



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 2:2-15

“The Pained Appeal of a Forgotten God”

TRANSCRIPT

Hosea chapter 2 verse 2 through verse 15, and this section is a section in which God, through the prophet, calls upon the children of Israel to contend with their mother. And in the allegory or figure that they are using, the Mother is representative of the Nation Israel. The husband is of course representative of God. And the children are representatives of individual Israelites. And what we have is God’s allegorical or illustrative way of expressing his unconditional love for the nation, of his deep sorrow and displeasure that the generation of Hosea’s day has turned away from him. But nevertheless, God pleads with the generation and it’s obvious that he wants his wife back, and furthermore that he will ultimately obtain her, because we have seen in our study last week, many of these prophecies conclude with the restoration of the relationship between Yahweh or Jehovah and the nation. So, beginning with verse 2 now, and the scene is set in a law court.

“Contend with your mother, contend,

For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband;

And let her put away her harlotry from her face

And her adultery from between her breasts, (this is not intended to be taken in a totally figurative way, because representative of the relationship they were having with the baals or the false gods of their day, many of the Israelites wore pieces of jewelry around their necks and between their breasts in order to acknowledge their indebtedness and dependence upon the false gods and so the reference here to her harlotry from her face and her adultery from her breasts is a reference to the particular types of jewelry that the Israelites were wearing)

Lest I strip her naked

And expose her as on the day when she was born

I will also make her like a wilderness,

Make her like a desert land (or like desert land)

And slay her with thirst.

"Also, I will have no compassion on her children,

Because they are children of harlotry.

"For their mother has played the harlot;

She who conceived them has acted shamefully

For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,

Who give me my bread and my water,

My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'

(Now you will notice beginning with the 6th verse, the prophet gives the thoughts of the Lord to Israel's condition, and you can sense as you read through these verses that there are three specific responses that are referred to, introduced by "therefore": verse 6, therefore, verse 9, therefore, and verse 14, therefore. Verse 6)

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns,

And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths.

"And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them;

And she will seek them, but will not find them

Then she will say, 'I will go back to my first husband,

For it was better for me then than now!' (This is very much like the prodigal son
who thought much the same after he had left the father's house)

"For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil,

And lavished on her silver and gold,

Which they used for Baal.

"Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time

And My new wine in its season.

I will also take away My wool and My flax

Given to cover her nakedness.

"And then I will uncover her lewdness

In the sight of her lovers,

And no one will rescue her out of My hand.

"I will also put an end to all her gaiety,

Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths

And all her festal assemblies.

"I will destroy her vines and fig trees,

Of which she said, 'These are my wages

Which my lovers have given me '

And I will make them a forest,

And the beasts of the field will devour them.

"I will punish her for the days of the Baals

When she used to offer sacrifices to them

And adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry,

And follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me," declares the LORD."

In the original text, that is rather emphatic, that word “me.” And frankly I think the rendering of the New American Standard Bible which I am reading has somewhat obscured that, for the last clause of that, it’s the 15th verse in the Hebrew text, is “and Me she has forgotten” the Lord says. So great stress rests upon the fact that she has forgotten other things, but it is He whom she has forgotten.

And the verse 14 introduces a third response,

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her,

Bring her into the wilderness

And speak kindly to her. (This is one of the great figures in the Bible of the grace of God to his people; I will allure her)”

That’s a very interesting word. That is used of the seduction of a maiden in the New Testament. It is used of the persuasion of someone. It also used of deceit. So, it’s a word that speaks very strongly of the influence that one may seek to have upon another, and of course here as in other cases in the Old Testament. It’s the language of courtship. And so allure is a very good rendering.

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her,

Bring her into the wilderness

And speak kindly to her. (The Hebrew text in its idiom says, ‘speak upon her heart or to her heart)

"Then I will give her her vineyards from there,

And the valley of Achor as a door of hope (as a reader of the Old Testament, I know many of you will remember that as Israel was taking Jericho, God told the Israelites that they were not to take any of the riches of Jericho, but they were to destroy the whole city. But Achan saw a goodly Babylonian garment and some silver and gold, and

deceitfully he took it and hid it, and as a result of it, God judged the whole nation because of the sin of the one man, and when they went out in warfare shortly thereafter, they were defeated, and then of course there was a search in the midst of the children of Israel for the one who had wronged the nation. In fact, the text of Joshua chapter 7 says the whole nation had sinned in the sin of the one, very much like what the Bible says, we all have fallen in the sin of the one Adam, and then Achan, of course was stoned to death after he confessed his sin. That was in the Valley of Achor; Achan’s name means “trouble,” and so the Valley of Achor means trouble, but often God’s troubling of us is the door to hope. And so here is this great expression. It occurs three times in the Old Testament, Achor is used in three places because of its significance, and here, the Valley of Achor as a door of hope)

And she will sing there (I like that Hebrew rendering of that word, there, as) she will answer there as in the days of her youth,

As in the days when she came up from the land of Egypt.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for these challenging and sobering words that come to us from the Prophet Hosea. And we know that the experiences of the Nation Israel are experiences that are experiences of the Christian church. And as we look back over the history of the body of Christ, from the Day of Pentecost onward, we have seen more than once the same principles at operation within the people of God, a drifting from the word of God, a loss of first love, a turning to interest in other things, to materialism; sometimes the occult; emotionalism; and many other types of things – human reason, human philosophy – that pull us away from devotion to the Lord God and to the word of God.

And O God, today, as we think about the Christian church, we pray for the entire body, for we sense a drift away from the great doctrines of holy scripture, a tendency on

the part of the ministers of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to discount the great truths of Christianity, and tend to want to substitute for those great truths, shallow and superficial appeals to emotionalism and other things that cannot in any way compare with those great verities of the faith that have brought us into the possession of everlasting life and into an eternal relationship with the triune God.

O God, we confess our sin and we confess our failure. We confess the lack of love that we have for the word of God and through that a lack of love for Jesus Christ. And deliver us from the kind of disciplinary judgment through which the Nation Israel has been put. Keep us Lord, close to Thee. And individually, we have noticed, Lord, in our own lives the tendency to become cold and indifferent, to seek for entertainment rather than for sanctification and edification. Deliver us from that. Give us, Lord, deep desires to know Thee better as Thou art set forth in the teaching of the apostles.

We pray for this church and for its leadership. For its elders, its deacons, its members, its friends. We pray for its ministries and ask that Thy hand may be upon them for good. We are grateful for the privilege of proclaiming the gospel over the radio and in other ways. And we pray that by Thy grace Thy hand may be upon that ministry for spiritual good. Give fruit, Lord, and glorify Thy name through the word of God.

And for those who have difficulties and trials, for those whose names are in our calendar of concern, we bring them all before Thee, Lord. And we pray that Thou wilt give comfort and strengthening and consolation and supply the needs that exist.

We pray for our country. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon our President and others who are associated with him in government, and upon all of the forms of government that exist in this great land, we commit, Lord, this country to Thee and pray, Lord, in this year of election that we may be guided by our great triune God in heaven, and that Thy blessing may rest upon this country, that it may continue to be a free land in which we may differ, and yet differ in freedom.

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And we commit our service to Thee today and pray Thy blessing upon us in it, each one of us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning in the exposition of Hosea is “The Pained Appeal of a Forgotten God.” Someone has said in connection with the prophecy of Hosea, that three words indicate the theme of the prophecy: sin, judgment, and love. And these three themes are before us here: sin, judgment, and love. And in fact, they merge, as this same person has said, into the perfect music of the prophecy.

To Hosea, sin was essentially unfaithfulness to God, and he looked through the lexicon for the ugliest word he could find to represent it, and he came up with harlotry, or adultery. To the prophet, as you read through his prophecy, there are certain things that sin means to him that they should mean to us. In the first place, sin ages one’s spirit. In chapter 5 and verse 12 the prophet writes these words, “Therefore, I (and the I is the I of Yahweh) am like a moth to Ephriam and like rotteness in the house of Judah.” And then in chapter 7 and verse 9, “Strangers devour his strength, yet he does not know it; gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, yet he does not know it.” What a beautiful picture that is: gray hairs scattered around the head of a man and he doesn’t realize he’s getting old at all. And he doesn’t transform his life in order to harmonize with what is happening to him.

The prophet also says that sin is contagious. He writes in the 4th chapter and the 9th verse, “And it will be like people, like priest.” And so the spirit of sin is contagious. “I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot or your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go apart with harlots and offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes, so the people without understanding are ruined.” So, sin is contagious. And when sin takes place, it begins to spread. It always does. Sin in an assembly of people will always spread if it is not immediately dealt with.

Sin’s effects, according to Hosea, are inevitable. They are as sure as gravity. He says in the 7th verse of the 8th chapter, “So they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind.”

And sin robs us of the power to make moral decisions. He says in the 4th chapter of the 11th verse, “Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding.” What a beautiful unfolding of the significance of human sin.

Well, we have seen in the study of the prophecy to this point that Hosea, the Prophet of Yahweh, was asked to marry a woman who would become unfaithful. And he complied with the request of God, and he married the woman who was a kind of woman like a woman of harlotry. And what of course follows is something of a pedagogical relationship in which Hosea represents the Lord God, and Gomer his wife is illustrative of the Nation Israel, and the children of the marriage, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi are all pedagogical children. Everything is designed to illustrate the relationship of the Lord God and the Nation Israel.

What is sometimes forgotten in the reading of this prophecy, of course, is that Hosea prophesied in a day of decline and departure from the Lord. In the midst of outward prosperity for the kings of the 8th Century, some of them were magnificent kings: Uzziah for example, a great king. Israel was strong, people were prosperous. Israel was a respected kingdom, and that was the Southern Kingdom. And in the Northern Kingdom, Israel with Jeroboam II and others, Jehoram, were kings that were of great influence in their day.

But in the midst of the prosperity, the north and the south, decline was setting in. That of course is very much like our day today. We have a lot prosperity in the United States of America. We have a lot of prosperity in the Western world. We have a lot of prosperity in the church of Jesus Christ, but one doesn’t have to look very far to see evidences of spiritual decline in our midst. And sometimes spiritual decline is covered over by an enthusiasm – a very superficial and shallow kind – we certainly see that in our

day. So the conditions in which Hosea prophesied are conditions that are just like the conditions of the United States today.

Now what would a prophet do in our day? I think he would do something of that which he does in Hosea. For example, we read right here in chapter 2 and verse 2 through verse 5 of a moving, divine plea for radical repentance. The focus of the first chapter has been upon the children who have been out of control, and the fickle wife, and now he turns to the individuals within the nation. It’s an allegory of husband, of wife, of children and illicit lovers.

And as is often the case in Micah and in other of the prophets, a law court is the figure that lies back of the words. The opening statement in verse 2, “Contend with your mother, contend” is obviously addressed to the children. That is, the children of this union, the children representing the individuals of the Nation Israel. And if I may be allowed the privilege of rendering this word that is translated “contend” by “plead my cause” – for it is a legal scene – then what God is saying is to the individuals, “Plead my cause with your mother.” Plead my cause.

In other words, he’s looking for individuals who will take up the cause of the Lord God and be the means by which the nation, or that generation, may be called back to him.

Now it’s evident from this that the Lord wants her back. And I think I may have said something last week that was confusing here, because as I thought about it afterwards, I see how it might have been misunderstood. I do not think that there is any indication at all in the Old Testament that Yahweh ever divorced the Nation Israel. Now, there are certain statements made that might suggest that. For example, right here in verse 2, “Contend with your mother, contend, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband” – that might suggest that. But we must distinguish between the nation and the prophecies that will be fulfilled to the nation and the individual nations that come on the scene down through the centuries.

And when he says, “Contend with your mother, contend, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband,” he doesn’t mean to suggest that he has divorced her. There would be no point in entering into a law case if that were the truth. But it is possible for individual generations to break the covenant, and in breaking the covenant to pass off the human scene, lost forever, so far as that generation is concerned.

The generation of Israel in the days of our Lord illustrates that point. That generation had the kingdom of God taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. But the relationship of the Lord God with the nation, that relationship is based upon an unconditional covenant. And being based upon an unconditional covenant, it shall be fulfilled to the nation. Generations come and go and are lost. But the nation is still in covenant with the Lord God.

That is why the Apostle Paul in the 9th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans asks the question implicitly, “What does Israel have?” And he answers by saying, she has the covenants and she has the promises. Chapter 3, chapter 9, they have the promises and they have the covenants.

So this, then, is a plea to the generation to return to him. By their disobedience, the covenant stands broken, but God is interested in winning them back. And the adultery in the historical situation is their attachment to the cult of the false god, Baal.

Now God, as set forth by the Prophet Hosea, is no Caspar Milquetoast, and so consequently, the husband of Gomer, the deserted husband, who figures and pictures the Lord God, is figured here as someone who is going to exercise disciplinary judgment. He does go around wringing his hands over what has happened. He says, as he appeals to the children, plead my cause with your mother. Plead my cause. She’s not my wife; I’m not her husband, and let her put away her harlotry from her face and her adultery from between her breasts lest I strip her naked and expose her as on the day she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, make her like a desert land and slay her with thirst, also I will have no compassion on her children, because they are children of harlotry.

There are people who think of the true God, the God of Christianity, the God of the Bible as a God of love alone. That is a very, very false conception of the God of the Bible. It’s the kind of conception that the world likes, and in emphasizing that the God is a God of love, they love to forget the fact that he is a God of justice and righteousness. The prophets never forgot that. I don’t think the prophets were very popular in their day.

I do not think the prophets would have been able to live on weekend seminars around the country, charging \$40-\$100 in order to get together and discuss the situation of the Nation Israel. I doubt that they would have had very many people at all in their seminars. They were very unpopular. And in fact, their necks were often on the line.

But they were representative of the true God. And what God promises here is that he’s going to do something about the situation that exists in the generation of his people. He’s going to cheapen her, if necessary, and he’s going to bring her to degradation and want. He’s going to make her like a wilderness, and he’s going to make her like a desert land. He’s going to slay her with thirst, and all the things that she is enjoying now and forgetting that they come from him, he’s going to take away from her, because he wants her back.

And he not only wants her back, he will ultimately get her back, if it means discipline and judgment, if it means captivity and scattering to the four corners of the earth. If it means trembling amidst all of the experiences of human life and fear. If it means persecution, if it means anti-Semitism, he will ultimately get them back, for he will bring his people back into the bonds of the covenant and bless them with those Abrahamic promises and Davidic promises and promises of the New Covenant.

Now Hosea describes the situation in the 5th verse by saying, “For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For, she said, I will go after my lovers who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.” What a blatant, bold, willful, whoring after the false god, Baal.

You’ll notice that the text says, “I will go after my lovers.” This is the attitude that God gives to the nation as they have gone after the worship of the false gods, and there is no aura of the glamorizing of sex here that is so characteristic of our society. Her motive is her wages, and one can sense the cynicism that drips from the use of the term. Notice the 12th verse, “I will destroy her vines and fig trees of which she said, ‘These are my wages which my lovers have given me,’ and I will make them a forest.”

The gods of Canaan were patrons of fertility, and what lies back of this is the practice of the worship of the god Baal. I’m sure that in the course of the study of the Scriptures you have read a great deal about the gods of Baal, but they were fertility gods and no doubt, as Israel came into the land and began to serve the Lord God there – they were an agricultural people – and the false gods, Baal, were gods that put themselves forth as being the means by which one might have more fertile land, have more produce, larger and healthier herds and cattle, prosperity. What they really taught was a kind of prosperity gospel. In other words, if you worship the baals, you will be prosperous.

We even have that in Christianity today. We have actually, believe it or not, in Christianity, and in many people’s minds, evangelical Christianity, the idea that if you are in right relationship with the Lord God, you will be prosperous. How foolish. There is no such thing as prosperity theology taught in the Bible. If a man is prosperous, of course he should be thankful and give God the glory. But if he’s not prosperous, that’s not a sign that he’s not in the center of the will of God. Bishop Leighton used to say, “The blessing of the Old Testament was prosperity, but the blessing of the New Testament is adversity.” And one does learn from adversity, and some of the greatest of the saints of God passed through adversity and have been some of our greatest men and women.

But the baals taught prosperity theology. And furthermore, they taught it wickedly. They had their temples and they had their prostitutes, both male and female, and they taught that if you went to the temple and you paid them a little bit of money and you had sexual intercourse with the temple prostitutes who were there for that, then

by going through the very act of sexual intercourse that would magically produce fertility in your land and in your flocks and in your herds. And that was very appealing to them.

Well, we could think, my, how could people believe things like that, that you could actually have a system of religion based upon an immoral kind of thing like that? Well, we don’t have that kind of Baal in the United States today. Our baals are more sophisticated. Our baals are baals of contemporary scholarship. How thrilling it is to think that one can become a scholar of holy Scripture? And the result is that we tend in evangelicalism today to worship contemporary scholarship, and many of our young men then that the only way to get ahead is to go off and study under some contemporary scholar, the great mass of which are unbelieving scholars. But oh how much we can learn from them, we are taught. But we can learn some things that are not very good from them, and the tendency to exalt scholarship is the same kind of tendency that existed in the baals of ancient Israel.

Not long ago an outstanding British scholar came to the United States – a Presbyterian minister – moved out to Southern California, and although he was a Presbyterian minister, he was a teacher of philosophy, well-known teacher of philosophy. I won’t mention his name, but I know some of you know him. He moved to Southern California and is now teaching permanently in one of the Southern California universities. And since he was a Presbyterian minister, he sought admission to the Presbytery of San Gabriel in Southern California, and he was received by a vote of 98-92.

Well, I congratulate the Presbytery because there were 92 people who realized that this man was not a Christian man at all; that is, a Christian man in the biblical sense. He was a man who denied the historical incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He also was a man who was very critical of the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus and critical of the uniqueness of the Christian faith because, he said, it hinders relationships with Judaism, it hinders friendly relationships with Mohammedanism, it hinders relationships with the other religions of the earth if we consider that the Lord Jesus Christ is unique and if

salvation through him is unique. To claim that makes it impossible for us to get along with others.

Well, the professor was right. Hallelujah. It does make it impossible for us to get along with those who deny the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But is it not strange that [sic., 98] of the Presbyterian members – and incidentally, they were the clergy – is it not strange that [98] of them voted for a man, and they were warned about him and knew him anyway. Instead, they voted him in as a member of the Presbyterian, or wanted to vote him in as a member of the Presbytery; well it was really 98 who voted for him, 92 who voted against him. So, the majority voted for him to be a member of the Presbytery. I must say that the Presbyterian Church in that part of the land is a church that obviously is not in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament.

Well, there are other forms of Baal. We have the Baal of psychology and counseling. Now let me say, I do not suggest that there is nothing that might be helpful about psychology. But let me also be honest with you. I think that psychology is one of the baals that is appealing to Christianity, and evangelicals, probably as much as any other group, are falling for the blandishments of the Baal of psychology.

Psychology is really a religion. It is a religion of self. And we talk about self-integration and self-realization and self-love, and we talk about human dignity, and even seek to support it from the word of God by saying, “Were not men created in the image of God?” And therefore, do we not have dignity? Well yes, we were created in the image of God. And furthermore, because we are created in the image of God, deep down within us we have the conviction, even in our sin, of the existence of God. But Christian theologians have always pointed out that even if we know that God exists, the knowledge that we have of God is clouded and marred and disturbed, and unless we put on the spectacles of the word of God, the special revelation of God, and illumined by the Holy Spirit, we will not understand God.

And furthermore, to know that God exists is a long way from being a Christian, and so consequently to affirm that we have dignity because we are created in the image of God is to forget the important fact that the image of God is a marred image at the present time, and consequently, everything that we know about God beyond the knowledge of the existence of God is marred and corrupted and warped, and so when we talk about human dignity and human self-realization and human self-love, well really, we’re talking about another kind of religion.

And the Christian church is so filled with that today. We have individuals who are rushing off to psychology and psychiatry when they really ought to be examining the teaching of the word of God. We are promised in the word of God a sufficiency, and there are some cases where it is essential for us to talk with a Christian psychologist or a Christian psychiatrist. There are certain degrees of difficulty that require such in my opinion. But basically, the appeal to psychology is an attack on the sufficiency of the word of God, and on the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, and upon the fact that in the Scriptures we are promised a sound mind as we yield ourselves to the teaching of the word of God.

And for myself, I would call upon the evangelical church to come back to the word of God, and to stop this endless journeying to those who stand outside the most fundamental relationship to the word of God.

But not only that, the Christian church has gone after emotionalism in our meetings, and what we feel, and entertainment – all of these are just sophisticated baals which we today in the 20th Century are espousing. And of course, as you can tell from my comments, one of the things that disturbs me – it’s a small matter I guess – but one of the things that disturbs me is the tendency for men to make merchandise of the word of God.

And not long ago I received in my mail an invitation to a National Conference on the Gospel. Can you imagine that? A National Conference on the Gospel, as if there is some difficulty in knowing what the Bible teaches about the gospel. And I was invited to

pay \$100 to come [laughter] and to go to this National Conference on the Gospel. And incidentally, it’s to be held here in Dallas, a National Conference on the Gospel, so save up your money [laughter] so that you can attend the National Conference on the Gospel and get straight on the gospel. Can you imagine that?

And the ones who are instructing it, well, I must say that some of them have thoughts about the gospel that are not all too clear. And so far as I’m concerned, don’t waste your \$100. Spend your \$100 on something far more fruitful than that. But it’s the tendency of the day to make merchandise out of the word of God, and it is so common that the average Christian today does not sense that there could be possibly anything that might be criticized about, pay me \$40 or pay me \$100 and I’ll tell you something about the Scriptures, when the Scriptures advertise that the truth of God is to be given without money and without price.

So, you can see that I feel that the Christian church has its own baals, and they should pay careful attention in the day to the things that they themselves are engaged in, and may Hosea be an illustration of some of the things that we are to avoid.

Now, we have a second thing. The prophet gives the divine response and unsparing discipline in verse 6 through verse 13, and we’ve read through this, and I gave you some comments from certain individual texts in it. I’d just like for you to think of this. What Hosea says is that these loves of the Nation Israel are all illusions. In other words, God is going to speed up Israel’s false hopes. He says, “Therefore, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths, and she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them.” That’s the way God does things, because you think, if I can go to this psychologist or this psychologist, or if I can go to this conference or this seminar, then everything will be plain and clear to me. So, you rush to it, and you put your money down, and you discover after a little while you don’t have anything. False hopes. They were illusions.

One of the doctors in this very congregation has told me that in years past he used to often have people come to him and say to him that they had certain problems. And he would send them off to counselors, and then after six months they would be back again with the same problems. And this became a kind of pattern. Now don’t misunderstand me. There may be some instances in which, particularly with a Christian counselor, that some good may be done. But the tendency to go to men instead of the word of God is what we must avoid.

And so God says, through the prophet, they’re all illusions. When they rush after these baals, he’ll hedge up the way, and they won’t be able to get through. And furthermore, they’ll pursue after their lovers, and just as they’re ready to overtake them, they’ll discover it’s a mirage. There’s nothing there. Then she will say, “I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.” Like the prodigal son, who finally, as he thought about his condition, as he fled from his father, it was better with me then than it is now.

And sadly, the prophet adds in the 8th verse, “She does not know that it was I who gave here the grain, the new wine, and the oil and lavished on her silver and gold which they used for Baal.” All the time the gods of Baal were saying, your blessings come from Baal, but it was really from the Lord Jehovah that those blessings come.

And God is so disturbed because, you see, he will not give up his people. Those who are not his people, well, he will give them up. But he will not give up his people. And so he says, if necessary, I will destroy the cult, and we read in verse 9, “I’ll take back thy grain at harvest time, my new wine in its season, I will take away my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers.” She says, Baal has given me this and Baal is giving me that. I’ll take it all away, and you’ll see that it was not Baal that was giving it to you at all. And so, you’ll be without anything.

“And no one will rescue her out of my hand. I will destroy her vines and fig trees of which she said, ‘These are my wages.’” I am the prostitute; these represent my hire which my lovers have given me. “And I am going to make them a forest and the beasts of the field will devour them.” And of course, what finally happened was that in 722 God sent the Northern Kingdom into captivity, and in 70 AD sent the whole of the nation to the four corners of the earth. And until recent times, that’s what Israel’s land looked like.

And the last verse of verse 13 is so fitting I think. He says, “And follow her lovers, and me she forgot, declares the LORD.” Once senses the mingled anger and anguish, and the mingled accusation and appeal of “Me she has forgotten.” She has betrayed the covenant relationship, and because she’s betrayed the covenant relationship, that generation passed off into non-existence and ultimate, divine punishment in hellfire.

And now the third response in verse 14 and verse 15. Suddenly, the whole scene lights up because through the prophet, Yahweh thinks of the future. And this unconditional covenant, and the fact that the nation shall ultimately come back to the Lord God even though the generations through the years may pass off into ultimate condemnation.

There is such a thing as a right infatuation. There is such a thing as a true love. And my dear Christian friends, the love of God in Jesus Christ is a right infatuation, is a true love. It is just as ravishing as a false love, but far less disappointing. Why we do not come to our senses and give ourselves to the Lord God as taught in the Scriptures is beyond me. I speak to myself as well as to you. What we have in verse 14 and verse 15 is inextinguishable love seeking his own willful bride, and God sets forth in the Scripture the doctrines that give us the things that ought to stir us and move us and support us in all of the experiences of life.

I guess one of the greatest baals of our present day is the tendency to prefer life to doctrine. To prefer facts to dogma. How foolish can you be? It was B.B. Warfield who said, “What, after all, is peculiar to Christianity is not the religious sentiment and its

working, but its message of salvation. In a word, it’s doctrine. To be indifferent to doctrine in another way of saying we are indifferent to Christianity.” And so when a person says, “I’m not interested in doctrine, I’m interested in life.” Or, I’m not interested in dogma; I’m interested in facts. Or I’m not interested in knowing the truth of God, I’m interested in the experience of it. He’s just saying, I’m indifferent to Christianity.

Is it true that Christianity loves darkness more than life, and it thrives best where it is least understood? Is that really true? Do you think that in Believers Chapel we shall make progress if we stop studying Scripture and we start getting interested in experience and place experience on the pedestal? Do you think we will be better off? We will not be better off, we will be worse off. We must start with biblical doctrine and then seek to experience the biblical doctrine.

Christianity consists not merely in Jesus Christ, but in the Jesus Christ as he is set forth in the words of the apostles. In other words, the Jesus of apostolical dogma, not of any Jesus we can choose to fancy in this 20th Century age of feelings and emotionalism, and materialism. We are interested in the Jesus of the apostles and what they taught concerning him. And spiritual health exists there and only there.

Well, it’s lovely to read in the 14th verse, “Therefore behold, I will allure here. I’ll bring her into the wilderness like she was in the days of the Exodus, and I will speak kindly to her.” If you’ll pardon the expression, that is the doctrine of efficacious grace. That’s what it is. I will allure her. I will pay court to her. I will press my suit upon her. I’ll do just what any lover does when he wants to be with his loved one. You’ve never schemed to be with your wife, have you? Come on, come on, you’re looking at me as if you’ve never done anything like that [laughter]. You never tried to arrange things so that you might be with her? Well, some of the wives are smiling [laughter], because I know you have done that. You have arranged things so that you might be with the person upon whom you’ve set your heart.

That’s courting. That’s the language of courting. I will allure her. I’ll bring her into a situation where she will be responsive, and she will be with me. And it’s going to be like the wilderness, because she’s going to have to need me. And so he does it. It’s effectual grace. It’s the thing of which the Prophet Zechariah speaks when he says, “In the last days I will pour upon them the spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him. It is what God is going to do for them, and he will do it. Oh, what a wonderful day that will be.

And further, the prophet describes her response. “Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope.” In other words, the great troubles of the future, the Great Tribulation he has probably ultimately in mind, in the great trials and tribulation, the nation shall return to the Lord God, for in the Valley of Achor, the valley of troubling, there shall be a door of hope. And when Israel recognizes her need, then she shall turn to him.

“And she will sing there (or better) she will answer there as in the days of her youth.” In other words, she’s going to succumb to the courting of Yahweh. For when he sets his cap for someone, he wins them. And that’s what he’s going to do.

And it’s going to be like the days in the past. In other words, the original time of the experience of the nation with the Lord in the Exodus is going to be the final time, and it’s going to be just like that again.

Well, the cycle of divine discipline is completed in blessing. Syncretism fails. Sins are not little things. We often think that sins are little things and that we can get away with them. But that is not true. There is no such thing as a little sin, because there is no such thing as a little God. And all of our sins are sins against a sovereign God.

E. Stanley Jones was a well-known, relatively liberal Methodist preacher. This shows you that I am without bias in my teaching [laughter], so I am going to quote a Methodist Arminian. But he said something that was very good. He said, “We do not break the laws of the universe; we break ourselves upon them.” That’s what Hosea

believed, too. We don’t break the laws of the universe, we break ourselves upon them.

How much better to yield to the teaching of the word of God, to avoid the syncretism of the baals and the dagon, for when you put Dagon by the side of Yahweh, even in the temple of Dagon, the next morning when you go to look, Dagon is on his face and broken, for God does not brook any other gods before him. And the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus is symbolic of the uniqueness of the only salvation for men through Christ. His love for his elect wins. It is completed in blessing. And the Valley of Achor does become and shall become the door of hope.

If God has been putting you through some discipline, it may be because you, too, have been drawn away from the source of all good, the Lord God and Father of Jesus Christ. If you’re here this morning and you’ve never believed in him, we invite you to put aside your baals and put aside your dagon, and come to Yahweh the true God, who loves and who will never let his own go. Come to him. Join the company of the covenant people of God. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thou shalt be saved. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, these are magnificent words that the prophet has been given by Thee, and we have so often sinned by putting other gods before Thee. We remember the apostle said, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Deliver us from materialism, from any kind of ism that obscures the glory of our unique Savior, Jesus Christ, who has promised us the blessings of eternal life, both now and forever.

We ask and we pray in his name. Amen.