

Key words in Hosea

Stumble: Hebrew *kashal*—4:5; 5:5—literally means “to totter,” “to trip and fall,” or “to stumble.” The prophets frequently used this word to describe the spiritual life of the Hebrews. For example, Hosea likens both false prophets and their followers to those who stumble in the dark. They are stumbling over the sin of idolatry and falling to their ruin (4:5; 5:5; Is. 3:8). Isaiah warns that those who rely on their own strength will stumble and fall (Is. 40:30), but those who are led by the Lord will not stumble (Is. 63:13). In fact, the Lord will provide strength to those who have stumbled in the past and now call upon Him (1 Sam. 2:4).

Commit Harlotry: Hebrew *zanah*—2:5; 3:3; 4:15—refers to having illicit sexual relations, especially involving prostitution. Two forms of prostitution were practiced in the ancient world: common prostitution and ritual, or “religious,” prostitution, which involved pagan fertility rites. Both forms were strictly forbidden in God’s Law (Lev. 19:29; Deut. 23:17). The OT frequently uses prostitution as an image of the sin of idolatry. Israel was pledged to serve one God (Exodus 20:3), so idolatry was like marital unfaithfulness against the Lord. Hosea actually married a prostitute as a living symbol of God’s patience with Israel’s infidelities (see chap. 1)

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