

The Word of the Lord to Hosea

Lesson 2

Hosea 4:1 – 6:2

A Case Against the Land

Hosea 4:¹ 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.

Why does the Lord have a case against the land? The answer to that question is presented in the second verse of the book.

Hosea 1:2 When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord."

The flagrant harlotry in the land of the Northern Kingdom is now defined in this fourth chapter as a threefold problem – no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God. When the Lord refers to the land, He is not speaking of the physical land, but of the people who dwell on the land as will be seen when He charges the people with breaking His specific commandments in the following verses.

No Faithfulness

Hosea 4:² *There is* swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed. 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.

Five of the Ten Commandments are presented as charges against the Northern Kingdom.¹¹

Swearing	Command 3: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
Deception	Command 9: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
Murder	Command 6: You shall not murder.
Stealing	Command 8: You shall not steal.
Adultery	Command 7: You shall not commit adultery.

When the Ten Commandments were given, a curse was also given that would come upon those who broke the Lord's laws.

Leviticus 26:¹⁹ 'I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze.

Deuteronomy 28:²³ "The heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. ²⁴ "The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

¹¹ In order, Commandments 3, 9, 6, 8, and 7 are broken.

The people's unfaithfulness to keep the commandments of the Lord finally resulted in the punishment that came through this curse. The summer drought of 2011 caused great damage in the central United States. The record shows more than 130 days without rain. The lakes of Texas dried up to record lows with two inches of water disappearing every day and in many cases the original creeks that the lakes were built upon were exposed for the first time since the dams were built. The crops in the fields burned in the heat of the sun. Fires blazed through the grasses of the neighborhoods and homes were destroyed. The loss of harvested produce drove prices higher in the grocery stores. It was even worse in the Dust Bowl drought of the 1930's. America has had a taste of what it is like to go without rain but not to the extent of some other countries. Also in the summer of 2011, African tribal members walked miles upon miles to find water and food. Parents would forgo their portions of food to give their children a chance at life. The land was as hard as bronze as described in the Scripture and the rain was like powder and dust. For the Israelites, the Lord did not promise rain in the curse; He promised powder and dust that would destroy them because of their sins.

Sin does not affect just the people who commit a sin; it affects everything and everyone around them. When the Lord punishes the people by withholding the rain from the crops, the people starve, the cattle starve, and the animals of the field starve. The birds of the air and the fish of the sea also suffer. Nothing can escape the drought brought on by the curse of unfaithfulness to the Lord.

No Kindness

Hosea 4:⁴ Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof; for your people are like those who contend with the priest. ⁵ So you will stumble by day, and the prophet also will stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.

The absence of kindness in this case has nothing to do with how people interact with other people; it is an indictment that deals with how people interact with God. The Lord set the laws and regulations but the people of the Northern Kingdom refused to follow them. Blemished offerings were made to the Lord and the priests accepted them, a violation of the Lord's instruction. False prophets led people to worship other gods, a violation of another of the Lord's regulations. The allegiance of the priests and prophets of the Northern Kingdom was given to the human king rather than the King of kings; therefore, they were as guilty as all the people of the kingdom and the Lord had a case against them as well. Their failure to follow the Lord resulted in their ultimate demise. The Lord removed the priests from their offices. The wives of the priests died without bearing children. No boys were born in the priestly line to take their father's places when they reached the age of retirement of 50.¹² The destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC fulfilled this part of the prophecy.

No Knowledge

Hosea 4:⁶ 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. ⁷ The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. ⁸ They feed on the sin of My people And direct their desire toward their iniquity. ⁹ And it will be, like people, like priest; so I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. 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. ¹¹ Harlotry, wine and new wine

¹² Numbers 8:25

take away the understanding. 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. 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. 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. 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!" ¹⁶ Since Israel is stubborn like a stubborn heifer, can the Lord now pasture them like a lamb in a large field? ¹⁷ Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone. ¹⁸ Their liquor gone, they play the harlot continually; their rulers dearly love shame. ¹⁹ The wind wraps them in its wings, and they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

The people of the Northern Kingdom suffered from a lack of knowledge because they had not been faithful to the teachings of the Lord through Moses. The seeds of idolatry were planted during the 430 years of Israel's life in Egypt. Germination of the seeds continued through the wilderness years, the times of the judges and the reigns of Saul and David, despite the Lord's direct instructions and the great ministries of men like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Nathan, and David. During Solomon's reign, the seeds grew, and with his death in 938 BC, they were in full blossom as Jeroboam I took control of the Northern Kingdom. Under Jeroboam's leadership, the case against the kingdom was set; yet the Lord was patient with the people. The people were fully rejecting the Lord at that time and, for more than 150 years, they broke every law of the Lord without remorse, without personal guilt and without understanding why what they were doing was wrong. How could they not have known? They did not know because they were not taught the truth! Rather, they were instructed in pagan worship which included the use of temple prostitutes for the blessings of the gods upon the produce of the fields.

The Lord was not ready for the sin of the north to be imported into the south. The three-fold warning, "do not let Judah ... do not go up to Gilgal ... or go up to Beth-aven," was an attempt to keep the Southern Kingdom of Judah out of cult worship. Bethel, which means house of God, sat on the original site of Jacob's dream and had been renamed Beth-aven which meant house of wickedness. ¹³ Gilgal was just as guilty of wickedness as we will see in Hosea 9:15. The Northern Kingdom was guilty of keeping the Law in their routines but breaking it in their hearts. The tribal area of Ephraim was the guiltiest of them all for the capital of the kingdom was in their land. The king of the north had the power to redirect and educate the people but he was the main culprit in the idolatrous sin of the land.

Judah to Follow Israel

Hosea 5:¹ Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For the judgment applies to you, for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread out on Tabor. ² The revolters have gone deep in depravity, but I will chastise all of them. ³ I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot, Israel has defiled itself. ⁴ Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know the Lord. ⁵ Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him, and Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also has stumbled with them. ⁶ They will

¹³ Amos 5:5; 1 Kings 12:28-30; 2 Kings 10:29; 23:15

go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, but they will not find *Him*; He has withdrawn from them.⁷ They have dealt treacherously against the Lord, for they have borne illegitimate children. Now the new moon will devour them with their land.⁸ Blow the horn in Gibeah, The trumpet in Ramah. Sound an alarm at Beth-aven: "Behind you, Benjamin!"⁹ Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke; Among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure.¹⁰ The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary; on them I will pour out My wrath like water.¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to follow *man's* command.¹² Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim and like rottenness to the house of Judah.¹³ When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, or to cure you of your wound.¹⁴ For I *will* be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.¹⁵ I will go away *and* return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.

Hosea 4:15 gives a threefold warning for Judah not to participate in the cultic sin of Israel, but the first 15 verses of Hosea's next message shows Judah also facing the judgment of the Lord. Israel and the tribal area of her capital were in a full-blown sickness of rebellion against the Lord. Hosea's prophecy showed Judah's fresh wound from the same sin. The Bible record reveals that the Southern Kingdom did not seep into such sin until after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC.¹⁴

In the message, the priests and the king were specifically guilty of entrapping the people and leading them into the cult worship located at Mizpah and Tabor. Amos spoke of this same prophecy and asked questions that compare it to a trap for birds.

Amos 3:5 Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?

Tabor was located northwest of the Jordan River near the Sea of Galilee and Mizpah was in the Gilead area, east of the river. In both cases, the priests would be disciplined by the Lord for the guidance they gave the people. Their corruption was seen by the Lord as spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness.¹⁵ The nation was proud of her guilt as well as her prostitution, an attitude that precluded any possibility of repentance at the time. Judah would not be far behind. When Hezekiah died and Manasseh became king, Judah fell into the same sin of idolatry.

Before the fall, the Northern Kingdom complicated this relationship with the Lord by returning to the Mosaic practice of sacrificing the herds and flocks when they realized that the blessings of the Lord had been removed. But their sacrifices showed nothing but a flagrant hypocrisy before the Lord. Isaiah addressed the hypocrisy in the opening of his prophecy.

Isaiah 1:11 "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.¹² "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?¹³ "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of

¹⁴ The Southern Kingdom made an ungodly alliance with Assyria in 701 BC.

¹⁵ Leviticus 18:20-24

assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ¹⁴ "I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. ¹⁵ "So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. ¹⁶ "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

The passage continues to draw the picture of Hosea and the illegitimate children who came through his wife's harlotry. It is used to promote the idea that many of the children born in the Northern Kingdom were products of sexual acts with the cultic prostitutes mentioned in Hosea 4:13-14. To be consistent with the family metaphor, all the children born in the kingdom were illegitimate offspring of parents who sought a relationship with imaginary gods. Such idolatry brought about their demise even though the people were actively participating in the religious festivals. The frantic attitude that caused them to return to the Lord's celebrations actually heightened the Lord's dissatisfaction with them.

The Lord was about to send the Assyrian forces to invade the Northern Kingdom who would quickly sweep through the land down to Gibeah, Ramah and Beth-aven which were originally in Benjamin's territory. Beth-aven became the property of the north and the boundaries of the kingdom were moved.¹⁶ The Lord mentions these towns and the territory of Benjamin to describe the limitations of Assyria's efforts. It went to Benjamin's property line and no further. Benjamin was part of the Southern Kingdom and verse 10 may mention these towns because the property boundaries had been moved, an act strictly forbidden in the Law. ¹⁷ But Judah was definitely not without sin at this point in the story. She was penalized by the Lord for moving the boundary lines.

In 733 BC, during the days of Ahaz, Assyria tried to conquer both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms without success. Hosea was referring to this same invasion in verse 11 when indicating the judgment had begun.¹⁸ The north was especially in trouble because she was devoted to commandments of the priests and king to worship the idols instead of following the Lord. The Lord was quietly allowing them to degrade and be destroyed. The little moth destroyed by eating the clothing in Ephraim.¹⁹ The rot ate away and decayed the bones in Judah.²⁰ What did these two things mean? They meant that the Lord God was manipulating everything to bring about His will. In this case, it was to bring about the demise of Israel.

In verse 13, Hosea mentioned King Jareb, the last northern king who attempted to make an alliance with the king of Assyria as recorded in 2 Kings. In an attempt to take over the Northern Kingdom, King Hoshea conspired against King Pekah and became king with the help of Assyria's king.²¹

2 Kings 17:³ Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him, and Hoshea became his servant and paid him tribute.

¹⁶ Joshua 18:25-28

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17

¹⁸ 2 Kings 15:19

¹⁹ Job 13:28; Isaiah 50:9; 51:8

²⁰ Proverbs 12:4; 14:30; Habakkuk 3:16

²¹ 2 Kings 15:30 – 17:6

Judah made a similar pact with Assyria when Syria and the Northern Kingdom threatened her as recorded in 2 Kings 16.

2 Kings 16:⁵ Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. ⁶ At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram, and cleared the Judeans out of Elath entirely; and the Arameans came to Elath and have lived there to this day. ⁷ So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." ⁸ Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. ⁹ So the king of Assyria listened to him; and the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and captured it, and carried *the people of it* away into exile to Kir, and put Rezin to death.

In both cases the two kingdoms were trying to survive as nations by calling out to Assyria, but Assyria was not able to heal their wounds caused by idolatry. When King Hoshea withheld the tax money required by Assyria, the Assyrian king invaded in 722 BC, and the kingdom fell into exile.²² The moth, known as Assyria, had turned into the lion. The capture of the city of Samaria and the tribal area of Ephraim fulfilled this prophecy. In 701 BC, Assyria attempted to overrun Judah but failed because the Lord miraculously intervened to deliver His people. Another century would pass before this prophecy was fulfilled with Nebuchadnezzar's assault.²³

Healing of Israel and Judah

Hosea 6:¹ "Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal us; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage us. ² "He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him.

The Lord sent Assyria upon Israel to deliver His judgment upon her. He sent Nebuchadnezzar to do the same with Judah. It was not His intent to destroy them; rather, it was His intent to heal them of their idolatrous wounds. Hosea pleaded with both to return to the Lord, but they would not. The prophet did not promise immediate deliverance; he promised destruction for two days and healing on the third day. The people might have thought the healing would be within the week after the fall, but history records that they would not be granted the land again until May of 1948. For the Southern Kingdom, it would be 2,554 years; for the Northern Kingdom, 2,670 years. Because the Lord was delivering this message through Hosea and not in Hosea's own words, perhaps Peter's message can shed light on why the deliverance did not occur in three actual days.

2 Peter 3:⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

History records that Israel was deeded her land grant by the United Nations in May of 1948. The actual circumstances that brought about the transfer of the land began in the late 1800's with the rise of Germany and, ultimately, the conflicts of both World Wars I and II. Whether this prophecy was speaking about the fall of the Northern Kingdom or the Southern Kingdom or both, it makes no difference. The Lord arranged the circumstances and restored the Promised Land to Israel in the middle of His third day.

²² 2 Kings 17:3-6

²³ 2 Kings 25