

June 18

Hosea 4-9

Hi, I'm Lori Eccleston. Today we read Hosea chapter 4-9. The first three chapters of Hosea set the stage for everything else we will read in the book by alerting us to God's understanding that Israel's sin has been that of physical and spiritual adultery and even prostitution. God had loved Israel, created her, carried her, been husband to her but Israel had gone after other gods and indulged in idolatry. Spiritual adultery is primarily what is in view here but do not lose sight of the fact that physical adultery, prostitution and sexual immorality of all sorts had crept into not only the life but the religion of the ten tribes because of their unwillingness to follow the laws that God had laid down.

Did you notice the root cause of all of this? Hosea says that God's people Israel are being destroyed from "a lack of knowledge" -- the knowledge of God.

Here is what Hosea says happened. Once upon a time, Israel had a full and certain knowledge of the Lord. Then, Israel rejected that knowledge -- They turned away from it. Then they exchanged their glory for something disgraceful and ended up with idolatry and prostitution and violence.

The downward spiral starts whenever people who have God's revelation choose to ignore it. When the knowledge of the Lord fails, people stop acknowledging the Lord. When the acknowledgement of the Lord is gone then an exchange takes place. Something has to fill the vacuum. That's when idolatry rears its ugly head. That's what happened in Israel.

Did you notice that Hosea's harshest words are to the priests because that is where the famine began. The priests rejected God's law. They stopped teaching Israel His word and led them toward destruction and judgment.

If Hosea's diagnosis was right, we can address it by going to the root of the problem and working as hard as we can to restore to our society the missing foundation -- the knowledge of the Lord! That is why it is so important for you to know the Word. What you are doing right now, in making the effort to read through the Bible in a year is such a great thing. If you have the knowledge of the Lord, then you will be much more likely to acknowledge the Lord.

Chapter 6 begins on a note of great hope. Hosea issues this hope filled call: "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

Hosea is saying: even now, if we will acknowledge Him, He will heal us. It is never too late to turn back to God! But there is more. Even if the judgment falls, Hosea is confident that healing will follow.

Now in Chapters 6-9, there is the pronouncement of God's righteous judgment against the people of Israel.

A little baking history lesson now.....The baking in ancient Israel was done outside. You heated flat stones in a fire and then buried them in a shallow pit with the flat cakes you were cooking wrapped in leaves on top of them. But if you forgot at the appropriate moment to turn the cakes over, you had a cake not turned -- or in modern language, a half-baked cake. I'm sure our Food Services Coordinator, Thuy, is relieved she doesn't have to bake cakes this way!

Ephraim is a cake not turned. But Ephraim is also like a dove --easily deceived and easily snared by the hunters who cast their nets into the air to snare the unwary birds. Then Ephraim is like a wild donkey wandering alone, selling herself for the prostitute's fee of Assyrian protection. Both Menahem and Hoshea, two of the last kings of Israel, paid tribute to Assyria in an attempt to buy security for the nation. What they did not understand was that the Lord, not Assyria, had become the real enemy of Israel! It was the Lord that was about to send judgment.

Right at the heart of all of the denunciations and pronouncements there are repeated references to the idols, the calf idols that Jeroboam set up right after the division of the kingdom to prevent the people from going down to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Those idols were right at the heart of Israel's downfall and even though Jehu did some good in eliminating the priests of Baal, the fact that the idols were never removed left the cancer intact right at the heart of the nation and God's judgment finally fell on Samaria for her idolatrous ways.

I hope that you also took the time to notice a very significant passage at the beginning of our reading today. Hosea writes on behalf of the Lord in chapter 6. "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings." As often as God might choose to communicate that, people are prone to forget it. It is so easy to fall into the trap of assuming that because we pay God lip service and go through the external motions of regular religious duties -- we go to church, we put money in the offering plate, we say our prayers and even read the Bible, that we have somehow done all that God expects or requires of us. It is not so. God wants doers of the Word, not just hearers.

The theme of Hosea's whole book might well be the faithfulness of God's unfailing love, but the main idea is that if we will not repent and obey Him, then He will punish us and judge our sins.

Blessings to you today!