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# HOS 4 : WHEN GOD GIVES UP A SOCIETY

*No. EE22*

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In the first three chapters of Hosea we read about the prophetic acts that the prophet had to carry out on the instructions of the Lord. His marriage to Gomer the prostitute sends out a strong message to this day. But from Chapter 4 onwards Hosea does some straight talking.

## THE FORMAL CHARGE (V.1)

God's charge against the people is not a vague reproach, but a formal indictment: "Hear the word of the Lord ... the Lord has a charge to bring..." And what is this charge? There is no "faithfulness", no "steadfast love" and no "knowledge of God" (ESV) in the land.

"Faithfulness" suggests dependability, honesty and integrity. You cannot depend on the word and the loyalty of someone who is unfaithful. The people of Israel are unfaithful to the Lord as well as their neighbour; they do not keep their marriage vows; their business dealings are rife with fraud and corruption.

"Steadfast love" suggests benevolence, dedication and selflessness. But this community is characterised by envy and selfishness (2Tim 3:3).

"Knowledge of God" suggests not only insight into that which He reveals about his character and will, but also love for Him and serious intent to reflect it in one's lifestyle. But in this society God and his will are no longer significant factors. According to the rest of the prophesy this is the main charge against the people.

## WHEN GOD GIVES UP A SOCIETY

The question arises how people whose ancestors experienced so much goodness and deliverance from the hand of the Lord, can stray so far away from Him? The Bible teaches that God progressively gives over to depravity a society which persists in its resistance against his Word and his law.

An outstanding pronouncement of Scripture in this regard is found in Rm 1, where it is stated three times that God gives over to their sins those who persist in their depravity (1:24, 26, 28) - in this case "sexual impurity", "shameful lusts" and "a depraved mind". But Hosea is more specific. Israel's hardening, increasing sinfulness and eventual fall come to the fore in especially five areas.

Just keep in mind that we are not talking here about individuals - there are always exceptions - but rather of general trends in a society.

- Firstly, *moral depravity* abounds (2). They break every commandment of God's law. They cross boundary after boundary in their pursuit of sin. Bloodshed is a common occurrence.

- Secondly, they *ruin the environment* (3). Exactly how this was done in Israel we do not know, but we can see clearly how it happens in modern times. In his unbridled selfishness and greed man in his depravity shows no consideration for the dwelling-place that he received from God. But when people turn to Christ, everything changes. Rather than stripping their environment bare, they plant trees and build weirs in erosion-dongas.

- Thirdly, *the religious leadership becomes corrupt* (4-14). To the extent that the spiritual leaders of a nation stray, to that extent society degenerates. However, the converse is also true. To a sinful nation God gives unholy priests - the spiritual leaders that they deserve. As v. 9 aptly puts it, "like people, like priests". The result is a downward spiral ending in a nosedive into depravity.

- Fourthly, *people lose their sense of fulfilment and contentment* (9b-10). This is how it works in life: the pursuit of God's good gifts for unholy and selfish reasons, always ends in frustration. As a result the pursuit is intensified until it becomes a mad rush to the precipice of immorality and meaninglessness. Sexual perversity degenerates from bad to worse; possessions become a burden; religion leaves you disillusioned.

- Fifthly, *ruin eventually sets in* (19). History has demonstrated an irrefutable principle: the fall of a civilisation is invariably preceded by decadence that escalates out of hand. Precisely this is what would happen to Israel, very soon after Hosea's prophesy. The Assyrians would come like a whirlwind and sweep them away.

## JUDAH IS WARNED (15)

The ten tribes of the northern kingdom, Israel, had crossed their Rubicon. For them there was no turning back any more. But in the two tribes of the southern kingdom, Judah, the decay was not yet as bad. There was still a chance for them to reform and so avert a catastrophe. Hence the warning in v. 15.

Of special significance is the warning to stay away from Gilgal and Beth Aven. These are the places of worship that Jeroboam 1, the first king of Israel, instituted many years before to prevent the people from going to the South to worship in Jerusalem. Both Hosea and Amos put it quite clearly that this wilful, man-made religion was the gravest of insults to the Lord.

The word of the Lord is therefore quite clear: immediately forsake all false and man-made religious practices. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness (2Cor 6:14).

## ENCOURAGEMENT IN OUR SITUATION

□ It is impossible to miss the resemblance between circumstances in our country at the present

time and those described by Hosea. In fact, the parallels are astounding. Just take, for instance, our moral nosedive over the last decade or two!

This gives rise to the inevitable question, *Have we also crossed our Rubicon? Is it possible for us to turn around?*

If it depended on us, the prospects would have been hopeless. But let us not underestimate God's mercy in Christ. There is hope yet!

□ During the well-known 18th century revival in the British Isles the Lord used preachers like George Whitefield (1714-1770), John Wesley (1703-1791), and many others to change a morally bankrupt England within a few decades into a nation setting the spiritual tone in the world. They also became firm leaders in the missionary field.

What should encourage us is the fact that the revival came in the midst of the most terrible decadence.<sup>1</sup>

□ Soon after the era of the Puritans (1560-1662) and the Act of Toleration of 1689 - which put an end to the persecution of evangelical Christians - spiritual decay started in England.

As is so often the case, it started with the clergy and theologians. They no longer preached the gospel. They also warned against what was known as *enthusiasm*, a derogatory term used at the time for what was in reality the zeal of people filled with the Spirit.

Deism too started gaining ground with its teaching that the Bible is only a product of the human mind and that it is impossible to learn more about God than what we are able to gather from nature. Deism therefore only accepts an impersonal first cause of everything and teaches that the cosmos was originally wound up like an alarm clock and then left to its own devices. The deistic god

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1. Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield - The life and times of the great evangelist of the eighteenth-century revival*, Vol.1, Introductory Chapter. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970.

does not involve himself with what goes on here on earth - he is a distant and unknown god.

This of course eventually resulted in empty churches - coupled with shocking licentiousness.

□ In an effort to curb alcohol abuse, an embargo was placed on the import of liquor. So people started brewing their own concoctions, leading to the so-called *gin craze* and a *gin shop* (or shebeen) in every sixth house in London. Drunkenness reached epidemic proportions. Babies were conceived, born and raised in drunkenness.

The divide between the rich and the poor widened, with an alarming increase in impoverishment due to laziness and alcohol abuse. Large areas of London became slums - filthy and rife with indescribable human misery. Crime became part of everyday life. Overcrowded prisons became dark, suffocating cesspits. In an effort to stamp out crime, as many as 160 offences were declared punishable by death. London's two public gallows were almost daily surrounded by inquisitive crowds in sportive mood. Gangs carried on a reign of terror.

In the meantime a super rich nobility was living in the lap of luxury, while perversity and immorality exceeded all propriety standards. A certain noble lady even jokingly suggested that the word "not" be removed wherever it occurs in the Ten Commandments and transferred to the Catechism in order to bring the two documents in step with the spirit of the times.

□ But! As early as 1673 a prayer group was founded in London by a group of young men in response to a series of revival services by one Dr Anthony Horneck. They started praying for revival. This led to the start of a movement, *The Societies*, of which there were a hundred in London by 1730, with as many outside the city. Herein lay the roots of the 18th century revival.

Then, suddenly in 1737 a voice echoed across England like a bell. A twenty-two year old preacher started preaching in London with power from on

high. Soon there was not a church big enough to contain the crowds that flocked to hear him. George Whitefield became a burning torch to the glory of God, the truth of the Bible and the saving power of the gospel. He was soon joined by the likes of John and Charles Wesley and several others. For the next half-century a wave of saving grace swept over the British Isles.

Dallimore ends his introductory chapter with this quotation: "... a religious revival burst forth ... which changed in a few years the whole temper of English society. The church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education."

□ Let us therefore not lose heart! Remember what history teaches us. Better still, remember Jesus Christ our King! His kingdom must and will come! His elect must and will be saved! He must and will be glorified!

Let us, one and all, do our duty - clearly spelled out in the Word! We are not ignorant! We have a High Priest in heaven! We have free access to the throne of mercy! The Holy Spirit abides in us!

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