

## The Book of Hosea

### Chapter 8

In Hosea, chapter 8, the LORD continues to explain why He was forced to put away His unfaithful wife, Israel. He was forced to judge her because she was unrepentant.

**Hosea 8:1 "Set the trumpet to your mouth! *He shall come like an eagle against the house of the LORD, Because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law.* (NKJ)**

The prophet Hosea is here introduced as a herald who proclaims war. He was commanded to show with the trumpet that war was near, as though God Himself here declared war against Israel, which was soon to be carried away captive by the Assyrians.

It is as though God said, "Hosea, put or set the trumpet to your mouth and proclaim the war that is now at hand, for the enemy is coming to attack the house of God—those who claim to be God's holy people; those who trusting in their election and adoption think they shall be free from God's judgment."

God declared Himself the enemy of the people; He was present with a strong army to destroy Israel. He was coming to take swift vengeance against the people—like an eagle He will quickly come.

Why will God judge the people so severely? God tells us the reason. It is "because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law."

Like many today who foolishly think the moral law of God no longer applies to Christians, the Israelites foolishly rationalized that they did not need to keep God's law; they rebelled against it. This brought God's judgment upon them, and so it will bring God's judgment upon us if we rebel against His law.

**2 Israel will cry to Me, 'My God, we know You!' 3 Israel has rejected the good; The enemy will pursue him.**

How reminiscent these words are of Jesus' words at the end of the sermon on the mount in Matthew, chapter 7: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:21-23).

The Israelites falsely claimed to be followers of the one, true God. "My God, we know You!" "We are Christians! We are children of God!"

Hypocrites confidently profess God's name and with great pride affirm they are God's people, but God laughs to scorn all this boasting, as it is vain and worthy of derision. "We are devout Christians. Jesus is our best friend. We believe in true doctrine and worship." Hypocrites may claim whatever they want, but Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20). The facts reprove and expose the hypocrisy of hypocrites.

The Israelites were indeed religious hypocrites, for they “rejected the good”; they rejected that which is good. They had thrown off true justice and righteousness. They rejected that which is pure and holy. Thus, God abandoned them, and “the enemy will pursue” them.

**4 "They set up kings, but not by Me; They made princes, but I did not acknowledge *them*. From their silver and gold They made idols for themselves -- That they might be cut off.**

Acting against the will of God, the Israelites followed their own, carnal wisdom. They created their own religion and their own kingdom. Beginning with their first king, Jeroboam, the people changed the kingdom and the priesthood from what God had commanded in His Word. Like many today, they said, “God changes with the times. The Church should change with the times.”

In acting presumptuously, the Israelites proved they were unwilling to be ruled by God’s hand. If they had truly feared God, they never would have dared to turn aside even in the least degree from God’s Word, from the kingdom of David, and from the priesthood ordained by God.

The people proved themselves to be apostates because they chose a new king for themselves without any command from God; they built for themselves a new temple and altar contrary to what the law prescribed; and they divided the priesthood. All this corrupted true worship and denied true religion.

In separating from the house of David and then forming for themselves their own worship, which God had not commanded in His law, the Israelites had rejected the one, true God. They had acted presumptuously, without God’s consent.

After Solomon’s death, when his son Rehoboam reigned in his place, the people acted sinfully in following the rebel Jeroboam. Rehoboam rightly reigned on the throne of David. When the people shook off the yoke of David’s ruler, it was the same as if they had rejected Christ Himself because Rehoboam was a type of Christ, the Son of David. The ten tribes that followed Jeroboam to set up the northern kingdom of Israel were traitors against God. What they did amounted to a rejection of Christ, the Messiah.

The Israelites set up their own rival kingdom, which surpassed the southern kingdom of Judah in its wealth and power. Yet, in doing so, they had torn themselves away from the body of the Church.

God had not commanded the people nor permitted the people to withdraw their allegiance from Rehoboam. So here God denies that the northern kingdom of Israel was set up by His decree. The people established Jeroboam as their king without consulting God. Instead, they followed their blind impulses and did what pleased them.

Furthermore, God adds that His worship was wholly corrupted. “From their silver and gold they made idols for themselves.” The people did not hesitate to overthrow the kingdom that God had instituted for their salvation. In fact, they even perverted the whole worship of God, together with the priesthood, by introducing new superstitions. Therefore, God is just to declare that the people will be “cut off.”

**5 Your calf is rejected, O Samaria! My anger is aroused against them -- How long until they attain to innocence?**

Why was God angry with the people? It was because of their idolatry; they had committed spiritual adultery. Since they were not teachable and could not be turned nor reformed by any admonitions, God will judge them in His anger. God had been patient and longsuffering with the people. Yet, His bride would not return to innocence; she continued obstinately in her adulterous ways.

**6 For from Israel *is* even this: A workman made it, and it *is* not God; But the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.**

Israel was wholly given over to idolatry. God held out little hope for His adulterous wife. Their superstition of a golden calf was not derived from others; they devised it for themselves of their own accord. They departed from the true and pure worship of God, convincing one another that this was the way in which God was to be worshipped, even though He never commanded this in His Word.

So it is with churches today that are not content with the simple word of God but choose to devise for themselves strange and new forms of worship. Men and women pridefully add these new inventions to the church's worship, corrupting the church's worship and rendering it false worship .

At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites made a golden calf for themselves, of their own accord, to worship. Once again, they had returned to their old, idolatrous ways. Jeroboam, their king, made them golden calves to be gods to them (2 Chronicles 13:8). And how did they respond? They willingly received the golden calves with resounding applause.

Yet, God declares, "A workman made it, and it *is* not God; But the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces." God will show the Israelites who the true God is. How stupid they were to seek salvation through a manmade object. Can a mortal man make a god? How ridiculous! How greatly deceived these people were.

**7 "They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bud; It shall never produce meal. If it should produce, Aliens would swallow it up.**

To sow the wind means that they put on an appearance of religiosity to fool the undiscerning; yet they lacked true faith. They made themselves appear to be pious religious people; yet they lacked true obedience. The Israelites' perverted worship was unprofitable and vain. They have sown the wind; they shall reap the whirlwind—a hurricane, a tornado shall overtake them, which is likely representative of the Assyrian armies that will conquer them. (Remember that Assyria was the rising superpower of the world at this time.)

Whatever hopes the Israelites entertained would prove fruitless. They overlooked and neglected God while seeking assistance from Egypt and Assyria, but neither would come to their aid. Their confidence was vain; their counsels would produce no fruit. Their enemies, aliens, would swallow up any fruit their efforts might seem at first to produce.

**8 Israel is swallowed up; Now they are among the Gentiles Like a vessel in which is no pleasure.**

Not only will the provisions of Israel be swallowed up, but also the people themselves. Hosea continues to attempt to convict the people of their sins, so that they might humble themselves and learn to pray for pardon. Israel would be destroyed and dispersed among the Gentile nations, cast off like “a vessel in which is no pleasure.” God wanted the people to know that He was greatly displeased with them.

**9 For they have gone up to Assyria, Like a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers. 10 Yes, though they have hired among the nations, Now I will gather them; And they shall sorrow a little, Because of the burden of the king of princes.**

Ephraim, or Israel, has hired lovers. She has become a prostitute (like Hosea’s wife Gomer). Instead of being faithful to God, her husband, she found a different lover. She fell in love with Assyria. The Israelites sought diligently to escape God’s judgment. The prophet Hosea compares the people to a wild animal that cannot be tamed. They regarded as nothing that help which the Lord promised His people. Instead of seeking her security and safety in God, Israel turned to the Assyrians for help.

God was Israel’s husband. He had made a marriage covenant with this people and pledged His faith to them. Yet, they acted like unchaste women who give themselves to adulterers and desert their own husbands. The prophet again reproves the Israelites for having violated their faith pledged to God and for being like adulteresses and even prostitutes, having “hired lovers.”

God says that although they have despised His aid and sought deliverance from the ungodly Gentiles and although they despise Him and choose to submit themselves to adulterers rather than keep their marital vows to God, yet He will gather them or preserve them. Why? For what purpose? So that they “shall sorrow a little,” yet not completely perish. God will act so that they may return to Him, even by the means of much sorrow. The Lord would temporarily suspend His vengeance. Israel would become a tributary of Assyria. The king and his counselors would have to pay large tributes, which would grieve the people of Israel. Yet, this would be a moderate grief, intended to cause the people to consider their sins and return to the LORD.

**11 "Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, They have become for him altars for sinning."**

The Israelite religion was popular but idolatrous. The Israelites had become hardened in their superstitions and had turned away from the pure and lawful worship of God. They thought that they did a meritorious deed every time they offered a sacrifice. Yet, their altars had become “altars for sinning.” Their sacrifices did not please God; rather, they provoked Him to wrath. They had made “many altars”; yet to God they were all an abomination.

**12 I have written for him the great things of My law, But they were considered a strange thing.**

God sets the law of God and the rule it prescribes for us as to how we ought to worship Him in opposition to all the inventions of men. Some people might call God unjust for not receiving as good and legitimate that worship that they have invented, but God prefers obedience to all sacrifices. God had clearly declared His will to the Israelites in His law. But they did not want to follow God's law; to them they thought it was "a strange thing."

God condemned all their superstitions—all their manmade inventions. Instead of obeying God's law, the Israelites had their own, perverted forms of worship, which they had invented for themselves. In verse 11, Hosea said they had multiplied altars for the purpose of sinning.

God not only calls us to worship Him, but also He teaches us the way in which we are to worship Him. It is not lawful for us to depart from this way that He has revealed.

However much the Israelites might despise God's law, He set it forth to them as true wisdom; in it He brought to light the secrets of heavenly wisdom. What excuse then can there be for the Israelites' despisal of His law?

**13 For the sacrifices of My offerings they sacrifice flesh and eat it, But the LORD does not accept them. Now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. They shall return to Egypt.**

The prophet reproves the Israelites for putting vain trust in their own religious ceremonies, which they invented; they sacrifice flesh and then eat it for their own gain. They were more concerned with feeding themselves than with pleasing God through proper burnt offerings. The LORD says that He did not accept their sacrifices.

Hosea forewarns them that God "will remember their iniquity and punish their sins." He is essentially saying, "The LORD may now spare you, but He will in a short time show just how much He detests your impure sacrifices." "Go, flee to your 'friend' Egypt, the nation from which I delivered you, from the house of bondage. Flee to Egypt, flee away from your God, flee in your foolish contempt of the only true Savior, but you will discover your flight to be useless."

**14 "For Israel has forgotten his Maker, And has built temples; Judah also has multiplied fortified cities; But I will send fire upon his cities, And it shall devour his palaces."**

The book of Hosea is quite repetitive. The prophet reminds us in his sermons of Israel's idolatry, superstitions, and the other corruptions that then prevailed among the people. Israel has forgotten his Maker by building temples because he followed not the directions of God's law.

In their defense, the Israelites could respond that they had nothing but good intentions in building temples for God in the northern kingdom at Dan and Bethel. But the message of Hosea is that God is not pleased with manmade inventions. In order to worship God truly, we must worship Him according to what His Word prescribes, submitting ourselves entirely to His Word and undertake nothing, attempt nothing, except for that which He has commanded us in His Word.

In His Word, God revealed His will to have one temple and altar located in Jerusalem. He did not need to give an explanation for why this was to be so. This is just what He commanded; His decree was not open to debate or discussion. So when Israel built for herself additional temples, the northern kingdom departed from God's Word. They did not follow the rule of the law and keep themselves within the limits of the divine command. They forgot God, their Maker. Although they gloried in their temples and altars and delighted in their superstitions, they had forgotten their Creator. Why? Because they failed to continue in His law. They did not obey His Word but instead followed their own devices and depraved imaginations.

Similarly, the people of Judah trusted in themselves and their fortified cities, instead of in God. What happens to those who trust in themselves? What happened to the self-loving citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah? Fire destroys them. "But I will send fire upon his cities, and it shall devour his palaces."

A day of judgment awaited Israel and later Judah. In His longsuffering, God spared the southern kingdom for a time, but about 135 years later, Judah also would be destroyed. God spares churches and nations for a time. Peter writes that "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Despite God's patience, the great day of Judgment still awaits each of us. The question we must each ask ourselves is: Will God find *us* faithful?

Let us conclude this study by praying these two prayers, written by John Calvin:

Grant, Almighty God, that since the rule of Your true and lawful worship is sufficiently known to us and You continue to exhort us to persevere in our course and to abide in that pure and simple worship which You have fully approved; O grant, that we may, in the true obedience of faith, respond to You. And although we may now see the whole world carried about here and there and all places full of awful examples of apostasy and so much madness everywhere prevailing that men become more and more hardened daily. O grant, that, being fortified by invincible faith against these so many temptations, grant that we may persevere in Your true religion. May we never at any time turn aside from the teaching of Your Word until the Day in which we are finally gathered to Christ our King, under whom, as our Head, You have promised we shall ever be safe, and until we attain that happy life that is laid up for us in heaven through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Grant, Almighty God, that as we have already so often provoked Your wrath against us, and You have in Your Fatherly indulgence born with us or at least chastised us so gently as to spare us; O grant, that we may not become hardened in our wickedness, but that we may quickly repent and that we may not be drawn away after the inventions of our flesh nor seek ways to flee away from You, but rather come directly into Your presence and make a humble, sincere, and honest confession of our sins, so that You may receive us into favor. Being reconciled to us, may You bestow on us a larger measure of Your blessings through Christ our Lord. Amen.