

God's Indictment of Israel

Key Verse: *"Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."*
—Hosea 4:1

Selected Scripture:
*Hosea 4:1-4; 7:1,2;
12:7-9; 14:1-3*

BEGINNING IN 931 B.C., under their first king, Jeroboam, ten tribes of Israelites, having separated from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, began a long history of iniquity as the kingdom of Israel. "In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."—II Kings 15:8,9

In Hosea's day, approximately 200 years after Jeroboam, Israel verged upon moral chaos. Idolatry, intrigues, and assassinations were rapidly becoming the norm. "By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." (Hos. 4:2) Added to these sinful practices was Israel's deluded belief that, for all this, it remained righteous in the sight of God due to its relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, did Israel dishonor God and manifest its corrupted perception of his righteousness.

Inevitably, God, through the prophet Hosea, declared his ‘controversy’—his differing perception of Israel which he then formally indicted. “They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face.” (Hos. 7:2) Pressing his case against Israel as a barrister would in court, he likens the ten-tribe kingdom to a deluded hypocrite—a self-righteous merchant who, believing he is undetected by God, manipulates the balances used in commerce to enrich himself by defrauding his customers; all the while presuming he remains in the grace of God. “He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin. And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.”—Hos. 12:7-9

God’s patient tolerance having expired, the nation was exposed to the complete range of Divine consequences. Even as the full weight of Divine justice fell on Israel, Hosea pleads with Israel to awaken to the fact that its only hope lay in recalling the words of God and, in repentance, returning to him in heartfelt worship. Its alliance with powerful Assyria could not save Israel from the consequences of God’s arraignment, nor could Israel’s idols. “O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.” (Hos. 14:1-3) Israel would not; and its hypocrisy, corrupt perception of God, and its perversion of his holy laws were condemned by the very principles of Divine justice that it had for so long ignored, forgotten or denied. ■