

## Hosea'S Prophecy (Part Two)

Hosea 3:1-5; 4:1-19

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In the way of a quick summary of what I covered in my last sermon on the book of Hosea: God had a marriage relationship with Israel, but Israel turned to other gods, made alliances with other countries, and took on their pagan culture. As a result, physical Israel became Jezreel, meaning *God will scatter*, also Lo-Ruhamah, meaning *not having obtained mercy or pity from God*, and Lo-Ammi, meaning *not God's people or not my loved one*.

In other words, they were cut off from God; divorced. Today, the Church of God is the spiritual Israel of God, and we have become Jezreel, meaning *God will sow*, Ruhamah, meaning *obtained mercy*, and Ammi, *God's people*.

Physical Israel is commanded to repent and turn to God, but this will not happen until the end of the tribulation, and on into the beginning of the millennium. At that time, God will have mercy on all Israel. Through the Israel of God, most, if not all, of the Gentile nations will also eventually enter into a covenant relationship with God, and then all the world will have obtained mercy and be God's people. But that is yet a long way off.

Chapters 1 through 3 use Hosea's own marriage to Gomer as a parable for the relationship between God and Israel, with the dominant image of Israel as an unfaithful wife. Hosea's personal biography exemplifies the Eternal's compassion. Chapter 3 of Hosea illustrates the redemptive work accomplished by Christ. The rest of the book illustrates and explains God's assertion and, intermittently, reminds Israel of her need for repentance. In one way, the remainder of the book is about repentance.

We are able to learn something of God's love for us through Hosea's difficulty, because the story of Hosea is, in type, the story of ourselves as the betrothed bride of Christ. But we must not take this analogy too far, because it fits the church in some respects, but not all. However, it fits the Israelites perfectly. Therefore, it has its application for our nation today, in a direct way.

The third chapter of Hosea is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, because it portrays the greatest story in scripture: the death of Jesus Christ for His people in the most concise and heart-rending form found anywhere. Hosea's story is a display of the love of God for Israel, and also for his people in every place, in every age. But when we ask, where in the whole of human history is that love most clearly seen, the answer is

obviously at the crucifixion of Christ. It is that crucifixion and the work Christ accomplished on that stake that is portrayed in this chapter.

Hosea 3 shows us God's work of redemption, the work by which Jesus Christ delivered us from sin's bondage, at the cost of His own life portrayed in Hosea's purchase of his fallen wife from the slavery of sin in the world. The heading on my chapter says "Israel Will Return to God."

**Hosea 3:1-5** Then the Lord said to me [the Lord speaking to Hosea], "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you." For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

So Gomer had left Hosea, as you will recall, and she had sunk lower in lower in the social scale of the day. Finally, she became a slave and was sold in the capital city of Samaria.

There are different ways in which a person could become a slave in ancient Israel. I will give you three of those ways. First, one could become a slave by conquest. To give one illustration, when the Athenians tried to attack Sicily at the time of the Peloponnesian war and were defeated, all in the army taken in the battle of Syracuse became slaves. Throughout history, that has been a method of going into slavery.

The second way is that you could become a slave by birth. If your parents were slaves, you became a slave automatically. Thus, all who descended from the Athenians, who were captured at Syracuse, became slaves as well; it became generational.

The third way to become a slave was through debt. Gomer presumably became a slave in this fashion. Thus the time came when at the depths of her despair and misery, she was sold on the auction block in the capital city, and Hosea was told by God to buy her.

We know quite a bit about the selling of slaves in ancient times; there have been many

records written of it. For example, the slaves were always sold naked; we know that for sure. How can it be much more humiliating? There is a Greek play in which an obese man is put up for sale. The bids are starting and the men were bidding, 10 cents, 15 cents, 20 cents, and so on. They begin to joke with one another, one man says, "Why do you bid 20 cents for that fat slave? As soon as he gets in your house, he is going to eat up all your food." The man who bid 20 cents justifies his bid by saying, "You do not understand. I have a squeaky mill. I am going to cut him up and use him for grease." The point is, slaves were less than human in ancient times, and that is how they were treated. They were treated less than animals, less than pets, less than dogs and cats.

In this case, at last a beautiful woman is put up for sale. Her clothes are stripped from her body, and now the bidding is not 10 cents, it begins at 20 cents. It is a hundred dollars, a hundred twenty dollars. The men are bidding for the body of the female slave. This is the viciousness of the world under Satan, and it is happening today in this world. It is kept very quiet, but thousands and thousands of woman are going through similar things in secret.

Hosea's wife Gomer was put up for sale in this way. Her clothes were removed and the men of the city were there to see her nakedness and bid for her. And God told Hosea to buy his wife back.

One man started the bid, "Twelve pieces of silver." "Thirteen," said Hosea. "Fourteen pieces of silver." Hosea's bid was fifteen. The low bidders were beginning to drop out, but one man continued bidding. "Fifteen pieces of silver and a bushel of barley." And then Hosea said, "Fifteen pieces of silver and a bushel and a half of barley." The auctioneer looked around and seeing no more bids, said, "Sold to Hosea for fifteen pieces of silver and a bushel and a half of barley." That is all she was worth.

Notice at this point, Hosea owned his wife. She was his property; he could do anything he wanted with her. If he wanted to kill her out of spite, he could have done it under the law of the land, because Israel had degenerated to that point. Did you know that is going on secretly today? We tend to forget that because it is hidden.

Gomer would have suffered far more as a slave to some brutal, sex-crazed man, but she was saved out of that by her husband. People might have called Hosea a fool to waste his money on a worthless woman. Still, Hosea could have killed Gomer if he wanted to; yet he did not because at this point Hosea's love, which is an illustration of God's love for us, manifested itself in benevolent action.

Instead of seeking vengeance, he put Gomer's clothes on her; he led her into the

anonymity of the crowd and claimed that love from her that was now his right. In addition, as he did so, he promised no less from himself.

God loves like that. He steps into the marketplace of sin and buys us out of sin's bondage by the death of Christ. We read in our Bibles, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," and we ask, "What does so mean? God so loved?" The answer is in Hosea's story when we see Hosea standing in the marketplace under orders from God to purchase His own wife, who had become an adulteress and a slave. We recognize that this is the measure of God's love.

We are Gomer, and we are the slaves sold on the auction block of sin and the world bids for us. The world bids fame, wealth, prestige, influence, and power. All of those things that are the world's currency. But when all seemed lost, God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the marketplace to buy us at the cost of His life. If you can understand this as an illustration, God was the auctioneer, in a sense, and He said, "What do you bid for these poor, hopeless, enslaved sinners?" And Jesus said, "I bid the price of My blood." The Father said, "Sold to Jesus Christ for the price of His blood," and there is no greater bid than that.

So He called us, and we became His, and He took us and clothed us, not with the dirty robes of our old unrighteousness, which are as filthy rags, but with the robes of Christ's righteousness.

**Revelation 3:5, 18-19** He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels [that is the bridegroom]. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

That is how we can make sure that we have the proper, righteous clothing: the righteous clothing of Jesus Christ. Overcome, repent; be zealous, enthusiastic about God's way of life.

This is how God loves us, and that is what Jesus did on our behalf. At our baptism and our receiving of the Holy Spirit, Christ begins to cloth us with His righteousness. Our spiritual nakedness must be covered, and we must also work with and submit to Christ

to do our part in putting on righteous clothing.

So how else does Hosea 3 apply to the descendants of the ancient Israelites today and how else does it apply to us? The first application of this chapter is to the history of God's dealings with Israel. Our thoughts naturally go from the story of Hosea to Gomer, and Gomer to Israel, to God's dealings with us.

**Hosea 3:4-5** For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

In view of verse 5, it is obvious that there will be a regathering of Israel, a national repentance of Israel in the last days that are yet to come. The Eternal has associated Himself to Israel and will not give up on her, even in the face of rampant unfaithfulness of the Northern Kingdom. He must purify Israel from her unfaithfulness through terrible punishments. For the Northern Kingdom to return to the Eternal, the people must return to the House of David, which they will do in the latter days. Remember, the Northern Kingdom was the 10 tribes, excluding Judah and Benjamin.

Theologians who do not understand the promises of Abraham of race and grace and do not know the true identity of the children of Israel argue with this fact that God will regather Israel and there will be a national repentance. These so-called scholars argue that Israel was scattered in the period following the falls of Samaria and Jerusalem, but she was regathered at the time of the Jews' return to their land under Ezra and Nehemiah. But this past regathering does not fit the prophecies.

During that period there was no king, as Hosea clearly foretells in Hosea 3:5, and there was no true national repentance. In fact, this period climaxed in the rejection of God's Messiah. These religious leaders argue that perhaps Israel failed to meet God's conditions when she rejected Christ. That argument does not hold up either because the prophecies of Israel's regathering, made by the Old Testament writers, are repeated in the New Testament following the rejection of Christ.

The fact that Jesus Christ had come to earth and was largely rejected by the Jews presented a major problem to the early preachers of the Gospel. Most of them were Jews, and they had understood that the Messiah was to bring blessing to Israel and to the Gentile nations, which the apostles and the disciples at that time expected. Jesus

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was the Messiah, but as they looked at the way things were unfolding, it seemed perfectly evident that most of the Jewish people did not believe in Jesus and, therefore, were not entering into the promised blessing.

It is plain to see how it grew into a major theological problem. However, God has never left His major ways with men unexplained. He said to Amos:

**Amos 3:7** Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

God explained the solution of the difficulty to Paul, who recorded it for our benefit. The answer had three parts. First, as Paul says in the opening verses of Romans 11, it is simply not true that God has utterly cast off His people. This idea is refuted in this case alone, because Paul was an Israelite, and yet believed in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

**Romans 11:1** I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Second, Paul says that he was not the only one who believed. There were many believing Jews, and he could have named the 11 apostles and 3,000 and 5,000 who believed at Pentecost; and the days following and those Jews to whom he had witnessed during his ministerial journeys and others. Furthermore, he argued that this is no different from what has always been; for even in the days of Elijah, not all Israelites believed, but only the 7,000 whose existence God revealed to the despondent prophet.

**Romans 11:5** Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

At this point, Paul inserts a parentheses, dealing with the matter of election.

The third point is that Israel has been removed from a place of special blessing in order that God might deal with the Gentiles. He warns the Gentiles that just as Israel was removed because of her unbelief, so the Gentiles may be removed because of their unbelief. Paul then returns to the major case of the chapter, adding that not only may Gentiles be removed from a place of special blessing, they actually will be removed as the days of the Gentiles draws to an end. When that happens, it will again be a day of blessing for the Israelites.

**Romans 11:25-27** For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

In these words, Paul restates and further defines the Old Testament prophecies of a time of future blessing and future salvation for Israel. It has not already been fulfilled; it is future, and it will happen.

The second application of Hosea chapter 3 is to Christian marriage, because the standard of Hosea's love in his union with Gomer is to be the standard of the Christian to his or her spouse, within the marriage relationship. This is precisely the standard Paul holds up before Christians.

**Ephesians 5:22, 25-26, 32** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord....Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,...This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Most people are always ready to abandon the standards of the Word of God and drop down to the standards of the world. That has been the human tendency since Adam and Eve. They would say that such love, demonstrated in the love of Hosea for Gomer, is impossible for us. But it is not impossible if we are truly united to Christ through the Holy Spirit and are allowing Christ's love to work in us. It does not naturally come out of us without that Holy Spirit to empower us in that way, with the love of God and Jesus Christ in us.

Godly love is not concerned with whether it is being treated fairly. In Hosea's case, he was personally commanded by God to stay faithful, no matter what. Many would say, "Well, that was not very fair."

Sometimes, one partner in the marriage will walk out, abandoning his family, or it may be physically or spiritually dangerous for a wife to remain with her abusing husband. Nevertheless, God still hates divorce as we are told in Malachi 2:16, partly because it covers one's garment with violence.

**Malachi 2:16** “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the Lord of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

God hates divorce the same way that He hates violence. Why does God hate divorce so fiercely? There are a number of reasons. First, it is a matter of a man and a woman breaking faith with his or her spouse. God, who is a God of faithfulness and truth hates infidelity. The marriage vow speaks of union in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health. We cannot guarantee anyone happiness, not even ourselves. We cannot guarantee affluence or health. But we can guarantee that we will stick by our word, that we will not break faith just because fidelity is difficult or because another way or person becomes more attractive. God hates divorce because it breaks faith, because it violates God’s standard of trust.

A second reason God hates divorce: because it is harmful. It is damaging to the couple involved, generally leaving scars that never truly heal. It is destructive to society. Above all, it is hurtful to whatever children may be involved. Divorcing persons generally do not want to admit this, and their reluctance is understandable. They have to raise their children, and it is difficult to do this if they are laboring under guilt that the divorce has done the children great harm. But admitted or not, divorce does damage children. It is a very sad thing. Some children cope better than others. Many children of divorced parents somehow manage to get on with their lives. But all are harmed, and some are harmed deeply and irreparably. We live in a day of human rights; everyone is fighting for his or her human rights, it seems, and the children are forgotten.

Even divorcing persons fight for their supposed right to be happy and what about the children? They also have rights: a right to a mother and a father; a right to a stable home environment; a right to a Christian home, living God’s way of life. Divorce deprives them of that and often leads them into a self-destructive life pattern. The great majority of children appearing in juvenile court are from broken homes. The vast majority of prison inmates have the same background.

In the final analysis, however, the fundamental reason why God hates divorce is that God created marriage to illustrate the most blessed of all spiritual relationships: the union of a believing man or woman with Christ, the divine bridegroom of the church. Divorce must, therefore, illustrate apostasy or the falling away of a man or woman from God.

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In Malachi 2:16, speaking of divorce, the Lord of hosts says "For it covers one's garment with violence." In its original sense, the word *covers* does not signify either husband or wife, but covers each reciprocally. A wife is a garment to her husband, and a husband is a garment to his wife. Another way of looking at it is that divorce cannot be hidden, washed away, or removed, but envelopes the husband and his wife as a garment to his or her shame and punishment. It was, as it were, an outer garment of violence.

Speaking of the wicked, Asaph says in Psalm 73:6, "Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment." In Psalm 109:18, David said of his sin: "...he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment..."

Sometimes, even a Christian will have to divorce; and in such a case, it is almost impossible to stop the separation. The one who loves, as God loves, and who desperately wants to save the marriage must nevertheless let the unbeliever go.

**I Corinthians 7:15** But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

Violence covers the wicked like a garment; and in contrast, peace covers the faithful like a robe. To God, peace is so much more important than the violence that we sometimes find in marriages. The faithlessness of the unbeliever should not end the true love of the believer, and that is the point. The believer or the one acting by the standards of the believer should remain free of any dating or second marriage while still married, even though he or she may be separated. It is a time for praying that the love of the erring partner might be restored.

You may say, "But I cannot do that; I cannot love like that." The answer is that you can love like that, if you will allow God to help you do it. You may say, "I cannot be happy single." Perhaps not, but God does not promise any of us happiness as we define happiness. We are called to faithfulness. It is in obedience to God in such difficult situations that the great spiritual victories are won.

The final application of this story is to spiritual faithfulness on the part of Christians. We are sometimes unfaithful, but we should be moved to faithfulness by Christ's love for us.

**II Corinthians 5:14-15** For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer [that is, live no longer unfaithfully] for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

That is where the focus of every Christian should be. The love of Christ should compel us; we should allow it to compel us, and we should accept and willingly want it to.

**Ephesians 3:17-19** ...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Remember, initially we did not seek Him; He sought us and is joining us to Himself through spiritual courtship. Before, we were a spiritually unmarried unbeliever. Now, we have become a spiritually betrothed believer.

**II Corinthians 11:2** For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

That is what we all are submitting to. As a betrothed spiritual woman, a Christian, now we must be careful to defend and maintain Christ's name by remaining unspotted from the world. We are no longer our own: we have been bought and paid for by our future spiritual husband. So we must be careful how we spend our time, and we must avoid questionable associations. Can a true Christian socialize with people who are immoral and murderers? That is what you find at worldly parties and drinking establishments: alcoholics, womanizers, harlots, and men and women who have murdered their unborn children through abortion. It is the unfaithful who are the world's friends.

We must always remember God's faithfulness. We must determine that from now on, we will always be faithful to Him. We must ask Him to seal that love, keep us, and perfect us until the day when we will stand before Christ and His Father at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Even though the failed and restored marriage of Hosea and Gomer is present only in the first three chapters, the controlling metaphor of covenant Israel as an unfaithful wife exerts an implied presence throughout the entire book of Hosea.

The multiple lists of indictments that God brings against Israel also make the implied metaphor of a divine lawsuit a continuous presence. Recurrent themes include these three:

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1. The unfolding list of acts and attitudes that disappoint God.
2. A picture of what people who reject God can expect to receive from Him.
3. Evidences of God's love and grace toward people who do not deserve them.

Chapters 4 through 14 spell out the details of the parable, with its series of accusations, warnings, appeals, and enticements for God's people to return. Several times already, we have applied the story of Hosea's tragic marriage to ourselves. If you have had any doubt about the spiritual application in Hosea, that we are Gomer and Hosea is God in this metaphor, you will now want to pay particular attention.

At this point, Hosea's prophecy launches into a formal accusation against Israel, in which the sins of the people are brought forth as evidence for the justice of God's judgments. In legal terms, we might say that this is the case for the prosecution. We try to excuse ourselves; that is our nature, our human nature. We say that these things are true of others, but not of ourselves. Now we are shown that they are indeed true of us, and that we, as well as other believers, were condemned earlier.

The 4<sup>th</sup> chapter begins as a formal court proceeding that today might begin this way: "Hear ye, hear ye! The court is in session." Hosea expresses the idea:

**Hosea 4:1** Hear the word of the Lord you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land."

We can certainly look at that, and apply it to Israel then and our nation today and the descendants of the Israelites spread around the world.

**Hosea 4:2-5** "By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint. With bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away. Now let no man contend, or rebuke another; for your people are like those who contend with the priest. Therefore you shall stumble in the day; the prophet also shall stumble with you in the night; and I will destroy your mother."

What is the basic problem? The opening indictment in the case has three parts, each a sin of omission. God is charging Israel with having no faithfulness; no devotion or love; and no knowledge of Himself.

The first, no faithfulness, refers to a lack of the very characteristic that God so abundantly shows toward us. It is the firmness and reliability of a person whose word is as good as his bond and who is consistent in his or her responsibilities. Faithfulness must be seen in all areas of life, but especially in marriage, and in the relationship to God that marriage illustrates.

The second, devotion or love that is lacking. Devotion or love means commitment, affection, fidelity, and devoutness, in the best sense. It is what we owe to God, every day, every minute of every day, every second of every day.

The third lack is knowledge. It is the awakening to God and love that affects our conduct.

Each of these three deficiencies is brought against Israel as a just cause for God's judgment. But when we look at Hosea's prophecy as a whole, it is apparent that of the three, the key concern and the most important ground of accusation is Israel's failure to acknowledge and know God. Hosea tells us many things about this acknowledgment, and God desires that we have knowledge of Him. I am not saying that knowledge is more important than the love or devotion; I am saying that Hosea targets or pinpoints knowledge.

**Hosea 6:6** For I desire mercy and not sacrifice [quoting God], and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Hosea 13:4 is a clear reference to the opening phrases of the Ten Commandments. Yet in spite of God's desire and articulate command, Israel has refused to acknowledge Him and has instead turned from such knowledge. Sin has kept her from a true knowledge of God and has in fact even blinded her eyes to God's goodness. The only hope for Israel is God's promise that as a result of His judgments, a day of reconciliation and renewal will come.

**Hosea 2:20** I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.

That connects marriage with our relationship with Jesus Christ and knowledge of the Lord. To know God in this practical, sensible, and realistic way was the greatest blessing the ancient Israelites could have. To turn from such knowledge, to know idols, was the greatest sin imaginable. It was the spiritual adultery against which the early chapters of Hosea were protesting.

This all comes down to us, and we bear guilt in the face of this indictment as a nation; and in our past, we have, and sometimes as Christians, we fail and fall into some of these sins. At this point, we cannot help but think of the first chapter of Romans because the argument brought against Israel in Hosea 4 is precisely the argument that Paul brings against mankind as a whole in his great doctrinal epistle. Let us compare them.

**Hosea 4:6-7, 11** My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame...Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.

So we see there, three of the major problems that the Israelites had then and do have today.

The similarity of ideas and even verbal echoes between Hosea 4 and Romans 1 indicate that Paul probably had Hosea's chapter in mind as he wrote his own indictment of the Gentile nations. With regard to this, compare Hosea 4:6 with Romans 1:24, 26, and 28. Another comparison we see is Hosea 4:7 with Romans 1:23. Yet another is Hosea 4:11 with Romans 1:21-22.

We will read in Romans, regarding God's wrath on unrighteousness, running parallel with Hosea.

**Romans 1:21-24, 26, 28** ...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves...For this reason God gave them

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up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge [there it is again], God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

Paul is saying three important things in these verses. First, God has made Himself known to all human beings, and all have departed from that knowledge of Him. There is a difference between Paul's words to the Gentiles and Hosea's words to the Israelites, because the Gentiles had less knowledge of God than Israel had. Nevertheless, there is an important similarity, because each group has departed from that knowledge, however little or however great it was.

In the case of the Gentiles, Paul reveals that there was a knowledge of God's eternal power and divine nature from the beginning, from the creation of the world. The Gentiles knew that God existed and that He was all powerful. Paul addressed the Greeks about this very thing:

**Acts 17:22-23** Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you..."

They were worshipping God without the knowledge that they needed to do it properly, among all the many gods that they had.

Israel possessed the inspired writings and the old covenant and therefore had greater knowledge, and she knew God as the Holy One of the Law and the Faithful One of the Covenant. To turn from such knowledge was greater sin than the sin of the Gentiles. Nevertheless, the sin was the same in nature and the judgment equally justified.

The second of Paul's points has already been implied in point one, but needs to be taken separately, because it is the heart of the accusation. Having been aware of God and therefore having at least a rudimentary knowledge of Him, still people have turned from that knowledge and suppressed it for fear that the truth about God would rise up to challenge them and lead them in ways that they do not want to go. This is the true nature of the problem. It is not that people have no knowledge of God at all and are condemned for what they have not been given an opportunity to know. It is rather that

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they do have knowledge of God, but they rejected it because they do not like the direction that knowledge takes them. They are proud of their own statement, "No one is going to tell me what to do."

In the case of the Gentiles, it is the sense that the all-powerful God has a rightful claim over them, and since they do not want to acknowledge this claim, they reject Him and suppress their true knowledge. In the case of Israel, it is knowledge of God's righteous commands, standards, and principles that the people rejected.

They wanted sin: they wanted prostitution, adulteries, idolatrous feasts, and pagan religions. Since these were incompatible with the worship of the true God, they rejected their knowledge of God and served idols. This exact same thing is going on today in this society, and we can all see it very clearly.

Paul's third and last point is that because of their rejection of God, through a suppression of the truth about God, the wrath of God is being poured out from heaven. In Romans, this is portrayed as the idolatry and moral debasement of the society of the Apostle Paul's time.

In Hosea, the idolatry and immorality are also clearly seen, but in addition, there is the specific promise of a future national catastrophe compared with a whirlwind that will sweep them away. This occurred in the overthrow of Israel and the subsequent deportation of its people, and it will happen again in the very near future to this nation and the rest of the Israelites throughout the world.

What happens when a people reject God? What happens when we turn our backs on such knowledge? The answer is that we begin a downhill course. God is the source of all good, so if an individual or people will not have God, they will have the opposite in increasing measure.

Paul indicates this decline by a threefold reiteration of a phrase referring to God. The phrase is, "He gave them over." He gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to shameful lusts, and to a depraved mind. He gave them over.

Hosea describes the same process, as one, moral depravity; two, destruction of the environment; three, the debasement of leadership, particularly religious leadership; four, personal emptiness; and five, ruin on a nation-wide scale.

The first consequence of a rejection of the knowledge of God is moral depravity, as seen in Hosea 4:2:

Hosea's Prophecy (Part Two) by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Hosea 4:2 (NIV 1984)** There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Of all of Hosea's statements in chapter 4, these words most closely follow Paul's similar description of the Gentile's depravity.

**Romans 1:28-31** And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

Welcome to the world ruled by Satan, and sadly, to this nation. It is a horrible picture, but one justly painted of the depraved human race.

We do not like to face such descriptions, but there is no accusation in these lists that cannot justly be leveled against our culture or that of any age in history. Although these descriptions are harsh, they are accurate.

What is the cause of this depravity? It is not that this society today, like ancient Israel, has rejected the knowledge of God. So is this society's judgment to be less certain or less swift?

The second consequence Hosea cites is the destruction of the environment:

**Hosea 4:3** Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away.

I read recently that the Fukushima disaster has put so much radiation into the air that we should be seeing that in the fish on the West Coast within the next year or so. The fish will have more and more radiation in them from that. That may be speculative, but it certainly fits: "...even the fish of the sea will be taken away," because it will certainly kill many of the fish of the sea. Also, what about the oil rig disaster in the Gulf? How many fish did that kill? Algae is growing more and more because of the pollution that is

dumped off of our shores: raw sewage, leading to red algae.

The sins mentioned here are preeminently true of us today, and the sin of the descendants of the Israelites today in neglecting or stripping the land is causing the ground to become wasteland with its due effect on the animals, the birds, and the fish. This is the result of the divine design and creation, to react toward how it is treated, and a specific judgment by God on sin.

Although ancient Israel seems to have lacked the technology to harm the earth as we have today, she harmed her environment by not letting the land rest on the seven year cycle which depleted the soil and its nutrients. Also, she deforested the land by war, and she turned to worship the environment, bringing harsh divine judgment upon herself. In Jeremiah 3, we will read about how Israel reacts to her environment as well as how she acts in general.

**Jeremiah 3:6-9** The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. [That is spoken of both physically and spiritually.] And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry [This was not something that she thought about, that she thought she was doing wrong; she just did not care. It is like a woman or man who just does not care about being immoral, and just does whatever she or he wants to do.], that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. [That is not literal; spiritually, she worshipped stones and trees, or set up stones or trees, or monuments to worship, and therefore committed spiritual adultery.]

Pagan rites and occultist new-age worship of Satan and the environment (stones and trees) are common-place, and are promoted through music, books, and movies. When Sue and I were in England a few years ago on our way to Africa, we stopped in Bath. They had giant statues of rabbits with demonic looks on their faces, but they represented fertility rites. England is known now as one of the most pagan nations on earth. As we know, descendants of Israel, the Ephraimites, settled there and are probably the most dominant factor there. They have gone totally over to this type of

thing.

Today we have gone many steps further than the ancient Israel has. Through our misused knowledge of science and technology, we have polluted the water and the food with pharmaceuticals, pesticides, fluoride, GMO's, chemicals, industrial waste, and much more, knowing very well that such things are fatally harmful to human beings, animals, insects, birds, and fish. Can we be innocent, when Israel, who was capable of so much less, was found guilty? I think not. When I say "we" I am talking about this nation.

God had every right to reject His people, because they had abandoned Him, not in order to marry another husband, but in order to play the harlot with many lovers. The people had gone to the hills and built shrines dedicated to foreign gods. They had acted worse than common prostitutes, who had at least waited for lovers to come to them. They have pursued false gods and have repeatedly committed spiritual adultery with them. Both the worldly and the religious people of this land are guilty of committing spiritual adultery by placing other gods before the one true God.

In a lesser sense, even some members of God's church are guilty of spiritual casual harlotry, by setting their children, homes, automobiles, or entertainment at a higher priority than reverent submission and devotion on a daily basis to the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In contrast, notice what the faithful are to do:

**Isaiah 33:15-16** He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: he will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure.

That has both a physical and a spiritual application. Physical bread, for eating and for sustenance, or the bread of life, for spiritual sustenance.

The third landmark consequence on the slippery slope of Israel's decline was the debasement of leadership, particularly religious leadership; in this case, the debasement of her priests.

**Hosea 4:7-9** The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of My people; they set their heart on their iniquity. And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will

punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.

The period of moral and spiritual decline about which the book is written was not a period of the withering-up of religion. Godlessness is not incompatible with religion; in fact, it goes along with it very well. It is interesting that for the Marxist type of world government that is being thrust upon us now, that they understand, even though it is an atheist type of government, that it is necessary for people to have something to fulfill their spiritual side, so they are in the process of making up a religion that will satisfy peoples' need or desire (they think).

In Israel, it was a period characterized by cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery. But during this period, the priesthood grew in number as those who were professional religionists or religious hobbyists. They moved in to capitalize on the debauchery.

Why is this? Again we refer to Romans to discover that when knowledge of the true God is refused, false gods inevitably come in to take the true God's place. True religion is replaced by false religion; godliness by superstition.

There is another point in these verses: people get the leaders they deserve. Hosea puts it in the form of a familiar saying in verse 9: "like people, like priest." He means that if a people are godly, they will be sent godly leaders. If they are corrupt, God will let them have corrupt leaders. If they are superstitious, God will abandon them to astrologers, fortune tellers, palm readers, and other charlatans.

The fourth consequence Hosea cites in Israel's decline is personal emptiness, dissatisfaction, or shallow mindedness:

**Hosea 4:10-12** For they shall eat, but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase; because they have ceased obeying the Lord. Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God.

The spirit of harlotry refers to the same thing that the apostle James warns of in James 4:4:

**James 4:4** Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of

the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Nothing satisfies them; even their feasts taste insipid. They engage in prostitution, but not increase, because of STD's. They have deserted the Eternal to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, meaning that they will drink anything, because they are so addicted to it, which take away the understanding of God's people.

It is hard to read this decree of God against the people and their priests without thinking of the shallow reasons why Gomer left Hosea. Hosea indicates that Gomer left him for things and pleasure, both of which were present in the lavish feasts and parties that marked the yearly festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths. She was a "party girl."

In this debauchery, four things came together: food, sex, wealth, and religion. Today, we have Easter, Halloween, and Christmas, all very heavily saturated by those four things.

The world might look to such things and wonder, "What more could one want?" But God tells us that He arranged life in such a way that if those things are pursued apart from holiness, the result is frustration and emptiness, rather than satisfaction and fulfillment.

There is to be food to eat, but it seems tiring after a while, and the glutton searches restlessly for some new titillation. Sex abounds, but it does not satisfy, and the decadent turn to increasingly kinkier forms of sex to satisfy their sex drive. Money is everywhere, but it is not enough. Everyone seems to be religious, but the great questions of life continue to go unanswered. And there is the gnawing suspicion that God has turned a deaf ear and that all worship services are worthless.

So what we see in the area of religion is total chaos, people confused. If you ask a person who never goes to church what their religion is, they might say Catholic. They still like that connection to a religion, but deny God in the way that they totally ignore Him and carry on doing whatever they want.

**Hosea 4:13-14** They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled.

God is basically saying that He is not bringing judgment upon people right away or yet, but He is letting the natural course of things take them away, trample them under their own sins, and of the people who are sinning around them.

The fifth consequence Hosea cites is the final and lowest point of the decline: ruin on a nation-wide scale. It comes first in individual lives, as those who will not have God make shipwrecks of themselves. It comes next in families: husbands leaving wives, and wives leaving husbands. The children are abandoned. It is observed in institutions, as corruption enters corporate life. Finally, the entire nation is overcome by sin, as Israel was, and our nation most certainly is today.

This brings us to the concluding section of the chapter. Hosea has presented the indictment of God against Israel exposing its root cause and tracing it through a declining series of effects of sin and judgments, to the point where God will not even intervene to avert the destruction. He is going to allow it to happen. So far as Israel is concerned, the point of no return is past; judgment is certain.

But Israel, the northern ten tribes, was not the whole of the Israelite homeland at this stage in history, that is, at the time of Hosea. Further south, there were still the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin together known as Judah. Judah, thanks to the greater faithfulness of her kings (not much, but more than Israel had), had not slipped quite as far on a moral scale as Israel. For Judah, there was still hope. As a result, Hosea abruptly turns from Israel to speak to Judah, the southern tribe, and warns her to shun the northern kingdoms so that Judah herself might be spared.

**Hosea 4:15-19** Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal [Gilgal was the former high place that was defiled], nor go up to Beth Aven [that was formerly Beth El, meaning “house of God,” but now meaning “house of wickedness”], nor swear an oath, saying, ‘As the Lord lives’—for Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf; now the Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country. Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone. [It is interesting that Hosea 5 is all about Ephraim, and how bad she has become.] Their drink is rebellion, they commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor. The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

The references to Gilgal and Beth Aven are significant. When Israel and Judah had divided after the death of Solomon, Rehoboam had taken control in the south, while Jeroboam had assumed rule in the north. Relatively speaking, each was an adherent to

the truth of God (that is, relatively speaking, at least at that time, the beginning of the split).

The temple was in the south in Jerusalem, as were most of the priests. Jeroboam reasoned that if the priests of his northern kingdom went south to the temple worship, as the law required, his control over the north would be weakened. Consequently, Jeroboam set up rival shrines of Beth Aven and Gilgal, contrary to the law, and encouraged the people of the north to worship at those places. That led quickly to idolatry as Hosea and even more forcefully, Amos, disclosed.

God's warning is to flee from these places. "Do not go to Gilgal, do not go up to Beth Aven." He gives us the same warning today. We live in a rapidly declining culture. Sin is apparent on every side. In light of all this, we must hear God's words to Judah and respond as Israel was encouraged to respond. The word to her is a word of separation: separation from the worldliness of this world, and particularly from the false and shallow religions that pass so easily as true. Many people who had been members of God's church in past years have gone over to many of the worldly churches, and many are now keeping Sunday as their Sabbath.

In my next sermon on the book of Hosea, we will carefully consider the attributes of God that people dislike the most, and we will see the kind of repentance that does not count. These are expressed by four images that show how God regards those who confess His name, while nevertheless continuing their rebellious way of life. We will consider the kind of repentance that does count.