

Hosea 4:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.

Analysis

Stubborn backsliding: 'For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.' The imagery contrasts stubborn heifer refusing yoke with lamb in open pasture. Israel, like untrained heifer (פָּרָה טוֹרֶה, parah sorerah—rebellious cow), resists God's discipline. The consequence is ironic: God will feed them 'as lamb in large place' (בָּקָשׁ בְּקָרְבָּן, keves bamerchav)—not blessing but judgment. A lamb in open space without shepherd faces predators; Israel scattered among nations faces destruction. Or possibly: God will pasture them extensively (not protectively) like exposed lambs. Either way, refusing disciplined covenant relationship results in dangerous freedom/abandonment. This echoes Romans 1:24,26,28: God 'gave them up.' Only Christ bears the yoke perfectly (Matthew 11:29-30) and shepherds His flock securely (John 10:27-29).

Historical Context

The heifer metaphor appears in Jeremiah 31:18 (Ephraim as untrained calf) and throughout Scripture depicting Israel's stubbornness (Exodus 32:9, Deuteronomy 9:6,13). An untrained heifer resists plowing, making agricultural work impossible—similarly, Israel resisted God's purposes. The historical fulfillment came through Assyrian exile: scattered among nations without land or protection, Israel faced assimilation and loss of identity. The 'ten lost tribes' disappeared historically, fulfilling the judgment of dangerous exposure. Yet Jeremiah 31:18-19 promises

eventual restoration when the rebellious heifer learns discipline and returns. This hope finds fulfillment in Christ gathering the scattered (John 11:52).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does resisting God's discipline and instruction paradoxically lead to more dangerous 'freedom' rather than genuine liberty?
2. What is the difference between Christ's yoke (easy and light, Matthew 11:30) and Israel's resistance to any yoke?

Interlinear Text

רֵעַ	מַעַתָּה	עֲתָה	יִשְׁרָאֵל	לְ	רָכֶב	רָכֶב	כַּפְרָה	הִ	רֵעַ
H6258	H7462	H6258	H3478	H6258	H5637	H5637	H5637	H3510	H3588
will feed			For Israel		as a backslding	as a backslding	as a backslding	heifer	
הִ	רֵעַ	רָכֶב	רָכֶב	כַּפְרָה	מַעַתָּה	עֲתָה	יִשְׁרָאֵל	לְ	רֵעַ
H3068	H3532	H4800	H3478	H6258	H7462	H6258	H3478	H6258	H3588
now the LORD	them as a lamb	in a large place							

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