

OpenTheo

August 11th: Hosea 9 & John 11:45-57

August 10, 2021



Alastair Roberts

Israel withered down to the roots. The plot to kill Jesus.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>). My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here: <https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Hosea chapter 9. Rejoice not, O Israel, exult not like the peoples. For you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors.

Threshing floor and wine vats shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them. They shall not remain in the land of the Lord, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria. They shall not pour out drink offerings of wine to the Lord, and their sacrifices shall not please him.

It shall be like mourner's bread to them. All who eat of it shall be defiled, for their bread shall be for their hunger only. It shall not come to the house of the Lord.

What will you do on the day of the appointed festival and on the day of the feast of the

Lord? For behold, they are going away from destruction, but Egypt shall gather them. Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver.

Thorns shall be in their tents. The days of punishment have come. The days of recompense have come.

Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool. The man of the Spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God. Yet a foulness snare is on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah.

He will remember their iniquity. He will punish their sins. Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel.

Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal Peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved. Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird.

No birth, no pregnancy, no conception. Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them.

Ephraim, as I have seen, was like a young palm planted in a meadow. But Ephraim must lead his children out to slaughter. Give them, O Lord, what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal. There I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house.

I will love them no more. All their princes are rebels. Ephraim is stricken.

Their root is dried up. They shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death.

My God will reject them because they have not listened to him. They shall be wanderers among the nations. Hosea chapter 9 begins with words that seem to evoke a summons to a feast.

However, rather than being summoned to celebrate a feast, Israel is being commanded not to do so. The feast in question seems to be a great harvest festival. Israel had turned to the bales for its fertility, and the threshing floor was the site where they presumed that they received their payment.

The threshing floor might also be a site associated with prostitution more generally. However, the source of the fertility of the land was always the Lord and the Lord alone.

As Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord, the land would become barren to them.

The places where grain and grapes were gathered in and prepared would no longer provide for them. The blessing of new wine would be cut off, and in addition to the cutting off of the blessings of the land, Israel itself would be cut off from the land. As a nation they had turned for support to Assyria and Egypt, and they would end up going to Assyria and Egypt in exile as they were expelled from the land of the Lord's promise.

Rather than eating the fruits of the Lord's land, they would eat unclean food in Assyria. Cut off from the place of the Lord's special blessing, they would be eating the food of the Gentiles. What is referred to here is not primarily non-kosher food, but the food eaten by those who are cut off from the fellowship of the people of God.

This becomes clearer in verse 4. They won't be pouring out drink offerings of wine to the Lord. They won't be enjoying fellowship with the Lord in the eating of sacrificial meals. Rather, they will be like mourners who, because of their association with the dead, are unclean and cannot enter into fellowship with the congregation.

Their food might sustain them in their hunger, but they would enjoy neither fellowship with the Lord nor with his people as they ate it. They would be cut off from the celebration of the feasts of the land. Maybe this is a reference in verse 5 to the feasts more generally, or perhaps it's a more narrow reference to the feast of tabernacles or in gathering.

Rather than celebrating the feasts of the land, they are fleeing the destruction that is coming upon the land and going into the hands of Egypt. They would end up dying in Egyptian cities. We might recall the curses of the covenant in places like Deuteronomy chapter 28, where the climax of the curses is their being returned to Egypt, the land from which the Lord had first delivered them.

They are experiencing an antiexodus, a reversal of the Lord's earlier deliverance. Their possessions and precious things, the things that they had once treasured, will be given over to thorns and to weeds. All of this would occur as the day of Israel's reckoning came upon it.

The second half of verse 7 and verse 8 are very difficult to understand and several competing interpretations have been advanced for them. Joshua Moon suggests that the words here are the words of Hosea's opponents. He paraphrases them as follows.

This Hosea is a fool. He's mad, talking about the greatness of your sin and the greatness of your hatred. Ephraim stands a century with my God.

Hosea sets traps for all Ephraim sets out to do. He brings hatred into God's household. John Goldengate, by contrast, sees the words here of Hosea himself.

Hosea sees himself as compelled to play the fool. He's driven mad by the people's unfaithfulness. In verse 8, he's describing his duty as a prophet in ways that might remind us of Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 17.

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. Goldengate suggests that Hosea's contemporaries might be speaking dismissively about his God, which might explain Hosea's reference to my God here.

His task as the watchman is to warn the land of approaching danger. Coming from the Lord himself, the Lord is like a fowler who has set a snare for the people and unless they respond in a way that will allow them to escape it, they will be trapped and destroyed. Francis Anderson and David Noel Friedman talk about the way that these sorts of dismissive statements can be seen elsewhere in scripture, in places like Amos chapter 7 or in 2 Kings chapter 9 verse 11.

There Jehu responds to a query about the prophet who had visited him. It's all well, why did this mad fellow come to you? And he said to them, you know the fellow and his talk. Anderson and Friedman suggest that the fowler's snare is not the snare that the Lord has set for the people, but rather the snare that the people have set for Hosea.

The corruption of the people is compared with the story of Gibeah. In the concluding chapters of the book of Judges from chapter 19 onwards, the tragic story of Gibeah and its sin are told. That sin led to a deep breach in the people and the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin.

The sin itself was similar to the sin of Sodom, a sin that represented the extremes of wickedness of the people of the land. The rest of the verses of the chapter, from verse 10 to 17, probably represent a distinct section. Within these verses the Lord recalls several episodes in the earlier history of the nation.

In verse 10 we have a sense of the joy that the Lord once had over his people and the way that he nurtured them. However, his care and love for the people was responded to by an act of deep betrayal. Their fathers were like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, something that would have been greeted with joy as a promise of later fruitfulness.

However, in the events described in Numbers chapter 25, Israel had played the whore and bound itself to Baal the Peol, forsaking the Lord and also intermarrying with pagan Moabite women. For their sin they would face an utter end. Their glory would utterly forsake them, flying away like a bird.

Israel would wither down into its very roots. There would be no birth, there would be no pregnancy that would yield a birth, and there would be no conception that would yield a

pregnancy. Even if the judgment of verse 11 did not hang over them, and they did bring children to birth, they would swiftly be bereaved of those children until there would be none left.

In verse 11 it spoke of the glory of Ephraim flying away like a bird. In verse 12, The Lord is the glory of his people, and he is about to forsake Israel. Ephraim's beginnings were auspicious, lovingly planted in a meadow in the very best conditions.

But now the nation has fallen so far that its children will be led out to the slaughter. What could the Lord give to his people in such a situation? Perhaps the most that he can give them is a mitigation of the cruelty that they will face at the hand of the Assyrians. If only they had a miscarrying womb and dry breasts, they would not be bringing up children only to see them brutally slain before their eyes by the Assyrians.

That at least would be a small mercy. The reason for the reference to Gilgal in verse 15 is unclear. What exactly was it that caused the Lord to begin to hate them there? Gilgal was the place where Israel first entered the land in the story of Joshua.

Perhaps the point is that from the very first entry to the land, they were engaged in the sort of unfaithfulness that was finally leading to their destruction at this point. Gilgal was also the site where Saul was made king, which might be another way in which it was associated with transgression. Anderson and Friedman note the contrast between the description of the evil of theirs being found in Gilgal and the Lord finding Israel like grapes in the wilderness in verse 10.

While Meir Gruber and others focused upon the monarchy started with Saul, Anderson and Friedman, among others, focused upon the practice of Baal worship in Gilgal. They quote from the book of Amos, chapter 4 verse 4, As in the message of Amos, Hosea declares that they are going to be expelled from the house of the Lord. The claim that all of their princes are rebels might refer not only to the ways that the princes have rebelled against the Lord, but also to the ways that the rulers of Israel had, one after another, rebelled against their predecessors. They were a bunch of assassins and revolutionaries, people who had staged coups, rather than legitimate and righteous rulers.

Returning to the points of verse 11 and 12, in verse 16 the point is repeated, As in verse 12, so in verse 16, A question to consider, within this chapter, fruit or offspring play a number of different roles. They can be signs of blessing or promise or the objects of judgment. What are some of the ways that the metaphor of fruit can help us to understand the people's relationship to the Lord, the people's relationship to their works, and the Lord's relationship to their works? John chapter 11 verses 45 to 57, If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know

nothing at all, nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus, and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, What do you think, that he will not come to the feast at all? Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

The conclusion of John chapter 11 is a key turning point within the narrative of the gospel. Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead, and many of the Jews who had gone to mourn with Mary and Martha had seen this, and come back believing in him. Others went and told the Pharisees.

This was a cause of great concern, as Jesus was gathering a following. It was a threat to the authorities and their rule of the people. As Jesus' works become more and more remarkable and undeniable, he becomes a much greater threat.

Jesus had already caused a stir in Jerusalem to a number of feasts, and they would not be surprised if he caused another stir in the Passover that was coming up. The gathering council may not be an official meeting of the entire Sanhedrin. However, whether it's an official assembly or not, many of the members of the Sanhedrin are gathering together to deliberate about what to do with this man Jesus.

In the following chapter, in verses 10 to 11, they ended up planning to kill Lazarus as well. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. In verse 17 of that chapter, the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.

The leaders went on to complain that the whole world was going after Jesus. The raising of Lazarus was such a remarkable miracle that it was very hard for people to avoid Jesus' glory. It had been manifest, and the manifestation of that glory set in motion the events that would lead to his death.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the plot to kill Jesus is seen to arise more from the conflicts and antagonisms of Holy Week. However, in John's Gospel, there have already been several attempts to take Jesus' life. After the raising of Lazarus though, those plans become more formalized and determined.

The fact that the galvanization of the plots to take Jesus' life occurs after the raising of Lazarus perhaps can be understood in the light of Jesus' statements in chapter 15. The Pharisees and chief priests are concerned that if they don't deal with him immediately, they are going to be in real trouble, not merely because they will lose their religious influence over the people, but also because in losing that influence the people will become more restive and there will be a threat of rebellion against the Romans. If this were to take place, they fear that the Romans would come and take away their place, the temple, and their nation.

They would lose both their sanctuary and their national status. The thing that animates them to crucify Jesus, of course, is something that happens to the nation about 40 years later. Although they tried to escape it in part through the crucifixion of Jesus, it is ultimately this that will lead to them losing their place and nation.

In the Gospels we discover just how much they were enthralled to the Romans when in response to the announcement that Jesus is the king of the Jews, they declared that they have no king but Caesar. Their concern to hang on to their nationhood and the temple at all costs actually led them to forfeit everything else. They ended up losing the very things that they should have guarded most jealously.

For the sake of political expediency, they rejected the messiah that was sent to them. The statement that Caiaphas was high priest that year has led some commentators to suggest that John was ignorant of Jewish custom. High priests were generally high priests for life, not just for a period of a single year.

However, it is far more natural to read this as a statement that Caiaphas' high priesthood happened to contain within it that most significant of years. There is no reason to read this as suggesting that he was high priest only for that year. Caiaphas' reasons by political expediency, the threat of Jesus' growing influence should be answered by putting him to death.

By this means he would be an effective scapegoat. If they speedily put him to death, the whole nation could be spared. Far better to take his life as soon as possible and save the nation than to allow his movement to gather further momentum and jeopardise the entire people.

There is a profound irony in what Caiaphas says, although he is the ringleader of the conspirators. In the very words in which he lays out the plot, he unwittingly describes the salvation that Christ will bring about. For John, this is not just accidental irony.

He sees the hand of the Holy Spirit as Caiaphas is the high priest, causing him to utter a statement that means more than he understands. The deliverance that Christ will offer to the nation is from an enemy far more pervasive and powerful than the Romans, from Satan and from the power of sin itself. In John's theology, Jesus does in fact die for the

nation of Israel.

The faithful people of Israel are gathered together as a flock under him as the Good Shepherd. And not just the faithful people of Israel, but also the children of God who are scattered abroad so that they might become one flock under one shepherd. Perhaps John intends a contrast between the Pharisees and the chief priests gathering together of the council and Jesus gathering together of the children of God.

While they had previously sought to put him to death, now they start to make more determined and purposeful plans. Theirs will not merely be a spur of the moment attempt to stoning, but is a cunning plot to take his life at the most carefully considered time. Knowing that they seek to take his life, Jesus no longer walks openly among them.

He leaves the area and goes to the region near the wilderness, to a place called Ephraim. There he stays in a place where he is out of the way. We don't know for exactly how long this stay was.

It could have been for a few months. However, the Passover will be the next natural time when he would be in Jerusalem. And when the Passover comes and people are heading towards Jerusalem, they naturally speculate about whether Jesus will be there for the feast as he has been on previous occasions.

Ramsey Michaels notes that the reference to the region or the country in verse 55 might not refer to the country more generally, but to the region where Jesus has been staying. The people of that out of the way region knew that Jesus was among them, and they were curious knowing that he was hiding, about whether he would be in Jerusalem at the time of the feast. While Jesus' life had been in danger in going to Jerusalem before, in chapter 7 for instance, now the authorities were far more determined to capture him.

They were actively looking for informants to tell them about his whereabouts. A question to consider. In our systematic theologies, we can often speak about the character of the death of Christ and what he achieved through his atonement.

Within the Gospels, however, what we are given is primarily a narrative of Christ's death. These narratives don't come in the form of atonement doctrines for the most part. Rather, we have to deduce some sort of understanding of what Jesus' death achieves from the actual story.

What can we learn from this chapter and the way that Jesus' death is described in relationship to Lazarus, and then also in relationship to the nation of Israel and the children of God throughout all of the world?