The Book of Hosea

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Chapter 4**

* **4:1-14– Lawlessness, adultery and ignorance pronounced**
* **Verse 1**– This chapter commences the second section of the book which emphasizes God’s faithfulness and Israel’s faithlessness. Similar to chapter 2, the setting in this chapter seems to represent that of a court setting.
* Hosea calls on the people to listen to God’s word. Notice the emphasis by the prophets is always placed on God and not them (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 1:10; 28:14; 34:1; Jer. 2:4; 7:2; Amos 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 7:16). The people need to understand it is God speaking and this is His message (Amos 1:2).
* The audience is broadly spoken of as the sons of Israel but, to be sure, this is the northern kingdom. The LORD has a “case” against these who inhabit the land. The word case that is used here is the word we use when speaking of a court case or a trial. The idea is that Israel has broken its covenant with God and thus merits consequences to be handed down.
* This is seen in the actual accusation brought by God (Judge-plaintiff) against Israel (defendant). Three particular attributes Israel has failed to keep is mentioned as a representation of the covenant made with God: **Faithfulness**, **kindness** and **knowledge**.
* As has been mentioned the faithfulness in Israel is lacking. This word can also be translated “truthfulness.” This word directly relates to how we should love our neighbor in word and deed. This was not common among Israel during these days (Ex. 18:21; 1 Sam. 12:24; Isa. 59:13-15; Amos 8:5).
* The word for kindness is the word that we have often used to describe God’s undying love and faithfulness (Ex. 34:6-7; chesed, hesed). It also refers to one showing mercy and compassion. This was foreign to the Israelites in their behavior (Amos 2:6; 8:6). Without such kindness, the ability to practice truth is lost. *“Truth cannot be sustained without mercy; and mercy without truth makes men negligent; so that the one ought to be mingled with the other”* (Jerome).
* Finally, knowledge (the basis for understanding God’s character, what He desires in worship, our responsibilities to Him etc.) is missing. This is a major theme in the book (Hos. 4:1, 6, 14; 5:4; 6:6) and one that God often emphasizes as the source for the downfall of man (Deut. 32:28-29; Isa. 1:3; 44:18; Jer. 4:22; 10:8; Rom. 1:18-32).
* The lack of these 3 qualities demonstrate that even the most rudimentary sense of good and evil is missing from the land. This also is a contrast to 2:19-20 which indicates that there is no existent relationship with God.
* **Verse 2**– God (the accuser) presents further evidence to indict His people for their wrongdoings. There are six particular sins mentioned with 5 of the 10 commandments (possibly more) clearly broken with the occurrence of these sins. The people have rejected the foundation through which God established them as a nation and His own people.
* The word **swearing** may be indicating the use of God’s name in cursing (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; Isa. 48:1). **Deception** (Ex. 20:16; 23:1; Deut. 5:20, **Murder** (Ex. 20:13; Lev. 24:17; Deut. 5:17), **Stealing** (Ex. 20:15; Lev. 19:11; Deut. 5:19), **Adultery** (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 2010; Deut. 5:18), **Violence/ Break out** (Prov. 1:11; 6:17-18; Isa. 1:15; 59:3-6) all aptly indicate the moral condition of the land.
* **Verse 3**– Due to the actions of vv. 1-2, there must be penalties levied on the defendant. The consequences are that of a drought and/or famine in the land. It is pictured as being so bad that all creation if affected (Isa. 24:4-6; Jer. 4:25, 27; 12:4; Ezek. 38:30).
* **Verse 4**– God says no one is to strive or offer reproof. It could be that in light of vv. 1-3, the people might want to blame each other. Whatever the case is, God is motioning that they keep quiet.
* This verse seems to be indicating the attitude of the people (Deut. 17:8-13) against the messengers of God (priest). It could also be referring to the priests themselves who were corrupt and sought to do evil.
* **Verse 5**– The people will stumble by day and the prophet by night. Day and night, judgment is continuous and will come at any time. The reference to “mother” is indicating the destruction of the entire nation (Hos. 2:2; Gal. 4:26).
* **Verse 6**– The destruction of the people comes as a result of no knowledge (1 Sam. 2:12; Prov. 1:30-32; Isa. 5:13). God will reject them from being His priest because they rejected Him (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 10:10-11; Jer. 2:8; Mal. 2:7-8).
* Israel forsaking of the LORD (Hos. 8:14; 13:6) was consistent and thus God advised He would neglect the children (Ex. 20:5-6) of the nation. They would not hear from Him nor receive anything from Him. Some suggest this is speaking directly to the priests in particular and thus their children (the priesthood) would be abandoned.
* **Verse 7**– It could be that this verse is referring to the people of the nation or the priests themselves. The point is that as they multiplied so their sin multiplied. This is aptly seen in the book of Amos with both priests and common people increasing in evil and iniquity (Amos 4:4-5; 5:12; 6:1-6; 7:10-17).
* The Israelites were repeatedly warned about the danger of prosperity and wealth (Deut. 6:10-15; 8:10-14) but they did not heed the warnings and their sin multiplied instead of their love (Deut. 32:15). As a result, God will turn their glory into shame (Psa. 47:4; Ezek. 24:21; Amos 6:8).
* **Verse 8**– The priests “feed” on the sin of the people. It could be a description of literal feeding (Lev. 6:26; 7:6-7; 1 Sam. 2:12-17, 29) or a figurative way of saying that they rejoice in the sin of the people (Isa. 56:11; Rom. 1:32). This is indicated by their desire to sin.
* **Verse 9**– If there was any doubt in the mind of the reader both the priests and the people will be judged and repaid for their deeds (Jer. 23:11-12; Rom. 2:1-9). No one will be exempt because of status or occupation. Sin demands judgment of all.
* **Verse 10**– These priests will eat but not be satisfied (Lev. 26:26; Prov. 13:25; Isa. 65:13-16; Mic. 6:14). The judgment here probably relates to drought, famine or pestilence of some kind.
* Playing the harlot (pursuing false gods; idolatry) will continue among them but with no increase. This ties in directly to chapter 2 where the people were pursuing their idols in connection to their sustenance (2:5).
* God pointed out that it is He who gave them these blessings (2:8-9) and He will take them way because they have stopped listening to Him (Heb. 5:11).
* **Verse 11**– The flagrant idolatry practices of the nation are observed in this verse with the inclusion of wine. Often in pagan practices, the use of strong drink was incorporated to satisfy the feeling of being out of control.
* It should be no surprise that such practices take away the understanding of a people (Prov. 20:1; 23:27-35; Isa. 28:7). God has always condemned this behavior and advisees His people other (1 Pet. 5:8).
* **Verse 12**– The foolishness and emptiness of idolatry is here personified with the mention of the wooden idol the people consult (Isa. 44:18-20; Jer. 2:27; 10:8). The diviner’s wand or staff further solidifies the illustration the ungodly practices Israel was accustomed to doing.
* They are known for their harlotry (Lev. 20:5; Deut. 31:16) and such a spirt has led them away from the One who is truly God and who can help them.
* **Verse 13**– This verse points out the regular and habitual practices the nation engaged in as a part of their idolatry. Mountain tops and hills are a reference to the high places and altars where these sacrifices and incense were offered (Deut. 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:9-10; Isa. 1:29; 57:5; Jer. 3:6, 13).
* Oak, poplar and terebinth trees were known for their shade and the Israelites sought to worship under such “comfortable” circumstances. It’s clear that everything associated with their worship is about pleasing self.
* The “spirit of harlotry” paved the way for these women to commit adultery and immoral acts also closely associated the practices mentioned in the verse. They followed the example of the leaders who led them astray.
* **Verse 14­**– This verse is not by any means saying God will leave these women unpunished or they will be exonerated simply because they are women. The point is just as they were female prostitutes there were also male prostitutes (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7).
* Both men and women are guilty, and God does not show partiality where sin is concerned and yet again the people are said to be without understanding and thus they are ruined.
* **4:15-19– Warning to Judah** 
  + **Verse 15–**The southern Kingdom, who is likely under the rule of Hezekiah at this time, is given a strong warning not to follow the sin of her sister nation. She is warned not to go to Gilgal (Josh. 4:1-7, 19-20; Amos 4:4) or Beth-aven (1 Kings 12:28-33; Amos 4:4-5).
  + Beth-aven (house of idols or house of wickedness) is the same place as Bethel. Since it is no longer a place associated with God but with idolatry, Hosea appropriately refers to it as Beth-aven. They are not to take oaths at these places for it would be useless since it is associated with sin (Isa. 48:1; Jer. 5:2; Amos 8:14).
  + **Verse 16**– Israel is stubborn as a heifer (Deut. 21:18-21; Jer. 7:24) and because of such stubbornness they cannot be cared for by the LORD as a lamb (Ezek. 34). The help that God can give as a Shepherd for His people is left wanting.
  + **Verse 17**– Ephraim (reference to Israel) is joined to their idols. The word join indicates an intimate relationship that they should have had with God but here it’s with their idols (Psa. 81:12). God says to leave them alone (Matt. 15:14) because their minds are made up.
  + **Verse 18**– The idea of the first clause seems to suggest they drink continually till all their liquor is gone or the liquor’s intoxicating effects leads them to harlotry and sin. The leaders love shame (1 Sam. 8:3; Mic. 3:11).
  + **Verse 19**– God will abandon the people like chaff in the wind and they will be swallowed up and tossed to and fro by their own desires (Eph. 4:14). The idea is that their sin will take them further than they wanted to go, and it will be a shameful conclusion.