

Session 2: The Message of Hosea

D. Repentance

What positive advice did Hosea offer to the Israelites of his day? What did he want to see happen as a result of his preaching?

His answer would have been that he wanted to see Israel "return" or, as we would say, "repent". In the book there are two "liturgies" of repentance. The first is in 6:1-6:

Hosea 6:1-6

'Come, let us return to the Lord;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.
Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.'

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?
Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.
Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgement goes forth as the light.
For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.

D1. Israel's Insincerity

In this passage, Hosea quotes one of the chants of the worshippers at the shrine of Yahweh. His assessment is that their apparent change of heart is in fact superficial. They expect everything to come right very quickly. "Two days" and "three days" mean a very short time, just as "forty days" usually means a long time. In fact, says Hosea, their love is like a cloud of mist in the morning; it vanishes as quickly as dew. A much deeper change of heart is needed. What the Lord looks for is not "sacrifice" but "steadfast love" and the "knowledge" of him (verse 6).

D2. Hosea's Hope Against Hope

The second liturgy of repentance comes in chapter 14:

Hosea 14:1-7

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

I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.
I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily,
he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.
His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.
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.

Here Hosea is telling Israel what they need to do to find the Lord's mercy. They need to go to the shrine taking words rather than animals for sacrifice, words that they mean and intend to follow through.

At the shrines, there would usually be prophets whose role was give Yahweh's reply to the worshippers' questions. So in verses 4-7 Hosea tells Israel what Yahweh's reply will be to such a petition. Thus the book ends on a note of hope with a promise of salvation, and this is a fair reflection of Hosea because, as we have seen, despite his predictions of direst judgement, he never stopped hoping for an eventual restoration of God's people.