

Hosea 5:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them.

Analysis

Seeking God without turning from idols: 'They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them.' The irony: they seek YHWH with sacrificial animals, maintaining outward worship forms while hearts remain idolatrous. God's response: withdrawal (יָנַח, chalats—depart, remove Himself). Proper ritual without heart transformation cannot secure divine presence. Isaiah 1:10-15 similarly rejects sacrifices from unrepentant hearts. Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6: 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice' (Matthew 9:13, 12:7). This teaches that God desires obedience over mere religious performance (1 Samuel 15:22). Only through Christ's once-for-all sacrifice do we access God (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Historical Context

Israel maintained sacrificial worship even while practicing idolatry—syncretism rather than abandonment of all YHWH worship. They brought offerings to northern shrines (Bethel, Dan, Gilgal), performing rituals while hearts were far from God (Isaiah 29:13). This mirrors medieval Catholic corruption: multiplying external religious performances (pilgrimages, penances, masses) while tolerating moral corruption and doctrinal error. The Reformation's emphasis on heartfelt faith over works-righteousness addresses this issue. God's withdrawal represents ultimate judgment: the living God becoming absent, leaving only dead ritual. This occurred

literally when Shekinah glory departed temple before Babylonian destruction (Ezekiel 10:18-19, 11:23).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How can religious activity become substitute for genuine relationship with God, and what indicators reveal the difference?
2. What does God's withdrawal in response to hypocritical worship teach about the necessity of heart transformation?

Interlinear Text

בְּצָאן מִלְאָה	לְבָקֵשׁ יְלָכֵד וּבְבָקֵשׁ מִלְאָה	אֶת הָיָה בְּצָאן מִלְאָה			
with their flocks and with their herds	to seek	H1980	H1245	H853	the LORD
H6629	H1241			H3068	H3808
וְלֹא יִמְצָא אֹתָהוּ	סָלֵךְ	מְקֻמָּה	בְּצָאן מִלְאָה	בְּצָאן מִלְאָה	בְּצָאן מִלְאָה
but they shall not find him he hath withdrawn		H1992			
H4672	H2502				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 1:28 (Parallel theme): Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

John 7:34 (Parallel theme): Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

Proverbs 15:8 (References Lord): The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD; but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Jeremiah 7:4 (References Lord): Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.

Ezekiel 8:6 (Parallel theme): He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.

Lamentations 3:44 (Parallel theme): Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.