

HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

by S. Franklin Logsdon

"For Israel hath forgotten his maker." (Hosea 8:14)

"My people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32)

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CHAPTER EIGHT -

THE HEARTLESSNESS OF THE PEOPLE (Hosea 7)

THE FREQUENT RECURRENCE of the same indicting statements will seem less repetitious if we keep in mind that Hosea presented them over a period of some sixty years. A series of messages, delivered orally once a month during the course of one year, then concentrated in written form, could not be read at one sitting with the same effect as when heard but once a month. It is not to be inferred, of course, that each of the fourteen chapters in the prophecy of Hosea constituted a complete message, and was given at one time, thus suggesting that the prophet only came to the people fourteen times in sixty years. In all probability, he was constantly fulfilling his office, moving from one place to the other, reasoning and pleading with them for a return to the LORD.

Two characteristics are prominent in Heaven-sent declarations:

First, they are always pertinent, and the message which Hosea delivered was exactly the type of message the people needed.

Second, repetition is necessary to register a lasting impression, especially when minds were so cluttered with extraneous things as were his hearers.

This is why the apostle Peter stated, **"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them [have heard them before], and be established in the present truth" (II Peter 1:12).**

"When I [the LORD] would have healed Israel [all the tribes], then the iniquity of Ephraim [used in a more restricted sense] was discovered" (v. 1).

Ephraim may be thought of as the "black sheep of the family." Only eternity will disclose the near-victories, the near-successes, the near-revivals which might have been realized, yet were hindered by some unrenounced sin on the part of some, But Ephraim was not the only hindrance to returning prosperity in the land; Samaria is indictingly termed "**the troop of robbers [which] spoileth without.**" In the former instance, it was sin of a concealed kind; in the latter, an open manifestation.

How shall we account for this pressing persistence along a devious course? Statedly, because "**they consider not in their hearts that I [GOD] remember all their wickedness**" (v. 2).

Some would have this read: "They did not think that evil conceived in the heart produces fruits seen by GOD." This could scarcely be the thought. All evil is conceived in the heart. Out of the heart are the issues of life. "**As he thinketh in his heart, so is he,**" The burden of the verse seems to be that they were not conscious that GOD held them accountable for the spiritual misdeeds which had filled their lives - deeds which called for repentance, confession and renunciation.

This truth does not seize upon Ephraim until the last chapter of the prophecy (14), the fulfillment of which, in all probability, is yet future. A backslider cannot come back to the LORD on his own terms. One cannot go widely afield, trampling the blood of the Son of GOD under foot, grieving the HOLY SPIRIT, bringing reproach to the Gospel, then suddenly, although his heart be pricked with conviction, move into the back pew, sing lustily, give his offerings, and thereby reinstate himself with the LORD. It simply does not work that way.

Then, there is another sad angle to persistent backsliding. "**Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil**" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). It is likewise easy for a backslider to exploit the patience of the LORD. Warnings had been issued for a long time, but judgment had not come. Because their licentious escapades with idolatry in the past did not result in some sorer judgment; because they had survived famine and enemy thrusts, they were not moved in contrition to bring words with them (14:2) - words of confession (cf. Jeremiah 5:12). "**The wicked [wayward] is snared in the work of his own hands**" (Psalm 9:16).

But GOD did remember! Concerning their doings, He said, "**They are before my face**" (v.2).

When we read that the iniquity of Ephraim "**was discovered,**" we are not to believe that the LORD was suddenly surprised to detect the existence of such iniquity. Never! The omniscient GOD cannot be surprised, "**for he knew what was in man**" (John 2:25). The word "discovered" means literally, "to denude," "to strip," "to uncover." And while the LORD desired greatly to recover the people, to withdraw His chastening rod, to bless the land, the sins of Ephraim and Samaria, open to His view, prevented.

The prerequisites had long since been emphasized:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14). They had sought His face, but this

prevailing corruption in Ephraim and Samaria proved conclusively that they had not turned from their wicked ways.

While the LORD was observing with pronounced displeasure these condemning attitudes and actions of Ephraim and Samaria, the king (possibly Shallum) was viewing the same with pleasurable approval. **"They make the king glad with their wickedness"** (v. 3). The word "wickedness" denotes the divine appraisal, but neither the king nor the people looked upon these matters as being contrary to holy principles.

The hazardous plunge into idolatry which Aaron took with the people while Moses was on the mountain communing with JEHOVAH was due, he maintained, to the strong insistence of his followers. **"For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us,"** was his worthless defense (Exodus 32:23).

However, here in Hosea there was neither seduction on the part of civil leadership nor coercion on the part of the people - simply mutual satisfaction of depraved hearts in their endorsement of ungodliness. Because of it, their land faced disaster.

The intensity of their burning lusts is likened unto a heated oven in which the baker, between the time of kneading the dough and its readiness for baking, stirs up a hot fire (v. 4). They thought nothing of celebrations where bottles of wine were plentiful; where the king himself, sick (perhaps drunk) with overindulgence, would join with the riotous revelers in clinking the glasses as they exchanged toasts with confused minds and terribly corrupted hearts (v. 5).

After a night of sleep, the morning found their passions just as inflamed as the night before (v. 6); and as an overheated oven can burn up what is placed in it, so they devoured their judges and murdered their kings (v. 7).

Commenting on these hideous displays of uncontrolled passions, the LORD sadly recalled, **"There is none among them that calleth unto me"** (v. 7). When leadership was most needed, it was pitiful in its betrayal of the people. Instead of stemming the tide, the priests aided and abetted its progress.

In His case against Ephraim, the LORD termed him an unturned cake and a silly dove; the former touching upon his character, the latter his conduct. He was utterly devoid of depth and pathetically destitute of a sense of direction. *The Pulpit Commentary*, in suggesting that we take a good look at this cake, states: *"It is burnt to a cinder on one side, and remains damp and doughy on the other. It is partly underdone, partly overdone; and thus, being neither dough nor bread, it is quite spoiled."* This was Ephraim.

Then the figure changes to a silly dove (v. 11) - an apt descriptive. In a psalm of Asaph, the speaker confesses: **"So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee"** (Psalm 73:22). While there is a similarity of condition, there is confession and correction with the psalmist; with Ephraim there is no such disposition.

"Envy slayeth the silly one" (Job 5:2). It is the result of deception, enticement or seduction, with envy being the bait which leads the victim into the trap. This is precisely how idolatry

found its way into the lives of those who were chosen of GOD and warned by Him repeatedly against idols. They saw what the heathen had and they acquired a desire for the same. Deteriorating devotion to the true GOD opened the way for the influx of these strange things. Like a silly dove, Israel flew straight into the net.

In a day like ours reporters and analysts would wax profuse in their press stories of these developments. They would show how Israel, lying between Egypt and Assyria, two great rival empires, sought diplomatically to play one against the other by feigning friendship with both. It was political intrigue for national security. The LORD termed it a compromise of the first degree, for in their alliances they departed from the faith of their fathers.

They were "**without heart**" (v. 11), that is, without understanding of the true way.

Instead of saying, Our "**help cometh from the Lord**," they sought the assistance of their neighboring countries. When they did this, the LORD warned, "**I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of [shot down from] the Heaven**" (v. 12).

Their political negotiations were futile. Failure was inevitable, and consequences duly prophesied were to be severe. And the chief reason the "**woe**" is now pronounced with such austerity is that their rapid departure ("**fled from me**") demanded firm treatment (v. 13). Their actions, and now their words, had spoken lies against the Holy One of Israel who had redeemed them (v. 13).

The people of Hosea's day "**howled upon their beds**" (v. 14) with anxiety and fear, yet the LORD disabuses our minds lest we accredit them with sincerity. "**They have not cried unto me with their heart**," He reveals (v. 14). That this was not the anguish of repentance is proved in the same verse where we see them gathering in idol temples to ask false gods for a harvest of grain and fruit; and, in so doing, they deliberately ignored the LORD.

"**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked**" (Jeremiah 17:9).

One of GOD's choice servants in recent times was humble enough to confess: "I sin when I pray. I sin when I preach. When I repent, my repentance needs to be repented of. When I weep, every tear needs to be washed in the blood of the LAMB." At our best, we are all unprofitable servants. How despicable must be our case when we are not at our best! Then, how imponderable the situation when godly restraint is thrown to the wind, allowing wayward propensities to reach out freely where they will!

Yes, they cried, but they did not cry with their hearts. Perhaps we have thought of the heart only as pulsating or palpitating, not enunciating or articulating. Well, GOD waits for the heart to speak. "**When thou saidst, Seek ye my face**"; David testified, "**my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek**" (Psalm 27:8). This is the proper response - the only kind acceptable to the LORD.

The heart must speak! One day the descendants of Jacob will speak with their hearts. When they do the LORD will gladly and promptly speak to them in peace and prosperity. This is what He waits with long patience to do.

It is with a disappointing note that chapter 7 closes.

Even though JEHOVAH-GOD, time and again, had granted them victory over their enemies, they kept on devising and practicing idolatry (v. 15). Like a crooked bow, they could not strike the proper target (v. 16). No more can a warped testimony today appeal to the LORD or impress the lost. And, let us not forget it, as these ancient people, through rebellion against GOD, faced the derision in the land of Egypt where they sought for help, even so Christians need expect no greater esteem from the world with which they have compromised their testimony.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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