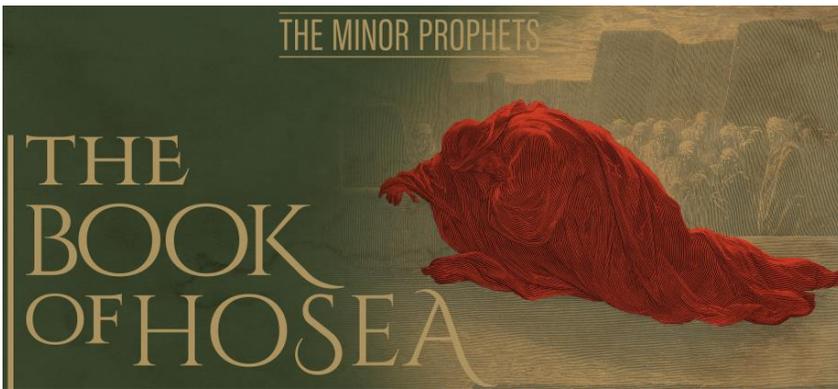


HOSEA

Faithful Love for the Unfaithful Lover

A St. Paul's Lutheran Bible Study



Humankind is very fragile, even though we do not like to admit it. For example, when a threat arises, we either flee or fight. However, there is another option too. When a threat arises, we accumulate resources for ourselves. In other words, we stockpile, we fortify, we disperse resources, and we form alliances. The nation of Israel was no different.

In Hosea 8, we read about the nation of Israel and the threat they had from other nation(s). Note verse 1: *"one like a 'vulture' is over the house of the Lord."* The word 'vulture' communicates an invading army - most likely Assyria. However, in response to the potential invading army, Israel transferred fear, love, and trust to other things. First, they chose kings, but kings not according to the Lord's criteria (kings who often made alliances with heathen nations). Second, they drifted toward idols (worshipping the false gods of neighboring nations).

We often give great lip service to our piety. We talk the talk, as they say. However, we can't walk the walk. In other words, the true test of one's faith and integrity is often exposed when we are in trouble. Sure, we can say that we fear, love, and trust in the Lord, alone. However, when our nation is in danger, is not our first thought for adequate weapons, while stockpiling, fortifying, and forming alliances? When trouble comes our way, is it not our first inclination to check to see if we have enough money, how much sick leave we have at work, and how good our insurance is. When trouble strikes, don't we circle the wagons to protect ourselves from being attacked?

HOSEA 8:1-14

Author:

Hosea the Prophet

Date:

740-715 BC

Place:

Israel

Purpose:

Israel was like an unfaithful wife. She was attracted away from her husband (the Lord) to other lovers (idols). In the book of Hosea, the Lord calls Israel back to Himself. It is a call for Israel to forsake her unfaithfulness and be restored in the Lord's faithfulness.

Other:

Hosea is the most quoted book of the Minor Prophets in the New Testament.

Now, it is essential to keep in mind that our resources are not evil. They are good gifts. However, when our fear, love, and trust in God are displaced with one of these gifts, we pervert the gifts and go the way of idolatry.

This sounds easy to pick up on; however, idolatry is sneaky. Idolatry has a tactic of not completely rejecting the Lord but redefining Him according to our personal agendas. Take one of the Bible's most ancient stories of Idolatry as an example. Consider Exodus 32:1-6.

We can learn several things from this brief story. First, the people wanted a visible representation to go before them. This stems from the unbelief of the natural heart. Secondly, by obtaining the calf, they are obtaining a visual image that is tangible and accessible. Which theoretically results in them receiving greater independence from God. Finally, in verse 4, Aaron says, *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."* Commentaries refer to this verse showing that Aaron is speaking of both the idol (i.e., golden calf) and God. Thus, Aaron and the people mix a false idol with an almighty God. Essentially a falsehood is being mixed with the true God. This is idolatry and what is called syncretism.

And so, what makes idolatry so dangerous is that it is practical, and frankly, it comes across as harmless. (*Apart from faith, it makes sense to want a visible representation so that one can have greater freedom.*) Furthermore, with idolatry, one doesn't necessarily have to reject God but can add to God. Ultimately, in this story of the calf and the following idolatrous festival, the people of Israel wanted to have things their way rather than restrain their theology and practice to what the Lord had set forth.

But what about now in the present day? While we don't have a lot of erected images in American Churches, we do have a plethora of idolatry. In the words of a modern-day theologian, *"the human self has become its own idolatrous creator, healer, and sustainer."* Another theologian named Eugene Petterson, goes on to say,

"We are saved from a way of life in which there was no resurrection. And we're being saved from ourselves. One way to define spiritual life is getting so tired and fed up with yourself you go on to something better, which is following Jesus. But the minute we start advertising the faith in terms of benefits, we're just exacerbating the problem of self. 'With Christ, you're better, stronger, more likeable, you enjoy some ecstasy.' But it's just more self. Instead, we want to get people bored with themselves so they can start looking at Jesus. We've all met a certain type of spiritual person. She's a wonderful person. She loves the Lord. She prays and read the Bible all the time. But all she thinks about is herself. She's not a selfish person. But she's always at the center of everything she's doing. 'How can I witness better? How can I do this better? How can I take care of this person's problem better?' It's me, me, me disguised in a way that is difficult to see because her spiritual talk disarms us."

To summarize, idolatry is the melding of the Lord with something else – it is the mingling of the Creator and the created. The net result is that idolatry depreciates the Lord (*when we add, we subtract.*) This mingling is the downfall of the Israelites; they went the way of syncretism and not faithfulness. It is breaking the 1st Commandment.

