

Lesson 2- Hosea 4 – 6: “Jehovah’s Controversy with Israel”

I. Israel’s *National Guilt*, chapter 4

Chp.4 begins the “*Lord’s case*” against Israel. Having been now prepared through his marital woes, Hosea can more understandingly present God’s indictment against Israel. His home life had caused him to well comprehend God’s love for but exasperation with an *adulterous wife/people*. Thus primed, he begins to lay Jehovah’s complaint against Israel in the form of a legal charge. Despite this *form* of the indictment, note the nature of the “crimes” specified. Israel, the northern ten tribes as specified in v.1, is charged with lacking: “*faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God.*” Furthermore, with these things absent, instead there was: “*swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery... violence*” to the extent that “*bloodshed follows (or “touches” in the marginal reading) bloodshed*” v.2. The picture painted is that the violent atrocities were so close in time and proximity that the blood from one crime would run or puddle into the blood of another. This was not *neighborhood* violence- it was a national epidemic. But look again at the first part that concerned those things which were lacking. First, consider the statement that there was no “*faithfulness.*” Again, the marginal reading gives an alternate word, “*truth.*” That there was no *truth* in the land does not refer to an absence of God’s *Word*, though that was likely the case as well. Instead, it seems to refer to a lack of *truthfulness* in the actions and speech of Israel. Likewise, *kindness* is alternately translated as “*loyalty,*” indicating that Israel lacked the quality of *loyalty* to God and one another. And obviously related to these two, if not the direct **cause** of them, there was no “*knowledge of God in the land.*” While the indictment of v.2 is of the type we expect to see in a court of law, v.1 is the crux of God’s complaint- Israel is **spiritually deficient**. This has led to the moral degradation outlined in the crimes enumerated in v.2! *Cause and effect* is being shown. The sins of v.2 were violations of the Law given at Sinai, but v.1 shows the *spirit* of rebellion against God that produced them.

In v.3 the result of these things is shown. The consequence of their sins would be destruction so complete as to even affect the animals of the land, air, and seas. So complete and sure is this coming destruction, that v.4 seems to say that there is no need to “*contend*” or offer “*reproof*”- there was now no need. The explanation is that these people are like “*those who contend with the priest.*” That is, because of their disposition highlighted in v.1, they are no longer willing to listen to *God’s word* (as given through the *priest*). If one refuses to hear God, there is nothing left with which to correct his path. Nothing but destruction can result. Such is the course of rebellious, sinful conduct, cf. Deut.17:12; Heb.6:4-6.

The *stumbling* of the people in v.5 is linked to that of the “*prophet.*” But this is not the same as the *priest* of v.4. This *prophet* refers to the false ones of Israel, whereas the *priest* of the previous verse is speaking of a true *spokesman of God*. Such is made clear by the *stumbling* of v.5. A *true priest* or *prophet* would not be a part of the sins of the people, and would therefore not suffer their fate. Likewise, the verse also mentions the destruction of “*your mother.*” A connection is apparently being made back to 2:2,5 where the *idolatrous origins* of Israel’s harlotries are intended. *Mother* here seems to be a reference the same- obviously *Gomer* is the representative *source*.

Verse 6 is likely the most quoted and utilized of the book. However, it is simply an encapsulation of God's indictment against Israel, and is closely linked to things already mentioned in the verses previous. Like them, it shows *cause* and *effect* for Israel *forgetting*, or ignoring, *the law of your God* for the licentious license of idolatry. Hosea seems to lay the blame for this deplorable condition squarely upon the **priests**.

There is some dissension among scholars with regard to the pronoun "*they*" in v.7. Some seem to think its antecedent is *the people*, while others say it refers to *the priests* (both are mentioned in v.6). Either application could be correct, as both were likely true. But, v.8 seems to indicate that *the priests* were the intended meaning since "*My people*" are mentioned in addition to the pronoun "*they*" which is repeated. What then is the charge against the *priest*? "*They feed on the sin of My people, and direct their desire toward their iniquity.*" What does this mean? These **priests fed themselves** on the sins of the people. The more the people sinned and sacrificed, the more the benefit to the priest. So, the priests are indicted as *encouraging the sins* of the people for their own selfish benefits. Therefore, *they* will suffer the same fate as the people whom they failed, cf. vv.9-10. This is very similar to the medieval Catholic practice of selling "*indulgences*" wherein sin was financially beneficial to the organization, and therefore individually to the priests.

In vv.11-14 we see the full extent of the religious perversion of this people. "*Wine*" and "*new wine*" were used, whether for the express purpose of dulling the senses or not, such was the result. Thus, drunken orgies became their worship done on the tops of *hills* or under the *thick foliage of the trees* in the valleys and plains. It is interesting to note that vv.13-14 indicate the women were not held accountable for such behavior as were the men. Those who should have been the spiritual leaders of the land were going "*apart with harlots*" and offering sacrifices with "*temple prostitutes.*" So far departed from understanding were these would-be leaders of the nation, that ruin could not be avoided.

Though v.15 is directed to *Israel*, the warning is intended for *Judah*. It is unclear exactly which *Gilgal* is intended in the verse- perhaps the Gilgal between Shechem and Joppa (NW of Jerusalem) which was a center for idolatrous worship, or the Gilgal near the Jordan where Israel had camped prior to entering the land (cf. Josh.4:19-20). But the reference to "*Beth-haven*" is much clearer. The prefix "*Beth*" refers to a "house." The suffix "*haven*" means "vanity." Thus the ancient city of *Bethel* (*house of God*) is referred to as a *house of vanity* since it has now likewise become a major worshipping place of idolatry. No longer should anyone in these places (or any others for that matter) take the oath saying "*As the Lord lives!*" The reason for the prohibition is clearly stated in the following verse (16): "*Since Israel is stubborn like a stubborn heifer, can the Lord pasture them like a lamb in a large field?*" The meaning here is agriculturally based. *Lambs* are docile creatures prone to following a leader and staying where he pastures them. *Stubborn heifers*, on the other hand, not only will not be led, they cannot even be effectively driven. Therefore, Israel would be like a lone lamb left unprotected in a large field- sure prey for the ravenous wolf, Assyria! Ephraim, in vv.17-19 as elsewhere in the book, stands for the nation of Israel as a whole. It is hopelessly mated to idolatry and therefore should be left alone- given up or abandoned by God and his prophets. Their

rulers, or shields as in the marginal reading, who should be “established in righteousness” (cf. Prov.16:12), instead *dearly love* and join in with the shameful behavior of the people. But, God says in a play on the word, “they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices” when the tornadic winds of His destruction sweep over them. Then it will be too late for repentance.

II. Israel’s Moral Corruption, chapter 5

In following the “Case Against Israel” format of these chapters, if chp.4 was the indictment, then chp.5 is “the verdict”- **guilty on all counts!** The guilt of Israel’s moral corruption is not limited to the people. The first few verses of this chapter include condemnations of the *priests, house of the king*, and among the *princes* of his house! These all have become a “snare at Mizpah” and a “net spread out on Tabor.” These were wooded areas where birds were commonly trapped and caught. The leaders of Israel have thus *ensnared* the nation! They (leaders) are called “*revolters*” in v.2 and have “gone deep in depravity.” However, the marginal reading is that they “waded deep in slaughter.” This could refer either to the *slaughter* that is coming as a result of their sins, or it could refer to the willingness of the leaders to *slaughter their own* to accomplish their selfish desires. Since the latter part of the verse declares, “God will chastise all of them,” it is likely referring to depth of depravity into which the rulers and priests have sunk to further their own purposes.

V.3 states that *He knows Ephraim and Israel is not hidden from Him*. He is fully aware of them both. Therefore, He is also completely cognizant of their all their defilements. At least two important lessons should be realized from v.4. Notice that it says “*Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God.*” From this statement we should learn that:

- 1) Sinful behavior *prevents* one from returning to God; therefore true repentance must involve the cessation of the behavior first, cf. Heb.6:4-6.
- 2) God will not save us *in our sins*, but rather *from our sins*; we must turn from them; cf. Acts 3:19.

Harlotry and lack of knowledge are again identified in the last of the verse as the primary indictments.

V.5 includes *Judah* in the *stumbling iniquity* of both Ephraim and Israel. The v.6 hearkens back to Israel’s history. When they left their Egyptian captors, they took with them their *flocks and herds* to meet Jehovah in the wilderness and dwell with the Lord in Canaan, cf. Ex.10:24-26. Here the prophet says that they will again go *with their flocks and herds*, but this time “**they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them.**” This is likely indicative of Israel’s future desire for repentance and return to the Lord after it is too late to do so.

In v.7, it says “*the new moon will devour them with their land.*” Some versions may instead render “new moon” as “a month”- which is the marginal reading in the ASV. If the latter is correct, it indicates *representatively* that a short period of time will elapse

before Israel's destruction. If "new moon" is correct, it probably refers to the sacrifices that were made in accordance with the lunar cycles- meaning that their own idolatrous sacrifices would eventually consume them. This seems to be the better interpretation.

Vv.8ff instruct that a warning, or alarm, should be sounded in Israel. But, it is interesting that the cities specified in which this should be done are both right on the border with Judah! This leads us to pose an important question: If Israel is to be completely destroyed as God and His prophet has indicated, why not just flee southward into Judah to escape?

The potential answers to this question could be:

- 1) the lack of knowledge of God overall and failure to heed the warnings of His prophet(s) would likely lead Israel to stay until it was too late to leave;
- 2) v.10 indicates that the "princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary." This could refer to the boundaries between *right and wrong*; or it could refer to the *blurring* of national borders when it comes to God's destruction. Where in Judah could one hide from God?
- 3) vv.10-14 suggest that Judah also will suffer.

Thus, trying to flee from the inevitable and sure punishment of God is pointless.

In v.13, a reference is made to "King Jareb" of Assyria. When Ephraim begins to realize his plight, he turns to Assyria seeking an alliance that he thought would save him. However, "King Jareb" (or *striver*, or *contention*) turned out to be the instrument of his destruction, rather than his salvation.

III. Israel's Abomination before the Lord: *Insincerity*, chapter 6

Chapter five closes with the Lord destroying Ephraim and Judah as *young lion* who tears its prey to pieces, and then returns to its den. V.15 even specifies that He will return to *His place* "until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face." But the last phrase introduces chapter 6 when it says, "in their affliction they will **earnestly seek Me.**"

Now notice 6:1-3. When Ephraim realizes his eminent demise, he quickly decides to "return to the Lord....For He has torn us, but He will heal us..." Their confidence in the Lord's salvation is compared to the *dawn* and *spring rain which waters the earth*. All of which sounds good, if it were sincere. It isn't.

The *insincerity of Ephraim's* plea is demonstrated in vv.4ff. God says that the *loyalty* of Ephraim and Judah is "like a morning cloud, and like dew which goes away early." These have the *promise* of sustaining moisture, but do not provide it, cp. Jude 12. In essence, Jehovah sees through their false promises and shallow repentance and will not be fooled by them. How do we know? Notice v.5, "Therefore I have hewn them in

pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and the judgments on you are like the night that goes forth.”

Additionally, how else are we to take v.6? It stresses the importance of *loyalty* over *sacrifice* and *knowledge* over *burnt offerings*. If the words of vv.1-3 were true and sincere, this verse makes little sense. But their words were not sincere; therefore judgment is coming upon them like the blackness of night.

The KJV utilizes the word “*man*” in v.7, whereas the ASV and NASV render the same as “*Adam*.” Since the antecedent of the pronoun “*they*” in the verse is *the people of Israel*, “*Adam*” seems to be the better translation- even though either could be correct otherwise. The general usage of “*man*” makes the point difficult. How is Israel being compared to *man*? Which *man*? *Man* of what time or period? However, if “*Adam*” is translated, the comparison becomes obvious. “*Adam*” broke the covenant with God in Eden and died as a result. Israel/Ephraim has broken its covenant with God and will similarly be destroyed. The specifics of Israel’s *treachery* against God in breaking the covenant is outlined in the verses that follow:

v.8 Gilead is not actually a city- at least not one which is mentioned in the O.T. or has been discovered through excavation. Instead, “*Gilead*” is a mountainous region east of the Jordan that had become a hideout for bandits and thieves. Symbolically, it is presented as city whose streets are filled with “*bloody footprints*” to demonstrate the *stains* of Israel’s atrocities.

Another geographic reference is made in v.9. “*Shechum*” is identified. This city was indeed a city of priests, as well as being a *city of refuge*. The latter means that it was a place that one guilty of manslaughter (defined as the unintentional or accidental taking of another’s life- therefore not *murder*) could go and be safe from the victim’s family, cf. Num.35:9-15 and Josh.20:7. Here, it is presented instead as a place where the priests themselves *lie in wait* to murder those going there!

V.10 again summarizes God’s disgust with, and case against, Ephraim/Israel.

In v.11, Judah is reminded that she will also be visited with God’s judgment when He purifies the nation.

Lesson 2- Study Questions for “Jehovah’s Controversy with Israel,” Hosea 4 - 63

Chapter 4

1. From vv.1-3: a) What is the *indictment* against Israel? b) What are its *sins*? And, c) What are the *results* of these things?
2. How was Israel “*like those who contend with the priest*” (v.4)? What does this mean?
3. What two specific *failures* are mentioned in v.6? What lessons do you think “we” should learn from these failures?
4. From vv.7-10, how did the *priests* “*feed on the sin*” of the people?
5. From vv.11-14, why did God say He would “*not punish*” the *daughters* and *brides* for their *harlotry* and *adultery*?
6. In v.16, Israel is compared to a “*heifer*” and a “*lamb*.” How, and what is the point?

Chapter 5

7. In v.1, the *priests*, *house of Israel*, and the *house of the king* are said to have been a “*snare at Mizpah*” and a “*net spread out on Tabor*.” What does this mean?
8. From vv.4-7, what prevented Israel from “*return(ing) to their God*”? What lessons should “we” learn from these things?

9. Why was Ephraim *oppressed* and *crushed in judgment*?
10. How would God be like a *lion/young lion* to Ephraim?
11. What is the most important word in v.15? (This may be more difficult to answer from the KJV, sorry!)

Chapter 6

12. Is Israel's "repentance" of vv.1-3 *genuine*? How do you know?
13. What does God say He *prefers* over "*sacrifice*" and "*burnt offerings*"? What do you think this means for "us" today?
14. What is the significance of *Gilead* and *Shechum* as mentioned in vv.8-9?
15. From v.11, *when/how* would God "*restore the fortunes*" of His people?