

RESTORING THE REPENTANT

Hosea 13:4-6; 14:1-9

Ignorance and lack of leadership result in a society or culture that is ill and functionally incompetent. Ephraim was in a position of leadership for the Northern Kingdom since it was the largest tribe. In the past when they spoke words that showed proper reverence to God, the rest of the nation listened to them with respect. Tragically, they lost their fear of the Lord and went from involvement in true worship to worship at the altar of the golden calves which was somewhat of an attempt to represent worship of Jehovah (blended religion approach) to devotion to Baal worship which resulted in “spiritual” death and a loss of their influence among the other tribes.

This loss of influence did not seem to bother them since they continued further into sin and continued putting more of their confidence in their own ability to solve their problems and protect themselves from those who wanted to eliminate them or dominate them.

The same thing has happened to the United States. In the past, when we, as a nation, stood for what was right and good and had a foundation based on Judeo-Christian beliefs, then we had respect among the nations of the world. A quote that has been attributed to Tocqueville regarding America being great because America is good is very true. Because we are abandoning what had made us great in the past, we are becoming a derision among most nations in the world today. We are disrespected, despised and ignored by those who want to control the affairs of the world. Much of our influence is dead and we have doubled down on our humanistic approach to save ourselves which is simply accelerating the decline from the leadership role we once had. We, as was the case with Israel, need to turn around and turn back to the foundation of Godly principles and trust in God rather than ourselves or we will disappear from the stage of history in the same way smoke disperses in the air and is all but forgotten.

Need of Repentance – 13:4-6

⁴Yet I *have been* the LORD your God Since the land of Egypt; And you were not to know any god except Me, For there is no savior besides Me. ⁵I cared for you in the wilderness, In the land of drought. ⁶As *they had* their pasture, they became satisfied, And being satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore they forgot Me. Hosea 13:4-6 (NASB95)

In words that are hauntingly similar to the introduction of the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20, God reminded them of the first commandment to have no other gods except Jehovah. From a practical standpoint, why does it really matter that we obey the first commandment? If you are not allowed to argue the point by saying “because God said it, we should do it,” then why would this be the right thing to do? What happens if you attempt to follow two or more different value systems in your conduct of life? It will result in confusion and indecision and multiple conflicts of interests between the various philosophies and ideas. Indecision and confusion will result in either inaction or random bad choices where the choices we make tomorrow will possibly cancel out the effects of the choices we made yesterday.

One of the main arguments we hear business leaders making regarding the lack of progress we are making in our nation today is the fact that we do not have any clear direction and firm policy decisions. Instead we are attempting to manipulate the free market system to accomplish social agendas. This results in confusion and uncertainty which leads to inaction or wrong choices.

The statement God made to them through Hosea in the last part of verse four does not surprise us since we agree that mankind’s only salvation is God’s plan that was ultimately

revealed in Christ. For Israel, this was not something they could agree upon. This lack of conviction and faith led to the downfall of the nation. I stated that “we agree that mankind’s only salvation is God’s plan,” however, “we” are rapidly becoming fewer and fewer. There are many people who totally reject the idea of the existence of God or any spiritual reality. There are some who embrace other religions that are contrary to Christianity. In addition to this, there are many who will tell you that they agree that God’s plan is the only one, but they live their lives as if God really does not exist and they essentially disregard His precepts and commandments.

As was the case for Israel, we have had a goodly measure of prosperity and we, too, have become proud and forgotten God Who “cared for us” and enabled us to become a great nation.

Call to Repentance – 14:1-3

¹Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity. ²Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity And receive *us* graciously, That we may present the fruit of our lips. ³“Assyria will not save us, We will not ride on horses; Nor will we say again, ‘Our god,’ To the work of our hands; For in You the orphan finds mercy.” Hosea 14:1-3 (NASB95)

We have seen throughout the study of the writings of Hosea what we might call the bad news and the good news. The messages from God through Hosea have called attention to the errors of the nation and the consequences of continuing in those wrong choices. The message would then change to a call to repentance along with the necessary action and the rewards of obedience that would follow making the right choices.

Beginning in Chapter fourteen, we see an outline of a multi-step recipe for repentance that would result in victory rather than defeat. The overall scope of the process involved something different from the normal ritualistic methodology that was part of their religious activities. Normally, the people would bring an animal for sacrifice and grain offerings, but God instructed them to bring “words” rather than sacrificial animals. The Hebrew word used here means “realities” and can be translated to mean “things” as well as “what is spoken.” In the context of this passage, Hosea clearly focused on the “spoken” words rather than things. The appeal was to bring words that were sincere and not just empty platitudes when they began the process.

Step one was “return” or change direction. Such an action involves a decision and exercise of a person’s will. This is like the Prodigal son who came to his senses and made a decision that he would return to his father. This is the same first step that is required for anyone to be saved. That first step is to repent.

Step two is found in the middle part of verse two where the people were called upon to acknowledge their iniquity or sin. This step is essential, because those who will not or cannot come to a realization that they have sinned and that what they are or have been doing is wrong will never be able to turn away from their destructive behavior. Did you notice that this is also the same thing that we would include in telling a lost person God’s plan of salvation? Acknowledging and confessing our sins are also ongoing parts that are needed for us to maintain a healthy relationship with God and our fellow Christians after we have been saved. We see this in 1 John 1:9-10 that tells that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

A natural outcome of receiving such forgiveness and restoration would be the third step that Hosea mentioned and that would involve praising God as an expression of worship and gratitude. In the latter part of verse two, this is expressed as the “calves” of our lips which most modern translations render the “fruit” of our lips. Calves were representative of sacrifices and in

Hebrews 13:15 we see this same idea expressed as “Through Him, then, let us continually lay on the altar a sacrifice of praise to God, namely, the utterance of lips that give thanks to His Name.”

The fourth and final step was simply to put their total trust and faith in God alone. No more relying on alliances with other nation, no more putting confidence in their military might, and no more reliance on pagan religious beliefs. In relating this step to what we would teach as an essential part of our salvation, we would recall the statement from Hebrews 11:6 that tells us “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

If we were to take inventory of how well we are doing as a nation with regard to putting our trust in alliances with other nations, we might score ourselves with relatively high marks, since most of us do not put a lot of confidence in what our allies would do to help us when there is real trouble. When it comes to our confidence in military might, most people have a lot of confidence in the technology we have, less confidence in our ability to make the right decisions about how to use what we have. Most of the time, we don’t give a lot of thought to simply relying on God in such matters unless it gets personal when we might have a friend or relative who would be in harm’s way in a war zone. What kind of marks would you give our nation when it comes to embracing philosophies that are contrary to Biblical teachings? Many people essentially do not give any credibility to what the Bible teaches with regard to how people should relate to each other which might include such aspects as the value of human life, being a good steward of our health or the environment, marriage and family concerns, as well as being honest and truthful.

Results of Repentance – 14:4-8

⁴I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from them. ⁵I will be like the dew to Israel; He will blossom like the lily, And he will take root like *the cedars of Lebanon*. ⁶His shoots will sprout, And his beauty will be like the olive tree And his fragrance like *the cedars of Lebanon*. ⁷Those who live in his shadow Will again raise grain, And they will blossom like the vine. His renown *will be* like the wine of Lebanon. ⁸O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress; From Me comes your fruit. Hosea 14:4-8 (NASB95)

While it was unlikely that Israel would turn back from their headlong plunge toward destruction, God held out promises that should have drawn them back from the brink. After they failed to heed the warning, these results of repentance could be applied to others who would turn from their sin and turn to God. The description of luxuriant provision and beauty may have been an attempt to describe an ideal environment. This description may have been pointing to what was lost in the Garden of Eden or what would be awaiting those whose eternal home is in heaven. The message is clearly one in which those who put their trust in God will experience great benefits that flow out from a providential God.

The first and most important provision is that God promised to heal their apostasy or backsliding. I think that the implication is that the word for backsliding as used here is more than what we tend to think of as being an occasional error or slip up. We all experience such things and are usually quick to get back on track and going in the right direction. The healing that is promised here is closer to that which would result from having a new heart as mentioned by Ezekiel in his writings as seen in Eze 36:26 which says “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” This is the only cure that will work to solve the problem of mankind’s rebellious nature. We need a new nature that is born of the Spirit of God rather than of the seed of Adam. After that relationship has been established, and then a whole new world of possibilities opens up for everyone who puts their faith and trust in God for their salvation.

Wisdom of Repentance – 14:9

⁹Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; *Whoever* is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, And the righteous will walk in them, But transgressors will stumble in them. Hosea 14:9 (NASB95)

These concluding remarks are similar to the idea Jesus expressed regarding those who have ears to hear, let them hear. Some commentators think that this last verse may have been added by an inspired editor of Hosea's prophecies with the hope to appeal to those who were serious about their spiritual relationship with God. Some will understand the importance of this and many others will not. We should pray that we will always be discerning and eager to hear.