

ISRAEL IS AN EMPTY VINE

TEXT: HOSEA 10:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

1. Last week we were reminded of Israel's early days when God found them like grapes in the wilderness. Back then they bore a little fruit for the Lord (9:10a), but they were soon corrupted by immorality ("but they went to Baal-peor"), idolatry (idolatrous "altars" in 10:1), and too much prosperity -- "the multitude of his fruit...the goodness of his land" (10:1).
2. Therefore, chapter 10 begins with the statement: "Israel is an empty vine" (10:1).
3. The symbol of the vine is used all throughout the Bible. Psalm 80:8 says, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it."
4. In Isaiah chapter 5, the prophet tells a parable of how the LORD had placed a vineyard in a very fruitful hill (Mount Zion), and He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.
5. In Jeremiah 2:21, the LORD told Israel, "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?"
6. Several other examples could be given and we will look at a couple more in a moment. My first point today is that Israel is an empty vine that had to be judged.

I. ISRAEL IS AN EMPTY VINE THAT HAD TO BE JUDGED.

1. As God's chosen people, Israel was supposed to bear fruit for Him, but instead they brought forth fruit only for themselves (10:1).
2. Their fruit was bad fruit, devoid of spiritual life. The empty vine was a mere piece of dead wood, good only as fuel for the fire. Ezekiel 15:4 says, "Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet (useful) for any work?"
3. Our Lord said in John 15:5, 6, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast

- forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."
4. The Israelites professed to believe in the true God of Israel, but they "made goodly images" (10:1). Their heart was divided (10:2) -- it was divided between God and their idols. They would not wholly part with either.
 5. Elijah upbraided them, "How long halt ye between the two opinions?" (I Kings 18:21).
 6. Israel did not fear the LORD (10:3). And because Israel did not fear God, they said, "We have no king" (10:3). *Barnes' Notes* says, "These are the words of despair, not of repentance; of people terrified by the consciousness of guilt, but not coming forth out of its darkness; describing their condition, not confessing the iniquity which brought it on them...Now...the memory of their evil deeds crushes them beyond hope of remedy. They groan for their losses, their sufferings, their fears, but do not repent. Such is the remorse of the damned."
 7. Since they rejected their heavenly King, they would soon be deprived of their earthly king (cf. 10:7, 15).
 8. Their succession of wicked kings was incapable and unable of slowing down the nation's downward course.
 9. "They have spoken words..." (10:4), but their words were without substance; they were empty and they were false.
 10. They swore falsely in making a covenant with the Assyrian King Shalmaneser, and then making a covenant with Egypt (II Kings 17:4).
 11. This brought upon them God's judgment springing "up as hemlock (poisonous weeds; cf. Job 20:16) in the furrows of the field" (10:4).
 12. Bethel ("house of God") had degenerated into "Beth-aven" ("house of vanity"), "because of the calves," i.e. the golden calves they worshipped (10:5).
 13. They had replaced the glory of God with the "glory" of idols -- their sacred calves which would be "carried unto Assyria for a present to King Jareb," the king of Assyria (10: 5, 6; cf. 5:13).
 14. Not only would Israel be carried into captivity, but its god (the golden calf) also (10:6). "Jareb" was not the king's real name. It means "contender," and is an epithet given to the king of Assyria.

II. ISRAEL WOULD BE ASHAMED OF THEMSELVES.

1. Unlike the USA which has forgotten how to blush, "Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel" (10:6b).

2. The other day, the president of Uganda signed a bill criminalizing homosexuality. He said this, "Homosexuals exhibiting themselves; Africans are flabbergasted by exhibitionism of sexual acts – whether heterosexual or otherwise and for good reason. Why do you exhibit your sexual conduct? Are you short of opportunity for privacy - where you can kiss, fondle, etc.? Are we interested in seeing your sexual acts – we the Public? I am not able to understand the logic of the Western Culture. However, we Africans always keep our opinions to ourselves and never seek to impose our point of view on the others. If only they could let us alone." He is right to rebuke the USA and Europe!
3. The counsel (10:6) refers to their foolish decision to separate from Judah and set up their own idolatrous, man-made religion.
4. God's judgment would fall in less than twenty years. We can only wonder how much time America has left. In 722 BC the Assyrians would invade Israel, and Samaria would fall (10:7).
5. "The high places" (10:8) were places where the people worshipped their idols and images. "Aven" refers to Beth-aven (10:8; cf. 10:5). "The sin of Israel" was their idolatry (10:8), the theme of Hosea.
6. God calls man-made religion, like what King Jeroboam started at Bethel and Dan "sin." Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, JWs, etc. -- were all started by men. God calls it sin.
7. The other day another news report came out about yet another RC priest who molested little boys. One of his victims died of AIDS. Yet even though he was convicted on child sex abuse charges over 30 years ago, the RCC continues to employ him and house him.
8. I heard Mike Gallagher discuss this sad story on the radio Tuesday morning, and a radio listener called in and called Mr. Gallagher a "Catholic-basher"!
9. God's judgment would be so severe that they would ask the mountains and hills to fall on them (10:8). These are the same mountains and hills on which they erected their idolatrous altars. God says that they "increased" their altars and made "goodly images" (10:1).
10. How ironic that these same hills and mountains will be called on to cover them and hide them from God's wrath and judgment.
11. Our Lord quoted this Scripture on His way up Mount Calvary. He said, "For, behold, the days are coming...Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us" (Luke 23:29, 30).

12. Some expositors believe He was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, but it also has reference to the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev. 6:14-17; 9:6).
13. To emphasize what a heinous sin it was, Hosea once again – for the third time – reminds Israel of the horrible sin that took place in Gibeah over 600 years earlier (10:9; cf. 9:9; 5:8; Judges 19:16, 22-30).
14. "Sin never dies a natural death; it must be thoroughly judged" – H.A. Ironside.
15. "There they stood (their ground)" (10:9). The battle in Gibeah "against the children of iniquity" was a bloody civil war in which the tribe of Benjamin was reduced from 26,700 armed men to 600 (cf. Judges 20:13-15, 25, 47, 48).
16. The battle "against the children of iniquity did not overtake them," i.e. the tribes of Israel survived (10:9b).
17. As backslidden as they were in the days of the judges, at least they dealt with the sin among them. But now they would not repent of their sin and so God would have to "chastise them" (10:10).
18. First Corinthians 11:31 says, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."
19. The "two furrows" (10:10b) could be a reference to their sin in separating from the house of David, and their sin of separating from the true worship of God -- "Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods" (10:11).
20. Israel was a trained "heifer" (10:11), but a "backsliding heifer" (4:16). God had given them much slack but no more. Now He would put a harness on her neck and make her carry a rider (10:11). Because of Israel's sin, the Lord was going to bring them into captivity.

III. ISRAEL WAS URGED TO REPENT.

1. Even though the hour is late, Hosea held out hope for his wicked generation (10:12). This means breaking up the "fallow (inactive, uncultivated, hard) ground" and seeking the LORD (10:12).
2. Jeremiah 4:3 says, "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."
3. They were to sow to themselves in righteousness, that they might "reap in mercy" (10:12). Then the LORD would come and rain righteousness upon them (10:12b). Showers of blessing!
4. Righteousness is the product of genuine repentance toward God and faith in His abundant mercy (10:12).

5. Acts 20:21 says, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."
6. Repentance was needed because they had "plowed wickedness" and had "reaped iniquity" (10:13). What else could they reap?
7. They had "eaten the fruit of lies" and trusted in man rather than God (10:13).
8. Most of what passes for preaching today has no effect on the fallow ground. Backslidden, carnal and unsaved people like weak, anemic preaching because they do not have to change. No demands are put upon them. In fact, they resent strong preaching.
9. But God says to break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD" (10:12).
10. God warned Israel of a coming "tumult" (10:14), i.e. the Assyrian invasion. Shalman is a contraction for Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, who besieged Samaria in 722 BC (cf. II Kings 17:1-6). This marked the end of the Northern Kingdom.
11. The battle at Beth-arbel was probably well-known in Hosea's day, but it is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (10:14).
12. Terrible atrocities would be committed, such as mothers being dashed to pieces upon their children (10:14; cf. 13:16).
13. This cruel and barbaric practice was not uncommon among the Syrians, Assyrians, Medes, and Babylonians (cf. II Kings 8:12; Ps. 137:8, 9; Isaiah 13:15, 16).
14. The last king of Israel, Hoshea, was "utterly cut off" (10:15). King Hoshea paid an annual tribute to Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria, but after Tiglath-pileser died, Hoshea revolted against the new Assyrian king, Shalmaneser (called "Shalman" in 10:14).
15. Shalmaneser then invaded Israel, took Hoshea prisoner, and besieged Samaria (cf. II Kings 17).
16. Bethel (10:15) was the seat of Israel's idolatry. King Jeroboam made two calves of gold, and he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan (I Kings 12:28, 29). The northern kingdom of Israel was idolatrous from the very beginning, and it led to their eventual destruction (10:15).

CONCLUSION:

1. Preaching and church-planting work is breaking up fallow ground (Hosea 10:12).
2. Breaking up fallow ground is difficult work – there can be no blessing without effort and no harvest without plowing.

