

Introduction to Hosea Chapter 8

Set the Trumpet to Your Mouth: The Eagle, the Broken Covenant, the Calf of Samaria, and the Wind Sowing

Hosea chapter 8 is the chapter of the broken covenant and its immediate consequences. The urgent alarm of verse 1 — Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of the LORD — opens the chapter with a military warning that is simultaneously a theological one: the Assyrian eagle circling over the land is not merely a geopolitical crisis but the covenant judgment that the broken covenant has produced. The chapter diagnoses with precision the specific ways in which the covenant has been broken and then traces with equal precision the consequences that the breaking has set in motion.

The chapter introduces three distinct covenant violations that are explored in sequence. The first is the political violation: Israel has rejected the good, the enemy pursues them, they have set up kings without the divine sanction, they have made princes but the LORD has not known them. The second is the religious violation: the golden calf of Samaria — the continuation of Jeroboam's original sin of the two golden calves established at Dan and Bethel — is the specific object of the divine anger. And the third is the diplomatic violation: the sowing to the wind of the foreign alliances, the multiplying of altars for sinning, the sending of the tribute to Assyria, the building of temples and the forgetting of the Maker. Each violation is a specific form of the general diagnosis of chapters 4 through 7: the absence of the knowledge of God, the misattribution of the provision, the misdirected seeking.

The most theologically concentrated verse in the chapter is verse 7: for they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The agricultural metaphor captures the moral logic of the covenant with devastating economy: the sowing determines the reaping, and the proportion of the harvest to the seed is the proportion of the whirlwind to the wind. The small, invisible investment of the wrong sowing — the foreign alliances, the golden calves, the self-appointed kings, the altars for sinning — produces a harvest that is exponentially larger and more destructive than the sowing that generated it. The whirlwind is the Assyrian conquest that is coming, and it is the harvest of exactly the seeds that the preceding chapters have been watching Israel plant.

The chapter closes with the most bitter irony available in the covenant theology: Israel shall return to Egypt. The people who were constituted as the covenant community by the Exodus from Egypt, whose entire national identity is founded on the redemption from the house of slavery, will be returned to the condition of Egypt — not geographically but typologically. The Assyrian exile is the new Egypt: the captivity of the people whose whole existence was meant to be the demonstration of the power of the God who brings His people out of captivity. The return to Egypt is the reversal of the Exodus, the unmaking of the founding event of the covenant community, the most comprehensive statement of the consequence of the covenant violation available in the Old Testament.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Hosea chapter 8 as people who live in the age of the Exodus reversed — the age in which the people who have been brought out of the captivity of sin by the greater Exodus of the cross of Christ are in constant danger of returning to the Egypt from which they have been redeemed. We know what it is to sow the wind of the small, invisible investments in the wrong directions — the political alliances that substitute for the trust in the covenant God, the golden calves of the comfortable religious forms that substitute for the living encounter with the God who cannot be represented in silver and gold, the self-appointed kings of the autonomous life that refuses the divine kingship. And we know, or we need to know, that the harvest of these sowings is the whirlwind that is exponentially larger and more destructive than the sowing that produced it.

Lord, let the trumpet of verse 1 sound in our ears as the alarm it is designed to be: the eagle is circling, the covenant has been broken, the consequences are in motion. Let the urgency of the alarm produce the response that the chapters of the book have been calling for: the acknowledgment of the specific guilt, the return to the Most High, the seeking of the face that has been turned away. Let the sow the wind and reap the whirlwind of verse 7 be the most practically effective verse in the chapter for the formation of a theology of moral consequence that takes seriously the proportion of the harvest to the seed.

And let the return to Egypt of verse 13 be received as the most comprehensive available statement of the consequence of the covenant violation, so that the desire to avoid it might be the formation of the covenant faithfulness that the chapter has been calling for. We do not want to return to Egypt. We were brought out of Egypt at a price that cannot be calculated. Let the threat of the return produce the consecration that the return will require us to abandon.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hosea 8:1–6

The Eagle and the Broken Covenant: Self-Appointed Kings, Unauthorized Kings, and the Calf of Samaria

(1) Set the trumpet to thy mouth.

*He shall come as an eagle against the house of the LORD,
because they have transgressed my covenant,
and trespassed against my law.*

*(2) Israel shall cry unto me,
My God, we know thee.*

*(3) Israel hath cast off the thing that is good:
the enemy shall pursue him.*

*(4) They have set up kings, but not by me:
they have made princes, and I knew it not:
of their silver and their gold have they made them idols,
that they may be cut off.*

*(5) Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off;
mine anger is kindled against them:
how long will they be incapable of innocence?*

*(6) For from Israel was it also:
the workman made it; therefore it is not God:
but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces.*

The Context

The Set the trumpet to your lips of verse 1 is the alarm call of the military watchman — the signal that the enemy is approaching and the community must respond. The eagle — or vulture, the Hebrew neshar can mean either — is the image of the Assyrian conqueror swooping on the house of the LORD. The house of the LORD is likely not the Jerusalem temple but the land of Israel, the covenant community and its territory. The reason for the approach of the eagle is given immediately: because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. The military crisis is the theological consequence. The eagle is not a random geopolitical event. It is the covenant judgment in geopolitical form.

The cry of verse 2 — My God, we know you, we Israel — is the continuation of the lying tongue of chapter 7. When the trumpet sounds and the enemy approaches, Israel will cry out the language of the covenant relationship. But the language of the covenant relationship is precisely what the behavior of the preceding chapters has demonstrated to be false: they have cast off the good (verse 3), which is the hesed and the da'at Elohim of chapter 6:6. The enemy will pursue because the covenant has been broken, and the breaking of the covenant has forfeited the covenant protection. The cry of My God, we know you is the deceitful bow of chapter 7 in its most desperate form: the claim of the covenant relationship at the moment of its most needed protection, made by the community whose behavior has been demonstrating the falseness of the claim.

The political violation of verse 4 — they have set up kings, but not by me; they have made princes, but I did not know it — is the specific indictment of the political history of the northern kingdom since its founding. From Jeroboam I onward, the succession of the northern kings had been characterized by assassinations and coups rather than the divinely sanctioned Davidic line. The four assassinations of the post-Jeroboam II period that chapter 7 described as the heated oven consuming its own rulers are the culminating expression of the political self-determination that has characterized the northern kingdom from its beginning: the making of kings without the

divine sanction, the establishing of the political order on the basis of human ambition rather than the divine appointment.

The calf of Samaria in verses 5–6 is the specific religious object that the divine anger is directed against. The golden calf of Samaria is the continuation of the golden calves that Jeroboam I had established at Bethel and Dan when he divided the kingdom from Rehoboam — the religious system that was designed to provide the northern kingdom with an alternative to the Jerusalem temple and the Davidic dynasty, while claiming to be the worship of the LORD who brought Israel out of Egypt. The workman made it; therefore it is not God is the most concentrated refutation of the calf worship available in the Old Testament: the object that has been manufactured by a human craftsman is, by that very fact, not God. The God of the covenant cannot be captured in a manufactured object.

Plain American English

Sound the alarm! The enemy is swooping down like an eagle on the LORD's land, because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my instructions. Now Israel is going to cry out to me, "Our God, we acknowledge you!" But it's too late — Israel has rejected what is good, and now enemies will hunt them down. They chose their own kings without asking me, and set up rulers I never approved of. They took their silver and gold and made idols — and it will be their downfall. I am furious at your calf idol, Samaria! How long will these people refuse to be made clean? This calf was made in Israel — a craftsman made it, so it's not God at all. The calf of Samaria will be smashed to pieces.

Key Observations

“He shall come as an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law”: This signifies **The Military Crisis Is the Theological Consequence — the Eagle of the Assyrian Conqueror Is the Covenant Judgment in Geopolitical Form, and the Connection Between the Broken Covenant and the Approaching Enemy Is Explicit and Direct.**

The opening verse is the most direct statement of the covenant theology of history in the chapter: the military crisis is not a random geopolitical event but the direct consequence of the covenant violation. The because connects the eagle to the transgression with the logical force of the covenant's own threat structure: the covenant blessings were conditioned on covenant faithfulness, and the covenant curses — including the military defeat by the enemy and the exile from the land — were the stipulated consequences of the covenant violation. The eagle that is circling over the house of the LORD is not an independent political actor whose actions require no theological interpretation. It is the instrument of the covenant curses that Deuteronomy 28 spelled out in advance. The military crisis is the theology of covenant consequence made geopolitically visible.

“Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee”: This signifies **The Crisis Cry of the Covenant Language Is the Most Desperate Form of the Deceitful Bow — the Claim of the**

Covenant Relationship at the Moment of Its Most Needed Protection, Made by the Community Whose Behavior Has Been Demonstrating the Falseness of the Claim.

The we know you of verse 2 is the claim of the da'at Elohim — the knowledge of God that chapter 4 identified as absent and chapter 6:6 identified as what God desires more than burnt offerings. The cry is made when the eagle is approaching — when the covenant protection is most urgently needed — by the community whose behavior has been demonstrating throughout the preceding chapters that the knowledge has not been present in the ways that matter. The cry is not false in the sense of deliberate deception. It is the deceitful bow of chapter 7:16 in its most urgent form: the community genuinely reaches for the language of the covenant relationship at the moment of its greatest need, without recognizing that the reaching is contradicted by the entire pattern of the behavior that has preceded the crisis. The knowledge of God that would have prevented the crisis cannot be claimed as the resource for the crisis it did not prevent.

“They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not”: This signifies **The Political Self-Determination of the Northern Kingdom Is the Founding Sin of Its Political History — the Making of Kings Without the Divine Sanction Is the Political Expression of the General Covenant Violation.**

The they have set up kings but not by me is the indictment of the entire political history of the northern kingdom, from its founding in the rebellion of Jeroboam I against Rehoboam through the succession of assassinations and coups that characterized the final decades before the Assyrian conquest. The northern kingdom's political history is the history of the autonomous self-determination that rejected the divinely appointed Davidic dynasty and established its own succession on the basis of military force and political ambition. The divine I knew it not is not the ignorance of the omniscient God but the covenantal non-recognition — the refusal to acknowledge as legitimate the political arrangements that have been made without the divine sanction. The kings of Israel from Jeroboam I onward have been the kings that Israel made for itself, not the kings that the covenant God appointed.

“The workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces”: This signifies **The Refutation of the Idol Is the Most Concentrated Available in the Old Testament — the Object That Has Been Manufactured by a Human Craftsman Cannot Be God Because the God of the Covenant Is the One Who Made the Craftsman.**

The workman made it; therefore it is not God is the logical refutation of idolatry in its briefest form. The argument is the argument from manufacture: the object that has been made by a human craftsman is, by definition, the product of a human being and therefore subject to the human being who made it. The God of the covenant is the Creator of the craftsman — the One who made the one who made the calf. The manufactured object cannot be the God who manufactured the maker of the manufactured object. The calf that has been fashioned from silver and gold is the human projection of the divine onto the material that the human being has shaped — and the God who cannot be projected onto the material has declared that the projection will be broken in pieces. The breaking in pieces is not merely the physical destruction of the idol. It is the refutation of the theological claim that the idol embodied.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Read the Connection Between the Broken Covenant and the Approaching Eagle as the Theology of Moral Consequence That Governs the Entire Chapter — the Military, Political, and Social Crises of the Covenant Community Are Not Random Events but the Covenant Curses Made Historically Visible: The because they have transgressed my covenant is the interpretive key for every crisis that the covenant community experiences. The covenant was established with blessings and curses attached: the blessings for faithfulness, the curses for violation. The crises of the northern kingdom — the political instability, the military vulnerability, the Assyrian threat — are not random geopolitical events that require only a political response. They are the covenant curses that the covenant violations of chapters 4 through 7 have been accumulating. The contemporary church and the contemporary believer who read their crises only in political or economic or social terms, without the theological interpretation that the covenant framework provides, are reading the eagle without reading the because. The crisis is the theology made visible. Read it accordingly.

2. Examine the Kings You Have Set Up Without the Divine Sanction — the Arrangements of the Autonomous Life That Have Been Made Without the Covenant God's Appointment or Knowledge: The they have set up kings but not by me is the indictment not only of the northern kingdom's political history but of every form of the autonomous self-determination that arranges the structures of the life without the covenant God's sanction. The contemporary believer who has arranged the priorities of the life, the commitments of the time, the investments of the resources, and the direction of the career without the deliberate seeking of the divine sanction is setting up kings without the divine appointment. The autonomous self-determination that characterizes the modern Western approach to the life — the arrangement of the structures of the individual life according to personal preference and market logic rather than covenant obedience — is the political violation of verse 4 applied to the level of the individual.

3. Apply the Workman Made It; Therefore It Is Not God Refutation to the Contemporary Equivalents of the Calf of Samaria — the Manufactured Religious Experiences and Self-Projected Deities That the Culture Produces: The workman made it; therefore it is not God is the most useful theological tool in the chapter for evaluating the contemporary religious landscape. Every religious object, experience, or concept that has been manufactured to meet the specifications of the consumer's preference is subject to the same refutation: the workman made it. The God who cannot be manufactured to specification — who refuses to be shaped by the craftsman's tools to fit the customer's requirements — is the God of the covenant who is encountered on His own terms and not on the terms that the religious consumer has specified. The calf of Samaria is the religious object that the community has made to serve its own needs. The God of the covenant is the One who made the community that made the calf.

How This Relates to Today

The cry of verse 2 — My God, we know you — is the most contemporary and the most pastorally significant verse in the opening section. The community that claims the da'at Elohim in the moment of the crisis is the community that has demonstrated throughout the preceding chapters that the knowledge has not been present in the ways that matter. The contemporary church that claims the language of the covenant relationship in the moment of the cultural crisis — that appeals to its Christian identity and its covenant heritage at the moment when the eagle of the cultural and institutional pressure is approaching — while its preceding behavior has

demonstrated the same absences of the faithfulness, the steadfast love, and the knowledge of God that chapters 4 through 7 catalogued in the northern kingdom is in the condition of verse 2. The claim of the knowledge of God in the moment of the crisis cannot substitute for the knowledge of God in the ordinary practice of the covenant life that the crisis has interrupted.

The calf of Samaria is also one of the most important images in the chapter for understanding the contemporary religious phenomenon of the manufactured religious experience. The religious culture of the contemporary West has produced an abundance of manufactured religious experiences — the conference, the worship event, the retreat, the online community, the theological podcast — that offer the stimulation of the religious encounter without the demands of the covenant relationship that the genuine encounter with the living God produces. Each of these is, in its own way, the product of the craftsman: the event planner, the worship leader, the theological communicator who has shaped the religious experience to meet the specifications of the consumer. The workman made it. Therefore it is not God. The God of the covenant is not encountered in the manufactured experience. He is encountered in the covenant relationship that makes demands that the manufactured experience is specifically designed to avoid.

Key Lesson: **The opening section establishes the chapter's governing theology of moral consequence: the eagle approaches because the covenant has been transgressed, the cry of My God, we know you is the deceitful bow of the covenant language at the moment of the crisis it did not prevent, the political self-determination of the kings set up without the divine sanction is the founding violation of the northern kingdom's political history, and the workman made it; therefore it is not God is the most concentrated refutation of the manufactured religion that has replaced the living encounter with the covenant God who cannot be shaped by the craftsman's tools.**

Hosea 8:7–10

Sowing the Wind, Reaping the Whirlwind: The Swallowed Harvest and the Hired Lovers

*(7) For they have sown the wind,
and they shall reap the whirlwind:
it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal:
if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.*

*(8) Israel is swallowed up:
now shall they be among the Gentiles
as a vessel wherein is no pleasure.*

*(9) For they are gone up to Assyria,
a wild ass alone by himself:
Ephraim hath hired lovers.*

*(10) Yea, though they have hired among the nations,
now will I gather them,
and they shall sorrow a little*

for the burden of the king of princes.

The Context

The sow the wind, reap the whirlwind of verse 7 is the most quoted verse in the chapter and one of the most memorable verses in the entire Old Testament. Its memorability is inseparable from its moral logic: the proportion of the whirlwind to the wind is the proportion of the harvest to the seed, and the harvest is exponentially larger and more destructive than the sowing that produced it. The wind is the small, seemingly inconsequential sowing of the covenant violation: the golden calves, the foreign alliances, the self-appointed kings, the altars for sinning. The whirlwind is the Assyrian conquest that is the harvest of these sowings. The proportion is the moral logic of the covenant: the small sowing of the wrong direction produces a harvest that overwhelms the community that produced it.

The continuing agricultural metaphor of verse 7 — it has no stalk, the grain has no flour; if it were to yield, strangers would devour it — deepens the diagnosis. The wind-sowing produces not merely the wrong harvest but no harvest at all: the stalk has no grain, the grain has no flour. And even if there were a harvest, the strangers would consume it before the community that sowed could benefit from it. The double negation — no harvest, and if harvest then no benefit — is the most comprehensive statement of the futility of the covenant violation's agricultural consequence. The sowing that produces no harvest, or the harvest that is consumed before it can be enjoyed, is the image of the spiritual condition that chapter 2 described: the agricultural gifts that the wife attributed to the Baals are now being taken back, and the strangers are consuming what the covenant God gave.

The Israel who is swallowed up of verse 8 — now among the nations like a useless vessel — is the fulfillment of the threat of the covenant. Israel was called to be the distinct covenant community among the nations: the people whose life together was the demonstration of the covenant God's character and provision to the watching world. The vessel that is no longer desired is the covenant community that has lost its distinctive identity through the assimilation and the idolatry that the preceding chapters have catalogued. The vessel was valuable when it contained the covenant life. Empty of the covenant content — the faithfulness, the steadfast love, the knowledge of God — it has no value among the nations.

The wild ass of verse 9 is the image of the solitary, undomesticated animal — going up to Assyria alone, without the companionship of the covenant community, seeking the hired lovers of the political alliance. The Ephraim who has hired lovers is the continuation of the marriage metaphor: the wife who has not merely gone after lovers but has now begun to pay the lovers for the attention that the faithful husband was giving for free. This is the deterioration of the unfaithfulness beyond the stage of the simple adultery: the wife is now spending the husband's resources to maintain the relationships with the lovers. The tribute that Israel is paying to Assyria — the silver and gold of verse 4 that has been given to the foreign power — is the payment of the hired lover, the spending of the covenant gifts to maintain the political relationships that have replaced the covenant God's protection.

Plain American English

They have planted the wind, and now they will harvest the whirlwind. The stalk has no grain, and even if grain were to grow, foreigners would swallow it all up. Israel is already swallowed up — they are like a broken pot that no one wants anymore, lost among the nations. They have gone to Assyria, wandering alone like a wild donkey. Ephraim has been hiring foreign allies. And even though they have been paying other nations, I am going to round them all up. Before long, they will writhe under the crushing weight of the king of the great powers.

Key Observations

“They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind”: This signifies **The Moral Logic of the Covenant Is the Logic of the Harvest — the Proportion of the Whirlwind to the Wind Is the Proportion of the Harvest to the Seed, and the Covenant Violation Produces a Return That Is Exponentially Larger and More Destructive Than the Investment That Generated It.**

The sow the wind, reap the whirlwind is the most economical statement of the theology of moral consequence in the entire Old Testament. Its power lies in the proportion: the wind is small, invisible, seemingly without consequence. The whirlwind is massive, destructive, irresistible. The proportion of the harvest to the seed — the fundamental agricultural reality that a small planting produces a large harvest — is applied to the moral domain with devastating effect: the small, seemingly inconsequential sowing of the covenant violation produces a harvest that is exponentially larger and more destructive than the sowing that produced it. The golden calves of Jeroboam, the foreign alliances, the self-appointed kings, the altars for sinning — these are the wind sowings. The Assyrian conquest that destroys the northern kingdom in 722 BC is the whirlwind harvest. The proportion is exact. The harvest corresponds precisely to the sowing, multiplied by the factor of the covenant’s own moral logic.

“Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure”: This signifies **The Covenant Community That Has Lost Its Distinctive Identity Through Assimilation and Idolatry Has Lost the Content That Made It Valuable Among the Nations — the Empty Vessel Is the Image of the Covenant Community Without the Covenant Life.**

The vessel that is no longer desired among the nations is the image of the covenant community that has been emptied of the content that made it distinctively valuable. Israel was called to be the demonstration of the covenant God’s character among the nations — the living exhibit of what the knowledge of God produces in a human community: the faithfulness, the steadfast love, the justice, the righteousness that the covenant life generates. When the covenant life has been emptied by the idolatry, the assimilation, and the covenant violation, the community that remains is the vessel without content — still present among the nations, but no longer distinctively valuable because the covenant character that made it valuable has been lost. The empty vessel image is the image of the church or the community that has maintained the institutional form of the covenant community while the covenant content has drained away.

“Ephraim hath hired lovers”: This signifies **The Deterioration of the Unfaithfulness from the Simple Adultery to the Paying of the Hired Lovers Is the Most Advanced Stage of the Marriage Metaphor’s Deterioration — the Wife Is Now Spending the Husband’s Resources to Maintain the Relationships That Have Replaced the Covenant God’s Protection.**

The hiring of lovers is the most advanced and the most economically perverse stage of the unfaithfulness that the book has been tracing. In chapter 2, the wife went after lovers who she believed were giving her the bread and water, the wool and flax, the oil and drink. The attribution was wrong — the faithful husband was the actual source of the provision — but the motivation of the idolatry was the perceived benefit. In chapter 8, the deterioration has advanced to the stage where Ephraim is paying for the attention of the lovers: the tribute to Assyria is the payment of the hired relationship. The wife who was receiving what she wrongly attributed to the lovers is now paying what she should have been bringing to the husband. The misattribution of the provision has become the misallocation of the provision: the covenant gifts are now being spent on the maintenance of the relationships that have replaced the covenant God.

“Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them”: This signifies **The Divine Gathering That Follows the Hiring of the Nations Is the Discipline That Interrupts the Wrong Alliance Before It Can Produce the Security That the Hiring Was Designed to Purchase.**

The now will I gather them of verse 10 is the divine response to the hiring of the nations: not the permanent abandonment of the gathered community but the gathering for the discipline that the hiring has made necessary. The gathering is the instrument of the covenant judgment — the bringing together of the scattered community for the experience of the burden of the king of princes (the Assyrian emperor) that the tribute payments have been attempting to avoid. The discipline of the gathering is the discipline that the covenant curses stipulated: the military defeat, the exile, the subjugation to the foreign power. And the purpose of the gathering is not punishment for its own sake but the production of the condition that chapter 5:15 identified as the object of the discipline: the in their affliction they will earnestly seek me that the comfortable seasons of the wind-sowing could not produce.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Take the Sow the Wind, Reap the Whirlwind as the Most Practically Useful Statement of the Theology of Moral Consequence for the Formation of the Deliberate Life: The agricultural metaphor of the harvest is the most intuitive available framework for understanding the theology of moral consequence, and the sow the wind, reap the whirlwind is the most concentrated application of that framework to the moral domain. The contemporary believer who takes this verse seriously will evaluate the small, seemingly inconsequential sowings of the daily life — the small compromises, the small misattributions, the small investments in the wrong directions — with the awareness that the harvest is proportional to the sowing, and that the wind-sized investment in the covenant violation produces the whirlwind-sized consequence. The formation of the deliberate life requires the evaluation of the sowings, not merely the management of the crises that the sowings produce.

2. Examine Whether the Covenant Community Is the Vessel with Content or the Empty Vessel — Whether the Distinctive Character That Makes the Community Valuable Among

the Nations Is Present or Has Drained Away: The vessel that is no longer desired among the nations is the community that has maintained the form while losing the content. The test is not the form — the institutional structures, the theological language, the communal gatherings — but the content: the faithfulness, the steadfast love, the knowledge of God that the form was designed to express and sustain. The church that is present among its community but whose presence is no longer distinctively valuable — because the covenant character that would make it a vessel of value has been emptied by the assimilation and the idolatry that the book has been diagnosing — is the vessel without pleasure. Examine the content. The form without the content is the vessel that the nations have no reason to desire.

3. Identify the Hired Lovers in Your Own Life — the Relationships and Alliances Whose Maintenance Is Consuming the Resources That Were Meant for the Covenant Relationship: The Ephraim who has hired lovers is the image of every believer whose resources — time, energy, money, attention — are being consumed by the maintenance of the relationships and alliances that have substituted for the covenant relationship with God. The hired lovers are not only the flagrant idolatries. They are the ordinary investments in the things that promise the security, the significance, the protection, and the provision that the covenant God alone can supply. The tribute to Assyria is the contemporary believer's investment in the political alliance, the financial hedge, the relational network, the professional status — the things that are being maintained with the resources that the covenant relationship was meant to receive. Identify the hired lovers. The tribute they are receiving is the tribute that the faithful husband was meant to receive.

How This Relates to Today

The sow the wind, reap the whirlwind has become one of the most commonly quoted proverbs in the English language, deployed in contexts that have entirely lost its original theological meaning. The proverb is quoted as a general observation about the consequences of foolish behavior, stripped of the covenant framework that gives it its full theological force. In the context of Hosea 8, the wind is not generic foolishness and the whirlwind is not generic bad luck. The wind is the specific covenant violation — the specific sowings of the idolatry, the political self-determination, the misattribution of the provision, the hired lovers — and the whirlwind is the specific covenant curse: the military conquest, the exile, the return to Egypt. The full theological force of the proverb is the force of the covenant's own moral logic applied to the specific sowings that the preceding chapters have been naming.

The empty vessel of verse 8 is also one of the most applicable images in the chapter to the contemporary institutional church. The denominations, the seminaries, the parachurch organizations, the local congregations that continue to function institutionally while the covenant content — the faithfulness, the steadfast love, the knowledge of God — has been drained by the decades of the assimilation and the idolatry are the vessels that are no longer desired among the nations. The nations around the institutional church have noticed the emptiness of the vessel before the institution itself has been willing to acknowledge it. The vessel is present. The content is gone. The nations have no reason to desire a vessel without content, and the decline in the institutional church's cultural influence is the accurate assessment of the vessel's current condition.

Key Lesson: **The sow the wind, reap the whirlwind of verse 7 is the most concentrated statement of the covenant theology of moral consequence in the chapter — the proportion of the whirlwind to the wind is the proportion of the harvest to the seed — and the swallowed Israel of verse 8, the wild ass going up to Assyria alone, and the Ephraim who has hired lovers are the three specific portraits of the community whose wind-sowings have produced the whirlwind-harvest of the empty vessel, the exhausting solitude, and the perverse economics of the tribute paid to the hired lovers from the resources that were meant for the faithful husband.**

Hosea 8:11–14

Altars for Sinning, the Forgotten Maker, and the Return to Egypt: The Final Consequences of the Broken Covenant

*(11) Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin,
altars shall be unto him to sin.
(12) I have written to him the great things of my law,
but they were counted as a strange thing.
(13) They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings,
and eat it;
but the LORD accepteth them not;
now will he remember their iniquity,
and visit their sins:
they shall return to Egypt.
(14) For Israel hath forgotten his Maker,
and buildeth temples;
and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities:
but I will send a fire upon his cities,
and it shall devour the palaces thereof.*

The Context

The altars for sinning of verse 11 are the most theologically concentrated expression of the religious perversion that Hosea has been diagnosing throughout the book. The altars were given as the instrument of the atonement for sin and the expression of the covenant relationship. When the altars have become the instruments for sinning — when the religious system that was designed to address the covenant violation has become the occasion for the covenant violation — the perversion of the system is complete. The many altars that Ephraim has built are not the many expressions of the genuine covenant worship. They are the many occasions for the wrong worship that the building of the altars has enabled and encouraged. The altar that was meant to be the instrument of the approach to the covenant God has become the instrument of the departure from Him.

The great things of my law written for them of verse 12 is the most direct statement of the divine investment in Israel's formation in the chapter. The law — the Torah that the LORD gave to Israel through Moses at Sinai — is described as the great things that the LORD wrote for them: the comprehensive guidance for the covenant life, the practical wisdom for the community that knows the LORD, the framework for the faithfulness and the steadfast love and the knowledge of God that the preceding chapters have been lamenting as absent. And the response: they were counted as a foreign thing. The law that was given as the most intimate gift of the covenant relationship — the guidance of the faithful husband for the household of the covenant community — has been treated as if it were the alien imposition of a foreign religion.

The sacrifices that the LORD does not accept in verse 13 are the confirmation of the principle of chapter 6:6: the sacrifice without the *hesed* and the *da'at* Elohim has no more content than the empty vessel of verse 8. The eating of the sacrificial flesh is the performance of the religious form — the community assembles, the offerings are made, the flesh is consumed — but the LORD does not accept them because the content of the covenant relationship that the sacrifice was designed to express is absent. And the now will he remember their iniquity is the reversal of the false comfort of the community that believed the performance of the religious form was covering the sin: the divine memory that chapter 7:2 identified as the diagnostic reality that Israel was not considering has now been activated. The iniquity will be remembered and the sins will be visited.

The they shall return to Egypt of verse 13 is the most theologically catastrophic statement in the chapter and one of the most comprehensive statements of covenant consequence in the entire Old Testament. The Exodus was the founding event of the covenant community: the act by which the LORD constituted Israel as His people, the demonstration of the covenant God's power and the covenant community's identity as the redeemed of the LORD. The return to Egypt is the reversal of the Exodus — the unmaking of the founding event, the dissolution of the covenant identity, the return of the covenant community to the condition from which the covenant God's most fundamental act of grace had rescued it. The return to Egypt is not the simple geographical return: the Assyrian exile is the typological Egypt, the captivity that corresponds to the original captivity that defined what Israel was before the Exodus made it what it was meant to be.

Plain American English

Ephraim has built more and more altars for sinning, so those very altars have just become places to sin even more. I wrote out my laws for them — all these great instructions — but they treated them like something strange and foreign. They offer sacrifices and eat the meat, but the LORD doesn't accept it. Now he will remember their guilt and punish their sins — they will go back to Egypt. Israel has forgotten the One who made him, and has been building palaces. Judah has built more and more fortified cities. But I will send fire on their cities, and it will burn up their fortresses.

Key Observations

“Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin”: This signifies **The Perversion of the Religious System Is Complete When the Instrument Designed to Address the Covenant Violation Has Become the Occasion for the Covenant Violation — the Mirror Judgment Matches the Specific Form of the Perversion.**

The altars for sinning are the most complete expression of the religious perversion that the book has been tracing. The altar was the instrument of the atonement — the place where the sin was acknowledged, the offering was made, and the covenant relationship was expressed and renewed. When the altars have become the instruments for sinning, the system has been fully perverted: the mechanism designed to address the departure from the covenant God has become the occasion for the departure. The mirror judgment — because he has made many altars to sin, altars will become his sin — is the exact correspondence between the perversion and its consequence: the perverted instrument becomes the perverted consequence. The altars that were meant to restore become the altars that confirm the departure. This is the final stage of the religious perversion: the instrument of the relationship becomes the instrument of the alienation.

“I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing”: This signifies **The Torah That Was Given as the Most Intimate Gift of the Covenant Relationship Has Been Treated as the Alien Imposition of a Foreign Religion — the Most Comprehensive Rejection of the Divine Investment.**

The great things of my law that the LORD has written for Israel are the Torah — the comprehensive guidance for the covenant life that was given at Sinai as the expression of the covenant God’s will for the community that knows Him. The law is the practical wisdom of the relationship: the guidance of the faithful husband for the household of the covenant community, the framework for the faithfulness and the steadfast love and the knowledge of God that the covenant life is meant to produce. The counting of the law as a foreign thing is the most comprehensive rejection of the divine investment available: the community has treated the most intimate gift of the covenant relationship as if it were an alien imposition. This is the cognitive reversal that underlies every other form of the covenant violation: when the law that was given as the guidance of the faithful husband is experienced as the restriction of the foreign tyrant, the departure from the law becomes the pursuit of the freedom that the law was supposedly preventing.

“They shall return to Egypt”: This signifies **The Return to Egypt Is the Most Comprehensive Statement of Covenant Consequence Available — the Typological Reversal of the Exodus That Unmakes the Founding Event of the Covenant Community and Returns the People to the Condition from Which the Most Fundamental Act of Divine Grace Rescued Them.**

The return to Egypt is not a geographical prediction but a typological statement of the most comprehensive covenant consequence available. Egypt is the place of the captivity, the house of slavery, the condition of the people before the Exodus constituted them as the covenant community. The return to Egypt is the unmaking of the Exodus — the dissolution of the covenant identity back into the pre-covenant condition. The Assyrian exile is the typological Egypt: the captivity of the people who were defined by the Exodus from captivity is the most thoroughgoing available demonstration that the covenant violation has reached the level of the covenant dissolution. For the New Testament reader, the return to Egypt resonates with the warning of Hebrews: the person who has known the Exodus of the cross and deliberately returns

to the pre-Exodus condition of the life without the covenant God has tasted the most comprehensive available form of the covenant consequence.

“For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples”: This signifies **The Forgotten Maker Is the Summary Indictment That Echoes the She Forgot Me of Chapter 2 — the Building of the Temples Is the Architectural Expression of the Practical Atheism That Has Replaced the Living Knowledge of the God Who Made Israel.**

The forgotten Maker is the architectural expression of the practical atheism that the book has been diagnosing since chapter 4. Israel has forgotten the God who made him — and the evidence of the forgetting is the building of temples, the construction of the alternative sanctuaries that substitute for the genuine encounter with the Maker. The temples are the architectural equivalent of the calf of Samaria: the manufactured religious structures that attempt to substitute for the living God who cannot be housed in the structures that the human craftsman builds. And Judah’s multiplied fortified cities are the political equivalent of the temple building: the investment in the constructed security of the fortress that substitutes for the covenant God’s protection. Both the temple and the fortress are the building projects of the community that has forgotten its Maker and is attempting to construct the security and the worship that only the Maker can provide.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Examine Whether the Instruments of the Covenant Life in Your Community Have Become the Occasions for the Covenant Violation They Were Designed to Address:

The altars for sinning are the warning against the perversion of every instrument of the covenant life. The church service that has become the occasion for the performance of the religious form that covers the continuing covenant violation is the altar for sinning. The theological education that has become the occasion for the pride of knowledge that replaces the humility of the da’at Elohim is the altar for sinning. The community gathering that has become the occasion for the social performance that substitutes for the genuine covenant life is the altar for sinning. Examine the instruments. The test is whether the instrument is producing the covenant life it was designed to produce or whether it has become the occasion for the covenant violation it was designed to address.

2. Receive the Great Things of the Law as the Most Intimate Gift of the Covenant Relationship Rather Than as the Alien Restriction of a Foreign Imposition:

The counting of the law as a foreign thing is the theological reversal that underlies every other form of the covenant violation. The community that experiences the commandments, the moral demands, and the covenant requirements of the Scripture as the alien restrictions of a foreign system rather than the intimate guidance of the faithful husband has lost the covenant framework within which the law makes sense and produces the life it is designed to produce. Receive the law as the gift it is: the great things that the faithful husband has written for the household of the covenant community to enable the life of the hesed and the da’at Elohim that He desires more than the sacrifice. The law is the guidance of the relationship, not the restriction of the tyranny.

3. Read the Return to Egypt Warning as the Most Comprehensive Available Statement of What the Sustained Covenant Violation Ultimately Produces — and Let the Warning Form the Covenant Faithfulness That Avoids the Return:

The return to Egypt is the covenant

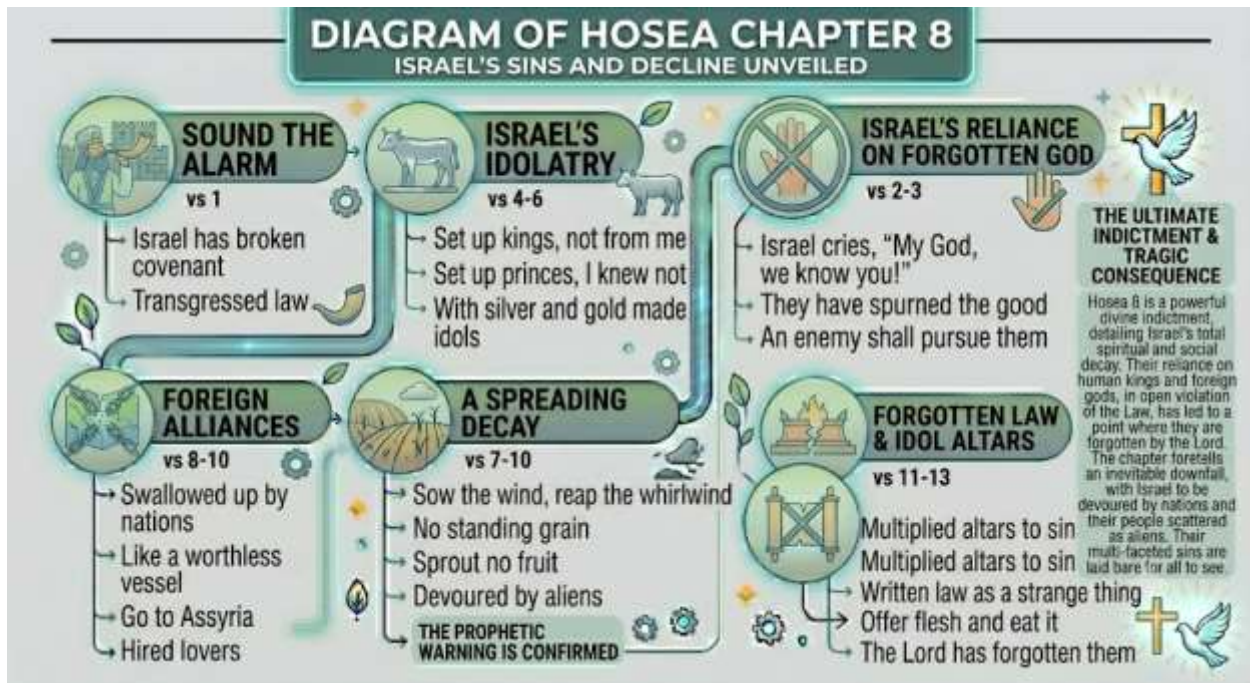
consequence that encompasses all the others: the reversal of the Exodus, the dissolution of the covenant identity, the return to the condition of captivity from which the most fundamental act of divine grace rescued the covenant community. For the New Testament believer, the return to Egypt is the warning of Hebrews 6 and 10: the person who has been brought out of the captivity of sin by the Exodus of the cross and who deliberately returns to the pre-Exodus condition has experienced the most comprehensive available form of the covenant consequence. Let the return to Egypt be the most urgent available motivation for the covenant faithfulness: the desire to avoid the return to the condition from which the Maker's most fundamental act of grace rescued us.

How This Relates to Today

The great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing of verse 12 is one of the most urgently applicable observations in the chapter to the contemporary church's relationship to the Scripture. The community that has received the most comprehensive and most carefully preserved collection of the divine guidance in history and treats it as a foreign imposition — that reads the moral demands of the Scripture as the alien restrictions of a pre-modern culture rather than the intimate guidance of the covenant God who knows His people better than they know themselves — is in the condition of verse 12. The counting of the law as a foreign thing is not the dramatic rejection of the Scripture. It is the incremental accommodation of the Scripture's authority to the preferences of the surrounding culture, until the Scripture's demands are experienced as the restrictions of a foreign system rather than the guidance of the faithful husband.

The Israel who has forgotten his Maker and built temples, and the Judah who has multiplied fortified cities of verse 14, are also the most architecturally specific expressions of the general condition that the book has been diagnosing. The community that responds to the absence of the covenant God by building the structures that substitute for His presence — the more elaborate worship facilities that replace the genuine encounter with the living God, the more sophisticated institutional structures that replace the covenant life that the institutions were designed to serve — is the community of verse 14. The building projects of the forgotten Maker's community are always impressive from the outside and empty from the inside. The fire that the LORD sends will not discriminate between the temple and the fortress. The manufactured security burns as readily as the manufactured worship.

Key Lesson: **The closing section of the chapter traces the full arc of the covenant violation to its most comprehensive consequences: the altars that were designed to address the sin have become the occasions for the sin, the great things of the law have been counted as a foreign thing, the sacrifices are not accepted because the covenant content is absent, and the return to Egypt — the typological reversal of the Exodus that unmakes the founding event of the covenant community — is the most comprehensive statement of the covenant consequence available; and the Israel who has forgotten his Maker and built temples, and the Judah who has multiplied fortified cities, are the architectural portraits of the community that has responded to the absence of the living God by constructing the structures that substitute for His presence.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 8 having received the most urgent alarm in the book: the trumpet sounding, the eagle circling, the covenant broken, the consequences in motion. We have heard the sow the wind, reap the whirlwind — the most concentrated statement of the covenant theology of moral consequence available — and we have examined the sowings of our own lives and our own communities against its standard. We have seen the altars for sinning, the law counted as a foreign thing, the sacrifices not accepted, and the most comprehensive consequence of all: the return to Egypt, the reversal of the Exodus, the unmaking of the founding act of the covenant community.

Lord, let the trumpet of verse 1 sound in our ears with the urgency it is designed to produce. The eagle is circling over the house of the LORD in every generation — not always the Assyrian eagle, but always the covenant consequence that takes the specific form that the specific sowings of the specific covenant violation have produced. Let us hear the alarm not as the distant warning for a people long gone but as the present alarm for the community that is sowing its own wind and will reap its own whirlwind if the course is not changed.

Let us not be the community that cries My God, we know you when the eagle approaches, having demonstrated throughout the preceding seasons that the knowledge was not present in the ways that mattered. Let us instead be the community that knows You in the daily practice of the covenant life — in the faithfulness, the steadfast love, and the knowledge of God that You have

desired from the beginning and that You have expressed that desire for in the great things of the law that You wrote for us so that we might live. Let the law be received as the gift it is: the intimate guidance of the faithful husband for the household of the covenant community. Let it not be counted as a foreign thing.

And let the return to Egypt be the warning that forms the covenant faithfulness that avoids it. We were brought out of Egypt at a price that cannot be calculated — the price of the cross that is the greater Exodus, the redemption of the people who were slaves to sin and death and have been brought into the freedom of the covenant community of the new creation. Let us not return to Egypt. Let the faithfulness that the awareness of the Exodus produces be the faithfulness that the closing verse of the chapter demands: the faithfulness of the community that has not forgotten its Maker and therefore does not need to build the temples and the fortified cities that substitute for His presence.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is the greater Moses of the greater Exodus, who has led His people out of the Egypt of sin and death into the covenant community of the new creation, and who will not allow the return to Egypt to be the final word of the community that earnestly seeks His face — Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone