



4 | HOSEA 4

GOD'S WAKE UP CALL

We need to have the courage of love to confront a godless culture

Outline

Wake Up!

1. **THE SUMMONS FOR DIVORCE (4:1)**
2. **THE SINGLING OUT OF LEADERS (4:2-14)**
 - Godly Leaders Expose Sin (4:2)
 - Godly Leaders Recognize Signs of Judgment (4:3)
 - Godly Leaders Accept Accountability (4:4-9)
 - Accountable for Spiritual Education (4:4)*
 - Accountable for Spiritual Intimacy (4:5-6)*
 - Accountable for Personal Integrity (4:7)*
 - Accountable for Shepherding (4:8-9)*
 - Leaders Unplug from the World (4:10-12)
 - Empty Souls*
 - Empty Heads*
 - Wake Up & Be Men (4:13-14)
 - Passive Men are the Problem*
3. **THE STEPS BACK TO GOD (4:15-19)**
 - The Warning
 - The Wandering
 - The Stubborn Cow*
 - The Lost Lamb*
 - The Desperate Prostitute*
 - The Wind
 - The Awakening

Call to

Worship: This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

“Whether therefore you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Everything is worship!

Introduction

Our message today is from Hosea 4 on page 752 of your pew Bible. The title of our message today is “God’s Wake Up Call”.

The Lord wants his people to come back to him. That’s the wake up call. Come back! You child of God, if you’ve been straying. He says to you this morning: come back! God wants you to wake up to his love.

WAKE UP!

“Morning by morning the LORD God **awakens**; he **awakens my ear to hear** as those who are taught” (Isa 50:4).

“You know the time, that the hour has come for you to **wake from sleep**. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11, quoting from Isa 52:1).

We need to wake church! The world is on its way to hell, and we have this temptation to cozy up to a world at war with God.

Today’s message from Hosea 4 is the prophet Hosea’s first recorded sermon. It takes place after Hosea buys his wife back from the slave market. She had become a prostitute. He had every right to abandon her, but he pursued her no matter what. It was not just a Hallmark movie love story. It was a divine love story. What incredible love must have Hosea had to track down Gomer and take her back and love her. But what incredible love God must have for us to pursue us unrelentingly in our sin, and love us!

Hosea says in chapter 4, “Look you’ve got prophets like Amos and Isaiah and Hosea. You’ve got the Word of God crammed into your brain, but it means nothing.” He says:

HOSEA’S MAIN POINT

4:6a | My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...

KNOWLEDGE: (דַּעַת, *da'ath*)

Here the word *knowledge* is like the most intimate personal, first hand form of knowledge. My people are perishing, languishing because they have information about God, but lack intimacy with God. It is knowledge this is possessed by God and taught by God.¹

Here we are in North America. Never in the history of the world have we had so much Bible teaching, with so many Bible study tools, and never has it made so little difference in the way people live. Listening, listening. Bible teaching can become a form of entertainment. We have so much information about God in our heads, but it’s made so

¹ Richard Whitaker et al., *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: From A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, Based on the Lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius* (Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906). From דַּעַת

little difference in our lives. That's the message Hosea preaches to Israel, and it's a message we need to hear today.

Did you wake up to an alarm this morning? Some of you heard the alarm and wanted to chuck it as far as it could go out the window. The alarm could mean many things. It could mean: **get ready**. Something important is about to happen. It could mean **something's wrong**, like a fire alarm or a check engine light.

Have you ever ignored the "check engine light" in your car? If you have, you probably are not driving that car any more. It's not in the parking lot, it's in the JUNK HEAP. Now I don't really care about your alarm clocks or check engine lights, but I do care about your soul.

Hosea preaches his **first recorded sermon** in chapter 4, and it's an intense wake up call. We've heard the beautiful story of redemption in Hosea 1-3. Israel has broken God's heart like Hosea's unfaithful wife, Gomer. The great love story of Hosea and Gomer is concluded. He takes her back. He never leaves or forsakes her. It was a powerful illustration for what God is going to do for Israel and us.

Can you imagine? After the fight to get his wife back, he now gets the heart of God. His message: Come back to God, like I've come back to my wife.

This is a message for the churches of today. It's for those who call themselves the people of God, the church, the Body of Christ. Come back! Come back to Christ!

Hosea begins with a great shock: a summons for divorce.

1. THE SUMMONS FOR DIVORCE (4:1)

4:1 | Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy [*Heb "rib" – court case*] with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.

Hosea 4 begins with divorce court. God has a controversy, literally, a legal case against Israel. From the context of Israel's spiritual adultery, we can see this is a divorce case. Any Jewish person reading this in Hebrew knows this is common wording for a divorce.

God basically says, "I have every reason to leave you. You are not acting like my people. You've forgotten my love and my covenant." Obviously from the story of Hosea in the first three chapters, **God has no intention of divorcing his people**.

The court case begins. The **controversy**, or charges, against Israel are presented. God's heart is expressed, "You say you love me. You say you know me. You say you worship and serve me. But your heart is far away from me. You don't know me. There's no love, no intimate knowledge of me. There's no faithfulness. You say you love me but you are committing spiritual adultery on me."

Here are the charges God is filing against Israel: No faithfulness, no steadfast love, and ultimately this is due to no knowledge in the land. They aren't faithful to God. They don't love God. All this is because they don't know God.

We were at one time a nation of people, many of whom loved and served God in this country. Something has happened. **Erwin Lutzer**, former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago said:

Despite its foundational Christian heritage, America is rapidly degenerating into a godless society. The church in America, although highly visible and active, appears powerless to redirect the rushing secular currents. Mired in a moral and spiritual crisis, America's only hope is a national revival, like God has graciously bestowed in the past.²

So God summons Israel for divorce to get their attention. "You deserve divorce!" but from the story of Hosea 1-3 where God illustrates his love for Israel through Hosea and Gomer, we see God has no intention at all of divorcing Israel.

Child of God, are you straying? It's awful that the world sins. But listen the world in moral darkness and chaos. But Christian, you are in the light. Do you realize what a heinous crime it is for Christians to sin? When we sin, oh how we deserve to be cut off from God. But God says no! "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "You are written on the palm of my hand." "Shall a mother forsake her child: indeed on earth there are mothers who forsake even their own children, but I will never forsake you." Wow. This is God's Word to us today saints. God will never leave us, but we deserve it.

But listen closer to God's charges in divorce court:

4:1b | There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.

You say you have a relationship with me, but either you are severely backslidden, or you never were really a child of God in the first place. There is "no knowledge of God" – again, no intimate, personal, face to face knowledge of God. That's a problem. God has legitimate grounds for divorcing Israel, though he's going to pursue her and bring her back if she will repent.

The problem in Israel was not mainly about the people. We are going to find out it was about the leaders. This is a difficult message for me to preach. God in verses 2-14 singles out the leaders. He says, "You need to be like Hosea, and love these people. But you don't love these people. You love yourselves."

2. THE SINGLING OUT OF LEADERS (4:2-14)

Israel is falling away from God, and God lays the blame on the leaders. People and churches make a slow fade into unbelief. They know all the doctrine, but they stop walking with the Lord. It's just like Hosea says in verse 6.

4:6a | My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...

In most of the chapter, God sets down his criticism of the leaders of Israel. I'm so thankful for the leaders at Living Hope will let their hearts break today as we feel God's burden for his wayward people, not just in Hosea's day, but in the churches here and around the world today. It's got to begin with us. Where does it begin? We have to know God intimately. We need to be talking about our walk with God with one another. That's

² Erwin W. Lutzer. "America's Spiritual Crisis." *Will America Be Given Another Chance?* 1993. Accessed February 05, 2019. <http://articles.ochristian.com/article3157.shtml>.

the measure of the health of the church. What is God saying to you *today*? How is he speaking to you right now? Or is he speaking to you? Are you backslidden? Are you far away from God right now, even though you know so much about him?

You see, Satan doesn't mind if you have sound doctrine, good church services, and a large congregation, as long as he can gut your spiritual life. Keep talking about the Lord, as long as you neglect your walk with him. Destruction comes when we neglect to know Christ. "That I may know him" Paul said (Phil 3:10). Neglect that, and your life and society will unravel. Your church will cease to be the salt and light in the culture.

We need to have that intimate walk with God. We will perish from lack of truly knowing God intimately. God's people are destroyed for mere superficial knowledge of him. It starts in you and I. We have to lead! What do real leaders do?

GODLY LEADERS EXPOSE SIN (4:2)

We've seen a massive moral free fall in our country in the last ten years, but what has the church done? We've built bigger churches. We turned up the music. We've gotten fancier. But we've lacked the courage to really shine a light into the darkness. **The church is sleeping**. The only way to wake her up is to sound the alarm of **repentance**. The only way repentance comes is to expose sin. You have to call sin what it is. That's what Hosea did.

4:2 | There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Hosea is so courageous. He's won his wife back, and he's God's instrument to win Israel back. Hosea is willing to call sin what it is: sin. Until we are willing to call sin what it is, there can be **no true intimacy with God**. Without repentance there can be no remedy. **How can a person with cancer get treatment if they won't admit they have cancer?**

We must deal with sin as it is: rebellion against a holy God of glory. **We must not excuse it by renaming it**. Sin is moral evil. There is evil in the world. It starts in you. Until you come to that place, you will not know God.

Hosea wasn't afraid to confront the culture of his day. He squares up and declares that it's the culture of this fallen world that has infiltrated God's people. David Jeremiah writes in his book *I Never Thought I'd See the Day*:

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." With that famous line from the movie ... the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy and her dog, Toto, find themselves in the strange and wonderful land of Oz—quite different from the Kansas of her childhood. As I wake up and scan today's headlines, I am often tempted to think, Toto, we're not in America anymore. I'm exaggerating, of course, but only a little. When I look at the changes that have occurred in the land I love—and **in the Church** I love even more—just in my lifetime, I have to pinch myself to see if it's a dream gone bad. Sadly, what I see is all too real. I do a double take several times a week—sometimes several times a day—as I witness more and more changes I never thought I would see.³

³ David Jeremiah. *I Never Thought I'd See the Day!* (New York: FaithWords, 2011), xiii.

I feel that way; don't you? But let's not fool ourselves. The world lies in darkness because of a church that is asleep. If we are going to see change in our culture, the church has to wake up. Listen to Evangelist Leonard Ravenhill. Twenty-five years ago, the year he died, he said:

With index finger extended, Napoleon Bonaparte outlined a great stretch of country on a map of the world. "There is a sleeping giant. Let him sleep! If he wakes, he will shake the world." That sleeping giant was China. Today, Bonaparte's prophecy... makes sense.

Today Lucifer is probably surveying the church just as Bonaparte did China. One can almost behold the fear in his eyes as he thinks of the Church's unmeasured potential and growls, "Let the Church sleep! If she wakes, she will shake the world." Is not the Church the sleeping giant of today?⁴

No one disagrees. The Church of Jesus Christ is asleep in the Western countries for the most part. How do we wake her up?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ begins with the word repent! The first recorded words out of Jesus' mouth in his public ministry were: "**repent and believe in the gospel**" (Mk 1:15).

Until we see the sinfulness of sin, we cannot see the beauty of Christ. Until we as leaders begin to repent of our own sins, our own worldliness, our own lack of knowing God, we cannot begin to see the Lord's church change.

I'm calling the leaders of our church to a unity of repentance. Let's unite in this. Let's be done with mere superficial knowledge of God, no matter how pristine it is. It's wonderful, the Christian faith. I'm eternally grateful for the careful theology we preach in this church. But this is our sin: we don't know our God as we ought.

All the sins listed by Hosea in 4:2 come down to this: we don't know God rightly. We are content to talk about our grasp on theology instead of our grasp on God. We need theology. But you can know theology without knowing God. Oh the sin we excuse when we don't know God. What sins are you excusing today?

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psa 139:23-24).

Leaders call sin what it is: sin. Hosea was not afraid to confront the world, but really, he was confronting God's people who adopted the world and became powerless. Hosea's indictment is not primarily an indictment against the world, but the church of Hosea's day. The people of God were following after the world in every way. When the world influences the church, we are in trouble.

The church today is sick and dying. Thankfully Christ will build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But God is beginning to remove the power of the Western churches and put their candles of influence out. We need to repent. We need to know God personally.

Gross sin is happening today, not only in the world but also in the church. All of these kinds of things are taking place among God's people. Where is the holiness that the people of God had of old?

⁴ Leonard Ravenhill. "Today's Sleeping Giant." *O Christian*, 1994. <http://articles.ochristian.com/article6912.shtml>.

GODLY LEADERS RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF JUDGMENT (4:3)

Not only did God warn the people of the rapid moral decline in Israel's culture, he sent drought and barrenness during the time of Hosea in northern Israel in order to turn their hearts back toward him.

4:3 | 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.

Certainly, natural disasters do not always mean God's judgment, but they are always an alarm to get our attention, and to point to the brevity and frailty of life. Every natural disaster is God's dress rehearsal for judgment day.

There is coming when the earth will quake and not stop quaking until Jesus is done judging it. Every time we see a natural disaster, we ought to realize that this is the mercy of God, giving us a dress rehearsal before the actual day of judgment.

C.S. Lewis said, "Pain is God's megaphone" to get our attention.

Creation groans to see sin dealt with. Sometimes creation itself trembles with earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes because the creation is groaning for Christ to return and wipe out sin.

According to the National Weather Service and the Insurance Information Institute, "The top 10 costliest U.S. natural disasters between 1980 and 2010 caused more than \$501.1 billion in damage and up to 22,240 deaths."⁵ They include hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and droughts. God used natural disasters in Hosea's day and he's using them today. He wants our attention. He's mercifully making us become aware of our own mortality.

The truth is, it doesn't matter how much we put in the bank or build on the earth. A natural disaster reminds us that God can take it all away in an instant. We take nothing with us anyway. You don't see U-Hauls behind hearses.

Natural disasters were God's warning of mercy for Israel. It will be the same at the end of the age for the whole world. Natural disasters will increase as the end of the age winds down. According to Jesus: "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places... all these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (Mt 24:7-8). Jesus describes the events preceding his Second Coming as birth pains. Just as a woman has horrible labor pains before delivering the beautiful child, so Jesus says there are horrible labor pains that come before him making the earth new again in his Second Coming. Wake up and see creation groaning.

GODLY LEADERS ACCEPT ACCOUNTABILITY (4:4-9)

God's biggest contention is with the leaders. The leaders of a nation or a country or a church can turn things around if they will be courageous. Sadly, the leaders in Israel were laying down on the job. The priests were to take spiritual care to teach and instruct God's Word to the people. The prophets were to be careful to hear from God. They were never to sugar coat or edit God's message.

⁵ Kim Fulscher. "Natural Disasters Are Costing More Money." Bankrate. September 03, 2017. Accessed March 15, 2019. <https://www.bankrate.com/finance/insurance/natural-disasters-are-costing-more-money.aspx>.

Accountable for Spiritual Education (4:4)

God speaks first to the priests since they were the ones who should have been caring for the souls of the people, instructing them in his holy Scriptures. They should have been the counselors among the congregation, pointing them to God's grace and willingness to forgive. Instead, it seems they were simply blaming and accusing the common people.

4:4 | Yet let no one **contend**, and let none accuse, for with you is my **contention** (Heb "rib" – case, same as verse 1, controversy], O priest.

The priests were **contending**, or **making excuses** for themselves. The responsibility of the nation's decline falls directly upon God's leaders. God's chief target for this verse is—in modern terms—pastors, elders, and teachers. "We can use that rough equivalent because it is the priests in their neglected capacity as teachers, not as sacrificers, who are now under fire. The prophets are no better, but here they are not the main concern."⁶

The **priests** the nation's **spiritual educators**. Unlike most religions, where priests were mere sacrificers, the OT priests were to bring God's revelation to bear upon every mind and conscience, 'making wise the simple'. The priests' duty was both profound and crucial: a matter of life and death. Learn of Christ and live. Don't learn of Christ and die. So a spiritually sightless priest is a mortal danger to himself and a disaster to others. Hosea spells out in detail what Christ would one day sum up unforgettably in his saying on the "**blind who lead the blind**" (Mt 15:14).⁷

Accountable for Spiritual Intimacy (4:5-6)

God moves from the priest on to the prophet and their system of teaching people, which he calls a "mother" metaphorically. The culture and institutions of Israel are the greatest impediment to spiritual integrity in the people.⁸

4:5-6 | You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother. ⁶ My 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.

The Bible and teaching of the Word were a **mother** to Israel, as the next verse (4:6) reveals. The **prophet** and the people live in the **night** of their sin, **stumbling** along. Since they won't feed the people with the love and nourishment of a mother, he will remove the system of priests and prophets from Northern Israel. Though there were other prophets in the south, after the Assyrian invasion, there were no prophets in the north until the time of Jesus and John the Baptist.

The ultimate sign of a failure in leadership is the failure to teach, live, and apply the Word of God. God pinpoints the reason for a nation's decline: **lack of knowledge**.

⁶ Kidner, 49.

⁷ Ibid..

⁸ Garrett, 116–117.

There is a neglect of preaching and teaching of the Word of God. The priests and prophets of Israel were guilty for not instructing the people in the Scriptures. The people's destruction comes because they do not know the Bible well.

They came to a place where the leaders and the people **rejected biblical knowledge** and **had forgotten the law of their God**. Truth is preached but ignored.

The coming of Jesus Christ illustrates the knowledge of God to the fullest degree. Jesus died for the sins of all people, offering every person the opportunity to come to faith in him (Jn 3:16; Eph 2:8-9). To those who do believe, Jesus is "wisdom from God" (1 Cor 1:30). Because of Christ, there is no need for anyone ever again to be "destroyed from a lack of knowledge." Many pastors are responsible for the lack of sound Bible teaching in the churches today. How might pastors neglect the Word?

1. We are more concerned about "tickling the ears" of people than cutting their heart with the Word.
2. We entertain the goats instead of feeding the sheep.
3. We do not teach through the Bible systematically or expositively so that we end up only preaching on our favorite passages of the Bible.
4. We preach and teach morals or purpose without preaching Christ.
5. We might place a theological system above a personal relationship with Christ.
6. We turn the Bible into a law to obey instead of pointing people to the grace and love of God in Christ, which gives us power to obey.
7. We water down the hard doctrines of the Bible and try to reinterpret it to say that the Bible really doesn't say what it obviously says.
8. We fail to preach the majesty and greatness of the triune God.
9. We do not apply the Word practically to everyday situations in life.
10. We confuse preaching long with preaching to feed the people.
11. We have the right teaching and position on Scripture without having the right disposition and attitude of love and gentleness.
12. We are imbalanced in our emphasis in Scripture. We often over focus on a pet doctrine or pet passage of Scripture to the neglect of the full counsel of God's Word.
13. We do not emphasize the need for conversion (a new heart with a Spirit-filled life) in order to live out the Scriptures.
14. We fail to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen from every text of Scripture.

Accountable for Personal Integrity (4:7)

The priests thought the increase of priests meant they were right with God.

4:7 | The more they increased [*in number*], the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame.

The sad thing is, in northern Israel they accepted anyone as a priest. There were virtually no qualifications. That's why they grew so quickly in number. They saw that as success. God saw it as great sin because they were changing "their glory into shame." Our glory as a church is not "numbers, nickels, noses and nonsense". Our glory is the living and eternal God and our relationship with him.

The answer is not more self-glorifying and self-serving preachers. The more leaders lift themselves up, the more they sin against God. "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5). For the proud preacher, God can turn all his glory into shame.

I've seen this happen in multiple ministries. God blesses a ministry. It expands. It grows. It is blessed. The preacher or the church gets proud. The church and pastor may become worldly. Before long, God puts out the candlestick. How we need to be humble when God blesses us!

Accountable for Shepherding (4:8-9)

God says he has nothing for proud priests and proud people but judgment. The priests excused the sin they were supposed to expose. Instead of exposing it, they actually **feed on the sin of God's people** as part of their ministry.

4:8-9 | They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity. And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.

It was so bad, that God was going to bring the nation to nothing. James Montgomery Boice puts it this way: "The period of moral and spiritual decline about which the book is written was not a period of the withering up of "religion." Religion actually increased! Here was a period characterized by cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery; but during this period the priesthood grew in numbers as those who were professional religionists moved in to capitalize on the debauchery."⁹ For these religionists, God is for sale. I've seen it with my own eyes. I've heard Joel Osteen answer Larry King when he asked if he would go to hell if he didn't believe that Jesus is the "way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Osteen responded, "I don't want to judge anyone Larry, I'll let God do that." That might seem shocking, but that is exactly what is happening today. You can go on CNN or NBC NEWS, and they all have what they call their "God Squad" of religious leaders who have either fallen away from the true faith or serve a false religion. It may be a priest or a rabbi, or a popular evangelical teacher. It's often what people refer to as a "rock star" preacher who everyone loves, and who is willing to say or do just about anything to fill a church, sell a few books, fill a stadium, or get on TV.

We see pastors today not only water down the offense of the Gospel but also water down the ugliness of sin. Today we hear of "gay Christians" and "alcoholic believers". That's the same as saying "murderous Christians" or "drunk believers". Pastors need to be sure that Christians are calling sin what it is: sin. When we start remaking sin so it sounds acceptable, you can be sure the nation is spiraling downward.

GODLY LEADERS UNPLUG FROM THE WORLD (4:10-12)

Since the people lacked a full and satisfying relationship with God, they pursued gods of food, sex, wealth, and religion.

⁹ Boice, 45.

We can't have Empty Souls

4:10-11a | They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish ¹¹whoredom, wine, and new wine...

Israel was **playing the whore** like Gomer. They went after everything but could **not be satisfied**. They **left their God to play the whore**, but God goes after his people. Hosea the prophet was living this out with his wife Gomer. She kept going back to the whore house. And Hosea kept going back after her. Hosea had nothing to gain from loving Gomer. She didn't even seem to love him back! But Hosea's love did not depend on what Gomer did or did not do. In this way, Hosea is a picture of God, while Gomer represents you and me. God continues to love us regardless of where we run. He comes to the darkest, messiest places to find us and rescue us, again and again, because he loves us. God loves us even if we run and even if we choose not to love him back. God chases after us because he hurts when we hurt.

In this passage, four things are named that Israel pursued to fill their empty souls: food, sex, wealth, and religion. The world might look to such things and wonder what more one could want. But God tells us that he has arranged life in such a way that if these things are pursued apart from holiness, the result will be frustration rather than satisfaction. Nothing satisfies. God knows that even the best the world can offer us will not satisfy the longing in our souls. We try to fill our hearts, minds, and bodies with new things and new relationships, but the emptiness always catches up.

We can't have Empty Heads

4:11b | ...they have forsaken the Lord to cherish ¹¹whoredom, wine, and new wine, **which take away the understanding**.

It's interesting that Hosea reminds us the more we give ourselves to idols like food, sex, wealth, and self-righteous religion, they **will take away our understanding** (4:11b). The self-centeredness of sin makes people stupid. Puritan Thomas Watson said it in a gentler way: "Sin brings a man low in his intellectual parts. Sin has ruined the rational part."¹⁰

4:12 | 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.

People go after the strangest things for answers. In Israel, they went after an idol made from a **piece of wood** or a **walking staff that gives them oracles** and messages from a god. The story of Israel involves seeking help in all the wrong places. It's our story as well. Rather than dealing with the root of the issue – our spiritual waywardness – we keep trying temporary solutions. We change locations, jobs, friends, relationships. We read the next book, go to a new conference, or talk about the accountability that we need. But the problem is our fundamental waywardness that we keep bringing to every so-called solution.

¹⁰ Thomas Watson. *The Mischief of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), 36.

GODLY LEADERS LEAD OTHERS (4:13-14)

Look at the boldness of Hosea. He confronts the church of his day. In verses Hosea 4:13-14, Hosea goes on to show how and why the entire nation got to be so lost and backslidden. It's not the fault mainly of the women, but of the men.

4:13 | 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.

The trees described on the hilltops are still there today: **oak, poplar, and terebinth**. One of the most delightful places to go in Israel is the city of Tel Dan in the very north of Israel, where the Baal altar to the golden calf is sadly still there. Of course, the idolatry is no longer happening. Tel Dan is now a nature reserve where thousands visit each year. The **shade is good there**, and the trees still provide a desirable environment. The remnants of the idol altar is in surprisingly superb condition. God has allowed it to remain as a testimony to the authenticity of the Scriptures as well as a warning to all true believers to flee from idols.

Men are to Protect Women

In these verses (4:13-14), the men are charged, but the women are let off the hook. Why? The Lord is holding the men of Israel accountable for the lust and sexual license of the women in the Baal worship cult. Sadly, the **daughters** (a term used for married women in Israel) are out at the Baal temples in Dan and Bethel fornicating and committing adultery.

Passive Men are the Problem (4:14)

If the men of the churches of Jesus would just begin to lead, we could have a great revival.

4:14 | 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.

Passive men are the problem in Israel as they are today. Men do not want to stand up for their women. Like Adam in the garden, we stand by while the serpent harasses and overcomes Eve. We let it happen just like Adam did, plunging the human race into oblivion. Because the women are victims of passive men, God rightly says, "**I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery**" (4:14a).

When a nation leaves God, God gives them the leaders they deserve and the sin they crave, and that is punishment enough for anyone. The culture begins to live for these idols which make a culture tolerate of everything except intolerance. This will be a culture that accepts everything, but vehemently rejects the true and living God.

The guilt is laid here in Hosea 4, and in our society today, at the feet of passive men. Oh, that godly men would rise up and repent and lead in the right direction. That men would again be courageous and stop blaming others and take responsibility for their own

sin. Then the idols of society would be destroyed and rooted out. If a nation is given to idolatry, it is because of passive, immature, entitled, childish men. God have mercy.

3. THE STEPS BACK TO GOD (4:15-19)

The only way back to God for Israel is for God to strip them of everything. That's Jesus' call. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24).

Spurgeon said, "If you will not have death unto sin, you shall have sin unto death. There is no alternative. If you do not die to sin, you shall die for sin. If you do not slay sin, sin will slay you."

God will do whatever it takes to strip you of your sin.

The men have to lead. Israel is radioactive. They can't go down to Judah. They need to repent. They don't need to swear and say "the Lord lives" and jump through hoops. They need to repent right where they are. They need to stay away from Gilgal and Bethel which were places of idolatry at the time.

Though a nation does indeed decline, God's people are to remain faithful and separate from false teachers. The church is to rise up with intentional men who are willing to lead.

Boice says, "Israel was not the whole of the Jewish homeland at this stage in history. She was the larger nation, the northern one. But further south there was still the half of the nation known as Judah, and Judah (thanks to the greater faithfulness of her kings) had not slipped so far on the moral scale as Israel. For her there was still hope."¹¹ God addresses the unfaithful first.

THE WARNING: REPENT

Though northern Israel **played the whore**, God was looking out for **Judah** (southern Israel) who had a number of godly kings leading them in the right direction.

4:15 | 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.'

The exhortation to Judah not to visit Israel's favorite Baal temples is meant for the ears of those who did worship in them. It was a startling, infuriating thing for Israelites to hear—far more effective than a straight onslaught.¹²

In order to appreciate fully what Hosea is saying, you have to know a bit of Bible geography. **Gilgal** was the place where King Saul lost the kingdom because of his] disobedience in not utterly destroying the Amalekites. **Beth-aven** (house of wickedness) is a nickname for Bethel (house of God). It is one of two sites that hosted the golden calf Baal worship in a replica of Solomon's temple. Both places are near Jerusalem, the place of God's presence and Temple.

God says "Don't go near **Judah**. Don't bring them into your idolatry. Repent right where you are. Don't jump through hoops and use "Christianeese": "As the Lord lives" as if you know the Lord. Repent. Admit you don't know him.

¹¹ Ibid, 47.

¹² Kidner, 55.

Called to Come and Die

Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Mt 16:24-26).

We've got to be willing to die right where we are to all other ambitions but knowing God. We perish because we lack God's revealing himself to us!

THE WANDERING: EXAMPLES

God now describes Israel with three pictures of things that wander to wake them up: a stuck cow, a lost lamb, and a desperate prostitute.

4:16-18 | 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.

The Stubborn Cow: Stuck

First, he says Israel is like a **backslidden heifer** and a **lost lamb** to illustrate how idolatry makes us wander. The **stubborn**, or literally "backslidden" cow is stuck. Addiction and idolatry will bring a marriage into a place that seems impossible. It will bring a person's life into something that seems impossible.

The Wandering Lamb: Lost, Away from the Shepherd

He also compares Israel to a wandering **lamb** who is lost and wandering in a large and **broad pasture**. Though there seems to be plenty of good grass, it is mixed with poisonous herbs that will hurt and possibly kill the lamb. Without the good shepherd there to guide the sheep to good pasture, the lambs are in trouble. The question is asked, "**Can the LORD now feed them?**" It brings to mind our Lord's lament, "How often would I ... and you would not!" (Mt 23:37). It is God's desire to feed us, but we must stop going astray as sheep (Isa 53:6) and return back to Jesus.

The Desperate Prostitute: Curing the Pain

Going back to the theme of the first several chapters, God then describes them as a **whoring**, desperate prostitute who goes back to walking the street, giving sexual favors for money whenever she runs out of **drink** and food. That brings us as Christians back to the foundational truth about idolatry: anything we are willing to sin in order to get, or sin if we don't get, is an idol.

God's verdict: "**Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone**" (4:17). Sometimes the most humbling thing God can do is leave us to the consequences of our sins. We often can't hear God's merciful voice until he shows us that the "way of the transgressor is hard" (Pro 13:15).

Sometimes the most severe thing God can do to chasten and humble us is allow us to harvest what we planted with our idols. I've seen successful businessmen and women lose

it all through drug and alcohol abuse. Families have been torn in pieces over and over again due to adultery and abandonment. As bad as those situations are, God can finally work in hearts that are torn up due to the devastating consequences. God's desire is not to punish, but to correct and heal.

THE WIND

Hosea closes by reviewing the problem and giving the ultimate solution. The problem is their unfaithfulness and **whoredom** (4:19a). The solution is repentance and **shame** for their sinful **sacrifices** (4:19b). The Hebrew word for "**wind**" can also mean "spirit" as in Hosea 4:12 where "**a spirit of whoredom**" has engulfed Israel like a whirlwind. This wind is so powerful, it will carry the children of Israel into exile, where they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

4:19a | A wind [of whoredom] has wrapped them in its wings...

The spirit and wind of whoredom is so powerful. We must never trust ourselves to defeat temptation on our own. Like Jesus, we need the Word of God, and because we are not Jesus, we need the accountability of other Christians. Starting with faithful attendance on Sundays is a good beginning, but if you want to grow, you need a couple other people in your life. Paul had a Barnabas who he could pull up and he had a Timothy who he could encourage. You need that person who will hold you accountable and you need another person who you can pour into. The more you teach what you know, you will cement your godly character. You need to make disciples now, and not wait until you are completely mature. If you wait till you are fully perfect, you will never make disciples. Discipleship is a wonderful way of staying away from the whoredom of this world.

Today as then, God's people need to stay separate from this unfaithful culture, and the false teachers and the worldly churches. Let us stay faithful to Christ. Don't be wrapped up like a whirlwind in their idolatries.

In 1844, a Philadelphia school wanted to teach morals without using the Bible at the Supreme Court in *Vidal vs. Girard*. The Court said "Why may not the Bible, and especially the New Testament, be read and taught as a divine revelation in the schools? Where can the purest principals of morality be learned so clearly or perfectly as from the New Testament?" Consider our nation today. Since 1963 violent crime has increased 544%. The nation has been deprived of an estimated 50 million citizens through legal abortions just since 1973. We are now bringing down the institution of marriage as well as the idea of biological gender. Our debt is so high in the USA that recently at the G20 summit our creditor nations told us we need to restructure our economy so we can repay them. Can God have mercy? Yes!

THE AWAKENING: BROKENNESS

4:19b | ... and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

The people of Israel had offered **sacrifices** to the golden calf in the name of Jehovah. God says, there will come a day when they will repent and be **ashamed because of their sacrifices**, which included human sacrifices of their infant children. God is essentially saying, "As wicked as you are, I will save a remnant. I will cut your heart and cause you to feel shame again."

What's it going to take for Israel to awaken to their shame and repent? It takes "a wind" that carries northern Israel into exile for 70 years, where they are cleansed from their idols and return to their land.

The believing remnant in the north had to flee around 722BC when the Assyrians invaded. The northern remnant runs to Jerusalem, and Hezekiah has to enlarge the walls of the holy city (2 Chron 32:5).

God wants us as men and families to take responsibility for our sin. The most important commodities we have are not our job or our country. The souls of ourselves and our families and our nation are what matters. What shall we as Christians do when the world (and even the church) around us goes mad? We have to keep doing what Jesus commanded: make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20). Stay holy so life and character and fruitfulness stays healthy and powerful. Flee idols! Pray for and promote a true revival among the lost: believe God's reach is long!

Conclusion

The lemming is found in Norway and is a short-tailed animal that looks like a miniature rabbit. Through the sub-Arctic Norwegian winter it lives completely buried under snow through which it burrows in search of food. Females can conceive and produce offspring within four weeks of their birth. Talk about reproduction, these things make rabbits look infertile. Mass reproduction! Eventually they outgrow the tunnel system, and the lemmings fill the tunnels, and there's not enough food and not enough space.

God has put a little alarm inside the lemmings to give us a picture. A warning for us. What these lemmings do is about every two years, when the population is too high, most of them will crawl out of the ground and start a march. They come out of the ground in Norway.

This is so bizarre that the people come outside and watch this happen. First 10 and then 100 and then thousands and then hundreds of thousands join this massive march across the landscape so that you can't even see the ground. They get to the sea, and they go right over the cliff, and right over into the ocean and DROWN.

This is silly. It's stupid of these animals to do that. That animal has a brain as small as your fingernail, yet some of you are on the same path. You are about to make some decisions that are going to harm your future. Others of you need to be bold and trust God and go forward with God's revealed will.

We have been given a great warning in Hosea 4. We need to listen to it! We need to speak more about our walk with God than all the mechanics of Christianity. Systematic theology is good and necessary. Christian music is amazing and good. But what about your walk with God? Do you know him? Do you walk with him? What's he saying to you? We can go down a long hard road if we don't know him. We can be supremely interested in the things of God without actually knowing God. God must not be a mere curiosity. He must be your all in all, your heavenly Father, your everything.