**3. Priestly Privileges Removed**

In the first three chapters Hosea has shown us (and learned through painful experience) the big picture of God’s relationship with Israel. Though God had graciously redeemed them and called them his people and promised to be their God forever, Israel was unfaithful. But like a jealous husband, God promises to keep pursuing his people. From Chapter 4 Hosea opens up for us the manner of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God – the more we learn about Israel’s depravity, the more we need to appreciate the scale of the love of God.

*Read Hosea 4:1-5:7*

**A. Failures of a Priestly Nation *(Hosea 4:1-19)***

1. In 4:1-3, God brings his charges against Israel.

1. What are the *general* qualities that are lacking in God’s people (v1)?
2. What are the specifics in v2? Is there another part of the Old Testament in mind here?
3. What is the link between Israel’s sin and the created order around them (v3)? What does this signify? (cp. Deuteronomy 28:15ff.)

2. Much of chapter 4 is difficult to translate (compare some English translations and you will find a number of points of disagreement). The word **priest** is used several times (e.g. vv4, 6, 9) and this has led many to conclude that it is the priests who are in God’s sights here (this seems to be the slant the NIV takes). However, these references to **priest** in the original Hebrew are always singular, meaning either a specific priest is in view OR that the nation as a whole is first of all targeted before addressing the priesthood more specifically later (see 4:9 and then 5:1ff.).

1. We saw in Study #1 that Israel was being stripped of the title, ‘God’s people.’ Now read Exodus 19:4-6 – in light of this, what privileged position is Israel being stripped of in Hosea 4:4-10?
2. What would it practically mean for Israel to be God’s priest?
3. Still considering Hosea 4:4-10, how does the prophet describe what Israel has done to bring this loss of privilege? (e.g. v6 & 8)
4. This is an important New Testament theme. We have seen already how the New Testament writers take some of these privileged titles that Israel had and applied them to the church. So Peter, writing to Christians:

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* ***1 Peter 2:9***

If (all) Christians now make up the *royal priesthood*, what are the privileges each of us have? What are the responsibilities each of us have?

3. Hosea 4:7 is more literally rendered in the ESV:

 *“The more they increased,*

 *the more they sinned against me;*

 *I will change their glory into shame.”* ***Hosea 4:7 ESV***

Rather than referring to increasing numbers of priests (as in the NIV) it may be more likely that it refers to the increased material prosperity in Israel – which influenced them negatively.

1. In general, is there a link between material wealth and faithfulness to God?

(cp. 1 Timothy 6:6-10)

1. How can we make sure that material possessions don’t lead us away from God?

(cp. 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

4. Hosea 4:10-19 reveals the shocking contents of Israel’s religious life. We find there are sacrifices in typically pagan places (e.g. on the mountaintops, 4:13), but also in places approved by God (e.g. Gilgal and Beth-el, v15). [N.B. God calls Beth-el by the name *Beth-aven* here, which means ‘house of nothingness,’ showing how he views what happens there.]

1. Consider vv10-14. What sort of effects has idolatry had upon God’s people? (e.g. their intelligence, their morality, their families)
2. God wants them to stop saying *As surely as the Lord lives!* (4:15). The word *Lord* is the covenant name of God – YAHWEH. What does this reveal about what *true* worship is and is not?
3. Israel is repeatedly denounced as stubborn in Chapter 4 – *like those who bring charges against a priest* (v4), they do not listen to God. What are the symptoms and prognosis of stubbornness in 4:16-19?

**B. Failures of Kings and Priests *(Hosea 5:1-7)***

6. You see that Ch5 opens with fresh accusation from God – who is specifically targeted here? What does the imagery of being a *snare* and a *net* (5:1) suggest about the effects of Israel’s sin?

7. In Ch4 we saw that Israel were headed for ruin because of their *lack of knowledge* (4:6) and because they are *without understanding* (4:16).

1. How does this compare to how God is described in 5:3?
2. What good religious things does Israel (and Judah, v5) commit themselves to do in 5:6-7? What does God see instead? How does God respond?

*In your group…*

Share points for prayer.

Worship God for his attributes revealed in this passage

What has challenged you about this passage of Scripture?

Pray for each other’s needs.

**4. Get Ready For War**

As we considered in the introductory notes, Hosea prophesied in Israel at a tragic time for the nation – before long they would be overrun by the Assyrians and deported out of the Promised Land. Here the impending war comes into view, which would end badly for Israel (e.g. see 2 Kings 15-17).

*Read Hosea 5:8-6:6* [N.B. *Ephraim* is another name for the Northern Kingdom of Israel]

**A. The Judgement of God (Hosea 5:8-15)**

1. Notice how 5:8 opens – the voice of accusation turns into a trumpet sounding for war. It is the image of a watchman seeing the enemy troops approaching and sounding the alarm.

1. Though it is the Assyrian army who threaten God’s people, what do vv9-11 reveal about what’s really going on?
2. What attributes of God are displayed in this?
3. God seems to call Hosea to be the watchman who blasts the trumpet to warn Israel about the coming judgement of God. Do we need spiritual watchmen (watchpersons!) today? How do we do this effectively?

2. God’s judgement is graphically portrayed using a series of three metaphors in vv12-15. What are they and what do they convey?

 (a) v12

 (b) v13

(c) v14

3. The *great king* of v13 is the ruler of Assyria.

1. What is Hosea telling us that Israel did to try and relieve the judgement of God? What does this reveal that they believed about God?
2. What was God looking for from Israel (v15)?
3. Again, what attributes of God are revealed here?

The closing verse of Ch5 is one of hope – hope that God’s judgement on Israel was not final; in fact it was for a purpose:

*Hosea means by theses words, that God does not so punish men as to pour forth his wrath upon them for their destruction; but that he intends, on the contrary, to promote their salvation, when he is severe in punishing their sins. (****John Calvin****)*

**B. The Road Back to God (Hosea 6:1-6)**

4. Chapter 6 opens with a response from Israel – notice how they recognise in 6:1 the ways God has afflicted them by using some of the imagery from 5:13-14. There is a realisation that God’s wrath can give way to healing and recovery.

1. What characterises Israel’s response in 6:1-3?
2. What sort of things must someone be convinced of before turning to God in repentance?
3. How would you define repentance, and why is it such an important part of salvation?

5. There is some disagreement as to whether the words of repentance in vv1-3 are genuine, but we can be sure that the words of vv1-3 from the heart are what God seeks. What seems to frustrate God in v4? Can you relate to this?

6. Verses 5-6 reveal more of what God is like and what God requires.

1. From verse six, what does God tell us he desires from his people (and how does that compare with what his people think God desires)?
2. Read *Mark 7:5-8*. How does Jesus diagnose this sort of attitude?
3. In what ways that we can be guilty of this?

7. Hosea 6:6 is quoted twice by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (Matthew 9:13, 12:7). Read Matthew 12:1-8, how does this help us to understand what *I desire mercy, not sacrifice* means?

8. At the heart of Israel’s broken relationship with God is their failure to understand who God is (e.g. 2:8, 4:1, 6; 5:4). The way to be right with God is to reverse this:

 *Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord… (Hosea 6:3)*

 *For I desire…the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)*

1. What lies had Israel believed about God?
2. What lies do we tend to believe about God?
3. How can we *press on to know the Lord*?

*In your group…*

Share points for prayer.

Worship God for his attributes revealed in this passage

Ask God to reveal more and more of who he is to you through his word.

Pray over what has challenged you about this passage of Scripture?

Pray for each other’s needs.