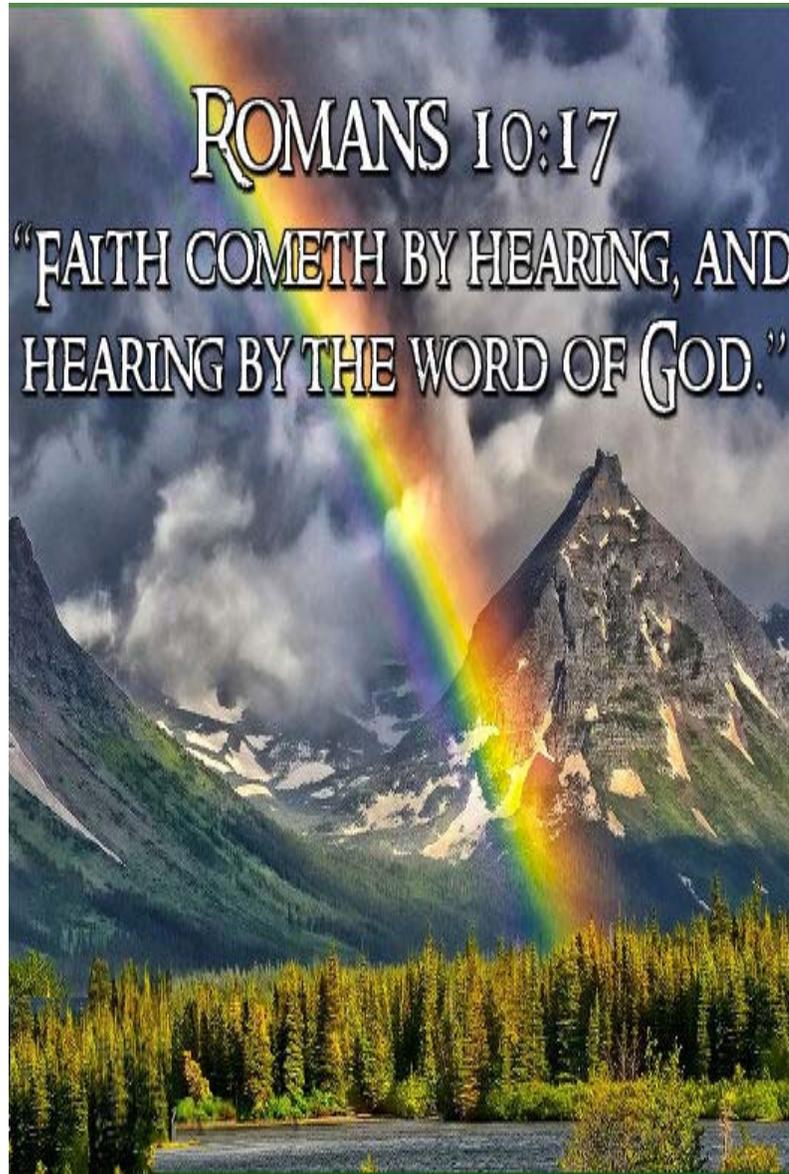


# Daily Devotional

July 2016



## Foreword

We have completed half of our goal of daily devotions through the 2016 calendar year. At the beginning and end of July, we continue with our very slow progress through Philippians, with a break in the middle of the month to study Hosea.

In Philippians we will augment our study of specific passages by reading other Bible chapters. These additional readings do not necessarily relate to the verse or verses we are studying. The purpose of these additional assignments is so that we continue to develop the habit of regular study in the Word.



I want to encourage you to read and study the scriptures noted for each day and let the Holy Spirit lead you to new understanding of God's instructions for us. When you have completed your independent study in the Word, read the devotion discussion I have written to supplement the day's study scripture to see how it can augment what you have learned on your own with the help of the Holy Spirit.

We will be blessed as a congregation as we develop the habit of regularly reading and studying God's Word.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kevin Redig

# Return to Philippians

## Friday, July 1: Read Romans 6

In our study of Philippians 1:11, we have been discussing the means by which we are to live the Christian Way of Life (CWL), a grace provision of God. We will continue to reinforce this essential topic for one more day. Let's recap and then move on to a point of application. There are two ways to attempt to live a life that is pleasing to God:

- **Man's way**, which is to focus all one's energies upon improving self, trying to conform to what a *Christian* is supposed to be. We might call this the *religious* approach.
- **God's way**, which is to recognize self as incurably corrupt! The only way to deal with such an influence is to set it aside. This is precisely what God did at the cross when He crucified us (our old nature—see Romans 6:6).

The power of the old man was broken and now we are to walk in newness of life, the life of Christ to whom the Holy Spirit ministers. (See Galatians 2:20 and Romans 8:4). So where does that leave us? It leaves us in a situation that requires our total dependence on the provision of God, the crucifixion of the old, and the Spirit-enabled new (Romans 6:11), until we are one day liberated completely from the sin nature's presence (Philippians 3:21).

### Application

With this in mind, let's make some application. One way to better understand this issue is to realize there is both a *direct* and an *indirect* approach to living the CWL. Consider John 14:15,23.

*If you love Me, you will obey what I command.  
If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching.*

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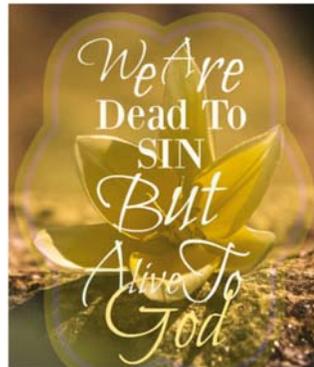
# Return to Philippians

Friday, July 1: Read Romans 6 (continued)

After reading these verses, spoken by Jesus, what would the *direct* approach look like? We might make a listing of the commands of Jesus, catalogue His teaching, and then do our best to be obedient. Failure would only lead to a redoubled effort in order to *force* obedience.

How about the *indirect* approach? Let's apply what we have just learned about God's provision to produce the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ. To begin, we would recognize that obedience to the commands of Jesus is descriptive of the new life in Christ. Any failure is to fall short of what God intends for his children. However, it is also to realize that we do not have the ability, within ourselves, to force obedience. In fact, there is a conflict warring inside each believer, between the desires of self and the desires of the Spirit (Galatians 5:17).

The role of the believer is to walk by faith, faith in the provision of the cross to break the power of the sin nature and in the Spirit-enabled new life to achieve what God desires. That is the indirect approach, God working through us. He both directs and enables His call on our lives. Even when our struggles with the sin nature cause us to doubt the truth of Romans 6:6, our calling is always the same, to labor to reach that point where we are resting in the truths of the Word of God. This is going to take time, repetition, and further development. We will have the opportunity to investigate this further when we reach Philippians 2:12-16. In the meantime, use the summary truth of Philippians 1:11 as a starting point to meditate upon the truths of Romans Chapters 6-8.



# Return to Philippians

Monday, July 4: Read Psalm 84  
(Philippians 1:11)

We are ready to take a look at the final phrase in Verse 11 of the first chapter of Philippians.

*...being filled with the fruit of righteousness  
(God's expectation)*

*Which are by Jesus Christ,  
(the grace means)*

*to the glory and praise of God.  
(the ultimate result)*

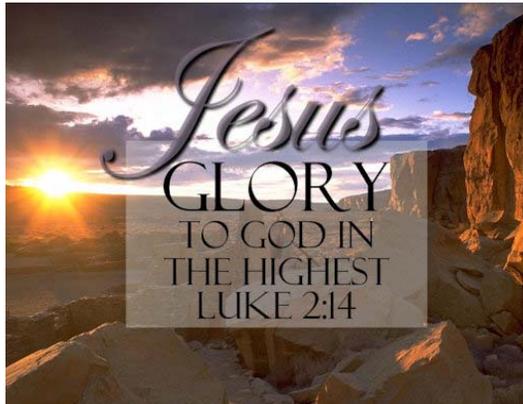
To “give glory to God” is a phrase that Christians, all too easily, tack onto the end of almost everything, without really thinking about what it means. The word glory has three basic meanings: radiance (the giving off of light), splendor (weightiness), fame and honor. To “give” glory, is therefore to ascribe honor and magnificence to another.

This brings us to an immediate question, how is it that

Verse 11 concludes with glory and praise being given to God?

The answer is straightforward, when it is Jesus Christ who works in the life of a believer, resulting in fruit compatible with the righteousness He has given to us, God

gets the credit or the glory. In essence, our lives point to Him because His righteousness is the standard and He is the means by which we produce fruit. Thus, the credit for any production in our lives belongs to Him!



Continued on the next page

# Return to Philippians

## Monday, July 4: Read Psalm 84 (Philippians 1:11) (continued)

Although just a few words, the final portion of Verse 11 shows us that it is an essential aspect of the Christian Way of Life (CWL) that our lives give “praise and glory” to God. The CWL can be described as a call to grow in grace and knowledge, to serve as the Lord first served us, and in these two ways live a life of practical worship. In other words, our lives are a testimony to what God can do in the lives of believers. In this way, we “give” glory to God, bringing us back to our passage in Philippians 1:11.

We each, as believers, have a choice to make. Will we follow the example of our Lord and choose to serve, developing a dependent relationship with our Savior and appropriating what God has provided to accomplish His plan for our lives? Or, will we follow the pattern of Satan, who thought service in God’s kingdom beneath him and acted independently of the will of God in a vain effort to achieve his own glory? Far too often man’s attitude matches the words Milton ascribed to Satan, “It is better to rule in hell than serve in heaven!” Balance this against the words of the psalmist, “One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” (Psalm 84:10)

Why set yourself up against God? He will not share His glory with another. On the other hand, we will receive blessing for ascribing honor and majesty to the sovereign Loving Power of this universe.

We will take a short break from the book of Philippians and to study the Old Testament book of Hosea.

# Old Testament Hosea

## Tuesday, July 5: Read II Timothy 3 and Romans 15:4

You may wonder why we start a study of Hosea by looking at two New Testament scriptures. I wanted you to note from II Timothy that all Scripture is God-breathed, and for that reason profitable for a wide range of applications—including the book of Hosea. The passage in Romans keeps us from making a common mistake of many church-age Christians, specifically thinking we need only pay attention to the New Testament. To no longer be under the law, which is true, is not even remotely the same thing as ignoring the Old Testament as Romans 15:4 makes perfectly clear! For it was written to “teach us,” and be part of the hope we have as we persevere in the CWL.

As we turn to the text of Hosea, consider the following:

- The entire breadth of Scripture is for us. It may not all be directly written to us, but it is all meant to build us up in the faith.
- The New Testament is meant to be understood in terms of the Old! In other words, it is difficult to understand much of what is revealed in the New unless you have the Old as a frame of reference. For example, when I Corinthians 5 refers to Christ as “our” Passover Lamb, how would you know that Paul is referring to something that historically occurred in the book of Exodus.
- Our faith is confirmed when it is grounded in real history. We can see that God fulfills His promises. We can see He is capable of all things. We can see that He can reach into this earth at any time of His choosing when we study the historical record laid out in the Old Testament. Let’s approach the study of Hosea with the intent of seeing what God has for us and learning how we can further our understanding of the New Testament by looking at how God has proved faithful in the pages of history.

# Old Testament Hosea

## Wednesday, July 6: Read Hosea 1

The name Hosea means *The Lord Saves*. The best way to understand the role of Old Testament prophets is to think of them as attorneys representing the Lord within the context of a contract. Their job was to document non-compliance, and you will find that throughout the book of Hosea. The second thing to note, by way of introduction, is how much of God's Old Testament revelation is within the context of history. Note how Hosea's ministry is firmly anchored within the historical framework of Verse 1. History is *His-story* and He is constantly at work within it.

Now focus on Verses 2-3 and note two things:

- Hosea is sending a message from the Lord, to both Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom), regarding their unfaithfulness to the Lord. This unfaithfulness is called adultery and consists of both idolatry and sinful behavior. The fact that Hosea has an adulterous wife, and all the baggage that goes with that, serves as a ready allegory for the equally shameful behavior of the Jews in turning from God. This is an amazing thing for God to reveal to us. As the chapters unfold we can imagine how Hosea feels when his wife leaves him for other men, and God is telling us that He feels the same when His people turn from Him and a walk of righteousness.
- You can see the same kind of allegory in Hosea 3:1, except this time God is putting on display His ongoing love for His people. Now think about this for a minute. Is the God of the Old Testament, as some teach, really a God of harshness and justice only? What we have in the opening chapters of Hosea is a God who loves His people dearly and suffers when they turn from Him. To be sure, He is just, but He is loving and compassionate and wants the best for those who are His—always!

# Old Testament Hosea

## Thursday, July 7: Read Hosea 2

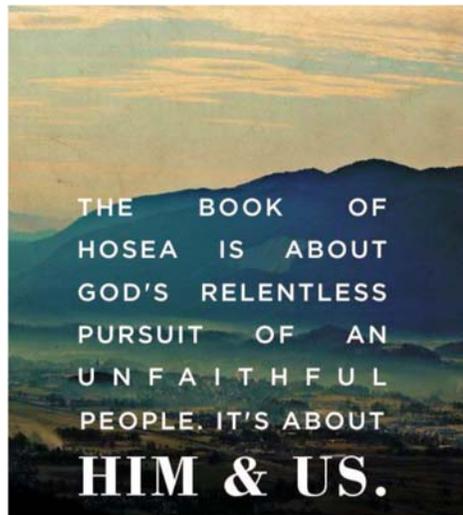
Has anyone ever said to you, “You don’t take the Bible *literally* do you?”

I always respond, “No, I take it normally.”

As you can imagine, the person immediately asks, “What do you mean?”

This gives me the opportunity to further talk about spiritual things. I tell them what I mean is that I take the Bible to be saying exactly what a most natural reading of the text would lead a person to believe it is saying. I am telling you this before we discuss Chapter 2, because the author of Chapter 2 is using the marriage relationship, and an unfaithful wife, as a figure of speech. This analogy makes it crystal clear what God thinks about the behavior of Israel. Any other interpretation is to force things into the text that are not there.

Read the chapter again for yourself and see how naturally this falls out. In Verse 2 we have the adulterous wife; in Verse 4 the children of adultery. As the chapter continues to unfold, idolatry becomes part of the picture, then discipline on the rebellious nation, and then a mention of the wife who came out of Egypt. In the context, what else could this be than the nation of Israel coming out of slavery.



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# Old Testament Hosea

Thursday, July 7: Read Hosea 2 (continued)

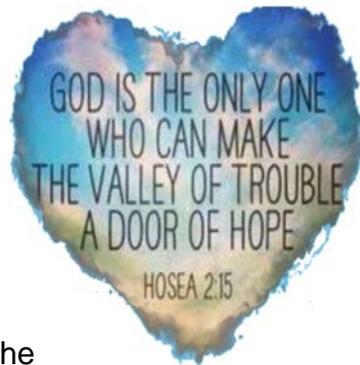
By the end of the chapter, the Lord makes the figure of speech crystal clear when He says:

*"I will say to those called 'Not My people,'  
You are My people  
and they will say, 'You are my God'".*

Notice, as we move through the Chapter, the adulterous wife and children of adultery imagery has been completely replaced by the real subject matter of the book, the rebellious people of God who need to come back to Him.

What kind of application can we draw from this?

- First, a person turning from the Lord, to something that looks better, more exciting, or alluring, can lead to discipline from the hand of the same God that was able to reach in and judge the Egyptians.  
Why go there?
- Second, It demonstrates the response of the Lord to those who are guilty of breaking the faith. Adultery is egregious and very hard to forgive on the human level. So you can see how gracious God really is when the people turn back to Him. Read from Hosea 2:14 to the end of the chapter.



This is the same way God treats us when we confess our sins. For example, this is how God treats us when we have been tangled up in the pursuits of this world and turn back to Him. What a merciful God we have!

# Old Testament Hosea

## Friday, July 8: Read Hosea 3

In case you aren't completely certain that God is using an adulterous marriage relationship to provide a stark and graphic illustration of the sin of His people, then Chapter 3 should settle that matter. For, in Verse 1, Hosea is given specific direction regarding his wayward wife, and, in Verses 2-3, he acts in obedience. At the same time, we have a hint in Verse 1 that God is really communicating about His people, and in Verses 4-5 it is very clear.

Furthermore, as we will see beginning in Chapter 4, the illustration is set aside and the focus is entirely on the people of both the northern and southern kingdoms. Chapter 3 is almost a summary before the detail that follows. For here is what we can know for sure, God loves with an unchanging love those who are His. That's because, first of all, it is part of His essence.

*God is love.* 1 John 4:8

This is the explanation for how He loves,

*...even when we were His enemies, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:10

Lastly, there is nothing that can separate us from this love (Romans 8:35-f). Now, with this being the case, do we really need to go through the same pattern of sin-suffering that is going to fall on the Jewish people before they repent and ultimately return to the Lord. No! As we have already seen, this book is written for our instruction—to teach us. It is also part of recorded history, to make it very clear that God is indeed able to discipline His people when they forsake Him. So let's turn from the middle part of this story, the years of sin and rebellion, the years eaten by the locusts, and instead turn now, through confession, to a "walk in the Spirit." Put on the new nature and walk in the newness of life that is available for every child of God.

# Old Testament Hosea

## Monday, July 11: Read Hosea 4

Symbolism has been set aside and we are now dealing with the Jewish people of both the northern and southern kingdoms. The first thing to note is the sin that is in the Land. As you read through the chapter, you will note it falls into two broad categories. There is the social evil of Verse 2:

*There is only cursing, lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery; they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

Then there is the idolatry of Verse 12:

*...they consult a wooden idol and are answered by a  
stick of wood. A Spirit of prostitution leads them  
astray; they are unfaithful to their God.*

In short, the people have turned from God and things are a sinful mess! At this point I would like to draw your attention to two things God has to say. First, consider Verses 6 and 14:

*My People are destroyed from lack of knowledge...  
and "a people without understanding will come to ruin."*

I think these two verses tell us how the people of Israel managed to get themselves into such a condition, and by extension, how we have too! If you don't **know** what God's Word has to say, and if you don't **understand** the actual intent of what God has said, then you can expect destruction and ruin to dominate the scene.

This ruin can occur in the very midst of a nation that is otherwise materially prosperous. You need to look no further than the United States for a modern day example.

## Old Testament Hosea

Monday, July 11: Read Hosea 4 (continued)

One more bit of application, in Verse 17 the people of the southern kingdom (Judah) are told with respect to the even more depraved north: "*leave them alone!*"

This is God's directive to His people in a land of sin—  
"*come out from them and be holy!*" (II Corinthians 6:17)

This doesn't mean we shouldn't pray for them or hold out the truth of the Gospel, it means we shouldn't rub shoulders with them and join in their sin.



# Old Testament Hosea

## Tuesday, July 12: Read Hosea 5

This chapter documents the sin of both Ephraim and Judah with Ephraim's sins being of greater depravity. (Ephraim is a reference to the northern kingdom, which consists of ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. Judah is a reference to the remaining two tribes in the south and centered in Jerusalem.) For this reason, the northern kingdom is going to be destroyed first and its people taken into exile. This should have been a deterrent for the south, but if it was, it was short-lived as they too eventually went into exile. The coming destruction is clearly stated in Verse 9:

*Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning.  
Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain.*

Notice how in Verse 13 the people turn to Assyria for help. You might wonder, "Why there?" During this time period Egypt was waning as a power and Assyria was growing, and there was a lot of national/political uncertainty in the region. So, rather than turning to the Lord to protect them, they added to their sin by betting on Assyria to be the eventual winner among the nations. Assyria did attain ascendancy, and, along the way, they completely wiped out Ephraim, dispersing the people of the north throughout the empire. God loves His people, but His character also includes justice and righteousness. This means the lesson of Verse 15 will always have to be learned—judgment will come until: "

*they admit their guilt. . .and they seek My face. . ."*

Oh, that we would learn this lesson the easy way. We can choose to keep short accounts and confess our sin daily. This will keep the Lord from having to use discipline in our lives to get our attention. There is no future in sinning until dragged off by another Assyria. We need to admit our guilt and seek the face of the Lord through confession.

# Old Testament Hosea

## Wednesday, July 13: Read Hosea 6

In Chapter 6, we can see a trend that is going to continue throughout the rest of the book. In reality, it is exactly the same issue that underlies the unfolding of our lives. Specifically, God is going to continue to document the sin of Israel, which is their willful turning from and forsaking the Lord and taking up all kinds of evil. For no one turns from the Lord to a neutral position. We always turn from the Lord to something else. Nevertheless, the love and mercy of God just keeps coming through. No matter how sinful the people become, no matter how thoroughly God documents their sin, His offer of forgiveness is always there.

Look at Verse 1. The discipline the people have brought on themselves is the equivalent of being “torn to pieces,” but God is willing to heal. God has injured His wayward people in that “He chastens every Son He loves” (Hebrews 12:6), but He is so willing to bind the very wounds that came from His hand. For He longs to be gracious to us (Isaiah 30:18), but we must repent and turn back to Him. Do you see the application? No matter how much of a mess we have made of our lives, God will heal us and He will bind up our wounds.

Often our problem is that we don't realize we have wandered just as far away as had Israel. Perhaps we don't have overt sin and obvious idolatry. Instead, we have just become tangled up in the subtleties of this world and simply haven't had any real fellowship with the Lord for decades. The call is the same, “Come let us return to the Lord. . .” He will heal, He will bind up our wounds for He is a loving and merciful God. If you feel His tug on your heart, test Him on this. By test I mean, confess your sin, turn to Him, and seek His face!

You will see, His mercy endureth forever!

# Old Testament Hosea

## Thursday, July 14: Read Hosea 7

I don't know about you but, at first reading, I find Chapter 7 thoroughly depressing. The people are blatantly and thoroughly sinful. They appear oblivious to their sin, and so they are going to be recipients of judgment from the hand of God. Not a very pretty picture. (One can't but help think of the day in which we live!)

And yet, in the midst of this not-so-pretty picture, there are hints of hope. Most importantly, look at God's attitude toward all of this in the closing sentence of Verse 13:

*"I long to redeem them. . ."*

What a remarkable God we love. In the midst of documenting the sinful and rebellious condition of His Chosen People, His underlying attitude is one of desiring to extract His people out of the mess they are in and set them free! Is this an isolated concept? The Scriptures teach otherwise. Consider Isaiah 30:18-f which tells us,

*Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you;  
for He rises to show you compassion. . .  
How gracious He will be when you cry for help!  
As soon as He hears, He will answer you.*

One might ask, "Well then, what's the hold-up?" It is certainly not on God's side of the relationship. No, as both Hosea 7 and Isaiah 30 make clear, the hold up is on man's side of the relationship.

God longs to have a relationship with His creation, but it must be on His terms and not on man's terms. For God is as holy as He is loving, which means man cannot simultaneously pursue the desires of his sinful nature in rebellion to God and have the benefits of relationship with Him!

# Old Testament Hosea

Thursday, July 14: Read Hosea 7 (continued)

On the day we come to our senses and realize that *better is one day in His courts than a thousand elsewhere*, we will know not only that God longs to redeem but also that God saves. For that is what the Hebrew name Hosea means—The Lord Saves!

As New Testament Christians, we know that both redemption and salvation have been accomplished by Jesus Christ, and that both can be had through faith in Him!



# Old Testament Hosea

## Friday, July 15: Read Hosea 8

God is trying to get through to His people. They have sinned mightily in God's sight and He wants them to repent and turn back to Him before judgment falls. And, in Chapter 8, the rhetoric is really heating up.

We might be tempted to think, "Alright already, I understand how bad they are!" I am not sure we do. For it is very hard for mankind, even Christians, to have a full realization of the depths of our sin before a holy God and how it grieves Him who made us. Take a moment to hold the United States up to the indictments of this passage. In Verse 2 the people say, "O God, we acknowledge You." But the passage continues on to show how they are completely ignoring God and, in fact, allowing idols to take His place.

Consider the U.S. Our money says, "In God we trust." Our academic buildings quote Scripture (the truth will set you free). Yet, I see nothing from our government and our institutions of higher learning but total disregard for who God is, what He is like, and what He has said. As painful as Verse 7 is, I think it perfectly describes what has been going on in our nation for the past 20 years and is now coming to a terrible fruition:

*They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.*

It is also fitting to apply Verse 14 to us: that as a nation we have "*forgotten our Maker.*" We have several more chapters of God's indictment of Israel left to read. But rather than just feel like you've had enough, do two things. First, take it to heart and pray, "Search me O Lord and see if there be any wicked way within me!" And second, take a peek ahead at Chapter 14. For our great God is always at work redeeming the lost and making all things new! I love the light of God, the more I understand the darkness within man!

# Old Testament Hosea

## Monday, July 18: Read Hosea 9

Another chapter and more promises of judgment to come!

*The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. . . . Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of My house.” (Verses 7,15)*

I find it particularly hurtful to read of the destruction that will occur within the context of family. This brings to mind a question, “Why don’t the people respond?” All of this prophecy has come to the people because God does not want to pour out His wrath on them. For He is warning them over and over. Why won’t they respond? What’s wrong with them?

The same thing that is wrong in our day—**unbelief!** Did not Jesus clearly say in John 3:36 that those who “*reject the Son will not see life!*” Hasn’t God made clear that every single member of the human race is “*appointed once to die and then judgment.*” (Hebrews 9:27)

Why, then, do we act as if we will never be called to account for our actions and choices? Why do the people of our allegedly Christian nation live as if this life is all there is and there is no such thing as eternity? The answer is the same—unbelief. Sure, we might give lip service, but anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

At this point it is very easy to make application, just spend the next few minutes thinking through the answers to these questions: Am I living in such a way that my belief in God is evident? Do I believe that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him, and if so, what exactly is the substance of my “earnest seeking?” Challenging, and perhaps with God’s help, transforming questions as we continue in the Word.

# Old Testament Hosea

## Tuesday, July 19: Read Hosea 10

One more chapter that's all about the sin, before we have a glimpse of hope and the love of God in Chapter 11. A couple of thoughts for you as we continue this difficult series of chapters. First, don't become immune or apathetic to statements regarding the judgment of God. For man is always worse and more deserving of wrath than we realize. For example, Verse 9 mentions Gibeah for the second time in the book of Hosea. If you want to see what this is about, go back to Judges, Chapter 19, and read what has to be one of the low points in the history of Israel. It is not just about the sin, but about how low a sinful people can sink. That is why God says in Hosea 10:13:

*"...But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception."*

Israel is simply repeating the sins of the past and has once again declined to the same level as Judges 19. What is going to happen? The northern kingdom is going to be destroyed and most of the people deported and spread throughout the Assyrian empire (Verse 5) and *the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.* (Verse 15)

To this day the northern kingdom remains dispersed. In fact, it has been so thoroughly amalgamated into the world, that it would take a miracle to re-gather these people who have been dispersed for their sin. But this is something that God has promised to do and it will be a miracle of His doing. In the meantime, should we not take to heart the lesson of the necessity of turning from evil, humbling our hearts, excluding the leaven that so easily contaminates, so that we can avoid God's hand of discipline in our own lives?



# Old Testament Hosea

## Wednesday, July 20: Read Hosea 11

I have been waiting for the love of God to show through, haven't you? In Chapter 11 we see God using the parent-child relationship as a metaphor for His relationship with Israel. In Verse 1 the nation of Israel is compared to a child and a son, with God calling them out of Egypt via the Exodus. But this child has always had a rebellious streak.

As you continue to read through Verse 7, you must recognize a very common pattern. God consistently shows His love and provides what is best for His people, and they, in turn, consistently turn away from Him. By this point, we should realize that Israel is not the least bit deserving of the love that God has shown them (and by analogy, neither are we). Despite this realization, look at the grace of God in Verses 8-11!

Despite all the rebellion and all the reason for judgment to fall, God clearly declares "*His passion is aroused*", and I will not "*devastate Ephraim*." It is not that He is not going to discipline them. In that discipline, He is not going to forever cast them aside. You might be asking yourself, "How can this be?" Verse 9 tells us:

*"For I am God and not a man—  
the holy One among you."*

God is drawing attention to the unchangeable nature of His love and mercy. That is why the psalmist over and over says "*His mercy endures forever*." This same principle is further developed in the New Testament. As Christians who will fail, we must know the depths of our acceptance in Christ. For nothing will be able to...

*separate us from the love of God that is  
in Christ Jesus, our Lord. (Romans 8:39)*

*[and even] if we are faithless, He will remain faithful,  
for He cannot disown Himself. (II Timothy 2:13)*

# Old Testament Hosea

## Thursday, July 21: Read Hosea 12

Chapter 12 brings us back to more of God's indictment against Israel, especially the northern kingdom, referred to as Ephraim. The northern kingdom is feeling the pressure of being caught between two political powers, Egypt on the south and Assyria to the northeast. Egypt is a superpower on the way down while Assyria is one on the rise. How should the people of God deal with this? By turning to Him and the many promises He has given His people, not to any human power no matter how *super!*

You can see what Ephraim did in Verse 1. Instead of trusting in God, they tried to play both sides. The outcome of this, by the way, was the north paid a lot of money in tribute to Assyria, and then Assyria overran the north anyway and deported most of its people. That is what always happens when you trust the powers of this world for your preservation.

*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than  
to trust in princes. Psalm 118:9*

One more thing to note. Look at Verse 8 to see how caught up in wealth the northern kingdom had become. They even think that their wealth will be a covering for their sin! Not for the first time, there seems to be a parallel between Israel in Hosea's day and America in our day. Verse 9 makes it very clear that God is the source of whatever wealth we have. He can most certainly humble us, whether it be at the hand of the Assyrians or any number of the modern day difficulties which we face. Like Ephraim, we need to repent before we feel the full force of God's judgment. Pray, first for the purity of the church, and then its empowerment by the Spirit of God to proclaim the truth of our sin and the need for the redemption that is available only through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

# Old Testament Hosea

## Friday, July 22: Read Hosea 13

At this point we have read so much of discipline for sin, that we might be tempted to say, “Here comes another chapter about God punishing Israel!” Don’t become hardened to the text by failing to make application. This should provoke a strong sense of the Fear of the Lord within each one of us. Let me show you:

- Verses 1-2. The people are involved in idolatry and “sin more and more.” Is this not true of our day?
- Verse 3. What happens to such a people? They are like “chaff swirling on the threshing floor,” like “smoke escaping through a window.” This means they will come to nothing. We should fear for our nation.
- Verse 4. What’s the answer? There is only one God and one Savior, and this has always been the case.
- Verses 8-10. A failure to understand this, coupled with a failure to turn and repent, will always lead to only one thing—judgment. No power on earth can prevent it!
- Verses 14, 16. It remains possible to be “ransomed from death,” but not in persistent rebellion. Every person will bear their guilt and it will be terrible.

There seems to be just one response to this, and it must start on the individual level:

*Search me O God and know  
my heart. See if there be any  
wicked way within me.  
Psalm 139:23-24*

This I do that I might repent of my sin and turn to You. For You only have eternal life and Your blessings are forever more at Your right hand!



# Old Testament Hosea

## Monday, July 25: Read Hosea 14

Here is a simple lesson repeated over and over again in Scripture. We find half of it in the closing chapter of the book of Hosea. It is never too late to receive forgiveness from God! If you are still alive, you can turn back to Him. However, sad to say, there are those who have become so hardened that they never turn back.

Despite the many chapters of the book of Hosea that describe the sin of Israel, look at the message in this final chapter. Verses 1 and 2 emphasize the need to turn back, and Verse 4 documents God's response,

*"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely,  
for My anger has turned away from them."*

Most of the rest of the chapter documents the blessings that are poured out upon those who return. For God is not stingy with the blessings that come from His hand nor does He keep His blessings only for a chosen few. Rather, He desires to pour blessings upon those who will turn to and depend upon Him!

There are those who are so hardened they won't turn. For example, consider the Pharisees who put Jesus to death and then saw the effect of the resurrection and the outpouring of God's Spirit in Jerusalem. Why didn't they repent and turn to the Lord? They were too caught up in their religion, status, and hardness of heart for most of them to do so. You know this applies to us as well and the book of Hosea closes with the perfect admonition:

*Who is wise? He will realize these things.  
Who is discerning? He will understand them.  
The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them.*

When you realize that you have become tangled in sin of any kind, confess that sin, turn to the Lord, and trust in His well-documented mercy to those who turn back to Him!

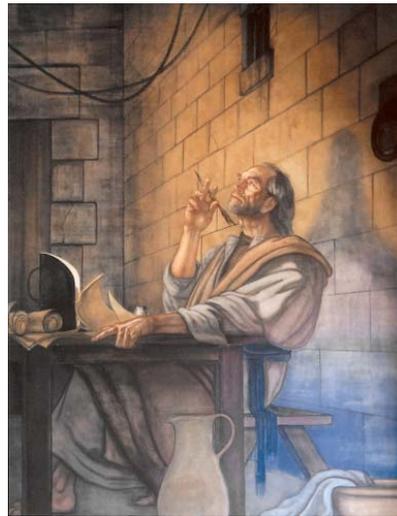
# Return to Philippians

## Tuesday, July 26: Read Philippians 1

Let's begin by taking a closer look at Philippians 1:12:

*Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to (against) Me has really (instead) served to advance (further against obstacles) the Gospel.*

Paul is in a difficult situation. He is most likely a prisoner of Nero in Rome. He has been under arrest for many months and has already experienced a great deal of physical suffering and emotional stress during what we might consider the *appeals* process that has finally landed him in Rome. The Philippians have heard of his difficulties, fear for Paul's life, and are discouraged about the termination of his ministry.



Paul wants to update them on the *real* situation. I have added a few clarifying comments, after studying the Greek text, to make sure we really grasp Paul's intent in this verse:

- Certainly, there are physical and spiritual forces that have come *against* Paul. However, the expected outcome of hindering the Gospel message has not occurred.
- *Instead*, these things have advanced the Gospel, an advancement against obstacles to be sure, but an advancement nonetheless.

In Verses 13-14, Paul is going to give two examples of how the Gospel has been furthered, first outside of the Christian community and then within.

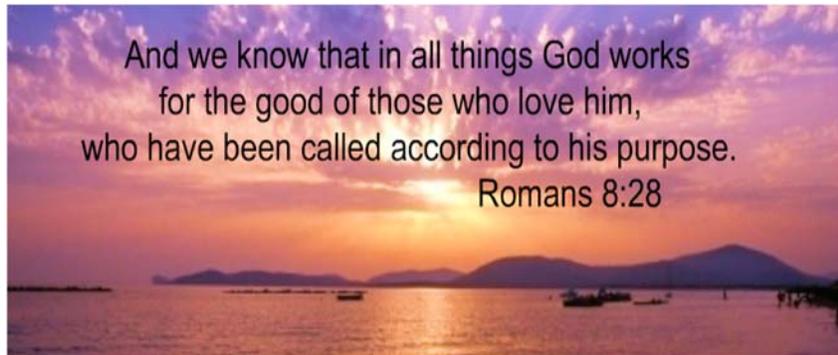
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# Return to Philippians

Tuesday, July 26: Read Philippians 1 (Continued)

## Points of Application

First, doesn't the principle of Romans 8:28 fairly leap off the page? This is a down-to-earth example of a principle that has been demonstrated from the book of Genesis (how about Joseph?) to the Book of Revelation. God can cause all things, including the evil intent of man, to work together for good.



Second, it is essential that we realize this is true, not only with respect to the purposes of God, but within the life of the individual believer. We must couple Romans 8:29 with Verse 28. Specifically, God is at work using circumstances to conform us to the image of His Son!

Third, part of what is going on in our lives is God *working* through circumstances towards a good end. I am thinking of some of the *tragedies* that have occurred not only in the lives of those within our fellowship, but also in the lives of the missionaries with whom we have contact. Are these tragedies outside of the control of God or instead the result of living in a world in rebellion against God? Our great God can turn tragedies around and use them to accomplish His good purposes?

# Return to Philippians

**Tuesday, July 26: Read Philippians 1** (Continued)

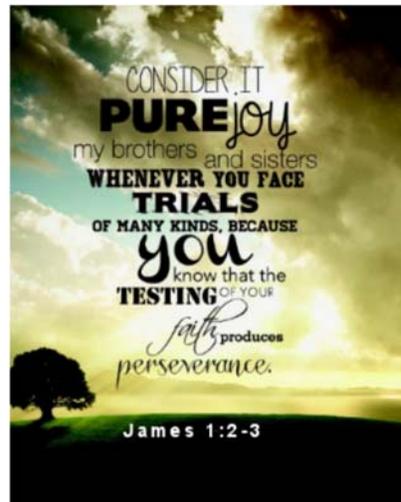
Finally, do you want to be like Christ? A pretty easy question, of course we do! However, here is a more difficult question. Do you think you can develop godly character and dependence upon God? That is, can we become more like Christ, apart from the presence of personal trials and struggles?

This is a much more difficult question to answer honestly because of the ramifications. If we answer yes, if we choose Christ-likeness apart from trials, then we can't possibly understand perseverance or how to *rest* in the promises of God.

If we say no, then we have to acknowledge that trials and difficulties are really a necessary part of God's plan of development for each one of us.

These trials will ultimately be a blessing. It is a very difficult thing to *choose trials* or at least agree with God that trials are a necessary part of our development. Thankfully, they are in His keeping as to time and type, Further, through our trials He will never forsake us nor allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear.

Remember, we do not have to force things to work together for good, that is God's job. Our job is simply to "fix our eyes upon Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1-2) and let God work out the details.



# Return to Philippians

## Wednesday, July 27: Read I Thessalonians 1 (Philippians 1:13-14)

As we saw in our previous lesson, far from shutting down his ministry, Paul declares his situation has led to the furtherance of the Gospel. Verse 13 gives us an example outside of the Christian community and Verse 14 within. Consider first Verse 13:

*As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*

Everyone knows it is not criminal or subversive behavior for which Paul is under arrest, but instead for the cause of Christ. The “palace guard” is literally the Praetorian, which refers to an elite special guard. If Paul is in Rome, this is a reference to Emperor Nero’s personal guard, which numbered 9000 men. Although it is unclear how this entire number could personally have known about Paul, what is clear is that Paul took every opportunity to share the Gospel with those assigned to guard him. No doubt the word spread quickly within this close knit community about the *interesting* religious leader under arrest.

Now, consider Verse 14:

*Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

Now we see the result of Paul’s imprisonment within the Christian community. The word “encouraged” is in the perfect tense while the verb for speaking is in the present. What this tells us is that many of the believers were first convicted by Paul’s example, and then took ongoing action to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

# Return to Philippians

## Wednesday, July 27: Read I Thessalonians 1 (Philippians 1:13-14) (Continued)

Both the words “courageously” and “fearlessly” are terms expressive of the courage these believers showed within the hostile environment of Rome.

### Points of Application

First, notice how you do not hear a word about Paul’s personal rights or personal convenience. He has subordinated them to the advancement of the Gospel. Perhaps we too need to focus a bit more on the *effects* of what God is about rather than the details about which we are so often prone to complain.

Second, we can take this a step further by asking the question, “Is it clear to our own *Praetorian Guard*, those in our daily periphery, that we are focused on advancing the cause of Christ?” For example, when we, in the midst of difficult circumstances, are able to trust God to “*work all things together for good*,” it provides a powerful testimony to those watching.

Third, is it worth it personally and in terms of our testimony to trust God. Of course it is! See II Timothy 4:7-8 as an example of it being *worth it* personally. And then let’s peek ahead to Philippians 4:21-22 to see the worth of maintaining our testimony in the face of difficulties:

*The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.*

How is it that members of Caesar’s household —Nero’s household—had become members of the household of faith? Could it be that God used the faithfulness of Paul in the face of trials to accomplish His purposes? What better outcome for our trials than that our faithfulness would also result in others becoming members of the family of God!

# Return to Philippians

Thursday, July 28: Read I Thessalonians 2  
(Philippians 1:15-18)

During our last study, we saw that many of the believing brothers were boldly proclaiming the Gospel message (Verse 14). In Verses 15-17, we can see that there were two motives among these *preachers* of the good news. Some were motivated by Paul's bold witness, but some were motivated by self and envy. Paul's analysis of the situation, at least initially, seems very peculiar for he says, "But what does it matter?" (Verse 18)

How do we understand Paul's seemingly strange attitude? He reasons that as long as the Gospel is advancing, it doesn't matter to him how, since he has his eyes on the plan of God. However, in terms of the consequences to the individual preacher (or believer), it matters a great deal indeed! This is a good time to introduce you to something I am going to refer to as the *knife-edge* of God's sovereignty and three points of application:

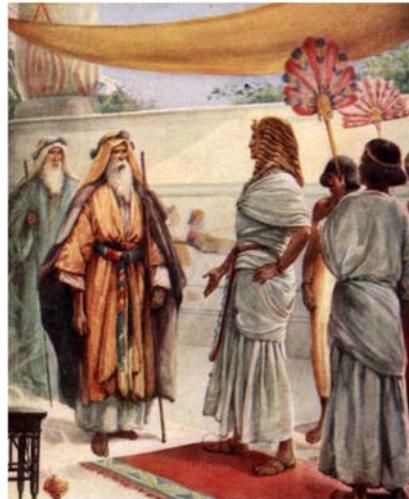
First, consider the simple graphic below. Keep in mind the choices we make, all of them, will come up against the sovereignty of God, causing them to be *sliced* to one side or the other.



# Return to Philippians

## Thursday, July 28: Read I Thessalonians 2 (Philippians 1:15-18) (Continued)

Second, let's develop this graphic with a few Biblical illustrations. In our first Biblical example, Pharaoh can be used to represent the unbeliever. You can read the full background of Pharaoh's response to God in the first 12 chapters of the book of Exodus. Briefly summarized, the Israelites had initially been preserved in Egypt, but now were in bondage. In God's timetable, it was time for them to leave Egypt and move to their own land. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with both a clear message of God's intent and a manifestation of His power.



At this point, Pharaoh had a choice—he could either respond positively to the revealed will of God by letting the Israelites go, or he could resist the will of God by attempting to maintain control of his slave-labor force. What he didn't understand, and we often don't either, is that the one thing that was not at issue was whether or not the Israelites were going to leave! The Israelites did, in fact, march out of Egypt, because it was God's plan for them to do so.

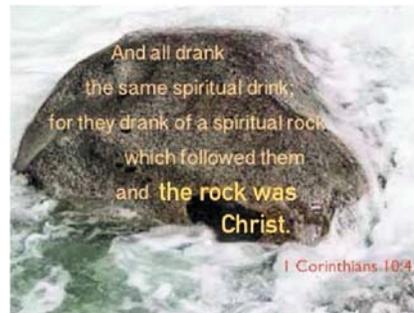
Not only was Egypt left in ruins, but they actually gave booty to the Israelites. It didn't have to be this way. Because of Pharaoh's hardness of heart, he fell on the cursing side of God's sovereignty. You see, the resistance of an unbeliever does not thwart the plan of God. Rather, what is at stake is the temporal and eternal condition of that individual.

Continued on the next page

# Return to Philippians

Thursday, July 28: Read I Thessalonians 2  
(Philippians 1:15-18) (Continued)

Let's consider the Exodus Generation as representative of believers. I have categorized the Exodus Generation as believers based upon the text of 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, which makes clear they all drank from the spiritual "rock" that is Christ.



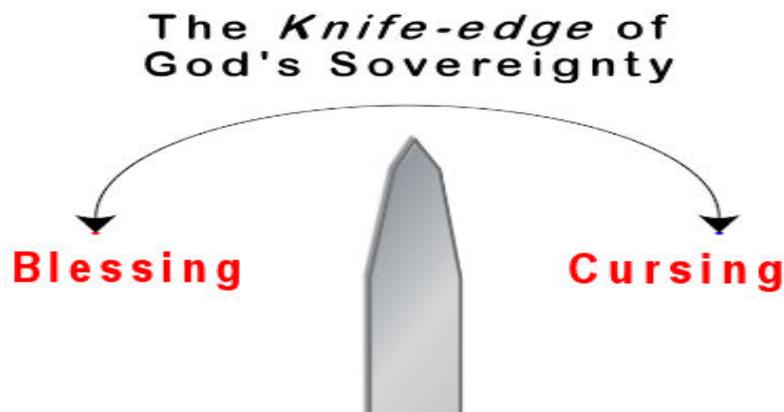
God's will was to bring this group of people, numbering close to two million, into a land of their very own, a land "flowing with milk and honey." Not only had He demonstrated His inherent power to accomplish His will through the ten plagues against Egypt, He also demonstrated His power by parting the Red Sea, supplying water from a rock and food from the heavens. In order to enter into the blessing of the Promised Land, the Israelites simply needed to trust in the provision of their God. However the "giants" of the land loomed too large in their thinking and they choose instead to complain against God. For this reason, even as believers, they fell on the *cursing* side of God's sovereignty because of their lack of faith. (See Hebrews 3 and 4 for more details).

This should really bring into focus an important lesson for all of us. It does matter how we live our lives as believers. It is wonderful to know that we have an eternal home in heaven, but that should never lead us to willingly choose to be on the receiving end of *cursing* (discipline) as a believer. Rather, since God has given us His Word and His Spirit, why not choose to be on the receiving end of blessing in any and every circumstance? Think about it! We will take this one step further tomorrow.

# Return to Philippians

Friday, July 29: Read I Thessalonians 3

Let's continue our investigation of the *knife-edge* of God's sovereignty as it relates to a range of Biblical examples. We have looked at Pharaoh as representative of the unbeliever and the Exodus Generation as representative of believers in general.



I would like to close with a more subtle example that looks at a special case regarding the believer. Consider the example of Balaam. Here is a quick summary of the situation, which is further developed in Numbers 22-25. The king of Moab is desperate to do something about the Israelites as they move into the Promised Land. As a last resort, he attempts to contract the prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites. Balaam takes the king's request to God, Who tells him in no uncertain terms that he is not to curse the children of Israel.

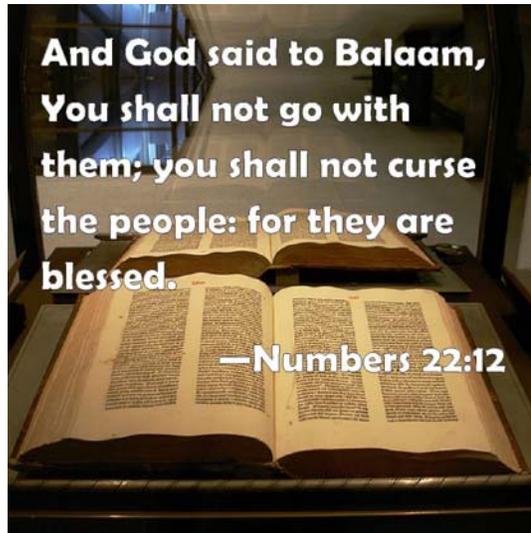
What follows in the book of Numbers, is a series of machinations whereby Balaam somehow tries to find a way to not violate the command of God and still receive his fee from the king of Moab (that is to serve both God and look out for his material prosperity).

Continued on the next page

# Return to Philippians

Friday, July 29: Read I Thessalonians 3  
(Continued)

Balaam never does find a way to directly curse Israel, and Chapter 24 ends with Balaam returning home. Balaam appears to have remained *clean* before the Lord. However, if we carefully piece together the rest of the story, we will see the legacy of Balaam is a lasting reminder of the terrible consequences of trying to live for both self and God, something we need to have the discernment to avoid.



## Points of Application

First, we always put ourselves at risk whenever we see how close we can come to the boundaries that God has established. We need to steer clear of those boundaries, something Balaam failed to do.

Second, now for the terrible part of this story. Numbers 25 tells us that the women of Moab enticed Israelite men to become involved in sexual immorality. As the result of this sin, 24,000 Israelites died in judgment from God.

# Return to Philippians

Friday, July 29: Read I Thessalonians 3  
(Continued)

Third, look at Numbers 31:16 and Revelation 2:14. Although Balaam refused to directly curse the Israelites, he was the source of the suggestion to undermine the Israelites standing before God through sexual sin.

As Moab hoped—this led to judgment from the hand of God. Scripture doesn't say, but perhaps Balaam obtained his retainer after all. However, scripture does tell us that Balaam was put to the sword when the Israelites defeated the Midianites. All that is left is a legacy of infamy recorded for all time in the Scriptures as a warning to us. Could it be that Balaam had returned home after refusing to curse the Israelites *clean* in his own eyes?

Finally, let me be very clear, with the *knife-edge* of God's sovereignty clearly in mind, an *end-run* on the will of God will always leave a legacy that lays bare self-righteousness! The lesson for us is to have such a healthy respect for the sovereignty of God, that we keep well clear of the boundaries that He speaks into our lives. In this way we can avoid the double-mindedness of Balaam.



VISTOSO  
Community Church



He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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