



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 5:1-15

“God Withdrawn”

TRANSCRIPT

We're turning to Hosea chapter 5 and reading verse 1 through 15 for our Scripture reading. For those of you who have been following along in the prophecy of Hosea as we have been attempting to expound it, you may remember that the first three chapters are chapters in which against the background of marriage, the prophet accuses Israel of unfaithfulness to the covenant between the Lord God and his people. And then in chapter 4 he begins a rather detailed elucidation in which Ephraim, particularly the Northern Kingdom, although Judah is also referred to, as departed from the faith to which they were called by God so many centuries before. It therefore becomes a very significant revelation of God's response to our, that is, human, sin. And when we read these chapters, we should of course not stop with the exposition of Israel or Ephraim's sin, but ask ourselves the ways in which we are condemned by these words which the prophet speaks. Beginning chapter 5 and verse 1, and we will attempt to cover the entire chapter this morning. Hosea writes,

“Hear this, O priests!

Give heed, O house of Israel!

Listen, O house of the king!

For the judgment applies to you,  
For you have been a snare at Mizpah  
And a net spread out on Tabor.

(Just two slight comments here. The word “judgment” may mean justice, and if it means justice, then of course he is referring to their neglected responsibilities to be just in the dealing with the people. And the second thing is, as you notice the term “snare,” and then “a net spread out on Tabor.” Since many of us grow up in the city and never have any direct relationship with this kind of hunting, it may escape us that these figures are drawn from the practice of hunting animals. And so the snare at Mizpah and the net spread on Tabor are ways by which Israel is ensnared through the false worship of the baals. And he is accusing these priests and also the house of Israel and also the king of being an occasion of the ensnaring of the people by their departure from the truth of Yahweh, by also their worship of the baals.)

“And the revolvers have gone deep in depravity,  
But I will chastise all of them.  
I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me;  
For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot,  
Israel has defiled itself.”

(Remember, in this prophecy, Ephraim is often referred to and the whole Northern Kingdom is referred to usually as Ephraim, because this was the largest of the ten tribes, and therefore gave its name to all of the Northern Kingdom. The parallel one can see for now: Ephraim, you have played the harlot; Israel has defiled itself indicates that.)

Their deeds will not allow them

To return to their God.

For a spirit of harlotry is within them,

And they do not know the LORD.

Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him,

And Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity;

Judah also has stumbled with them. (This little aside concerning the Southern Kingdom, for they are not neglected entirely in Hosea’s prophecy)

They will go with their flocks and herds

To seek the LORD, but they will not find Him;

He has withdrawn from them.

They have dealt treacherously against the LORD,

For they have borne illegitimate children

Now the new moon will devour them with their land.”

(And here, Hosea alludes to the practices of the worship of the baals. And I know there are some in the audience who have not been here previously, and will you permit me just to remind you that the worship of the false gods, and particularly these gods, the baals, for they were local deities, primarily – the worship of these kinds of gods was not merely a spiritual kind of worship, a spiritual kind of apostasy – but also involved very lewd practices as well. For the baals were considered to be gods of fertility. That is, if one worshipped them, their fields would be fruitful, their flocks would grow. And in addition, they were also fertility gods of the womb as well, and therefore Israel would have children.

And therefore, when one went to worship the Baal, there were associated with the temples temple prostitutes, and they engaged in sexual intercourse with them and that was designed to be a magic way in which the flocks, the fields and the people themselves would be fertile and fruitful. It was, of course, not simply spiritual apostasy; it was also

harlotry – prostitution, physically. A vile kind of worship, but Israel had become entangled in it.

That is what he means when he says, for they have borne illegitimate children. One of the commentators says, if you’ll pardon the expression, “A crop of bastards.” Not only physically but also spiritually – those who are the products of the false worship of the baals. You can see that the prophets did not in any way soften their message; they spoke very plainly and very truly.

Now the prophet in verse 8 through verse [sic., 15] speaks of Israel’s judgment being expiated upon her sin,

“Blow the horn in Gibeah,  
The trumpet in Ramah

Sound an alarm at Beth-aven: (remember, that’s Hosea’s word for Beth-el; Beth-el is the place where they set up worship of Jehovah falsely, Beth-el, “house of God” – he calls that false worship and the place where it takes place “the house of iniquity.” So, wherever false worship takes place – mind you, worship – but false worship, he calls it Beth-el, he takes Beth-el, calls it Beth-aven, the house of iniquity)

‘Behind you, Benjamin!’ (He’s warning, you see, that the Assyrians are coming and they are to blow the horn in Gibeah and the trumpet in Ramah. There are towns near the borders of the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, because the Assyrians are coming, and judgment is coming from the Lord)

Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke;  
Among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure.

The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary;  
On them I will pour out My wrath like water. (That’s a local practice. When the boundaries were drawn up and your property had a fence, if you could move the fence, if you were stronger, you could encroach on your neighbor’s property; that has been known

to happen in our country, too. If you’ll study the history of the West, you’ll see that that was characteristic often of people to move the boundaries, do away with the boundaries and therefore encroach on property. That’s what he’s talking about.)

Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment,  
Because he was determined to follow man's command.

Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim

And like rottenness to the house of Judah. (That’s a word translated “moth” here which may well be the correct translation. It also can possibly mean something like “pus” from a wound; putrefaction. Therefore, I am like a moth to Ephraim and like rottenness to the house of Judah)

When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
And Judah his wound,  
Then Ephraim went to Assyria (not to the Lord, to Assyria)  
And sent to King Jareb.”

(There was no King Jareb, incidentally. This is an expression that means “the great king.” Perhaps also it means, many of the commentators mean because of the basic meaning of the root, “the avenging king” or even – George Adam Smith called this a reference to “king pick-a-quarrel” in order to, by reason of the quarrel, to take over the property. That has also been known to happen among the nations in modern times; pick a quarrel with some small nation in order that you may gobble up that nation. Human nature, for some strange reason, seem to be same now matter when it is alive. Then he says,)

“But he is unable to heal you,  
Or to cure you of your wound.

For I will be like a lion ([Johnson laughs] I don’t know whether you understood

that or not; people say I say a word, “lion,” and they never know what it is [laughter]. For those of you who are Yankees, LIE-on [more laughter])

I will be like a lion to Ephraim

And like a young lion to the house of Judah

I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away,

I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.

I will go away and return to My place

Until they acknowledge their guilt (or perhaps, for the word may mean this, too, “until they bear their punishment”) and then seek My face;

In their affliction (that’s the word that is used for tribulation) In their tribulation, they will seek Me early.”

When God desires to bring his people back to himself, he has ways that always work. They are infallible ways. And when they are his sovereignly chosen people, his sovereign ways sometimes involve affliction and tribulation. How much better it is to avoid that and keep short accounts with God? May the Lord bless this reading from his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words which the Prophet Hosea has given, for we see so many ways in which they apply to us in 1984.

Not only to us individually, but to us a local church, and to us as a part of the local churches that name the name of Jesus Christ. To us as a part of the worldwide professing body of Jesus Christ, in so many ways, our minds and hearts and activities follow the pattern of Thine ancient people, Israel. O God, keep us from apostasy. Keep us from departure from Thee. May we, in our own personal life, be stirred by the Holy Spirit to abide in the word of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And for this congregation, particularly, Lord, we pray, may, O God, Thy hand be upon us for spiritual good. Enable us to understand the proper priorities of our lives.

Keep us resting upon Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the holy Scriptures. O God, bless our elderly people, our middle-aged people, our young people and our children. Keep us faithful to Thee.

We pray for those who are listed in our calendar of concern and pray, Lord, that Thou wilt minister to them in a spiritual way and also in a physical way, and give healing where healing is needed and desired. We pray that the solutions to the problems of life may be found in our great God in heaven, for no one can truly cure us but the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whom we worship and whom we desire to serve.

We commit the entire the church of Christ to Thee today, wherever the word of God is proclaimed, truthfully. O God, through the Holy Spirit bring fruit. Build up the body of Christ, enlarge its numbers. Bring it to its perfection. We pray for our country, for our President. We also, Lord, remember this particular assembly here, its elders and deacons, and its ministries which go out to so man distant places. O Father, glorify Thy name in the fruitfulness that flows from the Spirit’s use of the word of God.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning as we come to this chapter, which is important for the doctrines of human apostasy and divine discipline upon a collective body, the Nation Israel, is “God Withdrawn.” The stages of Israel’s history as one studies the Old Testament seem very plain. And the relationship of the history of Israel to the conditions of the church in her apostasy from the Lord are quite clear.

We remember that the Scriptures tell us that in the future there is to come a time of great affliction, a time of Great Tribulation. The term, Great Tribulation is one that our Lord himself uses, and so we must as individuals know that from the Scriptures that there is to come a time of Great Tribulation. Debate continues in the church of Christ over the rapture of the church, whether it shall take place before the time of the Tribulation or after. But we should remember this, that if the true church is raptured before the Tribulation, so far as we can tell, that forms a relatively small part of the whole body of

professing Christians today, and so the great mass of professing Christians today may face the necessity of going through those great events of judgment in the future.

When Paul says that he waits for our Lord from heaven who was raised from the dead and expects deliverance from the time of wrath, there is a great body of professing Christians who will not have that deliverance. So we know then that the church itself faces a time of discipline and a time also of retribution.

There are a number of other significant related lessons here, too. God’s total knowledge of man’s sin, for example. Notice the statement in verse 3, “I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me.” You could put your own name in that verse. I know you, Lewis, and your history, your being, your thoughts, mind, actions – they are known to me. They are not hidden.

It is also a chapter in which we note that the real enemy of the apostate is God himself. Look at verse 12 where he says, “Therefore, I am like a moth to Ephraim.” I am like a moth to Ephraim. The 14<sup>th</sup> verse, “For I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a lion to the house of Judah. And verse 15, “I will go away and return to my place and acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their affliction and their tribulation, they will earnestly seek me.”

And of course, the leaders of this body are singled out for special attention. “Hear this O priests,” he says in verse 1, “Give heed O house of Israel. Listen O house of the king.” And so the priests and the rulers, those who have authority in the land are singled out for special attention. One cannot help but reflect upon the history of the kings of Israel and look at the history and the kings, and one can see that it was long line of men who departed from the worship of the Lord God. And they shall come into special discipline and judgment.

And then if we have any question about the doctrine of divine retribution. That is, that because of our failure to respond to the gospel of the grace of God, that eternal judgment awaits us, he only has to read some of the prophets. They firmly believed in



the doctrine of divine retribution, and we firmly believe here that that subject is before us constantly.

Well as we look at chapter 5, we notice that the prophet begins with the exposition of Ephraim’s sin. It’s a loving analysis, but yet at the same time it’s a very strong analysis of the way in which Israel has departed from the Lord, and attention is laid upon the idolatry of the people. And it has affected not simply the leaders, but the individuals who were the ordinary citizens of the kingdom as well. He says, “Hear this, O priests; give heed O house of Israel. Listen O house of the king.”

And then with very marvelous little metaphors, he describes what has happened in the land because the leaders of the land have permitted the people to go after the worship of the false gods. If you have any question about the God of the Bible being an exclusive God, being absolutely unique in his claims, if you ever have any question about the fact that he is angered to the depths of his being over syncretism – that is, the idea that as long as we worship a god, it’s alright; it doesn’t really make much difference what God we worship as long as we worship a god – then you only have to read the Scriptures with understanding. The Scriptures from beginning to end set forth the God of the Scriptures: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one God who subsists in three persons, whom we worship as an exclusive deity. There is one God and by him there is no one else.

Now in places like Mizpah, in places like Tabor, in places like Beth-aven (or Beth-el if you like) – in places where Israel went for its worship, where their little trees and where they had their little huts and where they had their little altars – you might have said, as so many people say in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, It doesn’t make a whole lot of difference if you worship the right God, the important thing is that you worship god. It doesn’t really make a difference what church you go to as long as you go to church on Sunday. Go to the church of your church.

It would be nice if all churches preached the gospel. In that case, one could say with some significance, go to the church of your choice. But we don’t have that freedom, and particularly in our day. So, we have here the prophet saying, “Those places that you worship, they’re like the traps and snares by which you catch animals, and you catch animals through these traps and snares, and so you by the permission of the worship of the false gods, you’ve been trapping the unwary in the nation, and therefore they have gone off into false teaching and have gone off to false gods and have engaged in not simply, in their spiritually apostate worship, but in those lewd and lascivious physical rites as well.

One, as he thinks about this, cannot help but make application. Israel itself has become a menace to the spiritual health of the citizens of the land. In other words, the leadership, the priests, the kings – those who should have authority – they are the real menace in Israel. Now, I do not think you can study the Christian church’s history without seeing the application of this to us today. Often, today the greatest menace to the Christian faith is found inside the Christian churches. The greatest menace to the Christian faith is those who have familiarity with it but deny its preeminent doctrines. Churches are places that are menaces to the Christian faith today. It’s sad, but it’s true.

If we were to day, where are the Mizpahs and where are the Tabors today, well they are in the First So-and-so Church of such-and-such a city, or the First Such-and-such a church of another city. Or in the theological seminaries, or in the Christian colleges and universities. You would be amazed, if you knew, at the unbelief that is proclaimed in our schools in which the Christian faith is supposed to be preached. So, the Mizpahs, the Tabors and all of the places of false worship include, I’m sad to say, include professing Christian organizations, Christian colleges and seminaries and universities today. Hosea would be a very unpopular man today. And I have a hunch he would put his finger specifically on the evils of the day.

Now, the prophet goes on to say in verse 2, “And the revolvers have gone deep in depravity, but I will chastise all of them. I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me. For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot. Israel has defiled itself.” Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God, for a spirit of harlotry is within them and they do not know the Lord. They have dug pits for the snares, and they have been caught in them themselves. And their deeds will not allow them to come to the knowledge of the Lord. This is something very close to what we would call in Christian doctrine, the doctrine of the total inability of man as he is to respond to the gospel of Christ. Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God.

I think the Apostle Paul would have at this point have said, if he were preaching to us, “When I wrote the Corinthians, I said something of the same thing.” I said, “For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them; they are spiritually discerned.” And further, I said to the Romans, “The mind of the flesh is enmity toward God.” It’s not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Their deeds cannot allow them to return to their God, for a spirit of harlotry does not know the Lord.

And now he says, “Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him. And Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity. Judah also has stumbled with them. They will go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn from them.” What an interesting thing. In something of a cynical way he says these citizens of Ephraim and of Israel, who incidentally, remember, are citizens of a theocratic nation (not like the United States which has never been a theocratic nation), but here is a theocratic nation, founded upon the constitution of the word of God.

And now they bring their cattle and their animals to the places of worship to slaughter them, to worship the Lord God, but really their hearts are with the baals. And so he says, “They’ll go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, but they will not find him.” In other words, I’m not a prisoner of my sacraments. I’m not a prisoner of my

ordinances. The Lord God was the one who gave Israel the command to have the sin offerings and have the trespass offerings, to celebrate the feasts, to celebrate the Passover, to celebrate the Day of Atonement. But it is possible to carry out things that are set out specifically in the word of God as duties of believing people and to do them in such a way that God hates the doing of them. “I hate your feast days,” said another one of these prophets in the days of Hosea.

He’s saying the same thing. He’s saying, “They will seek with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him; because He has withdrawn from them,” because the Lord God is not a prisoner of his ordinances. The fact that you sit in church on Sunday, and perhaps you’ve been baptized in water in testimony to faith in Christ. But perhaps you didn’t have faith in him, and the fact that you come Sunday evening in Believers Chapel and sit very piously around as we partake of the bread and wine, that is no guarantee that God at all is hearing the things that you are saying, and that he is blessing you.

You see, the fundamental relationship to the Lord God in a personal way determines all of the other personal spheres of our personal life. He’s not a prisoner to the act of baptism and to the observance of the Lord’s Supper and forced therefore to bless those who are plunged under the water and come out and who sit at the Lord’s table on Sunday night and take the bread and wine. As a matter of fact, that can be so heinous in his sight because it is done in hypocrisy that he is positively angry at the person who does it in that spirit. That’s what Hosea is saying. He’s not a very nice prophet is he? He’d be very unpopular in 1984.

“They have dealt treacherously against the LORD, they have borne illegitimate children. Now the new moon will devour them with their land.” And so now all of the leaders, by going off into apostasy have been responsible for leading the children of Israel into apostasy, and begetting by those lewd sacrifices and rites and acts a crop of physical bastards have also by their physical apostasy created a crop of apostate children as well.

Oh how terrible it is for the doctrines of the word of God to fail to be preached in the churches of Jesus Christ, and as a result of the ministry of the pulpit, what is actually brought into being who are familiar with the terms of Christianity, familiar with the terms of the great doctrine of the faith, but have no real responsiveness to them in their hearts. They are spiritual bastards – illegitimate children. Terrible.

Now, the prophet speaks of Ephraim’s judgment. All of these verses are filled with vivid metaphors that one would like to spend an extended period of time upon them, but of course we cannot. We cannot do that. I urge you to read over and over again this great prophecy. Here is a vivid warning of judgment to come in verse 8 through verse 14, “Blow the horn in Gibeah, (the enemy is coming) blow the trumpet in Ramah, sound an alarm at Beth-aven, ‘Behind you, Benjamin!’”

He’s talking about the fact that the Assyrians are going to come, and the Northern Kingdom is seeking to make an alliance from the Syrian kingdom in order to protect themselves from the wicked Assyrians who are to come, and they are seeking at the same time to draw Judah into their alliance, and in the meantime Judah does not want to be drawn into their alliance because they’re afraid they’ll be taken over, and they seek to make an alliance with the Assyrians, and all of these political shenanigans are going on, and God says, None of that is going to help you. I’m the God who controls the Assyrians. I control the Assyrians. I know Ephraim. I know Judah. I’m the one to whom you should appeal.

“Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke. Among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure. The princes of Israel have become like those who move a boundary. On them I will pour out my wrath like water. Materialistic, grasping, seeking to enlarge their portfolio of real estate, at the same time outwardly parroting the true things that have to do with Jehovah; inwardly corrupt, worshipping the false gods, seeking to do anything they possibly can to become richer and more influential. Ah Hosea – Hosea, you are speaking to our age. You are speaking to us.

“Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to follow man’s command. Therefore, I am like a moth and like rottenness to the house of Judah.” A moth? Think of it. Small, subtle, hard to see, not terrifying at all – who’s afraid of a moth? But imperceptibly, constantly, continually it weakens, secretly corrupts until finally, what do you have?

Have you ever had a garment of wool that you liked. And you put it away in the spring, and you forgot to put the mothballs with it, or whatever other means you have of preventing it becoming infested with moths. And then when the cold weather comes months later, you rush to your closet and take out the sweater – cashmere, beautiful cashmere sweater that you bought when you went to St. Andrews to the woolen mill [laughter], and you thought you got such a bargain, and you look, and my goodness, beautiful sweater isn’t it? And you take it out, and on the back of it there’s a little moth hole. And on the front of it there’s a little moth hole. And in fact there are three or four of them, and your beautiful sweater is in process of being destroyed. That’s the way a moth works.

How do you like it when you see those little silverfish around your house? They strike terror to me, because I know that when I see them, they’ve been there a long time before. I found one the other day. We, I think, should have a prayer meeting at that time [laughter].

But that is what God says. He’s going to be like a moth. He’s going to work imperceptibly – why you’ll not even know the fact that God’s judgment is in your heart. If you depart from him, you’ll think everything is going along wonderfully for a great while. You’ll meet with the saints. You’re happy. Your family is fine. The value of your stocks is growing, and every few months you tally it up – ah, I’m a little richer than I was a month before. I sure did clean up last year. [Laughter] And all the time the moths are working. All the time the corruption, the putrefaction, the pus is there but you don’t really see it. That’s a terrifying metaphor that the Lord God uses here. I’m like a moth to

Ephraim. That’s a small, subtle, hard to see, but imperceptibly and secretly we are weakened at our hearts.

So what do you do when something like that comes? When Israel and this Lord had been working like a moth in Ephraim, what do they do when trouble comes? Do they go to the Lord God? No, they don’t go to the Lord God. They go to King Pick-a-quarrel. In other words, if the Syrians and Ephraimites are getting ready to attack Judah, what does King Ahaz do? Well Ahaz would like to make a little bargain with the King of Assyria in order to protect himself against Ephraim and against Syria instead of going to the Lord God.

And when Ephraim is in difficulty with Syria (or with Assyria), Ephraim does not seek the Lord God. They want to bring in other political powers in support. Ah, he says, they don’t know the Lord. They don’t understand that they’re really is the Lord God, and their real deliverer is the Lord God.

Then he says, “Ephraim,” in verse 13, “went to Assyria and sent to King Pick-a-quarrel, but he was unable to heal you or to cure you of your wound.” That is what happened in 722 BC not long after this. The Northern Kingdom went into captivity.

Now when we think of the church of Jesus Christ, what do we think of? We look out on Sunday morning. We have a nice little attendance here in Believers Chapel. A lot of professing Christians are here and some unbelievers also – may if you are an unbeliever, you come to Jesus Christ and believe in him, and order your life by the word of God – but we also have many who are here who have been Christians a long time. Are the moths at work in your spiritual life? Is there a weakening in your very being? Is the relationship with the Lord God fresh and vital? When was the last time you got down on your knees before the Lord by yourself and poured out your heart to him? When was the last time you have a clear testimony when it cost you a little bit, to your faith in Jesus Christ?

What about the church as a whole? One does not have to know much theology to know that the church of Jesus Christ is in spiritual decline, theological decline. There’s a whole lot of activity in evangelicalism, but there’s spiritual and theological decline going on at the same way, for it’s all superficial. It’s all insubstantial. There may be a lot of genuine Christianity, but so far as the great truths of the word of God are concerned, one can see the moths everywhere.

Pelegianism. Think of it. Pelegianism in the family of God. Semi-Pelegianism, with its doctrine of free will – the ultimate deism. Of course, it’s obscured. Those who worship the baals say, You’re worshipping the master; Baal means “master, lord.” So, you’re worshipping Lord when you come to our shrines and worship there. It’s the same God. There may be a slight difference in the liturgy, but it’s the same god; come worship with us. And so we’re told that the doctrine of free will – well that is Scriptural teaching. It is false teaching. It is a denial of the grace of God, ultimately – the ultimate deism that everything, ultimately, depends upon us.

The sovereignty of God. Socinianism is in the church today. Universalism. If you will go to our theological seminaries of professing Christianity today, the one great controlling doctrine in so many of our theological schools – I know, I teach in one; fortunately, they don’t believe in universalism – but the great doctrine today is the universalism of “everyone will get to heaven.” Taught by our leading theologians – that is, leading so far as the media is concerned; not leading so far as God is concerned – but theology is on the decline.

Theology has even become a bad word. There is worldliness and human thinking, and actually immorality in the church of Jesus Christ today. The things that are set out in the word of God, clearly as sin and abomination to the Lord God, are not only allowed in the church, but are actually in many of the churches given official recognition. Think of it. Ah, Hosea, you should be here today, because you should have much



opportunity to apply the truths that you gave to Ephraim and Israel so many hundred of years ago.

And then the next step in verse 14, “For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a young lion to the house of Judah.” Can you not see the innocent, tender little sheep coming along, and a lion hungry, waiting for its prey, and the little lamb, the little sheep moves close, and the lion suddenly pounces upon it and slays with a few mighty blows from its paws, and then tears it to pieces and sits down upon its haunches to eat the meat? And do you think that you could go over and pluck that meat out of the lion’s paws? I wouldn’t want to try it, and I wouldn’t like to see you try it.

This is the figure God uses of what he is doing with Ephraim and to Israel. He says, I will be like a lion to them, like a young lion. I – even I – will tear to pieces. And I’ll go away. I’ll carry away, and there is none to deliver. He’s the lion. They are the animals, and they are going to be disciplined and judged by him.

And then finally, what may be the greatest judgment of all in the last verse. “I will go away and return to my place.” Or as he said in the 6<sup>th</sup> verse, “They will go with their flocks and their herds to seek the Lord, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn from them.” This is the most awful of all the divine judgments. God has returned to his place in heaven. He is no longer concerned with what is going to happen with Israel and Judah – with this generation of Israel and Judah.

And think of it for a moment. If he goes, what’s the result? Well, we have no divine guidance. We have no holiness and no distinction between right and wrong, because the ultimate distinction between what is right and what is wrong is the will of God. Not what we are taught in our universities. Not what we are taught in our colleges, and even in many of our seminaries. The ultimate distinction between right and wrong is settled by the will of God.

And if he is not here, there is no distinction between right and wrong. We have seen this in the history of the United States in the last generation or two. Dostoyevsky

said a long time ago, “If God does not exist, then everything is permitted.” And in our society which has become a godless society for the most part – an official godless society – everything is permitted, because the ultimate test of what is right versus wrong is what is done. What the people approve of; what the community approves of. So obviously, the standards are constantly changing, and Relativism is king today and the word of God has been unseated from its throne in our national life. No wisdom, no strength, no love, and even homosexuality, so clearly denounced by the word of God, has its official place in our society, but in our spiritual society as well.

There is a great story in the Old Testament – it was true. It’s the story of Belshazzar. And Belshazzar, the king, had a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles. And he was drinking wine in the presence of the 1,000, and they were living it up, having a great time, and in the midst of this feast, they decided that they would drink out of the vessels of the temple of God which was in Jerusalem.

And so they in positive rebellion against the Lord God began to drink from the holy vessel in rebellion, taunting the Lord God, challenging the God of the Hebrews, and suddenly in the midst of the feast when everyone was having a wonderful time, King Belshazzar became greatly alarmed and his face grew paler. The queen entered into the banquet hall because of the words of the king and said, “O King, live forever. Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale.” Because he had looked off and he had seen on the wall a supernatural writing of some terms.

It turned out to be, “*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,*” and he didn’t know what they meant. But finally someone said, there is a fellow who can do interpretations, and his name is Daniel. And so Daniel was brought in. And Daniel gives a little philosophy of history as he leads up to his interpretation. And he says, “Belshazzar, you’ve forgotten what happened to your father. Your father was a fellow who lived as if there was no God of the Hebrews, and God had to teach him a thing or two, and now you, his son, in spite of that, have not humbled your heart even though you knew all of this. But you’ve

exalted yourself against heaven, and you’ve brought the vessels of his house before you, your nobles, your wives, your concubines have been drinking wine from them, and you’ve praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, wood, iron and stone which do not see, hear or understand, but God in whose hand are your life, breath and your ways, you have not glorified.

“Yes, Belshazzar, even your whiskey-smelling breath is in the hand of the Lord God. And these words tell a story of your kingdom. *MENE, MENE* – God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. *TEKEL* – you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. *PERES* – your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. God has already acted. And it wasn’t before the night was over that Belshazzar and his kingdom fell. For in the ultimate, we are under the hand of the God of the Scriptures. Let us never forget that.

Mr. Reagan. Mr. Chernenko. And all of the rest of the world leaders are under the hand of the Scriptural God – the one of whom Daniel and Hosea write, the one in whose hand their breath is. He’s the one with whom we have to do.

And he says he’s going to have to return. He’s going to go away. And he’s going to go away until Israel acknowledges their gift, and their guilt and seeks his face. That’s not only a figure of a lion. That’s not simply a figure of the past. The prophet probably sees beyond Assyrian and Babylon to the worldwide dispersion in which we are living today in which Israel has been scattered to the four corners of the earth, and God it seems has become silent in his heavenly throne. And he’s waiting. And he’s waiting for Israel to acknowledge him.

When our Lord came on the scene, Israel had an opportunity to respond, but they responded by saying, “We have no king but Caesar!” They, the theocratic people, refused to acknowledge the great God in heaven who was their God. And so now, for centuries, they’ve been scattered to the four corners of the earth. The Lord God is in his place, and

he’s waiting for Israel to acknowledge their guilt and seek his face. They will never do that except that the Lord God has promised that they will do that.

And he says, in their affliction, they will earnestly seek me. And so the time will come when Israel, unable to settle its difficulties and problems by its machinations and treaties, and by its reliance upon the United States or in any other kind of political activity; finally brought to its very knees with only one hope of recourse, the Lord God, they will call upon him. They will earnestly seek him, and our Lord Jesus Christ will come and bring order in this universe in which we live.

In the meantime, it is the Lord God with whom we have to deal. O, the peril of apostasy. You see, when we apostatize from the faith, when we depart from the faith, when lethargy and indifference grips us, the real enemy is the Lord God himself. He has not forgotten what he is going to do, and he will accomplish it.

If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and your life is in shambles because of indifference and because of lethargy, the Lord God may be working like a moth in your life. May God help you to recognize what is really happening, and may he stir you by his Holy Spirit to come back to him, to confess your sin, seek to put him first in your life, and use the time that he’s given you for the glorification of his name.

The remedy, as Hosea puts it so plainly is, “Know the Lord.”

And if you are here this morning, and if you have never believed the Lord Jesus Christ, your sins and your iniquities form the basis of your eternal judgment. May God help you to see the peril in which you stand at this very moment, and may God help you to come to the one who has offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners. That atoning sacrifice for sinners is for you, as you recognize your need and come to him. May God help you to do it. May you believe in him and receive as a free gift, eternal life in marvelous grace. If you’re here this morning, don’t leave without faith in him. Don’t leave without the assurance that I belong to him and my future is settled ultimately.

And for you who are believers, don’t leave this auditorium without a restoration of relationship to him. May the warmth and the vitality that came to you in the day that you sought Christ as your Savior return. May the greenness of the new growth be seen in your life. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these magnificent words of admonition and exhortation from this great prophet of unconditional love. We are so grateful for the warnings and the admonitions which remind us of our failures and call us to repentance and confession, as Christians, and to repentance and confession as salvation as the lost.

O God, may in Believer’s Chapel, until our Lord comes, there be a true and faithful testimony to the grace of God through Jesus Christ -- grace, salvation, through the free gift of God to rebellious people who otherwise would flee from Thee.

Lord, if there are some here who have never believed in Christ, give them no rest nor peace at this very moment until they turn to Thee. Glorify Thy name in the salvation and in the sanctification of those who are here.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.