



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | [believerschapeldallas.org](http://believerschapeldallas.org)

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 8:1-14

“The Tragedy of a Forgotten God”

TRANSCRIPT

Turn in your Bibles to Hosea chapter 8, and will you listen as I read verse 1 through verse 14. Hosea chapter 8 verse 1 through verse 14,

Put the trumpet to your lips!

Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the LORD,

Because they have transgressed My covenant

And rebelled against My law.

They cry out to Me,

"My God, we of Israel know You!"

Israel has rejected the good;

The enemy will pursue him.

They have set up kings, but not by Me;

They have appointed princes, but I did not know it

With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves,

That they might be cut off.

He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, saying,

"My anger burns against them!"

How long will they be incapable of innocence?

For from Israel is even this!

A craftsman made it, so it is not God;

Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces.

For they sow the wind

And they reap the whirlwind

The standing grain has no heads;

It yields no grain.

Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up.

Israel is swallowed up;

They are now among the nations

Like a vessel in which no one delights.

For they have gone up to Assyria,

Like a wild donkey all alone;

Ephraim has hired lovers.

Even though they hire allies among the nations,

Now I will gather them up;

And they will begin to diminish

Because of the burden of the king of princes.

Since Ephraim has multiplied altars for sin,

They have become altars of sinning for him.”

This particular text has been a puzzle for some, but I think that if we bear in mind one simple little fact it will help us. And that is that in the Hebrew language, the word for sin is a word that is related to the making of a sin offering. And in fact the word for sin is also the word for sin offering as a noun. And so probably the reference is here to the fact that since Ephraim has multiplied the altars upon which sin offerings are made, they have

become altars of sinning for Ephraim. In other words, the altars where sin offerings are constantly being made are, because of Israel’s disobedience and unresponsiveness to the word of God, have become means for their own sinning.

“Though I wrote for him ten thousand precepts of My law,  
They are regarded as a strange thing.”

It’s a rather striking that the rabbis went through the Old Testament and counted the commandments of the Old Testament and came to the number 613. 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. Hosea says, though he had written ten thousand precepts of my law, they are still regarded as a strange thing.

“As for My sacrificial gifts,  
They sacrifice the flesh and eat it,  
But the LORD has taken no delight in them  
Now He will remember their iniquity,  
And punish them for their sins;  
They will return to Egypt.  
For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces;  
And Judah has multiplied fortified cities,  
But I will send a fire on its cities that it may consume its palatial dwellings.”

A magnificent chapter in which Hosea ranges over the spiritual attitude of the nation, the Northern Kingdom particularly in mind, but you’ll notice there is a word for the Southern Kingdom, too, in that last verse: “For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities,” and so, the same attitude that prevailed in the Northern Kingdom was manifesting itself also in the Southern Kingdom.

Isn’t it strange that people who lived so long ago should fall into these types of sins, and isn’t it nice that in 1984 we don’t fall into these kinds of sins? [Laughter] May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee that by Thy marvelous grace Thou hast given us an understanding of the primary message of the word of God, that we’re sinners, that Jesus Christ is the Savior, and that is through him and through him alone that redemption from sin comes. And we are grateful and thankful.

And Lord, we confess that as we read the Prophet Hosea, though he wrote so many hundreds of years ago, his words speak very definitely and precisely to the spiritual condition that we often find ourselves in. And we thank Thee for these ancient warning and admonitions, and as we look back over the history of the ancient people Israel and see that these admonitions and warnings did come to pass for generations of them, it solemnizes us even more to realize that the severity of God is part of the nature of God. And Lord, if we forget Thy word and forget Thee, discipline will come to us as well.

Enable us, as Paul warned the Gentiles in his day, not to mind “high things,” but to trust. And we thank Thee and praise Thee for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee that on this, the Lord’s Day we are able to come together and reflect upon the word of God which is so sufficient for our needs, for it points us to Thee.

We thank Thee, Lord, for the privilege of serving Thee, and we thank Thee for this particular church, its elders and deacons, its members and its friends. We are grateful for Thy hand of blessing upon us, Lord, but we know that we, too, tend to depart from Thee. And O God, by Thy marvelous grace, enable to cleave to Thee and Thy grace. We pray for the elders and the deacons especially, and ask Lord that Thou wilt give them wisdom and enablement and concern, and enable them to minister to us and to shepherd us and oversee us that we may not fall into the same kinds of sin that Hosea’s generation did.

We pray for our country. We pray Thy blessing upon the President. We ask Lord Thy blessing upon the country as a whole, and by Thy grace, as the election draws near,

we pray that we may be guided to the selection of the President which Thou wouldst guide us to have. O God, give us a godly President.

And we thank Thee Lord for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and we pray Thy blessing upon every assembly of believers where the word of God is proclaimed, and may there be responsiveness.

We thank Thee Lord for the calendar of concern, and for its mention of the names of those who’ve requested that we pray for them. And we pray O God that Thou wilt minister to them, each one whose name is mentioned there, and may the difficulties and trials of life which belong to all of us find their solution in the ministry of our great triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And Lord, may the ministry of the word build us up in our faith and draw us closer to Thee. Deliver us from spiritual forgetfulness. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Today we’re turning again to the prophecy of Hosea, and the subject for the ministry of the word this morning is “The Tragedy of a Forgotten God.” When one studies the theology of the Scriptures, after first being exposed to prolegomena, or matters that have to do with the beginning of things and ways by which we know divine truth, we usually turn to the study of the doctrine of God – his being and his attributes, and his works (excluding his redemptive works). Nothing is more important than who God is, what he does and what he has done.

Israel’s ancient failure was her failure to remember her doctrine of God. May it not be ours. It is one of the tragedies of the life of the local church that the same kinds of failures that characterize the Nation Israel are the kinds of failures that one sees carried out again and again in the history of the Christian church. Here are the tragic results of forgetting.

And strikingly, even though they have forgotten the Lord God, they plead their birth and their breeding. Did you notice how the prophet puts it in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter in the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse? After speaking about the fact that they have transgressed the covenant and

rebelled against my law, the prophet says that the nation cries out to the Lord God saying, “My God, we of Israel know Thee.” Isn’t it a striking thing? They have forgotten the Lord God, yet they say, “We of Israel know Thee.”

In other words, they plead their birth. We are Israelites. And they plead their breeding: We know Thee. We have been instructed by accredited ministers of the true God. We belong to the right people, and we’ve studied the right things. In fact, one might even translate this, “My God, we of Believers Chapel know Thee. After all, we are of the Chapel, and we have been instructed in the orthodox theology.” It’s striking to me that one may actually forget God and nevertheless plead one’s birth and breeding.

Some years ago I had a friend who wanted to join a church in which I was preaching, and our custom was to visit and discuss their faith. Well, a young man called me early one morning as I was sitting at my desk and said, “My wife and I would like to join the church.” And so I made an appointment to come by and talk to them, and I had hardly put the phone down before it rang again and a man, as I said hello, said, “We want to make it a double wedding.” And of course, I knew what he was talking about from my previous conversation, and it was obvious that he knew about it, and so I made an appointment to talk to him.

The only thing that I really knew about his faith was that he had attended the services for quite a time, and he had told me that he had liked me. And he said he liked me because of the way that I crossed my legs on the platform. [Laughter] That made me, for some reason, a little suspicious of his faith [loud, sustained laughter]. But anyway, I went to call on him and I said, “Just what evidence do you have that you are a Christian?”

He said, “Dr. Truett baptized me.” We now, of course, if you wanted to be baptized by a well-known and successful Christian preacher, you couldn’t have found a better preacher than Dr. Truett. He was a great Christian, a great preacher. And a preacher in a very well-known church in the city of Dallas, First Baptist Church. And if

one could become a Christian by the rites and ordinances of a local church, he had a good claim.

And we talked on, and that was really the only thing that he knew about Christianity. In the meantime, and I wouldn’t blame this on Dr. Truett or the church in which he was baptized, because he shortly after that went to another church and was not even in the Baptist church, and so we cannot blame this on the First Baptist Church. Truett, no doubt, had done what he was supposed to do. But at any rate, this individual could never give me any assurance that he was a genuine Christian, so I made a number of appointments with him, and finally, in fairness to him and in fairness to the church, I told him we could not accept him as a member in the church.

Well, he left the church as a result of that, quite angry over the fact that we had not accepted him, because he had been baptized by Dr. George Truett. It’s a very tragic thing, but nevertheless it’s true that people still claim that they are a Christian by some rite or ordinance they have observed. And he was not the first one who has talked to me through the years, and I know you have had the same experience. If you’ve done any witnessing of the Lord at all, of individuals, if you say to them, are you a Christian, are you a Christian? They say, Why yes, I was baptized on such and such a date. There’s nothing wrong in saying that, because that may be an indication of the time at which one really did believe in Christ. But so often, it’s a substitute for the personal relationship.

Well, with that in the background, let’s turn to this chapter in which, again, the prophet of tears and thunder expresses the mind of God to his generation. As we read the Scripture reading, you probably noticed the very first verse contains at least one, I think two clarion calls for Israel to turn from their self-reliance and turn from their trust in the Lord God. Put the trumpet to your lips; like an eagle, the enemy comes to the house of the Lord.

Now, the word “put” is not really in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text says, simply, “to your pallet” the trumpet. And then, “like a vulture against the Lord’s house.”

So there are two clarion calls. To your pallet the trumpet, like an eagle against the Lord. And the word for eagle here really refers often to a vulture, a griffin, and so really what we have here is that God is very angry over the spiritual condition of the nation, and so he says, to your pallet a trumpet. Sound the trumpet of judgment, and like a vulture against the Lord’s house.

You see, there is an ominous speck in the sky. Israel does not see it. Israel does not understand it, but it is there. And that ominous speck in the sky is a vulture, and the vulture is flying about waiting for the stricken nation to expire in order that the vulture may pounce upon the dead body and eat it. You see, it’s God’s note of judgment, and a very striking judgment it is.

And one might ask, How is it that God can speak in this way of the chosen people? Well, he explains, because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. And verse 3, “Israel has rejected the good.” The causes of this are very plain. The basic relationship, the covenant, has been broken. And furthermore, the ways in which the covenant expresses itself in detailed response to it.

Well, he says, they have rebelled against those expressions, those ways of expressing their obedience to the Lord God. They’ve transgressed against my covenant. They’ve rebelled against my law, and further – you know, there are things that are right and wrong, even though the law might speak to them. For example, there are things that are right even though the law might not support them. And on the other, there are things that are wrong even though the law might not expressly speak with reference to them.

You see, there is a law above our law, and the law above our law is the law of God. And there things that are good from the standpoint of the law of God, which our law may speak negatively with respect to. And there things that are bad that our law may say nothing about, but which really are bad in the sight of the supreme law. It is well for us as citizens and as individuals, and particularly as Christians to remember that the laws of the land are under the law of God. And the law of God is the ultimate law. And so



Israel has transgressed the covenant of God, the Mosaic law. They have rebelled against its express statements. And furthermore, they have rejected the good. And so the nation is without excuse.

And so now five charges are laid out against it. And in verse 2 through verse 13 the prophet speaks of them. As a matter of fact, they are like five trumpet blasts. To your pallet, the trumpet, and blast number one comes, and incidentally, these five things are simply symptoms of a deeper malady. But the first blast of the trumpet is the transgression and trespass of the law that we have been speaking about.

Now in the fourth verse, the second blast of the trumpet is the false king-making that characterizes the nation. They have set up kings but not by me. They have set up princes, but I did not know it. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves that they might be cut off.

If one goes back and studies the history of Israel in the Old Testament, and we learn that from the days of Samuel – well, perhaps it would be good for us to look at Samuel. In 1 Samuel chapter 8 the question of a king arose in the nation. Listen to how God dealt with it. This is 1 Samuel chapter 8. We begin reading at verse 4, “Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways.” Isn’t that sad? Here is the judge of Israel, the great and good Samuel, also a prophet of the Lord, and his sons do not walk in his ways. “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” Everybody wants to be like all the nations, don’t we?

All the people in the churches want to be like all the other churches. Following the Lord God? Ah, that’s difficult. That brings us into reproach, doesn’t it? We want to be like the nations. “But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’” Do you know why? Because the ideal thing is for the Lord

God to be king. That’s what he was. He was their king, and they were, in effect, rejecting him.

“And Samuel prayed to the LORD. The LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.” One of the things we learn, incidentally in the doctrine of God is that there is such a thing as the decretive will of God, and such a thing as the preceptive will of God. The preceptive will of God is that which pleases him. That’s set forth in his word. His decretive will of God is what he has determined to come to pass. And he has determined that all things come to pass in accordance with his will. Scriptures state that plainly.

We often don’t like to realize that everything comes to pass in accordance with the will of God. He works all things in accordance with the counsel of his own will, Paul says, and if Paul was standing in this pulpit, that’s exactly what he would say. All things come to pass according to the counsel of his eternal will.

But there are times, you see, when God for other reasons – greater good, perhaps – determines that certain things are to come to pass which don’t please him. That puzzles people who are not responsive to the word of God, but if you just think for a moment about the cross of Jesus Christ, and if you think the cross of Jesus Christ was something that was determined in ages past, then you see that it was something that was determined of God. He does determine things that come to pass, even things that may not please him, may not be according to his word.

Or, as the Scriptures put it, Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost says, “Him, Christ being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” – that’s God’s determination – “you have with wicked hands taken him up and nailed him to the tree.” And they did not have the excuse of, “Well, we were just doing what God determined to come to pass.” God called them wicked even when they were carrying out things that he had determined were going to come to pass. And if you have any problem

with Acts chapter 22 and verse 23, and you think that’s an exception, then just turn over the fourth chapter, and read there what the apostles say there, because they say it even more emphatically in that chapter.

So, Samuel, go ahead and let them have their way. Because they’re not rejecting you; they’re rejecting me. “Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day--in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods--so they are doing to you also. Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the custom of the king who will reign over them.” Saul, of course, is primarily in view here.

So, God was not pleased that Israel desired the king, but he determined that they should have that king in order that they might learn that no human king will ever satisfy God and do his will perfectly except the king who is to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. So, from the days of Samuel, through Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, to the climax of John 18:40 when the nation, when asked by Pilate, shall I release Jesus unto you, replied, “Not this man but Barabbas,” and then a few moments later said, “We have no king but Caesar,” the voice of God, the moral law, is made subject to the vote of men and to the climate of human opinion. How sad. How sad.

I imagine that there were very good reasons brought forward for having a king like the nations. But, as we’ve often pointed out, when we don’t have the will to do his will, there is nothing so mysterious as that which is obvious. When we lack the will to see things as they really are, there’s nothing so mysterious as the obvious. And Israel lacked the will to follow the will of God, became confused, and ultimately exposed themselves to divine discipline and judgment. False king-making.

What’s the recourse to Mondale? What’s the recourse to Hart? Alright, for you Democrats, what’s the recourse to Reagan? [Laughter] You see, ultimately, our hope is in the Lord God. And if we cannot find our security and hope in the Lord God, then we

don’t know what the Scriptures are talking about. Well that’s the second blast, the false king-making.

Now the third blast is the puppet gods, verse 5 through verse 7. “He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, saying, ‘My anger burns against them!’ How long will they be incapable of innocence?” Remember, it was Moses, who coming down with the law in his hand, that though he was gone a short period of a few weeks, Israel had turned away from the God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt by the mighty miracles, through the Red Sea, and now had made themselves a golden calf and were beginning to dance about it and worship it as if the Lord God was dead.

You might think that having learned that lesson, they would never be guilty of that again. But when the kingdom divided and Jeroboam becomes king as we’ve mentioned before in this series, Jeroboam was a politician. And he was one of those kings that God allowed Israel to have – one of those evil kings that Israel was allowed to have, too.

And Jeroboam realized that if we’re going to have two kingdoms, one in the north and one in the south, and if one only can worship God in Jerusalem, then it won’t be long before all of those people down in Judah are going to have all of our citizens following the king of Judah. And so he decided that he would solve the problem by having his own golden calf in the north. But not one, but two: one at Bethel and one at Dan. And that’s Hosea’s speaking about: He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, your bull – because the word probably means “bull” – a young bull characterized by strength and sexual potency, the things that our society so often idolizes and appreciates.

And so they accepted the superstition. Accepted superstition, one of the commentators has said, is like established etiquette. It can put anything beyond challenge if you can show this is the way it has been done. Can you imagine getting this whole nation to follow this religion?

And today, well, we have the accepted Christian superstition of free will. And do you think it is hard to get the Christian church to follow this. No. It’s very easy. And a

person who speaks out against it is about as popular in our society and among our churches as Hosea was in the Northern Kingdom. Not very popular. And Jeremiah was not popular, either. And the rest of the prophets, too, were not very popular either, but our responsibility is to teach the word of God.

There was a day in the history of the Christian church when that was regarded as sound doctrine. Listen to John Owen. I love Mr. Owen. Unfortunately, he takes two pages what he could write what he could succinctly say in one page, and as a result, many people do not read him. But he has a book on *A Display of Arminianism*. I even like Mr. Owen’s titles, because if you read his title, you have half the book. His titles take up about a half a page. Listen to his title on *A Display of Arminianism*. Incidentally, this is not all his title. This is just some of the title. The book is entitled, *A Display of Arminianism, Being a Discovery of the Old Pelagian Idol, Free Will with the New Goddess, Contingency, Advancing Themselves into the Throne of the God of Heaven to the Prejudice of his Grace, Providence and Supreme Dominion Over the Children of Men, Wherein the Main Errors by Which They are Fallen Off From the Received Doctrine of all the Reformed Churches with Their Opposition in Divers Particulars the Doctrines Established in the Church of England*. Now of course, there is more to the title, but that’s enough to give you an idea [laughter] of what kind of titles they have. When you read the title, you can see that the doctrine of free will is a new idol, because ultimately, the doctrine of free will makes man the decision maker and not the Lord God, and God himself is torn from his throne and put upon the throne is the goddess contingency. Or the god or idol, the old Pelagian idol, free will.

You know, this is a serious matter. I say it over and over again. I suppose one day they will flail me from the platform as the one person who said one too many times that free will is a heresy. Well that’s alright. I’ll have a good time in heaven, anyway.

Now, these are puppet gods and goddesses. And God speaks about them and he says, “Look, they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no

heads; it yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up.” That’s the third blast of the trumpet against the puppet gods. Those calves that there people who were the followers of the one true God, Jehovah actually bowed down before as their gods.

Now the fourth blast of the trumpet in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> verses is related to the folly of an alliance with false nations. As a matter of fact, the folly of alliance with Assyria. False religion pays disastrous dividends; it always does. The way in which we turn away from the Lord God and trust in that which is false will inevitably come back and we will reap catastrophe from it. To put it in Paul’s words in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 8, the apostle says this, “For the one who sows to his own flesh, from the flesh, shall reap corruption. But the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. And so, if you ally yourself with Syria, if you ally yourself with Egypt, you will reap the corruption of turning away from the Lord God.

And finally, in the last blast of the trumpets in verse 11 through verse 13, we have false altars and sin. Sin-offering altars – think of that! Altars where the children of Israel were to come and sacrifice their animals, confessing their sin to receive forgiveness, have now become altars of sinning. Doesn’t that seem strange to you? Doesn’t that seem strange to you that the altar of burnt offering where the priests slew the offerings for individuals whose consciences had brought conviction to them because they had departed from the Lord God, and they had brought their animal in accordance with the Mosaic law because of their trespass, because of their sin or whatever kind of sin they had committed. They had fulfilled the Mosaic law. They had brought their animal. The animal had been sacrificed and their conscience had been cleared because they had followed the word of God.

But now, because their hearts had become hardened to the truth of God, they were still bringing their animals, but the place of forgiveness because of repentance, and they carrying out in obedience to the word of God, the place that was to be a place of

repentance and forgiveness has now become, because of their coldness and lethargy and indifference has actually become another place of sinning.

Let’s not fail to make application. Why do you come to the meetings of the saints? Well, you come to the meetings of the saints to hear the word of God. You come to the meetings of the saints in order to be encouraged by other Christians. You come also in order to worship the Lord God. It’s even possible that while you’re here in this meeting, that you may remember, as the Holy Spirit ministers the word of God, that you have displeased him and so you have confessed your sin and you receive forgiveness in the meeting.

But instead of that transpiring, when we come to a meeting and our hearts are indifferent and hardened, and we are lethargic in our spiritual life, and we are just carrying out because it is custom or because it is expected of us, ah, then the very thing that should be a means of blessing has become a means of cursing. And instead of being a place where worship takes place and confession and repentance, it becomes a place of discipline and judgment, even in Believers Chapel. That’s what the prophet is saying here.

So sin offering altars have become altars for sinning. And mind you, it is insulting to God. It is sickening to God. It is sickening for us to come to a meeting of the saints, and to come indifferent to the things of God, not having our hearts prepared. Not responsive to the word of God. It’s insulting to him, it’s sickening to him. As Amos puts it, “I hate your sacrifices. I hate your burnt offerings,” so God said through that prophet. Isaiah says the same thing. The prophets unite in this, that our religious exercises carried out in indifference to the reality of the truth of the word of God – it’s not simply deadness my friend; it’s a kind of deadness that brings discipline and judgment to us. There is no such thing as neutrality in spiritual things.

One of the amazingly wonderful things about the Prophet Hosea is that he can speak of the grace of God in brining Israel out of the land of Egypt, and then the disgrace

of the fact that he is going to have to send them back to Egypt, because that’s the way the 13<sup>th</sup> verse ends. They will return to Egypt. These people who had, by a mighty work of divine redemption, been brought out of the land of Egypt and the bondage that they felt, are now, because of their disobedience and unresponsiveness to the word of God are going to retrace the steps of that grand epic so that they go back to Egypt.

Ah yes. That’s possible. It’s possible for a church like Believers Chapel. We can see it over and over again carried out in the churches of this great land and this Western world, where, in the history past there were men who were vial in the faith, true believers in Jesus Christ, who preached the true gospel. Men were gathered together who had faith in God, who taught their children the things of the word of God, but now, today, look at them. Do you get any sound doctrine in them? No. No sound doctrine. As a matter of fact, denials of the Christian faith, and so they’ve retraced their steps to spiritual Egypt, and laboring there without forgiveness of sins and under the burden of it, they’re blind. When we abandon the one way through Jesus Christ, corruption must inevitably come.

Now we come to the conclusion in verse 14, and it’s a conclusion and a kind of summary, but we’ve been talking about the symptoms up to this point. But now the malady: “For Israel has forgotten his maker.” In the Hebrew text there is a simple little “and,” “And Israel has forgotten his maker,” but it probably should be rendered something like this, because it’s clear Hosea now is tracing their troubles to the fact that Israel has forgotten their Lord God. This is the malady, this is the origin of all he’s been talking about.

Forgotten? Wait a minute. Does this chapter support the idea that Israel has forgotten God? Not in the sense in which we think of forgotten, because in verse 2, God says through the prophet, “They cry out to me, My God, we of Israel know Thee.” They haven’t forgotten God in the sense that they don’t know he exists. They know he exists. They are believers in the existence of God, as everyone ultimately is, for God has by him, making us in the image of himself, has created us in such a way that deep down within



we all know that he exists, including Madalyn Murray O’Hair. We know that. That is part of our being. And in order to say we don’t, we have to suppress the truth that God has put in us because we are creatures of the Lord God.

Israel, forgotten him? No. As a matter of fact, this word, forgotten, if you look it up in any Hebrew lexicon that is worthwhile, you will find that this particular word, *shakach*, is a word that means something like, “to mislay,” “to neglect to mention,” Brown, Driver and Briggs put it. Or, “to cease to care for.” See, the problem with Israel is not that they’ve totally forgotten the Lord God; they’ve mislaid him. They don’t care about his interests. Or, they don’t bother with him. They neglect him. That’s what Hosea means.

And incidentally, if you’ll go back in the Book of Deuteronomy, that marvelous book in which the Lord God, through Moses, goes back over their experience and encourages and admonishes them with reference to entering into the land, he points out that personal neglect or forgetting God is often seen in failure to instruct our children in the things of God. One of the great causes of difficulty in the church of Christ today is not because we don’t have enough psychologists and psychiatrists. It’s hard to get into a church meeting without stumbling over one of them. And if you don’t stumble over one of them, there’s some kind of counselor around who will, you will stumble into them.

But we have neglected our responsibilities, and we have not trained up our children in the things of the Lord God. And so they are allowed to grow up in those years in which they could be impressionably drawn to the things of the Lord God. And Moses goes on to talk about the neglect that comes from self-satisfaction because we are so happy with ourselves. He talks also about the self-righteousness of pride, and I’m sure in Israel, just as in the Church of Jesus Christ, there was a great deal of that. He even says that prosperity is a reason why we forget God, but all of these things are symptoms. The problem is forgetting God.

One wonders how it happens. Well is it something like this? Is it possible that we have become by the grace of God a vital believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but then in process of time, as we get acquainted with church and we start attending church, and we start listening to the word of God and hearing preaching and talking about spiritual things and getting to know Christian people that it’s not long before the freshness of the life with God wears off?

And when it wears off, our faith becomes something like intellectual assent only? The Reformers told us that faith was composed of knowledge, assent, trust; *notitia, ascensus, fiducia*. And as a result of acquaintance over and over as the generations pass on, finally, faith become intellectual assent only. And God is relegated to the temple, he’s relegated to the church. And so when we think of God, we think of the church, and as far as the rest of the week is concerned, we don’t have to pay any attention to those things that Dr. Johnson or whoever it is is preaching; it’s on Sunday that we pay attention to these things, but on Monday, no. In our business, we live like other men. We do things like others do, because how can you get along if you do not do what others do. How foolish. How foolish.

I was in business for eight years. I know what it is to have to wrestle with the conditions and also the sins of the society. But let me assure you, if you sow to those things, you shall, of the flesh, reap corruption. It’s interesting to me that the prophet says, Israel has forgotten its maker and has built palaces, and Judah has multiplied fortified cities. The passion for bigness. The passion for building – that even may be a symptom of something good in the sense that you will have capacity for the eternal. But when the Lord God is forgotten, then our building is without him, and our business is often built without the Lord God. Our hobbies, even, may be ways by which we are drawn away from the truth of God and the worship and praise of him.

And what are we interested in? Security. So we build our big cities and we also, of course, are interested in our fortified places. Our pride and our safety. And then we

listen to others who tell us things about the word of God rather than reading the word of God, and so we talk about human dignity. What an amazing thing that human dignity has become spoken of more in the church than the cross of Christ itself. Self-esteem. We even have an apostle of self-esteem, and crowds of people come to hear men’s self-esteem preached.

Fulfillment. Emotional control. The balanced life. The wholistic life. Releasing forgiveness. Sexual sanity. All of these things become our focus instead of the word of the Lord God. What are these things? When America becomes so interested in security – what is this, really? What kind of security? Security against the fact that they have forgotten God. Security against the lack of God. But don’t talk about the nation. Talk about us. Talk about me. Security. Security against failure to rest in the Lord God. This is the answer to Mondale and inflation. We’ll not be worried about what may happen in November if our faith is really in the Lord God. When we have the Lord God on our side and we’re resting in him, how else is it possible for us to fail? We have security. We have strength. We have a God who stands for his truth and stands for us if we stand in his truth. May God give us the grace to do it.

I love John Newton: “a slave of slaves,” he described himself. For that’s what he was, a slave of slaves, but by the grace of God and a family that had known the Lord God, John Newton was marvelously saved and the great author of amazing grace, how sweet the sound, knew exactly what it was all about.

Do you know what his favorite text was? Set above his mantle piece in his study, later when he became a preacher of the faith that he had once attacked, it was this. Deuteronomy 15:15, “Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord Thy God redeemed Thee.” Thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord Thy God redeemed Thee. If you’re a believer in this audience, that’s a text that applies to you – applies to you. You were a bond man in the land of Egypt, under the bondage of sin. Under all of the things that sins lays upon us as burdens in the

world, and the Lord thy God has redeemed thee through the Lord Jesus Christ. How can you forget him? How can you turn from him? How can you become the kind of person who attends church to be attending church? How can you become indifferent and lethargic?

And how is it possible for you to sit in the presence of the Lord God and not be stirred by what God has done through his redemptive work? “Can a virgin forget her ornaments,” Isaiah said, “Or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb, even these may forget, but I will not forget you.” What a magnificent God we have. How is it possible for us to live the kind of life that we do, forget him, neglect him?

Safety, security, happiness and ultimate joy reside in the Savior, and there is no substitute. Psychiatry, psychology, philosophy, human reason – all are crutches. And inevitably, if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption. May the Lord God give us to lean upon him who’s loved us and loosed us from our sins with his own blood.

If you’re here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to trust in him who offered the atoning sacrifice sufficient for your sin. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Receive from him the forgiveness of your sins for time and eternity, but you believers, you believers whose lives are often so cold, so indifferent, so neglectful of spiritual things and of the Lord God himself, confess your sin. Come to him. Acknowledge. Weep a tear or two. Shed a tear or two, for the way in which you have neglected him, and he will give you the glorious experience of family forgiveness.

May God help you to do it. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for these wonderful words from the prophet, and we confess that we have so often forgotten Thee. Lord, deliver us from our spiritual forgetfulness. Help us by Thy wonderful grace and the enlightenment of the

“The Tragedy of a Forgotten God” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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Holy Spirit to see ourselves as we really are. We need the security and safety of trust in  
Thee. Go with us today.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.