

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 14, Israel's Spiritual Infidelity, Hosea 4-14, Part 2

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the book of the 12. This is lecture 14, Israel's Spiritual Infidelity, Hosea 4-14, Part 2.

Our study of the book of Hosea has helped us to understand the layout and the message of the book. The layout of the message and the layout of the book is that in chapters 1 to 3, we have the focus on a story, the story of the love relationship between Hosea and Gomer and the way in which it mirrors the apostasy of Israel and the unfaithfulness toward Yahweh as her covenant partner.

The relationship between God and Israel is like that of a marriage. God commands the prophet to do this shocking thing where he marries a promiscuous woman as a way of illustrating to Israel the seriousness of their defection against him and in the Assyrian crisis, to warn them of the severe judgment that's going to come as a result of that. The rest of the book, chapters 4 to 14, provide the details, the specifics of exactly and precisely how Israel has been unfaithful to the Lord and the ways that they have been an unfaithful partner.

It is laid out in the form of a series of covenant lawsuits where the formal charge of adultery is laid against Israel. The prophet, in a very clear way, is going to demonstrate to the people that these are the ways that you have committed unfaithfulness to the Lord. The hope in the midst of all of this is that there might be a repentance and response, but we've seen a recurring theme that Israel would not return.

They could not return. There was a spirit of harlotry within them. Instead of turning back to God and practicing justice and obeying the commands, the way that they returned to God was simply by multiplying the pagan rituals that they were carrying out.

They were wailing to him on their beds, and they were cutting themselves. This indictment of Israel works itself throughout the book. Remember that at the end of each one of these three cycles, there is also a promise of restoration.

What we are doing to tie this book all together is looking at the four or five specific ways that Israel has committed unfaithfulness and infidelity to God. How are these charges of spiritual adultery, how are they being confirmed? What exactly is it that Israel has done that leads to the seriousness of the charges that are made against them? Number one, they have not practiced hesed. They have not practiced covenant faithfulness in response to the hesed of the Lord.

To make that a little more specific, they have not kept the commandments of God. There are both social sins and religious sins that they have committed. What I would like to do as we look at the third charge is now to focus specifically on the religious charges that are brought against the people of Israel.

Amos, in a real sense as a minor prophet, focuses very heavily on social sins. Hosea includes that, but Hosea is going to focus on the religious sins. So, the third charge that is being brought against Israel, the third reason that they are an unfaithful wife, is that they have worshipped other gods and they are idolatry.

This is why I think the marriage metaphor particularly is apropos in the book of Hosea because the worship of the idols that Israel was involved in, their devotion to the Canaanite god Baal, also involved the worship of female fertility goddesses and a number of pagan rites that were abhorrent to God. God had told the people of Israel that as they came into the land, they were to worship the Lord God. They were to worship him only.

They were not to worship the other gods. Any person that did worship other gods was to be put to death, Deuteronomy 13. If there was a city in ancient Israel that promoted Baal worship, that city was to be wiped out and exterminated.

If there were prophets who encouraged the people to follow the other gods and the Baals, then they were to be put to death. This was a serious issue. Many people have a problem with the moral message of the Old Testament because God commanded the Israelites to exterminate the Canaanites.

But if we had time to talk about that issue further, the reason for that really serious command was that God wanted to make sure that the pagan, immoral, ungodly, idolatrous practices of the Canaanites did not become a part of Israel's lifestyle. Unfortunately, that's exactly what we see happening. They are constantly drawn and constantly attracted to these gods.

It's an issue and a sin. Before Israel enters the land, they worship Baal out in the wilderness and commit immorality. So, it happens before they come into the land.

Then, after they come out into the land, instead of being a distinctive light to the people around them and leading them to worship the true God, Israel ultimately ends up worshipping the gods of the other peoples. Now, we might read this as Christians, and we read this from the perspective of the New Testament and say, what was wrong with these people? Why didn't they just stop doing this? What could possibly lead them to worship these images and idols? They know the true God, and they've seen the great works that he's done. They've seen the exodus.

They've seen the way that he brought them through the Jordan. They've seen the walls of Jericho fall down. They've seen him give the promised land into their hands.

They've seen the mighty miracle. Why? Why don't they just stop this? What was the attraction of Baal worship? We also think, well, the Old Testament constantly talks about the sin and the problem of idolatry. It's a good thing that I don't have this problem because I don't have images and false gods in my house.

Other than occasionally bowing down to my 50-inch TV, I don't normally worship images and idols. I don't have one on the dashboard of my car. But what we fail to understand is that idolatry is not just about images and idols.

It's not just about giving confession to gods that have different names from the gods that we worship. Idolatry is an issue of the heart. In Ezekiel chapter 14, when the prophet Ezekiel confronts the people for their idolatry, it is not simply an issue of building images out of either stone or metal.

He says, you have erected, and you have built idols in your heart. We can't look at the Old Testament and say, wow, these people struggle with idolatry. It was a constant temptation.

It was a snare to them. Why did they do this? We don't have that problem. Anything that we erect in our hearts that takes the place of God that becomes our object of ultimate devotion, that becomes our object of security and significance, that becomes something that we give our energies and efforts to, that only should be given to God, that's a form of idolatry.

And so, this is very relevant to us. I think as we understand the background of the worship of Baal and all of the Canaanite worship practices, we can understand that ultimately, they were drawn to this, not just because they loved idols and images, but because there was something in Baal worship that drew their hearts toward this. Now there are a number of gods that are known as Baal or Baal.

The word simply means Lord or Master. It's a word that could also be used for husband. It's not a bad word in and of itself, but Baal is the word that was used by the Canaanites to express their devotion to Baal as their Lord, their King, and their Master.

And of the number of these gods that are mentioned as Baal in the book of Hosea, we sometimes have a plural reference to the Baals, which may simply be a term for illicit gods in general, or it may be a reference to the individual manifestations of Baal at these local sites and sanctuaries that ultimately represented the one God, Baal. But in the Canaanite literature that was discovered at Ugarit and in the Canaanite

epics and myths, we are introduced to this god, Baal Hadad. There are several things that we know about him.

I think when we understand who this god was and what this worship involved, we understand why the hearts of the people of Israel were drawn toward this. As we see their hearts being drawn to the worship of Baal and the Canaanite gods, we understand that the desires and the lusts that were in their hearts that were drawing them to this are often the same desires that are drawing us into various forms of idolatry today. But Baal Hadad was known as the storm god, and he really is the storm god par excellence.

He is referred to as the rider of the clouds. We have a famous representation of Baal that has been preserved and found in archeology that pictures Baal riding across the sky. In one hand he has a lightning bolt, in another hand he has a mace.

He is standing on top of the clouds. So the idea is that as the rains and as a storm or as a thunderstorm comes across the sky, the thunder represents the voice of Baal. Baal was the one who was bringing the rain, bringing the storm.

So, the fertility of the land depended upon rain, and Baal was viewed as the one who was the source of that. So, in an agrarian society and in a nation of farmers that depended on its agricultural produce as being the thing that would sustain their lives and sustain their livelihood, there was a constant temptation for the Israelites to worship this god because behind it, there was the promise of prosperity. Now, if I was devising my own religion today and I wanted to come up with Garyism, one of the ways that I think I could draw people into that religion would be to promise them prosperity.

There are forms of Christian faith today that really preach a message of prosperity that I think is inconsistent with the gospel message of the Bible itself, inconsistent with the Christian message and what the Christian life is really about, but it's tapped into the same thing. That here is a God who is offering wealth and prosperity. So Israel, really they're not foreign from us because they worship stone and metal images.

They are like us in that they are drawn to the things of the world, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the lust of the eyes, and the things that wealth and material blessing can bring them. That's really the impetus behind this. And so, their idolatry, in a sense, is no different than the idolatry of Americans today, who are driven by consumerism and by the worship of their possessions, their jobs, their careers, their wealth, and their prosperity.

Even for many Christians to lose those things would be a major crisis of faith. So instead of looking at the Israelite worshipers as different from us because they're

drawn to these idols, I think we need to see the parallels and the similarities. In the Canaanite epics, Baal or Baal, and we'll use both of those terms to refer to him, Baal becomes the king by subduing Yam and the forces of chaos.

Yam is the god of the sea. So, Baal engages in a battle with the forces of chaos that are represented by the churning waters of the sea. Yam is the god of the sea.

His ally is Nahar, the god of the river. These forces of chaos are also represented in the Canaanite literature by a seven-headed dragon by the name of Lotan. And so, Baal becomes prominent in the Canaanite pantheon because when these gods, who are the forces of chaos, threaten the other gods, it is Baal who goes out and defeats them and subdues them and puts these waters of chaos that threaten civilization, that threaten life, that threaten the security of life, he puts those waters in their place and subdues them.

So as a result of this, the Canaanite gods and the Canaanites themselves, they recognize Baal as a great king. A palace is constructed for him and he is recognized as the king after he defeats these forces of chaos. Baal is also in the Canaanite literature, however, Baal is ultimately at some point in the story, he is defeated by Mot, the god of death.

And ultimately Baal, even though he is this great king, he's the storm god, he defeats and subdues the waters of chaos. He is forced himself to go down into the underworld and he does this on a yearly basis. And in the Canaanite epic, he is ultimately rescued out of that.

But as the Canaanites thought about Baal as the storm god and as the rider of the clouds, and then as a god who was defeated by Baal and had to be rescued on a yearly basis and come out of the underworld, they used this as a way of understanding the agricultural seasons. During the time when the crops were planted and then produced, there was fertility in the land, which represented the fertility that was brought by Baal in the rains that he provided for the people. However, when Baal went down into the underworld, that was the time of the winter when things died, when things were barren.

And then when he came out of the underworld, this was repeated in a recurring cycle. So here again, this is the temptation for the people of Israel. They are drawn to this god because he offers them something that human beings naturally worship, prosperity and blessing and sustenance and livelihood.

They're farmers, and they need these crops. And so, this is what is behind the worship of Baal, and specifically, this is what it says in Hosea 2, verse 8. Israel did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil, who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore, I will take back my grain in its

time and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness, and I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers.

They took the blessings of God and attributed those blessings to Baal, the storm god. And I liken this to Valentine's Day. And I go to the store and I buy roses for my wife.

And as a way of expressing her thanks, my wife cooks dinner for the man next door. I'm not going to be as pleased as a husband. In a much more serious way, Israel has committed infidelity against God because they have given their devotion to Baal.

The Lord blessed them with these things. The Lord gave them the promised land and this place flowing with milk and honey. They attributed it to the pagan gods.

The Lord says I'm going to teach them a lesson. I'm going to take those things away, and they're going to learn that I'm the ultimate source. And by that, the Lord would ultimately cause Israel to love him, and they would no longer call him my Baal.

They will refer to him as my husband. Any idea of Baal worship is ultimately going to be removed. This temptation to think that Baal was the source of their prosperity and their fertility is also reflected in chapter 7, verse 14.

They do not cry out to me from their hearts. They don't repent and turn back to God. They wail upon their beds for grain and wine.

They gash themselves, and they rebel against me. So instead of when they experience drought and famine and the covenant curses that God has warned them about, instead of turning back to God in repentance, they simply multiply their pagan rituals they gash themselves, and they cut themselves. They do the same things that the prophets of Baal do in the contest on Mount Carmel with Elijah because they believe that those gods are the ones that are able to secure them the blessing.

So this is the impetus. This is the motivation behind what is being described for us in Hosea chapter 4, verse 12. A spirit of whoredom has led them astray.

Verse 13. They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains. They burn offerings on the hills, and they commit these pagan rites that involve sexual immorality of some sort and some variety.

They do these things because they believe that these gods are the ones who provide these resources for them. Now, this sin ultimately didn't just affect the northern kingdom of Israel. It also affected the southern kingdom of Judah.

It becomes part of the reason why God must ultimately judge them as well. There is a passage in the book of Jeremiah that I want to read for us that I think reflects for us just how saturated this idea was in the minds of the Israelites and the Judahites. That Baal and the fertility gods, the Canaanites, are responsible for our blessing.

The people of Judah, when they look back on their history, and they talk about God sending them away into exile, Jeremiah is ministering to a group of them in Egypt, and they say this to Jeremiah: As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you. But we will do everything that we have vowed. We will make offerings to the queen of heaven.

I think the reference here is to the Canaanite fertility goddesses. We will pour out our drink offerings to her as we did, both we and our fathers, our king and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For when we did those things, we had plenty of food, prospered, and saw no disaster.

But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and the famine. They had a completely upside-down understanding of reality. They said, you know, Jeremiah, the reason that we've gone into exile, the reason all of this has happened to us, is that Josiah came along and made these reforms and returned us to worship God and took away our asherahs and our false gods and burned down our altars.

If Josiah had left us alone and if we had continued making our offerings to the queen of heaven, if we had persisted in our fertility rites, everything would have gone well for us. So, you are calling us to be exclusively loyal to God; we're not going to do that because our loyalty to God is what has deprived us of our prosperity. I mean, that is an upside-down understanding of reality.

And again, we look at this and we're not part of that culture, we're not part of this context. And we say, how could they ever think that? How could they know the true God and then turn away from these cheap imitations? How could they have the reality and then turn away to something that was so fake and false? The answer to that is they were drawn to this by their own desires, the same desires that we have. And they were also drawn to this by the prevailing lies of their culture.

You see, they had been given the truth. God had revealed to them the reality that he was the one true God, but the prevailing culture around them had a different belief system and ethos. As a result, the Israelites accepted that story of reality rather than the story of reality that God had revealed to them.

Romans 12 is going to say, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. We have to work not to believe the prevailing lies of the

culture around us. We have to, as Americans, work not to believe the prevailing lie that our worth is determined by our possessions or that the thing that makes us happy in life is the wealth that we possess or the pleasures that we enjoy.

God is ultimately the source of our joy and enjoyment and pleasure and blessing. But when we believe the prevailing lies of the culture, we are drawn away into idolatry in the same way that the Israelites were. And so, this message is very real to us.

The same thing goes on in our lives today. Now, throughout the Old Testament, this is a constant battle. This is a constant struggle.

They are going to be drawn repeatedly into the worship of Baal and the false gods. And so, one of the things that is going to happen in the Old Testament, and we see this with the prophets, we see it with the psalmists, we see it throughout the Old Testament literature, is that much of the Old Testament is going to reflect an underlying polemic against Baal worship. And I think when we can understand this, and we get a grasp of what's going on in this historical setting, we come to a deeper and fuller understanding of the Old Testament.

What the writers of the Old Testament are going to do is that they will often take the imagery, the beliefs, and the ideas of the Canaanites and turn them completely upside down and say that Baal is not the storm god. Baal is not the one who provides the rains. Yahweh, the one true God who is the creator of all that is and all that ever will be, is the one who is the king.

He is the one who brings fertility. He is the one who has subdued the forces of chaos. And so, we will see specific images, ideas, metaphors, and motifs that are associated with Baal worship in the Canaanite text being used, I think, in a polemical way in the Old Testament.

The idea here is not that the Old Testament has bought into the pagan mythology of the culture around it, but it is using those cultural ideas. It is using those images. It is using those motifs that the people understood that was part of their prevailing culture and using them as a way to teach them the truth that God alone was the one who could provide for them.

So, the Canaanite literature is going to say that Baal was the rider of the clouds. Psalm 68, verse 4, and some other Old Testament passages are going to say, no, the Lord is the one who is the rider of the clouds. One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 29.

Some scholars will even speculate that this might have originally been a Canaanite hymn that was sung about Baal. It is taken, revised, and worked over in the Old Testament. It becomes a song that is about the Lord.

In that passage, the voice of the Lord seven times, just like in Canaanite literature, seven times the voice of the Lord is used in the epic to talk about the thunder during the thunderstorm. But what Psalm 29 does is that it pictures a thunderstorm that begins in the Mediterranean Sea. It moves across the northern part of the land down through Israel all the way down into the wilderness.

It says, as we observe this storm, the voice of the Lord is what is being reflected. The Israelites, as they worship God in this praise psalm, want to say that it's not Baal who reflects his power and his might and his greatness in the storm; it's Yahweh. So, ascribe to the Lord the glory that is due his name.

Ascribe to the Lord glory and honor because as this storm moves across the sky, it's a reminder not of the greatness of Baal, but of the greatness of Yahweh because Yahweh is the creator. The Canaanites believed that their gods dwelt on Mount Zaphon. That was the sacred and the holy mountain.

Psalm 48 is going to say that Mount Zion is the height of Zaphon. I think no one would go to Jerusalem and naturally describe that as this majestic, mighty mountain. But what Psalm 48 is doing is that it's portraying Zion as a cosmic mountain.

It is the place where the one true God lives. As a result of that in Psalm 46, it is Yahweh who is the one who subdues the waters of chaos when it rages and roars and foams against the city of Jerusalem. The nations of the earth are compared to the waters of chaos in passages like Psalm 46 or Isaiah 17, 12 to 14.

Again, it's not Baal who subdued Yam, and it's Yahweh who has done that. Yahweh subdued the waters of chaos when he created the world and he put the waters in their places, but he also has subdued the forces of chaos throughout history. He used the sea to defeat the armies of Egypt at the Exodus.

Again, in Psalm 46, when the enemies of Zion roar and foam like the waters of chaos, Yahweh is the one who ultimately is going to subdue them and subject them. Again, the Old Testament is not buying into the mythological idea that there is a God of the river or these mythological creatures. The Old Testament is simply using an image and motif that communicated to the culture of that day in a way that the people could understand the exclusivity of Yahweh as the one true God.

Psalm 74, I think, is another passage where again, we have a direct polemic against the ideas and the ideology, and the thinking of the Canaanites about Baal. It says this, You, O God, my king, are from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might.

You broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the head of Leviathan. I remember in the Canaanite literature, Lotan, the seven headed dragon in the sea that is part of the waters of chaos.

It is not Baal who defeated Leviathan, and it is Yahweh. You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You split open the springs and brooks.

You dried up the ever-flowing streams. So, an image or picture of creation is being used here: God is the one who subdued these forces of chaos. Psalm 104 says that the Lord put Leviathan in the sea to play with him.

And Leviathan, instead of being this monstrous creature that the Lord must subdue, is one of the creatures that God has created and put in the sea, and God plays with him. One scholar says, as if Leviathan were his rubber ducky. So, all of this is subverting the theology of the Canaanites and saying Yahweh is the one true God.

The narratives of Elijah and Elisha are designed to subvert the theology of the Canaanites. Ahab and Jezebel are promoting the worship of Baal. They are making that the official state religion.

Well, how well did that work out for them? They believe that Baal was the one who provided the rains and that he was the rider of the clouds. And so, what does God do as Ahab and Jezebel give the loyalty of Israel to that particular God? God causes it not to rain for three years. During that time, God takes the prophet Elijah and moves him up to minister to the Syrophenician woman who lives in the home territory of Baal, and her needs for food and oil and meals and all the things that she needs to survive are provided by this prophet of the Lord.

While the people of Israel, who are supposed to be worshiping God but are worshiping Baal, are starving to death. There is a direct polemic here that God is the one who provides those things, and Israel is going to be deprived of them until they come to realize that. When Elijah raises the son of the Syrophenician, of this woman, this widow, it is a reminder that the Lord is the one who has power over the forces of death.

That makes him superior to Baal because Baal himself is defeated by Moth and must go down into the underworld. God is completely in control of the forces of death. Isaiah 25 is going to say that in the end, when God puts an end to death, God will swallow up death.

That is a direct contrast to what we see in the Canaanite literature where Moth, the God of death, is the great swallower and has one lip extended to the stars and one to the ground and consuming everything in between. That was the Canaanite way of saying death wins, everybody dies. The statistics on death are impressive, one out of

one, but the Old Testament is offering a hope that the great swallower will be swallowed up.

Baal could not offer that to the people. Baal was supposed to be the God of life. Ultimately, what he brought to the people of Israel was death.

Along with the worship of Baal, there was the worship of the female fertility goddesses. There was the Asherah and Ashtar and Anat that were the consorts of both El and Baal. The Israelites were drawn into the worship of the Asherahs.

The Asherah Poles became a part of the Israelite religion. Throughout the land of both Israel and Judah, archaeologists have discovered a number of these nude figurines of these female fertility goddesses. Israelite women, the women in Judah, were worshipping these, praying to them, offering sacrifices to them because they believed that they would provide children.

They were the ones who were the source of fertility. The Lord wants them to understand, and I'm the source of that. You need to trust me for that.

Along with this whole idea of fertility and provision, there were also these lewd, immoral fertility rites that went along with that. Sacred prostitution became a part of Israelite worship. As we talked about in a previous video, there may not have been this idea of sympathetic magic where sex with a prostitute ultimately brought fertility to the land.

It may have simply been that introducing the worship of these gods and these goddesses into Israel promoted immorality and gave it religious approval. Now, prostitution was a way of raising money at the sanctuary. Again, if I was going to create my new religion and if I could promote one that was going to make people wealthy and prosperous and remove all moral restraint, I think I could go on the internet and have some followers by the end of the day.

That again was the attraction of Baal worship and the worship of these Canaanite fertility goddesses, the moral demands that God places on us. We don't have to follow that. We can live by the dictates and the desires of our own flesh and we don't have to constrain ourselves.

We don't have to worry about being a holy nation because these gods will bless us. And immorality and sexual perversity is endorsed as part of the religious practices. Again, the Israelites are not a lot different from us.

They're not simply drawn to images of metal and stone. They are drawn to pleasure, to wealth, to all of these things and they want those things, not in the way that God offers them. God ultimately will fulfill our desires in the deepest possible way.

They want them in an illicit way. The idols that we seek after or the things that we put in the place of God are ultimately moving us in the same direction. So, there's a polemic because of the strong desire and the attraction of Baal worship and the Canaanite practices.

There's a polemic throughout the Old Testament. Ultimately, these gods will not satisfy you, and they will not meet your needs. As I have studied the book of Hosea, now taking it back to our prophetic book here, there is a similar polemic in the book of Hosea.

Hosea is going to say in a variety of ways to the people, you have turned to Baal because you believe that he will satisfy you and he will meet all of your needs. There is this recurring motif, and I would call it the message of futility in the book of Hosea that the Baals and their false gods and their false practices and, in fact, anything that they turn to other than God is ultimately not going to work. It is a failed strategy to turn to anything other than God as your ultimate source of security.

It is going to lead you ultimately to death and to misery and to not experiencing the full kind of life that God will offer to you when anything other than God becomes the ultimate source of devotion in your life. And so the prophets are going to say if you turn to worshipping Baal, ultimately you're going to experience futility. Prophet Jeremiah says this in chapter 2 of Jeremiah, they turned to the Baals they turned to the Baals, and God gave them Yael; God gave them worthlessness as their reward.

Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 13 says my people have done something very foolish. They have substituted a relationship with the God who is the source of the living waters and they have turned instead to broken cisterns that will never hold water and that will never provide for them and meet their needs. And so Baal is not going to satisfy them.

Chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, they think that it's the Baals who have provided this for them. God is going to teach them a lesson by taking it away. Chapter 4 verse 10 they shall eat but they shall not be satisfied.

They shall play the whore, but they will not multiply. They think God will give them more food. It's not going to happen.

They think the worship of the fertility goddess is bringing them offerings, offering raisin cakes that were part of these fertility rites that they will be able to multiply. It's not going to happen. Chapter 9, verses 1 and 2. Rejoice not, O Israel, exalt not like the other peoples, for you have played the whore and have forsaken your God.

You have loved a prostitute's wages on all the threshing floors. And here's the pagan fertility rites. Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them.

They shall not remain in the land of the Lord, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria. Do you think that the gods are going to provide you with crops? The land is not going to produce. In the same way that God took away the rain in the days of Elijah, God's going to do the same thing to the people in Hosea's day.

And ultimately and finally they're going to end up eating unclean food in Assyria. That's the consequence of the choice they've made. Chapter 9, verses 11 to 14.

Going back to Israel's history in Numbers 25. They came to Baal Peor, and they consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and they became detestable like the thing that they loved. Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird.

No birth, no pregnancy, no conception. So, you imagine an Israelite woman in 8th century Israel. They're praying to these false gods. They're praying to these goddesses.

They have statutes of them in their homes. They are bringing them raisin cakes and other offerings and they think that this is going to provide them. And God says, no birth, no pregnancy, no conception.

Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them until they have none. Wow, God's going to take away the children. God's going to take away their fertility.

9, 16, and 17. One last verse. Ephraim is stricken, and their root is dried up.

They shall bear no fruit even though they give birth. I will put their beloved children to death. My God will reject them because they've not listened to him.

So they think that these false gods and goddesses will bring them crops and children. God is going to deprive them of both. Here's the surprise.

Well, it's not really a surprise. This is something that people should have known all along. Who is the real source of the blessings that they're searching for? Who is the one who is ultimately going to provide these things? It's the Lord himself.

I mean, they had the God who would give them all of these things. They wanted a God that they could see with their eyes. They wanted a God that was impressed upon them by the pagan culture and the prevailing culture around them.

If they had faith to see, they would have realized that the Lord was the one who all along had promised to provide these. So, some of the metaphors that are used to talk about God in the book of Hosea, I think, are direct responses to their worship of Baal as the storm god. Chapter 6, verses 3 and 4. Let us press on to know the Lord.

His going out is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us as the showers and as the spring rains that water the earth. The Lord, his very presence, would be like refreshing rain and dew.

They had turned to the wrong source. They had lived by a bad strategy. And sin and idolatry in our lives ultimately is a form of stupidity because it's a bad strategy to live your life by.

Chapter 10, verse 12 says this, sow for yourselves righteousness and reap steadfast love. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord that he may come and rain righteousness upon you. And what God is ultimately going to do, God will rain righteousness upon them.

And then as he does that, the physical rain that they want will come as a corollary and a consequence of that. Finally, as we turn to the end of the book, we see a couple of statements like this. Chapter 14 verses 5 and 7, the Lord says, when I heal their apostasy and when I love them freely, I will be like the dew to Israel.

He shall blossom like the lily. He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. His roots will spread out.

His beauty shall be like the olive, his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow. They shall flourish like the grain.

They shall blossom like the vine, and their fame will be like the wine of Lebanon. What are the three things that Israel is constantly losing in the Minor Prophets? They're losing the wine, the vine, and the grain. The Lord will give those things back to them when they recognize the right source.

The Lord is able to provide for people what it is that they're really searching. The real hunger in our hearts is ultimately for a relationship with him. Augustine said the heart is restless until it finds rest in you.

Israel has turned to all these things, like a thirsty man turning to salt water. It will not satisfy them, and it will not provide for them.

God ultimately describes himself in this way. He says, O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress.

From me comes your fruit. And so there's this polemic and rhetoric of futility in the book to try to remind the people that God was ultimately going to be their source of security. There's a problem with idolatry.

One of the other manifestations of idolatry and one of the other ways that Israel had committed unfaithfulness toward the Lord is that they had also, not just in worshiping the Baals and the false gods, but by worshiping the calf gods and worshiping the gods of their sanctuaries, they had also committed apostasy and idolatry against the Lord. Remember, Aaron had led the people into this type of apostasy in Exodus chapter 32, makes the golden idol. Here are the gods that brought you out of Israel or out of Egypt.

Israel was not to worship God by any kind of image. Any kind of image would ultimately demean the character and the nature of God. Even if God was simply viewed as the rider on this invisible calf and the calf were used to portray God as a god of power and fertility, that lessened the reality of who God really was.

Throughout Israel's history in the Northern Kingdom, as they worship the golden calves at the sanctuaries in Dan and Bethel that Jeroboam the first had established for them, they were living in apostasy. Chapter 8 verses 5 and 6 says this, I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them.

How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel a craftsman made it. It is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken into pieces.

So instead of saving them, their calf god ultimately would be broken to pieces in the same way that Aaron's was when Moses came down from the mountain. There are multiple sanctuaries where they worshipped and where they thought that they were carrying out the will of God and doing what God had commanded them. These sanctuaries are ultimately going to be destroyed.

And so Hosea is going to say in chapter 4 verse 15, Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-Aven, Beth-El, the house of God, referred to as Beth-Aven, the house of worthlessness, and swear not as the Lord lives. So they had also been led astray and they were perpetuating Jeroboam's sins by continuing to worship God in this illicit way.

So I think if we could somehow be transported back to 8th century Israel, what we would see there as we talk to people or maybe as we observe their religious practices is that you had some people who had remained faithful and they were devoted Yahweh worshippers. There were other people on the other side that they were devoted Baal worshippers and they were devoted to the Canaanite gods. But probably what we had in the midst of all of this and the majority of the people was that there was this syncretistic mix where there was worship of Yahweh and worship

of Baal and all of these things had been mixed together in a way that ultimately was confusing to the people and completely and totally dishonorable to the Lord.

And so there's not just the problem of outright idol worship. There are the number of ways that syncretism where Baal worship and Yahweh worship have been joined together. The majority of Israelites who lived in the 8th century, if you had surveyed them, would perhaps have viewed Yahweh as having a female consort, an Asherah, just like the worshippers of Baal did.

Now one of the scary things about idol worship that the Old Testament constantly reminds us is that ultimately when you worship these idols you will become like the gods that you worship. So, let's think about this. Greg Beale has developed this in his biblical theology of idolatry.

In ancient Israel, they are worshipping the golden calves. Notice how Israel is described in chapter 4 verse 16, like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn. And can the Lord now feed them like a lamb in broad pasture? Ephraim is joined to idols.

Leave him alone. When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring. So, throughout the Old Testament, there's going to be this idea that you become like what you worship.

And so, what that means in the book of Hosea is that Israel has become like the stubborn calf. They have become like the calf god that they bow down and worship. Chapter 10 verse 11 says this, Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, but I spared her fair neck.

But now I will put Ephraim to the yoke and Judah must plow and Jacob must harrow for himself. If you want to worship the golden calf, if you want to become a stubborn heifer, the Lord is going to put a yoke on you and lead you away into captivity. Chapter 11 verses 4 to 7, I led them with cords of kindness and with bands of love.

I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down and fed them, and God took care of them. But my people are bent on turning away from me. Chapter 10, verse 7, you become like what you worship.

So ultimately, the book of Hosea is going to remind us of two serious issues that are related to idolatry. One of them is anything other than God will never satisfy us. And ultimately, as you worship these false gods, you will become like what those gods are like.

For Israel, they had worshiped the calf god. As a result of that, they became a stubborn heifer. Isaiah is going to say, you worship gods that are dumb and cannot speak and cannot hear and do not have eyes to see or mouths to speak.

You have become spiritually insensitive just like they are. And I think part of the explanation for why in 8th century Israel, they had been given over to social justice and violence is that they were imitating the character of the Canaanite gods that they had become devoted to. It is nothing for Ahab and Jezebel to take away by force and by violence and by murder the land that belongs to Naboth because that's the ethos of their gods.

Their gods take power by violence and taking whatever they want. There is an entirely different ethos when you follow the God who leads you out of bondage, who cares for slaves, and who loves widows and orphans. That's the God of Israel.

That's the true God. And so, idolatry is still an issue for us as we follow the Lord, and two great warnings are given us in Hosea. If you trust in something other than God, if you make that object something that you trust in a way that you should only trust in God, it will not satisfy you.

It will not lead you to abundant life. Life in Christ is the only thing that can do that. Additionally, whatever you worship, you ultimately become like that.

Like Midas, when he worships gold and turns it, whatever you worship, you ultimately become like that. We are reminded in Hosea why it is so important that our devotion and hearts be kept pure for the Lord and solely focused and devoted to him. The Lord says you are to love me with all of your heart and with all of your mind and with all of your strength.

We realize that every day we fail to do that, but that is the goal that God is ultimately leading us to. And that is the kind of relationship that God wants to have with us. An exclusive love relationship where we are totally and fully devoted to him.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the book of the 12. This is lecture 14, Israel's Spiritual Infidelity, Hosea 4-14, Part 2.