

God's Lawsuit Against His People

Hosea 4:1

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

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“Assurance is never to be enjoyed on the basis of a past experience. There is need of the present and continuing work of the Holy Spirit...in giving assurance.”

–Jonathan Edwards

Introduction: We are already in the middle of the book of Hosea. The prophet has just bought his prostitute wife back from the slave market. What a love story. And that love story is applied to the nation of Israel in chapter 4. The nation was like a prostitute about to be sold as a slave because of her immorality.

[Quote from MacArthur] So we see an old truth applied to a modern era. But this old truth was first applied to Israel in Hosea 4.

Open your Bible to Hosea 4. Hosea 4 is a summary of the Hosea’s message to Israel. It is really an outline of the rest of the book. It describes a nation in utter freefall from God’s grace. They are in major spiritual decline.

The chapter begins like a court hearing. We can almost hear someone saying, “Hear ye, hear ye, court is in session.” God is about to prosecute His case against Israel. The language is judicial. Israel, like every single one of us, will give an account. God says to Israel in **Hosea 4:1a**, “Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.”

Nations like people live by the laws of the harvest. If you plan something, don’t be surprised that you harvest more than you plant. God brings nations to account.

D.A. Carson puts it this way:

“The language used here implies that God has entered into an argument or quarrel with Israel. Perhaps we should think of a lawsuit, such as was carried out at the gates of the city. We can imagine Hosea approaching the elders sitting for judgment, and announcing that God himself has a dispute to bring. Those who live in the land are accused of two things.”¹

¹ Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition* (4th ed.) (Ho 4:1–3). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

Someone once said: “**Societies...do not fall – the individuals in them do**”² So we are praying for each mother and father, each son and daughter.

Churches Lack the Marks of True Conversion

Listen to the scolding words of God to the religious leaders of Israel. **Hosea 4:1b** (ESV) — “There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land”. Jesus said in the NT, “You shall know them by their fruit [actions].”

A nation in decline has churches that lack the marks of true **conversion** - that of faith working itself out through love. Faith alone is death (James 2). We need to see God working the Gospel in individuals before we will see a change in our country.

Lutzer Quote

Erwin Lutzer, retiring pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago said: "Despite its foundational Christian heritage, America is rapidly degenerating into a godless society. The church in America, although highly visible and active, appears powerless to redirect the rushing secular currents. Mired in a moral and spiritual crisis, America's only hope is a national revival, like God has graciously bestowed in the past."³

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The churches of America can be described as Israel of old.

I. Offense #1: No trust in God's Word. NO FAITH

No Faithfulness to the power of God's Truth

Interestingly, the word “faithfulness” can also be translated “truth”. It “includes both telling the truth and acting in faithfulness, steadfast *love*”.⁴

Like Paul says in 2 Tim. 4:3-5, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound^[a] teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Like many who name the name of the Lord, Israel was "living a lie." We would call this being “genuine”. There were none in northern Israel that was the “real thing”. They were fake. They had ulterior motives for serving God. There was no sincerity.

II. Offense #2: No covenant loyalty to God (manifested in obedient love). NO FRUIT/WORKS

No committed love (“steadfast love” or *hesed*) –

This word has been described as covenant conviction or loyalty. When we make a covenant with someone, we have a much higher level of commitment.

² Reb Bradley, *What's Happened to America?* Accessed 02 July 2008. LINK: http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=16149

³ Erwin Lutzer, *America's Spiritual Crisis, Revival Commentary*, v. 1, n. 2, p. 12.

⁴ Bradley, *ibid*.

Michael P.V. Barrett, a mentor of mine, now Professor of Old Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (with Joel Beeke), tells a story that describes this word:

“If I saw a woman stranded with a flat tire, I might stop and change the tire. That would be a kind gesture expressing compassion and pity. However, if I were on a tight schedule or in a coat and tie, I could pass by, feeling duly sorry for her but feeling no obligation to help. If, on the other hand, that woman were my wife, regardless of schedule or attire or anything, I would stop, change the tire, or at least call our roadside assistance number and wait with her for help to come. The relationship demands my action on her behalf”. That is steadfast love or *hesed*.⁵

God says in **Hosea 6:6** that He was tired of their heartless religious activity. **Hosea 6:6** (ESV) —“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” As God told King Saul of old, “To obey is better than sacrifice.” God doesn't need your money or your offerings. He's already rich. He wants his children's obedience (the ultimate reflection of covenant loyalty), i.e. “If you love me keep my commandments.”

III. Offense #3: No personal Walk with YHWH. NO WALK.

No personal walk and knowledge of God –

Here, according to theologian and pastor James Boice, this is “knowledge is that experiential awakening to God in love that affects our conduct.”⁶ We would simply call this “faith” or “abiding in the Lord”. Northern Israel was filled with professing believers who knew about the Lord, but didn't know Him in a personal way.

Three qualities of Conversion

These three qualities are found in every believer of any age. Sincere faith, committed/obedient love, personal knowledge of God. Israel didn't walk with God.

Alexis de Tocqueville Quote

Alexis de Tocqueville said it this way, “America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.” A nation's whose citizens love the Lord will have the blessing of God. It used to be that the United States honored God and His Word.

- It was assumed that all people would pray and ask His blessing.
- It was assumed that His Word would be taught to our children in school and at home.

⁵ Michael P.V. Barrett. *Love Divine and Unfailing: The Gospel According to Hosea* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2008), 132-133.

⁶ Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Minor Prophets : An expositional commentary* (42). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

Illustration: Most Americans own a Bible. In fact, one study by George Gallup discovered that 92% of households in America own at least one copy. Of those households that own a Bible, the average number of Bibles is three. This includes not only the homes of practicing Christians but hundreds of thousands of atheists as well.⁷

Yet the same study revealed that...

- Only half of adults interviewed nationwide could name any of the four Gospels of the New Testament.
- Just 37% of those interviewed could name all four Gospels.
- Only 42% of adults were able to name as many as five of the Ten Commandments correctly.
- Seven in ten (70%) were able to name the town where Jesus was born, but just 42% could identify him as the person who delivered the Sermon on the Mount

George Washington Quotes

Listen to the words of George Washington in a speech to the Delaware Indian chiefs as he was highlighting the need for a good education. He said these amazing words:

“What students would learn in American schools above all is the religion of Jesus Christ.”

—George Washington in a speech to the Delaware Indian Chiefs May 12, 1779

Washington also said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and Bible.”

A nation is in decline whose citizen’s lack the marks of true faith in God.

A Nation Hostile to God

A nation in decline bear the marks of all that God **hates** – the marks of godlessness.

Hosea 4:2, “there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.”

A nation is in decline when **lawlessness** is on the rise! God begins to enumerate His covenant with Israel, which begins with the Ten Commandments.

A nation whose citizens know the Lord are God-fearing, lawful, conscientious people. As Isaiah said, who was preaching at the same time as Hosea said in Isa. 59:14, “Truth is trampled on in the streets.”

People are willing to break God’s law because they want what they want.

What's Happened to America?

I read an article recently by Reb Bradley on World Net Daily from 2008, entitled “What’s Happened to America?”⁸ Bradley says:

<quote> According to a crime study from the Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, in the last 30 years the murder rate has increased more than

⁷ George Gallup, Jr., *The Role of the Bible in American Society* (Princeton: The Princeton Religion Research Center, 1990)

⁸ Bradley, *ibid.*

100 percent... **While crime is increasing**, stability of family relationships is on a downward spiral. On a national average, marriages are now dissolving at nearly a 50 percent rate of divorce... Now adolescents are not only alienated from their parents, but they sue them for "emancipation." And in one well-known case, a man who had been born with a birth defect, sued his parents for not aborting him... Students are killing their classmates, crime is up, families are falling apart, and academically, student success is at an all-time low. Since 1963 SAT scores have been dropping steadily, from an average score of "980" in 1963 down to a score of "901" more recently... In the last few decades premarital and extra-marital sexual activity has increased markedly. Graphic pornography, once available only on the black market, and popular only with the "lower elements of society," can now not only be found openly in reputable hotels but also in state and federally sponsored public libraries through their internet connections, and is enjoyed as entertainment on many cable connections by the masses. In just the last generation, the number of teenage girls that have become sexually active has increased from 12 percent in 1955 to 70 percent now... <unquote>

Conclusion: Isn't it amazing how relevant this prophecy in Hosea is to our own country?