

Hosea Chapter 4

Verses 1-2: Here the focus of the book shifts from Gomer to the “children of Israel.” God chastised Israel for breaking five of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21)

“Swearing” (the misuse of oaths and vows), “lying, killing, stealing,” and “committing adultery.” He also elaborated on the sin of idolatry (4:12).

Hosea 4:1 "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."

“The LORD had a controversy”: Turning from the analogy of his own marriage, the prophet made the judicial charge in God’s indictment against Israel.

We have stressed so much in these lessons, that wisdom is a gift from God, but knowledge takes an effort upon our part. Knowledge is accumulated learning. Notice, first they must hear the Word of God. The Word is spoken through the prophet Hosea, but he is like an "ambassador", who brings someone else's message to the people. In this case, it is God's message.

The purpose of this Bible study is so that we can accumulate more learning and understanding of God's Word. The land spoken of (in verse 1 above), is a perfect description of our land today. They are at odds with God. They are disobedient to His Word. Truth and mercy are both God's gift to mankind. The knowledge of the will of God for their lives was far from them, because they did not diligently seek the truth and knowledge.

Hosea 4:2 "By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood."

Note the many infractions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17).

Again, we see so much of this in our society today, that there is not enough jail cells to hold the criminals. It is interesting to me, that this begins with swearing. In the loose society we live in, this has become so commonplace, it is not even considered a crime anymore. There was a time, when swearing got a person tied to a whipping post for 10 or 15 lashes of a whip.

When people are out of the will of God, they commit all of these things and many more. Drugs and alcohol add to the immense number of crimes committed. Even drugs and alcohol is a sign of a society out of fellowship with God.

Hosea 4:3 "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away."

Sin plays havoc with lower creation and nature (Joel 1:17-20; Rom. 8:19-22).

The civil authorities may allow these things to happen and go unpunished, but God will not. "Languish" implies sickness, and is another way of saying mourn. There is a sickness, and it is called sin. When these things happen in any land, God removes His blessings from them.

Zephaniah 1:3 "I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD."

Verses 4-6: "Fall" describes how the people were tripped up by sin and consequently fell to their ruin (5:5; 14:1; Isa. 3:8; 40:30). Those who allow the Lord to lead them will not stumble (Isa. 63:12-13).

"Knowledge" in scripture implies experience, not just intellectual pursuit. God wanted Israel to experience His through their loyal obedience (4:1); instead, the people and priests violated His covenant law (4:2, 7-8), and forfeited their blessings (4:3, 9-10).

Hosea 4:4 "Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people [are] as they that strive with the priest."

"Let no man strive": Rationalizing and denying their wrongs, the people protested their innocence, like those who would not humbly accept the decision of the priests (Deut. 17:8-13).

It appears that no one was above sin, so no one was not in a position to judge, or reprove another. Even the people were trying to tell the priest what was wrong.

Hosea 4:5 "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother."

"Thy mother": The Israelite nation of which the people are the children (compare 2:2).

It appears from this, the prophet suffered with his people. The first part of the above sentence seems to be speaking of individuals who will not be spared. It will not matter whether it is day or night, the outcome is the same. The nation Israel is spoken of as "mother".

Hosea 4:6 "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

The cause of man's problem is "lack of knowledge." It does not stem from a shortage of information, but rather from rejection of information.

"Thou shalt be no priest to me": Having rejected the Lord's instruction, Israel could no longer serve as His priest to the nations (Exodus 19:6; James 3:1).

This is almost like saying; they did not study the Word of God and hide it away in their hearts. When God says "my people", he is speaking of each individual in the nation of Israel. To reject the knowledge of the Word of God is to reject God. We can see from the following Scriptures that God speaks of all of His followers as priests.

1 Peter 2:5 "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9-10 "But ye [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:" "Which in time past [were] not a people, but [are] now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

Those who do not remember God will be forgotten of God, as well.

The priests were eager to "eat up the sin" of the people. They did this by urging the people to offer hypocritical, ineffective sacrifices for sins (6:6; 8:11-13). The more the people sinned, the more the priest ate and sold the sacrificial meat to make money.

"Like people, like priest". The people enjoyed sin in excess while the priests, who should have been faithful, encouraged it (Mal. 2:1-9; 2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Verses 7-10: Their position of power and glory, abused in succeeding generations by the eating of the sin offerings, would be turned to shame. Being no different than the people, the priests, who should have been faithful, would share their punishment (Isa. 24:1-3).

Hosea 4:7 "As they were increased, so they sinned against me: [therefore] will I change their glory into shame."

The increase in numbers and prosperity probably refers to the priesthood, who, as they grew in numbers, became more alienated from the true God. These eat up, or fatten on, the very sins they ought to rebuke.

"Therefore will I change their glory into shame": Therefore I will divest them of all those glories for which they pride themselves, and lead them away in a poor and miserable condition into captivity.

God had blessed them, and they had increased, but they could not handle prosperity. The minute they were out of trouble, they sought false gods. He turned the blessings into cursings.

Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:"

Just as it was their choice, it is our choice to receive blessings, or cursings. God will not bless those who are unfaithful to Him.

Hosea 4:8 "They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity."

"They" are the problem; that is, the priesthood. They have not helped the people face their sin and deal with it. Rather, they have gloried and taken pleasure in the sin of the people.

There was an offering for sin. Perhaps, this is speaking of the evil priest being pleased with their sin.

He would receive more offerings to eat, instead of correcting their iniquity.

Hosea 4:9 "And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings."

"Like people, like priest:" The priest of God is corrupted and made like the sinning people, not vice versa.

God punishes the priests, the same as He does the people when they sin. He also blesses the priests, as the people when they keep His commandments.

Hosea 4:10 "For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD."

This is almost a proverbial saying of Holy Scripture, and as such, has manifold applications. In the way of nature, it comes true in those, who under God's afflictive Hand in famine or siege, "eat" what they have, but have "not enough," and perish with hunger.

It comes true in those, who, through bodily disease, are not nourished by their food. Yet not less true is it of those who, through their own insatiate desires, are never satisfied, but crave the more greedily, the more they have. Their sin of covetousness becomes their torment.

"They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase": That is, their offspring; they shall not beget children, so the Targum, Jarchi, and Kimchi; or the children they beget shall quickly die; yea, though they commit whoredom in the idol's temple with that view, where the women prostituted themselves for that purpose:

"Because they have left off to take heed to the Lord": To his word, and worship, and ordinances, which they formerly had some regard unto, but now had relinquished: or, "the Lord they have forsaken", or "left off to observe"; his ways, his word, and worship.

When they eat and do not have enough, it means their food does not satisfy them. One of the ways God would punish those who followed false gods, was to cut off their food with a famine.

Verses 11-15: Israel's practice of idolatry included widespread prostitution, and the "men" who propagated it by their participation were even more responsible in the Lord's eyes than the "daughters" who committed "harlotry". False religion leads to spiritual adultery, and these work their way into a society and ultimately produce an immoral generation.

Hosea 4:11 "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart."

Here is a moral truth applicable to all people and times. (Verses 12-13), are illustrations of the enslavement in Israel.

Drunkenness and whoredom go together. Those who drink too much lose control of their own will.

Verses 12-14: "My people ask counsel at their stocks:" Like the heathen (of Romans 1:25), they worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. Instead of consulting the God who made the trees and the wood, they consult the tree and the wooden idols that can be fashioned from them.

"Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery." Spiritual harlotry gave way to physical harlotry, which was incorporated into the religious rituals of their idolatrous worship.

Hosea 4:12 "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused [them] to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God."

"Spirit of whoredoms": A prevailing mindset and inclination to worldly spiritual immorality, i.e., idolatry (compare 5:4).

The "whoredom" spoken of here, is of a spiritual nature. This is speaking of the worship of false gods. They have left the One True God for the false gods.

Hosea 4:13 "They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof [is] good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery."

Bereft of righteous teaching and understanding, they sacrificed to idols. Hilltops and groves of trees were favorite places for idolatrous worship (Deut. 12:2; Jer. 2:20; Ezek. 6:13), including religious prostitution.

This is a description of the various types of false worship that went on in the country. God caused their wives to be unfaithful to them, as they had been to Him.

Hosea 4:14 "I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people [that] doth not understand shall fall."

Although all who sin will be judged, God forbade punishing the adulteresses alone and leaving the men who patronized them to go free. The heaviest punishment would not be on the women who sin, but the fathers and husbands who set such a bad example by their engagement with prostitutes.

“Doth not understand”: (compare 4:6).

Sin feeds upon itself. God was the husband of Israel in the spirit. They, who worshipped false gods, committed spiritual adultery against God. That sin was so terrible that physical adultery paled in comparison. It had been the law to stone to death someone caught in the act of physical adultery. But why punish that individually, when the majority of the nation was guilty of spiritual adultery?

Verses 15-19: Israel’s primary shrines were at “Gilgal” (9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4-5), and “Beth-Aven” (“house of wickedness”). The Lord urged “Judah” to avoid the sins of “stubborn”, rebellious Israel. Hosea refers to the northern kingdom as “Ephraim,” a reference to the largest of the 10 northern tribes.

Hosea 4:15"Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, [yet] let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The LORD liveth."

“Gilgal”: Between Jordan and Jericho in the area of Samaria, this was once a holy place to God (Josh. 5:10-15; 1 Sam. 10:8; 15:21), afterwards desecrated by idol worship (9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5).

Beth-aven”: Judah was to stay away from Israel’s centers of false worship, including Beth-aven (“house of wickedness/deceit”). This was a deliberate substitution for the name Bethel (“house of God”), once sacred to God (Gen. 28:17, 19), but made by Jeroboam a place to worship calves (1 Kings 12:28-33; 13:1; Jer. 48:13; Amos 3:14; 7:13).

Israel got into this type of sin long before Judah did. In fact, Israel went into Assyrian captivity more than a hundred years before Judah was taken captive by Babylon. Jeroboam had set up a calf to worship in Beth-aven. Gilgal had become a place of worship of false gods. God did not want them mingling with those of Judah, for fear Judah would pick up their idolatry.

Hosea 4:16 "For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place."

Because Israel was like a stubborn calf, God no longer attempted to corral her, abandoning her as a lamb in a vast wilderness.

This gives a reason for the warning in the other verse. This shows that Israel is falling further into idolatry. She is slipping further and further in. When people or nations slip further into sin, they go further and further from God.

Hosea 4:17 "Ephraim [is] joined to idols: let him alone."

“Ephraim ... let him alone”: As the largest and most influential of the northern 10 tribes, Ephraim’s name was often used as representative of the northern nation. This was an expression of God’s wrath of abandonment. When sinners reject Him and are bent on fulfilling their wicked purposes, God removes restraining grace and turns them over to the results of their own perverse choices. This kind of wrath is that (in Rom. 1:18-32; compare Judges 10:13, 2 Chron. 15:2; 24:20; Psalm 81:11-12).

The name given to Israel because it was the largest tribe of the northern kingdom is completely given over to its idolatry and accompanying practices. He is beyond recall.

Ephraim was the predominant tribe in Israel. They should have been the leaders. They are seemingly the deepest in sin. Idol worship was a rebellion against God, as well as being spiritual adultery.

Hosea 4:18 "Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers [with] shame do love, Give ye."

This is the only instance where the Hebrew word *magen* is translated by the English word “rulers.” It occurs in the Old Testament more than 50 times and is usually translated by the English word shield. The leaders God gave to the nation, with the express purpose of shielding it from sin and leading it to God, have instead led in its spiritual defection.

It appears that the leaders, as well as the people, were continually sinning. It had become a way of life for the whole nation.

Hosea 4:19 "The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices."

That is, the wind in its wings hath bound up Ephraim, Israel, or the ten tribes. Compared to a heifer; meaning, that the wind of God's wrath and vengeance, or the enemy, the Assyrian, should come like a whirlwind, and carry them swiftly, suddenly, and irresistibly, out of their own land, into a foreign country.

“And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices”: They of the ten tribes, the people of Israel; or their shields, their rulers, as Aben Ezra, shall be filled with shame, being disappointed of the help they expected from their idols, to whom they offered sacrifices; and the more, inasmuch as they will find that these idolatrous sacrifices are the cause of their ruin and destruction.

The most ridiculous thing of all was the fact that they were still going through the formality of worshipping God. The wind, spoken of here, has to do with the wind of God's wrath. This type of sin leads nowhere, but to shame and disgrace.

Hosea Chapter 4 Questions

1. Why does God have a controversy with the people in the land?
2. How does knowledge differ from wisdom?
3. What is an "ambassador"?
4. What is the purpose of this very Bible study?
5. Truth and mercy are God's _____ to _____.
6. What are the sins mentioned in verse 2?
7. What is interesting to the author about swearing being listed first?
8. What are drugs and alcohol a sign of?
9. What does "languish" imply?
10. Who suffers along with the people?
11. Who is "mother", in verse 5, speaking of?
12. My people are destroyed for _____ of _____.
13. Who is God speaking of, when He says, "my people"?
14. To reject the knowledge of the Word of God is to reject _____.
15. Ye are a _____ generation.
16. Whose choice is it, whether you will be blessed, or cursed?
17. When they eat and it is not enough means what?
18. Those who drink too much lose control of their _____.
19. What kind of "whoredom" is verse 12 speaking of?
20. Describe some of the false worship?
21. What was worse than physical adultery?

22. Jeroboam had set up a _____ to worship in Beth-haven.
23. Why did God not want Israel mingling with Judah?
24. How was Israel described in verse 16?
25. _____ is joined unto idols.
26. What was the most ridiculous thing of all about their worship?