

# Lesson 19

## Hosea 4:13b–14

13b 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.

In these verses, the book of Hosea is making its plainest assertion yet that the Israelites were engaging in fornication as part of their worship at these shrines. Before we have had some strong hints about what was going on, but verse 14 plainly tells us that the men were involved with cult prostitutes.

As with most false religions, this one it seems had been created simply to provide an excuse for sexual immorality. And, as with most false religions, this one is pictured here as what it is: a mindless, superficial, self-indulgent cult that lures its converts with earthly, sensual desires.

We have seen that the terms “mother” and “children” have been used in Hosea to metaphorically refer to the society of Israel and the ordinary people of Israel. But here, due to their specificity and due to the context, I think we should take the terms “daughters” and “brides”

literally. These sins were being committed by actual daughters and actual brides.

Here is how one commentary opened its discussion on these verses:

When women in significant numbers no longer value their virginity before marriage or their chastity after marriage, society is in trouble.

And if that is the test today, then I think society is in trouble! It certainly was in the days of Hosea, as we see from the end of verse 13. "Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery."

And with terrible sins such as these, I suspect that none of us would be surprised to find terrible punishments for these terrible sins in verse 14 – but once again, the book of Hosea turns left when we were all expecting it to turn right. Verse 14 says: "I will **not** punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery!" What is going on with that?

Well, for starters, I think we will all agree that it is impossible to fall asleep while reading the book of Hosea! We find surprises all throughout this book!

And why is that? Why so many surprises? Could it be that God through Hosea was trying to rouse a people that had become dulled by sin? A people who had drifted into a stupor that made them very hard to reach? A people that needed to be shocked into realizing their condition apart from God? I

think that is exactly why we see so many surprises in this book. God is trying to wake them up!

How do we explain this surprise? Why aren't the daughters and the brides going to be punished?

The text gives us the answer in the second half of verse 14: "for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes."

The answer is that, once again, we find someone else who is more to blame. Remember that we saw this same thing earlier in chapter 4 where the people were told not to blame each other because the priests were to blame.

But one difference is that earlier in chapter 4 the people were still punished (even though they were less to blame than the priests) while here the daughters and the brides are not punished (even though it is hard to see how they also did not share at least some of the blame with the men).

Why the difference? Why do the women completely escape the punishment?

First, although the women appear to completely escape this punishment, they do not completely escape all punishment. They are part of the same people we saw earlier in this chapter who will receive punishment along with the religious leaders.

But second, I think verse 14 is exposing another terrible sin – a terrible sin that was committed more by men than by women.

What was that terrible sin? It was the sin of applying God's law with partiality. It was the sin of having a double standard when it comes to my own sin. It is the sin of seeing the speck in my brother's eye, but not seeing the log that is in my own eye (Luke 6:41-42).

We see an example of this in Genesis 38. In that chapter, Judah sees his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar while she was wearing a veil, thinks she is a prostitute, and engages her services. Judah later discovers that Tamar is pregnant, and in Genesis 38:24, Judah (who was just as guilty as Tamar) says, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." In fact, under the Law of Moses (that would be given later) both Judah and Tamar would have faced the death penalty.

**Leviticus 20:12** – If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them.

But Judah did not see that log in his own eye!

And we see the same double standard in the New Testament when the woman caught in adultery is dragged before Jesus in John 8 while the man caught in adultery is nowhere to be found. We don't know what Jesus wrote on the ground during that encounter, but I wonder if what he wrote had something to do with that double standard. Was Jesus perhaps writing down the names of some of

the men who had been with this woman? And did he write them down rather than speak them to avoid further embarrassing the woman?

God does not like double standards!

**Proverbs 20:23** – Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good.

**Leviticus 24:22** – You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the LORD your God.

**Romans 2:11** – For God shows no partiality.

I think in verse 14 God is saying, in effect, “why should I punish these women for sins that they learned from their husbands?”

That message would have been very unexpected to the men of Hosea’s day who (much like the men of Jesus’ day) would have expected quick and severe punishment for an adulteress, with little or no punishment for the adulterer.

One commentary calls verse 14 a “landmark in moral history,” and perhaps it is. When men create a religion, they excuse their own sexual misconduct. But with the religion from God, all people – both men and women – are in the same position. God shows no partiality. Throughout history, the religions of man have denigrated women and continue to do so today, but never so with God.

And, again, we need to be thinking all along about the events in Hosea’s own life. Hosea had

married a prostitute who later left Hosea and went back to a life of prostitution. And what did Hosea do? He sought out and redeemed Gomer, as God commanded him to do. Hosea could have demanded Gomer's death, but instead Hosea redeemed her and provided a way for their previous relationship to be restored.

The women in verse 13 deserved a very severe punishment, but in verse 14 God says that he will not punish them. Gomer deserved a very severe punishment, but Hosea (following God's command) did not inflict such a punishment.

Can we think of another example like that? Can we think of someone else who deserved a severe punishment but did not receive that deserved punishment? I think we can.

**Romans 6:23** – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Throughout this entire book of Hosea, we need to be on the lookout for the gospel of Christ. As we have said, Hosea had bad news and good news (in that order) for the people – the bad news was that the Assyrians were coming, but the good news was that the Messiah was also coming!

The book of Hosea makes no sense at all apart from the gospel of Christ – and so it should not surprise us at all when we see prophecies about the gospel and allusions to the gospel in this book. I think we see such an allusion here in verse 14.

What about that final phrase in verse 14? “And a people without understanding shall come to ruin.”

In verse 13, we see our themes of **sacrifice** and **whoredom**. In verse 14, we see an anticipation of the **gospel**, and here, in the final phrase of verse 14, we see our theme of **knowledge**. (There’s a reason we are calling these things **themes**! They occur a lot in this book!)

This phrase at the end of verse 14 is simply repeating what we saw earlier in verse 6: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

Here, in place of “knowledge” we have “understanding,” but the thought is much the same. The understanding in verse 14 is the guidance that naturally comes from the knowledge of verse 6.

**Psalm 32:9** – Be not like a horse or a mule, without **understanding**, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

**Proverbs 1:5** – Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who **understands** obtain guidance.

If the people lacked the knowledge of verse 6, then they certainly lacked the understanding of verse 14.

But there is a telling difference between verse 6 and verse 14 – do we see it?

**Hosea 4:6** – **My people** are destroyed for lack of knowledge

**Hosea 4:14** – And a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

Back in verse 6, God was still calling Israel “my people” – but now Israel is just “a people.” And I suspect that nearby, listening to Hosea, was a little boy named “Not Mine” who could have told them all exactly what it feels like! “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hosea 1:9).

A final comment about verse 14 is that the final phrase looks a lot like a proverb, or at least like the end of a proverb. Earlier in verse 11 we saw something else that looks like a proverb – “Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.”

One commentary made the intriguing suggestion that originally verse 11 and verse 14 were, when taken together, a single well-known proverb of the day:

Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

If so, that would mean that God has split that well-known proverb into two pieces, and inserted descriptions of Israel in between to show how Israel had become a living illustration of the decadence and ignorance described by that proverb.



## **Introduction to Hosea 4:15 – 5:15**

Verse 15 begins a new section of Hosea that continues through the end of chapter five.

If we are still looking for occurrences of the number three, we will find another example with the three warnings to Israel in this section. And with each message to Israel, we will also find a message for Judah.

And the threes don't end there. Each of the three warnings to Israel in this section begins with a threefold exhortation, followed by indictments against the people and by an unusual metaphor illustrating the wrath of God (a wind, a new moon, a moth, and a lion).

And if we are still on the lookout for references to Hosea's children, I think we will see that here as well.

Earlier in chapter 4, we saw a section in verses 1-3 that reminded us of Gomer's first child, Jezreel, when we saw the the bloodshed in verse 2.

And later in chapter 4, we saw a section in verses 4-14 that reminded us of Gomer's third child, Not Mine, when we saw the change from "my people" in verses 6, 8, and 12 to just "a people" in verse 14.

In this section (4:15-5:15), we will be reminded of Gomer's second child, her daughter, Not Loved, in at least two ways.

First, we will see harsh and violent language describing God's punishments of the people, and second, we will see messages for Judah, which remind us of the surprising message to Judah that we saw in Hosea 1:7 after Not Loved was introduced in the previous verse.

## **Hosea 4:15**

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."

At the very beginning of this section, we are told that it will address both Israel and Judah. So far, Israel has been the focus, and that will continue, but we will find messages to Judah interspersed throughout the text (as we also saw earlier in chapter 1).

The reference to playing the whore provides a link to the previous section and confirms that the major theme of spiritual adultery will continue in this section.

The first sentence in verse 15 is a prayer or a plea that Judah will not fall into the same trap as had Israel. Israel was playing the whore – let Judah not become guilty of that same sin.

And while Judah was not as guilty as Israel yet – we know that Judah did share in Israel's guilt later. But we also know that Judah repented and returned to rebuild the temple and restore proper

worship as we saw in our study of Ezra. Yes, Judah fell, but Judah was not scattered.

And why was that important? Why this sudden prayer for Judah? Because God's plan of redemption depended on the continuation of the royal line of King David. We saw that earlier in Hosea 3:5. And we also saw that in our study of Ezra and our study of Zechariah when we met Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David.

In the second half of verse 15 we find a threefold warning in the form of three negative commands.

But to whom are these warnings directed? Let's save that question until after we have look at each of the three warnings.

The handout for Lesson 19 is a map showing the places mentioned in Hosea 4-6. As always, Hosea does not hold our hand by taking the time to remind us about the history of these locations. Instead, Hosea expects us to already know that history. And we will - as soon as we look it all up!

**Warning #1: Enter not into Gilgal.**

Gilgal (likely meaning Circle of Stones) was a place of great significance in the spiritual history of Israel.

It was in Gilgal that Joshua set up his first base of operations after crossing the Jordan River.

**Joshua 4:18-20** – And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before. The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

And it was in Gilgal that the people were circumcised prior to their first passover in Canaan.

**Joshua 5:7-9** – So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

It was in Gilgal that the kingdom was renewed under Samuel and King Saul.

**1 Samuel 11:14-15** – Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.” So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

The people of Judah welcomed David back at Gilgal after the war with Absalom.

**2 Samuel 19:15** – So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to **Gilgal** to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan.

So, again, Gilgal had great significance for God's people, but that significance had long been forgotten by the days of Hosea. In fact, we also see warnings about Gilgal in Amos (whom we recall was the **southern** prophet who preached in the north at the same time as Hosea).

**Amos 4:4** – Come to Bethel, and transgress; **to Gilgal, and multiply transgression**; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days.

**Amos 5:4-5** – For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, **and do not enter into Gilgal** or cross over to Beersheba; **for Gilgal shall surely go into exile**, and Bethel shall come to nothing."

As one commentary described Gilgal, "it went from being a shrine for pilgrims to a center of apostasy." Yes, Gilgal had an illustrious history – but that had now all changed.

The first warning in verse 15 is to not enter Gilgal.

**Warning #2: Nor go up to Beth-aven.**

In the two verses that we just read from Amos, the prophet mentioned both Bethel and Gilgal. Here in verse 15 Hosea mentioned Beth-haven and Gilgal.

I agree with the many commentaries that say Beth-aven here in Hosea 4:15 is Bethel, so that Hosea

and Amos are speaking to the same people about the same two cities.

But why then does Hosea refer to Bethel as Beth-aven? Amos actually gave us the answer to that question. Let's reread Amos 5:5.

**Amos 5:5** – For Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing.

Bethel shall come to nothing. The Hebrew word translated "nothing" in that verse is the word *aven*, meaning vain or empty. Hosea has taken Amos' description of Bethel as vain and empty and turned it into a nickname for Bethel – **Beth-aven**. (Remember our earlier discussion about sarcasm in the Bible! I think we see another example of it here.)

In Isaiah 66:3 the same Hebrew word is translated "idol," and in Psalm 6:8 the same word is translated "evil." Later in Hosea 10:8, the prophet will refer to the high places of Aven – the high places of vain, empty, evil idols.

But here in verse 15 that same term for vain, empty, evil idols is being used to describe Bethel, which should have been very shocking to the people. If Gilgal was a sacred site, Bethel was much more so.

Abraham himself had camped in Bethel.

**Genesis 12:7-8** – Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of **Bethel** and pitched his tent, with **Bethel** on the west and Ai

on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

Jacob saw the stairway to heaven in Bethel, and he gave the place its name, Bethel, meaning "house of God."

**Genesis 28:16-19** – Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

God later referred to himself at the "God of Bethel."

**Genesis 31:13** – I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.

Bethel was the home of the ark of the covenant for a time.

**Judges 20:26-27** – Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days...)

Bethel was originally part of the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:22), but it was later taken over by the tribe of Ephraim (Judges 1:22, 4:5).

(This point will be important to remember when we get to Hosea 5:8.)

After the division of the kingdom, Jeroboam I took advantage of Bethel's sacred history to turn it into a shrine for the people in the north to use in place of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

**1 Kings 12:28-29** – So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." **And he set one in Bethel,** and the other he put in Dan.

And the prophets immediately condemned Jeroboam's actions.

**1 Kings 13:4** – And when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." And his hand, which he stretched out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself.

Yes, Bethel, like Gilgal, had an illustrious past, but, again as with Gilgal, Bethel had suffered a great fall from its lofty origins.

The second warning in verse 15 is to not go to Bethel.

**Warning #3: Swear not, "As the LORD lives."**

This third warning is different from the first two warnings in that this third warning does not mention a place name.

Instead, we find a very common oath in the Old Testament – "as the Lord lives." This phrase had



been used earlier by many significant historical figures, including Boaz (Ruth 3:13), David (1 Samuel 20:3), and Solomon (1 Kings 2:24).

Jeremiah later used this oath to contrast those who were loyal to God with those who were loyal to Baal.

**Jeremiah 12:16** – And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, ‘As the LORD lives,’ even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.

But Jeremiah also said that the people who used that oath were then often guilty of perjury. They made the oath, but they did not keep the oath.

**Jeremiah 5:2** – Though they say, “As the LORD lives,” yet they swear falsely.

Jesus, of course, later gave a broad prohibition against all oaths.

**Matthew 5:33–37** – Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

So, with that background, what is meant by this third warning in verse 15?

I think the context answers that question. The first two warnings both dealt with something that had been sacred but that had now degenerated into something that was empty and vain.

I think Hosea is making the same point about this sacred oath, which by Hosea's day had either lost all of its significance or perhaps was now being used in reference to Baal rather than to God.

The third warning in verse 15 is to not make this oath.

### **But to whom are these warnings directed?**

We have only three choices – either they are directed to Israel or they are directed to Judah, both of which are mentioned in the first half of the verse, or perhaps they are directed to both Judah and Israel.

Again, I think the threefold warning in Amos is helpful here. As we see from the opening phrase in Amos 5:4, those warnings from Amos are directed to Israel.

**Amos 5:4-5** – For thus says the LORD **to the house of Israel**: “Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing.”

Here in Hosea, as in Amos, we also have a threefold warning, and the first two warnings in Hosea are the same as the first two warnings in Amos. Why are the third warnings different?

To help us answer that question, let's look at the map on the handout for Lesson 19. Bethel and

Gilgal were in the Northern Kingdom, but they were both very close to the border of the Southern Kingdom. But Beersheba was different – it was located in Judah, far to the south of the border with Israel. Why would Amos have expected any Israelites to travel that far south into Judah?

I think we can see the answer when we note that the name “Beersheba” means “well of the oath.” Perhaps Beersheba was chosen more for its meaning than for its location. The city was given that name because it was the place where Abraham and Abimelech swore an oath in Genesis 21:31. What that means is that, although the third warnings from Hosea and Amos are different, they are closely related because each of them involves an oath.

At first glance, the command not to go “up to” Bethel might seem to indicate that the command must have been given to Judah, given that Bethel is located very near to the border between Judah (to the south) and Israel (to the north). But the phrase “up to” here likely refers to altitude rather than direction, and we know that Bethel was located in the hill country (1 Samuel 13:2, Joshua 16:1). So that phrase “up to” is not helpful in answering our question – everyone went “up to” Bethel no matter which direction they came from.

So, with that background, who is the target of the warnings in verse 15?

I think the answer is Israel, even though some commentaries argue that it is Judah instead. Why do I favor Israel?

First, the parallel warnings in Amos 5 are explicitly directed to Israel, and they agree precisely with the warnings in Hosea as to the first two warnings, and they agree in subject as to the third warning involving oaths.

Second, the two locations mentioned in verse 15 were in Israel. Yes, they were close to the border with Judah, but they were north of that border.

And yes, Amos mentioned a southern city in his warnings to Israel, but that may have been more directed to the **meaning** of Beersheba than the **location** of Beersheba, as we see in Hosea.

And yes, Jeremiah's warning about this same oath were directed to Judah, but all that shows is that Judah was guilty of the same sin as Israel. It does not mean that verse 15 here must be directed to Judah.

But whether the warnings are meant for Judah or for Israel, I think the message is the same.

As an analogy, think of a parent speaking to two children – one who always obeys his parents and the other who seldom obeys his parents. The second child frequently goes places where he shouldn't go, but not so with the first child. The parent could make the same point by warning either child not to go to those places. By warning the disobedient child, the obedient child

hearing that warning would know that it applied to him as well. Or by warning the obedient child, the disobedient child would hear his parent saying to the other child, "Don't be like your brother!" Either way, the same message would be delivered to both children.

Perhaps one commentary sums the issue up the best:

"Whether Judeans were inclined to visit Gilgal and Bethel is beside the point. The exhortation to Judah not to visit Israel's favourite shrines is simply bitter condemnation of their cult meant for the ears of those who did worship in them."

So, although I favor Israel as the immediate target of the warnings in verse 15, I think they are effectively addressed to both Israel and Judah.