

Third Day People

Hosea 5:8-6:11a

The Bible is a book of surprising reversals. Surely, we all enjoy stories where all hope seemed to be gone, when suddenly fortunes turn. Perhaps, you can reflect on a time in your own life when hope was lost, and from the embers of lost hope, a ray of light broke through. Or you may be in a place where there is only darkness.

In the OT, there is a death to life reversal that happens consistently *on the third day*. Consider the Isaac narrative, death was certain, but *on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar* (Gen. 22:4); or *on the third day Joseph said to his brothers, Do this and you will live* (Gen. 42:18); or Esther, when death was certain for the Jews, *on the third day... put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace* (4:16; 5:1).

Hosea put forth this death to life theme when he said, *After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him* (Hosea 6:2). The NK would soon cease to exist, and the SK was not far behind. Their only hope was the resurrection of the dead.

Lee wrote an article showing that when the NT authors say that Christ will be raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*, they are drawing from this OT theme of certain death turning to life on the third day.ⁱ Once you see this theme in the OT, you cannot un-see it.

These OT references are shadows and types of the ultimate death to life event in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul wrote to the Corinthians *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures* (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Jesus said to the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, *It is written that the Christ should suffer and on third day rise from the dead* (Lk 24:46).

Hosea argues in this text that nothing short of resurrection is required for people of God to live. The fulfillment of this Hosea text is the death and resurrection Jesus. In our text today, God would raise the dead to make them live before him (6:2).ⁱⁱ Hosea believed that God would somehow destroy his people and then raise them on the third day.

When would God raise them, and how would God raise them? We have to realize that there was only one faithful Israelite, only one over whom sin and death had no claim. He was fully God and fully man, representing both God and man. When he died, the people of God were destroyed. When he died, hope died.

But on the third day, God raised him from the dead. As our representative when he died, we died, and when he was raised, we were raised. This is how God would cause his people to live before him.

Hosea describes for us the radical work of God in redeeming his people. He warns, he tears, he raises the dead, and he reveals what he requires.

I want us to walk through the text, making applications along the way.

1. We must heed the warnings of God (5:8-11)

The biblical history in the background of Hosea is found roughly in 2 Kings 14-20. Conflict between the two kingdoms ensued from the time the kingdom divided.ⁱⁱⁱ Benjamin was the buffer tribe caught between the NK and SK, with the SK trying to take it, and the NK trying to hold on to it. The alarm needed to be sounded in Benjamin. *We follow you, O Benjamin* may mean *watch your back* (5:8).

Gibeah, Ramah, and Beth-aven (Josh 7:2) were all places of historical significance in the territory of Benjamin.^{iv} Hosea will mention a lot of place names in his book, some of which we can only guess why, but his listeners would have known exactly why. The place names seem to point to the long history of conflict between the NK and SK. Suffice it to say, a historical reckoning is taking place.

God makes *known what is sure* (5:9). What is sure is the only thing he can make known. It is a sad state of affairs when God's people have to be told he is not kidding. Ephraim, the NK, is becoming a *desolation*, literally a waste land. It is significant to the theology of Hosea that the NK becoming a waste land is a *day of punishment* or correction.

The reason Ephraim was oppressed and crushed in Judgment is because he was determined to go after *filth* (5:11). The footnote for the word *filth* offers, *to follow human precepts* as a translation. This is a curious word. The only other place it occurs is in Isaiah 28:10,13 where it is used 8 times. Isaiah said, the word of the LORD would be to them *precept upon precept, precept upon precept*. Then he tells

us what he means by that: *For by people of strange lips with a foreign tongue I will speak to this people* (Isa 28:11). The point is they rejected the word of the LORD and it became unintelligible to them. When the word was preached all they heard was *blah, blah, blah*, but the nonsense ideas of idolatry were the most reasonable thing in the world to them.

Judah planned to capitalize on Israel's situation in order to expand their own territory, so they are *like those who move the landmark* (5:10; cf. Proverbs 22:28; 23:10; Deut. 19:14). The problem is the land was God's. He established the tribal boundaries. It would be a while, but God would flood Judah with wrath as well (5:10).

The background of these verses seems to be the Syro-Ephramitic Conflict.

Although the NK and SK had a history of conflict, Jeroboam in the North and Uzziah in the South had been able to keep a lid on it, for nearly 5 decades. When they passed off the scene, old rivalries heated up.

Assyria had been rising as an international threat. The NK and Syria teamed up to force the SK into their alliance to resist Assyrian aggression. Curiously, the biblical writer in 2 Kings phrased the situation like this: *the LORD began to send Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah* (2Kgs 15:37). They laid siege to Jerusalem to force Ahaz into cooperation. He refused. Ignoring Isaiah's warning Ahaz appealed to Assyria (cf. 2Kgs 16:5-9).

Pul, king of Assyria, responded immediately and destroyed Syria and systematically took much of the NK.

To keep Assyria from completely destroying the NK, Hoshea assassinated Pekah son of Remaliah and agreed to pay tribute to Pul. That meant that both the SK and the NK were paying tribute to Assyria. This arrangement would lead to the demise of the NK in 722 BC.

The background for this section of Hosea is the height of the Syro-Ephramitic Crisis.

Application:

We must heed the warnings of God because the LORD *makes known what is sure*

(5:9b). The LORD does not have an unsure word. He does not have a nonsensical word (cf 5:11b). If the LORD says we need to be saved, then, we need to be saved. If he says we need to repent, then, we need to repent. If he says, he raises the dead, then, he raises the dead. We must take His warnings seriously and not be dismissive of them.

Israel had turned from the word of God and gone after nonsense. *He was determined to go after filth* (5:11b). As I pointed out earlier, the footnote for *filth* is *human precepts* or ideas or better, *nonsense*. They conjured up their own ideas of God and made that into a religion. What they came up with was shrines and golden calves and cultic prostitution, which looked strangely like the world. They turned a deaf ear to the word of God as so much noise and bought right in to their imagination as truth: eternal, unchanging truth.

When you reject the knowledge of God as revealed in Scripture, you lose the capacity to know rightly and open yourself to embracing so much nonsense.

Everybody has some kind of so-called truth that he or she is holding to, a thought, an idea, or a belief that closes their minds and hearts to reason through the word. What could possibly be more nonsensical than offering sacrifices to and bowing down before a golden calf. How does that make more sense than what is revealed about God in Scripture?

There is much god-talk in the world. I never cease to be amazed at people who give no time to the contemplation of God and the study of Scripture, yet, speak as authorities on religious truth. Such statements usually start with, *I think* The real thought underneath all the starch is, *I am the captain of my fate, the master of my soul* (*Invictus*, William Earnest Henley),

How kind of the LORD is to send his warnings to us! His warnings come in strange ways. Through plots, assassinations, and skirmishes, the Almighty shouted to Israel. Maybe in the words of a friend, the face of a spouse, the unforeseen circumstances in which you find yourself, or a 1000 others ways, the LORD is warning you. You would do well to heed the warnings of God.

2. We must consider the discipline of the LORD (5:12-15)

In 5:8-11 both Judah and Ephriam are accused and sentenced. They thought their

problem was threats from hostile political and military powers, but God was their real adversary. God would use Assyria as his tool to chastise both Israel and Judah.

Isaiah could not be clearer: *Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury* (Isa 10:5)!

Both Israel and Judah appealed to Assyria for help. The irony is they invited and paid a nation to help them that God was using to judge them.

God's activity among Judah and Ephraim is compared to *a moth* and *dry rot* (5:12) and a *lion* (5:14).

Moth and dry rot denote the slow, steady, unnoticed operation of God at work judging his people. The constant warfare worked like an infection gnawing at their strength. The Kings material shows this in both kingdoms.

In the reign of Jehu in the **NK**, the *Lord began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel* (2Kgs 10:32). This continued through the reign of Jehoahaz. The *anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael* (2Kgs 13:3).

In the days of Jotham, king of **Judah**, *the LORD began to send Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah* (2Kgs 15:37).

When Judah and Israel realized they were sick, rather than turning to God, they turned to Assyria, the axe in God's hand (cf. Isa. 10:15). Assyria was bigger than God to them but could not cure them (5:13).

God was like moth and dry rot, he was also like a *lion*. The *I* is emphatic, literally *I even I, I will tear* (5:14). Someone might rescue you from a lion, but no one can rescue you from God. God did tear them. In 722BC the NK was shattered never to recover. In 586 BC, the SK went into captivity.

Application:

The furthest thing from Israel's mind was that God was their adversary. But God was the moth and the dry rot that was eating away at their lives. He was soon to be the lion who would tear and no one would rescue.

So, when they realized they were in trouble, they did what any reasonable human

would do. They appealed to the one they feared most, Assyria, not God. It was not like they did not have prophets who were theologically interpreting the times. In the middle of this very crisis, Isaiah said to Ahaz, *If you will not believe, surely you will not be established* (Isa. 7:9b). But appealing to God just did not seem as feasible as appealing to Assyria.

In this life, God is always disciplining us in some way. Another way to say that is he treats us as sons. When are your children not under your discipline?

Ordinary discipline is one thing, but it gets more severe. The odd thing is when we don't even consider the LORD may be disciplining us. When we don't consider it and make changes, we invite more severe discipline. The design of discipline is correction.

Here is what Israel did. Conflict ensued that the LORD stirred to awaken them (2Kgs 10:32; 13:3; 15:37). Rather than see it for what it was, they doubled down in their ways and appealed to Assyria, disregarding that foreign alliances were forbidden. Perhaps they were thinking, *God helps those who help themselves*.

Here is what happens most often to us. Life is not working for you, so you double down in your ways and things just get worse and worse. The worse things get, the more you double down in your ways. When are you going to realize that you can't cure you, and what you are pursuing can't cure you? When are you going to give up and lay down your battle axe, give up on your ideas, schemes, and devices and in your distress earnestly seek the LORD?

For example, we may have marriage difficulties. I know the Scripture tells me to love my wife, to live with her in an understanding way, and give honor to her as the weaker vessel. But you reason, she is not very lovable. When she does what she is supposed to do, I'll do what I'm supposed to do. A wife may think, I know I'm supposed to respect my husband, but he is not very respectable right now. When he improves, I'll respect him.

When you are in obvious disobedience to the Word, and you double down in it, you are appealing to saviors that cannot save. There is gracious design on God's discipline. Consider, just consider God's discipline or you may invite more severe discipline.

God's gracious design in tearing them is that dispersed, destroyed, and in distress, they will seek him.

3. We must return to the LORD (6:1-3)

God's intention in returning to his place after tearing his people (5:15) is that his people might return to him (6:1). Perhaps when they sensed God's absence, they would repent. The words of 6:1-3 are words that the LORD is giving the people he has torn to show them the way back to him. They had gotten so deep in sin that they did not know how to repent or what repentance looked like (cf. 5:4).

This is a call to repentance. There could not be a better word picture of God's people returning to him. This is a picture of coming to the end of self, of every scheme, and of hope in anything else in this world: a person, a relationship, an alliance. This is realizing that their problem was not Assyria. Assyria was only the axe in God's hand. This is the realization that they had made an adversary of God. He is the one who had torn them, and he was the only one who could heal them (5:13b,14b). Only God could bind up and heal.

This is complete and total repudiation of the fear of man, embracing of the fear of the LORD. Because God is the one who is chastening and punishing, it is counterintuitive that the way to healing is casting yourself on his mercy. Rather than running away from God as if to escape his discipline, we must run to him to find relief. Hosea says, *Come let us return to the LORD; for he has torn that he may heal ...* (6:1).

The restoration of Israel would require nothing short of a resurrection of the dead (6:2). The text presents us with the demise of the NK and its dispersion. As stated here and elsewhere in the book, God is not simply judging them that they may be judged but to bring about a future day of salvation (cf. 5:15b; 3:4-5; 2:14-23; 1:10-2:1).

The prophet knows that the NK is done, but he also knows that the redemptive purpose of God has not failed. He holds out hope here by prophesying of God raising the dead: *After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him* (6:2).

The call to repentance is a call to return to the God who has wounded us, knowing

that he raises the dead, and then, to *press on to know the LORD* (6:3). Hosea has told us that God's people were destroyed for lack of knowledge (cf. 4:6). To give us an idea of what it means to *press on*, the word was used of Abraham's 318 servants *pursuing* Lot's kidnappers. It was used of Pharaoh's army pursuing the Israelites. If you pursue the LORD, you will find him. *He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rainstorms that water the earth* (6:3).

4. We must grow in love for and the knowledge of God (6:4-11a).

Mercifully, the LORD laid out the path of repentance, but what he found in Ephraim and Judah was fickleness. The rhetorical questions of verse 4 have a tone of exasperation (6:4a), but we are not to think of God as at his wits end. The questions are to awaken Israel and Judah to their lack of love for God. Their love dissipated like a morning cloud or the morning dew. These questions reveal not exasperation in God, but his patience and forbearance.

God had sent his prophets to make clear what he requires (6:5). He desired *steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings* (6:6). Hosea has already charged that the weightier matters of the covenant were absent in the land: *no faithfulness, no steadfast love, and no knowledge of God* (cf. 4:1).

God was not interested in rituals that were void of the reality they represented, a life fully devoted to God. With their rituals, they related to God as if he were a pagan deity—manipulating and maneuvering to get God to do what they wanted him to do. There was no relationship between their sacrifices and steadfast love for God and the knowledge of God. In fact, their sacrifices reflected just the opposite—that they do not love or know God.

In contrast (*But*) to steadfast love and the knowledge of God, they *dealt faithlessly* with God (6:7). Again, Hosea gives us place names that seem to point to a specific heinous crime of murder that, perhaps, occurred at Adam (6:7) in the district of Gilead (6:8) on the road to Shechem (6:9).^v The NK was defiled (6:10b), and Judah could expect to reap what they had sown (6:11a).

Application:

We must grow in love for and the knowledge of God. We cannot approach like

he's a pagan deity. I've heard people say, *If go to church my life goes better.* I often think, *what if it goes worse?* God will not be manipulated into doing our will.

God is not interested in our rituals, but desires that we live lives devoted to him. Our self-justifying schemes, our attempts to placate God, and to earn his favor are offensive to his holiness and betray a lack of love for and true knowledge of God. A telltale sign of a lack of love for and knowledge of God is when we experience disappointment in God for life not going according to our plan. We want God's will for our lives as long as it meets with our approval.

I've noticed that God is little interested in making me happy. My task is to get happy. God is little interested in making me feel content. My job is to be content. God is not interested in giving me a charmed and carefree life. God meticulously rules over every detail of my life. He rules over every hardship, every trial, every loss, every disappointment, as well as every joy.

I realize that what needs done in me is bigger and much deeper than my ease and my desires. I must approach God as one who owed me nothing but wrath and who gave me nothing but mercy and grace. What he desires from me is simply that I love him and know him. I have nothing he needs. I owe him what I cannot give. He simply says, *love me and know me. I have a lot of work to do in you to fit you for the plans that I have for you. Some of it will be painful, but I'll finish it on the third day.*

ⁱ Lee Tankersley, a paper submitted to SBTS Journal of Theology, “Thus It is Written...” You can also listen to Aaron and Lee discuss this topic on The Old Roads Podcast on the April 24, 2025, episode.

ⁱⁱ Hosea repeated shows God’s redemptive purpose will not fail. Hosea prophesied in chapter 1 that even though the covenant was null and void, *Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea ...* (1:10). In chapter 2 though Israel forgot him, he would *in that day ... betroth them to him in faithfulness. And they would know the LORD* (2:13b, 20). In chapter 3, in the latter days, they would no more play the harlot, but would *return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king ...* (3:5).

ⁱⁱⁱ Even a cursory reading of the OT shows rivalry between Jacob's sons and the tribes that issued from them. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom divided each with its own king. The NK did not produce a single ruling dynasty, but was ruled by 9 different families or dynasties, comprising 17 different kings from 930 to 722 BC (some very briefly). The SK by contrast maintained the Davidic line until its demise in 586BC.

^{iv} There was a town called Beth-aven in Benjamin. Because Beth-aven means House of Iniquity, Bethel is pejoratively referred to as Beth-aven at times because of the shrine of the golden calf there. It's difficult to know but of little importance which is referred to here. Ramah was a place where Baasha tried to establish the capital of the NK to box in all travel to and from Judah (1Kgs 15:16-32). Gibeah is where the rape and murder of the Levites concubine took place and tribal war against Benjamin ensued as they protect the men of Gibeah (cf. Judges chs 19-21).

^v Some say, these verses describe a pilgrim route from Gilead to Bethel by way of Adam and Shechem. All of these places were located in the tribal territory of Manasseh.

If the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis is the background for this passage, it focuses on an event in which the priests collaborated in a conspiracy against the royal family. Gilead was the launching place for Pekah’s assassination of Pekahiah by 50 men of the Gileadites (2Kgs 15:25). Pekah rode into Samaria with his men and killed king Pekahiah to start the Syro-Ephraimitic War.