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DIVINE MERCY IN HOSEA'S PROPHECY.

– JULY 2. – HOS. 14:1-9. –

"Come, let us return unto the Lord." – Hos. 6:1.

FOR THE next six months the International Lessons are in the Old Testament, and begin with the closing words of Hosea's prophecy.

To appreciate the lesson it is necessary that we have at least a general understanding of the time and circumstances under which the prophecy was given. Hosea was a resident and prophet in the kingdom of Israel – the ten-tribe kingdom – during a part of the period in which Isaiah was prophesying in the kingdom of Judah – the two-tribe kingdom. We recall in our lessons of last year (Sept. 4) the death-bed of Elisha, and his instructions to Joash, the king of the ten-tribe kingdom, to smite upon the ground, and his explanation that the smiting of the ground three times with the arrows by Joash represented three victories which he would gain over Syria, effecting the full deliverance of Israel from Syrian control. Those promised victories were gained, and for a time Israel made great strides nationally, extending its borders to very nearly the area of territory controlled by David and Solomon (Judah excepted). This condition of things was favored by dissensions in Egypt and in Assyria, the greater nations near. The Lord manifested his favor to Israel in token of the measurable reformation begun by Joash by giving [R2490 : page 160] bountiful harvests also, so that the land became very wealthy and prosperous from the large crops, as well as from the spoils taken in war.

But these prosperities, which were in full accord with the covenant God had made with Israel at Sinai (Deut. 28:1-14), instead of leading the people back to God and to full obedience to their covenant, seem to have had before long a very different effect. Soon they forgot that the prosperities were the results of divine favor, and,

in the language of Scripture, the nation "went whoring after other gods." Undoubtedly one thing which especially made the false religions attractive was the fact that their worship and ceremonies gave loose reign to licentiousness, and even gave a certain sanctity to it. Thus their great prosperity led Israel into idolatry and into general licentiousness and corruption, worse, probably, than at any other period of their history, and this led to their utter rejection by [R2491 : page 160] the Lord, delivering them to the Assyrians, who took the entire nation captive.

Hosea's prophesying was at the time of Israel's depravity, just preceding their captivity. Through the Prophet the Lord appeals to Israel, pointing out his loving tender care for them from the very beginning of their history as a nation, pointing out their backsliding attitude, their falseness to him – picturing them as a false wife and God himself as a most merciful husband.

It would appear that the Lord permitted Hosea to have certain very trying experiences in domestic troubles, with a view to impressing upon his mind the Lord's view of Israel, his spouse. The Prophet, in the very opening of his book, declares that the word of the Lord first came unto him in connection with his domestic trials. The Prophet had married, seemingly by divine providence, an attractive girl, named Gomer, whom he dearly loved, and who at the time of their marriage was quite probably true and worthy of his affection – or it is possible to understand from the account that the Prophet, loving her, hoped to fully reclaim her, – but, infected with the general immorality of the time, she proved unfaithful, so that only her first child was recognized by the Prophet. The names given to the succeeding two show that the Prophet did not acknowledge them. Dr. George Adam Smith remarks: "Hosea does not claim the second child, and in the name of this little lass, Lo-ruhamah, '*She that never knew a father's love,*' orphan, not by death, but by her mother's sin, we find proof of the Prophet's awakening to the tragedy of his home. Nor does he own the third child, named Lo-ammi, '*Not my people.*' That could also

mean, '*No kin of mine.*' Once at least, but probably oftener, Hosea had forgiven the woman, and until the sixth year she stayed in his house. Then either he put her from him, or she went her own way. She sold herself for money, and finally drifted, like all of her class, into slavery."

The Prophet's sympathy went out to his wife to the extent that he redeemed her from slavery, as recorded. (3:1-3.) These severe experiences through which the Prophet passed seemed to be preparing him to voice the Lord's sentiments of tender compassion to Israel, his espoused one, who so frequently and persistently went after other gods. If the prophecy of Hosea be read from this standpoint its tender compassionate appeals will be appreciated as from no other.

Our lesson is the conclusion of the matter. First, the Prophet is represented as addressing the people: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity; take with you words and turn to Jehovah" – words of contrition, promises of reformation.

Then Israel is represented as speaking in a repentant attitude, saying: "Say unto him [the Lord], take away all iniquity and receive us graciously: so shall we render the calves of our lips. Assher shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless find mercy."

This is the attitude of heart in which all "Israelites indeed" throughout this Gospel age are returning to the Lord; – not those alone who are Israelites according to the flesh, but those also who are called to fill up the elect number from every nation under heaven; to become members of the holy nation, the peculiar people, by becoming the Bride, the Lamb's wife. The Lord has indeed graciously received them, and has put away their iniquity – through the blood of the cross.

The Lord's answer is recorded in vss. 4-6, saying, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely [unmeritedly], for my anger is turned away from him. [Spiritual Israel is not received of Jehovah as a woman, but as a man, of which Christ Jesus our Lord is Head and his Church the

members of his body, accepted in the Beloved.] I will be as the dew [refreshment] unto Israel; he shall grow [thrive] as the lily [whose growth in Palestine is remarkable], and cast forth his roots as Lebanon [the trees of Mt. Lebanon had very sturdy roots]. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as an olive [everlasting], and his fragrance as Lebanon." Thus does the Lord picture the development and establishment of his true Israel, the Christ.

Then follows a picture of the blessings of the Millennial reign of Spiritual Israel as God's Kingdom; the revival and restitution of Israel and of all the nations is symbolically pictured, saying:

"They that dwell under his shadow shall return [have restitution]; they shall revive as the corn and flourish as a vine, and the fragrance thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim [one of the names given to the ten-tribe kingdom, and also symbolically used sometimes in referring to nominal churchianity] shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him [the great Prophet – Acts 3:22] and observed [obeyed] him; I am like a green fir tree [an evergreen tree, – symbolically representative of the possession of everlasting life]. From [in] me is thy fruit found;" – the fruits of the spirit.

In conclusion, attention is called to the fact that not by earthly wisdom and intelligence can these predictions be comprehended. They shall be understood only by those who are taught of the Lord with the true wisdom which cometh down from above: as the Prophet declares, "The [truly] wise shall understand, but none of the wicked shall understand." – Dan. 12:10.

We give the translation of this last verse from *Leeser*, as follows: "Who is wise that he may understand these things? intelligent, that he may know them? For righteous are the ways of the Lord, and the just shall walk in them [understand them], but the transgressors will stumble through them [misapprehend them]."
