

Two Wrong Responses

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[0:00] Prophet of Hosea in chapter 5. I'll read all of chapter 5 in the first three verses of chapter 6.

! Follow along as I read the word of God from Hosea 5. Hear this, you priests. Pay attention, you Israelites. Listen, O royal house. This judgment is against you.

You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. I know all about Ephraim. Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution.

Israel is corrupt. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart. They do not acknowledge the Lord. Israel's arrogance testifies against them. The Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin.

Judah also stumbles with them. When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them. They are unfaithful to the Lord. They give birth to illegitimate children.

[1:16] Now their new moon festivals will devour them and their fields. Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth-Avon. Lead on, O Benjamin.

Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel, I will proclaim what is certain. Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.

Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols. I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah. When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria and sent to the great king for help.

But he is not able to cure you. Not able. He is not able to cure you. Not able to heal your sores. For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah.

I will tear them to pieces and go away. I will carry them off with no one to rescue them. Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt and they will seek my face and their misery.

[2:22] They will earnestly seek me. Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us. He has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds.

After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will restore us that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord. Let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear. He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.

Sometimes the heat of our troubles gets so hot that we respond by jumping out of the frying pan right into the fire.

When our response to our troubles only gets us into greater troubles. That was Israel 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

We're in the book of Hosea and we've seen that God married Israel and Israel. Israel played the harlot. She had taken vows to forsake all others and to keep herself and to obey all of God's ways.

[3:39] But then just as Gomer did to Hosea, Israel walked out on God, her husband and went after other lovers. She forsook God for idols.

God substitutes other things and other gods that took his place in their hearts. And because of Israel's sins, God's judgments were pronounced against her and began to fall upon her.

He blocked Israel's path. He stripped the land and made it like a desert.

He did that by stripping the crops. By not sending rain. By bringing raiding parties in. By disease and wild animals.

He stripped her people. Stripped the land of her people by killing them in war and hauling others off into captivity. And when God's judgments started coming down upon Israel, she responded.

[4:48] And chapter five gives us two of her wrong responses to the Lord's judgments. And both of these responses are temptations for us when we are going through our troubles and disciplines from the Lord.

But to respond like Israel is to jump out of the frying pan and right into the fire. Now, today we're going to look at those two wrong responses to troubles and then the right response that God was looking for.

Now, in chapter five, we're back into the courtroom. God is prosecuting Israel of her sins, pronouncing judgments upon her.

Nearly 12 times he will call her out for her sins and just as often he will pronounce judgments, punishments that must fall on her because of her sins.

So we come to the opening charges of sin and judgment. The first thing he does is calls us to pay attention.

[6:00] He calls upon the land. Listen up, you priests. You're the spiritual leaders of Israel. You royal house. You're the political leaders of Israel and all Israel.

None are exempt. He says this judgment is against you. This judgment pertains to you. I'm talking to you. So you better listen. Because you have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will punish all of them. Now, at once we're taken out into the field to watch some bird hunting. By way of entrapment.

And there's a little bird walking along, minding its own business. And it sees a crumb of bread. And so it gobbles it up. And not far off is another crumb of bread.

And it gobbles that one, too. And the next one, and the next one, and the next one. Until it's positioned right under the tree where the net is hanging. And the hunter gives the jerk.

[7:12] The net falls and entraps the silly bird. And it's soon a bird sandwich. It's been snared.

It's been caught in the net. And God says to Israel, that's you. You are the one hunting. You are hunting down your own people and killing each other.

You're deep in slaughter. Ensnaring and murdering each other. That's the first charge.

It's bloodshed. And it sticks on the priest. You priest. Because what did the priest do? They lured a gullible people who were like silly birds right into the Baal worship.

Which would murder their souls and lead to their physical destruction as well. The Israelites are like silly doves that wandered into the trap and were destroyed for lack of knowledge.

[8:14] But these priests also had blood on their hands because they lured them into the worship where they sacrifice their children.

Look at chapter 6 and verse 8. Gilead is a city of wicked men stained with footprints of blood.

As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests. They murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes.

No doubt spiritually they murder the souls of men. But here it almost sounds like he's referring to literally ambushing people and murdering them. Who? Bands of priests. Listen up, you priests.

You're deep in slaughter. What about you, royal house? Does anyone remember how Jehu became king? It was by a bloodbath at Jezreel.

[9:14] Wasn't it? Chapter 1, we studied that. He slaughtered two kings and 70 young royal princes. The whole time frame was a period of great political instability in the northern kingdom of Israel.

And after King Jeroboam II, the next king reigned for six months and then was assassinated. The next king reigned for one month and was assassinated.

The next king for ten years. The next king for two years and was assassinated by his own officer in a military coup. And the next king, eight years, and was assassinated by one who became king and sold Israel off to Assyria.

The royal house of Israel had their hands stained with blood. Deep in slaughter. And all Israel was the same. Did they want something?

And someone stand in the way of getting it? They were not beyond murdering them to get it. We just read Gilead is a city of wicked men stained with footprints of blood.

[10:29] All around the city of Gilead. Footprints of blood. They murdered each other to get what they wanted. They someone that they hated.

The whole nation was deep in slaughter. There was such little regard for life that no one's life was safe. And is that not the fruit of forsaking God wherever God is forsaken?

It's not long before life in his image is easily snuffed out. The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. And then God, the prosecutor and judge, says, though Israel does not know me, I know them.

In fact, I know all about them. Verse three. She's not hidden from me. Though she carries out much of her bloodshed under the cover of darkness and in secret, perhaps.

And though she carries on in her idol worship under the cover of the groves on the high places. Yet nothing in all creation is hidden from my sight.

[11 : 39] Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. You don't know me. He charges in verse four.

But I know you and all that you've done. And this is what I see. Not only bloodshed, but secondly, unfaithfulness. Verse three. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution.

You have played the harlot. And no doubt he meant spiritual adultery. Israel had left her one true husband, God, and went off after other lovers, idols.

But the idols that they went after included physical prostitution. And so there's this double meaning when he says, Ephraim, you've now turned to prostitution.

Israel is corrupt. She is. She's defiled herself. Now, this is not a surface wound. This is not something a bandaid and gauze will take care of.

[12 : 38] Notice how deeply rooted the problem is. What is Israel's need? Their need is just to return to the Lord. They've forsaken the Lord. They've turned their back on him for other gods.

Their great need is just to turn back to him. But that's not so easy. Notice what verse four says. Their deeds do not permit them to return. To their God. Their deeds, their sins don't allow them to return.

In other words, they're enslaved by their sins. And this speaks of the bondage of sin and idolatry. It always takes you further than you want it to go.

And you can't just say goodbye to sin and idols when you think, well, I'll just quit that and start something else. No, their sins would not allow them to turn and repent.

[13 : 37] It's a heart problem, he goes on to say, because a spirit of prostitution is in their heart. This is not an outward fix that's needed.

It's there's an inward problem. The reason their feet stray into spiritual prostitution is because they've got a straying heart. A spirit. Of prostitution and harlotry and adultery.

And it's a knowledge problem, not only a heart problem, but a knowledge problem, because they do not acknowledge the Lord, he says. They do not know the Lord. Remember, we saw that earlier in Hosea.

They didn't know his character, his ways. And so they were destroyed for a lack of knowledge. They do not know the Lord.

And then it's a pride problem. Israel's arrogance testifies against them. Verse five says here, Israel's own pride steps up into the witness stand and testifies against them.

[14 : 43] Your own pride, your own pride, your own arrogance testifies against you. Well, what was their arrogance? She's too proud to acknowledge her guilt.

She's too proud to say, I am the sinner and I need mercy. Lord, forgive. Lord, save. She flatters herself too much to detect or hate her sin.

Isaiah is a prophet who spoke to. The same spoke at the same time as as Hosea to the people. And he says, the look on their faces testifies against them.

They parade their sin like Sodom. They do not hide it. Woe to them. They have brought disaster on themselves. Chapter three, verse nine. Your pride testifies against.

So the heart, the root problem, the whole tree's bad. It's a heart problem. It's a knowledge problem. They don't know the Lord. It's a pride problem.

[15 : 47] They're they're too proud to acknowledge their guilt and to turn back to the Lord. And so we see just how helpless Israel is to fix her own problem. She is helpless.

She can do nothing to remedy the situation. Her own sins won't let her turn back to the Lord. And here we see the first of Israel's wrong responses to God's unfolding judgments.

Because she thinks that she can fix it. And so her first wrong response is more religious activity. More religious activity.

Notice verse six says they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord. Is God upset? Are his judgments starting to fall upon the land?

Well, then let's placate his and his anger with more animal sacrifices. Let's bring our herds and our flocks. That's how we have manipulated bail.

[16:50] The Canaanite God of fertility. We give him sacrifices and he gives fertility to our land. We'll do the same with Jehovah.

You see, they don't know him. They don't have a clue how holy he is and how sinful they are. They think they can buy him off with sacrifices.

Just like they did bail. We'll throw some lambs and oxen his way and and he'll calm down. He'll be satisfied. Pride. This problem is nothing that can't be fixed.

With some livestock. On an altar. Now, that's not only ignorance. That's the height of arrogance, isn't it? To think that their sins are really so small that a few animal sacrifices will make everything right.

It's pride to think that anything we do can satisfy God for our sins. That there's some religious sacrifice or right or duty or activity.

[18:05] That will serve the purpose and satisfy him. That's penance. That's penance. And there's no place for penance in true religion. Absolutely nothing we do can satisfy God for the offensiveness of our sins.

Do you know that every one of your sins this week is so offensive? That the only thing that could remove the offense is that the son of God would be damned in your place?

That's how offensive sin is. And they say. We'll bring our flocks and herds and all will be well. They think so little of God and so God's word to them is when they go.

Verse six. When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord. They will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them. He's not a God in a box to be manipulated.

Like the Canaanite gods. So as you see Israel seeking the Lord coming with their flocks and herds. Don't call it revival just yet.

[19:21] Look again. Hosea says they will not find him for he has withdrawn himself from them. Why? Why would God not welcome the returning prodigal?

Why would he withdraw himself from them? Well, because they aren't the returning prodigal. They're not truly seeking him.

Do you know that Jeremiah 29 13 says God says to his people. You will seek me. And you will find me. If you seek me with all your heart.

You will find me when you seek me. If you seek me with all your heart. How many. Church-ed young people.

Have said, well, I sought the Lord and he didn't save me. As if it's God's fault that they are not saved. They did their part.

[20:25] They sought the Lord. But he didn't save. Guess it's his fault. Guess I'm just not an elect. So I'm just waiting. I've done my part.

I sought the Lord. Young person, if that's you this morning, whatever you did. Whatever you did, no matter how many tears went with it.

What you did was not seek the Lord with all your heart. You know how I can say that? Because on the honor of God, God says.

If you seek me with all your heart. You will find me. You will find me. He does not withdraw himself from true seekers after himself.

He's not playing hide and seek with true seekers. These Israelites. The nation. The whole is here described as having come to the Lord.

[21:22] Expecting to find him. But they didn't find him. Let's return to the Lord. Let's seek him. Too many judgments. Bad things happening. Let's seek the Lord. And they didn't find him.

He had withdrawn himself. Because their seeking was a farce. Because even as they sought the Lord. They went right on in their prostitution.

And their bloodshed. Notice verse 7. They are unfaithful. Here they come with their flocks and herds. But don't be deceived. This isn't revival.

They are unfaithful to the Lord. They give birth to illegitimate children. Through their ongoing involvement with Baal worship. They continued to consort with harlots and shrine prostitutes. And the children that they gave birth to were illegitimate. That's true literally. As they went into prostitution and harlotry and adultery.

[22:21] Children were born illegitimately. But it's also true of the nation as a whole. That the kind of children that the Israelites were bringing up. The next generation did not belong to the Lord.

They belonged to Baal. Well. Continuing in sin you see. Yet all the while they were keeping up the worship of Jehovah. Let's seek the Lord.

Come flocks. Come herds. Let's go and sacrifice to Jehovah. You see we're going to misunderstand the book of Hosea.

And probably Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. And all the other minor prophets. If we think that when we read that Israel forsook the Lord. And she turned her back on the Lord. And went after other gods. If we think that by that. They all together abandoned the worship of God. We'll miss the point.

[23:18] Well they wouldn't think of that. They're Israel. They're the people of God. We worship Jehovah. Jehovah. And so they kept up. The sacrifices. They kept up.

The feasts and festivals. And they. They saw what they were supposed to do in their religious worship. And so they brought their animals and their herds and.

Sought the Lord. But all the while they were breaking his commands on how to live before God. And how to live before their fellow man. Their neighbor. They. They. Went in to worship God. But continued. Continued murdering.

Fornicating. Mixing idolatry. Into God's worship. Now what kind of seeking is that then? Well it's insincere seeking.

[24:16] It's heartless and phony seeking. And the Lord. In his own days on the earth said to.

His. Contemporary. Jews. Isaiah was right. When he said of his people. And it's true of this people. That they draw near to me. And honor me with their lips.

But their hearts. Are far from me. Come let's seek the Lord. Their hearts are with their prostitutes. And with their idols. And with their murderous schemes.

You see. False religion. Can have all the proper. Outward forms. Of true religion. In place. And yet. Because it lacks the heart. The heart. Is far from God. It's an abomination to him. And how is the heart.

[25:15] Seen to be far from God. Well. They don't keep his commandments. No wonder the Lord. Would not be found by them. But withdrew from them. If what you do out there.

Monday through Saturday. Does not line up. With what you say. And hear on Sunday. Then your worship. Is a sham. Whether you lived.

In Hosea's Israel. Or in our day. Notice what he says. At the end. Of verse seven. And now their new moon. Festive. Festivals. Will devour them.

And their fields. This kind of worship. This kind of nominal. Worship of the Lord. Keeping new moon. Festivals. To the Lord. And so on. It's going to lead.

To their own. Ruin. The devouring. Of themselves. And their fields. So do you see the picture. God's judgments. Were coming upon them.

[26:12] They respond. With more religious activity. Is that what he wants? More sacrifices. And the very religious activities. That they relied on.

To placate God's wrath. Will actually provoke him. To even. More wrath. That's jumping out of the frying pan.

Into the fire. Their religion does nothing. To diminish their guilt. But greatly. Increases it. Now. You who read your Bibles. Hear bells ringing. All over. The new. The old. Testament. And even. The gospels. When. Hosea speaks.

As I said. Isaiah was a contemporary. Prophet with Hosea. Listen to what he writes. And. Says in chapter 1. Verse 11. The multitude. Of your sacrifices.

[27:07] What are they to me? Says the Lord. Lord. I have more than enough. Of your burnt offerings. Of rams. And the fat. Of fattened animals. I have no pleasure.

In the blood. Of bulls. And lambs. And goats. When you come in. To appear before me. Who has asked this of you? This trampling. Of my courts. Stop bringing.

Meaningless offerings. Your incense. Is detestable to me. New moons. Sabbaths. And convocations. I cannot bear. Your evil assemblies. Your new moons.

Festivals. And your. Your appointed feasts. My soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary. Of bearing them. When you spread out your hands. In prayer.

I will hide. My eyes. From you. Even if you offer. Many prayers. I will not listen. Because your hands. Are full. Of blood.

[28 : 01] Wash. And make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds. Out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right. Seek justice. Encourage the oppressed.

Defend the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow. Come now. Let us reason together. Says the Lord. Though your sins. Be as scarlet. They shall be as white as snow. And though they be red like crimson. They will be as wool. But when you come to me. You can't just come. And go on living. The same way you've been living.

And expect me. To treat you as serious. Worshippers. Amos says the same thing. I hate. I despise your religious feasts.

God says. I have no regard for them. I'll not accept them. Away with the noise of your song. I won't listen to your music. But let justice roll on.

[28 : 57] Like a river. Righteousness. Like a never failing stream. Micah. Was another contemporary prophet of Hosea.

And he says. The end of that book. With what shall I come before the Lord. And bow down before the exalted God. Okay. Israel's coming before the Lord.

With all their flocks and herd. Micah asked this penetrating question. With what shall I come?

Before the Lord. Shall I come before him with burnt offerings.

With calves a year old. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams. With ten thousand rivers of oil. Shall I offer my firstborn.

For my transgression. The fruit of my body. For the sins of my soul. Something that was being done in the Canaanite worship. He has shown you oh man.

[29 : 54] What is good. And what does the Lord require of you. To act justly. To love mercy. And to walk humbly. With your God. David knew it.

What was David guilty of? It seems like it's similar to Israel's sins. Was it not bloodshed? Murder of Uriah. Murder of Uriah. And the spirit of harlotry.

And going after Bathsheba. And in Psalm 51. We hear. Hear this man with blood on his hands. And. And unfaithfulness to his marriage vows. Coming before the Lord. What shall I bring to you?

You do not delight in sacrifice. Or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart. Oh God. You will not despise.

[30 : 54] I'm not seeking you with a payoff. But with a broken heart. And that's what the Lord is after.

It's what he was always after. He never meant for Israel. Just to bring him an offer. I don't need your sheep. I own the cattle on a thousand hills. He says. I wouldn't ask you if I was hungry.

Don't think I'm like Baal. Bring me your broken heart. God. Indeed. That's what Hosea will say. The Lord will say through Hosea in chapter 6.

In verse 6. For I desire mercy. Not sacrifice. An acknowledgement of God.

Rather than burnt offerings. So. So. Why is the scripture so littered with this. God hating. The worship of his people. Why do we find that so often.

[31 : 53] If it's not a sign. To the fact that this is a common problem. With the people of God. The flesh is programmed.

To think our religious activities. Will somehow make up. And satisfy God for our sins. The flesh would choose sacrifice. Over true repentance.

And over a broken heart. Ten times out of ten. To go on in my own sinful way. At the same time.

To come to church. And to offer my worship. That's what Israel was doing. To come to God. Just to have him forgive my sins.

But not to have him save me from sinning. That was Israel. To go to church. To put some money in the offering box.

[32 : 45] To sing the hymns. To promise to read my Bible. And pray more. To try to do better. Others go to confessionals. Others. Say so many Hail Marys.

And Paternosters. But both are thinking. That these things ought to somehow satisfy God. And cause him to treat me different. From the judgments and disciplines.

That are coming upon me. Somehow balance the scales a bit. And make up for my sins. I bring my sacrificial lamb. And I'm good to go. And so all across our land today.

People have filed into places of worship. Worshiping God. God. The God of the Bible. They got Bibles on their laps.

And it's a frightening question to ask. How many are truly seeking his face? You're here. I'm here. But why are we here? Israel was there.

[33 : 49] Israel was sacrificed. Israel had all these things in their right place. True religion. Forms of true religion were to be found in Israel. Even while they were doing all this other stuff.

How many are truly seeking the Lord today? And how many others are simply doing their religious thing that is a stench in God's nostrils?

They will not find him. Nor his mercy. They'll rather find that he's gone. He's withdrawn his gracious presence. And that in itself is a painful judgment.

To not have God with you. God for you. God helping you. God. God. God. But I said it's like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.

And the fire is the greater judgments were coming upon them. Because of this. He will. He will call an invading army to come and to bring them as a nation to an end.

[34 : 48] Their sacrifices will not stop the charging army. And so we have the noises of war in verses eight and nine. That sound of the trumpet. The battle cry. One soldier shouting to another.

And God saying Ephraim. That's another name for Israel. The northern kingdom. Will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. And he says I am proclaiming what is certain.

These are not threats just to be shrugged off as if they're not going to happen. I'm telling you what is certain. And indeed. Just a few years after Hosea was done prophesying.

In 722 BC. The northern kingdom of Israel. Was obliterated. And then in verses 10 and 11.

You have the land grabbing of the royal line. God says I'll pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.

[35 : 45] What can hold back a flood of water? Nothing. We've seen that. Flooding water gets into all sorts of crevices and cracks. It just keeps coming.

And that's the way God's judgment will be. There's no way to hold it back. I'll pour out my wrath like a flood of water. And Ephraim's stubborn pursuit of idols will leave her trampled in judgment.

And we have this interesting figure that God takes to himself in verse 12. I am like a moth to Ephraim. I'm like rot to the people of Judah.

What images? God takes to himself. So there's a sweater. And it's being put away into storage. And the next fall it's taken out.

And it's holes right through it. It's ruined. Wasn't any noise. Loud clamor. But secretly, inwardly, a moth was gnawing on it.

[36 : 50] For weeks and weeks. And it ruined the sweater. God says, I am like that moth. Or there's a house.

And upon close inspection, the beams are shot through with dry rot. And the timbers are just. Can be torn with your fingernails.

It ruins the whole house. And God says, I am like that dry rot to you, O Israel. You see, God has more than one way to wreak judgment upon Israel.

He can call for an invading army. Or he can have internal forces just decay the very life right outside. Right out of Israel. So they just crumble in on themselves.

Just give them over to their idolatry. And their promiscuousness. And their bloodshed. Their murder. Their lies. Their cheating. Just give them over to that decay.

[37 : 52] And that too is a judgment of God. I am like rot. And like a moth to you. And when the nation woke up to its danger, what did they do?

And this brings us to the second wrong response. To God's judgments. Secondly, they turned to political alliances instead of to the Lord. Verse 13 says, when Ephraim saw his sickness.

Here his sins and the judgments of God upon him are compared to a physical condition. When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria and sent to the great king for help.

God's judgments were meant to send them running back to the Lord. But instead of turning to the Lord, they turned to Assyria and the great king of Assyria to come and help them.

You see, it's just another one of their own attempts to fix the problem without having to return to God himself. Without having to humble themselves and humble their pride and acknowledge their guilt and go back to God.

[39:03] And it's just another idol beside Baal. Now they erect the king of Assyria and they're trusting in him as they ought to have trusted in God for protection. But notice God says it won't work.

He is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores. You see, they're looking to human methods to cure a spiritual problem.

They treat spiritual problems with political cures. I'm afraid we're high in that kind of answers, too, in our own day.

They treat spiritual problems and we're throwing political cures at them. That was Israel. Come and help us. That's not going to help the problem.

Remember, the problem is the heart that's turned away from God that needs to return to him. It's like putting antibiotics on a broken down car. It's a different kind of problem needing a different kind of solution.

[40:10] And it is ironic that in jumping out of the frying pan, they jumped right into the fire. Do you know what nation God would use to destroy the northern kingdom and to obliterate them?

It would be Assyria. The very one that they turned to for help and leaned upon would eventually destroy them completely. What do we do in our troubles?

Who do we look to? Who do we call for help? Who's the first person we go to? Is it God himself? Or do we turn to some power and ability that we can see rather than the invisible God?

Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. Why would we turn to flesh when we have the living almighty God to turn to? Well, the reason the great king of Assyria will not be able to cure their sores is because it's the Lord himself who's the one inflicting the incurable wounds. Verse 14, for I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah.

[41:19] I even I will tear them to pieces and go away. I will carry them off with no one to rescue them. So now we're on the Discovery Channel and we're watching a great lion tearing into its prey with its fangs, its teeth and its sharp claws.

He's just tearing it to pieces. And God says, that's me, the lion. And that's you being torn to pieces. I will tear you to pieces and go away.

Kids, you remember when David was watching his father's sheep and the lion came along and took hold of a little lamb and ran off. And David went after the lion and grabbed it by the mane and with the help of God, he struck the lion and killed the lion and rescued the little lamb.

But what do you do when. God is the lion. And he's got Israel. In his claws.

There is none to rescue. You see, if God before us, who can be against us? But if God is against us, it doesn't matter who is for us.

[42:39] When the one wounding is God. Only God. Can be the cure. So Israel sin.

And God's judgments. And as they fall upon Israel, she responds. But her responses are so inadequate and and so proud and and self initiated.

She doesn't throw herself upon the Lord. We come lastly to the correct response to the Lord's judgments. What is it that he's wanting to see? Well, after carrying them off with no one to rescue them, God says in verse 15, then I'll go back to my place.

Back to my lion's den. Until they admit their guilt and they will seek my face in their misery, they will earnestly seek me.

What is God after in all of this? Why the dry rot and the moth decay of the land? Why giving them over to their sins? Why calling for invading armies?

[43:46] Why hiding himself and withdrawing himself from Israel? What's God's judgments meant to do? We see it here. They're gracious judgments.

They're meant to bring them to admit their guilt. I'll go away until they admit their guilt. That's what he wants. For you to come and to say, I have nothing good to say about myself.

I am a sinner. Save me for Jesus' sake. So I'll go away until they admit their guilt. And then they will seek my face. They will earnestly seek my face in their misery.

Isn't God gracious? That's what he wants. The broken, contrite heart. Admitting guilt. Truly seeking him. And that's his purpose behind these judgments.

And this is something that will happen. Notice he says, in their misery they will earnestly seek me. Now when would that be fulfilled? Well, it was partially fulfilled after the exile.

[44:52] As Judah went away into exile and they came back to Jerusalem. Yes, there was a returning to the Lord. But it points beyond that. That was a partial fulfillment.

It's something that will happen during the reign of Messiah. We saw that in chapter 3 and verse 5. Where we read, afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God.

And David their king. There's the name for Jesus. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessing in the last days. That's the time we're living in.

Between Christ's first coming and the last coming. It's the last days. And in those days, Israel will come trembling back to him. They will seek the Lord.

You see, it's in Christ that sin's bondage is broken. It's in Christ that sin's offense is removed. It's in Christ that sin's punishment is forgiven.

[45:52] It's in Christ that God's wrath against sin has been born. And it's in Christ that all the Israel of God will be saved.

Many of you have found it so. In the misery of your sin and God's judgments upon you, you turned to the Lord and admitted your guilt and trusted in his Savior.

And he saved you. Sinner friend, now is the time to seek the Lord. Hosea immediately turns to pleading with Israel to return to the Lord.

Return to him, he says. Even as he had pleaded with his unfaithful wife, Gomer, to return to him, he now turns to unfaithful Israel and pleads with Israel to return.

Verse 1. Come, let us return. He puts himself right alongside them. Come, I'm going with you. I too am a sinner. Come, let us return to the Lord.

[46:59] He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us. He has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds. Now, in one way, return to the Lord is the theme of the whole book.

God is calling his wayward wife Israel back to return to him. And the message is there's only one who can heal you. And it is the lion who wounded and tore you.

It's the same one who called for the invading army and the corruption within to destroy you. It is the lion who tore you to pieces. He's the only one who can heal you.

Can we trust him? He's so fierce in his judgments. Can we actually turn and go to him?

Come. Come, Hosea says. Yes, the one who has torn us in pieces will heal us. He is willing. Doubt no more.

[48:03] In fact, the reason he wounded us is that we would come back to him to have him heal us. As painful as it was, he meant it for your good.

So come, let's return. Have his woundings had that desired effect upon you? Have all the troubles in your life had that effect on you that they've called you back to the Lord?

They've made you a seeker after him. He can reverse the wounds and the decay in the nation. He can heal the sins and idolatries of our hearts.

And he can do the work quickly. Verse 2. After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will restore us that we may live in his presence. Here we are in our hospital bed, torn and wounded, sick and sore.

And here comes the promise. Return to the one who wounded you. And he'll heal you. He'll revive you. He'll restore you. He'll bring you off your sickbed that we may live in his presence.

[49:12] That's what he's after. It's not just peace replacing war. It's not just preservation replacing dry rot. It's not just disciplines of sin gone and blessings of God restored.

But he will restore us to live in his presence. After all, it's a marriage that God is after here. He wants us to live with him and to share the whole of our life with him.

So come on then. Verse 3. Let us acknowledge the Lord. Let us press on to acknowledge him. Let's press on to know God. Let's make knowing God better the object of our zealous pursuit.

Isn't that what Paul said? I want to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of me. I want to know Christ. Isn't that what Jesus said?

The eternal life itself. The thing that God saves us to. Is that we may know him. The only true God. And Jesus Christ whom he has sent. And that's what it means to return to him.

[50:20] It means knowing him. Relating to him. Knowing what he requires. Knowing his gospel.

Knowing his attributes. And living in the light of it all. Living with him. Christianity is knowing God in Christ.

Have you come to Christ? Are you trusting in Christ? Are you getting to know him? And as we're urged to return to the Lord. He leaves us with the certainty of his response.

He's been wounding. Remember like a lion tearing us. How will we ever have courage to go to him? Well here's the promise. The end of verse 3.

As surely as the sun rises. He will appear. He will come to us like the winter rains. Like the spring rains that water the earth. As sure as the sun rises.

[51:22] He will appear for us. He will come and save us. As sure as rains refresh and transform the land with life. So he will revive and restore and save.

Let there be no doubt as to God's willingness to receive us. If we'll just return to him. So has God been pursuing anyone here? With his disciplines. With his rods.

With his troubles. With his judgments. Don't jump out of the frying pan into some greater fire. Rather turn and jump right into the arms of the lion of Judah.

And he will save you. He will help you. And he will rescue you. Your troubles have done their work. When they brought you to Christ.

Let's pray. Lord we're all too much like Israel of old.

[52:21] And we thank you for a word from heaven. It's like a sharp double-edged sword. Sharper than a double-edged sword. And it reveals the very thoughts and intents of our hearts.

But it also reveals a God in Christ. Who is willing to heal. Able to restore and revive. And so we turn to you this morning.

We have strayed like wandering sheep. And we return and ask you to have mercy on us for Jesus' sake. Look on him and all of his worthiness. And pardon us and all of our unworthiness.

And teach us what it is to live in your presence. To know you. To walk with you. To share the whole of our day. And our days with you.

Until we see you face to face. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.