

Minor Prophets

Lesson 1:

Call to Know God

STUDY TEXT: Hosea 4:1-19; 6:1-11

PRINTED TEXT: Hosea 4:1-3, 6-10, 17; 6:1-4, 6

Hosea 4:1 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.

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

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.

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.

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

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

9 And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.

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.

17 Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

6:1 Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

2 After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

3 Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

4 O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

NIV Hosea 4:1 Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land.

2 There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows blood shed.

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

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

7 The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.

8 They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.

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

10 They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves

17 Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!

6:1 “Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.

2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

3 Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

4 “What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.

6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

Bible Focus: *“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”* – Hosea 6:3

Lesson Objective

To contrast those who know God with those who reject Him, and seek to know Him.

Central Truth

God is gracious to those who know and follow Him.

Evangelism Emphasis

God shows mercy to repentant sinners.

Lesson Outline

1. Consequences of Rejecting God. Hosea 4:1-6,
2. Tragedy of Sin. Hosea 4:7-12, 16, 17
3. Return to Knowing God. Hosea 6:1-6

Study Helps For the Lesson

Historical Background

The prophet Hosea was sent to the ten northern tribes in Israel. He ministered during the days of King Jeroboam in the eighth century B.C. Among his contemporaries were Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. His ministry to the ten tribes in the north mirrored that of Jeremiah's role in Judah to the two tribes of the southern kingdom. More is known about the man Hosea in his own writings than is revealed about the authors in most of the other works of the minor prophets. In one of the most extraordinary and controversial accounts in the Bible, the Lord spoke to Hosea and told him to marry a harlot named Gomer (1:1-3). Although this directive seems contrary to the character of God, the Lord clearly used the life of this prophet and episode as an object lesson for the nation of Israel. God also used this personal illustrative method in the lives of Isaiah, Jonah, and others. Here, the unmistakable message was that Jehovah loved His people despite their persistent iniquity. God frequently used the union of marriage to symbolize His own relationship with the people of Israel (Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 3:14). Once again he did so through the pen of Hosea "I will betroth thee unto me forever" (Hosea 2:19). When one reads the acts of Gomer leaving Hosea and her own children to pursue her former lifestyle, he or she is also reading the summation of the history of Israel and that nation's propensity to backsliding. Hosea's message for the people to return to their previous relationship with God came some 200 years after the ten tribes had separated from Judah and set up their own kingdom.

Literary Background

There are at least three primary interpretations to the part of the book that speaks of Hosea's marriage to the prostitute. First, some believe that we should understand the narrative literally, that is, God instructed the prophet to marry a woman of such ill repute, which he did. Second, others contend that Hosea did marry her, however, Gomer did not seek such a sinful lifestyle until after their marriage. Finally, some suggest the entire story was merely a vision and not an actual experience in the life of the prophet. This latter explanation is the least likely choice because there is nothing in the context that suggests the incident was only allegorical. If the first possibility is embraced, it must be done so with the assurance that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thus His sovereignty must be trusted beyond our understanding (Isaiah 55:9). The second scenario remains possible, if for example Hosea was delivering his message in his latter years and was writing from the vantage point of having lived through the entire sequence. The first three chapters of Hosea confirms the unfaithfulness of the nation, while chapters 4-10 focus on the chastisement from the Lord. The last four chapters conclude with a note of hope and the promise of eventual blessings in a future kingdom.

Plan Ahead

□ **EXPLANATION:** Share with the class at the beginning of this unit the reason for the oft-used designations of "major" and "minor" prophets. Point out that the two categories are not based on levels of importance, but rather refer to the size of the writings in each. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel constitute the major prophets, while Hosea is the first of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament canon.

□ **RESOURCES:** Prepare the materials for this lesson provided in the *Adult Teaching Resource Packet*.

Introducing the Lesson

□ **EXPLANATION:** In the social context of Hosea's time every self-respecting Jewish man was only interested in marrying a virgin wife. Outside of the kinsman redeemer law, the men in that culture rarely married a woman who had been previously married to another man because it brought shame to the prospective husband. This shame was heightened for Hosea, who not only married such a woman, but a prostitute. His humiliation was doubled when he had to chase after her when she left him to return to her life of prostitution. Explain how this is a vivid portrayal of how God desired unshared intimacy with His chosen people, yet they repeatedly mocked Him by seeking idolatry.

□ **CORRECTION:** One of the fallacies held by many opponents of the Bible is the false idea that the God of the Old Testament differs greatly from the God of the New Testament. This misguided notion contends that the Lord in the Old Testament is all of judgment and that the Jesus who comes in the New Testament is all of love and mercy. The premise is actually flawed on both counts, for there is surely judgment promised from the Lord in the New Testament, and books such as Hosea testify that God is also filled with love, mercy, and grace in the Old Testament.

The Power of the Word

1. Consequences of Rejecting God (Hosea 4:1-6)

COMMENTARY

The Lord – Hosea 4:1. *“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.* At the start of chapter four Hosea leaves the account of his personal tragedy to use the strongest language to persuade the nation of Israel to repent and be saved in light of their impending doom. The exhortation to “hear the word of the Lord” was a frequent introduction to prophetic speech in biblical times. The prophet proceeded to issue a three-fold indictment that God serves against the country. They are lacking in truth (faithfulness, NIV), mercy (love, NIV), and a knowledge of God. The latter involves much more than an intellectual awareness, Hosea is speaking of a communion in relationship that expresses a personal intimacy. To be absent of such indicated an ignorance and indifference to the law of God. Just as Hosea's wife was unfaithful, so also the nation of Israel had been also (see Hosea 2:19-20; 5:4-7; 6:3-6; 10:12; 11:3-4; 12:6). Not only was the nation empty of faithfulness, love, and real relationship with God, they were full of cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery (verse two). Note that these infractions are among the violations of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17). (Specifically the third, ninth, sixth, eighth, and seventh prohibitions are cited.) The closing clause of verse two indicates that the people had literally broken out in such sins that there was no longer in apparent boundaries. The language about “blood touching blood” indicates that one murder would lead to a reprisal killing until an such activity had reached a national epidemic.

The Land– Hosea 4:3. *“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.* Verse three indicates that nature itself suffers as a result of humanity's sin. Centuries later the Apostle Paul would write about all of the creation groaning and travailing in anticipation of being delivered from bondage as a consequence of sin (Romans 8:22-23). It is

likely that Hosea's reference here is a specific allusion to the beasts, fowls, and fishes languishing as a natural result of the drought in King Ahab's reign (1 Kings 17:1-7). Nature continued to suffer as the nation continued to sin (Amos 1:2; 8:8). Verses four and five seem to indicate that the priests and the prophets were as guilty as everyone else in the nation. Instead of imparting the knowledge of God to their constituency, they themselves had rejected obeying the Lord in covenant relationship. The reference to "I will destroy your mother" pronounced coming destruction upon the whole nation which had produced such priests and prophets.

The Law– Hosea 4:6. *“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.* Here Hosea clearly proclaims not only the doom of the present generation, but also the reason for it. As noted above, “lack of knowledge” does not refer to mere intellectual awareness, but rather a relationship based on obedience. The tragic condition of the nation was compounded by their false sense of security with a God they were obviously out of covenant relationship with (Exodus 19:6). It was not more information the people needed, but genuine repentance and accountability toward the Lord. As a result of their fatal choices, their rejected God declares that He will in turn reject them and their posterity.

TEACHING HINTS AND APPLICATIONS

☐ **DISCUSSION:** What controversy would the Lord have with our nation and the nations of the world today? What are the issues in our day that trouble God the most? Does the class believe our current culture is similar to Hosea's day in knowing the Lord intellectually, but not practically?

☐ **HUMOR:** One man was asked, “Do you believe the two biggest problems in the country are ignorance and apathy? He replied, “I don't know and I don't care.” (Explain how these twin maladies were existing in Hosea's day, and discuss to what extent they are rampant in our present time as well.)

☐ **HANDOUT:** Distribute a handout showing the indictment of sin that Hosea proclaimed against the people. The list should include the following: (1) falsehood (4:1); (2) licentiousness (4:11); (3) murder (5:2); (4) robbery (7:1); (5) oppression (12:7)

2. Tragedy of Sin

(Hosea 4:7-12, 16, 17)

COMMENTARY

Repudiated by God – Hosea 4:7. *“As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame.”* As the nation grew, so proportionately the number of priests did as well. However, this escalation did not include an adherence to a right representation of God before the people. On the contrary, as the number of priests grew, so also did the practice of sin among these who should have been at the forefront of shunning iniquity. The NIV renders verse seven as “They exchanged their glorious God for something disgraceful. No prophet could have uttered more condemnatory words than these at the feet of the national ministers. Because of this ill-advised exchange, the Lord declares He will also make a change in them – from glory to shame! One of their practices was to eat the flesh of the animals slain as a sin offering for the people. Although this act was not prohibited, the priests were evidently

desiring the people to sin more, so that they in turn would bring more sacrifices to the priests, which they could then consume. It is no wonder the Lord deemed their conduct as reprehensible. **Rewarded by God - Hosea 4:9.** *“And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.”* What an indictment against a sinful nation – that there was no discernable distinction between the behavior of the priesthood and the people. At other times in the history of Israel, faithful priests endeavored to intercede for the sinful nation. Still other seasons found a corrupt priesthood preying on an innocent population. Here however, Hosea declares that both priests and people are culpable for their sins before the Lord. The God who keeps immaculate records will be rewarding them accordingly for their transgressions. Because the priests have deserted the Lord to engage in idolatrous practices, they will find no contentment in those things, despite how long they continue in them (verse 10). **Rejected by God– Hosea 4:17.** *“Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.”* In verses 12-14 Hosea turns from charging the priests to the people. Their sins included consulting idols made of wood and even using a staff to try to discern the future (verse 12). In verse 15 the prophet issues a caution to Judah in the south not to follow the path taken by the ten tribes in the northern kingdom. If they pursue such a path, they will wind up in the same condition as Israel, who he likens to being as stubborn as a cow (verse 16). The Lord was willing to feed them like a lamb, but they would not because of their own intentions. Verse 17 is one of the most succinct and poignant sayings in all of the writings of the Minor Prophets. Ephraim (one of the two sons of Joseph) was the largest and most influential tribe of the northern kingdom and is thus frequently used as a synonym for Israel. The people are so enslaved in their idolatry, there appears to be no hope of a remedy for them. However, since later in the book God says “How can I give you up, O Ephraim” (Hosea 11:8), it is likely that in 4:17 Hosea is speaking to a small minority who are trying to be faithful to God. If this is so, he is thus warning them not to become accomplices in the deeds of the vast majority.

TEACHING HINTS AND APPLICATIONS

☐ **DISCUSSION:** What kind of idols are people in our generation in danger of having prominently in their lives?

☐ **HANDOUT:** Provide a handout to the class showing the wide use of metaphors that Hosea uses in his prophetic writings. Include the following: (1) adulterous wife (3:1); (2) drunkard (4:11); (3) backsliding heifer (4:11); (4) troops of robbers (6:9); (5) adulterers (7:4); (6) cake not turned (7:8); (7) wild ass (8:9)

☐ **CLARIFICATION:** Make certain the class knows the distinction between “backsliding” and “apostasy.” Individual Christians in this age of grace may choose to drift away from the Lord, however, just as with God and Israel in the Old Testament era, their relationship is not dissolved. “Apostasy,” however, is more than becoming cold or indifferent toward God, it is completely renouncing the Lord and the faith. Backslidden nations and people may always come back into relationship with God, however, there is no cure for apostasy (Heberws 6:4-6; 10:26-31).

3. Return to Knowing God (Hosea 6:1-6)

COMMENTARY

Let us Come – Hosea 6:1. *“Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.”* Chapter six signals a shift in the message of the

prophet, as he appeals for the people to come back to a right relationship with God. Here Hosea pictures the Lord as the source for all things – not only does He execute judgment (“hath torn;” “hath smitten”), He also heals and binds up deep wounds. According to verse two, this national revival will occur in a short time, as noted by the reference “*After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us.*” Although some have tried to read allusions to the resurrection of Jesus into this text, it is better understood as figurative language denoting the close proximity of the approaching event. The closing clause “*that we may live in his presence*” is more than the ultimate goal of the after-life, it is the reward for every true revival attained in this world.

Let us Know – Hosea 6:3. “*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.*” Once again Hosea employs the language of “knowing” to describe the results of being reconciled to God. The prophet writes that such a union with the Lord is possible if the people pursue this quest with sincere action. He then uses majestic prophetic language to convey to his audience that this renewal will happen like the “former” and “latter” rains fall upon the earth. These familiar rains came during the spring and winter each year. True repentance will bring a “new dawn” to the nation that will be followed by consistent blessings from Jehovah (Leviticus 26:4-5; Deuteronomy 11:14:28:12; Isaiah 58:8; 60:2). The prophecy also contains a hint of the coming Messiah who will usher in the complete fulfillment of the promises of God (Isaiah 35:6; 44:3; Ezekiel 36:25-28).

Let us Desire – Hosea 6:6. “*For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*” In verse four Hosea records a divine lament, “What can I do with you Ephraim? What can I do with you Judah?” The apparent exasperation of these questions lead some to believe that the contrition of the northern and southern kingdoms was only superficial and not sincere. Because of this, their goodness was like the morning dew, appearing only momentarily and then becoming invisible. Consequently, the Lord sent His own prophets to speak words of judgment against His own bride (verse five). By contrast to the righteousness of the nation appearing only like a mist or the dew, the judgments of God are like the brilliance of the sun, shining extensively throughout the land. The Lord’s words in verse six appear several times in Scripture and the case can be made that it is one of the essential truths about God in the entire Bible (Psalm 40:7-9; 50:8-15; Isaiah 1:11-17; Micah 6:8). The statement first is made in 1 Samuel 15:22 and was even spoken by Jesus Himself (Matthew 9:13). Jehovah clearly desires obedience over religious acts and values a relationship with His people above rituals. These words should not be taken to presume that actions have no meaning to the Lord, rather, such outward expressions should flow from inward passion.

TEACHING HINTS AND APPLICATION

❑ **OBSERVATION:** One can make a case that God’s “favorite word” is simply “come.” He certainly used it frequently in both the Old and New Testaments (Genesis 7:1; Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28; John 7:37; Revelation 22:17). Here the prophet uses that word to exhort his audience to return to their relationship with the Lord.

❑ **TESTIMONY:** If you know people in the class who have a vivid testimony of having left the Lord, yet they came back to Him, ask them in advance to share a brief description of their experience. If you are not aware of such people, ask if anyone has experienced this in his or her life and allow them a few moments to share their story.

❑ **MARKER BOARD:** Make two columns on the board. At the top of one write “Mercy” and at the top of the other write “Sacrifice.” Under “Mercy” write “Relationship” and under

“Sacrifice” write “Religion.” Ask the class to brainstorm and see what other contrasts they can make between the two concepts.

Closing the Lesson

□ **ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATION:** To emphasize the powerful truth that all actions have consequences, share with the class about a hammer and nail. A nail that has been driven into a wall can certainly be removed, just as sinful acts that have been committed may be forgiven. However, even after the nail is removed, the hole in the wall remains, testifying that consequences linger beyond forgiveness. Show how this is true in the lesson from Hosea.

□ **SUMMATION:** The message of God’s desire to have a loving relationship with His people throughout the book of Hosea provides a background for that same idea to be amplified in the New Testament. This concept of a fellowship based on love reaches a zenith in 1 John 4:16: “God is love; and He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

Looking Ahead

Not only does our contemporary generation share the need for truly knowing God in a relational way, we also are great candidates for a revival of personal and corporate repentance. Next week we will turn to the prophet Joel and hear his relevant cry for those in his day to change their direction. Both the consequences for disobedience and the benefits of compliance will be explored from the words of his passionate prophecy.