God’s Faithfulness and Love to a Faithless People
A Study in Hosea by Brent Aucoin ©2014
Hosea #4

Goals for this Bible Study

1) To know God more through His revelation in the book of Hosea
2) To consciously apply the truths in the book of Hosea in the following three areas:
   a. What does the passage under consideration teach about God?
   b. What does the passage under consideration teach about humanity/what God desires in humanity?
   c. What does the passage under consideration teach about God’s plan?
3) To learn how to interpret Old Testament literature like Hosea
4) To encourage one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25, accountability)

Weekly Procedure

1) Each week do the assigned homework on your own.
2) Come to your small group with the following prepared:
   a. Your thoughtful answers to any discussion questions
   b. 2–3 insights you have learned from your study
      i. What does the passage under consideration teach about God?
      ii. What does the passage under consideration teach about humanity/what God desires in humanity?
      iii. What does the passage under consideration teach about God’s plan?
   c. 1-2 ways you are applying the truths to your life
   d. Any questions you might have

Personal Homework Week #4

1. Plan for 1-2 hours of study
2. Read Exodus 20
3. Read through Hosea 1–4 in a translation of your choice. Read through completely without stopping.
4. Carefully read through the Introduction to Hosea #4 below.
5. Carefully read through the following text of Hosea 4 with notes and discussion questions.
Introduction to Hosea #4

Remember: Begin with the End

Hosea 14:9

Who is wise? He will realize these things.  
Who is discerning? He will understand them.  
The ways of the LORD are right;  
The righteous walk in them,  
But the rebellious stumble in them.

The last verse of Hosea (Hos 14:9) calls for any wise individual exposed to the message of Hosea to carefully pay attention. As the conclusion of Hosea, this verse casts Hosea’s entire message as a lesson in wisdom.

Godly wisdom is the ability to discern God’s righteous ways of living that foster stability, healthy relationships, justice and peace (Hebrew “shalom” or “wholeness in life”). Godly wisdom also rejects unrighteous paths leading to chaos, broken relationships, injustice, and emptiness.

By casting this book as a lesson in “wisdom,” Hosea makes it applicable to God’s people for all time. This study will explore the various applications of Hosea’s message to God’s people.

Hosea and Gomer—An Adulterous Marriage Made in Heaven?

Hosea and Gomer’s adulterous marriage is the lived out “parable” to picture for the Israelites what was happening spiritually. Israel had consistently violated the very first commandment—“worship no other god beside Yahweh.” The fundamental human heart problem is spiritual adultery.

In chapter 4, Hosea discards any metaphors concerning his marriage and the land and brings a charge directly against the people.
Hosea 4 (NIV)

Repeated Key Words/Phrases/Concepts:

- “Jezreel” is an Israelite city and a valley whose name means “God sows.” The Hebrew words relating to this “sowing” concept are highlighted in pink. Hosea uses this to indicate God “sows” judgment and also salvation.
- The Hebrew words for adultery/prostitution are highlighted in dark grey.
- The Hebrew word for Compassion/Mercy/Pity is highlighted in red. The NIV often translates this as “love,” yet, “compassion/mercy/pity” is more precise.
- “My People/My God” terminology is highlighted in yellow. This is Exodus covenant language (Exodus 19:6) “uniting” God and His people just as wedding vows unite husband and wife. “Not My people/Not my God” is the language of the negation of the covenant just as a divorce breaks the husband/wife bond.
- The Hebrew word for love is highlighted in blue.
- The Hebrew word “hesed” is a key word in the OT used to describe God’s covenant loyalty. It is highlighted in grey. NIV translates this as “love/mercy.”
- The Hebrew word for “turn/return/repent” to God is highlighted in green and is the solution for the wayward people.

Prophetic Speech 1: Covenant Lawsuit against Israel—Israel has broken the 10 commandments and the law of Moses (Hosea 4:1–19).

Yahweh’s Summons

4 Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land:

Yahweh’s Covenant Charge

“There is no faithfulness, no love (Key Hebrew word “hesed” —“Faithful commitment” like God’s commitment), no acknowledgment of God in the land.

Yahweh’s Summons

“Charge” is the language of a lawsuit. Israel has broken a legal covenant between themselves and Yahweh—the Mosaic covenant. Yahweh is calling a hearing, marshalling the evidence, and pronouncing judgment.

Notice Hosea drops any metaphor/analogy and directly says, that the problem is with “the inhabitants of the land.”

Yahweh’s Covenant Charge

There is no covenant loyalty in the land. Hosea uses the theologically significant term “Hesed” that is most often used of God’s faithfulness to His covenant with His people. That loyalty is not returned by the people. Yahweh, the gracious initiator of the covenant, is not even acknowledged in the land anymore. He was the focus of the first four commandants of the ten commandments—the ten commandments represented the concise summary of the covenant.
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<th>Verse</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Verse 2 is essentially a list of the other relational commandments from the ten commandments. Hosea is making the point that the covenant has been violated.</td>
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| 3     | **Yahweh’s Judgment**  
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. |
| 4     | “But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. [Hebrew is difficult. ESV has better translation] *for with you is my contention, O priest.*  |
| 5     | You (priests) stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother (the priestly institution) and 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 (the people of the land). |
| 6     | At the precise time of Hosea’s ministry, Israel was materially prosperous and the number of priests “increased.” But their temporal prosperity, “their glory” |
| 7     | The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something more beautiful. |
disgraceful.

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

And it will be: Like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay[“turn/return/repent”] them for their deeds.

“They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of my people.

They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood (form of divination). A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.

They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery.

“I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes—a people without understanding will come to ruin!

Though you commit adultery, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. “Do not go to Gilgal; do not go up to Beth Aven. And do not swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives!’

would be turned to “shame.” The greediness and gluttony of the priest is pictured here as feeding on the “sin of the people”—their sin offerings (meat). Their attitude was let more people bring their sin sacrifices so that we get more.

The elite priests will receive in full what they perpetuated upon the people. Yahweh will turn all of their deeds back upon them.

Shame is coming. No longer will they increase. Their spiritual adultery with Baal, a false god who is supposed to be the “fertility” god, will not result in fertility increase.

Ponder: Without the knowledge of God, is there any true understanding? Who is the source of knowledge? How does spiritual adultery impact the understanding of life and the created order?

Ponder: “No knowledge” of God. No “understanding.” “Consulting a wooden idol.” “Answered by a stick of wood.” How does a lack of knowledge of God reduce His people to obviously foolish activities?

Hosea begins to describe what is happening at the idolatrous Baal worship places in Israel. Actual prostitution would occur so as to manipulate the god Baal to bring forth fertility in the land. Without the knowledge of God’s intent for sexuality, chaos in sexual practices reign.

Hosea points out that the men, the husbands, are more culpable than the daughters. The daughters learned of this kind of debauchery from the men.

Hosea exhorts Israel, the northern kingdom, not to tempt the southern kingdom Judah to follow in her adulterous ways. Hosea warns Judah not to go up to two worship centers on borders near Judah—Gilgal and Bethel (Golden calf resides at Bethel. cf. 1 Kings 12:28–13:33). Hosea calls Bethel, “Beth-Aven.” Bethel means “House of God” (Beth=house, El=God). Beth Aven means “House of sin/destruction/idolatry” (Beth=house, Aven=sin/destruction/idolatry). The “house of God” has become the “house of sin/destruction/idolatry”). Hosea plays with words quite a bit to make his point! Also, “As the Lord lives” had become associated with Baal worship (cf. Jer 12:16—“Then if they will really learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, ‘As the Lord lives,’ even as they taught My people to swear by Baal, they will be built up in the midst of My people.”).
16 The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?

17 Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!

18 Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways.

19 A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.

Hosea 4 ends with three images of Israel which signify that the people are so immersed in sin that nothing but severe judgment is necessary. Judah is to take notice of this.

Israel is an immovable cow—not a lamb that can be shepherded.

Israel is bewitched by idols and should be left alone in that deceived trance until destruction comes.

Israel is in a drunken stupor in which unrestrained behavior persists even when the drinks are gone.

Thus, a storm is ordained by God to destroy Israel. Israel’s “spirit/wind of harlotry” (v. 12) will become a “whirlwind” against them. Judah, take note!

Discussion and Application

1) What have you learned about God in Hosea 4 and how has it impacted you?

2) How have you been impacted by Hosea’s presentation of mankind in Hosea 4? Is it hard for you to view yourself as having violated the essence of God’s covenant as summarized in the Ten Commandments? Do you understand yourself as an idolater? An adulterer? A murder? A liar? Why? Why not?

3) There comes a point when mankind is like an immovable stubborn cow (BTW: the people were worshipping a bull/cow idol) and God must act radically. How does this impact you?

4) The wise man hears the message of this book. What do you specifically need to heed in order to be a wise child of God?
Pointers to Jesus:

5) God desired a people who were faithful to Him. Israel perpetually broke the covenant of God. Again, for what kind of man/person did this demonstrate a need?

6) Again, how is Jesus Christ the opposite of Israel? Why are we hopeful about being “in Christ” today? The priests in chapter 4 were assigned culpability for not following and disseminating the knowledge of God to the people. How was Jesus the ideal priest?

Interpreting the Scriptures:

7) What have you learned about interpreting a prophetic book like Hosea?