

## Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 11, Hosea 12

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We're looking at Hosea chapter 12, and my wife said this evening that she thinks Hosea is boring. She's right. She assured me the teacher wasn't boring, but as I said to you before, there really is no outline to the book.

He's simply making the same points over and over again in a variety of ways, and that's happening again here this evening in chapter 12. As I said last time, most people agree that the final verse of chapter 11 should be the first verse of chapter 12, and it is in Hebrew. Why the Greeks, which is where we get our versification from, why they changed that, I don't know, but so verse 12 of chapter 11, Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, Israel with deceit, Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful holy one.

Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. Then in the latter part of the verse, it focuses specifically on the treaty with Assyria and the treaty with Egypt. When Hosea, the last king, came to the throne, he made a treaty with the Assyrians, and then, halfway through his reign, he broke that and made a deal with Egypt, and it didn't pay off very well.

But what I want to focus on here is, Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, Israel with deceit. What lies were they telling about God that are quite current today? What are some lies that can be told about God? Alright, he won't punish, and maybe even we might say can't punish. Alright, what else? He's not present.

If there is a God, he is somewhere off in the distant heaven's space, he's not really here. What else? He can't be trusted. He won't keep his word.

What else? Alright, alright. He's one among many. Dr. Brown, at the dinner on Friday night, talked about the book called Dischurched, which says that something in the neighborhood of 40 million people have left the church since 2000.

Why? What lies are they telling themselves? Okay, that marker is dying, I think. What else? The fact that a lot of new religions and stuff have come on the scene. Okay, yeah, he's one among many.

Yeah, yeah. Alright. Yes, he is not necessary, and if I don't have a present sense of his necessity, then who cares? I serve him to get, and he is not producing.

Therefore, why serve him? With so much evil in the world, obviously, he can't be good. Well, we could go on, couldn't we? Yes. So, these kinds of lies about God are perennial.

They're not limited to Ephraim. He can punish and will. Ah, he is present.

I got that one wrong, yeah. He is present. He is.

Reverend Diddle preached a good sermon on Sunday about God's witness. He is with us. And I have said in my Isaiah commentary that Emmanuel, God with us, is good news if you're with him.

If you're not with him, God's witness is bad news because he is here. You can't leave him out. He's a factor in the equation, and if you leave that factor out, the equation will never balance.

He can be trusted, and many of us here could give testimony to that, to his trustworthiness. He is not one among many. He is the one and only.

He is terribly relevant. The issue is our perception. He is in control.

He is not indifferent. He does care. He is very necessary.

He is good, and he's not alien. Something that we would say today is that he cannot be proven. Uh-huh, precisely, precisely.

He cannot be weighed and measured therefore he does not exist. Unless you can weigh and measure something, it is not real. And again, I think the ancient Sumerians are just chuckling over us.

They figured out that in this cosmos, there are spirits, and you ignore them to your own detriment. We have said, no, no, there is no spiritual reality. There is only material, physical reality. And the ancient Sumerians are saying, you'll figure it out sooner or later.

You'll figure it out. Okay, in verses two through six, we have a story about Jacob. He has a charge to bring against Judah.

He'll punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. Now, these are not in order, but they're here. When we look at Jacob's life, we see that it begins with deception and its consequences.

And I've always thought of that scene when Jacob foolishly thought that a blind man doesn't have good ears. Hello, Father, I'm Esau. Sounds like Jacob.

Are you really Esau? And he gets him to lie three times, and then come the consequences. When Esau says, bro, when the old man dies, there are going to be two funerals around here. Oops.

And so, he runs. He runs to Bethel, where God renews all his promises to Abraham and Isaac. Unbelievable.

Unbelievable. Jacob is very fortunate that I was not God at that moment. Who do you think you are? You had to straighten up, fellow.

No. This land on which you're lying, I give to you. The promises to your grandfather and your father they're all yours.

My goodness. You see, God has no pride. And Jacob is really fortunate that I was not God at that moment in his response.

He wakes up in the morning and says, oh my goodness, God was here, and I didn't know it. God, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. If you keep your promises, I'll give you a cut.

He'd have been a cinder at that moment. You don't talk to God like that. But the fact is, God will take us any way he can get us.

And that was the best deal Jacob ever made. Because he was about to meet a man more crooked than he was, you can write that down.

There will always be somebody crookeder. Somebody stronger, somebody smarter. But through 20 years, as Laban seeks to beat Jacob out, God keeps his promises.

Oh, my goodness. What a God. What a God.

Eventually, Jacob discovers that it wasn't the blessing of his father that he needed. It wasn't Laban's blessing that he needed. It was the blessing of God.

And that wonderful line, I will not let you go until you bless me. God has a hard time saying no to that prayer. Now, for many years, when I preached on Jacob, I stopped my sermon right here.

But in fact, this is not the end of the story by a long shot. One of the interesting things is, God says here at Peniel, face of God, I'm going to change your name.

And your name now will be Israel. Guess what? He is called Jacob in the next four chapters. Never once, Israel.

Hmm. What's that about? Wesleyans have preached this as sanctification for many, many years. I have a friend who doesn't believe in sanctification.

And he makes that point very clearly. God didn't change his nature here. Well, I'm not so sure of that.

But I am sure that God had said to him, Go home to the land of your fathers and your relatives. Where did he go? He went to Shechem. Peniel is about here on the Jabbok River.

And Shechem is over here. Shechem, today Nablus, is the center of Canaanite culture. Home is down here.

Between Hebron and Beersheba. That's where Abraham and Isaac spent most of their time. What's he doing up here? Canaanite culture is very, very attractive.

The church proves that in every generation. We don't want to be different from them; we want to be like them.

We want to look like them. We want to think like them. We want to live like them.

And there he is. There he is. Settling in Shechem.

Can you have a great experience with God? An experience of blessing. And God certainly did bless him. I think there's no question.

If Esau came to meet him with 450 armed men, he was not planning to shake hands. But the next night after Peniel, Esau calls him brother. And Jacob says very profound words.

To see your face is like seeing the face of God. Hmm. But.

But. When Esau says, come on, let's go together, we'll go see Dad. He said, well, I can't travel that fast.

You go on, and I'll come later—yeah, a lot later. And what happened? I love the New Living Translation.

You remember the Canaanites take Dinah, his only daughter. Simon and Levi take care of that problem. Well, yeah, you can have her as long as all you guys get circumcised.

And when they're all incapacitated, Simon and Levi go in and kill them all. And Jacob says you have made me stink. Yeah.

Yeah. Canaan will take your most precious possessions and leave you stinking. And God says, okay, okay.

Now, then, go back to Bethel. Go back to that blessed place, which by this time, of course, has been turned into an idolatrous abomination. But go back to Bethel, where I met you.

Renew your awareness of who I am as the gracious provider. And from that point on, from chapter 35 on, he is regularly called Israel. Sometimes, our sanctification has to be realized.

And realized in a hard choice about Canaan. So that's the story there. In his womb, he grasped his brother's heel.

As a man, he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him. He wept and begged for his favor.

He found him at Bethel and talked with him there. The Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his name. Then, verse 6. Verse 6. You must return to your God.

Carefully keep love and justice and always wait for your God. In that verse, there is a total picture of what it is to be a child of God. Five words here.

Turn back. The Hebrew word is shuv. And it refers to a physical turning and a spiritual turning.

Just the context will tell you which it is. Here, very clearly, Hosea is using it in a wordplay. Go back.

Yeah. And turn around. This is where it all begins.

First John. Don't say you don't need to repent. Don't say you don't need to turn around.

Every one of us does. There is none righteous. No, not one.

So turn around. And then the next word gets hidden. It's the verb shamar.

To guard. To carefully keep. And it's used regularly throughout the Old Testament in regard to obedience.

It's not just obey, but be careful to obey. Not just do, but be careful to do. Take care.

Take care. I've got the NIV here. It says maintain.

I don't think that's strong enough. Carefully keep. Guardedly keep.

Whatever you do, don't allow not to. And what is it that you should carefully keep? Steadfast love--hesed.

That self-denying, self-giving love that is always undeserved. As I've said to you many times before, it is the Old Testament equivalent of New Testament agape. It is the same concept.

To give yourself away for others. Turn back to God. Be very, very careful to do hesed.

Again, there are two words in Hebrew. There's ahav, and that's a feeling. That's affection.

You don't feel hesed. You do hesed. You can't have hesed for your garden.

You can't have hesed for your dog. But you can for your neighbor. To do it.

And then, we've talked about words many times. Mishpat. God's divine order for life.

It regularly gets translated either justice or judgment. As I've said to you before, the problem with justice today is it's fairness. And it ain't fair if you have more than I have.

And that's justice. No, it isn't. No, it isn't.

God's order for life in which, in particular, those who are unable to contribute receive special care and attention. Remember, as I called your attention here to Micah chapter 6, verse 8. Walk humbly with your God. Do mishpat.

And love hesed. This is so fascinating. Have a warm affection for hesed.

Of course, it comes into the King James tradition as love mercy. Again, as I've said to you before, mercy is not a wrong translation for hesed. You deserve ten years and the judge is graciously giving you five.

But it's so much more than mere cold mercy. It's giving yourself to others. And finally, wait for your God always.

The Hebrew word qava, Q-A-V-A. And as I've said to you again many times, in Hebrew, the words which literally are translated wait are synonyms for trust. It's to wait expectantly.

It's to wait patiently. It's to wait with anticipation. It's a little like waiting for Christmas.

He's coming. He's going to answer my prayers. He's going to redeem me.

He's going to save me. He's going to... But in many ways, there is, I say, the life of the believer. Turn around from your sinful self-dependence.

Carefully, carefully live out these qualities of God's character. And live it trustfully in the confidence that God will indeed keep His Word. So, verses 5 and 6. A beautiful little interlude is in the middle of the Jacob story.

The Lord God Almighty, Yahweh God Almighty. Yahweh is His name. Return to your God.

Carefully keep love and justice. And wait for your God always. Then we return.

As I mentioned in the background, the word merchant has the same consonants as the word Canaan. And so again, there's almost certainly a wordplay going on here. That you, Jacob, have become a Canaanite.

And as a Canaanite, you're using dishonest scales. Again, I mentioned in the background, about six times in the Old Testament, the figure of speech for crooked dealing is dishonest scales. As you know, you're buying a bushel of wheat.

And that's on this side of the scales. On this side of the scale, you put a weight that is equal to a certain amount of coinage. Okay? I give you that many coins.

But it's a crooked weight. It's too heavy. And so, you're giving the person less for their grain.

On the other hand, you're buying. And again, you're using, you're selling. And now you're using a weight that's too light.

What is this? Why is it that God particularly likes that figure to express it? Because you are flying, Oops, I can't use it on there. That was a close one. Because it is a defiance of Mishpat.

God says, in this world that I have made, 16 ounces always equals one pound. I made the world according to certain characteristics and nature. One pound will never weigh 13 ounces.

One foot will never be 11 inches long. I made the world according to a certain order. And your task is to live in keeping with that order.

And we hate it. We hate it. Yeah, I know.

The speed limit says 55, but I'm special. I'm in a hurry, and your clods are in my way. Honestly, I find it more and more frightening to drive on the interstate.

People who are absolutely thoughtless, not about me, but about physics. So it is that throughout the Old Testament, here's the example, people thinking they can change reality in their favor. It won't work.

In the end, the scales are going to be balanced. Now, it's fascinating. In Egypt, at the last judgment, there is a scale, and on this side, I'll use this figure; they've got another figure.

But on this side is the dead person's heart. On this side is the feather of truth. If your heart is heavier than a feather, there's a monster sitting over here waiting to eat you up.

If your heart is filled with sins and iniquity in view of the truth. Now you say, wow, did they know the Bible? No. But they were smart enough to figure out how creation works.

A number of the proverbs in the Bible are similar to the proverbs of the Egyptians. Well, God's very economical. If people are smart enough to figure out how the world works, they'll use it.

And so, it is here. So, with my dishonest scales, I've made myself rich. Ephraim boasts.

I am very rich. I have become wealthy. Now, look what comes next.

I can buy off the judge with all my wealth. They will not find in me any iniquity or sin. Well, that hasn't changed, has it? Now I want you to look at this passage from Genesis chapter 32.

Jacob is on his way home. Twenty years earlier, Esau, with his red face, had said there are going to be two funerals around here. So, here he comes.



So, he's sending these messengers with herds and flocks and other kinds of gifts. Give this message to my master, Esau.

Humble greetings from your servant, Jacob. Until now, I've been living with Uncle Laban, and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of sheep and goats, many servants, both men and women. I've sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.

I'm rich, Esau, and I want to buy you off. Think about Jesus' parable in Luke 12 of the guy who had wonderful harvests, and he found out his barns weren't big enough. So, what did he do? Tear them down and build bigger ones.

And then he says to his soul, Soul, take your ease. And what does God say? Tonight, your soul will be required of you. Now relate those, that, and this, and what we've talked about.

What does that say to you and me? All that we have really belongs to God. What else? Yes. Yes.

No man can serve two masters. This night, your soul is required of you. What did that man think? He had control of his harvest.

But more than that, he was the one who raised it. But what did he say? And who was to take its ease? My soul. He thought that when you're dealing with your soul, earthly abundance is the key.

Just like this passage, with my wealth, they will not find in me any iniquity or sin. He thought that the key to soul health was money. And he missed it, didn't he? So, the question for you and me is, where do I think my soul's health lies? What am I doing to make my soul healthy? I go to the doctor, and he says, are you exercising? You don't want to drop dead? Exercise that body.

And I say, yes. It's the same. Am I exercising my soul? Am I feeding my soul? Or is my soul famished because I'm feeding it trash? With all my wealth, they will not find in me any iniquity or sin.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. With your wealth, they will find in you iniquity and sin.

Then in verses 9 through 13, I think I even said 14, you have a number of reminiscences of Israel's life. We've gone through Jacob's life, now Israel's experience. I've been the Lord your God ever since you came out of Egypt.

They were brought out of Egypt. Verse 10, or still verse 9, you lived in tents. I spoke to you by prophets.

Down in verse 13, he says I used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt by a prophet he cared for them. Spoken to by prophets, led by a prophet, cared for by prophets. Verse 11, is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless.

Now, where is Gilead? Gilead is on the east side of the Jordan River. If you're looking at the map, the east side of the Jordan River. Remember, that's where Israel had its first victories.

That's where they conquered Sihon and Og. Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field. What about Gilgal? Gilgal was the home base that they went back to after each of the victories that they experienced while receiving the land.

They didn't conquer the land, and God gave it to them. So, you see them going out on raids and coming back to Gilgal. And they've become places for sinning.

We love memories. And we have a way of corrupting them. Jacob fled to the country of Aram.

Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her, he tended sheep. Yes. He was given progeny.

He was given a family but by means of service in a foreign land. Now, as you look at that list, what's the overall impression you get? Okay. God is an afterthought.

God can take care of you. What else? Okay, God's faithful, but they turned their back. Okay.

They thought they took it when it was given. Yes, that's one of the things I see here. They aren't the actors.

Do you see all those passive verbs? They were brought out. There's one active one, lived in tents, but again, spoken to by prophets, given the land, given a progeny, cared for, led. Transients.

The old spiritual, I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger. There's no permanence in them. Everything they have is a gift from the God who brought them out of Egypt to the God who made them a people before Egypt.

But they don't understand that. And friends, we tend not to either. There is no permanence here.

And whenever we try to make ourselves secure and permanent, it gets blown away. We are utterly dependent. That's what Paul is talking about in Philippians.

He said, I achieved all those things, but they were nothing. The only really important thing is to know Jesus because Jesus is the key to permanence.

Going back now for a moment, let's look at verse 9. I will make you live in tents again. The Feast of Tabernacles occurred in the fall. For us, it is about the first of October.

It was the end of harvest. The grape harvest is the end of the harvest. It's really been going on since April with the barley harvest beginning there.

And the grape harvest is the end. And so, in the feast of Tabernacles, and that's why it's called Tabernacles, the Feast of Tents. As I've told you before, I was very troubled as a child when they talked about the feast of booze.

Why did the Hebrew people have a feast of alcohol? But it's tents. Remember, remember, for 40 years, I took care of you. 40 years I provided the harvest.

You are congratulating yourself today that you were smart enough to plant the right grain in the right field and you worked hard and you got it and, no, you didn't. I gave it all to you. Remember that.

And live in tents for a week. Then, the last event is on the great day of the feast, as we read in the Gospel of John. They got water out of the pool down at the foot of the city of David where the Kidron Valley and the Hinnom Valley come together, big pool that Hezekiah had built.

They carried that water up the hill to the temple and poured it out, remembering the rock from which water came in the desert. And it was on that day that Jesus said, water will pour out of your bellies—the water of the Holy Spirit.

What's all this imagery about? It's about God's provision. Now, I'm going to make you live in tents again. Go back now to chapter 2, verse 14.

Why is God going to do that? Yes. I will allure her. I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.

Why is God going to do this? I'm going to make you live in tents again to try to get your attention, to try to help you to remember that you don't have anything, that it's all a gift to get reoriented. So, God has given them a history lesson or tried to. But about your first ancestor, Jacob, it's all about the promises of God.

And you had to go back to Bethel to get them. Now, you're worshipping that golden calf at Bethel. You are the children of Jacob.

But I have cared for you for thousands of years. And I'm going to take you into the wilderness, the exile. But I'm not taking you there because I hate you.

I'm taking you there because I love you. And my intent is in the wilderness of the exile you will say, Oh dear God, what have we done? And you'll let me buy you off the slave block and take you home again. Questions? Comments? Observations? I'm just wondering if you've understood or believe in the present day.

It isn't. It isn't. We've erased the lies.

That's what they believe in Israel today. Any God who would allow six million of us to be murdered by Christian Germans, don't ask me to believe in that. That's where they are.

I think our world today is like Israel. We value wealth and power more than God. Oh yes.

And his will. We value wealth and power more than God and his will. There's no question.

No question at all. And to come back to where we began, we do not serve God in order to get. That's what's happening.

Well, I'm getting fine. I don't need God. No, we serve him for love.

Because he is the master of the universe and gives us his universe in which to live, prosper, and love, and we serve him. We serve him for love.

And somehow, we have not communicated that to the twenties and thirties. And they are saying, I'm getting along fine without God. I don't need him.

Well, God is patient. And the mills of God grind very slowly. But they grind exceedingly fine.

And it's in that context. Yes. Anything else? Precisely.

Precisely. Yes. What has God done for me lately? Now, I have to say, and this is Oswald talking, and Oswald has been wrong before.

We spent millions on youth ministry in the nineties and the zeros. Those are the people that are leaving. We created an alternate church that was fun and exciting.

And now we invite people to come into the church. It's not like youth group. Personally, I think that's a major reason for what has happened.

We have not prepared them for the fact that the Christian life is by and large not fun and exciting. The Christian life is a long walk in the same direction. The gate is narrow and the road is steep.

Well, that's not fun. It's not extreme. John Bunyan had it right. It's a pilgrimage. And it means putting one foot in front of the other every day. Wow.

So, that's me talking. And I, if I get to heaven and God says, boy, you missed that one, I'll say, yes, sir.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we confess that everything we have is a gift. You've given us birth. You've given us this wonderful country with its marvelous Christian heritage.

Thank you. Praise you. Help us, oh Lord, not to fall into the trap of thinking that wealth and power and security and comfort are what our soul needs.

Help us, oh Lord, to give the proper attention to nourishing our souls in you. Thank you. In your name, amen.