

Hosea 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

Analysis

Ephraim's attachment to idols: 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' The stark command קְבּוּר עֲצָבִים אַפְקִים הַנְחָלָן (chavur atsabbim apqim hanach-lo): 'Ephraim is bound to idols, leave him alone.' The verb קָבַר (chavar, 'joined/bound') suggests marriage or covenant bond—Ephraim wedded to false gods. The response 'let him alone' (הַנְחָלָן, hanach-lo) is judicial abandonment: God withdraws warnings and allows sin's consequences. This most terrifying judgment appears throughout Scripture: 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone' (Hosea 4:17), 'My people would not hearken...So I gave them up' (Psalm 81:11-12), 'God gave them up' (Romans 1:24,26,28). When persistent rebellion exhausts divine patience, God withdraws restraining grace. Only Christ's intercession prevents this fate for believers (Luke 22:32, Hebrews 7:25).

Historical Context

Ephraim, dominant northern tribe, often stood for entire northern kingdom. By Hosea's time, idolatry had become so entrenched that reform seemed impossible. Unlike Judah, which experienced periodic revivals under godly kings (Hezekiah, Josiah), northern Israel never experienced sustained reformation after Jeroboam I's initial apostasy. Archaeological evidence shows pervasive syncretism throughout northern sites. The divine 'let him alone' preceded Assyrian conquest by only decades—God withdrew protection, allowing historical consequences to unfold. This demonstrates that God's patience, though extensive, has limits. Persistent hardening eventually results in final hardening (cf. Pharaoh, Exodus 7:13,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,34-35; then 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8,17).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do we recognize when we're becoming 'joined to idols,' and what steps lead to repentance before reaching the point of 'let him alone'?
2. What does divine abandonment ('let him alone') teach about the seriousness of persistent, unrepented sin?

Interlinear Text

רַבָּ יְמִינָה אֶפְרַיִם לְתַתְּנִינָה יְלִלָּה
is joined to idols Ephraim let him alone H0
H2266 H6091 H669 H3240

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 81:12 (Parallel theme): So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

Matthew 15:14 (Parallel theme): Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

Hosea 13:2 (Parallel theme): And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.

Hosea 4:4 (Parallel theme): Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.

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