

# Idolatry of Israel

Hosea 4:10-19

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4/14/2024



## Hosea 4:10-19 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> "They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not flourish, because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves <sup>11</sup> to prostitution; old wine and new wine take away their understanding. <sup>12</sup> My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner's rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. <sup>13</sup> They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. <sup>14</sup> "I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes—a people without understanding will come to ruin! <sup>15</sup> "Though you, Israel, commit adultery, do not let Judah become guilty. "Do not go to Gilgal; do not go up to Beth Aven. And do not swear, 'As surely as the Lord lives!' <sup>16</sup> The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the Lord pasture them like lambs in a meadow? <sup>17</sup> Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone! <sup>18</sup> Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways. <sup>19</sup> A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.

### v1 – Why would Israel eat but not have enough?

One aspect of the judgment God promises is that Israel will not be blessed with increase. They will have, but it will never seem to be enough, and they will never be satisfied.

### Why would they not flourish from prostitution?

Activities that are not sanctioned by God never bear any fruit of value.

### Why would Israel not be satisfied or flourish?

Because they have turned away from God.

### What is the principle here that applies to us today?

The further our society turns from God; the more unsatisfied people will be and prosperity will diminish.

### v11 – How had prostitution and wine taken away Israel's understanding?

Prostitution and drunkenness were simply symptoms of a deeper spiritual problem. But such things do exacerbate that spiritual problem resulting in the consequence of impaired mental ability.

### v12 – What is the spirit of prostitution that led them astray?

Israel's idolatry was like adultery against the LORD. Every sacrifice made to a pagan god was like an act of adultery.

- The Lord had been a faithful and good husband to His people. Adultery is even more heinous against a good, faithful, loving spouse.
- Israel wanted to add pagan gods to their worship of the LORD. This would be like a wife telling her husband, "I want you to still be my husband, I just want to take on a few more lovers also."

### v13 – What was the connection between idol worship and prostitution?

If you are going to be unfaithful to God, you will be unfaithful in human relationships as well. Also, many pagan practices involved sexual immorality with even shrine prostitutes.

### v14 – Who was God blaming here, the women turning to prostitution or the men encouraging them?

Both were culpable but the men were especially to be blamed... you couldn't have prostitutes if there were not men involved. And the men were failing in their call to be spiritual leaders.

- God doesn't have a double standard for sexual conduct between men and women.

### What was the role of the shrine prostitutes in idol "worship"?

Many pagan gods were "worshipped" by the hiring of a ritual harlot. This was far more enticing than just praying to a statue.

- Describing idolatry as spiritual adultery is especially appropriate when we consider this practice.

## **What would be the result of being a people without understanding?**

They would come to ruin, destruction.

- Ignorance is not bliss, it is deadly!

The idea of Hosea 4:6 is repeated here (*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*).

## **v15 – Why was Judah mentioned here?**

While Israel's apostasy was far more ingrained, Judah is cautioned that they must not follow her neighbor's sinful ways.

## **What was significant about the cities of Gilgal and Beth Aven?**

The cities of Gilgal and Beth Aven were centers of idolatry in Israel. For a citizen of Judah to travel there meant they shared in Israel's idolatry.

- At one time, Gilgal was a place where prophets were trained under Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:1; 4:38). But in Hosea's day it had become a center of false worship (Hosea 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5).
- There was no city actually named Beth Aven. Hosea is twisting the name of the city of Bethel - meaning "House of God" - into the more fitting name Beth Aven, meaning "House of Deceit." Bethel was the southern center of calf worship established by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:28-29).

## **What is the principle here that applies to us today?**

When we get too close to sinful practices, they often rub off on us...

1 Corinthians 15:33 – *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."*

## **What is wrong with swearing, 'As surely as the Lord lives'?**

It is hypocritical in the context of worshiping idols.

## **What kind of similar mindless swearing goes on today?**

Using the phrase "I swear to God" as a tagline or in jest, is usually made without any consideration to the character of God. This too is hypocritical and thus wrong. It is similar to the flippant "Oh, my God!" that is so common today.

Exodus 20:7 – *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*

## **How else do people use God's name in vain?**

Using God's name for emphasis ("*God, no, I won't do that!*"). Such expressions are disrespectful and indicate that the speaker has little awareness of the One whose name he uses so carelessly.

Matthew 5:33-37 – *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do*

*not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one*

Basically, Jesus says that, if you say something, people should be able to assume that it's true, without the addition of various oaths. Your word should be good.

## **v16 – What was the significance of Israel being likened to a stubborn heifer and not a lamb?**

Cattle can safely feed out on the open range, because they are not easy prey for predators. But a lamb in open country away from the shepherd and is vulnerable.

- Hosea's point is: if you act like a stubborn cow, don't expect to be protected like an obedient sheep.

## **v17 – What was the significance to Ephraim being joined to idols?**

The tribe of "Ephraim" was the largest tribe in Israel. Therefore, the prophets often referred to Israel as "Ephraim."

## **What is meant by God saying that Ephraim should be left alone?**

This expresses the judgment that is coming against Israel. God will simply leave Ephraim alone. When the mighty Assyrian army comes against them, they'd have to fight for themselves - God will let him alone.

- We don't want God to leave us alone because we need Him to protect us against our spiritual enemies.
- Satan wanted to sift Peter like wheat, but Jesus prayed for Peter, and he emerged victorious (Luke 22:31-32).

## **Why else do we not want God to leave us alone?**

We need God to protect us from ourselves. Left to our own sinful hearts, we would drift away from the LORD.

- All God must do to make certain a man goes to hell is simply let him alone.
- Our prayer should always be, "LORD, don't leave me alone. Keep working on me."

## **v18 – What is meant by Israel continuing her prostitution when her drinks are gone?**

They were so corrupt in their spiritual adultery that they didn't even need inebriating drink to engage in it.

**What is the principle here that applies to us today?**

God will give us over to ourselves if we fail to repent when He repeatedly warns us...

Proverbs 29:1 – *He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

**v19 – How would Israel's sacrifices bring them shame?**

- Certainly, their sacrifices to pagan idols would be shameful to them at the Great White Throne Judgment.
- But also, their sacrifices to God would be seen a hypocritical because of their idolatry.

**What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- The further our society turns from God; the more unsatisfied people will be and prosperity will diminish.
- Don't get too close to sinful practices, they'll rub off on us.
- Don't take God's name in vain!
- God will give us over to ourselves if we fail to repent when He repeatedly warns us.