

A GOD READY TO PARDON

– JUNE 4. – HOSEA 14. –

"For thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger." – Neh. 9:17.

TODAY'S study is an exhortation by the Prophet Hosea to Israel, at that time distinct from Judah; but it is applicable to our own nation as well as to every nation. Israel had become debauched through idolatry. Intermarriage with the royalty of heathen nations had introduced the idolatries of heathen religions and the sensualities which constituted their attractive features to the people. With the sensuality came a lack of moral sense – a general numbness of conscience respecting impurities. The record indicates that Hosea's own wife was an adulteress, a debauchee, who finally left her husband and her false offspring. Later the Prophet took her back under his own roof, but not as his wife. He was compassionate toward her and her offspring.

No doubt the Prophet's own experiences had much to do with awakening him to a realization of the deplorable state of his own people. When the spirit of the Lord came upon him in prophecy, he could the better from his own experiences enter into sympathy with them. He had been pitiful and of tender compassion, and his message told of the still greater Divine pity and sympathy.

"RETURN UNTO THE LORD"

The Prophet, in our lesson, urges his nation to realize their fallen condition, their helplessness, and to avail themselves of God's clemency. They must not look to Asshur (Assyria) for help, nor must they trust in horses imported from Egypt; nor must they any longer rely upon idols, the work of their own hands. On the contrary, they must turn to the Lord, who is merciful even unto the fatherless. The

Israelites were *fatherless* in the sense that they had denied the Heavenly Father; the Creator, and had become children of the Adversary; even as Jesus said to some, "Ye are of your father the Devil, for his works ye do."

In their repentance, in their return to God, they were not only to abandon false hopes and false worship and iniquity, but they were to take with them words, and say unto the Lord, "Take away our iniquity and receive us graciously, that we may render unto thee the fruit of our lips – our praise."

Then follows a prophecy which has not yet been fulfilled, but will, we believe, soon be realized. It tells of the turning away of God's anger, of his blessing upon Israel. It will have fulfilment in the beginning of Messiah's reign.

"RECEIVE US GRACIOUSLY"

Be it noted that the people of Israel to this day have not accepted the Lord's terms as stated by the Prophet. They have not asked to be received by grace – graciously. They are still hoping for Divine favor through the keeping of the Law Covenant, which neither they nor others of fallen humanity can keep in its letter and spirit. This is the great lesson to be learned by all people, kindreds, nations – that we are all fallen, imperfect, unable to meet the Divine requirements – that we all need Divine grace, mercy, forgiveness of iniquity and help out of our imperfections.

How God can be just and yet clear us was not made known in Hosea's day, but is now clearly set forth as the very essence of the "good tidings" of God's love. God himself has provided in Jesus this, the Ransom sacrifice, necessary to the satisfaction of Divine Justice, so that God can be both just and merciful, although these terms are antagonistic.

"THE WISE SHALL UNDERSTAND"

The last verse of the chapter declares, "Who is wise and he shall understand these things, prudent and he shall know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but transgressors shall fall therein."

In order to have a clear understanding of God's merciful provision it is necessary, first, that the transgressor shall come to a realization of his own needs – that he shall crave a recognition by the Creator and a share in his mercy and loving provisions. Such abandoning of sin to the extent of ability will be assisted of the Lord in connection with the exercise of faith in him, which will bring rest and peace of soul and a realization that Divine mercy will make good all unintentional blemishes and cause all things to work together for good to him. But there is no place on the Highway of Holiness – the Highway of Divine mercy and love and forgiveness and peace – for transgressors, for those who knowingly and willingly go contrary to the Divine will.

CHRISTENDOM'S IDOLATROUS DEBAUCH

We are not to lose the force of this lesson by applying it wholly to the nation of Israel. There is also a nominal spiritual Israel, styled "Christendom," professing to be espoused to the Lord. Christendom is, in the Scriptures, charged with adultery, in that she lives with the world. She is charged also with idolatry – with worshiping houses and lands, banks, stocks and bonds, name and fame. Indeed the serious charge against "Christendom" is that she has lost her God. Only the comparatively few, a mere handful, know God as their Father and are known of him as his children. Their confidence is in the work of their own hands, and in lodges, unions, trusts, insurance, church membership, etc. "God is not in all their thoughts." [R4811 : page 139]

The condition of "Christendom" today is one of trust in armies and navies, soldiers and guns, aeroplanes and dynamite, great wealth

and prosperity. Under the picture of Laodicea the nominal church of today is described as saying, "I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing." The Lord answers, "Thou knowest not that thou art poor and wretched and miserable and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, and raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." – Rev. 3:17,18.

THE FATHERLESS FIND MERCY

Such as are children of the Adversary – such as love iniquity and hate righteousness – have nothing to expect from the Almighty in the way of favor – "All the wicked will he destroy." But all such as renounce sin and desire to return to the Lord are fatherless in that they have neither Satan nor God as their father, but to such God proffers mercy, forgiveness, through the merit of Christ's sacrifice. Thus turning from sin they will be in proper condition to be the recipients of Divine favor and adoption as children of God. "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger."

While God's anger against sin has been manifested for six thousand years in the reign of sin and calamity and death, nevertheless the Scriptures clearly foretell of the especial time of trouble or Divine wrath that will come upon Christendom in the close of this Gospel Age – at the ushering in of Messiah's Kingdom. The present is the time of special opportunity for those who would escape the severity of that trouble as well as for those who, becoming saints, would make their "calling and their election sure" to a share in the "Kingdom of God's dear Son."

