

Hosea 5:1-6:4
The Covenant Love of God and The Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction

A. Structure of 4:1-14:9:¹

1. **4:1-6:3 — Evidence of ignorance of God and statement of hope**
2. 6:4-11:11 — Evidence of disloyalty to God and statement of hope
3. 11:12-14:9 — Evidence of faithlessness to God and statement of hope

II. 5:1-7 — Lack of knowledge and empty religion

A. 1-2 — Yahweh brings a charge against what would appear to be the leaders in Israel. We have three groups:

1. **Priests**
2. **House of Israel** - Garrett suggest that this refers to the middle and upper class of Israelites who have some leadership, but are not in the place of the third group (house of the king).² Some translations make this the “people of Israel,” which may also be true (e.g. NIV, NET). However, the context seems to indicate that Hosea has the leadership of Israel in mind in this passage, rather than all the people.

3. **House of the king**

B. **Mizpah/Tabor** — Mizpah is another significant city in the spiritual life of Israel. It was part of Samuel’s circuit (1 Samuel 7) and it was a place of meeting for Israel in Judges 20. Tabor, a mountain, that’s all we know. **Israel has effectively lead these cities (itself) into idolatry and into a place to receive judgment.**

C. **Revolters** — It is difficult to associate historical events with different comments in Hosea, but it may be that here we have a reference to the many assassinations that came after Jeroboam’s reign. The description “the revolters have gone deep into slaughter” pictures that idea.

The current leaders, and even those who may think they are doing a service to their nation by overthrowing them, will all be judged.

D. **3 — Yahweh is aware of the idolatry of his people. The whoredom here as Garrett suggests is both the apostasy and the immorality.**³

1. Consider the contrast between this and what we saw in chapter 4. Yahweh “knew” his people and their sin. This term describes an intimate knowledge of something.⁴
2. Note: *“Although the prophets often used ‘Ephraim’ as a virtual synonym for ‘the northern kingdom,’ this was because Ephraim was the leading tribe, and it is this cultural hegemony that Ephraim represents here.”*⁵

¹ Michael Barrett, 19.

² Garrett, 141.

³ Ibid, 144.

⁴ This is not the same term as “knowledge” in 4:1, but is used in contexts of an intimate knowledge (e.g. Gen 4:1).

⁵ Garrett, 144.

3. Because of the parallel form and the use of two words describing the same people, there is added emphasis on Israel being fully known by Yahweh.
4. However, the second phrase seems to indicate some distinction between the two names. It helps to continue to see Ephraim as the representative of Israel, which explains why their whoredom has defied the northern kingdom.

E. **4 — Consider how this verse works in conjunction with verse 3.** We've already established that verse three describes God's intimate knowledge of Israel, now we see the contrast with them. They did not know⁶ the LORD.

1. **To what degree do Israel's sins keep them from being restored to God?** We know that repentance is always a possibility, but it would seem that Israel had so abandoned Yahweh, that they had made it impossible to turn back. The basis of this, "**For**" their whoredom is within them. Their inability to turn back to Yahweh has to do with their heart idolatry and lack of knowledge of Yahweh. **5:15 helps us understand exactly what's going on here.**

F. **5 — What does this phrase mean?** Israel looked toward their prosperity with pride. McComiskey writes this, "*Aliens were devouring the nation's strength, yet the people paid no heed; that which was the object of their vaunted pride was in a state of decay, but they did not observe it.*"⁷

They attributed all their achievements to their lovers, and those achievements became a source of pride. Now that pride testifies to their face that there is something wrong because everything is starting to unravel. They are going to stumble because of their guilt, but they did not anticipate it happening.

There is now the sad reality that Judah is following in the footsteps of their sister nation.

G. **6-7 — What do these verses tell us about the religious life of the Israelites?**

1. We see them bringing their flocks prepared for sacrifices.
2. They are celebrating the New Moon festival (Isa 1:13 for help).

Chisholm writes this, "*their lack of genuine devotion to the Lord rendered these rituals ineffectual. In fact, such sham merely heightened their guilt and would hasten their destruction.*"⁸

Yet, in the midst of this religious pursuit we see that Yahweh will not let them find Him, for they have dealt faithlessly with him and have "borne alien children" (which likely refers to both apostasy/adultery, and that they were children of foreign gods⁹)

They are going through all the motions and being religious, yet their true state of heart is faithlessness to Yahweh. They are worshiping God on their terms.

⁶ This same term as verse 3.

⁷ McComiskey, 78.

⁸ Chisholm, 32.

⁹ Garrett, 146.

III.5:8-15 — Israel and Judah shall not escape judgment

- A. 8—All three cities, Gibeah, Ramah, and Beth-Aven (Bethel) are all located in Benjamin’s territory. It seems best to say that this pictures the final desolation of Ephraim (Israel). Some try to date this event, but it’s left to subjectivity. These cities suggest that an army is coming northward through Benjamin toward Ephraim.
- B. 9-10—All are under judgment, for Hosea mentions Ephraim, Israel, and Judah in these verses. That Judah will be like those who move the boundary marker means that they will face the curse like those who do such things (cf. Deut 27:17).
- C. 11 — While this verse is for the most part straight forward, we see that the last statement, “determined to follow man’s command” or “human precepts,” needs to be understood. It is possible that this refers to the requirements of the Assyrian army from 2 Kings 15:19-20.
- D. 12 — It’s difficult to know whether the term “moth” here is actually referring to a moth, or just generally referring to decay. Either way, I think we get the sense of what he is saying. The idea of rot, is that of rot caused by worms in wood.¹⁰ **What do these images lead you to understand about the nature of this judgment?**
- E. 13-14 — Instead of turning to Yahweh for help/healing, they turned to Assyria. We don’t know exactly when this took place in history, either it was King Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1-4), or it was King Menahem (2 Kings 15:19). Regardless of who it was, what is most important is that Yahweh will judge them because they turned to Assyria. They recognized their sickness but did not turn to the only One who could heal them.
- F. In one sense, it’s as if Yahweh is saying that no nation can save them out of his hand. The emphasis in verse 14 is clearly on the “I,” That Yahweh will bring judgment down upon Israel is certain. There is no one that can rescue them from His hands.
- G. 15 — Yet, in the midst of all that was taking place, we are reminded that Yahweh’s punishment is not without purpose. Chisholm is right when he says that God’s ultimate purpose is to restore His people.¹¹

IV. 6:1-3 — Hosea’s plea and a message of hope

- A. **1-3 — What is Hosea’s plea to his country men?** To return to Yahweh.
 - 1. 1— Observe that in 5:12-15, Yahweh is like a moth, dry rot, a young lion tearing apart Israel, yet all the while is waiting for them to return to Him. Verses 1-3 are a call to return to Yahweh so that they can find true healing.
 - a) In this section Israel is promised healing if they return. In the previous section they faced some serious affliction, now they can return to Yahweh to find healing from those wounds.
 - b) What does the plural “us” communicate about Hosea?**
 - 2. 2 — How far can we take a statement like this? The parallel to Jesus’ death and resurrection are hard to miss. 1 Corinthians 15:4 makes reference to “in accordance with the Scriptures.”
 - a) Garrett suggests that it does relate to a prophecy.
 - b) We have to be careful to read more into this than was intended.
 - c) Another important factor to consider is that Israel is not portrayed to be dead and then raised. They are wounded in need of healing.¹²

¹⁰ NET Notes

¹¹ Chisholm, 33.

¹² McComiskey, 88.

d) McComiskey writes this, “The point is that when the people respond in sincerity to God, his response to them will be quick; they will have to wait only a short time for relief.”¹³

3. **3** — Notice the emphasis placed on their need to pursue knowledge. That knowledge of Yahweh is absent in Israel takes us back to 4:1, where that was one of the accusations against Israel. Here it is a plea to pursue knowledge. This pursuit of knowledge is both objective and subjective. Objective in the sense that Israel’s priests had not taught the people and they had not learned what Yahweh requires of them. Subjectively it means that they would acknowledge Yahweh as their God.¹⁴

V. Conclusion

- A. How do we cultivate both an objective and a subjective knowledge of God?
- B. What are ways we can do well at leading our families and leading our church, so that we will “know” Yahweh?
 1. Membership Covenant — “We will read, study, and meditate upon the Scripture. We will give careful attention when the Bible is preached or taught. We will endeavor to live according to its truths and authority, and we will encourage one another to do so as well.”

¹³ Ibid, 88.

¹⁴ Garrett, 110.