
HOSEA 14: 1 Israel, return to the LORD your God; for you have fallen because of your sin.

By the terrible denunciation of vengeance which concludes the preceding chapter, the prophet is led to exhort Israel to repentance, furnishing them with a beautiful form of prayer, very suitable to the occasion, Hos 14:1-3. Upon which God, ever ready to pardon the penitent, is introduced making large promises of blessings, in allusion to those copious dews which refresh the green herbs, and which frequently denote, not only temporal salvation, but also the rich and refreshing comforts of the Gospel, Hos 14:4-7. Their reformation from idolatry is foretold, and their consequent prosperity, under the emblem of a green flourishing fir tree, Hos 14:8; but these promises are confined to those who may bring forth the fruits of righteousness, and the wicked are declared to have no share in them, Hos 14:9.

Verse 1

O Israel, return unto the Lord - These words may be considered as addressed to the people now in captivity; suffering much, but having still much more to suffer if they did not repent. But it seems all these evils might yet be prevented, though so positively predicted, if the people would repent and return; and the very exhortation to this repentance shows that they still had power to repent, and that God was ready to save them and avert all these evils. All this is easily accounted for on the doctrine of the contingency of events, i.e., the poisoning a multitude of events on the possibility of being and not being, and leaving the will of man to turn the scale; and that God will not foreknow a thing as absolutely certain, which his will has determined to make contingent. A doctrine against which some solemn men have blasphemed, and philosophic infidels declaimed; but without which fate and dire necessity must be the universal governors, prayer be a useless meddling, and Providence nothing but the ineluctable adamant chain of unchangeable events; all virtue is vice, and vice virtue, or there is no distinction between them, each being eternally determined and unalterably fixed by a sovereign and uncontrollable will and unvarying necessity, from the operation of which no soul of man can escape, and no occurrence in the universe be otherwise than it is. From such blasphemy, and from the monthly publications which avouch it, good Lord, deliver us!

HOSEA 14: 2 Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Tell him, "Forgive all our sins, and accept that which is good: so we offer our lips like bulls.

Verse 2

Take with you words - And you may be assured that you pray aright, when you use the words which God himself has put in your mouths. On this very ground there is a potency in the Lord's Prayer, when offered up believingly, beyond what can be found in any human composition. And it may be presumed that it was this consideration that induced our reformers to introduce it so frequently in the public liturgy.

See the order of God's directions here: -

1. Hearing these merciful invitations, believe them to be true.
2. Cast aside your idols; and return to God as your Maker, King, and Savior.

3. Take with you the words by which you have been encouraged, and plead them before God.
4. Remember your iniquity, deeply deplore it, and beg of God to take it all away.
5. Let faith be in exercise to receive what God waits to impart. "Receive us graciously;" וקח טוב vekach tob, receive, or let us receive good; when thou has emptied us of evil, fill us with goodness.
6. Be then determined, through grace, to live to his glory, "so shall we render thee the calves" (פרים parim, for which the versions in general read פרי peri, fruits, omitting the ם mem) "of our lips;" the sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, gratitude, and the hearty obedience which our lips have often promised.
7. Having thus determined, specify your resolutions to depend on God alone for all that can make you wise, useful, holy, and happy. The resolutions are: -
 1. Asshur shall not save us - We will neither trust in, nor fear, this rich and powerful king. We will not look either to riches or power for true rest and peace of mind.
 2. We will not ride upon horses - We shall no more fix our hopes on the proud Egyptian cavalry, to deliver us out of the hands of enemies to whom thy Divine justice has delivered us. We will expect no rest nor happiness in the elegances of life, and gratification of our senses.
 3. Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods - We will not trust in any thing without us; nor even in any good thing we are able to do through thy grace; knowing we have nothing but what we have received. We will trust in thy infinite mercy for our final salvation.
 4. And we will do all this from the conviction, that in thee the fatherless findeth mercy; for we are all alike helpless, desolate, perishing orphans, till translated into thy family.

HOSEA 14: 3 Assyria can't save us. We won't ride on horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, 'Our gods!' for in you the fatherless finds mercy."

HOSEA 14: 4 "I will heal their waywardness. I will love them freely; for my anger is turned away from him.

Verse 4

I will heal their backsliding - Here is the answer of God to these prayers and resolutions. See its parts: -

1. Ye have backslidden and fallen, and are grievously and mortally wounded by that fall; but I, who am the Author of life, and who redeem from death, will heal all these wounds and spiritual diseases.
 2. I will love them freely - נדבה nedabah, after a liberal, princely manner. I will love them so as to do them incessant good. It shall not be a love of affection merely, but shall be a beneficial love. A love that not only feels delight in itself, but fills them with delight who are its objects, by making them unutterably and supremely happy.
 3. For mine anger is turned away from him - Because he has turned back to me. Thus God and man become friends.
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HOSEA 14: 5 I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily, and send down his roots like Lebanon.

Verse 5

I will be as the dew unto Israel - On these metaphors I gladly avail myself of the elegant and just observations of Bp. Lowth. "These verses (Hos 14:5-7) contain gracious promises of God's favor and blessings upon Israel's conversion. In the fifth verse, it is described by that refreshment which copious dews give to the grass in summer. If we consider the nature of the climate, and the necessity of dews in so hot a country, not only to refresh, but likewise to preserve life; if we consider also the beauty of the oriental lilies, the fragrance of the cedars which grow upon Lebanon, the beautiful appearance which the spreading olive trees afforded, the exhilarating coolness caused by the shade of such trees, and the aromatic smell exhaled by the cedars; we shall then partly understand the force of the metaphors here employed by the prophet; but their full energy no one can conceive, till he feels both the want, and enjoys the advantage, of the particulars referred to in that climate where the prophet wrote." - Lowth's twelfth and nineteenth prelection; and Dodd on the place.

What a glorious prophecy! What a wonderful prophet! How sublime, how energetic, how just! The great master prophet, Isaiah, alone could have done this better. And these promises are not for Israel merely after the flesh; they are for all the people of God. We have a lot and portion in the matter; God also places his love upon us. Here the reader must feel some such sentiment as the shepherd in Virgil, when enraptured with the elegy which his associate had composed on their departed friend. The phraseology and metaphors are strikingly similar; and therefore I shall produce it.

Tale tuum carmen nobis, divine poeta,

Quale sopor fesses in gramine, quale per aestum

Dulcis aquae saliente sitim restinguere rivo.

Nec calamis solum aequiparas, sed voce magistrum.

Fortunate puer! tu nunc eris alter ab illo.

Nos tamen haec quocunque modo tibi nostra vicissim

Dicemus, Daphninq̄ue tuum tollemus ad astra:

Daphnin ad astra feremus: amavit nos quoque Daphnis.

Virgil. Ecl. v., ver. 45. "O heavenly poet, such thy verse appears,

So sweet, so charming to my ravish'd ears,

As to the weary swain with cares oppress'd,

Beneath the sylvan shade, refreshing rest;

As to the feverish traveler, when first

He finds a crystal stream to quench his thirst.

In singing, as in piping, you excel;
 And scarce your master could perform so well.
 O fortunate young man! at least your lays
 Are next to his, and claim the second praise.
 Such as they are, my rural songs I join
 To raise your Daphnis to the powers divine;
 For Daphnis was my friend, as well as thine."

HOSEA 14: 6 His branches will spread, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.

HOSEA 14: 7 Men will dwell in his shade. They will revive like the grain, and blossom like the vine. Their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon.

Verse 7

They that dwell under his shadow shall return - The Targum is curious: "They shall be gathered together from the midst of their captivity; they shall dwell under the shadow of his Christ, and the dead shall revive."

They shall revive as the corn - The justness and beauty of this metaphor is not generally perceived. After the corn has been a short time above the earth, in a single spike, the blades begin to separate, and the stalk to spring out of the center. The side leaves turn back to make way for the protruding stalk; and fall bending down to the earth, assuming a withered appearance, though still attached to the plant. To look at the corn in this state, no one, unacquainted with the circumstance, could entertain any sanguine hope of a copious harvest. In a short time other leaves spring out; the former freshen, and begin to stand erect; and the whole seems to revive from a vegetative death. This is the circumstance to which the prophet refers "they shall revive as the corn." Of this a prudent and profitable use may be made.

1. When a soul is first "drawn by the cords of love," Hos 11:4, every thing seems to it promising, comfortable, and delightful, like the corn in its first state.
2. But when the Spirit of judgment brings to the light of conscience the hidden things of iniquity, and repentance is deepened into contrition, the broken and the contrite heart groans, and thinks that all is lost; deep distress takes place, and discouragement succeeds discouragement. This answers to the corn in its second state.
3. By and by the pardon comes, and God's love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; every hope is revived and realized, the full corn in the ear becomes manifest; and this answers to the corn in its third state. "They shall revive as the corn." Glory be to God for his unspeakable gift!

HOSEA 14: 8 Ephraim, what have I to do any more with idols? I answer, and will take care of him. I am like a green fir tree; from me your fruit is found."

 Verse 8

What have I to do any more with idols? - The conversion of Ephraim is now as complete as if was sincere. God hears and observes this.

I am like a green fir tree - Perhaps these words should be joined to the preceding, as Newcome has done, and be a part of God's speech to Ephraim. "I have heard him; and I have seen him as a flourishing fir tree." He is become strong and vigorous; and from his present appearance of healthiness, his future increase and prosperity may be safely anticipated.

From me is thy fruit found - All thy goodness springs from the principle of grace which I have planted in thy soul; for as the earth cannot bring forth fruit without the blessing of God, sending the dews and rains, with the genial rays of the sun, so neither can the soul of man, even of the most pious, bear fruit, without a continual influence from the Most High. Without the former, neither grass could grow for cattle, nor corn for the service of man; without the latter, no seeds of righteousness could take root, no stalk of promise could grow, no fruit of grace could be produced. And the unclean spirit, which was cast out, would soon return; and, finding his former house empty, swept, and garnished, would re-enter with seven demons of greater power and worse influence; and the latter end of that man would be worse than the first. Reader, ever consider that all thy good must be derived from God; and all that good must be preserved in thee by his continued influence of light, love, and power upon thy soul.

HOSEA 14: 9 Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Who is prudent, that he may know them? For the ways of the LORD are right, and the righteous walk in them; But the rebellious stumble in them.

Verse 9

Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? - What things? Those which relate to the backslidings, iniquity, and punishment of Israel; and to the mercy and kindness of God in their promised restoration. The things which belong to the work of sin in the heart; the things which belong to the work of grace in the soul; and particularly the things mentioned in this wonderful chapter.

Prudent, and he shall know them? - He who endeavors to understand them, who lays his heart to them, such a person shall understand them.

For the ways of the Lord are right - This is the conclusion which the prophet makes from the whole. All God's conduct, both in the dispensation of justice and mercy, is right: all as it should be, all as it must be; because he is too wise to err, too good to be unkind.

The just shall walk, in them - This is a truth which he will always acknowledge; and illustrate it by a righteous and godly life.

But the transgressors shall fall therein - Howsoever good they might have been before, if they do not consider the necessity of depending upon God; of receiving all their light, life, power, and love from him; ever evidencing that faith which worketh by love; maintaining an obedient conduct, and having respect to all God's precepts; they shall fall, even in the "way of righteousness." When still

using the Divine ordinances, and associating with God's people, they shall perish from the way; and be like Ephraim, who once "spoke trembling," and "was exalted in Israel," who was "God's beloved son," and "called out of Egypt;" yet, by "offending in Baal," giving way to "the idols of his heart," fell from God, fell into the hands of his enemies, and became a wretched thrall in a heathen land.

"Whoso is wise, let him understand these things!

Whoso is prudent, let him know them!" -

He who is well instructed will make a proper application of what he has here read; will tremble at the threatenings, and embrace the promises, of his God.

The Targum is worthy the most serious attention. "The ways of the Lord are right, and the just who walk in them shall live for ever; but the ungodly, because they have not walked in them, shall be delivered into hell."

How instructive, how convincing, how awakening, and yet how consolatory, are the words of this prophecy! Reader, lay them to heart. A godly mind cannot consider them in vain; such shall know them, and know that the ways of the Lord are right.