

Lesson 46

Last week we started looking at the first verse of Hosea 14, and the first thing we noticed about it is that it has an abrupt change in tone from the horrors that we saw in the final verse of Hosea 13.

And we also considered when and where Hosea 14 was written. A likely possibility is that it was written in Judah after Hosea had fled there to escape the Assyrian invasion.

If so, then Hosea 14 was likely written after the fall of Samaria, which means that the promises in this chapter were not for the people of Hosea's day, but for their descendants who would later see and hear the Messiah.

But that is not a surprise. Why not? Because the other promises of deliverance we have seen in this book have pointed to the deliverance and salvation that would come from the Messiah.

Hosea 14:1 (Continued)

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

The command in verse 1 is to return to God, and Hosea had earlier told us that the people would, in fact, return when the Messiah came.

Hosea 3:5 – Afterward the children of Israel **shall return** and seek the LORD their God, and **David their king**, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

And we see an example of that return in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well.

John 4:41-42 – And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

The Savior of **Israel**? The Savior of **Ephraim**? No – the Savior of the **world**! These promised blessings were for Israel, but they were not only for Israel. They were blessings promised to the entire world, of which Israel was a part.

And, yes, the people had stumbled because of their iniquity, and yes, the people had been punished because of their iniquity. But the door remained open for their descendants – for their children.

And to those who look at the final verse in Hosea 13 and complain that God was not caring for those children, the ones who did not care for the children in Hosea 13 were their parents, who led their children into that terrible situation despite countless warnings from God!

Did God care for their children? Hosea 14 is written to their children. These promises are directed to their descendants.

The relationship that had been lost between God and the parents would later be restored between God and their children. But those children needed to return. They needed to repent.

Hosea 14 places that condition first here in Hosea 14, and Peter did the same thing in Acts 2.

Acts 2:38 – And Peter said to them, “**Repent** and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Before we can walk with God, we must turn away from this world. We must return. We must repent. I think those who have the most trouble living the Christian life are those who have the most trouble with this step – they have never fully turned to God and fully away from this world.

And why was Ephraim in need of repentance? Verse 1 answers that question: “for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.” That’s the same reason that we are all in need of repentance.

We have seen that word “stumble” frequently in this book. In fact, if you look down the page a bit you will see that the book of Hosea ends with that word: “but transgressors **stumble** in them.”

One commentary defines that word “stumble” this way:

“The term ‘stumble’ describes falling into disgrace and defeat as a result of immoral or foolish behavior.”

And, yes, we stumble, and yes, we fall. But that stumbling need not be the end of our story. Instead, we can return to God. That is the great promise of Hosea 14, and it is the great promise of the gospel.

We see that in Acts 2, and we also see it in Acts 3, where once again, as in Acts 2 and as in Hosea 14, the command begins with “repent!”

Acts 3:19–21 – **Repent** therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Hosea 14:2-3

2 Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows 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. In you the orphan finds mercy.”

“Take with you words and return to the LORD.”

Again, we see the command to return, but here we also see something else: a command to “take with you words.”

What does that mean? What words?

I think verses 2–3 answer that question. How? Because they give us the actual words that the people are told to use. Hosea is not just telling the people to return to God, but Hosea is also telling them what to say when they do that.

And, of course, we know that Hosea is not just telling them to **recite** these words – Hosea is telling them to **mean** these words. That is why we also see the word “return” in verse 2. If the people just recited these words as some sort of an empty formula, then it could never be said that they had returned to God. In fact, as we have seen, they had been saying the right words all along, but they had been empty words said as part of their empty worship.

“Take with you words!”

We must never doubt the importance of words. The promised Messiah was called the word made flesh in John 1:14. God has always communicated with mankind using words. God was speaking words to Adam from the moment he created him (Genesis 1:27–28). And God speaks to us with words.

Hebrews 1:1–2 – Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God **spoke** to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has **spoken** to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

We live in a day and age in which the written word is losing its importance. If our cell phones teach us

anything it is this: images are more important than words. We exalt images, and we skim words.

And we see that same attitude in a religious world that exalts feelings over words. They ignore the written word because they feel they are being led by the spirit to do whatever it is they are doing. And surprise! That spirit that is leading them always agrees with what they want to do! But that fact, of course, alerts us at once to the real identity of the spirit that is leading them – it is their own spirit!

Yes, we are led and guided by the Holy Spirit, but that leading and that guiding are accomplished through the **words** that the Holy Spirit has given us. The **words**! As we read in verse 2: “take with you **words**!”

If we want to trace the origin of most religious error in the world today, I think we should start with the false notion that the Spirit of God is somehow guiding us and nudging us today in some way apart from the word of God.

I like what Franklin Camp wrote about this issue in the introduction of his book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption*:

The subject of the Holy Spirit is one that I have been interested in from the time that I started preaching. One of the first errors that I had to meet when I began preaching was the denominational claim that the Holy Spirit worked directly and apart from the Word of truth. **This is one of the basic doctrines of the denominational world.** The teaching that the Spirit works directly and apart from the

truth strikes at the very foundation of the authority of the Scriptures. This doctrine opens the door for the claims of all false teachers from Joseph Smith and Oral Roberts to Billy Graham. If one is led directly by the Spirit apart from the truth, then he does not need the Bible, nor indeed can he be expected to follow the Bible.

And I also like what the Apostle John wrote on this issue!

1 John 4:6 – We are from God. Whoever knows God **listens to us**; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. **By this we know** the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

“Whoever knows God listens to us.” And to what do we listen? We listen to **words**. And what do those **words** allow us to do? **“By this** we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

There are countless people today being led by the spirit of **error** because they have refused to **listen** to the **words** that we have from Spirit of **truth**.

Back to verse 2, what are the words that the people are told to say when they return to God?

“Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. 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. In you the orphan finds mercy.”

I think we can split these words into three parts: a plea for forgiveness, a renunciation of false faith, and an appeal for mercy.

Let's start with the plea for forgiveness:

“Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”

The first step to asking God to forgive my sins is to admit that I have sinned.

So far, we have seen nothing to suggest that Ephraim was aware of its own sin. Instead, Ephraim has been trying to worship both God and Baal, with the false belief that God would be fine with that arrangement.

But, of course, God was not fine with that arrangement. The people were guilty of idolatry and faithlessness and disloyalty and ingratitude and on and on. As we saw in Hosea 13:2, “they sin more and more.”

But here they are told to say, “take away all iniquity.” Not only is that a plea for forgiveness, but it is an admission that there is iniquity that needs to be forgiven.

We have seen nothing to suggest that the people listening to Hosea would ever say such a thing. And so, perhaps, even with this opening phrase, we may have a clue that this final chapter is not addressed to those people.

We never see this attitude from the people in Hosea's day, but we do see it later with their descendants who believed in Christ in John 4 and who obeyed the gospel in Acts 8.

What about the next phrase in this plea for forgiveness? "Accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips." What does that mean?

The "good" that God is asked to accept is most likely the words themselves – a plea for forgiveness that comes from a penitent heart.

These are the words of someone who has turned away from the things of Baal, who has recognized the great sin that he has done, and who has turned to God for forgiveness and restoration. I think that penitent plea is the "good" that God is asked to accept.

And then we have a promise made to God: "we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips." What does that mean?

I think a verse in Hebrews 13 answers that question.

Hebrews 13:15 – Through him then let us continually offer up a **sacrifice** of praise to God, that is, the fruit of **lips** that acknowledge his name.

In that verse we find the same two things we see here in verse 2 – sacrifice (bulls) and the fruit of lips (the vows of our lips).

We have already seen what God thinks of sacrifices that are made without a changed heart.

Hosea 6:6 – For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

And so here, the people promise to offer up that which God desires – steadfast love and knowledge of God – what Hebrews calls "a sacrifice of praise to God."

And how often does the writer of Hebrews tell us that we should offer up that sacrifice? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Yearly? No. **Continually.** “Let us **continually** offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.”

But how can we continually offer up a sacrifice? Paul answers that question.

Romans 12:1 – I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a **living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

A **living** sacrifice is something I offer while I am **living**, which means that I do it **continually** as Hebrews 13:15 tells us. It’s not something we turn off and on. We are a **living** sacrifice. We **continually** offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That attitude that we are commanded to have all the time in Hebrews 13 and Romans 12 is the same attitude that is promised to God here in verse 2. “We will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”

The next thing the people are told to speak is a renunciation of their false faith:

“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.”

Again we see things that Ephraim never said. We have not heard the people say anything like this in Hosea, and we know they never had this repentant attitude. How do we know that? We know it because we know that Assyria invaded and punished Ephraim at God’s command. That fact alone tells us that the people did not repent.

But here the command is to repent, to ask God for forgiveness, and to confess that salvation comes only from God.

The kingdoms of this world cannot save us (“Assyria shall not save us”), we cannot save ourselves (“we will not ride on horses”), and our false gods cannot save us (“we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands”). Only God can save us.

Did Ephraim ever say this to God? No. In fact, they looked for their salvation from each of these other sources.

They believed that Assyria and Egypt would save them. They believed that their kings and their own military power would save them. And they believed that Baal and their golden calves would save them. God was not even on their list!

And so, once again, I think we see evidence here that these words were not being spoken by Ephraim in Hosea’s day.

But what about their descendants? What about the woman at the well who listened to Jesus in John 4? What about all of the other Samaritans who heard her story and believed in Jesus in John 4? What about those Samaritans who heard and obeyed the gospel in Acts 8?

I think they all said these words to God. I think they all understood that only God could save them. I think they all knew that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

That understanding that only God can save us (as we are told in Acts 4) is the same understanding that we see here in verse 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."

And the final thing the people are told to speak is an appeal for mercy:

"In you the orphan finds mercy."

This phrase has two parts – a stated part and an unstated part. The stated part is that God shows mercy to orphans.

And we certainly know both how God feels about orphans and, by extension, how we should feel about orphans as well.

Psalms 68:5 – Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

James 1:27 – Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

But **why** are orphans mentioned at the end of verse 3?

The reason orphans are mentioned here in this final phrase is because this final phrase also has an **unstated** part. As we just saw, the stated part is that God shows mercy to orphans. And the unstated part? It is this: **I am an orphan!**

There is a reason that the person saying this to God is reminding God about his care for orphans! The person saying this prayer is an orphan himself!

Remember what we know about Ephraim. They were “Not Loved”! They were “Not Mine”!

Throughout the book of Hosea, we have seen Ephraim depicted both as a faithless wife and as a child of that faithless mother. And, as we have said, Ephraim as a wife or mother denotes the institutions and leaders of Ephraim, while Ephraim as a child of that faithless mother denotes the common people of Ephraim who had been raised and led astray by those institutions and leaders.

And now? Assyria has destroyed those institutions and killed those leaders. The people are motherless.

And who was their father? To whom had the wife run when she was faithless to God? Baal.

The people had rejected God as their father and had instead looked to Baal as their father. If Baal had become the **husband** of the faithless wife, then Baal had also become the **father** of her children.

And now? Baal had forsaken them. Baal had let them all down. Baal did not save them because Baal was unable to save them. Baal could not even save himself.

And what do we call these common people who had now lost their mother and their father? We call them **orphans**.

And, like most actual orphans of that day, they were now homeless, having been dragged away from their homes and scattered by Assyria.

That was true of the people of Hosea’s day. But what about their descendants? They were still orphans. They

had lost their identity, and they had lost their homeland. The Jews who had once been a part of their family now looked upon them as being worse than Gentiles. The Samaritans were orphans just as their parents had been left as orphans.

And so, when verse 3 says, “in you the orphan finds mercy,” there is in those words a plea for mercy from the orphan who is saying those words. “You show mercy to orphans. **Please show mercy to this orphan!**”

So, let’s now circle back to a question we asked about verse 1 – **when** was it written?

I think we have some more evidence to support what we said earlier about that question – that Hosea penned this final chapter **after** his escape to Judah, **after** Samaria fell, and **after** the people of Israel were killed or exiled.

And what is that additional evidence. We just saw it. **When** would these words have been said if they were said at all? Well, **when** did the people become orphans? They became orphans after Assyria carried them off.

Again, I think this final chapter is looking **back** at that event just as the first thirteen chapters looked **toward** that event.

I think the fall of Samaria happened between Hosea 13 and Hosea 14.

And what will happen when these orphans return to God? The book of Hosea has already told us.

Hosea 1:10 – Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

These orphans would become the children of the living God.

And when and where did that happen? Peter tells us.

1 Peter 2:9-10 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people;** once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

And Paul tells us.

Romans 9:25 – As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

And John tells us.

1 John 3:1 – See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

These orphans quit being orphans when they obeyed the gospel of Christ. That is when God adopted them.

Galatians 4:4-5 – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And that is also when God adopted us.

We, like the people here in Hosea 14 and like the publican in Luke 18, can only pray, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" And, like the Samaritans and the publicans who obeyed the gospel, we can find that mercy only at the cross of Christ.

But are we saved at the moment we say a prayer? No, we are not. We are saved at the moment we come up out of the watery grave of baptism. That is what Paul tells us in Romans 6. We are buried in that water as a dead person, and we are raised from that water a living person.

And, yes, I know that countless denominational preachers tell us that all we need to do is pray what they call the sinner's prayer - but that is not what the Bible tells us.

1 Peter 3:21 - Baptism, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hosea 14:4

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

Where is the gospel in Hosea? We are looking at it!

Heal their apostasy? Love them freely? Turn my anger from them? Those are the same things that God does for us through the gospel of Christ.

In fact, we see all three of these things in the most famous verse in the Bible.

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world (“**I will love them freely**”), that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish (“**my anger has turned from them**”) but have eternal life (“**I will heal their apostasy**”).

Perhaps the next time we attend a football game we should hold up a sign that says **Hosea 14:4!** This verse is the **John 3:16** of the Old Testament!

I think we now have conclusive evidence for what we have been saying all along – that the great blessings promised in this book were not blessings for the people of Hosea’s day, but were instead blessings for their descendants who would some day hear and obey the gospel.

And those are the same blessings that are offered to the entire world. Those are the worldwide blessings that God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3 – “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

And **after** we are healed, **after** we are loved freely, and **after** God’s anger is turned from us – **what then?** The book of Hosea closes with the wonderful answer to that question.