

"The Idea of Worship in the Prophetic Books of the Bible"

by

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Introduction

Worship is "the act of paying divine honors to a deity; reverence, homage, or adoration paid to God or a being viewed as God; or reverence paid to something sacred from a reputed connection with God". Further, it is the "performing of religious exercises or religious services; the honoring with extravagant love and extreme submission; idolizing".¹

The scope of this thesis is limited to "The Idea of Worship in the Prophetic Books of the Bible". The passages containing references to the idea of worship in the writings of the three major prophets and in the so-called "Minor Prophets" have been carefully noted.

The Method and Aim of this Study

It has long been supposed by many that the Prophets departed from the other biblical writers by insisting that sacrifice was unimportant, even unnecessary.² It was their contribution, so some say, to point out the importance of social justice and prayer to the exclusion of ritual and sacrifice as an element of worship.³

It is also generally believed that the Prophets berated Israel for the heinous sin of idolatry. For

example, when Jeremiah (in 2:28) says to the people that their gods are as numerous as their cities, a commentator writes, "...we cannot exaggerate this division of the God-head into countless local forms".⁴

It is our contention that both of these widely accepted notions are erroneous; they will be dealt with in detail below.

This study deals with an analysis of the passages relating to worship distributed among certain categories. The direct references to worship that I have noted, bearing in mind the definition given above, concern the following:

altar, assemblies, beseeching, blessing, bowing down, calling on the name of the Lord, circumcision, crying to the Lord, defiling, fasting, feasting, fearing, House of the Lord, idols, images, knowing the Lord, keeping the statutes of the Lord, loving the Lord, making vows, offering, praying, profaning, return to the Lord, Sabbath, sacrifice, Sanctuary, seeking the Lord, serving the Lord, Temple, walk after the Lord, walk in the name of the Lord, wait for the Lord, and the like.

I have incorporated these under the broader categories⁵ of Prayer, Sacrifice, Fasting, Vowing, Other Ritual Observances (including circumcision, ritual cleanliness, and Sabbath observance), God's Abode, The Priesthood, Behavior: Proper and Improper, and Idolatry. Each of these nine categories comprises a chapter in this paper and collectively

spell out *"The Idea of Worship in the Prophetic Books of the Bible"*.

Chapter 1

PrayerA. Prayer and Sacrifice

It has been stated elsewhere¹ that the Prophets threatened the people with the cessation of sacrifice and special observances. In addition, prayer was also to cease at this time, as Hosea warned in 2:13,

והשבתי כל-משושה חנה חדשה
ושבתה ובל מועדה.

Amos, too, links prayer with sacrifice. In a passage (5:21-24) where he declares that God will not accept sacrifice when not accompanied by justice, he says (in v. 23) that God does not want the people's prayers at such a time:

חסר מעלי חסון שריך וזמרה
נבליך לא משמע.^{1,2}

Likewise, Jeremiah says in 14:11-12,

ויאמר יהוה אלי אל-החמלל
בעד-העם הזה לטובה. כי
יפסו אינני שמע אל-דנחם
וכי יעלו עליה ומנחה אינני
ראם כי בחרב וברעב ובדבר
אנכי מכלה אותם.

And Deutero-Isaiah, in 62:8-9,

נשבע יהוה בימינו ובגורוע
עיו אם-אחן אם-דגנך עוד

מאכל לא יביך ואם-ישחו בני-
 נבר תירושך אשר יגעת בו. כי
 מאספיו יאכלהו ותללו את-יהוה
 ומבציו ישחאו בחצרות קרשי

where prayer is closely associated with eating what
 has been brought as sacrifice.³

B. Prayer and Repentance

A second kind of prayer, according to the Pro-
 phets, consists of "crying (or calling) to the
 Lord". This form of prayer seems to be an aspect
 of repentance, as in Hosea, 7:14,

ולא-זעקו אלי בלבם כי
 ילילו על-משכבותם...

and in Micah 3:4,

אז יזעקו אל-יהוה ולא
 יענה אותם ויטהר פניהם
 מהם בעת ההיא כאשר
 הרעו מעלליהם,

and in Jonah 2:3,

...קראתי מצרה לי אל-
 יהוה ויענני מבטן שאול
 שועתי שמעת קולי.

In Jonah 1:14, the non-Israelittes also cry to the
 Lord, in repentance for their deed of throwing Jo-
 nah overboard,

ויקראו אל-יהוה ויאמרו
 אנה יהוה אל-נא נאבדה
 בנפש האיש הזה...

C. Prayer as Praise

For the Prophets, prayer is also praise of the Lord, giving thanks to God, exalting His name, singing to the Lord, shouting, and the like. One of the best examples of this is the thanksgiving song of Isaiah, 12:1-6,

ואמרת ביום ההוא מזרח יהוה
כי אנחה בי. ישב אפך וחנוכסני.
הנה אל ישועתי אבטח ולא
אמתד בי-עזי וזמרת יה יהוה
ויהי-לי לי שועה. ושאבחתם-
מים בששון ממעוניגי הישועה.
ואמרתם ביום ההוא תודו ליהוה
קראו בשמו הודיעו בעמים
עלילותיו תזכירו כי נשגב
שמו. זכרו יהוה כי גאון עשה
מידעת זאת בכל-הארץ. צהלי
ורני יושבת ציון כי-גדול
בקרבך קדוש ישראל.

Another example is from Deutero-Isaiah, (42:10-12),

שירו ליהוה שיר חדש תהללתו
מקצת הארץ יורדי הים ופלג
מים וישביהם. ישאו מדבר
ועריו חצרים חשב קדר ירנו
ישבי פלע פראש הרים יצונו.
ישימו ליהוה כבוד וחתלתו
באיים יגידו.

D. Prayer and God

It is certain that, according to the prophetic idea of worship, God wants prayer. Jeremiah says it clearly in 29:12-13,

וקראתם אתי והלכתם והחמלתם
 אלי ושמעתי אליכם. ובקשתם
 אתי ומצאתם כי חרשני בכל-
 לבבכם.

It would seem that not only does God want the prayers of the Israelites but He also wants the prayers of the other nations, as might be concluded from Zephaniah 3:9,

בִּי-אֵן אֶתְּךָ אֱלֹהִים שָׁמָּה
 בְּרוּרָה לִקְרָא כֹלָם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה
 לַעֲבֹדוּ שִׁבְתָּ אַחֲרָי.

A similar statement is to be found in Zechariah 8:22,

וּבָאוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְגוֹיִם
 עֲצוּמִים לִבְקֹשׁ אֶת-יְהוָה
 אֲבֹנוֹת בִּירוּשָׁלַם וּלְחַלּוֹת
 אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה.

While it is questionable that the Prophets really meant for all the world to pray to God, it cannot be questioned that passages such as the above, point up the importance of prayer for the Prophets.⁷

Prayer properly offered, according to the Prophets, will be heard by God and answered. Isaiah says it in 38:5,

...שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-חֲמַלְתְּךָ יְהוָה
 אֶת-דִּמְעֹתֶיךָ חֲנָנִי יוֹסֵף עַל-יָסוּדְךָ
 חַמֵּשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה.

Micah has it in 7:7,

וְאֲנִי בֵיתוֹהָ אֶצְמַח אֶחָיִלָּה
 לְאֵלֹהִי יִשְׁעִי יִשְׁמְעֵנִי אֱלֹהִי.

It is also to be found in Jeremiah 33:3,

קרא אלי ואענוך...

and in Joel 3:5,

**והיה כל אשר-יקרא בשם
יחזק ימלך...**

and finally in Zechariah 13:9,

**...הוא יקרא בשמי ואני
אענה אותו...**

Chapter 2

Sacrifice

As stated in the Introduction, some writers have asserted that the Prophets believed that God was indifferent to sacrifice,¹ and that sacrifice was an unimportant, if not unnecessary, aspect of worship. Let us present the facts as they are, permitting the biblical statements to speak for themselves. It is our contention that this widespread and generally accepted view of the prophetic attitude toward sacrifice is erroneous.²

In Amos 4:4-5, we read,

בְּמִן בֵּית-אֵל וּמִסֵּעַ הַלָּאֵל
 חֲרָבוּ לַמָּסַע וְהִבִּיאוּ לַבָּקָר
 וּבְחֵיכֶם לִשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים מִקֵּסֶם
 רַחֲיִבָם. וְקָטַר מִחֶמֶץ חֹדֶרָה
 וְקִרְאוּ נִדְבוֹת חֲסִידֵיכֶם כִּי
 בֶן אֲחֻזָּתָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָאֻם
 אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹה.

One might be led to assume from this that sacrifices are equated with transgressions and should not be offered. These verses, however, must be understood in the general context of God's reproofing His people for their unrighteous behavior; i.e., for oppressing the poor and crushing the needy (4:1), and for refusing to repent of their behavior (4:6). Then, when Amos says to them in 5:21-24 that God hates their sacrifice and will not accept it,

שנאתי סמתי חגיכם ולא
 אריח בעצרתכם. כי אם-
 העלו-לי עלות ומנחתים
 לא ארצה ושלם סריאכם
 לא אביט. הסר מעלי חסון
 שריך וזרח נבליך לא אשמע.
 ויגל במים משפט וצדקה כנחל
 איתן

we understand that it is not sacrifice per se that God rejects, but sacrifice associated with unrighteousness. From verse 23, we see that God does not even want prayer when there is no צדקה וצדקה with it.³

Hosea discusses the punishment that will come to the sinful altars that have been built in 8:11 and also in 10:1-3.

גפן בוקק ישראל מרי יסוה-
 לו כרב לפדיו הרבה למזבחות
 כסוב לארצו הסיבו מצבות.
 חלק לבם עתה יאשמו הוא
 יערף מזבחותם ישרד מצבותם.
 כי עתה יאמרו אין מלך לנו
 כי לא יראנו אה-יהוה והמלך
 סה-יעשה לנו.

But it is not so much the altars as such that are criticized as the fact that the people have built them while rejecting the Torah (8:12) and not fearing the Lord (10:3).⁴ Sacrifice itself was accounted an important part of worship; this is shown in 3:4 where being restrained from sacrifice was used by Hosea as a threat of punishment.⁵ Hosea was not opposed to sacrifice, but he was opposed to

improper sacrifice: i.e., sacrifice accompanied by immorality, lack of understanding of God, or refusal to pay attention to God.⁶ Hosea (5:6-7) surely implies that God wants sacrifice, even though when the people come to Him, He will have withdrawn Himself because of their treachery,

בצאנכם ובבקר־ים ילכו לבקש
אח-יהוה ולא ימצאו חלץ
מחם. ביהוה בגדו בִּי-בָנִים
וְרִים ילדוּ עִתָּה יֹאכְלֶם חֹדֶשׁ
אח-חֲלִיקֵיהֶם.

Even when God says in Hosea 6:6,

כִּי חֹדֶשׁ חֲמַצְתִּי וְלֹא זֶבַח
וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מַעֲלִיזָה,

the word **מַעֲלִיזָה** is the clue that this is a comparative negative phrase, and it should not be understood as an absolute rejection of sacrifice and offerings: **חֹדֶשׁ זֶבַח** are more to be desired than **מַעֲלִיזָה זֶבַח** because these sacrifices have been accompanied by sins and iniquity,⁷ but **חֹדֶשׁ זֶבַח** are not substitutes for sacrifice. Similarly, in Hosea 14:2-3,

שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
כִּי בָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֹזְנְךָ. קָחוּ עִמָּכֶם
דְּבָרִים וּשְׁוֹבוּ אֶל-יְהוָה אֱסֵרוּ
אֵלֶיךָ כָּל-חַטֹּאת עֲוֹן יִקְחֶם-מִכָּ
וְנִשְׁלַחַת מִדְּבָרִים שְׁמַחֲיִינוּ

instead of offering the usual bullocks, the people will offer forgiveness for their sins; their sacrifice on this occasion—if **וְנִשְׁלַחַת מִדְּבָרִים שְׁמַחֲיִינוּ** is original and correctly understood—will be their

words of prayer and repentance, but this is not to assume that prayer is a permanent substitution for sacrifice.⁸

Isaiah says very much the same thing in 1:10-17:

שמעו דבר-יהוה קציןי. סדם
האזינו תורה אלהינו עם
עפרה. לפה לי רב-זבחים
יאמר יהוה שבעתי עלות
אילים וחלב מרימים ודם
פרים וכבשים ועחורים לא
הפצתי. כי תבאו לראות פני
מי בקש זאת סידכם דם הצרי.
לא חוסימו הביא מנחת-שום
קדש חועבה היא לי חדש ושבת
קרא מקרא לא-אכול און ועצרה.
חדשיכם ומועדיכם שגאת נמשי
היו עלי למרה גלתי נשא.
ובמרשכם כפיכם מעלים עיני
מכם גם כי-תרבו תפלה אינני
שמע ידיכם דמים מלאו. רחצו
הזכו הסירו רע מעלליכם מנגד
עיני חדלו הרע. למדו היטב
דרשו משפט אשרו תקוץ שממו
יהם ריבו אלמנה.

So does Micah in 6:6-8,

במה מקדם יהוה אכף לאלהי
מרום האקדמו בעולות
בעגלים בני שנה. הירצה
יהוה באלפי אילים ברבבות
נחליששמן האתן בכורי משעי
פרי במני חטאת נמשי. הגיד
לך אדם מה-טוב ומה יהוה
דורש ממך כי אם-עשות משפט
ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם-
אלהיך.

Here, again, sacrifices and offerings are compared
to משפט וחסד.

Jeremiah's attitude is no different.¹⁰ In 6:19-20, we read,

שמעו הארץ הנה אנכי מביא
רעה אל-העם הזה מרי מחשבותם
כי על-דברי לא הקשיבו וחורתי
וימאסו-בה. למה-זה לי לבונה
משבא תבוא וקנה חטוב מארץ
מרחק עלותיכם לא לרצון וזב-
חיכם לא-ערבו לי.

He, too, speaks of the unacceptability of sacrifice when the words of God and His Torah are rejected.¹¹ On the other hand, to put it positively, when the proper behavior will be achieved, when the covenant will be observed properly, sacrifice, too, will be brought, as Jeremiah declares in 17:25-26 and in 33:11:

ובאו בשערי העיר הזאת
מלכים ושרים יושבים על-
כסא דוד רכבים ברבב
ובמסותים המה ושריהם איש
יהודה וישיבי ירושלם וישבה
העיר הזאת לעולם. ובאו
מקרי-יהודה ומסביבות
ירושלם ומארץ בנימין ומן-
השפלה ומן-החר ומן-הנגב
מבאים עלה זבחה ומנחה
ולבונה ומבאי חודה בית
יהוה. ... קול ששון
וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול
כלה קול אמרים הודו את-
יהוה צבאות כי-טוב יהוה
כי-לעולם חסדו מבאים חודה
בית יהוה כי-אשיב את-שבותי¹²
הארץ כבראשנה אמר יהוה.

What could be clearer than an equation of justice and righteousness (משפט וצדקה) with the offering

of sacrifice by the Levites at the time when the Temple will be restored? Such an equation is found in 33:14-18,

הנה ימים באים נאם-יהוה
והקמתי את-הדבר הטוב אשר
דברתי אל-בית ישראל ועל-
בית יהודה ביםים ההם ובעת
התיא אצטח לדוד אסח צדקה
ועשה משפט וצדקה בארץ.
ביםים ההם חושע יהודה ירושלם
תשבון לבמה וזה אשר-יקרא-לה
יהוה צדקנו. כי-בה אסר יהוה
לא-יכרה לדוד איש ישב על-
כסא בית ישראל. ולכחנים
חלויים לא-יכרה איש מלפני
מעלה עולה ומקטיר מנחה
ועשה זבח כל-הימים.

Ezekiel speaks of God's requiring gifts and
heave-offerings after the Restoration, in 20:39-44:

ואתם בית-ישראל בה-אמר
אדני יהוה איש גלוליו לכו
עבדו ואחר אם-אינכם שמעים
אלי ואח-שם קדשי לא תחללו-
עוד במתנותיכם ובגלוליתכם.
כי בהר-קדשי בהר מרום ישראל
נאם אדני יהוה שם יעבדני כל-
בית ישראל כלה בארץ שם ארצם
ושם אדירוש את-חרומוהיכם ואת-
ראשית משאומיכם בכל-קדשיכם.
בריה ניהח ארצת אתכם כהוציא
אתכם מן-העמים וקבצתי אתכם
מן-הארצות אשר נמצאתם בם ונק-
דשתי בכם לעיני הגוים. וידעתם
כי-אני יהוה בהביאי אתכם אל-
ארצת ישראל אל-הארץ אשר נשאתי
את-ידי לחת אותה לאבותיכם.
וזכרתם-שם את-דרכיכם ואת כל-

על־לוח־בם אשר נִמְסָאֲתָם בָּם
וְנִקְטָתָם בְּמִנִּיכָם בְּכָל־דְּעוֹתֵיכֶם
אשר עֲשִׂיתֶם. וַיִּדְעֻם כִּי־אֲנִי
יְהוָה בַּעֲשׂוֹתֵי אֲהַבָּם לִמְעַן שְׂמִי
לֹא כִדְרֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וּבַעֲלִילוֹתֵיכֶם
הַנִּשְׁחָחוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנִי
יְהוָה.

Chapters 40-47 of Ezekiel, the chapters dealing with the Restoration of the Temple, will not be dealt with in this study. It is worth noting, however, that these chapters, though primarily dealing with mechanical details of the cult and therefore not relevant to this paper, contain explicit statements concerning God's acceptance of offerings, such as the one to be found in 43:27,

וַיִּכְלוּ אֶת־הַיָּמִים וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם
הַשְּׁמִינִי וְחָלָאָה יַעֲשׂוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים
עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶת־עוֹלוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֶת־
שְׁלֵמֵיכֶם וְרֵאֲתִי אֲהַבָּם נֶאֱמַר
אֲדֹנִי יְהוָה.

In general, these chapters imply this acceptance even without explicit references to it.

In Deutero-Isaiah, 40:15-16, there is a comparison between God and the images:

הֵן גּוֹיִם כְּסֵר מְדִלִי וּבִשְׁחָק
מַאֲזֵנִים נִחְשְׁבוּ הֵן אֵיִם בְּרֶקַע
יְסוּל. וְלִבְנֵי אֵין דִּי בַּעַר
וְחִיתִן אֵין דִּי עוֹלָה.

Such a reference assumes the importance of sacrifice since it must be something that the people are well acquainted with in order for it to be an un-

derstandable comparison.¹³ Deutero-Isaiah also reminds the people (43:21-24) that they have brought sin instead of sacrifice,

עם-זו יצרת לי חלה
 יספרו. ולא-אתי קראח
 יעקב בן-יגעה בן ישראל.
 לא-הביאת לי שם עליך
 וזבחך לא כבודתי לא
 העבדתך בסנחה ולא חוגעתך
 בלבונה. לא-קניתי לי בכסף
 קנה וחלב זבחך לא הרויתני
 אך העבדתני בחטאותיך חוגעתני
 בעונותיך.

There is some question as to whether this last reference is to a time prior to the Exile or contemporaneous with it when the people could not have brought sacrifice even if they had wanted to. Either way, it seems clear that the meaning is that God wants sacrifice, but not with sin. In 57:4-8, there is a similar question about the time reference:

על-מי חתוננו על-מי חתוננו
 פה חתוננו לשון חלל-אחם ילדי-
 פסע זרע שקר. הנחמים באלי
 חתה בל-עץ רעון שחם ילדים
 בנחלים חתה סעמי חסלעים.
 בחלקי-נחל חלקן הם הם גורלך
 גם-להם שפכה נסך העליה מנחה
 העל אלה אנחם. על חר-גבוה
 ונשא שמה משכבך גם-שם עליה
 לזבח זבח. ואחר הדלת וחמיונה
 שמה זכרוןך כי סאתי גליה
 וחעלי הרחבה משכבך וחברת-לך
 מהם אהבה משכבם יד חיות.

If this is exile, it makes no sense to scold the

people for sacrificing at an improper place, i.e., not in Jerusalem, because they couldn't have sacrificed there; and if this refers to pre-exilic times, we have no evidence that the children of the Israelites were being slaughtered at that time.¹⁴ Perhaps this is but a conventional way of stating that they were not paying proper attention to God. In like manner, we call attention to Isaiah 65:1-15 which speaks of sacrifice in improper places and of forsaking the Lord. In other words, it accuses the people of generally transgressing the covenant. Verses 13-15 are quoted below:

לכן כה-אמר אדני יהוה הנה
עבדי יאכלו ואחם חרעבו הנה
עבדי ישחו ואחם תצטאו הנה
עבדי ישמחו ואחם תבשו. הנה
עבדי ירנן משוב לב ואחם
תצעקו מכאב לב ומשבר רוח
חילצו. והנחתם שמכם לשבועה
לבחירי והמיתך אדני יהוה
ולעבדיו יקרא שם אחר.

It should be noted that such exaggerated statements are found here that it can be assumed that the preceding is also in the same vein: the so-called improper sacrifice in gardens and upon bricks is nothing more than rhetoric. Even the sacrifice mentioned in 66:3-4 that was supposedly proper is not accepted,

שוחם חסור מכה-איש וזבח
חשה עורף כלב מעלה מנחה
דם-חזיר מזכיר לבנה מברך

און גא-הפה בחרו בדרכיהם
ובשקוציהם נפשם חמצה. גם-
אני אבחר בהעלוליהם ומגורם
אביא להם יען קראתי ואין
עונה דברתי ולא שמעו ויעשו
הרע בעיני ובאשר לא-חמצתי
בחרו.

*When God called, the people didn't answer; and when
He spoke, they didn't hear; but they did evil. Fi-
nally, according to Deutero-Isaiah (56:1-8) sacri-
fice in righteousness will be accepted because the
covenant will be observed:*

כה אמר יהוה שפרו משפט
ועשו צדקה כי-קרובה ישועתי
לבוא וצדקתי להגלות. אשרי
אנוש יעשה-זאת ובן-אדם
יחזיק בה שפר שבת מחללו
ושפר ידו מעשות כל-רע.
ואל-יאמר בן-הנוכר הגלות
אל-יהוה לאמר הבדל יבדילני
יהוה מעל עמו ואל-יאמר הסרים
הן אני עץ יבש. כי-כה אמר
יהוה לפרים אשר שפרו את-
שבתותי ובחרו באשר חמצתי
וסחזיקים בבריתי. ונתתי להם
בביתי ובחומתי יד ושם טוב
סבנים ומבנות שם עולם אתן-
לו אשר לא יכרת. ובני הנוכר
הגלויים על-יהוה לשרתו ולאחבת
את-שם יהוה להיות לו לעבדים
כל-שפר שבת מחללו וסחזיקים
בבריתי. ותביאותם אל-דוד קדשי
ושמחתם בבית הפלתי עולתיכם
וזבחיכם לרצון על-מזבחי כי
ביתי בית-הפלח יקרא לכל-
העמים. גאם אדני יהוה מקבץ
נדחי ישראל עוד מקבץ עליו
לנקבציו. 15

Malachi scolds the priests for their sacrifices of polluted bread (1:7), for sacrificing animals with blemishes (1:8), and for offering what they have obtained through violence (1:13); but these are unacceptable to God, only for these reasons, it would seem. If they were proper, they would be acceptable, as they are in 3:3-4, when they are brought

בבצקה:

וישב סצרך ומטהר כסף ומטהר
 את-בני-לוי וזקק אתם כזהב
 ובכסף והיו ליתוח סגיש
 סנחה בבצקה. וערבה ליתוח
 סנחה יתורה וירושלם בימי
 עולם ובסנים קרסני'ה.

Perhaps the following verses present the best summation of the prophetic view of sacrifice: God will judge all the Israelites, priest, Levite, and commoner alike (Malachi 3:5) because of their behavior and because of their rejection of Him; but if they repent, He will forgive them and return to them (3:7). They will no longer rob God of what He wants in tithes and heave-offerings, but He will receive the sacrifices He desires, as Malachi states in 3:10:

הביאו את-כל-המעשר אל-בית
 המוצר ויהי סרך בבית' ובחונוני
 נא בזמזוח ססר יתוח אבאות סס-
 לא אסחה לכם את ארבות חסמים
 והריקתי לכם ברכה עד-בלי-די.

Chapter 3

Fasting

According to the Prophets, in addition to other aspects of worship, fasting was a significant method of showing reverence to God. The concept seems to be more important after the Exile, for it is only mentioned explicitly¹ by Joel, Zechariah, Jeremiah, and Deutero-Isaiah. From references in Jeremiah (36:9) and in Zechariah (8:18) we know that there were fast days in the fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth, and tenth months of the year. Fast days were important ceremonially since they were days on which pilgrimages were made to Jerusalem, to the House of the Lord (Jeremiah 36:6,9). From Isaiah 58:3, we know that no work was to be done on those days; furthermore, they were called, (Zechariah 8:19),

לשבת ולמנוחה...
...שבת

From this we see that there was a holiday aspect of joy connected with them; this is quite different from the way we look upon fast days in modern times.

Fasting was not an observance per se, however. Fasting was accompanied by going to the House of the Lord, as we have seen above, and was also to be accompanied by prayer. This we know from statements such as Joel 1:14 and 2:12,

קדשו-צום קראו עצרה...
ויעקו אל-יהוה.

...שבו קרי בכל-לבבכם
וצום ובבבי ובספד.

Also, Jeremiah 14:12,

כי יצומו אינני שמע אל-
...רחם.

And similarly, Isaiah 58:4,

...לא תצומו כיום להשמיע
במרום קולכם.

Another element of the fast was the kind of personal behavior which the Prophets believed God demanded of an individual. Zechariah chides the people for fasting without paying attention to what God demands of them (7:7), and he urges them, in observing a fast as a time of joy, to love truth and peace, (8:19),

...והצמח והשלום אהבו.

According to Deutero-Isaiah, God does not accept a fast when it is improperly observed, e.g., if business is conducted on that day (58:3); or when strife is present, as in 58:4,

הן לריב ומצח תצומו ולהבות
באגרוף רשע...

But the fast can be acceptable to the Lord when it is a corollary to the kind of behavior about which one can say, (Isaiah 58:8),

...והלך לפניך צדקך כבוד יהוה
יאמך.

In other words, God will accept a man's fast only if it is associated with the proper kind of behavior, viz; avoiding wickedness, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, refraining from evil, etc., (Isaiah 58:5-10). It is behavior which seeks an ethic, not in lieu of the observance, but as a prerequisite for it. There is no evidence that God does not want a fast; to the contrary, the Prophets assert that He does, when it is accompanied by righteousness.

Chapter 4

Vowing

Vowing is an element of worship, according to the Prophets, but it is an unimportant one to judge from the paucity of references to it. Jonah has two references to vowing, in 1:16 and in 2:10. Since the first,

וַיִּרְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרֵאָה גְדוֹלָה
אֶת-יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח לַיהוָה
וַיִּדְּרוּ נִדְרִים ,

has the men (הָאֲנָשִׁים) sacrificing and vowing to the Lord, it appears that these are the (non-Israelite?) sailors on board the ship.¹ In the second reference, it is Jonah himself who mentions the sacrifice and his obligation to fulfill his vows to the Lord,

וְאֲנִי בְקוֹל חֲזָקָה אֶזְבַּחַת-לָךְ
אֲשֶׁר נִדְרָתִי אֶשְׁלַח יְשׁוּעָתָה
לַיהוָה.

There is but one reference to vowing in Jeremiah. That is as follows, in 44:25:

כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה-אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אַתֶּם וְנָשֵׁיכֶם
וְחִדְבְּרֵיכֶם בְּפִיכֶם וּבִידֵיכֶם
מִלְּאֲתֶם לֵאמֹר עֲשֵׂה נַעֲשֵׂה אֲתָּה-
נִדְרֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר נִדְרָנוּ לְקִסֵּם
לְמַלְכֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְהַטֵּף לָהֶם
נִסְכִּים הַקִּים הַקִּימָנָה אֲתָּה-
נִדְרֵיכֶם וְעֲשֵׂה חֲעֲשִׂינָה אֲתָּה-
נִדְרֵיכֶם.

Whether the Israelites did, in fact, worship other

gods is considered in this study elsewhere.² It will be assumed here, however, that the offerings and the vows have been made to the Egyptian deities by the Jews living in Egypt.

A third reference to vowing in the prophetic books occurs in Malachi 1:14,

וארור נזכר זיש בעדרו זכר
ונזדר וזבח פסחח לאדני כי
פלך גדול אני אשר יהיה
צמחח ושמי נזרח בגוים.³

It is to be concluded, that vowing is a proper, though lesser, form of worship; it is something that can be performed by Israelite or non-Israelite; but regardless of who makes the vow, it is never made and fulfilled per se: the vows referred to by the Prophets are all associated with the rendering of an offering to a deity.

circumcision of the heart, a poetic reference, it would seem, to the proper attitude of dedication to the covenant between God and Israel. The reason for mentioning it at all in this study is, that even though it is a literary reference, it was understandable to the people that Jeremiah was addressing. From this we may conclude that circumcision was known, practiced, and generally taken for granted in prophetic worship, particularly in its later phase.

B. Ritual Cleanliness

Another observance that the Prophets deal with is ritual cleanliness. For Ezekiel, to have to eat unclean bread (4:13-14) is a punishment that the Lord will inflict upon Judeans in exile,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה כֹּכָה יֵאָכְלוּ
בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-לֶחֶם טָמֵא
בְּיוֹמָם אֲשֶׁר אֲדִיחָם שָׁם.
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחָת אֲדָנִי יְהוָה חֲנָה
נָפְשִׁי לֹא טָמְאָה וְנִבְלָה
וְטָרְפָה לֹא-אֵכְלָתִי מִנְעוּרִי
וְעַד-עַתָּה וְלֹא-בָא בִּפִּי בָשָׂר
מִגּוֹל.

The Israelites also violated the laws of purity by having intercourse with a woman who was unclean because of her menstruation, (Ezekiel 22:10),

עֲרוּת-אִם גִּלְתָּ-בָךְ טָמְאָה
הִנֵּה עַוְוָה-בָּךְ.

Further, it is charged that the priests have done violence to God's Torah by not making clear the difference between clean and unclean, as Ezekiel charges in 22:26,

כֹּהֲנִים הִמָּסוּ תוֹרָתִי...
וּבִין-הַמָּסָה לַמְהוֹר לֹא
הוֹדִיעוּ...
הוֹדִיעוּ...

Ezekiel puts emphasis on ritual purification by water when the dispersion will be ended, in 36:24-25,29:

וּלְקַחְתִּי אִתְּכֶם מִן-הַגּוֹיִם
וּקְבַצְתִּי אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת
וְהִבֵּאתִי אִתְּכֶם אֶל-אֶרֶץ-חַכְמָכֶם.
וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים
וְטָהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל-
גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם...
וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם
וּקְרָאתִי אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה וְהָרֶבֶתִּי
אִתּוֹ וְלֹא-אֶחָד עֲלֵיכֶם רֶעִב.

Deutero-Isaiah recognizes the importance of ritual purity,² but at the same time he points out the penalty for those who will become ritually acceptable one minute and then turn their backs on God and eat the forbidden foods (66:17):

הַמְתַּקְדְּשִׁים וְהַמְטַהֲרִים אֶל-
הַגּוֹיִם אֲחֵרִים בְּחוּץ אֶרֶץ
בֶּשֶׂר הַחֹזֵר וְהַשֹּׁקֵץ וְהַעֲבֹבֵר
יָחִיד יִסָּמוּ נַאֲם-יְהוָה.

C. Sabbath and Festival Observance

For the Prophets, a third area of ritual observance was in keeping the special days of the calendar. Hosea (2:13) talks of the punishment God will bring by causing an end to prayer, feasts,³ new moons, and all the appointed occasions,

והשבתי כל-משושה חגה חדשה
ושבתה וכל מועדה.

For this to be an effective punishment, one must assume that these occasions were important in the life of the people.

Jeremiah discusses the proper observance of the Sabbath in 17:21-24 as a prerequisite for sacrifice,

כה אמר יְהוָה השֹׁמְרוֹ בְּנֵי
שׁוֹחֵיכֶם וְאֵל-חֲשֹׁמוֹ מִשָּׁא בְּיוֹם
הַשַּׁבָּת וְהַבָּאֵתָם בְּשַׁעְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם.
וְלֹא-תוֹצִיאוּ מִשָּׂא מִבְּתֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם
הַשַּׁבָּת וְכָל-מִלְאכָתָא לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ
וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת כְּאִשֵּׁר
צִוִּיתִי אֶת-אַבְנֹתֵיכֶם. וְלֹא תַעֲשׂוּ
וְלֹא תִסּוּ אֶת-אֲזִנֵּי וְיִקְשׁוּ אֶת-
עֲרֹמָה לְבִלְתִּי שׁוֹמֵעַ וּלְבִלְתִּי
קָחַת מוֹסֵר. וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַת
הַשְׁמָעוֹן אֵלַי נִאֲמַי-יְהוָה לְבִלְתִּי
הָבִיִּי מִשָּׂא בְּשַׁעְרֵי הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וּלְקִדְשׁ אֶת-יוֹם
הַשַּׁבָּת לְבִלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת-בָּהּ כָּל-
מִלְאכָה.

Ezekiel stresses the Sabbath for the priests in 22:26,

כהנים חססו חורתי...
ומשבתות העלימו עיניהם...

and for the people in 20:13,20,

ויסרו-בי בית-ישראל במדבר
...ואת שבתותי הללו מאז...
ואת-שבתותי קדשו והיו לאות
ביני ובניכם לדעה כי אני
יהוה אלהיכם.

Deutero-Isaiah devotes the whole of Chapter 58 to the ritual importance of fasting and Sabbath observance,⁵ but he goes even further by defining the kind of Sabbath observance that the Lord delights in; e.g., in 58:13-14,

אם-חשיב משה רגלך עשות
המצד ביום קדשי וקראת
לשבת ענג לקדוש יהוה מכבד
וכבודו מעשות דרכיך מספוא
המצד ודבר דבר. אז תתענג
על-יהוה ותרכבתך על-במותי
ארץ והאכלתיך נחלת יעקב
אמין כי יהוה דבר.

Also in 66:23,

יהיה כד-חדש בחדשו וסרי
שבת בשבתו יבוא כל-בשר
להשתחוה לפני אפרי יהוה.

In 56:4,6, observance of the Sabbath is considered to be an important part of the covenant,

כי-כה אמר יהוה לסריסים
אשר ישמרו את-שבתותי ובחרו
באשר חסצתי ומחזיקים בבריתי
...ובני הנכר הנלזים על-יהוה
לשרתו ולאהבה את-שם יהוה
להיות לו לעבדים כל-שמר שבת
מחללו ומחזיקים בבריתי.

It is an interesting fact that the major Prophets who deal with circumcision, ritual purity, and Sabbath observance are all prophets of the Exile. The only exception to this is the presumably earlier reference to Sabbaths in Hosea 2:13. It is only speculation on our part, but this might indicate that these rites, which are so important to normative Judaism of today, were not an important phase of worship prior to the Exile.⁶

In conclusion, there is no reference to these observances which stresses their importance by and of themselves. Every one of these references to ritual observances is found within the context of the proper observance of the covenant between Israel and God on the one hand, or between man and his fellow man on the other.⁷

Chapter 6

God's Abode

All the Prophets dealt with in this study, except Zephaniah, refer to an abode in which God dwells. There are two kinds of references to this place, however, and they should be kept distinct: A) one is to the **בֵּית ה' כָּל־קִדְשׁ**, God's Sanctuary in Jerusalem where Israel goes to worship and sacrifice; and, B) another type of reference deals with statements concerning **בְּמִצְרַיִם הַיָּם** and **בֵּית ה' הַנּוֹרָא** in which the nations of the world are mentioned as streaming to the Lord's House in order to worship Him.

A.

One of the earliest references to the Lord's House occurs in Hosea 9:15, in which God threatens to drive the people from His house because of their wickedness,

...עַל־רֹעַ מַעַלְלֵיהֶם מִבֵּיתִי
אֶרְשָׁם.

Jeremiah accuses the people of taking the

בֵּית ה' כָּל־קִדְשׁ for granted in 7:14, and of profaning it through their improper sacrifice and behavior,² as, for example, in 7:10,

וּבְאַחַם וְעַמְדָתָם לִפְנֵי בֵּיתִי
הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עָלָיו...
לִמְעַן עֲשׂוּת אֵם כָּל-הַחֲוָצוֹת
הָאֵלֶּה.

Furthermore, it is written explicitly (Jeremiah 17:26) that the House of the Lord is the place to which sacrifices are to be brought:

בְּמִזְבֵּחַ... מִבְּמִית עֹלֶה וְזֶבֶח
וּמִנְחָה וְלִבְנוֹת וּמִבְּמִית חֹדֶה
בֵּית יְהוָה.⁴

For the Prophets of the Exile, the Temple has been destroyed, and they are not only exiled from their land but also from their Sanctuary, although the Sanctuary remains very much a part of their theology. Ezekiel calls it the desire of their eyes, in 24:21,

וְהָיָה עֵינֵיכֶם מְחַמֵּד עֵינֵיכֶם
וְחָמַל וְשָׂבַח...⁵

Later on (37:26-28) he says that it is a place where God is to be re-established, that He might make His covenant with the people and set His Sanctuary in their midst for all to recognize that He is God,

וְהָיָה אֵל-מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּחִיבָה
לְעוֹלָם. וְהָיָה מִשְׁכְּנִי עֲלֵיהֶם
וְהָיָה לָהֶם לְמִלְאָהִים וְחֵמָה
יְהִי-לִי לְעַם. וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֵל-יִשְׂרָאֵל^{5,6}
בְּחִיבָה מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּחִיבָה לְעוֹלָם.

In the normal course of events, it is assumed that the House of the Lord is important,⁷ that people will come to the Temple for worship; Isaiah says as much in 30:29:

חֲשִׁיר יִהְיֶה לָכֶם... כְּהוֹלֵךְ
בְּחֹלֶל לְבָא בְּהָר-יְהוָה
אֶל-צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Habakkuk says (2:20) that God will be there in order to receive their worship:

יְהוָה בְּהִיבֵל קִדְשׁוֹ חֵם מִמְּנוֹ
כָּל-הָאָרֶץ.

Jonah 2:8 is similar,

בַּחֲקֵמָה עָלַי נִפְשִׁי אֶת-יְהוָה
זָכַרְתִּי וְחִבּוֹת אֵלַיךְ חִמְלָתִי
אֶל-הִיבֵל קִדְשֶׁךָ.

In addition to the importance of the Temple structure itself, the Prophets considered Jerusalem to be the only logical place for the abode of God. For proof of this, we cite Isaiah 24:23 and 27:13:

כִּי מֵלֶךְ יְהוָה עֲבָדוֹת בְּהָר
צִיּוֹן וּבִירוּשָׁלַם...
וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע
בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ הָאֲבָרִים
בָּאָרֶץ אֲשׁוּר וְהַנִּדְחִים בָּאָרֶץ
מִצֻּרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לִיהוָה בְּהָר
הַקָּדֵשׁ בִּירוּשָׁלַם.

B.

As noted above, a second group of passages deals with the nations of the world who are mentioned as streaming to Jerusalem to worship God. It must be decided whether these passages are to be taken literally; that is, whether Jerusalem and the House of the Lord were intended by the Prophets to become the religious capital of the world. Already

Amos (9:11-12) asserted that there are many nations who call upon God's name,

ביום ההוא אקים את-סוכת
דוד הנזמלת וגדרתי את
פרציתן והרפתיו אקים
ובנוחיה כימי עולם. למען
יירשו את-שארית אדום וכל-
הגוים אשר-נקרא שמי עליהם
נאם יהוה עשה זאת.

Running right through the prophetic books we have similar statements, such as Micah's famous passage dealing with the "end of days" in 4:1-2:

והיה באחרית הימים יהיה
הר בית-יהוה נכון בראש
ההרים ונשא הוא מגבעות
ונתרו עליו עמים. והלכו
גוים רבים ואמרו לבו
ונעלה אל-הר-יהוה ואל-
בית אלהי יעקב ויורנו
דרכיו ונלכה בארחתיו
כי מציון תצא חוקה ודבר
יהוה מירושלם.¹⁰

On the surface it would seem as if it were the desire of the Prophets for all the people of the world to come to the Temple and worship God there. It seems more plausible, however, to say that the Prophets were actually not concerned with making Jerusalem the world's religious capital, but that they were using a grandiloquent style for saying that eventually YHWH was to be recognized as the only God. It would seem that since Israel is accused so often of improper behavior¹¹ and so many

times of forsaking the covenant, that these references to universal worship are not literal but rhetorical. The immediate goal of the Prophets was to get Israel to observe the covenant properly; this goal is vast enough without the additional concern for the worship of the other nations. As a matter of fact, in the light of certain passages, we see that there was a strong antipathy to permitting any but circumcised and ritually clean Israelites in the Temple area, perhaps even in all of Jerusalem. The passages referred to, specifically Jeremiah 51:51 and Isaiah 52:1 appear below:

בשנו כִּי-שִׁמְעוּנו חֲרָפָה בְּמִתָּה
 בְּלִמָּה פָּנֵינוּ כִּי בָּאוּ זָרִים
 מִקְדָּשִׁי בֵּית יְהוָה...
 עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי לְבָשִׁי עוֹךְ צִיּוֹן
 לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי חֲמָרִתָּךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם
 עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ כִּי לֹא יִוְסַף יְבֵא-
 בָּךְ עוֹד עַרְל וּמִמָּה.

Thus, it is hard to believe that the Prophets expected Egypt, Ethiopia, the Sabeans (Isaiah 45:14); or Midian, Ephah, Kedar, Nebaioth, Tarshish, or Lebanon (Isaiah 60:4-8,13) to come and worship. Israel was expected to worship God in the Temple; to say that these other nations would do the same was probably no more than a stimulus to make Israel realize its obligation and to instill hope in its ultimate independence.

In view of the overwhelming statistical evi-

dence pointing to the importance of the Sanctuary,
it would seem fair to assert that a passage such as
Isaiah 66:1,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּסֵּאִי
וְהָאָרֶץ חֵדָם רַגְלִי אֵי-זֶה
בֵּית אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנֶה-לִּי וְאֵי-זֶה
מִקוֹם מִנוּחָי

which implies that a physical site cannot contain
God and is superfluous, is in reality, a statement
not against a physical Sanctuary, but a statement
meant to show how great, vast, and grand God is.
One must assume, therefore, that the Jerusalem site
of the Temple was considered by all the Prophets
who dealt with the theme, as a necessity for the
proper worship of God.

Chapter 7

The Priesthood

The Priesthood is closely linked to sacrifice and to the Temple in the prophetic idea of worship. When Ezekiel talks about the physical restoration of the Temple, he mentions the priests, who are near to the Lord, who receive the most holy things (of the sacrifice), and they are the ones who make the offering because they are the only ones who are holy enough to be permitted in the special areas of the Temple:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי לְשִׁכּוֹחַ הַצִּמּוֹן
 לְשִׁכּוֹחַ הַדְּרוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶל-פְּנֵי
 הַגִּזְרֵה הֵנָּה לְשִׁכּוֹחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ
 אֲשֶׁר יֹאכְלוּ-שָׁם הַכֹּהֲנִים
 אֲשֶׁר-קִרְבוּ יָמָם לַיהוָה קֹדֶשׁ
 קֹדֶשִׁים שָׁם יִנְיְחוּ קֹדֶשׁ
 קֹדֶשִׁים וְהִסְנוּחַ וְהַחֲסִיחַ
 וְהִשְׁמַח בִּי הַמָּקוֹם קֹדֶשׁ. (42:13)

It has been noted elsewhere¹ that the cessation of sacrifice as a punishment by God occasions sorrow and mourning among the people. It is no less a sorrowful time for the priests when there are no sacrifices being brought to the Temple. Not only is it their function to offer the sacrifice, but besides this, it is their livelihood; they need the sacrifice in order to live. No wonder they mourn and wail their lament when there are no sacrifices,

witness Joel 1:8-9,13,

אלי בבחולה חגרת-שק על-
בעל נעוריה. הכרת מנחה
וסך מביח יהוה אכלו הכהנים
משרתי יהוה. חגרו וספרו
הכהנים הילילו משרתי מזבח
באו לינו בשקים משרתי אלה
כי נסנע מביח אלהיכם מנחה
ונסך.

The conflict between prophet and priest that was taking place is well known.² Malachi, who wrote after the restoration of the Temple and its cult,³ was not willing to turn over the administration of the cult to a priesthood which failed to meet certain definite standards of behavior. He attacked the priests for their improper worship, that is, for their offering polluted and unfit sacrifices, (1:6-14):

לכם הכהנים בזוי שמי
ואמרתם במה בזינו את-שמן.
מגשים על-מזבחי לחם מגאל...
וכי-תגישון עור לזבח אין
רע וכי תגישו פסח וחלה אין
רע הקריבזהו נא למחתך הירצך
או הישא מניך אמר יהוה צבאות...
ואתם מחללים אותו באמרתם
שלחן אדני מגאל הוא וניבז
נבזה אכלו... וארור נזבל זיש
בעדרו זכר ונודר וזבח משהח
לאדני כי מלך גדול אני אמר
יהוה צבאות ושמי נורא בגוים.

In addition to this, Malachi laid down certain conditions for proper behavior to guide the priests: to give glory to God's name (2:2), to keep know-

ledge, to seek God's Torah, and to be a messenger of the Lord, (2:7),

ועתה אליכם המצוה הזאת
הבהנים. אם-לא תשמעו ואם-
לא תשימו על-לב לחת בבור
לשמי אמר יהוה צבאות...
כי-שפתי כהן יסמרו-דעה
וחורה יבקשו מפיהו כי
פלאך יהוה-צבאות הוא.

In addition to referring to priests as individuals who minister to the Lord, and as instructors in ritual matters,⁴ the Prophets also referred to the people Israel as a collective priesthood serving the Lord. Hosea tells the people in 4:6 that since they have rejected God, God will reject them and their children, and they will not be able to serve God as His priest,

נדמו עמי בלי הדעה כי-
אחז הדעה סתם ואמאמאך
מכהן לי וחשבה חורה מלהיך
משכה בניך גם-אני.

Deutero-Isaiah sets the people Israel over against aliens and foreigners (61:5), and then tells them that they shall be priests of the Lord, i.e., that they shall serve God, (61:6):

ואתם כהני יהוה תקראו
משרתי מלהינו יאמר לכם
חיל גוים האכלו ובכבודם
תתימרו.

Even if these last two references are literary,

and it was not the intention of the Prophets to make the whole nation a *מִיִּנְהֶם נָבִיא*, the importance of the priesthood can still be seen from these statements. Notwithstanding the rivalry between the priesthood and themselves, the Prophets considered the functions of the priest—serving God through proper behavior and through the special duties of administering the sacrificial cult—necessary to their idea of worship. For the Prophets to have threatened the people on the one hand with the punishment of not being able to be priests (Hosea 4:6), and on the other to have promised them that they would be rewarded by being the Lord's priests (Isaiah 61:6), shows what an important role the priest played in the prophetic society and in the prophetic idea of worship.

Chapter 8

Behavior: Proper and Improper

According to the definition stated above,¹ worship is "...the performing of religious exercises or services". In addition to offering sacrifices, to praying, vowing, fasting, etc., all of which are aspects of the prophetic idea of worship, there is another which is quite important to the Prophets: they go to great lengths² to state explicitly what they consider to be proper and improper behavior; i.e., they spell out in detail what constitutes the observance of the covenant in addition to the more formal aspects of worship listed above.

In its most general terms, this proper covenantal behavior includes terms like "walking in the Lord's statutes, seeking the Lord, waiting for the Lord," and the like. Many of the prophets have at least one reference to this kind of behavior.

For example, Hosea discusses "walking in the ways of the Lord" in 14:10,

פִּי חֶמֶס וַיִּבֶן אֱלֹהִים נִבְנוֹן
וַיִּדְעֵם בִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּרָכִי
יְהוָה וְצַדִּיקִים יִלְכוּ בָם
וְשֹׁמְרֵי יְכֻשְׁלוּ בָם.³

"Waiting for the Lord" is found in Isaiah 33:2,

יְהוָה חֲנֻנִי לֹךְ קוֹיָנוּ.⁴

"Walking in God's name" is in Micah 4:5,

...ואנחנו נלך בשם-יהוה
אלהינו לעולם ועד. 5

"Following the Lord" is found in Jeremiah 3:19
in close association with "forgetting the Lord"
(3:21) and "not hearkening to the voice of the Lord"
(3:25),

ואנכי אמרתי איך אשיחך
בבנים ואחין-לך ארץ חסדה
נחלה צבי צבאות גוים ואמר
אבי הקראו-לי ומאחרי לא
חשובו. אכן בגדה אשה סרעה
כן בגדתם בי בית ישראל נאם-
יהוה. קול על-שפיים נשמע
בכיתחונני בני ישראל כי
העזו את-דרכם שכחו את-יהוה
אלהיהם.

...ושכבה בבשחננו וחכמנו
כלמחננו כי ליהוה אלהינו
חטאנו אנחנו ואבותינו
סנעורינו וער-היום הזה ולא
שמענו בקול יהוה אלהינו. 6

Ezekiel speaks of "rebelling against God's
ordinances" and "not walking in them" in 5:6:

וחסר את-משפטי לרשעה סן-
הגוים ואת-חקותי סן-הארצות
אשר מביבותיה כי במשפטי
סאסו וחקותי לא-הלכו בהם. 7

Deutero-Isaiah (50:10) speaks of "fearing the
Lord" and "trusting in His name":

כי בכס ירא יהוה שמע בקול
עבדו אשר הלך חשכים ואין נגה
לו יבטח בשם יהוה וישעו באלהיו. 8

And Zechariah speaks of "walking up and down in God's name" in 10:12,

וּגְבַרְתִּים בִּיהוָה וּבְשֵׁמוֹ
יַחֲלִכּוּ נַאֲם יְהוָה.

The Prophets continue to spell out in more detail the kind of behavior that God expects. One of these forms of proper behavior is specifically observance of the Torah.

Amos speaks of the rejection of the Torah in 2:14,

עַל-מַאֲמַם אֶת-תּוֹרַת יְהוָה
וְחָקֵיו לֹא שָׁמְרוּ...

So does Isaiah, (5:24),

כִּי מָאֲסוּ אֶת תּוֹרַת יְהוָה
צִבְאוֹת וְאֶת אִמְרַת קְדוֹשׁ-יִשְׂרָאֵל
נֶאֱמָרוּ.

Similarly, Jeremiah 8:7-9,

גַּם-חֲסִידָה בְּשֵׁמִים יֹדְעָה
מוֹעֲדֶיהָ וְתוֹר וּפֶסֶח וְעֵגוֹר
שָׁמְרוּ אֶת-עֵת בָּאָה וְעַמִּי לֹא
יָדְעוּ אֶת שְׁמִי יְהוָה. אֵיכָה
הִאֲמַרְוּ חֲכָמִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְתוֹרָה
יְהוָה אֲחַנּוּ אֲבֵן חֵנֶה לְשֹׁקֵר
עָשָׂה עִם שֹׁקֵר סִמְרִים. הִבְשׂוּ
חֲכָמִים חֲתוּ וַיִּלְכְּדוּ חֵנֶה
בְּדַבַּר-יְהוָה מָאֲסוּ וְחִכְמָה-מֵהֶם
לָהֶם. 9

Deutero-Isaiah (51:7) equates having the Torah in one's heart with knowing justice,

שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי יוֹדְעֵי צֶדֶק עִם
תּוֹרָתִי בְּלִבָּם...

This equation of the Torah with justice leads to another aspect of behavior which the Prophets spelled out in detail—the area of acting with **חסד ומשפט וצדקה** because this is what God wants of man; e.g., Hosea 10:12,

וּרְעוּ לַחֵם לְצִדְקָה קָצְרוּ
לִמְי-חֶסֶד...
...

Or, in Isaiah 5:16, we read that God is sanctified through righteous behavior,

וַיִּגְבַּהּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בַּמִּשְׁפָּט
וְהָאֵל קָדוֹשׁ נִקְדַּשׁ בַּצְּדָקָה.

Then this general principle of righteousness is defined in terms of not doing wrong, specifically to the stranger, or the orphan, or the widow, as in Jeremiah 22:3-5,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עֲשׂוּ מִשְׁפָּט
וְצִדְקָה וְהִצִּילוּ גִזְלוֹל מִיָּד
עֲשׂוּ וְגַר יְחֹם וְאַלְמָנָה
אֵל-חֵנוּ אֵל-חֲחֻמָּסוֹ וְדָם
נָקִי אֵל-חֲשֻׁכָּו בַּמָּקוֹם
חֲזָה. 10

Deutero-Isaiah, in 59:1-4, accuses the people of lying and suing falsely,

הֵן לֹא-קָצְרָה יָד-יְהוָה מִחֲשׂוֹשׁ
וְלֹא-בִבְדָה חֲזָנוּ מִשְׁמוֹעַ. כִּי
אִם-עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הִיוּ מְבָרִיחִים

בִּינְכֶם לְבִין אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְחִטְאֵיכֶם
 הִסְתִּירוּ פָנִים מִכֶּם מִשְׁמוֹעַ. כִּי
 כַּפִּיכֶם נִגְמְלוּ בְּדָם וְאַצְבָּעוֹתֵיכֶם
 בְּעוֹן שִׁחְחוּתֵיכֶם דְּבַר-שָׁקֶר
 לְשׁוֹנֵכֶם עוֹלָה חֲתָמָה. אֵין-קֶרֶא
 בְּצִדִּיק וְאֵין נִשְׁמָע בְּחִסּוֹנָה בְּמוֹחַ
 עַל-חֲתוֹ וּדְבַר-שׁוֹא הָרָו עִמָּל
 וְהוֹלִיד אֹנָן. 11

Zephaniah talks of the time when people will not
 lie, 3:13,

שֹׂאֲרֵיהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-יֵעָשׂוּ
 עוֹלָה וְלֹא-יִדְבְּרוּ כִזְבוֹ. . . .

because God hates those who do not speak truth, as
 Zechariah says in 8:17,

וְאִישׁ אֶחָד-רָעָה רָעָהוּ אֵל-
 חֲשַׁבּוּ בְּלִבְכֶּם וּשְׁבַעְתֶּה שָׁקֶר
 אֵל-חֲתָמָהוּ כִּי אֶחָד-כָּל-אֵלֹהִים
 אֲשֶׁר שֹׂאֲחֵי נֶאֱמָר-יָחֹה.

Still another area of behavior specifically re-
 ferred to by the Prophets concerns "knowing the Lord",
 for which the Hebrew term is יָדַע¹² In Hosea 4:1,
 the Lord has a controversy with the people because
 of their unjust behavior and because there is no
 knowledge of God (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים) in the land,

שָׁמַעוּ דְּבַר-יְהוָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 כִּי רִיב לִיתְרוֹת עִם-יְשׁוּבֵי
 הָאָרֶץ כִּי אֵין-אֱמֶת וְאֵין-
 חֶסֶד וְאֵין-דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים
 בָּאָרֶץ.

Hosea sees the relationship between God and Israel
 like that of a marriage. In marriage, the partners

know each other; in this marriage the people will know the Lord, 2:21-22:

וארשתין לי לעולם וארשתין
לי בעדק ובמשפט ובחסד
וברחמים. וארשתין לי באמונה
וידעת את-יהוה.

He also points out (13:4) that God is the only God that the people should know,

ואנכון יהוה מלחין סמך
סמרים ומלחים זולתי לא
13 חרע ומושיע אין בלתי.

These uses of the term "knowing the Lord", seem to imply a use of the verb ידע to express a special relationship between God and Israel. "Knowing the Lord" seems to be a specialized term for the recognition on the part of Israel of the authority and sovereignty of יהוה. This is borne out by the continuing use of the term in Isaiah 11:2,9,

ונחה עליו רוח יהוה רוח
חכמה ובינה רוח עצה
וגבורה רוח דעה ויראת יהוה...

לא-ידעו ולא-ישהו בכל-
הר קדשי בן-מלאת הארץ דעה
את-יהוה במים לים מכמים.

Jeremiah calls the people foolish for not knowing God in 4:22,

כי אויל עמי אחי לא ידעו...

The verse just quoted is to be contrasted with Jeremiah 9:22-23, where the wise man does know God

and recognizes that God exercises mercy, justice,
and righteousness,

...אל-יחלל חכם בחכמתו
ואל-יחלל הגבור בגבורתו
אל-יחלל עשיר בעשרו. כי
אם-בזאות יחלל הסתחלל
השכל וידע אותי כי אני
יהוה עשה חסד משפט וצדקה
בארץ כי-באלה חפצתי נאם-יהוה.

Jeremiah also gives a definition of knowing the Lord in terms of משפט וצדקה (22:15-16); one executes justice and righteousness by judging the poor and the needy fairly because of a recognition of the authority of God and the realization that this is what God wants of His people; then it goes well with them:

...אביך הלוה אכל ושתה ויעש
משפט וצדקה אז טוב לו. דן
דין עני ואביון אז טוב
14 הלא-היא הדעת אחי נאם-יהוה.

Finally, it is the written hope of Ezekiel, if not his literal wish, that all the nations "shall know that" it is the Lord who sanctifies Israel. This is to be found in Ezekiel 37:28,

וידעו הגוים כי אני יהוה
קדוש אלה-ישראל בהיותם מקדשי
בחוכם לעולם. 15

In the meantime, God's wrath will be poured out on the nations "that do not know" Him, that is, who

do not recognize His authority and with whom He has no covenant. Jeremiah has it in 10:25,

שֶׁנֶּךָ חֲסֹךְ עַל-חַיִּים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-
יִדְעוּךָ וְעַל מַשְׁחֹחַ אֲשֶׁר בְּשֶׁנֶךָ
לֹא קִרְאוּ.

In conclusion, proper behavior of man toward man and of man toward God constitute Israel's part of the covenant. Besides the ritual practices, it includes observing the Torah and recognizing the authority of God. For the Prophets, this enunciation of proper behavior is more than an aspect of worship, it is an essential prerequisite for it.

Chapter 9

Idolatry

As stated in the Introduction, there are many commentators who see idolatry as one of the major sins of the prophetic society and one of the major areas of criticism by the Prophets. But we must allow these passages to speak for themselves, to be examined within their context. It is our contention that there is much less idolatry in the prophetic books than most commentators would have us believe.

It has been noted elsewhere¹ that Hosea sees the covenant relationship between God and Israel in terms of a marriage. Therefore, one of the most stinging accusations that the prophet can make is one in which he accuses Israel of harlotry and adultery. In Hosea 3:1, there is a parallel between Hosea's loving an adulterous woman and God's loving an adulterous people,

וַיֵּאָמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי עֹזֶר לִךְ
 אֶחָב-אִשָּׁה אֲהַבָה רָע וּפְנִימָה
 כְּאֲהַבָה יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וְהֵם מְנִיִּם אֵל-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
 וְאֲהַבִּי אֲשֵׁרִי עֹזְבִים.

It seems to us that the point of the verse just quoted is to bring out an emphasis on the adulterous quality of the people and not the idolatrous. Similarly, in 2:15, Hosea mentions "the days of the

Baalim", one might think that this, too, was an emphasis on idolatrous behavior, but we think not. The analogy to a prostitute is clear from the reference to jewels and the idea of going after her lovers. Furthermore, "the days of the Baalim" has been said to be a general term for "forgetting the Lord".² This and the expression "...forgot me, saith the Lord", would indicate that the entire verse is poetically synonymous for forgetting and neglecting the Lord.³ Hosea mentions the Baalim again in 2:18-22,⁴

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם-הַהוּא נֶאֱמָר-יְהוָה
תִּקְרָאוּ אֱלֹהִים וְלֹא-תִקְרָאוּ לִי
עוֹד בָּעָלִים. וְהִסִּירְתִּי אֶחָד-
שֵׁמוֹת הַבָּעִלִּים מִפִּי וְלֹא-
יִזְכְּרוּ עוֹד בְּשֵׁמִם. זָכַרְתִּי
לִהְיוֹת בְּרִיַּת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עִם-
הָיָה הַשֵּׁרָה וְעִם-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְרֶגֶשׁ הָאָדָמָה וְקֶשֶׁת וְחֶרֶב
וּמִלְחָמָה אֲשֶׁבֶר מִן-הָאָרֶץ
וְהִשְׁכַּבְתִּים לַבָּטָח. וְאַרְשְׁתִּיךָ
לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאַרְשְׁתִּיךָ לִי
בְּצֹדֶק וּבִשְׁפָט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים.
וְאַרְשְׁתִּיךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וִירְעָה אֶחָד-
יְהוָה.

In verse 18, there is a play on words between בָּעִלִּים and בָּעָלִים and אֱלֹהִים. The בָּעִלִּים will no longer be mentioned in the days when the covenant will be observed; as a matter of emphasis, the people won't even use the word בָּעָלִים in a normal sense of "husband", but they will use אֱלֹהִים instead. This is probably be-

cause of its close connection to the Baal cult, although as Kaufmann points out,⁵ Baal was earlier an epithet for YHWH. From this one can conclude that the baalim were known to the Israelites and were condemned, but it is not so that such passages are necessarily accusations of idolatry. The presence of verses 20-22 make it seem likely that this is a poetic reference to the ideal observance of the covenant on the part of Israel.

Zechariah also sees the union of God and Israel in terms of a betrothal⁶ for he speaks of the cleansing of Jerusalem from its **חטא** and **נדה**:

ביום ההוא יהיה מקור נפתח
לבית דוד ולישבי ירושלם
לחטאת ולנדה. והיה ביום
ההוא נאם יהוה צבאות אלהים
אח-שמונה העצבים מן-הארץ ולא
יזכרו עוד וגם אח-הנביאים
ואח-ריות הטמאת מעביר מן-הארץ.

In these verses just quoted (13:1-2), the word **נדה** is used. It is often used as a technical term for uncleanness caused by menstruation⁷; the intent of Zechariah seems to be to point out that idolatry causes the same kind of impurity as does menstruation.⁸ This we take to be a metaphor, but we do not believe it to be a literal reference to idolatry.

There are other references in Hosea which are not so clear as the ones analyzed above. From 4:17 it would seem as if the people had something to do

with idols:

חבור עֲצָבִים אֲמָרִים חֲנֹה-לֵו,

although this seems to be cancelled by 14:9,

אֲמָרִים חֲנֹה-לֵו יָזִיד לְעֲצָבִים...

When Hosea speaks of idols in 8:4,6, he speaks of them in contrast to God: i.e., an idol is man-made, and it is not God, and therefore will be cut off and will be broken,

כִּסְפָּם וְזָהָב עֵשׂוּ לָהֶם
עֲצָבִים לְמַעַן יִבְרָחַם...
כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל זָהָב חֵרֶץ עָשָׂהוּ
וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים הוּא כִּי עֲצָבִים
יִהְיֶה עַל שִׁמְרוֹן.

But whether this making of idols was widespread, or whether this perhaps was a warning to the people not even to attempt it, is not completely clear to us. The *לֵו* of 8:6 (above) and 13:1-2 is perhaps the only idol referred to. This may be an allusion to the calves of gold which Jeroboam set up at Beth-el and Dan.⁹ If this is so, one can say that the prophet is accusing the people of improper worship and possibly of syncretism, but there is no evidence that worship of YHWH is being denied in the worship of the calf¹⁰; at the same time, it is not the pure worship that God demands.

Isaiah tells the House of Jacob to walk in the light of the Lord (2:5) because they have forsaken

their brothers through attachments to aliens (2:6), alien horses and chariots (2:7). It is questionable whether verse 8 was meant to be taken literally,

והסלם מרצו אלילים למקשה
ידין ישחחון לאשר עשו
מצבתי,ו,

or whether it should be seen as an extension of Jacob's general haughtiness (2:11) which has led him to forsake his covenant. But in the end, the Lord will be exalted, and the idols will be gone (2:17-18),

ושח גבהות האדם וספל דום
אנשים ונשגב יהוה לבדו.
ביום ההוא. והאלילים כליל
יחלף.

Isaiah contrasts "walking in the way of the Lord" with the images in 30:21-22:

ואזניך תשמענה דבר מאחריך
לאמר זה הדרך לכו בו כי
חמסינו וכי תשמאילנו.
ומטאתם את-צמוי מסיילי כסמך
ואת-אמרת סמכה זהבך תזרם
כמו דוח צא תאמר לו.

Since "walking after the Lord" seems to be used often as a synonym for the observance of the covenant, it seems reasonable that these frequent references to images are nothing more than poetic contrasts to the proper observance of the covenant. For example, we cite a passage in Isaiah where man is told to

regard his Maker and not to pay undue attention to the cult objects made by his own hands (17:7-8):

ביום הוּוּא יִשְׁעָה הָאֲדָמָה עַל-
עֲשֹׂהוּ וְעֵינָיו אֶל-קִדּוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
חֲרָאִינָה. וְלֹא יִשְׁעָה אֶל-הַמִּזְבְּחֹת
מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו וְאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֲצַבְחָיו
לֹא יִרְאֶה וְהָאֲשֵׁרִים וְהַחֲסִנִּים.^{11,12}

Jeremiah makes equations between forsaking the Lord, offering to other Gods, and worshipping the work of one's own hands in 1:16,

וְדִבַּרְתִּי מִשְׁפָּטִי אֲחֵם עַל כָּל-
רָעָם אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּנִי וַיִּקְרְוּ
לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁחָחוּ
לַמַּעֲשֵׂה יָדֵיהֶם.

In Jeremiah 2:8-9, the priests are accused of not seeking the Lord and not knowing Him.¹³ The rulers are accused of transgressing against Him; and the prophets are accused of prophesying by Baal and walking after worthless things. In other words, in Jeremiah there are references to what seems to be idolatry, but they are within the context of forsaking God and of violating the covenant.¹⁴ This makes one wonder if the statements referring to idolatry might better be taken as literary and not as literal. In two references (Jeremiah 9:13 and 44:15-25) the idolatrous behavior is not closely connected with the idea of forsaking God, although this idea is present elsewhere in the same chapter.

In pouring out drink offerings to the other gods and to the queen of heaven, the reference is more than likely to some non-YHWH worship; in this case the reference seems too specific to be a figure of speech. Somewhat less exact is a reference in 8:2 to the worship of the sun, the moon, and the host of heaven,

וּשְׁתַּחֲוּם לַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּלְיָרֵחַ וּלְכָל
צִבְיֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר אֲהָבִים וְאֲשֶׁר
עֲבָדִים וְאֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ אֲחֵרֵיהֶם
וְאֲשֶׁר דָּרְסִים וְאֲשֶׁר חֲתָחוּן
לָהֶם לֹא יִשְׁמְרוּ וְלֹא יִקְבְּרוּ
לִדְמֹן עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה יְהִי וְ.

It is difficult to know whether the above is idolatry, astrology, or a nature-aspect of the worship of YHWH. ¹⁵

Jeremiah mentions images in two additional places (10:1-6 and 51:17-19) wherein the images are contrasted with God. They are vanity and delusion, false and worthless, and they will perish. In contrast, God is the former of everything. The idols are placed in contradistinction to the power and the abiding value of the true God. One should be careful not to mistake these figures of speech for evidence that Jeremiah did devote much of his energies to attacking idolatry. ¹⁶ If this were idolatry, one would expect mention of the beliefs or myths associated with the idols. But the prophet speaks only of the contrast between the images and God in

terms of power and value, never in terms of thought and theology.¹⁷

Ezekiel talks about the image of jealousy (8:5) and the idols which are portrayed on the wall of God's Sanctuary (8:10):

והוא ומראה ומה כל-
הבנות רמש ובמה שקץ
וכל-לילולי בית ישראל
ממקם על-הקיר פביב פביב.

One can argue that drawings are not idols, but even if it is assumed that Ezekiel is talking of idolatry, the fact that these abominations are being displayed within the Sanctuary would lead one to conclude that at worst this refers to a syncretistic type of worship and not to a wholly idolatrous one; i.e., one where YHWH would be rejected in toto in favor of idols. There is an especially clear mention of the worship of idols in Egypt in 20:7-8, but this is also clear in its reference to a time prior to the Exodus. Ezekiel does refer to the idols in several other places,¹⁸ but one should note that the context, once again, is that of the proper form of behavior with respect to the covenant relationship. For instance, in Ezekiel 33:25, idols are mentioned along with the ritual wrong of eating food with the blood in it, with the social wrongs of shedding blood, standing upon the sword, and defiling a neighbor's wife,

לכן אמר אלהים כה-אמר
אדני אלהים על-הדם האכלו
ועיניכם השאו אל-גלוליתם
ודם השפכו והארץ תירשו.

It is hard to take the accusation of idolatry in this context as anything more than synonymous for these other forms of improper behavior. More important evidence comes from 14:3-4,7,

...האנשים העלה הקלו
גלולים על-לבם...איש
איש מבית ישראל אשר
יעלה את-גלוליו אל-
לבם...כי איש איש מבית
ישראל ומתגר אשר-יגור
בישראל ויגור מאחרי ויעל
גלוליו אל-לבם ומכשול
עונו ישים נבם פניו ובא
אל-הנביא לדרש-לו בי אני-
יהוה נקוה-לו בי.

To set up an idol in one's mind or heart is not idolatry in the normal sense of the word—it seems to be a poetic way of denying the whole-hearted worship of God,¹⁹ but it does not seem to be idolatry, i.e., the worship of idols.²⁰

Deutero-Isaiah has several references to the idols, but they all refer to the worthlessness and the ineffectiveness of that which a man makes in contrast to the power, value, and the efficacy of the worship of a real God, of YHWH. The idols which a man makes are vanity, wind, and confusion (41:29):

הן בלם מון אפס מעשיהם
21 רוח וחלל נפיהם.

People who trust in them will be turned back and
ashamed, as in 42:17:

נִסְגָּר אַחֲרָיִם יְבֹשׁ בְּשֵׁם הַבְּטָחִים
בְּפֶסֶל הַמַּסֵּרִים לְמַסְכַּח אֲחֵם
אֱלֹהֵי נִינְוָה.

There is no efficacy of prayer offered to an image,
as Isaiah says in 46:6-7:

...יִשְׁכְּרוּ צֹרֶף וְיַעֲשֶׂהוּ אֵל
יִסְבְּדוּ אֶף-יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ. יִשְׁאָחוּ
עַל-כִּתְּפָם יִפְּלֹהוּ וַיִּנְיָחֻהוּ
הַחֲתִיּוֹ וַיַּעֲמֵד מִמְּקוֹמוֹ לֹא
יִמָּיֵשׁ אֶף-יִצְעַק אֱלִיוֹ וְלֹא
יִעֲנֶה מַצְרֵחוֹ לֹא יוֹשִׁיעֵנִי.

Deutero-Isaiah concludes this thought in a dramatic
contrast between the images which can offer man no
profit and God who rewards those who take refuge in
Him, (57:12-13):

אֲנִי אֶגִּיד צִדְקָתְךָ וְאֵת-מַעֲשֶׂיךָ
וְלֹא יוֹעִילוּךָ. בִּזְעַקְךָ יֵצִילְךָ
קְבוּצֶיךָ וְאֵת-כָּל־שֵׂא-רוּחַ
יִקַּח חֶבֶל וְהַחֲזִימָה בִּי יִנְחַל-
אֶרֶץ וַיִּירֶשׁ הָר קִדְשִׁי.²²

The contrast is so sharply worded that one cannot
be certain that these allusions to idolatry are
anything more than rhetoric.

To sum up, the Prophets speak in terms of
idolatry to show that God is not being properly
worshipped. The word "idolatry" is used to mean
a) the worship of a physical object, especially an

image, as a God, or b) too close an identification of God with faulty religious ideas.²³ One must assume that when the Prophets refer to idolatry, they refer to the secondary usage of the term, that they do not mean the actual worship of physical images in place of God; nowhere do they say that God is not worshipped because the idols have taken His place. We do concede that in some cases the Prophets did accuse Israel of worshipping idols, but most often the mention of idols parallels improper behavior and seems to be synonymous with anti-covenant behavior. The Prophets express great indignation against unrighteous behavior, and their anger against improper sacrifice is spelled out in detail. But if idolatry were being practiced, would we not have a right to expect that the prophetic anger would be as irate against it as against improper sacrifice? Clearly, we should expect it; but equally clearly, we don't have it.

Furthermore, archeology does not show distinctive native Israelite iconography. Those who believe that idolatry was present cannot explain this lack because of the Second Commandment alone. The lack of sculpture is due to the lack of myth about the pagan deities among the Israelites. This lack of myth, in turn, shows how shallow a belief there was and how far Israel was from being influenced by

pagan beliefs.²⁴

Our conclusion is, therefore, that the idolatry which the Prophets referred to is generally either superstition²⁵ or a figure of speech for less than complete and proper observance of the covenant between Israel and God.

Conclusions

In this paper we have selected the most representative passages from the writings of the Prophets, and we have analyzed them. Additional references have been noted in footnotes. In all, sixteen Prophets have been discussed in detail; that is, all the major prophets and the so-called "Minor Prophets". (Obadiah does not deal with worship.)

With the exceptions that have been noted, the themes concerning worship which are common to the earliest of the Prophets are also to be found in the latest of them. This seems to indicate that with the possibility that the latter Prophets spelled out their ideas in somewhat more detail, there is little difference in the overall prophetic concept of worship from Amos to Malachi. There is a consistent pattern of the idea of worship which the Prophets present, time not playing a significant role in its development. One can also conclude the same thing from an attempt to see if the locations in which the Prophets lived had any effect on their concept of worship. Once again, with certain limited exceptions, we cannot find any unique elements in the writing of a Prophet or a group of Prophets which we can attribute to the place in which the prophecy occurred.

According to our analysis of the above passages, the idea of worship in the prophetic books of the Bible has five major aspects: prayer, sacrifice, ritual and holiday observance, the worship of God in the Jerusalem Temple, and acceptable conduct between man and man as a manifestation of the covenant between God and Israel. Each of these is so closely linked to the others, that at times it is difficult to separate them. However, in analyzing them by themselves, we have seen that for the Prophets prayer, vowing, and fasting were important methods of worship. Often they were combined with sacrifice, which, contrary to the opinion of most, was an important and desirable element of the prophetic idea of worship. Ritual and holiday observances were important to the Prophets because, to the extent that they were observed, the duties of the covenant were performed. The site of the Temple in Jerusalem was considered by all the Prophets who dealt with the theme, as a necessity for the proper worship of God. Proper behavior of man toward man and of man toward God constituted an additional specification of the performance of the covenant: proper behavior was, for the Prophets, an essential prerequisite for worship. We believe that the idolatry which the Prophets accused Israel of so often, was generally either superstition or simply rhetoric

designed to show the people that their observance of the covenant was faulty. The charge of idolatry was not a charge of image worship but a charge of less than complete, proper, and whole-hearted worship of YHWH.

Notes to Introduction

¹ Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language.

² For example, "Amos insisted that God's sole requirement was social justice. God had never required any sacrificial cult from his people at all, only righteousness, nothing else!", J.A. Bewer, The Literature of the Old Testament, page 91.

³ "For Hosea, the nation will only cease to be a 'harlot'...when its sacrifices have come to an end." A. Lods, The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism, p. 69.

⁴ G.A. Smith, Jeremiah, page 76.

⁵ Within these categories, the Prophets are arranged in chronological sequence, whenever possible. That order for the major figures is: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ See Chapter 2.

² See also the analysis of Hosea 14:2-4 in Chapter 2 where sacrifice and prayer are closely equated.

³ See also Jeremiah 7:1-34; 30:20-22; and Jonah 2:10.

⁴ See also Hosea 7:7; 8:1-2; Habakkuk 1:2; and Jeremiah 11:9-14.

⁵ See also Isaiah 24:14-15; 25:1; 29:19,23; 26:13,19; Jeremiah 13:11,16; 17:14; 20:13; 51:10; Isaiah 63:7; and Joel 2:26.

⁶ See also Zechariah 14:16-17.

⁷ Isaiah 19:19-23 poses a similar problem:

ביום ההוא יהיה מצב
ליחוז בתוך ארץ מצרים
ומצבה אצל-גבולה ליחוז.
יהיה לאוז ולער ליחוז
צבאוח בארץ מצרים כי-
יצעקו אל-יחוז ספני
לחצים וישלח להם מושיע
ורב והמילים. ונזרע יחוז
למצרים וידעו מצרים את-
יחוז ביום ההוא ועבדו
זבח ומנחה ונדרו-נדר
ליחוז ושלמו...

There is a question as to whether this passage is a) a metaphor which simply means to say that Egypt will recognize God's authority (see the analysis of יר in Chapter 8), or b) whether this is a second-century passage which refers to the Temple at Heliopolis. G.B. Gray, The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, p. 337, takes this as a reference to Jewish worshippers in Egypt, not to Egyptians.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ For example, in A. Lods, The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism, it is stated that the prophets...challenged the efficacy of sacrifice and said that God is indifferent to them, page 68.

² For a full discussion of this point, see W.O.E. Oesterley, Sacrifices in Ancient Israel, especially Chapters XII, XIV.

³ See Chapter 1. The originality of verses 25-27 is open to question. See R.S. Cripps, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos, p. 201; W.R. Harper, The International Critical Commentary on the Books of Amos and Hosea, footnote on page 138 referring to Thiele; and see also S. Jozaki, "The Secondary Passages of the Book of Amos", (reprinted from the Kwansei Gakuin University Annual), page 66. Since the originality of these verses has been so generally challenged, they have not been dealt with in this study.

⁴ See also Hosea 10:8; 12:12.

⁵ See also Joel 1:8-14, where offerings are so important it is a time of mourning for the priests when they are cut off.

⁶ See Hosea 4:13-14; 4:19; 11:2.

⁷ See also Hosea 8:13-14; 9:1-5.

⁸ See Jonah 2:10 where sacrifice, praying, and bowing are all part of the same act of worship.

⁹ Passages such as Isaiah 25:6-8; 34:6-8; and Jeremiah 46:10 are taken to be figures of speech for a destruction indicative of God's great power, and are not dealt with in this study.

10 According to Cesterley, op. cit., page 207, however, he is the only one of the Prophets who advocated the abolition of sacrifice.

11 See also Jeremiah 7:1-34; 14:11-12; 44:25.

12 See also Jeremiah 31:14; 41:5.

13 There is some question as to whether verse 16 actually refers to sacrifice. Let it be noted that the assumption in this paper is that it does refer to sacrifice. This view is supported by T.K. Cheyne, The Prophecies of Isaiah, page 249.

14 On the contrary, Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, page 431, believes that child sacrifice was not normally practiced except during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh.

15 See also Zechariah 14:16-20, where sacrifice is taken for granted when all the other conditions for worship have been satisfied.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ There are other words which may connote a fast; e.g., נָחַם (Isaiah 1:13) and וְהָיָה נִיחָם (Isaiah 58:3,5), but this study deals only with clear references to fasting, for which the Hebrew term is נִצָּן.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ See also Isaiah 19:21 for another case of sacrificing and vowing to the Lord perhaps by non-Israelites, in this case by Egyptians. For a contrary possibility, see the analysis of this passage on page 65, note 7.

² See Chapter 9.

³ See also Nahum 2:1.

Notes to Chapter 5

¹ See Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

² See Isaiah 52:11.

³ For references to the observance of feasts, for which the Hebrew word is *an*, see also Amos 8:10; Hosea 9:5; Isaiah 29:1; 30:29; Nahum 2:1; and Zechariah 14:16, 18-19.

⁴ See also Jeremiah 20:16, 21, 24; 22:8.

⁵ See Chapter 3.

⁶ See J. Bright, A History of Israel, pages 415-16. In all fairness, however, it might be argued from the opposite point of view that these rites were so well observed prior to the Exile that they were taken for granted and not mentioned by the Prophets.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the importance of this point in the prophetic idea of worship, see Chapter 8.

Notes to Chapter 6

¹ See also Hosea 5:15 where the prophet talks of God's returning to His place until the people acknowledge their guilt. Here the use of *PIP* seems to be different from its usage elsewhere; in this case, it doesn't seem to be the Sanctuary, but merely an undefined place where God goes in order to make Himself inaccessible.

² See Chapter 2.

³ See also Jeremiah 32:29-40.

⁴ See also Jeremiah 33:11; 41:5; Joel 1:8-14; and Ezekiel 8:1-18; 25:3.

⁵ See also Ezekiel 43:7-9; and Zechariah 1:14-17; 6:12-15.

⁶ The Book of Haggai takes it for granted that the restoration of the Temple on a physical site is necessary for the proper worship of God in the Holy Land.

⁷ "House of the Lord" is mentioned an additional twenty times in Jeremiah in casual conversation, having no significance for our problem.

⁸ See also Malachi 3:1.

⁹ See also Isaiah 31:5; 33:20-22; 35:8-10; Micah 4:7; Jeremiah 3:13; 33:9; Isaiah 52:1,9; 65:18; 66:20; and Zechariah 1:16; 8:3,7.

¹⁰ See also Micah 1:2-3; Jeremiah 3:17; Isaiah 45:14-16; 60:4-6,13-14,20-23; Zechariah 1:15.

¹¹ See Chapter 8.

Notes to Chapter 7

¹ See Chapter 2.

² See Amos 6:10-13 for the conflict between Amos and Amaziah, and for a similar encounter between Jeremiah and Pashhur, see Jeremiah 20:1-6. See also Amos 5:4-6 where the mention of the shrines may be further evidence of this conflict.

³ See the references to Malachi in Chapter 2.

⁴ See Haggai 2:11-13.

Notes to Chapter 8

¹ See the Introduction.

² On the basis of statistics alone, there are at least eighty references to the kinds of behavior that God does or does not want.

³ See also Hosea 9:17; 11:10.

⁴ See also Isaiah 8:13; 9:12; 10:20; 25:9; 26:1-10; 30:9-12. ((30:1-2; 31:1 are probably political references against foreign alliances. This is supported by M. Noth, The History of Israel, note 1, page 267)).

⁵ See also Micah 7:7.

⁶ See also Jeremiah 2:17, 19; 3:6-10; 6:10; 11:4-7; 12:16; 17:5-8; 17:12-13; 18:15; 26:2-5; 26:13; 29:19; 30:9; 31:1; 40:3; 50:4-5.

⁷ See also Ezekiel 3:7; 12:23-38; 18:5-21; 20:7-26; 37:21-27.

⁸ See also Isaiah 40:31; 55:2; 59:19.

⁹ See also Jeremiah 5:4-5; 44:10.

¹⁰ See also Jeremiah 4:1-4; 5:1.

¹¹ See also Isaiah 42:6-9.

¹² According to N.W. Porteous, "The Basis of the Ethical Teaching of the Prophets", (Studies in Old

Testament Prophecy, page 151), Nowinkel has already expounded this point in "Die Erkenntnis Gottes bei den A.T.lichen Propheten", (Supplement to Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift, 1941, page 6).

¹³ Perhaps the expression from Amos 3:2,

לֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָד יְהוָה
...אֵלֶיךָ יָשָׁב

uttered by God to Israel, is the corollary: God recognizes only this people as the one with whom He has a covenant. He "knows" Israel as Israel was to "know the Lord".

¹⁴ See also Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33-34.

¹⁵ See also Ezekiel 11:12-21; 23:19; 36:38; and Isaiah 41:20; 49:23, where the phrase "know that I am the Lord" is used,

...אֵלֶיךָ יָשָׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל

This expresses the same idea although the Hebrew construction is different.

Notes to Chapter 9

¹ See Chapter 8.

² See W.R. Harper, The International Critical Commentary on the Books of Amos and Hosea, page 233.

³ For a continuation of the theme of idolatry within the context of harlotry, see also Micah 1:7 and Ezekiel 23:37.

⁴ Baal is also mentioned in Hosea 2:10; however, W.R. Harper, op. cit., rejects this as an original part of the prophecy, page 230.

⁵ The Religion of Israel, page 138.

⁶ See also Jeremiah 3:20 for a continuation of this idea.

⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, page 622.

⁸ H.G. Mitchell, The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Zechariah, pages 336-7.

⁹ 1 Kings 12:28-29.

¹⁰ See also Zephaniah 1:5, part of which follows:

מ'יגאין מ'ינחנח-נח...
 .מלמל מ'יגאין מ'ינח

It is not clear whether מלמל is to be translated as "their king" or is the god "Milcom". Even if this is a suppression of Milcom, it is, nevertheless, not idolatry, but syncretism, since the people also swear to the Lord.

¹¹ See also Isaiah 31:1-7, where the man-made things (v.7) is perhaps synonymous with the dependence on a man-made foreign alliance with Egypt (vs.1-3). See also Note 4, page 73.

¹² See also Isaiah 27:9, although there is doubt concerning the originality of this verse, (G.B. Gray, The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, page 456). And see also Micah 5:11-13. The originality of these verses is also open to discussion, (S.R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, page 330). It is possible to see in these verses a reference to complete and utter destruction by God and not necessarily a reference to an idolatrous situation.

¹³ See also Jeremiah 2:5,11,13; 2:23-28; 5:19; 8:19; 9:12-13; 11:9-14; 11:17; 13:10; 16:10-13; 19:4-5; 22:8-9; 25:5-7; 32:29-40; 35:15; 44:3-4,8.

¹⁴ See the analysis of "knowing the Lord" in Chapter 8.

¹⁵ See also Zephaniah 1:5.

¹⁶ See E. Leslie, Jeremiah, pages 30-40.

¹⁷ Y. Kaufmann, op. cit., pages 13-17.

¹⁸ Ezekiel 18:6-12,14; 20:16,24,31.

¹⁹ See J. Skinner, The Book of Ezekiel, page 124.

²⁰ Jeremiah (4:3-4) uses the example of circumcision of the heart to indicate the inner change one should undergo in order to worship God properly. There is a close connection between the proper attitude of the heart (above) and Ezekiel's command to remove the idols from the heart.

²¹ See also Isaiah 44:9-10.

²² See also Habakkuk 2:18-20 for a similar contrast.

²³ Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language.

²⁴ Y. Kaufmann, op. cit., pages 146-7.

²⁵ Y. Kaufmann, ibid., page 142.

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