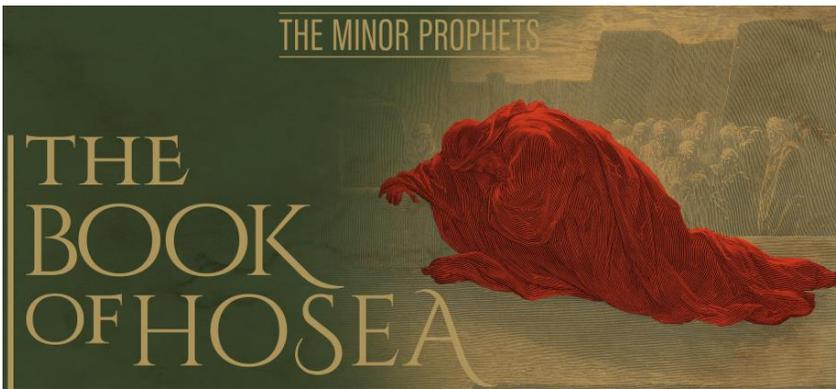


HOSEA

Faithful Love for the Unfaithful Lover

A St. Paul's Lutheran Bible Study



Luxury and prosperity are often seen as benefits to humankind. Indeed, it is good to have plenty of food, shelter, peace, etc. However, there is always a catch-22 with luxury and prosperity. That is to say; luxury and prosperity can lead to forgetfulness and ingratitude. It is easy to forget one's humble beginnings when prosperity sets in. It is easy to be complacent and go the way of ingratitude when one experiences luxury. For example, we can easily see this in our society with the rich and famous. Simply turn on the television to watch a reality television show - the Kardashians, the Real Housewives of LA, etc. These shows are full of rich and comfortable people upset about first-world problems. (Note: the term 'first-world problems' refers to the problems experienced in the developed world. First-world problems are contrasted with the problems faced in the underdeveloped parts of the world.) Tragically, though, the complaints about first-world problems are often abounding in our culture: we get upset that our smart phone isn't working properly, we get frustrated that our air conditioner isn't working properly, we are upset when an event is scheduled the same night as our favorite television show, and so forth. Again, ingratitude and forgetfulness set when we are blessed with luxury and prosperity, and it shows in our complaints and cries with first-world problems.

There is another aspect to this as well. When first-world problems occur, they typically do not drive us to desperation, brokenness, or being poor in spirit. Instead, they drive us to complaining, grumbling, and dissatisfaction. This complaining, grumbling, and dissatisfaction then leads us to fix the first-world problems with more first-world solutions. If an iPhone 13 isn't good enough, then an iPhone 14 will be better. If we can't watch our show when we

HOSEA 10:1-15

Author:

Hosea the Prophet

Date:

740-715 BC

Place:

Israel

Purpose:

Israel was like an unfaithful wife. She was attracted away from her husband (the Lord) to other lovers (idols). In the book of Hosea, the Lord calls Israel back to Himself. It is a call for Israel to forsake her unfaithfulness and be restored in the Lord's faithfulness.

Other:

Hosea is the most quoted book of the Minor Prophets in the New Testament.

want, then we subscribe to an online 'on-demand' feature. Tragically, our first-world problems drive us not to realize how good we have it, but these first-world problems drive us to demand more first-world solutions. So, what is the point that is being made? In Hosea 10, Israel is compared to a luxuriant vine. The more they increased with fruit (i.e., prosperity), the more altars they built. The more prosperity they received, the more they became obsessed with building altars to Baal. They were not lacking religious zeal. Instead, their religious zeal had slipped from the Lord to Baal.

Tragically, when all we have to complain about are first-world problems, we have failed to realize all the gifts we have been given. In the case of Israel, the Lord God states that he will break down their altars and destroy their pillars. The Lord would soon bring judgment. As has been stated before, Hosea has been called the 'death-bed prophet to Israel' because he was the last to prophesy before the northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC. In other words, it is important for us to understand that historically in the Old Testament, the Lord God had zero issues in destroying the comfort, luxury, and prosperity of Israel for the sole purpose of destroying ingratitude and removing forgetfulness. In other words, the Lord God does not flinch on afflicting his people - if it means that they would return to remembering their need for Him and being brought to a disposition of repentance and humility.

Speaking of affliction, though, what do we make of the 'Lord afflicting His people'? A look at Psalm 119 shows us clearly that the Lord afflicts His people. In Psalm 119:71, we read, *"It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."* And in verse 67, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word."* But why does the Lord afflict, and how does the Lord afflict? The Lord afflicts his people for three reasons: discipline (see Hebrews 12:5-11), refinement (see James 1:2-4), and so that they might be a witness (see 2 Timothy 1:8-12). Ultimately, the Lord afflicts so that we may be brought back to Him and His Holy Word, for apart from His Holy Word, we are nothing and can do nothing.

Above, we have considered the 'why' of affliction; however, what about the 'how' of affliction - how does the Lord afflict? There are three sources of affliction from the Lord: the Lord allows the devil to afflict mankind, the Lord Himself afflicts mankind, and the world afflicts mankind. Now, in considering the 'how' of affliction, there is often a temptation to discover the source of the affliction. However, the source of the affliction is not very important. In other words, it is not important to know the source of the suffering, but instead, it is more important to know what the affliction/suffering serves. And what do the afflictions serve? Again, we return to Psalm 119. The whole premise of Psalm 119 is that we are to be constantly taught by the Lord, given understanding by the Lord's Word, led by the Lord, confirmed by the Lord, etc. The whole premise is that we are not to be disconnected from the Lord via prosperity and luxury but connected to Him and His Holy Word, often through affliction that drives us to dependence and humility. In the case of Israel, their prosperity drove them further into the idolatry of Baal, in which the Lord God would soon bring desolation through the affliction of the Assyrians. And so, now we can begin to see how afflictions are gifts of God and not curses. He afflicts so that He can heal.

