

### Lesson 3: When Knowledge is Rejected!

Hosea 4:1-19

1. “We don’t need God for morality” is a common saying today. What do you think?  
Give reasons for your answers.

It was certainly true of the Israelites that when they turned away from God, all sorts of corrupt practices emerged. We have seen some of them already in the last three chapters. In this chapter, God gets more specific. It reads like a court case.

*“God’s Charge Against Israel: Turning from the analogy of his own marriage, the prophet now makes the judicial charge in God’s indictment against Israel.”—John MacArthur<sup>1</sup>*

#### Read Hosea 4:1-3

2. What indictments does God bring against the Israelites (v. 1)?
3. Hosea said, “There is no **acknowledgment** (no understanding, wisdom or spiritual insight) of God in the land.”
  - Read John 16:13; 17:3, and 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. How does a man gain spiritual wisdom and knowledge of the things of God?
4. What evidence supports these charges (v. 2; Romans 3:10-18)?
5. What are the outcomes for land, people, and environment (v. 3; Leviticus 18:28; Romans 8:20-21)?
6. How do we see this disturbing moral collapse unfolding in our lives and culture (Romans 1:18-32)?

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Jonah, Amos, & Hosea, the Faithfulness of God* (Grand Rapids: Harper Christian Resources, 2023), 64.

Israelite society was riddled with violence, deceit, and impurity of every kind. Two centuries before, the Jeroboam (1 Kings 12-14) had introduced idolatry into Israel. Even the powerful ministries of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17-21 and 2 Kings 2-13) had not turned the country around permanently. Two hundred years later, in Hosea's time, the social consequences are unmistakable. Rejection of the God of the Bible will affect society. The decay may be slow, but it will be steady. A generation will perhaps reject God's revelation but want to hold on to morality and decency or at least safety in the streets and in their home. But when God's self-revelation is rejected, sin grows in power and soon will be open, obvious. Society becomes riddled with deceit, violence, impurity, and theft. The seed was a rejection of God; the fruit is social decay. Then, even nature is affected. Hosea 4:3 implies a formidable drought. God is rejected first; then, society is affected. Then, the very environment, even the very air we breathe, is all affected by man's sinful ways. Nothing can stop the steady consequences of sin except faith in God, who 'makes bare his mighty arm' to save us.<sup>2</sup>

### **Read Hosea 4:4-9: False Prophets lead the people astray!**

According to Eaton, Hosea 4-14 presents challenging verses for translation from Hebrew to English. Nonetheless, Eaton has provided his own professional translation in his commentary on Hosea. As we progress through these chapters, some of his translations will be included.

7. See the translation below. Why does the Lord single out the priests for special condemnation (Jeremiah 23:1, 9-22, 30-32)?

#### **Eaton's translation of verse 4:**

"Surely God has a controversy with a certain person. And there is a person God reproves. With you surely is my controversy, O priest!"<sup>3</sup>

8. How are leaders amongst God's people responsible for the people's knowledge and understanding (Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; James 3:1)?
9. What consequences of the priest or teacher's failure does God point out here (vv. 5-9; Matthew 23:1-33)?
10. Read Acts 20:29-31; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; and 2 Peter 2:1-3.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael A. Eaton, *Hosea* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), 67.

<sup>3</sup> Eaton, 71.

- a. The nation of Israel was being led by false prophets (of Baal) during the time of Hosea. What do you see in America today that is similar to the problem the people of Israel faced during the time of Hosea and during the time of Jesus Christ?
  
- b. According to Matthew 23:33, what is the fate of all false teachers? Why will they pay such a heavy price (Jeremiah 23:1-3)?
  
- c. How can a man know if what he hears on Sunday mornings is the truth (1 John 4:1-3; Acts 17:10-12)?
  
- d. What should you do if you attend a church where the minister's sermons do not align with Scripture (Jeremiah 23:4, 16-18)?

**Read Hosea 4:10-14: The result of false teaching—sin becomes rampant!**

**Eaton's translation of verses 10-19:**

One key to understanding Hosea 4:10-19 is to note who the pronouns refer to. 'You' in 4:4, 5, 6, 13, 14 is the high-priest, the enemy of God's work. 'I' in 4:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14 is God. 'They' in 4:7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14 are the priest's supporters. 'He' in 4:9, 12 is the high-priest. In verse 15 'you' changes its meaning but this is made clear by the phrase 'You, O Israel'. In verses 17, 18 'He' refers to God. 'They' continues to refer to the priestly party in northern Israel (4:18, 19). In verse 19, 'she' is an unnamed female goddess.<sup>4</sup>

10 They have eaten but will not be satisfied. They have been promiscuous but will not increase. They have forsaken Yahweh to keep harlotry. 11 Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the heart of my people. He makes enquiry from his wood; and his staff reports to him. For by a spirit of promiscuity he has led people astray. And they act promiscuously in defiance of their God.

13 Upon the mountaintops they offer sacrifices, and upon the hills they burn incense, under oak-trees, under poplars and under terebinths, because there the shade is good. Therefore, your daughters are promiscuous, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. 14 I will surely send punishment upon your daughters because they are promiscuous, and I will send punishment upon your daughters-in-law because they commit adultery. The men actually couple themselves with harlots and they offer sacrifices with 'sacred' prostitutes. A people without understanding will surely come to ruin. 15 Israel, you are surely not to be a harlot. Let not Judah be guilty. And do

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<sup>4</sup> Eaton, 74.

not come to Gilgal. And do not go up to Beth-Aven. And do not swear ‘As Yahweh lives.’ (Israel, Judah, Gilgal, and Beth-Aven, or Bethel, were the places God points out as places of idolatry and wickedness.) 16 For like a stubborn cow, Israel is being stubborn. Shall Yahweh now be shepherding them like a lamb in an open field? 17 Ephraim is joined to idols. He (God), for his part, has abandoned them. 18 He has turned aside from their drunkenness. They have practiced harlotry. Their protectors have greatly loved dishonor. 19 The wind (symbolic of God’s judgment) with its wings has carried her away. And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.<sup>5</sup>

11. What sins does God point out in this section (vv. 10-14; Exodus 20:1-4; Hosea 1:2; 3:1)?
12. Read Deuteronomy 23:17-18; Exodus 34:15-16; Judges 2:16-17; 1 Kings 14:24; and 2 Kings 23:7. Also read the commentary below. Why is prostitution an apt symbol of worshipping false gods (besides being a literal part of Baal worship)?

Moses (Dt. 23:17-18) now dealt with the issue of **pagan cultic prostitution in Israel** by saying that none of the daughters of Israel shall be a **cult prostitute**, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a [male] cult prostitutes (v. 17). The phrase a cult prostitutes (Heb. “qādēsh,” “to be set apart” or “to be holy”) refers to males and females dedicated as prostitutes in **the worship of pagan fertility gods and goddesses**. Pagan cultic prostitution was a sexual rite consisting of sexual intercourse performed in the context of religious worship. This practice was common in the ancient world, especially among the people groups of Syria and Canaan, especially in the worship of Baal (the fertility god— often associated with fertility, agriculture, rain, and storm). Temple prostitutes would have sexual intercourse with the worshipers in order to flatter the gods so that they would make their fields and flocks fertile. Unsurprisingly, this bred a culture of widespread sexual perversion.<sup>6</sup>

13. What effect does this behavior have?

- Verse 10
- Verse 11
- Verse 12

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<sup>5</sup> Eaton, 73-79.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 23:17-18 meaning: What are shrine prostitutes? <https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-23/deuteronomy-2317-18/> ; accessed May 3, 2024.

- Verse 13

14. What similar results do we see in our lives and society when we turn from God to serve things, ideas, or people that replace God?

### **Read Hosea 4:15-19**

It seems like God has given up on these stubborn people. He warns Judah, the southern kingdom, not to go in the same idolatrous direction. Gilgal and Bethel (v. 15) were where the northern kingdom set up their Baal shrines. Hosea gives the nickname Beth-Aven ('House of Evil') to Bethel ('House of God') (cf. Gen 28:10-22).

15. How do you see stubbornness in people today in responding to Biblical truth (John 5:39-40; Acts 7:51-53; Romans 2:4-5)?

16. How can the Lord shepherd people when they have no true shepherds to guide them (v. 16; Matthew 9:35-37)? What is the solution for our country today (John 10:7-16, 25-28)?

### **Prayer Points**

Pray for each other that we would be ruthless with the idolatry that creeps into our lives and constantly turn to the Lord and his word to feed and guide us.