

The Good News of Israel's Brighter Future

Hosea 6

Hosea 6:1-3 - *"Come, and let us return to the Lord, for He has torn, but He will heal us. He has stricken, but He will bind us up. ² After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.*

³ Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning. He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth."

Background Notes

The theme of Hosea is God's redeeming and steadfast love. This theme emerges from the prophetic messages that Hosea preached, and it is also emerges from Hosea's personal life. God used Hosea's domestic life as an object lesson to illustrate His own relationship with His people Israel.

Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC. At that time Israel was strong militarily and prosperous economically, but morally the nation was weak and corrupt. The people were guilty of grave social injustices, and they had committed spiritual adultery by turning away from the living God to worship foreign gods. The worship of these false gods even involved practicing the sexual perversions associated with the fertility rites of the pagan religions.

In order to drive home the truth of what Israel was doing, God asked Hosea to marry a woman who would turn away from Hosea, leave him, and end up as a prostitute slave.

What a vivid illustration of what Israel had done in turning away from the Lord! But God still loved Israel, in spite of her unfaithfulness. As an illustration of His redeeming and steadfast and loyal love, God told Hosea to buy his wife back from her condition as a prostitute slave, and then re-establish his love relationship with her.

All of this was an illustration of God's relationship with His people Israel. We believe that God's plan to fully re-establish His love relationship with Israel is still yet in the future - but it will come! And that's what the first three verses of Hosea 6 are all about.

Doctrinal Points

1. God desires to heal rather than to hurt.

In Hosea 5:14 God declared that He would have to hurt Israel: *“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue.”* Being torn by a lion with no one to help is a lot of hurt!

But the good news began in Hosea 5:15 - *“I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”* God declared that Israel would not die out. Although they would be torn and hurt, they will still be alive! And in their affliction they will acknowledge their offense, and in their affliction they will earnestly seek the Lord.

What a perfect description of the present status of Israel! Over the centuries, the people of Israel have been torn and hurt by constant persecution - but miracle of miracles, they are still alive! They have survived! The Jewish people have not disappeared - in spite of being scattered around the world, in spite of the pogroms in Russia, in spite of the Nazi holocaust, in spite of centuries of worldwide anti-Semitism. And now the Jewish people are returning to their homeland. The secular state of Israel has been reborn.

But Israel has not yet acknowledged their offense. They have yet to seek the Lord's face. When the Jews returned from their 70-year captivity in Babylon, they did not diligently seek the Lord (as predicted in verse 15). In fact, they rejected their Messiah. That is why we believe these verses before us have not yet been fulfilled.

But ***they will be fulfilled!*** The story is not over yet! The nation of Israel will come to the place of Hosea 6:1 - *“Come, and let us return to the Lord, for He has torn, but He will heal us. He has stricken, but He will bind us up.”*

When that spiritual revival comes, it will take place in a relatively short period of time, and that's what verse 2 is all about: *“After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.”* That is the Hebrew way of saying a “relatively short period of time.” Now be careful with interpretation of verse 2. Some people take 2 Peter 3:8 (*“a day with the Lord is as a thousand years”*) and use that verse to say that the 2 days means 2000 years! No! 2 Peter 3:8 is ***not an equation*** that gives us the right to plug in a thousand years everywhere the word “day” is mentioned in Scripture! That would be ***baaad hermeneutics!***

So in Hosea 6:2, the phrase *“after two days; on the third day”* is a Hebrew expression meaning a short time. And that's the point. When Israel's healing begins (and it may be in the near future), it will come about in a relatively short time. And there's no *maybe* about it - it will happen! Just as surely as the sun comes up every morning (v3), so the Lord's love relationship with Israel will be restored. It will be like a time of refreshing rain (v3). What a great time that will be! God desires to heal rather than to hurt.

What is true of God's relationship with Israel is true of God's relationship with individuals. God would much rather heal than hurt, but sometimes He must hurt us for our own good - to keep us from sin, to keep us from hurting others, to turn us around, maybe even to bring you to the place of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior, if you're not a believer. You can only experience God's healing from sin if you turn to the Lord when you're hurting. God's desire is to heal rather than to hurt!

2. God delights in loyalty rather than sacrifice.

Hosea 6:4-11 - *"O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away. ⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth, and your judgments are like light that goes forth. ⁶ For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

⁷ "But like men they transgressed the covenant. There they dealt treacherously with Me. ⁸ Gilead is a city of evildoers and defiled with blood. ⁹ As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man, so the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem. Surely they commit lewdness. ¹⁰ I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the harlotry of Ephraim. Israel is defiled.. ¹¹ Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, when I return the captives of My people."

Just as morning dew evaporates quickly, Israel's faithfulness to God very short lived (v4). The prophets had pronounced judgment as clear as the light of the day (v5), but the people just continued to go through the motions of religion (v6). Is that a description of our lack of faithfulness? I hope not.

God delights in loyalty rather than sacrifice. When loyalty to the Lord disappears, all kinds of sins follow. The people of Israel broke their covenant with the Lord (v7). Harlotry and fornication was practiced in the pagan shrines scattered throughout the land. Israel was defiled, and Israel would be judged (v10).

Even the cities of refuge were no longer havens of safety, but places where your very life was in danger (v8-9). Ramoth Gilead was a city of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River, and Shechem was a city of refuge on the west side of the Jordan. It seems that things had gone so far downhill in the northern kingdom that corrupt priests were demanding payoffs with the threat of death to those who were trying to escape to the cities of refuge!

The southern kingdom of Judah would also be judged for her sins. She too was disloyal to the Lord (v11). Once again, God delights in loyalty rather than sacrifice: *"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."*

That word translated "loyalty" or "mercy" in some translations is the Hebrew word *chesed*. In the King James version it is usually translated as "lovingkindness." There's no English word that really does justice to the Hebrew word *chesed*.

Chesed combines the ideas of love and mercy and loyalty, and that's the meaning here in this context – steadfast and loyal love.

Are you loyal to the Lord - or do you just go through the motions of religion on Sunday morning? Are you loyal to the Lord when it comes to what movies or TV programs you watch? Are you loyal to the Lord when temptation comes? Are you loyal to the Lord when you're alone and no one is watching - when no one knows what you're doing? Are you loyal to the Lord behind an outward show of godliness? Remember - God delights in loyalty rather than sacrifice.

Practical Application

Let us press on to know the Lord!

Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord (v3). Hosea 6 says that knowledge of the Lord will be Israel's desire in the coming day.

Is knowledge of the Lord our desire now? How well do you know the Lord? Do you know Him as Savior? If not, you can start that relationship today, right now, by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, and committing your life to Him for salvation.

But I'd like to ask believers: How well do you know the Lord? Are you getting to know Him better every day? It's possible to get to know the Lord better - but it's not automatic! If we truly desire knowledge of the Lord, we must read and study His Word, and then follow through by obeying and living out what the Word teaches us. We must spend time in prayer. We must spend time in conversation with God.

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death..." (Philippians 3:10). Where are we in our relationship with the Lord? It's a good question for all of us.

Let us press on to know the Lord!