

“WHEN THE PEOPLE OF GOD BECOME CANAANITES”

Hosea 12:7-14

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INTRODUCITON

It is a sad and disheartening thing when we observe the wickedness, vileness, and open rebellion against God manifest in the ungodly world around us. How much sadder and extremely tragic it is when the same character and behavior is manifest in the lives of those who claim to be the children of God. When the people of God become just like those who claim no relationship with God, it is time for dramatic judgment.

God gives every opportunity for his professed people to come to Him and repent. There comes a time when such opportunities are gone and judgment must fall. Such a time had come for Israel.

YOU MUST NOT BECOME A CANAANITE; YOU MUST LOVE GOD FIRST AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

I. NOT SEPARATING FROM THE WORLD (12:7-9)

Now the Lord returns to deal with a specific area of sin in the national life—Greed and materialism. “Israel is not a Jacob who wrestles with God” (Keil, 903). They had become like the people they dispossessed—the Canaanites [same word means “merchant” here]—living for material possessions and gauging their success by their material achievements. The Canaanites and Phoenicians were the great merchants of that part of the world; see Is. 23:11; Ezek. 16:29; 17:4; Zeph. 1:11. Israelites were not wholesome leaven to the heathen nations round about them; instead, they had “imbibed the spirit of the Canaanite”—in both idolatry and business practices! But the stress here is not on the idolatry—“like a fraudulent merchant, offering Him false show for true reverence”. God requires *loyal love* and “justice”—v. 6. They were doing the opposite.

A. Scales of Deceit

“A merchant in whose hand are scales of deceit.” Always ready to do business! “Business before religion, gain before God, profit by hook or crook” (Laetsch, 97). They loved to “drive hard bargains. Money, influence, might came before right” (97). Otherwise, they used “dishonest”—deliberately inaccurate—scales in order to swing transactions into their favor. See Amos 8:5; Lev. 19:35-36. Deceit has “a devilish attraction to those practiced” in it (Pusey, 121). One can pride himself in his skill “in overreaching, outwitting”.

B. Oppression (7b)

In this case by defrauding his “customers”; see Mic. 2:2. Much of Israel’s dealings within their nation and with other nations involved merchandise and trading. Oppression involves “indulging self-will, caprice, love of power, insolence” etc. “When wages are paid in necessities priced exorbitantly, or when artisans are required to buy at a loss at their masters’ shops, what is it but the union of deceit and oppression? The trading world is full of oppression, *scarcely veiled by deceit.*”

To call “Israel” by “Canaan” is to imply that they have forfeited their right to the name, and the blessing of Jacob has been practically turned into a curse: “Your name shall be called no more Israel, but Canaan” (Pusey, 121).

C. Pride in Wealth and Achievement (8a)

Surely I am rich and I have found wealth for me (myself).” The word for “wealth” here is the same word used in v. 3 for “manly vigor” of mature age. “Israel boasts that he is no longer a feeble child among the nations. At last by his own efforts he has achieved manhood, has become a powerful kingdom, respected and feared by other nations.” The period spoken of here is likely that of Jeroboam and Uzziah. Since God has enabled me to prosper, that is proof that He is not displeased with me—“no iniquity can be found in me.” *“I was in the right, for I succeeded”!* Such has always been the world’s argument.

D. Unaware of Wrongdoing (8b)

The “iniquity” here has primary reference to their commercial and financial dealings with others. Somehow, even though using deceit and dishonest scales etc. they were able to find excuses for their sinful behavior; they must have found ways to reinterpret the Mosaic Law in order to redefine what “sin” was. Any “trifling lapses” they had would surely be forgiven. “I only wished to get rich; not to do wrong.”

In their view, they deserved no punishment from God—or others! As Leupold points out, they likely had so manipulated their laws and regulations that technically they had not violated them; but, they did not account for the higher standard that God has in love for God and for men. (p. 97). What things blind them to their sin?

The bad practices of other traders; the habits of trade; the supposed necessity of the situation; the conventional nature of many practices; the minuteness of many issues; the frequent repetition makes them seem correct and all these factors serve to “blind the soul, until it sees no sin.”

E. Forgetful of God’s Provision (v. 9)

But **I**—very emphatic use of the personal pronoun. You have been living somewhat independently—self-sufficient, materialistic, ignoring the claims of Me and My Law upon your heart and life. *“But I have been Yahweh your God since the land of Egypt.”* All along! And you have ignored Me! Israel’s entire history is here summed up to show His multitude of favors to them.

F. Painful Return to Deprivation

“I will make you live in tents again.” “Tents” is the correct rendering here, not the “stately houses of worship” spoken of in recent times. Yahweh is not describing a **happy occasion**, for this living in tents would be *involuntary* and would not be temporary but *long-lasting*. They will live in tents because Yahweh would drive them out of their land. **They would no longer live in wealthy circumstances but in deprivation.**

“As in the appointed feast”—The word is used for any appointed time or season, any convocation, festival or otherwise. Here likely a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles when they celebrated God’s bringing them out of Egypt and providing for them in the wilderness, living in “booths”—leafy tent-like structures—for 8 days (Dt. 16:13-17; Lev. 23:42ff; Neh. 8:14-18). This entire passage puts the emphasis upon their sin and resulting judgment. Surely when in exile they would meditate on God’s love that they had forfeited. The emphasis in this passage is on the divine threat to impenitent Israel with another period of dwelling in tents, in the wilderness of captivity in foreign countries far from the homeland. He comforts the believing remnant that the Lord would remain even in foreign countries their gracious Protector, causing them to dwell in homes, be they ever so humble. We must combine the two allusions” of the feast of tabernacles—wilderness privation, yet divine provision. God **does not threaten them “with utter rejection . . . but only with temporary banishment into the desert”** (Keil, 905).

II. NOT LISTENING TO GOD’S MESSENGERS (10-11)

A. The Lord’s Many Communications (10)

1. Prophets—they received revelation from the Lord, and it is implied that these prophets spoke with His people—warning, rebuking, and challenging them. (II K. 17:13). He gave them true prophets; they ignored and rejected them and sought after false prophets!
2. Visions—He “caused visions to multiply”. He gave them numerous visions, Prophets “saw” what God gave them, and communicated it to the people.
3. Parables—“By the hand of the prophets I used similitudes” or parables. Using earthly comparisons and illustrations to make the divine message clear.

Therefore, the people had no excuse; they could not plead ignorance. Examples of parables: Jonah and the gourd; Hosea and Gomer; etc. These parables could be either of *words* or *actions*, and could be *real* or *visionary*.

B. Israel’s Total Worthlessness (11)

1. The land to the east—“Gilead is iniquity”—incarnate!
Therefore they are “worthless.”
2. The land to the west—Gilgal—“They sacrifice bulls”—but to no avail!
3. Their altars become like heaps of stones
The point seems to be that their altars, so significant during their times of physical prosperity and rebellion from the Lord, would be no more significant nor useful than heaps of stones removed from a field because they were not only useless, but were harmful and troublesome to the farming process. The altars are ruined once God’s judgment comes upon them. The ruin of the altars “involves not only the cessation of the idolatrous worship, but also the dissolution of the kingdom and the banishment of the people out of the land” (905).

III. NOT LEARNING FROM THE PAST (12-14)

Some views of the purpose of these examples:

- 1)** To give prominence to his zeal for the blessing of the birthright, and his obedience to the commandment of God”
- 2)** “To bring out the double servitude of Israel”; and
- 3)** “To lay stress upon the manifestation of the divine care towards Jacob as well as towards the people of Israel”.

Keil says that the point of all this “is to **call to the nation’s remembrance** that elevation from the lowest condition, which they were to acknowledge with humility every year, according to Deut. 26:5ff, when the first-fruits were presented before the Lord. For Ephraim had quite forgotten this.” They were not thanking Him, but

provoking Him (v. 14). I think that Keil hits the mark as far as the primary emphasis of these two examples—but I do not think that it is necessary to deny that the other three options listed above have a part in the presence of these examples—esp. in light of the threatened captivity in v. 9 and the tabernacle care stressed there also, and in view of the positive assessment of Jacob’s example earlier in this passage—vv. 3-4.

A. Jacob’s Experience (12)

1. Fled to the field of Aram—a foreign country
2. Worked as a slave for a wife
3. Herded sheep—a menial job

B. Israel’s Experience (13)

1. Led out of Egypt by a prophet—Moses
2. Kept and provided for by a prophet.

Note the contrast between the two examples:

- Jacob had to flee to a strange country; God restored Israel from a strange country.
- Jacob’s reward for shepherd service in the strange country was a wife; Israel had a prophet for a shepherd.
- Jacob tended; Israel was tended.
- But regardless, the current nation is not grateful nor do they follow the pattern of either Jacob or Israel.

C. Ephraim’s Experience (14)

1. Bitter Provocation of the Lord

But, in the meantime, sin and rebellion must be punished. Past history should have taught them; but it had not. They had not humbled themselves nor submitted to God. “Ephraim”—the lead tribe of the north—“has bitterly provoked [Yahweh] to anger.” The righteous God must act upon the motivation of His holy anger. Israel had **profusely sinned**.

2. Blood guilt left upon them

It will not be forgiven but will be punished. The plural has the idea of manifoldness of the crime, the extreme seriousness of the offence. On the profuseness of this sin, see at 4:2—“Bloodshed follows bloodshed.” The blood of innocent victims—including especially of the prophets sent to them (I K. 18:4).

3. Reproach cast back upon them

The behavior of the wicked “boomerangs” upon himself. Israel’s **Lord** “will bring back the insults Israel rendered to God and to others—cause it to return—upon himself.

Israel “reproaches” God by their rebellion, by their excuses, by rejecting those He sends to rebuke them, by rejecting His corrections, by sinning against the knowledge of God, by giving occasion for God’s enemies to blaspheme Him (II Sam. 12:14), etc. “The reproachful words of the enemies of God are but the echo of the opprobrious deeds of His unfaithful servants” (Pusey). Such is especially true of idolatry. To attribute to idols what belongs only to God is awful reproach; to say of calves “these are your gods who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” is horrible reproach on His holy name. See I Sam. 2:30—he return it upon them.

CONCLUSION

Listen to God’s Messengers, Learn from the past, and do not learn the ways of the heathen around you!

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