

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 SIXTEEN -

THE REMEDY AND ULTIMATE RECOVERY (Hosea 14)

FEW BOOKS IN THE BIBLE close on a higher note, with a more climactic appeal, than Hosea.

- Genesis closes with **"a coffin in Egypt."**
- Deuteronomy ends with: **"There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses."**
- The last chapter of Joshua speaks of **"the bones of Joseph."**
- The Book of Judges has as its sad summation: **"Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."**
- The last chapter of II Samuel finds David in the dilemma of choosing his punishment for the sin of numbering the people.
- II Kings relates in its last verses that King Jehoiachin was in his thirty-seventh year of Babylonian captivity.
- The concluding chapter of Jeremiah portrays the brutal treatment of Zedekiah, last king of Judah: slaughter of his sons, loss of his eyes, imprisonment and death.

Some books, of course, close with a joyful note, but none is more dramatically impressive in this regard than Hosea.

THE REQUIREMENT STATED

There is in verse 1 what would seem to be a final call.

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy GOD." Such an appeal in Malachi brought the objection, **"Wherein shall we return?"** Such an objection here is forestalled by the immediate explanation: **"Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."**

At this juncture it would be superfluous to describe the extent of the fall. The preceding chapters have painted the drab picture. What is important, however, is the manner in which they were instructed to return.

"Take with you words, and turn to the LORD" (v. 2).

The kind of words is indicated in the verse. **"Say unto him, Take away all iniquity."** They must be words of confession. Is this not always the requirement for the backslidden if a restoration is to be effected? **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (I John 1:9).

THE CONFESSION OFFERED

"Asshur shall not save us" (v. 3) is the beginning of their confession. In spite of their demand for a king like the Gentiles, in spite of their alliances with the Assyrians and the Egyptians, they now make bold to assert that salvation cannot originate from kings or nations, from influence or prestige. These have been painfully proved noncontributive to their welfare. The retrospect is now most disturbing.

"We will not ride upon horses [cavalry]," they confess. Civil defense is not necessarily spiritual defense. National security is not necessarily spiritual protection. Without spiritual health there can be no national strength. We may boast of man made satellites and of intercontinental ballistic missiles with the terrifying potential of nuclear energy, but what can any people do without GOD?

"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us" (Psalm 124:2, 3). This will ever be true in spite of our military might.

"Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." This is an outright renunciation of idols. It must come before GOD can deal in love. These ancient people had actually fashioned with their own hands images for religious engagements. **"And he [Aaron] received them [contributed earrings, etc.] at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel"** (Exodus 32:4).

THE REMEDY PRESCRIBED

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" (v. 4).

The simplicity here is profound.

The promise is precious. The remedy is designed to bring results. It cannot fail. When the love of GOD goes to work:

- The SAVIOUR comes to earth (John 3:16);
- The Redeemer goes to the Cross (John 15:13);

- The servant of CHRIST presses on (II Corinthians 5:14);
- Christians are gracious toward one another (I John 4:7);
- The worshiper adores his LORD (I John 4:19);
- The wanderer is wooed back to the Father's hearth (Luke 15:18).

The word "freely" does not carry the connotation of "gratuity." It is rather the thought of lavishness. There is something constraining, overpowering, overwhelming about divine love (II Corinthians 5:14). It melts and moves the hearts of men. It warms and wins the emotions. Its magnetism attracts and holds the devotion when once it is shed abroad in the heart (Romans 5:5), that is, if no diversionary interest is allowed to contravene. Now the renunciation of idols clears the way for this divine potency to go to work.

THE REMEDY AND EFFECT

The Refreshing. "**I will be as the dew unto Israel**" (v. 5). The dew falls in the night, and the darkest period is yet to overtake them, but JEHOVAH will prove Himself "**a very present help in trouble.**" The dew falls silently, and this is how the Spirit of GOD always works in the lives of the people.

The big problem is always the heart problem. Whereas one day they did not cry unto the LORD with their hearts (7:14), they will with deep sincerity ask: "**What are these wounds in thine hands?**" when "**his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives**" (Zechariah 13:6; 14:4).

Then too the dew is penetrative, leaving no stem or leaf unvisited. Thus, when the love of GOD has its overwhelming and transforming effect, when "**in one day... a nation [is] born,**" when the "**blindness in part**" (Romans 11:25) shall give way to clear, unaffected vision, these people shall be called, "**The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD**" (Isaiah 62:12). Then, free from the blemishes of a dreadful, ignoble past, they "**shall grow as the lily**" and become firmly established as the deep-rooted trees of Lebanon (v. 5).

The Renewing. "**His branches shall spread**" (v. 6). Heretofore they had been but dwarfed shrubs, stunted bushes - no imposing branches, no luxuriant verdure. But the day will come when, typified by Joseph of old, they will be "**a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall**" (Genesis 49:22). It is this extension, beyond the confines of self-interest, which touches the lives of others with blessing. This will make, not only for fruitfulness, but for beauty and fragrance as well.

The Return. "**They that dwell under his shadow shall return**" (v. 7). Could this, in a wider, more general application, mean that those who are truly saved, though now deviating from the narrow course, will inevitably be brought back into fellowship with GOD? There may be some scriptural suggestion to encourage such a thought. However, this passage pertains directly to Israel. When the fullness of divine love, their overshadowing banner (Song of Solomon 2:4), long ignored, has its perfect work, the right relationship will be restored and enjoyed.

The Revival. "**They shall revive as the corn**" (v. 7). The prophets frequently gave voice to such an appeal: "**Revive thy work in the midst of the years**" (Habakkuk 3:2). Said the psalmist:

"Wilt thou not revive us again?" (Psalm 85:6). The answer is an emphatic "yes." The plea for quickening - some nine times in the Psalm 119 - means to revive, to keep alive, to nourish, to make strong, to recover, to repair. It would seem that in the ultimate kingdom blessing, the reviving will combine the force of all these meanings.

The Renunciation. **"Ephraim shall say [says], What have I to do any more with idols?"** (v. 8). The use of "Ephraim" instead of "Israel" in this instance is a purposed choice of words by the HOLY SPIRIT. Throughout the book Ephraim was frequently used, though representatively, to set forth the people's involvements in idolatry. Now there is a different attitude entirely. And what has occasioned it? Let Ephraim speak for himself. **"I have heard him, and observed him."**

This ever determines the difference between devotion and indifference, between dedication and waywardness. The regrettable tendency toward spiritual disobedience is scripturally explained in this manner: **"Eyes have they, but they see not; They have ears, but they hear not"** (Psalm 115:5, 6). One glimpse of the LORD through His Word, one earful of His message, and who would not join with Job in saying: **"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"** (Job 42:5, 6)?

The Resolve. **"I am (shall be) like a green fir tree"** (v. 8). With renewed vision and revived determination, Ephraim anticipates better days. Like the fir tree, which is ever green, he promises that his spiritual life will be rich and real. He means now to be, as Paul urged upon Timothy, **"instant in season, out of season"** (II Timothy 4:2). This is the surge of "first love." It indicates spiritual aspiration, but overlooks personal inability to perform.

Hence, The Reminder. **"From me is thy fruit found"** (v. 8). How greatly do we need to be reminded that **"we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"** (II Corinthians 4:7).

We are not **"sufficient of ourselves . . . our sufficiency is of God"** (II Corinthians 3:5). Even in the Millennium there will be sin; and where there is sin there must be temptation. Where there is temptation, man's frailties require divine strength. Should this statement of Ephraim - that he means to be perennially faithful - project him into this future time of predominating righteousness, he nevertheless needs the sustaining power of the LORD. If it has to do with a less favorable day, the need is the greater.

The Recognition. **"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?"** (v. 9). What things? Simply the things of this chapter, if not of the entire book - that GOD's people must not remain away from Him in a state of broken fellowship . . . that they should return. . . that they must bring words of confession in order for GOD to deal with them . . . that they must renounce their misdeeds. . . that GOD can heal the backslider. . . that He does it through His overwhelming love. . . that, being unto His needy people as the dew, He will refresh, renew and revive . . . that a return can be effected. . . that an erstwhile backslider can yet give a strong testimony. . . that GOD can make him fruitful again.

We are not long left in suspense regarding the prominent thought in the mind of the HOLY SPIRIT. Here it is crystallized: **"The ways of the Lord are right"** (v. 9). The difficulty with Israel was they chose divergent paths. They forgot that GOD's way is one; that man's way is

quite another (Isaiah 55:8). They ignored the fact that **"it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"** (Jeremiah 10:23).

They deliberately moved out of the will of GOD and plunged into disaster.

It is from this spiritual dilemma that the LORD eventually will extricate them. His plans for them call for a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). This purpose cannot be disannulled; nor can His hand be turned back (Isaiah 14:27). Had they been wise enough, sufficiently prudent, they would have escaped the treacherous detours over which they trudged so wearily in forty years of wilderness journeyings and these 2,500 years of world-wide dispersion. The outlook was so bleak to Ezekiel that there fell from his lips this plaintive cry: **"Ah Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"** (Ezekiel 11:13).

The LORD quickly assured him: **"I will even gather you [your people] from the people [the nations], and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel"** (Ezekiel 11:17).

Lest with Ephraim we forget our Maker, let us keep **"looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith"** (Hebrews 12:2). Lest with Judah we depart in avenues of waywardness, let us remember that **"the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day"** (Proverbs 4:18).

"Return unto the Lord thy God . . . take with you words" (14:1, 2).

THROUGH TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help" (13:9).

Here is love in its glorious transcendence. Love follows the backslider for a purpose. The purpose is to help. Well may the psalmist exult: the Lord is a **"present help in trouble."** And what trouble is more serious than the shipwreck of one's faith (I Timothy 1:19)? Help is desperately needed then. And who but the LORD can lift one out of the quicksand of subtle, slippery waywardness? **"In me is thine help,"** He says to Israel.

Now observe who was responsible for Israel's debacle. **"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."** Is this not always the case?

- Who ruins the drunkard's life? He does.
- Who undermines the character of a robber? He does.
- Who blemishes the reputation of an immoralist? He does.
- Who crushes the testimony of a backslider? He does.

But how did Israel destroy themselves?

"And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding" (13:2).

Sin is progressive - **"more and more."** This progression always points toward a sad end -

destruction. **"My people are destroyed,"** JEHOVAH laments (4:6). Their divine distinctives were gone. Their idols had eaten like a canker and their testimony was threadbare. Their spiritual influence was nil. The leaves of their spiritual tree, as though frostbitten, had dried and fallen to the earth, there to be trampled under the foot of heathen derision as GOD's people became a hiss and a byword.

In these fearful times of their disobedience, the announcement was made, **"her sun is gone down while it was yet day"** (Jeremiah 15:9). The curtain fell. It has remained down for some 2,500 years, obscuring the face and favor of GOD, and leaving them without a sacrifice, a high priest, a king, etc. But the curtain will rise! **"Thy sun shall no more go down. . . the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended"** (Isaiah 60:20). Now we see something of the LORD's plans for these people - to give them a future and a hope.

The day is coming, nearing all the while, when He shall **"give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"** (Isaiah 61:3). Here is all the scintillating brightness of a diadem of gladness, the coronet of joy, the symbols of an Oriental ceremony of praise.

And one of the most striking features of this doxology of promise is that GOD will not rest until it is fulfilled. **"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth"** (Isaiah 62:1).

This future glory will attract all the nations of the earth (Isaiah 62:2), and no more will the Gentiles spew forth invectives. The mouth of the LORD will state the salutation and it will be honored throughout the world (Isaiah 62:2).

The glorious transformation is explained in this manner: **"Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God"** (Isaiah 62:3). Marvelous? Indeed! The promise continues. **"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married"** (Isaiah 62:4).

Here JEHOVAH answers the question He put to Jeremiah when He took him to the potter's house to speak to him. The vessel was marred, and the potter made it again as seemed good to the potter. That is, he worked it over until it came up to his standard of perfection so he could delight in the work of his hands. It was then that the LORD asked pointedly: **"O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?"** (Jeremiah 18:6). Of course, He can!

Jeremiah answered: **"Ah Lord God! behold thou hast made the Heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee!"** (Jeremiah 32:17). GOD not only can; He will!

Thus, the day in view sees the marred vessel **"made... again."** Then JEHOVAH will say: **"Thou shalt be called Hephzibah [My delight is in her], and thy land (the holy land) Beulah [married]."** That is, the nation, then the delight of the LORD, will be united and attached to the

land as a bride is joined to her husband. And the peoples of the earth will refer to them as "**The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord**" (Isaiah 62:12). This is the beautiful picture just beyond the black corridor of suffering "**the time of Jacob's trouble.**"

Yes, they "**destroyed themselves.**" But how good and gracious of the LORD! How merciful! How patient! How forgiving! He will one day extend His hand of help. He will then lift them to unchallenged eminence among the peoples of the earth.

These are prophetic glimpses of recovery for the patient (Israel) still writhing in a prolonged sickness.

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