



Hosea - Chapter Fourteen

II. Hosea 4:1-14:9 - Hosea Spells Out His Parable with Accusations, Warnings, and Promises (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

Hosea finishes his book with a series of moving appeals to the wayward northern kingdom to return to the Lord and find healing and covenant renewal.

II.I Hosea 14:1-9 - Closing Appeals

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.I.i Hosea 14:1-3 - A Plea for Repentance

The appeal is for Israel to repent of their sins and return to the Lord, for he is the only hope for the people.

- ¹ Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Hosea 14:1

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. The chapter commences with a plea that offers a solution to all the ills and sins described throughout Hosea's writings. It is also the theme of others, for example: <<Go, and proclaim these words towards the north, and say: Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord; I will not be angry for ever>> (Jeremiah 3:12).

For you have stumbled because of your iniquity. The people of Israel have fallen away from grace because of their sinful actions, labelled frequently as adultery and even prostitution. They chose the ways of the world over the straight paths

that God had set out before them and had stumbled on rocky ground: <<**He will be a holy place; for both Israel and Judah he will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare**>> (Isaiah 8:14 NIV).

- ² Take words with you
and return to the Lord;
say to him,
'Take away all guilt;
accept that which is good,
and we will offer
the fruit of our lips.
- ³ Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride upon horses;
we will say no more, "Our God",
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.'

Hosea 14:2-3

Take words with you means to know ahead of time what you will say. Hosea then gives the words of repentance and confession that the people should use before the Lord. These verses are peppered with terms from the covenant that express God's grace and the proper response of gratitude: take away all guilt evokes: <<**keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**>> (Exodus 34:7a), and David's understanding: <<**Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord', and you forgave the guilt of my sin**>> (Psalm 32:5). Whereas we will offer the fruit of our lips represents the people offering God the praise and worship that he desires and is due. Words of confession, petition, or intercession can also be a sacrifice pleasing to God. This is what Israel can expect, if only they will return to the Lord. Also, no longer will they place their trust in foreign princes, such as Assyria, or in the implements of warfare, i.e. we will not ride upon horses; neither will they worship handmade gods. This is the message that Paul conveyed to the nations he visited and he met with fierce opposition such as that seen in Ephesus, where Demetrius exclaimed: <<**You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people**>>

by saying that gods made with hands are not gods>> (Acts 19:26). Paul also wrote: <<For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming>> (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

II.1.ii Hosea 14:4-9 - Assurance of Forgiveness

God still loves his people. He will heal those who return to him and bring them back into the land. He is the only living God; there is no hope in idols, there is hope only in him.

- ⁴ I will heal their disloyalty;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.

Hosea 14:4

As so often happens with calls to repentance, there follow astounding promises to entice Israel to return. The Lord will heal their disloyalty or apostasy. As noted in Hosea 5:13-14, the prophets often depict sin as a sickness and renewal as healing.

I will love them freely. It is not that the Lord had stopped loving Israel, but now he will love them without the prospect of imminent judgement. God saw that Israel was bent on backsliding from him: *<<My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all>>* (Hosea 11:7), but he promises to heal the backsliding of a repentant Israel. He does it not because Israel now deserves it, but because it is in his nature to love them freely.

- ⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily,
he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.

Hosea 14:5

I will be like the dew. Dew was one of the key sources of water for Israel. It would be vital for the growth of the kind of plants that follow.

He shall blossom like the lily. The Hebrew term can refer to several different lily-like flowers; all are prized for their beauty. Biblical authors regularly celebrate

the forests of Lebanon, especially cedars, as the most majestic: <<*The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted*>> (Psalm 104:16). It was the wood of choice for the great structures including the Temple and palaces in Jerusalem.

- ⁶ His shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.

Hosea 14:6

His shoots shall spread out. Here the imagery depicts an expanding kingdom like the growth of a great tree: Israel's original calling was to spread its influence throughout the whole world.

His beauty shall be like the olive. The olive was regarded as a symbol of strength and prosperity: <<*But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever*>> (Psalm 52:8).

His fragrance like that of Lebanon is a reference to the scent of cedars. However, the oil from the olive could also be in view here: <<*How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!*>> (Song 4:10). Paul writes of the sweet fragrance of knowing Christ: <<*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?*>> (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

- ⁷ They shall again live beneath my shadow,
they shall flourish as a garden;
they shall blossom like the vine,
their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Hosea 14:7

They shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. Israel again becomes a choice vine, which was her design from the beginning: <<*Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit*>> (Hosea 10:1a). The landscape here depicted is an Eden-like paradise, illustrating covenant renewal by the replanting of Israel as a lush garden; refer also to Hosea 2:14-23.

8 O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
your faithfulness comes from me.

Hosea 14:8

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? When God's people are healed from backsliding, they focus on the Lord himself and not on any kind of idol.

I am like an evergreen cypress. Nowhere else in the OT is the Lord likened to a tree, which leads some to suggest that these words are spoken by Israel. However, in Hosea 5:12 the prophet uses an equally bold comparison of the Lord with 'a moth' and 'dry rot,' so this suggestion is unnecessary. An evergreen tree is always full of life and strength; it also depicts God as ever faithful and not seasonal.

Your faithfulness comes from me. At one time, Israel thought they might find faith in themselves or in the idols of the nations. Now, if repentant and healed of their backsliding, they will find their faith only in God. In response, they will find his faithfulness towards them.

9 Those who are wise understand these things;
those who are discerning know them.
For the ways of the Lord are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.

Hosea 14:9

Hosea has an apt conclusion for his book. The Lord has made his case, and is justified in punishing Israel for ingratitude and covenant breaking. Yet there is a final appeal for the wise, who understand, using the same verb as in: <<***thus a people without understanding comes to ruin***>> (Hosea 4:14). Wise people will see the message throughout the Book of Hosea. They will understand that in his mercy, God offers a wonderful opportunity for repentance and restoration, and it is dangerous and foolish to neglect that invitation: <<***Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord***>> (Psalm 107:43), <<***The way of the Lord is a stronghold for the upright, but destruction for evildoers***>> (Proverbs 10:29), and: <<***Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand***>> (Daniel 12:10).

This verse is full of terms otherwise met in the Psalms and Proverbs, such as wise, understand, discerning, the ways of the Lord, and the contrast between the upright and transgressors. Most of the book has addressed Ephraim as a corporate body, but these terms focus on the moral response of individual Israelites. The positive terms in such a setting refer to those who really grasp the grace of the covenant. They also guide them in their own course of life, even when terrible disaster overtakes the people as a whole. Even in the midst of promised judgement, the wise and understanding man sees that the ways of the Lord are right, and that ever announcement of judgement is an invitation to repentance.