

Introduction to Hosea Chapter 14

Return, O Israel: The Words of the Return, the Promise of the Healing, and the Flourishing of the Restoration

Hosea chapter 14 is the dawn after the long night. The thirteen preceding chapters have traced the full arc of the covenant violation with a thoroughness and a diagnostic precision that has no parallel in the prophetic literature: the absent faithfulness, the absent steadfast love, the absent knowledge of God, the misattribution of the provision, the spirit of whoredom, the heated oven, the half-baked cake, the morning mist repentance, the deceitful bow, the sow the wind reap the whirlwind, the return to Egypt, the offending in Baal, the stored iniquity, the desolation of Samaria. Thirteen chapters of the most comprehensive available indictment. And then, in nine verses, the fullest available promise of restoration in the book.

The chapter is structured around three movements that are perfectly calibrated to the needs of the community that has received the thirteen preceding chapters of the indictment. The first movement (verses 1–3) is the call to return with the specific words of the return: the invitation to come back, the instruction in the words that should be spoken, the renunciation of the Assyrian alliance and the military horse and the manufactured gods, and the declaration of the orphan's finding of compassion in the covenant God. The second movement (verses 4–8) is the divine promise of the healing and the flourishing: the I will heal their apostasy, the I will love them freely, the I will be like the dew to Israel, the blossoming of the lily, the striking of the roots like Lebanon, the beauty of the olive tree, the fragrance of Lebanon, the shade of the vine, the grain and the flourishing of the garden. The third movement (verse 9) is the wisdom epilogue that steps outside the narrative frame and addresses the reader directly: the one who is wise will understand, the discerning will know, for the ways of the LORD are right and the righteous walk in them while the rebellious stumble.

The theological significance of chapter 14 for the entire book cannot be overstated. It is not merely the hopeful conclusion that softens the impact of the preceding indictment. It is the destination toward which the entire book has been moving: the *hesed* and the *da'at* Elohim that chapter 4 named as absent, the new betrothal in righteousness and justice and steadfast love and mercy and faithfulness that chapter 2 promised, the I will ransom them from the power of Sheol that chapter 13 announced. Chapter 14 is the arrival of everything that the book has been describing as the goal of the pursuing love that has been chasing the unfaithful wife and the rebellious son through every form of the discipline that the thirteen preceding chapters have described.

The most theologically concentrated verse in the chapter is verse 4: I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. The healing of the apostasy is the most comprehensive available statement of the divine response to the most comprehensive available indictment. The apostasy — the turning away, the departure from the covenant God — is the summary of everything the book has been diagnosing. And the healing is the most comprehensive available response: not the overlooking of the apostasy, not the minimizing of the

indictment, but the healing of the condition that the indictment has accurately diagnosed. The I will love them freely is the love that is not earned by the adequacy of the return but given by the freedom of the divine love that the I am God and not a human being of chapter 13:9 established as the character of the covenant love.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Hosea chapter 14 as people who have received the full weight of the thirteen preceding chapters and who need this chapter with an urgency that the thirteen chapters have produced. We have been indicted. We have been diagnosed. We have been warned. We have been shown the morning mist repentance, the deceitful bow, the satiation-forgetting, the stored iniquity. We have received the darkest chapter of the book and found in it the ransom from Sheol that the darkness makes the more astonishing. And now we come to the dawn. We come to the return and the healing and the flourishing. We come to the chapter that is the destination of the pursuing love that has been chasing us through every form of the discipline that the book has described.

Lord, let us speak the words of the return that verses 2–3 provide. Not our own words — the book has shown us the morning mist inadequacy of our own words of return. Let us speak the words that You provide: take away all iniquity, accept what is good, we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Let us make the specific renunciations that the return requires: no more Assyria, no more the horse, no more our hands' work, for in You the orphan finds mercy. These are the words of the genuine return, the words that are specific rather than general, that renounce rather than merely intend, that acknowledge the orphan's dependence rather than the rich man's self-sufficiency.

And let the I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely be received as the most comprehensive available response to the most comprehensive available indictment. We do not deserve the healing. The book has made that clear through thirteen chapters of the most thorough diagnostic available. But the love that is given freely — the love that does not wait for the deserving — is the love of the One whose nature does not permit the abandonment that the deserving would require. Heal the apostasy. Love freely. Let the anger that the book has been describing turn from us in the freedom of the love that is greater than the indictment.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One in whom the healing of the apostasy has been most fully accomplished, who loved freely at the cost of Himself, and who is the fulfillment of everything that chapter 14's promise of restoration announces — Amen.

Hosea 14:1–3

Return, O Israel: The Call, the Words of the Return, and the Renunciation of the Wrong Refuges

*(1) O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God;
for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.
(2) Take with you words,
and turn to the LORD:
say unto him, Take away all iniquity,
and receive us graciously:
so will we render the calves of our lips.
(3) Asshur shall not save us;
we will not ride upon horses:
neither will we say any more to the work of our hands,
Ye are our gods:
for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

The Context

The return, O Israel, to the LORD your God of verse 1 is the most direct call to the return in the book, and it comes at the end of the entire preceding sequence rather than at the beginning. The return that was called for throughout chapters 4 through 12 — the return that was refused in chapter 11:5, the return that the deceitful bow of chapter 7 failed to reach, the return that the morning mist repentance of chapter 6 only gestured toward — is now called for with the full weight of the thirteen chapters of indictment behind it. The for you have stumbled because of your iniquity is the acknowledgment that grounds the call: the call to return is grounded in the honest acknowledgment of what the iniquity has produced. The stumbling is the consequence. The return is the only available response to the stumbling.

The take with you words of verse 2 is the most unusual feature of the call and the most important. The prophetic word does not merely call the community to return. It provides the community with the words of the return — the specific liturgical language that the return should take. This is the pastoral provision of the words that the community needs but does not know how to provide for itself. The morning mist repentance of chapter 6 had its own words — beautiful words, accurately theological, insufficient in substance. The words of chapter 14:2–3 are the words that are provided by the covenant God Himself, shaped by the book's own diagnostic, addressed to the specific conditions that the book has named. They are the words that acknowledge the iniquity specifically, that ask for the grace specifically, that offer the substitute sacrifice of the lips specifically.

The three renunciations of verse 3 are the most specific content of the return available in the chapter. Asshur shall not save us: the renunciation of the Assyrian alliance that chapters 5, 7, and 8 indicted as the wrong-physician appeal of the community that had misidentified the cause of

the wound. We will not ride on horses: the renunciation of the military self-trust that chapter 1:7 contrasted with the divine salvation by the LORD their God and not by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen. And we will no longer say our gods to the work of our hands: the renunciation of the manufactured idols that the workman made and therefore is not God of chapter 8:6. The three renunciations address the three specific forms of the wrong trust that the book has been diagnosing: the political, the military, and the religious. And the for in you the orphan finds mercy is the positive ground of the renunciation: the renouncing of the wrong trusts is grounded in the recognition of the covenant God as the One in whom the most dependent and the most helpless — the orphan — finds the mercy that the wrong trusts have been seeking in the wrong places.

Plain American English

Return to the LORD your God, O Israel! Your sins have been your downfall. Come with your words of confession and return to the LORD. Say to him, "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, so that we may offer you the praise of our lips. Assyria can't save us. We won't ride war horses. We will never again call the idols our gods — for in you alone the fatherless find compassion."

Key Observations

“Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously”: This signifies **The Provision of the Words of the Return Is the Most Pastoral Feature of the Call — the Covenant God Who Has Been Diagnosing the Insufficiency of the Community’s Own Words of Return Now Provides the Words That Are Sufficient.**

The take with you words is the most unexpected and the most theologically significant instruction in the opening section. The community that produced the morning mist repentance of chapter 6 — the beautiful but insufficient words of Come, let us return to the LORD — is now being given the words that are sufficient. The provision is the most direct pastoral response to the diagnostic failure of the community’s own repentance language: the words that the community produces from its own resources are the morning mist words that evaporate under the heat of the divine examination. The words that are provided by the covenant God Himself — take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, we will render the calves of our lips — are the words that correspond to the actual condition that the book has diagnosed and the actual provision that the covenant God’s grace offers. The pastor who gives the congregation the words of the genuine confession is doing what verse 2 models.

“Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy”: This signifies **The Three Renunciations Are the Specific Content of the Genuine Return — Addressing the Three Specific Forms of the Wrong Trust That the Book Has Been Diagnosing and Grounding the Renunciation in the Recognition of the Covenant God as the Orphan’s Mercy.**

The three renunciations of verse 3 are the most specific available definition of what the genuine return looks like in the practice of the covenant life. Each renunciation addresses one of the three specific forms of the wrong trust that the book has been diagnosing: the Assyrian alliance (the political wrong trust), the horses (the military wrong trust), and the manufactured gods (the religious wrong trust). The genuine return is not the abstract spiritual intention to be more devoted. It is the specific renunciation of the specific things that have been trusted in the place of the covenant God. And the for in you the orphan finds mercy is the positive ground: the renunciation of the wrong trusts is not the abandonment of the trust itself. It is the redirection of the trust toward the One who deserves it and who provides what the wrong trusts have been promising without delivering. The orphan who has no earthly resources and no earthly advocates finds in the covenant God the mercy that the Assyrian alliance, the military horse, and the manufactured gods have been unable to provide.

“We will render the calves of our lips”: This signifies **The Substitute Sacrifice of the Lips Is the New Covenant Dimension of the Return — the Offering of the Words of the Praise and the Confession That Replace the Sacrificial System the Exile Has Rendered Impossible.**

The calves of our lips — the words of praise and confession that replace the animal sacrifices of the covenant worship — is one of the most theologically significant phrases in the chapter for its anticipation of the new covenant dimension of the worship. In the exile, the sacrificial system of the Jerusalem temple will be impossible to maintain — the question of chapter 9:5, What will you do on the day of the feast? will be answered by the development of the synagogue worship that centers on the word and the prayer rather than the sacrifice and the offering. The calves of the lips are the offering that the exiled community can make without the temple, without the land, without the sacrificial system: the words of the praise, the words of the confession, the words of the renunciation. Hebrews 13:15 quotes the phrase directly: Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. The new covenant worship that Hebrews describes is the worship that Hosea 14:2 anticipates.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Words of the Return as the Most Practically Useful Feature of the Call — and Use Them as the Shape of the Genuine Confession: The take with you words is the instruction that the contemporary community of faith most needs in the season of the return. The community that has been producing the morning mist words of the return from its own resources — the revival language, the renewal gathering language, the Come, let us return to the LORD language that chapter 6 showed to be insufficient — needs the words that the covenant God provides. The words of verse 2–3 are the shape of the genuine confession: the specific acknowledgment of the iniquity (take away all iniquity), the specific appeal to the grace (receive us graciously), the specific offering of the substitute sacrifice (we will render the calves of our lips), and the specific renunciation of the wrong trusts (Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, no more to the work of our hands, you are our gods). Use the shape. The shape is specific. The genuine confession is always specific.

2. Make the Three Renunciations the Specific Content of the Return Rather Than the Abstract Intention to Be More Devoted: The three renunciations of verse 3 are the most practically orienting instruction in the opening section. The genuine return is not the abstract

spiritual intention. It is the specific renunciation of the specific things that have been trusted in the place of the covenant God. The contemporary believer who wants to return must make the contemporary equivalents of the three renunciations: Assyria shall not save us (the political alliance that has been trusted for the salvation that only the covenant God can provide), we will not ride on horses (the military, financial, institutional, and professional power that has been trusted in the place of the covenant God's protection), and we will say no more to the work of our hands, you are our gods (the manufactured religion, the self-projected theology, the made-to-order god of the understanding). Make the renunciations specific. The genuine return is grounded in the specific renunciation of the specific wrong trusts.

3. Receive the For in You the Orphan Finds Mercy as the Most Honest Available Ground of the Return — the Return That Is Grounded in the Recognition of the Orphan's Dependence Rather Than the Rich Man's Sufficiency: The for in you the orphan finds mercy is the ground of the return that the book has been building toward through thirteen chapters of the indictment of the self-sufficient community. The Ephraim who boasted I have become rich; I have found wealth for myself; no iniquity can be found in me has now arrived at the only honest position available: the orphan's dependence. The return that is grounded in the orphan's recognition of the dependence is the return that can receive the mercy that the covenant God has been promising. The return grounded in the self-sufficient rich man's confidence that the prosperity is the evidence of the innocence is the return that cannot receive the mercy because it does not recognize the need for it. Come as the orphan. The orphan finds the mercy.

How This Relates to Today

The take with you words is one of the most important pastoral provisions in the chapter for the contemporary community of faith that is navigating the season of the return after the long indictment. The community that has been formed by the thirteen chapters of Hosea's diagnostic is the community that has had the inadequacy of its own words of return exposed: the morning mist, the deceitful bow, the howling on the beds that is not directed toward the face of the covenant God. The provision of the words is the most direct pastoral response to the diagnostic failure: here are the words that are sufficient. The pastor, the liturgist, the community that shapes its prayers of confession and repentance according to the model of verses 2–3 — the specific acknowledgment, the specific appeal, the specific renunciation, the specific grounding in the orphan's dependence — is doing what the chapter models as the pastoral provision of the words that the community needs but cannot produce from its own resources.

The three renunciations of verse 3 are also one of the most important structural features of the chapter for the contemporary church's engagement with the question of what the genuine return looks like in practice. The contemporary church has no shortage of the language of return. It has an abundance of the revival gathering, the renewal conference, the season of heightened spiritual intensity. What it frequently lacks is the specificity of the renunciation that verse 3 models: the naming of the specific wrong trusts, the specific declaration that Assyria shall not save us, the specific commitment that we will not ride on horses, the specific renunciation of the manufactured gods. The genuine return is always specific. The morning mist return is always general. The specificity of the renunciation is the test of the genuineness of the return.

Key Lesson: **The opening section of the chapter provides the most complete available instruction in the genuine return: the call grounded in the honest acknowledgment of the stumbling, the provision of the words that the community needs but cannot produce from its own resources, the specific liturgy of the acknowledgment and the appeal and the renunciation, and the grounding of the entire return in the recognition of the orphan's dependence — for in you the orphan finds mercy, which is the most honest available ground of the return that the book has been preparing through thirteen chapters of the diagnosis of the self-sufficient community that does not know it is an orphan.**

Hosea 14:4–8

I Will Heal Their Apostasy: The Divine Promise of the Free Love, the Dew, and the Flourishing of the Restoration

*(4) I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely:
for mine anger is turned away from him.*

*(5) I will be as the dew unto Israel:
he shall grow as the lily,
and cast down his roots as Lebanon.*

*(6) His branches shall spread,
and his beauty shall be as the olive tree,
and his smell as Lebanon.*

*(7) They that dwell under his shadow shall return;
they shall revive as the corn,
and grow as the vine:
the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.*

*(8) Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?
I have heard him, and observed him:
I am like a green fir tree.
From me is thy fruit found.*

The Context

The I will heal their apostasy of verse 4 is the most comprehensive available response to the most comprehensive available indictment in the book. The apostasy — the turning away, the departure, the specific condition that the thirteen chapters of the book have been diagnosing in all its specific forms — is the thing that the covenant God declares He will heal. The healing is not the overlooking or the minimizing of the apostasy. It is the addressing of the specific condition at the level of its root cause: the covenant relationship that the apostasy has broken will be restored, and the restoration will be accomplished by the divine action rather than by the human performance. And the I will love them freely is the declaration that the love that accomplishes

the healing is the free love — the love that is not conditioned on the adequacy of the return, the love that gives itself without waiting for the earning that would make the giving proportionate.

The I will be like the dew to Israel of verse 5 is the return of the rain imagery from the covenant God's description of Himself in chapter 6:3 — his going forth is prepared as the morning; he will come to us as the showers — but now fulfilled rather than merely promised. The dew is the gentle, pervasive, life-giving moisture that comes in the night and covers everything with the provision that the morning reveals. The dew that the LORD provides is the dew that Israel was seeking through the Baal worship: the fertility and the abundance that the wrong worship was designed to secure and that only the covenant God can give. And the growing of the lily, the striking of the roots like Lebanon, the spreading of the branches, the beauty of the olive, the fragrance of Lebanon — all of these are the images of the flourishing that the covenant relationship at its most restored produces.

The Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? of verse 8 is the most remarkable statement in the restoration section because it is the voluntary renunciation of the idols by the restored community — the community that has been healed of the apostasy and loved freely saying, of its own accord, that it has nothing more to do with the idols. This is the destination that the entire book has been moving toward: not the external prohibition of the idols by the divine command, but the internal renunciation of the idols by the community that has been healed and loved and restored and no longer needs or wants what the idols were offering. The I have heard him and observed him is the declaration that the renewed relationship with the covenant God has been established — the da'at Elohim of the genuine knowing has been restored. And the I am like a green fir tree; from me comes your fruit is the divine declaration that the covenant God is the source of the fertility that the Baal worship was designed to secure: the fruit that Israel has been seeking from the Baals is the fruit that only the covenant God provides.

Plain American English

“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the morning dew to Israel. He will blossom like a lily and take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His young shoots will grow, and his beauty will be like that of an olive tree, and his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Once again they will live in his shade. They will flourish like grain and blossom like a vine, and their fame will be like the wine from Lebanon. Ephraim will say, ‘What do I have to do with idols anymore?’ I will answer him and take care of him. I am like a green pine tree — your fruitfulness comes from me.”

Key Observations

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him”: This signifies **The Healing of the Apostasy and the Free Love Are the Most Comprehensive Available Statement of the Divine Response to the Indictment — the Love That Is Given Freely Is the Love That Is Not Conditioned on the Adequacy of the Return.**

The I will heal their apostasy is the most direct possible statement of the divine response to the most comprehensive possible indictment. The apostasy is the condition that the thirteen chapters have been diagnosing. The healing is the divine action that addresses the condition at its root. And the I will love them freely — the Hebrew is nadab, the freewill offering, the voluntary gift that is not required and is not conditioned — is the declaration that the love that heals is the love that is given by the freedom of the divine will rather than secured by the adequacy of the human performance. The anger that has been the character of the divine response to the covenant violation through the preceding chapters is turned away: not because the violation did not deserve the anger, but because the free love that is the character of the covenant God has prevailed over the anger, as the how can I give you up of chapter 11:8 declared it would. The healing and the free love are the arrival of what the entire book has been building toward.

“I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast down his roots as Lebanon”: This signifies **The Dew That the Covenant God Provides Is the Life-Giving Provision That the Baal Worship Was Designed to Secure — the Gentle, Pervasive Fertility of the Restored Covenant Relationship.**

The dew of verse 5 is the covenant God’s claim to the provision that the Baal worship had been designed to provide. The Baals were the fertility deities whose rain and dew and agricultural abundance the community had been seeking through the wrong worship. The I will be like the dew is the covenant God’s declaration that the dew Israel has been seeking from the Baals is His dew to give — the provision of the covenant relationship at its most restored. And the images of the restored flourishing — the lily, the Lebanon cedar roots, the spreading branches, the olive tree beauty, the Lebanon fragrance — are the images of the covenant blessing at its most abundant, the counterimage to the morning mist, the early dew that passes away, the chaff, and the smoke of chapter 13:3. The community that was transient as the morning mist will flourish as the lily rooted like Lebanon. The judgment images and the restoration images are the deliberate counterparts to each other.

“Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him”: This signifies **The Voluntary Renunciation of the Idols by the Restored Community Is the Most Complete Expression of the Covenant Restoration — the Community That Has Been Healed and Loved Freely No Longer Needs or Wants What the Idols Were Offering.**

The What have I to do any more with idols? is the most remarkable statement in the restoration section because it is the community’s own voluntary declaration. The renunciation of the idols in verses 2–3 was the renunciation called for in the words of the return — the commanded renunciation that is the condition of the genuine return. The renunciation of verse 8 is the spontaneous declaration of the restored community that has been healed and loved freely and no longer wants what the idols were offering. The idols offered the fertility, the abundance, the protection, the significance that the community was seeking. When the covenant God provides the dew, the lily-blossoming, the Lebanon roots, the olive beauty, the wine-fragrance — when the restored covenant relationship provides everything that the idols were promising to provide — the community that has experienced the restoration simply asks: What have I to do any more with idols? The healing of the apostasy has produced the desire that the apostasy had displaced.

“I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found”: This signifies **The Covenant God’s Declaration That He Is the Source of the Fruit Is the Final Reversal of the Misattribution**

That Has Been Running Through the Entire Book — the Fruit That Was Attributed to the Baals Is the Fruit That Only the Covenant God Provides.

The from me is your fruit found is the final reversal of the foundational misattribution that the book identified in chapter 2:8 — she did not know that I gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil. The Baals received the worship that should have been directed to the covenant God because Israel did not know that the provision was the covenant God's gift. The from me is your fruit found is the restoration of the knowledge: the community that has been healed of the apostasy and loved freely and provided with the dew of the covenant relationship now knows what it did not know in chapter 2:8 — the fruit comes from the covenant God. The misattribution that was the root of the idolatry has been healed. The correct attribution is the fruit of the healing: the community that knows that the fruit comes from the covenant God will direct the worship and the gratitude toward the correct source and will have nothing more to do with the idols that were worshipped for the provision that the covenant God was giving all along.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the I Will Heal Their Apostasy as the Most Comprehensive Available Promise for the Most Comprehensive Available Diagnosis — the Healing Is as Comprehensive as the Indictment:

The healing of the apostasy in verse 4 is the promise that corresponds in scope to the thirteen-chapter indictment that precedes it. The book has not merely described the symptoms of the covenant violation. It has diagnosed the apostasy itself — the turning away, the departure, the root condition from which every specific form of the covenant violation grows. And the healing that verse 4 promises is the healing of the apostasy itself — not the management of the symptoms but the address of the root condition. The community that has received the comprehensive diagnosis of Hosea 1 through 13 needs the comprehensive promise of Hosea 14:4: the apostasy will be healed. The love will be given freely. The anger will turn away. Receive the promise in its full scope.

2. Allow the Restored Covenant Relationship to Be the Source of Everything That the Wrong Worship Was Promising to Provide — and Experience the What Have I to Do Any More with Idols as the Natural Result of the Restoration Rather Than the Strained Achievement of the Willpower:

The What have I to do any more with idols? of verse 8 is not the achievement of the willpower that has decided to stop worshipping idols. It is the spontaneous declaration of the community that has been healed and loved freely and has received the dew of the restored covenant relationship. The idols offered what the covenant relationship provides. When the covenant relationship is restored, the idols have nothing left to offer. The contemporary believer who is straining to maintain the renunciation of the wrong trusts through the willpower alone has not yet received the full restoration of verse 4–8: the dew, the lily-blossoming, the Lebanon roots, the olive beauty. Receive the restoration. The what have I to do any more with idols is the fruit of the restoration, not the condition of it.

3. Read the From Me Is Your Fruit Found as the Resolution of the Misattribution That Has Been Running Through the Entire Book — and Practice the Attribution That the Restoration Produces:

The from me is your fruit found is the resolution of the she did not know that I gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil of chapter 2:8. The restoration of the covenant relationship restores the knowledge of the correct attribution: the fruit comes from the covenant

God. The community that has been healed of the apostasy and loved freely now knows — really knows, with the da'at Elohim that the book has been naming as the absent knowledge — that the provision comes from the covenant God. Practice the attribution: receive every form of the provision with the gratitude directed toward the correct source, the acknowledgment that the fruit comes from the One who is like the green fir tree. The practice of the correct attribution is the practice of the knowledge of God that the restoration produces.

How This Relates to Today

The I will be like the dew to Israel is the most complete fulfillment of the agricultural promise that the Baal worship was designed to secure and that the book has been showing to be available only through the covenant relationship. The Baals were worshipped because they were believed to control the rain and the dew and the agricultural abundance. The entire history of the Baal worship — the kissing of the calves, the high-place worship under the oaks and poplars, the multiplication of the altars, the priests who fed on the sin of the people — is the history of the community's attempt to secure what only the covenant God can provide through the mechanisms that only the covenant God has authority over. The I will be like the dew is the declaration that the dew Israel has been seeking from the Baals for the entire history of the covenant community's unfaithfulness is the covenant God's dew to give, and that when the covenant relationship is restored, the dew will come from the right source.

The I will love them freely of verse 4 is also the most direct Old Testament anticipation of the New Testament's theology of grace as the unearned, unconditioned giving of the divine love. The nadab — the freewill offering quality of the love — is the love that is given not because the community has earned it but because the nature of the divine love is the free giving. The community that has received the thirteen chapters of the indictment has not earned the healing of verse 4. The Ephraim that stumbled in the iniquity, that offended in Baal, that was satisfied and forgot, that kissed the calves, that stored up the iniquity, that desolated Samaria — this Ephraim has not earned the healing. But the love is given freely, because the nature of the love is the freedom of the giving rather than the earning of the recipient. This is the grace that the New Testament proclaims in its fullest form: the love that sent the Son not because the world had earned the sending, but because the freedom of the divine love is the sending that does not wait for the earning.

Key Lesson: **The divine promise of the restoration section is as comprehensive as the thirteen-chapter indictment that precedes it: the healing of the apostasy, the free love, the turning away of the anger, the dew of the renewed provision, the lily blossoming, the Lebanon roots, the olive beauty, the wine fragrance, and the voluntary renunciation of the idols by the community that has been healed and loved freely and has received from the One who is like the green fir tree the fruit that the Baal worship was always seeking from the wrong source.**

Hosea 14:9

The Wisdom Epilogue: The Ways of the LORD Are Right, and the Righteous Walk in Them

*(9) Who is wise, and he shall understand these things?
prudent, and he shall know them?
for the ways of the LORD are right,
and the just shall walk in them:
but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

The Context

The closing verse of the chapter and of the book is the wisdom epilogue that steps outside the narrative frame of the prophetic speeches and the covenant lawsuit and addresses the reader directly. The who is wise? is the sapiential challenge that summons the reader to the reflection that the entire book has been designed to produce: the one who is wise will understand these things; the one who is discerning will know them. The things to be understood and known are the things that the fourteen chapters of the book have been presenting: the faithfulness of the covenant God's love, the reality of the covenant's consequences, the diagnosis of the specific forms of the covenant violation, the promise of the restoration, and the ways of the LORD that the book has been describing from the first verse to the last.

The for the ways of the LORD are right is the most comprehensive theological summary of the book available in a single phrase. The ways of the LORD that the book has been describing — the pursuing love that goes again, the wilderness wooing, the new betrothal, the hedge of thorns, the withdrawal to His place, the ransom from Sheol, the free love, the dew — are right. They are not the arbitrary exercises of the divine power or the vindictive responses of the offended deity. They are the right ways: the ways that correspond to the actual nature of the covenant God and the actual condition of the covenant community, the ways that are designed to produce the restoration that chapter 14 has promised.

The and the just shall walk in them but the transgressors shall fall in them is the final statement of the two ways that has been implicit throughout the book. The same ways of the LORD that the righteous walk in are the ways in which the transgressors stumble: the covenant discipline that the righteous receive as the provision of the faithful husband's love is the covenant judgment that the transgressors experience as the consequence of the persistent violation. The ways of the LORD are not different for the righteous and the transgressors. The difference is in how the ways are received: the righteous walk in them because they have understood that the ways are right; the transgressors fall in them because they have refused to understand that the ways are right. The wisdom that understands that the ways are right is the wisdom that enables the walking. The foolishness that does not understand is the foolishness that produces the stumbling.

Plain American English

Who is wise enough to understand all this? Who is discerning enough to grasp it? The paths of the LORD are right and true. People who live right will walk in them, but those who rebel against God will stumble and fall.

Key Observations

“Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?”: This signifies **The Wisdom Challenge of the Epilogue Steps Outside the Narrative Frame and Addresses the Reader Directly — the Book Has Been Written to Produce the Wisdom That Understands and the Discernment That Knows.**

The wisdom challenge of verse 9 is the most self-aware moment in the book — the moment when the text acknowledges its own purpose and addresses the reader who has been receiving it. The who is wise? is not a rhetorical question whose answer is assumed. It is the genuine challenge to the reader: are you the wise person who will understand what this book has been showing? Are you the discerning person who will know it? The book has been the long demonstration of the ways of the LORD — the pursuing love, the covenant discipline, the diagnostic precision, the promise of the restoration — and the epilogue is the invitation to receive the demonstration with the wisdom and the discernment that the demonstration has been designed to produce. The wise reader of Hosea is not the reader who has received the information of the fourteen chapters. It is the reader who has been formed by the information into the understanding that the information was designed to produce.

“The ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein”: This signifies **The Final Statement of the Two Ways Is the Most Comprehensive Available Summary of the Book’s Theological Argument — the Same Ways of the LORD That the Righteous Walk in Are the Ways in Which the Transgressors Stumble.**

The ways of the LORD are right is the theological verdict on everything the book has been describing. The pursuing love of the faithful husband is right. The discipline of the hedge of thorns and the wall against the lovers’ paths is right. The wilderness wooing is right. The withdrawal to His place until the acknowledgment of guilt produces the genuine seeking is right. The ransom from Sheol is right. The free love of the restoration is right. And the just shall walk in them is the declaration that the righteous person — the person who has understood that the ways are right — is the person who walks in the same ways that the transgressors stumble in. The difference is not the ways. The difference is the orientation of the person who encounters the ways: the wisdom that walks, or the foolishness that stumbles. The final verse of the book is the invitation to be the wise person who walks in the ways that are right.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Who Is Wise? as the Most Important Question the Book Has Left with Its Reader — and Examine Whether the Reception of the Book Has Produced the Wisdom That Understands or the Foolishness That Does Not: The who is wise? of verse 9 is the self-assessment question that the entire book has been building toward. The reader who has received fourteen chapters of the most comprehensive available indictment and the most comprehensive available promise of restoration has been presented with the demonstration of the ways of the LORD. The question is: has the demonstration produced the wisdom that understands and the discernment that knows? The wise reader is not the reader who has accumulated information

about the book. It is the reader who has been formed by the book into the understanding that the ways of the LORD are right and who has begun to walk in them. Has the reception of the book produced the walking? That is the question the epilogue leaves with the reader.

2. Read the Ways of the LORD Are Right as the Most Comprehensive Available Theological Affirmation of the Entire Book's Argument — Including the Difficult Ways of the Discipline That the Book Has Described: The ways of the LORD are right is the affirmation that includes the difficult ways that the book has been describing alongside the tender ones. The hedge of thorns and the wall against the lovers' paths are right. The withdrawal to His place until the acknowledgment of guilt is right. The bear robbed of her cubs is right. The east wind that dries the spring is right. The desolation of Samaria is right. And the free love and the dew and the lily blossoming are right. The ways of the LORD are right in every expression — the disciplinary and the restorative, the severe and the tender. The wisdom that understands that the ways are right is the wisdom that can walk in the difficult ways without stumbling, because the walking is grounded in the understanding that the discipline is the provision of the faithful husband's love rather than the vindictive punishment of the offended deity.

3. Walk in the Ways of the LORD Rather Than Stumbling in Them — and Understand That the Walking Is the Walking of the One Who Has Received the Wisdom That the Book Has Been Designed to Produce: The just shall walk in them is the final positive instruction of the book. After fourteen chapters of the diagnostic, the warning, the promise, and the invitation — after the morning mist and the deceitful bow and the sow the wind and the ransom from Sheol and the free love and the dew — the final instruction is the simplest and the most comprehensive: walk in the ways that are right. The walking is not the achievement of the moral performance that has earned the right to walk in them. It is the walking of the one who has understood that the ways are right and has begun to walk in them because of the understanding. The wise person walks. The foolish person stumbles. Walk.

How This Relates to Today

The wisdom epilogue of verse 9 is the canonical marker that places the book of Hosea in the tradition of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The who is wise? and the ways of the LORD are right are the language of the Psalms and the Proverbs, the language of the reflective engagement with the divine instruction that is the characteristic mode of the wisdom tradition. The book that began with the most personally costly prophetic commission in the Old Testament — go, take a wife of whoredom — ends with the most characteristically sapiential of closings: the invitation to the wise understanding of the ways that the book has been demonstrating. Hosea is both prophet and wisdom teacher: the prophet who speaks the word of the LORD into the specific historical crisis, and the wisdom teacher who invites the reflective understanding of the ways that the prophetic word has been demonstrating.

The and the just shall walk in them but the transgressors shall fall in them is the final statement of the binary that has been implicit throughout the book: the two ways, the two responses to the same ways of the LORD. The morning mist repentance and the genuine return. The deceitful bow and the seeking of the face. The kiss the calves and the What have I to do any more with idols? The sow the wind and the sow righteousness. The satiation-forgetting and the return to the

orphan's dependence. The same ways of the LORD that the righteous walk in are the ways in which the transgressors stumble. The book of Hosea has been the demonstration of both: the community that stumbled in the ways, and the promise of the restoration that makes the walking possible. The wisdom challenge of verse 9 is the invitation to walk. Will you?

***Key Lesson:** *The wisdom epilogue of verse 9 steps outside the narrative frame and addresses the reader directly with the most comprehensive available summary of the book's theological argument: the ways of the LORD are right, and the wise person who understands this will walk in them, while the transgressor who does not understand will stumble in the same ways; the who is wise? is the most important question the book leaves with its reader — the question of whether the reception of the fourteen chapters has produced the wisdom that understands and walks, or whether the reader has received the demonstration and remained in the stumbling that the book has been diagnosing.**

The Theological Synthesis of Hosea Chapter 14 and the Whole Book

The Arrival of the Pursuing Love: How Chapter 14 Completes What Chapters 1 Through 13 Have Been Preparing

Hosea chapter 14 is the destination of the entire book, and it can only be fully understood as the destination of the entire book. The healing of verse 4 is the healing of the apostasy that chapters 4 through 13 have been diagnosing with comprehensive precision. The free love of verse 4 is the free love that the how can I give you up of chapter 11:8 declared would not permit the abandonment. The dew of verse 5 is the rain that chapter 6:3 promised would come when the community followed on to know the LORD. The lily and the Lebanon roots and the olive beauty and the wine fragrance of verses 5–7 are the counterimages to the morning cloud, the early dew, the chaff, and the smoke of chapter 13:3. The voluntary renunciation of the idols in verse 8 is the arrival at the destination that the three renunciations of verse 3 were the beginning of.

The book of Hosea has been structured as the demonstration of the pursuing love that does not give up. The marriage metaphor of chapters 1 through 3 established the character of the love: the faithful husband who goes again, who pays the redemption price, who enters the mutual discipline of the waiting period, who will betroth in righteousness and justice and steadfast love and mercy and faithfulness. The extended prophetic speeches of chapters 4 through 13 have demonstrated the love in its most difficult expressions: the love that disciplines with the hedge of thorns, the love that withdraws to its place until the acknowledgment produces the genuine seeking, the love that declares the I would redeem them even while the they have spoken lies against me is still being spoken, the love that asks how can I give you up even when the community is bent to backsliding and produces no upward movement. And chapter 14 is the demonstration of the love in its most beautiful expression: the healing, the free love, the dew, the flourishing.

The canonical significance of chapter 14 for the New Testament's theology cannot be overstated. The free love of verse 4 anticipates the grace that Paul describes as the love that was

demonstrated while we were still sinners in Romans 5:8. The dew of verse 5 anticipates the Spirit who is given as the down payment of the inheritance in Ephesians 1:14. The What have I to do any more with idols? of verse 8 anticipates the turning from idols to serve the living and true God that Paul describes as the characteristic conversion of the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:9. The from me is your fruit found of verse 8 anticipates the I am the vine; you are the branches of John 15:5 — the abiding relationship in which the fruit is produced by the covenant connection to the source rather than by the independent effort of the community.

The wisdom epilogue of verse 9 is the invitation to the canonical community of every generation that has received the book of Hosea to understand and to walk. The ways of the LORD that the book has demonstrated are the ways that are right: the pursuing love, the covenant discipline, the diagnostic precision, the promise of the restoration, the free love, the dew, the from me is your fruit found. The wise person understands these things. The discerning person knows them. And the just person walks in them. The book of Hosea has been the demonstration. The walking is the response to the demonstration that the wisdom epilogue invites. Will you walk?

The Book of Hosea and the New Testament

The book of Hosea is the most extensively quoted prophetic book in the New Testament, and the quotations cluster around the chapters that have been most theologically significant in the book's own argument. Matthew 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1 — Out of Egypt I called my son — for the typological identification of Jesus as the true Israel who recapitulates the covenant community's history in His own person. Matthew 9:13 and 12:7 quote Hosea 6:6 — I desire mercy and not sacrifice — in the two contexts where Jesus challenges the Pharisees' prioritization of the performance of the system over the living heshed that the system was designed to express. Romans 9:25–26 quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 — the reversal of Lo-ammi and Lo-ruhamah — for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. And 1 Corinthians 15:55 quotes Hosea 13:14 — O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? — as the most triumphant declaration of the resurrection theology.

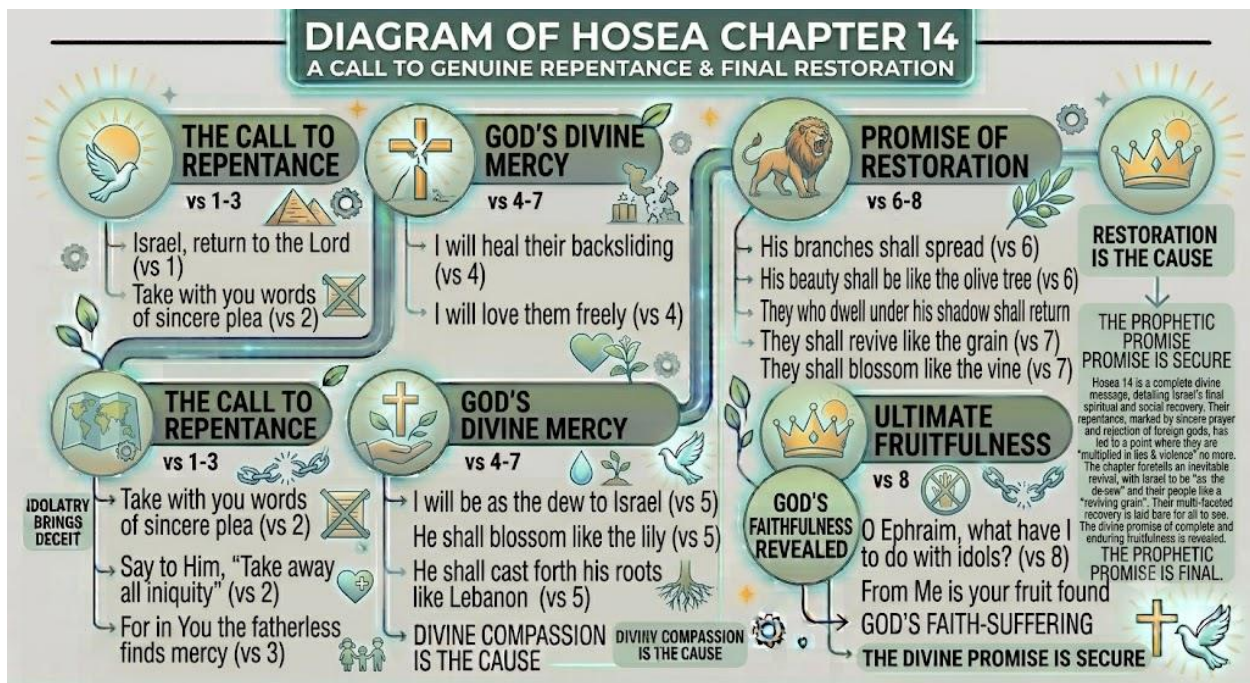
The trajectory from Hosea to the New Testament is the trajectory from the promise to the fulfillment: the ransom from Sheol that Hosea 13 announces is the ransom that the resurrection of Jesus accomplishes; the free love that Hosea 14 promises is the love that the cross of Jesus expresses at its most costly; the from me is your fruit found that the covenant God declares is the I am the vine that Jesus declares in the upper room. The book of Hosea is not merely the historical record of the eighth-century BC prophetic ministry. It is the canonical preparation for the gospel: the revelation of the pursuing love that the gospel proclaims as the love of the Father who sent the Son, the covenant theology that the gospel fulfills in the new covenant of the blood of Christ, the promise of the restoration that the gospel announces as already accomplished in the death and resurrection of the faithful Son who is the true Israel, the healing of the apostasy that the gospel declares as the work of the Spirit who is given to the community that has been healed and loved freely and has nothing more to do with idols.

How This Relates to Today

The book of Hosea closes with the wisest available advice for the contemporary community of faith that has received its fourteen chapters: understand the ways of the LORD that the book has demonstrated, and walk in them. The walking is the practical response to the understanding. The ways that are right are not merely the ways to be understood theoretically. They are the ways to be walked practically — the pursuing love to be received and returned, the covenant discipline to be received as the provision of the faithful husband rather than the vindictive punishment of the offended deity, the free love to be received as the unearned gift that it is, the dew to be received as the provision of the One who is the source of the fruit that the idols were promising to provide.

The community of faith that has read Hosea carefully is the community that has been equipped with the most comprehensive available theological framework for understanding its own condition, the condition of the culture around it, the nature of the covenant love that is pursuing it, and the specific practices of the genuine return that the book has been modeling from the sow righteousness of chapter 10:12 to the take with you words of chapter 14:2 to the walk in the ways that are right of chapter 14:9. Walk. The ways are right. The wise person understands. The just person walks.

Key Lesson: *Hosea chapter 14 is the destination of the entire book: the words of the genuine return that the book has been preparing the community to speak, the healing of the apostasy and the free love that the pursuing love of the faithful husband has been working toward through every form of the discipline, the dew and the lily-blossoming and the Lebanon roots and the from me is your fruit found that are the restoration of everything the idolatry has broken, and the wisdom epilogue that steps outside the narrative frame and leaves the reader with the most important question in the book: who is wise enough to understand these things? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them.*



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 14 — and with it the entire book — having arrived at the destination that the pursuing love has been working toward through every chapter of the pursuit. We have received the words of the return that You have provided: take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, we will render the calves of our lips. We have made the renunciations that the genuine return requires: Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, no more to the work of our hands you are our gods. We come as the orphan who finds in You the mercy that the wrong trusts have been promising without delivering.

Lord, heal our apostasy. We have been the community that offended in Baal and died, the community that made idols according to our own understanding and kissed the calves, the community that was satisfied and forgot, the community that sowed wind and reaped whirlwind, the community that refused to return and was bent to backsliding and produced no upward movement in response to the upward calling. Heal the apostasy. Not because we have earned the healing — the book has made it clear that we have not — but because the love is freely given, because the I am God and not a human being means that the love does not end when the human love would have given up.

Be like the dew to us. Let the lily blossoming and the Lebanon roots and the olive beauty and the wine fragrance be the images of the restored covenant community that is no longer chasing the east wind and feeding on the wind-food of the wrong refuges. Let the What have I to do any more with idols? be our spontaneous declaration as the restoration progresses and the covenant relationship provides everything that the idols were promising to provide. And let the from me is your fruit found be the knowledge that we have been lacking since chapter 2:8: the correct attribution of the provision to the One who is the source of every good gift.

Let us be the wise people who understand these things. Let us be the discerning people who know them. For the ways of the LORD are right — the pursuing love and the covenant discipline and the diagnostic precision and the promise of the restoration and the free love and the dew are all right. They are not arbitrary. They are not vindictive. They are the ways of the faithful husband and the father who bends down to feed, the ways of the One whose heart turns within itself in compassion, the ways of the God who cannot give up the Ephraim He loves. Let us understand. Let us know. And let us walk.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is the fullest available expression of the pursuing love that the book of Hosea reveals, who healed the apostasy at the cost of His own life, who loved freely at the cost of the cross, who is the dew and the lily and the Lebanon roots and the fruit that comes from the One who is the true vine — Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Glory to God Alone