

# Lesson 25

## Hosea 6:6

6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Before we look at verse 7, let's consider one more point about Hosea 6:6.

As we recall from last week, Hosea 6:6 is one of the great texts of the Bible. It is a verse that Jesus quoted at least twice in responding to charges made by the Pharisees.

But is that verse in Hosea itself a quote from someone else? Yes, or at least it is very close to being a quotation. And the source of that quote shows us that the problem described in Hosea 6:6 was a problem that existed from the first king of Israel up until the last kings of Israel.

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul was commanded by God to "go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have" (verse 3). But (as we recall from our earlier study of Esther involving Haman the Agagite) Saul disobeyed that command.

**1 Samuel 15:9** – But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

And when Samuel showed up to confront King Saul, here is what Samuel said:

**1 Samuel 15:22** – And Samuel said, **“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”**

It is instructive to compare what Samuel said with what we read here in Hosea:

- (Hosea) “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the **knowledge** of God rather than burnt offerings.”
- (Samuel) “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in **obeying** the voice of the LORD?”

As we have found, knowledge is a major theme in the book of Hosea. But that knowledge is not just an academic knowledge. There is a huge difference between knowing God and just knowing **about** God. And I think we see that difference here.

What God wants in Hosea is **knowledge**, and what God wants in 1 Samuel is **obedience**. Those are **not** two separate things. The knowledge of God that God desires includes the obedience of God that God desires.

Why did King Saul disobey the command of God? Because King Saul did not know God as he should have. I think we see Saul’s lack of knowledge in what Samuel said to King Saul after a prior act of disobedience.

**1 Samuel 13:14** – But now your kingdom shall not continue. **The LORD has sought out a man after**

his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

King David, unlike King Saul, was a man after God’s own heart. King David had the knowledge of God that King Saul lacked.

And I think there is one more verse from 1 Samuel that really drives this point home.

**1 Samuel 2:3** – For the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

In that one verse we see both knowledge and obedience. God is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. We cannot separate knowledge and obedience. If we know God as God desires to be known, then we will obey God as God desires to be obeyed.

And if we do not obey God, then we do not know God.

**1 John 2:3-4** – And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

## **Hosea 6:7**

7 But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

“But like Adam they transgressed the covenant.”  
Who are they?

If we back up to verse 4, then it seems that Ephraim and Judah are still being discussed.

But if we look ahead to verse 9, we see another possibility – verse 7 may be describing a gang of priests.

So which is it? Let's hold off on that question until we get to verse 9.

For now we can say that either Ephraim and Judah from verse 4 or the priests that we will meet in verse 9 are said here in verse 7 to be like Adam. What does that mean?

**Question:** Outside of Genesis, how many times is Adam *discussed* in the Old Testament?

**And the answer is...**either never or once, depending on what we decide about Hosea 6:7.

Adam is *mentioned*, but not discussed, in one Old Testament verse outside of Genesis – his name is the first word of First Chronicles, where he leads off the genealogy of Abraham. But Adam is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament outside of Genesis other than possibly for here in Hosea 6:7.

The New Testament, of course, has quite a bit to say about Adam, but such is not true of the Old Testament (outside of Genesis). Given the importance of Adam, we might expect the prophets (or maybe the Psalmist) to have discussed Adam more frequently (or ever!) – but Hosea 6:7 **may be** the only example.

Why do I say “**may be** the only example”? Because it is possible that Hosea 6:7 has nothing at all to say about the patriarch Adam.

Once again, we have a translation issue. Here are three translations of Hosea 6:7.

- (ESV) But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.
- (KJV) But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.
- (NRSV) But at Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

So which is correct? Is Adam a person, a people, or a place? Let’s start by looking at each of the various possibilities that have been proposed.

**First, Adam could be Adam, the first man, as the ESV suggests.**

Those who reject this view point to the word “there” in the second half of verse 7, which, they say, means that Adam must be a place rather than a person. They also note that Gilead in verse 8 and Shechem in verse 9 are places, which, they say, suggests that Adam is also a place.

But the word “there” in verse 7 could be pointing forward to Gilead in verse 8 rather than pointing back to Adam. And there is no rule that Hosea could not have referred to both people and places as examples.

But did Adam the patriarch transgress a covenant? Yes, he did, if we define a covenant as a relationship that involves obligations.

**Genesis 2:15-17** – The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

That’s a covenant. Adam, the first man, transgressed that first covenant – and in that sense he is like Ephraim and Judah, because they are also guilty of violating their covenant with God.

**Second, Adam could be a city by that name located on the Jordan river.**

**Joshua 3:14-16** – So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, **at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan**, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho.

The handout for Lesson 25 shows the location of Adam, and also includes an inscription from the reign of Pharaoh Shishak in which he claims to have captured the city of Adam during his

incursion into Israel and Judah, which is mentioned in 1 Kings 14:25–26.

Joshua 3 says that Adam is beside Zarethan. Zarethan is usually identified either with a tell that is about twelve miles further north, or with a tell that is on the north side of the Jabbok River. (A tell is a mound formed by the remains of an ancient city.)

This view of the word “Adam” as an ancient city in verse 7 amends the text slightly so that, instead of being “like Adam,” the text would read “at Adam,” which is almost identical in the Hebrew. But, as one commentary, explains:

There is no textual basis for this change, which seems to rob the verse of a powerful comparison ..., but it must be admitted that the next line, ‘there they dealt faithlessly with me’, is hard to account for if no place has yet been mentioned.

Choosing Adam the city over Adam the person does explain the word “there” in verse 7 and does fit nicely with the other two cities that are mentioned, but it does not explain **why** Adam the city is mentioned here.

There is nothing in the Bible about the people from the city of Adam having transgressed a covenant – or, for that matter, having done anything! But, with that said, there is an intriguing possibility about Adam the city that we will consider when we get to the next two verses.

**Third, we could change the word "Adam" in verse 7 to instead be "Admah."**

Admah was city on the plain that was destroyed by God along with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 10:19 and Genesis 19:29. In fact, we will see Admah mentioned later in Hosea 11:8. But there is really no basis for changing the word "Adam" in verse 7 to Admah.

**Fourth, we could take Adam to refer generally to men, as in the KJV.**

The first problem with this view is that I could not find a single commentary that interprets the underlying Hebrew this way.

And a second problem is that it leaves us wondering **which** men are being discussed. In effect, this approach has the verse saying that "they" are like "them," which seems a bit too obscure even for Hosea!

**So which is it?**

I think we should reject the third and fourth possibility in favor of either the first or second. That means we must choose between a **person** named Adam and a **city** named Adam.

**Or must we?** Remember that Hosea seems to enjoy a good pun every now and then. Hosea might be using the name Adam to mean **both** the person and the place. Perhaps Hosea is saying: "Like Adam (the man) they break covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam)." After all, it seems likely that Adam the place



was named after Adam the person, so perhaps Hosea is making a pun using the city's name.

If that is not what Hosea is doing here, then either the person or the place could be correct, but I lean toward Adam the **place** given what we will see next in verses 8–9. So let's look at those verses and then circle back to our question about verse 7.

## Hosea 6:8–9

8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. 9 As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together; they murder on the way to Shechem; they commit villainy.

What is going on here? Verse 7 seemed like a general statement, but verses 8–9 suddenly sound much more specific. Tracked with blood? Like robbers in wait? Priests banding together? Murder on the way to Shechem?

Are we missing something? Does Hosea have some specific villainous event in mind here? Perhaps he does.

And, as we said, the answer to this question may help us decide which way to jump when it comes to the identity of Adam in verse 7.

To begin, let's start with what we see here about Gilead and Shechem.

And the first thing we see about Gilead is something odd – verse 8 refers to Gilead as a **city**. But Gilead was a region or a district

rather than a city. (You can see the region of Gilead shown on the map from Lesson 19.)

But the word “Gilead” does occur in city names. Jabesh-Gilead and Ramoth-Gilead are both cities in Gilead. (Jabesh-Gilead is shown on the map from Lesson 21.)

Adam is also a city in Gilead, and perhaps it was known at the time as Adam-Gilead. And if so, then perhaps the name Adam-Gilead is broken up in verses 7 and 8, so that Adam-Gilead is both the city that transgressed the covenant in verse 7 and the city of evildoers in verse 8.

That proposal would explain the meaning of Adam in verse 7, and would also explain why Gilead is called a city in verse 8.

But what happened at Adam? Who are these evildoers, and who did they murder?

We have another clue in verse 9 – whatever happened did not happen in Shechem, but rather happened **on the way to** Shechem. And again, that **specificity** in location makes us think that Hosea is describing a **specific** crime.

And whatever happened on the road to Shechem may have occurred on the east-west road to Shechem that crosses the Jordan **at the city of Adam**.

If we look for the identity of the evildoers in verse 8, the most likely candidate is the gang of priests in verse 9. And perhaps, as we said earlier, this gang of priests is the villain, not only in verse 9, but also in verses 7-8.

But whom did they kill?

One commentary suggests it was likely “a momentous event in which priests collaborated in a conspiracy, perhaps against the royal family.”

Another says:

[The description here] indicates that this was no ordinary murder. It was a serious breach of covenant, involving deception, wickedness, and treachery and adding up to the worst possible crime.

And another says:

For all of their obscurity to modern readers, the comparisons to Israel’s folly in Hosea 6:7–9 suggest political treachery with religious motivations, violence, and murder with the collusion of priests. It is a picture of the society coming apart.

I think Hosea is most likely describing here some terrible event that all of his listeners already knew about but that was not otherwise recorded in the Bible, which is why we now can only speculate about what happened.

But even without knowing of what happened, we can see here from Hosea’s description the depths of depravity to which these priests had fallen. They were nothing more than robbers and murderers.

So now let’s briefly go back to our question about verse 7 – who or what is Adam?

Again, it could be Adam the man, but I favor Adam the city, and I think verses 7–9 are together describing some terrible bloody crime that was

perpetrated by a murderous gang of priests in that specific city.

One more point about verse 8 is that the phrase “tracked with blood” is particularly interesting. Literally it is “footprints of blood,” and the root word in Hebrew for “footprints” is also the root word of the name “Jacob.”

And the phrase “city of evildoers” uses the Hebrew word “aven,” which is the same word that Hosea previously used to coin the nickname Beth-aven for Bethel. Why is that important here? Because Bethel is also closely associated with Jacob.

It seems that the text of Hosea is deliberately working Jacob into this prophecy. Why? What is the point? One commentary suggests an answer:

The point here appears to be that the Israelites have taken on the worst characteristics of Jacob – selfishness and cunning – without having his redeeming experiences – encounters with God. They had no knowledge or experience of God comparable to Jacob's, who had a vision at Bethel and was renamed Israel in the region of Gilead. His descendants, instead of being transformed into Israel, into people of God, remained Jacob, a name that Hosea has transformed into the grim phrase, “stained with footprints of blood.”

If that is correct – that Hosea is intentionally referring indirectly to Jacob the person – then that may strengthen the view that the word “Adam” in verse 7 is being used to refer to **both** Adam the person and to Adam's namesake city.

## Hosea 6:10–11

10 In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled. 11 For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed, when I restore the fortunes of my people.

One commentary begins its comments on these two verses by saying: "All scholars agree that [the second half of verse 11] belongs with 7:1." And perhaps that is true, but it likely depends on how that commentator defines the word "scholar."

But I agree that the final phrase in verse 11 does seem to make more sense with the first verse of chapter 7 than it does with the final verse of chapter 6. Looking ahead a bit into chapter 7, I think the NRSV is better than the ESV:

**Hosea 6:10 – 7:1 (NRSV)** – In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there, Israel is defiled. For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed. **[NEW PARAGRAPH]** When I would restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel, the corruption of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds of Samaria.

So, taking that approach, we will save our comments on that final phrase in verse 11 until we get to the first verse of chapter 7.

***"In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing."***

What is the "house of Israel"?

That is a question we considered earlier when we saw that same phrase at the beginning of chapter 5.

**Hosea 5:1** – 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.

The focus there was on the **leadership** of the people, and so we suggested there that the “house of Israel” referred to the wealthy landed-owning people who were *de facto* leaders of the people because of their prominence, influence, and wealth. And I still think that view makes the most sense in Hosea 5:1.

But what about here in Hosea 6:10 where we see the same phrase? Does it mean the same thing here?

Our general approach should be that the same phrase means the same thing, but that is not always the case with a general phrase such as this. The context might cause us to come up with another meaning here.

I think we have two choices. Either the “house of Israel” in Hosea 6:10 means the same thing it meant in Hosea 5:1, or the “house of Israel” in Hosea 6:10 is referring to the entire northern kingdom – both Ephraim and Israel.

If the meaning is unchanged, then I think Hosea is telling us something here that we likely would have suspected anyway – that the whoredom and the

defilement in the land was being spread primarily by the wealthy land-owning people in the land.

They had the money and the land required to build the false shrines, and they had the economic interests driving them to look to false gods for an improved harvest. I lean toward this view.

But the simpler view also has some appeal. The “house of Israel” might be used here as an umbrella term that includes Israel and Ephraim, both of which are also mentioned in that same verse.

But if that view is correct, then that phrase has two different meanings in the two verses. Why? Because, as we said, the house of Israel in Hosea 5:1 sets a snare and spreads a net, and that would not make sense for the entire nation of Israel. If everyone is included, then who is being caught in the snare and in the net? Back in Hosea 5:1 it was the leaders who did those things.

Either way, what God tells us is that in this “house of Israel” he has seen a “horrible” thing. What does that mean?

The Hebrew word translated “horrible thing” is found four times in the Bible – once here and three times in Jeremiah. The Hebrew word refers to something that is rotten and disgusting. Jeremiah 29:17 uses a related word to describe rotten figs.

What is it that God sees that is so disgusting and rotten? Why is God holding his nose? It is

the whoredom of Ephraim and the defilement of Israel.

***“Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled.”***

Where is **“there”**?

Most likely it is the “house of Israel,” but others suggests it is Shechem or Adam. I think the most likely antecedent is the closest option, which is the house of Israel. And, if so, that confirms what we said earlier – that the house of Israel is the wealthy land-owners in which the whoredom with false gods and false alliances was centered. They had the greatest motive to look to those sources for better harvests and for protection of their wealth.

And what is there? What is in the house of Israel?

Whoredom and defilement – the same two things that we have been seeing over and over again ever since chapter 1 when we first met Gomer.

Hosea knew exactly what it was like to look at your wife and see someone who was caught up in whoredom and defilement. That is also what God saw when he looked at his wife – the people of Israel.

And how had they played the whore? By rejecting God, their true husband, in favor of their false gods and their foreign alliances.



And why were they defiled? Because of their faithlessness and because of their sexual immorality and drunkenness.

And, of course, just because Ephraim is called out here for playing the whore and Israel is called out for being defiled does not mean that Israel had not also played the whore or that Ephraim was not also defiled. We know from other verses that both Ephraim and Israel had played the whore and that both were defiled.

But with that said, I think perhaps we can say that Ephraim was worse, and perhaps we see that fact here with Ephraim being mentioned first. And why was Ephraim worse? Remember who their king was – King Menahem. And what was he like?

**2 Kings 15:16** – At that time Menahem sacked Tiphshah and all who were in it and its territory from Tirzah on, because they did not open it to him. Therefore he sacked it, **and he ripped open all the women in it who were pregnant.**

So perhaps Ephraim was worse, but we know that Israel was not very far behind.

But what about Judah?

***“For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.”***

As we have now seen many times, Judah is mentioned briefly here after Israel and Ephraim are described.

Hosea’s primary message is aimed at the north and is delivered to the north, but there are also some messages here for the south. Judah was following in the footsteps of Israel and Ephraim,

and so we see frequent warnings here for Judah not to follow their bad example.

“You, too, Judah!” That short phrase at the beginning of verse 11 lets us know that Judah is being accused here of the same sins as Israel and Ephraim. Perhaps the sins were not yet as bad, but they were there, and, of course, we know Judah also descended into apostasy and was eventually carried off by Babylon.

But what about that final phrase: “a harvest is appointed.” What does that mean, and is it good or bad?

As for a harvest being good or bad, it can be either good or bad depending on the context. Later we will see an example of this in Hosea:

**Hosea 10:12-13** – Sow for yourselves righteousness; **reap steadfast love**; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you. You have plowed iniquity; **you have reaped injustice**; you have eaten the fruit of lies.

Reaping steadfast love? That’s a good harvest. Reaping injustice? That’s a bad harvest. So we need to look at the context.

What is the context here? The context here is sin – it is whoredom and defilement. We should **not** be expecting a good harvest in verse 11. Whatever harvest is appointed for Judah, it is a harvest that comes about because Judah is sharing in the same sins as her sisters, Israel and Ephraim.

I think the harvest here is the harvest of **judgment**. Yes, this harvest would be done by God, but God would use the Assyrians to harvest Ephraim and Israel, and God would use Babylon to harvest Judah. Assyria and Babylon were sickles in the hand of God, and Assyria and Babylon would arrive at their appointed times.

As we said, the final phrase in chapter 6 really belongs at the beginning of chapter 7, so we will include it with Hosea 7:1.

## **Hosea 7:1**

[6:10*b* When I restore the fortunes of my people.] 1 When I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria; for they deal falsely; the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside.

Again, we are reminded of what God wanted to do – what God longed to do – to restore the fortunes of his people and to heal his people. But his people were evil, and so they did not receive these blessings from God.

The phrase at the end of chapter 6 literally reads: “I will bring my people back from captivity.” But we should not read that language narrowly to apply only to captivity or exile by a foreign nation. Instead, the phrase used here can simply mean captivity by sin – by the evil deeds that are mentioned here. Those deeds were holding the people captive and away from God, as God says in these verses.

What does it mean when God says, “When I would heal **Israel**, the iniquity of **Ephraim** is revealed”?

Israel can have broad or narrow meanings depending on its context.

- At its most narrow meaning, Israel can refer to a single person – Jacob.
- At its broadest meaning, Israel can refer to all Jews from all tribes.
- But Israel can also refer to all of the northern tribes after the division of the kingdom.
- And, as we have already seen in Hosea, Israel can refer to only the anti-Assyrian faction of the northern kingdom (as opposed to the pro-Assyrian faction, Ephraim).

What is the meaning here? I think Israel is most likely being used here as a synonym for the phrase “my people” at the end of chapter 6. That is, I think Israel is being used here to denote all of the people in the north.

And why do I think that? Because it appears in verse 1 that Ephraim is a subset of Israel. God wanted to heal Israel, but there was iniquity in Ephraim and evil deeds in Samaria. That would not seem to make sense if Ephraim and Samaria were not considered a part of Israel in verse 1.

Elsewhere we see Ephraim and Israel treated as separate kingdoms, but here I think we see Israel being used as an umbrella term for the entire northern kingdom.

Samaria, of course, was the capital of Ephraim during the 12 year civil war and was the capital of Israel (the entire northern kingdom) at other times.

What is the iniquity of Ephraim? What are the evil deeds of Samaria? I like how one commentary answers that question:

“Crime is rampant in society. People cheat one another, thieves burglarize, and gangs mug people in the streets (one wonders whether Hosea is here speaking of ancient Israel or modern America).”

And we are reminded in verse 1 of the catalog of sins that we saw back in chapter 4.

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

In short, verse 1 is telling us that society was breaking down because of sin. The people were all lying to each other and stealing from each other, and no society can endure that for very long.

## **Hosea 7:2**

2 But they do not consider that I remember all their evil. Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face.

I doubt that this will come as much of a surprise to anyone, but one of my favorite authors is J.R.R. Tolkien. And his book *The Hobbit* is the source of one of my favorite quotes:

“It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.”

And I think God says something very similar here about himself! It does not do to leave God out of our calculations!

I might think I have pulled the wool over God’s eyes. I may think that God doesn’t know what I am doing. I might think that God is far away and that he either doesn’t know or doesn’t care what I am up to. But I would be completely wrong.

Yes, knowledge is a central theme of Hosea, but that knowledge runs both ways. In one way, I must know God. But a message of Hosea is that God also knows me. God knows!

**Luke 8:17** – For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

**Hebrews 4:13** – And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

But the people in Hosea 7:2 did not understand that. “They do not consider that I remember all their evil.” They did not include God in their calculations. They did not understand that God knew all that they had done and all that they were plotting. And they did not understand that God will always have the last word.