

# Introduction to Hosea Chapter 10

## *The Luxuriant Vine, the Broken Altars, and the Sow in Righteousness: Prosperity's Perversion and the Final Call to Return*

Hosea chapter 10 is the chapter of the perverted prosperity. The opening image — Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit — is not an accusation of poverty or failure. It is the diagnosis of the most dangerous spiritual condition available: the prosperity that has become the occasion for the multiplication of the idolatry rather than the deepening of the covenant faithfulness. The more the fruit, the more the altars. The more the land prospered, the better they made their standing stones. The prosperity that was the sign of the covenant blessing has become the fuel for the covenant violation, and the more thorough the prosperity the more comprehensive the violation it has enabled.

The chapter moves through three distinct but interconnected movements. The first (verses 1–8) is the diagnosis of the perverted prosperity: the luxuriant vine, the divided heart, the false oaths, the poisonous weeds growing in the furrows of the field, and the coming destruction of the altars and the sacred stones that the prosperity has multiplied. The second (verses 9–10) is the historical indictment, reaching back again to the days of Gibeah — the lowest moral benchmark in the covenant community's history — and declaring the gathering of the nations against the community that has compounded the original sin. And the third (verses 11–15) is the most direct call to action in the chapter: the sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up your fallow ground, seek the LORD — the most concentrated positive instruction in the book since the earliest chapters, followed by the warning of the war that is coming if the sowing is not undertaken.

The most theologically significant verse in the chapter is verse 12, which stands in deliberate contrast to the sow the wind, reap the whirlwind of chapter 8:7. Where chapter 8 described the harvest of the covenant violation, chapter 10:12 describes the harvest of the covenant obedience: sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you. The same agricultural framework that was used to describe the consequence of the wrong sowing is now used to describe the possibility of the right sowing. The land that has been sowing wind can begin sowing righteousness. The community that has been reaping whirlwind can begin reaping steadfast love. The agricultural metaphor that has been the instrument of the judgment is now the instrument of the invitation.

The chapter also contains the most direct statement of the military consequence in the book. The Shalman who destroyed Beth-arbel in the day of battle — probably a reference to a devastating Assyrian military action that the audience would recognize — is the historical precedent for what is coming to Bethel. The king of Israel shall be utterly cut off like foam on the face of the waters. The military consequence is not the worst thing that can happen to the covenant community. The worst thing is the continuation of the conditions that made the military consequence inevitable.

The war is the consequence of the wrong sowing. The sowing of righteousness is the alternative to the war.

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## Opening Prayer

*Heavenly Father,*

*We come to Hosea chapter 10 as people who understand the danger of the luxuriant vine. We know what it is to receive the abundance of Your provision and to use the abundance as the occasion for the multiplication of the wrong devotion rather than the deepening of the covenant faithfulness. We know what it is to be more prosperous and more idolatrous simultaneously — to increase in the fruit while multiplying the altars, to prosper in the land while making the sacred stones more elaborate. We come to this chapter asking for the diagnostic clarity that reveals the divided heart beneath the abundant fruit, and the pastoral urgency that calls us to the right sowing before the war that the wrong sowing makes inevitable.*

*Lord, let the sow for yourselves righteousness of verse 12 be the most urgent word in the chapter for us. We have been sowing wind. We have been reaping whirlwind. We have been breaking up the wrong ground and planting the wrong seeds and wondering why the harvest is the harvest that it is. Let the sow for yourselves righteousness be the most practically orienting instruction available: this is the seed, this is the ground, this is the season, this is the rain that will come if the sowing is done. We want to sow righteousness and reap steadfast love. We want to break up the fallow ground of the heart that has been left untilled by the wrong cultivation. And we want to seek the LORD, that He may come and rain righteousness upon us.*

*Let the it is time to seek the LORD of verse 12 be the declaration of the moment. It is time. Not after the next season of the wrong sowing. Not after the next cycle of the wind and the whirlwind. Now. It is time to seek the LORD. Let the urgency of the time produce the urgency of the seeking, and let the seeking produce the rain of righteousness that the fallow ground has been waiting for.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## Hosea 10:1–8

*The Luxuriant Vine and the Divided Heart: Prosperity's Perversion and the Coming Destruction of the Altars*

*(1) Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself:  
according to the multitude of his fruit*

*he hath increased the altars;  
according to the goodness of his land  
they have made goodly images.  
(2) Their heart is divided;  
now shall they be found faulty:  
he shall break down their altars,  
he shall spoil their images.  
(3) For now they shall say,  
We have no king,  
because we feared not the LORD;  
and what should a king do to us?  
(4) They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant:  
thus judgment springeth up as hemlock  
in the furrows of the field.  
(5) The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear  
because of the calves of Beth-aven:  
for the people thereof shall mourn over it,  
and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it,  
for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.  
(6) It shall be also carried unto Assyria  
for a present to king Jareb:  
Ephraim shall receive shame,  
and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.  
(7) As for Samaria, her king is cut off  
as the foam upon the water.  
(8) The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel,  
shall be destroyed:  
the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars;  
and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us;  
and to the hills, Fall on us.*

## **The Context**

The luxuriant vine of verse 1 is the diagnosis of the spiritual danger of prosperity. Israel is described as a luxuriant vine — productive, abundant, generating fruit in generous measure. But the abundance has not produced the covenant faithfulness. It has produced the proliferation of the altars and the elaboration of the sacred stones. The more the fruit, the more the altars: the prosperity that was the covenant blessing has become the resource for the covenant violation. The goodness of the land has been deployed in the service of the wrong worship rather than the right one. This is the most common and the most dangerous form of the covenant perversion: not the poverty that forces the abandonment of the covenant forms, but the prosperity that enables the multiplication of the wrong forms alongside the right ones.

The divided heart of verse 2 is the diagnostic center of the opening section. The heart that is divided between the covenant God and the Baals is the heart that is not the heart of the genuine return. The division is not merely the simultaneous worship of two deities — it is the fundamental orientation of the heart toward two incompatible objects of devotion, neither of which can receive the whole heart that the covenant relationship requires. The now they shall be found guilty is the consequence of the divided heart: the covenant that requires the whole heart has been violated by the division, and the guilt follows from the violation. The breaking of the altars and the destruction of the sacred stones is the divine response to the divided heart — the removal of the objects of the divided devotion so that the whole heart can be directed toward the one object that deserves it.

The false oaths of verse 4 — they utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants — are the verbal dimension of the divided heart. The covenant requires the oath — the sworn commitment that makes the covenant binding. The false oath is the oath taken by the divided heart: the language of the commitment made by the person who does not intend to fulfill the commitment, the covenant words spoken by the person whose heart is not oriented toward the covenant God. The judgment that springs up like hemlock in the furrows of the field is the agricultural image of the false oath's consequence: the field that should be producing the grain of the covenant life is producing the poisonous weed of the judgment instead. The furrows have been planted with the wrong seed.

The calves of Beth-aven — the golden calves of Bethel that Hosea has been renaming as the house of wickedness throughout the book — are the object of the fear of verse 5. The inhabitants of Samaria fear for the calves because the calves are about to be carried away to Assyria as tribute to the great king. The people who have worshipped the calves as their gods will now watch their gods be taken away by the power that the gods were supposed to protect them from. The priests who rejoiced in the calf's glory will mourn its departure. The Ephraim who will receive shame and the Israel who will be ashamed of its counsel are the community that has placed its trust in the manufactured god and will watch the manufactured god be carried away by the earthly power that cannot be resisted because the covenant God has not been sought.

The call to the mountains and hills of verse 8 — Cover us! Fall on us! — is the most extreme expression of the shame and the despair of the coming destruction. The people who worshipped at the high places — at the mountains and the hills where the Baal worship was conducted under the oaks and poplars — will call on those same mountains and hills to cover and bury them from the consequences of the worship they conducted there. The mountains and hills that were the sites of the wrong worship become the hoped-for burial of the shame that the wrong worship has produced. Jesus echoes this language in Luke 23:30 as the description of the coming judgment on Jerusalem, and the book of Revelation quotes it in 6:16 as the response of the unrighteous to the opening of the sixth seal. The language of the shame-burial has become the canonical language of the eschatological judgment.

## Plain American English

*Israel was a thriving vine, producing plenty of fruit. But as the fruit increased, they built more and more altars. As their land prospered, they set up more and more sacred stone pillars. Their heart is divided — and now they must bear their guilt. God will demolish their altars and destroy their stone pillars. Then they will say, “We have no king because we didn’t fear the LORD — and what could a king do for us anyway?” They make promises and sign treaties with empty words, so lawsuits and accusations spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field. The people of Samaria will be afraid for the gold calf idol of Beth-aven. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idol-priests who used to rejoice when its glory was on display — but that glory has now departed. It will be carted off to Assyria as a gift to the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced, and Israel will be put to shame by depending on this idol. Samaria’s king will be swept away like a twig on the surface of the water. The high places of Aven — Israel’s own sin — will be destroyed. Thorns and thistles will take over their altars. Then the people will cry out to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Bury us!”*

## Key Observations

**“According to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images”:** This signifies **The Perverted Prosperity Is the Most Dangerous Spiritual Condition Available — the Abundance That Becomes the Resource for the Multiplication of the Wrong Devotion Rather Than the Deepening of the Covenant Faithfulness.**

The correlation between the abundance of the fruit and the multiplication of the altars is the most precise diagnosis of the perverted prosperity in the chapter. The danger is not poverty — poverty that forces the abandonment of the covenant forms is a clear crisis that demands a clear response. The danger is the prosperity that enables the elaboration of the wrong worship alongside the right one: the abundance that resources the golden calves, the pilgrimage to Beth-aven, the sacred stones made more elaborate as the land grows more productive. The community that is most prosperous is the community most capable of investing in the most elaborate forms of the wrong devotion. The Jeroboam II prosperity that chapters 4 through 8 have been diagnosing as the context of the covenant violation is the prosperity of verse 1: the luxuriant vine that brings forth fruit, and uses the fruit to multiply the altars of the wrong worship. The prosperity is real. The covenant violation it funds is also real.

**“Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty”:** This signifies **The Divided Heart Is the Diagnostic Center of the Covenant Violation — the Heart That Is Not Wholly Directed Toward the Covenant God Has Violated the Covenant’s Most Fundamental Requirement.**

The divided heart of verse 2 is the most fundamental diagnosis in the opening section. The covenant requirement of the whole heart — Hear O Israel, the LORD your God is one, and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart — has been violated by the division of the heart between the covenant God and the Baals. The division is not primarily the division between competing theological beliefs. It is the division of the devotion — the orientation of the will, the affection, the trust, and the obedience — between the covenant God and the objects of the wrong worship. The heart that is divided cannot give to either object the whole devotion that the covenant requires of its recipient. And the now they shall be found guilty is the covenant

consequence of the divided heart: the covenant that was made with the whole heart cannot be maintained by the divided one.

**“Thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field”:** This signifies **The Hemlock in the Furrows Is the Agricultural Image of the False Oath’s Consequence — the Field That Should Be Producing the Grain of the Covenant Life Is Producing the Poisonous Weed of the Judgment Instead.**

The furrows of the field are the prepared ground — the plowed soil that is ready for the sowing that will produce the harvest. The hemlock that springs up in the furrows is the poisonous consequence of the wrong sowing: the ground that was prepared for the covenant grain is producing the judgment weed instead. The false oaths that are made by the divided heart are the wrong sowing in the prepared ground. They cannot produce the covenant grain because they are not the covenant seed. They produce the hemlock of the judgment — the bitter, poisonous consequence that grows in the furrows that should have been producing the steadfast love and the righteousness of verse 12. The hemlock in the furrows is the agricultural image of the contrast that the chapter is setting up: the wrong sowing produces the poisonous weed of the judgment; the right sowing of verse 12 produces the harvest of the steadfast love.

**“They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us”:** This signifies **The Shame-Burial of the High-Place Worshippers Is the Most Extreme Expression of the Desperate Desire to Escape the Consequences of the Wrong Worship That Was Conducted at the Very Mountains and Hills Now Called Upon to Provide the Burial.**

The people who worshipped at the high places — at the mountains and hills of the wrong worship that chapter 4 described as the characteristic sites of the Baal cult — will call on those same mountains and hills to bury them from the shame of the consequences that the worship has produced. The irony is precise: the mountains that were the sites of the wrong worship become the hoped-for instruments of the shame’s concealment. The call to the mountains is the desperate seeking of a hiding place from the covenant judgment by the community that has nowhere else to turn because it has turned away from the covenant God who is the only genuine refuge. The New Testament’s use of this language in Luke 23:30 and Revelation 6:16 establishes it as the canonical expression of the condition of the community that faces the eschatological judgment without the covenant relationship that would have provided the refuge from it.

## **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Examine the Relationship Between Your Prosperity and Your Devotion — Is the Abundance of the Covenant Gifts Deepening the Covenant Faithfulness or Funding the Multiplication of the Wrong Devotion:** The luxuriant vine that increases its altars with its fruit is the warning for every community and every believer who is experiencing the abundance of the covenant gifts. The prosperity is not the problem. The perversion of the prosperity is the problem: the use of the abundance to resource the wrong devotion rather than the deepening of the covenant relationship with the God who gives the abundance. The diagnostic question is not whether the community is prosperous but what the prosperity is being used for. Is the abundance of time, energy, resources, and attention being invested in the deepening of the hesed and the da’at Elohim that the covenant requires? Or is it being used to elaborate the altars of the wrong

worship — the more sophisticated entertainments, the more elaborate programs, the more refined theological performances that substitute for the living encounter with the covenant God?

**2. Address the Divided Heart as the Most Fundamental Diagnostic Before Addressing the Specific Behaviors That the Division Produces:** The divided heart of verse 2 is the root from which every specific covenant violation grows. The false oaths, the multiplied altars, the sacred stones, the calves of Beth-aven — all of these are the specific expressions of the heart that has been divided between the covenant God and the wrong objects of devotion. The address of the specific behaviors without the address of the divided heart is the treatment of the symptoms without the treatment of the disease. The recovery of the whole heart — the whole orientation of the will, the affection, the trust, and the obedience toward the covenant God — is the condition of the genuine covenant faithfulness. Ask the diagnostic question: is the heart divided? If so, the address of the specific behaviors will not produce the covenant faithfulness that the whole heart alone can generate.

**3. Receive the Destruction of the Altars and the Sacred Stones as the Merciful Removal of the Objects of the Divided Devotion — the Stripping That Enables the Whole Heart to Be Recovered:** The he shall break down their altars, he shall destroy their pillars of verse 2 is not merely the punishment of the wrong worship. It is the merciful removal of the objects of the divided devotion — the stripping away of the things that have been competing for the heart that the covenant God requires wholly. The community that has been dividing its heart between the covenant God and the altars of the wrong worship is the community whose altars are being broken by the covenant God who will not accept the divided heart. The breaking of the altars is the provision of the condition in which the whole heart becomes the only option: when the objects of the division are removed, the heart that was divided must either find new objects of division or return wholly to the covenant God. The breaking of the altars is the discipline designed to produce the return of the whole heart.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The luxuriant vine that multiplies its altars with its fruit is one of the most precisely applicable images in the chapter to the contemporary Western church in its relationship to prosperity. The church in the most materially abundant period of its history has also produced the most elaborate and most resourced forms of the wrong devotion: the manufactured worship experience, the celebrity theological culture, the therapeutic community that substitutes for the genuine covenant life, the institutional machinery that resources its own expansion rather than the deepening of the covenant faithfulness that the institution was founded to serve. The more the fruit, the more the altars. The prosperity has not produced the deepening of the covenant faithfulness. It has produced the elaboration of the substitute devotion that the prosperity has been able to resource.

The call to the mountains and hills of verse 8 is also one of the most important images in the chapter for the canonical reading of the eschatological judgment. The language that Hosea uses to describe the shame of the high-place worshippers becomes, in Jesus' use of it in Luke 23:30, the language of the judgment coming on Jerusalem for its rejection of the Messiah, and in Revelation 6:16 the language of the final eschatological judgment. The mountains that were the sites of the wrong worship in Hosea become, in the canonical development, the hoped-for hiding

places from the eschatological judgment that the wrong worship has produced. The community that worships at the wrong high places in this age will call on the mountains and hills in the age of the judgment. The mountains will not answer. The covenant God is the only refuge from the judgment that the wrong worship has made inevitable.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The opening section of the chapter diagnoses the most dangerous spiritual condition available: the luxuriant vine whose prosperity has become the resource for the multiplication of the wrong devotion, the divided heart that violates the covenant's most fundamental requirement, the false oaths that produce the hemlock of judgment in the furrows prepared for the grain of the covenant life, and the shame-burial of the communities whose high-place worship has left them with nowhere to turn when the mountains and hills they worshipped at are called upon to provide the burial from the consequences of the worship they enabled.\**

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## **Hosea 10:9–10**

*Since the Days of Gibeah: The Compounded Sin and the Gathered Nations*

*(9) O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah:  
there they stood:*

*the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity  
did not overtake them.*

*(10) It is in my desire that I should chastise them;  
and the people shall be gathered against them,  
when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows.*

### **The Context**

The return to the days of Gibeah in verse 9 is the second reference to the benchmark of the lowest moral point in the covenant community's history in the book — the first being in chapter 9:9. The days of Gibeah are the days of the gang rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19) and the civil war that followed. The Israel has sinned since the days of Gibeah is the declaration that the sin that Gibeah represented — the breakdown of the covenant community's moral order at its most foundational level — has been the continuous condition of the community from that moment to the present. The Gibeah sin is not a historical episode that was addressed and resolved. It established a pattern that has persisted.

The there they stood of verse 9 is the most difficult phrase in the section and has been interpreted in multiple ways. The most likely reading is that the men of Gibeah stood — persisted in their iniquity — without the original civil war's judgment having been sufficient to produce the genuine reformation that the judgment was designed to produce. The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them — the judgment of Gibeah did not produce the moral reformation that would have ended the pattern. The sin persisted. The pattern continued. And the

compounding of the sin through the generations has produced the condition that chapter 10 is diagnosing.

The it is in my desire to chastise them of verse 10 is the most direct statement of the divine intention in the short section. The chastisement is not the vindictive punishment of the offended deity but the covenant discipline of the faithful husband who has determined that the discipline is necessary for the restoration that the prolonged and compounded sin has made otherwise impossible. And the nations will be gathered against them when they are bound — when the Assyrian coalition comes against the northern kingdom to execute the covenant judgment — is the political-military form that the divine discipline will take. The binding in the double furrow is the image of the yoked ox that is bound by the plow — the community will be bound by the judgment that the compounding of the Gibeah sin has made inevitable.

### Plain American English

*You have been sinning since the days of Gibeah, Israel, and you haven't stopped! The battle that overtook the wicked people of Gibeah will come to you too. I am determined to punish you, and the nations will be gathered to attack you — punishing you for your many sins.*

### Key Observations

**“O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood”:** This signifies **The Compounded Sin from Gibeah to the Present Is the Declaration That the Pattern of the Covenant Violation Has Not Been Interrupted by the Judgments That Were Meant to Produce the Reformation — the Sin Has Persisted and Compounded Through Every Generation.**

The sinned since the days of Gibeah is the declaration of the continuity of the covenant violation as a pattern rather than a series of isolated incidents. The Gibeah event was the nadir of the covenant community's moral history, and the civil war that followed was the covenant community's attempt to address the sin and purge the community of the people who had committed it. But the purging did not produce the reformation: the pattern of the sin continued in every generation since Gibeah, compounding with each iteration until the present condition has reached the depth that the book has been diagnosing. The there they stood is the declaration that the original sinners stood in their sin rather than turning, and that every generation since has done the same. The judgment of Gibeah — the civil war, the near-destruction of Benjamin — did not interrupt the pattern. The compounding continues.

**“It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them”:** This signifies **The Divine Desire for the Chastisement Is the Covenant Discipline of the Faithful Husband Who Has Determined That the Prolonged and Compounded Sin Requires the Discipline That Lesser Measures Have Not Produced.**

The it is in my desire to discipline them is the most direct statement of the divine will toward the discipline in the chapter. The desire is not the desire of the vindictive punisher but the desire of the faithful husband who has watched the pattern of the sin persist and compound through the

generations, who has spoken through the prophets and been dismissed as fools, who has withdrawn the comfortable provision and watched the community seek the Assyrian king instead — and who has determined that the discipline of the gathering nations is the measure that the prolonged and compounded sin requires. The gathering of the nations is the instrument of the covenant discipline, not the random geopolitical event of the independent political actors. The nations are gathered by the desire of the covenant God who is executing the covenant curses that the covenant violation has activated.

## What This Means for Us Today

**1. Recognize the Compounding of the Sin Across Generations as the Most Accurate Framework for Understanding Why the Present Condition Is What It Is:** The sinned since the days of Gibeah is the declaration that the present condition is not the product of the present generation alone. Every generation of the covenant community has inherited and compounded the sin of the preceding generations: the pattern of the divided heart, the multiplied altars, the false oaths, the Baal worship that the cultural forms of each age have made available. The contemporary church that understands its present condition only in terms of the present generation's choices — without the generational self-awareness that recognizes the inherited patterns from Gibeah to Baal-peor to the high places to the contemporary equivalents — has an insufficient understanding of why the present condition is what it is. The generational repentance — the acknowledgment of the sins of the fathers as well as the sins of the present generation — is the most historically accurate form of the acknowledgment that chapter 5 identified as the condition of the genuine seeking.

**2. Receive the Gathering of the Nations as the Covenant Discipline Rather Than the Random Geopolitical Event — and Read the Political Crises of the Covenant Community Through the Theological Framework That Gives Them Their Meaning:** The people shall be gathered against them is the political-military form that the divine discipline takes. The contemporary believer and the contemporary church that read the political and cultural crises of the covenant community as random geopolitical events requiring only political responses have lost the theological framework that Hosea chapter 10 provides. The crises are the covenant discipline. They are the gathering of the nations that the covenant violation has activated. They require not only the political response but the theological response: the acknowledgment of the guilt that the discipline is designed to produce, and the seeking of the LORD that the affliction of chapter 5:15 promised would be the fruit of the earnest discipline.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The two verses of the second section establish the historical depth of the covenant violation — the sin that has been compounding since the days of Gibeah without the judgments that were meant to produce the reformation having been sufficient to interrupt the pattern — and declare the divine desire for the chastisement that the gathering of the nations will execute; the binding in the double furrow is the image of the community yoked by the judgment that the compounding of the original sin has made inevitable.\**

## *Sow Righteousness, Reap Steadfast Love: The Final Call and the War That Is Coming*

*(11) And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught,  
and loveth to tread out the corn;  
but I passed over upon her fair neck:  
I will make Ephraim to ride;  
Judah shall plow,  
and Jacob shall break his clods.*

*(12) Sow to yourselves in righteousness,  
reap in mercy;  
break up your fallow ground:  
for it is time to seek the LORD,  
till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*

*(13) Ye have plowed wickedness,  
ye have reaped iniquity;  
ye have eaten the fruit of lies:  
because thou didst trust in thy way,  
in the multitude of thy mighty men.*

*(14) Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people,  
and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled,  
as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle:  
the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.*

*(15) So shall Beth-el do unto you  
because of your great wickedness:  
in a morning shall the king of Israel  
utterly be cut off.*

### **The Context**

The heifer that loves to thresh of verse 11 is the image of Ephraim at its most promising: the young cow that has been trained for the agricultural work and that performs it willingly, that loves the easy work of treading the grain on the threshing floor. The threshing was the easy agricultural work — the ox walked over the grain on the threshing floor and the grain was separated from the chaff. But the LORD has now put the yoke on the fair neck of this willing heifer: the easy work of treading is being replaced by the harder work of the plow. Judah will plow, Jacob will break the clods. The pleasant agricultural work of the abundance is being replaced by the harder work of the covenant preparation: the plowing that breaks up the fallow ground for the new sowing.

Verse 12 is the most direct and the most hopeful verse in the chapter — the positive counterpart to every form of the wrong sowing that the book has been cataloguing since chapter 4. Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to

seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you. The four imperatives of the verse — sow righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up the fallow ground, seek the LORD — are the most concentrated positive instruction in the book. The sowing of righteousness is the deliberate investment of the covenant obedience in the prepared ground of the life. The reaping of steadfast love — the hesed — is the harvest of the covenant relationship that the right sowing produces. The breaking up of the fallow ground is the preparatory work of the heart that has been left untilled by the wrong cultivation. And the seeking of the LORD is the orientation of the whole heart toward the covenant God whose coming as the rain of righteousness is the harvest that the right sowing is designed to receive.

The contrast of verse 13 — you have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies — is the direct counterpart to verse 12. The community that has been invited to sow righteousness and reap steadfast love has instead been plowing wickedness and reaping injustice. The agricultural metaphor that verse 12 uses for the right sowing is the same metaphor that verse 13 uses for the wrong sowing: the community has been doing the agricultural work, but in the wrong direction. The ground has been plowed, the seed has been sown, the harvest has been reaped. But the ground was plowed for wickedness, the seed was the seed of the wrong devotion, and the harvest is the fruit of lies. The because you have trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your warriors is the identification of the wrong trust that has produced the wrong sowing: the community that trusts in itself and its own military power rather than in the covenant God has been plowing in the wrong direction.

The tumult of verse 14 and the destruction of verse 15 are the military consequences that the wrong sowing has made inevitable. The Shalman who destroyed Beth-arbel — probably the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III or V, or possibly the Moabite king Salamanu mentioned in Assyrian records, who conducted a military campaign against Beth-arbel that was sufficiently devastating to serve as the benchmark for the horror that is coming — is the historical precedent for what Bethel will experience. The mother dashed in pieces on her children — the most horrible image of the brutality of ancient warfare — is the horror that the covenant community has brought on itself through the wrong sowing. And the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off in the morning is the summary consequence: the political leadership of the community that has been trusting in the multitude of its warriors will be cut off as suddenly and as completely as the foam on the face of the water of verse 7.

### **Plain American English**

*Ephraim was like a trained young cow that loved to thresh grain — easy work! But I will put a yoke on her beautiful neck. I will put Ephraim to hard work. Judah must plow, and Jacob must break up the clods. Plant the seeds of righteousness and you will harvest love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, because it is time to seek the LORD. If you do, He will come and shower righteousness down on you. But you have planted wickedness and harvested evil. You have eaten the fruit produced by lies. Because you trusted in your own power and your many warriors, a roar of battle will rise against your people, and all your fortifications will be demolished — just as Shalman demolished Beth-arbel when mothers were smashed to death with their children.*

*Bethel's idols will do this to you because of your great sin. When the day of judgment dawns, Israel's king will be completely destroyed.*

## **Key Observations**

**“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you”:** This signifies **The Most Direct and Most Hopeful Verse in the Chapter Is the Most Concentrated Positive Instruction in the Book — the Four Imperatives of the Right Sowing Are the Counterpart to Every Form of the Wrong Sowing That the Book Has Been Cataloguing.**

The four imperatives of verse 12 are the most practically orienting instruction in the chapter and among the most important in the book. Sow righteousness: the deliberate investment of the covenant obedience in the prepared ground of the life, the intentional planting of the right seed in the right soil. Reap steadfast love: the harvest of the hesed that the right sowing produces — the covenant loyalty and love that the covenant relationship generates when the right seed has been planted in the right ground. Break up the fallow ground: the preparatory work of the heart that has been left untilled by the wrong cultivation, the breaking up of the hardened soil of the heart that has been growing hemlock rather than grain. And seek the LORD: the orientation of the whole heart toward the covenant God whose coming as the rain of righteousness is the harvest that the right sowing anticipates. The four imperatives together are the practical description of the genuine return that chapter 5:15 identified as the condition of the finding: the acknowledgment of the offense, the seeking of the face, the earnest pursuit of the One who has withdrawn to His place.

**“Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men”:** This signifies **The Wrong Plowing Is the Diagnostic Counterpart to the Right Sowing of Verse 12 — the Community Has Been Doing the Agricultural Work but in the Wrong Direction, and the Harvest of the Wrong Sowing Is the Fruit of Lies.**

The contrast between verses 12 and 13 is the most explicit statement of the agricultural theology of moral consequence in the chapter. The community has not been idle. It has been plowing, sowing, and reaping — the agricultural work has been done. But the direction of the work has been wrong: the plowing has been for wickedness, the sowing has been the seed of the wrong devotion, the harvest has been the fruit of lies. The because you trusted in your own way is the root of the wrong direction: the trust in the self and the military power rather than the trust in the covenant God has oriented the agricultural work of the moral life in the wrong direction from the beginning. The community that trusts in itself sows for itself and reaps for itself: the harvest is the fruit of the self-trust, which is the fruit of lies, which is the hemlock in the furrows of verse 4.

**“For it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you”:** This signifies **The It Is Time Is the Declaration of the Urgency of the Moment — the Season of the Right Sowing Is the Present Season, and the Delay of the Right Sowing Is the Extension of the Wrong Sowing's Consequences.**

The it is time to seek the LORD is the most urgently temporal phrase in the chapter. The timing of the agricultural work is everything: the seed sown in the wrong season produces no harvest,

the field plowed at the wrong time produces the wrong conditions for the growth. The it is time declares that the present moment is the moment of the right sowing — that the season of the seeking is the present season and that the delay of the seeking is the extension of the conditions that the wrong sowing has produced. The till he come and rain righteousness upon you is the promise that the right sowing will be met with the divine provision: the rain of righteousness that the covenant God provides when the right ground has been prepared by the right sowing. The rain is His to give. The sowing is ours to do. The time is now.

**“In a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off”:** This signifies **The Sudden Destruction of the Morning Is the Most Complete Image of the Catastrophic Consequence of the Wrong Sowing — the Community That Has Trusted in Its Own Way and the Multitude of Its Warriors Will Be Cut Off as Suddenly as the Morning Ends the Night.**

The in a morning shall the king of Israel be utterly cut off is the most sudden and the most complete statement of the political consequence of the wrong sowing in the chapter. The morning is the moment of the sudden transition: the night has been the time of the wrong devotion, the wrong trust, the wrong sowing. The morning is the moment when the consequence of the night becomes visible. The king who has been trusting in his own way and in the multitude of his warriors will discover in the morning of the Assyrian conquest that the trust was misplaced and the warriors were insufficient. The utterly cut off — like the foam on the face of the water of verse 7 — is the image of the sudden and complete political dissolution. The morning of the judgment arrives as suddenly as the dawn and leaves as little time for the preparation as the foam leaves for the rescue.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Receive Verse 12 as the Most Practically Useful Positive Instruction in the Book and Apply It to the Present Season of the Covenant Life:** The sow righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up the fallow ground, seek the LORD of verse 12 is the most concentrated practical instruction available in the book for the community that has been sowing wind and reaping whirlwind. The instruction is not the general exhortation to be more spiritual. It is the specific agricultural instruction for the specific season: the preparation of the ground, the planting of the right seed, the orientation toward the LORD whose coming as the rain of righteousness is the harvest that the right sowing anticipates. Apply the instruction to the specific ground of the present life: what specific ground of the heart needs to be broken up? What specific seed of the covenant obedience needs to be planted? What specific orientation toward the LORD needs to be cultivated? The specificity of the instruction is the specificity of the application.

**2. Examine the Direction of Your Agricultural Work — Is the Plowing for Wickedness or for Righteousness, and Is the Trust in Your Own Way or in the Covenant God:** The you have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice of verse 13 is the diagnostic of the community that has been doing the agricultural work in the wrong direction. The contemporary believer who is doing the work of the spiritual life — who is engaged in the study, the prayer, the community, the service — but whose direction has been set by the trust in their own way rather than the trust in the covenant God is plowing for wickedness. The self-determined spiritual life — the spiritual formation project designed according to the consumer’s preferences, the theological development shaped by the market’s expectations, the community life organized

around the institution's survival rather than the covenant God's agenda — is the plowing for wickedness. Examine the direction. The harvest corresponds to the plowing, not to the intention.

### **3. Take the It Is Time as the Most Urgent Available Declaration That the Season of the Right Sowing Is the Present Season and That the Delay Is the Extension of the**

**Consequences:** The it is time to seek the LORD is the declaration that does not allow the deferral of the right sowing to the more convenient future season. The fallow ground that is not broken up now will not be broken up by the passage of time. The seed that is not sown in the present season will not be sown by the anticipation of the next one. And the rain of righteousness that the covenant God sends in response to the right sowing will not come until the sowing has been done. Take the urgency of the it is time seriously. The season of the right sowing is the present season. The delay is the extension of the consequences of the wrong sowing. The wrong sowing that has been producing hemlock in the furrows can begin producing righteousness in the same furrows if the right seed is sown now.

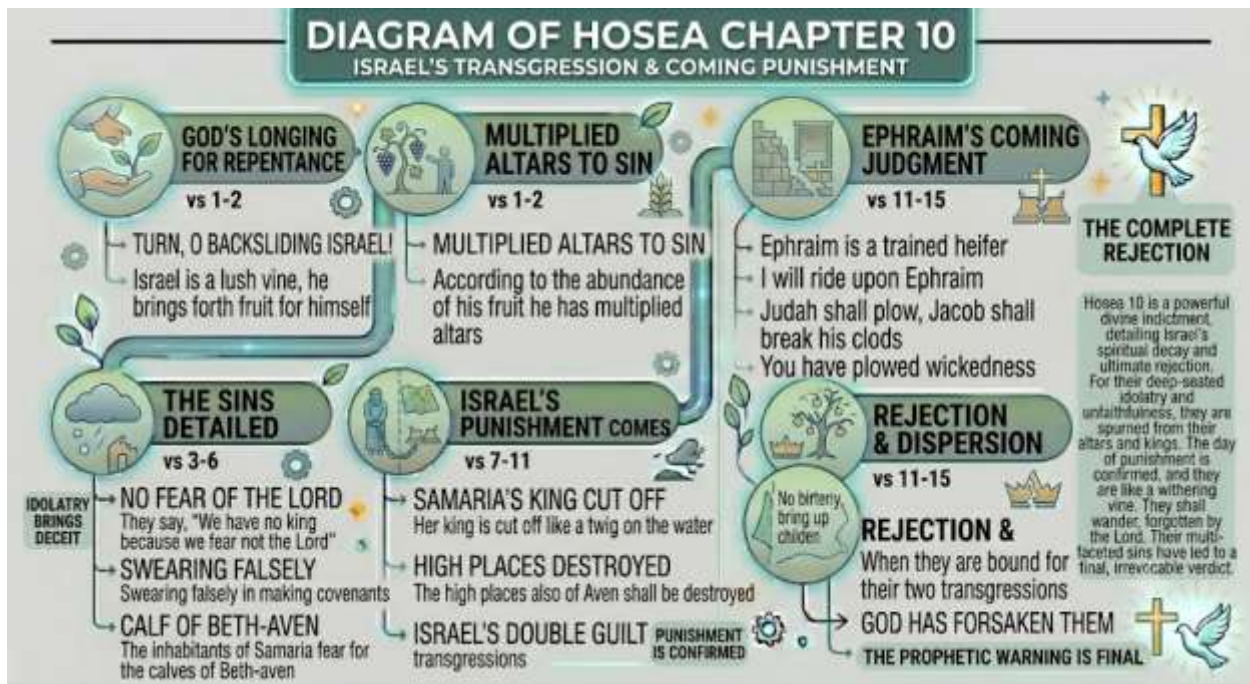
### **How This Relates to Today**

Verse 12 is one of the most pastorally generative verses in the entire book of Hosea and one of the most urgently needed in the contemporary church's season of institutional and spiritual crisis. The church that has been sowing wind — the church of the manufactured religious experience, the therapeutic community, the cultural accommodation, the wrong trust in the multitude of its communicators and its platforms and its institutional resources — is the church that is reaping the whirlwind of the institutional decline, the spiritual shallowness, the wandering among the nations that the wrong sowing has produced. The invitation of verse 12 is the invitation to begin the right sowing in the present season: sow righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up the fallow ground of the heart that has been growing hemlock, and seek the LORD that He may come and rain righteousness. The rain is His. The sowing is ours. It is time.

The because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your warriors of verse 13 is also one of the most applicable diagnostics in the chapter for the contemporary church's relationship to its own institutional resources. The church that trusts in the multitude of its communicators, its platforms, its financial resources, its theological credentials, its cultural influence — the church that has been doing the agricultural work of the spiritual life in the direction set by the trust in its own way — is the church that will be cut off like the foam on the face of the water when the morning of the judgment arrives. The trust in the multitude of the warriors is the trust in the institutional capacity of the covenant community to manage its own affairs without the covenant God who is the only source of the righteousness that the right sowing produces.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The closing section of the chapter holds together the most hopeful and the most urgent instruction in the book — sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you — and the most devastating description of the consequence of the alternative: the community that has plowed wickedness and trusted in its own way will be cut off in the morning like foam on the face of the water, its fortresses spoiled and its king utterly destroyed; the four imperatives of verse 12 are the pastoral invitation of the covenant God who has been watching*

*the wrong sowing and is offering the right sowing as the alternative to the whirlwind that the wrong sowing has been making inevitable.\**



## Closing Prayer

*Heavenly Father,*

*We close Hosea chapter 10 with verse 12 ringing in our ears as the most urgent and the most hopeful word in the chapter: Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that He may come and rain righteousness upon you. We have received the diagnostic — the luxuriant vine whose prosperity has funded the multiplication of the altars, the divided heart that has violated the covenant's most fundamental requirement, the hemlock in the furrows that the false oaths have produced, the compounding of the Gibeah sin through every generation. We have received the consequence — the tumult, the spoiled fortresses, the mother dashed in pieces, the king cut off in the morning. And we have received the invitation: it is time to seek the LORD.*

*Lord, let the it is time be received with the urgency it deserves. We have been plowing wickedness and reaping iniquity long enough. We have been eating the fruit of lies and trusting in our own way and in the multitude of our warriors long enough. The fallow ground of our hearts has been growing hemlock long enough. It is time. It is time to break up the fallow ground. It is time to sow righteousness. It is time to seek Your face — not the seeking that goes with flocks and herds for the performance of the religious form, but the earnest seeking of the face of the covenant God that chapter 5 identified as the condition of the genuine finding.*

*We repent of the divided heart. We repent of the prosperity that has been funding the multiplication of the wrong devotion rather than the deepening of the covenant faithfulness. We repent of the false oaths that have produced the hemlock in the furrows. We repent of the trust in our own way and in the multitude of our warriors that has been plowing in the wrong direction. And we receive the promise of verse 12: that if the right sowing is done, if the fallow ground is broken up, if the LORD is sought, He will come and rain righteousness upon us.*

*Come, Lord, and rain righteousness. The ground is being broken. The seed is being planted. The seeking is beginning. Come and rain.*

*In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is Himself the righteousness that rains from heaven, the harvest that is the harvest of the right sowing, the rain of the latter days that chapter 6 described as the coming of the covenant God to the prepared ground of the seeking people — Amen.*

***Soli Deo Gloria***  
*Glory to God Alone*