

**When Leadership Fails
God Still Holds All of Us Accountable
Hosea 4:4 – 19**

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The indictment has been announced by YAHWEH against His people, Israel.

The charges, as we learned, were very detailed and all encompassing.

Now comes the presentation of evidence.

The spiritual leadership of Israel is about to be brought up on charges. Are they Levites? For the most part, in Israel, no (2 Chronicles 11:14 – 16), but they were Jews, and they did know better. Accountability did not change simply because they were not professionals. The curse still applies.

Deuteronomy 28:15–29

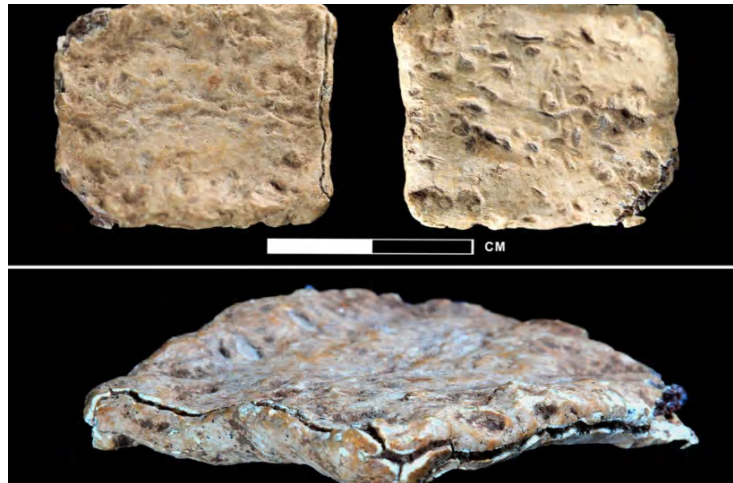
“But if you disobey the LORD your God and do not faithfully keep all his commands and laws that I am giving you today, all these evil things will happen to you: The LORD will curse your towns and your fields. The LORD will curse your corn crops and the food you prepare from them. The LORD will curse you by giving you only a few children, poor crops, and few cattle and sheep. The LORD will curse everything you do. If you do evil and reject the LORD, he will bring on you disaster, confusion, and trouble in everything you do, until you are quickly and completely destroyed. He will send disease after disease on you until there is not one of you left in the land that you are about to occupy. The LORD will strike you with infectious diseases, with swelling and fever; he will send drought and scorching winds to destroy your

crops. These disasters will be with you until you die. No rain will fall, and your ground will become as hard as iron. Instead of rain, the LORD will send down duststorms and sandstorms until you are destroyed. The LORD will give your enemies victory over you. You will attack them from one direction, but you will run from them in all directions, and all the people on earth will be terrified when they see what happens to you. When you die, birds and wild animals will come and eat your bodies, and there will be no one to scare them off. The LORD will send boils on you, as he did on the Egyptians. He will make your bodies break out with sores. You will be covered with scabs, and you will itch, but there will be no cure. The LORD will make you lose your mind; he will strike you with blindness and confusion. You will grope about in broad daylight like a blind person, and you will not be able to find your way. You will not prosper in anything you do. You will be constantly oppressed and robbed, and there will be no one to help you.” (GNB)

Joshua Repeated This

At Mount Ebal, Joshua repeated these curses, as a recent discovery verified. A lead tablet was unfolded electronically and then read. In proto-Hebrew dating back to the original event on Mount Ebal. https://images.jpost.com/image/upload/f_auto,fl_lossy/t_JD_ArticleMainImageFaceDetect/500475

Folded Lead Tablet



(Luddeni 2022)

The word “cursed” (aroor) appeared 10 times. And, the tetragrammaton, the four-letter ineffable name of God usually written in English as YHWH, appeared twice: Cursed, cursed, cursed - cursed by the God YHWH. You will die cursed. Cursed you will surely die. Cursed by YHWH – cursed, cursed, cursed. Mount Ebal where the amulet was found was the mountain from which the curses were called out when the children of Israel made a covenant with God before entering the land of Israel. (Berkowitz 2022)

As appointed spiritual leaders and as Jews, they are familiar with the curses, they know this is what the Torah says; and then there is the consistently delivered word of God coming from the the prophets, both in Israel and Judah. We are talking about the priests in Israel. They know what the truth is but have decided to favor the culture that they are a part of and the political establishment which provided them power.

They are not Levites, they are not professionals, but they are being held accountable by God because they have assumed roles as spiritual leaders of His people.

Why the indictment against the people, because those who are supposed to be the shepherds, have failed. The people did nothing to change that. Now comes accountability for the leaders, or to use the

term used in the Bible, shepherds. Jeremiah echoed this later for Judah when he said, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:1, ESV) Some of the points may hit a bit close to home as the Holy Spirit is not a respecter of cultures, persons, or political personas.

Hosea 4:4–6

“Yet let no one find fault, and let no one rebuke; For your people are like those who contend with a priest. So you will stumble by day, And the prophet also will stumble with you by night; And I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Since you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children.” (NASB 2020)

Yes, verse 4 is a bit problematic. Who is this addressed to? We must look at the overall context for that answer. It is addressed to the priests. The so-called spiritual leadership of Israel.

The priests were not doing their job. They were not warning the people or calling them back to repentance. They were not telling them of the Law or the need to follow it. The priests were not finding fault and were not rebuking anyone. They had become no better than those who argue against a priest who was doing their job. They were worthless.

After 200 years, the corruption had infiltrated all corners of the culture in Israel. The priests led from the front and “were so corrupt, that there were none fit to be reprovers; the people were like the priests, and the priests like the people, ver. 9. so that when the priests reprov'd them, they contended with them, and said, physician, heal thyself; take the beam out of your own eye; look to yourselves, and your own sins, and don't reprove us.” (Gill 1810, 394)

The people have rejected God's ordained authority, as well as those who the King appointed, the Priests. On top of that, that so called authority is corrupt and has rejected the authority over them, God's word expressed in the Law and YAHWEH Himself. Because of that, God sent prophets, but guess what, not all of them were called of God either but many were self-appointed and corrupt.

A good example of just how corrupt comes to us from 1 Kings 22 during the rule of King Ahab who was on the throne just prior to the beginning of Hosea's ministry. Note how many were faithful to YAHWEH.

1 Kings 22:13–23

“And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, “Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.” But Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak.” And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?” And he answered him, “Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.” But the king said to him, “How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?” And he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, ‘These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.’” And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?” And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’ Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you.” (ESV)

Most of the prophets in Israel were in it for the money. They were not in it for the Lord. They liked to tickle the ear of their audience.

Notice the progression we see here in 1 Kings 22:

- The Lemming appeal. We are all going to go jump off a cliff because it makes the boss look good. Everyone else is saying this, you should too. Don't make us call you a liar, intolerant or ignorant and then shame you.
- The unsafe answer. I follow the Lord, not the culture. I have been and always will be dangerous to you.
- Reputation matters, even when sarcastically parroting back the lie, the big boss knows there is just something not right with the answer because Micaiah never agrees with the culture on anything. He follows God.
- Reputation and a history of Biblical consistency allow for the delivery of the unexpurgated counter-cultural, unsafe, word of God.
- News flash – Ahab, your time is up. God wants you gone and in the unseen realm, the Divine Council has debated over how to make that happen.
- Everyone else is lying to you, I am telling you the truth...your sin is an ongoing stench, so you have been judged by YAHWEH. You are doomed.
- The culture responds...how dare you reflect your ignorance and intolerance of our truth; what the culture and leadership wants to do.
- Let's publicly denounce him and shame him, jail him unjustly, remove his ability to provide for his family, remove what he is saying from the public square and publicly embarrass him.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Ecclesiastes 1:9–11

“What has happened before will happen again. What has been done before will be done again. There is nothing new in the whole world. “Look,” they say, “here is something new!” But no, it has all happened before, long before we were born. No one remembers what has happened in the past, and no one in days to come will remember what happens between now and then.” (GNB)

The play book has never changed, the fallen members of the unseen realm still want believers to be marginalized, their testimony blocked and them physically removed out of the way.

What we see in Israel is that the prophets were no better than the priests; and they were no better than the people. Everyone had rejected the line of authority that is over them. They were loyal to the King and loyal to the culture, not the Lord. The King was the culture of the day, so they all fell in line.

Hosea 4:5

“So you will stumble by day, And the prophet also will stumble with you by night; And I will destroy your mother.” (NASB 2020)

Imagine that. A stumbling leader.

A promise from YAHWEH then for the priest and the prophet, they will both stumble and it does not matter what time of day it is.

“It is worth noting that the dual indictment presupposes that prophet and priest have worked together. This should not be surprising, given that prophets and priests can be found together in service to central institutions such as the royal court or a state-sponsored sanctuary. It makes sense from many things in the book that Hosea opposed (and was opposed by) cultic prophets in service to the central institutions of Israel. Hosea opposed them not because they were “cultic prophets,” but because they served corrupt institutions upon which YHWH had announced judgment.” (Dearman 2010, 157-158)

The failure of spiritual leadership to do their job is a theme that will continue in the scriptures. It will not be limited to non-Levitical priests in Israel either. The professionals will also be called out.

Malachi 2:8–9

“But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have ruined the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of armies. “So I also have made you despised and of low reputation in the view of all the people, since you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.” (NASB 2020)

What about in our culture today? What are many of our spiritual leaders doing in these last days? How many are now cultural sycophants? Has the culture walked away? Do they listen?

Did you pick up on what the progression was from Malachi?

The spiritual leadership turned away from following YAHWEH and from following the instructions of Torah and the Word. This destroyed the faithfulness, loyalty and leadership capability of the leadership.

The net impact, YAHWEH Himself destroys their reputation. No one listens to them anymore because, the majority were no longer being faithful followers of YAHWEH. They had become progressive Jews. And we wonder why there is a decreasing overall respect today for those serve in ministry.

Influence is Iffy

For example, how about Pastors in the US today. “But on issues closer to the ground, pastors are less integral. Only one out of six US adults say Christian leaders are very reliable guides for how Christianity should inform our political and justice systems. And only 25 percent of adults say ministers are very reliable in helping people live out their convictions privately and in public. On the whole, pastors and priests are well liked—two-thirds of Americans say their presence is a benefit to a community—but their insights are not considered relevant to living real life. You might say Christian leaders are viewed like a smiling greeter at Walmart: they might point you in the right direction, but after that you’re on your own.” The enemy is still busy marginalizing believers. (Kinnaman and Lyons 2016, 29)

Israel did not have a YAHWEH centric worldview. They had strayed far away and here in Hosea we are seeing the reason being laid at the feet of those leaders who had abdicated their duties. How are we doing today?

George Barna has done research on this topic and he has learned that “most pastors believe they are doing a terrific job of helping their congregants develop a biblical worldview and feel that they have largely succeeded. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by the fact that only one out of every twenty adults who regularly attend a Protestant church possesses a biblical worldview, that confidence is misplaced.” (Barna 2003, 175)

Many churches no longer teach the Bible as we do here at Calvary, expositively and exegetically.

There is nothing wrong about doing topical studies. There are times that needs to be done. But the temptation is to stick with those topics that sell and boost the numbers. Why upset the apple cart with topics that upset people, like sin, or repentance, or who God is including those aspects of His attributes that are hard to hear.

In other words, most churches do not teach the whole council of God. They do not teach the Bible as we and others like us do, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. When you do, you get everything, the easy to hear as well as the hard to hear bits.

Something else that is popular today, not letting the text speak for itself. Have you noticed that in many places the Bible is not politically correct or culturally acceptable? An increasingly popular trend is to read

into the scripture what you want it to say rather than let it be what the text says. Literally repurposing the Bible to say what you want rather than what God says in the text.

This is an old problem; it just seems to be more pervasive than in the past. In the Israel of Hosea, it had become so serious that YAHWEH says the nation is going down because of it.

Hosea 4:6

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Since you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children.” (NASB 2020)

We have seen the reason why God is making sure the priests and the prophets will not succeed any further, and now we receive confirmation, it is because they no longer teach truth, but gobbledygook instead. They lost sight of their mission.

The background behind the indictment and pending judgement is simple and something we need to remember, it a lack of knowledge about the Word of God. The priests wouldn't teach it, the prophets wouldn't proclaim it, the people didn't know it.

The moment we turn away from a reliance on the Word of God to the world's so-called wisdom, or our own intuition, we are doomed.

When we turn away from simply teaching the word, simply, in favor of man's wisdom, per what we see here in Hosea, we are rejecting true knowledge. We are teaching gobbledygook. Ichabod, the Spirit has departed, is now written over the entrance to the building (1 Samuel 4:21).

I have witnessed a church die. It took over 25 years as the “lay leadership” of the church opted to can Pastors who taught the word in favor of those who made them feel good. I was saved there. Today it is gone, and, on the site, there is a Chick-Fil-A.

Churches are filled by appealing to carnal desires and aesthetic tastes. Brilliant oratory, scientific music, sensational topics and fashionable pewholders, are the baits to lure people into the churches, and a church is called prosperous as these wretched devices succeed. The preacher delights to get himself into the newspaper and he accommodates his preaching to the newspaper level. Such churches will, of course, have worldly-minded officers and a worldly-minded membership, while godly souls either flee from them, or else mourn in secret, if they are not themselves chilled by the lack of Gospel heat. (Crosby 2005, 169-170)

Hebrews 4:12–13

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart. And no creature is hidden from God, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.” (NET)

The important thing for us to remember is what it doesn't say here. It does not say our rhetoric will change lives, our ideas, our writing, but God's Word. I cannot argue, harangue, or browbeat you or anyone else into the Kingdom.

It is the Holy Spirit's responsibility to use the word, which He promises to do, and make it that sharp surgical instrument He promises to use it as. The Holy Spirit can and will use anyone and He honors the use of His word.

Therefore, here, we teach the Bible. We teach all of it. The happy stuff and the sad stuff. The politically incorrect stuff as well as the love stuff. The whole council of God is found in His whole word.

We study His word to see what it says to us today. We study His word to learn about Jesus and how to live in these last days.

John 5:39

“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!” (NLT)

I have learned over the years that I cannot predict what verse the Holy Spirit will use to reach someone. I simply know that He will honor and use the use of His word to change us as we hear it. We simply must be faithful.

In Israel, those who were responsible to teach God’s Word turned their back on it. They intentionally rejected His Word in favor of something else. They became part of the culture. We see Pastors today doing the same. They intentionally turn their back on the Word and what it tells us in favor of topics such as social justice. There is nothing wrong with being in favor of social justice, the Word encourages us in that area, but our mission as the church is to make disciples. We are supposed to be catching and cleaning fish, not cleaning the pond. We wash in the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26).

For Israel, the mission to be salt and light to the nations was forgotten, encouraged by whispers from members of the fallen unseen realm, and it was replaced by being just like the nations. You do not win people to Christ by being and acting just like them. We are called to be like Jesus and that means being genuine, not weird or goofy.

In Israel, the problem had reached and gone past the final tipping point. YAHWEH lets those failed spiritual leaders know that since they have rejected Him, He will in turn, reject them.

“They had neglected and despised the revelation which had been given to them, and would not desist from the sins introduced by Jeroboam I. This led to more than internal decay (4:6a): it occasioned the withdrawal of divine privilege, I reject you from being a priest to me. It had been at the core of Israel’s covenant status that they were ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6; Isa. 61:6), but when his priests neglect what God requires, he withdraws that status from them.” (Mackay 2012, 139)

This is a concept that we see even today. We are surrounded by mainline denominational churches that have marvelous histories of reaching the lost for Jesus. Somewhere along the line they lost focus, become a bit more modern in their thinking and lost site of the mission.

“There has been a tendency from the very beginning to conform the doctrine of Christ to the philosophy of man, to fuse the two together, and to show that all religions have the same Divine element at their roots. This was seen in gnosticism, in the Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen, and in a score of heresies that sprang up within the later Church.” (Crosby 2005, 168)

This is not new. The roots predate Hosea. The enemy is the same then as today.

The attack vector has remained consistent on the part of the enemy since Cain. Attack those in leadership. You may not be able to change the minds of everyone they lead, but if you change the message the leaders teach, then, over time, you impact those who are listening, and they drift away. The reaction of the Lord then is the same today.

Revelation 3:15–20

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see! All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and

repent! Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me.” (NET)

Since those who are responsible for providing spiritual leadership have rejected the Word and the knowledge of God, God rejects them as Priests.

This is not only a rejection of those Priests who have not served as they should, but for the nation as well. Israel was supposed to point the nations to the Lord, they were not doing that. They conformed. We know that once restored, they will be restored to this role, but because of their sin and rejection, God has rejected the nation and this rejection will cross over multiple generations.

They had ruptured their relationship with the LORD and could no longer enjoy his favour. Divine forgetfulness of their sons/’children’ (cf. 1:10) points to the withdrawal of God’s protection and blessing with all the dire consequences which would follow from that. So their action has repercussions for the well-being of subsequent generations to whom they bequeath a legacy of rebellion and alienation (cf. Exod. 20:5). (Mackay 2012, 140)

God has a few more words for the Priests.

Hosea 4:7–10

“The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of My people, And long for their wrongdoing. And it will be, like people, like priest; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds. They will eat, but not have enough; They will play the prostitute, but not increase, Because they gave up devoting themselves to the LORD.” (NASB 2020)

This is still to the failed spiritual leadership of Israel. Accountability begins with those who should know better. This still applies today.

James 3:1

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.” (NLT)

We are not to add to the Word or subtract from the Word. Since we know the Word and teach it as well, there is accountability. It should not be a do as I say but as I do. Paul operated that way. “I encourage you, then, be imitators of me.” (1 Corinthians 4:16, NET)

As parents, we all teach that way. After coming to Christ, I chose to imitate my granddad who loved the Lord.

If we are known by friends and co-workers to be believers, then we are being watched, all the time. You never know who is watching and what they are learning about Jesus by what they see. Having more priests around should be a good thing, right? But in Israel, it was the opposite. “Given their calling, the increase of priests ought to have served the people’s good. Rather what we find is the opposite: the more priests, the more sin.” (Moon 2018, 84)

In the beginning of this chapter, we have the sin of ignorance set forth, here we have its danger. There we had the charge, that they had “no knowledge in the land”; here we have the judgment, that they “are destroyed for want of knowledge.” (Exell n.d., 61)

This picture of what is going on in Israel is a picture that Paul expanded on and applied to cultures that reject God.

Romans 1:18–25

“But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.” (NLT)

What happens when a people reject God? What happens when we turn our back on such knowledge? The answer is that we begin a downhill course. (Boice 2002, 44)

Israel had arrived at that point. Hosea is discussing the same process that Paul did.

Hosea 4:8

“They feed on the sin of My people, And long for their wrongdoing.” (NASB 2020)

The Priests were not training their children about Torah or the holiness of YAHWEH. But their kids were watching and being trained in the mechanism of sacrifice, and they saw that the more people sinned, the more food they had to eat because the result was more sacrifices taking place in order to deal with the sin. They were now feeding on the sin of the people. In Israel, remember, the priests were not of the tribe of Levi.

1 Kings 12:31

“He built temples on the high places and appointed as priests people who were not Levites.” (NET)

Israel’s priests were feeding on the sin offerings that the people brought to their pagan shrines. Yet since these offerings were to idols it was as though the priests really fed on the people’s sins. The priests desired these offerings, which meant they desired the people to practice idolatry so they would bring more sacrifices. (Constable 2003, Ho 4:8)

At first, these replacement priests played at worshipping YAHWEH as they went about inventing what it was that they were really doing. They twisted what the Torah taught and turned things into rituals which would benefit them. They were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of Israel, but they were no better than the people of Israel, who also were out for gain. God removed their reputation.

Sin was big business as it increased the coffers and the meat locker. They were literally feeding off of the sin of the people and longing for more wrongdoing to take place. Sin was a money-making business.

Because they were no different, they too would feel the effects of violating the covenant. “Despite their greedy schemes to accumulate food, their appetites would not be satisfied for drought would make food scarce (cf. 4:3; Lev. 26:26; Micah 6:14). Their efforts to promote fertility through cult prostitution would not succeed (cf. Hosea 2:13b; Deut. 28:18a).” (Chisholm 1985, 1389)

Hosea 4:10–11

“They will eat, but not have enough; They will play the prostitute, but not increase, Because they gave up devoting themselves to the LORD. Infidelity, wine, and new wine take away the understanding.” (NASB 2020)

The priests had initially played at serving the Lord, and some might have followed Torah but that all changed quickly as they incorporated more of the practices from the surrounding nations into their worship. The world got the better of them. Many of the false teachers we hear of today have the same issue. John warned of this temptation.

1 John 2:15–17

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (ESV)

Taking his lesson material from what Hosea is putting pen to, Peter also addressed the problem of false spiritual leadership.

2 Peter 2:1–3

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (ESV)

The priests had the opportunity early on to follow YAHWEH, but they chose to do otherwise. They introduced the teachings behind encouraging more sacrificing for sin. They also brought in the practice of male and female prostitution from the surrounding nations as well. The way Peter put it, “introduce destructive heresies” and “follow their indecent behavior.”

The priests were effectively nothing more than greedy pimps operating under the guise of religion. The NRSV translation clarifies this for us.

Hosea 4:10–11

“They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply; because they have forsaken the LORD to devote themselves to whoredom. Wine and new wine take away the understanding.” (NRSV)

So far in chapter 4 we have received the indictment from YAHWEH against Israel. That has been followed with accusations against the spiritual leadership of Israel, centering in on the so-called Priests of the nation. Now we move on to the accusations against the people.

Hosea 4:12–14

“My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner’s wand informs them; For a spirit of infidelity has led them astray, And they have been unfaithful, departing from their God. They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar, and terebinth, Because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the prostitute, And your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the prostitute, Or your brides when they commit adultery, Because the men themselves slip away with the prostitutes And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; So the people without understanding are ruined.” (NASB 2020)

As we look down on the high place of Dan, built by Jeroboam and administered by the false Priests we now consider the accusations against the people. They willingly accepted this as an alternative to Temple worship when Israel split off from Judah.

When they did this, they accepted, willingly, turning away from the covenant with YAHWEH and turning towards false gods. YAHWEH creates a graphic word picture when He says, “My people consult their wooden idol.” On top of this they are using a diviner’s wand for guidance. In the Hebrew, the impact of what YAHWEH is saying is a bit more damning.

My people consult their trees or wood. The word idol is not in the Hebrew.

My nation asks its wood, and its stick prophesies to it: for a spirit of whoredom has seduced, and they go away whoring from under their God..." This reproof is strengthened by the antithesis my nation, i.e., the nation of Jehovah, the living God, and its wood, the wood made into idols by the people. The next clause, "and its stick is showing it..." is supposed by Cyril of Alexandria to refer to the practice of rhabdomancy, which he calls an invention of the Chaldaeans, and describes as consisting in this, that two rods were held upright, and then allowed to fall while forms of incantation were being uttered; and the oracle was inferred from the way in which they fell, whether forwards or backwards, to the right or to the left. (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 54)

They trust in their idols; they look to magic for guidance. Israel is unfaithful to YAHWEH. They left Him, they instituted the divorce, not YAHWEH.

Idol-worship is harlotry in a figurative sense. Here a complete devotion to idols is in view, shown in attitude and also in action, in disposition and in deeds. Idolatry has become the be-all and end-all of their trust, showing the vacuum of spiritual understanding. (Rosscup 2008, 1295)

Hosea 4:13

"They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar, and terebinth, Because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the prostitute, And your brides commit adultery." (NASB 2020)

Israel was deeply involved in worshipping fertility gods. Why did this activity take place under trees? The high place at Dan was in the middle of a treed area, and that was intentional. Israel was mixing in some of the local Canaanite practices.

To provide an example to all other plants and particularly to food crops, the Canaanite people anxiously sought to ensure that it would flourish again. But first the divinities of fertility, Baal and Ashtoreth, now down below the ground in the "dead" season, had to be induced to copulate themselves. The Canaanites sought to bring this about by what we today call "imitative magic." They themselves gathered in these gardens to "worship" the gods by copulating together in order to encourage Baal and Ashtoreth to do likewise. (Widyapranawa 1990, 10)

The fertility cult was a central part of Canaanite religion. It is thought that sacral prostitution was a form of sympathetic magic. As people performed sex acts with the temple harlots, this stimulated sexual activity among the gods, ensuring the fertility of the soil. The terms qādēš and qēdēšâ (Deut. 23:17) designate male and female sacral prostitutes. The words come from the root qdš, meaning "set apart," "holy," "consecrated." These men and women considered themselves consecrated to their gods for the purpose of religious prostitution. (Nelson, Jr. 1996, 647)

Hosea 4:14

"I will not punish your daughters when they play the prostitute, Or your brides when they commit adultery, Because the men themselves slip away with the prostitutes And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; So the people without understanding are ruined." (NASB 2020)

The practice of temple prostitution destroyed family relationships, just as we saw between Hosea and Gomer.

Since 'holy' prostitution was at the heart of the nation's worship it led to a culture in which relationships between the sexes were without purity, in which women who had been sex-objects even at sanctuaries continued to be viewed in such a way, and in which sexual liaisons were casual and unprincipled. (Eaton 1996, 76)

The men, the leaders of the nation and the leaders of the family are the ones responsible for this.

The Priests failed in what they were to do, be spiritual leaders. They added to the worship of YAHWEH and turned it into a fertility rite. Rather than say no, the men of the nation accepted and indulged in this practice as it gave license to their own immorality and then placed it all under a religious hat. The men would go with their families to the high place, then “quietly separate themselves from the group they are with so that they may engage in sexual activity with whores, probably ordinary prostitutes, and what is more they offer sacrifice with cult prostitutes, literally, ‘holy ones’ who offered their services as part of the fertility cult practised at Baal shrines. Portions of the sacrifices offered would have been returned to the worshipper to consume. The picture is one of a banquet with an accompanying sexual orgy (cf. Deut. 23:17; Amos 2:7). This picture is not necessarily of an explicit Baal shrine; it would seem that such practices had invaded sites where it was ostensibly Yahweh who was worshipped.” (Mackay 2012, 150-151)

This is a culture that is in deep trouble. Anyone in Judah who is reading this prophecy of Hosea would point a finger at Israel. They had not reached this level of debauchery, yet. The overall trajectory though is the same and the destination will also be rather similar to Israel.

We see a warning issued to Judah.

Hosea 4:15–19

“Though you, Israel, play the prostitute, Judah must not become guilty; Also you are not to go to Gilgal, Nor go up to Beth-aven And take the oath: “As the LORD lives!” Since Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn cow, Will the LORD now pasture them Like a lamb in a large field? Ephraim is allied with idols; Leave him alone. Their liquor is gone, They prostitute themselves continually; Their rulers dearly love shame. The wind wraps them in its wings, And they will be put to shame because of their sacrifices.” (NASB 2020)

The warning to Judah is simple...don't go there. “The exhortation to Judah not to visit Israel's favourite shrines is ... meant for the ears of those who did worship in them.’ It was a startling, infuriating thing for Israelites to hear—far more effective than a straight onslaught.” (Kidner 1976, 55)

With those in Israel reading along, hearing what YAHWEH is saying through Hosea, they then read the warning to Judah and what He says about the goings on in Israel.

We will read in Amos, when we get to that book, that Amos will do the exact opposite. Amos will use irony. He will invite Israel to their favorite shrines and prove they are serious sinners. But here, Hosea is warning Judah to stay away. “YHWH addresses Judah in Israel's hearing, but only to make the point of Israel's refusal to listen.” (Moon 2018, 92)

Israel is stubborn to the point that they are immovably determined to do everything the God does not want them to do. He calls them a stubborn cow, not sheep. Sheep you can lead to pasture, a stubborn cow, not so easily.

Israel, as embodied in Ephraim, have joined with and allied themselves with the false gods they were not even to entertain. Judah is told to let what is about to happen to Israel, happen. Let them be.

If one thinks in terms of the larger context of the book—the marriage or covenant between YHWH and the people—the fullness of YHWH's judgment is compressed into this brief phrase. Of all judgments, this one strikes the covenant nearest its heart. No more reproof; no more correction or argument. Judah is told to do what YHWH has resigned himself to do: let Ephraim be (cf. 5:6). (Moon 2018, 95)

The final picture drawn for us that the wind will blow them away. They will be going into exile. Wherever the wind of God's judgement blows them is where they will be exiled to. Israel is doomed in the short term. Judgement is coming.

They have been swept away by the Priests who intentionally misled them. Whoever rejects the knowledge of God and his instructions entrusted to him brings hopeless disaster upon himself and upon those for whom he is responsible. (Wolff 1974, 93)

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