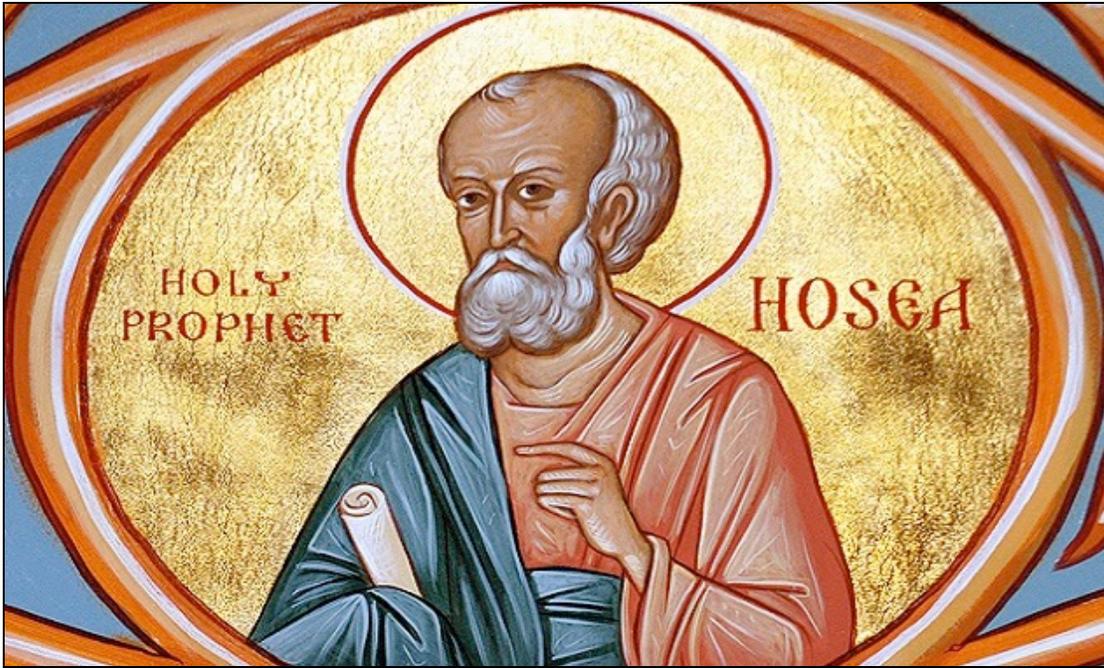


HOSEA 4, 5: TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES



T. M. MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Hosea 4, 5: Truth and Consequences

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Hosea 4, 5: Truth and Consequences

His preparation for ministry complete, Hosea begins his public work. We enter into Part 2 of Hosea's prophecy, in which he lays out God's charge against Israel, and the consequence of their disobedience, and calls them to repent and return to the Lord.

Israel has been in rebellion against God for generations, and their condition has gone from bad to worse to finally, intolerable. God is preparing to move in judgment against His people because they have forgotten Him, rejected His Law, and violated His covenant.

Yet even though He must bring judgment against them, God will not fail in His promise of blessing. A day of restoration is coming in which all His people will be reunited with Him.

But first, terrible judgment must ensue, and Hosea is the bearer of that bad news.

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We hope you find this study of Hosea instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 No Knowledge of God

Week 4, Monday: Destroyed for lack of knowledge

The heart and core of God's problem with Israel was that there was no heart or core of love for Him in them. Religion in Israel had become a tool of politics and a matter of convenience. They "worshipped" God, of course, but they also traveled to the high places, altars, and brothels of various foreign deities, as many as they preferred, all for the purpose of obtaining the good life as they saw it.

Sadly, the good life as they saw it would bring them to ruin, destruction, captivity, and death, precisely as God had warned (Prov. 14.12).

Read Hosea 4

Meditate on Hosea 4.1-6

1. Note that word, "Hear." Hosea's book began as a series of messages proclaimed in public forums to the people of Israel. What kind of risk did this involve on Hosea's part? Why do you suppose he was willing to take that risk?
2. This is almost a courtroom scene. God stands up as the prosecuting attorney, speaking through His prophet, to lay out His "charge" against the nation of Israel. Meditate on Psalm 50. This psalm is set in the context of worship, in which God is reviewing His people. What "charges" does He set before them here? Is worship a proper context for this sort of thing? It is possible that Hosea was preaching like this in worship services around the nation of Israel, or perhaps in Samaria, the capital. Should you see your church's worship service as a time of gathering before God to have your life reviewed by Him? What are the implications for this as a framework for thinking about worship?
3. Summarize God's charges against His people as we see them in verses 1 and 2. According to verse 3, what does God promise as a consequence of this?
4. Verses 4 and 5 are intended to preclude any blame-laying, whether neighbors, priests, or prophets, or even one's parents. Meditate on Genesis 3.1-6. Blame-laying is a natural tendency of sinners. What is the proper response to having your sins exposed?
5. Verse 6 lays bear the real issue: Israel does not "know" the Lord. In this verse, to what is "not knowing" the Lord compared? Jesus said the Law of God teaches us to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40). Paul said the Law is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12). James wrote that we should all live as though we expected to be judged by the Law of God (Jms. 2.12). John wrote that the Law of God marks out the path of discipleship (1 Jn. 2.1-6). How would you describe the status of the Law of God in your church? In your life?

Summary

They who reject God's Law reject His Spirit as well (Rom. 8.5-9). Without the Spirit and Word of God, beginning with His Law, we cannot possibly know the Lord. And if we will not know the Lord this way, we should expect to hear His rebuke when we come before Him for review. What's the most important message to take away from God's charge against His people?

Closing Prayer

Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.

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Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You *are* the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.
Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses,
For they *are* from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions;
According to Your mercy remember me,
For Your goodness' sake, O LORD.

Psalm 25.4-7

Observations, notes, questions:

2 Glory to Shame

Week 4, Tuesday: The wages of sin

The people of Israel preferred the life of sin to living according to God's holy and righteous and good Law. Thus they chose to come under the curses of God's covenant, rather to enjoy the promised and abundant blessings of His favor. Now the time had come for a people who had worked so hard at sinning to receive the wages they were due.

Read Hosea 4

Meditate on Hosea 4.7-10

1. Sin is like compound interest – it mounts up daily, generation by generation, compounding and multiplying and corrupting everything. How can you see that in this passage?
2. God is not merely looking at the outward lives of the people of Israel. His focus goes deeper, as we see in verse 8. What's the difference between setting one's heart on iniquity and setting it on the Law and Word of God (Ps. 119.112)?
3. What was Israel's "glory" (v. 7)? What would it mean for this to be changed to "shame"?
4. For generations, the people of Israel have been "working" for the "good life." Now they were about to receive their reward: shame, punishment, want, decline. Is this what they were hoping to receive? What does the plight of Israel suggest about the blinding power of sin? How would you counsel a fellow believer to avoid this snare?
5. There is no true faith without works of obedience (v. 10, cf. Jms. 2.26). Does this mean God was expecting Israel to save themselves by their works? What is the place of obedience and works in the life of faith?

Summary

Israel's sin and rebellion against God had been compounding and multiplying for generations. The people were largely blind to their wickedness, because they had become so accustomed to it. Their hearts, which should have been devoted to God and His Law, were devoted to their own happiness, defined in terms other than those outlined in God's Word. Now the reward of their labors was about to be visited upon them. How do you define the "good life"?

Closing Prayer

Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope *is* in the LORD his God,
Who made heaven and earth,
The sea, and all that *is* in them;
Who keeps truth forever,
Who executes justice for the oppressed,
Who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners.
The LORD opens *the eyes of* the blind;
The LORD raises those who are bowed down;
The LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the strangers;

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He relieves the fatherless and widow;
But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.
The LORD shall reign forever—
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 146.5-10

Observations, notes, questions:

3 Ready for Trampling

Week 4, Wednesday: The vicious cycle of sin

Sin in Israel had become such a way of life, so “normal”, that no one thought anything about it.

Except God.

God always remembers His covenant with His people, and, even when they fail to remember and keep it, He does not. All the sins the people had committed for generations would now be paraded before them, as God prepared His people to be trampled under foot by their own rebellion.

Read Hosea 4

Meditate on Hosea 4.11-14

1. Instead of serving the Lord, Israel had become enslaved to sin (v. 11). How does sin “enslave the heart”? How might someone be able to tell when he or she was beginning to become a slave to sin?
2. People these days – at least in the West – don’t “ask counsel” of wooden idols. But a “staff” could be seen as a scepter, a symbol of government authority (v. 12), and diversions that gratify our sensual nature – that merely entertain – are all around us, gobbling up our time and consuming our attention. What kind of “idols” can keep us from being devoted to the Lord with all our heart?
3. The worship activities described in verse 13 were not commanded by the Lord. Indeed, they were explicitly forbidden. People did these because they were “fun” or “convenient” (note the mention of shade). But the people considered themselves to be very religious, even protesting that they “knew” the Lord (Hos. 8.2). While the people were going through these motions of “worship”, they would have been unable to worship God as He commanded. Are churches in danger of this today?
4. Yet some of the people of Israel were apparently shocked to find their children and loved ones becoming involved in practices that were blatantly sinful (v. 14). Should they have been? Why not?
5. The word “trampled” in verse 14 perhaps would have called to mind the grape harvest. What was God saying about the state of Israel’s rebellion, and where it was leading her as a nation?

Summary

Israel had become “ripe” for being trampled under the feet of oppressors, acting as agents of God’s wrath. Rather than seek the Lord and His counsel, they turned to foolish deities, fallible rulers, and fun times for all. It was a recipe for disaster then, and it remains so today. Are we in danger of playing the harlot against God today?

Closing Prayer

Praise the LORD!

For *it is* good to sing praises to our God;

For *it is* pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful.

The LORD builds up Jerusalem;

He gathers together the outcasts of Israel.

He heals the brokenhearted

And binds up their wounds.

He counts the number of the stars;

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He calls them all by name.
Great *is* our Lord, and mighty in power;
His understanding *is* infinite.
The LORD lifts up the humble;
He casts the wicked down to the ground.

Psalm 147.1-6

Observations, notes, questions:

4 Warning to Judah

Week 4, Thursday: "Let him alone!"

While Hosea's primary ministry was to the people of Israel, we can assume that his preaching and writings were finding their way back to Judah. The Southern Kingdom was certainly a secondary audience for the prophet's ministry, and the message to them was not subtle in the least: "Let him alone!"

Read Hosea 4

Meditate on Hosea 4.15-19

1. Gilgal and Beth Aven were places Israel worshiped their false gods, even as they swore by the name of the Lord (v. 15). What's the warning here for the people of Judah, the Southern Kingdom?
2. How many different images of Israel in rebellion can you identify in these verses? What would each of these have communicated to the people of Judah? Why did God use so many different images to warn them about following in the ways of Israel?
3. That warning, "Let him alone" (v. 17), is chilling. What did this imply? Does there come a time when people are so determined to live in sin that churches need to just "let them alone"? Explain.
4. Based on what we've seen thus far in our study of Hosea, what do rulers – civil or ecclesiastical – look like who "dearly love dishonor" (v. 18)?
5. Summarize God's warning to Judah. What applications does this warning have for us today?

Summary

Judah was warned to stand back and keep her distance as Israel came under the wrath of God. But she was also warned about following in her ways, a warning, alas, which fell on deaf ears in subsequent generations. From these verses, suggest some indicators that might serve as "warning lights" to tell us that we were beginning to stray (v. 12) from the path God intends for us.

Closing Prayer

How long, LORD?
Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?
Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You,
And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.
For they have devoured Jacob,
And laid waste his dwelling place.
Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,
For we have been brought very low.
Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!

Psalm 79.5-9

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Observations, notes, questions:

5 Like Leaders, Like People

Week 4, Friday: Chips off the old block

The leaders of Israel, who should have been working to keep the people within the “blessings side” of God’s covenant, had instead led them into rebellion and, hence, judgment. The people were guilty of sin; yet even more guilty were the priests and rulers who had encouraged and promoted the religion of convenience which was now destroying the Northern Kingdom.

Read Hosea 5

Meditate on Hosea 5.1-5

1. Mizpah and Tabor were high mountains in Israel, thus suggesting prominence and visibility. Priests, household heads, and rulers were guilty of what took place there. They were a “snare” and a “net” to the nation. According to verse 2, does it seem the leaders of Israel were listening to Hosea? Why or why not? Meditate on James 3.1. How should you pray for the leaders of your church?
2. “Ephraim” (v. 3) was the most prominent tribe of the Northern Kingdom and, thus, representative of the nation as a whole. What did God “know” about Ephraim? How did He know it? Does He still know His people like this?
3. What would someone be doing who was directing his or her deeds “Toward turning to their God” (v. 4; cf. Ps. 119.59, 60)?
4. Why is “the spirit of harlotry” logically combined with not knowing the Lord (v. 4)?
5. God calls a “witness” to testify against Israel in support of His charges (v. 5). What is this “witness” and why would it have been effective? Note the warning, in passing, to Judah. What effect did God intend for this comment?

Summary

The “pride” of Israel was mainly in her name and the heritage that name represented. Bearing that in mind, we can see why the leaders’ boasting that they were the people of God, descended from the patriarchs, would have testified against them. There is no magic in merely *claiming* to be a Christian. God is looking for more than mere words. What?

Closing Prayer

“Now consider this, you who forget God,
Lest I tear *you* in pieces,
And *there be* none to deliver:
Whoever offers praise glorifies Me;
And to him who orders *his* conduct *aright*
I will show the salvation of God.”

Psalm 50.22, 23

Observations, notes, questions:

6 Too Late

Week 4, Saturday: The Lord withdrawn

Hosea was a preacher. Only later did he bring his messages together into the book we're studying in this series. As he preached, he must have touched the hearts of some people, because it seems as though some movement to seek the Lord was beginning to stir. But it was too little and too late; God had already withdrawn from the nation, leaving them to the consequences of their disastrous choices.

Read Hosea 5

Meditate on Hosea 5.6-9

1. Some of the people, at least, apparently thought it wise to “seek the LORD” (v. 6). Meditate on Psalm 51.16, 17 – a psalm these people would have known. How is it evident that the people of Israel still didn't “get it”?
2. God had “withdrawn” from Israel. Meditate on Romans 1.18-32. What are the signs that God has begun to withdraw from a people, nation, or church?
3. In what way had the nation of Israel “dealt treacherously” with the Lord (v. 7)? Is ingratitude a kind of first step in such treachery? What would be some other steps? How can we keep from following that path?
4. Verse 8 calls for a sense of alarm. Why? Is it appropriate for preachers today to cry with alarm to the people of God? Explain.
5. God's “rebuke” – His coming judgment – would leave Israel “desolate” (v. 9). This was Hosea's “sure” message to the nation. What is Hosea's message to churches today?

Summary

God's grace does not continue indefinitely toward those who choose to rebel against Him. He will gradually give them up to their wicked ways, until, like Judas, there comes a time when it is too late to turn back to the Lord. How should this counsel us with respect to the lost people God has placed in our lives?

Closing Prayer

Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine
And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself.
It is burned with fire, *it is* cut down;
They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.
Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself.
Then we will not turn back from You;
Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.
Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!

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Psalm 80.14-19

Observations, notes, questions:

7 The Dark Side of Glory

Week 4, Sunday: Glory in wrath and judgment

The glory of God is not all beauty and loveliness, wonder, joy, and awe. Because God is holy, His glory, when revealed against unholiness, can be terrifying. Israel has come under indictment for a wide range of charges, amounting to rebellion and revolt against God. His holiness will not allow Him simply to “wink” at such wickedness. Israel is about to discover this in spades, and Judah is fairly and somberly warned.

Pray the lesson is not lost on us.

Read Hosea 5

Meditate on Hosea 5.10-15

1. What does it mean to “remove a landmark”? Are churches today ever guilty of this? Explain. How does God respond when this happens (v. 10)?
2. Israel’s rebellion comes down to their having chosen the ways of men rather than the ways of God (v. 11). This is because she rejected God’s Word and pursued a course of convenience and expediency to justify breaking away from the Davidic king and to endear herself with pagan nations. Is it possible that churches today might be guilty of something like this? Explain.
3. As Israel began to lose political strength, she turned to political allies (vv. 12, 13). Her chosen ways failed to produce the “good life,” but she continued to seek it along the same paths. What should Israel have done? What would that have required of the priests, prophets, rulers, and household heads of the nation?
4. Verse 14 is terrifying. What does this suggest about the discipline God can bring to bear against His people (cf. Heb. 12.3-11)? Should we fear Him for this? What else?
5. There is in verse 15 a note of hope. How can you see it? How does the “seeking” of verse 15 differ from that of verse 6? What does it mean for you to seek the Lord in this way?

Summary

God’s judgment is terrible. We should avoid it at all times. But if we persist in choosing the ways of men rather than those of the Law and Word of God, we will always find ourselves heading down the wrong path. Should we find that we have come to that place in our lives, what would be a proper course for returning to the Lord?

Closing Prayer

Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, be not far from me!
Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Psalm 38.21, 22

Observations, notes, questions:

Questions for discussion

1. What causes people to stray from the Lord? How can we know when that might be happening with us?
2. What does it mean to know the Lord in the way God wants us to know Him? What can hinder or prevent us from this?
3. Complete the following: When it comes to defining the “good life”...
4. Is it appropriate for us, in seeking to *know* the Lord, to *fear* Him? How do fear and love work together in the life of faith to produce obedience?
5. What’s the most important idea or lesson you take away from Hosea 4 and 5?

Glory to Glory

As we look into the mirror of Scripture, we want to see God’s glory and our own condition before Him. Then, yielding to the Spirit to teach, convict, and transform us, we can grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Did you see yourself in any ways in Hosea 4 and 5?

What do you learn about God and His glory from these two chapters?

What new directions or “next steps” is the Spirit leading you to take?

Prayer:

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Thank you.