

Our Gomerish Ways

Today In Your Reading...

Of all the nations He could have selected to be His own, the Lord chose Israel. Once a nation bound by chains, He set her free. Once a slave without purpose, He gave her hope and new life, by making her the object of His affection. He provided for her every need, He protected her from all her enemies, and He offered her everything she desired. What more could He do to demonstrate His love for one who had never known love like this before?

How did Israel repay Him? She pushed away from His arms, she scorned His words, she despised His attention, she took for granted His provision, she sought out other options, and she eventually gave herself to other lovers. Despite all that the Lord had done for her, Israel proved to be an unfaithful and adulterous wife.

Take King Ahaz of Israel, for example, who went to Damascus to meet with the king of Assyria. "While he was there, he noticed an unusual altar. So he sent a model of the altar to Uriah the priest, along with its design in full detail. Uriah built an altar just like it by following the king's instructions, and it was ready for the king when he returned from Damascus. When the king returned, he inspected the altar and made offerings on it..." (*2 Kings 16:10-13*).

To demonstrate His displeasure with Israel's adulterous behavior, having run to the arms and affection of other gods, the Lord asked the prophet Hosea to marry a harlot named Gomer. Like Hosea, the Lord had been a faithful husband, and like Gomer, Israel had played the prostitute with other lovers. As any good husband would be, the Lord was jealous for His bride and grieved over her infidelity.

However, the Lord had enough of Israel's harlotry. He was ready to punish her. "I will call

Israel to account, for she is no longer my wife, and I am no longer her husband. Tell her to take off her garish makeup and suggestive clothing and to stop playing the prostitute... For she has said, 'I will run after other lovers and sell myself to them...' But I will leave her to die of thirst, as in a desert..." (*Hosea 2:2-5*).

Daily Reflection

Before we condemn Israel for her unfaithfulness to the Lord, you and I must look in the mirror and carefully examine ourselves. **Can we say with a clear conscience that we have never "cheated" on our God?** He has pursued us with His love, yet we are quick to leave Him for the worldly temptations that come our way?

What temptations have caused you to pull away from the Lord, even leave Him for a while?

All of us must admit that, at some level, we have committed adultery, spiritual adultery, and have fallen "head over heels" for other loves. All of us have sacrificed time and money and attention to express passion for idols and false gods, all to the detriment of our relationship with God.

Describe how these acts are hurtful to God. What should He do to get your attention?

Confess to your Gomerish ways. **Do not return the Lord's love with spiritual adultery.**

Following the Leader

June 26 — Hosea 2:14-8:14

Day 177 — 188 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We continued reading the prophecies of Hosea, which are not uplifting at all. The Lord asked him to marry a prostitute to demonstrate Israel's unfaithfulness to Him. While He has remained faithful, they had been adulterous. Here is an example of God venting His wrath:

"Here the word of the Lord, O people of Israel! The Lord has filed a lawsuit against you, saying 'There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land! You curse and lie and kill and steal and commit adultery... Alcohol and prostitution have robbed My people of their brains. They are asking a piece of wood to tell them what to do! They think a stick can tell them the future. Longing after idols has made them foolish. They have played the prostitute, serving other gods and deserting their God... For they have betrayed the honor of the Lord, bearing children that aren't His'" (4:1, 2, 11, 12).

The Lord goes on to lay the blame on Israel's leaders, their kings and priests. "Listen, all you men of the royal family. These words of judgment are for you. You are doomed! For you have led the people into a snare by worshiping idols. I will settle with all of you for what you have done. I know what you have done. You have left me like a prostitute leaves her husband. You are utterly defiled" (5:1-3).

The Lord continued His charges against the priests, "Don't point your finger at someone else and try to pass the blame! Look, you priests, My complaint is with you. My people are being destroyed because they don't know Me. It is all your fault, for you yourselves refuse to know Me... Like priests, like people. Since the priests are wicked, the people are wicked too" (4:4-9).

Thankfully, in the midst of these charges and promise of judgment and exile, God promised a

ray of hope. "Then the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go and get your wife again. Bring her back to you and love her, even though she loves adultery. For the Lord still loves Israel...'" (3:1). Though God's wrath will burn and Israel's judgment will be harsh, He will still be merciful and restore Israel to her land and her covenant with Him.

Daily Reflection

While each of us are responsible for our own relationship with the Lord, I couldn't help but be convicted about my leadership of others. **Am I leading them towards the Lord or away from Him?** Am I leading them to be faithful to Him, or would I be responsible for their apostasy? Jesus said, "A student is not above His teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

I believe everyone is leading someone, because everyone has influence; and, *it only takes one follower to be a leader.* What kind of leader have you been? Are you leading others towards the Lord or away from Him?

If your children, your friends, your students, your co-workers, your small group, or your church members patterned their lives after your example, your teaching, your leadership, then what would they be like? **Could God blame you for leading others astray?**

Put Your Hands to the Plow

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June 27 — Hosea 9:1-14:9

Day 178 — 187 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We finished the book of *Hosea*. God used this prophet to warn His people of their impending judgment and to plead with them to repent and return to a faithful relationship with Him. "O people of Israel," He said, "you have been unfaithful to your God, hiring yourselves out like prostitutes... Now you will be carried off to Egypt and Assyria... Plant the good seed of righteousness and you will harvest a crop of My love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that He may come and shower righteousness upon you. But you have cultivated wickedness and raised a thriving crop of sins. You have eaten the fruit of lies... You have become satisfied and proud, and you have forgotten Me" (9:1, 3; 10:12, 13; 13:6).

These are sad words, indeed; and, the more I think on them, the more I realize that they could describe us, if we are not careful. How does a nation like Israel, who started so well, end up provoking the wrath and judgment of God? How do we avoid the same mistake?

In the passage above, the Lord through Hosea gave us a glimpse into how this happens.

Hearts do not harden overnight; rather, by long dry spells, fresh soil turns to fallow ground. It happens one day at a time, one step from the Lord at a time, and, after a while, we realize that we are some distance away.

First, **we become satisfied and proud.** We become prosperous and successful in the world's eyes. Life becomes easy to manage. We do not face difficulties regularly, and we believe that we can handle things on our own. We do not need the Lord. This leads to arrogance and self-reliance. We become prayerless, spiritually apathetic, and disinterested in God and His Word.

Second, having become prideful and callous, we grow curious in the wisdom of the world, less discerning of the truth and, instead, more keen on the ways which seem right to men. Before long, **we are eating the fruit of their lies** — we must have what they have, we must look like they look, we must listen to, follow, and watch what they do. We must believe what they do and put down the archaic beliefs of our past.

Finally, after we have wandered away from the faith, **we begin cultivating wickedness and raising a crop of sins.** It starts small, but we are good at hiding things from others. Then, the path leads us to bigger, more bold sins, but still we keep them out of sight. *Before we know it, we have committed acts that we would have never dreamed of,* not realizing how far the enemy has taken us.

Daily Reflection

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever allowed your heart to become hardened ground, so brittle that no one, not even God, could get your attention? How did it happen? How long did it take? How far did it take you?

The Lord gives you the solution to a hardened heart — plow it up! Always keep your soil loose and fresh, so that the Lord can plant seeds of righteousness, shower you with His kindness, and reap a harvest of love. But, this is easier said than done. How do you do this? What does this look like?

Useful or Useless?

Today In Your Reading...

After reading days of prophecies regarding Israel's fall to the Assyrians, it finally happened. King Shalmaneser besieged the capital city of Samaria for three years until he breached the walls, captured the city, and deported the people into exile. All of these things took place because several generations of the people of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. Though He warned the people by sending His prophets, they would not listen. His patience had run out.

After Shalmaneser emptied the nation of Israel, he transported his people from Assyria to live in Samaria. Thus, the land was full of both Assyrians and left-over Israelites. Over time, the two groups learned how to live together. They intermarried and had children, thus becoming a mixed breed and compromising the pure Jewish bloodlines. This hybrid group became known as Samaritans, who were despised for their intermarriage and idol worship. Even in Jesus' day, some 800 years later, Samaritans were hated for their impurity and idolatry.

If you will recall, when Samuel was the judge and prophet, the people of Israel rejected God and called for a king. The basis of their request was so that they could be like all of the other nations around them. The fall of Israel is the fulfillment of this request. Though they were chosen by God to be His people, an instrument in His hand to reflect His glory and goodness to the nations of the earth, His people rejected Him and His purposes to be like surrounding nations. The author of *2 Kings* put it this way, "They worshiped worthless idols and *became worthless* themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the Lord's command not to imitate them" (17:15).

Once again, in the midst of judgment, God promised a small ray of hope. "Look! I am plac-

ing a foundation stone in Jerusalem. It is firm, a tested and precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never run away again" (*Isaiah 28:16*). This Cornerstone is a prophecy of the Messiah, who is the only sure foundation upon which to build (*Acts 4:11, 12*).

Daily Reflection

As Christians, we are "not to love the world or things of the world..." (1 *John 2:15, 16*). We are also not to conform to the world's mold or thinking but to be transformed (*Romans 12:2*), to be separate, "to be in the world but not of the world" (*John 17:16*). Why do you think the Lord has these expectations for His people?

When the Israelites became like the world, **they worshiped worthless idols and became worthless**. How would this apply to you today?

The Lord has called you out of this world to be His follower, His child, His representative, His ambassador and voice, to reflect to a lost world His glory, the difference only He can make in someone's life. If you resist the world system, that which the devil himself has constructed, then you will remain useful in God's hands to do His work. However, if you compromise and become like the world, *you forfeit your usefulness* and become, in a way, "worthless" or useless.

Are you useful or useless?

Skim Off Your Slag

Today In Your Reading...

Now that the Kingdom of Israel has fallen to the Assyrians in the north, the Lord turned His attention to the Kingdom of Judah in the south. His people there had also turned their backs on God, neglected His statutes, and worshiped idols. The only reason that He did not destroy Judah with Israel is for a few good kings that did what was right (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah).

However, these righteous kings only delayed the coming judgment; and, that judgment was a prevalent topic in Isaiah's prophecies. Similar to the fate of Israel, God told Isaiah that an army from far away would come and destroy the kingdom and exile the people. The only thing that would change God's mind was if His people would repent of their sins and do what's right.

"See how Jerusalem," He said, "once so faithful, has become a prostitute... I will pour out My fury on you. I will turn against you. **I will melt you down and skim off your slag.** I will remove all your impurities... Judah and Jerusalem will lie in ruins because they speak out against the Lord and refuse to obey Him. They have offended His glorious presence among them..." (1:25; 3:8).

Sometimes words or phrases catch my attention more than others. Today it was "**skim off your slag.**" Slag refers to something that is useless or unnecessary. When a metal is heated or melted down, the slag, dross, or scum separates from that which is useful. That's why the Lord says, "I will melt you down and remove all your impurities." With impurities, a metal is weak. With less impurities, a metal is stronger.

In the Christian life, God's intention for us is to conform us to the image of His Son. This process is called sanctification, a refining of our lives to "skim off our slag," our impurities.

"For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:7). "Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed... In them you once walked, but now put them all aside — anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech," etc. (Col. 3:5-7). "Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among the saints" (Eph. 5:3 NASB).

While the Lord has done a great work in our hearts, through salvation in Christ, we are still trapped in our sinful flesh. Therefore, with His help, we must overcome our flesh, work with Him to "skim off our slag," and become more and more like Christ.

Daily Reflection

How are you doing with skimming off your slag? If you compared your life with that of Christ, what impurities are marring that image?

God does not expect you to reach perfection, although that is your aim. He knows that you will never be able to attain perfection until your sanctification process is completed in heaven. However, **He does expect you to look more like Him today than you did yesterday.**

How exactly do you work with the Lord in your refinement? Confess your impurities. Surrender them to the Lord and turn away from them. Pursue what you know is pleasing to God. Abandon those things that are not. Then, trust the Lord to take you through the heat of difficulty, and **He will skim off your slag.**

I Have a Plan

June 30 — *Isaiah 13:1-16:14*

Today In Your Reading...

We read Isaiah's prophecies regarding Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, and Moab. While these may seem pointless to us, they are not. When reading prophecies, we must understand that there is usually a *double meaning* and there are included some amazing descriptions of God. Such was the case with those we read today.

For example, though God was describing the fall of Babylon's king (*14:12-15*), scholars believe this passage to be a description of Lucifer's rebellion in heaven. "How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth... For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars... I will climb to the highest heaven and be like the Most High.' But, instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead, down to its lowest depths."

What I find amazing in prophecies is that, while these events have not happened yet, God describes them as if they have happened. For example, though Israel has fallen, the nation of Judah has not. The Lord will save their destruction for the people of Babylon. Still, God prophecies of the fall of Babylon to the armies of the Medes (*13:17*). "Babylon, the most glorious of kingdoms, the flower of Chaldean culture, will be devastated like Sodom and Gomorrah... and will never rise again" (*13:19, 20*).

What is even more amazing is that *not only is God able to foresee future events but He is in control of them*. He makes them happen the way He wants them to happen. For example, in the prophecy of the fall of Babylon by the hands of the Medes, He said, "See the flags waving as the enemy attacks. Cheer them on, O Israel! **I, the Lord have assigned this task to these armies...** I have called them to satisfy My anger. The Lord Almighty has brought them here... They

are the Lord's weapons; they carry His anger with them..." (*13:1-5*).

Why is that so amazing? **God sees the future as well as He does the past; and, He is in control of all events, fulfilling His purposes.**

These truths speak of His incredible sovereignty and providence, His orchestration of events to His will. "I have a plan for the whole earth," He says, "for My mighty power reaches throughout the world. The Lord Almighty has spoken. Who can change His plans? When His hand moves, who can stop Him?" (*14:26, 27*).

Daily Reflection

What do truths like these make you think? How do they encourage you and give you hope?

If God has such knowledge of the past and future, and if He is in control of all the nations of the earth, is He not also in control of your life? Does that not give you confidence, hope, joy, and peace?

American Founder Benjamin Franklin once said, "The longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth — **that God governs in the affairs of men**; and, if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

God sees everything; nothing escapes His notice. *God knows everything*; nothing escapes His knowledge. *God controls everything*; nothing happens without His permission. **History is His Story and everyone plays a part**. Praise God for His power! Praise Him for His plan.

One Heart on Fire

Today In Your Reading...

We followed the incredible story of King Hezekiah's spiritual revival, which started in Jerusalem and then spread to all of Judah. He reopened the Temple, which had not only been neglected but had been packed full of shrines, altars, and statues of false gods. He purified and reinstated the Levitical priesthood. He ordered the recommencement of all the Mosaic festivals, beginning with the Passover, and challenged the people to recommit to giving offerings and sacrifices. The King had single-handedly rescued the nation from an impending judgment and led his people to honor the Lord again.

All I could think while reading this incredible story was that **finally someone got it right!** Someone connected Judah's terrible situation to their unfaithfulness to God. In Hezekiah's charge to the Levites, he said, "Our ancestors were unfaithful and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God... That is why the Lord's anger has fallen upon Judah and Jerusalem. He has made us an object of dread, horror, and ridicule... But now, I will make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that His fierce anger will turn away from us" (29:6, 8).

This revival warrants our close attention, for in it are some principles that I think are helpful for us. First, **we cannot escape the truth that one person can make a huge difference.** Yes, Hezekiah was the king, but we had seen many kings before him sway the people in the wrong direction. Hezekiah simply used the platform that God had given him to glorify the Lord instead of himself. He was determined, even at the age of 25, to make a difference for God in his sphere of influence.

Second, **conviction is contagious.** It is clear that Hezekiah had some outstanding teachers in his life, perhaps parents, prophets, or priests.

Whoever it was, he caught a zeal for the Lord and transferred it to everyone around him. He gave an impassioned speech that inspired the priests and Levites to get right with the Lord. He sent out letters to the people, to call them back to God. "In all that he did in the service of the Temple and in his efforts to follow the law and the commands, Hezekiah sought his God wholeheartedly" (31:21). He had a heart on fire!

Third, **personal example is powerful.** Hezekiah took it upon himself to make a covenant with God, in order to turn His anger away from the people. He led others to bow before God and worship, pray, and give offerings; and, he led others to thank God for their success. He was easy to follow, because he was a good example of what a God-follower should look like.

Daily Reflection

What other principles did you find in Hezekiah's revival? What else inspired you from his story?

Don't ever fall for the lie that you are only one person. That is the enemy trying to keep you down. There are many examples of God using one to change many. God can and will use you to do great things. All you need to do is surrender to Him and say yes to where He leads.

Did you notice that before Hezekiah reached the kingdom, he started with his city; and before he reached his city, he started with a small group. A spiritual awakening can begin when you influence those around you and inspire them to inspire others. **Don't underestimate what God can do with a zealous heart!**