

Hosea 2:11

“Did God Intend to Terminate His Appointed Times?”

“I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths and all her festival assemblies.”

It is probably not that infrequent that some of today’s Messianic people could be quoted Hosea 2:11 (or 13), and then be told that God Himself had every intention of one day abolishing the seventh-day Sabbath and appointed times: “I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals” (TNIV). It is clear to responsible Bible readers, however, that this statement is issued within a wider context of Hosea issuing condemning prophecies about the idolatrous behavior of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim.¹ This word is preceded with statements about the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom depicted as harlotry against the Lord (2:1-7), and how it does not realize how its prosperity comes from the Lord and not Baal (2:8-10). It is further stated how even though judgment will come from the Lord (2:11-13), a definite promise of future restoration to Him will be seen after a period of chastisement (2:14-23).

The Lord’s decree, “I will terminate her every rejoicing, her festival, her New Moon, her Sabbath and her every appointed season” (ATS), is doubtlessly serious. It cannot go overlooked how this statement opens with *v'hishbati* (וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי), “[and] I will put an end” (RSV/NRSV/ESV), “and-I-will-stop” (Kohlenberger).² Here, some might conclude that there is a slight pun intended with the word *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), as the related verb *shavat* (שָׁבַת) is employed. More important to be sure, is how to approach the Lord’s word, “I will also cause all her mirth to cease” (NKJV). As Elizabeth Achtemeier forthrightly concludes, “In verses 11-13 Yahweh is saying that the entire cultic calendar will be canceled. Israel’s worship has been used to honor the pagan baals. Therefore it will be done away.”³ A far lesser assertion is made by James Limburg, “The sanctuaries so busy with Baal worship will be shut down (v. 11).”⁴

That the Northern Kingdom has been guilty of giving Baal credit for its prosperity—failing to recognize how it was actually the Lord—has been indicted previously: “She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!’ For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, *which* they used for Baal” (2:7-8). Because of a failure for the Northern Kingdom to recognize the source of its well being as the Lord, He will take it away from them: “Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time and My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax *given* to cover her nakedness” (Hosea 2:9). The Torah explicitly admonishes how obedience to God’s Instruction will bring His bounty (Deuteronomy 11:13-14), which those of the Northern Kingdom have not done.

Questions are necessarily raised that if the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, which broke away and did establish a different system of worship than the Southern Kingdom of Judah—and its connection to the Temple in Jerusalem—then how can God say, “I will end her happiness, her festivals, *Rosh-Hodesh*, and *shabbats*, and all her designated times” (CJB)? It is widely recognized that even with a high degree of paganism and Baal worship, present within the Northern Kingdom, that some degree of worship of Israel’s God, the Sabbath, and appointed times had to persist. Gary V. Smith offers the general thought, “Removing the fertility of Baal will eliminate any reason or theological basis for praising Baal at Israel’s sexually perverse festivals or weekly religious

¹ If necessary, do consult the entry for the Book of Hosea, appearing in the workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

² Kohlenberger, 4:484.

³ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 23.

⁴ James Limburg, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), pp 11-12.

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celebrations at his temples (2:11).⁵ A syncretic employment of the Torah-prescribed Sabbath and appointed times, observed either in conjunction with or alongside of Baal worship, should be recognized as being a factor in God's termination of them. Douglas Stuart draws the conclusion,

"The holidays...were especially disgusting because they provided the occasion for the bulk of the Baal worship....Though these holidays were in their origin legitimate, they had been turned into 'days of Baal' (v. 15 [13]) by Israel, thus syncretistic in nature. Accordingly Yahweh announces that he will destroy the covenant calendar he himself had revealed. What could interrupt such traditions? The end of the nation as a sovereign state, off its land and in bondage. The covenantal curse predicting the rejection of the cult (Lev 26:31) was now to be enforced."⁶

Because of the Torah-prescribed Sabbath and appointed times caught up into Baal worship, and obviously perverted as a result, some Old Testament theologians conclude that the only real answer to the problem was God canceling the very *moedim* He established. However, the termination of what the text labels as *hodshah v'Shabbatah v'kol mo'adah* (חֲדָשֵׁה וְשַׁבְּתָהּ וְכָל מוֹעֵדָה), "her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts" (RSV), is connected to the judgment of the Northern Kingdom and its downfall. David Alan Hubbard notes the wider scope of sins present:

"Any doubt about the central role of the corrupt cult is dissipated in verse 11. The forceful language is continued by the uncompromising *I will put an end* (Heb. *šbt* in a form that means literally 'cause to cease'), an expression already used of the annihilation of Jehu's dynasty (1:4). There may be a direct connection between the disgrace witnessed by Israel's lovers (v. 10) and the destruction of the feasts (v. 11). The feasts in all their forms were so degraded by Israel's Baal worship that they no longer belonged to God; they were *her mirth*, her occasions of unbounded joy...but they were utterly dependent on Yahweh's bounty. Once the land, at his command, withheld its crops, no offerings and, hence, no feasts were possible; Israel stood bare before the Baals whose favour she courted....All these God-given occasions were co-opted by Israel for *her*...pagan purposes. The agricultural calendar of the pilgrimage feasts made them readily adaptable to the fertility cult whose purpose was to assure regularity of harvest and abundance of produce. The *new moon* and *sabbath*, which had counterparts in other Middle Eastern religions, may well have become corrupted by the astrological practices of Israel's neighbours as well as by the sexual rites against which Hosea inveighs."⁷

A burden of proof is certainly placed upon the sinners of the Northern Kingdom, given how the Sabbath and appointed times are designated with the possessive pronoun "her" in Hosea 2:11. This would indicate how the observance of the Sabbath and appointed times had been caught up in sinful behavior, no longer to be designated as "My" or "Mine" in belonging to God. In the estimation of James Luther Mays,

"The possessive 'her' repeated after each festival emphasizes that they now belonged, not to Yahweh, but to Israel in her own and mad pursuit of the gods of fertility. Note the same device of emphasis in Amos 5:21-23⁸. Whether the pagan quality of the northern kingdom's celebration of these festivals lay in an outright worship of the Canaanite gods, or manifested itself in a syncretism in which Yahweh was called Baal (v. 16), was worshipped with fertility rites, and was more and more conceived as Baal—the cult was none the less a forgetting of Yahweh."⁹

The view of Duane A. Garrett, while not dismissive of the Sabbath and appointed times being caught up in Baal worship in Hosea 2:11, focuses attention more on their heartless observance and dismissal of God by the people, concluding that this is what is being condemned more:

"The festivals had been corrupted by Baalism...On the other hand, we should not exaggerate this possibility since Hosea does not here describe any such behavior in the cult. It is important to recognize that these festivals were all essential parts of Israel's covenant life. They were Israel's

⁵ Gary V. Smith, *NIV Application Commentary: Hosea/Amos/Micah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 61.

⁶ Douglas Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah*, Vol. 31 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 51.

⁷ David Alan Hubbard, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Hosea* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), pp 78, 79.

⁸ "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps" (Amos 5:21-23).

⁹ James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 42.

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expressions of love and gratitude to Yahweh and were to be occasions of joy (Lev 23:40; Deut 26:11). For us it is noteworthy that their apostasy had not caused them to abandon the routines of life under the covenant. They could carry on the outward duties the faith required without realizing that God had rejected them and was determined to put this pretense to an end. The tragedy is not that so many were desperately licentious but that so many had fallen so far from God and did not know it.¹⁰

The sad reality of what is envisioned in Hosea 2:11 and the surrounding context, is the Torah-anticipated judgment of God upon a people which has committed idolatry and rejected Him:

"I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, for My soul shall abhor you. I will lay waste your cities as well and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your soothing aromas" (Leviticus 26:30-31).

The termination of the Sabbath and appointed times observed by the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim (perhaps better viewed as "the Sabbath" and "appointed times") is not something that is isolated from the judgment to come upon it as not just a group of people, but also a state. J. Andrew Dearman describes,

"The verb *hišbattî* [הִשְׁבַּתִּי], 'bring an end to,' more literally means 'cause to cease.' It is the same verb used in 1:4 to announce the end of the rule of the house of Israel...A parallel is found in Jer. 7:34, which comes at the end of the diatribe against the temple cult in Jerusalem: 'From the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem I will bring an end to the voice of gladness and joy, the voice of the groom and the bride, for the land will become a ruin.' In this expression one finds public celebration, reference to people and a capital city, and the ruin of the land, all of which are also part of Hosea's criticism of Israel."¹¹

It is hardly responsible of any reader of Hosea 2:11, "I will put an end to all her celebration: her annual religious festivals, monthly new moon celebrations, and weekly Sabbath festivities—all her appointed festivals" (NET Bible), to conclude that these speak of a universal termination of *Shabbat* and the *moedim*, when this prophecy is contextually issued in terms of Divine judgment upon the idolatry practiced by the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim. What needs to be instead recognized by readers of Hosea 2:11 is how the Torah-prescribed *Shabbat* and *moedim* can be co-opted by syncretism, being observed alongside of, or in conjunction with, paganism. A similar misuse of the Sabbath and appointed times is witnessed later in Galatians 4:9-11 and Colossians 2:16-23, even though more customary interpretations may conclude otherwise.

Of course, that Hosea 2:11 **does not represent a universal termination** of *Shabbat* and the *moedim*, is not just realized in how this was a word issued to the Northern Kingdom. Upon the Southern Kingdom exiles' return to the Holy Land, the Temple was rebuilt, the Sabbath and appointed times were observed, and the Sabbath and appointed times were observed in the First Century by faithful Jews such as Yeshua the Messiah and His Disciples.

¹⁰ Duane A. Garrett, *New American Commentary: Hosea, Joel*, Vol 19a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 84.

¹¹ J. Andrew Dearman, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 117.