

The Book of Hosea

Chapter 6

NKJ Hosea 6:1 Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

Throughout our studies in Hosea, we have seen a repeated call to repentance—to turn away from superstition, false beliefs, false worship, and sinful practices, and to turn to the LORD and His holy way.

As a lion tears its prey, the Lord tore apart the rebellious Israelites. Yet, now we hear words of hope. God has “torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.” The purpose of the Lord’s chastisement and discipline was to promote His people’s salvation. God had stricken the people with great judgment not so that they would be utterly destroyed but so that they would return to the LORD.

So what is the purpose of God’s chastisements? Is it to make us hopeless? No, the purpose of God’s discipline is to drive us to repent—to change our course and to turn back to God.

The message of Hosea still rings true for us today: “Come, and let us return to the LORD.” When God has disciplined us or afflicted us or sent calamity or disaster upon us, what should we do? We should return to the LORD. If we do, He will heal us, He will heal our families, He will heal our churches, He will heal our land. He will bind us up.

2 After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.

The prophet Hosea calls the people to patience. If God should not immediately revive the people, do not lose hope, do not despair, for “after two days He will revive us.” In other words, although the Lord may not deliver us from our miseries the first day, we should not lose hope. For God can raise up dead bodies from their graves and restore life in a moment.

Why was it that God would not revive the people immediately? It was because their rebellion and hardness of heart was deeply rooted. As with a disease that requires slow and various remedies and even then is difficult to cure in its advanced stages, so the Israelites had become nearly incurable, and therefore it was necessary to lead them to repentance by slow punishments.

The exile the Israelites would have to endure would be long and difficult. Yet in the midst of receiving their punishment, they should not lose hope. For the Lord would revive them and raise them up in due time that they might “live in His sight.”

The Messiah, Christ the Lord, was literally raised from the dead on the third day. He gives us the hope that we may live in God’s sight if we have placed our trust in Him alone for salvation. We all should find hope in God’s Word to us from Hosea. Even if we are languishing in unbelief or under God’s Fatherly discipline, we have the hope of **forgiveness** through Christ. If we turn to God with true saving faith, He will revive us, He will raise us up, and He will give us life. If we abandon our idols and cling to the

cross, walking according to God's perfect commandments, then we, too, may live in God's sight.

3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth.

God here promises that although there is now on every side a horrible darkness and drought, yet the Lord will show His goodness to us, even though it may not immediately appear.

Let us acknowledge the Lord. Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. Let us study His Word so that we will know Him, and let us obey Him. As surely as the sun rises each day, so God will appear to us. As the rain replenishes the earth and makes it fertile that it may produce a great harvest, so the Lord will restore His covenant people. Although the land seemed barren, it would become fertile once again. But first the people had to abandon completely their idolatrous false worship. (Remember that they had looked to the Baals for rain and fertility.) The people must repent and return to the one true Lord, who alone is the giver of rain and fertility. They must pursue the knowledge of the one, true covenant LORD. Then, He will show Himself to them as the true giver of rain and fertility.

4 "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away.

Ephraim (another name for Israel) and Judah were so deeply entrenched in their depravity and waywardness that they were unable to receive God's favor. Remember that after Solomon the united monarchy was divided into two rival kingdoms—Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

God offers pardon to all, but the Israelites and the Jews continued obstinately in their sins. They scorned God's favor. Thus, God declared to them that the door of salvation was closed to them.

In saying that their faithfulness is like a morning cloud and like the early dew it goes away, God charges the people with being hypocrites. Israel and Judah had proven themselves to be unfaithful brides. As soon as the sun rises, the morning dew evaporates and the morning clouds may soon pass away. Likewise with the Israelites and the Jews, there was no solid or inward goodness in them. Rather, they only had the appearance of goodness and faithfulness.

God wanted His people to have pure hearts. He wanted a pure and faithful bride. Yet, Israel had proven herself to be a harlot. She had gone after other gods. She had played the harlot with the Baals. She became fixated with superstition and followed man's commands (5:11) rather than God's Word alone. She had a form of godliness and piety, but she denied its power.

5 Therefore I have hewn *them* by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And your judgments *are like* light *that* goes forth.

God commanded His prophets to treat the people roughly and harshly. John Calvin writes that “hypocrites . . . cannot bear any rebuke.” Hypocrites often accused God of being their batterer. God here declares that He was constrained to kill them and to make His word by the prophets like a hammer or an axe. When men are teachable, God kindly and sweetly draws or invites them to Himself. However, when God sees a perverse hardness in men’s hearts, He acts quite differently, showing His wrath toward the unrepentant and hypocritical. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

God had made known to the Israelites His plan for their lives—how they should live holy lives that were pleasing to Him. They could not claim ignorance. God had given them the light of His word and warned them. Notwithstanding this, they sinned knowingly and willfully. As the sun daily shines on the earth, so God’s Word had been light to them to show them the way of salvation, yet it profited them nothing.

6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. 7 "But like men they transgressed the covenant; There they dealt treacherously with Me.

God desired mercy and faith on the part of His people, not just outward show. Yes, they performed all the outward acts of religion—they sacrificed and brought burnt offerings to God in His name. Yet, they lacked mercy and true faith. They lacked the true knowledge of God. They transgressed God’s covenant, breaking His holy commandments. They dealt treacherously with God.

Jesus Christ twice quoted from this passage in Hosea. Jesus taught the Pharisees that God desires that men forgive and bear with one another. Holiness does not consist in performing outward religious acts and ceremonies. True worship is not something of outward pomp and show; rather, it must be from the heart, performed out of love for God and in obedience to His commands.

It is not that God forbade the Israelites to perform sacrifices, for indeed He had commanded them to offer them. Rather, what God was teaching them is that true mercy and faith are far more important. Without kindness, love, mercy, and faith, all religious exercises are hypocrisy and a fraud. God does not condemn sacrifices, but only the abuse of them.

The Israelites vainly boasted of their sacrifices and all the extravagance of their external worship, yet God did not regard these things at all. Rather, what He wanted was true, spiritual worship.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

Hebrews 13:15 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.

The false priests and prophets corrupted God's law. They turned the sacrificial system into a mockery; it had a form of godliness but denied its true, spiritual power. Their hearts were far from God; they lacked true faith, mercy, and love.

John Calvin comments, "There is no falsehood worse than to turn the truth of God into a lie, and to adulterate His pure doctrine. . . . And this is what all hypocrites do, when they thus turn sacraments into gross abuses and false worship, when they build temples, when they imagine that God is rightly worshipped whenever an ox or a ram is offered hypocrites so grossly mock God and turn away sacrifices from Christ, they turn away from the doctrine of repentance and faith; in a word, they regard God only as a dead idol. When they thus deprave the whole worship of God and adulterate it, when they so impiously corrupt the word of God and pervert His institutions, are they not covenant-breakers?"

8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, And defiled with blood.

Gilead was one of the cities of refuge, and the Levites possessed these cities that were reserved for fugitives. This city was therefore occupied by the Levites and the priests, and they ought to have been examples to all others. The priests should have been the best human examples of godliness and righteousness for the people. Yet, instead they were like robbers, and the holy city, which was to be a sanctuary of God, had become a den of thieves. The priests were the ringleaders of the evildoers among God's people. If Gilead is a city of evildoers, surely the other cities were even worse. How was Gilead "defiled with blood"? Verse 9 helps us better to understand what Hosea means.

9 As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man, So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem; Surely they commit lewdness.

The priests were robbers and murderers. The priests were so void of the fear of God that they perpetrated every kind of cruelty as if they were wholly given to robberies. The priests committed shameful crimes. How shocking! Yet, it really should not be all that shocking. If the priests were willing to proclaim a false God to the people and to preach against His holy laws, what crime would they not be willing to commit? If they would deny God and His holy laws, then should we expect them to be holy and virtuous men? On the contrary, despite their outward religiosity and false piety, we should expect them to be among the most perverse, wicked, depraved men on earth.

In our day in which churches have so departed from the truth of God's Word, all of the high profile scandals involving Catholic priests and even Protestant pastors should not surprise us. Of course, all of us are sinners and subject to the temptations of the devil and the weakness of our flesh. However, if a priest or pastor will deny the one, true Gospel and fails to teach God's law to His people, what kind of priest or pastor is that? If He does not fear God enough to preach God's Word faithfully to his flock, then what other corruptions lie within his heart? If he can willingly allow God's worship to be corrupted, then should we be surprised if his own heart is equally corrupted? If a priest or pastor will act unfaithfully toward God in his doctrine and worship, then we should not be surprised if he is unfaithful in his dealings with other people.

10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: There is the harlotry of Ephraim; Israel is defiled.

Hypocrites often are quick to make excuses for their conduct when they are reproved. If they are accused of being superstitious, they reply that what they have done is based on their “good intentions.” John Calvin says that they say, “Good intention . . . is the judge; as if good intention were . . . the queen, who ought to rule heaven and earth, and God were now excluded of all His rights.”

Even if men may value and applaud the superstitions of men, God regards them as a “horrible thing.” All idolatry is harlotry which defiles. Men may worship according to their own imaginations and devices and call it most holy religion; yet God regards it as a profaning of His name, a falsehood, a blasphemy.

Jeroboam introduced gross idolatry among the ten tribes of Israel, which the other kings of Israel followed. Jeroboam had built a temple in which he thought God would be worshipped in the best manner; but the prophet Hosea declares that Israel’s temple is in fact a brothel, and its worship is filthy fornication.

11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, When I return the captives of My people.

The pure worship of God had remained, at least in outward form, at Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. Superstitions had sprung up among all Israel and had spread through all the corners of the land. In Judah there had remained at least some hope, for some form of true worship remained there, and the purer teaching of God’s law continued there. Yet, now Judah also is planting his own shoots, for he draws the Israelites to himself and looks to the Israelites as role models as to how he ought to worship God. A day of reckoning awaits Judah as well.