

Hosea 4:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love, Give ye.

Analysis

Corrupt worship and degraded leadership: 'Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love, Give ye.' The text is difficult but suggests drunkenness ('drink is sour,' סָר סוֹבְאִים, sar sov'am—their drinking bouts have ended/turned sour), persistent harlotry (spiritual and literal), and rulers who 'love shame' (אָהָבוּ הֵבִי קָלִיִן, ahavu hevu qalon) or 'love gifts' (bribes). Leaders love shame/dishonor, or they love to say 'Give!'—demanding tribute/bribes. Either interpretation reveals corruption: leaders seeking personal gain through shameful means. This echoes Micah 3:11, Isaiah 1:23—rulers selling justice for profit. When leaders model immorality, entire society corrupts (Proverbs 29:12). Only Christ establishes righteous rule, the leader who gives rather than demands (Mark 10:45), who glorifies rather than shames His people.

Historical Context

The chaotic final decades of northern Israel saw six kings in 30 years, four by assassination. Political instability bred corruption as leaders sought quick enrichment before inevitable overthrow. The phrase may reference drunken feasts where ruling elites plotted and schemed. Archaeological evidence shows increasing wealth disparity in 8th century Israel—rich grew richer through oppression while poor suffered. Amos contemporary with Hosea similarly condemns leaders who 'sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes' (Amos 2:6). Such corruption hastened divine judgment. This pattern recurs

historically: when leaders pursue personal gain over people's welfare, societies collapse.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does leadership corruption ('rulers with shame do love') affect entire communities, and what responsibility do leaders bear for collective moral climate?
2. What characterizes Christ's servant leadership model in contrast to leaders who 'love to say Give!'?

Interlinear Text

יִסּוּר	סִבְאָם	הִזְנוּ	הִזְנוּ	אֶהֱבֵם	יֵהֱבֵם	קֵל וְזֹלָתוֹ
is sour	Their drink	continually	continually	do love	Give	with shame
H5493	H5435	H2181	H2181	H157	H3051	H7036

מְגִדֵּיהָ:
her rulers
H4043

Additional Cross-References

Micah 3:11 (Parallel theme): The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.