

# HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

by S. Franklin Logsdon

**"For Israel hath forgotten his maker."** (Hosea 8:14)

**"My people have forgotten me days without number"** (Jeremiah 2:32)

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## CHAPTER FIVE -

### THE CONTROVERSY OF THE LORD (Hosea 4)

THE CHAPTER OPENS with the faithful prophet calling for the attention of the people. **"Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel,"** he appealed, **"the Lord hath a controversy [contention] with the inhabitants of the land."** This introductory statement was an index into the type of message about to be delivered. It suggested a denunciatory presentation, the type which is neither pleasant to speak nor soothing to hear, especially by those who would be reminded thereby of their guilt.

Hosea sketched a gloomy picture of the dark clouds of apostasy as they settled upon the nation. He spoke of alarming conditions, of perilous times. He informed his people that GOD had found an utter absence of truth, mercy, and knowledge in the land (v. 1). A stronger indictment is scarcely conceivable. It summarizes the content of the chapter and is threefold:

They were without truth. Here, "truth" is not a moral attribute, but GOD's own precious Word. **"Thy word is truth,"** JESUS prayed (John 17:17). These people were without it. They were without truth as most people are without it, not that it was not available, but because they rejected it (v. 6). There was a deepening hostility toward the word of the LORD, and the detailed evils listed in Hosea were the sad results. It has been aptly stated that the Bible will keep one from sin, or sin will keep one from the Bible. This adage was never more applicable than to these people.

They were without mercy. Toward men, mercy speaks of kindness; toward GOD, piety. They were deficient in both respects. It would seem, however, that the burden of the LORD's controversy with them concerned their lack of piety - their lack of fear toward Him. Few subjects in the Old Testament Scriptures are dealt with so prominently as the fear of Lord. **"Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man"** (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Israel

was destitute in this regard. **"Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD"** (Jeremiah 5:24).

They lacked the knowledge of GOD. This is not a repetition. It is the outcome of lacking truth and mercy. The word "knowledge" here is experiential, not theoretical. GOD was not in their lives. They acted in defiant independence of Him. As in the days of the Judges, each did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). This tendency continued until, through Jeremiah, the LORD was forced to state pointedly, **"My people is foolish, they have not known me"** (Jeremiah 4:22).

It is to be expected that, when **"the godly man ceaseth... the faithful fail from among the children of men . . . The wicked walk on every side"** (Psalm 12:1, 8). Thus the land of Israel was plagued by crumbling foundations (Psalm 11:3), and there was a rising tide of deplorable conditions - swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, and murder following murder (v. 2). Anguish and loss became the common lot of the people (v. 3), who were warned against laying the fault at the door of one another, for the people were generally guilty of striving as against the priest; that is, against spiritual leadership (v. 4). As a consequence, the fall of the nation was the sorrowful foreboding of the prophet (v. 5).

The downfall of Israel is attributed to their willful rejection of the Word of the LORD (v. 6). It rendered them pathetic in their godlessness. In rejecting the truth of GOD, the spiritual soldier disarms himself of the **"sword of the Spirit"** (Ephesians 6:17). The sojourner in this dark world robs himself of illumination (Psalm 119:105). The hungry denies himself essential food (Job 23:12), and the unwary divests himself of understanding (Psalm 119:130). Few people realize that the same Word which produces eternal life (I Peter 1:23) also brings responsibility (II Timothy 2:15), and will be our inescapable and unchangeable witness in judgment (John 12:48).

Israel simply ruled the Word of GOD out of their lives (v. 6).

The contributing factor in this utter disregard for divine revelation was their prosperity (v. 7). As their assets increased, their devotion decreased. This occasioned the LORD's decree: **"Therefore will I change their glory [their accomplishments and acquirements] into shame [confusion, dishonor, reproach]."**

Some commentators think the word "shame" has to do with idols. Some go so far as to identify the type of idol as the phallus. It is true the people had involved themselves in matters too revolting for comment, but this view does not seem tenable for the simple reason that the LORD Himself is the actor in the statement: **"Therefore will I change their glory into shame."** It was the glory of their increased possessions - their pride and joy - which was changed, changed for poverty, **"for they shall eat, and not have enough,"** all because they would not **"take heed to the Lord"** (v. 10).

The deceitfulness of riches choked the Word of GOD (Matthew 13:22); the deceitfulness of sin hardened their hearts (Hebrews 3:13), then idolatry and dissipation ensued (v. 11). And in this sad spiritual debacle, the leadership collapsed utterly, the leaders being as guilty as those whom they purported to be leading. **"Like people, like priest,"** is the report (v. 9). When blind leaders seek to lead the blind, they fall into the ditch together (Matthew 15:14). Judgment was promised

for all alike.

The people were so involved in their idolatry, so bound by their false procedures, so confirmed in their waywardness, that they asked advice of their (stocks) wooden idols (v. 12). Their consciences were so seared; their minds so distorted; their hearts so corrupted that they placed confidence in false and hopeless means for deliverance from their precarious situation. **"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me"** (Isaiah 30:1).

What was the source of their counsel in the chapter before us? **"Their staff** [divining rod] **declareth unto them"** (v. 12). This is almost too difficult to believe, but when people turn a deaf ear to the voice of GOD they may turn in any false direction. This deafness became so general that eventually JEHOVAH raised the question, **"To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken"** (Jeremiah 6:10).

The general disposition toward idolatry reached the proportions of a fast-spreading epidemic. **"The spirit of whoredoms"** caused them to err (v. 12). Only the Spirit of GOD leads aright.

Their sacrilegious indulgences took place on mountain tops, on hills, and under trees (v. 13), and had a most degrading effect upon their wives and their daughters. These practices were wide-open avenues for Satan to enter and disrupt home life. It is only the flow of GOD's SPIRIT which furnishes an atmosphere for spiritual edification in a family.

Of course, this condition did not develop suddenly.

Through their tolerance of wicked national and spiritual leaders it had gotten out of hand like a wind-swept forest fire in a period of drought. They either passively or actively condoned what GOD condemned. Even the otherwise commendable reformers by-passed the **"high places."** For instance, **"Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD . . . But the high places were not taken away"** (II Kings 12:2,3). Azariah **"did that which was right in the sight of the Lord . . . save the high places were not removed"** (II Kings 15:3, 4). Jotham **"did that which was right in the sight of the Lord . . . Howbeit the high places were not removed"** (II Kings 15:34,35).

Hezekiah **"removed the high places, and brake the images"** (II Kings 18:4), but Manasseh, his son, soon **"built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal"** (II Kings 21:3). the LORD had but one explanation for this: **"My people are bent to backsliding from me"** (11:7).

Judah, the southern kingdom, was not at this time in the best of spiritual health, but JEHOVAH expressed concern lest the northern kingdom contaminate the southern with its harlotry and whoredom (v. 15). If Israel desired to encourage spiritual adultery, Judah must not. As a precautionary measure, the people of Judah were warned against going to Gilgal and Bethaven (v. 15). These were centers of false worship. They were also warned about saying, in conjunction with idolatry, **"the Lord liveth."** That was the formula of oath appointed by GOD Himself. They were not to hold truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

Concerning the figure of "**a backsliding heifer**" (v. 16), Israel had not the slightest reason for casting off the yoke of JEHOVAH. His yoke is ever easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). It is the way of the transgressor which is difficult. Israel's departure into idolatry (v. 17) was a most unpleasant sight before the LORD. "**O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?**" (Micah 6:3). There was but one thing to do in such a case of deliberate backsliding - "**Let him alone**" (v. 17). "**Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices**" (Proverbs 1:31).

Nothing is so sure about a devious course (such as these people pursued) as failure, dissatisfaction, and ultimately disillusionment with its bitter remorse. Yet, Israel was carried away by the spirit of idolatry, only to be confounded by the emptiness of her false sacrifices (v. 19).

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