

Hosea 04 - God's Case Against Israel; Guilt of Israel's Priests, Citizens; Judgment on Idolatrous Worship

II. Wayward nation and faithful God (Hosea 4:1—14:9)

(1) Israel's adulterous unfaithfulness (Hosea 4:1—7:16)

- (A) Inauguration of the covenant lawsuit identifying Israel's sins (4:1-3)
- (B) Priests' sins (4:4-10)
- (C) People's sins (4:11-19)

Hosea 4

II. Wayward nation and faithful God (Hosea 4:1—14:9)

(1) Israel's adulterous unfaithfulness (Hosea 4:1—7:16)

(A) Inauguration of the covenant lawsuit identifying Israel's sins (4:1-3)

1 Listen to the word of the LORD, you sons of Israel, Because the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, For there is no faithfulness, nor loyalty, Nor knowledge of God in the land.

1 Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land.

1 "Hear this message from the LORD, people of Israel. Indeed, the LORD brings a charge against the people who live in the land— for there is no truth and no gracious love or knowledge of God in the land.

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.

- A subpoena from God: As in, "Hear ye! Hear ye! The court is in session..."

— God is talking about a covenant lawsuit He's filing against Israel...God is suing them for non-performance of the Mosaic Covenant

— Hosea called on the Israelites to listen to a message from *Yahweh* because He was charging them with serious crimes

- The prophets come on the scene when national Israel is in disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant

— They file a covenant lawsuit against the nation of Israel

- Throughout the OT, the prophets always cite the Mosaic Covenant
- They lay out the areas where Israel broke God's law, then they begin to prophesy about various powers that will take Israel into either captivity or dispersion, foretold in Lev 26; Deut 28
- Then the prophets will state that if Israel repents and begins obeying the Mosaic Law, God will reverse the curse and begin to bless Israel
- This is where the OT prophets begin giving us glimpses of what things will be like when Israel does indeed return to obey the Mosaic Law again...the lifting of the curses and the implementation of the blessings
- First, He outlines their sins of omission:
 - No truth (developed in 11:12–13:16)
 - No mercy (developed in 6:1–11:11)
 - No knowledge of God (developed in 4:4–5:15)
- These were all things that the Lord had ordered His people to pursue when He covenanted with them at Sinai
- The Lord states these charges against Israel in v1-3, then developed them in reverse order

Hosea's personal life will now fade into the background...the rest of the book is *prophetic*: What had previously been presented in figure and symbol is now plainly and literally stated. God is going to spell out the specific charges: lawlessness, immorality, ignorance of God's Word, and idolatry.

God's law, while given specifically to Israel, sets out the pattern for any nation which wants to be blessed. Here, the charges are disclosed in a manner whose depth is unparalleled in the rest of the OT. God's holiness demands an indictment for Israel's sin; God's justice requires that she should be punished.

Brainwashed in their idolatry: no truth; no faithfulness. What has happened to the sanctity of a commitment? "My word is my bond"? We have lost it in our marriages. We have lost it in our business dealings. We have disconnected character from destiny. 700 years later, John would write, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

The Holy One of Israel was acting as the prosecuting attorney, the plaintiff, the witness, the judge, and the executioner (Cf. Amos 9:8). It is interesting to note that they had ignored the Word of the Lord for 200 years! ... *so have we in the United States!*

2 *There is* **oath-taking, denial, murder, stealing, and adultery**. They **employ violence**, so that **bloodshed follows bloodshed**.

2 *There is* swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.

2 Swearing, lying, murder, theft, and adultery are rampant, and blood mingles with blood.

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

- Instead of truth, mercy and knowledge of God, He observed (all were forbidden in God's Mosaic Covenant with Israel):

- "...oath-taking" - cursing others by misusing oaths

- "...denial" - lying

- "...murder" - killing

- "...stealing" - theft

- "...adultery" - lack of sanctity in marriage

- "...employ violence" - violent crime was so common that they seemed to follow one another without interruption

- "...bloodshed follows bloodshed" - continual bloodshed, even among relatives

— In Hebrew, each of these commandments is stated by Hosea in the infinitive absolute, a grammatical form used for vividness and emphasis

— It is far more forcible in the Hebrew than just saying that they swore, lied, killed and stole. It expresses that these sins were continual, that nothing else was going on. Sin was everywhere, pervasive in every part of society.

3 Therefore **the land mourns**, And everyone who lives in it languishes Along with the animals of the field and the birds of the sky, And even the fish of the sea disappear.

3 Therefore the land mourns, And everyone who lives in it languishes Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky, And also the fish of the sea disappear.

3 Therefore the land will mourn, and all who live there will languish, along with the wild animals of the field and the birds of the air. Even the fish in the sea will disappear.

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.

- "...the land mourns" - the environment was polluted as well

- Because of these sins, God was not going to bless Israel, but instead was going to bring curses on the land, so that every part of the Northern Kingdom suffered

— Drought seems to be the primary form of chastisement in view (Cf. Lev 26:19; Deut 28:23-24)

(B) Priests' sins (4:4-10)

4 Yet let no one find fault, and let no one rebuke; For **your people** are like those who contend with a priest.

4 Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof; For your people are like those who contend with the priest.

4 "Let no one fight or bring charges against another, for my dispute is with you, priest.

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

- Israel's guilt was so clear that the Lord forbade the people from denying His charge against them

- The blame is assigned to the priests...the pathetic scene of the leadership rendering judgments under staggering drunkenness is forcibly portrayed by Hosea's contemporary, Isaiah (Cf. Is 28:1-8)

- "...your people" - the leadership change is made plain by the change of pronoun from "My people" to "thy people"

5 So you will stumble by day, And the prophet also will stumble with you by night; And **I will destroy your mother.**

5 So you will stumble by day, And the prophet also will stumble with you by night; And I will destroy your mother.

5 So you will stumble during the day, the prophet also will stumble with you at night, and I will destroy your mother.

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.

- Because of their rebellion, the people would have difficulty and "stumble" through life; their false prophets would also err

- The decision to live as rebels made them "squatters" who deserved eviction

- "...I will destroy your mother" - probably another reference to the nation as a whole (Cf. 2:2)

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Since you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children.

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

6 My people are destroyed because they lack knowledge of me. Because you rejected that knowledge, I will reject you as a priest for me. Since you forget the Law of your God, I will also forget your children.

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.

- God would destroy the Israelites because of their lack of knowledge of Him: they failed to acknowledge Him as their God

— God would reject them as His priests, whose task it was to mediate the knowledge of God to the nations (Ex 19:6), because they rejected the knowledge that He gave them in His law

- He would abandon (forget) their children because they had abandoned (forgotten) His law

- America, too, can clearly track the acceleration of its moral decay to the 1960s Supreme Court decisions outlawing prayer and Bible reading in the public schools...

The Word of God

The minute you get away from the Word of God, you are doomed to failure in both your Christian life and your national life. As a result of their sin, God will even take away their priests. Paul may have had Hosea in mind when he penned Rom 1:18-32. There is a specific judgment pronounced on every culture that fails to acknowledge Him as Creator...

- Compare Hosea 4:6 with Rom 1:24,26,28
- Compare Hosea 4:7 with Rom 1:23
- Compare Hosea 4:11 with Rom 1:21-22

The Gentiles had only Creation as a witness, *but that was enough*. Israel was even more guilty than the Gentiles in that they had been given more knowledge of God, but they had rejected it. *We are even more guilty than Israel for the same reason.* "To whom much is given, much will be required!" (Luke 12:48)

7 The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame.

7 The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame.

7 "The more they increased in number, the more they sinned against me, so I will change their glory into shame.

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

- God kept His promise to Abraham and multiplied them, but that just brought more sinners into the world

— God blessed the Israelites by increasing their numbers, but their response to this blessing had been to increase their sinning against Him

— However, these people had no knowledge of the Word of God. Their darkness was a result of their own ignorance (v6; Cf. John 3:19; Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 4:6), therefore He will change their glory to shame.

8 They feed on the sin of My people, And long for their wrongdoing.

8 They feed on the sin of My people And direct their desire toward their iniquity.

8 They feed on the sin of my people; they purpose in their heart to transgress.

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

- Israel's priests were feeding on the sin offerings that people brought to their pagan shrines, yet since these offerings were also offered to idols, it was as though the priests were feeding on the people's sins

— The priests desired these offerings, which meant they wanted the people to practice idolatry so they would bring more sacrifices; the more sacrifices, the more meat the priests could eat

9 And it will be, **like people, like priest**; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds.

9 And it will be, like people, like priest; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds.

9 So it will be: like people, like priest. I will punish them for their lifestyles, rewarding them according to their behavior.

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" - their leadership urged people to sin: Like people, like priest, both to be punished

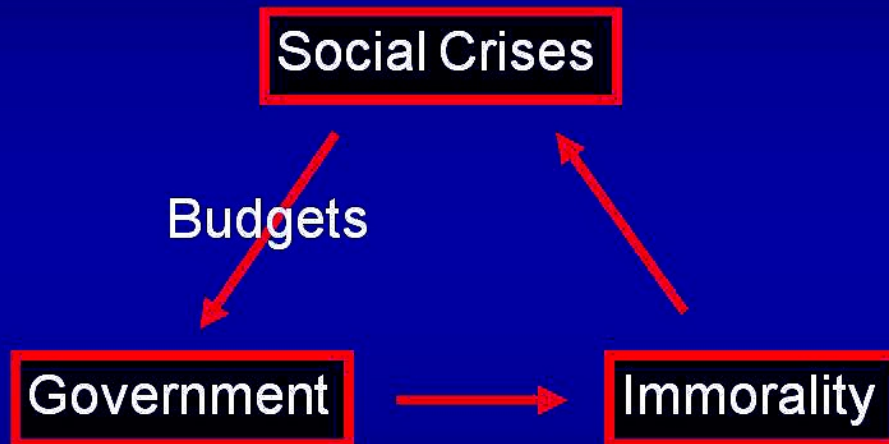
— Both the people and priests were sinning, so God promised to punish them for their sinful ways

— "What a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal 6:7)

Immorality of Governments

Our pagan government, too, has developed the following stratagem: Crises favor increased budgets, controls; social crises work as well as military ones; immorality creates social crises; thus, governments promote immorality.

Diabolical Cycle



10 They will eat, but not have enough; They will play the prostitute, but not increase, Because they gave up devoting themselves to the LORD.

10 They will eat, but not have enough; They will play the harlot, but not increase, Because they have stopped giving heed to the LORD.

10 They will eat, but will not be satisfied. They will engage in prostitution, but they won't increase, because they have stopped listening to the LORD.

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.

- They would eat but "not be satisfied" because the Lord would send drought and scarcity of food as punishment (Cf. v3)

- They would act like harlots by committing fornication with pagan temple prostitutes, but their population would not increase because Yahweh would reduce their fertility

— He would do both of these things (insatiable hunger and fruitless wombs) because they had stopped listening and observing His law

— There is irony here: worship of Baal was supposed to ensure fertility of the soil and the fertility of the womb (Cf. Deut 31:17)

(C) People's sins (4:11-19)

11 Infidelity, wine, and new wine take away the understanding.

11 Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding.

11 "Sexual immorality, wine, and fresh wine seduce the heart of my people.

11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

- Idolatry (spiritual harlotry), with its emphasis on drinking wine, had turned the hearts of the Israelites from Yahweh

— Along with their heart for God went their realistic understanding of what was best for them

Alcoholism

God has condemned drunkenness. Is alcoholism a “disease?”

- It is the only disease contracted by an act of will
- It is the only disease that is habit forming
- It is the only disease that comes in a bottle
- It is the only disease promoting crime and brutality
- It is the only disease playing a major part in more than half of fatal highway accidents
- It is the only disease which is sold by license
- It is the only disease that is bought in grocery stores, drug stores, and well-marked retail outlets
 - It is (not) the only disease that provides the government with revenue...

12 My people consult their **woodenidol**, and their *diviner's* wand informs them; For a spirit of infidelity has led *them* astray, And they have been unfaithful, *departing* from their God.

12 My people consult their wooden idol, and their *diviner's* wand informs them; For a spirit of harlotry has led *them* astray, And they have played the harlot, *departing* from their God.

12 My people seek counsel from their piece of wood, and their diviner's rod speaks to them. For a spirit of prostitution causes them to go astray; in their immorality they desert their God.

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.

- God's people consulted wooden idols and sought revelation using a diviner's rod

- "...wooden idol" - Lit., "wood"; "Woe unto him who says to a piece of wood, 'Awake'" (Hab 2:19)

— The insanity of paganism: the blood spilled on the altars of *the gods who are not* and *the demons who are...*we become like the gods we worship (Ps 115:8; 135:18)

13 They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar, and terebinth, Because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the prostitute, And your brides commit adultery.

13 They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar and terebinth, Because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the harlot And your brides commit adultery.

13 They offer sacrifices on the mountain tops, burning offerings on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinth trees, since their shade is very good. Therefore your daughters are prostitutes and your daughters-in-law commit adultery.

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.

- They worshipped their idols on the tops of hills, believing that they were then nearer to heaven (Cf. Deut 12:2)

- They enjoyed worshipping at their convenience, so they worshipped under shade trees (Cf. 2 Kings 17:10-11)

- These sins were just as bad as the daughters of the Israelites practicing harlotry and adultery with male cult prostitutes (Cf. Deut 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24)

14 I will not punish your daughters when they play the prostitute, Or your brides when they commit adultery, Because *the men* themselves slip away with the prostitutes And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; So the people without understanding are ruined.

14 I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot Or your brides when they commit adultery, For *the men* themselves go apart with harlots And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; So the people without understanding are ruined.

14 However, I'm not going to punish your daughters when they commit prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because their men are themselves immoral— they offer sacrifices with prostitutes. These people who aren't discerning will stumble.

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.

- Yahweh would not punish only the females in Israel; the males were just as guilty

- The females were unfaithful to their husbands, but their husbands were also engaging in immoral acts with pagan temple prostitutes

- For homosexuals, homosexual prostitution was provided (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7)

- Sin would thus be punished by even more sin

Judgment on Idolatrous Worship

15 Though you, Israel, play the prostitute, Judah must not become guilty; Also you are not to go to Gilgal, Nor go up to Beth-aven And take the oath: "As the LORD lives!"

15 Though you, Israel, play the harlot, Do not let Judah become guilty; Also do not go to Gilgal, Or go up to Beth-aven And take the oath: "As the LORD lives!"

15 "Even though you prostitute yourself, Israel— let not Judah incur guilt— don't go to Gilgal, or visit Beth-aven, or swear an oath using the LORD's name.

15 Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Bethaven, nor swear, The LORD liveth.

- The Lord warned the Israelites not to pollute the Southern Kingdom with their unfaithfulness

— This is a warning to the Southern Kingdom to not replicate the unfaithfulness of the North, but to flee their idolatry

— It was too late for the North...their judgment was certain; however the Southern Kingdom still had opportunity for national repentance

- He also warned them to not go to the pagan shrines and take an oath in His name since they really didn't worship Him

- Gilgal and Bethaven (Bethel) were representative of pagan cultic sites (Cf. 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5)

— Hosea seems to be using the names contemptuously, renaming Bethel, "The House of God" as Bethaven, "The House of Vanity"

16 Since Israel is stubborn Like a **stubborn cow**, Will the LORD now pasture them Like a lamb in a large field?

16 Since Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn heifer, Can the LORD now pasture them Like a lamb in a large field?

16 For Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn mule! Nevertheless, will not the LORD feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?

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

- The Lord asks a rhetorical question...could He continue to guide Israel as its shepherd, since it was not behaving like a compliant heifer or lamb, but had become stubborn and obstinate

- "...stubborn cow" - refers to being guilty of refusing to be led of the Lord

— The word is used 3x in Hosea; it is used only by Jeremiah and Hosea, both of whom spoke to a nation ready to go into captivity

17 **Ephraim** is **allied** with idols; Leave him alone.

17 Ephraim is joined to idols; Let him alone.

17 Ephraim has become entwined with idols; leave him alone!

17 Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

- "...Ephraim" - Ephraim being the dominant tribe in the north, became idiomatic for the entire Northern Kingdom

— Used 37x in this book; it is God's synecdoche for the Northern Kingdom, the name of its dominant tribal constituent

— The Northern Kingdom had abandoned their Shepherd for idols, so the Lord instructed others to leave them alone; He would abandon them to the judgment that would come inevitably from pursuing sin

- "...allied" - *chabar*, yoked to, cleaving to, merged with

18 Their liquor is gone, They prostitute themselves continually; Their rulers dearly love shame.

18 Their liquor gone, They play the harlot continually; Their rulers dearly love shame.

18 While drinking to excess, they prostitute themselves. They're in love with dishonor.

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

- Under the influence of alcohol, they continually played the harlot

- The rulers of the people, who should've been shields protecting the people, also loved the sins that brought shame on the nation

19 The wind wraps them in its wings, And they will be put to shame because of their sacrifices.

19 The wind wraps them in its wings, And they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

19 A wind storm will carry them away in its embrace, and their sacrifices will bring them shame."

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

- God would "blow away" Israel in judgment as though the wind wrapped the nation in its wings

- When judgment came, the Israelites would finally feel shame for sacrificing to idols

God's covenant people are called to court, found to be in violation of the stipulations of his covenant, and sentenced to destruction.

The passage details a long series of crimes against the divine law, all related to the catalog of blessings and curses found in Deut 28-33. The sins of omission and commission pictured so relentlessly throughout the chapter make up a remarkably complete picture of the depths of Israel's apostasy.