

Hosea 6:4-7:16
The Covenant Love of God and The Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction/review

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. 6:4-11 — Empty religion and a guilty people

A. **4-6 — Israel's empty religion and lack of *hesed* love**

1. 4 — Despite the plea to his people to return, Israel's response contradicts the faithfulness of Yahweh. Instead of turning to him in true *hesed* love, their *hesed* love is like a morning mist that vanishes. This explains the exasperation of Yahweh, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?" "What shall I do with you, O Judah?" **Do any of you have a similar reaction to your children?**
2. 5² — In response to their empty religion Yahweh sent his messengers, the prophets, to proclaim His Word. These words had the effect of hewing and slaying them, in the sense that it showed the judgment that would be coming if they did not repent. The people were without excuse, for Yahweh had shown them their errors. McComiskey writes, "*No Israelite could say that the demise of the nation was due only to the fortuitous course of national events or the caprices of foreign kings.*"³ They were going to face judgement from Yahweh because of the absence of *hesed* love.
3. 6 — "Steadfast love" is the same word that we saw in verse 4 ("love"). Duane Garrett offers this definition: "*The quality of hesed is not simply a matter of fulfilling one's duties to a covenant obligation; it is going beyond legal obligations to give kindness freely to those with whom one relates.*"⁴ This is seen very clearly in this verse. The Israelites are willing to check off the boxes related to their religious duties, but that is as far as it goes.

Anyone can check off the box of religious duty, but only those with genuine love for God are willing to go beyond expectation and give freely whenever possible. Just like in a marriage relationship, we don't act as those who are under obligation, but out of a heart of love for our spouses. This means we often go beyond the expectation.

**What are ways we see Christians living according to loveless duty?
How do we guard ourselves from performing this empty religion?**

¹ Michael Barrett, 19.

² Light - could refer to the clarity of the judgment (McComiskey, 92) or the exposure of sin (Garrett?).

³ McComiskey, 92.

⁴ Garrett, 110.

B. 7-11a — The depths of their transgression

1. 7 — **What does Hosea mean by “there”? “There” as in the garden when Adam transgressed? Or “there” in reference to town in Israel?**
 - a) There are many opinions on this verse. What becomes apparent is that Adam can be seen as a place and the name of the first man. Chisholm argues that it refers to a city near the Jordan. The basis for this is the parallel with verse 8-9 with other cities mentioned.⁵ Garrett agrees, but then adds to this, *“It appears that Hosea singled out the shrine at Adam not because of some peculiarity about the town, but because of its namesake. The prophet has made a pun on the name of the town and the name of the original transgressor.”*⁶
 - b) The point made by Hosea then, is that just like Adam transgressed the covenant, so do cities in Israel today.⁷
2. 8-9 — **According to these verses, how bad were things getting in Israel?** Hosea accuses the people of Gilead along with the priests. All of them are swallowed up in bloodguilt and villainy. Though it is difficult to determine a historical event that is eluded to here, it is clear how far the people have gone by disregarding human life.⁸
3. 10-11a — Hosea identifies the reality that Israel’s harlotry and their defilement is evident to Yahweh. Judah is included in the group awaiting future judgment (e.g. harvest).

III.7:1-16 — Yahweh’s desire to redeem His people, yet their persistence in sin.

A. 11b-2 — Their evil must be exposed

1. 11B-2 — In order for true restoration to take place, the sin of the people must be exposed. Yahweh people cannot continue in sin and expect restoration. But what seems most shocking about these verses is that Israel doesn’t understand that their evil is sin. They go on with their poor treatment of one another, without understanding that their sin surrounds them like an army. It’s before them, and most importantly, their sin is before Yahweh’s face.

B. 3-7 — Oven Metaphor

1. This section is described by Garrett to be, *“Without question among the most vexing texts in the Hebrew Bible.”*⁹ In this section we (I believe) have a description of the failure of the King to protect the nation from sin. A King who did not fulfill his role. The king appears to be compared with the baker of this text (a position I hold somewhat loosely). It would seem that the Baker should have paid more attention to what was taking place with the oven in the night. His inattentiveness becomes clear in verse 8 as well. What we discover is that he should have stirred the fire to prepare it

⁵ Chisholm, 35.

⁶ Garrett, 163.

⁷ McComiskey argues that this is best seen in reference just to the transgression of Adam in the garden of Eden (95).

⁸ See McComiskey for more on this, 96.

⁹ Garrett, 166.

adequately for baking bread in the morning. Instead of there being good coals to bake, there was a raging fire.

2. **7 — The people are compared to the oven, an oven that burns with anger all night and eventually bursts into flames in the morning.** It could be that this result turned into an outcome of assassination of various leaders in Israel, which would make sense in light of the context of assassinations.

C. 8-12 — Israel and foreign powers

1. 8 — Hosea keeps it loosely connected with the previous oven illustration. This seems to tie into the idea that the baker is the king/ruler. The metaphor here ties into the previous section by demonstrating that Israel was not taken care of as they should have been or protected. They have allowed themselves to be mixed with the other nations.

What happens when a cake is not turned?

2. **9 — What point is Hosea making?** Israel's strength is being devoured by strangers (related to the foreign powers at play — e.g. tribute and other cultural impacts), and this is similar to how old age tends to happen without anyone noticing. The point here is that Israel failed to realize the impact of what these foreign powers were doing to them — they were heading to the grave.
3. 10 — In the midst of them being unaware of their path to destruction, they did have a witness, their pride.¹⁰ Two verbs in this verse describe Israel: “they did not return,” “they did not seek.” This was the call that Yahweh made in 5:15, and Hosea made in 6:1. They failed to turn to Yahweh.
4. 11-12 — Israel like a Dove. Instead of returning and seeking Yahweh, they turn to foreign powers. The reference to Egypt and Assyria may connect with the time when King Hoshea made an alliance with Assyria and a secret alliance with Egypt (2 Kings 17:3-4) — ***“Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. 4 But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.”***

Now, Israel is compared to a Dove that is “silly and without sense.” Garrett suggests it's because they are frantic to find help.¹¹ They attempt to find their salvation outside of Yahweh, but as was said in 2:6-7, Yahweh was going to keep them from finding their lovers. That they have net spread over them points to the forthcoming exile. The report may be connected with their inability to obtain the foreign powers help.¹²

D. 13-16 — Despite all that Yahweh had done, they do not return to Him.

¹⁰ McComiskey, 109.

¹¹ Ibid, 171.

¹² Ibid, 171.

1. 13 — We see Israel pursuing help from all sources but Yahweh. Yahweh promises with great emphasis that he would redeem them. **What do you think he means by “They speak lies against me”?** Their lie (possibly their inconsistency with their religious practice...syncretism¹³) keeps them from enjoying that redemption.
2. 14 — Instead of Israel crying out from their hearts to Yahweh, they turn and cry out to their baals, for the following lines seem to be connected with Baal rituals (1 Kings 18:28). What a shocking statement. They followed the rituals of the Baals, sought after them, but would not give Yahweh their heart.
3. 15 — Emphasis is on Yahweh’s actions, **“I, I trained, I strengthened.”** Despite the grace that Yahweh showed them, Israel turned it to evil. In the same way that we often take God’s grace and use our freedom for evil.
4. 16 — It would appear that Israel returns, but not to Yahweh, which could imply returning to Baal. The reference to a bow may imply their inability to fight or their uselessness (Garrett). Another thought is that their bow is “treacherous.” Meaning, they are like a bow that isn’t able to accomplish it’s purpose — the arrow doesn’t go where it should go.¹⁴ In the end the nation they would have turned to for help would be the nation that would laugh at them (See also Deut 28:37).

IV. Conclusion

Despite Yahweh calling His people to repent, and return to Him so that He can restore them, they persisted in their sin. Instead of turning to Yahweh for help, they turned to their idols and foreign powers to relieve them of their problems — which resulted in them meeting their own doom.

V. Application

A. What can we learn from Israel’s view of their sin?

1. How they responded to their sin
 - a) They did not see their sin as God saw it.
 - b) They thought their sin could be hidden from God.
 - c) They thought they could maintain a good relationship with Yahweh, while carrying on with their idols on the side.
2. The consequences of our sin are often subtle.
3. There are always consequences to our sins.
4. Love for sin keeps us from being fully devoted to God.

B. **What can we learn from the interaction between Hosea and Israel?** Israel was close enough to following Yahweh that they were in a dangerous spot. They knew enough of the truth, but weren’t fully committed to that truth. This could be the case for many of us, which is why we need people to be regularly speaking into our lives about our sin, and be willing to receive that confrontation.

¹³ Ibid, 174.

¹⁴ Smith, 124.