

## Memories: A Walk Down Memory Lane

### Hosea 9:7b-10:15

Memories can be tricky things. I have a few people in my life who can recall what I say when I have no recollection of it. Memories can be powerful. We can feel the emotion of the thing remembered. Some memories we would like to forget, but they seem to be engraved in the metal of our minds. Some things we would like to remember, but they are the property of those who remind us of the things we've forgotten. Often memories are romanticized and embellished, and the stories grow over time.

My junior and senior proms are among those memories I would like to forget. Much about them, I don't remember, like who my dates were. I may not have had dates, so I've blocked-out that part. Unfortunately, the thing I remember is the prom themes: one year *You Light up My Life*, and the other, *Memories*. We apparently lit up each other's lives, and those memories lighted the corners of our minds, those misty watercolored memories of the way we were. Yes, Debbie Boone and Barbara Streisand. We could have had, Kansas—Wayward Son, or Bob Seiger and the Silver Bullet Band, even The Eagles—Hotel California, or Wayland, Willie, and the Boys. But, No. We had *Memories*.

In this text, the Lord presents his case against his people by recounting His history with them. The text is bookended with the *great iniquity* (9:7b) of the prophet guild in the NK and the resulting *great evil* (10:15a) of Bethel, the household of God.

It is a detailed recollection enriched by place names: Gibeah (9:9; 10:9), Baal-peor (9:10), Gilgal (9:15), Beth-aven (10:5), Aven (10:8), and Bethel (10:15). Memories are etched in each location, carved in the stone of where they occurred, but lost to us.

The Lord's memories are further enhanced by the colorful use of metaphor. God finding Israel was like grapes in the wilderness (9:10), like first fig on the tree (9:10), like a palm in a meadow (9:13), a luxuriant vine (10:1), and a trained calf (10:11). Ah, such rich metaphors. Who doesn't appreciate a trained calf?

Memories associated with places and word pictures give us the mood and let us feel the truth of this text. And the mood of the text shows indisputably the

justification of God in the exile of His people, while He pleads with them return to Him (10:12).

As we walk down memory lane with the LORD, I want us to remember some important lessons from this text.

### **1. We are to be watchmen with our God (9:7b-9)**

Hosea had taken criticism from the prophets of the NK earlier in the book (cf. 4:4-6). Here he goes on the offensive, taking the LORD's case to its root cause—the failure of the watchmen of Israel.

He begins by using the collective singular, speaking to whole prophetic guild as if to one man, saying, *The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is man* (9:7b). What caused their insanity was their *great iniquity and great hatred*. Their sin was matched only by their hostility to the truth.

Hosea was a watchman in Israel with *His God* (9:8a). A watchman was to sound the alarm when danger threatened. The danger looming over Israel was the judgment of God. Like Moses before him who had walked with his generation for 40 years in the wilderness until they all perished under the judgment of God, Hosea and his contemporaries had to walk with Israel into exile. They offered a defense of God's faithfulness to his promise in abolishing the Old Covenant and instituting a New Covenant due to Israel's continual breaking the old covenant (cf. Hos 1:10; 2:14-23; 5:4-5).

If the prophet guild had been faithful watchmen, they would have been preaching the same message. Rather, they were both ensnared and trapping others in a religion that was *hostile to God*. They were as corrupt as the in the days of Gibeah, a doubtless reference to Judges 19-21 when the men of Gibeah in Sodom-Esque fashion abused and murdered the Levite's concubine (9:9).

Could they possibly think God would not *remember their iniquity and punish their sins*?

#### ***Application:***

The prophets in Israel were to be preachers of the covenant. In other words, they were to preach the word. The prophets in the NK had abandoned that role to parrot

the culture and religious mood of the NK. As a result, they ensnared the people in a hostile relationship with God.

The world does not set the agenda of the church, the Bible does. The world is and will always be in a hostile posture to the church. If our agenda matches the cultural agenda, we have lost our prophetic voice and all relevancy. We become redundant and expendable.

It is no great mystery how Cornerstone got to where it is today. We have held fast to the Bible and doctrine and practiced meaningful church membership. These things have become dear to us, and something we pursue together.

Since I have been a member of this church, I have heard the entire Bible preached, all 66 books! I have sat through several rotations of systematic theology in Sunday School. I have seen an entire church family rally around each other, care for one another, and encourage one another.

We must remember how we got here. The LORD Jesus set the agenda for his church when he gave us the great commission: Disciple the nations by baptizing them and teaching them to do all I have commanded until he comes again. That covers everything the church needs to do.

Preach the Gospel: We have to be clear on it. Our task is not to train unconverted people to do better. It is to call them from death to life, out of darkness into light.

Bring them under the oversight the church: This is what baptism does. Membership in the church is meaningful. Through the oversight of the church in possession of the keys of the Kingdom, the membership of the church is guarded.

Teach them to do all that Christ commanded: we must learn the Bible and Christian doctrine to obey all Christ commanded.

Jesus is with us in this task to the end of the age: This great commission is what Jesus is about in the world until the end. Dear friend, that is enough to occupy us. We are not called to transform the culture; we are called to preach the gospel.

Right here in this text we see what will keep the church on track: the Doctrine of God, man, salvation, the church, and last things.

We did not get to place we are today by being doctrinally blown about, cherry-picking Scripture texts, and aping the world.

Recalling the story of Gibeah (9:9) sets the tone for the LORD to recount his memories of Israel thorough a series of metaphors that start so promising only to end so tragically.

## 2. What we love sets the direction of our lives (9:10-17)

Hosea began his book by recounting his relationship with his unfaithful wife as living metaphor of Israel's unfaithfulness to the LORD.

Here the LORD positively describes Israel when he first found her as a man finding grapes in the wilderness or a fig on a tree in its first season (9:10a) or a young palm planted in a meadow (9:13). These metaphors speak of the delight God took in his people. Out of all the people of the earth, God loved Israel and set his affection on them.

Then came Baal-peor (9:10b). Balaam, a pagan prophet for hire, endeavored to curse Israel in the employ of Balak, king of Moab. He relayed to Balak that he could not curse Israel because God had blessed them. In the end, the conversation between Balak and Balaam probably went something like this (cf. Num 31:16): *I can't curse what God has blessed but lead Israel to sin, and God will curse them.*

Sure enough, the women of Moab enticed the men of Israel, and they consecrated<sup>i</sup> themselves to a thing shame,<sup>ii</sup> a derogatory reference to Baal. They became like what they loved (9:10b).

The metaphors in these verses describe fruitfulness. God made Israel fruitful. *Ephraim*, one of Hosea's go to names for the NK, means *doubly fruitful*. What is described in the following verses (9:11-17) is how *Double Fruit* became totally unfruitful—just **like** the Baal they loved.

Hosea zeroed in on the loss of their children (9:11-14,16). The severity of the judgment Hosea is preaching seems to overwhelm him. Perhaps, it brought to mind his own children,<sup>iii</sup> so he prays (9:14): *Give them, O LORD*—and he pauses. Then asks, *What will you give?* He gets the answer: *Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.*

These were hard words for Hosea to pray and preach, but they show the indescribable reality of God's wrath about to be poured out on the NK. It is sobering and heartbreaking.

Not only do we have the shocking language of the loss of their children, we also have the stunning language of divorce. At Gilgal, God began to *hate* them. We gasp when we read the words. Lots of things happened at Gilgal.<sup>iv</sup> What event this reference points to is lost to us. Regardless, it was where the LORD says He began to *hate them* and the reason he will *drive them out of his house* and *love them no more* (9:15).

Both *hate* and *drive out* are the language of divorce in the Old Covenant.<sup>v</sup> They loved the Baals (cf. 9:10); God would love them no more (9:15b; cf. 1:6b). All that is left is exile from the land (9:17).

This is the story of love gone wrong.

### ***Application:***

Israel devoted himself to what was shameful and became like the detestable thing he loved (9:10b). What we love sets the direction of our lives. We know this is true. If a man is an avid hunter, you can usually tell from what he wears, drives, buys, and how he spends his time. If he says, he loves hunting but has no camo and no guns, we would say, *probably not so much*. We are simply shaped in some way by our loves.

The question arises then, *do we love the LORD? How is love for him shaping our lives?* I had a friend one time who was so convinced of the transforming power of loving the LORD that he said every morning he would look at himself in the mirror and ask, *Dave, do you love Jesus more today than yesterday?* He was convinced the key to the Christian life was loving Christ.

### **3. The peril of a divided heart (10:1-10)**

At the start of chapter 10 another metaphor takes the field of play and captures our attention. *Israel is a luxuriate vine that yields its fruit* (10:1a). *Luxuriate* (boqeq) carries the idea of *emptying*. The picture is of a vine that produces like crazy as if it is trying to get all of its fruit out. It simply pours out fruit.

The point is that Israel had been blessed with abundant prosperity. Instead of responding with thankful, generous hearts to the LORD, the more their prosperity increased, the more altars and pillars they built to honor Baal (10:1b; cf 1:5b).

What was their problem? *Their heart is false* (10:2). *False* (halaq) means divided or slippery. They were to be completely devoted to the LORD, but they devoted themselves to Baal. In reality, their god was their prosperity. They made material gain a religion. But God would tear down all that they should have torn down.<sup>vi</sup>

Their words betrayed their divided hearts: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*. The particle *now* ties verses 2 and 3 together. *For now they say, 'we have no king, for we do not fear the LORD; and a king—what could he do for us* (10:3).

Their divided hearts made their oath and covenants empty (10:4). They spoke pious words of devotion that met with no heartfelt devotion, like an atheist quoting the Nicene Creed.

They did not *fear* the LORD, but they *trembled* for the calf (10:5).<sup>vii</sup> We worship what we fear. Their divided heart led to misplaced fear. The fear of the LORD puts us in proper relation to everything else.

Their fear of the calf led them to glory in what is shameful. With the calf gone, their hope was gone. They had no way to face the future.

This is the peril of a divided heart. Where the *fruitful vine* flourished, *thorn and thistles will grow up* (10:8b; cf. Gen 3:18).<sup>viii</sup> The very place in which they placed their hope and fear will produce *thorns and thistles*. The loss is so devastating that death will appear better than life, so they will cry for the mountains to cover them and the hills to fall on them.

The NT picks up on this reference and applies it to the final judgment. On the way to cross, Jesus said to the woman following him not to weep for him but for themselves and their children because the days were coming when *they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'* (Luke 23:26-30)

It is picked up again in the Revelation when the 6<sup>th</sup> seal is opened: People will hide in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, *calling to the mountains and*

*the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand (Rev 6:15)?"*

This is the peril of a divided heart.

***Application:***

Whatever we fear, we worship. We can't miss the contrast here. They had no fear of God, but they feared something. We will fear something or someone, and that which we fear takes the place of God in our lives. We will be controlled by our fear.

Your fear may be the fear of man. That can be in the form of your spouse, your kids, more than likely everybody. If so, you read into what people say, and what they don't say. How you feel about yourself, life, everything about you is shaped by that fear. It is a miserable feeling.

You may fear poverty or being alone. There is only one fear that will set you free from all other fears and enable you to love people—the fear of the LORD. To fear what cannot save is torment.

**4. We are not just living, we are sowing (10:9-15)**

The direct address, *O Israel* (10:9) and *O Bethel* (10:15) seems to form an inclusion tying verse 9-15 together to show the reality of sowing and reaping. The metaphor of the trained calf illustrates the truth (10:11).

In the whole of the passage we are looking out today, verse 12 stands out as a sincere offer of hope and the possibility of repentance:

*Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up you fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.*

Surrounding this call to repentance is the stark reality of Israel reaping what they had sown.

From the days of Gibeah, they continued to sin in similar ways (10:9). If the tribe of Benjamin suffered near annihilation for their atrocities at Gibeah, did they think

God would not judge them as well?<sup>ix</sup> He would gather the nations against them. *Double fruit* (Ephraim) would be *bound up*<sup>x</sup> for their *double iniquity* (10:10).

God recalls the early days of Ephraim in the land. She was a *trained calf that loved to thresh* (10:11a). There was no need for tight reins on her neck. But somewhere along the way things changed. Now Ephraim gets a yoke, Judah must plow, and Jacob must harrow (10:11b). Not appreciating the gentleness of God, they made for themselves a much more difficult way.

What happened? They *trusted in [their] own way* and in their own strength (10:13b). They know better than God. They were way overconfident. They sowed iniquity, injustice, and dishonesty. They would reap a similar fate as Beth-arble when both women and children were massacred.<sup>xi</sup>

What is the remedy? Hosea exhorts them to sow righteousness, reap steadfast love, and break up you fallow ground, *for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you* (10:12). Hosea is calling them to repentance, to return to covenant fidelity.

Verse 12 shines as a lighthouse of direction for the desperate soul.

---

<sup>i</sup> Consecrated is the word *nazar*, the same root for nazirite, one who devoted himself to God.

<sup>ii</sup> They devoted themselves to a thing of *shame* (boset), a derogatory name used for Baal. You can see it in the biblical names of Ishbosheth (*man of shame*, Saul's son) and Mephibosheth (*mouth of shame*, Saul's grandson). *Shame* and *glory* are antonyms in Hosea.

<sup>iii</sup> *Lo-ruhama*, no mercy; *Lo-ammi*, not my people.

<sup>iv</sup> Gilgal is where Israel first set up camp when they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land and stacked 12 stones as a memorial (cf Josh 4:19). It was the place where Saul's kingship was established (cf 1Sam 11:14-15) and lost (cf 1Sam 15:12). Later, it became a center for Baal worship (cf Hosea 4:15). Perhaps, it was the location of an assassination of a king in Hosea's day. We have to recognize that while the historical significance of the places may be lost to us, Hosea's hearers clearly understood the point being made.

<sup>v</sup> For *hate* see Deut. 22:13-21; 24:1-4. For *drive out* see Lev 21:7, 14. It is also used for Abraham driving Hagar out (Gen 21:10). It is clearly the language of divorce.

<sup>vi</sup> see Ex. 34:12-17; Deut. 6:14-15; 7:1-5; 12:2-3, 29-31.

<sup>vii</sup> The calf of the House of Evil (Beth-aven) being carried away as *tribute* (10:6) to the king of Assyria echoes the time the Philistines captured the Ark of God. The sorry sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas took the Ark to battle the Philistines. The Philistines killed them, defeated Israel, and captured the Ark. When Phinehas's wife heard it, she went into labor, giving birth to a son she named *Ichabod* before she died. Ichabod means, *the glory has departed*. The NK was so far gone in idolatry that the calf being carried away was the equivalent of the Ark being captured by the Philistines. Only Ark of God proved too hot to handle for the Philistines, but the calf revealed the *shame* of

---

Israel. It could do nothing about its captivity. It could not afflict the Assyrians; it could not topple their gods; There was no glory to it, only shame.

<sup>viii</sup> We cannot help but see the play off the fall and Eden. The Promised Land was a type of Eden, fruitful land.

<sup>ix</sup> *Against the unjust is bene alwa*, sons of injustice (cf Eph. 2:2).

<sup>x</sup> There is a word play on *discipline* (*yasar*) and *bound up* (*asar*) in 9:10.

<sup>xi</sup> Like many of the historical references in Hosea that would have been readily understood by his readers, the history is lost to us, so we can only speculate. A likely candidate, we can piece together from a contemporary prophet with Hosea. Amos charged the Ammonites with splitting open the pregnant women of Gilead. A man named Shalman(u) was most likely their king at the time. Since Beth-arbel was next to Gilead, they likely were included in their atrocity. See Dearmon, *Hosea* in the NICOT, 273, for other likely candidates.