

THEY ARE BENT TO BACKSLIDING

TEXT: HOSEA 11:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

1. The LORD says in Hosea 11:7, "And my people are bent to backsliding from me."
2. Sadly, some people have a bent toward backsliding, and we see this all throughout the book of Hosea. Hosea 4:16 says, "For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer."
3. We also see it throughout the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 8:5 says, "Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return."
4. The good news is found in the last chapter of Hosea. Hosea 14:4 says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."
5. You have probably noticed that week after week the emphasis in this series has been on the judgment of God (cf. 10:15), but Hosea 11 also stresses God's love and His mercy (cf. 11:1, 9).

I. DESPITE THEIR BACKSLIDING, GOD LOVES ISRAEL (11:1-4).

1. God's love for Israel was supremely demonstrated when He redeemed them from bondage in Egypt (11:1). This deliverance is referred to all throughout the Bible.
2. God refers to Israel as His "son" (11:1). God's covenant relationship with Israel is based upon redemption and is denoted by the term "son," an expression referring to Israel's national election.
3. Exodus 4:22 says, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn." God chose Israel out of all the nations, to be His special people.
4. Because of God's covenant relationship with Israel, they are still beloved of God despite their unfaithfulness and disobedience.
5. Romans 11:1 and 2 says, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid...God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew."
6. Matthew 2:15 applies Hosea 11:1 to the Lord Jesus Christ, giving the words a double aspect. Historically they refer to the calling of Israel out of Egypt, and prophetically of the bringing of Christ, Joseph, and Mary out of Egypt after the death of Herod.
7. This is not the only example of the blending of Christ and Israel. For example, in the book of Isaiah the Messiah and Israel are viewed

- together, as though to form a composite picture. God refers to both as "my servant" (41:8, 9, 21; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21; 49:3, 6; 52:13).
8. Once again, God tells them why they were to go into captivity – "As they (the prophets) called them (the backslidden, idolatrous people), so they (the people) went from them (the prophets)" (11:2; cf. II Kings 17:13-15, 22, 23).
 9. God removed the Canaanites and the other pagan tribes out of the Promised Land because of their wicked Baal worship. But when the Jews took over the land they did the same thing as the heathen (11:2).
 10. In addition to the sin of idolatry was their sin of ingratitude. God delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and led them through the wilderness but the ungrateful and inconsiderate Israelites did not realize that it was the Lord who had "healed them," i.e. restored them both physically and spiritually.
 11. Exodus 15:26 says, "I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee."
 12. Once again, Hosea returns to God's love for Israel (11:4). In the Bible we see that God always deals with people in love. God draws (not forces) with "bands of love."

II. BECAUSE OF THEIR BACKSLIDING, GOD HAD TO JUDGE ISRAEL (11:5-8).

1. God's punishment for Israel's idolatry and ingratitude was the Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. This was "because they refused to return (to God)" (11:5; cf. II Kings 17:13, 14, 22, 23).
2. "The sword" (11:6) here represents God's judgment upon Israel. Israel's chastening would include foreign invasion, death, destruction, and captivity.
3. This was "because of their own counsels" (11:6; cf. 10:6), i.e. their decision to trust in other gods rather than the true God, and their decision to seek help from Egypt and Assyria rather than God.
4. They were "bent to backsliding" (11:7; cf. 4:16).
5. The severity of God's judgment can be seen by God's reference to Admah and Zeboim (11:8), two of the neighboring cities that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Deut. 29:23-29).

III. DESPITE THEIR BACKSLIDING, GOD WAS MERCIFUL TO ISRAEL (11:8b-12)

1. Verse 8 is indication of God's reluctance to invoke judgment. The LORD says, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?"
2. This is a lament of grief; God's heart was "turned within" (11:8b).
3. This is called anthropomorphic language, i.e. ascribing human form or attributes to God – e.g., The Bible says God's eyes run to and fro; the Bible speaks of His "strong arm" and His "outstretched hand." The Psalmist says, "Give ear to my words, O LORD" (Ps. 5:1).
4. "My repentings" (11:8b) carries the same thought of grief.
5. God does not repent the way men repent. Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent."
6. From our perspective God seems to change His mind. But this is not actually what is happening because the Bible says, "For I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6).
7. Merrill Unger says, "The Lord's apparent change was an adaptation to human modes of thought...in order to magnify His grace and make it comprehensible to finite minds."
8. All throughout the book of Hosea, God – through the prophet Hosea – has been telling the people of Israel that He was going to judge them severely for their idolatry and other sins (cf. 10:15).
9. Over and over God warned them that the Assyrian army would soon come down upon them and overthrow Samaria, and take them away into captivity.
10. How then, can this be reconciled with God's statement here that He "will not execute the fierceness" of His anger and will not return to destroy Ephraim (11:9)?
11. The answer can be found by going back to verse 8 – God is saying that He will not utterly destroy Israel the way He destroyed Admah and Zeboim, the wicked cities on the plain near Sodom and Gomorrah.
12. The Lord is God "and not man" (11:9), therefore, He will keep His promises. He will be merciful to those who deserve only punishment.
13. "They shall walk after the LORD" (11:10) refers to the believing remnant that will repent and will not be destroyed (cf. 3:5; 5:15).
14. When our Lord comes back it will not be as the lowly Lamb of God, but as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). "He shall roar like a lion" and the wicked shall tremble (11:10; cf. 5:14; 13:7, 8).
15. Joel 3:16 says, "The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but

- the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel."
16. Amos 1:2 also says, "The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem."
 17. "Then the children shall tremble from the west" (11:10b). Assyria and Babylon are to the east, so this prophecy predicts a return after the later dispersion when Jerusalem was attacked in AD 70 by Roman soldiers (cf. Isa. 11:11).
 18. Interestingly, the USA is "west" of Israel (11:10b).
 19. God will restore His people when they return "as a dove" (11:11), not as a "silly dove" (cf. 7:11).
 20. Judah was not as wicked as Israel (11:12). They had several good kings who led them in the paths of righteousness, such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah. But all the kings of Israel were wicked.

CONCLUSION:

1. Verse 12 says, "Ephraim compasseth me about (has surrounded me) with lies." This means that everywhere the LORD looked He saw idolatry, false religion, and deceit.
2. "But Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints" indicates that (at that time) Judah was faithful, and not guilty of idolatry.
3. Hosea wrote this about 740 BC, about 150 years before the fall of Jerusalem.
4. Judah followed Israel into idolatry and judgment. The book of Jeremiah describes in great detail the wickedness and idolatry of Judah.
5. S. Franklin Logsdon said, "History records how this slight glimmer of testimony in Judah faded into the dense darkness of their disobedience, desertion and destruction. Their national existence ceased, and their last king Zedekiah had his eyes thrust out and the fetters affixed. He was held in prison until the shades of death enveloped him (Jeremiah 52:11)."