

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE— A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

TEXT: 4:1-5

- 1 Hear the word of Jehovah, ye children of Israel; for Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land.
- 2 There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, 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 the birds of the heavens; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.
- 4 Yet let no man strive, neither let any man reprove; for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.
- 5 And thou shalt stumble in the day, and the prophet also shall stumble with thee in the night; and I will destroy thy mother.

QUERIES

- a. Why was there "no knowledge" of God in the land?
- b. What does the prophet mean, "blood toucheth blood?"
- c. What is wrong with "striving with the priest?"

PARAPHRASE

Listen to the word of the Lord, you children of Israel. The Lord has an indictment against you and is going to bring judgment against you because there is no truthfulness, nor goodness, nor personal knowledge of God in the hearts of the people of the whole country. On the other hand there is false swearing and covenant breaking, murdering, stealing, adultery everywhere! There are men breaking in and robbing and one bloody death after another throughout the whole land. When the Lord brings drought and famine upon you for your sins, the whole land will mourn. The people and even the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens will grieve—yes, even the fish of the sea will perish. When all this happens let no man blame anyone else for such disaster—every man is equally to blame. And so, God's judgment will come, unceasingly; the slaughter of an unfaithful people and of the false prophets who led them will have no respite neither day nor night—and I will destroy national Israel.

SUMMARY

These first five verses form the first stanza of a long ode of Judgment. They contain the theme of the whole remaining section of the book of Hosea, and especially this fourth chapter—cause and resultant judgment of God.

COMMENT

v. 1 . . . JEHOVAH HATH A CONTROVERSY WITH THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND . . . There is a similar arrangement of the covenant people (Judah in this instance) in Micah 6:2ff. God is personified as both the Plaintiff, Prosecutor and the Judge. God has a case against the covenant people. They are arraigned. God presents His case listing the many ways and instances by which the people broke His covenant. He proves their guilt and pronounces sentence. In His prosecution God even bears witness to the cause—there is no knowledge of God in the land. This specially blessed and favored people certainly could not claim ignorance of the terms of the covenant as an excuse (for the terms of God's covenant were reiterated over and over and they were plain enough for the dullest child to understand, cf. Deut. 8:19-20). They could not claim that God had not warned them for He sent one prophet after another attempting to call the people back to covenant keeping—all to no avail.

A nation is almost beyond hope when "there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land." Jerome said, "Truth cannot be sustained without mercy; and mercy without truth makes men negligent; so that the one ought to be mingled with the other." When there is no truthfulness no one trusts another (cw. Jer. 9:3-4).

Truth is the basis of all morality. The Bible, God's revealed will, is the only infallible standard of objective truth. Morality cannot be determined on any subjective basis. Morality cannot be determined on any humanistic basis. Morality cannot be reasoned on any philosophical basis. Morality must be determined by an objective standard and this standard must be infallible, supernatural truth. All other attempts to determine what is moral must ultimately end in complete moral anarchy (which leads to political anarchy) and the "autonomous man." The "dark ages" of the covenant people, during the period of the Judges, was a result of "every man doing that which was right in his own eyes!" When the divine standard of truth, God's revealed word, is rejected moral and political suicide is the result. This is exactly what

was happening to Israel in Hosea's time and also what happened to Judah in Jeremiah's time—complete moral and political anarchy! The same will happen to any nation which rejects God's Word, the Bible.

Hosea depicts the situation in Israel as one in which there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God. The "knowledge of God" is an experiential knowledge, to be sure, but this experience of God in our hearts only comes as a result of knowing God from His revelation of Himself through His written Word. That God does exist may be known from nature (Rom. 1:20-21; Psa. 19; Acts 14:14-18; etc.), but we must also know that He is a "rewarder" (Heb. 11:6). In other words, we must know what kind of a Person God is. This can only be known by a knowledge of what He says about Himself and how He has proved Himself through His marvelous deeds in the past (cf. II Pet. 1:3-9, where we "know" Him through His "precious and very great promises," and also become partakers of the divine nature). Of course, when God tells us what He is like and promises us that His will put to practice in our lives will give us certain blessings such as peace, love, joy, fruitfulness, forgiveness and etc., we cannot "know" such blessedness until we *do* what He says. Then our knowledge of God becomes experiential. First, however, our knowledge of God must be intellectual, based upon facts of history which record God's deeds. We must be able to trust Him with our reason before we can experience Him with our hearts. We must know He is historically trustworthy before we can be convinced that what He says to do is the right thing to do!

Israel had long ago taken the revealed truth of God away from the people. They built false "calf gods" and instituted a false priesthood. The verbal revelation of God in the Mosaic Law was no longer revered or practiced. So the inevitable consequences of moral rotteness followed.

v. 2 THERE IS NOUGHT BUT SWEARING AND BREAKING FAITH, AND KILLING, AND STEALING, AND COMMITTING ADULTERY . . . AND BLOOD TOUCHETH BLOOD . . . Here the prophet merely enumerates the sins of the nation. In later chapters he describes in detail the immoral practices of the people. In this list we find violations of five of the ten commandments of the decalogue. The people are guilty of false witnessing, covenant breaking, murder, theft, and adultery. And this is on a national scale. There are not just a few isolated cases of such crimes but the prophet says, "to the contrary, there is nothing else going in the land but such criminality!" One bloody deed follows another ("blood toucheth blood.")

v. 3 THEREFORE SHALL THE LAND MOURN . . . Such flagrant violations of all that is moral, right, good, reasonable and true inevitably bears fruit. God created the universe and sustains it through inexorable laws, both moral and physical. When those laws are transgressed the penalty must be paid. Where there is no penalty, there is no law; so where there is law there must be penalty. The penalty for violating a physical law of the universe is usually death or some other disastrous consequence. The penalty for violating a moral law is moral ruin, moral darkness, injustice, greed, cruelty, distrust and all the other decadent practices resulting from falsehood.

In Israel's case God brought pestilence, drought, plague and other forms of divine chastisement upon them. Not only does the inanimate creation suffer in consequence of the sins and crimes of men, but the moral depravity of man causes the physical destruction of all other creatures through such punishments of God. Even the beasts of the field, the birds and fish, mourn.

v. 4-5 . . . LET NO MAN STRIVE . . . REPROVE . . . THOU SHALT STUMBLE IN THE DAY . . . The fundamental requirement of God's covenant was willing, unflinching, obedience (Ex. 19:5; 23:20-22; Deut. 6:1-25; I Sam. 15:22). Three times the people had solemnly pledged obedience (Ex. 19:8; 20:19; 24:3-7). But alas, they rebelled only forty days later and continued to rebel until their rebellion was culminated in the divided kingdom. Hosea writes to the people and tells them they are like those who strive with the priest. This is a reference to the Mosaic ordinance which prohibited people from striving or rebelling against a priestly decision (cf. Deut. 17:8-13). It may also indicate that the people were trying to blame the priests for their waywardness. In any case, the nation is a nation of rebels, rebelling against the rule of God. They are like the wicked servants of the parable Jesus told concerning the "pounds" (cf. Lk. 19:11-27) who said, "We do not want this man to reign over us."

So they would have to bear the consequences of their rejection of the light of God's truth. When the divine Light is rejected the darkness of falsehood and lie must follow. When people love the darkness they will refuse to come to the Light (cf. Jn. 3:18-21). When such people have their say they prefer "teachers after their own lusts" (cf. II Tim. 4:3-5) and they will be like the "blind leading the blind" (cf. Lk. 6:39), they will both fall into the pit! This goes on all the time—day and night. And God is going to destroy the "mother"—the whole nation.

QUIZ

1. What picture does the figure of speech "controversy" paint for us?
2. What was the cause of God's controversy against the nation?
3. Why is truth the basis for all morality?
4. Why must we have a divine, objective standard of truth?
5. When does one's knowledge of God become experiential?
6. Why does the land mourn when people sin?
7. How were the people like those "that strive with the priest?"

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE— FORGETTING THEIR GOD

TEXT: 4:6-10

- 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 also will forget thy children.
7. As they were multiplied, so they sinned against me: I will change their glory into shame.
- 8 They feed on the sin of my people, and set their heart on their iniquity.
- 9 And it shall be, like people, like priest; and I will punish them for their ways, and will requite them their doings.
- 10 And they shall eat, and not have enough; they shall play the harlot, and shall not increase; because they have left off taking heed to Jehovah.

QUERIES

- a. Why are the people to be destroyed for "lack of knowledge?"
- b. Who is feeding "on the sin" of Jehovah's people?
- c. What does the phrase "like people, like priest" mean?

PARAPHRASE

My covenant nation is destroyed because they have no knowledge of Me, and so I will reject it from being a priestly nation because it has refused and rejected My law. Since this nation has forgotten My law, I will forget to bless its children. The more the population of My people increased, the more they sinned against Me. I will take all

their present glory and turn it into shame upon them. The priests grow fat because of the sins of my people. They set their heart on the people increasing their sins because as a result the sin-offerings which go to the priests for food, will also increase. Therefore, what is going to happen to the people, will also happen to the priests, they will perish with the nation because of their greed. And because they have stopped paying heed to the law of Jehovah, Jehovah will withdraw His blessing from both priests and people so that they may eat but they shall not be satisfied and they may commit whoredom but they shall not produce off-spring.

SUMMARY

The destruction of the nation of Israel is inevitable. Israel has stopped giving heed to God. God is going to stop blessing Israel. It is just as simple as that. When blessings are deliberately spurned, when the laws of God are purposely disobeyed, disaster inexorably follows. It all comes from a deliberate lack of experiential or covenant-knowledge of God.

COMMENT

v. 6 MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE . . .
The knowledge of God which the people lacked was, of course, an experiential knowledge of God. But even an experiential knowledge of God must come from, first, a knowledge of God's existence and God's will as God is pleased to reveal Himself. In other words, there is no way to come to an experiential knowledge of God except first coming to an intellectual knowledge of Him through His verbal and natural revelation of Himself. We must first *know* that He exists (through the various proofs of His existence in both nature and His Word); then we must *know* what He is like and what He invites us to be and promises we may be; and then, when we have trusted Him to be what He is and able to do what He promises, and when we have done what He commands—we really begin to know Him as we ought to know Him! Such a knowledge as this brings peace, joy, forgiveness, satisfaction, fulfillment, purpose and eternal life. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" Jn. 17:3. But, conversely, to lack such knowledge of God is to be lost in ignorance, despair, hopelessness, guilt, purposelessness and eternal separation (death) from God. See our comments on the preceding section, Hosea 4:1-5. One is led to think of the terrible

condition of the Gentiles described in Romans 1:18ff when one sees the knowledge of God rejected. They "refused to have God in their knowledge . . ." "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie . . ." and so God gave them up to serve the enslaving and degrading passions of their bodies. One is also reminded of II Thess. 2:10-12 where those who have no love of the truth are given over by God to self-delusion and to believing a lie. And this is, for all practical purposes, the condition Israel had come to—enslaved, degraded, and self-deluded!

And so God has rejected this nation, this nation with which He had covenanted, from being a priestly nation. God had chosen this nation for a special purpose, to be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). They stood in a privileged position to both God and the rest of mankind. They were a "bridge" between God and all of creation over which the rest of mankind would eventually be reached by God through the Messiah. But now they were no longer fit for such a calling and God rejects them until they are purified and cleansed and made fit again for the bringing in of the Messiah.

V. 7 AS THEY WERE MULTIPLIED, SO THEY SINNED AGAINST ME . . . As their population increased, so their prosperity and, apparently, their power increased. But, so did their sin! Prosperity and power does not solve the problem of sin, crime and immorality. Prosperity without God only increases the problem! Why? Because prosperous man without God loses spiritual perspective. Affluent man without God deifies "man, the flesh and the devil." Prosperous man without God deludes himself into thinking he is self-reliant, self-made and self-contained. That is the crucial problem—SELF! Soon, it is every self for self, and the devil take the hindmost! God created man to be more than flesh. So when man concentrates on the flesh to the exclusion of the real man—the spirit—he is out of harmony with the eternal purpose and out of harmony with himself, with the world, with his fellow-man, and is thus a true schizophrenic. The man who persuades himself that the physical is the ultimate and refuses to acknowledge the spiritual is the true schizophrenic—withdrawn from reality! He is afraid, he is guilt-ridden, he is neurotic (deep down in his soul), and so he actually goes out of his way to seek self-destruction. He, "having itching ears, heaps to himself teachers after his own lusts and is led away into foolish myths . . ." (II Tim. 4:3-4).

So, what God intended for glory (Israel) or, what Israel intended for her own glory (which we are not certain), would be changed into shame when they should be taken into captivity and slavery by Assyria.

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE — FORGETTING GOD 4:6,7

v. 8 THEY FEED ON THE SIN OF MY PEOPLE . . . The Hebrew word that is used here for "sin" *chatt'ath*, is also translated "sin offering." Evidently the priests of Israel (a mongrel priesthood to begin with) were eager to see the people sin since when they sinned they brought sin-offerings for atonement. The sin-offering was, of course, to go to the priest for a part of his sustenance according to the Mosaic law (Lev. 6:26; 10:17.) Figuratively speaking, then, the priests were "feeding on the people's sins." To "set the heart on" the iniquity of the people means to "long for the people to commit iniquity." We are reminded of the 19th century when the Roman Catholic pope Leo X and Tetzal sold "Indulgences" and used the money to build St. Peter's cathedral. The leaders of religion feeding on the sins of the people.

v. 9 AND IT SHALL BE, LIKE PEOPLE, LIKE PRIEST . . . Since the priests were as corrupt and, perhaps, even more debased (longing for the people to commit sin in order that they might profit), they would be destroyed with the nation. The sins of the religious teachers and leaders would certainly not go unpunished, for the one called to such a high responsibility as that must know that he will receive the more severe judgment (cf. Rom. 2:1-9; 2:17-25; James 3).

v. 10 AND THEY SHALL EAT, AND NOT HAVE ENOUGH . . . Whatever they shall do will not prosper. All their attempts at self-dependency shall end in vanity and emptiness. They will find the same thing Solomon found and about which he wrote in Ecclesiastes. Money, fame, power, sensual indulgence—all is vanity—all is unsatisfying without God. The "whole of man" is to fear God and keep His commandments. When men stop paying heed to God, God's only alternative is to withdraw His proffered blessings. God's blessings are given conditionally, when man refuses those conditions, God will not force His blessings on him. When that happens, man is left frustrated, lost and hopeless. Man cannot hope to defeat God so man, the enemy, is defeated!

QUIZ

1. What "knowledge" of God did the people lack and how did it destroy them?
2. What did their population explosion and prosperity have to do with their sin?
3. Why did the priests "set their heart" on the iniquity of the people?
4. How were they to "eat and not have enough?"

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE— SPIRIT OF IDOLATRY

TEXT: 4:11-14

- 11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding:
 12 My people ask counsel at their stock, and their staff declareth unto them; for the spirit of whoredom hath cause them to err, and they have played the harlot, departing from under their God.
 13 They sacrifice upon the top of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks, and poplars and terebinths, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters play the harlot, and your brides commit adultery.
 14 I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and they sacrifice with the prostitutes; and the people that doth not understand shall be overthrown.

QUERIES

- a. What are the "stocks" from which the people ask counsel?
- b. Why were the people burning incense under the trees?
- c. Why would God *not* punish the woman for harlotry and adultery?

PARAPHRASE

Licentiousness and debauchery is robbing men of their reason and understanding. My people seek wisdom and religious revelations from their divining sticks. The spirit of promiscuity and sensuality in their hearts has caused them to depart from Jehovah and the truth and to worship idols. They indulge in the immoral and vain pagan worship on the mountain tops and in the pleasant groves. Their daughters and wives have become prostitutes and priestesses in such heathen worship services. But why should I punish them when you men are so reprobate and, as leaders of society, have corrupted the women by your own indulgence in sexual immorality and idolatry. So this people which has allowed its understanding to be taken away by drunkenness and paganism will be cast headlong into destruction.

SUMMARY

In one quick stroke, Hosea tells the nation why they have no knowledge of God. They have allowed debauchery to take away their understanding.

COMMENT

v. 11 WHOREDOM AND WINE . . . TAKE AWAY THE UNDERSTANDING . . . Licentiousness and debauchery robs man of his reasoning power and of his will-power. Sexual excess and alcoholic addiction will reduce any self-assured man or woman to abject, whimpering, slobbering slavery. The Bible has a great deal to say about self-control in both sex and alcohol (cf. I Cor. 7; Prov.20:1; 23:20, 31; Isa. 5:11, etc.). Many an individual, home and nation has been destroyed because of one or both. Belshazzar lost an empire because of this; Alexander the Great died a debauched profligate at the apex of his power; the Roman empire of the Caesars disintegrated because of this—and in our day the British empire is about to fade away because men in high places betrayed their country after they had become enslaved to such excesses. And let Americans tremble when they think of the drunkenness, the the partying, the carousing and whoring that goes on in high levels of government, business and the arts in her own fair land! How can we trust men with such tremendously cataclysmic responsibilities in places of political leadership to make the true, good and right decisions when their minds are sated with sensual excess?! These two excesses are "demons"! They literally possess men and women! Men who are so possessed will compromise and surrender, they will pervert and poison, they will even steal and kill to satisfy their lusts. They become senseless (cf. Rom. 1:18ff).

v. 12 MY PEOPLE ASK COUNSEL AT THEIR STOCK . . . AND THEIR STAFF . . . This is a demonstration of the preceding statement. Men who lose their reason by allowing themselves to be overcome with sensual excess turn to falsehood to deliberately shield themselves from the truth! It sounds impossible but it is true nevertheless (cf. Jn. 3:19-21). The people of Israel turned deliberately to dumb, speechless, powerless idols in order to rationalize their lust for licentiousness. Men today are not any wiser. Men who delight in sensual indulgence will turn to dumb or dead gods of scientism, psychology, philosophy, liberal theology, or some pagan cult in order to rationalize and find credence for their indulgences. Many form their own philosophy or system of ethics (all relative, of course) and turn to "fate" or the "stars" to ask counsel. Some have made "love" a god (their definition of love, of course, precludes any discipline or moral responsibility). God is love, but love is not God! People will turn to every source under the sun for counsel but the divine revelation of God propositionally delivered and inerrantly recorded in human language

in the Bible. This is too objective for people, too restrictive for those with "the spirit of whoredom."

The "spirit of whoredom" is that spirit of promiscuity, license, libertinism or anarchy which desires to be free of all reasonable, moral and physical restraint. It is a totally selfish spirit for it considers only its own pleasure or satisfaction. It is a spirit of envy, greed and covetousness for it desires to possess that which does not rightfully belong to it. It is a spirit of rebellion, a spirit of pride which says, "I know better than God and His law." It is the spirit which is susceptible to being led astray into ignorance, lie, and spiritual death by the devil.

This describes the people of Israel in Hosea's day. So they were turning to their "sticks" for revelations and wisdom. Cyril of Alexandria says this refers to a practice which was an invention of the Chaldeans where two rods were held upright and then allowed to fall while forms of incantation were being uttered; and the oracle or message was inferred from the way in which they fell, whether forwards or backwards, to the right or left, or (if they had inscriptions) which inscription was facing upward, (cf. also Isa. 44:9-20; 45:20; Jer. 10:3-11). What foolishness men will succumb to when they allow their minds to be thus darkened!

v. 13 THEY SACRIFICE UPON THE TOPS OF THE MOUNTAINS, AND BURN INCENSE UPON THE HILLS . . . AND YOUR BRIDES COMMIT ADULTERY . . . The "sacrificing upon . . . the mountains" refers, of course, to Israel's practice of pagan idolatry. They were infected with the paganism of Jezebel, the heathen wife of Ahab (I Ki. 16:32; 18-19), early in their history as a nation. Earlier than this though, Jereboam I started the nation in idolatry when he built golden images for the nation to worship. In the pleasant, shady, cool groves they indulged themselves in the grossly immoral religious rites of Baalism (cf. Jer. 2:20; 3:6, 13; II Ki. 16:4; 17:9-18). According to Henry H. Halley, in the Pocket Bible Handbook, in the religion of the Cananites, 'Priestesses were temple prostitutes. Sodomites were male temple prostitutes. The worship of Baal, Ashtoreth, and other Canaanite gods consisted in the most extravagant orgies; their temples were centers of vice . . . Under the debris, in one of the High Places, Macalister (of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1904-09) found great numbers of jars containing the remains of children who had been sacrificed to Baal. The whole area proved to be a cemetery for new-born babes. Another horrible practice was

what they called 'foundation sacrifices.' When a house was to be built, a child would be sacrificed, and its body built into the wall, to bring good luck to the rest of the family. Many of these were found in Gezer. They have been found also at Megiddo, Jericho, and other places. Also, in this High Place, under the rubbish, Macalister found enormous quantities of images and plaques of Ashtoreth with rudely exaggerated sex organs, designed to foster sensual feelings."

The literal meaning of the word *baal*, is "possessor, husband." Very lascivious rites accompanied the worship (I Ki. 14:23-24). Sometimes priests, dancing around the altar in a state of frenzy, slashed themselves with knives (I Ki. 18:26-28). When people commit themselves to *worship* (which really means to adore, to practice and believe in something or someone as the reason for existence and the motivating center of life) in such immoral, fleshly indulgence, one can understand why the society became politically corrupt and falls apart.

J. N. D. Anderson, in "The World's Religions" states (from his own knowledge as a missionary) that in India today young girls are still provided in Hindu temples to serve as religious prostitutes. If a worshiper visits the temple prostitute he is doing only what is customary and taking advantage of what is provided for him by his gracious gods.

v. 14 I WILL NOT PUNISH YOUR DAUGHTERS . . . AND THE PEOPLE THAT DOTHT NOT UNDERSTAND SHALL BE OVERTHROWN . . . God does not mean to say that He will not *ever* punish the adultery and harlotry of the women of Israel. What is meant is evident from the last phrase of this verse—namely that God is going to leave the people in their deliberate, rebellious ignorance to choose their own course. God has spoken. God has sent calamity after calamity, but the people refuse to hear. There is nothing left for a merciful God to do but "give them up" (cf. Rom. 1:18ff). So, because this is the way Israel wants it, the presence of Jehovah has left them—they are left to their own devices. They are given up in their headlong plunge into utter ruin.

QUIZ

1. How does whoredom and wine take away the understanding?
2. What is the spirit of whoredom?
3. Describe the worship of Baal. Where did it come from?
4. Does such gross immorality occur in the name of religion today?
5. How does verse 14 compare to Romans 1:18ff?

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE— JUDAH IS TO DEPART FROM HER

TEXT: 4:15-19

- 15 Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, As Jehovah liveth.
- 16 For Israel hath behaved himself stubbornly, like a stubborn heifer: now will Jehovah feed them as a lamb in a large place.
- 17 Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.
- 18 Their drink is become sour; they play the harlot continually; her rulers dearly love shame.
- 19 The wind hath wrapped her up in its wings; and they shall be put to shame because of their sacrifices.

QUERIES

- a. Why the exhortation to Judah at this time?
- b. What is the meaning of the phrase, "let him alone?"
- c. What does the figure "the wind hath wrapped her up in its wings" mean?

PARAPHRASE

But though Israel has prostituted herself to worship idols, I exhort Judah to keep from offending Me in this way. Stay far away from Israel's centers of pagan worship, Judah, having nothing to do with these places. Do not be guilty even of saying the name of Jehovah in connection with anything idolatrous. Israel is behaving like a stubborn heifer, resisting the leading and protection of the Lord. Now the Lord will have to leave her defenseless to become a prey for her enemies, because, like a stupid and stubborn lamb she has wandered astray. Yes, Israel is joined inseparably to her idols and is headed for inevitable ruin—LEAVE HER ALONE! When the men become so intoxicated they can't drink any more and their wine begins to turn sour, they all go off to find some whores with whom they consort. They actually love shame more than they love honor. The great storm of God's judgment has already encircled Israel and she is trapped. She will find that she has been deceived by placing confidence in her idols and pagan sacrifices.

SUMMARY

Israel has been completely given up by God to self-hardening. Let Judah keep away from her and not be seduced into her idolatry.

COMMENT

v. 15-17 **THOUGH THOU, ISRAEL, PLAY THE HARLOT, YET LET NOT JUDAH OFFEND; . . . EPHRAIM IS JOINED TO IDOLS; LET HIM ALONE . . .** Hosea strikes a note of imperativeness in his warning. There is extreme urgency in his cry to Judah to have nothing to do with Israel! Isaiah was in the southern kingdom preaching his heart out to Judah to make no alliances, neither political, military, economic or religious, with Judah. Hosea attempts to confirm the warnings of Isaiah by sending down to Judah the same word. Although there was some corruption even in Judah at this time, generally speaking the people of the southern kingdom had not become nearly so decadent or religiously corrupt as Israel. There were still a number of faithful people in Judah. This principle of non-union of believers with unbelievers runs all through the Bible. We find it in the New Testament in I Corinthians 6 . . . "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever." We agree with a statement made by G. Campbell Morgan in his little book entitled, "Hosea, The Heart and Holiness of God." Mr. Morgan, "the prince of expositors," said:

"A man must be true to his own conscience. I have been asked if I would not go to some meeting at which representatives of other religions were to speak—Mohammedan and Jewish. No. I will respect the Mohammedan, and I will respect the Jewish rabbi, but I cannot stand on a religious platform with them. They are joined to false representations of God. If someone says he is not sure about that, I shall reply, then he is not sure about Jesus Christ, not sure about His finality. So long as we are prepared to compare Him, we are something less than Christian. So long as we put Him into comparison with others, it is because we have not risen to the height of intellectual comprehension concerning Him, to say nothing of volitional surrender to Him. Until we see Him alone as "the Image of the invisible God," filling all the horizon to the uttermost bound, we have not really seen Him at all, and our relation to Him lacks the uttermost of devotion. The hour is coming, nay, the

hour is here, when loyal souls ought at least to stand separate from all complicity with any form of the misrepresentation of God, even though the form be some new presentation of Jesus that denies the things of Revelation. There must be no compromise."

This call to separation did not mean God was at a loss to do something to help Israel, if she would be helped. God, mercifully and purposefully, allows Israel to be carried away into captivity because at the present time Israel will not listen to God. But God will deal mercifully with Israel by and by. Listen to the heart of God speak as the prophet reveals it . . . "How can I give you up, O Ephraim . . ." (Hos. 11:8) . . . "I will love them freely . . ." (14:4). If Israel will repent and learn her lesson from the captivity, God will love her freely. But so long as Israel gives God up, Judah is to have nothing to do with her. The principle is just as true today! Let all who name the Name of God stand clear of all complicity with any false representation of God (cf. II Jn. 9-11).

The people of Judah are especially warned not to frequent any of the religious centers of Israel—Gilgal, Beth-aven, etc. They are also warned not to even speak the name of Jehovah when they talk about such places lest people begin to associate Jehovah with pagan religion.

Every farmer knows how stubborn a heifer can be. When one does not wish to be led, no amount of pulling, persuasion or prodding can move one. A stubborn, balking heifer will often times lie down on the ground to keep from being led. It will absolutely defy its owner to herd it anywhere. This graphically describes the stiff-necked Israel. There is nothing left for God to do but let Israel have its wish like a stupid sheep which insists on straying out into an open, unprotected pasture by itself. God is going to turn Israel loose to go her own rebellious path. She will wander into a "large place." She will be dispersed among the nations. That is where she is headed!

v. 18-19 **THEIR DRINK IS BECOME SOUR . . . THEY SHALL BE PUT TO SHAME BECAUSE OF THEIR SACRIFICES.** The prophet pictures for us men drinking until they cannot drink any more and the wine which they leave in their glasses becoming sour because they cannot drink any more. Then, having poisoned their minds with drink and seared their moral consciences, they go out in search of a prostitute to gratify their sexual lust. They do not have to look long for there

are plenty of loose women. They play the harlot continually. The indictment of the prophet is terrible to contemplate . . . "The rulers *dearly love* shame." They are like those described by Paul in II Thessalonians 2:9-12 who "refused to love the truth . . . but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

God will have them in derision. They shall be put to shame—the word *shame* means they will be confounded, caused to stumble. Literally, they will suddenly realize that they have been deceived by placing confidence in impotent idols. They will learn that their idols are powerless and feelingless. How shameful, how pitiful, how utterly helpless they will be when they realize all this. They will be led away into abject slavery, shamed and mocked by their heathen neighbors.

QUIZ

1. Why was Judah warned to leave Israel alone?
2. Is this a principle for believers today?
3. Why does the prophet say Israel acted like a stubborn heifer?
4. What is the terrible indictment of the rulers by Hosea?
5. How will God put the people of Israel "to shame?"

ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE— REBELLION AND TRANSGRESSION

TEXT: 5:1-7

- 1 Hear this, O ye priests, and hearken, O house of Israel, and give ear, O house of the king; for unto you pertaineth the judgment; for ye have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor.
- 2 And the revolvers are gone deep in making slaughter; but I am a rebuker of them all.
- 3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me; for now, O Ephraim, thou hast played the harlot, Israel is defiled.
- 4 Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God; for the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not Jehovah.
- 5 And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in their iniquity; Judah also shall stumble with them.
- 6 They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah; but they shall not find him: he hath withdrawn himself from them.