

# Hosea 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

## Analysis

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The divine lawsuit: 'Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.' The Hebrew רִיב (rib, 'controversy') is legal terminology—a covenant lawsuit where God prosecutes His people for breach of covenant. The triple indictment identifies core failures: no אֱתָה (emet, truth/faithfulness), no תִּסְדֵּק (chesed, covenant love/mercy), no דעת אלֹהִים (da'at Elohim, knowledge of God). These aren't mere moral failures but relational covenant breakdowns. 'Truth' denotes covenant faithfulness; 'mercy' the steadfast love covenant partners owe each other; 'knowledge of God' intimate relational knowing (not mere intellectual awareness). Their absence constitutes total covenant violation. This anticipates Christ who is truth incarnate (John 14:6), demonstrates perfect covenant love (John 15:13), and makes the Father known (John 1:18).

## Historical Context

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The covenant lawsuit (rib pattern) appears throughout prophetic literature (Isaiah 1, Micah 6, Jeremiah 2). God prosecutes Israel for violating Sinai covenant terms. In ancient Near Eastern treaties, suzerain (overlord) could summon vassal to account for treaty violations. Similarly, YHWH summons Israel to answer charges. Hosea 4:1-3 follows classic lawsuit structure: summons (v.1a), charge (v.1b),

evidence (v.2), verdict (v.3). The specific charges reflect Decalogue violations: truth, mercy, and knowledge encompass both vertical (godward) and horizontal (neighbor-ward) covenant obligations. Jesus summarizes the law similarly: love God and love neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40).

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does recognizing sin as covenant breach against a personal God rather than mere rule-breaking change your understanding of repentance?
2. What is the difference between 'knowledge of God' as intimate relationship versus intellectual information about God?

## Interlinear Text

לְהִיה	עִם	יֹשֶׁב	בָּאָרֶץ	כִּי	אֵין
for the LORD	H5973	with the inhabitants	in the land	H3588	H369
H3068		H3427		H776	

אֵם תִּהְיֶה	אֵין	סְדָד	אֵין	עֲתָה	יְמִים	אֱלֹהִים
<b>because there is no truth</b>	H369	<b>nor mercy</b>	H369	<b>nor knowledge</b>		<b>of God</b>

בָּאָרֶץ  
in the land

## Additional Cross-References

**Jeremiah 4:22** (Parallel theme): For my people are foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

**Micah 6:2** (References Lord): Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD'S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.

**Isaiah 1:18** (References Lord): Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

**Isaiah 34:1** (Parallel theme): Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it.

**Jeremiah 25:31** (Word): A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD.

**Jeremiah 5:4** (References God): Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their God.

**Romans 1:28** (References God): And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

**1 Corinthians 15:34** (References God): Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

**Hosea 12:2** (References Lord): The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

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