

# "How's Your Hearing?"

## *Hosea 4-5*

The first three chapters introduce the context of the book of Hosea through Hosea's marriage to Gomer. God commands Hosea to marry a harlot named Gomer and to have children with her. God gives Hosea the names of the 3 children, all symbolic of how Israel (the Northern Kingdom) has spiritually adulterated herself from God because of her failure to keep the covenant God made with them. Due to godless leadership in their kings and religious leaders, the Israelites have prostituted themselves spiritually by worshipping Baal, believing that the more popular and culturally accepted worship of their day (everyone's doing it) was the key to a happy and fulfilled life.

Here in Ch. 4-5 we see God's analysis of Israel's lifestyle through courtroom language of:

- the charges against them
- and then he lists the evidence that convicts them of their spiritual adultery of how they consistently break God's laws
- and then we see the sentencing through prophetic warnings of coming disaster.

Isn't this going to be a wonderful message? I pray it will be. Because the best time to talk about the consequences of sin is when we're not where these people are, and we want to stay in a better place. So, that's how we're going to approach these negative chapters. We'll see what they were doing and show what they should have been doing to avoid ruining their lives. None of us wakes up saying to ourselves 'Today, I'm going to ruin my life.' We do it gradually by making one poor decision here and another here and after some time find ourselves far from living for God.

The key to all this is found in the opening verses of Ch. 4 and Ch. 5 where we read,

*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:*

*5:1 "Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house!"*

*4 "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.  
A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD.*

And there are numerous references to their failure to listen to the word of God. This word "listen" is the Hebrew word 'Shema' the infamous word that every Jewish person knows even today that begins Deut. 6:4

*4 "Hear, Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*

God gave Israel and us His Word so that we would obey God's Word. Shema means hear to obey. So when Hosea says listen he means

**Hearing God's Word = Obeying God's Word**  
**(4:1-14)**

If we back up in Deut. 6 to vv.1-3, we see clearly that this is what God meant:

*“Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, so that you may do them in the land where you are going over to take possession of it, <sup>2</sup> so that you, your son, and your grandson will fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. <sup>3</sup> Now Israel, you shall listen and be careful to do them, so that it may go well for you and that you may increase greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.*

Sadly, these chapters illustrate that Israel was not obeying God’s Word and life was not going very well. We’ll see this more as we go.

God gave us His Word so we would listen to obey Him. Sometimes we’re very good at memorizing, reciting, and having our head filled with biblical knowledge. But if its not changing us that means we’ve deceived ourselves as James says in James 1:22 that we are hearers only of the Word and not doers of the Word. It’s easy to do. We can listen to podcasts and sermons and read blogs and articles all we want but if it doesn’t change the way we talk to our spouse, or not overreact when something unpleasant happens or not resort to worry when bad laws are passed or prices skyrocket or our health deteriorates. Knowledge of God’s Word is not a goal; obedience is. Perhaps we should listen to fewer sermons, podcasts, books, etc., and take one or two things to practice rather than just filling our heads with biblical knowledge that isn’t making us more like Jesus.

God charges the Israelites with ignoring His Word. And what happens when His people ignore His Word?

*“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.*

<sup>2</sup> *There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*

<sup>4</sup> *“But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.*

<sup>5</sup> *You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother—*

<sup>6</sup> *my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.*

When we don’t obey the Word of God all relationships break down. So, let’s keep obeying God’s Word because

### ***Obedience produces loyal relationships (vv.1-5)***

Trusting God, obeying God results in just the opposite of what God charged the Israelites with. When God is acknowledged truth, love and faithfulness happen. Without God there is no truth, which is why our world is in such a confused mess. That truth is ignored. That no one is trusted anymore. The word love (or kindness) is the word “hesed”. Hesed is God’s loyal, faithful, covenant love. When we accept that love from God we show it each other, when we’re obeying the Word of God. Love God, love others. Having a problem with loving others? We’re probably not loving God wholeheartedly.

In v.2 he references many of the 10 commandments are being broken. The 10 commandments are a summary of all the laws of God. Obedience to God’s Word results in healthy marriages, families

and society in general. Following God faithfully promotes the value of life and improves all relationships.

In vv.4-5 the people complain about the priests, their spiritual leaders (who as we'll see they had reason for complaining). But, obedience to God's Word results in lifting people up not tearing them down. This is an indictment. God hears our words and knows our critical thoughts about others.

*<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers and sisters, that there will not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.*

*<sup>13</sup> But encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called "today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb. 3:12-13)*

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge". The opposite of which my people are built up through knowledge. When we're walking with God we will love each other and build others up in obedience to the Word of God. And our

### ***Godly leaders will point people to glorify God (4:6-14)***

The priests were Israel's spiritual leaders. God spread them throughout the land so that all the people would be taught about God, and that life is about glorifying God. These priests however, were ignoring the Law (v.6), sinning and acting wickedly following the example of the people rather than being an example to the people (vv.7-8). They were drinking and committing adultery (vv.10-11), following idols and even sacrificing to them (vv.12-14). God hates relational and spiritual adultery because you're trying to maintain both relationships. You're looking like your faithful to the one when in truth you're unfaithful to both.

If you and I remain committed to pointing people to the glory and magnificence of God, lesser, temporal glories will not be attractive. As C. S. Lewis so fittingly put it years ago in his book, "Mere Christianity"

*"It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.*

John Piper repeats over and over, 'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.'

I love reading C S Lewis and John Piper and many others who point me to the glory of God because their

## **Love for God Attracts Others to Love God** **(4:15-5:4)**

But we see here the opposite. God has been speaking to the Northern Kingdom of Israel but he knows the Southern Kingdom will eventually fall into the same sinful patterns as the north did, so he warns Judah in 4:15,

<sup>15</sup> *"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!'" [And not mean it]*

- <sup>16</sup> *The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!*
- <sup>18</sup> *Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways.*
- <sup>19</sup> *A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.*

Gilgal and Bethel were places where idols were set up in the North. God says to Judah don't let their sin entice you. He even misnames Bethel (House of God) as Beth Aven, (House of wickedness). Don't go to sin city. Leave them alone. Destruction is coming on them. Nothing good will come with making sinful people your closest friends. Here, God warns Judah to stay away from the evil they see. And the opposite is a good prevention:

### ***People see holiness and are drawn to us (4:15-19)***

That's what God wants to do. He wants to use our obedience, our holiness and out God-directed and glorifying lives as a powerful alternative to the evil around us. 1 Peter 3:13-15 is written in the context of don't be afraid to live for God against the sinful culture of your day.

*<sup>13</sup> And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE IN DREAD, <sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect; <sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who disparage your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.*

Making a defense implies people are making accusations against us that are untrue. But Peter says, if you are putting God first in your life, your lifestyle and humble answers to their questions will attract them to want to know how you and I have such hope. Because everyone is made by God, in His image and are wired to find true joy in Him, don't think that our obedience will not attract unbelievers to Jesus. It will. Trust God.

In 5:1 God turns directly to the disobedient priests and charges them with being a snare and a trap for the people to follow in their sinful footsteps. If leaders aren't living by the truth then the people will follow suit. But when we're walking with God

### ***Our faithfulness encourages others (5:1-4)***

The priests lack of faithfulness to God encouraged others to sin. Not that they shouldn't think for themselves but let's face it, we all tend to be swayed by those we look up to; socially, relationally, etc. 'Well he's doing it. It must be okay then.' No its not okay. That's why we each need to set a healthy example to our family and friends who know Christ so they are encouraged to remain faithful to God and not be discouraged because so few are following God. Someone is always watching you and me and (unfortunately) will make a lifestyle decision based on what we model. So let's be careful to walk with God in such a way that we are encouraging each other to stay faithful.

Hosea, speaking as God's prosecuting attorney, continues his indictment of Israel's sins and lays out the sentence as well in vv.5-15, citing their pride has caused their sin (v.5) and in their worshipping idols and trying to worship God, they won't find Him (v.6) nor will Judah eventually either because they have followed in sin too. He's going to pour out His anger and judgment in different

ways (vv.10-14) so that they would return to Him (v.15). If pride leads us away from God and insensitive to our sin, then the opposite again is our preventative medicine:

## **Consistency in the Word Keeps Us Sensitive to Sin** **(5:5-15)**

Israel was unrepentant. Because they tried to mix worshipping God and worshipping idols, they drifted away from truth. And grew hardened by their sin and thought in their pride, 'Yes, I can have my feet in both worlds', because judgment doesn't happen immediately. The best way to prevent pride is to

### ***Listen honestly to the Word which produces humility (vv.5-7)***

How? *"Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I may not sin against Thee"* (Ps. 119:11). Two verses earlier we read *'How can a young person remain pure? By keeping it according to Your Word.'*

To be doers of the Word means putting it in our heart and believing God is speaking to us about sin and areas we need to work on to become more like Him and love others deeper. Again if we're spending a lot of time in God's Word or listening to articles and podcasts about God's Word and not growing in humility, it means it's stuck in our heads and hasn't moved to our hearts. Israel demonstrated a lack of knowledge of God's word because they flagrantly mixed Yahweh and Baal worship together. Ultimately God needs to act and He will discipline or even judge if we don't humbly repent.

In their pride the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim, v.13) would turn to Assyria and not God for help. Assyria became their worst nightmare. God said he would be like a moth to both Israel and Judah (v.12). Big deal. Oooh, I'm really scared, a moth! Actually, what do moths do? They silently, nibble away at what is yours that you have stored somewhere. God says I'm going to nibble away at your life and gradually remove everything you value. And then I'm going to come like a lion (v.14) in the end and take you away – exile. But all this warning was to get them to repent and turn back to God (v.15).

But consistency in the Word will prevent this from happening. When God confronts our sin, we humble respond and repent because we want to follow Him and please Him and be blessed by Him. Israel's downfall would be Assyria. Instead of trusting God and turning around as a people they would reap what they sowed. What they should have been doing had they been following the word was

### ***Committed to their community and disaster would have been prevented (vv.5-15)***

The unbelievers of the world will not solve your problem. The governments of the world will lead you astray. How will we stay strong? By committing ourselves to God and His people. They would make commitments with Assyria and Babylon when they should have stuck together trusting God. Staying connected to the community of believers will help us stay true to God and to His Word.

Disaster would come to Israel, but it didn't have to. God warned them through good prophets to get back to the Word. To remain faithful to His Word, to humble themselves and repent of sin and abandon their syncretistic worship of both Baal and God. That doesn't work. God calls it adultery when we try to please Him and ourselves.

Stay in His Word everyday. Don't fill your head with too much knowledge. Focus on a passage, a chapter a day and meditate on it. Let God speak to you through it. Is He pointing out sin or sinful

tendency? Or maybe alerting to be careful? Obey Him. Be doers of the Word. Live for His glory and don't try to satisfy your life with the lesser glories this world offers. Ask yourself sometime this week, where am I slipping? Have I tried to please both God and me? Am I being a good example to others to stay true to God? Who am I partnering with in my walk with God to keep me strong.

Let's conclude with a positive encouragement to remain faithful to God and drawing on each other for strength from Hebrews 10:23-25,

*<sup>23</sup> Let's hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*