

JACOB, WHO STROVE WITH GOD | HOSEA 12:2-13

DO NOT LET GO OF RIGHTEOUSNESS | BY LUKE THORNE

INTRODUCTION

The last three chapters of Hosea can be broken into two parts. Each contains a description of the people's sin and a command directly from the LORD for what they must do, but the audience and tone for each could not be more different.

The first is God's gentle (by Hosea's standard) rebuke of Judah, the southern kingdom (12:2-13). The second is God's forceful condemnation of Ephraim¹, the northern kingdom. In the first, God calls the Jews to hold fast to him and not slip into the sin in which they are tempted. In the second, God describes their fate of judgment and pleads with the Israelites to repent and turn back to him and be restored.

We are, each of us, from the beginning like the rebellious Israelites; our actions and our heart are a "bitter provocation²" to a holy God that demand a bloodguilt. But this is not the end of our story. God has provided a way to be made clean, to have the bloodguilt removed from us.

In this sermon, however, we are going to focus not on rebellious Israel but chastened Judah. For here too we can relate as we walk the trail of the crucified life in Christ. There are many temptations to depart that path, but we must hold fast to the faith³, never letting go, lest we find ourselves far from the light, recipients of fullness of God's judgment for our insults to Jesus' love and sacrifice⁴.

JUDAH IS NOT INNOCENT

Hosea 12:2 (NET⁵)

2The Lord also has a covenant lawsuit against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.

Recall, the vast majority of the Hosea oracles are against Israel as that was his ministry field. However, sprinkled throughout the text have been warnings and judgments against Judah⁶. Here now, the LORD is laying out his principle "covenant lawsuit" with a less-than-faithful bride, Judah.

Note, though, the difference in tone between God's declaration to Judah here and his declaration to Israel in verse 14: "But Ephraim bitterly provoked him to anger; so he will hold him accountable for the blood he has shed, his Lord will repay him for the contempt he has shown."

Where Ephraim (Israel) has bitterly⁷ provoked the LORD's wrath, Judah has transgressed a covenant. Where Ephraim will be held under blood-guilt, Judah will be disciplined. Where Ephraim will be repaid for contempt of the LORD in like kind, Judah will be repaid for his faithlessness. And so, God gives the people of Judah a role-model to follow, an example to emulate... though at first glance, it is a strange one.

JACOB THE ROLE-MODEL?

Hosea 12:3-4a

3In the womb he attacked his brother; in his manly vigor he struggled with God.

4He struggled with an angel and prevailed; he wept and begged for his favor.

¹ Note, Ephraim and Israel are used in Hosea interchangeably and both refer to the Northern Kingdom which included all 10 non-Levite tribes except Judah.

² "But Ephraim bitterly provoked him to anger; so he will hold him accountable for the blood he has shed, his Lord will repay him for the contempt he has shown" Hosea 12:14 (NET).

³ See 1 Corinthians 16:13, Romans 11:20, Hebrews 3:6, 10:23

⁴ See Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-29, 2 Peter 2:21

⁵ All references are from the New English Translation unless otherwise marked.

⁶ See Hosea 1:7, 5:5, 10, 14, 6:4, 11, 8:14, 10:11

⁷ The form of the Hebrew word, tamrur in the text is absolute, implying "the most bitter."

Hosea begins this oracle by bringing the audience of his ministry (and us) back to a particular patriarch of Israel: Israel himself. Israel (more specifically, Jacob before the LORD gave him a new name) is a character of some infamy and confusion in the Bible. But in order to fully understand what the LORD is telling Judah through this prophesy we must go back and discover who this man of God was and why he is so important.

JACOB, WHO STROVE

Jacob is an interesting character. He was born seizing the heel of his older twin, Esau⁸. Already, his ambitions for favor and blessing were apparent. Things would only escalate between his brother and him from there. In Genesis 25, Esau, returning from a long hunting expedition, collapsed by Jacob as he prepared a meal. Famished, Esau begs a plate of food. Jacob, ever the clever manipulator, trades him for his birthright as the oldest son.

Genesis 25:30a, 31–33

30a So Esau said to Jacob, “Feed me some of the red stuff—yes, this red stuff—because I’m starving!”

31 But Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

32 “Look,” said Esau, “I’m about to die! What use is the birthright to me?”

33 But Jacob said, “Swear an oath to me now.” So Esau swore an oath to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.

In Genesis 27, Isaac, their father spoke with Esau about his desire to give his son his blessing in sight of God before he died. Overhearing this, Jacob’s mother helped Jacob to impersonate his older brother (to the point of putting animal skins on his arms and neck to deceive their blind father) so that he could usurp the blessing of Isaac. Jacob played the part perfectly and stole the blessing from his older brother. Here is that blessing:

Genesis 27:28–29

28 May God give you the dew of the sky and the richness of the earth, and plenty of grain and new wine.

29 May peoples serve you and nations bow down to you. You will be lord over your brothers, and the sons of your mother will bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you be blessed.”

So far, we might put Jacob down as a reprobate, however there is one important aspect of this man that helps inform us of his motivation and heart behind these deeds and others, and we arrive to it in Genesis 32. After Jacob and his two wives (there’s a whole story there⁹) leave the land of their father, they are forced to turn homeward into danger as Esau, seeking blood is hunting for them.¹⁰

After seeing everyone safely across the river, Jacob stayed behind and wrestled with the Angel of the LORD.

Genesis 32:25–30 (NET)

25 When the man saw that he could not defeat Jacob, he struck the socket of his hip so the socket of Jacob’s hip was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

26 Then the man said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.” “I will not let you go,” Jacob replied, “unless you bless me.”

27 The man asked him, “What is your name?” He answered, “Jacob.”

28 “No longer will your name be Jacob,” the man told him, “but Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have prevailed.”

29 Then Jacob asked, “Please tell me your name.” “Why do you ask my name?” the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, explaining, “Certainly I have seen God face to face and have survived.”

When we read this story in Genesis, it feels like we are missing something. Why did Jacob keep holding the man after being defeated? What was going through his mind? Did he understand who it was he was wrestling with?

⁸ Genesis 25:22-26

⁹ See Genesis chapters 29-31

¹⁰ Genesis 32:6

But Hosea gives us insight into the desperation of Jacob as he clung to the Christophany¹¹, “he wept and begged for his favor.¹²” Here, we learn an important truth. He who is wise, let him understand, victory in the Kingdom of God comes through defeat. Jacob understood the stakes of the game, and he would bear any injury to attain what he sought. Will you?

GOD REVEALED

Hosea 12:4b-5

He found God at Bethel, and there he spoke with him!

5As for the LORD God Almighty, [YHWH] is the name by which he is remembered!

And so, clinging to God (spiritually as well as physically), Jacob received the blessing of God’s favor. Remembering the LORD’s promise¹³ to him when he laid his head upon the stone, Jacob traveled again to Bethel and there, received a new identity.

Genesis 35:10–12

10God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but your name will no longer be called Jacob; Israel will be your name.” So God named him Israel.

11Then God said to him, “I am the [El Shaddai]. Be fruitful and multiply! A nation—even a company of nations—will descend from you; kings will be among your descendants!

12The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you. To your descendants I will also give this land.”

No longer would he be the remembered as the sneaky cheat. He inherited the promise of God to Abraham as Israel — “he struggles with God.¹⁴” The old things had passed away. Notice, though, that God isn’t telling us to be like Israel, he’s telling us to be like Jacob.

TAKE HOLD OF GOD

Be like Jacob!? Not many would implore others to be like Jacob—he was a selfish liar and a manipulative trickster—and yet that is precisely what YHWH is telling the people of Judah. Why? Because in spite of Jacob’s rather obvious character flaws, he sought after God’s love and justice. Recall the story of Jacob’s wrestling with the Christophany; Jacob prevailed against God, though he was physically defeated, because he held fast to Christ!

Hosea 12:6 (ESV)

6“So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.”

When everything around Jacob was falling apart and his brother was search for him with a small army, he fell to his knees and prayed to the LORD. Here is Jacob’s prayer to the LORD:

“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant...” Genesis 32:10 (ESV). Jacob, for all his flaws, understood his own nature. He knew he was not worthy of God’s loving-kindness or mercy, and yet he pursued God with vigor, begging the LORD with tears in his eyes for forgiveness and blessing.

Along each step of his life, Jacob strove for the favor of the LORD. While his brother Esau was content to trade his inheritance for some lentils, Jacob sought the blessings of standing in the LORD’s shadow. He wrestled all night for it and begged for it even in defeat.

And defeat is where he found it.

¹¹ Meaning appearance of Jesus in physical form in the Old Testament (theophany). “Christ” = Jesus, “ophany” = appearance.

¹² Hosea 12:3-4

¹³ “¹⁵I am with you! I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you!” Genesis 28:15

¹⁴ Long, P. J. (2016). Israelites. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

COME AND LISTEN TO YOUR GOD

Hosea 12:7-8

7The businessmen love to cheat; they use dishonest scales.

8Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich! I have become wealthy! In all that I have done to gain my wealth, no one can accuse me of any offense that is actually sinful."

Ah, the famous Hosea anti-climax strikes again. Just when you think the oracle has turned the page towards something positive, God doubles down on the specifics of his lawsuit.

The word translated as "businessmen" or "traders" is actually Canaanite. Hosea is comparing Judah with their ancestral enemies, saying in effect, "you are no different from those whom God destroyed with Joshua. You rely on your own cunning and cleverness to get ahead instead of YHWH Yireh."¹⁵ God's implication is two-fold and sobering.

"Was it for this that I redeemed you? To make you a bunch of Canaanites? And secondly: 'When you re-live the exodus each year, camping out as your fathers did, is it only make-believe? Or is it to re-learn the lesson of those days, that man does not live by bread alone?'"¹⁶

THE ROYAL WAY

And here is a word of warning to those of us who seek success in this world. The Canaanite claims, "I haven't done anything sinful to gain my wealth! All my finances are above board." Here's the tricky part, humans are clever little devils and we excel at rationalizing our behaviors, especially when we stand to gain. The following is from the book *God's Smuggler* by Brother Andrew, and it illustrates perfectly the difference between clinging to God's mercy and justice and clinging to our own understanding.

"I called it the Game of the Royal Way....The last round in the game was the most subtle of all. It was December 30. I had to have my application in the mail that day if it was to get to London on the thirty-first. At ten o'clock in the morning, one of the students shouted up the stairwell that I had a visitor. I ran down the stairs thinking that this must be my delivering angel. But when I saw who it was, my heart dropped. This visitor wasn't coming to bring me money, he was coming to ask for it. For it was Richard, a friend I had made months ago in the Patrick slums, a young man who came to the school occasionally when he just had to have cash.

"With dragging feet I went outside. Richard stood on the white-pebble walkway, hands in pockets, eyes lowered. "Andrew," he said, "would you be having a little extra cash? I'm hungry." I laughed and told him why. I told him about the soap and the razor blades, and as I spoke I saw the coin. It lay among the pebbles, the sun glinting off it in just such a way that I could see it but not Richard. I could tell from its color that it was a shilling.

"Instinctively I stuck out my foot and covered the coin with my toe. Then as Richard and I talked, I reached down and picked up the coin along with a handful of pebbles. I tossed the pebbles down one by one, aimlessly, until at last I had just the shilling in my hand. But even as I dropped the coin into my pocket, the battle began. That coin meant I could stay in school. I wouldn't be doing Richard a favor by giving it to him: he'd spend it on drink and be thirsty as ever in an hour. While I was still thinking up excellent arguments, I knew it was no good. How could I judge Richard when Christ told me so clearly that I must not. Furthermore, this was not the Royal Way! What right had an ambassador to hold on to money when another of the King's children stood in front of him saying he was hungry.

"I shoved my hand back into my pocket and drew out the silver coin. "Look, Richard," I said, "I do have this. Would it help any?" Richard's eyes lit up. "It would, mate." He tossed the coin into the air and ran off down the hill. With a light heart that told me I had done the right thing, I turned to go back inside. And before I reached the door the postman turned down our walk. In the mail of course was a letter for me.

"I knew when I saw Greetje's handwriting that it would be from the prayer group at Ringers' and that there would be cash inside. And there was. A lot of money: A pound and a half—thirty shillings."

¹⁵ Alternatively, *Jehovah Jireh*, meaning "the LORD who provides. See Genesis 22:8, 13-14

¹⁶ The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 111). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Woe to us if we consider the money we have as ours. We console ourselves by saying that the LORD has blessed us with it, therefore it's for us. And by doing so, we let go of God in order to take hold of our dirty little shilling.

If we take our eyes off the eternal prize of Jesus, we become blind to the needs of his children all around us. We become Canaanites. Did God redeem us so for so small a life, or is there something greater and higher that we have lost sight of?

YOU WERE WARNED

Hosea 12:9-10

"9I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again as in the days of old. 10I spoke to the prophets; I myself revealed many visions; I spoke in parables through the prophets."

In counterpoint to the rich Canaanite who connives his way to prosperity and security, God reminds Judah that it has always been he who provided for them. His warning is simple, if you cannot hold fast to the All-Sufficient One¹⁷—if you cannot hear his calling through the prophets—you will lose everything you have gained in the light of his countenance.

Has the LORD brought you out of Egypt or are you still a slave to sin?¹⁸ Does the LORD speak to you every day? He does you know, though we sometimes become hard of hearing. Like the Children of Judah, we have the live and quickening words of the Holy Scriptures—truly a megaphone of God's voice to each and every person¹⁹—but we have more. We have the Spirit of God himself searching our hearts and touching our minds. Do not grieve the spirit by turning away. Cling to him.

GOD DESIRES MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE

Hosea 12:11-12

11Is there idolatry in Gilead? Certainly its inhabitants will come to nothing! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Surely their altars will be like stones heaped up on a plowed field! (12Jacob fled to the country of Aram, then Israel worked to acquire a wife; he tended sheep to pay for her.)

God will not accept the worship or sacrifices of a hypocrite. He is not interested in a portion of our time or money if they rest of us revel in idolatry. Here, Hosea is naming specific towns that will reap wrath when it arrives if they do not return to God.

Verse 12 is an odd ball. It's a parenthetical aside hearkening back to the Jacob comparison of prior verses. But its importance is found in the fact that Jacob was no hero of God to be worshiped.²⁰ He was an ordinary man with pedestrian concerns. We are not called to emulate a superhero; we are called to emulate someone just like us.

Only fools say that the crucified life is only for the special super-elect. It is the calling for all of us, whether we accept or not. **"The Spirit-filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people."** A. W. Tozer, *The Crucified Life*

GOD ALWAYS PROVIDES A WAY

Hosea 12:13

13The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt by a prophet, and due to a prophet Israel was preserved alive.

The word of God is powerful.²¹ It preserves life, it slays sinful natures, it convicts the ungodly, commands demons, compels obedience. The word of God is a treasure. May we never lose sight of what a precious thing it is for us to have and

¹⁷ "5Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God..." 2 Corinthians 3:5, "8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:8

¹⁸ See Romans 6:6-16

¹⁹ "[The experience] has increased my love for the Bible as God's very word, because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words and through the Bible I have experiences like this almost every day. The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind — and your mind. We hear his very words." John Piper

²⁰ *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless.* (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 113). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

²¹ See Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23

to hold. May we always read it in reverence to the Holy God who spoke it into existence.

God spoke to the people of Israel and Judah through his appointed prophets, but the choice to hear was still there's. Israel abandoned YHWH; they even took steps to protect themselves from his wrath. Judah remained, though more out of complacency than conviction.

God loves his children, and he desires so much more for us than the life of a contented Canaanite. His call rings clear—no matter what corner of the world you find yourself in or what part of the Bible you read, he calls for us to cling to him, to strive to enter the narrow way.

Luke 13:24–28 (ESV)

24“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’

26Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’

27But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’

28In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.

Will you strive with God? Will you let go of your life in order to gain Christ? If you do, brothers and sisters, you are more than conquerors, and you will find victory in the struggle through God's good grace.

“To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love.” — A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

BENEDICTION: ROMANS 8:35-39 (ESV)

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

QUESTIONS:

Instead of the normal questions. Take a moment sometime today to pray and *honestly* answer these questions. (From A.W. Tozer's *Rules for Self-Discovery*):

1. What do I want most?
2. What do I think about most?
3. How do I use my money each day?
4. What do I do with my leisure time?
5. What company do I enjoy?
6. Who and what do I admire?
7. What do I laugh at?
8. If I have become complacent in my pursuit of God, where?