

HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

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"For Israel hath forgotten his maker." (Hosea 8:14)

"My people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32)

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CHAPTER SIX -

THE DAY OF REBUKE (Hosea 5)

THE DARKNESS DEEPENS. Nor are the Scriptures silent about the deadening effects thereof. Spiritual darkness dulls the conscience, dims vision, diminishes zeal, destroys testimony, delays decision, and defies the Infinite GOD. **"If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness"** (Matthew 6:23). And when the light of testimony begins to flicker and fade, invariably the leadership is chargeable.

Thus the priests first are called to task. **"Hear ye this, O priests,"** the LORD demands (v. 1). This accounts for the caution sounded forth in James 3:1: **"My brethren, be not many masters [leaders], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."**

Unfaithfulness in leadership, encouraging thereby a decline of testimony among the people, is **"spiritual wickedness in high places"** (Ephesians 6:12). Failure to hearken unto the divine entreaties resulted in such fearful degeneracy that the priesthood became poor, proud, and profligate, dishonoring the name of the LORD and corrupting His worship. **"O priests, that despise my name . . . Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar . . ."** (Malachi 1:6,7).

As Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand out in bold relief on the pages of history as monuments to the devastation of the atom bomb, even so Mizpah and Tabor are cited as symbolic of the wanton destruction of blatant idolatry (v. 1). And despite the fact that GOD had rebuked them (v. 2) for their unorthodoxy, the **"revolters"** (apostates) operated freely (**"are profound to make slaughter"**), corrupting the minds and perverting the hearts of the people.

Although the leadership is addressed in particular, the LORD also held the people accountable (v. 1). He had already pointed out that they were equally guilty **"like people, like priest"** (4:9). They had deeply revolted, notwithstanding the many warnings placed before them. Leaders

could not get very far with their nefarious false teaching if the people did not, passively or otherwise, subscribe to and support them in it. "**The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so**" (Jeremiah 5:31).

"**I know Ephraim,**" the omniscient One declares, "**and Israel is not hid from me**" (v. 3). This expression, as to construction, is similar to "**go . . . tell his disciples and Peter**" (Mark 16:7).

The tribe of Ephraim was apparently the chief offender, though all Israel had become defiled (v. 3).

And what did the LORD know about the conduct of His people? Within the confines of eight verses (4-11), He envisioned continued rebellion, pride, impenitence, deceit, danger, desolation, chastisement, and oppression - the multiplying signs of persistent waywardness.

The LORD knew that His people had no intention of altering their course, of rearranging their lives, of mending their ways (v. 4). They conducted themselves as those oblivious of holy standards. The spirit of idolatry was sweeping the emotions, overpowering the judgment, and leading the people in ill-advised channels as they expended their time, energy, and devotion in extraneous matters which could only blight their lives.

Verse 5 embodies a cause and effect relationship - the cause, "**the pride of Israel**"; the effect, "**therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall . . . Judah also shall fall with them.**" The word "**pride**" has several meanings, such as arrogancy, haughtiness, excellency, majesty, etc. It is something which the LORD threatened to break (Leviticus 26:19); something He promised to mar (Jeremiah 13:9); something which "**goeth . . . before a fall**" (Proverbs 16:18). In Zephaniah 2:10, "**pride**" is specifically said to be self-magnification. "**I abhor the excellency [pride] of Jacob**" is a forthright evidence of divine detestation (Amos 6:8).

There is in verse 6 a little glimmer of the effectiveness of the prophet's warning. The people momentarily turn away from their "**stocks**" (wooden idols, 4:12) and hastily gather sheep and bullocks, presumably for the purpose of offering Levitical sacrifices, and they "**seek the Lord.**" There is no indication of their willingness to renounce their idolatry, their spiritual licentiousness. Incomplete repentance is imperfect repentance - an empty gesture - and fails always to register favorably with the LORD. Thus, it follows that "**he hath withdrawn himself from them**" (v. 6). And this is the "**day of rebuke**" (v. 9).

The kinsman said in the days of Ruth: "**I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar [ruin, destroy, cast off] mine own inheritance**" (Ruth 4:6). Here, of course, the LORD could do what He would with no danger of marring His own inheritance, for the unholy things which His people had espoused were not His. The things which had crowded into their lives were "**strange children**" (illegitimates) born of a treacherous wife - strange to her husband. They were apostates of the worst kind. Only the brief space of "**a month**" (v. 7) would elapse before punishment would overtake them in the loss of their portions (possessions).

The term "month" is usually connected with troublous times. The Ark of the Covenant was in the hands of the Philistines seven months (I Samuel 6:1); the locusts tormented five months (Revelation 9:5); and Jerusalem was trodden under enemy feet for forty-two months (Revelation

11:2). These, of course, are periods of experiences; Hosea's prophecy is the brief prelude to the commencement of judgment.

The alarm was to be sounded energetically by the use of the cornet and trumpet; the former was made of animals' horns, the latter of metal in an elongated design.

There were not a few varieties of them. One type gave a clear note; another, sundered or quavering notes; another, clattered as of the slapping of the hands together; still another, a continuous sound.

The instrument used and the sound produced were always identifiable by the populace. The blast which announced the arrival of an enemy was as disturbing to their emotions as the sound of a siren announcing an air raid in the heart of London during World War II. And, in spite of their rushing with animals **"to seek the Lord,"** the instruments must announce the inevitable at Gibeah, Ramath, and Bethaven in the northern kingdom, with a special need of concern for Benjamin in the southern kingdom where an attack would most likely be made first.

"Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be" (v. 9), the prophet announces, not with any sense of pleasure, but with the personal consolation that he, as Paul in a later day, had **"not shunned to declare . . . all the counsel of God"** (Acts 20:27). And in no era can any people use the excuse that ample warning was not given from on high.

The extended warning which was given at a later period relative to the invasion by **"noisome beasts"** (Gentile nations, Ezekiel 14:15) emphasizes the mystery of GOD's patience. Beginning with Ezekiel 11 and continuing for 22 chapters the record states that warning upon warning was given concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar.

The alarm then swells into unmistakable seriousness: **"Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head"** (Ezekiel 33:4).

In Hosea's day the princes (leaders) of Judah were in GOD's sight as those that **"remove the bound"** - those who ignored boundary lines. GOD said: **"Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark"** (Deuteronomy 19:14), but lines of demarcation meant little to them. Even though JEHOVAH was meticulously careful in pointing out, **"that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel"** (Exodus 11:7), they went widely afield in compromising with the heathen (goyim). They simply set all bounds aside and drifted whither they would. In view of this, the severity of the LORD is felt in His declaration: **"Therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water"** (v. 10).

The extent of this judgment cannot be comprehended, but something of its severity is revealed in the statement, **"Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke"** (v. 9). The manner of its imposition, together with added reasons for and results of its imposition, follows in rapid succession in the prophet's message to the people.

Since the verb tenses in this area are future, it would seem that verse 11 should read, "Ephraim will be oppressed." And what will the oppression be? The word itself is heavy with meaning. It

denotes violent defrauding, a vicious kind of robbery, as, for instance, "**The fruit of thy land, and all thy labors, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway**" (Deuteronomy 28:33). And why should such ruthless defrauding befall them? Because Ephraim (the ten tribes) was "**broken in judgment**" (v. 11). This means they sinned against knowledge. Knowing to do good, but doing it not; recognizing the wrong, but indulging. A case in point is that "**he willingly walked after the commandment**" (v. 11).

It was Jeroboam who used his good offices to destroy the religious unity of the nation. "**Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them [the people], It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt**" (I Kings 12:28). This was the wicked commandment in view.

Now, approximately 200 years later, the people still blaspheme the Holy One of Israel by worshiping lifeless gods, attributing to them, with no apparent compunction of conscience, the deliverance of their forefathers from the slavery of Egypt. GOD must at long last purge this idolatry from the land.

In the punishment to be imposed, the LORD, as the agent, represents Himself as a moth, a lion, and a young lion - the irresistible One. The impact of the chastening rod is felt in a famine of food (4:10), in lack of clothing (the scarcity of garments coming about as though destroyed by a moth), and physical maladies described as "**rotteness**" (v. 12), or a worm in their bones.

As the devastating trials befall the people, the LORD says, "**I will go and return to my place**" (v. 15); that is, "I will withdraw My favor." Thus, the One who is "**a very present help in trouble**," under these conditions and with His own expressed intention must remove His comfort.

Out of His heart of love, and with a desire to avert such a sad end, the LORD inquires most sympathetically through Jeremiah, "**How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?**" (Jeremiah 12:5). Simply this, they will go to false sources with no hope of receiving aid. "**When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and [Judah] sent to King Jareb**" (v. 13).

No healing was found. The weird crying at the "wailing wall" brings no consolation for the descendants of Jacob who failed to recognize the things which belonged to their peace (Luke 19:42).

This condition will continue "**till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face**," saith the LORD (v. 15). That time is still future.

Chapter 6, verse 1, is not an echo out of the past, but; rather a preview of the future - the dawning of a new vision, the cry of repentant hearts. "**Come, and let us return unto the LORD**," they will say. And the parable of the prodigal son makes clear that nothing so touches the heart of GOD as the return of the wayward. There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of GOD over one sinner who repents. In their cry, they will acknowledge that it was the LORD's

hand upon them in judgment during this extended era of suffering, and they are assured that the One who bruised them with the rod will bless them with His loving hand of grace (6:1). Herein is observed the twofold character of the major theme of the minor prophets - the goodness and the severity of the LORD.

This bright spot on the horizon for the descendants of Jacob involves three "prophetic days." Revival will come after two "days," with restoration blessing the third "day." While it is more conjectural than conclusive, it is thought by some that the two days refer (1) to this present hour of their dispersion when GOD is out of covenant relationship with them; and (2) "**the time of Jacob's trouble**" (Jeremiah 30:7), which will follow the rapture of the Church. Then, of course, (3) following such reasoning, would be the Millennium.

The viewpoint of the remnant, however, is right. If they are to know (experientially) this prophesied blessing and joy, it is a matter, first and always, of following the LORD (v. 3). There is no other gratifying, satisfying course in any age. What the LORD has prepared for them is just as sure as the rising of tomorrow morning's sun (v. 3).

And what He has prepared for the Church is just as certain: "**Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit**" (I Corinthians 2:9, 10).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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