

Introduction to Hosea Chapter 7

The Oven, the Cake, and the Silly Dove: Images of Passion, Folly, and the Refusal to Return

Hosea chapter 7 is one of the most vivid chapters in the book for the sheer density and originality of its imagery. In the space of sixteen verses, the prophet deploys six distinct metaphors for the spiritual condition of Ephraim — the heated oven, the half-baked cake, the aged man with gray hair who does not know it, the silly dove without sense, the deceitful bow, and the treacherous vine — each one adding a dimension to the portrait of a people whose corruption has become so thoroughgoing and so self-concealing that they cannot see their own condition. The chapter is the diagnostic deepening of the indictment that has been building since chapter 4, but with an emotional and imaginative intensity that sets it apart from the preceding chapters.

The chapter opens with the most direct statement of the divine intention in the book: when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria. The healing that the LORD desires is the healing that chapter 6 described — the *hesed* and the *da'at Elohim*, the steadfast love and the knowledge of God that He desires more than sacrifice. But when the healing is attempted, what is revealed is not the readiness for healing but the depth of the iniquity. The very act of approaching the wound exposes the wound's extent. The people who speak the morning mist repentance of chapter 6 are revealed, when the diagnosis goes deeper, to be a people whose corruption has penetrated to a depth that the surface language of return has entirely failed to address.

The political dimension of the chapter is also at its most specific. The kings and the princes who are inflamed with wine and conspiracy, the assassinations that have destabilized the northern kingdom's political life in the decades after Jeroboam II, the appeals to Egypt and Assyria that represent the foreign policy of a kingdom that has lost its theological moorings — all of these are named in chapter 7 with a historical specificity that anchors the theological indictment in the concrete events of the 730s and 720s BC. The chapter is simultaneously a theological diagnosis and a political history.

The emotional register of the chapter is also among the most intense in Hosea. The divine cry of verse 13 — Woe to them, for they have fled from me! Destruction to them, for they have transgressed against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me — is the most concentrated expression of the divine grief and frustration in the chapter. The I would and the but they is the structure of the entire chapter: the divine intention toward restoration and the human behavior that systematically defeats it. The would redeem is the will of the faithful husband. The speak lies against me is the response of the unfaithful wife who has called out Come, let us return but whose behavior demonstrates that the call was the morning mist that chapter 6 exposed.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Hosea chapter 7 as people who recognize the condition it describes from the inside: the passion that heats the oven of the wrong desire without the awareness that the passion is consuming us, the half-baked quality of the repentance that is raw on one side and burned on the other, the gray hairs of spiritual decline that have appeared without our noticing them, the silly dove that flutters between the wrong refuges without the sense to seek the right one. We know these conditions. We have lived in them. And we come to this chapter asking for the diagnostic clarity that the metaphors are designed to provide.

Lord, when You would heal us, let what is revealed be received rather than concealed. When the approach of the healing exposes the depth of the wound, let us not respond with the lies against You that verse 13 describes — the religious language that claims return while the behavior demonstrates departure. Let the revelation of the iniquity be the beginning of the genuine acknowledgment that chapter 5 identified as the condition of the genuine seeking. We would rather have the diagnosis accurate and the wound exposed than maintain the appearance of health while the corruption deepens.

And let the divine grief of verse 13 — I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me — be received for what it is: the cry of the faithful husband whose will toward redemption is defeated again and again by the lies of the morning mist repentance. Let us not be the people whose religious language claims the return while whose behavior demonstrates the continuation of the departure. Let the I would redeem them of Your heart find in us the response that the I would has been waiting for: the genuine turning that makes the redemption possible rather than the lies that make it impossible.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hosea 7:1–7

The Heated Oven: The Exposed Iniquity, the Inflamed Conspirators, and the Kings Who Fall

*(1) When I would have healed Israel,
then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered,
and the wickedness of Samaria:
for they commit falsehood;
and the thief cometh in,
and the troop of robbers spoileth without.
(2) And they consider not in their hearts*

*that I remember all their wickedness:
now their own doings have beset them about;
they are before my face.*

*(3) They make the king glad with their wickedness,
and the princes with their lies.*

*(4) They are all adulterers,
as an oven heated by the baker,
who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough,
until it be leavened.*

*(5) In the day of our king
the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine;
he stretched out his hand with scorners.*

*(6) For they have made ready their heart like an oven,
whiles they lie in wait:
their baker sleepeth all the night;
in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire.*

*(7) They are all hot as an oven,
and have devoured their judges;
all their kings are fallen:
there is none among them that calleth unto me.*

The Context

The opening declaration of verse 1 — when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed — is the diagnostic statement that governs the entire chapter. The healing that the LORD desires has been the subject of the book from the first chapter: the restoration of the covenant relationship, the reversing of Lo-ammi and Lo-ruhamah, the new betrothal in hesed and da'at Elohim. But when the healing is approached — when the diagnostic examination that precedes the healing is conducted — what is revealed is not the readiness for healing but the full extent of the iniquity. The thief within and the band of robbers without are the social expressions of the covenant violation: the community that should be held together by the hesed of the covenant has become the community of predators and prey.

The they do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their evil of verse 2 is the cognitive failure that underlies the moral failure. The people have committed the evil under the assumption that the divine memory is short or that the divine attention is elsewhere. The now their deeds surround them is the moment of the reversal: the evil that was committed in the assumption of divine forgetfulness is now surrounding the people as the inescapable evidence before the divine face. The doings have become the accusers. The evil that was performed in the confidence of concealment has become the witness that stands before the face of the God who remembers everything.

The oven metaphor of verses 4–7 is the most sustained and the most developed metaphor in the chapter. The oven that the baker heats and then leaves while the dough rises is the image of the passion that is kindled and then left to build while the conspirators wait for the moment to act. The king's feast of verse 5 is the specific occasion: the day of the king's celebration, when the princes have made him sick with wine and the conspirators have kept their hearts like an oven through the night. In the morning it burns like a flaming fire — the passion that has been building through the night of the conspiracy erupts in the assassination that has been planned. The all their kings have fallen of verse 7 is the historical summary of the northern kingdom's political catastrophe in the decades after Jeroboam II: four of the six kings who followed him were assassinated.

The most devastating phrase in the first section is the closing phrase of verse 7: there is none among them who calls on me. After the catalogue of the heated oven, the drunken feast, the conspiratorial night, the morning assassination, the fallen kings — after all the political chaos and the moral corruption — the most damning observation is the simplest: in the middle of all of it, no one thought to call on the LORD. The political crisis that has consumed the northern kingdom has not produced the earnest seeking of chapter 5:15. It has produced more conspiracy, more assassination, more appeals to Egypt and Assyria. The affliction that was meant to produce the seeking has produced everything except the seeking.

Plain American English

Whenever I want to heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed, along with all the evil of Samaria. They are all liars — there are thieves breaking into homes and bandits robbing people in the streets. They never stop to think that I keep track of all their wicked deeds. Their sins are all around them now, and I can see everything. Their wickedness makes the king happy, and their lies bring pleasure to the princes. They are all adulterers — they are like a blazing oven, smoldering while the baker sleeps, but flaring up when the dough has risen. On the day of their king's celebration, the princes get drunk on wine, and the king joins in with those who mock. Their hearts are like an oven as they plot their schemes. While they sleep, their anger smolders. In the morning it blazes up like fire. They are all burning hot like ovens, and they have consumed their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and not one of them calls out to me.

Key Observations

“When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered”: This signifies **The Divine Intention Toward Healing Is the Constant of the Chapter, and the Revelation of the Iniquity When the Healing Is Approached Is the Diagnostic Statement That the Wound Is Deeper Than the Surface Language of Return Has Acknowledged.**

The when I would heal is the most important phrase in the opening verse because it establishes the divine intention as the constant: the LORD desires to heal, the will toward restoration is uninterrupted, the faithful husband's pursuit of the wayward wife has not ceased. What changes is not the divine intention but the divine diagnostic: the approach to the healing reveals the iniquity rather than the readiness for healing. This is the theological movement that connects

chapter 6 to chapter 7: the beautiful words of the morning mist repentance have given way, under the diagnostic examination of the approaching healer, to the revelation of the full extent of the corruption that the morning mist was covering. The words of chapter 6:1–3 said, He has torn and He will heal us. The diagnostic of chapter 7:1 says, When I would heal, what is discovered is not the wound that needs healing but the iniquity that produced it. The healing cannot proceed until the iniquity is acknowledged.

“They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness”: This signifies **The Cognitive Failure of the Divine Forgetfulness Assumed Is the Foundation of the Moral Failure — the Evil That Is Committed Under the Assumption of Divine Inattention Is the Evil That Most Thoroughly Corrupts the Character.**

The they do not consider of verse 2 is the second diagnostic statement of the section, and it deepens the analysis of the not knowing of chapter 4. The people who do not know that the LORD is the source of the provision (chapter 4:8) are also the people who do not consider that the LORD remembers the evil they commit. The two cognitive failures are related: the failure to recognize the LORD as the giver of the gifts produces the misattribution that enables the idolatry; the failure to recognize the LORD as the rememberer of the evil enables the moral corruption. Both failures are failures of the knowledge of God — the da’at Elohim that chapter 4 identified as the central absence. The people who know the LORD know both that He gives and that He remembers. The people who do not know Him can commit the evil in the assumption that the divine memory is as short as their own.

“They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me”: This signifies **The Political Chaos of the Fallen Kings Is Not the Crisis That Has Produced the Seeking but the Crisis That Has Been Navigated Without the Seeking — the Most Devastating Observation in the Section.**

The all their kings have fallen is the historical summary of the most politically chaotic period in the northern kingdom’s history: the period between 752 and 722 BC in which six kings sat on the throne of Israel, four of whom were assassinated by their successors. The oven that heated the passion of the conspirators through the night of the plotting and erupted in the morning of the assassination is the image of the political culture that has consumed its own leadership. And against this backdrop of political catastrophe, the most devastating observation is the simplest: there is none among them that calls on me. The crisis that should have produced the earnest seeking of chapter 5:15 has produced only more conspiracy, more assassination, more political instability. The affliction is not working. The people have found ways to navigate the distress without calling on the one whose calling is the condition of the healing.

“They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies”: This signifies **The Wickedness That Makes the King Glad Is the Corruption of the Political Accountability Structure — When the Leadership Is Pleased by What Should Displease It, the Community’s Capacity for Self-Correction Has Been Lost.**

The making glad of the king with wickedness and the princes with lies is the description of the political accountability structure in full reversal. The king and the princes were meant to be the instruments of justice — the political expression of the covenant community’s commitment to the righteousness that the covenant God requires. When the king is pleased by the wickedness and the princes are delighted by the lies, the accountability structure has been inverted: the

leaders who should be confronting the covenant violation are celebrating it. This is the political dimension of the like people, like priest of chapter 4:9: the leadership that should be different from the people has become the audience that applauds the people's worst behavior. When the leadership celebrates the wickedness, the community has lost the political resource for the correction that the covenant requires.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Revelation of the Iniquity When the Healing Is Approached as the Diagnostic Gift That Makes the Genuine Healing Possible Rather Than the Evidence That the Healing Has Failed:

The when I would heal and the iniquity is revealed is the sequence that every genuine healing requires. The approach of the healer to the wound always reveals the depth of the wound more fully than the patient's self-assessment has acknowledged. The contemporary believer whose honest engagement with the process of spiritual formation reveals more sin rather than less, whose earnest pursuit of the knowledge of God uncovers more corruption rather than less, is not in a process that has gone wrong. They are in the diagnostic phase that must precede the genuine healing. The iniquity that is revealed when the healing is approached is not the evidence that healing is impossible. It is the evidence that the healing is being taken seriously enough to expose what the morning mist repentance was covering.

2. Take Seriously the Diagnostic Implication That the Covenant God Remembers Everything That Is Committed in the Assumption of Divine Forgetfulness:

The they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness is the pastoral warning that has the most immediate application to the believer who compartmentalizes the spiritual life from the moral life. The person who attends worship, speaks the language of the covenant community, and performs the forms of the religious life while committing the specific covenant violations in the assumption that the divine memory is confined to the religious performance is in the condition of verse 2. The their own doings have beset them about — the evil that was committed in the assumption of divine inattention is surrounding the community as the inescapable evidence before the divine face. Consider: the LORD remembers. The consideration is the beginning of the moral seriousness that the not considering has prevented.

3. Examine Whether the Afflictions and Crises of Your Life Have Produced the Earnest Seeking of Chapter 5:15 or Only the Navigation of the Crisis Without the Calling on the LORD:

The there is none among them that calls on me is the most devastating phrase in the section because it describes a community that has navigated the most severe political crisis in its history without calling on the covenant God who is the only source of the genuine healing. The contemporary believer who has navigated illness, financial crisis, relational breakdown, professional failure, and institutional collapse without calling on the LORD in the earnest seeking that the affliction was designed to produce is in the condition of verse 7. The crisis has come. The oven of the passion has heated. The kings have fallen. And the response has been more conspiracy, more Assyrian alliance, more political maneuvering. Ask the question: has the affliction produced the calling? If not, why not?

How This Relates to Today

The oven metaphor of verses 4–7 is one of the most psychologically precise images in the chapter for the process by which unchecked passion produces destructive action. The oven that heats while the baker sleeps, that smolders through the night of the conspiracy, that erupts in the morning of the assassination is the image of the passion that is given time and space to build without the interruption of the covenant relationship’s demands. The contemporary equivalent is the passion — the anger, the lust, the ambition, the resentment — that is allowed to smolder through the night of the unexamined inner life, that is not brought to the light of the da’at Elohim that the knowledge of God would provide, and that erupts in the morning of the action that the smoldering has made inevitable. The oven is always heated by the night of the unexamined passion. The morning of the destructive action is always preceded by the night of the unchallenged heat.

The there is none among them that calls on me of verse 7 is also one of the most urgently applicable observations in the chapter to the contemporary church’s response to institutional and political crisis. The church that navigates its institutional crises — the decline in attendance, the financial pressure, the cultural marginalization, the internal conflict — through the instruments of institutional management, strategic planning, and cultural accommodation without the earnest seeking of the LORD’s face is in the condition of verse 7. The affliction that was meant to produce the calling on the LORD has produced only the more sophisticated version of the Assyrian alliance. The kings keep falling. And there is none among them that calls on me.

Key Lesson: **The opening of the chapter establishes the governing theological tension of the entire section: when I would heal Israel, the iniquity is revealed rather than the readiness for healing — and the most devastating observation of the section is the closing phrase of verse 7: all their kings have fallen, and there is none among them that calls on me; the political catastrophe of the heated oven, the drunken conspiracy, and the morning assassination has been navigated in its entirety without the calling on the LORD whose calling is the condition of the only healing that can reach the wound.**

Hosea 7:8–12

The Half-Baked Cake, the Gray Hairs, and the Silly Dove: Three Portraits of Spiritual Self-Ignorance

*(8) Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.*

*(9) Strangers have devoured his strength,
and he knoweth it not:*

*yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him,
yet he knoweth it not.*

*(10) And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face:
and they do not return to the LORD their God,
nor seek him for all this.*

*(11) Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart:
they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.
(12) When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them;
I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven;
I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.*

The Context

The three metaphors of this section — the half-baked cake, the gray-haired man who does not know it, and the silly dove — are each images of a specific kind of self-ignorance: the ignorance of the person who does not know their own condition. The half-baked cake is the image of the person who is raw on one side and burned on the other — who has mixed with the surrounding nations so thoroughly that they have adopted the culture's values and practices on one side while maintaining the performance of the covenant religion on the other. The gray-haired man who does not know it is the image of the community whose strength has been drained by the foreigners without the community's awareness of the declining vitality. And the silly dove is the image of the person who flutters between wrong refuges without the sense to seek the right one.

The Ephraim who has mixed himself among the peoples of verse 8 is the northern kingdom that has pursued the political alliances and the cultural assimilation that the covenant had explicitly prohibited. The mixing is the image of the syncretism that chapter 4 diagnosed: the blending of the covenant community with the surrounding nations in such a way that the distinctive identity of the covenant people has been lost. The cake not turned is the result of the mixing: a religious and cultural condition that is simultaneously over-developed on the side of the assimilation to the surrounding culture and under-developed on the side of the genuine covenant formation. The half-baked quality is the quality of the community that has been shaped by too many sources and too few of the right ones.

The gray hairs of verse 9 are the most poignant image in the section. The man who does not know that the strangers have drained his strength — who has gray hairs here and there upon him without knowing it — is the image of the decline that is not recognized because it has been gradual and because the recognition of it would require the honest assessment that the pride of verse 10 prevents. The strangers who have devoured his strength are the foreign powers and foreign practices that have been draining the vitality of the covenant community incrementally: the Assyrian alliances, the Egyptian appeals, the Baal worship that has been replacing the covenant life from the inside. The vitality has been draining for decades. The gray hairs are visible to everyone except the one who has them.

The silly dove of verse 11 is the most socially and diplomatically specific metaphor in the section. Ephraim flutters between Egypt and Assyria — the two great powers of the ancient Near East, the two resources to which the northern kingdom has appealed at different moments in its political desperation. The dove without sense is the image of the misdirected seeking: the dove that flutters from branch to branch without settling, that is drawn by the appearance of safety toward every refuge except the right one. The divine response in verse 12 is the spreading of the

net: the bird that flutters toward the wrong refuges will be caught by the net of the divine discipline, brought down like a bird of the air, chastised as the community has been taught to expect from its own covenant tradition.

Plain American English

Ephraim has blended in with the nations — he is like a pancake that hasn't been flipped. Foreign nations have drained his strength, but he doesn't even realize it. He has gray hair scattered all over his head, but he doesn't even notice. Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but even so they don't return to the LORD their God or search for Him. Ephraim is as silly as a dove with no sense at all — first calling to Egypt for help, then turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them and pull them down like birds from the sky. I will discipline them just as their community was warned I would.

Key Observations

“Ephraim is a cake not turned”: This signifies **The Half-Baked Cake Is the Image of the Community That Has Been Formed by Too Many Sources and Too Few of the Right Ones — Raw on the Side of the Genuine Covenant Formation and Burned on the Side of the Cultural Assimilation.**

The cake not turned is one of the most domestically vivid metaphors in the prophetic literature. In ancient bread-making, the flat bread baked on hot stones required turning at the right moment — the bread left unturned would be burned on the stone side and raw on the exposed side, inedible in both directions. Ephraim who has mixed himself among the peoples is the cake not turned: the community that has been formed by the heat of the cultural assimilation on one side — shaped by the values, the practices, the religious vocabulary of the surrounding nations — while remaining underdeveloped on the side of the genuine covenant formation. The double condition — burned by the wrong heat, raw in the right formation — produces the community that is edible in neither direction: too assimilated to be distinctively covenant, too superficially religious to be genuinely secular. The half-baked quality is the quality of the community that has been shaped by the wrong sources and starved of the right ones.

“Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not”: This signifies **The Gray Hairs of Unrecognized Decline Are the Most Poignant Image of the Chapter — the Incremental Draining of the Covenant Community's Vitality by the Foreign Practices and Powers It Has Embraced.**

The gray hairs that are here and there upon him are the most visually precise and the most pastorally tender image in the chapter. The man who does not know that his hair is going gray is the man who has not looked honestly at himself, or who has looked and chosen not to see what the looking reveals. The strangers who have devoured his strength are the incremental drains of the covenant vitality: the foreign alliances that have redirected the political trust from the covenant God to the earthly great kings, the foreign practices that have replaced the covenant formation with the cultural assimilation, the foreign values that have displaced the hesed and the da'at Elohim with the priorities of the surrounding world. The draining has been gradual. The

gray hairs have appeared one by one. And the community that does not know it is the community that has not conducted the honest diagnostic that would reveal the extent of the decline.

“Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria”: This signifies **The Silly Dove Is the Image of the Misdirected Seeking — the Community That Flutters Between Wrong Refuges Without the Sense to Seek the Right One.**

The silly dove without sense (the Hebrew is without heart — without the leb that is the seat of the understanding and the moral direction) is the image of the seeking that lacks the discernment to find the right refuge. The dove is not indifferent to its safety. It is actively seeking refuge — it calls to Egypt, it goes to Assyria. The problem is not the absence of the seeking impulse but the misdirection of the seeking: the dove flutters toward every refuge except the one that can provide the genuine safety it needs. Egypt and Assyria are the two great earthly powers that the northern kingdom has appealed to in its desperation — the superpowers of the ancient Near East whose protection is sought as the substitute for the covenant God’s protection. The silly dove calls to both, trusts neither fully, and finds that neither can provide what the covenant God alone can give. The misdirected seeking is the seeking that the chapter has been tracing since verse 7: they do not call on me, and everything else to which they call cannot answer.

“When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven”: This signifies **The Spreading of the Net Over the Fluttering Dove Is the Divine Discipline That Intercepts the Misdirected Seeking Before It Can Complete the Wrong Refuge-Finding.**

The net of verse 12 is the response to the silly dove’s fluttering toward the wrong refuges. The discipline does not wait for the wrong refuge to be reached and found insufficient — it intercepts the misdirected seeking in its flight. The bird that flutters toward Egypt and Assyria will be caught by the net of the divine discipline before the wrong refuge can be fully occupied. This is the theology of the discipline as the interruption of the wrong seeking: the God who spread the hedge of thorns and the wall against the lovers’ paths in chapter 2:6 is the God who spreads the net over the dove that flutters toward the wrong refuges in chapter 7:12. The discipline is the interruption of the misdirected seeking — the bringing down of the bird that is flying in the wrong direction, so that the correct direction can become the only direction available. The net is not the punishment of the seeking. It is the redirection of it.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Conduct the Honest Diagnostic That Reveals the Gray Hairs Before the Decline Has Advanced to the Point of the Collapse: The gray hairs that Ephraim does not know he has are the accumulation of the incremental decline that has not been assessed honestly. The contemporary individual believer and the contemporary church community both need the regular honest diagnostic that asks: where has the vitality of the covenant life been drained without our noticing? What foreign practices have devoured our strength while we maintained the performance of the forms? Where are the gray hairs of the spiritual decline that have appeared gradually and gone unrecognized because the pride of verse 10 has prevented the honest assessment? The diagnostic requires the humility that the pride prevents. But the decline that is

recognized early can be addressed. The decline that is not recognized until the collapse comes can only be lamented.

2. Identify the Egypt and Assyria of Your Own Life — the Wrong Refuges to Which the Silly Dove Flutters When the Genuine Refuge Has Been Abandoned: The silly dove without sense that calls to Egypt and goes to Assyria is the image of every believer who knows they need help and seeks it from every source except the covenant God who alone can provide the genuine help that is needed. The Egypt and Assyria of the contemporary believer are the sources of the refuge that promise the safety, the security, the healing, the restoration that the covenant relationship alone can supply: the therapy that substitutes for the da'at Elohim, the political alliance that substitutes for the trust in the covenant God, the financial security that substitutes for the provision of the faithful husband, the social approval that substitutes for the acceptance of the One who betrothed His people in steadfast love. Identify the wrong refuges. The dove that flutters toward them will be intercepted by the net. Better to seek the right refuge before the net is spread.

3. Resist the Pride of Verse 10 That Prevents the Return Even When the Evidence of the Condition Is Before the Face: The pride of Israel that testifies to his face is the pride that has seen the evidence of the decline — the gray hairs, the devoured strength, the falling kings, the burning oven of the conspiracy — and refused to allow the evidence to produce the return. The pride is the defensive mechanism that interprets the evidence of the decline as the occasion for the more vigorous pursuit of the wrong strategies rather than the return to the covenant God. They do not return to the LORD their God or seek Him, for all this. The for all this is the most damning qualifier: after everything — after the oven and the conspiracy and the fallen kings and the drained strength and the gray hairs — the pride has prevented the return. Resist the pride. The evidence of the condition is the invitation to the return, not the occasion for the doubling-down on the wrong strategies.

How This Relates to Today

The cake not turned of verse 8 is one of the most diagnostically useful images in the chapter for the contemporary church's condition of cultural assimilation. The church that has been formed by the values and practices of the surrounding culture on the side of its public engagement — adopting the therapeutic vocabulary, the therapeutic goals, the market logic of consumer preference, the entertainment aesthetics — while remaining underdeveloped on the side of the genuine covenant formation is the church that is half-baked. Burned by the wrong heat, raw in the right development. The assimilation to the surrounding culture has been thorough. The formation in the hesed and the da'at Elohim has been superficial. The cake has not been turned, and the resulting community is inedible in both directions: too assimilated to be prophetically distinct, too superficially religious to be genuinely formed by the knowledge of the living God.

The silly dove of verse 11 also speaks directly to the foreign policy of the contemporary church — not geopolitical foreign policy but the theological foreign policy of the community that seeks help from every source except the covenant God. The calling to Egypt and going to Assyria is the contemporary church's oscillation between the political left and the political right, the therapeutic and the technological, the institutional and the charismatic, in its desperate search for

the healing of the wound that only the covenant relationship can address. The dove flutters. The net is being spread. And the question of verse 10 hangs over the entire frantic seeking: they do not return to the LORD their God or seek Him, for all this.

Key Lesson: **The three metaphors of the second section — the half-baked cake, the gray hairs, and the silly dove — are three portraits of the same condition: the spiritual self-ignorance of the community that does not know its own condition, does not recognize the decline that has been advancing incrementally, and flutters between wrong refuges without the sense to seek the right one; and the divine response to the silly dove's misdirected seeking is the spreading of the net that intercepts the flight toward the wrong refuges and brings the fluttering bird down so that the correct direction can become the only direction available.**

Hosea 7:13–16

The Deceitful Bow and the Lying Tongue: The I Would and the But They of Divine Grief

*(13) Woe unto them! for they have fled from me:
destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me:
though I would have redeemed them,
yet they have spoken lies against me.*

*(14) And they have not cried unto me with their heart,
but they have howled upon their beds:
they assemble themselves for corn and wine,
and they rebel against me.*

*(15) Though I have bound and strengthened their arms,
yet do they imagine mischief against me.*

*(16) They return, but not to the most High:
they are like a deceitful bow:
their princes shall fall by the sword
for the rage of their tongue:
this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.*

The Context

The woe and the destruction of verse 13 are the formal covenant curses pronounced against the community that has fulfilled the conditions of the covenant violation. But they are immediately qualified by the most revealing statement of the divine heart in the chapter: though I would have redeemed them. The woe and the destruction are not the desire. They are the consequence of the behavior that has defeated the desire. The I would redeem them is the constant of the divine will throughout the chapter — the same I would of verse 1 (when I would heal Israel) restated in the language of the redemption that the faithful husband desires. And the but they have spoken lies against me is the human response that defeats the divine will: not the dramatic apostasy of the

explicit rejection of God, but the lies — the religious language that claims return while the behavior demonstrates departure.

The howling upon their beds of verse 14 is one of the most psychologically precise observations in the chapter. The people do not cry to the LORD with their heart — they howl upon their beds. The distinction is between the genuine prayer that is directed to the personal God of the covenant relationship and the distress cry that is directed at the ceiling while lying in bed, fueled not by the desire for the face of the God who has withdrawn but by the desire for the grain and the wine that the distress has interrupted. They assemble themselves for grain and wine and they rebel against me: the gathering for the agricultural abundance is the gathering of the people who still want the gifts of the covenant without the covenant God who gives them. The howling is not the earnest seeking of chapter 5:15. It is the expression of the distress without the direction of the distress toward the One who can address it.

The deceitful bow of verse 16 is the final and the most technically specific metaphor of the chapter. The bow that is deceitful — the bow that cannot shoot straight, whose arrow veers from the target despite the archer's aim — is the image of the return that does not reach the Most High. They return, but not to the Most High. The return is real — there is movement, there is the gesture of coming back, there is the assembling and the howling that look like the earnest seeking. But the bow is deceitful: the arrow of the return does not fly to the target. The movement that looks like the return lands somewhere other than the Most High. The deceitful bow is the most concentrated image of the morphology of the false return: the return that has the form of the genuine return but lacks the orientation toward the Most High that makes the genuine return what it is.

The closing shame of verse 16 — this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt — is the eschatological irony of the silly dove that called to Egypt. The community that sought Egypt as a refuge will be a laughingstock in Egypt: the great power that was supposed to be the ally will be the audience for the humiliation that the coalition has produced. The rage of their tongue — the boastful language of the political alliance and the lying language of the morning mist repentance — will produce the fall of the princes by the sword and the derision in Egypt. The tongue that spoke lies against the LORD and boasted of the political alliance has become the instrument of its own humiliation.

Plain American English

Destruction is coming to them because they have run away from me! I want to set them free, but they keep telling lies about me. They don't sincerely cry out to me — instead they just wail and complain while lying in their beds. They gather together to beg for grain and wine, but they are actually turning away from me. I trained them and made their arms strong, but they plot evil against me. They turn back, but not to the Most High God. They are like a faulty bow that misses its target every time. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their arrogant talk, and they will be ridiculed back in Egypt.

Key Observations

“Though I would have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me”: This signifies **The I Would Redeem Is the Constant of the Divine Will and the But They Have Spoken Lies Is the Human Response That Defeats It — the Lies Are the Religious Language That Claims Return While the Behavior Demonstrates Departure.**

The though I would have redeemed them is the most direct statement of the divine desire in the chapter. The redemption that the faithful husband desires — the buying back of the beloved from the condition the unfaithfulness has produced, the price paid for the degraded wife of chapter 3 — is the will of the covenant God toward Israel throughout the entire chapter. What defeats the I would is the specific form of the human response: they have spoken lies against me. The lies are not the explicit denial of God or the dramatic renunciation of the covenant. They are the religious language that claims return while the behavior demonstrates departure — the howling on the beds, the assembling for grain and wine, the rebellion that accompanies the religious gathering. The lies are the morning mist of chapter 6 named for what they are: the language of return spoken by the community that has not returned.

“They have not cried unto me with their heart, but they have howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me”: This signifies **The Howling on the Beds Is the Distress Cry That Is Not Directed Toward the Covenant God but Is Fueled by the Desire for the Gifts of the Covenant Without the Covenant God Who Gives Them.**

The distinction between crying to me with their heart and howling upon their beds is the distinction between the genuine prayer of the covenant relationship and the distress cry of the person who wants the situation resolved without the relationship restored. The howling is real — the distress is genuine. But the direction of the howling is the ceiling, not the face of the LORD who has withdrawn to His place. And the motivation of the assembling is the grain and the wine — the agricultural abundance that the covenant relationship provides and that the Baal worship was designed to secure. The people are assembling for the gifts, not for the Giver. The howling is the expression of the desire for the gifts without the desire for the face of the One who gives them. This is the most precise description of the false prayer in the book: not the absence of the distress cry, but the misdirection of the distress cry toward the gifts rather than toward the Giver.

“They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow”: This signifies **The Deceitful Bow Is the Most Concentrated Image of the Return That Does Not Reach Its Target — the Movement That Has the Form of the Genuine Return but Lacks the Orientation Toward the Most High That Makes the Return What It Claims to Be.**

The bow that is deceitful — the weapon that cannot shoot straight — is the final and the most technically precise metaphor of the chapter. The archer with the deceitful bow is not the archer who does not aim. They aim. The return is real: there is movement, there is the gesture of turning, there is the assembling and the howling. But the bow is deceitful: the arrow veers from the target. The return that claims to be directed toward the Most High lands somewhere other than the Most High — at the grain and the wine, at the political alliance, at the Egyptian refuge, at the Assyrian king. The they return, but not to the Most High is the summary of the entire chapter’s indictment: the movement is present, the direction is wrong, and the wrong direction is concealed by the language of the return that claims more than the movement delivers. The

deceitful bow is the image of the community whose religious language claims a precision of orientation that the actual direction of the movement does not achieve.

“Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me”: This signifies **The Strengthening That the LORD Has Given Is the Resource That the Community Has Deployed Against the One Who Gave It — the Ingratitude of the Misused Gift.**

The though I have trained them and strengthened their arms is the echo of the chapter 2 dynamic: the LORD has given the gifts — in this case the political and military strength that the training has produced — and the community has deployed the gifts against the Giver. The mischief devised against the LORD is not the dramatic assault of the enemy on the divine throne. It is the use of the strength that the LORD has given for the purposes that the LORD has prohibited: the political maneuvering, the Egyptian alliance, the Assyrian appeal, the conspiracy of the heated oven. The strengthened arms that should be extended toward the covenant God in the seeking of His face are the arms that are imagining mischief against the One who strengthened them. The misuse of the divine gift against the divine Giver is the recurring pattern of the chapter and of the book.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Examine the Direction of Your Distress Cry — Is the Howling Directed Toward the Ceiling or Toward the Face of the God Who Has Withdrawn to His Place: The howling upon the beds and the crying out with the heart are distinguished not by the intensity of the distress but by the direction of the cry. The genuine prayer of the covenant relationship is directed toward the face of the God of the covenant — the personal presence of the One who has withdrawn and whose return is the specific object of the seeking. The howling on the beds is directed toward the resolution of the distress — the return of the grain and the wine, the end of the discomfort, the restoration of the comfortable circumstances. Both involve genuine distress. Both involve the expression of the distress. The difference is entirely in the direction. Examine your own prayer life with this diagnostic: is the prayer directed toward the face of the God of the covenant, or toward the resolution of the circumstances that the God of the covenant controls?

2. Identify the Deceitful Bow Pattern in Your Own Spiritual Life — the Returns That Have the Form of the Genuine Return but Land Somewhere Other Than the Most High: The deceitful bow is the most personally applicable metaphor in the closing section for the believer who has repeatedly undertaken the return without the return having reached the Most High. The return that assembles for the grain and wine, that howls on the beds for the resolution of the distress, that calls to Egypt and goes to Assyria — these are the returns that have the form of the genuine return but lack the orientation that makes the genuine return what it claims to be. The diagnostic question is: where does the arrow of the return actually land? At the resolution of the distress? At the return of the comfortable circumstances? At the grain and the wine? Or at the face of the Most High, the personal presence of the covenant God who is the only genuine refuge and the only genuine source of the healing that the wound requires?

3. Receive the I Would Redeem Them as the Promise That the Divine Will Toward Your Redemption Has Not Been Defeated by the History of the Deceitful Bow Returns: The

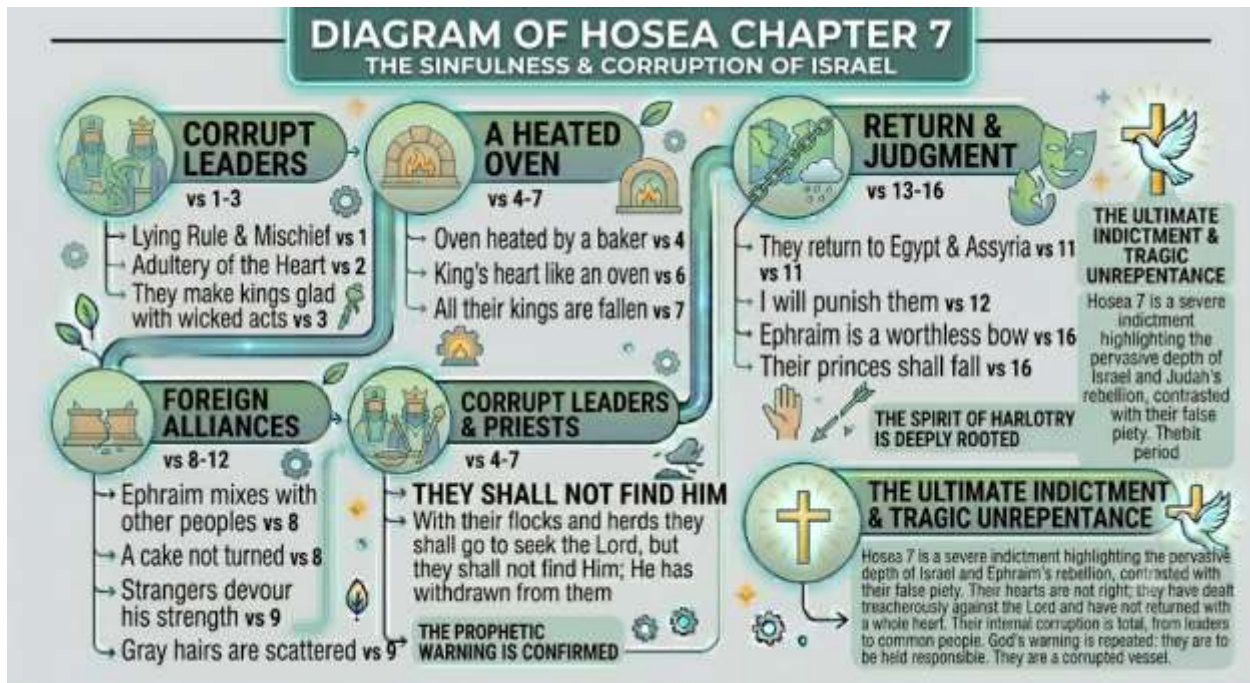
though I would have redeemed them is the constant of the divine will throughout the entire chapter, and it is stated in the context of all the evidence that the community has provided of its inability to return genuinely. The woe and the destruction are the consequences of the behavior. The I would redeem is the will that precedes and survives all the behavior. The faithful husband whose will toward the redemption of the unfaithful wife has been stated from chapter 1 onward is the same faithful husband who says I would redeem them even after the heated oven, the gray hairs, the silly dove, the howling on the beds, and the deceitful bow have provided the fullest available evidence of the community's incapacity for the genuine return. The I would is not conditional on the adequacy of the return. It is the constant that the return, when it finally becomes genuine, will find waiting for it.

How This Relates to Today

The they have spoken lies against me of verse 13 is the most direct description in the chapter of the contemporary phenomenon of the religious language that claims more than the behavior delivers. The lies are not the explicit denials of God or the dramatic renunciations of the covenant. They are the Sunday morning declarations of return that are not matched by the Monday morning direction of the life. They are the conference experiences of renewal that produce the morning mist of a devotion that has evaporated by the following week. They are the small group confessions of spiritual hunger that are not accompanied by the sustained pursuit of the da'at Elohim that alone can satisfy the hunger. The lies against God are not malicious lies. They are the morning mist lies of the community whose religious language has outrun the reality of its spiritual condition.

The deceitful bow of verse 16 is also one of the most useful images in the chapter for understanding the contemporary phenomenon of the return that does not reach the Most High. The contemporary church's cycles of revival — the conference, the awakening, the renewal gathering, the season of heightened spiritual intensity — are the returns that have the form of the genuine article. The assembling is real. The howling is genuine. The language of return is sincerely spoken. But the arrow of the return veers from the target: it lands at the grain and the wine of the comfortable circumstances restored, at the Egyptian refuge of the cultural approval regained, at the Assyrian alliance of the institutional security recovered. The deceitful bow is always aimed at the Most High. The arrow always lands somewhere else. And the God who says I would redeem them is still waiting for the day when the aim and the landing coincide.

Key Lesson: **The closing section of the chapter is the most concentrated expression of the divine grief in the book: the I would redeem them that is defeated by the they have spoken lies against me, the genuine distress cry that is misdirected toward the gifts rather than the Giver, the return that lands somewhere other than the Most High because the bow of the religious life has been warped by the syncretism and the misdirected seeking of the preceding verses — and through it all the I would remains, the constant of the divine will that the history of the deceitful bow has not extinguished and that the genuine return, when it finally becomes what the chapter has been demanding, will find waiting with the redemption that the faithful husband has always desired to give.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 7 having received the most vivid and the most searching diagnostic in the book. We have seen the heated oven of the unchecked passion that smolders through the night of the unexamined inner life and erupts in the morning of the destructive action. We have seen the half-baked cake of the community formed by too many wrong sources and too few right ones. We have seen the gray hairs of the incremental decline that we have not noticed because the pride that prevents the honest diagnostic has prevented the noticing. We have seen the silly dove fluttering between Egypt and Assyria without the sense to seek the only genuine refuge. And we have seen the deceitful bow of the return that has the form of the genuine article but whose arrow lands somewhere other than the Most High.

Lord, the most devastating phrase in the chapter is there is none among them that calls on me. We have seen the oven heat and the kings fall and the dove flutter and the bow deceive — and through all of it, the calling on You has been the one response that has been consistently absent. Let that absence end. Let the chapter's diagnostic produce the calling that the diagnostic was designed to make necessary. We call on You. Not with the howling of the beds that is directed at the ceiling. Not with the assembling for the grain and wine that is directed at the gifts. But with the seeking of the face that chapter 5 identified as the condition of the genuine seeking that finds the One who withdrew to His place to wait for it.

Let the I would redeem them be the word that breaks through the history of the deceitful bow. We have spoken lies against You with the morning mist repentance. We have returned but not to the Most High. We have aimed at You and landed at the grain and wine. We acknowledge the deceitful quality of the bow. We confess the lies against You that the religious language has been speaking. And we receive the I would redeem them as the promise that the history of the deceitful bow has not exhausted the divine will toward our redemption. The I would is still there. The redemption is still desired. The faithful husband is still waiting for the genuine return that lands where the arrow of the genuine seeking must land: at the face of the Most High, the personal presence of the covenant God who has always been the only refuge that the silly dove needed to find.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is the genuine refuge that Egypt and Assyria could never be, who paid the redemption price that the I would redeem has always desired to pay, and whose resurrection on the third day is the genuine article of the return that the morning mist of the deceitful bow could only gesture toward — Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone