

## **HOSEA 11:12-12:14**

*(Readings: Genesis 27:1-29; 32:22-32)*

### **The God Leading The Way**

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

If it is one thing that we have seen through the exposition of this book of Hosea thus far is that there's nothing un-orderly or disparate about it.

While we may have read a chapter and wondered how it could ever tie together, it always did.

Our text today is much the same.

While it seems to be an assortment of past and present events, it is a clear story line.

Actually, there are two clear story lines interacting through these verses – one from the past and one from the present.

But they both come down to one theme.

A theme continuing on from chapter 11's focus on God going out to love His own.

And that theme is, perhaps surprisingly given what we read in this chapter, that God is leading the way.

So let's see how this is so.

Let's open up this chapter to reveal God having His way.

And as we read through the text it certainly was clear which past history is largely being brought out here.

It is about the father of the nation, Jacob.

And so it is that the first aspect tells us, **ISRAEL HAS BECOME JACOB.**

This might seem a nonsensical phrase.

We know Jacob became Israel.

He was renamed because of God had changed him to become the father of the nations.

His sons would bear the names of the twelve tribes.

So why speak about Israel becoming Jacob?

How could it go the other way?

Well, the prophet does that here through comparing what Israel had become with who Jacob the person had been.

Hosea in describing the house of Israel as a thoroughly deceitful place connects in with what Jacob was like before God wrestled with him.

Verse 12 of chapter 11 and verse 1 of chapter 12 show us a nation that has become completely 'Canaanized'.

It has totally taken over the ways of this world.

Israel is definitely secularised.

There is no spiritual aspect in her whatsoever.

Verse 12 spells that out with Israel's religious 'lies' and 'deceit'.

Religious because it is the Lord who has been surrounded with this falseness.

Judah too is included in this situation.

All the tribes are going against the Lord their God.

Then in the next verse, Hosea also uses sarcasm to bring home God's point.

Ephraim's worldly politics is compared with a chasing after the wind.

Because that's something they will never catch!

And in the meantime the lying just gets worse and worse.

So bad is this deceit Israel even begins to believe it herself.

In fact, Israel thinks she can get away with having the best of both the major world powers of that time – Assyria and Egypt.

'Well, hello! – which planet are you on Israel?'

You're in no position to think you can trick those empires!

Every other nation was either aligned to one or the other.

Yet even allying yourself with one of those powers would have been wrong anyway!

Israel was only meant to be allied to the Lord her God.

He was the One she should have been looking to for help.

This is especially portrayed in the reign of Israel's last king.

His name was Hoshea.

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17 describes how the king of Assyria found out that Hoshea had been a traitor by doing a deal with Egypt.

And yet the worst thing of all about Hoshea is what we read just before that.

For verse 2 there declares of Hoshea, "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD."

Congregation, ISRAEL HAD BECOME JACOB.

And in verse 2 we see exactly why this is so.

Because there the name 'Jacob' appears.

A name here for the one who is going to be punished for the evil he has done.

That was the name their common ancestor had had changed by the Lord.

And no wonder it was changed because 'Jacob' meant, "he grasps the heel."

Or to translate it figuratively it means, "he deceives."

Genesis chapter 27 tells us about how treacherous Jacob could be.

Aided and abetted by his mother, Rebekah, he lied and cheated to get the blessing belonging to his older brother, Esau.

And later even his Uncle Laban, that sublime operator of duplicity, had nothing on him.

Who could forget the way he made sure he got the offspring of the stronger goats in Laban's flock?

It's all that wickedness of Jacob that Hosea brings to mind here.

It's the man of the world who has been described here.

And it will be with this world that their end will be.

ISRAEL HAS BECOME JACOB.

But, then, the next four verses paint us quite a different picture.

For in the second place we see, JACOB THOUGH BECAME ISRAEL.

Having brought in the historical allusion Hosea further digs into their forefather.

Because Jacob didn't stay a rat-bag.

He didn't keep on going with his lying and cheating.

Unlike the way Israel was going right then, God turned Jacob right around!

You see, while verse 3 picks up that strand of Jacob's deviousness with reference to what happened in the womb, it quickly shows the other side of him when he was older.

As it says, "In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God."

Well, that was some change!

Because he certainly wasn't trying to live right with God in his earlier life.

And yet God had not let him go.

He was working out His will through Jacob.

His electing love shone clearly through.

Malachi 1 verses 2 and 3 declare His word, "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated."

Congregation, this is definitely of God through and through!

While Jacob is certainly being held up a model for the way Israel ought to go, he only ended up going that way because the Lord in His sovereign grace was working it out that way.

There was nothing in Jacob himself that was going to save him.

As Derek Kidner notes, "the remaking of the man had its origin not in his own enterprise, but in God's initiative revealed at Bethel long before, in that classic display of grace unexpected, unsought and overwhelming."

And notice what happens to Jacob.

He wrestled with God.

He wept and begged for his favour.

He knew that without God he was totally lost.

This is shown through the name Bethel in verse 4.

Because how had Hosea described that place before?

It wasn't by calling it this name, meaning 'house of God'!

He had renamed it 'Beth Aven' – 'house of wickedness.'

But back in Jacob's time it was truly the 'house of God'.

For that was where God did meet with Jacob.

And there Jacob became Israel.

The name meaning 'the deceiver' was replaced by the name meaning 'he strives with God.'

And that was exactly what Israel should be doing there.

Not worshipping the idol of the golden calf, but worshipping the LORD God Almighty!

Verse 5 puts it in the right picture.

Because God must be in the centre of the picture.

In fact, He had to be seen right throughout the whole picture.

It is after laying down what the Lord had done in humbling Jacob and so glorifying His name Hosea brings the lesson home for these people.

Verse 6 is absolutely clear: "But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always."

As Jacob held on tight to his Lord so they must also.

They must keep on holding on and not let go.

They must not be as they were described in chapter 6.

For there in verse 4 their actions are described as being like the morning mist that quickly disappears.

Congregation, something of Jacob's weeping and begging needs to be found in us.

Yes, us too, for these are not only words written to those people 2700 years ago – they are words just as true today!

And if we think this is beyond them then don't forget what has happened to us.

For you know that it was the Lord who saved you.

Indeed, here Hosea has the nuance that they can return with God's help.

While the NIV translates the beginning of verse 6 as, "But you must return to your God," other translations have the words, 'So you, by the help of your God, return.'

Congregation, we have seen that Israel has become as Jacob was before he became Israel.

It is the godly example of Jacob as Israel that the Lord lays before them here.

He is the man the nation is named after!

But Israel is beyond redemption.

In fact, so deep is Israel in her wickedness we can honestly say ISRAEL HAS BECOME CANAAN.

Our third aspect.

This is what the verses 7 till 10 tell us.

Right at the beginning of verse 7 the tie in to Canaan is spelt out.

For the word translated “merchant” is the word for Canaan.

This brands Ephraim as having completely taken over the ways of the previous residents of the land.

While God’s law is clear about having honest scales and doing honest dealings these people are going to get away with whatever they can!

And look how they justify it!

In verse 8 we read, “Ephraim boast, ‘I am very rich; I have become wealthy.

““With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin.””

There’s certainly a double standard here.

Those with the wealth have the power.

Which means for the poor they will become even poorer.

Now you know how those rich people became rich.

It was by stepping all over those who are least able to help themselves!

Not that the poor are really in the picture here at all.

This is the voice of those who have made it.

And because they’ve made it they obviously had God’s blessing, right?

Congregation, these people have the nerve to camouflage their sins, the false balances, the bribery, and all their pious pretences, by showing how rich they are!

Nothing’s changed has it?

How many claiming to be Christians aren’t doing the same today?

What they forgot then and isn’t understood today is that success and blessing are not one and the same but actually two elements.

A nation can be “successful” even though it lacks God’s blessing.

There are enough unbelieving billionaires around to show that!

This is also referred to elsewhere in Scripture.

Revelation chapter 18 described Babylon as exceedingly wealthy, but it certainly doesn’t have God’s blessing.

In fact, that symbolic representation of all that stands against the Lord God is about to be totally destroyed.

And so it is here in our text.

While men may be envious of that clever rogue, selling your soul to get what you can now is dooming you to a sure destruction.

In the face of such brazen selfishness, God replies with another scene from history.

A scene which they regarded as very much **their** history.

Even today this event is the one the Jews know very well.

For this event is the exodus.

The words beginning verse 9 would have struck quite a cord with them.

For they are the words beginning the Decalogue – the words forming the preface to the Ten Commandments.

They are words they would have known as well as we know the Lord's Prayer today.

And then He refers to the annual remembrance of that event.

"I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed feasts," refers to the Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Tents as it's also known.

Because then for a week they would live in tents as they lived in during the wilderness.

The effect that Hosea impresses upon them here is two-fold.

The first is that he challenges them as to why God redeemed them in the first place, if they've just become Canaanites anyway!

And the second asks them as to why they relive the exodus every year when they obviously don't want to learn the lesson of why their forefathers had to live that way for forty years!

Congregation, God is leading the way by spelling out His way.

They ought to have repented and returned to Him.

Their own history is clear enough of what happens when that hasn't been done.

While the threat to make them live in tents again might seem a chance to come back again, as it was in chapter 2, this is a point beyond that redemption now.

And this is what verse 10 confirms.

Because it wasn't only mere men speaking whenever the prophets proclaimed.

As verse 10 says, they declared God's own words.

They had the visions directly from the Lord.

They had spoken through various literary devices, such as parables.

Despite all that what did they do?

They ignored it.

Even worse, they called the prophet raving madmen!

And how many times didn't they do that?

Regardless of how sharp and penetrating those prophet's words actually were.

They shut their ears to it all.

**ISRAEL HAS BECOME CANAAN.**

And what had happened to Canaan?

Or should we say, what should have happened to Canaan – because Israel was never faithful enough to fully carry it out!

You see, Canaan was meant to be totally obliterated.

God's command was clear that all those living in the land before Israel were to be completely destroyed (Josh.9:24).

And, congregation, they would be.

Including the Israel who had joined itself to Canaan!

In the words of the fourth aspect to our text, CANAAN THOUGH WILL BE WIPED OUT.

This is what we see in the final four verses of chapter 12.

For the Lord pours scorn on their false piety.

Gilead and Gilgal are both places of religious importance.

But it's a useless religion being followed there!

The religion which has been borrowed straight out of the book of the Canaanites!

And Canaan will be wiped out!

We hear in these words the divine impatience with His people.

Together with Amos, Micah and Isaiah, the other prophets of this time, Hosea declares the Lord's curse on all that the people thought they could replace God with.

Canaan will be wiped out!

To bring this home in a close way, Hosea goes back to Jacob.

But this time it is back to the time when he was definitely Jacob and not Israel.

Here the prophet speaks about the time when Jacob was clearly un-spiritual.

For here Hosea speaks of Jacob's flight to a foreign country and when he has to work for a wife.

Then Jacob was virtually a slave in that strange land because of his deceptive attitude.

And there he married a woman outside of his father's land.

There Jacob was not a refugee but a fugitive.

And there Jacob was the keeper of sheep rather than the shepherd of a nation.

So there Jacob is totally selfish.

And yet what a contrast with what the Lord did?

Verse 13 tells of God bringing Israel out of bondage when He led them by the hand to the promised land.

Indeed, He preserved Israel.

That's a different kind of keeping than what Jacob did for his Uncle's sheep.

The treacherous side of Jacob is brought out here.

And it's brought out here to show what comes from man is not what gets you anywhere.

It is God working through you that alone brings true blessing.

This is why verse 13 doesn't name Moses directly but calls him a prophet of the Lord.

For in the first place that's what he was.

Indeed, he is considered the greatest of all prophets in the Old Testament.

But there is still more to this mention of Moses.

In mentioning the exodus Hosea is bringing out the fact that above all else it was spiritual.

While the result was also physical, in that the Israelites were brought out of slavery, the wonder of it all is that God did it all!

In this vein we must see Moses not as the man who stood up to Pharaoh, but especially the man who stood before God.

He knew the Lord face to face.

Isn't this what the revelation of the burning bush and the giving of the Ten Commandments shows us?

It was in knowing God that Israel had its only reason for being.

Without that it was a nothing – just a blip in world history!

And yet that's exactly what Israel was about to become!

Verse 14 couldn't be more frank about that.

Deliberately turning their backs on God is the bitter provocation of God.

Forget their famous ancestors now!

It's no use how successful they have been!

Contempt is completely writing off the Lord.

So what could the Lord do with them anyway?

Congregation, this is God leading the way.

No one is going to get in His way.

And those who should have gone His way and yet haven't aren't going to be left guiltless.

I mean, it wasn't as though they didn't know?

And neither can we have such an excuse.

For we are those who have God's ultimate sacrifice made for us on the cursed cross.

We are those who have received sovereign grace.

Would you dare to spit that back in His face?

Dear believer, look up!

Don't look down!

Because seeing what is here below won't help you to see the One who's controlling things up above.

He is the God of love.

And you must see you are the child of His love.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Lord God, we do so much look up to You.

We pray that it will be Your will that we do.

For then it is You leading the way.

So please keep us away from the devil's seduction.

Don't let us become distracted by what is here below but always keep the single eye to You up above.

And especially may we keep looking to the Son of Your love at Your right hand, the One who even now is pleading for us with You.

For it is in the name of Christ we pray, Amen.