

Sunday, December 8

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Hosea 10:1 - 14:9

10 1 How prosperous Israel is— a luxuriant vine loaded with fruit. But the richer the people get, the more pagan altars they build. The more bountiful their harvests, the more beautiful their sacred pillars. **2** The hearts of the people are fickle; they are guilty and must be punished. The LORD will break down their altars and smash their sacred pillars. **3** Then they will say, “We have no king because we didn’t fear the LORD . But even if we had a king, what could he do for us anyway?” **4** They spout empty words and make covenants they don’t intend to keep. So injustice springs up among them like poisonous weeds in a farmer’s field. **5** The people of Samaria tremble in fear for their calf idol at Beth-aven, and they mourn for it. Though its priests rejoice over it, its glory will be stripped away. **6** This idol will be carted away to Assyria, a gift to the great king there. Ephraim will be ridiculed and Israel will be shamed, because its people have trusted in this idol. **7** Samaria and its king will be cut off; they will float away like driftwood on an ocean wave. **8** And the pagan shrines of Aven, the place of Israel’s sin, will crumble. Thorns and thistles will grow up around their altars. They will beg the mountains, “Bury us!” and plead with the hills, “Fall on us!” **9** The LORD says, “O Israel, ever since Gibeah, there has been only sin and more sin! You have made no progress whatsoever. Was it not right that the wicked men of Gibeah were attacked? **10** Now whenever it fits my plan, I will attack you, too. I will call out the armies of the nations to punish you for your multiplied sins. **11** “Israel is like a trained heifer treading out the grain— an easy job she loves. But I will put a heavy yoke on her tender neck. I will force Judah to pull the plow and Israel to break up the hard ground. **12** I said, ‘Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.’ **13** “But you have cultivated wickedness and harvested a thriving crop of sins. You have eaten the fruit of lies— trusting in your military might, believing that great armies could make your nation safe. **14** Now the terrors of war will rise among your people. All your fortifications will fall, just as when Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel. Even mothers and children were dashed to death there. **15** You will share that fate, Bethel, because of your great wickedness. When the day of judgment dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.

11 1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt. **2** But the more I called to him, the farther he moved from me, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and

burning incense to idols. **3** I myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn't know or even care that it was I who took care of him. **4** I led Israel along with my ropes of kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from his neck, and I myself stooped to feed him. **5** "But since my people refuse to return to me, they will return to Egypt and will be forced to serve Assyria. **6** War will swirl through their cities; their enemies will crash through their gates. They will destroy them, trapping them in their own evil plans. **7** For my people are determined to desert me. They call me the Most High, but they don't truly honor me. **8** "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. **9** No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy. **10** For someday the people will follow me. I, the LORD, will roar like a lion. And when I roar, my people will return trembling from the west. **11** Like a flock of birds, they will come from Egypt. Trembling like doves, they will return from Assyria. And I will bring them home again," says the LORD. **12** Israel surrounds me with lies and deceit, but Judah still obeys God and is faithful to the Holy One.

12 1 The people of Israel feed on the wind; they chase after the east wind all day long. They pile up lies and violence; they are making an alliance with Assyria while sending olive oil to buy support from Egypt. **2** Now the LORD is bringing charges against Judah. He is about to punish Jacob for all his deceitful ways, and pay him back for all he has done. **3** Even in the womb, Jacob struggled with his brother; when he became a man, he even fought with God. **4** Yes, he wrestled with the angel and won. He wept and pleaded for a blessing from him. There at Bethel he met God face to face, and God spoke to him — **5** the LORD God of Heaven's Armies, the LORD is his name! **6** So now, come back to your God. Act with love and justice, and always depend on him. **7** But no, the people are like crafty merchants selling from dishonest scales—they love to cheat. **8** Israel boasts, "I am rich! I've made a fortune all by myself! No one has caught me cheating! My record is spotless!" **9** "But I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. And I will make you live in tents again, as you do each year at the Festival of Shelters. **10** I sent my prophets to warn you with many visions and parables." **11** But the people of Gilead are worthless because of their idol worship. And in Gilgal, too, they sacrifice bulls; their altars are lined up like the heaps of stone along the edges of a plowed field. **12** Jacob fled to the land of Aram, and there he earned a wife by tending sheep. **13** Then by a prophet the LORD brought Jacob's descendants out of Egypt; and by that prophet they were protected. **14** But the people of Israel have bitterly provoked the LORD, so their Lord will now sentence them to death in payment for their sins.

13 **1** When the tribe of Ephraim spoke, the people shook with fear, for that tribe was important in Israel. But the people of Ephraim sinned by worshiping Baal and thus sealed their destruction. **2** Now they continue to sin by making silver idols, images shaped skillfully with human hands. “Sacrifice to these,” they cry, “and kiss the calf idols!” **3** Therefore, they will disappear like the morning mist, like dew in the morning sun, like chaff blown by the wind, like smoke from a chimney. **4** “I have been the LORD your God ever since I brought you out of Egypt. You must acknowledge no God but me, for there is no other savior. **5** I took care of you in the wilderness, in that dry and thirsty land. **6** But when you had eaten and were satisfied, you became proud and forgot me. **7** So now I will attack you like a lion, like a leopard that lurks along the road. **8** Like a bear whose cubs have been taken away, I will tear out your heart. I will devour you like a hungry lioness and mangle you like a wild animal. **9** “You are about to be destroyed, O Israel— yes, by me, your only helper. **10** Now where is your king? Let him save you! Where are all the leaders of the land, the king and the officials you demanded of me? **11** In my anger I gave you kings, and in my fury I took them away. **12** “Ephraim’s guilt has been collected, and his sin has been stored up for punishment. **13** Pain has come to the people like the pain of childbirth, but they are like a child who resists being born. The moment of birth has arrived, but they stay in the womb! **14** “Should I ransom them from the grave? Should I redeem them from death? O death, bring on your terrors! O grave, bring on your plagues! For I will not take pity on them. **15** Ephraim was the most fruitful of all his brothers, but the east wind—a blast from the LORD — will arise in the desert. All their flowing springs will run dry, and all their wells will disappear. Every precious thing they own will be plundered and carried away. **16** The people of Samaria must bear the consequences of their guilt because they rebelled against their God. They will be killed by an invading army, their little ones dashed to death against the ground, their pregnant women ripped open by swords.”

14 **1** Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for your sins have brought you down. **2** Bring your confessions, and return to the LORD . Say to him, “Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer you our praises. **3** Assyria cannot save us, nor can our warhorses. Never again will we say to the idols we have made, ‘You are our gods.’ No, in you alone do the orphans find mercy.” **4** The LORD says, “Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever. **5** I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven. Israel will blossom like the lily; it will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon. **6** Its branches will spread out like beautiful olive trees, as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon. **7** My people will again live under my shade. They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines. They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon. **8** “O Israel, stay away from idols! I am the one who answers your prayers and cares for you. I am like a tree that

is always green; all your fruit comes from me.” **9** Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those with discernment listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But in those paths sinners stumble and fall.

Jude 1:1 - 25

1 **1** This letter is from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. I am writing to all who have been called by God the Father, who loves you and keeps you safe in the care of Jesus Christ. **2** May God give you more and more mercy, peace, and love. **3** Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. **4** I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. **5** So I want to remind you, though you already know these things, that Jesus first rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, but later he destroyed those who did not remain faithful. **6** And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them securely chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the great day of judgment. **7** And don’t forget Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and serve as a warning of the eternal fire of God’s judgment. **8** In the same way, these people—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings. **9** But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels, did not dare accuse the devil of blasphemy, but simply said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (This took place when Michael was arguing with the devil about Moses’ body.) **10** But these people scoff at things they do not understand. Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction. **11** What sorrow awaits them! For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion. **12** When these people eat with you in your fellowship meals commemorating the Lord’s love, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots. **13** They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds.

They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness. **14** Enoch, who lived in the seventh generation after Adam, prophesied about these people. He said, "Listen! The Lord is coming with countless thousands of his holy ones **15** to execute judgment on the people of the world. He will convict every person of all the ungodly things they have done and for all the insults that ungodly sinners have spoken against him." **16** These people are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their desires. They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want. **17** But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted. **18** They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. **19** These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them. **20** But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, **21** and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love. **22** And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. **23** Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives. **24** Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. **25** All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

Psalms 127:1 - 5

127 1 Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. **2** It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones. **3** Children are a gift from the LORD ; they are a reward from him. **4** Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior's hands. **5** How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.

Proverbs 29:15 - 17

29 15 To discipline a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child. **16** When the wicked are in authority, sin flourishes, but the godly will live to see their downfall. **17** Discipline your children, and they will give you peace of mind and will make your heart glad.