

## The Book of Hosea

### Chapter 12

When God's judgment came upon ancient Israel, the land of milk and honey experienced great devastation—the agricultural sector and the economy of this once prosperous kingdom were hard-hit. Today, we can increasingly relate to the experience of ancient Israel, as our nation has witnessed similar phenomena. According to the U.S. Agriculture Department, corn prices have more than doubled and wheat prices have more than quadrupled since 2004, with most of the increase coming just since 2007 (World, May 3/10, 2008, p. 34). In the news this week was another reminder of the peril facing our land of milk and honey, as a survey of bee health revealed a grim picture, with 36.1 percent of the nation's commercially managed hives lost since last year. Furthermore, last year's survey commissioned by the Apiary Inspectors of America found losses of about 32 percent. A bee expert with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture said, "For two years in a row, we've sustained a substantial loss. That's an astonishing number. Imagine if one out of every three cows, or one out of every three chickens, were dying. That would raise a lot of alarm." What is the cause? Scientists call it Colony Collapse Disorder, a mysterious disease that causes adult bees to abandon their hives. The disorder is not predictable or understood. The loss in bees is endangering the production of berries, fruits, and nuts. For the first time in American history, it seems that our entire food supply is in danger.

**Hosea 12:1 "Ephraim feeds on the wind, And pursues the east wind; He daily increases lies and desolation. Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, And oil is carried to Egypt. (NKJ)**

The prophet Hosea says that Ephraim (Israel) "feeds on the wind." His stomach is full of air, not food. This means that Israel entertained much confidence in his crafty ways, but it was to feed only on the wind. They dreamt that they were happy and secure, having secured both the Assyrians and the Egyptians as their allies. Yet, the Israelites were deluded.

In Judea, "the east wind" is a dry and often stormy wind. Israel, through their vain confidence, brought about many sorrows for themselves and remained ever void and empty. "He daily increases lies and desolation." The Israelites were so obstinate as to become quite hardened against God's teaching. Their teaching was falsehood; they fabricated for themselves many excuses to make themselves feel safe against all the threats that God made against them through His prophets. These lies and falsehoods would bring about their "desolation," their destruction.

"Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried to Egypt." What were the lies of Israel that brought about their desolation? They sought to make friends of the Assyrians (to the northeast) and the Egyptians (to the southwest). They brought presents to them, such as the "oil" they carried to Egypt. They made illegal covenants with their pagan neighbors.

God desired for Israel to be under His protection. He promised to defend His special people, His holy nation. Their desire to be friends with Egypt and Assyria was a clear evidence of their unbelief. In the New Testament, James warns in James 4:4: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity

with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

The Israelites had sought friendship with the unbelieving world, and thus they made themselves enemies of God. They denied the sufficiency of God’s power. So also whenever we attempt to provide for ourselves by unlawful means (whether by ungodly friendships, ungodly pacts, or stealing), it is the same as if we denied God. When we turn to the world for aid in our times of need, we are denying Christ as our Savior and Lord. May we never flee to Egypt or Assyria in our time of need!

**2 "The LORD also *brings* a charge against Judah, And will punish Jacob according to his ways; According to his deeds He will recompense him.**

Earlier in the book of Hosea, the prophet Hosea had spoken positively of Judah. In comparison to the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah had remained relatively faithful to God. Nevertheless, the southern kingdom had grievous evils, too. The Lord had praised the worship that yet prevailed in Jerusalem so as to emphasize the sinfulness of the ten northern tribes who of their own accord had departed from the rule of true worship which God had given. The Israelites had neglected the word of God and had given themselves up to new and false forms of worship. Hosea praised the worship but not the deeds of the tribe of Judah.

Hosea only briefly addressed the sins of the southern kingdom of Judah because he was sent as a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. However, pointing out God’s displeasure with Judah serves to further strengthen his warnings to Israel. If God should bring a charge against Judah, then how much greater His charges must be against their far more depraved neighbor to the north.

In comparison to the sins of Israel, Judah was innocent in God’s eyes. Nevertheless, Judah shall not escape God’s judgment for their sins either. The Israelites deserved a hundred times the punishment of Judah, for among Judah at least some integrity and righteousness existed. The lives of the Jews were corrupt, yet the law of God and true religion were not despised by them as they were by the Israelites. If God will not spare the people of Judah, then how much less will He spare the Israelites!

God will punish “Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will recompense him.” How much greater will be God’s punishment against Israel (Jacob), which had departed from God’s law, from true worship and doctrine, and from obedience to God.

**3 He took his brother by the heel in the womb, And in his strength he struggled with God. 4 Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him *in* Bethel, And there He spoke to us – 5 That is, the LORD God of hosts. The LORD *is* His memorable name.**

Israel (the name that had been given by God to the patriarch Jacob) was chosen by God according to His sovereign grace and divine election. Jacob did not by choice or design lay hold of his brother Esau’s heel in his mother’s womb. On the contrary, it was God who guided the hand of the infant, and by this sign God testified to His free adoption of Jacob. So also the Israelites, who were the descendants of Jacob, did not excel other

people by their own goodness or that of their parents; rather it was that God had of His own good pleasure chosen them and set them apart as His special people.

In a similar fashion, the prophet Malachi declares: "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' *Was not Esau Jacob's brother?*" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated." (Mal. 1:2-3)

Instead of acknowledging God's gracious mercy, the Israelites were swollen with pride. Thus, God sought to remind them of their humble origins and of His special grace that He had shown to their ancestor Jacob, the first Israelite.

As we have seen throughout the book of Hosea, the Israelites had forsaken their Maker, casting off the true worship which He had taught in His law, abandoning themselves to idols and ungodly superstitions.

Let us note that this passage clearly shows that men do not gain the favor of God by their "free will," but rather they are chosen by His goodness alone before they are born. **We are chosen by God not on account of our works but rather on account of God's sovereign choice.**

Hosea adds that Jacob "in his strength struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us—that is, the LORD God of hosts." What does it mean that He struggled "in his strength"? Yes, it was Jacob's strength, but that strength was given to him by God as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Hosea here makes explicit what was only implicit in the original account in Genesis. The Angel with whom Jacob struggled was in fact God Himself!** Most likely, this was a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ. Christ, who is God and our Mediator, is rightly called "the angel or the messenger of God," for He as our Mediator acts as a messenger between God the Father and men.

**John Calvin notes the contrast Hosea makes between Jacob (also known as Israel) and the Israelites of Hosea's day.** Jacob was endued with a heroic power; he wrestled with God and gained the victory. In contrast, the Israelites were the slaves of idols; they devoted themselves to the devil; they worshipped in a house of prostitution, with their temple having become a brothel. The Israelites had become adulterers, daily committing spiritual adultery with their idols. Their abominations were filthy chains, which revealed their lack of knowledge and their unregenerate hearts. The Israelites had forsaken God and adopted new and profane modes of worship.

The name Israel was given to Jacob because of the victory he obtained in that wrestling match, which is recorded in **Genesis 32**. Here we are told that Jacob wrestled with a Man, who was in fact Christ. And that wrestling match resulted in the socket of Jacob's hip being dislocated. In Genesis 32:28, God told Jacob: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

So also in our walk as Christians, we struggle with sin, and in a sense we struggle with God. God fights with His elect to humble them and rid them of their prideful self-love. Jesus says in Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be

zealous and repent.” God desires for us, like Jacob, to prevail, to be overcomers. God desires for us to be strong, to take up the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6), and to overcome our sinful temptations.

In the book of Revelation, Christ gives several promises to those who prevail or overcome:

Revelation 2:7 “. . . To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Revelation 2:11 “. . . He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Revelation 2:17 “. . . To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*.”

Revelation 2:26-28 “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ – as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.”

Revelation 3:5 “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

Revelation 3:12 “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him My new name.*”

Revelation 3:21 “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

Revelation 21:7 “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

In considering this famous struggle between God and Jacob, let us make some additional observations. John Calvin notes the comfort we should find as Christians in this account. God fights with us with His left hand and defends us with His right hand. He assails us in a weak manner while stretching forth His right hand to defend us. All this sets forth the grace and goodness of God. God seeks to humble us for our own sake, so as to choose to concede to us the praise of victory. Why? Certainly not so that we may become proud of ourselves, but that He may be the more glorified as He exercises His mighty power to defend us rather than overwhelm us, which He could do with one breath of His mouth. If God were merely to choose to blow on the whole human race, the whole world would in a moment be extinguished. Yet, the Lord fights with us and at the same time does not allow us to be crushed. In fact, God raises us up and concedes to His people the victory. Paul says in Romans that “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” or “we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

We read **in verse 4**, “He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him *in* Bethel, And there He spoke to us.” Jacob indeed gained the victory in the wrestling match, yet he did not depart without grief or loss. His hip socket was dislocated so that he was handicapped for the rest of his life. The struggle thus left Jacob victorious and yet at the same time humbled. Jacob did not exalt himself, seeking to claim merit for himself. On the contrary, he prayed to God, asking to be blessed by Him. Although his leg had become disjointed, even though he was worn out with weariness, yet Jacob did not withdraw himself; he did not wish to flee from Christ.

This account teaches us that we ought to seek God and His favor even when we are facing severe trials, whether physical ailments or other. Even if we face great suffering, may we never shun God’s presence. On the contrary, may we embrace Him with both arms and cling to Him. When we face trials, temptations, sorrow, sickness, or pain, let us pray to God and seek His assistance above all else.

Jacob found God “in Bethel.” Jacob gained the victory because God had long before begun to embrace him in His love. God had testified to His love when He had manifested Himself to Jacob in Bethel, “the house of God.”

Let us turn to **Genesis, chapter 28**, to recall the incident in which **God appeared to Jacob at Bethel**:

Genesis 28:10 “Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. 12 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 “Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15 “Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it*.” 17 And he was afraid and said, “How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!” 18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.”

In the New Testament, we learn that the ladder that Jacob saw in his dream represented Christ, the Mediator between God and men. Jesus said to Nathanael in the gospel of **John 1:51**: “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” Jesus is the door, the gate of heaven (John 10:9).

In Hosea 12, verse 5, “the LORD God of hosts,” or Yahweh Elohim, refers to **God as a divine warrior**; He is the all-powerful God, the Lord over the armies of heaven.

What does Hosea mean when He declares that “the LORD is His [God’s] memorable name”? The LORD is the English translation for the Hebrew name YHWH (Yahweh).

This is the covenant name of God, given to Moses at the burning bush. In **Exodus 3:13-15** we read: "Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.'" "I AM WHO I AM" refers to God's aseity; He is self-existent. He is the eternal Creator; no one created God. He exists in and of Himself.

**6 So you, by the help of your God, return; Observe mercy and justice, And wait on your God continually.**

Once again, the prophet Hosea calls the people to repentance. "So you, by the help of your God, return." To seek repentance without God's power is futile; such an attempt would be evidence of unbelief. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can repent and return to God.

In the case of the Israelites, He had sent them sound teaching and stirred up His prophets to bring back the lost and scattered sheep to the way of safety, yet they had rejected God's love and had refused to repent.

Hosea calls the people to confess that they have worshipped false gods and wearied themselves in their superstitions. He calls them to confess that they have rejected God's law. And He calls them to return to the one, true God.

He then calls on the people to evidence true repentance through the practice of true love. **How do we know if a person has true love?** Jesus says that they will keep God's commandments. The Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus chapter 20, are a summary of God's moral law—with the first four commandments relating to our love for God and the fifth through tenth commandments relating to our love for our fellow man. Hosea says, "Observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually." This is a summary of the fifth through tenth commandments (the second table of the law) and then the first through fourth commandments (the first table of the law).

In John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

John 14:23, Jesus answered and said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

John 14:24: "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."

In fact, **the apostle John tells us that keeping God's commandments, keeping God's law, is the test for determining whether someone is a true Christian:**

1 John 2:3-6: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in

him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He [Jesus] walked.”

**How do you know if a person has true love? The apostle John tells us:**

1 John 5:2: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.” He adds in 1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

So if a person shows love for his fellow man but does not keep God’s commandments, then he does not have *Christian* love; **in order to have true, Christian love, John tells us, we must love God first and evidence our love for Him through our obedience to His law, to His commandments.**

Hosea therefore is calling upon the people to keep God’s commandments. “Observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually.” If the people observe mercy and justice and seek to keep all God’s commandments, this will be a sign of true love for God.

God calls Israel **to forsake** their own superstitions and **to return** to the one, true God, trusting only in Him for their salvation. They must purify their worship and cast off all their adulterous superstitions. In short, they must **reform** their whole life according to the law of God. Is that not what it means to be a Christian? God’s law expresses God’s will for our lives. Insofar as we depart or deviate from God’s law, we are departing from the Lord.

**Are you a Christian? All Christians are “reformed” people.** To be a Christian means that you are seeking to become more and more holy, more and more like Christ. To be a Christian means that you are seeking to reform your beliefs, your worship, and yes, even your entire life, to bring it into conformity with the Truth of God. The apostle Paul says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:1-2). To be a Christian you must seek to be conformed to God and His will.

**John Calvin**, a founder of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in continental Europe, comments; “When we turn to God, the true proof is when we amend our life according to His law and begin with worshipping Him spiritually, the main part of which worship is faith, from which proceeds prayer. In addition to this, we [will] act kindly and justly towards our neighbors and abstain from all injuries, frauds, robberies, and all kinds of wickedness. This is the true evidence of repentance.” **This is what it means to be a true Christian, and this is the heart of what it means to be “Reformed.”**

Hosea adds in Hosea 12:7: **“A cunning Canaanite! Deceitful scales are in his hand; He loves to oppress.”**

The prophet Hosea here condemns the Israelites, calling them cunning Canaanites. He likens them to aliens, uncircumcised people who are unworthy to be called the children of Abraham. In essence, Hosea is saying, “You are not the children of Abraham; you falsely boast of his name. On the contrary, you are cunning Canaanites!” Their cunning depravity was evidenced in their use of “deceitful scales” and through their love of

oppression. They were a nation of greedy robbers. They claimed to be God's chosen people, but their lawlessness proved them to be unbelievers of the worst type; they were religious hypocrites.

On the one hand, they wronged their neighbors through deception, fraud, and craftiness. Like a corporation that "cooks the books," like Wall Street's financial institutions which collapsed in 2008 through deceitful lending practices, like a grocery store that adjusts their scales or their computers to charge more than the advertised price, like a gas station that adjusts their gas pumps to charge consumers for more gas than what they actually receive, so Israel has deceived and committed fraud. On the other hand, Israel wronged their neighbors through open cruelty; they shunned kindness and mercy. They loved to oppress other people for their own gain. Does our once Christian nation oppress others for economic gain? What about the immigrants who build our houses, pick our lettuce, strawberries, and oranges, slaughter our chickens and cattle, and yet are denied access to even temporary legal visas? What about those we hire oversees to make our electronics, our clothes, and other products? Are they denied basic human rights—like free speech and religion? Do we oppress others for economic gain?

**8 And Ephraim said, 'Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; In all my labors They shall find in me no iniquity that is sin.'**

Jesus seemed to have this verse in mind when He rebuked the lukewarm church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:17: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked . . ."

The people of Israel (Ephraim) were deceived by their prosperity and abundance. They flattered themselves and deceived themselves into thinking that God approved of them just because they were materially rich and wealthy. Blinded by their economic prosperity, they laughed at all the reproofs they heard from the mouths of God's ordained prophets. They cared nothing for what the true prophets preached. They were content with their sin.

They said, "in all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that is sin." The Israelites were so deluded by their wealth, that they thought they must be sinless. After all, how could a sinful people be so *blessed* by God? In their pride, these ungodly and reprobate men persuaded themselves that they were just since God did not immediately punish them. In their prideful madness, they thought, "God must regard me as innocent and pure from every vice, for He favors me. Surely He finds nothing in me that is worthy of punishment." So while God was longsuffering and treated the people with kindness, they abused Him in return and preyed upon His grace. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). In contrast, the haughty Israelites thought they could get away with their sinful ways. "Go and sin some more" was their practice.

May we learn from the unbelieving Israelites. May we never let prosperity blind us. May we never despise God's reproofs. May we never flatter ourselves in our sin. When God deals kindly with us, let us not abuse His patience. Rather, let us examine ourselves, repent of our sins, humble ourselves before God, and turn back to Him in faith and obedience.



**9 " But I *am* the LORD your God, Ever since the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, As in the days of the appointed feast.**

"But I am the LORD your God, ever since the land of Egypt." God is saying, how could you forget my great work of redemption, in delivering your fathers from the house of slavery, from the cruel tyranny they had faced under Pharaoh?

God had purchased the Israelites for Himself to be His own special people. Yet, in rejecting His prophets, who spoke in His name, they had rejected God Himself. The Israelites counted their redemption from Egypt as nothing, as if it no longer was relevant. So He "will again" make them "dwell in tents." He will cast them out from the Promised Land and later restore them again, to prove to them that He is indeed the Redeemer of His people.

**10 I have also spoken by the prophets, And have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets."**

The Israelites could not plead ignorance, for God had spoken to them "by the prophets." They had been continually warned by the prophets. Yet, the witness of His prophets had fallen on deaf ears; the people would not listen; they would not repent.

As Christians, Christ has redeemed us from slavery to sin, the world, and the devil, so that we may be wholly devoted to God. Christ was crucified and rose again for this purpose—so that He might be the Lord of the living and the dead. Let us be careful not to rebel against God and His Word. We willfully deny His Lordship over our lives, every time we sin or break His commandments.

All too many today who profess the name of Christ are living not for Him but for themselves. Yet, the apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." All too often we forget that Christ bought us with His own blood, that God saved us by His grace, so that we might be holy, set apart to Him as His holy bride. God has spoken to us today through His prophetic word; may we be careful not to harden our hearts as the Israelites did!

**11 Though Gilead *has* idols -- Surely they are vanity -- Though they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal, Indeed their altars *shall be* heaps in the furrows of the field.**

Gilead was overtaken with gross sin, idolatry, and wickedness. "Though Gilead has idols—surely they are vanity." They had false modes of worship, devised without God's approval, against the authority of God's law. People often attempt to excuse their false worship practices, saying that they set them up only from their good intentions. They may have said that they built altars with no other intent than to make known everywhere the name of God. Yet, God says all their worship is "in vain"; it is "worthless" (NAS/NIV). How shocking this must have been to their ears!

So also, Jesus told the Pharisees in **Matthew 15:9**: "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." The NIV translation says, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." Worship devised according to **men's inventions**, even if of the best intentions, amounts to "vain worship";

**it is false worship in God's eyes.** God has revealed to us in His Word exactly how He is to be worshipped. Any other worship is vanity; it is worthless.

We see the conflict between true and false worship from the very beginning, as we read the first book of the Bible. Remember the conflict between Adam and Eve's children, Cain and Abel? We read in **Genesis 4:2-8**:

2 Then she [Eve] bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. [Perhaps Cain thought, how dare God question my love for Him? I have worked hard to worship God and serve Him, in the way that I have devised out of my good intentions. How dare God reject my worship.] 6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it." 8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."

Whenever someone murders a person, they are killing God in effigy, for we are created in the likeness and image of God. If the rebellious Cain had the power to do so, he likely would have attempted to kill God Himself. He did not want to obey God, and he hated his brother who was a faithful follower of God.

God does not accept worship performed according to man's inventions. He demands that we worship Him only as He has commanded us in His word.

Another classic example of the importance of true worship is found in the story of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. We read in **Leviticus 10:1-2**: "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, **which He had not commanded them**. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."

**God's Word is clear: If you fear the Lord, then you will not worship Him in a way which He has not commanded in His Word!**

Hosea continues, "Though they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal, indeed their altars shall be heaps in the furrows of the field." The Israelites worshipped their gods everywhere, sparing neither expense nor time nor labor. But the Lord did not value their corrupt practices, for it was not in accordance with His Word. There was only one legitimate altar, and that was in Jerusalem. The more the Israelites multiplied their altars, the more they elicited God's vengeance. God declares that He would soon destroy their altars.

John Calvin comments, "When we turn aside from God's Word, . . . when we with loose reins abandon ourselves to new inventions, though we may plausibly profess that our object is to worship God, yet all this is a vain and fallacious [a false] pretence, as the Prophet here declares." If we follow human tradition and inventions, then we, like Cain, are really worshipping ourselves, because we think that we know how to worship God better than He does.

John Calvin again comments, “Superstitious men gain nothing, when they boldly and openly boast that they worship God; for whatever disguise they may invent for themselves and others, the Lord yet abominates everything that is contrary to His Word. **Our mode [form] of worshipping God is alone true and lawful, when we only follow what He prescribes and allow to ourselves nothing but what is according to His command and appointment.** (emphasis added)”

**12 Jacob fled to the country of Syria; Israel served for a spouse, And for a wife he tended sheep. 13 By a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, And by a prophet he was preserved.**

The Israelites had forgotten their roots. They apparently ignored or did not want to learn from their own history. This should serve as a lesson to us today, for it is said that Americans are an extremely ignorant people when it comes to world history and even American history. High school students are shockingly ignorant even when asked to identify George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. We must study history, or we will repeat the mistakes of the past. Let us not pridefully ignore the lessons of history—world history, American history, and church history.

The Israelites’ ancestor Jacob (Israel) was forced to flee to Syria and serve for a spouse—Rachel. He was treated little better than a worthless slave. He was a keeper of sheep for Laban his uncle. This was the humble origin of the nation of Israel, as descendants of Jacob.

Their second origin was during the days of the prophet Moses, by whom the LORD brought their ancestors out of Egypt. There was nothing that the Israelites could do to achieve their freedom. God was their deliverer, as was evidenced through the plagues and mighty deliverance, in which God enabled only them to cross through the sea. The LORD had delivered the Israelites by His mercy, love, and grace. The LORD had preserved and sustained the Israelites by the law of Moses. Despite all this, they had pridefully turned against Him.

The Israelites ought to have acknowledged the debt they owed to God. How great then was their ingratitude.

Hosea, chapter 12, concludes with the certain decree of God against Israel:

**14 Ephraim provoked *Him* to anger most bitterly; Therefore his Lord will leave the guilt of his bloodshed upon him, And return his reproach upon him.**

Though they have spurned His law, fallen into gross superstitions and false worship, yet they shall know that they remain under the hand and power of God. Their Lord shall return their reproach on them.

**PRAYER (by John Calvin)**

Grant, Almighty God, that as we have not only been created by You, but when You have placed us in this world, You have also enriched us with abundance of all blessings. O grant, that we may not transfer to others the glory due to You, and that especially since we are daily admonished by Your word, and even severely reprov'd, may we not with an iron hardness resist. On the contrary, may we render ourselves pliable to You, and not give ourselves up to our own devices, but follow with true humility and meekness that rule which You have prescribed in Your Word, until finally having put off all the remains of errors, we shall enjoy that blessed light, which You have prepared for us in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.