

“HOW CAN I GIVE YOU UP?”
[Or, “The Love that Will not Let Me Go”]

Hosea 11:8-11

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INTRODUCTION

Here we have a window “into the heart of God” We see a God who so loves His people that He will “never let them go.” The passage looks beyond His chastisement of His people to their ultimate restoration once Israel truly returns unto the Lord—in the Millennium. Note that they are still “my people” (v. 7)

Some have said that this is the greatest passage in the book.

I. THE GOD WHO CANNOT GIVE UP HIS CHILDREN (8)

Two “poignant questions reveal the depth of God’s love for his people:

- How can I give you up [and surrender you—Ephraim and Israel?
- How can I make you like Admah or treat you like Zeboiim? These cities, along with their better known “sisters” Sodom and Gomorrah, had become proverbial “as the ultimate wickedness” and as a reminder of how devastating Yahweh’s ‘wrath’ and ‘anger’ (v. 9) can be”.

A. He Cannot Surrender His Covenant People. (8a)

B. He Cannot Totally Destroy His Covenant People. (8b)

The point here is that in reality, Israel was very deserving of the same kind of punishment as these cities!

C. His Heart is Turned Over within Him. (8c)

God “cannot bear to give up his chosen people . . . forever”.

Such expressions of “divine reluctance” accomplish two things:

- They show that there is no vindictiveness in divine judgment.
- They show that if judgment is released despite such restraint, “it is because Israel’s sin has gone to the extreme, with no hope of renewal and no trace of contrition to give grounds for compassion” (Anderson, 588).
- “My heart is turned upon me”—i.e. within Him, see also I Sam. 25:36, Jer. 8:18.

D. His Compassions Have Grown Tender. (8d)

He **does chasten them according to the promised covenant curses (Lev. 26; Dt. 28)**. Surely now they will respond to such tender love! As *Cohen* states, God “wishes the sinner to turn from his wickedness and live.” (44) Yahweh’s compassions “are kindled together”—[“grow warm and tender”]. Pusey points

out that “God is infinitely just and infinitely merciful”; there is no conflict between the two (p. 113). Here He shows that He has no pleasure in inflicting ills upon us. **The mercy He shows is from His own goodness—not from any in us real or perceived.** Israel is both justly punished and mercifully spared. “The depth of the sinner’s guilt reflects the more vividly the depth of God’s mercy” Feinberg points out that judgment “is His strange work”; He takes pleasure in mercy and kindness.

II. THE GOD WHO WILL NOT FULLY EXECUTE HIS WRATH UPON HIS CHILDREN (9)

A. What He will not Do

1. Fully carry out His punishment on His people
“I will not”—A statement of God’s mercy. *Again, the Lord speaks of a **future day of restoration**, after the present impending destruction.*
2. Repeat His destruction of them
“I will not destroy again” is literally: “I will not return to destroy”, a familiar Hebrew idiom. After all, Ephraim is His “son” (v. 1).
3. Come against them in heated anger (9d)
“I will not come in wrath.” Literally, “agitation, excitement”. He will not come “in excitement, in irritation” (Laetsch, p. 92).

B. Why He will not Do Such

His refusal to destroy Ephraim is **not based upon Ephraim’s merit—he has none; it is based upon the fact that: “I am God and not man”—“I” is very emphatic.** His ways transcend man’s ways; man is vengeful; God is compassionate and forgiving.

1. He is God, and not man.
 - His Righteous Law had to be fulfilled (Gal. 4:4-5).
 - He had to remove sin from the sinner (Is. 53:6; II Cor. 5:21)
 - He had to satisfy His punitive justice (Is. 53:4-5; Gal. 3:13)
 - His own Son had to become the Propitiation for man’s sin (I Jn. 2:2) and “Jehovah Our Righteousness” (Rom. 3:20-26).
 - In his “absolute justice and perfect love, flawless righteousness and purest grace . . . are united without the slightest conflict in one holy being.”
 - “To whom, then will ye liken me?” (Is. 40:25; 6:3; Ex. 15:11).
2. He is the Holy One
As “the Holy One” who is in their midst He is not governed by sinful passions such as *bitterness and vengefulness*. He promised in the past “wondrous

blessings” if His people would follow him (Dt. 28:1-14) [Wood, p. 214]. As the **Holy One** He will not arbitrarily “clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7b) but He “remains eternally the Lord of unalterable grace” (Ex. 34:6-7a). Laetsch puts this beautifully: “Man often is ruled by his **passions**, by **favoritism**, by **whims and fancies**, by a **spineless love without regard to justice**, or by **stern justice untempered by proper mercy**, by **cruel passion riding roughshod over righteousness and justice**” (p. 91). He does not forget his “gracious promises which He made to their forefathers” (Pusey, p. 114). **Truth and faithfulness are part of the holiness of God**” (p. 114)

God “hates sin and the sinner” (Ps. 5:5-6; Hos. 9:15) and His wrath “burns to the lowest hell (Deut. 32:22)” (p. 91). But, He is also a God who loves sinners and gave His Son for their salvation—while at the same time fulfilling the demands of His righteousness and justice. **HE IS GOD, NOT MAN. HE IS THE HOLY ONE.**

3. He is in a Covenant relationship (“in your midst”). He is “in the midst” of Israel—still their **covenant God**. They must **return to Him**.

III. THE CHILDREN WHO WILL FOLLOW AFTER THEIR GOD (10-11)

“The Lord of eternity, to whom the distant future is as today (2 Peter 3:8), sees the result of His compassion and faithful love” (Laetsch, p. 92). The result of His mercy is that His people “**will walk after the Lord**”—follow Him as the “Commander of the people (Is. 55:4), no longer following their lovers (Hos. 2:5); thus a reversal of 11:2.

These are the “remnant among God’s people”. Note that in Hos 3:4-5 Israel will return “and seek after the LORD their God and David their king, and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.” *Apostasy* in Israel is “never complete and universal; there is always a remnant among the people”

A. They will hear His Roar

The “lion’s roar” represents His clarion (clear) call that will be heard throughout the earth (cf. the blowing of a trumpet—Is. 27:13). Notice the emphatic repetition of “**for He will roar**”. This is a “voice of majesty and awe”. Like a lion that roars to “summon its young”.

B. They will come “trembling”

Humbly, in “eagerness and glad anticipation” (Feinberg, 95). They tremble “in sorrow for their sins. Note that the same verb is emphatically used at the beginning of v. 11.

C. They will follow Him in quick obedience

“As a bird” and “as a dove”—The readiness of their coming, and their responsiveness. “Flying in haste” (Feinberg, 95). No longer is Israel the “silly dove” of 7:11. A dove is proverbial for “the swiftness of its flight as well as for its timidity.” “The startled dove” flies “even faster when frightened” (Cohen, 44).

IV. THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD FULLY RESTORES (11c)

Notice that His people here are called “sons” (v. 10).

A. The Lord brings them from all parts of the Earth

1. “From the West—lit. “the sea”: Mediterranean.

Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were in the East, this represents a later and greater return from around the world—such as that noted in Is. 11:11-12. In these circumstances Israel will dominate their neighbors and Messiah reigns over them.

2. From Egypt—to the Southwest.

3. From Assyria—to the Northeast.

“Egypt” and “Assyria”—Israel’s years of bondage in Egypt and their impending captivity in Assyria. These two nations “**typify the many nations from which God’s people will return in the future day**” (Wood, 214).

B. The Lord settles them in their houses and land

God will “settle them in their homes—assurance of “their permanent residence in their land” [see 2:19]. Thus, they return to their farms.

“Oracle of the Lord”—This is “not idle speculation” (Laetsch, 93). This expression is used in Hosea only here and in 2:13, 16, 21.

CONCLUSION

Can you see that the God of Israel is your God also?

He will not give you up! He will not destroy you! His heart is overturned for you; His compassions are kindled.

Despite your failure, **He will not fully execute His anger—He has done that with His Son!**

HE IS GOD, AND NOT MAN. HE IS THE HOLY ONE IN YOUR MIDST!

One day we too will assemble in His kingdom with His people Israel. And then we will live with and follow Him forever.

His is a love that will not let you go!