

God's Garden of Love

Hosea 14:5-9

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

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Introduction: Open your Bible to Hosea 14. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "God's Garden of Love."

God's love is amazing. Listen to the words of A. B. Simpson...

"Let us but feel that God has His heart set upon us, that He is watching us from those heavens with tender interest, that He is following us day by day as a mother follows her babe in his first attempt to walk alone, that He has set His love upon us, and in spite of ourselves and our failures, He is working out for us His higher will and blessing, as far as we will let Him – and then nothing can discourage us."¹

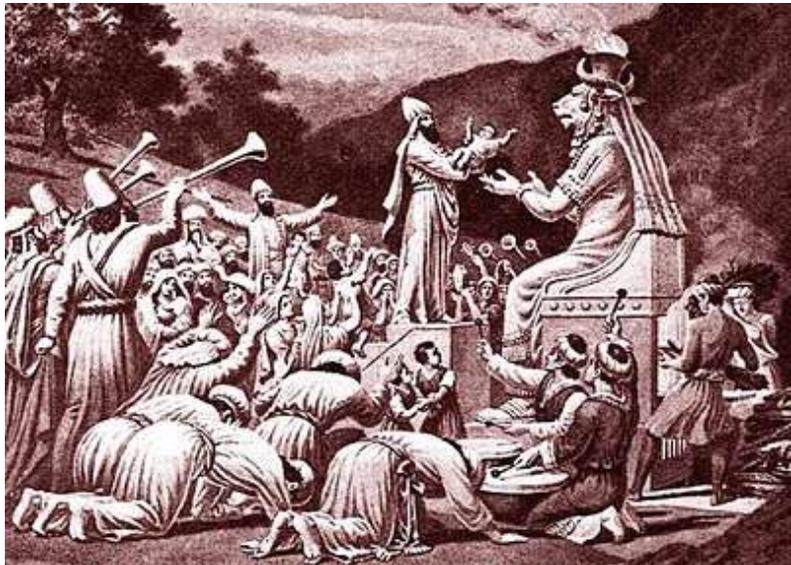
- A. B. Simpson

YHWH or Baal: Which Garden?

Throughout the book of Hosea, God's people have been acting like the prostitute – playing the whore in the gardens of Baal and Asherah. The Canaanite paganism is very much associated with agriculture.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, they found a land of farmers, not shepherds, as they had been in the wilderness. The land was fertile beyond anything the Hebrew nomads had ever seen. The Canaanites attributed this fertility to their god Baal, and that is where the Israelites problems began. Could the God who had led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness also provide fertile farms in the Promised Land? Or would the fertility god of Canaan have to be honored? Maybe, to be safe, they should worship both; Yahweh and Baal. Baal was presented in human form with the head and hands like a bull.

At times of crisis, Baal's followers sacrificed their



¹ A.B. Simpson. *Christ of the 40 Days: Experiencing the Risen, Triumphant Lord* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2014),

children, apparently the firstborn of the community, to gain personal prosperity. The Bible called this practice “detestable” (Deut. 12:31, 18:9-10).

INVOLVEMENT QUESTION: BAAL GARDENS IN OUR LIVES

What are some Gardens of Baal and Asherah in our lives? We go to them because it gives us instant “whatever.” What are the false comforters in our lives that we need to get rid of? We know these are Baal Gardens because they cost us time and emotional energy, and we end up with great loss.

- Pity parties instead of refocusing on serving God and others
- Winning an argument instead of remaining silent/trusting God

What are some Baal Gardens in your life?

- Thought life – World as opposed to God
- Friends – people that love Jesus / those that bring you down
- Media/Movies that are sensual / worldly / violent or *that which is pure*

God’s Garden

As the book of Hosea ends, we basically have the Lord pleading with Israel to leave the fertility gardens of Baal and Asherah and come to His garden of love. The scene in Hosea 14:5-9 is so descriptive that the sights, smells and sounds are very similar to the Song of Solomon where the prophet seems to be alluding. God wants us to come into His garden of love. The question remains: will you and I listen and return to the comfort of His presence?

What do we gain in God’s garden of love?

- Growth
- Protection
- Wisdom

I. Growing in God’s Garden, vs.5a

Hosea 14:4-6, “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. 5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; 6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.”

The Heals our Sinfulness

God not only promises to love us, but to hear our apostasy – our “fallings away.” He will change the nature of our heart as Eze. 36:26 says. He puts His Spirit in us.

INVOLVEMENT QUESTION: AREAS GOD HAS HEALED YOUR APOSTASY

What are some areas of apostasy God has healed you from? How has he done it?

The Garden of God

This last set of promises is painted in a series of extravagant images that may well be the most beautiful and poetic section of the book. They describe God's garden of love. They are all pastoral and caring in nature.

So often we settle for the Baal gardens in our lives. We need to be done with those gardens. Baal gardens are like plastic inflatable trees. They give instantaneous relief from the sun, but there is no fruit on them. And they wither quickly in the blistering heat. They are gone before we know it. God's garden is like the "oaks of righteousness" that can endure the storms. It can give us the fruit we need. It does stink like Baal's garden. God's garden emanates the life-giving aroma of Christ!

I Will Love You Freely, Unrelentingly

Hosea 14:4a, "I will love them freely." The word for love is AHAB, and it means to be a friend or covenant partner.² It's meaning is similar to HESED. To love freely.

Out of the Ruins...

In light of this amazing love, we remember the judgment of which the earlier chapters which was given in a harsh and sudden manner. Ruin results. But from the ruins, like plants or trees gradually forcing down their roots and rising above the destruction, the people would again begin to grow under God's divine presence and blessing.³

God says, "I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; 6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. 7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. 8 O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit."

Though they come so close to destruction, the people would again begin to grow under God's divine presence and blessing. God presents Himself in the New Testament as a garden in John 15.

God's Anger Toward His People?

We read in Hosea (8:5), that God's "anger" was "kindled against" His people. Now in chapter 14:4 – "My anger has turned from them." Any loving mother or father knows that anger does coexist with love. We find God angry with Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam; and he does sometimes "visit us with the rod" and "with stripes." Yet he will never "utterly take" away his covenant faithfulness (hesed) from His people.

Psalm 89:30-33, "If his [David's] children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules, 31 if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, 32 then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes, 33 but I will not remove from him my steadfast love (hesed) or be false to my faithfulness."

Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs observes: "A man maybe angry with his wife, or child, or friend, whom he yet dearly loves. And God is said to be thus angry with his people, when the effects of displeasure are manifested towards them. Now God promises not only to 'love them

² Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997). Exported from Logos Bible Software, 11:55 AM July 15, 2015.

³ Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Minor Prophets: an expositional commentary* (p. 113). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

freely,' but to clear up his countenance toward them, to make them by the removal of judgments to see and know the fruits of his fierce love and bounty toward them."⁴

INVOLVEMENT QUESTION: CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Just because God forgives us when we display repentance does not mean there are no consequences. Consider some places in the Bible where sin was forgiven but consequences continued. How about the life of David?

- Sin with Bathsheba – lost the kingdom eventually to Absalom.
- The census counting – lost 70,000 in a plague in Israel in 1 day.
- While we know all eternal consequences are removed in Christ, what are some temporary consequences you have suffered because of sin?

GOD'S GARDEN DESCRIBED

God is Like the Dew

Now God begins to describe His garden of love.

Hosea 14:5a, "I will be like the dew to Israel..." God promises He will be like the early dew of morning—quiet but ever present and effective. They will be like flowers, trees, vines, and fields of grain. The "dew" (vs. 5) signifies a return of God's favor. Dew is gentle (unlike a downpour, which can become a flood), but agriculture in Israel cannot survive without it. The evening dew waters the earth most copiously when it is most needed, in the summer.⁵

Jeremiah Burroughs Quote

God will be to them like a dew – applied to the people to give them nourishment. Puritan pastor Jeremiah Burroughs describes how God is a dew to Israel through the ministers of His word:

"The ministers of God must apply the word to their people. The prophet preaches at Samaria against the sins of Samaria, and tells them to their faces, that for their rebellion they shall be made a desolation. Thus did all the prophets; they made Jerusalem to know her abominations (Isa. 58:1; Ezek. 16:2). So did Christ himself apply the word particularly to his hearers (Mt. 11:21, 23; 23:37-38; Jn. 4:17-18); so did the apostles (Acts 2:36-37). This is the only way to convince and convert men; what is spoken generally to all, few will apply to themselves."⁶

God Will Give Us His Beauty

Hosea 14:5b, "he shall blossom like the lily." Yahweh's promises to Israel encompass every aspect of lavishness and health by means of metaphors derived from plant life. The lily (or yellow iris) signifies beauty and growth.⁷ God wants us to be people of godly character. He will bring it if we follow the process of discipleship outlined in Mt. 28 and Tit. 2 (and other places).

We will blossom in the Lord – in our character – in our attitudes – in our friendships – in the ways we touch other people's lives. Why do we play in the swamplands of sin when we could be on the rolling hills of God's beautiful garden? Why do we live in the wilderness desert

⁴ Burroughs, Jeremiah, 1599-1646; Hall, Thomas, 1610-1665; Reynolds, Edward, 1599-1676. An exposition of the prophecy of Hosea (Kindle Locations 37275-37279). Edinburgh : J. Nichol.

⁵ Garrett, D. A. (1997). *Hosea, Joel* (Vol. 19A, p. 274). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Burroughs, *ibid.*

⁷ Garrett, 274.

of bad friendships / bad character and excuse making and lazy habits of no Bible study or personal prayer to God?

We often seek for beauty in places that are really just mud heaps. I am reminded of the quote from C. S. Lewis, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”⁸

Beauty to our Wilderness Places

God can restore beauty to our wilderness places.

Joel 2:25-26, “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. 26 You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.”

Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

God’s Garden of Abiding Love in Jesus

God’s good plans for you are weaved into His garden of love. Consider **John 15:1-11**, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

God Will Give us Health & Endurance – Oaks of Righteousness

Hosea 14:5c, “he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon.” This passage is very similar to what God promises us in **Isaiah 61:3**, “to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.”

God wants us to be “rooted and grounded” in the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17).

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*

Growth in God

Hosea 14:6, “his shoots [roots] shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. 7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.”

Roots and aroma. Our godly character will blossom.

Lebanon (vs. 5, 6, 7), the final word in each verse, symbolizes the pinnacle of abundance and fertility in dramatic contrast to the bleak, almost treeless terrain of Palestine in Hosea’s day.⁹

“[olive] trees of Lebanon” (v. 5)

“fragrance [from the flowers] like Lebanon” (vs. 6)

“the vine... and the wine of Lebanon” (vs. 7)

Song of Solomon

So much of the imagery is so similar to the Song of Solomon, that it is likely the allusion is to the love ballad of Solomon for the poor Shulamite farm girl.

Solomon’s song is about the love he shares with a peasant girl who becomes his princess. This girl was not someone who should have been on the radar of a great king. The Shulamite girl was so poor that her brothers made her a shepherdess—“they made me keeper of the vineyards” (Song 1:6). This was not a flattering vocation for a girl. Not much was on her side. She was impoverished and without striking natural beauty. Yet Solomon loved her and wrote this letter as the standard for marital love in the Bible.

Everything about Solomon seeking a poor peasant farm girl to marry is meant to tell the greatest love story ever told. This is the story of how God can love the most unworthy people. God takes impoverished sinners and pursues them. He overcomes them with His relentless love.

Lebanon’s prominence in Solomon’s Song is evident: once they are married, Lebanon is the lover’s favorite romantic getaway (Song 4:8) known for its streams (4:15), wood (3:9), mountain (7:5; lit. ‘tower’), cedars (5:15), and fragrance (4:11; cf. Hos.14:6) and gardens.¹⁰

INVOLVEMENT QUESTION: TESTIMONIES OF RESTORATION

What are some times when you were backslidden as a believer and God delivered you?

II. **Protection** in God’s Garden, vs. 7-8

Hosea 14:7-8, “They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.”

God’s garden is our protection. It is the only place we can flourish. Outside of God’s garden our families will fall apart. Our hearts will become selfish and evil.

In God’s garden we have our joy full, like the “wine of Lebanon.” Some of you have never tasted wine. We don’t need it today like they did back then for sanitary drinking and for medicine. Yet there is another effect of wine – that is joy. It is wrong to be drunk, but one of the side effects of drinking a little watered down wine for health purposes was a sense of joy.

But that sense of joy from wine is only an illustration of where true joy comes from . When God is our garden and we abide in Him we are protected.

⁹ Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 24, p. 242). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁰ Burroughs, *ibid.*

We are **tended** to by God Himself. Our **roots** are deep with **flourishing**. Our vines **blossom** with fruit. People will know – the fame of our joy and well being of God will be like the famous **wine of Lebanon**.

God is offering His love and care—this is our only hope; to reject Him is suicide; no other gods are worth the material from which you make them.¹¹

III. **Wisdom in God’s Garden**, vs. 9

Hosea 14:9, “Whoever is wise, let him [he alone may] understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him [he alone may] know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright [the righteous] walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.”

There are two types of people: those who follow God in the right way, and those who stumble over what God says. These are the righteous and the wicked. How may we know which one we are?

Only the Humble Can Understand

The point is that *one must be wise in order to understand the message of God’s grace in Hosea*. Jesus said the Father must draw – the Spirit must illumine the mind – faith and repentance must be granted.

In this sense the words of Hosea are like the parables of Jesus. They both instruct and confuse; they both explain and disorient. They are not simply riddles, that is, word games that are interesting until the proper solutions are found and then can be laid.¹² The words of Hosea are meant for only the humble to receive. **Only the humble will understand the seriousness** of God’s rebuffed covenant love.

Only the humble will see their sin and return to Him.

A Regenerated Mind – A.W. Pink Quote

The essence of verse 9, is that you must have a regenerated mind to understand all God’s ways. **A.W. Pink** defined the new birth. He said: “Regeneration consists in a radical change of heart, for there is implanted a new disposition as the foundation of all holy living; the mind being renovated, the affections elevated, and the will emancipated from the bondage of sin.”

INVOLVEMENT QUESTION: SIGNS OF REGENERATION

In your testimony of salvation, how did you know you were regenerated? How do you know God will bring you to final redemption?

Conclusion

Leave the gardens of Baal! Come into the love, and nourishment and protection of YHWH’s garden of love. Be rooted in Christ! Be grounded in Him! Emanate His aroma! Let the fame of His wine and joy be your testimony! As we close this prophecy of Hosea, remember God’s love is relentless! **I will love you UNRELENTINGLY!** Hosea 14:4a, “I will love them freely.” As I said, it means to be a friend or covenant partner. God loves us freely, or unrelentingly. This is the theme of Hosea and of the entire Bible!

¹¹ Hubbard, 244.

¹² Garrett, 282.