

“INDICTED”

I. Introduction

- A. The basic message of Hosea is conveyed in the first few chapters of the book.
 - 1. Like the other OT prophetic books, Hosea is an announcement of both woe and weal, both judgment and salvation.
 - 2. The remainder of the book continues to unpack this basic message.
 - 3. In doing this, it gives us deeper insight into the greatness of our sin and misery and into the greatness of God’s grace in delivering his people from that sin and misery.

- B. Here in chapter 4, the emphasis is upon the first part of Hosea’s message: the greatness of our sin and misery.
 - 1. This passage is essentially God’s case for the prosecution against his wayward people.
 - 2. As we consider what these verses have to say, we might be inclined to think that they do not really apply to us.
 - 3. But there are two reasons why we would be wrong to think along those lines.
 - 4. First, even if our sins are not as notorious as those described here, we are still sinners.
 - 5. Israel could not defend themselves against the charges that were brought against them, and neither can we.
 - 6. We are just as guilty of breaking God’s law as they were.
 - 7. Second, this passage applies to all of us in the sense that it issues a serious warning against falling into the same errors that led to

Israel's downfall.

II. Unfaithful People

- A. Our passage begins with the Lord bringing his indictment against the northern kingdom of Israel.
1. This legal tone is set by these words in verse 1: "the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land."
 2. The Hebrew word that is translated as "controversy" is a technical term that appears frequently in the Old Testament's prophetic literature.
 3. It is used in contexts in which the Lord is bringing a lawsuit against his people for their breach of the covenant.
 4. This is clearly what is taking place in this passage.
 5. God is confronting his people for their covenant unfaithfulness.
- B. The charges that God brings in this indictment are listed in verses 1 and 2.
1. The first set of charges are sins of omission, or failing to do what God requires.
 2. The qualities that God looks for in his covenant people are nowhere to be found among the children of Israel.
 3. Now, I do not think that this is intended to be taken literally.
 4. We know from other OT passages that there were a few godly people in the northern kingdom.
 5. But they were the exception.
 6. The point being made here is that, in general, as God looks around he sees no faithfulness, which refers to the reliability and trustworthiness that should be a defining quality in the lives of

those who know the Lord.

7. There is no steadfast love, which describes the covenant loyalty to which God calls his people.
 8. There is no knowledge of God.
 9. Of course, the Israelites knew about God, but they failed to love and serve him as their God.
 10. Their love of sin caused them to reject the knowledge of God and to serve idols instead.
 11. It is so important for us to cherish and cultivate our knowledge of God.
 12. Failure to do so has tragic consequences.
 13. Consider what Paul says about this in Romans 1: “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.” (Rom. 1:21-25)
 14. When people fail to honor God as God, when they exchange the knowledge of God for their own ideas and preferences, God gives them over to all sorts of impurity and idolatry.
- C. This leads us to a consideration of the sins of commission that are listed in verse 2.

1. Not only had the Israelites failed to do what God requires, but they also did the things that God forbids.
 2. They were guilty of swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery.
 3. All of these things are violations of the Ten Commandments.
 4. This just goes to show that when godly character is lacking, sinful character invariably steps in to fill the void.
 5. The principle 'nature abhors a vacuum' is just as true in the spiritual realm as it is in the natural realm.
 6. Rejecting the knowledge of God results in moral corruption.
- D. God then tells his people that judgment is about to befall their nation because of these sins of omission and commission.
1. Verse 3 indicates that even the land will be affected by their sin.
 2. The various members of the animal kingdom will suffer.
 3. This appears to be saying that one aspect of the coming judgment will be a drought that will devastate the land.
 4. One thing to note about this is that the sins of the many had an impact upon the faithful few.
 5. The believing remnant had to suffer the consequences of the wide scale apostasy around them.
 6. Of course God caused that suffering to work for the good of his people, but they were affected by the sins of their neighbors.
 7. The same thing takes place in the world today.

III. Unfaithful Leaders

- A. After bringing a general indictment against Israel as a whole, the Lord narrows his focus in verse 4 and following upon Israel's leaders, the priests and prophets.
1. God holds the priests and prophets responsible for the sins of the people.
 2. In Israel, priests had to do more than just get the rituals right.
 3. Unlike other religions in the ancient world, biblical religion was not just a matter of performing certain rites.
 4. Biblical religion addresses the mind.
 5. The priests were the spiritual educators of the people.
 6. They were supposed to teach the people God's law.
 7. Their failure to do so brought devastation upon the covenant people.
 8. The people's blindness stemmed from the blindness of their guides.
 9. This is why God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."
- B. This underscores the vital importance of being biblically literate.
1. Only God's truth will keep us from apostasy.
 2. We are living at a time in history when we have access to untold riches of resources that can help us understand and apply the Scriptures.
 3. Saints in past ages would be amazed to know that you have your own personal copy of the Bible.

4. They would be astounded by the study Bibles and other resources that we have at our disposal.
 5. Yet in spite of all of these resources, surveys tell us that American Christians do not know the Bible very well at all.
 6. That being the case, we should not be surprised that so many of those who profess faith in Christ are being conformed to the world.
 7. Ignorance of God's truth leads to the acceptance of the world's lies.
 8. Never let yourself think that you don't need to be feeding upon God's Word on a regular basis.
 9. What was true for Israel is true in any era: God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
- C. In verse 7, we see that the problem in Israel was not that people were not interested in religion.
1. On the contrary, the priests were in high demand.
 2. Their popularity was actually part of the problem.
 3. God says, "The more they increased, the more they sinned against me".
 4. Instead of teaching the people God's truth, they used the people for their own gain.
 5. Israel's priests had a following, but they had abandoned God's Word.
 6. The same thing could be said of many popular religious figures today.
 7. This passage tells us that such teachers and those who listen to them will be punished for their ways.

IV. Idolatry and Its Consequences

- A. This brings us to verse 11, where we see the Lord confronting the idolatry in which his people were participating.
1. They had forsaken the Lord so that they could cherish things like sexual immorality and the immoderate use of alcohol.
 2. They abandoned God's truth and ran after sensual pleasures.
 3. Those sensual pleasures were closely related to their idolatrous worship.
 4. Idolatry is spiritual adultery.
 5. The Israelites thought that they were worshipping the Lord, but they were actually abandoning him to worship gods of their own devising.
 6. They were bowing down to carved images, something that was explicitly forbidden by the second commandment.
 7. 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.
 8. When people believe things about God that are not true, they are not worshipping the true God.
 9. When people try to worship and serve God in ways that run contrary to what he has commanded, they are engaging in idolatry.
- B. Another thing that we see in this section is that physical adultery, and sexual sin in general, is caused by spiritual adultery.
1. We see this in the ways in which the concept of sexual immorality is discussed here.

2. In verses 11-13 the term 'whoredom' is used as a metaphor for Israel's idolatry, but verse 14 speaks of the physical acts of sexual immorality that the people were committing.
 3. There is a connection between these two things.
 4. Idolatry leads to sexual immorality.
 5. When people set aside the knowledge of God, God gives them over to the lusts of their hearts.
 6. Idolatry bears the fruit of immorality.
- C. It might seem strange that God would say in verse 14 that he will not punish Israelite women when they play the whore and commit adultery, but this verse makes a couple of important points.
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.
 2. They will receive the punishment in themselves.
 3. 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.
 4. God says, "the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes."
 5. This is something that sets Old Testament ethics apart from other ancient moral codes.
 6. The Bible does not treat a man's sexual sins more leniently than those of a woman.
 7. Women are certainly held accountable for such sins, but men bear an even greater responsibility because of their leadership role in marriage.

8. This was not the case elsewhere in the Middle East.
 9. There are even places in the world today where adultery is a capital offense for a woman but not for a man.
 10. But the Bible holds both men and women responsible for sexual sin.
- D. This section ends with another point about the people's lack of knowledge.
1. God says, "a people without understanding shall come to ruin."
 2. This is a principle that we need to take to heart.
 3. If our minds are not being renewed by God's truth, then we will come to ruin.
 4. We are told in Romans 12 that it is by the renewing of our minds that we are transformed and given the ability to discern God's will.
 5. If that mind renewal is not taking place, we will be conformed to the pattern of this world, a world that already stands condemned.
 6. If we set aside the knowledge of God's truth, we will come to ruin.

V. A Warning

- A. This brings us to the last section of the chapter, which begins in verse 15.
1. Here God issues a warning to the people of Judah.
 2. The first four chapters of Hosea have made it clear that the northern kingdom of Israel (which is referred to in verse 17 by the name Ephraim) is about to be judged for forsaking the Lord.
 3. As this chapter concludes, God warns the southern kingdom of Judah not to participate in Israel's idolatries.

4. Judah is not to visit the shrines that the northern tribes set up at Gilgal and Beth-aven.
 5. Those places of worship were popular for historical reasons, but they were unauthorized.
 6. God commanded his people to offer their sacrifices in the central sanctuary in Jerusalem.
 7. But Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, set up those shrines because he did not want his people to travel to Judah to offer sacrifices.
 8. He set up those shrines for the sake of political expediency.
 9. But God made it clear that the people of Judah were to stay away from these shrines.
- B. There are things that we need to stay away from today.
1. We need to be very careful that we do not participate in the idolatries of this world.
 2. If we do not guard our minds, we will end up embracing assumptions that run contrary to God's truth.
 3. We also need to be careful that we do not participate in corrupted expressions of the Christian faith.
 4. There are many who take up the name 'Christian' these days who are nevertheless setting aside the knowledge of God and running after idols of their own devising.
 5. Such people believe in god, but he is not the God of the Bible.
 6. Of course, we should be kind to such people.

7. We should make gentle attempts to help them see the ways in which they are being unfaithful to God's Word.
8. But our Lord does not want us to have any fellowship with such people.
9. That would only be a fellowship in error.

VI. Conclusion

- A. This passage is not just about the people of Israel in the 8th century B.C.
- B. It is also about us.
- C. While we may not be guilty of notorious sins, we all stand condemned under the law of God.
- D. Taken on its own, this chapter offers us no hope.
- E. But we have to remember that this chapter is set within a larger context, a context in which God graciously promises to deliver his people from the judgment that our sins deserve.
- F. This passage's indictment should cause us to be humbled for our own sin.
- G. Its warning should cause us to keep watch lest we fall into the same kind of error that led to Israel's downfall.
- H. And when we reflect upon this passage in light of the salvation that is offered to sinful people like us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we should be all the more grateful that though our iniquities so often prevail against us, our God atones for all of our transgressions.