

PHONY REPENTANCE | HOSEA CHAPTER SIX

“THEY WORSHIP WITH THEIR MOUTHS BUT HEARTS FAR FROM ME” (Is. 29:13) | BY LUKE THORNE

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we witnessed the complete destruction of Israel because of their *determined* and *willful* idolatry; even in the midst of God’s wrath, they refused to repent. However, at the end of chapter five, God declared, “I will return again to my lair until they have suffered their punishment. Then they will seek me; **in their distress they will earnestly seek me**” Hosea 5:15 (NET).

Now, the narrative of Hosea shifts to a dialogue between the guilty party and God.

THE PEOPLE REPENT

Instead of going verse by verse, I believe talking about the main themes one at a time might prove most beneficial. First, we will consider what this passage is *really* saying about the Children of Israel and the nature and motive of their repentance. Second, we will compare what they were bringing to the LORD’s table to what he was patiently waiting for.

And third, we will reread this passage in light of the life of the Son of Man, Jesus himself, and what it means for us here and now.

LET US COUNT ON HIS FAITHFULNESS

The unfaithful declare, “let’s repent! This judgment we’re facing is from him, let’s return to him so that he can heal us.” They rightly understood that what had befallen them was directly from the LORD, and they understood that there was an urgent need to repent in order to reestablish their position under God’s protection.

No doubt, this reversal in their minds—from ignoring God and pursuing their own lusts and idolatries to acknowledging YHWH’s sovereignty over their nation—was informed by their cultural knowledge of how God had dealt with the children of Israel in the past. They looked to Joshua and saw promises of blessing if they would just worship the LORD and obey his commandments.

Joshua 23:3, 5–8 (NET, emphasis added)

3 You saw everything the LORD your God did to all these nations on your behalf, for the LORD your God fights for you.

5 The LORD your God will drive [the nations] out from before you and remove them, so you can occupy their land as the LORD your God promised you.

6 Be very strong! Carefully obey all that is written in the law scroll of Moses so you won’t swerve from it to the right or the left,

7 or associate with these nations that remain near you. You must not invoke or make solemn declarations by the names of their gods! You must not worship or bow down to them!

8 But you must be loyal to the LORD your God, as you have been to this very day.

They saw the warning being laid bare against them in this moment, and so they took the advice of their patriarch Joshua to “obey all that is written in the law of Moses,” and turned to Moses in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 6:12–15 (ESV, emphasis added)

12 then **take care lest you forget the LORD**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

13 **It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.**

14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—

15 **for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God**—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

They recalled his great jealousy and hoped to avoid his continued wrath by worshiping him. They were scrambling for a cure to their current affliction, and they saw God's jealousy as something that had to be appeased in order for their curse to be lifted.

But what they did not acknowledge was the verses that came just before this passage: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" Deut 6:5.\

Consider, "...no fault can be found with the sentiments of these verses. In themselves they are a perfect expression of humility, faith and serious intent. The trouble is that Israel is at present in no state to speak or even think along such lines. Religion, for her, is not *knowing* God, still less 'pressing on to know him'. It is merely placating Him with sacrifice, as verse 6 implies.¹"

THE GOD OF HEARTS

God would not be appeased! He desired faithful *love*, not mere sacrifice and worship.

Psalm 50:7–23 (NET)

7 He says: "Listen my people! I am speaking! Listen Israel! I am accusing you! I am God, your God!

8 I am not condemning you because of your sacrifices, or because of your burnt sacrifices that you continually offer me.

9 I do not need to take a bull from your household or goats from your sheepfolds.

10 For every wild animal in the forest belongs to me, as well as the cattle that graze on a thousand hills.

11 I keep track of every bird in the hills, and the insects of the field are mine.

12 Even if I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all it contains belong to me.

13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls? Do I drink the blood of goats?

14 [No!] Present to God a thank-offering! Repay your vows to the sovereign One!

15 Pray to me when you are in trouble! I will deliver you, and you will honor me!"

16 God says this to the evildoer: "How can you declare my commands, and talk about my covenant?

17 For you hate instruction and reject my words.

22 Carefully consider this, you who reject God! Otherwise I will rip you to shreds and no one will be able to rescue you.

23 Whoever presents a thank-offering honors me. To whoever obeys my commands, I will reveal my power to deliver."

God mocks his people's obsession with offering blood and smoke, when he has made it plain from the very beginning that he desires their hearts.

Thank offerings (Ps 50:14) are "...free-will offerings, something spontaneously devoted to God."² In other words, thank-offerings are direct manifestations of our love for God. They are not commanded or done out of duty; they are not in *any way*, done with expectation of being reciprocated. They are plain, unadulterated affection from a sinner toward his creator. But, as we shall see, they Israelites did not yet understand this. They thought to *appease* when God desired love.

GOD'S REBUKE

Hosea 6:5

Therefore, I will certainly cut you into pieces at the hands of the prophets; I will certainly kill you in fulfillment of my oracles of judgment; for my judgment will come forth like the light of the dawn.

¹ Kidner, D. (1976). *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 64). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

“The fierceness of verse 5, with its hewing and slaying, is not blind fury, but has the clarity of light, the purity of justice and the constructiveness of love—for verse 6 reveals the end in view. Notice, too, the implied appeal to reason and conscience, for the ‘hewing and slaying’ was ‘by the prophets’ first of all. God does not send His judgments without warning or without the offer of repentance.³”

God declares what he *must* do in order to bring the people to a real and lasting relationship with Him.

OUR HIDDEN TREACHERY

Hosea 6:7-8

⁷ At Adam they broke the covenant; Oh how they were unfaithful to me!

⁸ Gilead is a city full of evildoers; its streets are stained with bloody footprints!

God is of one mind: he desires us, his bride, to be faithful to him! He desires a relationship borne not just of legal demands but of love and affection. He desires to be your morning star and evening sunset. It wounds him that we are hell-bent on sneaking out each night to lay with another.

ADULTERY IN THE MARRIAGE BED

Hosea 6:9-10

⁹ The company of priests is like a gang of robbers, lying in ambush to pounce on a victim. They commit murder on the road to Shechem; they have done heinous crimes!

¹⁰ I have seen a disgusting thing in the temple of Israel: there Ephraim practices temple prostitution and Judah defiles itself.

God’s own *priests* were culpable of the same abominations as the rest of the people! They brought temple prostitution *into* the Holy Place! Can you imagine the gall? But then, we consider the vast history of scandals within Christ’s body. Priests sexually abusing children, famous pastors caught up in adultery. In 2016, hackers released the database of Ashley Maddison, an online resource for hiring a prostitute, and over 400 pastors and church staff were on the list.⁴

Being a priest of God—or a pastor of his church—does not mean we have

GOD’S DESIRE

So far, we have considered the direct context of this passage, but I want to turn to the bigger issue. What does this passage tell us about God? The Heart of God has *never* been hidden from his people. Over and over, he has and continues to reveal it. He has *always* asked for fidelity and trust. He has *always* sought to be the center of our world.

The LORD desires to be intimately known by his creation! All throughout scripture he reveals himself, waiting for a man or women to take hold of the hunger to know him.

“To most people God is an inference, not a reality. He is a deduction from evidence which they consider adequate; but He remains personally unknown to the individual. “He must be,” they say, “therefore we believe He is.” (Tozer, A.W., *The Pursuit of God*, chapter 4).

YHWH does not want our legal offerings, he want our hearts! Consider Joel 2:12-13:

“Yet even now,” the LORD says, “return to me with all your heart— with fasting, weeping, and mourning. [rend] your hearts, not just your garments!” Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and boundless in loyal love—often relenting from calamitous punishment.”

GOD’S BROKEN HEART

² Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton’s Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

³ Kidner, D. (1976). *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 67). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/august/my-pastor-is-on-ashley-madison-list.html>

Hosea 6:4

What am I going to do with you, O Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, O Judah? For your faithfulness is as fleeting as the morning mist; it disappears as quickly as dawn's dew!

How heartbreaking this is. The LORD has pursued his beloved day after day, and they have taken him for granted each time. And here, now, they are back, hoping to presume upon his loving-kindness, trusting that the LORD is an easily fooled doe-eyed lover who will only be grateful to have them before they rest and recuperate and leave him again.

Their overconfidence was that he would take them back in love and mercy as surely as the light of the dawn comes every morning. But this is not like all the other times. The LORD will not simply take them back because he knows that their repentance is false! Instead, he promises that his *fury* will come forth as the light of day!⁵

THE LORD DELIGHTS IN RELATIONSHIP

Hosea 6:6

For I delight in faithfulness, not simply in sacrifice; I delight in acknowledging God, not simply in whole burnt offerings.

David understood this central truth, and he enshrined it in verse so that the people would learn it.

Psalm 51:16–17 (NET)

16 Certainly you do not want a sacrifice, or else I would offer it; you do not desire a burnt sacrifice.

17 The sacrifices God desires are a humble spirit— O God, a humble and repentant heart you will not reject.

We have to keep going back to that passage in chapter two that reveals God's heart and God's desires: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her" (2:14). "Throughout the book this is the longed-for outcome of His judgments. Whatever else might be their character, they are pre-eminently a lover's short-lived coolness to reawaken love."⁶

TRUE REPENTANCE

When David's horrible sins with Bathsheba were found out, and he was confronted with them by Nathan the prophet, David's heart was torn apart. And in his grief of sin, he penned Psalm 51—a testament to *true* repentance that any sinner can turn to as an example of what the LORD desires in us.

Psalm 51:1–13 (NET)

1 Have mercy on me, O God, because of your loyal love! Because of your great compassion, wipe away my rebellious acts! 2 Wash away my wrongdoing! Cleanse me of my sin! 3 For I am aware of my rebellious acts; I am forever conscious of my sin.

4 Against you—you above all—I have sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me. 5 Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me. 6 Look, you desire integrity in the inner man; you want me to possess wisdom.

7 Sprinkle me with water and I will be pure; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Grant me the ultimate joy of being forgiven! May the bones you crushed rejoice! 9 Hide your face from my sins! Wipe away all my guilt! 10 Create for me a pure heart, O God! Renew a resolute spirit within me! 11 Do not reject me! Do not take your Holy Spirit away from me!

12 Let me again experience the joy of your deliverance! Sustain me by giving me the desire to obey! 13 Then I will teach rebels your merciful ways, and sinners will turn to you.

⁵ Biblical Studies Press. (2006). The NET Bible First Edition Notes (Ho 6:5). Biblical Studies Press.

⁶ Kidner, D. (1976). The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 64). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Repentance is permanently exchanging one thing for another. A full reversal of direction. A cutting down of the thicket of brambles and burning them. But where we often stumble is in thinking this must be done in our *behaviors* instead of in our *heart*. We often see the fruit of the tree of sin as the problem (the behaviors), but you will never be able to kill the tree by picking the fruit. The axe must fall on the heart of the matter! Quite literally.

Repentance is the only real response to Jesus' words, "Come unto me."⁷

"When you hear those words you will know that something must happen in you before you can come. The Holy Spirit will show you what you have to do, anything at all that will put the axe at the root of the thing which is preventing you from getting through. You will never get further until you are willing to do that one thing. The Holy Spirit will locate the one impregnable thing in you but He cannot budge it unless you are willing to let Him."⁸

When Jesus finished the work of God on the cross, the veil that separated the Holy if Holies was torn asunder. Never again would God be separated from the hearts and minds of any man or woman who sought him! Have you, though, ever felt distant from God? Or perhaps you would characterize it as spiritual "drought" or "coldness"? Maybe you find yourself facing this very real and aching spiritual state even now.

Beloved, there is another veil. It resided deep within our hearts, hiding the face of God from us. "It is woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. They are not something we do, they are something we are, and therein lies both their subtlety and their power."⁹

"Self is the opaque veil that hides the Face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. As well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. We must prepare ourselves for an ordeal of suffering in some measure like that through which our Saviour passed when He suffered under Pontius Pilate."¹⁰

It is no easy thing to remove this veil because it isn't what we do, it is a huge part of *who we are*. The Holy Spirit calls to us to let this part of our Self die—to allow the great physician to amputate—and replace it with something immeasurably greater in the promises of Christ! Will you allow him to tear down this veil? Will you allow Him to take the axe to the base of the tree? To do so, is *true* repentance, and it is always worth the pain, though it may not seem so at the time.

QUESTIONS:

1. What did the people of Israel understand about God in verses 1-3?
2. What did they fail to understand?
3. What does verse 4 tell us about God?
4. What was he going to do because of their unrepentance?
5. Verse 6 is Incredible. What does it reveal about God's heart?
6. Who does God compare the people to in verses 7-8? Why?
7. What does God have to say about his priesthood?
8. Can we relate, today? If so, what is the solution for the elect?
9. What, if anything, does this passage have to do with Jesus?
10. What does this prophesy mean for us, here and now?

⁷ See Mat 11:28

⁸ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, "Come Unto Me"

⁹ Tozer, A. W., "The Pursuit of God," chapter 2

¹⁰ Ibid.