

The Book of Hosea

Chapter 9

What is the Gospel in two words? It is *good news*.

When we think of the good news of the Gospel, we remember that Christ is risen! We think of God's love, His grace, and His mercy. We think of salvation, redemption, and deliverance.

But what are we saved from? What are we redeemed from? What are we delivered from? That question is the basis for a book by R.C. Sproul called *Saved from What?* Dr. Sproul recounts that he encountered a zealous evangelist who once asked him, "Brother, are you saved?" He responded, "Saved from what?" This left the evangelist dumbfounded. In order to be saved, we have to be saved from something. To be saved means that we have been delivered from God's wrath, from eternal death, from hell, from God's judgment.

Hosea's revelation of God's righteous judgment on the unrepentant reaches its peak in chapter 9 with some of the strongest language in all of Scripture for how God views sin and unrepentant sinners.

In Hosea, chapter 9, the LORD continues to explain why He was forced to put away His unfaithful wife Israel. He was forced to judge her because she was unrepentant.

Hosea 9:1 Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like *other* peoples, For you have played the harlot against your God. You have made love *for* hire on every threshing floor. (NKJ)

The prophet Hosea declares that the Israelites ought not to rejoice or have joy, for they have been obstinate and unrepentant in their sin. They have played the harlot against their God. Like a prostitute, they have "made love for hire on every threshing floor." Israel had hired the Assyrians for a large sum of money. Meanwhile, Israel worshipped false gods with the hope of reaping material gain, like a prostitute who sells her body for dishonest gain.

God likens those who commit idolatry to a woman who had been treated kindly and lovingly by her husband, but who nevertheless casts her eyes on other men. God offers Himself freely to us and promises to be a Father and preserver and Husband to us, but the majority of people despise God's blessing and turn elsewhere, inventing for themselves false gods.

The Israelites did not think God was sufficient for them, so they turned to other gods, like the idolatrous Jews the prophet Jeremiah condemned who worshipped a goddess called "the queen of heaven":

Jeremiah 44:17 says, "But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For *then* we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble."

Interestingly, the Roman Catholic Church refers to the Virgin Mary as the “Queen of Heaven.”

God warned the Israelites not to rejoice in their prosperity or vainly think they were immune from God’s vengeance just because He was longsuffering and patient with them. If we are living in sin and idolatry, even if we are at the moment enjoying great prosperity, we must ask ourselves whether we are doing that which will elicit God’s wrath. Even when things seem by all accounts to be going great, we ought to examine ourselves and confess our sins to God, and turn from our wicked ways. We ought to follow Christ, who is the way of Truth.

Israel had cast off the yoke of God; she had rejected God’s law; she had violated the marriage covenant. Thus, God declares that even though He may spare other peoples, He will inflict a just punishment on Israel.

2 The threshing floor and the winepress Shall not feed them, And the new wine shall fail in her.

Since the people had rejected the one true God and His pure worship, He will punish them by depriving them of His blessings. He will take away all their agricultural prosperity and abundance.

John Calvin comments, “The harlot, as long as she prospers, as long as she surpasses all honest and chaste women in her clothing and standard of living, is pleased with herself and blinded by her own splendor. But when she is reduced to extreme poverty, when she sees herself to be the laughing-stock of all, then she realizes and admits how stupid she had been in leaving her husband. So the Lord now declares by His prophet, that He will deal in the same way with the Israelites, so that they will no longer be deceived by and deluded by their prosperity.”

For a nation that is addicted to indulgence, for a nation that is overfed and drunk with wine, it may take a severe famine or complete economic collapse in order to bring them to their knees to seek God. God deprived His people of wine and of wheat, in order to drive them to repentance.

3 They shall not dwell in the LORD's land, But Ephraim shall return to Egypt, And shall eat unclean things in Assyria.

The prophet Hosea now declares to Israel that a greater punishment is coming—the Lord will drive them into exile. They will be deprived of the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. The Father will disinherit His son. Not only will God deprive the people of food, but also He will repudiate them. “They shall not dwell in the LORD’s land.”

“Ephraim shall return to Egypt,” the house of bondage out of which God had redeemed His people under the leadership of Moses. And the Israelites shall “eat unclean things in Assyria.” The once holy people will be defiled, as God blends them with the profane Gentiles. God had called His people to abstain from unclean foods and all that was unclean in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Now, He declares that they will truly be unclean. No longer will they be God’s special people. No longer will they be under God’s care and protection. Rather, they shall live according to their own wills, just

as they had desired. They shall be just like all the other nations, as they desired. They could not bear to live under God's law, so now He will set them free to be polluted and defiled like the rest of the Gentile world that does not know God.

God deprived the Israelites of the great abundance of wine, wheat, oil, and honey they once enjoyed. On top of that, He also took away their badge of holiness. When they abandoned the Jewish dietary laws, they ceased to be God's special people. They conformed themselves to the ways of the world and no longer were set apart as holy to God.

We ought to ask ourselves, is it right for us, when we are among non-Christians or idolaters, to conform to the rites approved by them? John Calvin comments that it is a blessing to be highly valued when we are permitted to abstain from all defilements and to worship God purely as He has commanded us in His Word. However, if we are compelled, under the tyranny of the ungodly, to conform to impure superstitions and manmade inventions, it is a sign of the dreadful judgment of God. It is an extreme reproach of God when people who ought to be sacred to God and to profess outwardly His pure worship allow themselves to be polluted by false worship.

4 They shall not offer wine *offerings* to the LORD, Nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him. *It shall be like bread of mourners to them; All who eat it shall be defiled. For their bread shall be for their own life; It shall not come into the house of the LORD.*

In exile it will not be lawful for the Israelites to make offerings to God. The Israelites sought in vain to pacify God by their ceremonies; God did not appreciate them but rather regarded them as worthless. The LORD would reject whatever they did.

The prophet Isaiah similarly declares in Isaiah 66:3-4: "He who kills a bull *is as if* he slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb, *as if* he breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain offering, *as if he offers* swine's blood; He who burns incense, *as if* he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, So will I choose their delusions, And bring their fears on them; Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

The Israelites chose their own ways; they did not listen to God and carefully follow His decrees and laws. Their sacrifices are compared to murders, for it is a most atrocious crime to abuse the sacred name of God, and this is what idolatrous men do.

Scripture teaches us that God detests the ungodly. Not only is He not pacified by their sacrifices, but He holds them to be the greatest abomination.

5 What will you do in the appointed day, And in the day of the feast of the LORD?

The prophet Hosea tells the people that God will take away the whole of their worship and deprive them of all the evidences of His presence. On the appointed holy days and feasts days, they should be especially aware of God's absence from their midst—that God has abandoned them. God's removal of their sacred days was evidence of His dreadful judgment. He hid His face from them.

6 For indeed they are gone because of destruction. Egypt shall gather them up; Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their valuables of silver; Thorns shall be in their tents.

The Israelites would soon discover that God's prophets had not threatened them in vain, although they had despised their preaching of God's coming judgment. Hosea speaks of the exile as though it has already taken place. "For indeed they are gone because of destruction." The Israelites may yet dwell in their own land; but their judgment and exile is drawing near.

The Israelites had hoped to find temporary shelter in Egypt. Yet, Egypt will be a grave to them. They should not hold out hope for a return to Canaan. "Egypt shall gather them up; Memphis (a great city in Egypt) shall bury them."

The exile would last so long that their land would become waste and uncultivated. Nettles and thorns would grow up in this wasteland. The land will be deserted and left without inhabitants. Having deprived the Israelites of the hope of return, God sought to make their exile bitter and sorrowful for them.

7 The days of punishment have come; The days of recompense have come. Israel knows! The prophet is a fool, The spiritual man is insane, Because of the greatness of your iniquity and great enmity.

Israel was filled with religious hypocrites who had hardened themselves against God and His holy law. They did not fear God or His judgment. Yet, God would prove Himself to be a just avenger. "The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come."

The more God had shown mercy to the Israelites, the more the people had grown in their pride and contempt of God. They thought that they were at peace with God, that they could sin, commit idolatry, and worship God in the way that suited them. How deceived they were.

They had provoked God to wrath through their continual sin, idolatry, and false worship. He could not leave their sin unpunished.

"Israel knows!" Finally, when it was too late, Israel would discover just how wicked they had been. Yet, sadly, it was too late to repent. They had rejected God's Word; they had refused to obey wise admonitions and counsel.

John Calvin comments, "whoever does not now willingly submit to [God's] teaching, shall find God to be a judge and shall not escape His hand."

"The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is insane." Israel shall at last understand that she was deluded by the flatteries of false prophets and false teachers. The false prophets assured the people of God's love for them and His plans to prosper them. These false teachers had deluded the people; they had turned the truth of God into a lie.

John Calvin comments, "even at this day this disease prevails in the world, as it has prevailed almost in all ages. For what do the ungodly seek, but to be let alone in their sins? When [the] mouths [of true prophets] are closed, they think that they have gained

much. This madness the Prophet [Hosea] derides, implying that those ungodly men who have such delicate ears that they can bear no words of reproof shall at last know what they have gained by hiring [false] prophets to flatter them." By acting in this way, the ungodly all the more boldly provoke against themselves the wrath of God.

The prophets are fools and the spiritual men insane, for their lies and flatteries will be of no benefit to the people on the day of God's judgment. No one would severely reprove the people or boldly exhort them to repent. Although all the prophets should give them a false sense of safety, they would yet perish.

True prophets and true spiritual men speak the words of God's Spirit; they faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of the Word of God. The people of Israel would be judged "because of the greatness of [their] iniquity and great enmity." The people refused God's light and ran headlong into the darkness, to their own destruction. By their own sins, they excited against themselves the wrath and hatred of God.

But were the people at fault? After all, they had false teachers. They might object, saying, "We should not be judged. We were deceived. We would have willingly obeyed God if only we had been given better teachers." Yet, God does not hear such excuses. The reality is that the people had been deprived of true and faithful teachers because they had refused the favor offered to them and had extinguished the light. As Paul says, they preferred a lie to the truth. Their itching ears led them to shut their ears to the true prophets and instead flock to false prophets who would tell them what they wanted to hear. They had been deceived by false prophets because they willingly followed the lawless one to their own ruin when the Lord called them to salvation.

8 The watchman of Ephraim is with my God; But the prophet is a fowler's snare in all his ways -- Enmity in the house of his God.

The watchmen of Ephraim ought to have been with God. Yet, this prophet is "a fowler's snare in all his ways." As God's watchman, the prophet was to keep watch and be vigilant to warn, guide, and protect the people. Yet, this watchman is a snare; he leads the people astray to their own destruction. The place that was called the house of God was defiled; it was filled with false teaching, hatred, and enmity.

9 They are deeply corrupted, As in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins.

The people were deeply corrupted and totally depraved. We read of the days of Gibeah in Judges, chapters 19-21. Gibeah was known for the prevalence of unbridled licentiousness and sin, as was the case in Sodom and Gomorrah. There was no distinction between good and evil; there was no sense of shame among the people. They raped the Levite's wife and killed her in the most brutal way. This was the cause of the memorable slaughter that nearly destroyed the whole tribe of Benjamin.

Who could have thought that a people that had been taught the law of God could have fallen into such a state of depravity as the city of Gibeah did, which was near to the holy city of Jerusalem? Like brute beasts, the people gave themselves over to the most depraved and filthiest lusts.

The prophet Hosea says that the whole of Israel had become as corrupt as the citizens of Gibeah had been. The Israelites were completely disobedient and would receive no instruction. It is as if God told them, "The Lord will no longer labor in vain to teach you, but He will seize the sword and execute His vengeance. You are not worthy of being taught by Him any longer, for His teaching is counted a mockery by you."

May each of us stir ourselves up to repentance. May we be careful that we never descend into such depravity. Hosea says, "He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins." Let us never be deceived to think that we can take advantage of God's longsuffering patience and continue to live in sin or willfully commit sin. God will remember our sin; He will punish our sins. Let us flee to Christ for deliverance and mercy. Flee from sin, and flee to the cross!

10 "I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. *But they went to Baal Peor, And separated themselves to that shame; They became an abomination like the thing they loved.*

The Lord had greatly loved Israel. He found Israel "like grapes in the wilderness," like an oasis in the desert. As a man delights in the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season, so the Lord took delight in His covenant people. Yet, the people showed themselves to be ingrates; they were unthankful. How depraved the people were to reject God's unending love. They showed complete contempt for God.

It as if God said, "I have loved Israel, as a traveler loves grapes when he finds them in the desert and as the first ripe figs are to be enjoyed. Since I so much delighted in them, ought they not to have honored me in return? Ought not my love that I freely showed them to have inflamed their hearts and induced them to devote themselves entirely to me?"

"But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame." As an adulteress prostitutes herself out to a man, so they went in to Baal Peor. They broke their spiritual marriage vows. Instead of setting themselves apart to God as holy, they separated themselves to shame. They gave themselves over to idolatry, the false worship of a false god.

"They became an abomination like the thing they loved." The people no longer distinguished between good and evil, light and darkness. They gave themselves over to immorality. In God's eyes, the people became just like their idol, an abomination.

11 As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird -- No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception! 12 Though they bring up their children, Yet I will bereave them to the last man. Yes, woe to them when I depart from them!

The glory of Ephraim—his wealth, his glory, his power—shall fly away like a bird. God will curse their fertility. Remember that the people had committed spiritual adultery by turning to the false Baal gods, who were supposedly gods of rain and fertility. Now, God will curse the people's fertility, proving that He is the true Lord of fertility. "No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception!"

Although the Israelites still attempted to flatter themselves, God would have the last laugh. “Though they bring up their children, Yet I will bereave them to the last man.” God will wipe out their children. In sum, God threatens entire destruction to the northern kingdom of Israel.

“Yes, woe to them when I depart from them!” Calamity is God’s trumpet, and yet few will pay attention to God’s hand. Through adversity, calamity, and disaster, God sends a loud and clear message that He is an enemy of the people, that He is armed to destroy them. Yet, oftentimes, as John Calvin says, “they care nothing but promise to themselves a prosperous fortune. Until they feel the hand of God and the signs of destruction appear, they continue still secure.”

God’s words of woe to unrepentant Israel make Jesus’ statements to the religious hypocrites of His day, the scribes and Pharisees, all the more chilling. In Matthew, chapter 23 and Luke, chapter 11, we find Jesus’ repeated pronouncements of woe on these religious hypocrites of His day: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matt. 23:13). Likewise He declares the horrifying divine woe upon the cities that rejected Him and His teachings: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you” (Luke 10:13; cf. Matt. 11:21). And, again in Matthew 11:23-24, He said, “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”

In contrast, if we live in obedience to God and His law, He promises us great blessing—His paternal (fatherly) favor, His grace, and abundant blessings.

13 Just as I saw Ephraim like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place, So Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer.”

Hosea warns the Israelites not to trust in their present prosperity, for God can reverse their prosperity at any time. Prosperity, like wine, can make men drunk. They indulge in their pleasures and amuse themselves. Remember what happened to Sodom and the cities of the plain. The prophet Ezekiel said this about Sodom: “Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw *fit*” (Ezekiel 16:49-50). The abuse of God’s patience, preying upon God’s patience, has ever been the cause of destruction to the unbelieving. The Israelites ignored all God’s warnings.

Although God had treated Ephraim like a precious tree, by caring for him gently and tenderly and protecting him, his judgment was drawing near. Now he will “bring out his children to the murderer.”

The people of Israel flattered themselves. They said, “God loves us. After all, He has preserved us free from calamity.” Yet, they should not have been so proud. Yes, God had been patient and longsuffering and treated them with the utmost kindness. But now God’s wrath was going to be poured out.

14 Give them, O LORD -- What will You give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts!

The prophet Hosea appears to be speaking as an intercessor, asking the Lord to be merciful to the people by giving their women “a miscarrying womb and dry breasts”—to make them infertile. Why? Because of the coming judgment. For what can be more miserable than for infants to be snatched from their mothers’ bosom, for children to be killed before their mothers’ eyes, for pregnant women to be slain, and for cities and fields to be consumed by fire so that unborn children should perish together with their mothers. With calamity approaching, the best thing that could befall the Israelites was barrenness—that their name and memory might soon be blotted out.

So also history would repeat itself in the days of Jesus. In the Olivet Discourse, recorded in Luke, chapter 23, Jesus warns the religious hypocrites of His day that divine judgment is coming on them. His words remind us of Hosea’s: “But Jesus, turning to them, said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!’” (Luke 23:28-29). A horrid destruction would befall Jerusalem when she and her inhabitants were destroyed in A.D. 70. So also an even greater Judgment awaits all the unrepentant at the last day when God shall judge an unbelieving world and an apostate church with His sword.

15 "All their wickedness *is* in Gilgal, For there I hated them. Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more. All their princes *are* rebellious.

The prophet Hosea earlier said that in Gilgal the people multiplied for themselves altars for sinning. “All their wickedness is in Gilgal,” for there God hated them. Their place of worship had become a brothel, a house of false worship where religion was prostituted. The people claimed to be very religious, yet God was not impressed with their manmade inventions and superstitions.

“Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more.” They did not love God, for they corrupted and adulterated His pure worship. Therefore, God says, I will love them no more. God will cast them away, drive them from His house.

God detests sin with a holy hatred. Of course, all people are born sinners, and God loves all repentant sinners. God is infinite in His love (1 John 4:16). But what does He here declare about how He viewed unrepentant, rebellious sinners? God does not love them, for He is going to send them to hell.

This statement is similar to Jesus’ words to two churches featured in Revelation, chapter 2. To the church in Ephesus, Jesus said, “But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Rev. 2:6). Jesus commends this church for having a holy hatred of sin. So also Jesus spoke to the church in Pergamos calling them to repent for “you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

Returning to Hosea---Rather than restraining the people from wickedness and ruling in accordance with mercy and justice, all their princes were “rebellious.” Yet, God held not just the corrupt political leaders but also the whole people guilty for their sins.

From this passage, John Calvin explains that religious hypocrisy is even worse than secularism:

But why the Prophet Hosea speaks in this manner, I have lately explained; and that is, because superstitious men put forth their own devices, when God reproves them, “O! we have still many exercises of religion.” They bring forward these by way of compensation. But the Lord shows that He is far more grievously offended with these superstitions, with which hypocrites cover themselves as with a shield, than with a life void of every appearance of religion: for “these,” He says, “I conceived a hatred against them, on account of the wickedness of their works.”

Here again the Prophet Hosea condemns what men think to be their special holiness. Who indeed can persuade hypocrites that their false modes of worship are the greatest abominations? No, they even extol and imagine themselves to be like angels, and, as it were, cover all their wickedness with these disguises; as we see to be the case with the Papists, who think, that when they obtrude on God their many masses and other devised forms, every sort of wickedness is redeemed. Since then hypocrites are thus accustomed to put on a disguise before God, and at the same time flatter themselves, the Prophet here declares that they are the more hated by God for this very wickedness, of daring to corrupt and adulterate His pure worship.

16 Ephraim is stricken, Their root is dried up; They shall bear no fruit. Yes, were they to bear children, I would kill the darlings of their womb.”

God again threatens extreme vengeance on the Israelites. Why does He seem to repeat Himself so many times? Perhaps because hypocrites are prone to flatter themselves and are not frightened even by the most severe of threatenings. Therefore, the consciences of hypocrites must be frequently pricked, and most sharply, so that hopefully at last they will awaken to reality and repent. Like a tree whose root is dried up and bears no fruit, so is Ephraim. She is spiritually dead. God says that He would take such vengeance on this miserable people as completely to destroy them without any hope of recovery.

The most extreme vengeance awaited the wayward Israelites. Not only the men and women, but also the children, would be destroyed by God’s hand of judgment.

17 My God will cast them away, Because they did not obey Him; And they shall be wanderers among the nations.

God will cast them away. Why? Because they did not obey Him and His law.

Let us heed the admonition of the wise King Solomon: “Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Yes, let us fear God and obey His commandments, lest God cast us away!

Obedying God's Word is very important. That is why Jesus, in the Great Commission, calls us to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**" (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis added). Jesus is God, and therefore the Church is to teach Christians to observe all things that God has commanded for His people throughout Scripture (except for those things that have been fulfilled or abrogated—i.e., the civil and ceremonial parts of the Old Testament law.)

God is not cruel or unjust; He is completely just. The people did not obey Him; therefore He was compelled to judge them in accordance with the severity of their rebellion.

Although the whole worship of God was shamefully corrupted in the kingdom of Israel, the people yet boasted that they were the holy seed of Abraham. "We are devout Christians." Yet, through their false doctrine and worship, they profaned the name of God without shame.

What brings about God's most severe and extreme vengeance? It is when people harden their hearts against God and His Word.

Those who have not heard the Gospel will perish in their sins. But those who have heard the Gospel and refuse to obey God's Word, those who obstinately refuse to obey and repent—these shall receive God's extreme judgment.

Jesus explained that the more knowledge a person has been given of God and His will, the more they will be judged if they fail to obey and keep His Word: "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. "But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:47-48)

Those who remain in the land will be "wanderers among the nations." No longer will they have a homeland. They will be dispersed among the Gentiles in judgment. They are tragically lost!