

The Book of Hosea

Chapter 14

In Hosea, chapter 14, the closing chapter of this great Old Testament book, the prophet Hosea, speaking the word of the LORD, continues to reveal how adulterous Israel will be restored to the LORD.

Hosea 14:1 O Israel, return to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity; (NKJ)

Once again the prophet Hosea calls the people of Israel to repentance. The prophet had already denounced God's imminent judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel. How then can he hold out hope for them? Primarily Hosea held out hope for the elect few, the faithful remnant who yet dwelled in Israel. However, he also may be addressing those Israelites who will survive the coming judgment and be taken into exile by the Assyrians. Even they have the hope of salvation and God's grace if they will repent. It may be too late to save their nation from destruction, but as long as God gives them breath, they still have the opportunity to repent.

For the nation as a whole, there was no hope left; their fate had been sealed. Nevertheless, God had His remnant among His chosen people. In a large heap of chaff some grains may be found concealed. Even though the body as a whole was putrid and corrupt, yet some sound members remained.

Many of God's elect in Israel had fallen away for a time. They had allowed their sinful culture to conform them to its ways. They had backslidden, becoming entangled in the common sins of their age. However, they were not altogether incurable. God exhorts them, saying, "O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity."

Before we can be saved, we must be convicted of our own personal sinfulness—that we have stumbled because of our iniquity. We must humble ourselves, being displeased with our sinfulness and acknowledging that we are worthy of death and hell on account of our sins. Only when we detest our sins will God drive us to seek repentance.

2 Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.

Hosea calls on God's people to speak to God, to call out to Him with heartfelt, genuine prayers of contrition and repentance. As evidence of their return to the Lord, they must declare truthfully from their mouths, "Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips."

Only God can forgive us of our many sins. If we are truly penitent, He will receive us graciously.

This verse reminds us of Psalm 116. Please turn there. Let's read Psalm 116:1-13: "1 I love the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications. 2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. 3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and

sorrow. 4 Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!" 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. 6 The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. 8 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the LORD In the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted." 11 I said in my haste, "All men are liars." 12 What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD."

What can we give back to God for all the many blessings He has shown us? We have nothing to offer Him, except to show our gratitude as we do good works and praise His holy name. We must offer the sacrifice of praise with our lips.

Hebrews 13:15 exhorts us, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."

3 Assyria shall not save us, We will not ride on horses, Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods.' For in You the fatherless finds mercy."

Those Israelites whom God shall save in the future shall give evidence of their true repentance. Let's remember that the word *repentance* means "a change of mind." As true believers, we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), and we are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14).

A person who has genuine repentance will no longer trust in herself or her idols; she will trust in the one, true God. The Israelites were worthy of God's vengeance, for they had placed their hopes for safety in the Assyrians and the Egyptians; they had fled to statues, idols, and mute images.

"Assyria shall not save us." No longer will the people trust in godless regimes and a league of pagan nations—all too many people today place their hopes in the government to solve all the world's problems (e.g., to protect the environment, protect children, bring peace to the world, and end famine). Ought we not to place our trust chiefly in God?

John Calvin comments, "For unless we are convinced that God alone is sufficient for us, even when all earthly aids fail us, we do not place in Him our hope of salvation; but, on the contrary, we transfer to mortals what belongs alone to Him. For this sacrilege the Israelites therefore condemn themselves, and, at the same time, show that the fruit of their repentance would be to set their minds on God so that they will not be drawn here and there as before or be led to think that they could be preserved through the help of men. Let us therefore learn that men do not turn to God, except when they say "adieu" (Fr., goodbye) to all creatures and no longer fix their hopes on them."

The people will say, "we will not ride on horses." No more shall we trust in ourselves and in our own strength. Nor shall we ride on our horses to seek to make peace treaties with the pagan nations all around us, trusting in them to defend us.

They add, "Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods.'" No longer shall the people worship idols and pursue superstitions, placing vain confidence in their manmade idols and human inventions.

God alone is a sufficient help for us. For in Him “the fatherless finds mercy.” Here God shows that we must become depressed and lowly so that we may learn to be dependent on God alone (cf. Luke 9:23; 14:26). The fatherless are dependent on the aid of another and stand in need of direction and wisdom; their safety depends on the assistance of others. Like those who are fatherless, we must look to God to adopt us as His children. We must trust in Him—that He will show us mercy and look on us with compassion, for we all are like fatherless children. We need a heavenly Father, full of mercy and compassion to adopt us as His own. So let us cast all our hopes and cares on God alone!

God's grace is sufficient for us, so that we have no need of seeking aid from any other.

4 " I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him.

The Israelites were guilty of great backsliding. Yet, God would heal them, if they would repent. His chosen remnant would repent in due time. God is indeed ready to be reconciled to His covenant people; He desires nothing more than to receive and embrace His people—like the father who stood ready to embrace the prodigal son (Luke 15:20).

Do you remember the story of the prodigal son in Luke, chapter 15? Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 15, verses 11-24:

Luke 15:11 “Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. 12 “And the younger of them said to *his* father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me*.’ So he divided to them *his* livelihood. 13 “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. “Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 “And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*. 17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 ‘I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 “and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’ 20 “And he arose and came to his father. **But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.** 21 “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. 23 ‘And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; 24 ‘for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.” (emphasis added)

God heals the backsliding of His repentant children, by forgiving them and pardoning all their sins. The apostle John reminds us of God’s promise that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

God adds, “I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him.” The Lord is said to love us freely because He finds in us no cause of love, for we are unworthy of

being regarded or viewed with any favor; but He shows Himself to be abounding in grace and love as He manifests His love to unworthy sinners such as us.

Even though the Israelites had in various ways provoked God's wrath, yet the Lord promises to be propitious to His people, which means that His wrath has been appeased and He now views us with kindness and benevolence. By adopting us as His sons and daughters, God becomes our Father, and He regards us as His children. He abolishes our sins, and He freely admits us to the enjoyment of His love.

God chooses us; He adopts us. We don't choose God or adopt Him as our Father. He adopts us as His children! Sadly, many people are quite confused about this, imagining that they come to God and somehow can turn or incline Him to love them. This cannot be the case. The apostle John says it simply, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

As long as God imputes sins to us, we are the objects of His righteous anger. Yet when He freely forgives us, He begins to love us as His own.

5 I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily, And lengthen his roots like Lebanon.

Throughout our study of the book of Hosea we have seen how Israel's unfaithfulness toward God brought the covenant curses of God on the entire nation. Now, the future repentance of God's true Israel, will bring on her the great blessings promised in God's covenant of grace.

Previously Israel had been plagued by drought and deprived of God's favor. Yet, now God "will be like the dew to Israel."

When the fields were dried up by the heat of the sun and there was no dew, all things withered. Lilies and roses cannot flourish when there is a lack of moisture. Yet, God promises that Israel "shall grow like the lily," which means that God will raise the Israelites from the dead, as the lily also rises overnight and unexpectedly. The restored and beautiful flower of Israel would not again wither. For God will "lengthen his roots like Lebanon." Like tall trees, which have deep roots in the ground by which they remain firm and for a long time flourish, God's restored Israel shall also be stable and persevere.

6 His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree, And his fragrance like Lebanon.

God continues to reveal His plan for a restored Israel. "His branches shall spread." A tree, after it has roots, remains not in the same state but grows and spreads forth its branches in all directions. God promises a daily increase to His blessings after He has begun to show Himself bountiful to the people of Israel.

Israel's branches have spread the farthest through the New Israel, which is the Church of the new covenant. The members of Christ's Church are of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The prophet Zechariah prophesied of the Messiah who was to come, who would be "the BRANCH" (Zech. 3:8).

Zechariah 3:8 "Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH."

Zechariah 6:12-13 "Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: 'Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the LORD; 13 Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.'"'"
(emphasis added)

Jesus Christ is the BRANCH!

In Hosea 14:6, Hosea says that Israel's "beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon." The love of God is indeed the fountain of all blessings. By these similes the prophet shows that the state of the people would be prosperous and happy as soon as they should be received by God into His favor.

7 Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; They shall be revived *like* grain, And grow like a vine. Their scent *shall* be like the wine of Lebanon.

"Those who dwell under his shadow shall return." Psalm 36:7 declares, "How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings." So also Hosea declares that those who shall dwell under the shadow of God's restored Israel "shall return" and "shall be revived." Those who flee under Israel's shadow are protected from the heat of the sun; they shall flourish again and be refreshed.

Hosea adds, "They shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon." As from one grain many stalks proceed, so also the people shall grow like grain and prosper after their restoration to God's favor. They will grow like a vine and produce the sweetest aroma, like that of the wine of Lebanon. The Israelites will be happy, prosperous, and joyful once they have been converted from their superstitions and immorality and have completely surrendered themselves to be governed by God.

8 " Ephraim *shall* say, 'What have I to do anymore with idols?' I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; Your fruit is found in Me."

Hosea says that in the future the Israelites shall admit and deplore their past blindness and folly; they shall renounce their false worship and superstitions. How foolish they were to trust in dead idols and pagan nations to save them!

John Calvin comments, "It is a testimony of true repentance when men, being ashamed, are displeased with themselves on account of their sins and apply their minds to God's service, detesting their whole former life."

Ephraim, the tribe from which King Jeroboam came and which represents the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel—Ephraim shall say, "What have I to do anymore with idols?" They shall confess their former sins and announce their own repentance, promising to have nothing more to do with false gods.

Israel will come to realize that there is nothing better for them than to live under God's protection. For He hears and observes us; He is like a "green cypress tree." He protects us under His shadow; He provides us with cool relief and protection. David prayed, "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 17:8).

So also our fruit is found in God. When God makes us fruitful we are branches set in the best vine. All the good fruit we have comes from God. All strength would fail us if God were not to supply us with water and even with life itself.

In the gospel of John, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. 7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." (John 15:5-8)

Jesus also taught in Matthew 7:16-20: "16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

If we are wise, we will seek God's support for all our endeavors, knowing that His fruit are sufficiently rich and abundant.

9 Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them.

Who could envy the prophet Hosea? God sent him to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel just before her destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. What kind of congregation did he preach to? Throughout his ministry, Hosea found a people that either openly despised his teaching or at least regarded his teaching as mere fables. They rebuked him or even threatened him when he treated them with severity. Surely Hosea must have thought, "This people may think that they shall go unpunished while they make a mockery of what I teach them, but they shall surely find out at last that the ways of the Lord are right."

The last verse of the book that bears his name ends with these words from the prophet Hosea: "Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them."

Hosea was surely amazed at how few people would yield themselves to be taught by God. The Israelites surely claimed, in their great pride, to be wise. Prideful people follow their own counsels (Hosea 11:6); they trust in their own wisdom and shake off every fear of God and all regard for His divine truth, the Bible. Oftentimes, they pridefully think that they don't need teachers, for they know it all already. In other cases, they place their trust in the spiritual gurus and false prophets who are popular in their day.

In Hosea's day, the whole land of Israel was filled with a dreadful contempt of God, which manifested itself in open contempt for God's true prophets. Nevertheless, men foolishly thought themselves to be wise and good religious people. They even thought that they could deceive God (Hos. 11:12). Yet, God exposes hypocrites for what they really are.

Hosea must have meant something like this: "I indeed see that you all think you are wise. You dare to rise up against God, and you think yourselves ingenious when you elude every truth, when you proudly tread religion under foot; in this way you are all wise. But at the same time, if there be any grain of wisdom in you, you must surely acknowledge me to be sent by God and that what I declare is not the invention of men, but the word of the living God."

At the same time, the prophet Hosea's questions seem to condemn all the wisdom of men. God's Word thunders from heaven against the pride of those who presumptuously mock Him. Anyone who thinks himself to be preeminent over God is blind and stupid and insane.

The true wisdom of men is to obey God and to embrace His Word. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all." Proverbs 1:7 tells us that wisdom and the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. Whoever then wishes to be truly wise must begin with the fear of God and with reverence for God's Word.

In the absence of God's Holy Word, apart from God's revealed will, men cannot certainly understand anything correctly.

John Calvin comments, "Let us suppose men [to be] endued, not only with great clearness of mind, but also with the knowledge of all the sciences; let them be philosophers, let them be physicians, let them be lawyers, let nothing be lacking to them, except that they have no true knowledge of eternal life, would it not be better for them to be mere cattle than to be thus wise, to exercise their minds for a short time on fading things, and to know that all their highly valued treasure shall perish with their life? Surely to be thus wise is far more wretched than if men were [totally] void of understanding. Justly then does the Prophet imply here that those were not only foolish, but also mad, and wholly destitute of all understanding, who regarded not [heavenly] truth and were deaf to the Prophets and discerned not when God spoke nor understood the power of His Word. All then who are not thus wise, the Prophet justly says, are utterly void of all prudence and judgment."

The prophet Hosea adds, "For the ways of the LORD are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them."

The ways of the LORD are right. Yet, Proverbs tells us that "fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). Today, a myriad of skeptics, atheists, and antagonists of the true Christian faith not only reject God's Word but also work diligently to seek to destroy all faith in God's Word. They falsely claim that the Bible is full of contradictions. A group of unbelieving so-called scholars vote on which words of the Bible are really God's Word, eliminating nearly everything.

John Calvin comments (with the very appropriate use of the verb “vomit”): “However much then the ungodly may vomit forth slanders against the Word of God, it is the same as if they threw dust into the air to darken the light of the sun [how foolish and futile]; just so much they effect . . . by their audacity. For perfect rectitude will ever be found in the ways of the Lord; His Word will ever be found free from every stain or defect.”

Hosea says that “the righteous walk” in the ways of the LORD. The righteous courageously fight against all the temptations of the world; they seek a heavenly home; they feel assured that even if they are miserable for a time, they shall yet be blessed, for they have embraced the grace of God in Christ. They are sustained by their own conscience so that they can look down on all the reproaches and slanders of this world and proceed onward towards their final victory in Jesus. Those who walk in the way of the Covenant Lord are unconquerable; were the whole world to oppose them, the godly would still pursue their course until they reached heaven.

By daily advances God’s people press forward, as we seek to become more and more godly, more and more like Christ. Hebrews, chapter 11, in speaking of the heroes of faith of the Old Testament, speaks of the experience of all Christians, living as strangers and pilgrims on this earth:

Hebrews 11:13-16: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” **Hebrews 13:14** adds, “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”

The just walk in the Lord’s ways, as the Lord leads them by His hand. God arms us with promises and encouragements. The faithful find in the word of the Lord the best ways and follow them, “but transgressors stumble in them.” To them all doubts are as mountains, insurmountable.

Let us never question God or His ways, for His ways are right. Let us learn from the lessons of the book of Hosea.

Summary themes / teachings of the book of Hosea:

Beware of spiritual adultery. Never run after other lovers, other gods. Flee from idolatry. God wants a chaste and faithful bride. He alone is God; we must worship Him alone.

Flee from immorality. God wants a chaste, holy, and faithful bride.

God calls us to true worship, to worship Him according to His Word alone. May we never add to or subtract from the pure worship He has ordained in His Word. God detests all those things that people invent for His worship, even if they are invented with the best of intentions. God declares how He is to be worshipped; it is pride and presumption for us to think that we know better. To add anything in worship that God has not commanded amounts to superstition and false worship.

Beware of pride and stubbornness. Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Flee from hypocrisy and seek *true* holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

Don’t follow your own counsels; follow God’s Word *alone*.

Don’t practice a self-made religion or self-made worship.

God is longsuffering and patient, a God of abundant love, grace, and mercy. He has redeemed us as harlots and made us His bride. He has adopted us wayward children to be His sons and daughters.

Obey the Lord, and keep His commandments.

Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand! (Mark 1:15)

PRAYERS by John Calvin:

Grant, Almighty God, that as we now wear this mortal body and nourish through sin a thousand deaths within us—O grant, that we may ever by faith direct our eyes toward heaven and to that incomprehensible power, which is to be manifested at the last day by Jesus Christ our Lord, so that in the midst of death we may hope that You will be our Redeemer and that we will enjoy that redemption, which He completed when He rose from the dead. May we never doubt but that the fruit which He then brought forth by His Spirit will come also to us when Christ Himself shall come to judge the world. May we thus walk in the fear of Your name, that we may be really gathered among His members to be made partakers of that glory, which by His death He has procured for us. Amen.

Grant, Almighty God, that as we are so miserable as soon as You withdraw Your favor from us—O grant, that we may deeply feel this conviction and thus learn to be humble before You. May we learn to hate our own selves and that we may not in the meantime deceive ourselves by such allurements as commonly prevail, putting our hope in creatures or in this world. Rather, may we raise our minds upwards to You and fix on You our hearts, never doubting that when you embrace us with Your paternal love, nothing shall be wanting to us. In the meantime, may we suppliantly flee to Your mercy, and with true and genuine confession, may we acknowledge this to be our only protection—that You choose to receive us into Your favor and to abolish our sins, into which we not only daily fall but by which we also deserve eternal death. May we daily rise through Your free pardon until at last our Redeemer Christ Your Son shall appear to us from heaven. Amen.