
Day 169 - June 18

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Hosea

Readings: *Hosea 4:1-9:17*

Reflections:

- The charges against Israel are long and intense. Baal worship was focused on a sex cult that promised to bless the participants with fertility, many children, great crops and productive herds. Baal worship centered in temple of prostitution where women, girls and boys were used as sex slaves and at times children were sacrificed to the gods. The belief was that having sex would arouse the gods and they would orgasm and their sperm would fall on the land and cause all things to be fertile. Rain was a physical image of the gods' sperm. With this background, it is easy to understand the prophecies of Hosea and the many references made against Israel's prostitution with Baal worship and their addiction to adultery.
- Throughout this text we read of God's judgment against the leaders of Israel, prophets, priests and the kings of their choosing. In the stories leading up to the book of Hosea, we see over and over again how the leaders of Israel led the people into sin. Leaders and the people are considered as one and both are judged equally.
- We also see God's incredible frustration and anger with the cycle of sin and rebellion of Israel. God oscillates between words of judgment and promises of redemption. At one point God is declaring that he will be like a lion that tears them to shreds and the next that he will raise them back to life after three days. We see in this passage the two aspects of God's character: His holiness and His mercy. He is both a perfect judge and a loving savior. We at no time can let go of these two truths of God or else we fall into the danger of either living in fear and despair of his judgment or living in careless spiritual apathy from a false view of grace.
- Key verses in this section:
 - "My people are destroyed because of lack of knowledge." This is a lack of true experiential knowledge of God's truth and love. This is not a lack of head knowledge. See Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1 and 3 for more about the kind of experiential knowledge people need to truly live and be free in Christ.

- “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.” Here again we see the irreligious nature of God. He is clearly declaring that he does not care about the externals of religion but the internal heart of his people. Acknowledgement of God should not be viewed as simply acknowledging God exists. Here it means a “true experiential knowledge of God.” In other words, God doesn’t care if we go through religious motions. He cares that we actually know him and live in friendship with him.
- “They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.” This principle of reaping what you sow is used here with a powerful image of the wind. The wind here is viewed as complete emptiness and yet as they sow into the emptiness of their self-indulgence and idolatry, when time for reaping comes, the emptiness of the wind turns into the incredible destructiveness of the whirlwind. It seems so harmless at first but when the season of reaping comes, everything is wiped out. A great warning for those who take self-centered rebellion to God as something that is no big deal. We will see in the next section how we should sow as people passionate for God: “Sow for yourselves righteousness and reap the fruit of unfailing love...”
- Over and over again we see reaffirmed that what God really cares about is not the outward displays of righteousness as seen by keeping religious rules or rituals. What God cares about is the heart and the degree we are humbly submitted to him in a loving relationship. Jesus will model this over and over again. Praise God for Jesus.