

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Lesson 24, Chapters 14 END

Today we conclude our study of the Book of Hosea. Hosea preached and warned Israel about their consistent double-mindedness and unfaithfulness to Yehoveh and this mainly by means of disobedience to the terms of the Covenant of Moses. Using primarily the metaphor of human marital unfaithfulness (adultery) Hosea convicts Israel of the same type of unfaithfulness to God, which in the spiritual realm is idolatry.

Hosea's message, which was written and given over about a 35-year span of time, took place as the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel's prosperity and security was declining at an ever-accelerating pace. Israel's constant wars with their brother kingdom to their south, Judah, led Israel's kings to do the wrong thing in seeking political alliances with the region's two superpowers: Assyria and Egypt.

For 13 chapters of his book, we have witnessed Hosea bring God's message of condemnation to Israel for their idolatry and disobedience to the covenant. That condemnation included the fact that God would no longer bless Israel with prosperity and security, and in fact has become Israel's enemy. Further, even though the call was to repent and to change their behavior, it was that Israel needed to prepare for the catastrophe that was soon coming... and what was coming (judgment) would not be delayed or modified no matter how much Israel might sincerely beseech God for His mercy.

In response, Israel doubled-down in their efforts to secure favor from their pagan neighbors, especially from Assyria. God called this an act of treachery and made it clear that no matter who Israel might ultimately make a treaty with, it didn't matter because Yehoveh was Israel's God and therefore no one could oppose what He had determined to do. Israel could not save itself, and the only means of their salvation (Yehoveh) was blocked shut. Their doom was certain.

However, now in the 14th chapter of Hosea, Israel receives a message of love and hope. Rescue and restoration would indeed happen for them... but only in the future... many generations removed from Hosea's era. The recipients of that

mercy would come to the distant descendants of Ephraim/Israel and it would happen in the End Times.

Let's re-read Hosea chapter 14.

RE-READ HOSEA CHAPTER 14 all

We studied the opening verses of this chapter last time. These verses are essentially introducing a prayer that the exiled End-Times 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom will pray, and next comes the good news that God will answer and accept them back.

Verse 3 opens with the awkward instruction for Israel to "Take words with you" (at least this is awkward to modern Western ears). The Hebrew word that is being translated to "words" is **debarim**. **Debarim** indeed correctly translates to words. What words is it that Israel is to bring? First, we must be informed that when Israel brought their sacrifices to the Lord at the Temple, they necessarily had to be accompanied with obedience, a contrite heart, and prayer. That is, from the negative viewpoint, sacrifices are worthless without obedience and contrition. Yet from another more positive angle, if Israelites were obedient in the first place, there would be no need for sacrifices of atonement in the second place. This was not a new thought.

CJB 1 Samuel 15:22 *Sh'mu'el said, "Does ADONAI take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying what ADONAI says? Surely obeying is better than sacrifice, and heeding orders than the fat of rams.*

This same thought pattern of voluntary obedience being better than the consequent sacrifices was entrenched in Israelite society as we see demonstrated in the Gospel of Mark, where a Torah-teacher is responding to Yeshua.

CJB Mark 12:32-33 *³² The Torah-teacher said to him, "Well said, Rabbi; you speak the truth when you say that he is one, and that there is no other besides him; ³³ and that loving him with all one's heart, understanding and strength, and*

loving one's neighbor as oneself, mean more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."

So just as we must never buy into the long-held but faulty Church doctrine that grace has replaced law (but rather they are to work together, hand-in-glove), so it is that obedience and sacrifice are not mutually exclusive but rather they, too, are to work together hand-in-glove.

But now, secondly, what exactly are the words that are to be taken with each Israelite as they sacrifice? We begin by recalling that this is an End Times prophecy and occurrence. I can only assume that here the term ***debarim*** (words) means prayer, and considering that verses 3 and 4 *are* the End Times prayer to be prayed, then it must surely be that this is referring to that particular prayer... kind of a more ancient Israelite version of the Lord's Prayer model. Numbers 14:20 and Jeremiah 14:10 use the word ***debarim*** to indicate prayer, so there is precedent for it.

Thus, the first part of verse 3 is an instruction to End Times Israel to sacrifice and to pray this prayer model as part of their repentance. We covered this a little last week, but it bears repeating because the principle has not changed over the centuries; so, it applies to we modern-day Believers in Yeshua just as much as it applied to Israel. It is that for the most part in the Bible, to repent is as much about changing our thoughts as it is about changing our behavior. Our works, our actions, our deeds are the fruit of our faithfulness and God demands that this fruit appear as evidence of our sincere trust in Him. Our fruit is not what we feel in our hearts, nor is the belief we have in Christ. Rather, it is that an active belief we have in Christ ought to produce good fruit (righteous behavior) if that belief is real and sincere. Thus, our bad behaviors are to be replaced with our good (our righteous) behaviors (bad fruit replaced with good fruit). In relation to what God is demanding from Israel, it is that Israel must stop sacrificing wrongly, which is disobedience, and instead must sacrifice properly. Proper sacrifice begins with a proper attitude and with proper prayer.

But even more, in the Holy Scriptures to return to God always, always, always means to return to the ways of the Torah. The ways of the Torah are mostly expressed in the Law of Moses, and the Law of Moses is mostly a God-given code

of morality that instructs us about our actions, deeds, and behaviors (including our worship practices) that necessarily come from a changed attitude and renewed mind that directs our desire to be obedient to God.

The second half of verse 3 presents the prayer of repentance; it begins with "forgive all iniquity and accept what is good". These words are a little cryptic and require some explanation, so I'd like to substitute for these words the thought of what they mean to modern ears. It is: "Forgive us Lord for our many sins, and see our new righteous behavior as payment for our past bad behavior". This falls in line with what we find in the Book of Ezekiel about what true repentance is, and about how God looks upon our behavior.

CJB Ezekiel 3: 17-21 ***17 "Human being, I have appointed you to be a watchman for the house of Isra'el. When you hear a word from my mouth, you are to warn them for me. 18 If I say to a wicked person, 'You will certainly die'; and you fail to warn him, to speak and warn the wicked person to leave his wicked way and save his life; then that wicked person will die guilty; and I will hold you responsible for his death.***

19 On the other hand, if you warn the wicked person, and he doesn't turn from his wickedness or his wicked way, then he will still die guilty; but you will have saved your own life. 20 Similarly, when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and commits wickedness, I will place a stumbling block before him- he will die; because you failed to warn him, he will die in his sin; his righteous acts which he did will not be remembered; and I will hold you responsible for his death. 21 But if you warn the righteous person that a righteous person should not sin, and he doesn't sin; then he will certainly live, because he took the warning; and you too will have saved your life."

I cannot reiterate strongly enough: God defines sin according to what we do... our behavior... and our behavior is the outward display of our inner spiritual condition. Therefore, to repent means to physically and tangibly turn to the ways of the Lord (to the Torah) ... and "the ways of the Lord" inherently mean our good behavior. This principle has, frankly, become all but lost in institutional Christianity and especially within the Evangelical branches that stress grace as a universal, perpetual Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free card that has no connection to our

behavior. And, the implied doctrine that goes along with it is that our "fruit" is how much or how little we feel a warmth towards God, and perhaps towards people, in our hearts. That is far from how the Bible describes the principle of repentance.

Therefore, what the final words of verse 3 are saying (also in line with what Ezekiel said) is: if one changes his behavior for the better (in God's eyes), the bad behavior the person formerly had been exhibiting is ignored when it comes to blessings and curses... rewards and punishments. On the other hand, if a person who has been exhibiting good behavior turns to bad behavior then his former good behavior is also ignored. I shouldn't have to, but let me be clear: by no means am I suggesting that if we behave well that we have no need for salvation in Christ. Nor is one a replacement or substitute for the other. Both are expected by God; righteous behavior is the expected outcome from accepting Jesus's sacrifice as atonement for our bad behavior.

Essentially the prayer words at the end of verse 3 are an acknowledgment that sacrifices are pointless unless the altar is approached with a proper attitude and in tangible obedience. I'll say this another way: the prayer beseeches God to accept good behavior and proper prayer from a contrite heart as a substitute for animal sacrifices. It is interesting that buried in the traditional liturgy recited on the Jewish Day of Atonement proceedings we hear these words: "We are permitted by God to offer prayers instead of sacrifices".

I want to offer something that I cannot prove, but I think is so. I believe those prayer words are intended to comfort exiled Israel who will believe that they must always live in their sin, without hope, remedy, or atonement, because they are away from the Temple and Altar in Jerusalem and therefore have no means to restore fellowship with God through sacrifices. In so many ways this is actually preparing them for their Messiah who will remedy this problem for them as He becomes their once-for-all sacrifice. Thus, what God will need from them is trust and faithfulness in the Messiah, and no further sacrifice is needed.

In verse 4, continuing this future prayer of contrition, Israel promises three things: 1) They will not seek an alliance with Assyria's god, 2) they will not rely on their military for deliverance, and 3) they will no longer create or worship idols

and images. In the future, Israel will say that Ashur will not save us. It does NOT say that Assyria will not save us. Ashur is a pagan god; the national god of Assyria. So, from the 30,000-foot view, the meaning is that a pagan god (a false god) cannot possibly be Israel's deliverer. Promising that they (Israel) will not ride upon horses is referring to chariots. Rashi offers that the riding on horses automatically connects Egypt to Israel in that Egypt was the source of horses for Israel's military. Therefore, the idea being expressed is that Israel proclaims that they will no longer rely on that which is supplied by Assyria or Egypt, and that the specific help Israel was hoping for was help from Assyria's god and from Egypt's provision of horses for Israel's military. What is interesting is that this practice of getting horses from Egypt (for military use) was yet another covenant violation.

CJB Deuteronomy 17:16 *However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again.*

The NJPS version of the Bible translates that 3rd promise the most literally and it is this: "Nor ever gain will we call our handiwork God". Thus, this statement (while in the widest scope certainly includes idols) is really about the human-crafted golden calf images that Ephraim/Israel said were representations of Yehoveh. Once again reminding you that this prayer of repentance belongs in the mouths of End Times members of the 10 Northern Tribes, then it is easier to grasp that Ephraim/Israel and the several generations that will be born in exile will be subject to the curse described in the Torah, but then later in God's mercy, Israel will obtain His blessing. Listen carefully to these words of Deuteronomy that were written at least 500 years (probably more) before Hosea was written. These words are preceded by God warning Israel what will happen when they become disobedient and begin committing idolatry.

CJB Deuteronomy 4:27-31 *²⁷ ADONAI will scatter you among the peoples; and among the nations to which ADONAI will lead you away, you will be left few in number. ²⁸ There you will serve gods which are the product of human hands, made of wood and stone, which can't see, hear, eat or smell. ²⁹ However, from there you will seek ADONAI your God; and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and being. ³⁰ In your distress, when all these things have come upon you, in the acharit-hayamim, you will return to ADONAI your God and*

listen to what he says; ³¹ for ADONAI your God is a merciful God. He will not fail you, destroy you, or forget the covenant with your ancestors which he swore to them.

Notice how in verse 30 it says that in the ***acharit-hayamim*** (the world to come, the End Times) that Israel will return to Yehoveh (that is, they will return to the ways of the Torah). This is what we are reading about in this End Times prayer.

The final words of verse 4 speaks of it being only in the God of Israel that the fatherless (orphans) find mercy (or pity). In the West, especially, we can be a little blind to the reality that in the 1st century there were no such things as orphanages. Nor was there governmental foster care or welfare or child protective agencies or anyone to protect their rights. Orphans were in a very bad way, and their survival and possibility of any kind of reasonable life depended on the pity of someone stepping forward. Thus, such an act of mercy from an individual towards an orphan was seen as among the highest virtues for an Israelite. So, this statement at the end of verse 4 is phrased in an Israelite 8th century B.C. cultural way to attribute to God's character the highest of virtues in that no human can match such great mercy He so graciously gives to Israel, which will soon, themselves, become a kind of orphan because their God is abandoning them.

Verse 5 is saying that after future Israel offers this prayer of true repentance, and after Yehoveh graciously accepts it as actual repentance, Israel's former abundance will begin to return. Three metaphors of nature are used to describe God setting His anger against them aside and instead healing them of all their curses for their covenant violations. "The dew" describes an abundance of water that makes plants grow almost without limit in a lush environment. "Blossoming like the lily" speaks of Israel's flowering beauty before God. "Casting roots like the trees of Lebanon" speaks of the strength and stability that will characterize the people and nation of the future Israel. This third metaphor about the roots of trees in Lebanon continues in verse 6.

The forests and plant life of Lebanon were legendary in ancient times, akin to a Garden of Eden. When we think of the Middle East, so much of it is a dry, barren land of sand, just as it was in Bible times. So, it's easy to imagine how the people

of Bible times in this large region of infertile and unproductive landscape would be so overwhelmed by the beauty and abundance of Lebanon that it become the object of myths and poems as it was seen as near heaven on earth. What Yehoveh had promised the refugee rabble coming up out of Egypt so long ago would be a land all their own of milk and honey so long as they were obedient to the Covenant of Moses. But, in the future, it will be reinstated and the promise made even more grand. It's not unlike the incredible glory of the Earth upon Creation that quickly went into disrepair when the sin of the first couple squashed perfection, but yet we are promised in the Prophets that there will be a re-created Universe and Earth that will surpass the magnificence of the original. And in both cases, the Lord does this in His mercy for a rebellious humanity that had so disappointed Him and ruined what He had first given to them...to us all... in an unapproachable act of love.

Verse 8 begins with speaking of Israel (assuming that's who the "they" is) as living under His shade or alternatively under His shadow. The Hebrew word that is being translated as shade or shadow is *tsele* and it can mean either. Very likely, though, the better translation to English is shade because the expression to be in someone's shade is meant as being placed under the protection of someone more powerful. Usually, this expression referred to kings or aristocratic patrons. Here's an example.

CJB Judges 9:15 *The thorn bush replied, 'If you really make me king over you, then come and take shelter in my shade. But if not, let fire come out of the thorn bush and burn down the cedars of the L'vanon!'*

Here's another example.

CJB Ezekiel 31:6 *In its boughs all the birds of the air had their nests, beneath its branches all the wild animals gave birth to their young, and all great nations lived in its shade.*

There are other examples, but this ought to suffice to make the point. So, this is speaking of God offering the ultimate protection for His battered people. Living in His shade means no one can harm them without His permission. Considering what exiled Israel has been through for these past 2700 years, this has to be

such a welcome promise for those of the 10 tribes who are, today, as I speak, being welcomed back home to the Land they were exiled from in the 8th century B.C.

It is said that Israel will blossom like a vine. Exactly how we are to picture that isn't clear except that it is part of a string of agricultural metaphors that were meant to strike wonderment and delighted awe into the hearts of the Israelites. So, in reality, no further explanation is needed for these poetic words. The same can be said for the pleasing aroma that comes from the wine of Lebanon... with the idea being that whatever agricultural product comes from Lebanon is the ultimate in quality and quantity, and so this describes what the land of Israel will also be like.

Verse 9 has God placing a rhetorical question into Ephraim's mouth. It is "why would I have any more use for idols?" All the things that the gods of the pagan idols Israel had relied on for so many years...fertility, security, rain... Israel now realizes that it was actually Yehoveh, their national God, doing the providing. Yehoveh is confirming to Israel that only by giving up their idolatry can the promised restoration occur... the two things are linked. No matter how many times God used prophets to remind Israel of that fact, Israel continued to give credit and glory to the Baals for their prosperity. But in the future Israel will acknowledge that they know exactly where their blessings come from, and so they have no need for pagan gods and idols. Therefore, Israel responds to all of God's wonderful promises of merciful restoration by saying that they will humbly accept them and they liken God to a big, green cypress tree (this connects back to verse 8 and God providing Israel with His "shade").

Hosea's message is one of Israel's Redemption History, and a reminder of who they are (descendants of Jacob). Their history is one of blessing, then curse, that will be followed by a future new era of blessing. This is the very definition of "restoration". Israel received their warnings from Hosea by reminding them what the terms of the Covenant of Moses contained; terms for them to be blessed, and the terms for them to be cursed. The thing is, Israel has forgotten the Covenant of Moses and instead adopted manmade traditions and worship practices so they know nothing of those blessings and curses. Each curse in the Torah is carefully

defined as to what it will entail, and connected to exactly which covenant term was broken.

Just as no specific timeframe has been laid out for Christ followers to know when our Messiah will return, so in Hosea no specific timeframe has been laid out to know 1) how long the curse/punishment will go on, and 2) when that time of restoration will occur. That hope can live and survive only in the faith and trust that it *will happen* even though it may take centuries to come about.

Ephraim/Israel was given no hope or hint that their restoration would occur in their lifetime, anymore than we Believers are given any hope or hint that the return of our Savior will occur in our lifetime. So, if the timeframe for these things is so distant and indefinite, why would ancient Israel... and us... be told about them in such an urgent manner? In a word: preparation. Israel was given... and we have been given... time to prepare. Time to prepare our minds, time to repent, and time to prepare our lifestyles and our pantries. Yet, since we don't know the timeframe then to assume that it won't be tomorrow is quite foolish. We must prepare...now. Today.

Part of the process of repenting for Israel was to seek their true God and to understand that God's divine mercy and blessing cannot be purchased with material things. They would still need to come forward with sacrifices and offerings, but these were to be accompanied with, or even preceded by, sincere words that Hosea describes as the fruit of their lips. Doing this is what God accepts as repentance, and nothing less. Repentance is a combination of a change of mind and a change of behavior. One without the other is not acceptable to Yehoveh.... not then, and not now.

It is critical that we keep in mind that this restoration for Israel is entirely coupled to the End Times and so whatever we understand about the End Times directly affects both Believers and Israel. The term the Bible uses for this new age is the Kingdom of Heaven, something that Yeshua said was "near".

Believers and followers of Yeshua, please pay close attention to the final verse (verse 10) of this final chapter of Hosea because it is every bit as much for us as it was for ancient Ephraim/Israel. Stuart aptly calls this verse a "Challenge to the Wise Reader". I want us to re-read it.

CJB Hosea 14:10 *Let the wise understand these things, and let the discerning know them. For the ways of ADONAI are straight, And the righteous walk in them, but in them sinners stumble.*

The RSV puts it this way:

RSV Hosea 14:9 *Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.*

This is a fully encapsulated thought that operates much like what our Bibles put as either chapter 13 verse 16 or chapter 14 verse 1 (we discussed this in our last lesson). I see it very much as a Proverb... a Wisdom saying. I suspect that Hosea had Psalm 107 in mind when he wrote these inspired words.

CJB Psalm 107:43 *Let whoever is wise observe these things and consider ADONAI's loving deeds.*

Fellow Believer, do you consider yourself wise? If you are not sure, would you like to become wise? Then the solution is to understand the message of the Prophet Hosea. This entire book is about Israel turning away from the ways of God and God specifically addresses what and where these ways of His are set down and enumerated.

CJB Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for want of knowledge. Because you rejected knowledge, I will also reject you as cohen for me. Because you forgot the Torah of your God, I will also forget your children.*

The ways of God are set down in the Covenant of Moses, and so the Book of Hosea uses the various commandments of that covenant as the reasons for Israel's punishment, that is banishment from their land. The ways of God are STILL the Covenant of Moses; that has never changed despite institutional Christianity insisting that Jesus changed it. Jesus Himself forcefully denies that such a change ever occurred in a passage that most of you are already familiar with.

CJB Matthew 5: 17-20 ***17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. 18 Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. 19 So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"***

Therefore, when in Hosea 14:10 we next encounter the words "for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them", knowing that "the ways of the Lord" directly mean the Torah, then it simply means that knowing and obeying the Torah is how one walks in righteousness. Douglas Stuart, the conservative Christian Bible scholar, completely agrees with this notion. In his highly esteemed and often quoted commentary on the Book of Hosea he says this:

"The ways of Yahweh are in fact covenant stipulations of the Pentateuch. For the righteous to walk in them is nothing other than for them to keep them".

On the other hand (as say the final words of Hosea's book) "but transgressors stumble in them". To stumble of course means to disobey the Torah... to disobey the terms of the Covenant of Moses. To be wise means to obey the covenant terms, and in contrast, to be a transgressor is to disobey the covenant terms; it is just that simple. Just as that principle applied to ancient Israel, it also applies to modern-day Believers who have been joined to Israel's covenant by means of our trust in the work of our Savior, Yeshua, on the cross.

The implication is that if it is wisdom to seek, learn, and do the Law of Moses, then it is foolishness not to. What we have here is nothing less than a governing dynamic of God that is intended for all humanity. To continue quoting Stuart:

"The words of verse 10 serve as a reminder to readers of all generations that Hosea's message continues as a message for them. The words are not simply directed to his contemporaries, thus being of no more than arcane interest to us.

Rather, the ways of Yahweh are a guide to the righteous, and a source of understanding to the intelligent of all successive periods."

This concludes our study of the Book of Hosea.