

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 3, Hosea 4

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Well, it's good to be back with you. The primary reason for being away was that last week I was recording 20 hours of lectures on the books of 1st and 2nd Kings. There is an organization and friends in the Bible study at the Free Methodist Church will help me get this right, BibleTraining.org. I've given several different... Biblical Training! Call out a... whatever.

BibleTraining.org. This is an organization which is seeking to make a biblical seminary education available around the world for free. And so, I have done Isaiah for them and this was Kings. So, that was a great opportunity.

Since they very kindly agreed to fly Karen and me out to Washington, we asked if we might put an Alaska cruise on the front end of that and they kindly gave permission. So, we did that to begin with and then came back for the recording last week. So, it was some vacation, yes, but not last week by any means.

We're looking at Hosea and I want to remind you of the time frame here because I think this is quite significant. In terms of the dates of the Kings that he names in chapter 1, we can say that these prophecies were given roughly between 755 BC and 715 BC. The first 10 years, everything seemed to be lovely.

They had had some 35 years of Jeroboam II before this, a pretty effective king, although no believer and everything had been lovely. So, that Amos could say, you think the day of the Lord is coming, don't you? It is, but it's not what you think it is. So, everything was wonderful.

And then in 745, Assyria, which had been quiescent for about 50 years, Jonah, begins on its last 100 years of Pac-Man, gobbling up everything in front of it. In this period of time, from 745 to 722, Israel, the northern kingdom, had five different dynasties, one-man dynasties, before he was murdered by someone else who started a new dynasty. So, a bloodbath here, and finally, during this time, Assyria is taking more and more of Israel's territories, till finally, in the end, all that's left really is the land immediately around Samaria, and finally, Samaria falls in 722, and three-quarters of Israel goes into exile.

The question then is, what's going to happen? Is Judah going to go, too? There's every reason why they should, but they don't. And the answer, to a large degree, is Hezekiah. And it's in this situation that Hosea's prophecies come to him from the Lord, and in this situation, he declares his word.

We've seen how, in the first three chapters, the metaphor is set up. Yahweh is the husband, and Israel is Gomer, the prostitute wife who bears children to her husband who are not her husband's. And yet, in the end, her husband says, I'm going to make those children mine.

So, what we see in the book is God's continued affirmation of His love for them. Regardless of what they've done, regardless of how they've responded, God continues to say, I love you, I'm not going to let you go, I'm going to find a way to restore you. So, a lot of grim stuff here, but at the same time, the underlying covenant of God, as we saw last time in chapter 3, God says, I'm going to buy you back.

I'm going to take you into the desert and woo you there. We normally don't think of the desert as a good place for wooing. Lovely gardens are places for wooing, but God says, no, I'm going to take you into the desert, and you will have no other lovers, but only me.

So, we're looking at the fourth chapter tonight, and I comment in the opening background that we've got a lot of textual difficulties in the book of Hosea. Now, I say a lot, that's relatively speaking, compared to most of the other books of the Old Testament. You've got several places where the text is just pretty clearly wrong.

One of the interesting things is that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, often has a better reading. And the example that I give you here in the background is an example of that. The Greek translation seems to get it right, whereas the Hebrew gets it wrong.

Now, let me just talk quickly about a possible explanation for that. The Bible was in process in 586, when Jerusalem fell, and it appears that there were three groups of biblical texts. There was one group that stayed in Palestine, and it's called the Palestinian.

Another group of texts that went to Egypt remember after they killed Gedaliah, the man that the Babylonians put in charge? They said, hmm, maybe the Babylonians won't like us, maybe we better go someplace else. Let's go to Egypt. And another group went to Babylon.

Most of the biblical books seem to be from this family, and by and large, it is more reliable than either of these two. This one becomes the Samaritan Pentateuch, and this one becomes the basis for the Septuagint, which, remember, is Greek. Yes, the Septuagint was written about 225 BC.

So, by and large, these texts are the best texts, and it looks as though, in the end, when they chose the canon, it was basically, are we going to choose all of these, or are we going to choose all of these, or are we going to choose all of these? And the decision was to choose all of these. Now, again, we don't know this, we don't have any records of that, nobody kept any minutes, but the evidence is, by and large, these 39 texts were better preserved from the originals than either of these two, except in Hosea and Samuel. But it looks as though they said, they probably recognized this, but it looks as though they said, look, it's all or nothing, we're not going to pick and choose, and there may well have been politics involved, we Babylonians are going to win this contest.

Anyway, in Hosea and Samuel, the Septuagint text is the better one. Now, again, there's nothing of great theological import in these issues, but there they are. So, look at the background.

The King James reproduces the Hebrew. Let no man strive, nor reprove another, for thy people are those that strive with a priest. What does the Greek text say? Let no one contend, let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priests.

And that makes sense with the way the rest of the chapter goes, with the way the rest of the book goes. What's the problem? The problem is right at the top. So, there are a few other examples of that.

So, that's that. Nancy? Some of it was, and that's post-Christian. Yeah.

Yeah, it's 300s, 400s AD. Yeah. The Talmud and the Mishnah are Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament, and they were written after the time of Christ.

Okay. I mentioned three possible divisions of the text in chapters 4 through 14. Coming in chapter 6, where there's a call to repentance.

In chapter 11, where God says, I can't give you up. And then, in the end, chapter 14, which is God's promise of restoration. So, there are three sections: 4 through 6, the remainder of 6 through 11, and 12 through 14.

Now, Gold Star for anybody who remembers the terms that I gave for the three divisions. Okay, where is my commercial driver's license anyway? I'm going to ask again next week. I expect a loud affirmation.

Now, I'm not sure, and I'm relying on my memory here. I may have reversed these two, so. I didn't? Oh, good.

Good, good, good. No knowledge of God, no hesed for God, no faithfulness to God. Now, look at verse 1. What does it say? Anyone? And? No love.

And? Yes. The three words show up right here in this first verse, after chapter 3. He's setting the stage. What's the problem? The problem is, there is no, and remember, I hope when I die, you'll remember.

The word that is typically translated faithfulness is a word which literally means truth. So, we're talking about relational truth. Being true to one another.

Being true to your promises and being true to your covenant. And that is to be faithful.

So, God's truth is not, first of all, factual. His truth is, first of all, you can depend on Him to the end of everything. He's true.

Now, that means that in His world, there are things that are true. But there it is. Well, there's no truth in our relationships with God and, thus, with one another.

There is no hesed. Remember what I've said, probably, maybe not a hundred times, maybe 99. Hesed, passionate devotion of a superior to an inferior, especially when undeserved.

Madison Avenue and Hollywood have done a terrible thing to us. What is love? Love is a squishy feeling in the pit of your stomach. An enchanted evening, love.

No biology. Hesed, hesed, is the passionate, undying devotion of a superior to an inferior, especially when undeserved. My favorite in all this, and I'm sure it's because of my time in life, is Boaz on the threshing floor.

When Ruth says, you are my kinsman redeemer, you have to marry me. And he says, oh my daughter, what hesed you have done to me in that you chose me and not one of the young men. He has put her in the position of the superior.

She's doing something for him he does not deserve. And look at their standings. He is an old, male, rich, landed native.

You can't get higher than that. She is a young, poor, female, landless immigrant. You can't get lower than that.

And yet he says to her, my daughter, what hesed you have done to me. How kind you have been to me. You chose the fat, old, paunchy guy instead of one of these good-looking young bucks.

What hesed. That's hesed, folks. And that's, you know, we read steadfast love.

But oh, we need to pack that full. And because we do not recognize that God has done that for us, we are unwilling and unable to do it for them. The prayer says, forgive as you are forgiven.

It could also be, do hesed as you have received hesed. There's no faithfulness or steadfast love, no knowledge of God. What does it mean to know God? Yes.

Yes, yes, yes. I think that's exactly right. It's exactly right.

Did they know stuff about God? Well, of course, they did. They could have written a theology book. But they didn't know God.

They had no personal relationship with him. Why not? They never followed the commandments. They worshipped their idols.

They worshipped their positions and who they were. The priests had fumbled the ball. They did not love mercy.

Let me say it this way. And I think this captures virtually everything we've said. They were unwilling to surrender to that love.

You see, love requires surrender. Well, they were afraid. When God spoke out loud in words, it scared them to death.

And they told Moses, you talk to him. But love, if you're going to receive it, you have to surrender to it. You have to let that person love you.

I'm tempted to get too intimate here, so I better back off there. But there it is. No, no.

We won't surrender to God. We want God's we can control. Surrender means you don't know what he's going to do to you.

And my friend the snake says he's going to do bad things. He's going to make you poor. He's going to make you hungry.

He's going to make you hurt. No, thank you. If that's what it means to know God, I don't care to.

So, these three ideas, no truth, no faithfulness, no hesed, receiving or giving. No knowledge, intimate acquaintance with God and his character. And his love and his trustworthiness.

All of us can testify to this. You cannot know God's trustworthiness until you've let him prove it to you. Until you've let him back you into a corner where you had to trust him.

And he came through. But it doesn't happen until you surrender to him.

Until you give up your damnable determination to control him. Now, what happens next in verse 2? Is this related to verse 1 or not? And if so, how? Okay, we make our own truth. On the cause and effect, if we're not faithful or not loving, we don't get cursing, lying, murder, stealing, or bloodshed.

Yeah. No bounds. Yes, yes, yes.

I think those two verses condemn our culture. Why is this stuff going on? Because the other stuff is not going on. No restraint.

Yeah. I want what I want, and you're in my way. We see that on the highways all the time.

Why should I let you have the right of way? You'll go slow. So, the direct correlation. If indeed, indeed, I know the God who lays down his life for others, that's going to change how I treat you.

And if it doesn't change, then I don't know God. The two are cause and effect. And this is the nature of the whole Bible.

You see, in the ancient world, religion is here, and ethics is here. Religion doesn't have anything to do with ethics. Now, we know we've got to have ethics for some crazy reason.

A society where there's no ethics won't last. So, we're going to have ethics. And we're going to have it by coercion.

You will not lie in my kingdom. Lie once too often, and you lose your tongue. Religion, oh yes, this is about getting what I want from the deities.

This is about prayer. This is about sacrifices. This is about rituals.

But those two are unrelated. This crazy book says they're directly related. Why do you keep the laws of your society? Because there's a cop on every corner? No.

Because you love God. Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

Would you have a society where you didn't need so many cops? I think so. All right. That's two verses.

And that's God calling on my phone. Saying what? Okay, now look what you've got in verse three. What's that opening word? Therefore.

Or because. Causal word. Because the people don't know God.

There is an ethical disaster. And what else? Yes. Creation suffers.

The land mourns. The beasts of the field. The birds of the heaven. Even the fish of the sea. Oh yes. Yes.

I've told you before that in my old age, I remember my father more and more. And saying things that I never said I would say. But he was an early advocate of crop rotation.

Eighth-grade education. But he read widely. And he said it's not our land.

It's God's land. And we're holding it in trust. And you better leave it better when you leave than you found it.

That's Christian. That's Christian. It's not my land to use as I wish.

For my purposes, it's God's land that he has given. To be cared for.

So those three verses, it seems to me, are powerful. Powerful statements about ethical theology. And it's rooted in the beginning.

In our relationship with God. And then the implications of that. So then, what's the problem? Where did this come from? And here comes verse four.

Let no one contend. Let no one accuse. For with you is my contention.

And I think I see people saying, well, it's his fault. No, no, it's her fault. No, no, it's their fault.

God says it's the priest's fault. Whoa. You shall stumble by day because the priest also will stumble with you by night.

And I will destroy your mother. The nation. The land.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge. I reject you from being a priest to me.

You priests don't know God. And since you have forgotten the Torah of your God, I also will forget your children. One of the great problems after the return from exile was the priestly genealogy, which was all messed up.

Who was going to be a priest? And today, of course, perhaps you remember Mickey Cohen. Cohen is the Hebrew word for priest. Mickey the priest.

Now, remember that priests had two responsibilities. Two responsibilities. They were to be windows.

Through whom God could shine on his people. And through whom the people could see God. That involved two elements.

It involved sacrifice and teaching. Sacrifice is the means whereby the people are able to come into the presence of God without being destroyed. Teaching is the means by which God can display himself and his character and nature to the people.

There's a problem here. How does a priest get paid for certain pieces of meat? And if you didn't eat them all, you could sell them. So, it's to the priest's benefit if the people sin more.

More sin, more sacrifices. This doesn't pay. Now, I would dare to say, as a man who is not in the pulpit as a pastor, I would dare to say that the task of discipling is the closest to this teaching role.

It's one thing, and again, I point several fingers at myself; it's one thing to talk, to tell the truth, to tell the truth. It's another to inculcate it. And that's a difficult task.

It's a slow task. Pardon? To inculcate. You don't know the word.

Inculcate is to teach in such a way that the learning becomes part of the student's way of thinking. To plant it in. I had the privilege of being in Robert Coleman's seminary class the year that he was writing the Master Plan of Evangelism.

And he drove into us Jesus' method. He took 12 guys and poured his life into them. And from the 12, he took 3 and especially poured himself into those 3. The story is told of Jesus coming back to heaven and being met by Gabriel, and Gabriel says, Oh, Lord Jesus, you've saved the world, haven't you? Jesus said, well, no, not yet.

Oh, but you've saved Israel. No, not actually. Most of Israel? No.

Some of Israel? Well, yes. How many? I think I can count 11. 11! 11.

So, this role, this priestly role of helping people to see God and helping God to pour himself into people. Oh, my. Oh, my, what a role.

What a role. Verse 7: the more they increased, I think that's priests, the more they sinned against me. I'll change their glory into shame.

They feed on the sin of my people. They are greedy for their iniquity. It will be like people, like priests.

I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. Now, we're Protestants. What's the hallmark of Protestantism? The priesthood of all believers.

Every one of us has that challenge. To be the window through whom people can see God and through whom God can pour out his life and nature. I won't ask for any hands.

Are you disciplining anybody? You say, well, I'm not trained. I don't have a seminary education. If you know Jesus, you've got something to share.

Mothers, oh, my goodness, you're making disciples while they drive you bananas. Now, I'm not here to put a guilt trip on anybody, but I'm simply saying, what does it mean for us, you and me, to be priests in this world? And if the world looks awfully like chapter 4, verse 2, why? Verse 10: they shall eat but not be satisfied. They shall play the whore, but not multiply.

That's interesting, isn't it? A relationship that doesn't produce anything. Because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which takes away the understanding. The harvest festival in the world was the New Year festival.

There were two New Years in the world, and different cultures celebrated them differently. One New Year is in April, just before, at the beginning of harvest. It's the barley harvest.

And by the way, remember the book of Ruth? The barley harvest. And Ruth is read at Passover among the Jews. The other one is in, about now, about the first of October.

In fact, somebody said this week is Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year. This is the other one.

And this is the end of harvest. Typically, the grapes are the end. So, you got two.

And interestingly, part of the problem of numbers in kings. If you ever try to add up those numbers, you'll lose your mind. Part of the reason is that the two kingdoms use different New Years.

So, when did the kings begin? The other thing, while I'm on the topic, and you might think I'm full of kings. The other thing is, do you count the king's partial first year as his first year? Or do you count his first full year as his first year? Again, the two kingdoms did it differently. So, you put it together, and guys who started to reign on the very same day, you might very well say, King B became king in the second year of King A. Same day.

So, anyway, what that all says is, in fact, the numbers in Kings are astonishingly accurate when you take all these things into account. It's amazing. You would think it was historically accurate if you didn't know better.

Okay. This one, the Feast of Tabernacles, is at this time. You've got an issue.

The vegetation has died. Winter is coming. The sun is going away.

Is he going to come back? Is the vegetation going to come back? Is spring going to come? Get drunk and have as much sex as you possibly can to make sure that life prevails. They shall eat but not be satisfied. They shall play the whore but not multiply because they've forsaken the Lord to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which takes away the understanding.

Don't talk to me about theology. Talk to me about the ritual. Let's do the rituals because the rituals will work.

Why do they work? I don't know, but they work. 51% of the time. Don't talk to me about the character of God.

Don't talk to me about His commandments. Don't talk to me about the intellectual reality of God. I'm just a layperson.

You can't expect anything from me. My people inquire of a piece of wood. Their walking staff gives them oracles.

That is so funny. Which way should I go now? Oh, that way. Okay.

But again, it is this illusion of control. I can do these things and make the gods bless me. And again, we say, well, what about the 49% of the time that it doesn't work? Well, that's better than just trusting God.

Who knows whether that will ever work? My friend the snake says it never will. A spirit of whoredom has led them away. They have left their God to play the whore.

Now, I want to talk about that for a minute. I want us to talk about it. Practically speaking, today, in the 21st century, what does a spirit of prostitution look like? How does it manifest itself? No.

Now, what you're talking about, it seems to me, is the end result of our having lived this way for a hundred years. Nobody tells me what to do. Good.

What else? Okay. Okay. Okay.

What about prostitution as opposed to marriage? Obviously, no boundaries, no commitment, no faithfulness. And isn't it funny? We've decided today that there is no such thing as truth. I wonder where that came from.

What else? Yeah. Sure does. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. No thankfulness.

I like that because, in a marriage relationship that's working, there are lots of reasons for thanks. Now, a marriage relationship that isn't working, I've said to people I've counseled over the years that a good marriage is heaven, and a bad marriage is hell. But yes.

Yes. And I want to piggy on that and say, I don't want to know that prostitute. I just want to use her.

I don't care what she likes. I don't care what she dislikes. I don't care what moves her.

I just want to use her. Oh, my goodness. No, God, I don't want to know you.

I just want to use you. I think, in many ways, that phrase, we have a spirit of prostitution, is one of the richer phrases in the Bible in terms of its implications. These are some of them.

I think there are more still. But this is it. Now, turn back to Psalm 78.

This is describing, and we can start at verse 5. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a Torah in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children. Remember Deuteronomy. Where does discipleship begin? It begins at home.

To teach to their children that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandment, that they

should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation. Now, notice two things. A generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

What does God want? A heart that is steadfast. His, flat out. I like to say without a rival and without a limit.

And a spirit, the wind that blows through us, the motivations that carry us, that is true, faithful, dependable. One of the things we haven't said here is a spirit of prostitution is utterly undependable. But God, God can do a different work.

God can do a different work. And it's just so interesting. I think there are four generations there.

Their children, the children yet unborn, that they might tell their children. Absolutely. No, no.

Children are an inconvenience. Why would I have them? They cost money, and they make you unhappy. They break your heart. Your children are your first disciples. Okay.

How are we doing? Oh, we're about okay. On your sheet, if you're following along, number seven. Does anybody remember what's important about Gilgal? All right.

Why? Yes, it was the base of the tribes in the conquest. After they conquered Jericho, they set up Gilgal as their base. And after every, after the loss at Gilgal, they came back and wept.

And God said, stop weeping. You have a problem. But after the victory at Ai, they go back to Gilgal. After every victory, they come back and regroup.

So, Gilgal has all those historic memories of, wow, that's where God started out with us and gave us the land. What about Bethel? Jacob's first altar. That's where God met Jacob.

That's where the whole thing started from the point of view of Jacob. And after he sort of went off the rails and settled down in Shechem, God said, go back to Bethel. And Jacob gets back on the rails at Bethel.

So, Bethel has double connections with Jacob. What now? What's going on at Bethel now? The golden calf. The bull.

So, what does Isaiah say about that? Excuse me, Isaiah. Hosea. What does Hosea say about that? Verse 15.

What does he say? Don't go there. Why not? It's corrupt. Now, let's think about this.

Why are they going there? Probably. A spirit of worship. Pilgrimage.

Fellowship. What's the matter with that? Worshipping the wrong thing. Worshipping a place.

It's sort of like God saying, quit going to Indian Springs. I'll tell you what, there are some people who need to hear that because they're worshipping a place and not God.

Now in these cases, certainly Bethel has become religiously corrupt. We don't know for sure about Gilgal. But here it is.

And so, in the end, in verse 15, he calls it Beth-Avon. Not the house of God, the house of wrong. But again, it's this ritualistic approach that I, oh man, I just... Now, forgive me.

Forgive me in advance. I wonder if in February, there was anybody God would have said, don't go to Wilmore. I don't know.

I don't know. But I wonder. Oh, if I could just get to that place, God would do something to me.

Is God limited to Hughes Auditorium? Now, praise God. Praise God. That nine times across the last 125 years, God has manifested himself in that place.

But if we limit God to a place, we're in trouble. Big trouble. So, anyway, don't throw me out yet.

So don't go there. Don't think that I am contained in a historic place. Don't think that you can somehow use a place to manipulate me.

Make a temple in your heart. A clean, holy place where the living God can betroth himself to you. Where he can woo you.

Oh my. Again, this is delicate ground, but he wants to know you. And he wants you to know him.

In that kind of intimacy, it changes us. No longer using, but knowing. Now, filled with thankfulness for his faithfulness, which has been proven when we cast ourselves on him and said, God, if you don't show up, I'm going to crash.

And God shows up when we accept his boundaries. And again, part of knowing him, most of the boundaries, I love to say to young people who are saying, well, I don't know what the will of God is. I say, read the Bible.

99% of God's will is perfectly clear. But yes, in those moments when we wonder, God says, don't go there. Why? Don't go there.

Not going there. No, your right is right. God helping me.

I'm yours. Lock, stock, and barrel. As you have proven yourself faithful to me, so God helping me, I will be faithful in every one of my relationships, beginning with you.

As you pour your hesed upon me, give me hesed to give away. Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn. Can the Lord now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture? It's what I want to do.

It's what I'd like to do. But you're, and I'll close with this. It really helps to be raised on a farm to understand some of the metaphors in the Hebrew Bible.

You're trying to get this heifer to go to a really good place, but she doesn't know that. And you put the halter on her and pull the rope, and all four feet go straight into the ground, and her neck becomes like a rod. It's called stiff-neck.

I'd like to feed you like a lamb in the pasture, but not you. I'm not going there. It's a good place, but I've never been there before.

I don't know whether I'll like it there or not. Can you trust me? Do you know me well enough to believe that I really do have the best in mind for you in spite of what the snake says? That's what God wants. He wants to feed us like lambs in a pasture.

He wants to marry us like his truly beloved.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, what can we say? What can we say? The bridegroom with nail-pierced hands. The bridegroom with a riven side. And we say no thank you. Have mercy upon us, oh Lord, have mercy.

Forgive us for those times when we have been stiff-necked. When we really haven't known you well enough to know that you are trustworthy all the time. Deliver us.

I dare to ask, Lord Jesus, that there would be no one in this room with a spirit of prostitution. Let everyone here have a spirit of faithfulness. Thank you, Jesus.

In your name, Amen.