

# Hosea 14:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hos/hos-14/hosea-141-3/>

*Hosea calls Israel to return to the LORD with a genuine heart. He gives them a prayer to pray, and urges them to pray it and renew their allegiance to God—to recognize their dependence on God's mercy.*

The book of Hosea is about sin and judgment, but it is also about love and compassion. In the opening chapters, Hosea demonstrated his love for his faithless wife, Gomer (Hosea 1–3). In the present passage, the LORD demonstrates His unfailing love for His faithless wife, Israel. The book ends with a final call to repentance, in which the prophet urged Israel to return to the LORD their God.

The prophet first addressed the Israelites in the singular as if he was referring to an individual. The purpose was likely to highlight the truth that everyone was responsible to obey the command. Every member of the Israelite society was responsible for its wellbeing to ensure its longevity. God's covenant with Israel took the form of what moderns call a [Suzerain-vassal treaty](#). But unlike what was customary in that era, God did not make the treaty with Israel's king, but rather with the people themselves (Exodus 19:8).

Therefore, Hosea issued a call to repentance and said, *Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God* (vs 1).

To *return to the LORD* is to repent from sin, thereby returning to a state of favor and fellowship with Him. It is to begin to follow God's commands, as Israel had promised to do in making their covenant with Him. Rather than following the pagan ways of exploitation and self-seeking sensuality, it would mean returning to following God's ways of loving their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-39).

The Israelites were to mend their ways. They were to redirect their lives away from the path of sin and be devoted to God, their only source of help (Hosea 11:1–4). They needed to *return to the LORD* because they committed great sins against Him. In short, they *stumbled because of their iniquity* (vs 1).

The verb *stumble* can also be translated as “to stagger” or “to totter.” It is often used to describe someone's inability to walk steadily (Leviticus 26:37). Here in Hosea, it is used to describe Israel's failure to live righteously before the Suzerain God, following His commands designed to create a self-governing, serve-others culture.

Indeed, the Israelites *stumbled because of their iniquity*, which the prophet identified elsewhere to include hypocritical worship (4:8), lies and violence (7:1), idolatrous worship (8:1–7), social injustice (12:7–8), pride (12:8, 13:1), and corrupt leadership (13:9–12). So, by calling Israel to *return to the LORD*, the prophet illustrated the dual nature of biblical repentance: turning away from sin and returning to God. The exploitative behavior of lies and violence is a by-product of

the idolatrous pagan philosophy/worship, so they all go together. To *return to the LORD* would include obeying His commands to love their neighbors and live a life of service.

Having addressed the Israelites in the singular, the prophet moved to plural imperatives to strengthen the command. He said, *Take words with you and return to the LORD* (vs 2). The prophet asked the Israelites to *take words* with them as opposed to taking sacrifices. God desires a change of heart. God would not take pleasure in hypocritical sacrifices, made without a repentant spirit, but would not “despise a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17). The people of Israel were to speak to the LORD genuinely, confessing their sins to obtain mercy and forgiveness. These principles of confessing in order to obtain forgiveness, and speaking/choosing a perspective that is true in order to shape one’s behavior to walk in obedience, runs throughout scripture (Genesis 4:6-7, Deuteronomy 30:14, 1 John 1:9).

To ensure that the Israelites genuinely returned to God and properly confessed their sins, the prophet Hosea provided them with a model of prayer. According to Hosea, the Israelites were to *Say to Him (God), Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously* (vs 2).

The verbs translated *take away* and *receive* not only describe God’s actions on behalf of repentant Israel, but also display the sequence in which such actions would occur. God would first remove the *iniquity* of His covenant people and then accept them *graciously* if they would turn away from paganism and *return* to Him. The purpose, Hosea said, was so *that we may present the fruit of our lips* (vs 2).

The term *lips* is used consistently in the Bible to refer to spoken words. In the book of Proverbs, for instance, it is often portrayed as that which produces fruit, whether good or bad: “The lips of the righteous feed many” (Proverbs 10:21), but “a fool’s lips bring strife, and his mouth calls for blows” (Proverbs 18:6). So the prophet Hosea encourage Israel to offer *the fruit of our lips* as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered up to the LORD (Hebrews 13:15). This would be a practical step they could make toward repenting and returning to God.

In addition to asking God for forgiveness and mercy in their prayer to God, Hosea instructed the Israelites to confess that God was their only Suzerain and Ruler. In their confession, they were to make three pledges.

First, they were to say, *Assyria will not save us* (vs 3). The Israelites were to renounce Assyria and acknowledge the LORD as their only savior. They were to worship and serve God alone. Such a commitment would cause God to forgive and restore His people.

Second, the Israelites were to remove their dependence on military power. Hosea encouraged them to say to God, *we will not ride on horses* (vs 3). In biblical times, *horses* were essential for success in battle. So *horses* became a symbol of military might and national security (Psalm 20:7, Isaiah 30:16). However, the Suzerain God repeatedly demonstrated His superiority over such military forces. For example, at the Red Sea, He defeated Pharaoh’s *horses* and chariots (Exodus 14:9, 23, 15:1). Also, at the waters of Merom, He defeated the Canaanite coalition with its hordes of *horses* and chariots (Joshua 11:4–11). Therefore, Hosea admonished the people to put their trust in God rather than in *horses* (their own might).

Third, the Israelites were to renounce idolatry: *we will not say again, 'Our god,' To the work of our hands* (vs 3). The people needed to renounce false gods. These false gods were created by skillful craftsmen and were not real. They were unable to interact with human beings (Psalm 115:4). They were merely a moral excuse to indulge a fleshly desire for sensual pleasure and exploitation of others. A renunciation to pagan idol worship, and its attendant exploitative culture, along with a commitment to God, would guarantee Israel's prosperity and would cause God to restore His fellowship with them.

The prophet Hosea instructed Israel to end the prayer with a confession of trust and reason to cling to God: *For in You the orphan finds mercy* (vs 3). In this confession is a recognition of need as well as an acknowledgment of God's *mercy* upon those who have need.

In the biblical era, an *orphan* was especially vulnerable because he did not enjoy the protection of the male figure (father), who was the primary protector and provider; human strength was the primary source of energy for agriculture and war. But God cares for orphans and provides for them, because He provides for those in need.

God, not Baal or Assyria can have compassion and mercy on His people. That is why the Israelites were to acknowledge their dependence on Him as they renounced idolatry. They need to see themselves truly, which is to recognize that they are needy and dependent.

This is similar to Jesus's message to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3. There Jesus tells them that they think they are wealthy and in need of nothing, when really they are "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). Jesus was blunt in confronting this church because He chastises those He loves (Revelation 3:19). It is the same here in Hosea with Israel (Romans 11:28-29).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup>Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,  
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.**

**<sup>2</sup>Take words with you and return to the Lord.**

**Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity  
And receive *us* graciously,  
That we may present the fruit of our lips.**

**<sup>3</sup>"Assyria will not save us,  
We will not ride on horses;  
Nor will we say again, 'Our god,'  
To the work of our hands;  
For in You the orphan finds mercy."**