming to church.

The Lord's anger was kindled and it wasn't because he no longer loved the people of Israel, it was because he loved them that much that he restored them back to Him. The Lord stripped the Israelites down to the bare essentials so that they had to rely on the Lord.

As we were approaching Christmas and the Lord was turning over tables on the Israelites I was wondering how we were going to transition to a baby born in a manger.

But like the Lord always does, he segues us back to His great love for us. We ended November with chapter 11 which gave us the true, tender-hearted love that the Father has for his children.

Now I would be lying if I said that the ending to Hosea is a ride off into the sunset. The text we will see in the next two chapters of Hosea continues to have a bone to pick with Israel.

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The major themes that I want you to grasp from this book however is this:

1. God views sin very seriously yet our world has minimized it.
2. Despite our sin the Lord urges us to turn back to Him and he is faithful to forgive.
3. Often when we decide to remain in our sin the Lord will use whatever means necessary to get our attention.

I titled today's message "The Hard Way or the Easy Way."

Please stand as I read our main text in Hosea chapter 11:12-12:14

Hosea 11:12-12:14

¹¹Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,
and the house of Israel with deceit,
but Judah still walks with God
and is faithful to the Holy One.

12 Ephraim feeds on the wind
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a covenant with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

The LORD's Indictment of Israel and Judah

²The LORD has an indictment against Judah
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;
he will repay him according to his deeds.

³In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
and in his manhood he strove with God.

⁴He strove with the angel and prevailed;
he wept and sought his favor.

He met God at Bethel,
and there God spoke with us—

⁵the LORD, the God of hosts,
the LORD is his memorial name;

⁶"So you, by the help of your God, return,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God."

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- ⁷ A merchant, in whose hands are false balances,
he loves to oppress.
- ⁸ Ephraim has said, "Ah, but I am rich;
I have found wealth for myself;
in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin."
- ⁹ I am the LORD your God
from the land of Egypt;
I will again make you dwell in tents,
as in the days of the appointed feast.
- ¹⁰ I spoke to the prophets;
it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets gave parables.
- ¹¹ If there is iniquity in Gilead,
they shall surely come to nothing:
in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls;
their altars also are like stone heaps
on the furrows of the field.
- ¹² Jacob fled to the land of (A-rum) Aram;
there Israel served for a wife,
and for a wife he guarded sheep.
- ¹³ By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt,
and by a prophet he was guarded.
- ¹⁴ Ephraim has given bitter provocation;
so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him
and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

Here ends the reading of the holy scriptures. You may be seated.

Lets us pray!

Message

As you know many of us get to the finale of Christmas and scramble in the week to follow to come up with a new year's resolution.

New year resolutions date back 4,000 years ago when the Babylonians had a 12-day spring barley harvest and made resolutions for the next year. This took place in March as it was the beginning of the new farming cycle.

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The reason people make these resolutions to begin on January 1st today, is because it is a new year. It is a fresh start. It is a clean slate. We haven't messed it up yet.

The studies show that new year resolutions don't tend to last however. According to inside out mastery [website](#) that looked at 5 different studies over a 5 year period concluded that:

- **38.5% of US adults set New Year resolutions every year.**
- **59% of young adults (18-34) have New Year's resolutions,** which makes it the largest demographic that sets these goals.
- **48% want to exercise more,** making it the most popular New Year's resolution. The top 3 are all health-related.
- **23% quit in the first week**
- **36% make it past the first month**
- **9% successfully keep their New Year resolutions**

New Year Resolution – Olive Garden

About 10-12 years ago...Cleanse New Year Resolution. It was only 3 days we made it...I chalked it up to a prophetic

I know many of you like to follow along in the scriptures as I am making reference to them. I am going to make a couple of jumps to various scriptures as I set up the message that goes along with our main text in Hosea. If you want to note or flip to the following verses I will be referencing **Lamentations 3:40, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Pslam 121:2, 1 Timothy 6:11, Proverbs 22:6, Deuteronomy 6 and Matthew 7:13-15.** This is my no congregant left behind initiative.

There is nothing really biblical about a New Year Resolution that we can find in the scriptures however, the Bible does urge us to examine our lives regularly, and to seek God's help to become more like Christ. The Bible says in,

Lamentations 3:40

**"Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the LORD!"**

Did you ever ask yourself why you found it so hard to keep the resolutions you had made in the past?

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One reason may have been that they weren't realistic, or you had no clear plan for reaching them.

Many New Year resolutions, I'm afraid, are little more than a "wish list"—a series of things we'd like to change about our lives, but little more.

They also may be very self-centered, with little thought about whether or not they are God's will.

Another reason, however, why we fail to keep our resolutions is because we seek to reach them in our own strength instead of with God's help.

2 Corinthians 12:9

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

We are spiritually and morally weak, and we will never be the people God wants us to be unless we turn to Him for the help we need. The psalmist wrote in,

Psalm 121:2

"My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth"

On Christmas Eve at our 10 am service I challenged you to pray and ask the Lord to lay people on your heart for who you can be praying for. Many people need this message of Hope.

As we begin this new year, I again challenge you to pause and ask God to show you what He wants to do in your life during this coming year. Resolve to grow closer to Christ every day, and with the help of His Holy Spirit to:

"pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness," as it says in 1 Timothy 6:11.

Top 3 resolutions health related → Spiritual depth related

As the statistics mentioned, the top 3 new year resolutions were all health related. All of these are important but what if in your top 3 new year resolutions were to grow depth in your relationship with Christ.

Think about how much this would change the outcome of your life. Not just on this earth but eternally. Think about how much a goal like that might change your family

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tree. A simple shift to grow deeper in Christ may change the life trajectory of your spouse, your kids and your grandkids.

Now I am not suggesting that you take this message and say, "see, the pastor said you have to come with me to church now." Don't make church a swear word in your home.

What I am suggesting is that you make a goal this year to grow deeper in your relationship with Christ and allow the Spirit of God to shine through you.

One of the most important things you can strengthen in your life is your family.

We may:

- lock the doors at night
- check that everyone has their seatbelt on while traveling
- our kids brush and floss twice a day.

But how much time do we spend strengthening and protecting our family from the confusion of the world that challenges our knowledge of God?

High School students swept up

I am watching high school students, young in their faith but excited about being a Christian get swept off their feet 2 years into college. The faith of our kids is being challenged by a worldly doctrine that contrasts the knowledge of God.

Former youth group students

I follow many of the former youth group students I had in our youth ministry when I was on the west side about 6 years ago. I kid you not, the kids who were our most solid...like as in the ones we would invite to come back to be summer interns in our youth ministry, children's ministry and worship ministry have mostly all fallen completely away from the knowledge of God because they have bought into the worldly doctrines that are being taught in the college settings. It is super sad to watch.

Not a plug against college but for family worship

Now this isn't a plug against college. This is a plug for spending time together in family worship. The more time we spend in the word with our family and with our kids the more we are prepared when the counterfeit presents itself. We know the truth and recognize when there is an imposter.

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Flag football team

The problem I am seeing in the average Christian home is equivalent to putting our kids on a flag football team in high school and then have them try out for the D1 football team in college. They are going to get clobbered. That is what is happening to the faith of our kids.

In this new year, we want to give you resources to:

- strengthen
- encourage
- grow
- challenge
- test
- urge and
- cheer on your family's spiritual knowledge of God.

Proverbs 22:6

"⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

This is not just for families with kids

This information is not just for families who have kids. If you are an empty nester, you don't have kids or you are single. The importance of knowing and understanding the scripture can depend on what you build your foundation on.

I want you to flip to Deuteronomy chapter 6 as we are going to read from this in a minute.

Forms of Joy being the most frequent command

On Christmas Eve at the candlelight service, I talked about various forms of JOY being the command that shows up the most in scripture. The scriptures command us to have joy, to rejoice to sing a joyful noise over 200 times in the Bible.

Remember that repetitiveness in the Bible equals important. So, it is important for us to have gratitude for what the Lord has done for us.

Deuteronomy chapter 6 is what is considered the GREATEST commandment in scripture. We see Deuteronomy 6 boiled down to its simplest form in Mark 12:30. Let's take note of what this says.

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I have read pieces of this chapter throughout our time in Hosea...and I promise you that we will be getting to Hosea today but I needed to set the table with what God is wanting us to see.

Deuteronomy 6

6 "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ² that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

¹⁰ "And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, ¹² then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³ It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. ¹⁴ You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— ¹⁵ for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

¹⁶ "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. ¹⁷ You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. ¹⁸ And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers ¹⁹ by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised.

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²⁰ "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' ²¹ then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. ²³ And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. ²⁴ And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. ²⁵ And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'

This is what God wants the Israelites to remember

This section in Deuteronomy 6 is exactly what he is trying to get through the Israelites in the book of Hosea...essentially Hosea is saying because you haven't followed this command that I have given you in Deuteronomy you are getting what I have laid out in Hosea.

I am sure we have all received these if/then logical statements from our parents growing up. **If you don't / then you will. If you do / then you won't.** There are conditions that our parents put in our lives that protect us, teach us and help us to thrive.

Likewise, God does the same thing with us. We see this with the Israelites that is the example to those who are believers in Christ.

Matthew 7:13-15

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. ¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

If we don't have Godly direction we will be devoured

As we journey through life it is important for us to know our destination. If we wander aimlessly, we will be devoured by the wolves that will lead us down a path of destruction.

The ease of life can slip into our spiritual lives

We live in a society today that wants to make everything easy for us. As you know the more convenient life has become through modern advancements the more difficulties mankind seems to be facing. The temptations for luxuries and ease of life can also slip into our spiritual lives as well. We can become lazy with our faith and trust in a false understanding of grace, living our lives as recklessly as we can.

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In Hosea we have also seen this, as the affluency of the nation increased, so did their sins.

Lets break down our text in Hosea.

Hosea 11:12

¹² Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,
and the house of Israel with deceit,
but Judah still walks with God
and is faithful to the Holy One.

Northern & Southern – Ephraim & Judah - Hosea & Isaiah – Big & Little Brother

You may remember that the name Ephraim is used most of the time to refer to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Judah to the Southern Kingdom.

Unlike the Northern Kingdom, **Judah had some fairly good kings** – I listed out many of them in the Hosea chapter 5 sermon.

Good things happened under these good kings

Under some of these kings, God's law was dusted off and taught to the people. The priests continued to serve in God's appointed temple in Jerusalem, and the festivals were celebrated at least some of the time.

Couldn't completely wipe out idol worship – Hezekiah & Josiah almost did – Infected all

Unfortunately, the political or religious leaders were unable to completely wipe out idol worship and pagan rites, although Hezekiah and Josiah, two of Judah's former kings, came close to doing so, these idols continued to fester in the land until they eventually erupted and infected the whole country.

The good kings influenced Judah to survive 150 years longer than Israel

Still the influence of the good kings enabled Judah to survive more than 150 years longer than Israel, and that memory of their positive influence fortified a small group – a remnant – of faithful people who would one day return and restore their land and temple.

Hosea 12:1

Ephraim feeds on the wind
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a covenant with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

Searched for their own solutions and didn't seek God – Futile (feeding on wind)

Israel's attempted alliances with heathen neighbors were of no worth. This prophecy was delivered at about the time of Israel's seeking the aid of the Egyptian king.

We many times do this today as believers – search for our own solutions

Often, today, even as believers in Christ, we look to solutions all around us other than God to solve a problem. We often get so entrapped by the problem that we grasp at the shiniest or most convenient solution that we can find rather than trusting in the tried-and-true word of God as our first and only solution.

Christ as the Wonderful Counselor

In December we studied Christ as our Wonderful Counselor. Finding counsel from the word of God should be primary in our sought-out solutions.

Hosea 12:2

²The LORD has an indictment against Judah
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;
he will repay him according to his deeds.

Confusion

You might be thinking...okay wait I am a little confused here. Two verses ago in Hosea 11:12 the text said that Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.

Focus is on all of Israel at this point – Yes good kings but still sin and idol worship

Hosea is turning his attention to all of Israel at this point. Hosea is recognizing that though yes, the Southern Kingdom of Judah had some good kings, there was still idol worship taking place, and so all of the land will suffer because of this.

Basketball example

In basketball when you commit a personal foul in a game, you also receive a team foul. The offense impacts the whole team and over time can result in costly team penalties. Some members of the team may have never committed a foul, yet that individual still suffers the natural consequences of their teammates fouls.

Sin works the same way

Sin acts the same way. Though we all sin, we could have a situation in life where we had no involvement with the sin of someone else, but yet that sin can still directly impact us.

Illustration of freshman team - sticking sticker on the wall – entire team punished

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Another resounding theme in Hosea is that His people will be reconciled back to God.

Why is this? Is it because of what Israel has done? No, it is because God does not give up on His children. With that said, God also does not accept these halfhearted apologies from them either.

Back in Hosea 6:2-3 his people say...

²After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.

³Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;

And the Lord responds in verse 4...

⁴What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes early away.

The Lord is ever so patient with us and urges us to whole heartedly return to Him!

When God's wayward people don't respond to warnings – discipline follows

It is when God's wayward people don't return to Him through the guidance and commands of the scripture or through the warnings from the prophets that God disciplines.

- He will take away their idols
- Rid them of their Baal worship
- Ruin their reputation.

Hosea 12:3-4

³In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
and in his manhood he strove with God.

⁴He strove with the angel and prevailed;
he wept and sought his favor.

He met God at Bethel,
and there God spoke with us—

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We'll take a look at Genesis 35:1-4 in a bit that will link what Hosea is referring to here.

Jacob mentioned – his name changed to Israel – Common ancestor of 12 tribes

Hosea 12:2-4 also refers to Jacob. We haven't seen Jacob come up yet in Hosea. Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel in Genesis 32:28, was the common ancestor of all 12 tribes of Israel in both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Jacob and Israel practice deceit – Jacob sought out God, wrestled with him to be blessed – his descendants gave credit to own successes – Jacob purged idols – descendants worshiped them

Like the nations that descended from him, Jacob practiced deceit. Unlike Israel and Judah, however, he constantly searched for God. Jacob wrestled with God in order to be blessed, but his descendants thought their blessings came from their own successes. Jacob purged his house of idols in Genesis 35:2 but his descendants could not quit their idol worship.

When Jacob was being born, he seized his brother's heel. Jacob's act in the womb of his mother was one in which the providential direction of God symbolized Jacob's desire for the birthright and blessing. Similarly, Israel in Hosea's time should be striving for God's favor and blessing rather than chasing the wind.

Genesis 35:1-4

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." ² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments." ³ Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

Hosea 12:5

⁵ the LORD, the God of hosts,
the LORD is his memorial name:

Hosea puts focus on God who blessed Jacob and wants to do the same for Israel

Hosea now turns to God himself, the one who had blessed Jacob and wanted to do the same thing for Israel. Hosea refers to God as the "the Lord, God of hosts."

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The NIV translates this as “the Lord God Almighty.” This name distinguishes Him from every other thing that has ever existed.

Hosea 12:6

⁶“So you, by the help of your God, return,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.”

Verse 6 links us back precisely to the greatest commandment I read in Deuteronomy 6 earlier.

We all fall short. We all mess up. Sometimes we get moments where we reflect back on our lives and it didn't go the way we thought it would.

The words of verse 6 tell us to:

Return
Hold Fast
Wait

As long as you are alive you can always RETURN

It is never too late to RETURN to the Lord as long as you are still on this earth. It is never too late for your family members to RETURN to the Lord. This morning can be the moment that you reconcile with God and RETURN to Him. God is faithful to forgive.

Grandpa on his deathbed

I told the story last week of my grandpa making a commitment to the Lord literally on his death bed minutes before he passed. The Lord is faithful to forgive when we are ready to return.

Once you have RETURNED verse 6 tells us to **HOLD FAST.**

HOLD FAST is an idiom that means to adhere to, to cling to, to embrace, to live by. It is that important. Don't wander from IT.

What is IT?

IT is Love and Justice

The perfect balance of Love and Justice is how the Lord rules.

We are imperfect at doing this on our own. Some of us are loving to the point that we excuse wrongdoing. Others are JUST to the extent that we forget to love.

Love without justice, because it is not aiming at a higher standard, leaves people in their sins. Justice without love, because it has no heart, drives people away from God.

Cling to the Lords balance of Love and Justice

The more we cling to the Lord's balance of Love and Justice the better we can lead people to the Lord.

Finally, verse 6 tells us to **WAIT**. Wait for what? Wait on the Lord's timing. His timing is not slow or late. It is always exactly on time.

Whatever it is that you have going on in your life, seek earnestly the Lord in prayer and wait on His timing.

WORSHIP TEAM BACK UP!

Hosea 12:7-8

⁷ A merchant, in whose hands are false balances,
he loves to oppress.

⁸ Ephraim has said, "Ah, but I am rich;
I have found wealth for myself;
in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin."

Defrauding other nations – Claiming to have no sin – loopholes in the law

Hosea next turns to a specific area of sin in Israel — "the merchant" using dishonest scales and loving "to defraud" customers. Israel's practices of trading with the nations were contaminated by deceit.

As a result of these shady practices, the people had been boasting of their wealth and declaring that no one could find them guilty of any sin. So they did not see themselves as deserving any punishment. Apparently, they had devised loopholes in the law to justify what they had been doing. Hosea is probably speaking here of the reign of Jeroboam II, when Israel prospered greatly.

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Hosea 12:9

⁹ I am the LORD your God
from the land of Egypt;
I will again make you dwell in tents,
as in the days of the appointed feast.

Once a year the Israelites spent a week living in tents during the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated God's protection as they wandered in the desert for 40 years (Deuteronomy 1:19-2:1)

Here, because of their sin, God would cause them to live in tents again – this time not as a part of a festival, but in actual bondage.

Hosea 12:10

¹⁰ I spoke to the prophets;
it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets gave parables.

God warned them through prophets, visions and parables – no excuses

It is here that Hosea resumes his general theme. God, he recalls, had communicated His will to Israel through prophets, visions, and parables. The people therefore could not plead ignorance and were without excuse.

Hosea 12:11

¹¹ If there is iniquity in Gilead,
they shall surely come to nothing:
in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls;
their altars also are like stone heaps
on the furrows of the field.

Gilead east of Jordan – Gilgal to west – Gilgal locations were place of memorial

The location of Gilead was east of the Jordan river and Gilgal was west of it. There were at least 2 Gilgal locations and some scholars believe there to be a third. These locations at Gilgal were a place of memorial. These were locations to remind the Israelites of something significant that God had done.

Remembering what God had done - Later became places of idol worship

For example, after miraculously crossing the Jordan River, the Israelites stacked 12 stones representing the 12 tribes. They would come back to remember what God had

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done and offer sacrifices and worship to the Lord. Unfortunately, as the Israelites slipped into idolatry, these locations became a place where they would worship false gods.

Hosea 12:12-14

¹² Jacob fled to the land of (A-rum) Aram;
there Israel served for a wife,
and for a wife he guarded sheep.

¹³ By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt,
and by a prophet he was guarded.

¹⁴ Ephraim has given bitter provocation;
so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him
and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

Hosea was using this reference to Jacob to say, "Don't forget your humble beginnings. What you have is not a result of your own efforts, but it is yours because God has been gracious to you."

It is always important to keep our pride in check

This should cause Ephraim to confess their pride, recognize their humble origins, and acknowledge that only by God's gracious power were they made a nation.

Israel had a chance to choose the hard way or the easy way when it came to holding fast to the love and justice of the Lord.

The Israelites elected to take the easy road and in the end it made it more difficult for them as a nation.

The easier path to take in 2024 is a path that 2024 leads you down. The more difficult but rewarding path is one that is filled with Peace, Hope and Joy led by Jesus Christ.

In case you forgot, 2024 is an election year. You will need a firm foundation to stand on if it was anything like the last election year.

I encourage you and your family to stand on the truths of scripture together in regular family worship. Instill a firm foundation that no matter what comes about in this new year, good or bad, the Lord will remain unchanging.

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Old Hymn – How Firm a Foundation

There is an old hymn from the late 1700s that sings of the following scripture truths called "How Firm a Foundation."

I want to close with the 4 scriptures that this hymn is based on:

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Hebrews 13:5

For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Small Group Questions

1. What are some new year resolutions you have had in the past that fizzled out and were not completed? How long did it last?
2. If you have kids, what things are you doing or can you be doing better in 2024 to equip them with the tools they will need to navigate this world from a biblical worldview? If you don't have kids what types of things do you and your spouse or you and an accountability partner do to grow depth in your relationship with Christ?
3. Israel, a nation who once new the Lord, was now feeding on the wind. Which means they were trying to solve their problems with manmade solutions. What types of things do we often find ourselves trying to solve with manmade solutions?
4. Read Matthew 7:13-15. Some people don't even realize that there are two paths with two gates. Some know better but yet choose to go down the wide path and enter through the wide gate. What causes people to choose a wide gate pathway when they may know that the more rewarding path is through the narrow gate? As a believer what can we do to encourage others traveling on the wrong path from a practical standpoint?
5. What things will you be praying for the Lord to change in you in 2024? Are you open to the Lord changing other parts of your life that you may not be ready for? Why?