

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 THREE -

THE STRAIN UPON DIVINE PATIENCE (Hosea 2)

IT IS CLEARLY EVIDENT that Hosea the prophet had a difficult assignment. He was not told in detail, as was Ezekiel, about the problems which would attend his important ministry. They were readily apparent. He had lived among the people and had witnessed their conduct. He was himself one of the people, and GOD called upon him to acknowledge filial and national relationship (vv. 1,2). He was instructed to say to his brethren, "**Ammi**" (you are my people). And to his sisters, "**Ruhamah**" (I pity you). Then, in a universal manner, he was commanded: "**Plead with your mother** [the nation], **plead!**"

While JEHOVAH made it plain to the prophet that, since Israel's marriage vows had been broken through idolatry, He could not call them His wife, yet Hosea was to appeal to them, to minister to them as to his own kin. He was to have identically the same concern for them that Paul exhibited when he said: "**Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to GOD for Israel is, that they might be saved**" (Romans 10:1).

The prophet's ministry was to be energetic, intense! This is suggested both in the meaning of the word "say" (v. 1), and "plead" (v. 2). It is the same word that is used so effectively in Jeremiah 2:9, meaning "*to grapple*" or "*to strive with,*" as when an officer of the law pleads from the hotel window with the would be suicide who stands precariously on the ledge. In an attempt to find a heart response, the officer raises questions about home, wife, children, etc. Likewise, GOD sought a heart response (7:14).

Through Hosea, He appealed for an abandonment of their lustful escapades and a renunciation of their idolatry. "**Her adulteries from between her breasts**" (v. 2) means the longing within the breast - the outward reach of the affections - for things contrary to the divine will and way.

In the absence of a favorable response, the people must know from GOD's spokesman that they would run the danger of being stripped "**naked . . . as in the day that she was born**" (v. 3) - the equivalent of their condition while in Egyptian captivity when they had nothing to call their own. Or a return to the condition of their fathers in the wilderness when they wandered for forty years, a reverting to days such as when their forebears had to cry to Moses for water.

Then, the prophet was to stress the far-reaching effects of waywardness. He was to show how it imposes a handicap upon succeeding generations. To avert such a catastrophe, JEHOVAH cried out: "**O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!**" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Now there is no alternative. the LORD must severely punish the nation. "**Their mother** [not only the leadership but the adult life] **hath played the harlot,**" is the indicting revelation (v. 5). This means that they practiced idolatry. "**I will go after my lovers**" was the national attitude. The Hebrew here indicates that it was a "settled determination" (cf. Jeremiah 44:17). And let us notice the blasphemy apparent in the latter part of verse 5. They had the audacity to state that their idols furnished their necessary provisions, thus robbing divine Providence of His glory. Such an attitude is inevitable of serious consequences.

The word "**therefore**" (v. 6) introduces the chastening which befell them.

First, their paths to superficial pleasure must be barricaded. To this end, the LORD said, "**I will hedge up thy way with thorns.**" The "**thorns**" were not divinely provided, but were divinely permitted. To strengthen the pinions of faith and to deepen the devotion of heart toward Him, GOD has recorded many instances in His Word of allowed inducements. Job lost herds, property, loved ones, and health. Paul labored under a disturbing physical ailment for which he sought relief three times, then submitted willingly when he learned it was for his edification. Of what the thorns consisted in Hosea's day is not stated. The suggestion in the word itself would indicate disconcerting experiences.

Whether by loss of health or possessions, the diversionary interests of the people must be obscured - at least hindered. The words "hedge" and "wall," to say nothing of the term "**she shall not find her paths,**" denote the effectiveness of the measure to be imposed. The first part of verse 7 strengthens this conclusion, for the people could not pursue their idolatrous endeavors.

The chastening was twofold: GOD cut them off from their idols; then cut off from them His provisions.

"**Therefore**" of verse 6 introduces us to the one phase of divine dealing; the "**therefore**" of verse 9 directs us to the second phase. The LORD must impress upon them the severe lesson that the reality of true blessing is not accorded those living in sin. Until the lesson is learned, GOD will withhold from them the corn and wine, the wool and flax. The corn speaks of their necessary food; the wine, the luxuries of life; the wool and flax, their clothing.

How sadly must the LORD have stated: "**She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil . . . silver and gold**" (v. 8). Why did they not know? From a child, most of us were

taught that "behind the bread, the flour and the mill; behind the mill, the grain, sunshine and rain, and the Father's will." Did He not make it clear that the gold and silver and the cattle on a thousand hills were His? But these ancient people did not know! They utterly lacked gratitude to the true Giver. Such unthankfulness is the forerunner of apostasy (Romans 1:21). They had denied the living GOD.

Instead of believing and acknowledging that "**every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,**" they chose in their blinded hearts to attribute their blessings to lifeless idols.

To read such a statement on paper, or to release such a statement from the lips, seems pathetic in the extreme; but to actually see such an attitude in the daily lives of people who draw their every breath from the hand of GOD (Job 12:10), as JEHOVAH saw them, is an astounding and a horrible thing indeed. Even the psalmist was deeply distressed at such an attitude when he said: "**Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law**" (Psalm 119:53).

Lacking appreciation of the source of their blessings was sad enough, but that was not the full extent of their error. "**They prepared [them] for Baal**" (v. 8). That is to say, they used their God-given blessings in the furtherance of their idolatry.

It has been aptly stated that the Creator's provisions for man may be comprehended in three categorical designations: (1) a land - soil to produce; (2) a helpmeet - a companion at his side; and (3) beasts of burden - to serve him. Yet, according to the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16-20), these very blessings keep people away from the LORD, all because they are not dedicated to Him. The excuses are (1) "**I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.**" (2) "**I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.**" (3) "**I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.**"

GOD said: "**I will destroy her vines and her fig trees**" (v. 12) which the people had attributed to the greatness and benevolence of their idol-gods. And, of course, the consequence was most severe, for their crop failures were of more than one season duration. They were to feel the sting of want, both of food and of clothing (vv. 9, 10). The term "**in the sight of her lovers**" does not here refer to idols, but rather to the ill-gotten associates in their illicit, idolatrous activities, for idols cannot see. Thus, Israel became a spectacle before those with whom they compromised. And GOD saw to it that these "lovers" (perhaps Assyrians) should not furnish aid to them in their impending predicament. "**None shall deliver her out of mine hand**" (v. 10).

The effectiveness of the divine method of imposing the chastisement is further seen in verse 11. The thorny hedge (v. 6), which was to be as a wall to break up their trafficking in idolatry and to cut off their depraved enjoyment in such things, actually resulted in the cessation of their "**mirth**" (v. 11). The word "**mirth**" means "delight," but includes the thought of "the object of their cheer."

The curtain must fall. They are to become dismal in their destitution. The water of their broken cisterns will fail. The blind alley of deception can lead them nowhere but to disillusionment and

dismay. Their own stupidity will mock them in their remorse.

Nor will they find any soothing balm in worship. GOD says: "**I will also cause . . . to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts**" (v. 11). When the secular supports go, and one must fall back either on GOD or on nothing, it is rather instinctive for the heart to seek solace in worship. What would Ezra have done in the hour of his great perplexity if he could not have fallen upon his knees and spread out his hands unto the LORD at the evening sacrifice (Ezra 9:5)? What would David have done when his soul thirsted after the living GOD (Ps. 42:2)? But for these rebellious people, all opportunity of worship will be removed.

Lest there be any doubt as to why this judgment must fall with such severity upon Israel, the LORD clearly states that it is due to their worship of Baal (v. 13). They had burned incense to false gods and adorned themselves with earrings. They took this headlong plunge toward disaster by ignoring the true and living GOD. They "**[forgot] me,**" JEHOVAH sorrowfully admits. Nor was this for a brief period. "**My people have forgotten me days without number,**" the record states at a later date (Jeremiah 2:32). It was worse than if they had never known GOD, than knowing Him to apostatize from Him.

As the juvenile court is not primarily for the purpose of punishing recalcitrants, but to impress upon them the dangers of their wayward course, and to aid their rehabilitation, even so the purpose in view in the dealings of the Almighty with Israel was to show them their iniquities and to urge upon them a return to Himself. He waited patiently for their repentant hearts to cry: "**I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now**" (v. 7).

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