

DRIVEN TO REPENTANCE | HOSEA 5:8-15

THE LORD HARRIES THE UNFAITHFUL | LUKE THORNE

INTRODUCTION

Today we will explore that attribute of God that most Christians find uncomfortable if not altogether off-putting. However, it is necessary to understand and accept it, for to ignore it would be to ignore a substantial part of who God has revealed himself to be and rob the amazing act of Grace on the cross of its strength and value. I am speaking of God's wrath.

Some who profess the Faith relish this aspect above all others, forgetting the context of love that it *must* be placed within. Fearing that we might be seen as one of those fire and brimstone doom-callers, most Christians retreat too far the other way, preaching a gospel sanitized of judgment and punishment—in essence, sanitized of God's righteousness. But by doing so, we do God and his message to humankind a disservice, hiding the less palatable aspects of Him under smiles and hugs and *Jesus loves you's*.

It is as Job told his wife, "Should we receive what is good from God, and not also receive what is evil?"¹ That is, "should we receive blessing from God and not receive affliction?" Who are we to cherry-pick from God's table only those things we find conducive to our comfort and happiness? Of course, we must be willing to receive from our LORD *whatever* He, in His love and wisdom, deems best for us—even to the point of affliction and death.

In the previous passage, God abandoned Israel to their wicked hearts and warned them that the end of their path was destruction. Today, with heavy hearts, we shall witness their destruction. This wrath is poured out in love to cause an *earnest* repentance within the idolatrous people of Israel.

However, even under God's wrath, the people of Israel refused to turn back to their God. They sought solace and safety in everything but him! This passage serves as a warning to us too, that if we seek our security in any other fortress, the waters of God's deep wrath will wash them away.

TREMBLE IN FEAR

Hosea 5:8 NET

Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah! Sound the trumpet in Ramah! Sound the alarm in Beth Aven! Tremble in fear, O Benjamin!

God's wrath was upon Israel. His face and compassion were turned away. What is more, he was warning those near the borders between Israel and Judah to flee and "tremble with fear," demanding the appropriate response to his righteous and holy wrath. However, before we can digest the stark descriptions of God's wrath on the people, we must understand the nature of God Almighty's wrath.

GOD IS LOVE

"God is agape²." God is not only all-knowing and all-present; he is all-loving. His love for His creation knows no boundaries that cannot be crossed, bridged, scaled, or paved over³. "...His anger is that of love, not hate. His relentless harrying of [the children of Israel] is designed to bring them home, as passage after passage will make plain."⁴ We cannot forget this as we descend through the dark descriptions of God's wrath upon his people. His wrath is fueled by love—by a desire to see them restored to faith and saved from the deceit of idolatry.

The hand of God is heavy. When it is laid upon you, it can fill and bless you to do extraordinary things (greater things than even Jesus did⁵) but it can also crush you. His hand is good, but that doesn't mean that it only ever holds a carrot. Sometimes, because of our stubbornness, it must hold the stick.

¹ Biblical Studies Press. (2005). The NET Bible First Edition; (Job 2:10). Biblical Studies Press.

² Love without condition or expiration.

See 1 John 4, especially verse 8: "The person who does not love does not know God, because **God is love**" (emphasis added).

³ See Romans 8:38-39

⁴ The Bible Speaks Today - The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless.

⁵ See John 14:12

IT SHALL BE AS THE LORD DECLARES

Hosea 5:9

Ephraim will be ruined in the day of judgment! What I am declaring to the tribes of Israel will certainly take place!

The day of judgment described here is not The Day of Judgment, but rather the appointed time of wrath on the northern kingdom. It was foreknown and set, and there was now no escaping it. The prophecies of Isaiah also describe what happened next. In 722 BC, Sargon II laid utter waste to Israel, enslaving the people and leaving the once-mighty cities as burned out sepulchers.

What a terrifying thought! They had persisted past every warning and every roadblock and now there was no turning back. This is, I believe, why David urged his brothers and sisters to repent while there was still time: “For this reason every one of your faithful followers should pray to you while there is a window of opportunity. Certainly, when the surging water rises, it will not reach them” (Psalm 32:6). They were warned, under Moses, in Deuteronomy 28, that if they ignored God, he would destroy them as a flood.

As we are about to see, the surging torrent of God’s wrath was about to overtake not only Israel but Judah as well.

MIXING THE HOLY WITH THE PROFANE

Hosea 5:10

The princes of Judah are like those who move boundary markers. I will pour out my rage on them like a torrential flood!

Judah would not be spared this judgment. The description of the torrential flood parallels the prophecy of **Isaiah 8:7-8**:

So look, the sovereign master is bringing up against them the turbulent and mighty waters of the Euphrates River — the king of Assyria and all his majestic power. It will reach flood stage and overflow its banks. It will spill into Judah, flooding and engulfing, as it reaches to the necks of its victims. He will spread his wings out over your entire land, O Immanuel.”

But why? Surely, Judah has hitherto been described as the better of the two kingdoms? They, while not entirely given over to outward rebellion of God in their lust for idolatry, were nevertheless engaged in an act just as heinous.

“Removers of land-marks were to be cursed (Deut 19:14; 27:17). Princes of Jud. had removed the boundaries of truth between Jehovah and Baal, the worship of God and idolatry. If he who removes his neighbour’s boundary is cursed, how much more he who removes the border of his God” [*Hengsten.*]⁶”

There is an inherent danger to mixing your faith with worldly wisdom, other religious teachings, conspiracies, or esoterica. God is Holy—utterly separate and different than anything else in this world—and he *cannot* abide distortions of his nature, worship, or teachings, *period*.

To mix mythology with truth is to end with nothing but a myth. In formal logic, the Law of the Excluded Middle forces us to accept that something is either true or it is false⁷. Nothing can be “a little bit true” or “mostly true.” So too relationship with God... and forgiveness; you either have it, or you don’t. If we assent to the *knowledge* of God, understanding everything there is to know about him and his plan for salvation (even striving to share this knowledge with everyone around us), but we do not *love* him and *submit* to him, we have nothing⁸. God is all or nothing, which is why Jesus warns us emphatically to “count the cost⁹.”

⁶ James Wolfendale, Preacher’s Complete Homiletical Commentary on the New Testament: Volume 25: The Minor Prophets, (Austin, Texas: WORDsearch, 2016), (sic.)

⁷ “But on the other hand there cannot be an intermediate between contradictories, but of one subject we must either affirm or deny any one predicate. This is clear, in the first place, if we define what the true and the false are. To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false.” *Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book IV, Part 7 (translated by W.D. Ross)*

⁸ “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not

It is imperative, beloved, that we who have strayed from our first love turn back and run to him¹⁰. If you feel the weight of the Holy Spirit upon you now, run; pray to the Father!

THE REASON FOR WRATH

Hosea 5:11

Ephraim will be oppressed, crushed under judgment, because he was determined to pursue worthless idols.

They were reaping the harvest of God's wrath because they were *determined* to continue whoring their spirits. God gave them chance after chance after chance to turn back to his outstretched arms, but they refused each time. Now, God was pouring out his wrath which He had held back with incredible patience and long-suffering. The time of repentance was over; the time of reaping what was sown would soon begin.

Beloved, do not put off until tomorrow repentance and love of God¹¹. For surely, death takes each of us as a thief in the night, and we will stand before the judge of our souls without excuse¹².

This brings up an interesting question: why do we so often see ungodly people *not* receiving wrath but instead bountiful fortune? I do not have an answer. Perhaps, though, it is because the LORD knows where they are destined. Perhaps it is some small mercy that they have their day of glory in the sun, for soon they will live in only darkness and pain¹³.

Consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. After the rich man dies and was buried he cries out to Abraham across the gulf, but Abraham replies, "Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus likewise bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish" (Luke 16:25).

WHO CAN MAKE STRAIGHT WHAT THE LORD HAS MADE CROOKED?

Hosea 5:12

I will be like a moth to Ephraim, like wood rot to the house of Judah.

God's unraveling of Ephraim was two-fold. Not only would he come against them violently, but God would also undermine their culture and society; he would corrupt it entirely. I don't know about you, but that resonates with me in modern America. It has been so easy to see the degradation and corruption of our society as, perhaps, the slow natural progression of things or the effect of a society turned away from God or even the work of the prince of this world. But to consider that it is in accordance with God's will?! My mind does not accept that easily, regardless of what the scriptures say.

We forget sometimes, as Job's friends did, that the Lord *takes away* just as he gives¹⁴. Solomon cries,

"Consider the work of God: For who can make straight what he has [made crooked]? In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other, so that no one can discover what the future holds." Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

It would be folly for us to assume that the Lord only wishes to prosper America. We do not know and can never know his purposes with any given nation. He blessed and empowered Assyria to destroy Israel, and he did the same with Babylon against Judah, only to destroy those nations for their blood-lust and sinfulness.

have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I give over my body in order to boast, but do not have love, I receive no benefit." - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

⁹ "Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't sit down first and compute the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?... In the same way therefore not one of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his own possessions." Luke 14:27-28, 33 (NET)

¹⁰ See Revelation 2:4-7

¹¹ See Hebrews 3:13-14; James 4:13-14

¹² See Luke 12:5, 20; 13:23-30

¹³ For more on this topic, see Psalm 73

¹⁴ See Job 1:21

What we *do* know is that the LORD earnestly desires his church to be awake and alive and active in this world, utterly filled with the message of love, repentance, and grace. Let us not get tarried by worldly pursuits—even ‘noble’ ones—but put on the fleet-footed boots of the gospel, shining as beacons of love and hope to a dark and desolate world!

TURNING TO THE WORLD INSTEAD OF GOD

Hosea 5:13

When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and begged its great king for help. But he will not be able to heal you! He cannot cure your wound!

How easy is it for us to seek solutions everywhere and exhaust every avenue before turning back to God? We see solutions to our problems all around us, but we never look up. We think, “this alliance will make us secure!” or “if we just elect such-and-such leader, it will make all the difference.” Or, “if only the law of the land were this instead of that, all would be well again.” That fact of the matter is, nothing of this world can save us from *ourselves*.

Do you believe teaching creationism in schools will restore America? It will not. Do you believe overturning *Roe v. Wade* will restore America? It will not. In the 1950s, people believed adding “In God We Trust” to our money and “...under God” to our pledge of allegiance would restore America¹⁵. It did not. What *will* restore America is so simple it hurts; We must be about the business of our Father changing lives through authentic sacrificial love. Full stop; do not pass go, do not collect \$200. All else will follow when the heart of the nation is transformed into a reflection of the heart of Christ.

We want a 12-step program with all the bullet points and talking points to restoring society to godliness, but the answer is simple. Simple, that is, but so much harder. We need to live as Christ lived, divested of rights to our own life and completely invested in the lives of our neighbors¹⁶.

THE LION’S TERRIBLE MAW

Hosea 5:14

I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a young lion to the house of Judah. I myself will tear them to pieces, then I will carry them off, and no one will be able to rescue them!

As we saw before, God’s method for destruction included subversion of their society, but it also included violent destruction. God would wield Assyria (and later, Babylon) as a weapon against the children of Israel¹⁷. We have cuneiform records of King Sargon II’s conquest of Ephraim. 27,260 men women and children taken slavery and dispersed across the vast Assyrian empire¹⁸.

There are also massive stone reliefs of the siege of Lachish (A different campaign against Judah by Sennacherib, though no doubt similar in effect) depicting Hebrews being enslaved, beheaded, impaled on pikes, and skinned alive. These latter events are why God declared that Assyria had gone too far and would, herself, be annihilated. But the fact remains, God utterly crushed Israel, and, except for a few who repented and fled to Jerusalem, these northern 10 tribes would never again return to Israel.

¹⁵ "In God We Trust" is the official motto of the United States of America. It was adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1956, supplanting *E Pluribus Unum* “Out of many, one.” “...Under God” was added to the pledge of allegiance on June 14, 1954 by congress as an amendment to the Flag Code of 1947.

¹⁶ See Luke 9:23-26

¹⁷ Isaiah 10:3–6 “What will you do on judgment day, when destruction arrives from a distant place? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your wealth? You will have no place to go, except to kneel with the prisoners, or to fall among those who have been killed. Despite all this, [God’s] anger does not subside, and his hand is ready to strike again. Assyria, the club I use to vent my anger... a cudgel with which I angrily punish. I sent him against a godless nation, I ordered him to attack the people with whom I was angry, to take plunder and to carry away loot, to trample them down like dirt in the streets.”

¹⁸ “In my first year of reign *** the people of Samaria *** to the number of 27,290 ... I carried away.” Luckenbill, Daniel David. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, Oriental Institute University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1926.

Figure 1: Images from Assyrian stone relief depicting the aftermath of the siege of Lachish¹⁹.



They lost their inheritance. We have an inheritance in Christ²⁰. "Watch out, so that you do not lose the things we have worked for, but receive a full reward" 2 John 1:8.

Do not delay, beloved. Hold fast to the end for it is only for those who conquer that will be saved²¹.

FEAR LEADS TO REPENTANCE

Hosea 5:15

Then I will return again to my lair until they have suffered their punishment. Then they will seek me; in their distress they will earnestly seek me.

God returning to his lair (his hiding place) indicates his willingness to wait until the people seek him out again. No showy arrival of El Shaddai to stop the affliction. "After Yahweh has destroyed the nations, he will await Israel's repentance."²²

As I mentioned before, not all were taken into captivity. Some *did* repent and turn to the LORD, finding security under the same festival that celebrated the passing over of God's judgment in Egypt.

Hezekiah sent messages throughout Israel and Judah; he even wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, summoning them to come to the LORD's temple in Jerusalem and observe a Passover celebration for the LORD God of Israel. ... (2 Chronicles 30:1)

...This royal edict read: "O Israelites, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so he may return to you who have been spared from the kings of Assyria. Don't be like your fathers and brothers who were unfaithful to the LORD God of their ancestors, provoking him to destroy them, as you can see. Now, don't be stubborn like your fathers! Submit to the LORD and come to his sanctuary which he has permanently consecrated. Serve the LORD your God so that he might relent from his raging anger. (6b-8)

For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and sons will be shown mercy by their captors and return to this land. The LORD your God is merciful and compassionate; he will not reject you if you return to him." The messengers journeyed from city to city through the land of Ephraim and Manasseh as far as Zebulun, but people mocked and ridiculed them. But some men from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. (9-11)

After they had arrived in Jerusalem, Hezekiah prayed over the congregation,

"May the LORD, who is good, forgive everyone who has determined to follow God, the LORD God of his ancestors, even if he is not ceremonially clean according to the standards of the temple." The LORD responded favorably to Hezekiah and forgave the people. ... (18b-20)

¹⁹ See <https://etc.ancient.eu/photos/siege-lachish-reliefs-british-museum> for more information about the siege and these images.

²⁰ See 1 Peter 1:4

²¹ See Revelation 2 and 3, "The Letters to the Churches"

Psalm 32 (quoted in Romans 4:7,8) extols the blessings bestowed on those who's sins are forgiven. Take time now, to meditate on the words of David in this psalm. May our heart-cries echo the psalmists as he sings of his stubbornness leading to repentance, leading to God's overwhelming grace.

To receive the blessed assurance of forgiveness, we must repent of our idolatrous harlotry. The LORD harries the unfaithful bride until she is left with no option but to return to the love of her husband. And so, we discover in the end that oft quoted promise of God is true, though perhaps not at all how we sometimes believe it to be:

“38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:38–39

CONCLUSION

Do you know what is so incredible about all of this? They *deserved* it. In fact, they deserved much more than the LORD was willing to pour out on them. And you know what is so amazing? We deserve it too²³. Me and, yes, you. Our idolatry, our unrepentance, our selfishness *require* God to pour out his wrath upon us. *But*, God poured out all that wrath on his son instead.

That is incredible. Are you not moved to tears? All the debt you have accrued every second of every day has been paid for when God forsook Jesus on the cross. Trust me, the physical suffering was the least cause of his despair. When we sing Amazing Grace, does the realization enter your mind just how amazing that grace is!? It's not just, "he died so that I can go to heaven" or, "he paid my sins so I don't have to feel guilty any more." He took on *all* the righteous fury of a unapproachably holy God, shielding you from the furnace of his judgment and being utterly consumed in the process. Do you know why? Because He loves you. That is amazing grace, and he wants you to shout this good news from the alleys to the mountaintops.

We only have the *now*. It is our tiny portion of eternity in which we can commune with God... or not. There is no guaranteed tomorrow. This passage is incredibly hard to read and digest, but whatever you do, do not turn away from it. Our God is a holy God and his actions are unknowable.

What have we discovered (or rediscovered) today?

1. **The Holy God *cannot* abide willful sin.** He is patient and long-suffering, willing to send warning after warning our way, but He will not allow abominations to stain his bride.
2. **We must alter our understanding of the goodness of God** to accept that sometimes he sends hardship and affliction our way. He alone knows what will be most expedient in our lives to bring us back to the love of Christ.
3. **There comes a time for everyone when it is too late to repent**—when even in tears, pleading, it is too late. Do not wait until it is too late, beloved! May he pour out whatever is necessary upon our lives to bring us to that glorious moment.
4. **Grace is only amazing if we understand with our hearts what God's justice demands.** The more we soften our feelings towards our own sin, the less we thirst for God's good grace. May we never harden ourselves to the point where God's forgiveness is not amazing!

I earnestly wish I could tell you that if you follow the LORD, all will be good and comfortable in your life, but the fact is, that is not true. Can we accept the afflictions of God with the same joy as the blessings? We can, but it requires our understanding of God to stretch into uncomfortable areas. We cannot ignore what the LORD has said and done here, else we end with an idol instead of a living God at the center of our worship.

Come, all who trust in the LORD, repent while the moment of opportunity is here. Repent and throw yourselves on his mercy and compassion! Let us return daily to our first love, letting those snares which so easily entangles us fall away as we each run the race set before us.

Maranatha!

²² New American Commentary - Volume 19a: Hosea, Joel.

²³ See Psalm 14:1-3, Romans 3:23