

### 3. God's charges against Israel

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By the grace of God, I've never been charged with any criminal offense by the court of the law. But I had many occasions to meet those who have been in that position during my prison ministry period. I was told that it was a scary moment to hear the charges against them and to hear the sentence dished out by the judge.

We are about to see God's charges against idolatrous nations Israel and Judah from chapter 4 to chapter 6.

From this point on in the Book of Hosea we will not be seeing much about the private and personal life of the prophet. The emphasis is now upon the Lord and the faithless nation of Israel which has been playing the harlot.

Everything that has been said up to this point has been in the way of generalization. God has said, "They have sinned. They have played the harlot and been unfaithful to Me." Now God is going to bring them into court, spell out certain charges against them, and prove those charges. Israel is guilty of lawlessness, immorality, ignorance of God's Word, idolatry and false worship. We can compare this chapter with the first chapter of Isaiah in which Isaiah speaks to the southern kingdom Judah, spelling out God's charge against that nation.

I believe that you could interchange these same sins of Israel with the sins of our own nation. I think that our nation is guilty of the same sins that Israel was guilty of when God judged them and sent them into captivity. Someone will disagree with me and say, "Well, we're not idolaters." But I know and believe that many of Americans including born-again Christians are idolaters without realizing. For the non-believers, they practically worship the ground where Hollywood celebrities walked around. For the believers of Jesus, many of them think that those famous Christian celebrities ought to be very close to God that we need to see them, touch them and get to know them. That is wrong.

#### A. THE CHARGES AGAINST ISRAEL

*Hosea 4:1-10 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. 2 By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed. 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. 4 "Now let no man contend, or rebuke another; For your people are like those who contend with the priest. 5 Therefore you shall stumble in the day; The prophet also shall stumble with you in the night; And I will destroy your mother. 6 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. 7 "The more they increased, The more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. 8 They eat up the sin of My people; They set their heart on their iniquity. 9 And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, And reward them for their deeds. 10 For they shall eat, but not have enough; They shall commit harlotry, but not increase; Because they have ceased obeying the Lord.*

## 1) Charge No. 1 - No mercy and truth

In v1, we find that each of these three points is connected. When people forsake the knowledge of God, soon truth and mercy are both gone. Truth must be rooted in something more than personal opinion, and mercy means going beyond self-interest.

True wisdom and understanding always begin with the knowledge of God.

*Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Our modern age mindset is completely set against the idea of restraint according to God's principles. We can see it in current advertising slogans:

- "To know no boundaries" • "No rules, just right"
- "Break all the rules" • "Just do it"
- "Living without boundaries" • "Peel off inhibitions. Find your own road"

The message is the same: You make your own rules. You answer to no one. You are the one that matters. Your universe revolves around you. You should only restrain yourself if you want to. On top of these garbage concept, the New Age Movement tells you that you are a god. No wonder why the world is chaos.

## 2) Charge No. 2 - Lack of knowledge of the Word

I firmly believe that the born-again Christians who go back and forth between the world and Christianity due to their continual sins come from lack of knowledge of the Word of God and no fear of God.

When God's people are destroyed and waste away, it isn't because God has lost either His love or strength. It's because His people are lacking in knowledge of His Word.

It isn't that God says His people are completely ignorant. They have some knowledge, but not enough. They may have just enough to make them think they know it all.

One of the good examples of that is "The Bible says that you cannot judge me." They know only one portion of the Scripture out of contexts. If they continue to read further, they would have seen what Jesus says that we'll be judged with the same measure we judge others.

The knowledge of the Word of God is more than coming to church services or Bible studies. It has to do with personal relationship with God through devotion and prayer. God and His Word are vitally connected. When God sought for a term to express His nature, He calls Himself "The Word" in John 1:1.

*Psalm 138:2 You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*

Teaching was an important duty of the priests. It is extremely important that the minister, the pastor, the preacher must present God and His Word to the people without any compromise in their words and lives. If he neglects his duty to preach the word, then he can't lead the people into the true knowledge of God, and will lead them into destruction.

Priest didn't only serve on behalf of the people, but also on behalf of the Lord. The priest represented the people to God, but also represented – through the preaching of the word – God to the people.

## **B. IDOLATRY - SPIRITUAL ADULTERY**

*Hosea 4:11-19 "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. 12 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. 13 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. 14 "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. 15 "Though you, Israel, play the harlot, Let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal, Nor go up to Beth Aven, Nor swear an oath, saying, 'As the Lord lives'-- 16 "For Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn calf; Now the Lord will let them forage Like a lamb in open country. 17 "Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone. 18 Their drink is rebellion, They commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor. 19 The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.*

### **3) Charge No. 3 - Idolatry that is spiritual adultery**

The cities of Gilgal and Beth Aven were centers of idolatry in Israel. At one time, Gilgal was a place where prophets were trained under Elijah and Elisha. But in Hosea's day it had become a center of false worship.

There is no city actually named Beth Aven. Hosea is twisting the name of the city of Bethel – meaning "House of God" – into the more fitting name Beth Aven, meaning "House of Deceit." Bethel was the southern center of calf worship established by Jeroboam I.

"Ephraim" was the largest tribe that made up the population of Israel. So, the prophets often refer to Israel as "Ephraim."

Liberal people don't understand the meaning of tough love. It means that you can love someone so much that you are willing to take your loving hands off until that person comes to sense through his difficult life which is the usual end result of his ungodly lifestyle. A great example is a prodigal son in Luke 15. The father could plea with his younger son to stay home. But in his tough love, he allowed his young and ungodly son to go all the way down, so that there was no other way for him to see than up toward God.

That is what God is doing to the nation of Israel and her people. Letting them go all the way down until they sincerely cry out to Him for help.

## **C. THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING IN MAN'S DELIVERANCE**

*Hosea 5:1-9 "Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, Because you have been a snare to Mizpah And a net spread on Tabor. 2 The revolvers are deeply involved in slaughter, Though I rebuke them all. 3 I know Ephraim, And Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled. 4 "They do not direct their deeds Toward turning to their God, For the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, And they do not know the Lord. 5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also stumbles with them. 6 "With their flocks and herds They shall go*

to seek the Lord, But they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them. 7 They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, For they have begotten pagan children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage. 8 "Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah, The trumpet in Ramah! Cry aloud at Beth Aven, 'Look behind you, O Benjamin!' 9 Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke; Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

#### **4) Charge No. 4 - Israel's prideful attitude**

The real tragedy of Israel's sin wasn't so much that they stumbled. It was more so that they did not respond to God's rebuke when they did stumble. Because their heart was filled with pride. If a man knows how to humbly respond to God's correction, God can always work with him.

When God promised to leave rebellious Israel alone, it means that when they make superficial gestures of repentance, they will not find Him. Their repentance was superficial because they do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God. The Word of God says that if we seek Him with all of our hearts, He would be found by us.

### **D. THE CORRUPTION OF THE ISRAEL LEADERS**

*Hosea 5:10-15 "The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out my wrath on them like water. 11 Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, Because he willingly walked by human precept. 12 Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, And to the house of Judah like rotteness. 13 "When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah saw his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria And sent to King Jareb; Yet he cannot cure you, Nor heal you of your wound. 14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, And like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. 15 I will return again to My place Till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."*

#### **5) Charge No. 5 - The corruption of the Israel leaders**

This means that the political leaders of Judah were corrupt and cheaters. They were the kind of men who would change property boundaries to their advantage if they thought they could get away with it.

Israel was foolish enough to trust in man - her eventual conqueror - instead of trusting in God. Choosing men's help instead of the Lord is always foolish and ends in ruin.

By the way, 'Jareb' is not a known Assyrian's name but means 'warrior'.

This was the goal of God's judgment against Israel. The goal was not destruction, but restoration. Sadly, it is often only in our affliction that we earnestly seek the Lord. Why not seek the Lord now, before affliction forces you to?

### **E. A CALL TO REPENTANCE**

*Hosea 6:1-3 Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. 2 After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight. 3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth.*

This is a prayer that trusts the love of God, and sees His loving hand even in correction. Often, a rebellious child will complain that their parents do not love them. Of course, the parents do love the child, but in their rebellion and lack of submission, they can't receive or respond to that love. Hosea prays with a different heart. Instead of arguing with God, or resenting His correction, Hosea leads Israel in humble prayer.

Hosea prayed this full of confidence in God's love and power to restore. In the prayer, there is a shadowy prophecy of Jesus' resurrection on the third day. The context supports this wonderfully; on the cross Jesus was torn and stricken for our sake, yet He was also gloriously raised up on the third day.

The former rains were the heavy rains which fell toward the end of October, and the latter rains were the heavy showers of March and April which came right before the harvest.

### 6) Charge No. 6 - The false worship

*Hosea 6:4-11 "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away. 5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And your judgments are like light that goes forth. 6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. 7 "But like men they transgressed the covenant; There they dealt treacherously with Me. 8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, And defiled with blood. 9 As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man, So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem; Surely they commit lewdness. 10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: There is the harlotry of Ephraim; Israel is defiled. 11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, When I return the captives of My people.*

I'd like to bring your attention to v6 the word 'mercy'. In my opinion, it is a bad translation by KJV, NKJV and NIV. As we see it in NASB, it should be 'loyalty'.

The problem with Israelite was not that they didn't believe God. They sure believe that He was God. But they also believe that there were other gods to choose from, just like the people in America.

The Israel people brought their sacrifice with empty hearts. They went through religious motion like many church goers here. I know for sure, even in our fellowship, there are plenty of church goers. They come and satisfy their religious duty and go back home to their own carnal world. They were not interested in pleasing God. They were pleasing their religious satisfaction.

God would rather have right hearts, full of truth and loyalty than sacrifice. Jesus twice quoted this passage of Hosea to the religious leaders of His day in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. They also missed the heart of God, focusing on the wrong and superficial things.

Israel brought animals for sacrifice, but they never brought themselves as a living sacrifice. They missed what God really wants: a deep, close relationship with Him. These people didn't have a heart for God.

## ***F. APPLICATIONS***

1) When God disciplines us, we must remember that He loves us, not hate us.

2) God would rather have right hearts from us, full of truth and loyalty than sacrifice and service to Him.