3-17-19

Hosea 14: 1-9

The book of Hosea has thirteen chapters of God warning Israel of the judgement that is coming. God lets them know that their idolatry is the same as committing adultery. It is being unfaithful to God who alludes to being Israel’s husband. He lets them know that they cannot escape judgement; they have gone too far and steadfastly rejected God. In fact, the last verse of chapter thirteen reads:

Samaria will be held guilty,  
For she has rebelled against her God.  
They will fall by the sword,  
Their little ones will be dashed in pieces,  
And their pregnant women will be ripped open.

But all this is followed up by what we just read in chapter 14; God will not annihilate Israel but restore it, because God is faithful even when His people are not. God is merciful, but God is also just; both are part of who He is and He will not change either one; if He did, He would cease to be God. Therefore, judgement must take place before forgiveness can be given; before mercy can have its full effect. For the Christian, this judgement took place at the cross and Jesus bore it on our behalf; we now have forgiveness. The Jews have rejected their Messiah, so they continue to bear judgement themselves.

The mercy of God shines through when we see that it is God Himself who will solve the problem. His love shines through when we see His faithfulness to His people. As we read in verse 14:4: “I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For my anger has turned away from them.” That “I” is important; it is God who will do the work, not the people. God will turn the hearts of Israel to Jesus Messiah so they can be saved. It is God alone who will cause good to Israel.

So, why do I bring this up? I believe that Israel is currently experiencing a foreshadowing of these things. I refer to these verses that speak of blossoms and sprouts and raising grain and fruit and luxuriant trees and taking root. These things are due both to hard work and blessing from God. In Israel, I saw agriculture on a scale I’ve never seen. Additionally, they have been recently blessed with an unusual amount of rain. The result is lush foliage and blooms that is at least very uncommon in Israel.

The people who live there are amazed at how much greenery and flowers there are. I saw families picnicking along the Jordon River in the green grass. “He maketh me lie down in green pastures.” Even the desert areas have patches of green and flowers blooming.

The Jordon River starts at Mt Hermon. Mt Hermon is capped with snow and because of the precipitation this season, it has more snow than usual. The snow melt is what feeds the Jordon. Right now, the head waters of the Jordon are bright, clear, rapids. The amount of water flowing through is very unusual and the people recognize it as a blessing from God. The Jordon feeds the Sea of Galilee, which has been dropping in water level for quite a while. The lake has raised about 6 or 7 feet in just this season. It has almost that much more to go to be at normal level, but you get an idea of how much rain and snow they have had.

I got to see the Jezreel Valley. This is in the northern part of Israel and the Jordon flows through it. I had never realized how big the Jezreel Valley is. I pictured a valley like we see around here like Greenspring or Baker/Mathias. But it is miles wide. It gives a new perspective to Revelation 14:20, “And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.” Whether that amount of blood is literal or metaphorical doesn’t matter. The last war will bring a tremendous amount of death, more than has ever been seen.

But right now, the Jezreel Valley is beautiful. Israel has an interesting way of doing things. For the most part they use the best and most fertile, flat ground to grow crops and build their houses on the rocky mountain sides. The valley is full of fields growing wheat and vegetables and it is covered with orchards of fruit trees and vineyards.

They use intensive growing techniques. Acres of banana trees are under plastic screening to keep the birds and bugs out. There are also green house complexes that cover acers of ground. The open fields are laid off in such a way as to maximize water use while protecting the plants from water born molds and diseases. The result of this careful planning coupled with the blessing of rain from God has resulted in wonderous beauty. What I saw reminds me of what we read here in Hosea; of the physical blessing that God pours out on His beloved people; and the spiritual fruit that will be available to Israel once they turn to Jesus.

As you go south in Israel you leave the Jezreel Valley, pass Jerusalem, and head into the Negev or southland. This area is more rugged rocks and desert. But even here, the rain has had its effect. Amongst the rocks and sticking out of some of the cliff faces are flowers. The desert blooms. But even more, they are growing crops here. I have pictures of groves of date palms and greenhouses of vegetables right on the shores of the Dead Sea. Growing right up out of the rocky, sandy soil. I don’t know how they are doing it.

Earlier, I used the term “foreshadowing”. I believe that what is in Israel today is a foreshadowing of what is to come. What is there now, is not permanent. I mentioned the amount of death prophesied for the Jezreel Valley; certainly, you can’t have that amount of war without devastating the countryside. The reason for all this is that Israel still rejects her Messiah. Israel is still engaged in idolatry.

But God will “heal their apostasy”. And He will do it the same way He has always brought His people back to Him: By letting them experience judgement. It will be a harsh experience and it bothers me to consider the destruction of the land and the misery of the people. But then I remember that God is far more merciful than I could ever be. He is more concerned about the people and the land than I could ever be. Whatever happens to them will bring them into perfect fellowship with God, and so, will be worth what they go through.

In verse 8 we read:

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;  
From Me comes your fruit.

First, we see that God will not tolerate any idols, be they graven images or wealth or even ideals. To turn from God to follow any of these is apostacy; but as God has already said, He will heal them of their apostacy. God will cause them to turn from their idols.

But then we see how God will have them depend entirely on Him. He is the One who will look after and care for His people Israel. He is the One who will hear their prayers and answer them with good. Once Israel accepts Jesus as Messiah, they will see that all the fruit they have, both physical and spiritual, comes from God and not their own good planning.

The Jezreel Valley will again be planted and produce even more than it does now, the Dead Sea will become fresh water and the desert will produce food. Also, true fellowship with God will be established and made permanent. He will be their God and they will be His people.

Verse 9 warns us to understand these things. We must never write Israel off; we must never consider that they might no longer be God’s chosen people. The teaching that Israel has been replaced by the church is false. We who are gentile Christians have simply been grafted into the vine that is Israel. We must be diligent to bless and praise God for that grafting.

I encourage you to pray for Israel. Pray for God to pour out His Holy Spirit that they might turn to Jesus. Pray that God would act in mercy and not in anger with His people. Pray that they would turn quickly to Christ and shorten the time of their distress. Pray for the coming of Jesus so that we may live in the fruit of the land and of the Spirit.

Prayer

LORD God, we worship You for who You are; You are God and there is no other. There is no One like You, never has been, never will be; You are eternal and all powerful. Your love and lovingkindness are a gift to us from Your great mercy; without these, we would perish.

Born of Your grace and mercy is salvation by Your Son, Jesus Christ. Offered to all people, we admit that we are not capable of accepting the gift of salvation. Therefore, we give You the credit and praise; our acceptance of Christ is only by the moving of the Holy Spirit. Our salvation is entirely from You.

It is with gratefulness for Your providing salvation that we lift Your own people up to You. Replace their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. Heal them of apostacy; give them disdain for idols and discernment to recognize them. Remember that Your people are but dust and their life is a breath. Gather Israel to You, that they may become a nation of priests to serve You.

In is in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ that we pray these things

Amen