

THEY DO NOT TURN TO ME | HOSEA CHAPTER SEVEN

I DESIRE TO DELIVER THEM, BUT THEY LIE TO ME | BY LUKE THORNE

INTRODUCTION

Hosea chapter seven is a beautiful, if difficult to accept, example of Hebrew poetry. It is rife with metaphor, symbolism, and ironic comparison. The main thrust of the passage is clear: While God was patiently faithful to Israel, they were not faithful to Him. It is a refreshing break from the chapters surrounding it because it demonstrates God's desire for their restoration. He earnestly sought after them, but they gave him only lies and treachery in return.

"How better describe a half-fed people, a half-cultured society, a half-lived religion, a half-hearted policy, than by a half-baked scone?" — George Adam Smith

SINS HIDDEN; SINS EXPOSED

Hosea 6:11b-7:1 (NET)

11b Whenever I want to restore the fortunes of my people,

1 whenever I want to heal Israel, the sin of Ephraim [shall be] revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria exposed. For they do what is wrong; thieves break into houses, and gangs rob people out in the streets.

There is a cost to the restoration of God. To be reconciled, our sins must be exposed. This is a fact we often try to ignore. Have you ever convinced yourself that "enough was enough." You would no longer feed yourself to your hidden sin, and you convince yourself that this will be enough. That you do not need to confess it to your spouse or your brethren.

The truth is that there can be no clean slate until we have confessed². As long as we refuse to bring our transgression into the light, it will plague us. When we finally get real with God, it will hurt—as the setting of a dislocated shoulder hurts—but just like the shoulder being set, it will bring something far better and more lasting than peace with the discomfort. It brings healing and restoration.

Hosea 7:2

They do not realize that I remember all of their wicked deeds. Their evil deeds have now surrounded them; their sinful deeds are always before me.

Lit. "They did not say in their hearts." It didn't enter their minds that what they hid was totally visible to God. How often we do this. We live two incompatible parallel lives. It does not enter our head when we lie or slander or consort or condemn that God does not just see us on Sunday mornings or during our time in prayer. He is aware of more about each of us than we are. The LORD knows the substance of man's heart³.

Luke 14:11 (ESV) "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

This is what the LORD is saying to the children of Israel, and it what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today. Do not wait for the chastisement of God to humble you, instead, humble yourself in confession and be cleansed of unrighteousness.

What follows is a description of the heart God sees in his people. It is not a condemnation of their actions but the twisted and charred hearts behind them. Remember, God searches the hearts of men and tests the inward man, and he is faithful to give accordingly⁴.

1 Chronicles 28:9b (LEB)

9 "Yahweh searches all hearts and understands every plan and all thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will reject you forever.

THE FURNACE OF THEIR HEARTS

In the rest of the middle section of Hosea (through chapter 9:8), God will be explaining the reason for his divorce of Israel. It's important to remember back to the first three chapters of the Hosea, because they are a summary of what is now being explained in detail.

¹ The Book of the Twelve Prophets by George Adam Smith (The Expositor's Bible) p. 273, 1, 71900.

² 1 John 1:8–9 (ESV) "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

³ See 1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Chronicles 28:9, Jeremiah 11:20

⁴ See Jeremiah 17:10, 1 Samuel 16:7

- 3 The royal advisers delight the king with their evil schemes, the princes make him glad with their lies.
- 4 They are all like [adulterers], they are like a smoldering oven; they are like a baker who does not stoke the fire until the kneaded dough is ready for baking.
- 5 At the celebration of their king, his princes become inflamed with wine; they conspire with evildoers.
- 6 They approach him, all the while plotting against him. Their hearts are like an oven; their anger smolders all night long, but in the morning it bursts into a flaming fire.
- 7 All of them are blazing like an oven; they devour their rulers. All of their kings fall— and none of them call on me!

There are two parallel themes running here. Let's break them apart.

First is the corrupt rulers narrative:

3 The royal advisers delight the king with their evil schemes, the princes make him glad with their lies.

5 At the celebration of their king, his princes become inflamed with wine; they conspire with evildoers.

6a They approach him, all the while plotting against him.

The Second is the bread and oven simile:

4 They are all like bakers, they are like a smoldering oven; they are like a baker who does not stoke the fire until the kneaded dough is ready for baking.

6b Their hearts are like an oven; their anger smolders all night long, but in the morning it bursts into a flaming fire.

Both themes come together in verse 7: "All of them are blazing like an oven; they devour their rulers. All of their kings fall— and none of them call on me!" The people had fallen to the point where they delighted in evil... and their rulers became paradigms of that ugly fancy.

The applauded betrayal and avarice and cruel punishment. They admired the Machiavellian and mocked the honest and humble. In the final days of Israel, king after king was assassinated or deposed, none ruling more than a handful of years or months.

"With such a fever running at every level of society, it was no coincidence that Israel's last three decades were a turmoil of intrigue, as one conspirator after another hacked his way to the throne, only to be murdered in his turn. Of the six men who reigned in those thirty years, four were assassins, and only one died in his own bed.⁵"

LEAVEN IN THE LOAF

The bread oven is carried on to a new context. Where before they were like an oven in their appetites and depravity, now the simile is extended to show how they have become this way and what will result from it.

- 8 Ephraim has mixed itself like flour among the nations; Ephraim is like a ruined cake of bread that is scorched on one side.
- 9 Foreigners are consuming what his strenuous labor produced, but he does not recognize it! His head is filled with gray hair, but he does not realize it!

As the Apostle Paul warned, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump."⁶ The northern kingdom had mixed its culture and values with those of its neighbors. It would now pay the price.

But beyond the mixing of the profane with the holy, they were uncooked and scorched. The Israelites were cold and uncooked on one side and charred black on the other. They, as a flat-bread, were a ruined and completely inedible loaf fit only for destruction.

GREY HAIRS?

The phrase "his head is filled with gray hair" is actually a play on words. That is what the Hebrew literally says, but the context it refers to hairs of mold growing on the loaf of bread⁷. What a powerful image of their descent into depravity and corruption. The nation of Israel is literally rotting away, even as the nations around it devour what little can be scavenged from the husk of what it had been.

⁵ Kidner, D. (1976). *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 71). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁶ See 1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9

⁷ Harris, W. H., III, Ritzema, E., Brannan, R., Mangum, D., Dunham, J., Reimer, J. A., & Wierenga, M. (Eds.). (2012). *The Lexham English Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Hosea 7:10

10 The arrogance of Israel testifies against him, yet they refuse to return to the Lord their God! In spite of all this they refuse to seek him!

The metaphor of verses 8-10 invariably draws our minds to the letters to the churches in Revelation, specifically to the church of Laodicea in chapter 3 (verses 14 through 22). In that letter, John the Beloved is commanded to write:

Revelation 3:15–18 (ESV)

15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!

16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

They were both uncooked and scorched, neither hot nor cold, but a useless combination of the two. And isn't that what tepid water is? Can we, the Church, become that way? Sometimes, we fall into the trap of viewing the “Lukewarm” Christians of Laodicea as being merely apathetic. But their lack of hotness or coldness is only in relation to God. In life, they suck the zest from their pleasures, but God is resigned to only the smallest nook of their hearts. Just enough of their hearts is kindled towards him to keep it warm.

Why? Because the rest of the tepid Christian's heart is full to bursting with everything else! They may be hot towards physical pleasure or family or society, they may be cold towards substance abuse, or dishonesty or corruption, but they lack any particular zeal for YHWH.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). God is knocking at their doors, but they refuse to admit him into their lives. What a tragedy; but not one we have not, ourselves, experienced.

God's appeal to the church is the same as his appeal to the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Throughout the oracles of Hosea, he's been saying of Israel, It's too late for you. The time of reaping what has been sown has come. But to the southern kingdom, he warns, Even though Israel plays the whore, “do not let Judah become guilty” (Hosea 4:15).

A STUPID CREATURE

Hosea 7:11-12

11 Ephraim has been like a dove, easily deceived and lacking discernment. They called to Egypt for help; they turned to Assyria for protection.

12 I will throw my bird net over them while they are flying, I will bring them down like birds in the sky; I will discipline them when I hear them flocking together.

The second metaphor is that of a silly honing pigeon. Under the imminent threat of the God's judgment, the silly doves flee to safety... but there is no safety there. They trust in their own understanding instead of trusting YHWH with all their hearts⁸, doing what is right in their own eyes⁹.

They are silly because they know where there refuge is! They have been told throughout the Law and throughout the writings and throughout the prophets. Seek the LORD.

- 1 Chronicles 16:11 (LEB) “Seek Yahweh and his strength; seek his face continually!”
- Psalm 34:10b–11 (LEB) “...those who seek Yahweh will not lack for any good thing. Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of Yahweh.
- Psalm 11:1 (ESV) “In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to your mountain...’”

⁸ Proverbs 3:5

⁹ Deuteronomy 12:8 (ESV) “You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes,

But no, they did as David prophesied, “With bald-faced pride the wicked will not seek God. There is no God in any of his thoughts.¹⁰” It should remind us of Gomer, Hosea’s adulterous wife. How many times did he bring her home, often against her hearts desire? How many times has the LORD brought this nation back to himself? When is enough, enough?

THEY LIE AND TURN AWAY FROM GOD

Hosea 7:13-15

13 Woe to them! For they have fled from me! Destruction to them! For they have rebelled against me! I want to deliver them, but they have lied to me.

14 They do not pray to me, but howl in distress on their beds; They slash themselves for grain and new wine, but turn away from me.

15 Although I trained and strengthened them, they plot evil against me!

Two phrases in these verses should stop to give us pause, for they illuminate the heart behind God’s wrath. Often, we can struggle with the idea of wrath. As I spoke about in the previous sermon, it is hard for us, sometimes, to connect the loving God who sent his son as a perfect sacrifice for our iniquity with these descriptions of wrath and judgment.

But here we are given a clue. Notice that the LORD says, “I want to deliver them, but...” and “Although I trained and strengthened them...” These tell us something important. The LORD is for them—even now—but they refuse to be for the LORD. He earnestly desired to save them from their fate, but they refused to seek him.

That is to say, they sought their idols instead; they went whoring for the pleasure of it rather than turning home to their husband. They are adulterers, betraying the love of their husband with relish and zeal for their lovers. This passage and the ones before it are the case for God’s reasons for divorce. He stands as the judge, jury, and wronged party in laying out his case against his unfaithful bride and the punishment against her.

Notice that they grieve, but not for the wrong they’ve done their beloved. They grieve for the loss of wealth and comfort, for the consequences of their sin, but not for the sin itself. I think that I understand this suicidal depiction very well.

When I was still struggling with my alcoholism, I would sometimes be “found out” and confronted. In those moments, I did consider harming myself as described here, so deep was my grief and sorrow. But I did not grieve, as some might think, for the transgression itself, nor for the shame of being found out; I grieved for the harm I had caused to those I love.

I desperately wanted to be sober and victorious (and with God’s grace, I am!), but my grief was for the consequences of my sin, not for the sin itself. I ached for the damage I was doing to those relationships, but I did not ache for the damage I was doing to Jesus.

Psalm 51:4 (ESV) “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”

All of our sins are against God. Yes, they sometimes effect those around us, but the primary injured party is our loving Father in heaven. When we lie to a loved one, they will suffer as collateral damage, but Jesus is the one being tormented and judged for our crime. When we treat others with contempt, we are treating Christ with contempt.

THEY PLOT AGAINST GOD

Hosea 7:16

15 Although I trained and strengthened them, they plot evil against me!

16 They turn to Baal; they are like an unreliable bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because their prayers to Baal have made me angry. So people will disdain them in the land of Egypt.

When you have something, like a weapon of war, it is more important that it be consistent. If a bow works nine times out of ten, only to betray you in your dire moment of need, it’s worse than having no bow. I think this is why God told the Church of Laodicea that he would rather they were cold than warm. At least then, there would be some consistency; a quality to work with.

Israel had been established and maintained by the LORD. He had appointed their rule over the land and blessed them with abundance... but they were inconsistent in their love for him. Image having a spouse that is faithful to you... usually. What does it count that they were faithful yesterday and today unfaithful? Like we would do, God is formally declaring his divorce against the Northern Kingdom.

How much better to be consistent in our obedience and love towards God? It’s what he desired of the Israelites, and it’s what he desires of us. A little ice can cool a boiling cup... so too a little idolatry can make our hearts tepid to God.

¹⁰ Psalm 10:4 (LEB)

CONCLUSION

I implore them to return to me, but they refuse to return to me.

I desire to deliver them, but they lie to me and do not pray to me.

I trained and strengthened them, but they plot evil against me.

This is what will be said of every man and women who walks under their own strength into eternal damnation. They refused and rebuffed every opportunity to repent and be made whole in Christ. Their hearts were full of evil and treachery, only seeking to find what they could get out of the deal.

But it is also what would have been said of every man and women who walks under the power of the Holy Spirit into eternal peace. We are not different by nature. We all contain the avarice and selfishness required to spit in the face of the crucified king. What then, is the difference?

The difference is the incredible grace received when we stepped into Faith. It is not anything we have done differently except that when the call of amazing grace came (and thank the LORD that it did), we accepted. When we heard Jesus knocking, we opened the door and invited him inside our hearts, to do what he will.

But this tale of Israel's downfall should caution us to remember that faithfulness is not some trophy that, once earned, is to be set into a case and forgotten. It demands to be the ever-present centerpiece of our lives. If God is love, than faith must be the blood beating within our hearts. Let us it keep hot, un-chilled by idolatry.

BENEDICTION: HEBREWS 4:11–13 (ESV)

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the cost of experiencing restoration from God?
2. What is the danger of unconfessed sins?
3. Break down the specific charges of sin against the Israelite leaders.
4. Why does God compare their hearts to an oven?
5. How does the loaf of bread simile describe Israel's hearts and actions?
6. Is this a danger to be aware of as modern-day Christians?
7. What are the three things Israel does in opposition to God's actions?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
8. Is God just to condemn the idolatrous? Why?