

Hosea 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff
declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused
them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their
God.

Analysis

Divination and idolatry: 'My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.' The irony is devastating: God's people consult wooden idols ('stocks,' גֹּזֵז, ets—literally 'wood/tree') and staffs (מַקְלָה, maqqel—divination rod) instead of the living God. This refers to practices like belomancy (divination by arrows/rods, Ezekiel 21:21). The 'spirit of whoredoms' (רוּחַ זְנוּנִים, ruach zenunim) indicates demonic deception or disposition toward spiritual adultery. The phrase 'gone a whoring from under their God' (וָזָנוּ מִתַּחַת אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, zanu mittachat Eloheihem) uses 'under' to suggest covenant headship/authority—they've abandoned God's rightful lordship. This prefigures Jesus's warning against idolatry: 'No man can serve two masters' (Matthew 6:24). Only the Spirit of truth liberates from deceptive spirits (John 16:13).

Historical Context

Divination practices forbidden in Torah (Deuteronomy 18:9-14) were prevalent in Canaanite religion and ancient Near East broadly. Consulting wooden objects (possibly Asherah poles or teraphim household gods) and using divination rods were common pagan practices. Israel's adoption of these methods demonstrated total spiritual confusion—the people who possessed prophets and priests were

consulting mute wood. This parallels Paul's description in Romans 1:22-23: claiming wisdom, they became fools, worshiping created things rather than Creator. The northern kingdom's syncretistic worship had progressed from mixing YHWH worship with pagan elements to fully pagan practices replacing covenant faith.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What modern equivalents exist to 'consulting stocks and staffs'—seeking guidance from sources other than God's revealed Word?
2. How does the 'spirit of whoredoms' demonstrate that persistent sin isn't merely moral weakness but spiritual bondage requiring divine deliverance?

Interlinear Text

עַמִּי	בְּעֵצ וְ	יִשְׁאַ לְ	וּמִקֵּל וְ	יִגֵּד יְד	כִּי לֹא	
My people	counsel at their stocks	ask	and their staff	declareth		
H5971	H6086	H7592	H4731	H5046	H0	H3588
רֵחַ	זְנוּנִים	הִתְעָה				
unto them for the spirit	of whoredoms	hath caused them to err				
H7307	H2183	H8582				
וַיֵּזְנוּ	מִתַּחַת	אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:				
and they have gone a whoring		from under their God				
H2181	H8478	H430				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 2:27 (Parallel theme): Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us.

Hosea 5:4 (Spirit): They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD.

Habakkuk 2:19 (Parallel theme): Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

Deuteronomy 31:16 (References God): And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

Numbers 15:39 (Parallel theme): And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: