

Hosea 14

The Covenant Love of God and the Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction

- A. 1:1-3:5 — Marriage Metaphor
- B. 4:1-14:9¹ — Accusation, Judgment, and Hope
 - 1. 4:1-6:3 — Evidence of ignorance of God and statement of hope
 - 2. 6:4-11:11 — Evidence of disloyalty to God and statement of hope
 - 3. **11:12-14:9 — Evidence of faithlessness to God and statement of hope**

II. 14:1-3 — A Call to Repentance

- A. 1 — Keep in mind chapter 3 as we consider Hosea’s call to Israel to return and repent. In Chapter 3, we saw the tender love of this prophet for his wayward wife, Gomer. Hosea was willing pay the necessary cost to bring her back. Here, Yahweh is the one seeking to bring back His wife. He is calling upon Israel to return in repentance.

Their idolatry, self-dependence, and fundamental rejection of Yahweh had led them into ruin. Hosea calls them to return to “the LORD your God.” Consider the contrast we see with this statement and the ambiguous statements we have seen throughout the book. There is no reference to “Most High” or “Holy One,” but an explicit reference to their covenant keeping God. This is the God they are to return to in repentance.

- B. 2 — Hosea provides the second imperative “Take with you words.” On the surface this seems superficial and wooden. Yet, Israel needs an example of how to come to Yahweh. They need an example of what they should say to Him and what issues need to be repented of.

- 1. (2) — **“Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”** The essence of this section is that they need to come with an understanding that they have wronged Yahweh. Up to this point we have not seen much “good” in Israel or Judah. **So what does this “good” refer to?** It could be that it refers to their act of repentance, but it may be a request to simply accept that good that they have done (if any).

The next phrase is slightly more difficult. We’ve already seen that Yahweh is less concerned about their sacrifices, and more concerned about their heart. So what does Hosea mean when he says, **“... accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”**² I think the NET translation does the most justice to this sentence, “...that we may offer the praise of our lips as sacrificial bulls.”

In this way, they are to sacrifice with the vows of their lips as they would bulls. In other words, it is their act of repentance that Yahweh is looking for.

¹ Michael Barrett, 19.

² NASB, NIV, NKJV, all translate this passage different, relying more on the LXX instead of the MT. Thus they translate essentially, “and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.”

- (3) — *“Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands.”* — The second part of their needed prayer is a recognition that all they had been pursuing (e.g. foreign powers, military success, and idols fashioned by their hands) was nothing. They need to admit that what they thought would bring them happiness, protection, and help, was nothing more than feeding on the wind.

“In you the orphan finds mercy.” — This last phrase is situated in such a way that it is emphasized.³ Who is this Orphan? Hosea 1:9 says, “And the LORD said, ‘Call his name not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.’” Israel is an orphan because of their sin. This same orphan who rejected their Father, Yahweh, will also find mercy because of Him if they turn back to Him.

C. What are some principles of repentance

- Even though we stumble there is always an opportunity for repentance.* If it was said of anyone that they failed, it was certainly Israel. Despite their enormous sin, and even the looming consequences of their sin, they could still return to Yahweh.
- Repentance is directed to God.* Though there will be need to repent of sin committed against others, it should always begin with God.
- Repentance begins with an acknowledgement of sin.* Israel could only come in repentance if they understood their sin first. They needed to see their sin as God did.
- Repentance needs to be thorough.* They need to take with them the words that Hosea offers, not as a magical formula, but as a demonstration of how thorough they should be in their confession of their sin.
- There needs to be an acknowledgment of the empty promises of sin.* Someone will not turn to God in repentance while still believing that the promises of sin are better than what God offers.
- Repentance flows from a heart that understands God alone offers mercy.* There is no other person or god that can offer mercy, but God alone.

III. 14:4-8 — Yahweh’s Promise — If Israel calls out in true repentance to Yahweh there would be restoration.

- 4 — That Yahweh will heal their apostasy and love them freely is all because His anger has turned from them. From the very beginning He has loved His people (embodied most clearly in Hosea and Gomer), yet their persistent sin and rejection had no other consequence but judgment.
 - Their rejection of God could only be healed by God. They did not need to come with their lives in order, but they needed to come. McComiskey writes, **“Hosea did not call them to change their ways, but to acknowledge their waywardness.”**⁴
 - That He loved them freely... Garrett writes, “(1) it is by grace and thus unearned, and (2) Yahweh’s freedom to give love will no longer be hindered by their sin because he will have already removed every offense.”⁵

³ Garrett, 272.

⁴ McComiskey, 232.

⁵ Ibid, 274.

3. **Is this healing conditional?** On one level we see that judgment will come and their sin punished. However, the implication from the context seems to be that Israel would have come in repentance. Once they realize their sinfulness and their desperate need for restoration Yahweh would turn from His wrath and would pour out His blessings. Consider Proverbs 28:13, *“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”* Israel would experience this mercy—this healing from Yahweh—if they come in repentance.

There is another component that needs to be kept in view. Hosea 2:14 says, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her...” Though repentance is necessary for healing or restoration, there is this “Irresistible Grace.” Thus the “I will” statements are conditioned upon their repentance, but their repentance will come as a result of God’s alluring them to Himself.

- B. 5 — **What idea does this description convey?** Because of the actions of Yahweh, Israel would again enjoy fruitfulness, success, and would have roots that allow them to endure. One commentator even suggested that this section might be a form of love poetry similar to Song of Solomon.⁶ This makes sense in light of God’s alluring of Israel to Himself, and of the tender way in which he is calling them to repent.

Note the importance of dew: “The evening dew waters the earth in the Levant most copiously when it is most needed, in the summer. Its absence was a calamity and could be a divine judgment (Hag 1:10).” Garrett explains that the dew was essential for Israelite agriculture to survive.⁷ What we see here then is that Yahweh will provide all that they need to be fruitful.

- C. 6 — There would be new growth in Israel. Carrying on from the end of verse 5, Israel’s shoots will spread. **What is the significance of this?** Israel was going to be sent into exile, and was decaying and desolate. Yet, after experiencing God’s blessing, Israel’s roots would spread and they would be established. Furthermore, they would be like the olive tree and fragrant like Lebanon. The Olive tree could represent wealth, and the fragrance could refer to a fragrance of life.⁸ Because of God’s blessing, there has been a significant reversal in Israel’s situation.⁹
- D. 7 — There are several views on this verse. The ESV and NASB both translate this verse with the understanding that Yahweh is now the referent of the tree instead of Israel. Thus Yahweh is providing protection for His people Israel, which we know to be true from Scripture in general. However, it seems better to take this passage as the NIV and NET do which says, “People will reside again in his shade.” The “his” is referring to Israel, which makes more sense because Israel has been represented by the tree throughout this section. The implication is that Israel will be a source of protection and blessing for the gentile nations. Lebanon was not known for their wine, but the point seems to be that their land was fertile and a good place for wine to be cultivated.¹⁰ Israel would have abundance, and the nations would

⁶ Hubbard, 242.

⁷ Garrett, 274.

⁸ Ibid, 274.

⁹ See Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18 and Isaiah 2:1-3.

¹⁰ McComiskey, 233.

find abundance through them.

Where is their source of abundance coming from? Israel had sought all of these things through Baal, yet they learned of the empty promises of Baal. They have now seen that the gods made by hands are no gods at all and cannot provide true blessing. Yahweh is their source of abundance.

E. 8 — **A Summary**

1. Yahweh's statement, that He will have nothing more to do with idols, is a reminder to Israel that enough is enough. He has dealt with idols because of the sins of His people, but that was never the intention. From the very beginning Yahweh had made it clear that there would be no one but Him—no grave images—no idolatry.
2. He continues to build His case reminding them that He is the one who will look after them. Chisholm brings out the point that the same word used for “look after” is used in 13:7, where it is translated “lurk.” In that passage He is lurking, waiting for the right time to destroy the prey. Here, it is a matter of caring for and looking after His people.¹¹
3. The end of this verse brings us all the way back to chapter 2, where we see Yahweh reminding His people that He is the one that provided for them. He is their provider. It is here that Israel had doubted Yahweh, and so He reminds them again that Israel never found sustenance or provisions in anything else—for it always came from Him.

IV. 14:9 — A message to the reader

- A. The final words of the book of Hosea is an exhortation to walk in the ways of Yahweh. The wise person will understand the words of the book, they will “realize and fully comprehend the implications and significance of what God has revealed.”¹² It's this kind of understanding that leads someone to act in accordance to the ways of Yahweh.
- B. There are two responses to this book. The one who is wise, understanding, and who seeks to walk righteously, will walk in the ways of Yahweh. They will follow His call upon their lives to be completely devoted to Him alone. They will rightfully acknowledge that He is the source of all that they have, and they will offer Him more than lip-service, they will offer Him their heart. In contrast, Hosea describes the transgressor as one who stumbles. He will also hear the message of this book, but instead of walking in them, he will stumble. Instead of finding life he will find death. He will ultimately reject the good that God has offered and seek to feed on the wind.

¹¹ Chisholm, 47.

¹² Smith, 197.

V. Application

A. Identifying our idols¹³

1. What is fundamentally wrong with the human heart?
 - a) Romans 1:21, 25 — “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”
 - b) The fundamental issue with the human heart is idolatry. Tim Keller writes, “*idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong.*”¹⁴ We are always worshiping something.
2. **Evaluation questions - What might be some of the idols in our lives? How do we identify them?**
 - a) What do you enjoy daydreaming about? What occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think about? Do you develop potential scenarios about career advancement? Or material goods such as a dream home? Or a relationship with a particular person?
 - b) How do you spend your money? “Your money flows most effortlessly toward your heart’s greatest love.” Your pattern of spending reveals the idols of your hearts.
 - c) What is your real, daily functional salvation? To find this out, how do you respond to unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes?
 - d) Look for uncontrollable emotions:
 - (1) If anger, “Is there something here too important to me, something I must have at all costs?”
 - (2) If afraid or fearful, “Am I so scared, because something in my life is being threatened that I think is a necessity when it is not? Am I so down on myself because I have lost or failed at something that I think is a necessity when it is not?”

B. Replacing our idols

1. We need to remember that God is the true provider of all that is good, and He is the only Person who actually knows what is good for us. We must believe this is true in the times when our idols tempt us to run to them instead of God. The good that I am seeking is the good that can truly satisfy, which is the good that God can only give for He is its maker.
2. Colossians 3:1-7 — Instead of turning to worship our idols we need to direct our gaze upward, to the right hand of God, setting our minds on things that are above. As Keller writes, “Jesus must become more beautiful to your imagination, more attractive to your heart, than your idol.”¹⁵
3. How do we fix our eyes on Christ so that He is more attractive to us than our idols?
 - a) We saturate our minds and hearts in the glorious gospel. We do this by spending time in the Word of God and treasuring what Christ has done for us.
 - b) We spend time listening to messages and reading books that communicate truth about the gospel.
 - c) We must spend time in prayer thanking God for His gracious work in our lives.
4. If the gospel is the most significant truth for Christians, then we must never waver from seeking to understand it more. We will never plumb the depths of the love of God for us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:14-19).

¹³ This application section is largely a summation of what Tim Keller says in *Counterfeit Gods*.

¹⁴ Keller, 165-166.

¹⁵ Keller, 172.