

I. Charges against the nation as a whole

- A. The Lord bringing his indictment against the northern kingdom of Israel. The Hebrew word that is translated as "controversy" is a technical term that appears frequently in the Old Testament's prophetic literature. It is used in contexts in which the Lord is bringing a lawsuit against his people for their breach of the covenant. God is confronting his people for their covenant unfaithfulness.
- B. Sins of omission - or failing to do what God requires. The qualities that God looks for in His covenant people are nowhere to be found among the children of Israel.
1. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land - covenant loyalty to God alone, not other god. – Violation of 1st commandment

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 [4] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

2. There is no knowledge of God. The Israelites knew about God, but they failed to love and serve him as their God. Their love of sin caused them to reject the knowledge of God and to serve idols instead

Romans 1:21-25 "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

- C. Sins of commission- Not only had the Israelites failed to do what God requires, but they also did the things that God forbids. They were guilty of swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery. All of these things are violations of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20).
- D. When godly character is lacking, sinful character invariably steps in to fill the void. The principle 'nature abhors a vacuum' is just as true in the spiritual realm as it is in the natural realm. Rejecting the knowledge of God results in moral corruption.

II. Charge against the priests in particular

- A. God holds the priests and prophets responsible for the sins of the people. In Israel, priests had to do more than just get the rituals right. Unlike other religions in the ancient world, biblical religion was not just a matter of performing certain rites. Biblical religion addresses the mind. The priests were the spiritual educators of the people. They were supposed to teach the people God's law. Their failure to do so brought devastation

upon the covenant people. The people's blindness stemmed from the blindness of their guides.

Leviticus 10:8–11 “[8] *And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, [9] “Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. [10] You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, [11] and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”*

James 3:1 “*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”*

Hebrews 13:17 “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*

- B. The problem in Israel was not that people were not interested in religion. On the contrary, the priests were in high demand. Their popularity was actually part of the problem. God says, “The more they increased, the more they sinned against me”. Instead of teaching the people God's truth, they used the people for their own gain. Israel's priests had a following, but they had abandoned God's Word.

III. Idolatry and Its Consequences

- A. They had forsaken the Lord so that they could cherish things like sexual immorality and the abuse of alcohol. They abandoned God's truth and ran after sensual pleasures. Those sensual pleasures were closely related to their idolatrous worship.
 - 1. Idolatry is spiritual adultery. The Israelites thought that they were worshipping the Lord, but they were actually abandoning him to worship gods of their own devising. They were bowing down to carved images, something that was explicitly forbidden by the second commandment. They were offering sacrifices on the tops of mountains, something that was a direct violation of God's command to offer sacrifices in the one central sanctuary in Jerusalem.
 - 2. Idolatry leads to sexual immorality. When people set aside the knowledge of God, God gives them over to the lusts of their hearts. Idolatry bears the fruit of immorality.

Romans 1:21–25 [21] “*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”*

- B. Verse 4:14 What does it mean when God says that he will not punish Israelite women when they play the whore and commit adultery?

1. On the one hand, God is simply saying that there is no need to punish them, because their choices will lead to their ruin. They will receive the punishment in themselves.
 2. On the other hand, God is laying the ultimate blame upon the men of Israel for the sexual sin that is so pervasive throughout the land. God says, "the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes." This is something that sets Old Testament ethics apart from other ancient moral codes. The Bible does not treat a man's sexual sins more leniently than those of a woman. Women are certainly held accountable for such sins, but men bear an even greater responsibility because of their leadership role in marriage. This was not the case elsewhere in the Middle East.
- C. God says, "a people without understanding shall come to ruin." If our minds are not being renewed by God's truth, then we will come to ruin.

Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

- IV. A Warning - God warns the southern kingdom of Judah not to participate in Israel's idolatries. Judah is not to visit the shrines that the northern tribes set up at Gilgal and Beth-aven. Those places of worship were popular for historical reasons, but they were unauthorized and now places of Baal worship.
- A. At one time, Gilgal was a place where prophets were trained under Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:1; 4:38). But in Hosea's day it had become a center of false worship (Hosea 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5).
 - B. There is no city actually named Beth Aven. Hosea is twisting the name of the city of Bethel - meaning "House of God" - into the more fitting name Beth Aven, meaning "House of Deceit." Bethel was the southern center of calf worship established by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:28-29).
- V. The Folly of Trusting in Man's Deliverance
- A. Sin Cannot Be Hidden from God
 1. Israel abandoned the knowledge of God to run after idols. They no longer knew the Lord. But he still knew them.
 - a) God knew about the shrines that they had built on the high places in Mizpah, Tabor, and elsewhere.
 - b) God knew that they were engaging in cult prostitution.
 - c) God knew about all of the other atrocities that they were committing.
 - d) God was hidden from Israel, but their sins were not hidden from God.
- Hebrews 4:13 "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."***
2. Israel's sin acted as a barrier. It prevented them from returning to the Lord. There are a number of ways in which this can happen.

- (1) Sometimes we feel so bad about our sin that we hesitate to turn to the Lord in repentance.
- (2) Sin can also keep people from turning back to God by utterly blinding them.
- (3) Sin can take such a hold on a person's will that he has no desire to return to God. Of course, that is the condition of each and every one of us apart from Christ. It is only because of the Holy Spirit's work of effectual calling in the hearts of the elect that anyone returns to the Lord. No one would ever seek God were it not for the fact that God first seeks us and calls us to himself.

B. Sin Causes God to Withdraw

1. God sometimes disciplines true believers by hiding his face from them. This is the only sense in which the Lord withdraws from those who are truly his people.
2. At the same time, God withdraws from false believers by handing them over to their sin. God was doing both of these things to the people of Israel in Hosea's day.

C. Sin Brings Misery

1. God speaks of judgment that will fall upon both the northern and southern kingdoms.
 - a) Ephraim (Israel) will be crushed because they went after filth. They let their hearts desire the wicked things that belonged to the worship of their pagan neighbors.
 - b) Judah will have God's wrath poured out upon them like water, and the specific reason cited for this is because they moved landmarks. They were guilty of land-grabbing. The reason why that sin was so serious in Israel was because of the symbolic significance of the Promised Land. The land inheritance that was apportioned among Israel's tribes was a symbol of the eternal inheritance that the redeemed will enjoy in heaven. By stealing land, the people of Judah were robbing their neighbors of the symbol of God's promise. As a result, the Assyrians invasion of Israel will spill over into Judah and have an effect upon their inheritance.

Psalm 107:17 "Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;"

2. God describes the misery that will befall his people by saying this: "I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah."
 - a) Moths ruin clothes. Dry rot ruins structures. Both work slowly over time. You don't realize the damage that is being done until it is too late.
 - b) The same thing happens when we persist in sowing to the flesh. We don't realize it when we are indulging in sin, but our lives are slowly being eaten away by it.

D. Sin Causes Us to Look Elsewhere for Relief

1. Verse 13 tells us that when Ephraim saw his sickness, he went to Assyria for help. This is something that Israel's kings did on a number of occasions. When troubles arose,

they looked to other nations instead of to the Lord for help. One moment they would look to Egypt, and the next they would look to Assyria. The irony was that it was the Assyrians who eventually wiped Israel out. God warned his people, telling them that the king of Assyria "is not able to cure you or heal your wound." The fact that Israel turned to a political power for relief demonstrated their failure to see that their ailment was spiritual in nature.

2. Every single person in this world feels the ache of the misery that has come upon our race as a result of our sin. Human beings experience weakness, pain, frustration, instability, loneliness, loss, sorrow, and many other types of misery. And people respond to these things in the same way that the nation of Israel responded to the troubles that befell them: by looking for relief in the things of this world. But this only breeds more misery. It leads to things like addiction, debt, discontentment, dissension, worry, guilt, spiritual blindness.

E. Sin Must Be Repented of

1. God says that he will be like a lion to Ephraim and to Judah. He will tear at them in the same way that a lion uses its claws to tear at its prey. He will carry them off and no one will be able to rescue them.
2. This is why the nations are warned in Psalm 2,

Psalm 2:12 "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

3. In the final verse of our passage, the Lord says that he will return to his place until his people repent of their sins and turn to him as their only place of refuge.
 - a) When we persist in our rebellion against him, the Lord hides his face from us until we acknowledge our guilt and seek him.
 - b) We are given a powerful picture of this in Psalm 32, where David writes:

Psalm 32:3–5 [3] For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. [4] For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. [5] I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

F. All of this was pointing to the need for a guilt bearer, a righteousness fulfiller, who would bear the guilt on our behalf.

1. God's guilt bearer and righteousness fulfiller is Jesus Christ.

Matthew 5:17 [17] "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

2. John 1:14-18, in Christ we see what righteousness looks like, fleshed out. Christ is the living manifestation of the law of God.

John 1:14–18 [14] "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.') [16] For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17]

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

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