



UNIT 8 H O S E A LESSON 4.

CHAPTER 4.

In the second division of the book (Chapters 4-14) there is no direct reference to the circumstances of Hosea's life as previously mentioned (Chapters 1-3). But the same basic emphasis on the love of Yahweh for Israel and Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh, is central to the entire series of oracles. All Israel is reproached with a torrent of words descriptive of the sins which occasion the breaking up of a marriage covenant, that between Yahweh and His people.

The brief oracle in Chapter 4 verses 1-3 is a prophetic speech form called "judgment speech". (cf. Hosea 2:2, Micah 6:1ff, Isa. 1:18ff). The source of this form is found in the legal procedure practised in Israel's courts, and its use has the effect of putting the entire nation on trial with Yahweh serving as both prosecutor and judge.

Hosea's chief complaint is that Israel has lost the capacity to understand God's true nature (4:1,6). The failure to know God as He really is results in lowered moral and ethical standards (4:2). This is a particularly relevant issue today when there is an attempt to replace religious faith with an ethic without religious backing.

Chapter 4:1.

Controversy or accusation - a legal word suggesting a complaint or charge in a law case.

Specifically they are accused of a lack of "faithfulness", "loyalty" and "knowledge of God". All 3 are covenantal terms and must be understood in that context.

Faithfulness: (emeth) in its original meaning signified truth -not only in the sense of speaking what is right, but also doing what is right. The lack of this quality in one's relationship with the Lord is destructive of any continuing basis of fellowship. People can live with neither God nor a human if their relationship is devoid of faithfulness.

Loyalty (NRSV) In older translations this appears as "kindness" which in popular usage is a rather feeble word, connoting a mild type of consideration and concern for others. But the word used here (Hesed) is a strong word meaning "steadfast love" or "covenant love", which speaks of a relationship between two who have accepted mutual obligations in a spirit of trust and love.

Knowledge of God: To know God means, for Hosea, much more than passive acquaintance with or intellectual knowledge of Him. It is an intimate experience. It is sharing in a relationship at the most personal level of existence, like marriage. The root evil named in God's accusation against His people is their lack of a "knowledge of God".

Hosea 4:2:

The five crimes named in this verse are more than simple violations of general morality. They are acts prohibited by Yahweh in his covenant. These acts (swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery) violated the 5 of the Ten Commandments which are most directly related to a person's relationship with other people.

**Chapter 4:3:**

Human sin has an effect on nature (see also Amos 8:8, Joel 1:10-12 and Romans 8:22). We must remember the intimate relation of the land as God's gift to Israel and Israel's peculiar position as a covenant people. One obvious modern parallel of sin affecting nature is the devastation left behind in warfare, another is greed for more money causing destruction of forests by farmers, timber merchants etc.

Chapter 4:4-6:

Hosea claims the basic cause of the people's sin lies not in them but in their leadership. This opens up the question as to whether the moral problems facing the community today may be blamed on the failure of the clergy to present the true Word of God and keep in balance the alternative suggested by Ezekiel 2:35.

'I will destroy your mother' (verse 5) may refer to the destruction of the capital city, or the nation. The prophets of verse 5 are false prophets, probably attached to the temple shrines at Bethel and elsewhere in Samaria. It is probable that worship at these shrines was a mixture of Canaanite and Yahweh worship with some temple prostitution. This reflected a failure to understand Yahweh as a God who was Himself moral and who demanded morality from His worshippers. This rejection by the priests of the true knowledge of Yahweh will result in Yahweh in turn rejecting the priests and the nation i.e. no longer protecting them as His own.

Chapter 4:7,8:

As the priesthood increased in wealth and numbers they deteriorated as religious leaders and debased the glories of their calling. They used their office for personal profit, delighting in the sin of the people since such sin meant sacrificial offerings which in turn became the priests' personal property (cf. Lev. 6:14-30; 7:6-10, for the relevant laws).

Chapter 4:9,10:

Both priest and people will share in a common punishment -they will find no satisfaction from their wickedness. You may like to discuss whether it is true that sin never satisfies. Are we rationalising in such a statement or does experience confirm the bitter words of Ecclesiastes 2:10,11?

Chapter 4:11-14:

Although the people may be misled, their own sins are considerable. Drunkenness (verse 11) idolatry (verses 12 and 13) and immorality with sacred prostitutes at the shrines (verses 13 and 14) are prevalent.

In verse 12 the "staff" or "stick" refers to some form of divination in which a stick is thrown in order to secure (from the way it falls) the answer of the deity (cf. Ezekiel 21:21f). In verse 14, though adulteresses were severely dealt with in Israel (see Lev. 20:10), Hosea declares that the Lord will not punish the daughters and brides for their illicit deeds, for the blame for such conduct lies elsewhere. The men themselves are guilty, the fathers and teachers of their families. This passage is significant in that it is one of only a few in the Old Testament which places men on the same level of responsibility as women. He was the first prophet to attack the double standard (a separate standard



for men and women). He states that it is impossible for the men of a nation to live on a different and lower level than its women, and yet expect their wives and daughters to live up to a higher standard of moral purity.

Chapter 4:15-19:

These verses (and also 1:7,11; 4:15; 5:10-14; 8:14) view Judah in a favourable light. Hosea had an intimate knowledge of conditions in the Kingdom of Judah and a deep concern for her. Also, in the prophet's warnings and promises to Judah there was a message for Israel, if she would only listen and act.

Hosea's warning to Judah is a threefold one:

- (i) She should not become like Israel in her worship life and experience (v.17).
- (ii) She is not to become like Israel in her wilful disobedience to God (v.16 - like a stubborn heifer).
- (iii) She is to leave Israel alone. (v.17). In verse 17 there occurs Hosea's first use of the name "Ephraim" for Israel. Ephraim was the largest and most important tribe of the ten included in the northern kingdom of Israel. Hosea uses this term 37 times.

'Beth-aven'. This is probably a corruption of Beth-el, "House of God" to 'Beth-aven', "House of Iniquity". Gilgal and Bethel were two of the major Israelite shrines. To take an oath on God's name at such places is a blasphemy.

G.A.F. Knight translates verses 16-18 in this way - 'Truly Israel has been unteachable as a stubborn cow. Should Yahweh now just feed her like a pet lamb in a grassy field? No! Ephraim has joined the company of idols. Leave him alone. Once their liquor leaves them (sober) they will turn back eagerly to their whores. They are wholly in love with shame.' The passage is difficult to translate and alternatives may be found to the above, but it serves to make the passage intelligible.

The wind in verse 19 is probably a reference to the Assyrian conqueror who will carry Israel into captivity - an all enveloping irresistible force. Their confidence in this false worship will prove groundless and will lead to their open shame.

The key verse to the chapter is verse 6. The idolatry and licentiousness of the people all bear testimony to their failure to understand Yahweh's nature and his love. Finally he is left with no alternative. A people who can so grossly misconstrue His nature deserve only judgment. Despite His love, punishment must fall.

QUESTION 1:

What does the Hebrew word "hesed" mean?

Who is it used of in Hosea? Why is it a good word to be used of a marriage relationship?

QUESTION 2:



From these references (Gen. 8:21, Hosea 4:3, Amos 8:8, Joel 1:10-12, Rom. 8:20) what affect does man's sin have on nature? Why is this so? Does it have any connection with God's covenant with Israel?

QUESTION 3:

Read Lev. 6:14-30; 7:6-10. What were the priests entitled to? How were they abusing the system (Hosea 4:7,8)?

QUESTION 4:

Of what possible benefit to Israel were Hosea's warnings to Judah in Hosea 4:15-19? What were the warnings?

QUESTION 5:

In the context of Hosea 4:6-10 what is meant by Hosea's statement "and it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways"? When the religious leaders of a nation are corrupt, is there any way or hope for the nation to escape moral decay?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

In Hosea 4:9-10 both priest and people will share in a common punishment - they will find no satisfaction for their wickedness. Is it true that sin is never satisfied? Are we rationalising in such a statement or does experience confirm the bitter words of Ecclesiastes 2:10,11? What do you think?