

HOSEA: LOOKING BEYOND JUDGMENT TO RESTORATION

IX: God's Indictment For Israel's Spiritual Fickleness

(Hosea 6:4-11a)

I. Introduction

- A. God's punishment is very painful, but afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness, Hebrews 12:11.
- B. This was the theme of Hosea, the "death-bed prophet of Israel" and the last prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel before it fell to Assyria in divine judgment. (ESV Introduction to Hosea)
- C. Hosea 6:4-11a describes God's indictment of Israel for her spiritual fickleness, and we view the passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. God's Indictment For Israel's Spiritual Fickleness, Hosea 6:4-11a.

- A. One of the characteristics of sinful man that frustrates his relationships, especially his relationship with a perfectly righteous God, is his spiritual fickleness, his inconsistency.
- B. This characteristic is addressed in Hosea 6:4 where God rhetorically in great frustration asked the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Judah) what He should do with them!
- C. The cause of this question was the people's fickleness, for their "loyal love" (*hesed*, Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 900; H. A. W., Theol. Wrdbk. of the O. T., 1980, vol. I, p. 305-307) in staying true to God's Law in covenant relationship with Him was as fleeting as an early morning cloud and the dew that soon disappears, Hosea 6:4.
- D. For this reason, God had already kept His part of the Mosaic Covenant in punishing the people for their departure from covenant loyalty, using words of judgment by His prophets to bring sudden death and destruction to many of the people, Hosea 6:5 with Jeremiah 1:10; 5:14 in light of Deuteronomy 28:15-48.
- E. God had desired "loyal love" (*hesed* again, in the **emphatic** position **before the verb**, *Ibid.*, Kittel, p. 901) and not sacrifice, He had desired the "knowledge" (*da'at* in the **emphatic** position of the phrase) of God more than burnt offerings, Hosea 6:6. This statement did not mean that God did not want the people to sacrifice, but He wanted their sacrifices to be combined with hearts that were full of loyal love for Him, for without that loyal love, sacrifices and burnt offerings were empty, dead spirituality!
- F. Like the people of the town Adam [near the Jordan River] (*'adam*, *Ibid.*, Kittel; A. R. Hulst, O. T. Trans. Problems, 1960, p. 231), Israel and Judah in general had failed to fulfill their contractual duties (*bagad*, *Ibid.*, p. 1394, 1391) with God, for there [at Adam] they had dealt treacherously with Him, Hosea 6:7.
- G. Similarly, [Ramoah] Gilead east of the Jordan River had become a town of wicked men full of murder, men whose footprints were stained with the blood of their murdered victims, Hosea 6:8 NIV.
- H. As "marauders lie in ambush for a man, so" did "bands of priests" who murdered "on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes," Hosea 6:9 NIV. Gilead and Shechem had been designated by Joshua as cities of refuge where manslayers innocent of murder could find asylum (*Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1394), but these cities, also cities of Levites who were to be experts in the Mosaic Law and so to preserve its knowledge and application for God's people, had instead become known for murder, *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- I. The word for "shameful" in the "shameful crimes" of the priests is *zimmah*, normally used for the vilest of sexual sins like incest, cult prostitution, rape and adultery, but it was likely used here to describe the breach of God's covenant that was likened to spiritual immorality, *Ibid.*, p. 1394.
- J. Accordingly, God had seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel, for the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) was given to spiritual prostitution in idolatry, being defiled, and also the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Judah) had been appointed for a figurative harvesting in divine judgment, Hosea 6:10-11a.

Lesson: *Where the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah had been in a "loyal love" contract with God to heed His Mosaic Covenant, that "loyal love" proved to be fickle, soon vanishing like a morning cloud and the dew. This breach of contract had already begun to be judged by God, but the people had still gone beyond offering sacrifices with false motives to where even the Levites, those called of God to study and teach Scripture, had converted some of their Levitical cities of refuge into cities of murder, and spiritually prostituting themselves with idols, ripe for divine judgment.*

Application: (1) *We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to retain the faithfulness and self-control so necessary for sustained practical righteousness in life, Galatians 5:16, 22-23. (2) Failure to rely on the Spirit can eventually lead the most Biblically upright influencers in society to be its worst sinners (Levites in Gilead and Shechem), so may we rely on the Spirit of God for righteousness in our spiritual walk.*