Hosea and The Epistles of John: *Hesed,* God's Covenant Love

Lesson 8: Covenant Judgment

Key Verse: "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD."
~Hosea 5.4

Mariah Carey's song, "Always Be My Baby", spent two weeks in the number one spot of the US Billboard Hot 100 beginning May 4, 1996. Because of the simplicity of its lyrics and its achievable vocal range for the (below) average shower-singer, it's a favorite karaoke choice! The song expresses the everlasting nature of love. It celebrates the certainty and fidelity of a loyal lover even through heartache and heartbreak. The lyrics rejoice in the truth of the final judgment of this lover: everlasting love for her beloved. This is similarly expressed by our **Just Judge**: everlasting, even eternal, Love for His beloved. Even in **apostasy**, or abandonment and faithlessness towards God, God continues to pursue His people so that He may Judge them as "My people…who acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me" (Hosea 5.15). Even as He must enforce His curses for their rebellion against Him, God still calls His people to return to Him because, as Ms. Carey sang, they will "Always Be My Baby"!

Abba Father, how wonderful a privilege it is to know You as our Savior, our God and still intimately as our Abba Father. Thank You for making Your will for us so plain. Thank You for providing Your Son as the final payment for our rebellion against Your will. Thank You for disciplining us in Your eternally secured Love. Help us to continue to grow in spiritual maturity through this lesson. Remind us that we are united in Christ, crying out to You alone in one voice, "My Husband" (Hosea 2.16)! May we hear from You, "You are My people, living my command to love one another as I have loved you." (Hosea 2.23; 1 John 2.8).

Hosea 4.1-5.15 Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; **2** there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. **3** Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

4 Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest. **5** You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.

6My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since 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 feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity. **9** And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. **10** They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish **11** whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.

12 My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore. **13** They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery. **14** I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes, and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin. **15** Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven, and swear not, "As the LORD lives." **16** Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the LORD now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture? **17** Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone. **18** When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring; their rulers dearly love shame. **19** A wind has wrapped them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

CH 5 Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. **2** And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.

3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled. **4** Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD. **5** The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them. **6** With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them. **7** They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD; for they have borne alien children. Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields.

8 Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin! **9** Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure. **10** The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water. **11** Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth. **12**But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah. **13** When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal 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 and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue. **15** I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

Diamonds: Rather than using the luscious and satisfying voice of Mariah Carey to sing a lullaby of love to His people, God uses Hosea's harsh judgments and alarming historical predictions to jolt God's people to return to love for God alone. Hosea's focus shifts from replaying his metaphor-laden lifestyle in obedience to God's command to love and enter a marital covenant with a sex-worker (Hosea 1-3) to the destruction of the covenant "marriage" God has willfully and purposefully chosen with His rebellious, philandering people (Hosea 4-14).

1. Hosea brings three charges against God's people in Hosea 4.1: no faithfulness, no steadfast love *(hesed)*, and no knowledge of God in His people. John brings these same three charges against God's people walking in darkness! Explain how these likewise are found in those walking in darkness from 1 John 1-2:

God has yet to render His final judgment against His people in Hosea. God is following legal procedure, much like we do in our court system today. Before a judge can pronounce a verdict, a charge must first be brought to the court against a person, or in this case, a nation (V 1 - God "has a controversy", or "has a case against" His people). Having brought three charges against His people, God proves why these charges are right and necessary in verse 2. Dr. Kidner describes this list as a "catalogue of sins, a dark shadow of the Ten Commandments".[1] What is alarming is not just the "full-blown" truth of each sin in God's people, but that God's people were living in a time of "decadence and [these seven sins] have flourished virtually unchecked."[2] Dr. Dearman[3] brings the gravity of these sins to light with his exposition of God's likely evidence of each sin found in His community:

- Swearing (Exodus 20.7): not cussing but instead intentionally using God's name insincerely, for personal gain in a transaction, or in an attempt to manipulate God's law through a self-righteous justification, aka a loophole (Hosea 4.15; Matthew 5.33-37).
- Lying (Exodus 20.16): deceitfulness with an emphasis on providing false testimony. "Lying is not only deceit, but can be part of defrauding and condemning another person (Leviticus 6.2-3; Job 31.24-28)".
- Murder (Exodus 20.13): "unsanctioned taking of human life"; however, the context drives the meaning, and Dr. Dearman explains that it's likely tied to the "bloodshed" in the verse described as endemic in God's community and is tied into the next evidentiary sin, theft. Remarkably, and soberingly, Hosea finds this sin in God's own priests in Hosea 6.9!
- Theft (Exodus 20.15): this can also refer to kidnappings and stealing one's honor (Exodus 21.16-17). Hosea identifies this sin in Hosea 7.1.
- Adultery (Exodus 20.17): The emphasis here is on the actual breaking of a marriage vow rather than Hosea's use of this word to metaphorically describe God's people. Hosea identifies this sin in God's people in Hosea 4.2.
- Breaking all bounds/breaking forth: depending on its grammatical use, it indicates intense, aggressive acts usually paired with violence and theft (Exodus 19.22, 24; 2 Samuel 5.20). It can be a violent person, a robber, or a thief (Jeremiah 7.11; Ezekiel 7.22, 18.10). In other words, "breaking all bounds" is like adding an aggravated charge to a crime, thus resulting in the crime being considered a more serious offense, worthy of a felony conviction rather than a misdemeanor.
- Bloodshed follows bloodshed: alluding to horrific violence and societal breakdown. A good illustration of this is found in the cautionary narrative in Proverbs 1.8-19. This idea of societal breakdown impacts not only humanity, but also God's creation (Hosea 4.3). The result of the "unchecked" sins of God's people is not only the destruction of their community, but even of the land and of the animals used to provide them food and water.

2. Choose your (least) favorite of these seven sins found among God's people. Research this sin a bit more using the provided scriptures in the sin's definition. Share what you learned about God's view of this sin, including any examples of this sin in today's world:

There are several unresolved, difficult translation issues in these two chapters of Hosea. It is unclear if Hosea is speaking to

[1] Kidner, p. 38

[2] Kidner, p. 38

[3] Dearman, pp. 148-150

a priest, or high priest, in the first part of Hosea 4.4. It could also be that a priest or high priest is addressing Hosea to "Stop with the charges against us!" before Hosea's retort: "with YOU is my charge, O priest" (Hosea 4.4). No matter, the damning charge against God's chosen priesthood remains irrepressible: "dereliction of duty".[4] Hosea implies that the priesthood has designed a destructive echo chamber by colluding with the prophets, leading to the prophesied destruction of the cities that have fostered this dangerous and destructive pattern ("mother" = royal city[5]). Tragically, their internal algorithm has convinced the priesthood of their superior and protected status because of their role as God's priests to His people. Their spiritual arrogance (Hosea 4.6, 9) has made them "spiritual chameleons"[6] who now use God's law to enrich themselves! (Hosea 4.7-8)

3. We studied the prize of spiritual maturity in 1 John 2.13, 14: "knowing Him who is from the beginning." How are God's priests developing spiritual maturity within God's people according to Hosea 4.6-14?

4. Contrast your answer to John's basic progression towards spiritual maturity in 1 John 2.12-14 (see your answer to questions 4-6 from Lesson 7: *Covenant Command to Love*). What are the key differences between God's priests in Hosea's time versus John's teaching in 1 John 2.12-14. As applicable, include your personal insights discovered in spiritual growth (from your answers to questions 4-6 in Lesson 7).

Hosea becomes snarky as he moves on from the priests corrupting God's people to addressing the consequence of such spiritual corruption leading to apostasy and future destructive geopolitical events. His transition begins in Hosea 4.15 using sarcasm to reveal that the "house of God" in Bethel (also called Gilgal) is now a "house of iniquity", or *Beth-aven*. "This is intended as a slap at both shrines, as if to say even a prostitute will be corrupted as such places!"[7] God's people have become so committed to their shame and their idolatry, they are as stubborn cows (Hosea 4.16). The truth of Hosea 4.15-19 is that God's people are like unattended, wandering, purposeless, feral cows in a boundaryless pasture. Families who raise cows train their cows to find and follow the sound of special whistles, or unique calls often preceded by blaring the truck's horn. At the familiar sounds of their rancher, cows come from *every which way* throughout their land to get their food, their medicine, and to have their needs tended to. But not so for God's people.

5. God's people knew well of God's "old commandment" because God's command to love Him alone and to love others is "from the beginning" (1 John 2.7). Where are you convicted of unintentionally throttling your spiritual growth through a cow-like stubbornness? Like a rancher calling out with a special whistle (1 John 1.9), which of the identified sins found in God's people is God prompting you to repent of?

Like an "Amber Alert" screeching simultaneously from everyone's phone, Hosea blares his own alerts in Hosea 5.1 and 5.8 to warn of the geopolitical consequences God is bringing about for the destruction of His people. Hosea's message in Hosea 5.13 anchors God's warning to His people and is best summarized by Dr. Dearman, "YHWH is at work through the historical process to bring about His judgment."[8]

6. According to Hosea 5.13, what do the political and religious leaders realize the nation's needs? Who do they pursue to meet their nation's needs?

While the exact historical events leading to the national confusion and political division alluded to in Hosea 5.5-6 aren't completely settled, the reality of their compounded sins against God is a hard blow: when God's people go to seek Him, they will not find Him. "He has withdrawn from them" (Hosea 5.6). Hosea laces His proclamations of the hard blows coming to God's people in chapter five for their stubborn hearts that refuse to "acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me" (Hosea 5.15). Dr. Dearman reminds us of an important and very difficult truth buried in this

[4] Dearman, p. 157

[5] Dearman, p. 158

[6] Kidner, p. 40

[7] Dearman, p.166

[8] Dearman, p.185

chapter: "God is the source of their decay (Hosea 5.12), brought on by their following a futile pathway."[9] And likewise, "In response to the political and theological rebellion against Him, YHWH represents Himself as a lion.

7. According to Hosea 5.14-15, what will this "Lion" do?

Deity: Just Judge~ (Hosea 5.4) "Just" means legally correct: faithful to an original: conforming to a standard of correctness; "Judge" means to make an official decision about: to act with authority to reach a decision.

God is our Just Judge (Deuteronomy 32.4; 2 Corinthians 5.10). He can be trusted to do what is exactly right and legally correct (according to God's holy standard) with every human being (Genesis 18.25; Romans 2.1-16; Revelation 20.12-13).

As Just Judge, God alone is the final authority in knowing whose heart has been circumcised, changed by the Holy Spirit to seek His praise alone (Matthew 13.24-30; Romans 2.17-29). We are cautioned not to usurp His authority by judging others using standards that we too transgress, thus inviting condemnation (Romans 2.1-3).

8. In Hosea, we discover the security found in God as our Just Judge. Choose several (not all!) verses from the list. Notice the ways God is securing His people in Him (implied or obvious, even as He is carrying out his disciplining judgment against their rebellion):

1.7	3.4-5
1.10-2.1	4.16
2.6-7	5.3
2.10	5.13
2.14-23	5.14-15

9. In 1 John 1.1-2.2, we again discover the security found in God, the Father, as our Just Judge through His Son, Jesus. How has God provided our eternal security through His Son, Jesus?

Doctrine: Apostasy~ (Hosea 4.1; 5.4, 6-7) "A 'falling away', usually a deliberate and total abandonment of the faith previously held…Professing Christians who identify themselves with Christ and then subsequently renounce Him prove themselves to have never truly been converted, demonstrated by their going out from the fellowship of the faith that they were never really in Christ."[10]

There are two great examples of apostasy in the New Testament: Herod is a great example of apostasy (Mark 6.14-28), while Judas is a great example of insincerity of faith (Mark 14.17-21; John 6.26-71, 17.12).

In Hebrews 6.4-8, Paul intentionally provides two assurances to his readers to prevent them from becoming frightened by the idea that one can lose their salvation in Christ. First, in his transition to writing in the third person ("they"/"them") rather than using the first ("I"/"me") and second person ("us"/"we"), he assures his readers that he isn't talking about them specifically in verses 4-8. In fact, in V 9, he states, "...yet in *your* case, beloved, *we* feel sure of better things – things that belong to salvation" (italics added). From this verse onward to the end of chapter 6, Paul exhorts and praises their "God-dependent imitation"[11].

Second, Paul's original writings do NOT suggest that loss of salvation is a hypothetical situation that could become reality. "A number of translations give this impression by using the term, 'if'. This does not appear in the Greek text, which is best rendered not by the phrase, 'if they fall away', but 'those who have fallen away.'"[12] Thus, the more correct rendering of Paul's concern is developed from his knowledge of some who have "fallen away and can no longer be restored."[13] Such people would either be apostates whose "hearts were hardened in unbelief, and they fell away from the living God" (Hebrews 3.12-19), or they may be those who, despite enjoying the experiences of Christianity and a Christian lifestyle, had hearts that were never receptive to Christ. Such people, though part of a Christian community, fall away because they never

[9] Dearman, p.186

[10] MacArthur & Mayhue, pp. 352, 924

[11] Hughes, p. 173

[12] Phillips, p. 187

[13] Phillips, p. 187

truly believed in Jesus as Messiah (Mark 6.14-28).

10. Jesus, who lived under the same law as God's people in Hosea, explains the reality of apostasy and an insincere confession of faith. Read Matthew 7.21-23 and 13.3-9. Explain in your own words the difference between apostasy and an insincere confession of faith:

11. It is likely you know of someone who has fallen away from their faith, thus making you wonder if they ever were a Christian. While the final judgment is reserved exclusively for God, what is your typical response in this situation? How do you embrace hope in God's Sovereign plan over despair or brow-beating?

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer:

Lecture Outline:

Aim: Knowing God is our greatest calling and highest reward.

I. Prosecution (Hosea 4) **T1:** Replacing the truth of God for a lie leads to moral corruption and ruin.
   a. Which best describes your relationship with God right now – knowing about Him, spending time with Him at arm's length, or knowing Him as closest friend and King?
   b. What difference would knowing God make in your life?
   c. How will you move to a deeper intimacy with God?

II. Judgment (Hosea 5) **T2:** God will judge those who refuse the knowledge of Him they have been given.
   a. Will you acknowledge your guilt, seek His face, and begin or return to a real relationship with the God who actually is – not the one we invent?
   b. What are you doing with the knowledge you have been given?
   c. What do you most fear? Is it God or something else?
   d. Who do you go to for help?

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