

Hosea

Chapter 6

Israel Unrepentant

“Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. ³ Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.” ⁴ “What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. ⁵ Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. ⁶ For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. ⁷ Like Adam, they have broken the covenant— they were unfaithful to me there. ⁸ Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood. ⁹ As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes. ¹⁰ I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel. There Ephraim is given to prostitution and Israel is defiled. ¹¹ “Also for you, Judah, a harvest is appointed.

6:1 *let us return.* A shallow (see v. 4) proposal of repentance (using phrases from 5:13–15), in which Israel acknowledged that God, not Assyria (cf. 5:13), was the true physician (cf. 7:1). (CSB)

Hosea invites Ephraim and Judah to do right. (TLSB)

BIND UP OUR WOUNDS – Even if the Lord does not always send punishments in the same degree as those which He visited upon Israel, He has a most impressive way of administering correction. The hammer of the Law must smite and soften the hard hearts before the gentle message of the Gospel may find entrance. (Kretzmann)

6:2 *two days ... third day.* A brief time. Israel supposed that God’s wrath would only be temporary. (CSB)

A coming day of deliverance. We would say “in a few days.” God acted in a special way on the third day on other occasions as well, most notably when He gave the Law at Sinai (Ex 19:16) and when Christ rose from the dead. (TLSB)

6:3 *acknowledge the LORD.* A key concept in Hosea (see v. 6; 2:8, 20; 4:1, 6; 5:4). (CSB)

Hosea urges the people to strive for knowledge that begins with “the fear of the LORD.” Israel demonstrates a distinct lack of this knowledge by chasing after Baal. (TLSB)

"Therefore let us understand, follow after the knowledge of Jehovah!" for such pursuit, on the basis of true faith, was bound to have results. (Kretzmann)

like the winter rains ... spring rains. Israel believed that, as surely as seasonal rains fell, reviving the earth, God’s favor would return and restore her. (CSB)

Guaranteed natural events. For sinners, the daily and seasonal rhythms of repentance and faith bring renewal. (TLSB)

As welcome and as fruitful as these two rainy seasons were for the harvest of Palestine. But from this pleasing picture, promising the mercy of Jehovah to all those who repent, the prophet must once more abruptly turn to his doleful cry. (Kretzmann)

6:4–8:14 The Lord speaks. (TLSB)

6:4 When Ephraim and Judah join the prophet in confessing sincerely, the Lord will be very pleased. But this was not yet the case. The severity of God’s anguish is evident in the two questions He poses. (TLSB)

What can I do ... ? See Isa 5:4. God saw through Israel’s superficial repentance. (CSB)

Ephraim. Israel, the northern kingdom. (CSB)

morning mist ... dew. Figurative for that which is temporary. (CSB)

In contrast to the Lord’s reliability (v 3), the love of God’s people was transient, here today and passing away tomorrow. (TLSB)

There was nothing durable and stable about it; it vanished away upon close inspection. (Kretzmann)

6:5 *hewn them.* “Struck or cut them down,” as one would a tree. The Lord thus sent prophets to pierce the stubborn hearts of His people by the preaching of His Law. (TLSB)

my prophets. God’s spokesmen (see Jer 1:9; 15:19) had denounced the people’s sin. (CSB)

words of my mouth. The judgments spoken by the Lord’s faithful prophets. (CSB)

The prophets were God’s spokesmen. Their refrain was “Hear the word of the LORD” (4:1). (TLSB)

like lightning. See Dt 32:41. (CSB)

Ter: “Justice is the very fullness of the Deity Himself, manifesting God as both a perfect father and a perfect master: a father in His mercy, a master in His discipline” (ANF 3:308). (TLSB)

That is, the Lord's judgment upon the apostate people was so obvious that every one had to admit its source and object. (Kretzmann)

6:6 *mercy.* Hebrew *hesed*, a word that can refer to right conduct toward one's fellowman or loyalty to the Lord or both—the sum of what God requires of his servants. Here it perhaps refers to both. The same Hebrew word is translated “love” in v. 4. (CSB)

not sacrifice. Sacrifice apart from faithfulness to the Lord's will is wholly unacceptable to him (see 1Sa 15:22–23; Isa 1:11–20; Jer 7:21–22; Am 5:21–24; Mic 6:6–8; Mt 9:13; 12:7). (CSB)

God had commanded sacrifices, yet they were pleasing to Him only if they came from the heart. Jesus quotes this passage in order to condemn the Pharisees' insincerity. (TLSB)

burnt offerings. Iren: “It is evident that God did not seek sacrifices and holocausts from them, but faith, and obedience, and righteousness, because of their salvation” (ANF 1:484). (TLSB)

6:7 *Like Adam.* The allusion is uncertain, since Scripture records no covenant with Adam. The NIV text note suggests a place named Adam (Tell ed-Damiyeh) at the Jordan (see Jos 3:16), as suggested by the reference to “there” at the end of the sentence. A third interpretation takes Adam as “mankind.” (CSB)

Possibly a city near the Jordan River (Jsh 3:16) rather than the first human being, as evidenced by the word “there” and by the fact that other cities are named in the next two verses. That said, Scripture does not recount specifics about the people of that town breaking faith with God. (TLSB)

This statement being a testimony to the historical character of the first man and his transgression of God's command. (Kretzmann)

broken the covenant. See 8:1; Jos 7:11. (CSB)

In a faithless rejection of the one God of their salvation. (Kretzmann)

6:8 *Gilead.* See 12:11; Jdg 10:17; 12:7. (CSB)

Possibly refers to the 50 men that came from Gilead to help Pekah assassinate the Israelite king Pekahiah (cf 2Ki 15:25). (TLSB)

The entire province being a gathering-place of wicked people. (Kretzmann)

footprints of blood. The allusion is unclear, but Hosea may have been referring to a more recent event than the bloodbath of Jdg 12:1–6—such as Pekah’s rebellion against Pekahiah (see 2Ki 15:25). (CSB)

6:9 LIE IN AMBUSH – Lying in ambush in order to fall upon the unsuspecting traveler unawares. (Kretzmann)

priests band together. See notes, 4:4, 6, 9; 5:1. Hosea calls attention to a particularly heinous crime, i.e., when a gang of priests committed murder on the road to Shechem. (TLSB)

they murder. The specific event is unknown. (CSB)

"They murder on the way to Shechem," surprising the travelers and cutting them down in cold blood, probably as they sought refuge there, or as they were on their way to Bethel with rich sacrificial gifts. (Kretzmann)

Shechem. Major religious and political center, located near Mount Gerizim, just southeast of the capital city of Samaria. Joshua called the 12 tribes to a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem just after they had occupied the Promised Land. (TLSB)

6:10 prostitution. See chs. 2; 4. (CSB)

6:11 harvest. A figure for God’s judgments (see 8:7; 10:12–13; Jer 51:33; Joel 3:13; Mt 13:39; Rev 14:15). (CSB)

The judgment (e.g., Mt 13:30, 39). In contrast to the devastation in store for Israel, however, the Lord promises a good harvest for Judah. This will come after the Babylonian exile, when He will restore the fortunes of His remnant, including the sending of Jesus, the Messiah, a descendant of the tribe of Judah. (TLSB)

restore the fortunes. Paralleling “heal” (7:1), the phrase refers to the restoration of the wounded national body (see Joel 3:1; Zep 3:20). (CSB)

The great misery of the entire nation of the Jews could be changed only by means of God’s judgments of punishment, through which the godless would be destroyed and those who repented would be saved. To this day the only way for any person to be acceptable in the sight of God is by repentance and faith. (Kretzmann)