

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The prophet charges his people with their enormous sins, Hosea 4:1, Hosea 4:2; in consequence of which they are threatened with heavy judgments, Hosea 4:3-5. God himself is then introduced complaining of the ignorance and obstinacy of Israel; and as their priests had a large share in the common guilt, it is declared that they shall be visited with a proportionable share of the common ruin, Hosea 4:6-11. The sins of idolatry and divination are then particularly reprov'd, Hosea 4:12-14; and Judah admonished to beware of these sins, which would leave her rebellious sister Israel helpless and desolate as a lamb in a desert, Hosea 4:15, Hosea 4:16. In the remaining verses the style is varied, but the subject is the same. Ephraim is given up to idolatry, and the necessary consequence declared to be a bitter draught! Immediately we see him bound in the wings of a mighty tempest, and driven as chaff before the wind, either to destruction or captivity, Hosea 4:17-19.

Verse 1

The Lord hath a controversy - רִיב (rib), what we should call a lawsuit, in which God is plaintiff, and the Israelites defendants. It is Jehovah versus Israel and Judah.

But when has God a controversy with any land? - Answer. When there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. These refer to the minds of the people. But wherever these righteous principles are wanting, there will soon be a vicious practice; hence it is added,

Verse 2

By swearing, and lying - Where there is no truth there will be lies and perjury; for false swearing is brought in to confirm lying statements. And when there is no mercy, killing, slaying, and murders, will be frequent. And where there is no knowledge of God, no conviction of his omnipresence and omniscience, private offenses, such as stealing, adulteries, etc., will prevail. These, sooner or later, break out, become a flood, and carry all before them. Private stealing will assume the form of a public robbery, and adulteries become fashionable, especially among the higher orders; and suits of crim. con. render them more public, scandalous, and corrupting. By the examination of witnesses, and reading of infamous letters in a court of justice, people are taught the wiles and stratagems to be used to accomplish these ends, and prevent detection; and also how to avoid those circumstances which have led to the detection of others. Every report of such matters is an experimental lecture on successful debauchery.

Blood toucheth blood - Murders are not only frequent, but assassinations are mutual. Men go out to kill each other; as in our duels, the frenzy of cowards; and as there is no law regarded, and no justice in the land, the nearest akin slays the murderer. Even in our land, where duels are so frequent, if a man kill his antagonist, it is murder; and so generally brought in by an honest coroner and his jury. It is then brought into court; but who is hanged for it? The very murder is considered as an affair of honor, though it began in a dispute about a prostitute; and it is directed to be brought in manslaughter; and the murderer is slightly fined for having hurried his neighbor, perhaps once his friend, into the eternal world, with all his imperfections on his head! No wonder that a land mourns where these prevail; and that God should have a controversy with it. Such crimes as these are sufficient to bring God's curse upon any land. And how does God show his displeasure? See the following verse.

Verse 3

Therefore shall the land mourn - Fruitful seasons shall be denied.

That dwelleth therein shall languish - Endemic and epidemic disorders shall prevail, and multitudes shall die; so that mourning shall be found in all quarters.

The beasts of the field, and with the fowls - There is a death of cattle and domestic animals, in consequence of the badness of the season.

The fishes of the sea also shall be taken away - Those immense shoals which at certain seasons frequent the coasts, which are caught in millions, and become a very useful home supply, and a branch of most profitable traffic, they shall be directed by the unseen influence of God to avoid our coasts, as has frequently been the case with herrings, mackerel, pilchards, etc.; and so this source of supply and wealth has been shut up, because of the iniquities of the land.

Verse 4

Yet let no man strive - Or, no man contendeth. All these evils stalk abroad unreprieved, for all are guilty. None

can say, "Let me pluck the mote out of thy eye," because he knows that there is a beam in his own.

For thy people are - The people and the priest are alike rebels against the Lord; the priests having become idolaters, as well as the people. Bp. Newcome renders this clause, "And as is the provocation of the priest, so is that of my people." The whole clause in the original is *veammecha kimeribey cohen*, "and thy people as the rebellions of the priest." But one of my oldest MSS. omits *veammecha* (cohen), "and then the text may be read, And thy people are as rebels. In this MS. *veammecha* (cohen) is added in the margin by a much later hand.

Verse 5

Therefore shalt thou fall in the day - In the most open and public manner, without snare or ambush.

And the prophet also shall fall - in the night - The false prophet, when employed in taking prognostications from stars, meteors, etc.

And I will destroy thy mother - The metropolis or mother city. Jerusalem or Samaria is meant.

Verse 6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge - They have not the knowledge of God, nor of sacred things, nor of their own interest, nor of the danger to which they are exposed. They walk on blindly, and perish.

Because thou hast rejected knowledge - So they might have become wise, had they not rejected the means of improvement.

Thou shalt be no priest to me - If this be the true reading, there must be reference to some particular priest, well known, to whom these words are personally addressed; unless by priest the whole priesthood is meant, and then it may apply to the priests of Jeroboam's calves.

Verse 7

Will I change their glory into shame - As the idolaters at Dan and Bethel have changed my glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass, (Romans 1:23), so will I change their glory into shame or ignominy. In the day of my wrath, their calf-gods shall not deliver them.

Verse 8

They eat up the sin of my people - *chattath*, the sin-offering, though it be offered contrary to the law; for their hearts are set on iniquity, they wish to do whatever is contrary to God.

Verse 9

Like people, like priest -

"The priest a wanderer from the narrow way; The silly sheep, no wonder that they stray."

I will punish them - Both priest and people; both equally bad.

Verse 10

They shall eat, and not have enough - Whatever means they may use to satisfy or gratify themselves shall be ineffectual.

Verse 11

Whoredom and wine - These debaucheries go generally together.

Take away the heart - Darken the understanding, deprave the judgment, pervert the will, debase all the passions, etc.

Verse 12

At their stocks - They consult their wooden gods.

And their staff declareth - They use divination by rods; see the note on Ezekiel 21 (note), where this sort of divination (rabbdomancy) is explained.

Verse 13

Under oaks - *allon*, from *alal*, he was strong. Hence, the oak, in Latin, is called *robur*;

which word means also, strength, the oak being the strongest of all the trees of the forest.

The shadow thereof is good - Their daughters committed whoredom, and their spouses committed adultery.

1.Their deities were worshipped by prostitution.

2.They drank much in their idol worship, Hosea 4:11, and thus their passions became inflamed.

3.The thick groves were favorable to the whoredoms and adulteries mentioned here. In imitation of these, some nations have their public gardens.

Verse 14

I will not punish - Why should you be stricken any more; ye will revolt more and more. When God, in judgment, removes his judgments, the case of that people is desperate. While there is hope, there is correction.

Themselves are separated - There is a reference here to certain debaucheries which should not be described. The state of the people at this time must have been abominable beyond all precedent; animal, sensual, bestial, diabolical: women consecrating themselves to serve their idols by public prostitution; boys dismembered like the Galli or priests of Cybele, men and women acting unnaturally; and all conjoining to act diabolically.

Verse 15

Let not Judah offend - Israel was totally dissolute; Judah was not so. Here she is exhorted to maintain her integrity. If the former will go to what was once Beth-el, the house of God, now Beth-aven, the house of iniquity, because Jeroboam has set up his calves there, let not Judah imitate them. Gilgal was the place where the covenant of circumcision was renewed when the people passed over Jordan; but was rendered infamous by the worship of idols, after Jeroboam had set up his idolatry.

Verse 16

Israel slideth back - They are untractable, like an unbroken heifer or steer, that pulls back, rather than draw in the yoke.

Will feed them as a lamb in a large place - A species of irony. Ye shall go to Assyria, and be scattered among the nations; ye may sport yourselves in the extensive empire, wither ye shall be carried captives.

Verse 17

Ephraim - The ten tribes.

Is joined to idols - Is become incorporated with false gods.

Let him alone - They are irreclaimable, leave them to the consequences of their vicious conduct.

Verse 18

Their drink is sour - Or rather, he is gone after their wine. The enticements of idolatry have carried them away.

Her rulers with shame do love - Rather, have loved shame; they glory in their abominations.

Give ye - Perhaps it would be better to read, Her rulers have committed, etc. They have loved gifts. What a shame! These were their rulers, literally, their shields. Justice and judgment were perverted.

Verse 19

The wind hath bound her - A parching wind has blasted them in their wings - coasts, borders; or they are carried away into captivity, as with the most rapid blight. These two last verses are very obscure.