

引言 INTRODUCTION

“Those who don’t learn from history are destined to repeat it.” So goes the saying. We can always gain wisdom by studying others’ mistakes. The Bible says “there is nothing new under the sun.” That is a good reason to read the Bible. People in the Biblical world faced similar issues like we do today: leaders who did not believe in God, people had little interest in spiritual matters, they chased after money and pleasure, they dealt with threats from foreign nations, etc. The good news is, no matter how messy our world may become, God is still in full control. Leaders and nations are but pieces on His chessboard. Human history never goes off-track from God’s Masterplan. Our hope is in God, not in our leaders. God can surely intervene by miracles. But in most instances, He accomplishes His will through our participation. We will be blessed if we obey God. We will be disciplined if we forsake Him. The northern kingdom of Israel suffered a final blow in that regard. None of its kings followed Jehovah. Eventually, God’s timing came and Israel vanished from the Old Testament history. Today, we will study its last king, Hoshea. His experience and the history of Israel verify one fact: Ignoring God’s commands does not cancel His requirements for us.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 國家的滅亡 Downturn of a Nation

The nation of Israel came to a tragic downturn. **Verse 1-6** give us a brief summary. We learned from last week that Assyria successfully destroyed Aram. It also harassed a few former Israel kings. King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria took treasures, land and captives from Israel in successive campaigns. Instead of waging war against Assyria, Hoshea tried to buy peace from this foreign nation. However, Hoshea secretly made a deal with Egypt, hoping that the Pharaoh could help him fight off Assyria. That proved to be a bad move. Ancient history tells us that by this time Egypt had become much weaker. Assyria got the intelligence about Hoshea’s plan. It then sent troops to attack Israel. About this time, Tiglath-Pileser passed away and his son, Shalmaneser succeeded the throne. This new king surrounded Samaria, the capital city of Israel for three years and finally conquered it. Hoshea was kidnapped and his countrymen were scattered to different cities of Assyria. That was a common tactic the Assyrians employed. Historians tell us that Assyria imported refugees from a defeated country and mixed them with local people. That would reduce the possibility of a future revolt. Besides, the Assyrians also played mind games to diminish the morale of a conquered people. Before they deported refugees, they would place statues of the local gods at the city gate. It reminded people that the deities they worshipped were unable to protect them. The Assyrians also made up stories that the gods of a beaten nation paid tribute to the Assyrian gods. If their gods had surrendered, so should their people. The Israelites might come to the same conclusions. They knew that they were God’s chosen people. But where was God when all the devastations took place? Was He not supposed to protect them? It is

easy to blame God when problems arise. We are two months away from remembering the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 event. It was no doubt an evil plot. Some people with radical beliefs carried out a mass murder. About 3,000 people perished. Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of the late evangelist Pastor Billy Graham, was interviewed by CBS two days after the tragedy. The host asked: "...if God is good, how could God let this happen?" Lotz's answered: "I say God is also angry when he sees something like this. I would say also for several years now Americans in a sense have shaken their fist at God and said, God, we want you out of our schools, our government, our business, we want you out of our marketplace. And God, who is a gentleman, has just quietly backed out of our national and political life, our public life. Removing his hand of blessing and protection. We need to turn to God first of all and say, God, we're sorry we have treated you this way and we invite you now to come into our national life. We put our trust in you. We have our trust in God on our coins, we need to practice it." It was a wise answer. But of course, it did not address every question in our mind. It is a good time for us to evaluate our personal relationship with God when a calamity hits. Most people only want God to serve their needs. They do not want God to rule over their lives. But God is our Master, not a servant. He does not take orders from us. He gives wisdom to the humble to help them discern His will. It was 9/11 twenty years ago. We are still under the pandemic. What and when will the next catastrophe be? What was God telling us? Sin is the core issue. There are people who intentionally sin against God and innocent people. We need to come under God's protection all the time, not only when a problem occurs. True peace can only be found in Him.

2. 信仰的倒退 Backslide of Faith

The northern kingdom ceased to exist. It was the result of people's backsliding in their faith. The author gives us a detail description of their idolatry from verse 7 to 23. Verses 7 and 8 is a good summary: **7 All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods 8 and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced.** People abandoned Jehovah and turned to idols. Some of those false gods were imported by their kings. For example, Solomon and Ahab married pagan princesses. Those ladies transferred the deities they worshipped to Israel. The people of God did not want to live in the freedom God gave them. Instead, they chose to be enslaved by the idols they served. The subsequent context tells us the impacts of idolatry. First, the Israelites built statues, shrines and altars (verses 9, 10 and 16). Second, they worshipped idols at those facilities (verses 11, 12 and 16). Third, people became numb to the repeated warnings from the prophets (verse 13 to 15). Fourth, they followed the detestable practices of pagans (verse 17). Fifth, their kings dragged people into idolatry (verses 21 and 22). Our hearts are never a vacuum. People will worship something. Either a supernatural being, an idea, fate or people themselves. They will find a way to make sense of everything. There are three big questions everyone needs to answer: where do I come from, where will I go and why I am here. The Bible says God is the Creator and Sovereign Lord. He works out everything according to His perfect timing and purpose. But God invites us to build an eternal relationship with Him. He had also prepared an eternal

home for His children. It was shocking for the Israelites to forsake the one true God. There could be several possible reasons for that. First, they were tired of their ancestors' God. They offered the same sacrifices, observed the same Sabbath and other festivals, read the same Scripture and sang the same songs. Sounds familiar? We attend the same service. We celebrate Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas every year. We read the same Bible and we may have heard the same sermons before. We have to be careful when we feel bored about these "religious activities." God's truth will never change. But we can come up with creative ways to study the Bible and worship God. Second, the Israelites might mistakenly believe that they had to blend in to the local custom. The danger is that pagans had a completely different worldview. For example, a rock or a tree is a deity; they had to please their gods to ensure a good harvest; humans will reincarnate into other life-forms. Before we study other religions, we have to build a firm foundation on God's truth first. A lot of people think that every religion is the same. But the Bible tells us that there is only one true God. Jesus said no one can come to the Father except through Him. Thirdly, idol worship gives people a false sense of freedom. They can choose multiple gods like going to shopping. They can set up a personal shrine at home. Idol worship also involved immoral activities that God clearly prohibited. How fun it would be to consult spirits through witchcraft and predict the future through fortune-telling? Some people see Christianity as a kill-joy when they are not allowed to go to casinos or bars, and cannot gamble or smoke. God sets up a boundary to protect us. It is like traffic lights and traffic lanes. We can enjoy true freedom from God when we obey Him. Ultimately, the core issue is to whom we devote our hearts. Do we trust God wholeheartedly that He has the best interests for us? Do we admit that He is much wiser than us? Do we believe that God will provide for all of our needs and He will protect us from harm? Deep down inside, the choice is whether we want God or ourselves to be the boss.

3. 異邦的融入 Influx of Pagans

Israel now became a colony of Assyria. As we said earlier, Assyria had a policy to migrate refugees from other nations to a conquered country. Therefore, we see an influx of pagans to Israel. They brought along the religions they practiced. We will pick up our reading in **verses 25 and 26**. People deduced that lions chewed people up because they fail to respect Jehovah. It is like a flood happens when people enrage the river god, and a drought occurs when the rain god is not pleased, etc. They were actually right in this case. Even though Israel now did not exist, the land still belonged to Jehovah. To solve the problem of lions, the Assyrian king sent an Israelite priest back to teach people how to worship Jehovah. Continue to read **verse 32 to 33**. There were ready-made altars everywhere for the foreign people to burn their sacrifices. They kept their customs, but they also worshipped Jehovah to keep the lions away. That is a typical mindset for immigrants. You, your parents or your ancestors might come from Asia. They still cook Chinese food at home. Like many foreign students did, I brought along a rice-cooker when I left home twenty some years ago. At that time, rice-cookers in the U.S. were expensive. However, worship is very different from diet. Those pagan people used to worship many gods anyway. Therefore, it was not difficult for them to include Jehovah to the mix. But God demands our absolute devotion to Him. Those of you who dated two boyfriends or girlfriends at the same time should know this. There is double the pain rather

than fun! Likewise, God cannot tolerate our divided attention. Jesus said it clearly that we can only serve one Master. Those pagans had to ditch their customs before they could become true followers of Jehovah. The fact that God was still active in Israel reflects that He wanted people to know Him. It actually created evangelism opportunities when foreigners now occupied Israel and the Israelites were deported elsewhere. The same thing happened in the first century. The book of Acts says some Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem under the persecution of Rome. They carried the gospel to other places! Some of you became Christians when you came to this country. Perhaps some classmates or coworkers invited you to church. By God's grace you became a believer. God wants you to repeat the same process. Your classmates, coworkers or neighbors may also come from a foreign country. They may have never heard of Jesus. Make friends with them, invite them to church and share the gospel with them. For now, those pagans in Samaria just treated Jehovah the same as the other idols. Ironically, their spiritual status was quite similar to the Israelites. The last section of the chapter repeats God's indictment. We will look at [verse 37 and 38](#). The Israelites were guilty as charged. They did the very things God prohibited them to do. A sinful heart will lead to sinful values and behaviors. Everyone knows that honesty, compassion and righteousness are noble virtues. But instead of showing respect to others, people deprive each other. There is disbelief rather than trust. People choose envy and hatred over love. They want others to serve them instead of serving others. All sins can be boiled down to one cause: self-centeredness. People create their own rules if they do not want to submit to the one true God. The first step to the ultimate solution is to admit one's spiritual bankruptcy. We do not only do bad things occasionally. We are born-sinners. We need to invite Jesus to come in to do a spiritual heart surgery. We can love God and obey Him only when we have a new life in Christ.

CONCLUSION 結論

Ignoring God's commands does not cancel His requirements for us. The citizens of the northern kingdom learned that lesson in a painful way. Their country was no more. Many of them were scattered to other places. Pagan people now took over their homeland. Israel's failure was not due to a political, financial or military reason. The root problem was spiritual. God's people were now in a mess. One Bible commentator remarks: "How can Israel be Israel outside Israel?" Our God is infinitely wiser than we can imagine. He knew all-along that the Israelites would forsake Him. The covenant was breached, but it could not be broken. God would delay, but He would not deny His promises. God will not change His mind like we always do. God would prepare a way for His people to turn back. The name of the last king of Israel was Hoshea, which means salvation. He was not able to save his country or even himself. God sent His Son Jesus Christ as the ultimate salvation. Those who receive Jesus will be saved. While we cannot change our past, our decision today will shape our future. Turn back from sins and turn to Jesus!

引言 INTRODUCTION

俗語說：「不從歷史中汲取教訓的人注定要重蹈覆轍。」我們總是可以通過觀察別人的錯誤來獲得智慧。聖經說：「日光之下並無新事」。這是讀聖經的一個很好的理由。聖經裡的人物面臨著與我們今天類似的問題：不相信神的領袖、人們對屬靈的事情沒有興趣、他們追逐金錢和享樂、外國的威脅等等。好消息是，無論我們的世界變得多麼混亂，神仍然完全掌權。領袖和國家不過是神棋盤上的棋子。人類歷史永遠不會偏離神的整體計劃。我們的盼望在於神，而不是我們的領袖。神當然可以用奇蹟來干預。但在大多數情況下，祂通過人的參與來成就祂的旨意。如果我們順服神，我們就會蒙福。如果我們離棄神，我們就會受到管教。北國以色列遭受了最後的打擊。它的君王沒有一個跟隨耶和華。最終，神的時間到了，以色列從舊約歷史中消失了。今天，我們要看它的最後一位君王何細亞。他的經歷和以色列的歷史證實了一個事實：厭棄神並不會自動取消祂對我們的要求。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 國家的滅亡 Downturn of a Nation

以色列這個國家被毀滅了。第 1-6 節給我們一個簡短的總結。我們上週提到亞述成功摧毀了亞蘭。它還攻擊之前幾位以色列君王。亞述王提革拉毗列色在一連串的戰役中奪走以色列的財寶、土地和俘虜。何細亞不想和亞述打仗，於是他用金錢買平安。然而，何細亞暗中與埃及達成協議，希望法老能幫助他擊退亞述。事實證明這不是明智的行動。古代歷史告訴我們，此時埃及已經變得比較弱。亞述收到了有關何細亞計劃的情報，於是它派軍隊進攻以色列。大約在這個時候，提革拉毗列色去世，他的兒子撒縵以色繼位。這位新王圍困以色列的首都撒瑪利亞三年，最終攻破了它。何細亞被擄走，他的人民被分散到亞述的不同城市。這是亞述人常用的策略。歷史學家告訴我們，亞述從戰敗國運送難民到另一個地區，然後與當地人混在一起。這是為了減低將來發生叛變的可能性。此外，亞述人還用心理戰術來削弱被征服的人的士氣。在運走戰俘之前，他們把當地神明的像放在城門口。其意思是，人們所崇拜的神明無法保護他們。亞述人還編造謊言，說被戰敗國的神明向亞述的神明致敬。如果他們的偶像已經投降，他們也應該投降。以色列人可能會得出同樣的結論。他們知道自己是神的選民。但是，當所有的災難發生時，神在哪裡？為何神沒有保護他

們？當問題出現時，人們會責怪神。我們距離紀念 9/11 事件 20 週年還有兩個月的時間。這無疑是一個邪惡的陰謀。一些有激進思想的人進行了大規模謀殺。大約有 3,000 人喪生。已故傳道人葛培理牧師的女兒安妮·格雷·洛茲在悲劇發生兩天後接受了哥倫比亞廣播公司的採訪。主持人問道：「…如果神是美善的，為何祂會讓這種事情發生？」洛茲回答說：「我相信神看到這件事情也很生氣。但長久以來，美國人在某種意義上向神揮舞拳頭說，神，請祢離開我們的學校、我們的政府、我們的企業、和我們的商業市場。因為神是一位好好先生，於是祂便悄悄地退出我們的國家、政治界、和民眾的生活。祂也挪開祂祝福和保護的手。我們必須轉向神說，神啊，我們很抱歉這樣對待祢，我們現在邀請祢回到我們的國家。我們信靠祢。我們在錢幣上說我們相信祢，我們需要言出必行。」這是一個有智慧的回答。但當然，它並沒有解決我們心中所有的問題。災難來臨時是我們評估與神個人關係的好時機。大多數人只希望神滿足他們的需求。他們不要神干預他們的生活。但神是我們的主人，而不是僕人。祂不接受我們的命令。祂賜智慧給謙卑的人，幫助他們明白祂的旨意。二十年前有 9/11 事件。目前我們還在疫情之下。下一次災難會是什麼以及什麼時候會發生？神在告訴我們什麼？罪是最終的核心問題。有些人惡意地冒犯無辜的人。我們隨時都需要尋求神的保護，不僅僅是在出現問題時。只有在祂裡面才能找到真正的平安。

2. 信仰的倒退 Backslide of Faith

北國不再存在。這是人們信仰倒退的結果。作者從第 7 節到第 23 節詳細地描寫他們拜偶像的罪。第 7 節和第 8 節是一個很好的總結：**7 這是因以色列人得罪那領他們出埃及地、脫離埃及王法老手的耶和華他們的神，去敬畏別神，8 隨從耶和華在他們面前所趕出外邦人的風俗和以色列諸王所立的條規。**人們離棄耶和華，轉向偶像。其中一些假神是他們的王引進來的。例如，所羅門和亞哈娶了異邦的公主。那些女士們將她們敬拜的神明帶到以色列。神的子民不想生活在神賦予給他們的自由中。他們寧願被他們所侍奉的偶像束縛。隨後的經文告訴我們拜偶像帶來的影響。首先，以色列人建造神像、廟宇和祭壇（第 9、10 和 16 節）。其次，他們在那些設施中敬拜（第 11、12 和 16 節）。第三，人們對先知反覆的警告變得麻木（13-15 節）。第四，他們追隨異教徒可憎的行為（第 17 節）。第五，他們的君王把人民陷在偶像敬拜之中（第 21 和 22 節）。我們的心從來都不是一片荒地。人們會崇拜某些東西。可能是一些超自然的對象、某些思想主義、命運、甚至是自我崇拜。他們會找某些方法來解釋一切。每個人都需要回答人生的三大問題：我從哪裡來，我要去哪裡以及我為何活在世上。聖經說神是創造者和萬物的主宰。神按照祂完美的時間和旨意來實行一切。但是神邀請我們與祂建立永恆的關係。神還為祂的兒女預備了一個

永恆的家。以色列人離棄獨一真神是一件令人震驚的事。背後有幾個可能的原因。首先，他們厭倦了他們祖先的神。他們獻上同樣的祭物，遵守同樣的安息日和其他節期，讀同樣的聖經，唱同樣的詩歌。聽起來是否似曾相識？我們參加同樣的崇拜。我們每年慶祝復活節、感恩節和聖誕節。我們讀同樣的聖經。我們以前可能聽過同樣的信息。當我們對這些「宗教活動」感到乏味時，我們必須小心。神的真理永遠不會改變。但是我們可以用創意的方式來學習聖經和敬拜神。其次，以色列人可能會錯誤地認為他們必須入鄉隨俗。但是異教徒有完全不同的世界觀。例如，他們認為一塊石頭或一棵樹是神；他們必須取悅他們的神，以確保風調雨順；人離世後會轉化為其他生命形態。在我們學習其他宗教之前，我們必須先在神的真理上建立一個穩固的基礎。很多人以為所有宗教都是一樣的。但是聖經告訴我們，只有一位真神。耶穌說唯有通過祂，人才可以來到父神面前。第三，偶像崇拜給人一種虛假的自由。他們可以像購物選擇多個神明。他們可以在家裡設立個人的神壇。偶像崇拜還允許一些神明確禁止的不道德行為。人們也可以用巫術通靈，或用算命預測未來。有些人認為基督信仰扼殺了人生的樂趣，因為他們不準去賭場或酒吧，也不能賭博或吸煙。神設立界限來保護我們。它就像紅綠燈和行車道。當我們順服神時，我們就可以享受從神而來真正的自由。歸根結底，核心問題是我們將心獻給誰。我們是否全心全意地相信神，知道祂關心我們的利益？我們是否承認神的智慧比我們的更高深？我們是否相信神會供應我們的一切需要並保護我們免受災害？在內心深處，我們承認神是主，還是我們自己要做老闆。

3. 異邦的融入 Influx of Pagans

以色列現在成為亞述的殖民地。正如我們之前所說，亞述有一項政策，將難民從其他國家遷移到一個被征服的國家。因此，我們看到異教徒融入以色列。他們也帶進他們所信奉的宗教。我們將繼續閱讀第 25 和 26 節。人們推斷獅子咬人是因為他們不尊重耶和華。就好像當人激怒了河神就發生水災，得罪兩神時便會發生旱災等等。但他們這一次的判斷是正確的。雖然現在以色列國不再存在，但這片土地仍然屬於耶和華。為了解決獅子的問題，亞述王派一名以色列祭司回去教導人們如何敬奉耶和華。繼續讀 32-33 節。到處都有現成的祭壇，供外邦人獻祭。他們遵守自己的宗教習俗，但也敬拜耶和華以驅趕獅子。這是移民的典型心態。你、你的父母或你的祖先可能來自亞洲。他們仍然在家做中國菜。和許多留學生一樣，我二十多年前離家時也買了一個電飯鍋。當時，美國的電飯煲很貴。然而，信仰與飲食大不相同。那些異教徒過去敬拜多神。因此，將耶和華納入其中一點問題都沒有。但神要求我們對祂絕對的忠誠。那些同時和兩個男朋友或女朋友約會的人應該知道這一點。結果是雙倍的痛苦而不是樂趣！同樣，神不能容忍我們分心。耶穌說得很清楚，我們只能事奉一位

主。那些異教徒必須先放棄自己的風俗，才能真正跟從耶和華。神仍然在以色列活躍，反映出祂希望人們認識祂。外邦人現在佔領以色列，大部份以色列人被驅逐到其他地方，這其實製造了很多傳福音的機會。同樣的情形也發生在第一世紀。使徒行傳說，一些基督徒在羅馬的迫害下被迫離開耶路撒冷。他們把福音帶到了其他地方！我們一些弟兄姐妹是來到這個國家後才信主的。也許有些同學或同事邀請你去教會。因著神的恩典，你成為了信徒。神要你重覆同樣的過程。你的同事或鄰居也可能來自外國。他們可能從未聽過耶穌的事情。你可以跟他們交朋友，邀請他們來教會並與他們分享福音。目前，撒瑪利亞的異教徒把耶和華看為一般的偶像一樣。諷刺的是，他們的屬靈光景其實與以色列人一樣。本章的最後一部分重複了神的控告。我們將看第37和38節。以色列人被神定罪。他們做了神禁止他們做的事情。有罪的心會導致有罪的價值觀和行為。任何人都知道誠實、憐憫和公義是美德。但人們不尊重他人，反而互相剝奪利益。他們互不信任。人們選擇嫉妒和仇恨而不是友愛。他們希望別人為他們服務，而不是為他人服務。所有的罪歸根究底都是一個原因：自我中心。如果人們不想順服獨一的真神，他們就會制定自己的規則。解決方案的第一步是承認自己的靈命破產。我們不只是偶爾做壞事。我們天生都是罪人。我們需要邀請耶穌進來做一個屬靈的心臟手術。只有當我們在基督裡有了新生命時，我們才能愛神並順服祂。

CONCLUSION 結論

厭棄神並不會自動取消祂對我們的要求。北國的人民領會了痛苦的教訓。他們的國家不復存在。他們中的許多人被分散到其他地方。異教徒現在接管了他們的家園。以色列的失敗並非出於政治、經濟或軍事因素。根本問題是屬靈的。神的子民現在一團糟。一位解聖家說：「以色列國在以色列的邊界之外怎麼可能繼續是以色列呢？」神的智慧遠超過我們所能想像。神從來都知道以色列人會離棄祂。盟約被違背，但卻不能被廢棄。神會延遲，但祂不會撤回祂的應許。神不會像我們那樣常常改變主意。神會為祂的子民預備一條回頭的路。以色列最後一位君王的名字是何細亞，意思是救恩。他無法拯救他的國家甚至他自己。神差遣祂的兒子耶穌基督為我們預備了救恩的道路。接受耶穌的人會得救。雖然我們無法改變過去，但我們今天的決定將會影響我們的未來。轉離罪惡，轉向耶穌！