

Week 2: Hosea

Introduction

Last week we saw the beginnings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. From the very beginning, they setup idols and worshipped them and continued in idol worship until the end of the kingdom. But we saw that the Lord never left them without a prophet.

The word prophet means messenger. A prophet was someone who was sent by God to deliver God's message to the king and to the people. Sometimes we think of a prophet as someone who sees the future - and sometimes, that is the role of a prophet - The Lord reveals to him what is GOING to happen. But that is a narrow view of the prophets. The work and messages of the prophets was to reveal the will of God.

After the split of the Kingdom, Elijah and Elisha were our first big prophets. After them came the written prophets - 17 prophets whose prophecies are written and preserved in the Holy Scripture. We have 12 prophets called "Minor" because their books are shorter - Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. And then there are four prophets called "Major" because their books are longer - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. And Jeremiah also wrote the Lamentations. And then we have the prophet Baruch who is the disciple of Jeremiah. So a total of 17 written prophets.

These prophets were persecuted by Israel - that's why the Lord says in Matthew 5 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." and later in the gospel, when He laments over Jerusalem and says: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!"

They did not have an easy time. Isaiah was sawn in half. Some prophets were killed by the sword, or stoned, or beaten to death. Daniel, for example, was thrown in the lions' den.

Each book starts with "The word of the Lord that came to ..." (prophet name). The prophets were preaching a message of repentance but were also preaching about the coming of the Messiah. There is a strong message that as humans, there is nothing we can do for our own salvation, but there is One coming - a Messiah - who will save us. The prophets were speaking relative to their time period.

We have three categories for the time periods of the prophets. Pre-exilic prophets, exilic prophets, and post-exilic prophets. Each prophet spoke to his generation - so a pre-exilic prophet like Hosea would say something like "Repent for the captivity is coming." Jeremiah would say "Repent so that the captivity would end." Zechariah would say "The captivity is over, cling to the Lord because the Messiah is coming."

Studying the prophets is different from studying the historical books or the poetic books. Most people consider the Prophetic books to be the most difficult to understand. Fr Daoud Lamei says you can read Genesis and Exodus and understand 80% of it without any sort of commentary or help. Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy is a little bit harder around 60% but still doable. Historical Books after that are all stories - you read a story and meditate on it. And you'll understand almost 100% of it by yourself. Poetic books, are hit and miss. You might read a verse and understand it, and read another and not understand it. Some verses need commentary and some are easy to understand. But when you come to the prophets, without any commentary or someone to explain it, it's like 20%.

The reader needs to understand the time period and what the prophet is talking about. St Augustine says that some passages in Scripture are easy to understand, and some are hard and compares it with food. He says: "The Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the HOLY Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere." (On Christian Doctrine - Book 2, Chapter 6). Sometimes I'm hungry and I need a quick meal and I'll eat whatever. But other times, I have a craving, or I'm looking for complex flavor. Still, both meals will provide me with the necessary sustenance.

We will start to study the minor prophets with the Prophet Hosea. Hosea is pre-exilic, one of the earliest prophets, and in the same time as him were Amos, Micah and Isaiah the prophets.

The name Hosea in Arabic is "Hosha3" like what the people were crying out on Palm Sunday: "Hosha3na" - Hosanna. Save us. It means "God saves" and is very close to the name of "Joshua" Ya-shoo3 (Ya --> Yahweh, shoo3 like sha3). Or Jesus (Ya Soo3). It's also very close to Isaiah - Ash3-ya - "The Lord is Salvation"

What are some features of the book of Hosea?

1 - The book of Hosea reveals the relationship of the Lord with His people. The Lord loves His people, and longs for His people.

2 - The people of God are introduced as His bride; yet the bride is afflicted with a sickness. Being her Groom, He approaches her as the true Physician, who alone, can cure her. What is this sickness?

- Lack of knowledge
- Attachment to the Land
- Loss of fulfillment
- Lack of discernment
- Nonchalance
- Pride
- Seeking God's gifts, rather than a relationship and unity with Him

On top of all of that, there is the idolatry and worship of Baal... the harlotry of Israel, seeking after other gods when they have the One True God. And in participating in the idolatry, they fall into

magic, adultery, and all sorts of abominations.

3 - Repentance. No matter how often Israel falls, the Lord accepts the repentant heart, again because of His love.

May the Lord grant us to study the prophets and to glean from them His will as those same prophets revealed to God's people His will thousands of years ago. May it be an opportunity to look circumspectly and see ourselves in Israel, and may it be for our edification and salvation.

We'll read two chapters per day, and since Sunday is a catch-up day, we will finish next Monday, God willing.

Chapter 1

Chapters 1-3 of Hosea constitute the first part of the prophecy of this book.

God tells Hosea to take for himself a wife from the harlots and children of harlotry because the land has committed great harlotry.

First off, this is a hard saying for Hosea to hear. Many of the fathers say that Gomer, his wife, did not commit harlotry until after they were married. Harlotry is the word for prostitution - in those days of Israel, there was the worship of Baal and as we mentioned before, that worship included abominations like fornication, harlotry, other sexual immorality, magic and things like that. So this is a woman who after they got married and had children, would go and worship Baal and commit adultery. A very hard saying for Hosea

But the Lord is making a point here - God has taken Israel as His bride. He is her Groom. And she has committed adultery. God is revealing to us how He feels. Imagine being a husband or wife and your spouse does something behind your back - like if I agreed with my wife we wouldn't make a big purchase and then I found out she made the purchase behind my back. Or a wife agrees with her husband to register their kids in a certain school and he goes and registers them in a different school. Even with examples like this that are not adultery, it is a betrayal, it is unfaithfulness. It's not a good feeling. This is how the Lord feels. Israel has committed adultery to her Groom.

What is the message to us? In the New Testament, the Church is the Bride of Christ... So I ask myself. Have I committed idolatry? Have I put something before God? Am I chasing after money, popularity, fitness, titles and degrees, possessions, cars, houses, or anything else at the expense of my spiritual life?

The books of the Prophets are full of symbols and images like this.

Hosea has three kids:

Jezreel - Yazra'el - God plants or God sows. The first fruit of idolatry and rejection of God is simply the natural consequences - the reaping of what we sow. The chastisement that God plants in us are the fruit of our doing. St Paul writes in Galatians 6:8 "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

Lo-Rahama - No Mercy - The second fruit of idolatry and rejection of God is that God will not have mercy. The Lord says in verse 6-7: "For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away. Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horseman."

When we read these prophecies, there are several double meanings - on the one hand, it is referring to the captivity. On the other hand, it is referring to the New Testament. One of the keys here is the word "save" or "salvation." What is salvation? When an Israelite would read this, he would think of salvation as being "deliverance from the captivity of Assyria" - or later on "deliverance from the captivity of Babylon" - or "from Persia" - or from the Greeks, or from the Romans, or in the modern day, delivery from the other nations of the land and restoration of the nation and kingdom of Israel. He is thinking about the worldly salvation from the worldly enemies. But when a Christian reads this, we think of salvation from sin, death and corruption. We think of eternal life. We think of what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished in His Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

"I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, not by bow nor sword or battle, horses or horsemen" - when Judah returns from the Captivity, there is no uprising or revolt or battle - but God puts it in the heart of the Persian King Cyrus that he allows the Jews to go back to their home. And when the Lord Jesus brings about the salvation of mankind, He does not do it with an army or an uprising or a battle. It's a double meaning.

So this second child of Hosea and Gomer, their daughter Lo Rahama, means "No mercy" and refers to Israel - the northern kingdom - which will not see the mercy of God, because they rejected the mercy of God, and chased after other gods.

The third child is called Lo-Ammi "For you are not My people and I will not be your God." This is the final fruit of idolatry and the rejection of God, is that you are no longer God's people. But there is hope... in verse 10

God anticipates their return to Him - but now Hosea is speaking with the prophetic eye about us - the Christians. In the Scripture, when you see references to Israel - many times, it is speaking prophetically about the New Israel which is Christianity.

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered." - the Lord here is renewing the promise that He made to Abraham - your children will be as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea. And indeed, we are all children of Abraham as St Paul says in Galatians 3:7 "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'"

The Lord continues in Hosea: "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people', There it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'"

The Israelites always called themselves God's people - but as Christians, we don't really use that title "God's people" - instead, we say that we are "children of God." The Gentiles rejected God first and they were not His people... but now it is the Gentiles who are called sons of the living God. St

Paul refers to these verses by name in Romans 9 when He is discussing Israel's rejection.

"Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head;"

Who is our head, but the Lord Jesus Christ. The children of Judah - which are the Jews who will believe - and the children of Israel - which are the Gentiles who will believe, shall be gathered together under the Lord Jesus Christ as the head, and will be called the Body of Christ: Christians.

"and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel."

For a Jew, coming up out of the land means getting out of Assyria or Babylon or Persia... but for a Christian, it means coming up out of the earth and going to heaven. Our sights are on heaven. The holy men - Elijah, Elisha, Moses, - they understood this as we do.

See the prophetic eye? See how the Lord revealed to His prophets what would happen? See how the Lord used his prophet Hosea to leave a message for the ages? The story continues in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

"Say to your brethren, 'My people'" and to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown'. These are the opposites of the two children - Lo Ammi "not my people" and Lo Rahama "no mercy". Even in a kingdom and a people that has committed adultery, there are still some who are righteous. In every generation, there are many who are wicked and few who are righteous... but they are there.

These are the ones the Lord is talking to now - those righteous. Their mother is a harlot, but they are not children of harlotry. So the Lord pleads with them through the prophetic voice: "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges" or in another translation: "Plead with your mother, plead." Bringing charges reminds us of a court case or a trial - but it is a trial before the final judgment. And what is the goal of the trial? "Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts." And what happens if we get to the final judgment? "Lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst."

It is a message for each of us - bring charges against yourself so that you may repent, so that the Lord does not bring charges against you in the Final Judgment when there is no chance for repentance. What sin am I doing that I have not repented of yet? Maybe it's anger, or jealousy, or greed. Maybe it's lust or love of money. Maybe it's pride. Bring charges against yourself that you may repent, before the day of the Lord when all will be exposed and brought into the open.

There are of course many meanings to each of these words that the Lord uses. To give a few examples, "Lest I strip her naked and expose her" - When she forsakes Him by her own will, she would lose Him as a shelter - she would use the garment of righteousness. To "make her a wilderness and a dry land and slay her with thirst..." God the Holy Spirit is the Living Water, and is symbolized by water throughout the Scripture. So a rejection of God and a rejection of His spirit. is to lose the water which is the Holy Spirit. We can meditate for hours and if you want more, you can

read the Commentary by Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty or listen to the Bible Study by Fr Daoud Lamei (but it's in Arabic).

"Their mother has played the harlot; for she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink'" - when we depend on something or someone besides God for our needs, we commit spiritual harlotry. God is the one who feeds us and clothes us and quenches our thirst. He is our Provider. If I lean on my money, or my job, or my influence for my needs, I have committed spiritual harlotry.

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her loves, but not overtake them; yes she will seek them, but not find them." - thorns reminds us of the thorns and thistles of Genesis 3 after the Fall of man. We might find hardships in our life. We might find walls that block our paths. Maybe I don't get into the school I want to go to. Maybe the relationship that I am in falls apart. Maybe I am rejected from internships and jobs. And I see these things as being thorns that are blocking my path in life or blocking my future prospects - but let me seek spiritual guidance and take a closer look. Maybe the Lord is putting these thorns in my way, or these walls in my path, because I am on the wrong path. Maybe I am like the harlot seeking her lovers, and the Lord is blocking my path hoping that I will seek Him instead, as He is the way. As St Paul writes to the Hebrews: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." (Hebrews 12:6). Abouna Jonathan recorded a podcast recently where he talked about his experience of not getting into Med School the first time he applied and how he had to take a gap year, and how this gap year was the year he learned prayer and his prayer life was transformed. The year he really started to seek the Lord. And he looks back on it as the most important year of his life - because he didn't get into Med School.

See what the Lord says about the harlot: "Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.'"

"she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold - which they prepared for Baal." The gifts that the Lord had given her were defiled and offered to Baal. So what is the fruit of this behavior?

1 - God takes away His gifts in due time. "Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time and My new wine in its season, and will take back My wool and My linen, given to cover her nakedness."

2 - Loss of joy and peace. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, Her feast days, Her New Moons, Her Sabbaths - all her appointed feasts."

3 - Eternal Punishment. The end of it all. "I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, And went after her lovers; but Me she forgot," says the Lord.

In this section of the chapter, the Lord proclaimed the evil committed by his adulterous bride and the fruits of her evil. But now He will proclaim His desire for her to return to Him: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her."

How does He allure her?

1 - "I will give her vineyards" - the Lord Jesus said "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."

2 - "'And it shall be in that day,' says the Lord, 'that you will call Me 'My Husband.'" - it means she will accept the unity with God.

If it's not clear yet that this is a prophecy about the Messianic era and about the Christians, we can go to the last verse of the chapter: "I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy" (Lo Rahama) - "Then I will say to those who were not My people" (Lo Ammi) - "You are My people!" And they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

The Gentiles who had not previously obtained mercy and who were not previously God's people, the Lord will say to them "You are My people!" and they shall say "You are my God."

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, the Lord tells Hosea to "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery" - again, it's a very hard thing for Hosea to hear. Go and find your wife who is committing adultery and buy her back and accept her to stay with you and treat her as your wife. But it's a symbol of the Lord's love for us "Just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans."

But here, there is also a contrast: Hosea bought his wife back from self-inflicted slavery for 15 shekels of silver and one and a half homers of barley. 15 shekels of silver is lower than the price of a slave which is 30 shekels in the Law of Moses. And barley is the food of the poor and of the beasts, as opposed to wheat which is the finest. She was purchased for a cheap price, because in the eyes of the world, she is not worth more than that. But the Lord Jesus did not acquire us for gold or silver, wheat or barley, but He purchased us by His precious Blood, freeing us from the self-inflicted bondage of sin.

Chapter 4

The second section in the Book of Hosea is from chapter 4-10. This is when God brings charges against His people. You can think of this whole section like a trial.

In the beginning of Chapter 4: "Hear the word of the Lord, You children of Israel, For the Lord has a judgment for the inhabitants of the land: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land."

Whenever I see children of Israel, I should put myself in there to examine myself. I am the land that the Lord is talking about. Hear the word of the Lord, Morcous, for the Lord has a judgment for you: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God.

This is the first accusation brought about against Israel: no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. All three of these things are important.

First, truth. Truth is the word of God and the commandment of God. The Lord Jesus says in John 17:17 as He prays to the Father: "Consecrate them by the truth; Your word is truth." - There is no truth means they have rejected the word of God. In other translations, the word here is faithfulness. Am I faithful to the commandment of God?

Second, Mercy is how we treat others. Am I merciful to others? Am I good in my relationships and dealings with others? Am I trustworthy? Am I helpful? Am I supportive? Am I encouraging? Am I comforting? Am I generous with my time, my money, my energy?

Third, Knowledge of God is not just knowing ABOUT God, but knowing God as a person. Do I know God? Or do I just know about Him? Do I have a relationship with Him? Do I talk to Him? Do I let Him talk to me through various channels?

So these three judgments brought about by the Lord concern my relationship with myself, my relationship with others, and my relationship with God. Israel was lacking righteousness in all three categories. And he expands in the next verse: "cursing and lying, murder and theft and adultery gushed forth in the land, and blood is mingled with blood." These are the product of the lack of truth, mercy and knowledge of God. Sin and Corruption.

And the judgment: "Therefore the land shall mourn" - this is emptiness. You know when you feel empty, or when someone feels empty inside - that he is missing something. We usually say that there's a God-sized hole in the heart. And God is the only one that can fill that hole. But instead, we keep trying to fill the whole with things that are not God, or worse - with things that are contrary to God. With corruption.

"Therefore the land shall mourn and be diminished with all the things that dwell in it: the wild beasts of the field, the reptiles of the earth, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea shall come to an end."

In patristic thought, animals were seen symbolically. Land animals symbolize works or actions because they walk the earth and represent our tangible deeds. Birds symbolize thoughts since they move freely in the air. And fish symbolize feelings or emotions because they dwell in the depths of the waters, hidden and unseen - yet active.

- Animals: Actions
- Birds: Thoughts
- Fish: Feelings

So here, when Hosea writes from the Lord that the land will mourn and be diminished with all things: beasts, birds and fish

When I separate myself from God's commandment, I find corruption and confusion in my actions, in my thoughts and in my feelings. I will do corrupt things, think corrupt things, and feel corrupt things. If I want to measure my faithfulness to God, I can measure my actions, thoughts and feelings.

I can measure my thoughts - how much of my thoughts is with God, and how much of my thoughts is with the world?

I can measure my actions - how much of my actions is acceptable to God, and how much of my actions is not?

I can measure my feelings - how much of my feelings are with love for others and mercy and compassion, and how much is anger and jealousy and lust?

The prophecy continues with giving many of the sins prevalent among them, that give grounds for the Lord to judge them:

- Ignorance and forgetfulness of God: Verse 6 - "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have forgotten the law of your God"
- Drunkenness and uncleanness: Verse 11 - "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart."
- Idolatry and divination: Verse 12 - "My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them."
- Offering sacrifices in the high places: Verse 13 - "They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good."
- Harlotry and whoredom: Verse 14 - "The men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot" and Verse 18 - "They commit harlotry continually"

And the prophecy shows how God would punish them for all of these things:

- Verse 9 - "I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds."
- Being unsatisfied: Verse 10 - "They shall eat, but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase"
- Left to their sins: Verse 17 - "Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone"
- Made ashamed: Verse 19 - "They shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices"

In verse 15, a warning is also given to Judah not to follow the steps of Israel.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 continues with more judgments on Israel and now Judah. The beginning reads "Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king!" and we see the following sins:

- Persecuting others: Verse 2 - "The revoltors are deeply involved in slaughter"
- Spiritual Harlotry: Verse 3 - "For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled."
- Pride: Verse 5 - "The pride of Israel testifies to his face"

Etc.

How do we read these chapters? Again, I have to put myself in this chapter. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God - let me examine myself. Was there a time when I have ignored the law of God? Was there a time when I forgot God in my mind? Was there a time when I let myself become subject to a substance like drugs or alcohol? Was there a time when I fell into sins of sexual immorality? Do I prioritize things before God? Do I put my faith in things like money, or even in gambling with sports or dice or cards or the stock market? Do I persecute others? Do I have pride? Do I blame others? Do I act cruelly?

The Lord has brought charges against Israel, but in the same way, the Lord will bring charges against me on Judgment Day. Let me examine myself before that day comes and let me repent. In the next chapter, at the beginning of chapter 6, we will see a call for repentance.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, we see the beginnings of a theme of returning to the Lord. We read in verse 1: "Let us go and return to the Lord our God; for He has grasped and will heal us; He will smite and plug the wound with lint."

Although Israel is falling into all of these sins that we mentioned in the previous two chapters, there is always the chance for repentance. We can remember in the story of Jonah about the city of Nineveh that the Lord accepted their repentance. And we can apply these prophecies to ourselves - there is no sin that is too great for God to forgive if we offer repentance.

Sometimes when we sin, we have a guilty feeling - this is the rebuke of the Holy Spirit in us. But it is not repentance - it can be the beginning of repentance. Repentance should be complete - a change of heart. Repentance is the despising or hatred of the sin. Repentance is the commitment to avoid this sin. Repentance is the admitting in front of God through the father the priest. Repentance is asking God's mercy, and asking for His help in overcoming. Repentance is restoring what you have taken.

And repentance and the forgiveness of sin are made possible by the Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and Resurrection, and our participation in them with baptism.

And this draws us to the next point that we haven't mentioned yet - Messianic Prophecies. The Prophets are full of Messianic Prophecies; some of them are very clear, and some need explanation. But here in the beginning of Chapter 6 we see one that is clear.

"After two days He will heal us. In the third day we shall rise and live before Him"

Of course, any Christian when he hears "third day" and "rise and live" in the same sentence, is thinking about the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day. The two days here refers to the time the body of the Lord Jesus Christ lay in the tomb, and on the third day His Resurrection.

"Let us know, let us pursue, that we might know the Lord." - Resurrection gave us new life, new abilities, new vision, new knowledge through which we can follow the Lord's steps.

"We shall find Him ready as the daybreak" - this is a prophecy about the Resurrection being early in the morning

"And He will come to us as the early and latter rain to the earth" - this is a prophecy about the Holy Spirit. Water is one of the symbols of the Holy Scripture used in Scripture (along with fire, oil, wind and dove).

So we have in the beginning of this chapter, some very clear Messianic prophecies (like the rise on the third day) and we have some that are a little bit more vague and need explanation or

understanding.

These are just some examples of how we can study the Scripture.

To summarize the rest of Chapter 6, although repentance is made available by God, and the prophet Hosea here is making that clear for the people - you have an opportunity to repent, Israel and Judah are not repentant.

Verse 4: What shall I do to you, O Ephraim? What shall I do to you, O Judah? Your mercy [or in another translation, your faithfulness] is like a morning cloud and like the early dew it goes away." - the morning cloud and the dew of the morning are only there in the morning... then they go away. Same with Israel and Judah's faithfulness. It is not stable or consistent. May the Lord grant us that our faithfulness to him be solid and strong like a rock, and not like the dew of the morning.

Verse 6: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." - This is a VERY important verse, and one that I hope you will share with me in memorizing. Hosea 6:6 - the reference is easy to remember. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

This was the big problem that the Pharisees had in the New Testament, and it's a problem that some of us may struggle with today. The Pharisees were so concerned with the letter of the law - watching the motion of every person, what is he doing on the Sabbath? Did he wash his hands before eating? Is his tithe exactly 10% and did he tithe 10% of every little thing he has? But they did not have mercy on their brother. They did not have a relationship with God, but we just focused on the minutiae of the law.

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees saw the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath and said "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" - and the Lord explains to them this verse from Hosea. He says: "If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." And then the Lord goes and heals a man with a withered hand on that same Sabbath. And when they tried to accuse Him, He asked them: "If you had a sheep and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would you bring it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." - He explained to them the Spirit of the Law of the Sabbath. Keep in mind that the Lord Jesus is the Lawgiver - they are trying to tell the One Who Gave the Law, what the Law means! But He explains to them - the Sabbath isn't about "don't do xyz" but it's about Honoring God - doing good deeds, spending time with the Lord instead of with the cares of the world. Having mercy on God's creation.

Until today, some Jewish people in an attempt to keep the Sabbath will not push the button on an elevator... and in some places there are elevators that go up and down on Saturdays stopping at every floor so that Jews can use them without pushing the button... is this what the Lord meant by honoring the Sabbath day and keeping it holy?

Mark 2:27 tells the same story as Matthew 12, and in it the Lord said: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath was made for man. The Law was given FOR man. But it is the Spirit of the Law that the Lord desires, not the letter of the Law.

Since we are in the Great Fast, let us take the example of prayer. Now I am increasing in my prayers for the Great Fast and I am praying from the Agpeya some extra prayers. How do I pray them? Am I just reading them as fast as I can to get through them? Is the point of prayer to check a box about which prayers I read and which ones I finished, Or is the point a relationship with God? Is the prayer itself the goal, Or is prayer the means by which we enter into a relationship with God?

If we take the example of liturgy... am I attending liturgy on Sunday completely absent-minded or on my phone, or coming late, or just standing there and then taking communion and checking a box? Or am I attending the liturgy to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and to spend time in His presence, and to abide in Him and He in me? And what do I do after liturgy? Do I take the peace of the Lord with me and spread it everywhere I go? Do I take my joy and give it to the waitress at the restaurant and the cashier in the store and the attendant at the gas station? Or am I cursing at the guy who switched lanes in front of me, angry at the waitress who got my order wrong, impatient with the slow cashier? What have I gained from attending the Liturgy then?

When I was a kid, if I ever got in a fight with my brother or sister or disobeyed my parents, or did something wrong, my mom would tell me "that's what you learned at church?"

The Lord says by Hosea the prophet: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than whoel burnt offerings." - I encourage you to memorize this verse and remember its reference Hosea 6:6.

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