

Introduction to Hosea Chapter 6

Come, Let Us Return: The Shallow Repentance, the Divine Longing, and the Love Like Morning Dew

Hosea chapter 6 is one of the most theologically complex and most pastorally demanding chapters in the entire book. It opens with one of the most beautiful calls to repentance in the Old Testament — Come, let us return to the LORD — and within three verses reveals that the repentance being expressed is not the genuine article. The people who are calling one another to return have a confidence in the speed and certainty of their restoration that is itself the evidence of the superficiality of their understanding of what they have done and who they have offended. The beauty of the language and the shallowness of the repentance are the chapter's most devastating combination.

The divine response to the people's call in verses 4–11 is one of the most personally anguished passages in the prophetic literature. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? The questions are not rhetorical flourishes. They are the genuine cry of the faithful husband who has received the shallow repentance of verses 1–3 and found it insufficient — who has watched the hesed, the steadfast love, of His people evaporate like the morning mist and the early dew, and who is left with the question of what the persistent superficiality of their repentance requires of the love that refuses to abandon them. The chapter is the divine experience of disappointment from the inside.

The two indictments of the chapter's second half — the transgression of Adam in verse 7, the violence and wickedness at Shechem, Gilead, and in the priests' ambush of verse 8–9 — are the specific evidence that the returning love of verses 1–3 is not matched by a turning from the specific behaviors that the covenant has prohibited. The people have spoken the language of return while continuing the practices of the departure. And the harvest of verse 11 — appointed for Judah as well — is the eschatological horizon that closes the chapter: the harvest of judgment and restoration that is coming for the whole covenant people, north and south, is the action of the God who cannot be satisfied with the morning dew of a repentance that does not last through the heat of the day.

The most quoted verse in the chapter — and one of the most quoted in the entire Old Testament — is verse 6: For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Jesus quotes this verse twice in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 9:13 and 12:7), both times in contexts where the religious leaders have prioritized the performance of the religious system over the living encounter with the reality the system is meant to express. The verse is the distillation of the chapter's central theological claim: the LORD desires the hesed and the da'at Elohim — the steadfast love and the knowledge of God — that chapters 1 through 4 have been saying are absent. The sacrificial system was given to express and sustain the relationship; when the relationship has evaporated, the sacrificial system has no more content than the morning mist of the people's repentance.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Hosea chapter 6 with the honest awareness that we recognize ourselves in the repentance of verses 1–3. We know what it is to speak the language of return without the depth of turning that the language requires. We know what it is to come to You with the confidence that You will revive us quickly, that the healing will be prompt, that the restoration will be swift — a confidence that is itself the evidence of our insufficient understanding of what our departure has cost and who we have offended by it. We know what it is to offer the morning dew of a repentance that evaporates before the heat of the day has fully risen.

Lord, let the divine anguish of verse 4 — what shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? — be the question that breaks through the shallowness of our own returning. Let us hear in that question not the frustration of a God who has run out of patience but the grief of a faithful husband who has received the morning mist of our repentance and found it gone by noon, who desires the steadfast love that endures through the full heat of the day rather than the beautiful but transient confession that dissolves under the first pressure of the continuing circumstance.

And let the desire of verse 6 — I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings — form in us the understanding of what genuine repentance actually is. It is not the performance of the religious obligation. It is the hesed that holds to the covenant God through the full difficulty of the covenant life, and the da'at Elohim that knows Him not merely as the subject of the theological proposition but as the living God of the covenant relationship. Give us this repentance. It is the only repentance that endures through the heat of the day.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hosea 6:1–3

The Shallow Return: Beautiful Language and Insufficient Repentance

- (1) Come, and let us return unto the LORD:
for he hath torn, and he will heal us;
he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*
- (2) After two days will he revive us:
in the third day he will raise us up,*

*and we shall live in his sight.
(3) Then shall we know him, if we follow on to know the LORD:
his going forth is prepared as the morning;
and he shall come unto us as the rain,
as the latter and former rain unto the earth.*

The Context

The call of verse 1 — Come, let us return to the LORD — is one of the most beautiful and most problematic calls to repentance in the Old Testament. Its beauty is undeniable: the language of return, the confidence in the healing power of the God who has torn, the expectation of the swift revival and the resurrection of the third day, the magnificent closing images of the morning and the rain. The problem is equally undeniable: the divine response in verse 4 reveals that this repentance, however beautifully expressed, has not satisfied the covenant God who has been longing for the steadfast love and the knowledge that the people's behavior has consistently failed to produce.

The theological problem with the repentance of verses 1–3 is concentrated in its confidence. The people say he has torn, and he will heal us — which is true. He has smitten, and he will bind us up — which is also true. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up — which expresses a genuine theological understanding of the pattern of divine discipline and restoration. But the confidence is the problem. The people who speak these words have not addressed the specific behaviors that the preceding chapters have indicted. They have articulated the theology of restoration without the corresponding turning from the practices that made the restoration necessary. The language of return has been deployed without the substance of return.

The third day language of verse 2 has attracted enormous attention in the history of interpretation. The two days and the third day correspond to the common ancient Near Eastern pattern of short-term distress followed by restoration — and they became, in the New Testament's reading through the lens of the resurrection, one of the Old Testament passages that illumines the theological significance of Christ's resurrection on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4: he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures). The pattern of death and resurrection on the third day that Israel applies to its national experience of discipline and restoration is taken up by Paul as the pattern of the death and resurrection of the Messiah who embodies Israel's story in His own person.

The closing images of verse 3 — the going forth as the morning, the coming as the rain, the latter and former rain upon the earth — are among the most beautiful in Hosea's prophecy. The former rain (the early autumn rain that prepares the ground for planting) and the latter rain (the late spring rain that brings the harvest to completion) are the two seasonal rains of the agricultural year in ancient Canaan — the rains that the Baal worship was supposed to secure and that the covenant God provides. The imagery is the covenant God's claim to what Israel has been seeking from the Baals: He is the one who comes as the rain, as reliable as the morning, as life-giving as

the seasonal rains that make the harvest possible. The irony is that Israel is calling on Him with language that describes what the Baals were worshipped to provide.

Plain American English

Come on, let's go back to the LORD. He has hurt us, but He will heal us. He has wounded us, but He will bandage our wounds. In just a short time He will revive us so we can live in His presence. Let's press on to know the LORD. His coming to us is as certain as the sunrise. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth.

Key Observations

“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us”: This signifies **The Call to Return Is Theologically Accurate but Spiritually Insufficient — the Confidence in the Swift Restoration Is Itself the Evidence of the Shallowness of the Repentance.**

The theological content of verses 1–3 is not wrong. He has torn, and he will heal — this is accurate theology of the covenant God who disciplines in order to restore. The morning and the rain are accurate images of the covenant God’s reliability and life-giving provision. The third day resurrection is an accurate pattern of divine discipline and restoration. The problem is not the theology. It is the missing element: the specific turning from the specific behaviors that the preceding chapters have indicted. The people have learned to speak the language of return without producing the substance of return — the *hesed* and the *da’at Elohim* that verse 6 will identify as the things the LORD actually desires. Accurate theology in the mouth of an unchanged life is the definition of the shallow repentance that verse 4 will greet with the divine anguish of what shall I do with you.

“After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up”: This signifies **The Third Day Language Is the Pattern of Divine Discipline and Restoration That the New Testament Reads as the Typological Anticipation of the Messianic Death and Resurrection.**

The two days and the third day of verse 2 are the ancient Near Eastern idiom for the brief period of distress followed by divine intervention and restoration — a pattern so embedded in the religious consciousness of the ancient world that it functions as a kind of theological grammar for expressing the confidence that the God who has brought low will also raise up. The New Testament’s use of this pattern — Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:4 that Christ was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures — is the identification of Jesus as the one who embodies Israel’s pattern of death and resurrection in His own person. The Israel that should have been revived on the third day in the pattern of Hosea 6:2 has found the pattern fulfilled in the Messiah who dies the death that Israel deserved and rises on the third day in the resurrection that Israel longed for but could not accomplish through its own shallow repentance.

“He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth”: This signifies **The Rain Imagery Is the Covenant God’s Claim to the Provision That Israel Has Been Seeking from the Baals — the Life-Giving Seasonal Rains That the Fertility Cult Worshipped Are the Gift of the Faithful Husband.**

The former and latter rain of verse 3 are the two seasonal rains of the Palestinian agricultural year — the early autumn rain that softens the hardened summer soil for planting and the late spring rain that swells the grain before the harvest. The Baal worship that has been the primary subject of Hosea’s indictment from chapter 2 onward was the religious system designed to secure these rains — the worship of the fertility deity who controlled the agricultural abundance. The covenant God’s claim to come as these rains is His declaration that what Israel has been seeking from the Baals is His gift, not theirs, and that the returning to Him is the returning to the source of the very provision that the idolatry was supposed to secure. The beauty of the rain imagery is the beauty of the covenant God who gives what the Baals only pretended to give.

“Then shall we know him, if we follow on to know the LORD”: This signifies **The Conditional Knowing — we shall know him, if we follow on to know — Is the Most Honest Statement in the Call and the One That Most Directly Anticipates the Divine Desire of Verse 6.**

The if we follow on to know the LORD of verse 3 is the most theologically honest statement in the people’s call. The knowing of the LORD is not achieved by the declaration of the intention to return. It is achieved by the following on — the sustained pursuit of the knowledge of God that does not stop when the morning mist of the initial enthusiasm has evaporated. The following on to know is the da’at Elohim of chapter 4 and the knowledge of God of verse 6 — the intimate personal knowing that is achieved through sustained engagement and not through the one-time declaration of the religious sentiment. The people’s call contains, in this conditional phrase, the very standard that their own repentance will fail to meet: the following on that produces the knowledge that endures through the heat of the day.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Examine the Depth of Your Own Repentance by the Standard That the Chapter Implies — Is the Return Accompanied by the Turning from the Specific Behaviors That Made the Return Necessary: The repentance of verses 1–3 fails not because the theology is wrong but because the specific turning that the theology of return requires is absent. The contemporary believer who confesses the language of return — who speaks the words of coming back to the LORD — without the corresponding turning from the specific practices that the chapters of indictment have named is in the condition of verses 1–3: beautiful language, insufficient substance. Examine the repentance by the specific question: what specific behavior, what specific pursuit of the wrong lover, what specific misattribution of the provision has been named by the preceding indictment, and has the repentance addressed that specific thing? The depth of the repentance is measured by its specificity, not by the beauty of its language.

2. Receive the Third Day Pattern as the Typological Foundation for the Christian Understanding of Death and Resurrection as the Shape of the Covenant Life: The third day pattern of verse 2 — the brief distress followed by the divine revival and raising up — is the Old Testament grammar that the New Testament reads in the resurrection of Jesus. The Christian who reads Hosea 6:2 in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:4 is reading the passage as Paul read it: as the pattern of the Messiah’s death and resurrection that is also the pattern of the Christian life. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s hoped-for restoration — and the resurrection life that the risen Messiah bestows is the life in His sight that verse 2 describes. The

pattern of death and resurrection is not merely a historical event but the shape of the covenant life in every generation: the discipline that brings low and the divine raising that follows it.

3. Follow On to Know the LORD Rather Than Resting in the Initial Declaration of the Intention to Return: The if we follow on to know the LORD is the standard that exposes the shallowness of the repentance that does not sustain the knowing beyond the initial enthusiasm. The following on is the sustained, daily, costly pursuit of the knowledge of God that does not stop when the first flush of the returning has cooled. It is the opposite of the morning mist and early dew of verse 4 — the transient enthusiasm that evaporates under the heat of the continuing difficulty. Following on to know means the continued engagement with the Scripture that forms the knowledge, the continued practice of the prayer that sustains the relationship, the continued obedience to the demands of the covenant that the knowledge of God generates. The knowing is achieved through the following on, not through the one-time declaration.

How This Relates to Today

The shallow repentance of verses 1–3 is the most immediately recognizable pattern in the contemporary church’s approach to spiritual renewal. The language of revival — the confident expectation of the swift healing, the certain restoration, the quick reviving — has characterized much of the contemporary church’s prayer culture without the corresponding confrontation of the specific behaviors that the indictment of the preceding chapters has named. The beautiful language of return, spoken in worship services and prayer meetings and revival gatherings, evaporates as quickly as the morning mist when the continuing pressure of the surrounding culture reasserts itself. The *hesed* and the *da’at Elohim* that verse 6 identifies as the divine desire are not produced by the revival gathering. They are produced by the following on to know the LORD that verse 3 describes — the sustained, daily, ordinary pursuit of the knowledge of God that is the only repentance that endures.

The third day language of verse 2 is also one of the most significant passages for understanding the New Testament’s use of the phrase in accordance with the Scriptures in 1 Corinthians 15:4. The resurrection of Jesus on the third day is not merely the fulfillment of a specific prediction. It is the fulfillment of the pattern of Israel’s hoped-for restoration — the national death and resurrection that Hosea 6:2 describes. Jesus embodies Israel’s story in His own person: He undergoes the death that Israel deserved for the covenant violation and rises on the third day in the restoration that Israel longed for but could not accomplish through its own shallow repentance. The resurrection of Jesus is the genuine article of the return that verses 1–3 describe but fail to achieve.

Key Lesson: **The call of verses 1–3 is the most beautiful and the most theologically problematic repentance in the book — accurate in its theology of the God who tears and heals, alive in its images of the morning and the rain, honest in its conditional if we follow on to know — but insufficient in the substance of the turning that the language of return requires; the third day pattern anticipates the resurrection of the Messiah who achieves the restoration that Israel’s shallow repentance cannot, and the divine response of verse 4 will reveal what the steadfast love and the knowledge of God that verse 6 desires look like against the morning mist that the people have offered instead.**

Hosea 6:4–6

The Divine Anguish: What Shall I Do with You? — The Morning Mist and the Desire for Steadfast Love

*(4) O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?
O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?
for your goodness is as a morning cloud,
and as the early dew it goeth away.
(5) Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth:
and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth.
(6) For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;
and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

The Context

The what shall I do with you of verse 4 is one of the most remarkable statements in the prophetic literature for what it reveals about the inner life of the covenant God. The question is addressed to both Ephraim (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) — the whole covenant people. And it is a genuine question, not a rhetorical one. The God who has heard the beautiful words of verses 1–3 and found them insufficient is asking, from inside the relationship, what the persistent shallowness of the people’s repentance requires of His love. The anguish is the anguish of the faithful husband who has received, again, the morning mist of a devotion that does not last.

The morning cloud and early dew of verse 4 are the same images that appear in verse 3, but in the opposite direction. In verse 3, the people describe the covenant God as coming like the rain — reliable, life-giving, sustaining. In verse 4, the covenant God describes the people’s goodness as the morning cloud and the early dew — beautiful in the moment of its appearance but gone by the time the sun reaches its full heat. The irony is precise and devastating: the people have applied the most beautiful images of reliability and provision to the God they are calling on, while God applies the most beautiful images of transience to the devotion they are offering Him. The reliability is His. The transience is theirs.

The response to the morning mist in verse 5 is the prophetic word as the instrument of the discipline: therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth. The word of the LORD through the prophets is the instrument of the cutting and the slaying — the severe mercy that the superficiality of the devotion requires. The prophetic word does not merely describe the judgment. It enacts it: the hewing by the prophets is the execution of the divine judgment through the proclamation of the word that names the condition and

announces the consequence. And the thy judgments go forth like the light — the justice of the LORD is as visible and as inescapable as the light of the day.

Verse 6 is the theological center of the chapter and one of the most important verses in the entire Old Testament: For I desired steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. The verse does not reject the sacrificial system as inherently wrong — the sacrifices were given by God as part of the covenant worship. It establishes the priority and the purpose: the *hesed* and the *da'at Elohim* are the realities that the sacrificial system was designed to express and sustain. When the sacrifices are offered without the *hesed* and the *da'at Elohim* they are meant to embody, the system has been emptied of its content. The sacrifice without the steadfast love is the performance of the religious form without the reality of the covenant relationship.

Plain American English

“O Ephraim, what am I going to do with you? O Judah, what am I going to do with you? Your love for me is like the morning mist — like the early dew that disappears as soon as the sun comes up. That’s why I have cut you to pieces with my prophets, why I have killed you with the words of my mouth — my judgments flash out like lightning. I want you to show steadfast love, not just go through the motions of religious ritual. I want you to know me more than I want your burnt offerings.”

Key Observations

“O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away”: This signifies **The Divine Question Is Not Rhetorical but Genuinely Anguished — the What Shall I Do Is the Cry of the Faithful Husband Who Has Received the Morning Mist of the Shallow Repentance and Is Asking What the Persistent Superficiality Requires of His Love.**

The what shall I do with you is theologically unique in the prophetic literature. The prophets regularly announce what the LORD will do to His people. Here the LORD is not announcing what He will do but asking what He can do — expressing from the inside of the relationship the anguish of the faithful husband who has received, again, the beautiful but transient devotion of the people who speak the language of return without the substance of returning. The question is addressed to the whole covenant people — Ephraim and Judah, north and south — which means the shallowness of the devotion is not a regional problem but a covenant-wide one. And the question is open-ended in a way that the oracles of judgment are not: it is the question of the love that has not given up but does not know what the persistent morning mist requires of its patience and its discipline.

“Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away”: This signifies **The Morning Mist Applied to the People’s Goodness Is the Precise Mirror of the Rain Applied to the LORD’s Coming — the Reliability Is His, the Transience Is Theirs.**

The morning cloud and early dew of verse 4 are the exact images that the people used in verse 3 to describe the covenant God: His going forth is as certain as the morning, He comes as the rain. The irony is the precise reversal: the images of certainty and reliability that the people apply to God, God applies to the people's goodness — but in the negative register. The morning that the people use to describe the certainty of God's coming is the morning that God uses to describe the transience of their love: the morning cloud that looks substantial at dawn is gone before the heat of the day. The early dew that glistens on the ground at sunrise has evaporated by mid-morning. The people's goodness — their hesed, their covenant loyalty — is morning-mist goodness: beautiful in the moment of its appearance, transient under pressure, gone when the difficulty of sustained fidelity asserts itself.

“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings”: This signifies **The Divine Desire Is for the Substance of the Covenant Relationship Rather Than the Performance of Its Forms — Hesed and Da’at Elohim Are the Realities That the Sacrificial System Was Designed to Express, and When They Are Absent the System Has Been Emptied of Its Content.**

The I desired mercy and not sacrifice of verse 6 is the most quoted verse in the chapter and the one with the most direct New Testament application. The mercy — hesed, steadfast love, covenant loyalty — and the knowledge of God — da’at Elohim, the intimate personal knowing of the covenant relationship — are the two absent virtues from chapter 4:1 that the whole book has been lamenting. The verse does not abolish the sacrificial system — the not sacrifice is not the rejection of sacrifice as such but the establishment of the priority: the hesed and the da’at Elohim are what the sacrificial system was designed to express and sustain, and they must come before and produce and interpret the sacrifice. The sacrifice without the hesed is the form without the substance. The burnt offering without the knowledge of God is the performance of the ritual without the living relationship that the ritual was designed to enact. God desires the relationship, not the performance of the relationship's forms in the absence of the relationship itself.

“Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth”: This signifies **The Prophetic Word as the Instrument of the Severe Mercy Is the Response to the Morning Mist That Cuts Through the Beautiful Language to the Reality Beneath It.**

The hewing by the prophets and the slaying by the words of the mouth are the description of the prophetic word as the instrument of the divine discipline. The word that Hosea speaks — the indictment of chapters 4 through 14 — is the hewing: the cutting through the beautiful language of verses 1–3 to the reality that the beautiful language conceals. The prophetic word is not gentle in this function. It hews and it slays — it executes the judgment that the morning mist repentance has made necessary. And the thy judgments go forth like the light is the declaration of the visibility and inescapability of the divine judgment: it goes forth into the full light of day where nothing can be concealed by the morning mist of the beautiful language. The severe mercy of the prophetic word is the most loving thing the faithful husband can offer to the people whose morning mist goodness has been accepted as sufficient for too long.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Divine Anguish of Verse 4 as the Revelation of the God Who Is Genuinely Grieved by the Persistent Shallowness of Our Devotion Rather Than Merely Frustrated by Our Theological Incorrectness:

The what shall I do with you is not the cold assessment of the divine administrator who has found the religious performance inadequate. It is the genuine anguish of the faithful husband who has received the morning mist devotion of the people He loves and is asking, from inside the relationship, what the persistent superficiality requires. The God who asks what shall I do with you is the same God who went again in chapter 3, who wooed in the wilderness of chapter 2, who desires the steadfast love of verse 6. The anguish is not the prelude to abandonment. It is the expression of the love that cannot be satisfied with less than the hesed and the da'at Elohim that verse 6 names as the divine desire. Let the anguish break through the shallowness of our own returning.

2. Apply the Standard of Verse 6 to Every Form of Religious Performance — Does the Sacrifice Express the Hesed and the Knowledge of God, or Has the Performance Replaced the Reality:

The I desired mercy and not sacrifice of verse 6 is the standard that Jesus applies twice in Matthew's Gospel to the religious leaders who have prioritized the performance of the system over the living encounter with the reality the system is meant to express. The contemporary application is not the abolition of the forms of the covenant life — the worship, the sacraments, the prayer, the theological study — but the examination of whether the forms are expressing and sustaining the hesed and the da'at Elohim that they were designed to produce, or whether the performance of the forms has replaced the reality. The church attendance that does not produce the steadfast love. The theological education that does not produce the knowledge of God. The giving that does not come from the covenant loyalty. These are the sacrifices without the mercy that verse 6 addresses.

3. Welcome the Severe Mercy of the Prophetic Word That Hewes Through the Beautiful Language to the Reality Beneath It:

The hewing by the prophets and the slaying by the words of the mouth are the description of the prophetic word's most uncomfortable function: the cutting through the beautiful language of the shallow repentance to the reality that the beautiful language conceals. The contemporary believer and the contemporary church need this hewing. The beautiful language of revival and return, spoken in worship gatherings and renewal conferences, needs the prophetic word to cut through it and ask: is the hesed present? Is the knowledge of God growing? Are the specific behaviors of the indictment being addressed? The prophetic word that hews is the most loving word available to the community whose morning mist devotion has been accepted as sufficient for too long. Welcome the hewing. It is the severe mercy of the faithful husband.

How This Relates to Today

The I desired mercy and not sacrifice of verse 6 is the most directly applicable verse in the chapter to the contemporary church's relationship between the performance of the religious system and the living reality of the covenant relationship. Jesus' use of the verse in Matthew 9:13 — in the context of His eating with tax collectors and sinners, when the Pharisees challenge His disciples about table fellowship — is the most direct available interpretation: the religious leaders who have mastered the performance of the sacrificial system have missed the hesed that the system was designed to express and that Jesus is demonstrating in His eating with the unworthy. And in Matthew 12:7 — when the Pharisees challenge the disciples for plucking grain

on the Sabbath — the verse is applied to the rigidity of the system that has replaced the mercy the system was meant to embody. Both applications are the Hosea 6:6 standard applied to the forms of the religious life: the form without the substance is what God says He does not desire.

The morning mist image of verse 4 is also one of the most diagnostically useful images in the prophetic literature for evaluating the depth of spiritual commitment in any community. The question it poses is not whether the devotion is present at the moment of its expression but whether it endures through the full heat of the day. The revival gathering, the renewal conference, the retreat weekend, the moment of spiritual breakthrough — these are the mornings of the spiritual life, when the devotion is at its most visible and most beautiful. The test is what remains at noon: when the pressure of the continuing circumstance, the demands of the covenant life, and the difficulty of the sustained obedience have had their full effect. The morning mist devotion is beautiful at dawn and gone by noon. The hesed that verse 6 desires is the devotion that is still present at noon.

Key Lesson: **The divine anguish of verse 4 — what shall I do with you, O Ephraim, O Judah? — is the genuine cry of the faithful husband who has received the morning mist of the shallow repentance and found it gone by noon; and the divine desire of verse 6 — I desired mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings — is the most concentrated statement of what genuine repentance actually is: the hesed that endures through the full heat of the day and the da'at Elohim that sustains the covenant relationship through the discipline that the morning mist has repeatedly required.**

Hosea 6:7–11

The Evidence of the Shallowness: Adam's Transgression, Gilead's Violence, and the Harvest That Is Coming

- (7) *But they like men have transgressed the covenant:
there have they dealt treacherously against me.*
- (8) *Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity,
and is polluted with blood.*
- (9) *And as troops of robbers wait for a man,
so the company of priests murder in the way by consent:
for they commit lewdness.*
- (10) *I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel:
there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.*
- (11) *Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee,
when I returned the captivity of my people.*

The Context

The but they of verse 7 is the pivot from the divine longing of verse 6 to the specific evidence that the longing has not been met. The transgression like Adam — or like men, the translation is disputed — is the reference to the covenant violation that establishes the pattern of Israel's unfaithfulness in the most foundational terms. Whether the comparison is to Adam's transgression in the garden (the first covenant violation, in the place where covenant relationship with God was most fully present and most fully enjoyed) or to human beings generally (as men transgress), the point is the same: the covenant violation at the place where covenant intimacy was most fully given is the pattern that Israel has repeated. The transgression is the more devastating because it happens at the site of the greatest gift.

The Gilead of verse 8 is the Transjordanian territory that had been associated with the apostate worship of Jeroboam and the political violence of the northern kingdom's later period. Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood — the specific instance of the general condition that verse 6 named as the failure to produce the hesed. The blood in Gilead is the evidence that the morning mist repentance of verses 1–3 has not produced the turning from the violence that the covenant requires. The people have spoken the language of return while continuing the practices that the return was supposed to address.

The priestly ambush of verse 9 is the most specific and the most shocking evidence of the continuing corruption of the office that chapter 4 indicted. The company of priests who murder on the road to Shechem — lying in wait like bandits, committing crimes with full deliberation — is the final stage of the corruption that began with the rejection of knowledge in chapter 4. The priests who were supposed to be the mediators of the covenant relationship have become its most violent violators. And the horrible thing that the LORD has seen in the house of Israel in verse 10 — the whoredom of Ephraim, the defilement of Israel — is the summary indictment that closes the evidence of the shallowness: the beautiful words of verses 1–3 are the morning mist over the landscape of verse 7–10.

The harvest of verse 11 is one of the most theologically loaded images in the chapter. The harvest is appointed for Judah as well — a warning to the southern kingdom that the condition diagnosed in the northern kingdom is not foreign to it. The harvest in prophetic literature is almost always the harvest of judgment — the gathering in of what has been sown through the covenant violation. But it can also be the harvest of restoration — the gathering of the people who have been scattered by the judgment. The when I restore the fortunes of my people suggests the restoration dimension: the harvest is the gathering not only of the judgment but of the people who will be brought back through the judgment to the covenant relationship that the judgment was designed to restore. The chapter that opened with the beautiful call of verses 1–3 and moved through the divine anguish of verses 4–6 and the specific evidence of verses 7–10 closes with the eschatological harvest that holds both the judgment and the restoration.

Plain American English

But like Adam, they broke my covenant — they were unfaithful to me there. Gilead is a city of people who do evil, with bloody footprints everywhere. The priests are like gangs of robbers

lurking in ambush. They murder people on the road to Shechem, committing crimes on purpose. I have seen a horrible thing in Israel: Ephraim is given over to prostitution, Israel has become unclean. And for you too, Judah, a harvest of judgment is coming — though I long to restore my people's fortunes.

Key Observations

“But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me”: This signifies **The Covenant Transgression Like Adam Is the Establishment of the Pattern in the Most Foundational Terms — the Violation of the Covenant in the Place of Greatest Covenant Intimacy Is the Recurring Pattern of the Human Condition.**

The transgression like Adam is the reference that places Israel's covenant violation in the most comprehensive theological context. Whether the translation is like Adam (the specific first man) or like men (human beings in general), the point is the establishment of the pattern: the covenant violation at the place of greatest covenant intimacy. Adam transgressed the covenant in the garden — the place where the covenant relationship between God and the human being was most fully present, most fully enjoyed, most fully given. Israel transgresses the covenant in the land — the place where the covenant relationship between the LORD and His people was most fully expressed, most fully provided for, most fully given. The there of where they dealt treacherously is the there of the specific place of covenant gift: the transgression is the more devastating because it happens where the gift is greatest. This is the pattern of the human condition that runs from Adam to Israel to every generation of the covenant people: the betrayal at the site of the greatest gift.

“As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent”: This signifies **The Priestly Violence of Verse 9 Is the Final Stage of the Corruption That Chapter 4 Traced from the Rejection of Knowledge Through the Feeding on Sin to the Outright Violence That the Absence of the Hesed and the Da'at Elohim Has Produced.**

The company of priests who murder on the road to Shechem are the end point of the trajectory that chapter 4 began tracing: the priests who rejected the knowledge became like the people, fed on the sin of the people, and have now reached the point of outright violence. The corruption of the priestly office has not stabilized at the level of the moral compromise or the institutional capture by the incentives of sin. It has continued its downward trajectory to the point where the priests are committing the murder that verse 2 named as one of the five covenant violations of the absent knowledge. The like people, like priest of chapter 4:9 has produced its logical conclusion: the priests who became like the violent people have produced priests who are violent. The absence of the hesed and the da'at Elohim is not a static condition. It is a progressive deterioration.

“Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people”: This signifies **The Harvest Appointed for Judah Is the Most Direct Warning in the Chapter That the Condition of the Northern Kingdom Is Not Foreign to the Southern — and the When I Restore the Fortunes Holds the Judgment and the Restoration in the Same Eschatological Horizon.**

The harvest of verse 11 is the most theologically complex image in the chapter because of its double dimension: the harvest of judgment appointed for Judah who has been watching the northern kingdom's destruction without recognizing the same seed of the same destruction in her own soil, and the harvest of restoration implied in the when I restore the fortunes of my people. The same agricultural image that the Baal worship was designed to secure — the harvest — is deployed here as the image of both the judgment and the restoration. The harvest of judgment gathers in what the covenant violation has sown. The harvest of restoration gathers in what the pursuing love of the faithful husband has been cultivating through the long discipline of the many days. Both harvests are coming. The chapter that began with the people's call to return ends with the God who is appointing the harvest that will bring about the return that the morning mist repentance could not sustain.

“I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled”: This signifies **The I Have Seen of the Covenant God Is the Declaration That the Morning Mist of the Beautiful Words Has Not Concealed from the Eyes of the LORD the Reality of the Continuing Whoredom Beneath Them.**

The I have seen of verse 10 is the most sobering statement in the closing section. The God who heard the beautiful call of verses 1–3 and responded with the anguish of verse 4 has also seen the whoredom of Ephraim and the defilement of Israel that the beautiful words were covering. The morning mist of the repentance is beautiful from the human perspective. It is transparent to the divine perspective. The God who searches the heart and tests the mind has seen through the beautiful language to the reality it was attempting to conceal — or perhaps was not even attempting to conceal, because the people's morning mist repentance was so superficial that it did not occur to them that the continuing whoredom was in contradiction to the returning they were proclaiming. The I have seen is the declaration that the returning of verses 1–3 and the whoredom of verses 7–10 cannot coexist as descriptions of the same people's relationship to the covenant God.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Read the Transgression Like Adam as the Theological Diagnosis That Places the Contemporary Covenant Violation in the Most Comprehensive Possible Context: The pattern of the covenant violation at the site of the greatest covenant gift is not a uniquely Israelite problem. It is the human problem — the pattern that runs from Adam in the garden through Israel in the land through every generation of the covenant community that has received the greatest gifts of the covenant relationship and used the receiving of the gifts as the occasion for the departure from the Giver. The contemporary believer who has received the greatest gifts of the new covenant — the Spirit, the word, the community, the indwelling presence of the risen Christ — is in the position of maximum danger, because the transgression like Adam happens at the site of the greatest gift. The greater the gift, the more devastating the betrayal, and the more urgent the need for the hesed and the da'at Elohim that alone can sustain the relationship through the heat of the day.

2. Recognize the Progressive Deterioration of the Covenant Violation as the Warning That the Morning Mist Repentance That Addresses None of the Specific Behaviors Has Left the Trajectory of Decline Uninterrupted: The trajectory from the rejection of knowledge in

chapter 4 through the morning mist repentance of chapter 6:1–3 to the priestly murder of chapter 6:9 is the trajectory of the covenant violation left unaddressed by genuine repentance. The beautiful words of verses 1–3 have not interrupted the downward spiral that chapters 4 through 5 have been tracing. The morning mist evaporates and the violence continues. The contemporary church that cycles through seasons of beautiful revival language without the specific addressing of the specific covenant violations that the indictment has named is in the same trajectory: the morning mist of the revival gathering does not interrupt the deterioration if the deterioration is not specifically named and specifically addressed.

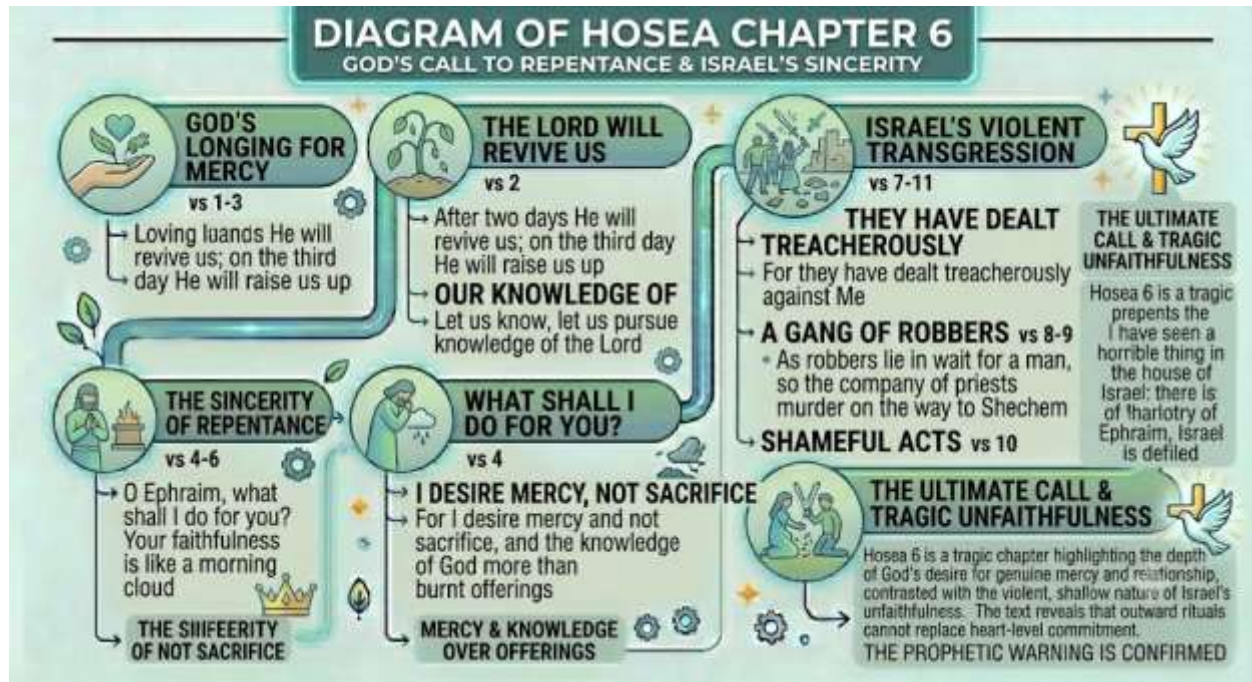
3. Receive the Harvest of Verse 11 as the Eschatological Assurance That the God Who Appoints the Harvest of Judgment Also Appoints the Harvest of Restoration — Both Are Coming, and the Second Is the Goal of the First: The harvest appointed for Judah and the when I restore the fortunes of my people hold the judgment and the restoration in the same eschatological horizon. The harvest of judgment is not the terminus of the story. It is the mechanism of the restoration — the gathering in of the consequences of the covenant violation that brings the people to the point where the return of verse 5 of chapter 3 becomes possible: the seeking of the LORD their God and David their king in the latter days. The judgment is real. The restoration is the goal of the judgment. And the God who appoints the harvest of judgment is the God who also appoints the harvest of restoration — the gathering in of the people who have been brought through the judgment to the place where the hesed and the da’at Elohim that verse 6 desires can finally take root and grow.

How This Relates to Today

The priestly ambush of verse 9 — the company of priests who murder on the road to Shechem — is the most extreme and therefore the most diagnostic exhibit of the deterioration that the absence of the hesed and the da’at Elohim produces in the religious professional class. The contemporary equivalent is not necessarily physical violence, though the history of religious institutions includes that. It is the violence done to the people through the systems of religious exploitation: the institutional abuse of power, the financial exploitation of the spiritually vulnerable, the theological manipulation of the congregation for the benefit of the leadership. The priests who feed on the sin of the people in chapter 4:8 have become in chapter 6:9 the priests who actively harm the people they were ordained to serve. The trajectory from the feeding on sin to the outright violence is the trajectory of the office captured by its own corruption, taken to its logical conclusion.

The harvest of verse 11 is also one of the most important eschatological images for the contemporary church’s understanding of the relationship between judgment and restoration in the purposes of God. The harvest that is appointed for Judah is not a different kind of divine action from the harvest of restoration that the when I restore the fortunes implies. They are two dimensions of the same divine activity: the gathering in of what has been sown, in judgment and in grace, toward the eschatological goal that the pursuing love of chapters 1 through 3 has been pursuing from the beginning. The God who appoints the harvest of judgment is the God who desires the hesed and the da’at Elohim — and the harvest is the instrument by which the morning mist devotion is burned away until the hesed that endures through the full heat of the day is all that remains.

Key Lesson: *The evidence of the shallowness in verses 7–11 — the Adamic transgression at the site of greatest covenant gift, the blood in Gilead, the priestly ambush on the road to Shechem, the horrible thing the LORD has seen in the house of Israel — is the landscape beneath the morning mist of the beautiful repentance of verses 1–3, the specific behaviors that the general language of return has left unaddressed; and the harvest of verse 11, appointed for Judah as well as Israel, is the eschatological double horizon of judgment and restoration that holds together the severe mercy of the hewing and the pursuing love of the faithful husband who will not be satisfied with less than the hesed and the da'at Elohim He has desired from the beginning.*



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 6 having heard the most beautiful call to return in the book, the most anguished divine response to the morning mist of the shallow repentance, and the most specific evidence that the beautiful language of return has not produced the turning that the return requires. We have heard You ask, from the inside of the relationship: what shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? And we have heard the answer that is not an answer but a desire: I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Lord, let the morning mist of our own repentance be confronted by the divine desire of verse 6. We know the language of the return. We know how to speak the words of coming back, of recognizing that You have torn and You will heal, of confessing that Your going forth is as

certain as the morning. But You have seen what lies beneath the morning mist: the whoredom of Ephraim, the defilement of Israel, the transgression like Adam at the site of the greatest gift, the continuing violence in Gilead and on the road to Shechem. You have seen the landscape beneath the beautiful language, and You are asking not for better language but for the hesed and the da'at Elohim that the beautiful language was supposed to produce.

Give us the hesed that endures through the full heat of the day — the steadfast love that is still present at noon when the morning mist of the initial enthusiasm has long since evaporated. Give us the da'at Elohim that follows on to know the LORD through the sustained discipline of the covenant life rather than resting in the one-time declaration of the intention to return. Let the sacrifice express the reality and not replace it. Let the worship embody the hesed and not substitute for it. Let the knowledge of God be the living knowledge of the living God, not the theological proposition about Him that leaves the heart unchanged and the specific behaviors unaddressed.

And let the harvest of verse 11 be received in both its dimensions: the harvest of judgment that gathers in what the covenant violation has sown, and the harvest of restoration that gathers in the people who have been brought through the judgment to the place where the hesed and the da'at Elohim can finally take root and grow. Let both harvests be received as the work of the God who desires mercy and not sacrifice, who will not be satisfied with less than the covenant relationship that the forms of the covenant worship were always meant to express. Come, and let us return to the LORD — but this time, let us follow on to know Him until the knowing endures through the full heat of the day.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who on the third day was raised up, fulfilling the pattern that Israel's morning mist could only speak but not accomplish — Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria**
Glory to God Alone*