



BETHEL
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The Book of Hosea, A Survey, Part 10

Hosea 4:1-10,

1 Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; 2 there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

3 Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

4 Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest.

5 You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

7 The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into

shame.

8 They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity.

9 And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.

10 They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish 11 whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.

The Difficulty of Rebuke

It doesn't matter the circumstances; to be on the receiving end of a rebuke is not easy. Yet if our greatest desire is to love, know, and serve the Lord, I hope you see that rebuke and correction will be a necessary part of our growth in grace. And that no doubt is why the Bible exhorts us as it does:

Proverbs 28:23, "He who rebukes a man will afterward find *more* favor than he who flatters with the tongue."

Hebrews 12:11, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Proverbs 27:5-6a, "Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend..."

Truly, rebuke is a necessary and healthy part of our growth in grace.

Now of all the "friends" that we have who might "wound us" via rebuke, we have no greater friend today than Christ! Yet the prospect of being rebuked/confronted by Him is frightening. He is God! Yet, because He is good we are given the exhortation.

Proverbs 3:11-12, "My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord, or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom he delights."

Hosea 4 contains the opening words of a rebuke which lasts for eight chapters! Notice the outline of Hosea. Hosea contains three main divisions:

- Chapters 1-3 which introduce a message of judgment and yet hope through the experience of Hosea in his marriage with Gomer.
- Chapters 4-11 which detail the basis and content of the judgment that was coming to the land.
- Chapters 11-14 which give a comparison and contrast of what Israel and Judah had been and what they were at present.

Now in our survey of Hosea we have walked our way through the whole of Chapters 1-3, looking at the relationship between Hosea/Gomer. Yet our "taste" of this prophecy is not complete. Accordingly I am going to spend a little more time introducing you to the final two divisions of this

prophecy. The first is Hosea 4-11:11 which again explains the necessity of the judgment which was coming to Israel. This judgment revolved around four transgressions of Israel, after a brief introduction (Hosea 4:1-3) we read of:

1. Transgression #1 (Hosea 4:4-5:7): Relationally, they had violated the covenant!
2. Transgression #2 (Hosea 5:8-7:16): Politically, Israel had been and was going to engage in an unholy alliance with Egypt. Yet this was but the tip of the iceberg as the northern kingdom violated the “foreign policy” which God gave to His people when the theocracy began.
3. Transgression #3 (Hosea 8:1-9:9): Religiously the northern kingdom was in trouble. As we’ve seen, they had abandoned God for Baal!
4. Transgression #4 (Hosea 9:10-11:11): Functionally, they ceased being the people whom God called them to be.

Now as our current study is intended to be a survey, it is my plan to look only at a portion of Hosea 4-11- yet enough to give us a taste of the entire section. With that we turn our focus to God’s complaint against Israel.

Faithless Shepherds

Hosea 4:1, “Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land.”

The “case” referenced here is not a formal court case, but rather a personal striving against another. In Micah we’ll discuss the Covenant Lawsuit by which God sued Israel for their worship and devotion. Yet the elements of this “covenant lawsuit” are not present in Hosea. Accordingly, we understand this not as a formal lawsuit in which God calls upon creation as His witness, but an explanation of an argument which God has against His people; an argument which we’ve already discussed in Hosea 2. What was the problem? Clearly it related to the nation’s lack of covenant fidelity. Notice the language used here for God appeals to three of the most fundamental elements of a Covenant relationship; each element referenced here is the basis for health and vigor in any covenant relationship.

- There is no faithfulness. This revolves around the issue of integrity and so truth telling. As God is righteous, a relationship with Him demands faithfulness/integrity/truthfulness in one’s dealings with others. You see it in parenting, where integrity is lacking on the part of a child there can be no trust.
- There is no kindness. This is covenant concern/compassion which was the basis for God’s relationship with Israel from the start. As God looked upon them in their weakness and sin, He took compassion on them. Nothing less is what God expects from us toward one another- this is the grace which must season the relationships in a covenant community and 1 Peter 4:8, where we are called to have “love [to] cover a multitude of sins.”
- There is no knowledge. “Knowledge” in the Old Testament is a relational term. “Now Adam **knew** Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain...” (Genesis 4:1) To speak of “no knowledge” in a litany of covenant abuse is to speak of the violation of the most fundamental part of the covenant: one’s relationship with God. If we were to speak of a marriage in these terms, we’d conclude that there was infidelity. And so it was with Israel in their relationship

with God.

Combined, these three elements constitute the foundation upon which a relationship with God rests and a covenant community exists! As redeemed people integrity, compassion, and fidelity must characterize our relationship with the Lord and one another. Where these are lacking, cancer has set in- and such was the case in Israel during this time. In contrast to these covenant virtues notice that by which Israel was characterized...

Hosea 4:2, *“There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.”*

These are the symptoms of sickness in one’s walk with God. Notice that five of the Ten Commandments are in direct reference here.

1. Swearing: This addresses the third commandment concerning not taking God’s name in vain. In violation of this, Israel was invoking the divine name; “swearing falsely” which is the force of the word used here. In fact some Bible’s translate this word as “cursing.” Evidently many in Israel at the time were invoking God’s name to damn the ones they didn’t like.
2. Deception: This addresses the 9th commandment concerning lying. Obviously at this time falsehood and deceit were everywhere.
3. Murder: This addresses the 6th commandment. In their dealings with one another, many did what was right in their own eyes and so resorted to taking the law into their own hands.
4. Stealing: This addresses the 8th commandment. During this time in the northern kingdom, God’s people were appropriating the possessions of others according to their own lusts and desires (it is reminiscent of Ahab and Naboth’s vineyard).
5. Adultery: This concerns itself with the 7th commandment addressing Israel’s physical as well as spiritual promiscuity.

In fact, so common was the violence perpetrated against others as represented by these five terms, the text ended with the literal translation, “blood touched blood” referring not simply to murder, but an environment of treachery, hatred, and violence as depicted by the description of Hosea 4:2. Hatred and ill-will were so common that the ground was figuratively tainted red with the blood of victims as God’s people gave themselves to “biting and devouring” each other (cf. Galatians 5:15). Notice the result.

Hosea 4:3, *“Therefore [as a result of Israel’s covenant infidelity and so their abuse] the land mourns, and everyone who lives in it languishes along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky; and also the fish of the sea disappear.”*

This passage details the awful consequence of covenant infidelity when it comes to “the land” in which the people of God live. Here it is said that the land:

- Mourns: which carries the idea of “drying up” (cf. Jeremiah 12:4; 23:10; Amos 1:2).
- Languishes: which literally means to “wither” or “waste away.”

Together these picture a famine/drought of apocalyptic proportions (the fish of both lake and stream die as the water evidently dried up). In fact, the description here uses language which goes

beyond that of the flood story. In Noah's day, at least a pair of each animal was preserved. Yet on account of Israel's rebellion, total devastation would come upon the land! And herein we see a very important doctrine when it comes to natural disaster, one that we need to understand. Note very well that in the Bible, the well-being of the land in which we live more than anything is tied to the fidelity of the people of God living in that land. In the Old Testament, any reference to our "inheritance" was a reference to the promise that God gave to Abraham concerning land!

God gave Abraham a very important promise in Genesis 12 when Abraham was first called.

Genesis 12:1, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you.'"

The New Covenant involved the promise of land.

Jeremiah 30:1-3, "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For, behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah." The Lord says, "I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.'"

In the broader context of the New Covenant prophecy of Jeremiah, God announced His will to restore His people to the Land of Promise, a land which is identified in the New Testament under the rubric of "the inheritance."¹ On his first missionary journey in Pisidian Antioch, Paul preached this message to the Jews there.

Acts 13:17-19, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years."

This reflects the nuance the word "inheritance" held for the people of God throughout the Old Testament. Truly for any and all familiar with the Old Testament, the "inheritance" is the Promised Land. Accordingly we read of Stephen's words during his trial before the Sanhedrin.

Acts 7:4-5: "Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living. And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him."

Again we must see that the word "inheritance" was a buzz word at the time of Christ for the land promised to Abraham so long ago. Accordingly, every New Testament reference to the "inheritance" must be understood in this light. In his testimony concerning his conversion, Paul said:

¹ cf. also Eph. 1:11-14, 18; 5:5; Acts 20:32; Heb. 9:15.

Acts 26:15-18, "And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive (1) forgiveness of sins and (2) an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'"

For those who have come to think of the "inheritance" as the forgiveness of sin, here Paul draws an important distinction between the "forgiveness of sins" and the "inheritance." Truly for Paul the "inheritance" involved much more than forgiveness, but the land of the New Heavens and Earth! Believe it or not, but this was the passion of Abraham.

Hebrews 11:8-10, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Truly "land" was and is a major part of the Promise of God in redemption! Accordingly, when the people of God are faithful to the covenant, God promises blessings upon the land. In contrast, if God's people prove unfaithful to the Lord, we are to expect that the land will be cursed. For example:

Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24a, "But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you... [for example] And the heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust..."

Brothers and sisters, when those identified as the people of God rebel against the Lord, the land in which they live will be cursed!

2 Chronicles 7:13-14, "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people [all of this as a response to Israel's sin], and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Do you see it? If the people called by God's name rebel, God will bring judgment upon the land. If they repent, God will heal the land. Think of the Judges. When the people of God sought the Lord, the land and the people had rest from oppression, violence, and bloodshed. Yet, when the people of God turned their backs on God, it was then that foreign nations arose, imposed their wicked laws, and severely treated the people.

From these and many other passages we conclude that when natural disaster occurs we have no biblical basis to suggest that such is a judgment of God on account of the nation in which we live.

This highlights the hypocrisy of so many pulpits today. When natural disaster takes place, many preachers wax eloquently as to the cause; “This is because America has turned its back on God!” Yet America has never been in covenant with God to turn its back on God. As it relates to the nation in which we live, at best we can only say when disaster hits, “This world is subject to futility on account of our sin. As such, this tragedy occurred as a birth pang of the judgment that awaits this earth. And “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:2-3)!”

But the church has been and is in covenant with the Lord! Accordingly, when natural disaster occurs we the church must look to ourselves. In Bible times when a disaster struck the land of Palestine, who or what was the culprit? The people of God and their infidelity to the Lord as a covenant community!

Do we today have any grounds to think differently about the disasters that come upon the land in which we live? Absolutely not! After all, we are “the salt- which is a preservative- of the earth” (Matthew 5:13)! When trial and difficulty descend upon a land, the people of God in that land ought to begin wondering: Could it be that such and such occurred because we His people...

- Are apostatizing?
- Have compromised the truth?
- Have adopted the practices of Baal in her worship?
- Have neglected the widow and orphan?
- Have forsaken the word of God?

This is why throughout Church history when disaster struck, the church typically responded with fasting and praying!

Brothers and sisters, if the Bible is true, then that which is most important on this earth, that which undoubtedly will impact what God deigns to do or not do, is the state of His Kingdom on this earth.

Do you want to bless America? Don't pin your hopes on Christian candidates but labor and pray to clean up the church! O. Palmer Robertson put it this way in his commentary on Zephaniah:

“It is remarkable to see how faith triumphs (or how nonfaith fails to triumph) in a scene involving all the intrigue of international politics. Particularly when the struggle climaxes as it does in the 7th century B.C., the faith of the kings of Judah in the covenant promises of God determines the course of individuals and nations more than all the resources of the mightiest of monarchs in their hours of greatest strength... ¶ [A couple of pages later he gives an example...] Quite intriguing is the fact that Assyrian presence in Israel reaches its zenith at the time when the monarch of Israel shows little or no faith in the one true living God. From a purely secular perspective, Assyria had to invade and subdue Egypt if they intended to maintain control of Syro-Palestine. As impossible as the task might have seemed, the effort had to be made. Otherwise Assyrian aspirations for world domination had to be surrendered. But one can hardly overlook the fact that the time of Assyrian expansionism corresponded with the dark days of unbelief under Manasseh. The God of all nations would not allow the people bearing his name to

deny him with impunity.” (Robertson, 1994, pp. 2, 6)

This has been the case throughout history. For example, think of Germany from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. German history brings to mind these things:

- The Reformation!
- Martin Luther!
- The word of God being translated into the language of the common man!
- A revival which would go way beyond the borders of Germany and so touch the world.
- Germany indeed would be blessed- becoming the bread-basket of Europe!

Yet what did God’s people in Germany do with this blessing? They got fat and so lost their passion and love for the Lord. They compromised their integrity and embraced first liberalism and then Neo-orthodoxy! It was at this time that Hitler arose! To use the words of Robertson paraphrased:

From a purely secular perspective, Hitler had to arise if Germany was going to maintain control of Europe... But one can hardly overlook the fact that the time of Hitler’s rise corresponded with the dark days of unbelief in the churches of Germany. The God of all nations would not allow the people bearing his name to deny him with impunity.

And such was the case in Israel in the Eighth century B.C. God’s people turned their back on God with the result that the land became cursed! Now in His compassion, the Lord did not leave His people without a witness. Rather He sent Hosea by which He leveled a complaint against Israel.

How ought Israel to reply? We know the answer:

Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”- this is what God wanted from Israel. This is what God wants from any and all of His people.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14, “If... My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

God wanted repentance and trust in Christ. What He didn’t want was a bunch of excuses or complaints, which leads us to the caution.

The Caution

Hosea 3:4, “Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof; for your people are like those who contend with the priest”

There are a variety of interpretations that have been suggested as to what this passage means. However, most of them boil down to the same thing: God here is speaking to an unidentifiable objector; it could be the people of Israel, the priests, the prophets, or the leaders. Again, there are many suggestions. Yet this is clear: they were not in a position to object to God about anything.

Notice the latter part of this verse:

Hosea 3:4, “for your people are like those who contend with the priest.”

In the Old Testament the priesthood (along with the elders) was charged with deciding the legal matters which came to them in the course of a disagreement between two Israelites (Deuteronomy 17:8-13). In such an event, the parties were to state their case before the priest; the priest then was to render a judgment. Now what the priest said was to be accepted without discussion, debate, or contention. In fact, to argue concerning his verdict was to risk death.

Deuteronomy 17:12, “And the man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the Lord your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.”

Yet by the time of Hosea, God’s people felt the freedom to contend with any and all religious leaders. Living in sin, any just verdict would of course sound wrong to them. Why? Because the Israelite lacked the capacity to reason according to truth as they had long since given up the truth for a lie.

It is in this context that God addresses an unknown objector, critical of His forthcoming judgments. In essence the Lord says, “As you are not living according to my word in that you argue against duly appointed priests, how can you in any way righteously judge my decree?” No, rather! Because their minds were steeped in the worldliness of Baal, God warned them thus:

Hosea 4:5, “So you will stumble by day, and the prophet also will stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.”

Because of their weak hold on God’s word, the nation would be left to “stumble.” The idea behind this word is tripping and so falling over an obstacle in one’s path. Without God’s word, Israel placed themselves as judge over God. This resulted in them stumbling and so falling!

Now because Hosea most likely delivered this message at one of the worship shrines which dotted the countryside of Israel, we read of the inclusion of “the prophets” which were assigned to these worship centers (theologians today refer to them as “cult prophets”). Their job was to pronounce an oracle of hope/doom depending on the word of the Lord. Obviously by this time, word from the Lord was non-existent in Israel, Hosea being an exception.

Accordingly, as the nation along with her prophets gave themselves to vanity and sin, they ceased being able walk in light of God’s word. Accordingly as a whole they stumbled over God. Truly, this was and is the beginning of the end for any people including Israel. In 722 B.C. God brought the foolish and contentious nation which was “Israel’s mother” into captivity. Rather than place themselves as servants of God and so doers of His word, they exalted themselves above God, judged Him to be lacking, and so gave themselves to the religion of Baal.

And so the caution must be heard today in our lives. Listen, God is going to do a lot of things which may not seem right in our eyes; He may lead us to a place we don’t like. He may bring us to a dark valley. Bitterness and hardship may be the cup which we must drink for a time. Yet regardless of

where He might bring us, we do harm to ourselves and His kingdom if, rather than submitting to the wisdom of God and His goodness we kick against the goads and fight against Him.

He lived at a time where the prevailing theological premise was, “God helps those who help themselves!” Now he had served the Lord the same way for forty plus years and was blessed. Then from out of nowhere he lost everything. It is important to note that Job, though a confessed sinner, did not change what he had been doing for forty years. Accordingly, “if God helps those who help themselves,” then we must conclude that God had changed! Job’s current plight was unjust! had done him wrong!

And that is exactly where Job went. Job demanded God to give account for the difficulty that came his way and so for a time, he stumbled over God! Did God ever give an accounting to Job? No! And we wouldn’t expect Him to for He answers to no man!

Likewise, we must be careful in our lives to maintain our place before the Lord. He is the Creator! He is God! Our meet is NOT to get God to give an account to us, BUT in and through all things to do the will of Him who sent us (John 4:34)!

Isn’t that what God charged us with in Deuteronomy 29 after commissioning His people to leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land with this caveat, many of them would deny the Lord in the land and so suffer accordingly. God exhorted Israel:

Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things [concerning the future] belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed [His word] belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”

That’s what Israel had before them in the days of Hosea. That’s what any child of God at all times has before them. It is NOT to have God answer to us BUT to do the will of Him who sent us in and through all things!

Ironically if we as a church would fulfill this calling, the land in which we live would be blessed! Accordingly, if we should wish for God to bless America or any nation, we first must wish that He would bless the church in the country and so restore the true preaching of His word to the pulpit. Transform the Sunday show back into Sabbath worship. Take away our quest for fulfillment and replace it with a longing to be emptied of all our pride.

Hosea brought such a message to the people of God in his day and they refused to listen. Will we do the same? May God give us the grace to heed the message, forsake our sin, and so cling to Christ!

Bibliography

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About the Preacher

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