

Judgment Against the Ancient Northern Kingdom

Hosea 4

Hosea 4:1-6 - *“Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: ¹“There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. ²By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint; with bloodshed upon bloodshed. ³Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Even the fish of the sea will be taken away.*

⁴“Now let no man contend, or rebuke another; for your people are like those who contend with the priest. ⁵Therefore you shall stumble in the day. The prophet also shall stumble with you in the night, and I will destroy your mother. ⁶My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

Background Notes

Hosea 1-3 gives us the record of Hosea's domestic life. God directed Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer, who was unfaithful to Hosea. She left him and committed adultery. It seems that Gomer even sank to the level of becoming a slave – a prostitute slave. But God directed Hosea to go and buy his wife out from her sordid and pitiful situation, and after many days he was to reestablish his love relationship with her.

In our studies so far we have seen that Hosea's marriage was an object lesson or illustration of God's relationship with the nation of Israel. Israel was God's special people, and the nation was considered to be in a “marriage relationship” with the Lord. But Israel had departed from the Lord, and had committed “spiritual adultery” by turning from God and worshiping foreign pagan gods. For their sins, God would have to judge and discipline His people.

But God still loves the Jewish people - and He will bring them back! We believe this return of Israel to the Lord is still in the future. The present return of the Jews to the land and the reestablishment of the secular state of Israel is only the beginning of what's to come in the future. A great spiritual awakening and revival will arise amongst the Jewish people, and they will return to the God of their forefathers. In fact, they will receive the Messiah whom they once rejected!

So Israel looks forward to a great future! The love relationship between God and Israel will be reestablished. All this is illustrated in the relationship between Hosea and Gomer in chapters 1-3.

Beginning in Hosea 4 and continuing throughout the rest of the book, we have excerpts of Hosea's sermons to Israel. These sermons were given over the course of his long ministry to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (v6). The prophets and the priests in Israel were not communicating the Word of God to the people. They failed to teach the Law of the Lord to the people. As a result, the entire nation was going to the dogs - it was destroying itself. Israel was in self-destruct mode because the people had rejected knowledge, and they had forgotten the Law of the Lord.

Notice in the sins that follow this lack of knowledge: *"There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed" (v1-2).*

If you didn't know that I was reading from the prophet Hosea in those verses, you'd swear I was reading a description of conditions in our own country today. Just watch the news or read the newspaper. How sad – and how true.

In verse 3, notice that ecological and environmental problems stem from the people's sin: *"Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Even the fish of the sea will be taken away."*

Trees don't sin. Beasts don't sin. Birds don't sin. Only mankind sins - but humanity's sin affects everything.

Verses 4-5 indicate that the prophets and priests were as corrupt as the people. Therefore their mother - Israel (v5) - would be destroyed. In verse 6 God said, *"Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God I also will forget your children."* According to Exodus 19, Israel was to be a kingdom of priests before the Lord, but they lost that privilege because they rejected the knowledge of God's Word.

God's people were destroyed for lack of knowledge then, and that's still true today. America is a (so-called) Christian country, but how well does the average American know the Bible? Do our average teenagers know the moral principles of Scripture? Does the average child in our nation know the way of salvation? The people of our nation are being destroyed for lack of knowledge of God and His Word. Praise God for churches that faithfully present the truth of God's Word, week after week, so that people can learn and gain the right kind of knowledge.

Let me ask you: How well do you know your Bible? How well do you know the principles of God's Word that come from the minor prophet Hosea? Aren't you glad you're studying and learning about what God has to say to us through the minor prophet Hosea? (And by the way, it wouldn't hurt to send your teens to Emmaus Bible College, where they'll gain further knowledge of God's Word!)

Remember - God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

2. God's people suffer because of idolatry.

Hosea 4:7-19 - *"The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me. I will change their glory into shame. ⁸ They eat up the sin of My people; they set their heart on their iniquity. ⁹ And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds. ¹⁰ For they shall eat, but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase; because they have ceased obeying the Lord. ¹¹ "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.*

¹² My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. ¹³ They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery. ¹⁴ "I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled.

¹⁵ "Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal, nor go up to Beth Aven, nor swear an oath, saying, 'As the Lord lives'—

¹⁶ "For Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf; now the Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country.

¹⁷ "Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone. ¹⁸ Their drink is rebellion. They commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor. ¹⁹ The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices."

The sacrifices mentioned in these verses were not sacrifices and offerings to the Lord, but rather were offerings made to idols (v12 & 17). God had ordained that true worship to the Lord was to be focused at the Temple in Jerusalem. But the people in the northern kingdom of Israel were offering sacrifices on any mountain or hilltop (v13).

In verse 15 the people of the southern kingdom of Judah were warned about going to the idolatrous golden calf shrines in the northern kingdom: *"Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal, nor go up to Beth Aven."*

Notice Hosea's play on words: Bethel, the location of one of the pagan shrines, means *"house of God."* But Hosea changed *Bethel* to *Beth Aven*, which means *"house of evil."*

In addition to setting up the pagan shrines, King Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, set up his own priests for his calf shrines. This priesthood was not in the line of Aaron, as was prescribed by God for His people's priests. The pagan priests were not Levitical priests, and they were as corrupt as the people (v8-9).

Furthermore, Israel had stooped to sexual immorality in their idolatrous worship. The surrounding pagan nations had temple prostitutes and practiced "fertility rituals" - and the northern kingdom of Israel was doing the same thing. Look at verses 13-14. Because of all this idolatry and immorality, the people were suffering. You would think that suffering would cause the people to repent and turn back to the Lord, but they did not return. *"And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I*

will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds. For they shall eat, but not have enough, and they shall commit harlotry, but not increase, because they have ceased obeying the Lord” (v9-10).

The people suffered because of idolatry, but they stubbornly refused to return to the Lord. *“Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf. Now the Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country.”* The people would suffer like unprotected lambs in open country, with no shepherd to protect them from wolves and other natural predators.

God’s people suffered because of idolatry then, and what was true in Israel in that day is true here as well today. God’s people always suffer because of idolatry, and tempting idols are all around us. Is the Lord Number One in your life? Is the Lord Number One in every area of your life? If not, it’s because an “idol” of some kind has taken the His rightful place - and that idol controls that area of your life! As a result, you’re suffering loss in some way. God’s people will always suffer when they’re involved with idols.

Practical Application

Don’t think that God has a “double standard.”

“I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go apart with harlots and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled” (v14).

Just like today, some people then thought that God should punish women who were involved in sexual immorality - but not the men! It’s a man’s world, they thought, and men should be able to get away with sexual sin. There was a different standard for men.

But God said, **“No way!** I will not punish women for their immorality, but fail to punish men who are committing the same immoral sins!” There’s no double standard with God.

So don’t think that God has a less rigid moral standard for men than for women. No way! According to the Bible **all** will be punished for their sin. Don’t think that God has a double standard.