

**A SEED OF GOD (6)**

— A. E. Bouter

The word "seed" occurs 285 times in the Hebrew O.T., and 95 times in the Greek, N.T. It is often used as a symbol of spiritual life. First, it represents a new order of life which God introduces in the Lord Jesus (Gen. 3:15; Jn. 12:2; Gal. 4:4). Second, it shows us this life reproduced in a new generation to which we belong today (Ps. 22:23; 126:6; Isa. 53:10; Mal. 2:15; 1 Jn. 3:9). In the last issue we considered God's Plan, Program, Purpose, Power, and Product as illustrated in the "seed." Here we look at Abraham and his seed.

*The seed of Abraham.*

The subject of Abraham and his descendants is a new subdivision in our studies on "A Seed of God." As is the case with all the heroes of faith, God introduced some features of His Son in Abraham's life, that we find later in a perfect way in the Lord Himself.

In this study of the seed, two aspects call for attention. The first: God's work in sovereign grace according to His plan. The second: Man's actions in responsibility. How does man work this plan out in his own life? In other words, how does he respond?

We want to divide this part of our study into eight sections. Certain points mentioned in one section may be discussed in greater detail in a later one. Though it is profitable to consider them in their entire context, they will of necessity be divided over several issues of COME AND SEE.

1. "That which is spiritual [was] not first, but that which is natural" (1 Cor. 15:46).

We begin with 1 Corinthians 15. This wonderful and important chapter contains several basic principles essential to the understanding of some of the passages that will be mentioned in these sections. In Genesis we have at least seven cases where the thought of 1 Cor. 15:46 is demonstrated. Some of the principles contained in this chapter are:

(a) God intended our bodies, as well as the natural things in general, to be "tools" for Him to employ in the working out of His thoughts in the natural world. Instead of our using our bodies or the things of this creation as objects in themselves, and thus reducing them to the level of idolatry, God intends our bodies to produce something of Christ in us. In this present evil age, He wants to use them as a testimony of things to be displayed by Him in the world to come. In the future, this work of God will be publicly seen and displayed for His glory. This is why even today, our bodies are so valuable as vessels of God's glory (see 1 Cor. 6:19f; Phil. 1:20; 2 Cor. 4:7 et al).

(b) The process and the result of resurrection are described in 1 Corinthians 15:35-57. We have already mentioned earlier that God introduced the thought of resurrection-life and power in connection with plants (Gen. 1:11f) and with man (Gen. 22; Jn. 12:24; Isa. 53; Ps. 22). It reveals the glory of God (cf. Jn. 11).

(c) With Christ and His death and resurrection, God introduced a new origin (source) of life (v. 47), a new Head (v. 45), a new order (v. 46), a new body (v. 44), a new Model, a new character, a new image according to His purpose (v. 47ff).

Already in Abraham and his seed some of these principles are illustrated. This underlines how important these types really are, in which the doctrines of the New Testament are prefigured

The truth of 1 Corinthians 15:46 as to Abraham's seed is confirmed in Romans 9:6-13 (Ishmael vs. Isaac) and John 8:32-59 (the Lord Jesus and the true children of Abraham vs. his unregenerate descendants).

"Not all [are] Israel which [are] of Israel..." (Rom. 9:6 — cf. Rom. 2:28, Jn. 1:13, and Gal. 6:16), "...nor because they are seed of Abraham [are] all children..." (Rom. 9:7).

This verse makes the same distinction that the Lord made in John 8:33, 37 and 39. Though the Lord recognized them as Abraham's seed (natural, physical descendants), He did not count them as Abraham's (moral, spiritual) children, for if they were, they would have displayed the same features (see below) that characterised Abraham.

"...but, In Isaac shall a seed be called to thee. That is, [they that are] the children of the flesh, these [are] not the children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned as seed" (Rom. 9:7f).

It is evident then that God does not recognize as "a seed of God" that which is produced by the actions and efforts of the flesh. In other words, when God seeks "a seed of God" in Abraham or in his descendants, He will not accept something of the flesh (see Gal. 4:21-31; Jn. 1:13; 3:6; 6:63). The true seed of God finds its expression in "the children of the promise" (in Isaac, as type of Christ, and those related to him), who alone are "children of God."

In John 8, we meet Abraham's descendants in bondage. The Lord Jesus had come to set them free and thus make them true children of Abraham. But the Jews had refused Himself, His words, and His works. The line of demarcation between the two seeds is just as clear as it was in Genesis 3 and 4. There we saw the seed of the woman (Christ, and in second instance those who belong to Him and are characterised by Him, seen in Abel and Seth) and the seed of the serpent (seen in Cain and Lamech), two lines which continue till the end of the Book of Revelation.

Now in John 8, the Lord shows the essential character of both seeds. The seed of the woman, the true seed of God, is seen in the Lord Himself (v. 28: the Son of man, who is at the same time the I AM — a blessed mystery!) and in those who abide in His word, His disciples (v. 31) — true sons set free, Abraham's children. The seed of the serpent shows itself in the unregenerate Jews, descendants of Abraham, of whom the Lord had to say, "Ye are of the devil, as [your] father, and ye desire to do the lusts of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks falsehood, he speaks of what is his own; for he is a liar and its father" (Jn. 8:44).

It could not be put any clearer than this. What a terrible truth it is that the children of the flesh, even though they are Abraham's natural descendants, reproduce what belongs to their "father," the devil: violence and corruption! In contrast to this, the Lord had come to free them from this bondage, from the slavery of sin (Jn. 4), from the bondage of legality (Jn. 5), from the bondage of this world (Jn. 6, 1 Jn. 2), and from the power of death (Heb. 2 and 2 Tim. 1).

Whenever the people of God as a whole is in bondage, in an irremediable state (Isa. 6; Jn. 8f; 2 Tim.; Rev. 3), God, in His sovereign grace, prepares a remnant for Himself. This remnant answers to His desires according to the principles He has given at the beginning. Paul explains this carefully in Romans 11, where he refers to himself as being "...of [the] seed of Abraham" (v. 1).

## 2. The emphasis is on what is *for God* in Abraham and his spiritual seed.

Abraham was called by God to leave a world which was self-centered, man-centered, and which was therefore under Satan's rule. Even Abram, a descendant of Shem, was an idol worshipper (Josh. 24:2) at the time when he saw the God of glory (Acts 7:2) and was called. Attracted by this glory and the divine excellence, he moved to the land God would show him. He left the city of man's purpose (Gen. 11 — Babel), in order to go to the land of God's purpose, having a clear impression of the city which is to come, the city with foundations, the city of God. If we are to show that we are Abraham's children (Rom. 4, Gal. 3 & 4), we should realise the importance of the principle: "First things first." What is of God and for God should have priority over all else. There should be no room for human reasoning or arguments. All is to be obedient to God and to His interests now. Although we are still *in* this world, we are no longer *of* it.

This call made Abraham a pilgrim (one who is journeying to another country), a sojourner (though in the promised land, he didn't possess it yet), and a stranger (see Heb. 11 and 1 Pet. 2). Therefore a characteristic of Abraham and of his seed is that he had a TENT in this world. Although we, with Abraham, are heirs of the world (to come — Rom. 4), and possess all things (*in relation to Christ*, 1 Cor. 3). We are, as it were, dwelling in tents when we testify publicly that we do not belong to this world (under Satan), maintain the Lord's claims on everything here, and show that we are on our way to a new world (as those who already belong to it) where righteousness will dwell.

It was God's joy to share by promise the country of His purpose (from the foundation of the world) with Abraham and his children. For us who are Christians, this is a type of what God has reserved for us in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1-3; Ti. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:9). Do we appreciate this? Do we rejoice that our Lord is now crowned with glory and honour? Do we already enjoy the spiritual blessings of our heavenly land, while not selfishly retaining our blessings exclusively for ourselves, but sharing them with each other in a spirit of worship and adoration?

Abraham's seed and the land — these two belong inseparably together. Genesis 12:7 speaks of the land, and of the presence and the worship of the Lord there. Chapter 13:15f speaks of an earthly people, but seen in connection with the world to come; 15:4f of a heavenly people; and 15:18ff of the vastness of the land.

God's covenant with Abraham and his seed is based on the circumcision, which speaks of the putting aside of the flesh (see also Rom. 2 & 4; Col. 2; Phil. 3; and Josh. 5). In order for us to enjoy the land, our heavenly blessings in Christ, we should apply the truth of circumcision in a practical way. We are here to live for God, but do we put His interests first? If we do, then we will be Abraham's children and sons. We will return to this later.

Abraham was a worshipper. According to the light given to Him by God, he responded in worship and adoration. Four times we read that Abraham built an altar (note carefully the progress he made in this!) in order to honour and worship his God. One time when he had to be brought back from a path of backsliding, he returned to his altar. All this underlines again the thought of putting God's interests first, and of giving a true response. We will see this again later when we consider sonship.

### 3. Why is Abraham called a friend of God?

Because Abraham appreciated what is for God, and because he identified himself with God's supreme interests, he is called a friend of God, one who loves God. To me, one of the most wonderful verses in relation to Abraham is: "Your father Abraham exulted in that he should see My day, and he saw and rejoiced" (Jn. 8:56). Those who, through grace, belong to Abraham's children (Rom. 4, Gal. 3-4) should be characterised by the same interests, motives, spiritual zeal, and joy.

In the days of Jehoshaphat only a small remnant was linked with the land and its God-chosen centre of worship (important elements we saw in Abraham's life). When this remnant was attacked by the enemy, its king referred to Abraham (2 Chr. 20:7). In days of failure, we often find God's people referring to God's unconditional promises to Abraham as a basis of their pleading with God. But the point here is especially striking. It shows how, when the same interests that once had been of vital interest to Abraham were at stake for this offspring of his, the same attitude that once had characterised their forefather was found among them. This little remnant, under their God-fearing king, did not want to give up one inch of their inheritance.

We, who are Christians, have also an inheritance as we have seen before. How about our zeal to defend and keep this? Do we also refer to such convincing arguments, when we are under attack from the enemy? "Hast not Thou, our God, dispossessed the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and given it for ever to the seed of Abraham, Thy friend (or: who loved thee)?" (2 Chr. 20:7).

One day, the future remnant, in similar circumstances as in Jehoshaphat's days, will be faced with idolatry of the worst kind all around them in the promised land. What will this seed of Abraham do then? In His sovereign grace, God will produce the same features in them as He did in Abraham (read Isa. 41). God will publicly identify Himself with this poor, small remnant and will speak in an affectionate way of them as being "the seed of Abraham, My friend" (v. 8). He will see in them the same interests and motives Abraham had. Does God see these things also in you and me who are now living in a "Christian" world filled with idolatry and evil, where God's interests do not count?

The New Testament also testifies of Abraham as the friend of God (Jas. 2:22-24). Abraham's faith was expressed by his willingness to offer up Isaac on the altar, not only in obedience to, but also out of love for God. But where can we find Abraham's seed as the friend of God in James 2? The answer is: In verse 5. "Hear, my beloved brethren: Has not God chosen the poor as to the world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to them that love Him?" (v. 5).

It is remarkable that we find an expression of this kind five times in the New Testament. I would suggest this speaks of man's responsibility in response to God's interests. First of all, we have man's responsibility with regard to the heavenly land, God's purpose and promises and His beloved Son (our true Isaac — 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Jn. 4:19; 5:1), then in his faithfulness to God in a world of evil (Jas. 1:12), and finally in his putting God's interests first (Jas. 2).

*To be cont'd*

## **THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER (6)**

—J. Rouw

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 26:39 the Lord Jesus is praying in Gethsemane. "And going forward a little He fell upon His face, praying and saying, My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me; but not as *I* will, but as *Thou* [wilt]." Then in verse 42: "Again going away a second time He prayed saying, My Father, if this cannot pass [from Me] unless I drink it, Thy will be done." This shows us that the Father had already answered, "No." The Father had already said "No" to the first prayer. Therefore the Lord said, "My Father, if this cannot pass [from Me] unless I drink it, Thy will be done." The Lord prayed three times, but He always added, "Thy will be done."

Here is a lesson for us. If we are not certain that the prayer is according to the will of God, we must pray, "Thy will be done." But now just imagine! The Lord Jesus is the beloved Son of the almighty God. What must it have been for the Father to see His Son bowed down in the dust, His sweat becoming as great drops of blood! This happened the night before He was going to die. It was not suffering for our sins, but anticipation of what He had soon to suffer in those three hours of darkness, and that filled Him with horror.

Since He was God, He knew everything that would come over Him, but those feelings He had as Man in His pure soul. He, the Man Christ Jesus, said, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me." But if the Lord Jesus had not died, heaven would have remained empty, the Father's house would be empty. Then we would have been eternally in hell.

There was no answer on His prayer. The Father said, "No My Son, it is not possible!" Later, hanging on the cross, He called out and did not get an answer. During these hours of darkness He called: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Darkness. No answer at all! He entered death, the death of a sinner. That was what was so moving about His suffering. That the spotless One, the perfect One, that He went unanswered.

Unanswered! An unanswered prayer! But what was more remarkable? Through His suffering and dying innumerable many will be eternally in glory. And thus we see that things become infinitely more beautiful when God doesn't answer a prayer. In Psalm 22, after the Lord called out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me," we read in the middle of the Psalm: "Thou answered Me" (v. 21). "From the horns of the buffaloes (from the power of the devil) hast Thou answered Me." Did God answer Him then after all? Yes. When did God answer Him? When He hung upon the cross? No, not then, but on the first day of the week. On the resurrection morning God answered Him. And what do we read then? "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee."

The Lord Jesus possesses a congregation, an Assembly, or a Church, made up of all true Christians, all true believers from the day of Pentecost, both those who have already died and those who still live on earth today. To which denomination they belong is not the main issue. It concerns all those who are children of God, those who are redeemed, for those are His brethren, brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus. He Himself said so. *We* don't call Him *our* Brother, but He is not ashamed to call us *His* brethren. How come? Because God did not answer His prayer. That is a salvation secret, that we will understand more and more in eternity. Here we cannot fathom it. But we see here a little of God's thoughts, of God's wisdom, grace, and love, even at the cost of His own Son. The Father's heart was rent when He saw how His Son suffered. But God, who is love, so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. And now, let all of us accept this offer of grace and say, "Thank you Lord," even today.

*To be cont'd*

## **CONFERENCE OUTLINE (4)**

### **XIV. THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BELIEVER**

#### **A. Promise**

1. Fulfilment — Jn. 14:17
2. When does someone receive the Holy Spirit? — Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Acts 5:32; Gal. 3:2,5,14 (Cf. Acts 2:2-4,38-39; 8:14-17; 9:17-18; 10:43-47; 11:13-18; 19:1-7)
3. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit — 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; Gal. 4:6
4. Sealing with the Holy Spirit — Jn. 6:27; 2 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:13; 4:30
5. Anointing with the Holy Spirit — Lk. 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Jn. 2:20,27
6. To be filled with the Holy Spirit — Ex. 28:3; 31:3; Dt. 34:9; Lk. 1:15,41,67; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:9,52; Eph. 5:18
7. To be full of the Holy Spirit — Jn. 3:34; Lk. 4:1; Acts 6:3,5; 7:55; 11:24

#### **B. Results of the indwelling of the Spirit**

1. He makes us Christians — Rom. 8:9; Jude :19; Acts 11:26
2. He causes us to know the Father and our relationship to Him as His children — Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 2:18
3. He gives the knowledge of the love of God — Rom. 5:5 82

4. He is the source through which we can be for blessing to those around us — Jn. 7:38-39
  5. He gives power and ability for service — Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:13; 12:1-11; 1 Pet. 1:12
  6. He leads us in service — Acts 16:6-10; 13:1-4; 20:28
  7. He leads us in our lives — Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16-18,25
  8. He is the earnest of God, the pledge, that His promises will be fulfilled — Eph. 1:14; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5
- C. The Holy Spirit will...
1. ...be our Comforter and Advocate (Paracletes) — Jn. 14:16-17; Rom. 8:26-27
  2. ...lead in all truth — Jn. 16:12-13; Acts 15:28; 1 Cor. 2:10-12
  3. ...announce things to come — Jn. 16:13
  4. ...reveal the glory of the exalted Christ — Jn. 16:10, 14-15; 2 Cor. 3:18
- D. He enables us to enjoy even here below:
1. The personal glory of the Father and the Son and to worship them — Jn. 4:14-15; 2 Cor. 3:8
  2. The future eternal blessings — Jn. 7:37-39; 2 Cor. 3:8
  3. Our oneness of life with Christ — Jn. 14:20; 1 Jn. 5:11,20
- E. Our responsibility in connection with it
1. To be filled with the Spirit — Eph. 5:18
  2. To pray in the Holy Spirit — Eph. 6:18; Jude :20
  3. To keep the good deposit — 2 Tim. 1:14
  4. To be led by the Spirit in our practical life — Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16-26
  5. To have and to be able to use the sword of the Spirit — Eph. 6:17
  6. Not to grieve the Holy Spirit — Eph. 4:30
  7. Not to quench the Holy Spirit in the Assembly — 1 Thess. 5:19

#### XV. SALVATION

- A. What is it? — Eph. 2:1-10; Tit. 3:4-7
- B. What is the means? — Acts 11:14; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 1:13
- C. From what are we saved? — Acts 2:40; Rom. 5:9; Jas. 5:20; Mt. 1:21
- D. Salvation as a present possession — Eph. 2:5,8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:9-10
- E. Salvation as a future hope
  1. General — Rom. 13:11; 2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 1:14; 2:10; 10:39
  2. By Christ's life and service — Rom. 5:10; Heb. 7:25
  3. At His coming — Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 5:8-9; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5
  4. The salvation of the body — Rom. 8:22-25; Phil. 3:20-21
- F. Our responsibility in connection with it is:
  1. To confess our faith — Rom. 10:10; cf. 1 Pet. 3:21
  2. To work it out — Phil. 2:2
  3. To be guided by the Word — 1 Cor. 15:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:15; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:2
  4. To avoid a wrong walk — 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; Heb. 2:3; Jas. 5:20

*To be cont'd*

#### OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (39)

#### 81. NAAMAN THE SYRIAN — 2 Kings 5

##### *Outline*

1. Naaman's Sickness 2 Kings 5:1-7
2. His Healing 2 Kings 5:8-19
3. Gehazi's Sin 2 Kings 5:20-27

##### *Explanation*

1. Naaman enjoyed the best of everything in life. Besides having a high position, he was famous, rich, honorable, and he was loved by the King and by his servants (who called him "father" — v.13). But he was leprosy. God used his leprosy to save him. God used a little captive maid as His instrument

2. Naaman's cure was simple, but humiliating. It brought his sinful, proud character to light (v. 11). Through faith he was healed and made clean. His humility, his confession (v. 15), his offer of money, his desire to worship Jehovah, and his new conscience (v. 18) were the fruits of new birth.

3. The sin of Gehazi illustrates the truth of 1 Timothy 6:6-10. Since it gave Naaman the impression that God's grace was not free after all, he was severely punished.

### *Lesson*

Naaman in his leprosy is a picture of every one who has not yet come to the Lord Jesus for cleansing. Notwithstanding their many virtues, such people are sinners. The young girl was faithful and honored Jehovah and His testimony in a foreign country. How different was the king of Israel. Though he lived in the country of the prophet, he did not believe. So there are today many professing Christians who do not know the salvation of God. Leprosy speaks of sin. It is repugnant, contagious, and incurable. Healing is only possible through faith (Rom. 3:23-24; Ps. 103:1-5), and the Jordan is a picture of the death of Christ, in whom alone there is salvation (Rom. 6:6-7).

## **82. ELISHA PROTECTED BY ANGELS. SAMARIA BESIEGED AND DELIVERED. — 2 Kings 6:8-7:20**

### *Outline*

1. Elisha in Dothan 2 Kings 6:8-23
2. Samaria Besieged and Delivered 2 Kings 6:24-7:20

### *Explanation*

1. Naaman's healing did not help to change the heart of either king. The King of Syria wanted to capture Elisha (2 Ki. 6:13), forgetting that he not only had to do with Elisha, but with the Lord, with the One whose eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth (2 Chr. 16:9), and the King of Israel desired to smite the Syrians he had captured so easily (2 Ki. 6:21). Elisha's servant in his fearfulness cried: "Alas, my master! How shall we do?" How encouraging was Elisha's answer: "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them". After Elisha prayed, the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw the horses and chariots of fire, the angelic host that is sent out for service to help those who shall inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14).

2. During the siege the need in Samaria had so increased that the king wore sackcloth. Hunger drove mothers to eat their children. Jehoram did not blame himself, but Jehovah and Jehovah's servant, and decided Elisha should be killed. The unbelieving captain mocked the word of God. He did not escape the judgment. All in Samaria received mercy, he alone was judged: trampled upon in the gate (2 Ki. 7:20).

### *Lesson*

Notwithstanding the wickedness of the king, the Lord had mercy and announced delivery.

The four lepers are an important lesson for every believer. They were unclean, incurable ill, and, like all the people in Samaria, they were facing death. In despair they went to the camp of the Syrians and found bread for their hunger and many treasures. Then they told the Samaritans and these, in turn, experienced the same.

So it is for every sinner. When the sinner turns to God, he will experience salvation, delivery, and many blessings. Even God's earthly people will experience the same. When they turn to God in a future day, they will gain the blessings from God. Meanwhile, who can hold his peace (2 Ki. 7:9)? The lepers could not, can you?

"We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace" (cf. Ezek. 33:7-9).

*To be cont'd*

## RETURN AND REVIVAL

—M. Muller

### A Study in Hosea

*A conference, recently convened in Guelph, Ontario, presented the theme, RETURN, REVIVAL, AND RESURRECTION, a clear call for individual and collective hearts to return, away from both worldliness and legalism, was given, as well as a challenge to move forward in the gospel. Following is an edited summary of the first message.*

### *A door of hope in failure*

Failure does not have to be final. God can give us a door of hope in the valley of Achor or "trouble" (Hos. 2:15). When Israel suffered defeat after the victory of Jericho, they found themselves under God's hand of judgment in the valley of Achor (Josh. 7:26). There the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger and led them to victory. In the valley of trouble, God gives a door of hope. Together we may set out to find a door of hope in our valley of trouble.

What is a door of hope? How do you find that door? How do you go through that door? Hosea, the name of the writer of this book, means deliverance or salvation. It is similar to Joshua and to the New Testament name Jesus, the One who would save His people from their sins. So right at the very beginning Hosea reminds us of the Saviour. *He* is the door of hope. We cannot put it more simply. In whatever valley of trouble we may be — personally, as a family, in business, in our job, or in the assembly, the Church — the Lord Jesus is that door, the door of salvation for the unsaved and a door of hope in failure.

### *Different applications of Hosea's message*

We can read the prophet Hosea in different ways. First, he spoke directly into history, into the situation of the ten northern tribes in their final hours before God's judgment would fall upon them. Even at that late hour, in all their failures, with the enemy at the door to carry them away captive, God was still ready to give them a door of hope out of the valley of trouble.

Then, in a future day, Israel, God's earthly people, will be at their extremity. You may think they are in trouble today, but that's nothing. You may think they were in trouble in the holocaust, but that will seem like a picnic compared to the valley of trouble that they will find themselves in someday, these dear people of God. In that day, God will give them a door of hope, and not only to them but to the whole world — the return of the Lord Jesus to this earth to set up His kingdom.

Finally, we can also read this book and apply its principles practically today and find that same door of hope available for you and for me.

### *When there is failure, He tears us*

"I will go and return to My place" (Hos. 5:15). God has spoken. As we go on in our departure, sin, and failure, God cannot bless us with His presence. He cannot be there in freedom and liberty, but has to withdraw out of our lives, homes, and congregations until three things happen. First, we must acknowledge our offenses, where we have gone wrong. Second, we must seek His face. And third, in our affliction we must seek Him early (earnestly). *Then* the process of restoration begins.

God cannot act in mercy until we confess. It is a change of heart that will begin to open the door for God to act. We can begin now by saying to one another, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord" (Hos. 6:1). Is this what the holy Spirit is producing in our hearts? Come let us return to the Lord. There is no other way to that door of hope.

Notice, it does not say "Return to the assembly." The assembly is right and proper, and it is God's purpose for His people to be gathered together around the person of His Son. But we should return, not to the place first, but to the Lord; not to the truth first, however necessary that truth is today, but to the Lord. For the truth without the Lord won't help us. It would only make us proud. We should not even return to our teachers, however blessed and precious their ministry may

be, but first to the Lord. *There* is the point of departure, and there is no restoration without returning to the point of departure.

### *When we return, He heals us*

Then we read: "For He has torn, and He will heal us, He has smitten and He will bind us up" (Hos. 6:1). We begin to recognize our present state, God's hand of discipline on us. *He* has torn.

We may say, "It is the enemy who has done it." That is true. God allows the enemy to tear us. He uses instruments which we cannot understand in order to bring His judgment upon us. When we recognize that, we are already on our way. We are being exercised, not despising the chastening of the Lord, not fainting, or giving up under the discipline of the Lord (Heb. 12:4-8). "Lord You are speaking to me. This situation is because I have failed. Not my wife, not my children, not my brother, not my sister, but it is me Lord. It is me. Your hand has been on me, You have torn and You have smitten."

We recognize that all the things that burden us are God's judgment on us. Then in faith we say, "Well, Lord, if You have allowed all this to happen, if You are the One who has torn and many of us are hurting, then, Lord, You are the One who can heal. You are the One who can bind up." We recognize God's hand in discipline and we recognize that He is the One who can heal.

### *Revival takes time*

"After two days will He revive us" (Hos. 6:2). Why not on the first day? Because it takes time. The way back is neither short nor easy, but it is sure. In that distant land of famine, the prodigal son came to himself and remembered that in the father's house the hired servants had bread to spare, while he was perishing with hunger he felt the hand of God upon him. He said, "I will arise, go to my father, and say, 'I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called your son. Just make me as one of your hired servants.'" But the father couldn't do that. It was his son!

The process of return is not instant, but it is sure. On the second day, there are things to be confessed. You and I know what is in our lives that needs to be made right with the Lord. If we ask Him to show us what this is, He will help us. Suddenly there will be signs of life. He will revive us.

Imagine someone who has been pulled out of the water. They have been drowning and are already unconscious. You give them artificial resuscitation to bring them back and you wonder whether they are going to respond. Then there is a cough, some flickering of the eyelids, or some movement. What a relief! You know there is hope. A revival is starting. That also happens spiritually. It won't be immediate, but God will do it. It is not our efforts alone. We do our part, but then God does what we cannot do. He brings revival. And it does not stop with a few signs of life, or with normal breathing.

When the Lord entered into the home of Jairus and his wife, their little, twelve year old daughter was dead. What did the Lord do? He took her by the hand and said, "Little maid, arise." She came back to life, but she didn't remain breathing quietly on the bed. She rose and began to walk. And that is what it says here, "We shall live in His sight" (Hos. 6:2). God will not stop halfway. If we give Him the chance, He will go all the way, He will revive us, and on the third day, He will raise us up to live in His sight.

### *Resurrection comes on the third day*

Resurrection takes us into the New Testament. The third day implies the power of the resurrection. There is no other way to live the Christian life, no other way to serve, no other way to worship, no other way to witness, no other way to enjoy communion. There is no other way to get victory over the law and legalism, over self and all its awful works, over the world that allures and ensnares us, except in the power of the finished work of Christ, and of His resurrection. Victory is in death and resurrection. On the third day He will raise us up.

What follows? "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord" (Hos. 6:3). Not just a lot of good activity, wonderful as that is, not just expressions of worship and praise, precious as they are, not just a going out to the lost, important as that is, but first of all a personal spiritual growth, which comes in the knowledge of the Lord.

Can you see this door of hope? It is the knowledge of the Lord. Paul said that he counted all things but loss, for one thing, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He forgot the things that were behind him, and pressed on to the



things that were before — the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus. That was the knowledge of the Lord. From here everything else falls in its place.

### *How do we begin? Four examples*

When you go through the book of Hosea, you find four pictures of ourselves which give us ideas of where we can start. First, Hosea says of God's people that Ephraim has mixed himself with the people of the land, and that they are a cake not turned (Hos. 7:8). When you make a pancake, you get one side done, flip it over and do the other side. Who would eat a pancake that has not been turned over — burned on one side and not cooked on the other? That's us. Think of the hours we spend in front of the television, the newspapers and books we read, the lifestyles we adopt, the words we speak, the movies we watch, whether in a theater or with our VCR's. We are a cake not turned, half baked, mixed. Are we willing to make a change?

Second, he says, "Strangers have devoured his strength... gray hairs are here and there upon him and he knows not" (Hos. 7:9). Those of us who have gray hair, remember when we saw the first ones, and we realized that we were getting older. We cannot stop our physical aging, but how tragic to grow old spiritually, to lose our spiritual vigor, and not know it! Like what happened to Samson, the enemy is upon us and we rise up to meet him and don't know that our strength is gone. We have gray hairs, and we don't perceive them.

Third, he writes, "Ephraim also is like a silly dove... they go to Assyria" (Hos. 7:11). Here we have a dove, flitting from one tree to another, looking here, looking there, for rest, for shelter, for food, or whatever. How true this is of our time! So often we behave just like a frantic bird, running to this, running to that, hopping here, and hopping there, reading this, and reading that, not knowing that there is a door of hope in returning to the Lord.

Fourth, Hosea concludes, "They are like a deceitful bow" (Hos. 7:16). You have a flawed weapon. You might have a good arrow, true and straight, and you mount that arrow on the bow and shoot. But it misses its target, because the bow is deceitful. We may know the Scriptures very well, but like a deceitful bow, there is something wrong with us, there is something that needs straightening out. And we'll never get the victory, because we miss the target.

As we study these four examples, we go through that process of acknowledging our sins, allowing God to convict us of what is wrong — in our personal lives, our family lives, in our assembly life — and then we begin to experience the promise! He revives and He will raise us up on the third day and we shall know if we follow on to know the Lord.

### *The balance we need*

Hosea has two themes, God's holiness and God's love, and we desperately need both. Some of us are strong in standing for God's holiness, and some of us seem strong in demonstrating God's love, but it is not easy to speak of both at the same time. We can throw our arm around our brother, or we can point out to our brother how he is wrong, but to do both at the same time is very, very difficult. There is only one place to go where holiness and love come together, the cross. Not only do they stand side by side, or even hand in hand, but they are kissing each other (Ps. 85:10). Holiness and love, mercy and truth, are not opposites. To use a human picture, they are in each other's arms, in the closest possible embrace, at the cross.

The cross means one thing — suffering, pain, and dying. It is going to cost us everything to stand in a position where we can have a sense of both God's holiness and God's love at the same time. We cannot do it in our own strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and by bearing the cross. There is no other way, if we want to follow Christ. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, but without denying ourselves, bearing the cross and following Him, we shall never have both God's holiness and God's love. They are only found together in a setting of pain and of suffering, of breaking and shattering of self, as in the agony of Gethsemane. "Father if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done" (Lk. 22:42).

Consider Hosea's story. God told him to marry Gomer, even though she was going to be unfaithful. He obeyed and married her. And sure enough, she proved unfaithful. She left Hosea, abandoned her three children, went with another man, and ended up on the street for anyone who would pay her a few pieces of silver. What pain, grief, and suffering for that dear prophet! What a breaking it must have been to him, what an agony! Oh, sure, he could have said, "Moses for the hardness of our hearts allowed us to put away our wives" (cf. Mt. 19:8), but he didn't.

But this was not the end. There is no end to the depth of the cross. It is the only way for mercy and truth to go together. When God said, "Hosea," and he replied, "Yes Lord," maybe he was wondering what relief God would give him. But God said, "Hosea, I want you to go out in the market place and find Gomer. She is worthless, sold now as a slave to the highest bidder. I want you to go, pay the price, bring her home and love her!" God's love, is like that. I was that Gomer, but God loved me the way I was. And God loves you like that. This is the challenge, His holiness, to live like Christ, and His love, to love like He loves.

### *The example of Jacob*

At the end of Hosea, God gives Israel a very beautiful picture to help them understand the door of hope. He takes them back to their beginnings, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Referring to Jacob, He says, "He took his brother by the heel in the womb" (Hos. 12:3). When Rebecca was giving birth, there were two boys. Esau was born first, and then Jacob. As he was born, his tiny, little hand was hanging onto his brother's heel. He was called the supplanter. He was going to trip his brother. By fair or foul means he was going to achieve his ends. He had the right goal — he wanted God's blessing — but he bought the birthright from his brother when his brother was hungry, and deceived his old father to get the blessing.

And then what happened? He ended up far away. The sun went down when he left Bethel, and it was night for years in Jacob's life, a night of pain and cold, and suffering away from the Lord. Finally the call came, "Return, go back to the point of departure, to Bethel, the house of God, to the Lord" (Cf. Gen. 35:1). And he went back. There God Himself met him as an Angel and Jacob threw his arms around Him and hung on to Him, because he wanted the blessing. "By his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication" (Hos. 12:3-4). How did the blessing come? How was his name changed from Jacob to Israel, from the cheat to the prince? By God touching the sinew of his thigh and breaking him for the rest of his life. There is no other way. God has to break us. But praise God, He does. Oh, that we might, as it says here, hang on (Hos. 12:5).

### *Return to the Lord*

The last chapter of Hosea begins, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hos. 14:1). The healing follows, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily (think of the purity of the lily), and cast forth his roots as Lebanon (think of the strength of the cedars of Lebanon), his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree (think of the shining of that olive oil, of the fruit in that land of promise), and his smell as Lebanon (think of the fragrance of Christ that shall result), 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. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do anymore with idols?" (Hos. 14:4-8).

The challenge is in verse 8, "From Me is thy fruit found," and in the final verse, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right." But the choice is ours. "The just shall walk in them." We can choose to walk in the ways of the Lord, or we can choose not to do so. "The transgressors shall fall therein." If we walk in them, we will walk through that door of hope and there is no telling what God can do. But if we say, "No," if we hold back, if we don't yield, then we will fall. That door of hope will be a place where, if we turn it down, we will fall. So, we are free to choose. May the Lord help us.

*(References from the KJV)*