

November 3

Scriptures: Read Hosea 5, 6 & 7

Key Verse: “Come and let us return to the Lord; ...He will heal..., bind..., revive ... [and] raise us up, that we may live in His sight.” (Hosea 6:1-2)

Overview

In chapter five, the Lord speaks, through His prophet Hosea, words of “rebuke” (a judicial term implying condemnation) to the leadership of Israel (priests and kings) for leading the nation astray and trapping the people in idolatry. After the division of the kingdom, Jeroboam the first king of the new Northern Kingdom, purposefully instituted calf worship as a political means of keeping the two kingdoms separated; he did not want his people going to Jerusalem to worship God. Israel then became defiled with her spiritual harlotry against God. On occasion, some people from Israel would still go to Jerusalem with their flocks to offer sacrifices, but this was hypocritical and meaningless to God, for He knew they were traitors who were practising idolatry and raising their children to be pagans (5:6-7). Therefore, the Lord proclaimed imminent judgment by means of a battle (5:8-9).

Guilt is also laid upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah at this time, for she saw the coming destruction of Israel, and rather than trying to turn Israel from her sin, Judah anxiously awaited her downfall so that she might remove Israel’s boundary stone and claim more territory for herself (5:10). The wrath of God was therefore upon both kingdoms, but Israel would meet destruction sooner from an external force (the moth), and Judah would slowly decay from within (like rottenness in the middle of a beautiful apple; 5:12). When they realized they needed help, they both made the mistake of going to the wrong source. Instead of turning to God, they looked to worldly powers, such as the king of Assyria, for protection (cf. 2 Kings 15:19-21; 16:5-9). But there would be none to protect or rescue them when God becomes like a vicious lion and takes Israel and Judah away as prey. Their judgment is essential, for without this chastisement they would never repent and seek God’s restored favour and blessing. Hosea prophesies that Israel would indeed repent, and he gives the very words of their repentance which express their desire to know the Lord and indicate their renewed faith and trust in God that He will heal, bind, revive, restore, and bless them (6:1-3).

Until that time, however, both Israel and Judah were fickle, floundering, insincere in their worship to Him, and hypocritical (6:4-6). Their outward acts of religion did not come from their hearts. God was more interested in their dedication and obedience to Him than in their empty burnt offerings, which were supposed to symbolize these things. Although Judah would not be punished until about 130 years after Israel, they would meet the same fate. The Lord’s justice demands that He punish sin. They were fraudulent traitors who had breached their contract (the Covenant) by disobeying God. Even though God desired to show mercy and deliver them, He could not, for they persisted in their sin without considering the seriousness of their offences (7:1-3).

Much blame is laid upon the kings and leaders of Israel who delighted in the wickedness of the people. The kings were drunkards and were like negligent bakers in not caring for the people

(7: 5, 6); but their negligence would be their ruin. Like an uncontrollable fire, evil desires burned within the hearts of the people. Four of Israel's last six kings were assassinated, and yet none of the kings cried out to God for help and wisdom to govern such a violent people (7:7).

Their road to ruin was in not keeping separated from the heathen influences within and without Canaan (7:8; cf. Ex. 23:33; Ps. 106:34-36). Their idolatry was slowly devouring any strength they may have had. Although God (who was the glory and "pride of Israel"; 5:5; 7:10) gave them many warnings through true prophets (such as Hosea) to confront them with their sin and predict the outcome, they did not heed the words of the Lord. Therefore, the Lord declared that He would fulfill all the prophecies spoken against them (7:9-12). What a sad commentary Hosea gives, for in spite of all God had done for them, they did not acknowledge Him or turn back to Him. How unfortunate that they first had to be "torn" and "stricken" before they would realize that true life is found only in repenting and seeking God (6:1).

Prayer

God, we repent today of any evil in our lives or of anything that would separate us from you. We acknowledge that You are a jealous God and we purpose in our hearts to serve only You.