

Hosea 14:4-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hos/hos-14/hosea-144-8/>

The LORD will respond to a prayer of repentance by Israel and restore them, bringing them back to life as a nation.

In response to Israel praying the prayer in faith taught them by Hosea (vs 2-3), the Suzerain God promised to restore them: *I will heal their apostasy* (vs 4).

The verb translated *I will heal* generally describes the activity of medical doctors and physicians who treat patients' diseases. But here, the verb is used to describe God as the healer of Israel's *apostasy*.

The term *apostasy* literally means a falling away, a turning. The Israelites turned to Assyria for security and help, thus turning away from the true and living God. They turned to pagan ways of sensuality and exploitation of others. As a result, their culture was sick to the point of death; it was full of deception and violence (Hosea 4:2). "For the waywardness of the naïve will kill them and the complacency of fools will destroy them" (Proverbs 1:32). Israel's wound was incurable without God's intervention. That is why God promised to heal their *apostasy* and restore them to fellowship with Him. Only the Suzerain God could heal *Israel* of their wound.

Not only would God *heal* the deep wound of Israel's *apostasy*, but He would also *love them freely* (vs 4). He would forgive the Israelites and extend His love to them once again. The reason for this was because God had already relented and withdrawn His burning wrath. He made that crystal clear when He said, *For My anger has turned away from them* (vs 4). In other words, God would turn away from His *anger* if Israel repented and shower His covenant people with His unfailing love.

The LORD then used a series of botanical images to explain His reconciliation with His covenant people. He began by saying, *I will be like the dew to Israel* (vs 5). In Israel, *dew* is a vital source of moisture. Water vapor from the Mediterranean condensing from warm air during a cool night provides much of the moisture for grazing lands in Israel. Thus the *dew* is the source of life and sustenance for Israel. Similarly, if Israel will repent, God will be their source of sustenance.

Because dew vanishes quickly, it was used figuratively earlier in Hosea to describe Israel's fleeting devotion to the LORD (Hosea 6:4) as well as their transient life (Hosea 13:3). But the term is used here in Hosea 14 as a symbol of refreshment and revival. Just as the *dew* provides moisture to flowers and trees during the dry months of summer (Isaiah 26:19), the Suzerain God would provide life-giving essence to Israel to cause the people to prosper.

As a result of God's gift of moisture, Israel would *blossom like the lily and take root like the cedars of Lebanon* (vs 5). The *lily* was a well-known sweet and beautiful flower, which was often used to convey images of beauty and love (Song of Solomon 2:2). The *cedars* were large

trees native to the country of *Lebanon*. They were known for their strength and durability, making them valuable for construction (1 Kings 6:9–10). Through these images, the LORD told His people that He would nourish them and cause them to continue to grow.

Indeed, Israel's *shoots would sprout, his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon* (vs 6).

The *olive tree* was known for its fruit and especially for its production of oil. It is used here as a symbol of beauty and prosperity (Jeremiah 11:16, Psalm 52:8). The *shoots* symbolize the abundance of new life. And the prosperity would extend beyond mere sustenance. It would include aesthetic enjoyment as well, like the *fragrance* of the *cedars of Lebanon*. All in all, the verse means that the Israelites would flourish in every respect because the LORD would refresh and revive them, if they would repent and return to Him.

And those who live in his shadow will again raise grain, and they will blossom like the vine. His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon (vs 7).

That means, Israel (referred to here by the pronoun “his,” as in the previous verse) would be the tree that would provide shade for the members of the nation, allowing them to flourish with freshness and produce good grains. This likely refers to strength, that those who are close enough to be *in his shadow* will be safe. If Israel returns to God, then it will turn from the pagan culture of exploitation and return to God's ways, to a culture of love and service one-to-another. This will create an elevation of productivity, represented by the image of lush agricultural production, of *grain* and the *vine*. Their productivity will soar, and they will gain *renown*.

Having described how He would restore Israel if they turn back to Him, the Suzerain (Ruler) God asked, *O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?* (vs 8).

The LORD used Israel's largest tribe *Ephraim* to refer to the entire nation. *Ephraim* means “doubly fruitful” (Genesis 41:52). For the northern kingdom of Israel to return to Him and His ways, they will have to turn from *idols*. The pagan ways of idolatry support a culture of exploitation and debauchery (Leviticus 18). God has nothing to do with that. You can't mix a little exploitation and violence with love and service; they are opposites.

In asking the rhetorical question what He has *to do with idols*, it is clear the inferred answer is that the LORD had nothing to do with *idols*. All the other gods were powerless. They were unable to rescue the people or provide for them (Hosea 2:8). But worshipping them led the people astray, into a decayed culture of deception, violence, and oppression (Hosea 4:2).

To reinforce His superiority over all the so-called gods of paganism, the LORD stated, *It is I who answer and look after you* (vs 8). God once again demonstrated that He cared for His people. He reminded them that He would answer their prayers and concerns because He is their provider and protector.

And having told the Israelites that He cared for them, the LORD pictured Himself as a tree to demonstrate His uniqueness: *I am like a luxuriant cypress; From Me comes your fruit* (vs 8).

This means that the covenant God of Israel is the source of all fertility, both physical and spiritual. Ephraim, the “doubly fruitful,” could only find his fruits in the LORD (not in the fertility god— Baal). Therefore, the LORD alone deserved to be worshiped.

Unfortunately, Israel did not repent or avoid being crushed by the Assyrians in the time of Hosea. In 722 BC, Assyria put a siege to Samaria, the capital of Israel, then defeated it and exiled its people (2 Kings 17:5-6).

This passage referring to Israel’s restoration would apply to the end of the age. Scripture tells us that when the Israelites repent at the end of the age, God will turn away from His anger and restore them. Although Israel failed to worship God genuinely and live righteously in the days of Hosea, in the future they will reverence Him (Romans 11:25-29). When the disciples asked Jesus “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus’s answer affirmed that the kingdom would, indeed, be restored to Israel, but that it would happen in God’s undisclosed timing (Acts 1:6-8).

Once restored to their land, revived, and regenerated, the Israelites will serve the Suzerain God forever and will have nothing more to do with idolatry. The LORD will be their God and they will be His people (Jeremiah 32:38).

Biblical Text

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For My anger has turned away from them.
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And he will take root like *the cedars of Lebanon*.
⁶ His shoots will sprout,
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⁷ Those who live in his shadow
Will again raise grain,
And they will blossom like the vine.
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⁸ O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like a luxuriant cypress;
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