

"HOW CAN I GIVE YOU UP?"

I. Introduction

- A. One surefire way to sour someone's attitude towards you is to be ungrateful when they have done something nice for you.
- B. In these verses God provides a vivid description of Israel's ingratitude towards him.
- C. Yet instead of giving them over to the utter destruction that they deserve, God extends mercy.
- D. As we study this passage tonight, we will see that it gives us a window into the heart of God.

II. God's Care and Israel's Ingratitude (1-4)

- A. Our text opens with the Lord looking to the past, recalling all that he has done for Israel.
 - 1. He loved Israel as his son, from Israel's earliest years.
 - 2. He called him out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
 - 3. You may know that Matthew quotes this verse near the beginning of his Gospel to describe how the child Jesus was taken by his parents to Egypt in order to protect him from King Herod's efforts to kill him.
 - 4. Matthew writes, "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" (Mt. 2:15)
 - 5. Matthew speaks of this verse as if it were a prophecy that was fulfilled by what happened to Jesus.
 - 6. This is surprising, because in Hosea it is not predicting anything but referring to something that happened in the past (Israel's

exodus from Egypt).

7. The fact that Matthew uses this verse in the way he does tells us that he sees Israel's historical deliverance from Egypt as a typological foreshadowing of the deliverance that God brought about through Christ.
 8. In other words, Jesus is the true Israel.
 9. He sums up in his own person all that Israel was called to be.
 10. Jesus' faithfulness as God's Son is the basis of the mercy that God extends to his ungrateful people in this text.
 11. The only reason why God shows us compassion and tenderness in the midst of our own waywardness is because of the faithfulness of Christ on our behalf.
- B. As we come to verse 2, it is helpful to point out something that is covered over by many modern translations, even by the ESV.
1. While these translations succeed in conveying the overall sense of the verse, they fail to represent what the Hebrew text actually says.
 2. The KJV and NKJV offer the literal translation, "As they called them, So they went from them".
 3. This may not seem very important, but it is significant because it tells us how the Lord called his people.
 4. If you fill in the names represented by the pronouns, the Hebrew says, 'As God's prophets called Israel, so Israel went from God's prophets.'
 5. God called his people through his servants, through Moses and through the prophets who came after him.
 6. God called Israel with an external word, a word that came from outside of their own heads, a word whose meaning could be

objectively understood.

7. It was not an internal or subjective word.
 8. It was a message that had a clear meaning, and Israel rebelled against that message.
 9. In spite of the many calls that were delivered by God's spokesmen, Israel kept going after false gods.
- C. As we come to verses 3-4, we see God describing some of the ways he nurtured Israel.
1. God was like a father teaching his son to walk.
 2. He picked him up with loving arms.
 3. He led him with kindness and love.
 4. He eased the child's burdens.
 5. He bent down and fed the child.
 6. The point of this description is to impress upon us the love and care that the Lord extended to his people.
 7. This then gives us a sense of how heartbroken God was by Israel's persistent ingratitude and rebellion.
 8. It also provides a picture of what we are doing whenever we sin as Christians.
 9. We are spurning the One who has done nothing but pour out his lovingkindness upon us and choosing to go our own way.

III. The Consequences of Turning Away (5-7)

- A. As we come to verses 5-7, we see that Israel's refusal to return to God in repentance is going to result in their return to slavery.
1. Though they will not literally go back to Egypt, they are going to go back to the experience that they had to endure in Egypt.
 2. The Assyrians are going to conquer them and remove them from their land.
 3. The name Assyria may not mean very much to us, but it struck terror into the hearts of people who lived in the Near East in the 8th century B.C.
 4. The Assyrians were utterly barbaric, and the prospect of being brought under their dominion would have been terrible.
 5. Think about the way the terror group ISIS deals with its hostages and you begin to get a picture of what was lying ahead for Israel's northern kingdom.
- B. The reason why the Lord was going to hand his own people over to such a horrific fate was because they were bent on rebellion.
1. Again and again they insisted on following their own way instead of God's way.
 2. They utterly ignored the counsels of God.
 3. They were only interested in their own counsels.
 4. This is the essence of sin.
 5. Sin is lawlessness.
 6. It is marked by the refusal to submit to God's law and by the determination to be a law unto oneself.

7. We all have this bent inside us, because even as Christians we still have sin dwelling inside us.
8. The moment we sense that our hearts are moving in the direction of wanting our own way over God's way, we should cry out to God for forgiveness and for a renewed heart, a heart that delights in submitting to his will.
9. We need to remember that the time will come when it will be too late to cry out for God's help.
10. As Hosea says of Israel in verse 7, "though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all."

IV. God's Compassion (8-11)

- A. As we come to verses 8-11, we see that the Lord portrays himself as conflicted, or inwardly divided, over what to do with Israel.
 1. He says, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender."
 2. The mention of Admah and Zeboiim further underscores the severity of what is being threatened here.
 3. Those cities of the plain were wiped out when God rained down judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah.
 4. If you look for Admah and Zeboiim on a map today, you will not find them.
 5. They no longer exist.
 6. For all we know their remains are lying at the bottom of the Dead Sea.

7. The same fate was hanging over Israel, and in due time that fate fell upon them.
- B. Now, the fact that God speaks as if he were inwardly conflicted about what to do with Israel doesn't mean that he actually was conflicted.
1. God always knows exactly what he is going to do in every situation.
 2. He knew what he was going to do with Israel from eternity past.
 3. As Isaiah puts it, "For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?" (14:27)
 4. Whenever God speaks as if he were inwardly conflicted about something, this is an example of anthropomorphism.
 5. Anthropomorphism takes place when the Bible speaks of God as if he had human traits or emotions.
 6. It does this in order to convey some truth about God in terms that we can understand.
 7. For example, when we read in Genesis 3 that God walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, it doesn't mean that God has legs.
 8. In our text, the picture of God being conflicted over what to do with Israel underscores his hatred of sin while also pointing us to the love that he has for his chosen people
- C. Because of God's great compassion, the northern kingdom is not going to be utterly wiped out.
1. A chastened remnant will return.
 2. As we read in verses 10 and 11, "his children shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their

homes, declares the LORD.”

3. This points to what took place with some of the people of Israel when the northern kingdom fell.
4. Some of them went south to Judah and found refuge there, and some of their descendants were numbered among those who returned to the land after the Babylonian exile.
5. These verses also remind us of the remnant character of God’s people as a whole.
6. All throughout redemptive history, not everyone who professes the true religion is truly saved.
7. When a particular branch of the church falls into apostasy, God typically preserves a remnant.
8. Our own denomination, the PCA, is one example of this.
9. The PCA split off from the PCUSA over forty years ago because of concerns over the influence of the PCUSA’s theological waywardness.
10. In light of the decisions that have been made by the PCUSA in the past few years, I think that it is accurate to say that as an institution the PCUSA is essentially apostate at this point.
11. Yet God has preserved a remnant, and that remnant can be seen in denominations like the PCA and the OPC.
12. Of course, being a part of that remnant is not something for us to take pride in.
13. On the contrary, it should humble us and make us stand in awe of God’s great compassion.
14. By his grace, the lion’s roar has returned us to our home.

V. Israel's Misplaced Trust (11:12-12:1)

- A. In the last part of our passage, we have two further descriptions of Israel's sin.
1. In verse 12 God rebukes his people for their lies, saying, "Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit".
 2. The lies that God is talking about here are the lies that the Israelites told about their religion as they worshipped their false gods.
 3. This is what false doctrine is — it is lies.
 4. There is plenty of false doctrine among professing Christians in our day.
 5. Liberal theology continues to gain a foothold in many churches and denominations, even among those that consider themselves evangelical.
 6. What is liberal theology?
 7. Here is how a prominent liberal theologian defines it:
"Fundamentally it is the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority. Liberal theology seeks to reinterpret the symbols of Christianity in a way that creates a progressive religious alternative to atheistic rationalism and to theologies based on external authority. Specifically, liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement [that is, seeing Christ's sacrifice only in terms of the example that it sets for our own self-giving love]; and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people." [Gary Dorrien, cited in DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*, 133]

8. Now isn't that refreshingly honest?
 9. Liberal theology is about rejecting external authority and replacing it with individual reason and experience.
 10. In other words, liberal theology is about rejecting the God who exists outside of our minds.
 11. No wonder J. Gresham Machen said that liberal Christianity is not Christianity but a different religion altogether!
- B. The other thing that Israel is rebuked for at the end of our passage is their persistence in looking to other nations to help them out of their predicament.
1. They entered into covenants with Assyria.
 2. They sent tribute to Egypt.
 3. This was something that God's people were never to do.
 4. They were not to enter into political alliances with other nations.
 5. They were to look to the Lord as their strength and put their trust in him.
 6. The irony is that they were about to be destroyed by the very nation in which they put their trust: the Assyrians.
 7. This is vividly described in 12:1 by the words "Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind all day long".
 8. The east wind was intensely hot and it was miserable to endure.
 9. Only an utter fool would spend all day pursuing it, yet that is what God's wayward people were doing when they sought relief by allying themselves with the world.

VI. Conclusion

- A. One thing that assures us that the church of Jesus Christ will never perish is the fact that God loves his people with the kind of love that is described in this passage.
- B. Of course, there will always be counterfeit churches in the world, and counterfeit churches and counterfeit Christians will indeed perish.
- C. But the future survival of Christ's true church does not depend on us but upon God's faithfulness to what he promises to those whose hope rests upon Jesus.
- D. "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:10-12)