**Woe to the Shepherds Who Lead My Sheep Astray!**

**Hosea 4**

**In Jeremiah 1:18 [the Lord said to Jeremiah]** “I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made.”

**Then, in Jeremiah 23:1,** the prophet addresses the real cause of their spiritual problem.

“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture,” declares the Lord. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord.

In **Hosea chapter 4**, the Lord brings charges against people, prophet and priest:

1. **The Charge against the people of Israel:**

The Lord’s charges in **verses 1 and 2**. “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.”

* The real problem lay with the false prophets and false priests who had turned away from the Word of God.
* The consequences of the egregious sins of the people.

**Verse 3:** “Because of this **the land mourns**, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.”

Rejection of the God of the Bible will affect society. The decay may be slow, but it will be steady…When God’s self-revelation is rejected sin grows in power and soon will be open [and] obvious. Society becomes riddled with deceit, violence, impurity, [and] theft. The seed was the rejection of God; the fruit is social decay. Then, even nature is affected.”—**Michael Eaton**

**Jeremiah 17:9** “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”

**Romans 8:22** Paul writes, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to our present time.”

**Leviticus 18**, the Lord gives Moses **19 commands** regarding perverse sexual activities.

* **Verse 22:** “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is destestable.”
* **Verse 23:** “Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.”
* **Verse 28**: The Lord says, “And if you defile the land, **it will vomit you out as it vomited out** the nations that were before you.”
1. **The Charges against the prophets and priests of Israel:**
* The most telling charge is that **the people no longer acknowledged God**. The question is why? What happened?

When the nation of Israel was divided upon the death of King Solomon, Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom.

* He made two golden calves and placed one in Bethel and the other one in Dan. This caused the people to worship false idols and was an egregious sin against God.
* Jeroboam built shrines on the high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.
* In other words, he disobeyed God because God has said the priests must all come from the line of Levi.

It was these false priests who began to lead the people away from God and into idolatry.

**Jeremiah 23:21** “I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied.”

In Hosea **verses 4-14**, the Lord levels **EIGHT CHARGES** against these religious leaders.

1. The prophets and priests are spiritually blind.

**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!**

**Verse 5:** And you shall **stumble in the day**: and with you also **the prophet shall stumble by night**; and I shall destroy your mother.

* Why do the prophets stumble? Because they are blind guides!

**Matthew 23**, Jesus called the Pharisees “blind guides.”

**Matthew 15:14**: Jesus says, “Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

2. The prophets and priests **ignore the word of God**!

**Verse 6**: “My people are destroyed from **lack of knowledge**. “Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you as my priests; because **you have ignored the law of your God**, I will also ignore your children.”

In **Acts 20:28-31**, Paul warned the Ephesian elders:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”

In **2 Timothy 4:2-4**, Paul gave Timothy this charge:

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

3. The prophets and priests **exchanged the glory of God for idolatry**!

**Verse 7:** “The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged my glory into something disgraceful.”

Eaton’s translation of the last part of this verse: “Their glory they changed into their shame.”

**Romans 1:22-23:** “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”

4.The prophets and priests **love wickedness!**

5. The prophets and priests **lead the people astray**!

6. The prophets and priests **deserted the Lord!**

7. The prophets and priests **worship false idols**!

8. The prophets and priests **practice sexual deviancy in their worship**!

**Verse 8:** They (the priests) feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.

**Verse 9:** And it will be: Like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.

**Verse 10b-12:** They (the priests) will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the Lord, to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which takes away the understanding of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.

**Verse 13:** They sacrifice offerings on the hills…There daughters turn to prostitution…

**Verse 14:** I will surely send punishment upon your daughters because they turn to prostitution…they commit adultery…the men actually couple themselves with harlots and they offer sacrifices with ‘sacred prostitutes.’ A people without understanding come to ruin.”

* It all began with the kings marrying foreign wives who brought with them their false gods.
* King Ahab married Jezebel who was a Sidonian. The Sidonians worshiped Astarte, also known as Ashtoreth, who was the chief goddess of Sidon, associated with fertility and love. She was often worshipped alongside Baal.
* Their religious practices included: Ritual prostitution, particularly associated with the worship of Ashtoreth.

The destination of false preachers and teachers: They will face **the judgment of God** and face very severe condemnation. Why? Because like people, like priests!

The problem in the modern church is that preachers have a **low view of God** and a **high view of man.**

* In their blindness, they fail to truly understand the nature of God—that He is so holy and so pure and so righteous that no one can come into His presence whose sin has not been dealt with.
* In their blindness, they see mankind as basically good.
* Thus, there is really no need to mention sin and the need for repentance.

In Hosea’ day, the worship of the Israelites became so perverted that it included **religious prostitution**. Men and women would perform sexual acts in public as part of their worship.

**Jeremiah 23:11, 12 and 14** declare: “The prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness,” declares the Lord. “Therefore their path will become slippery; they will be banished to darkness and there they will fall. I will bring disaster on them in the year they are punished,” declares the Lord.

**Verse 14b** “They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me: the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah!”

**Jeremiah 23:16-22** says, This is what the Lord Almighty says:

“Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.

They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The Lord says: You will have peace.’ And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, “No harm will come to you.’

But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word?

See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked.

The anger of the Lord will turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart.

In days to come you will understand it clearly.

I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied.

But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.