

CHAPTER 6

The closing words of the foregoing chapter gave us some hopes that God and his Israel, notwithstanding their sins and his wrath, might yet be happily brought together again, that they would seek him and he would be found of them; now this chapter carries that matter further, and some join the beginning of this chapter with the end of that, “They will seek me early,” saying, “Come and let us return.” But God doth again complain of the wickedness of this people; for, though some did repent and reform, the greater part continued obstinate. Observe,

- I. Their resolution to return to God, and the comforts wherewith they encourage themselves in their return (v. 1-3).
- II. The instability of many of them in their professions and promises of repentance, and the severe course which God therefore took with them (v. 4, 5).
- III. The covenant God made with them, and his expectations from them (v. 6); their violation of that covenant and frustrating those expectations (v. 7-11).

HOSEA 6:1-3

PENITENTIAL RESOLUTIONS

These may be taken either as the words of the prophet to the people, calling them to repentance, or as the words of the people to one another, exciting and encouraging one another to *seek the Lord*, and to humble themselves before him, in hopes of finding mercy with him. God had said, *In their affliction they will seek me*; now the prophet, and the good people his friends, would strike while the iron was hot, and set in with the convictions their neighbours seemed to be under. Note, Those who are disposed to turn to God themselves should do all they can to excite, and engage, and encourage others to return to him. Observe,

- I. What it is they engage to do: “*Come, and let us return to the Lord*, v. 1. Let us go no more to the Assyrian, nor send to king Jareb; we have had enough of that. But let us *return to the Lord*, return to the worship of him

from our idolatries, and to our hope in him from all our confidences in the creature.” Note, It is the great concern of those who have revolted from God to return to him. And those who have gone from him by consent, and in a body, drawing one another to sin, should by consent, and in a body, return to him, which will be for his glory and their mutual edification.

II. What inducements and encouragements to do this they fasten upon, to stir up one another with.

1. The experience they had had of his displeasure: “Let us return to him, for *he has torn, he has smitten*. We have been torn, and it was he that tore us; we have been smitten, and it was he that smote us. *Therefore* let us return to him, because it is for our revolts from him that he has torn and smitten us in anger, and we cannot expect that he should be reconciled to us till we return to him; and for this end he has afflicted us thus, that we might be wrought upon to return to him. His hand will be stretched out still against us if the people *turn not to him that smites them*,” ~~2002~~ Isaiah 9:12, 13. Note, The consideration of the judgments of God upon us and our land, especially when they are tearing judgments, should awaken us to return to God by repentance, and prayer, and reformation.

2. The expectation they had of his favour: “He that has torn will *heal us*, he that has smitten will *bind us up*,” as the skilful surgeon with a tender hand binds up the broken bone or bleeding wound. Note, The same providence of God that afflicts his people relieves them, and the same Spirit of God that convinces the saints comforts them; that which is first a *Spirit of bondage* is afterwards a *Spirit of adoption*. This is an acknowledgement of the power of God (he can heal though we be ever so ill torn), and of his mercy (he will do it); nay, *therefore* he has torn that he may heal. Some think this points particularly to the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when they sought the Lord, and joined themselves to him, in the prospect of his gracious return to them in a way of mercy. Note, It will be of great use to us, both for our support under our afflictions and for our encouragement in our repentance, to keep up good thoughts of God and of his purposes and designs concerning us. Now this favour of God which they are here in expectation of is described in several instances: —

(1.) They promise themselves that their deliverance out of their troubles should be to them as *life from the dead* (v. 2): “*After two days he will revive us* (that is, in a short time, in a day or two), *and the third day*, when

it is expected that the dead body should putrefy and corrupt, and be buried *out of our sight*, then will he *raise us up*, and *we shall live in his sight*, we shall see his face with comfort and it shall be reviving to us. Though he *forsake for a small moment*, he will *gather with everlasting kindness*.” Note, The people of God may not only be torn and smitten, but left for dead, and may lie so a great while; but they shall not always lie so, nor shall they long lie so; God will in a little time revive them; and the assurance given them of this should engage them to return and adhere to him. But this seems to have a further reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the time limited is expressed by *two days* and the *third day*, that it may be a type and figure of Christ's rising the *third day*, which he is said to do *according to the scriptures*, according to this scripture; for all the prophets testified of *the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*. Let us see and admire the wisdom and goodness of God, in ordering the prophet's words so that when he foretold the deliverance of the church out of her troubles he should at the same time point out our salvation by Christ, which other salvations were both figures and fruits of; and, though they might not be aware of this mystery in the words, yet now that they are fulfilled in the letter of them in the resurrection of Christ it is a confirmation to our faith that *this is he that should come*, and we are to *look for no other*. And it is every way suitable that a prophecy of Christ's rising should be thus expressed, “He will *raise us up*, and *we shall live*,” for Christ rose as the first-fruits, and we revive with him, we live through him; he rose for our justification, and all believers are said to be *risen with Christ*. See ²¹⁸Isaiah 26:19. And it would serve for a comfort to the church then, and an assurance that God would raise them out of their low estate, for in his fulness of time he would raise his Son from the grave, who would be the life and glory of his people Israel. Note, A regard by faith to a rising Christ is a great support to a suffering Christian, and gives abundant encouragement to a repenting returning sinner; for he has said, *Because I live, you shall live also*.

(2.) That then they shall improve in the knowledge of God (v. 3): *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know, the Lord*. Then, when God returns in mercy to his people and designs favour for them, he will, as a pledge and fruit of his favour, give them more of the knowledge of himself; the earth shall be *full of that knowledge*, ²¹⁹Isaiah 11:9. *Knowledge shall be increased*, ²²⁰Daniel 12:4. *All shall know God*, ²²¹Jeremiah 31:34. *We shall know, we shall follow to know, the Lord*, (so the words are); and it

may be taken as the fruit of Christ's resurrection, and the life we live in God's sight by him, that we shall have not only greater means of knowledge, but grace to improve in knowledge by those means. Note, When God designs mercy for a people he gives them *a heart to know him*, ^{<201B>}Jeremiah 24:7. Those that have *risen with Christ* have the spirit of wisdom and revelation given them. And if we understand our living in his sight, as the Chaldee paraphrast does, of the day of the resurrection of the dead, it fitly follows, *We shall know, we shall follow to know, the Lord;* for in that day we shall see him be perfected, and yet be eternally increasing. Or, taking it as we read it, *If we follow on to know*, we have here,

[1.] A precious blessing promised: *Then shall we know, shall know the Lord, then when we return to God;* those that come to God shall be brought into an acquaintance with him. When we are designed to *live in his sight*, then he gives us to know him; for this is *life eternal to know God*, ^{<201B>}John 17:3.

[2.] The way and means of obtaining this blessing. We must *follow on to know* him. We must value and esteem the knowledge of God as the best knowledge, we must *cry after it*, and *dig for it* (^{<201B>}Proverbs 2:3, 4), must *seek and intermeddle with all wisdom* (^{<201B>}Proverbs 18:1), and must proceed in our enquiries after this knowledge and our endeavours to improve in it. And, if we do the prescribed duty, we have reason to expect the promised mercy, that we shall know more and more of God, and be at last perfect in this knowledge.

(3.) That then they shall abound in divine consolations: *His going forth is prepared as the morning*, that is, the returns of his favour, which he had withdrawn from us when he went and *returned to his place*. His out-goings again are prepared and secured to us as firmly as the return of the morning after a dark night, and we expect it, as those do that *wait for the morning* after a long night, and are sure that it will come at the time appointed and will not fail; and the light of his countenance will be both welcome to us and growing upon us, unto the perfect day, as the light of the morning is. *He shall come to us*, and be welcome to us, *as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth*, which refreshes it and makes it fruitful. Now this looks further than their deliverance out of captivity, and, no doubt, was to have its full accomplishment in Christ, and the grace of the gospel. The Old-Testament saints *followed on to know him*, earnestly

looked for redemption in Jerusalem; and at length the out-goings of divine grace in him, in his going forth to visit this world, were

[1.] As the morning to this earth when it is dark for he went forth as the *sun of righteousness*, and in him *the day-spring from on high visited us*. *His going forth was prepared as the morning*, for he came in the fulness of time; John Baptist was his fore-runner, nay, he was himself the *bright and morning star*.

[2.] As the rain to this earth when it is *dry*. *He shall come down as the rain upon the mown grass*, ^{<3726>}Psalm 72:6. In him showers of blessings descend upon this world, which *give seed to the sower and bread to the eater*, ^{<250>}Isaiah 55:10. And the favour of God in Christ is what is said of the king's favour, *like the cloud of the latter rain*, ^{<165>}Proverbs 16:15. The grace of God in Christ is both the *latter and the former rain*, for by it the good work of our fruit-bearing is both begun and carried on.

~~<304>~~ HOSEA 6:4-11

THE CRIMES OF THE PEOPLE

Two things, two evil things, both Judah and Ephraim are here charged with, and justly accused of: —

I. That they were not firm to their own convictions, but were unsteady, *unstable as water*, v. 4, 5. *O Ephraim! what shall I do unto thee? O Judah! what shall I do unto thee?* This is a strange expression. Can Infinite Wisdom be at a loss what to do? Can it be nonplussed, or put upon taking new measures? By no means; but God speaks after the manner of men, to show how absurd and unreasonable they were, and how just his proceedings against them were. Let them not complain of him as harsh and severe in tearing them, and smiting them, as he has done; for what else should he do? What other course could he take with them? God had tried various methods with them (*What could have been done more to his vineyard than he had done?* ^{<2004>}Isaiah 5:4), and very loth he was to let things go to extremity; he reasons with himself (as ^{<310>}Hosea 11:9), *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* God would have done them good, but they were not qualified for it: “*What shall I do unto thee? What else can I do*

but cast thee off, when I cannot in honour save thee?" Note, God never destroys sinners till he sees there is no other way with them. See here,

1. What their conduct was towards God: *Their goodness, or kindness, was as the morning cloud.* Some understand it of their kindness to themselves and their own souls, in their repentance; it is indeed mercy to ourselves to repent of our sins, but they soon retracted that kindness to themselves, undid it again, and wronged their own souls as much as ever. But it is rather to be taken for their piety and religion; what good appeared in them sometimes, it soon vanished and disappeared again, *as the morning cloud and the early dew.* Such was the goodness of Israel in Jehu's time, and of Judah in Hezekiah's and Josiah's time; it was soon gone. In time of drought the *morning-cloud* promises rain, and the *early dew* is some present refreshment to the earth; but the cloud is dispersed (and hypocrites are compared to *clouds without water*, ^{and} Jude 1:12) and the dew does not soak into the ground, but is drawn back again into the air, and the earth is parched still. What shall he do with them? Shall he accept their goodness? No, for it *passes away*; and *factum non dicitur quod non perseverat* — *that which does not continue can scarcely be said to be done.* Note, That goodness will never be either pleasing to God or profitable to ourselves which is as the morning cloud and the early dew. When men promise fair and do not perform, when they begin well in religion and do not hold on, when they leave their first love and their first works, or, though they do not quite cast off religion, are yet unsteady, uneven, and inconstant in it, then is their *goodness as the morning cloud and the early dew.*

2. What course God had taken with them (v. 5): "*Therefore, because they were so rough and ill-shapen, I have hewn them by the prophets, as timber or stone is hewn for use; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.*" What the prophets did was done by the word of God in their mouths, which never returned void. By it they thought themselves slain, were ready to say that the prophets killed them, or cut them to the heart when they dealt faithfully with them.

(1.) The prophets hewed them by convictions of sin, endeavouring to cut off their transgressions from them. They were uneven in religion (v. 4), therefore God hewed them. The hearts of sinners are not only as stone, but as rough stone, which requires a great deal of pains to bring it into shape, or as knotty timber, that is not squared without a great deal of difficulty; ministers' work is to hew them, and God by the minister hews them, *for*

with the froward will he show himself froward. And there are those whom ministers must rebuke sharply; every word should cut, and though the chips fly in the face of the workman, though the reprov'd fly in the face of the reprover and reckon him an enemy because he tells the truth, yet he goes on with his work.

(2.) They slew them by the denunciations of wrath, foretelling that they should be slain, as Ezekiel is said to destroy the city when he prophesied of the destruction of it, ^{288B}Ezekiel 43:3. And God accomplished that which was foretold: *“I have slain them by my judgments, according to the words of my mouth.”* Note, The word of God will be the death either of the sin or of the sinner, a saviour either of life unto life or of death unto death. Some read it, *“I have hewn the prophets, and slain them by the words of my mouth,* that is, I have employed them in laborious service for the people's good, which has wasted their strength; they have spent themselves, and hews away all their spirits, in their work, and in hazardous service, which has cost many of them their lives.” Note, Ministers are the tools which God makes use of in working upon people; and, though with many they labour in vain, yet God will reckon for the wearing out of his tools.

(3.) God was hereby justified in the severest proceedings against them afterwards. His prophets had taken a great deal of pains with them, had admonished them of their sin and warned them of their danger, but the means used had not the desired effect; some good impressions perhaps were made for the present, but they wore off, and passed away as the morning cloud, and now they cannot charge God with severity if he bring upon them the miseries threatened. The prophet turns to him and acknowledges, *Thy judgments are as the light that goes forth,* evidently just and righteous. Note, Though sinners be not reclaimed by the pains that ministers take with them, yet thereby God will be *justified when he speaks and clear when he judges.* See ⁴¹¹⁷Matthew 11:17-19.

II. That they were not faithful to God's covenant with them, v. 6, 7. Here observe,

1. What the covenant was that God made with them, and upon what terms they should obtain his favour and be accepted of him (v. 6): *I desired mercy and not sacrifice* (that is, rather than sacrifice), and insisted upon *the knowledge of God more than upon burnt-offerings.* Mercy here is the

same word which in v. 4 is rendered *goodness* — *cheses* — *piety, sanctity*; it is put for all practical religion; it is the same with *charity* in the New Testament, the reigning love of God and our neighbour, and this accompanied with and flowing from the *knowledge of God*, as he has revealed himself in his word, a firm belief that he is, and is the *rewarder of those that diligently seek him*, a good affection to divine things guided by a good judgment, which cannot but produce a very good conversation; this is that which God by his covenant requires, and *not sacrifice and offering*. This is fully explained, ^{<3072>}Jeremiah 7:22, 23. *I spoke not to your fathers concerning burnt-offerings* (that was the smallest of the matters I spoke to them of, and on which the least stress was laid), but *this I said, Obey my voice*, ^{<3066>}Micah 6:6-8. To love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt offering and sacrifice*, ^{<4123>}Mark 12:33; ^{<1516>}Psalms 51:16, 17. Not but that sacrifice and offering were required, and to be paid, and had their use, and, when they were accompanied with mercy and the knowledge of God, were acceptable to him, but, without them, God regarded them not, he despised them, ^{<2110>}Isaiah 1:10, 11. Perhaps this is mentioned here to show a difference between the God whom they deserted and the gods whom they went over to. The true God aimed at nothing but that they should be good men, and live good lives for their own good, and the ceremony of honouring him with sacrifices was one of the smallest matters of his law; whereas the false gods required that only; let their priests and altars be regaled with sacrifices and offerings, and the people might live as they listed. What fools were those then that left a God who aimed at giving his worshippers a new nature, for gods who aimed at nothing but making themselves a new name! It is mentioned likewise to show that God's controversy with them was not for the omission of sacrifices (*I will not reprove thee for them*, ^{<1518>}Psalms 50:8), but because there was no *justice, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God*, among them (^{<2301>}Hosea 4:1), and to teach us all that the *power of godliness* is the main thing God looks at and requires, and without it the *form of godliness* is of no avail. Serious piety in the heart and life is the *one thing needful*, and, separate from that, the performances of devotion, though ever so plausible, ever so costly, are of no account. Our Saviour quotes this to show that moral duties are to be preferred before rituals whenever they come in competition, and to justify himself in *eating with publicans and sinners*, because it was in mercy to the souls of men, and in healing on the sabbath day, because it was in mercy to the bodies of men, to which the ceremony

of singularity in eating and the sabbath-rest must give way, ^{<4013>}Matthew 9:13; 12:7.

2. How little they had regarded this covenant, though it was so well ordered in all things, though they, and not God, would be the gainers by it. See here what came of it.

(1.) In general, they broke with God, and proved unfaithful; there were *good things committed* to them to keep, the jewels of mercy and piety, and the knowledge of God, in the cabinet of sacrifice and burnt-offering, but they betrayed their trust, kept the cabinet, but pawned the jewels for the gratification of a base lust, and this is that for which God has justly a quarrel with them (v. 7): *They, like men, have transgressed the covenant*, that covenant which God made with them; they have broken the conditions of it, and so forfeited the benefit of it. By casting off mercy and the knowledge of God, and other instances of disobedience,

[1.] They had contracted the guilt of perjury and covenant-breaking; they were like men that transgress a covenant by which they had solemnly bound themselves, which is a thing that all the world cries out shame on; men that have done so deserve not again to be valued, or trusted, or dealt with. “*There, in that thing, they have dealt treacherously against me; they have been perfidious, base, and false children, in whom is no faith, though I depended upon their being children that would not lie.*”

[2.] In this they had but acted like themselves, *like men*, who are generally false and fickle, and in whose nature (their corrupt nature) it is to deal treacherously; *all men are liars*, and they are like the rest of that degenerate race, *all gone aside*, ^{<3412>}Psalm 14:2, 3. They have *transgressed the covenant like men* (like the Gentiles that transgressed the covenant of nature), like *mean men* (the word here used is sometimes put for *men of low degree*); they have dealt deceitfully, like base men that have no sense of honour.

[3.] Herein they trod in the steps of our first parents: *They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant* (so it might very well be read); as he transgressed the covenant of innocency, so they transgressed the covenant of grace, so treacherously, so foolishly; *there* in paradise he violated his engagements to God, and there in Canaan, another paradise, they violated their engagements. And by their treacherous dealing they, like Adam, have

ruined themselves and theirs. Note, Sin is so much the worse the more there is in it of the *similitude of Adam's transgression*, ⁴⁸⁵Romans 5:14.

[4.] Low thoughts of God and of his authority and favour were at the bottom of all this; for so some read it: *They have transgressed the covenant, as of a man*, as if it had been but the covenant of a man, that stood upon even ground with them, as if the commands of the covenant were but like those of a man like themselves, and the kindness conveyed by it no more valuable than that of a man. There is something sacred and binding in *a man's covenant* (as the apostle shows, ⁴⁸⁵Galatians 3:15), but much more in the covenant of God, which yet they made small account of; and *there* in that covenant they *dealt treacherously*, promised fair, but performed nothing. Dealing treacherously with God is here called dealing treacherously against him, for it is both an affront and an opposition. Deserters are traitors, and will be so treated; the revolting heart is a rebellious heart.

(2.) Some particular instances of their treachery are here given: *There they dealt treacherously*, that is, in the places hereafter named

[1.] Look on the other side Jordan, to the country which lay most exposed to the insults of the neighbouring nations, and where therefore the people were concerned to keep themselves under the divine protection, and yet there you will find the most daring provocations of the divine Majesty, v. 8. Gilead, which lay in the lot of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, was *a city of the workers of iniquity*. Wickedness was the trade that was driven there; the country was called *Gilead*, but it was all called a *city*, because they were all as it were incorporated in one society of rebels against God. Or (as most think) Ramoth Gilead is the city here meant, one of the three cities of refuge on the other side Jordan, and a Levites' city; the inhabitants of it, though of the sacred tribe, were *workers of iniquity*, contrived it, and practised it. Note, It is bad indeed when a Levites' city is *a city of those that work iniquity*, when those that are to preach good doctrine live bad lives. Particularly it is *polluted with blood*, as if that were a sin which the wicked Levites were in a special manner guilty of. In popish countries the clergy are observed to be the most bloody persecutors. Or, as it was a *city of refuge*, by abusing the power it had to judge of murders it became *polluted with blood*. They would, for a bribe, protect those that were guilty of wilful murder, whom they ought to have put to death, and would deliver those to the avenger of blood who were guilty but of chance-medley, if

they were poor and had nothing to give them; and both these ways they were *polluted with blood*. Note, Blood defiles the land where it is shed, and where no inquisition is made or no vengeance taken for it. See how the best institutions, that are ever so well designed to keep the balance even between justice and mercy, are capable of being abused and perverted to the manifest prejudice and violation of both.

[2.] Look among those whose business it was to minister in holy things, and they were as bad as the worst and as vile as the vilest (v. 9): *The company of priests* are so, not here and there one that is the scandal of his order, but the whole order and body of them, the *priests* go all one way *by consent, with one shoulder* (as the word is), one and all; and they make one another worse, more daring, and fierce, and impudent, in sin, more crafty and more cruel. A *company of priests* will say and do that in conspiracy which none of them would dare to say or do singly. The *companies of priests* were as *troops of robbers*, as *banditti*, or gangs of highwaymen, that cut men's throats to get their money. *First*, They were cruel and blood-thirsty. They *murder* those that they have a pique against, or that stand in their way; nothing less will satisfy them. *Secondly*, They were cunning. They *laid wait* for men, that they might have a fair opportunity to compass their mischievous malicious designs; thus the company of priests laid wait for Christ to take him, saying, *Not on the feast-day*. *Thirdly*, They were concurring as one man: *They murder in the way*; in the highway, where travellers should be safe, there *they murder by consent*, aiding and abetting one another in it. See how unanimous wicked people are in doing mischief; and should not good people be so then in doing good? *They murder in the way to Shechem* (so the margin reads it, as a proper name) such as were going to Jerusalem (for that way Shechem lay) to worship. Or *in the way to Shechem* (some think) means in the same manner that their father Levi, with Simeon his brother, murdered the Shechemites (Genesis 34), by fraud and deceit; and some understand it of their destroying the souls of men by drawing them to sin. *Fourthly*, They did it with contrivance: *They commit lewdness*; the word signifies such wickedness as is committed with deliberation, and of malice prepense, as we say. The more there is of device and design in sin the worse it is.

[3.] Look into the body of the people, take a view of the whole house of Israel, and they are all alike (v. 10): *I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel*, and, though it be ever so artfully managed, God discovers it, and will discover it to them; and who can deny that which God himself

says that he has seen? *There is the whoredom of Ephraim*, both corporal and spiritual whoredom; there it is too plain to be denied. Note, The sin of sinners, especially sinners of the house of Israel, has enough in it to make them tremble, for it is a horrible thing, it is amazing, and it is threatening, enough to make them blush, for Israel is thereby defiled and rendered odious in the sight of God.

[4.] Look into Judah, and you find them sharing with Israel (v. 11): *Also, O Judah! he has set a harvest for thee*; thou must be reckoned with as well as Ephraim; thou art ripe for destruction too, and the time, even the set time, of thy destruction is hastening on, when thou that hast *ploughed iniquity, and sown wickedness, shalt reap the same*. The general judgment is compared to a harvest (~~4139~~ Matthew 13:39), so are particular judgments, ~~4183~~ Joel 3:13; ~~6445~~ Revelation 14:15. I have appointed a time to call thee to account, even *when I returned the captivity of my people*, that is, when those captives of Judah which were taken by the men of Israel were restored, in obedience to the command of God sent them by Oded the prophet, ~~4188~~ 2 Chronicles 28:8-15. When God spared them that time he *set them a harvest*, that is, he designed to reckon with them another time for all together. Note, Preservations from present judgments, if a good use be not made of them, are but reservations for greater judgments.