

Hosea

INTRODUCTION

Hosea, whose name means "Salvation" or "Deliverance," was chosen by God to live out his message to his people by marrying a woman who would be unfaithful to him. His sensitivity toward the sinful condition of his countrymen and his sensitivity toward the loving heart of God fitted him for this difficult ministry.

Hosea gives the historical setting for his ministry by naming the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah) and the king of the northern kingdom of Israel (Jeroboam II) who ruled during the period of his prophecy (1:1). This sets the dates from 755 B.C. to 715 B.C. Though all the gauges of outward success seemed positive for Israel, underneath disaster was lurking. The people of this period enjoyed peace, plenty, and prosperity; but anarchy was brewing, and it would bring the political collapse of the nation in a few short years. Hosea describes the characteristic social conditions of his day: corrupt leaders, unstable family life, widespread immorality, class hatred, and poverty. Though people continued a form of worship, idolatry was more and more accepted and the priests were failing to guide the people into ways of righteousness. In spite of the darkness of these days, Hosea holds out hope to inspire his people to turn back to God.

The Book of Hosea is about a people who needed to hear the love of God, a God who wanted to tell them, and the unique way God chose to demonstrate His love to His people. The people thought that love could be bought ("Ephraim has hired lovers," 8:9), that love was the pursuit of self-gratification ("I will go after my lovers who give *me*," 2:5), and that loving unworthy objects could bring positive benefits ("They became an abomination like the thing they loved," 9:10). God wanted Israel to know His love, which reached out for unlikely and unworthy objects ("When Israel was a child, I loved him," 11:1), which guided with gentle discipline ("bands of love," 11:4), and which persisted in spite of the peoples' running and resisting ("How can I give you up?" 11:8).

The problem was how to get this message of God's love to a people not inclined to listen, and not likely to understand if they did listen. God's solution was to let the prophet be his own sermon. Hosea would marry an impure woman ("wife of harlotry," 1:2), love her fully and have children by her (1:3), and go after her and bring her back when she strays ("Go again, love," 3:1). In sum, Hosea was to show by his own love for Gomer the kind of love God had for Israel.

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to Hosea, Sam Middlebrook)

Hosea 1:1-11

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam the son Jehoash, king of Israel. (1:1)

In the year 721 B.C., that eighth century before the Christian era, which witnessed the rise of Rome and Babylon, there happened in Samaria the saddest tragedy of the Old Testament. Amid scenes of horror, the kingdom of the 10 tribes perished, their fair city of Samaria fell under the hands of the Assyrians and Israel's tribes were carried captive into far distant lands. At the same time other captives from these lands were brought to populate Samaria; and thus, as far as it could be made humanly possible, the extermination of the nation was accomplished.

For 50 years, pious and patriotic hearts had foreseen this inevitable fate, and had forewarned this sinful people of the coming overthrow. After the brilliant career of Jeroboam II, which raised Israel for a time to her old preeminence, but which was but the flicker of the candle flame before it sank in darkness, the story of Israel's kings was an unbroken record of anarchy and assassination.

God's time of love is always the hour of man's emergency. Just as Elijah and Elisha came to Israel in the dreadful days of Jezebel, and Jeremiah hovered like a guardian angel over Jerusalem two centuries later when she fell, so God sent His messengers again and again to Israel to plead against their reckless crimes, and avert, if possible, their threatened judgment. We have already seen how Jonah was the counselor and friend of Jeroboam, and how Amos came up from Judah to warn him and his people against the coming peril.

But above all others, there was one man who for more than 60 years stood as the protecting angel between them and their fate. He lived and prophesied from the time of Jeroboam to the time of Hezekiah, a span of a good deal more than half a century. His beautiful name, the same as Joshua, Jesus and Messiah, signifies "salvation" or "savior." By a striking coincidence, the last king of Israel bore the same name as the last prophet. Both were Hosea or Hoshea. Both had the same significance; but the one, the king, had stood for the best that man can do to save, while the other, the prophet, stood for the salvation of the Lord. Thus God was pointing forward, as if by a living parable, to the greater Savior that was in due time to come to deliver His people, not only from their calamities and enemies, but from that which was the root of all their trouble—their sin.

The life and writings of Hosea, when considered in connection with his place in the tragic history of his time, present the most pathetic picture, perhaps, of the Old Testament. Let us first look at the man, and then at his message to his own people and to our times.

Like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and like the greater Prophet to whom his life pointed forward, the Man of Sorrows, he was early baptized into a ministry of suffering. His own life became a sort of object lesson of the story of his country and the message of God to His people. He was commanded by Jehovah to marry a woman of bad reputation, like so many of the women of her time, as a divine picture of God Himself, stooping to take to His heart the vile sinner whom He so strangely loves and saves. Three children were born of this ill-mated union, and as one by one, each little babe lay in its cradle, it also became a living picture of the mournful story that was so soon to be enacted. The firstborn was called Jezreel, meaning, "I will punish," and he was thus made a living prophecy of the judgment that God was so soon to send. The second was a daughter, and her name was Lo-Ruhamah, meaning, "no longer show love," and she forewarned her people of the fact that God's mercy for them soon should end. The third was a son, and his sad name was Lo-Ammi, meaning, "not my people." This expressed the last stage of the impending calamity, when they would be cut off, not merely from God's mercy but from God's covenant, and He should drop them utterly.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

The prophet must, as it were in a looking glass, show them *their sin*. The prophet must, as it were through a perspective glass, show them their ruin; and this he does in the names given to the children born of this adulteress. (Matthew Henry)

Hosea married at the Lord's request the prostitute Gomer who bore three children whose names are terribly significant.

What were those names and what was the significance of each?

Does Hosea 1:10 and other parts of scripture give an indication that eventual restoration will occur? Does Hosea 1:11 say anything about who their leader will be?

Ps. 2 Hos. 2:14-23 Amos 9:11-15

Hosea 2:1-23

Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.

And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

Hosea 2:6-7

This is a parenthesis of mercy in a passage of threatening. It relates to a people to whom the Lord was united by bonds of covenant love, who had, nevertheless, been faithless and rebellious. Strangely enough, it begins with a "therefore"; and the logic of it lies in the immutable resolve of the unchanging God never to renounce his covenant, nor utterly to cast away his chosen; as, also, in his unchangeable determination to win them to himself.

Ordinary means have missed their aim. The details are given in previous verses; and then we read "therefore": showing that because of former failures the Lord is about to try further measures.

(Spurgeon's Sermon Notes, C. H. Spurgeon)

What means does God use to reclaim Israel?

Explain how the prophet Hosea taking Gomer as his wife is similar to the Lord taking us to Himself.

By Jesus espousing us as His wife has what chief aim for us?

Eph. 5:15-32

Show the vows in this chapter that promise permanence and security to those God has entered into marriage. Compare these vows with those in Eph. 5:25-32.

Hos. 2:19-20

A. B. Simpson's explanation of Hosea 1:1-11 states that Israel "would be cut off, not merely from God's mercy but from God's covenant, and He should drop them utterly." Now we see C. H. Spurgeon's commentary on Hosea 2:1-23 stating "the unchanging God never to renounce his covenant, nor utterly to cast away his chosen." **How do you reconcile these two different conclusions in the book of Hosea?**

Hos. 2:19-23 Hos. 3:4-5 Hos. 5:14-15 Hos. 8:1-14 Hos. 9:15-17 Hos. 10:13-15 Hos. 11:8-12
Hos. 12:14 Hos. 14:2, 4 & 8

Hosea 3:1-5

After all this there came a second trial to the prophet. The wife of his bosom, whom he had reclaimed from shame and made the mother of his children, went back once more to her old life of sin and forsook her husband and sought her lovers. All this was symbolic of Israel's turning from God after He had called them and saved them. Then follows the story of the reclaiming of the unfaithful wife; but now she is not received back fully at first, but for a time is placed on probation. "You are to live with me many days," is the contract, "and I will live with you" (3:3). This long interval was intended to foreshadow Israel's centuries of waiting through the times of the Gentiles, until God's set time shall have come, and then the restoration will be complete, and they shall be betrothed to Him in faithfulness, never to wander again.

Hosea is the prophet of Israel's restoration. He tells us that the time is coming surely when they shall sing again in the mountains of Samaria and the heights of Zion, and the fearful curse of ages shall be wiped away in God's eternal favor and His everlasting covenant.

Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," they will be called "sons of the living God." The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. (1:10-11)

I will plant her for myself in the land;
I will show my love to the one I called "Not my loved one."
I will say to those called "Not my people," "You are my people";
and they will say, "You are my God." (2:23)

Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days. (3:5)

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

The fourth verse of Hosea three is, I might say, the great prophecy in the Old Testament with regard to the Interregnum, a period covered by the image of Daniel 2 and the New Testament expression, "the times of the Gentiles"—the time during which the scepter is departed from Judah, and representative governmental power is entrusted to the

Gentile nations until those times are fulfilled, and Zion becomes the center of government for the earth, and the place from where God's law will go forth, as never before, to all nations.

It is of interest to observe that the most authoritative Jewish commentators have themselves admitted that the fourth verse of our chapter gives a graphic description of the present condition of the Jewish people. I translate the following passage from one of the greatest of Rabbinic writers. (Kimchi) Speaking on the expression "many days," he says: "These are the days of this present captivity, in which we are in the power of the Gentiles, and in the power of their kings and princes, and we are 'without a sacrifice and without an image,' *i.e.*, without a sacrifice to God, and without an image to false gods; and 'without an ephod, and without teraphim,' *i.e.*, without an ephod to God, by means of which we could foretell the future, as with the Urim and Thummim; and without teraphim to false gods. And this is the present condition of all the children of Israel in this present captivity."

(The Ancient Scriptures, David Baron)

Can we see the destiny of Israel unfolding before our very eyes?

Ezek. 37:21-25 Hos. 5:13-6:3

Hosea 4:1-19

Many fancy that they know God, who know Him not. Of these it may be said by God, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (v. 6). Whatever else men know, if they know not God as a reconciled Father in Christ, they are destitute of the only knowledge which is essential to an immortal being. And what renders their ignorance inexcusable is, they *might* know the saving truth, and Him who is the Truth, if they would know both it and Him. But if they will not, God will reject them, even as they reject the knowledge of Him. He will forget them and their children who forget Him (v. 6).

It is the last and most hopeless stage of guilt when the sinner's conscience ceases to chide him, and the godly must leave him to himself. The sinner, like Israel, often is impatient of the narrowness of God's way; but woe be to him when God gives him his guilty wish, and lets him roam at "large" (v. 16), like Israel in Assyria, in a broad way indeed, but one which ends in destruction! Israel, who was once borne by Jehovah "on eagles' wings" (Exod. 19:4), was now about to be borne on "the wings of the wind," like chaff driven away. Let us all shun Israel's sin, as we would escape Israel's doom. Let us shrink from every pollution, and give all diligence, amidst our higher privileges, to make our calling and election sure.

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

What has the peoples' lack of knowledge to do with their state?

Hos. 4:6 Hos. 14:9

Hosea 4:12 states: "The spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray". **How were the Israelites being harlots? How can Christians be the same?**

Hos. 4:11-13 Hos 5:4 John 15:21 Eph. 5:17-21

Hosea 5:1-6:11

In the fifth and sixth chapters their punishment has already begun. The Assyrians are upon their border, but instead of turning to God they resort to diplomacy and deceit. They play alternately with Egypt on the one side as an ally, and then Assyria on the other, and their dishonesty is punished by losing the friendship of both. At last God turns away and exclaims, "Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me" (5:15).

The very next verse finds the vacillating people crying, "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds" (6:1). But, alas, it is all transitory. "What can I do with you, Ephraim?" He cries, "What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears" (6:4). "They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow" (7:16).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Hosea saw appeals to Assyria would not save Israel, for her wound was too serious to be cured by such means. **What remedy does moral and spiritual sickness need?**

In Hosea 6:1-3 there seems to be sincere repentance on Israel's part. **What is God's response to their appeal? Is it because of their hard-heartedness that they are incapable of true repentance?**

Hosea 7:1-16

All the while Ephraim was unconscious of his own real state. The foreign powers, Assyria and Egypt, whose aid he had invoked, only "devoured his strength" (v. 9); yet he knew it not. Like men who shut their eyes to the gray hairs here and there, the tokens of their approaching old age and death, so men spiritually will not take notice of the signs of their own declension in vital religion. The outward forms and the stated services remain, but, like Samson, after he had, for the sake of sensual pleasure, betrayed the secret of his strength, they are unconscious that God has departed from them. And when God's chastisements are sent upon them, their "pride" (v. 10) keeps them from acknowledging and repenting of their sins, and "returning to the Lord their God." "For all" their afflictions they will not "seek" Him, so that nothing remains but destroying judgments, now that all the means of correction and grace have been tried in vain.

When the God of Israel would have bent his covenant-nation as a bow to direct arrows against the kingdom of Satan, heathendom, and ungodliness, they were "like a deceitful bow," (Hos. 7:16) which carries not its arrows true to the mark: "the rage of their tongue" was "as an arrow shot out" (Jer. 9:8) against God and man: and ultimately they themselves "fall" by it. The very heathen were amazed at it. Egypt, in whom they trusted, made them "their derision." The raging and suicidal fanaticism of the Jews astonished even the Romans, who were the executioners of God's vengeance on them. Such is the portion of all who forsake God for the world: the world, which was the instrument of their sin, shall be the instrument of their punishment.

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

What are the accusations against Israel in chapter 7?

Hosea 8:1-10:15

And so he gives them up again to punishment and judgment. "The days of punishment are coming" (9:7). "They sow the wind and reap the whirl-wind" (8:7). "My God will reject them" (9:17). "All your fortresses will be devastated—as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed to the ground with their children" (10:14).
(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

"Ephraim is stricken, Their root is dried up; They shall bear no fruit." (Hos. 9:16) **Who is Ephraim?**

Hos. 10:1, 12, 13 Hos. 14:2, 8

When God departs from a people or an individual, then indeed "the glory is departed" (1 Sam. 4:21). God repays in kind those who depart from Him, by departing from them; and what else is the chief horror of hell, save that God is not there? Terrible as is the withdrawal of all God's gifts, it is as nothing compared with the withdrawal of God Himself.

Ephraim, as his neighbor Tyrus, was "planted" by a special providence "in a pleasant place," like the primeval Paradise; but now, on account of "all his wickedness" (Hos. 9:15), he was as a blasted and "smitten" tree, with "dried up root," and therefore without hope of "fruit" in time to come (Hos. 9:16). The God who is love itself, because of their "great hatred" (Hos. 9:7), and their provocations in the very scenes of His former loving-kindness (Hos. 9:15), now "hated them" with that holy abhorrence with which He must ever regard that which is opposed to love. He cast them away, to become "wanderers among the nations," like Cain, with the brand of His displeasure attending them every where, "because they did not hearken unto Him" (Hos. 9:17). If, then, God so punished the apostasy of His own elect nation, what guarantee of impunity can any Christian nation, or any individual professors, have, that they shall escape the wrath of God, if they fail to bring forth fruits in agreement to their high calling? Let us not be high-minded but fear. For "if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee (Rom. 11:20-21). (A. R. Fausset) **Is there any sense today that God has withdrawn Himself from once spiritually minded nations like the United Kingdom and United States?**

"Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty." (Hosea 10:2)

Israel as a nation, divided its allegiance between Jehovah and Baal, and so became good for nothing, and was given up to captivity. God has made one heart in man, and the attempt to have two, or to divide the one, is in every case injurious to man's life.

A *church* divided into parties, or differing in doctrine, becomes heretical, or contentious, or weak and useless.

A *Christian*, aiming at another object besides his Lord's glory, is sure to spend a poor, unprofitable life. He is an idolater, and his entire character will be faulty.

A *seeker after Christ* will never find Him while his heart is hankering after sinful pleasures, or self-righteous confidences: his search is too faulty to be successful.

A *minister*, aiming at something else besides his one object, whether it be fame, learning, philosophy, rhetoric, or gain, will prove to be a very faulty servant of God.

In any case this heart-disease is a dire malady. A broken heart is a blessing; but a divided heart is a mortal malady. (Charles H. Spurgeon) **Is a person with a divided heart capable of receiving saving faith? How does a divided heart affect a believer?**

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." (Hosea 10:12)

What should we think of a farmer who allowed his finest fields to lie fallow year after year?

Yet men neglect their souls; and besides being unprofitable, these inward fields become full of weeds, and exceedingly foul. You see to everything else, will you not see to your souls? It is God who calls you to break up the fallow ground of your uncultivated heart, and he waits to aid you therein.

Regard attentively the argument which he uses: "for it is time to seek the Lord." Thus, God reasons with you. To this he adds instructions which deserve our best attention. (Charles H. Spurgeon) **When is it time to seek the Lord? What is the peculiar work in seeking the Lord? How long should this be done? What will come of it?**

Ps. 105:1-6 Isa. 55:6 Matt. 6:33 John 1:12-13 Rom. 3:21-22 Heb. 10:37

Hosea 11:1-12

Israel would not have God for his king, therefore, in just retribution, "the Assyrian should be his king" (Hosea 11:5). Israel's own politic counsels (as he thought them) proved the source of his ruin (Hosea 11:6). Hoshea the king, by conspiring with the Egyptians, thought to secure his kingdom; but this proved to be the very occasion of its overthrow, by his thereby bringing down upon himself and his people the destroying hosts of Assyria. So short-sighted is human sagacity apart from piety towards God. Surely "He takes the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:13).

Yet such is the tender compassion of God towards the people of His covenant, that though they were "bent to backsliding," and 'clung to it' with desperate tenacity (Hos. 11:7), God still cries, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hos. 11:8) It is true, Israel deserved to be treated as Admah and the other four guilty cities of the plain. But "God is not man," that He should change from the everlasting covenant made with Israel's forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Hos. 11:9). Therefore, though His justice requires that the guilty ones in Israel should suffer, since He is "the Holy One in the midst" of the elect nation; yet His covenanted "mercy rejoices over judgment" as regards *the nation*. Accordingly, having once punished Ephraim, He will, when He shall have restored the people, "destroy" them no more. The time will come when His heart of infinite love shall turn to His long cast off people, and His "repentings" of the past evil inflicted on them shall be "kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). Then "shall they walk after the Lord" (Hos. 11:9), instead of backsliding from Him. His "children" shall flock to Him "as the doves to their windows," from the various regions of dispersion (Hos. 11:11). So also the children of the spiritual Israel, "the remnant according to the election of grace," both of the circumcision and the uncircumcision, through the electing love of God, which triumphs over all their demerits and backslidings, shall at last "come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Christ Himself will place them in the "many mansions" of His "Father's house" (John 14:2). Just as when Israel walked "with deceit" (Hos. 11:12), yet Judah was faithful with the saints, and with the Most Holy One; so God unto the end of the world shall never be without witnesses faithful to Him, and therefore "ruling with God" in spirit here, and about to reign with Christ in transfigured bodies hereafter. Let us see that our aim is not to reign without Christ now, but to rule already, through His Spirit in us, over the world, the flesh, and Satan; so hereafter shall we reign with Him in glory, when He who is our Life shall be manifested (Col. 3:1-4).

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

Read Hosea 11:1-4 and Numbers 24:8 and describe the condition the people should be in after being taken out of Egypt?

Hosea 12:1-14

Ephraim, by following after the alliances of idolaters and the worship of their idols, "fed on wind:" no, worse, not only were they as empty and unsatisfying as the wind would be to the hungry, but they were also hurtful and deadly, as is the scorching "east wind" (v. 1). Instead of having God as their shelter, they exposed themselves to the fatal blast by "in-

creasing lies:" for the inevitable result of all that is false in intention, opinion, words, deeds, dealings, worship, and hopes, is "desolations." Instead of renewing their covenant with God, they made a covenant with the Assyrians; and then, with characteristic fickleness, they tried to escape from the obligations of their covenant, by applying to Egypt for help. They who deal falsely with God are little to be trusted in their dealings with men. Most justly, therefore, God executed His judgments on them by the hands of the world-powers through whom they had hoped to escape them.

Not even Judah was blameless, though less guilty than Israel (v. 2). God therefore admonishes the former, and declares His purpose to the latter of "recompensing them according to their doings." Their apostasy stood in marked contrast to their godly forefather, "Jacob," by whose name, therefore, He calls them (v. 2). Jacob showed a presage of his faith from infancy, taking his brother by the heel in the womb (v. 3). His descendants were more like Esau, the creature of sense and self-indulgence, than like Jacob their ancestor, the man of faith, who all through life sought spiritual blessings. Jacob "by his strength had power with God." But it was not inherent strength, but strength derived from the Divine angel with whom he wrestled. The angel of Jehovah was overcome, because he wished to be overcome. Instead of "pleading against Jacob with His great power, He put strength in him" (Job 22:6). Jacob's conscious weakness made him cast himself with his whole weight upon Almighty strength. So he became an "Israel," or prince with God, having such power with Him that God would deny him nothing that he asked of real blessing. Let us imitate his pattern, and, feeling our own nothingness, take hold of Christ, our Elder Brother and our All in all, wrestling with Him in prayer, determined not to let Him go until He bless us; though, indeed, *He is* more willing to give than *we* to ask: and when we ask aright, it is He who, by His Spirit, prompts the prayer of all-conquering faith.

Jacob not only wrestled and "made supplication unto" the Lord, but also "wept." Tears were the indication of one whose words of prayer were no feigned words, but whose heart was deeply moved with the sense of his great needs, and whose feelings were excited to vehement and longing desires. Therefore, at Bethel "he found God," because God first "found him," and moved him so to weep and supplicate. And there God spoke, not only with him, but "with us," whosoever of us follow the unconquerable faith of his tearful prayers. God, through his case, admonishes us, if we would find Him, to 'cling to God in faith, rising, in proportion to our fears, so fast that, if God would cast us into hell, He should (as one said) Himself go with us; so should hell not be hell to us' (*Pusey*).

The "memorial" or character by which the Lord desires to be remembered by His people is "Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord." As JEHOVAH, He is now still the same unchangeable God such as He manifested Himself to Jacob. And He is as all-powerful as He is all-gracious, for He is "the Lord, the God of hosts," having all the powers of heaven and earth at His command. "Therefore," as the practical inference, God speaks to each individual soul as He spoke to Israel, "Turn thou to thy God." Israel after the flesh could claim God as *their* God: so all the spiritual Israel can equally regard God as *their* God in the covenant of grace. What consolation it is calculated to impart, that we should, in turning to God, regard as *ours* Him who is as unchangeably faithful to His promises as He is all-powerful in fulfilling them! At the same time, as a proof of our sincerity, let us, while we "wait on our God," be careful to "keep mercy and justice" towards our fellow-man (v. 6). Above all, let our waiting on God be not by fits and starts, but "continually." Men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1). Even unfaithful Ephraim had intervals of goodness, but their "goodness was as a morning cloud, and as the early dew" that soon "goeth away" (Hos. 6:4). But it is peculiar to the believer to *wait* on God *patiently* (Ps. 40:1), and "continually." whereas of the hypocrite Job asks (Job 27:10), "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he *always* call upon God?"

In sad contrast to God's command to "keep mercy and judgment" stood Ephraim's "deceit" as a "merchant," whereby he was no longer entitled to the honorable title of "Israel," but rather to be named "Canaan." How much of deceit is practiced by so-called Christians of the trading world, who are "Christians" in nothing else but the name! Yet all the while, like Ephraim, saying, "I am become rich . . . no iniquity shall be found in me" (v. 8), they think that their success is a proof of their integrity; and that because God does not immediately punish their dishonest cleverness, that God approves of their ways. None are more blind to their spiritual danger than those eager in pursuing gain. The conventional tricks of trade, and the alleged difficulty of competing with others save by practicing the usual frauds, are made the excuses for usages which, whatever else they gain, end in the eternal loss of the soul! In regard to spiritual riches, the soul is never so poor as when it is satisfied with its own imaginary riches. Let us beware of boasting of or trusting in riches of our own making, whether earthly or heavenly, and let us make Christ our treasure, both for time and for eternity.

Notwithstanding Ephraim's sin, God has still mercy in store for the nation; "and will yet make" His ancient people "to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast." The feast of tabernacles was a scene of joy following five days after the day of atonement, which was one of sorrow. So our being dead spiritually with Christ, our great Atonement, must precede the joy of living with Him. And as the law was read publicly in that feast, so shall the holiness of the law of God be then first realized fully by "the spirits of just men made perfect."

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

How does the catalog of Israel's sins illustrate the truth of Galatians 6:7?

Hosea 13:1-16

Sin was the cause of the awful change about to pass on Ephraim, as contrasted with the exalted station which he once held. "The wages of sin is death." Yes, sin has in itself from the first the seed of death, though that seed may not be developed and manifested in its terrible effects till a subsequent time. Thus from the moment that Ephraim "offended in respect to Baal" "he died" before God. Sin separates from God, the true life of the soul. Let all professors of religion ever remember this, that sin, habitual or unatoned for, and spiritual life, cannot co-exist in the same individual; for, says the apostle (Rom, 8:6), "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Sin is essentially cumulative in its nature: one sin entailing another, and that other the third. From rebellion the ten tribes passed on to the adoration of the *true* God under the form of a calf, and from that lesser form of idolatry to open adoration of *false* gods—Baal, Ashtaroth, and other heathen abominations. What ingenuity do men display in perverting religion "according to their own understanding."! (v. 2) They tax their invention, and, though loving money, lavish "silver" to realize their own apostate conceptions. Oh that even as much expenditure of mind and money were devoted to the propagation of truth as there is to that of error! The weight of influence, and even the strong hand of persecuting power, have been again and again exercised in behalf of false systems, virtually insisting, "Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves (v. 2).

Ephraim's "goodness" had been as "a morning cloud, and as the early dew that goeth away" (Hos. 6:4). In just retribution, then, Ephraim's prosperity, bright for a season as a gilded morning-cloud or as the glistening dew-drop, should in like manner "pass away." No, worse, "as the chaff driven with the whirlwind," and "the smoke out of the chimney," so the worthless people themselves, and their pride and smoke-like inflation, should be swept away. Yet God was the same God as of old, who led them out of Egypt. He had the same power and will to save them then as ever; and none else could be their "Savior" (v. 4). Let this truth be engraven on our hearts, that "there is salvation in none other (than the Lord Jesus): for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). He is still the same God who "knew," acknowledged, and treated Israel as His people "in the wilderness, in the land of great drought" (v. 5). We are sojourning in a moral wilderness, wherein He alone can satisfy the hunger and thirst of our immortal souls. As He "knows them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19), so their part is to "know no god" and "no savior besides" him (v. 4).

The "pasture" (v. 6) which the worldly seek is carnal gratification. If they seek Christ, it is not because of His doctrine and miracles, but "because they eat of the loaves, and are filled" (John 6:26, 27). They "labor for the meat which perisheth, not for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." So the carnal among the Israelites sought only to be filled with pasture for their appetites; and the Lord, in judicial wrath, "gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls" (Ps. 106:15). Their satiety produced "exaltation of heart," and this in turn produced "forgetfulness" of God, which is the root of all evil. Let us make it our chief desire that our Good Shepherd may "make us to lie down in the green pastures" of His Word (Ps. 23:2), and as to earthly things fulfill our desires only so far as is really for our good.

How sad the change, when He who had been Israel's Creator and Preserver became her Destroyer! With the fierceness of the lion, the sudden swiftness of the leopard, the determination of the bear robbed of her cubs, the judgments of God would overwhelm them (vv. 7, 8). "Their heart" (v. 8). heretofore closed against God, would be "rent" open. How awful in the last day it will be when the sinner's heart shall be laid bare, with all its impure, uncharitable, malicious, and unholy thoughts, before the Righteous Judge! Two great truths shall then be manifested to the sinner himself—first, that his damnation was solely due to himself; secondly, that "in God" would have been saving "help" for him, if only he had accepted that help (v. 9). The elect also shall then see that their salvation was due, not to any foreseen merit in them, but solely to the sovereign grace of God. Let every sinner take home to himself, for both warning and encouragement, God's words, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." God often punishes men by giving them their wish. Israel had wished to have a king, like the nations around; as though a king could save them in battle, and as though God could not! Again, they had wished to have Jeroboam, instead of the king of David's line whom God had appointed. They got their wish, but not with it the good that they expected. "Where is now thy king?" cried the prophet, when their king proved not only unable to help them, but even, unable to save himself from captivity (v. 10). As "God gave them a king in his anger, so he took him away in his wrath" (v. 11). The demons were heard when they asked to enter into the swine. The apostle's prayer, that the messenger of Satan should depart from him, was not so granted, as he had prayed. Let us jealously watch over our desires, lest they harmonize not with the will of God, and so God should be tempted to "give us up" to "our own affections" (Rom. 1:26).

No greater evil can befall men than that God should treasure up their iniquity, about in due time to bring it forth for condign (deserved) punishment. Sin is "bound up" (v. 12) as Ephraim's was, when it is not loosed or remitted. Self-justification and pride cover up transgression, so as to be hidden for a time; and the sinner flatters himself, like Agag, that "the bitterness of death is past" because execution is deferred. But the very way which the sinner takes to escape punishment is the very way whereby he brings it on himself. When he *covers* his sin, God also *covers* or *binds* it *up*. But God does so in order that in His own time He may bring forth to light the accumulated mass of sin heretofore hidden, and may inflict commensurate condemnation. If we would, instead of covering our sins, lay them all bare before God, He would cover them with the blood of the atonement, and then we should know the blessedness of the man "whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:1).

Sorrows poignant and sudden as those of a woman in travail are coming upon the impenitent (v. 13). How fatally "unwise" are all who, though judgment is impending, "stay long," deferring a new birth unto righteousness, whereby they might avert the coming evil! Those who halt between two opinions, reaching the verge of new life, and yet never being born again of the Spirit, shall perish eternally. But in the case of the true "children" of God, God gives them spiritual power to live in His sight now; they are "translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13); He hath "ransomed them" already, in title, "from the grasp of the grave" (v. 14); and hereafter He will, in actual fact, "redeem them from death." When Christ "gave his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28), He by death gave death its death-blow. He will hereafter be the actual destruction of the grave, when "death and hell (the world of separate spirits) shall be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death." These are God's irrevocable purposes (v. 14; Rev. 20:14).

Then shall all "fruitfulness" derived from earthly fountains of prosperity be "dried up." All that dazzled the eyes in worldly pomp, glory, wealth, luxury, and beauty, for which men cast away the favor of God, shall leave no memorial behind, save the condemning reflection to the lost, "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

But mercy was wasted on their unworthy, deceitful nature, and the sentence had at last to go forth. "So I will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will tear them apart" (13:7-8). "The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record" (13:12). "The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open" (13:16).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

"Let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Ps. 119:133) is the cry of every true penitent. Unable to effect this for ourselves, we must look wholly and heartily to God to effect it for us. (A. R. Faussett) **Although we will not rid ourselves of our evil nature here on earth in the present period, explain the process of conquering its hold on us.**

Hosea 14:1-9

But now there seems to come a pause in the movement of this drama of sin and judgment, and a voice is heard pleading in strange tenderness in the closing chapter: "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously' " (14:1-2). And there comes in response, like the voice of a mother's tenderness, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them" (14:4).

And then follows that magnificent picture drawn from all the richest imagery of that luxuriant land—from the sparkling dew of the morning and the blossoms of the fertile plain, and the forests of mighty Lebanon and the verdure (lushness) of the olive on the mountain side and the waving harvests of grain, and the sweet fragrance of the mountain and the plain—all blended in one supernal picture of gentleness and grace, as God pours out the fullness of His heart and the promises of His grace. And the last scene in the drama is the penitent resolve of Ephraim, "What more have I to do with idols?" (14:8), and the last answer of Jehovah, "your fruitfulness comes from me" (14:8). Ephraim has come back to God and God has betrothed His bride to Him forever in faithfulness.

Hosea gives us a most attractive picture of the riches of God's grace to His own. All the beauty and glory of nature are called into requisition to express in eloquent figure and expressive phrase His gentleness and grace. "I will be like the dew to Israel" (14:5). How it speaks of the hallowed influences of the Holy Spirit. The beauty of the lily, the luxuriance of the olive, the strength of the cedar, the abundance of the grain, the fragrance of the vine, the sweetness of the wine of Lebanon—all these proclaim the infinite grace and overflowing blessing which God is waiting to pour into the hearts that can receive it. "Men will dwell again in his shade" (14:7), tells us of the higher blessing which He will make us give to others after we ourselves have been blessed, and then His grace is guaranteed to keep us faithful. "O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? . . . your fruitfulness comes from me" (14:8).

While we learn that justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, yet how sweetly we also learn that mercy and truth shall go before His face. In the abundance of His grace we may well add, "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness" (Psalm 89:15-16). Sinner! Backslider! Return to this loving Father. And child of His love and bride of His heart, walk softly and closely with Him. "Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them" (Hosea 14:9).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

The prophecy of Hosea has been likened to the Old Testament parable of the Prodigal Son. As the Prodigal Son

repented and returned to his father; Israel is asked to do the same. Israel is asked to repent and offer to the Father the sacrifices of their lips. (Hos. 14:2) **What sacrifices is the Lord looking for in our present day?**

Heb. 13:9-15