

# Introduction to Hosea Chapter 12

## *Jacob in the Womb, Jacob at Bethel: The Patriarch's Striving as the Mirror of Israel's Condition*

Hosea chapter 12 is the chapter of the patriarchal mirror. The prophet reaches back behind the Baal-peor of chapter 9 and the Gibeah of chapters 9 and 10 to the very beginning of the covenant community's story — to Jacob, the ancestor whose name Israel bears, whose biography is deployed as the most intimate available mirror for the present condition of his descendants. The mirroring is not merely illustrative. It is diagnostic: the Jacob who strove with God and with men and prevailed, who wept and sought favor, who met God at Bethel and there spoke with Him — this Jacob is both the ancestor whose founding striving is the typological origin of Israel's persistent wrestling with the covenant God, and the ancestor whose encounter at Bethel is the theological indictment of the present Bethel that has become Beth-aven.

The chapter moves through three interconnected retrospects. The first (verses 1–6) is the double retrospect of Jacob and the present Israel: Jacob's striving from the womb against his brother, his prevailing with God at Peniel, his weeping and seeking favor, his meeting God at Bethel — set against the present Israel's feeding on wind and pursuing the east wind, its lies and violence, its commerce with Assyria and oil carried to Egypt. The second (verses 7–9) is the indictment of the merchant Ephraim whose scales of deceit, whose proud boast that all his gain is found without guilt, whose confidence in the wealth that removes the need for the return to tents of the feast, whose abominations since Egypt will be remembered. The third (verses 10–14) is the prophetic commission and the wilderness typology: the LORD who spoke through the prophets and multiplied visions, the wilderness as the place of the appointment, the coming dwelling in tents as in the days of the appointed feast, and the final indictment of the provocation of the LORD through the bitter anger of Ephraim's bloodguilt.

The theological contribution of chapter 12 to the book is the deployment of the patriarchal history as the hermeneutical lens through which the present condition is to be understood. The Jacob story is not merely an interesting ancestral biography. It is the founding narrative of the people who bear Jacob's name — the story in which the character traits that have produced the present condition were first exhibited. The striving of Jacob in the womb, the supplanting of the brother, the wrestling at Peniel, the encounter at Bethel — all of these are the ancestral exhibits of the striving, the deception, the wrestling, and the Bethel-encounter that Israel has been both reenacting and betraying in every generation since. The patriarch's story is the community's story at its most foundational level.

The most pastorally significant dimension of the chapter is the call to return of verse 6: so you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God. Embedded in the retrospect and the indictment is the most direct and the most actionable call to the genuine return in the chapter. The return is not the abstract religious sentiment. It is the specific turning with the specific content: hold fast to steadfast love and justice, wait continually for your God. The *hesed* and the *mishpat* — the steadfast love and the justice — are the two

covenantal virtues whose maintenance constitutes the genuine return. And the waiting for God is the patient orientation of the whole life toward the covenant God that is the alternative to the feeding on wind and the pursuit of the east wind.

---

## Opening Prayer

*Heavenly Father,*

*We come to Hosea chapter 12 as the descendants of Jacob — as the people who bear the name of the patriarch whose striving from the womb has been the ancestral exhibit of the condition that the book has been diagnosing in every generation since. We recognize the Jacob in ourselves: the striving with the brother, the deception in the pursuit of the blessing, the wrestling in the night that we enter not as the one who prevails but as the one who limps away from the encounter with the mark of the divine touch on the hollow of the thigh. We come to this chapter asking for the humility that recognizes the ancestral pattern in the present practice, and the courage to receive the call to return that is embedded in the recognition.*

*Lord, let the return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God of verse 6 be the most practically orienting instruction in the chapter for us. We have been feeding on wind. We have been pursuing the east wind — the hot, destructive wind of the wrong alliance and the wrong trust. Let the feeding on wind be replaced by the holding fast to the hesed and the mishpat — the steadfast love and the justice that are the content of the genuine return. And let the waiting continually for our God be the patient orientation of the whole life toward the covenant God that is the alternative to the frantic seeking of the wrong resources.*

*Let the Jacob who wept and sought favor — the Jacob at Peniel who would not let go until the blessing was given — be the model of the persistence of the genuine seeking. Let us be the community that weeps and seeks favor, that strives with the God who is available to be striven with, that holds on through the night of the wrestling until the day breaks and the blessing is given. We want the blessing of Peniel more than the wealth of the merchant whose scales are deceitful. We want the encounter at Bethel — the genuine encounter with the God who spoke there — more than the Beth-aven that the golden calf has made of the sacred site.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

---

## Hosea 12:1–6

*Jacob and Israel: The Patriarchal Mirror and the Call to Return*

*(1) Ephraim feedeth on wind,*

*and followeth after the east wind:  
he daily increaseth lies and desolation;  
and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians,  
and oil is carried into Egypt.  
(2) The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah,  
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;  
according to his doings will he recompense him.  
(3) He took his brother by the heel in the womb,  
and by his strength he had power with God:  
(4) Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed:  
he wept, and made supplication unto him:  
he found him in Beth-el,  
and there he spake with us;  
(5) Even the LORD God of hosts;  
the LORD is his memorial.  
(6) Therefore turn thou to thy God:  
keep mercy and judgment,  
and wait on thy God continually.*

## **The Context**

The Ephraim who feeds on wind of verse 1 is the most immediate diagnosis of the present condition before the patriarchal retrospect begins. The wind that Ephraim is feeding on is the insubstantial, the empty, the thing that cannot nourish: the foreign alliances, the oil carried to Egypt, the covenant made with Assyria. These are the wind-food of the community that has abandoned the covenant God's provision for the insubstantial alternatives that the surrounding empires offer. The east wind — the hot, destructive sirocco that blows from the desert and withers whatever it touches — is the image of the direction of the pursuit: Ephraim is not merely feeding on nothing, it is pursuing the actively destructive.

The controversy with Judah and the punishment of Jacob in verse 2 — according to his ways, according to his doings — extends the indictment beyond the northern kingdom to the whole covenant people. The Jacob is the ancestor whose name all Israel bears, and the punishment according to his ways is the connection between the ancestor's character and the descendant's condition. The Jacob who is being punished is not merely the historical patriarch. He is the eponymous ancestor of the community that has inherited and reenacted his characteristic traits across every generation.

The retrospect of verses 3–5 is the most concentrated deployment of the Jacob narrative as the patriarchal mirror in the chapter. The taking of the brother by the heel in the womb (Genesis 25:26) is the first exhibit of the striving that characterizes Jacob throughout his story: the striving that begins in the womb, the competitive reaching for the advantage that has characterized Jacob

and his descendants from the beginning. The prevailing with God at Peniel (Genesis 32:24–28) is the second exhibit: the wrestling in the night, the refusal to let go, the weeping and the supplication, the prevailing that ends with the blessing and the limp. And the finding at Bethel (Genesis 28:10–19, 35:1–15) is the third: the encounter with the covenant God at the site that has become, in Hosea’s time, the golden calf sanctuary of Beth-aven.

The therefore return to your God of verse 6 is the most direct call to action in the section, and it is grounded in the patriarchal retrospect. The Jacob who strove with God and prevailed, who wept and sought favor, who found God at Bethel — this Jacob is the model of the genuine return that his descendants are being called to. The hold fast to love and justice is the content of the return: the hesed and the mishpat are the covenantal virtues that the covenant relationship requires, and their maintenance is the specific form that the genuine return takes. And the wait continually for your God is the patient orientation that is the alternative to the feeding on wind: not the frantic pursuit of the wrong resources, but the steady waiting for the covenant God who is the only genuine source of the provision that the wind-food cannot supply.

### Plain American English

*Ephraim is chasing the wind — all day long piling up lies and violence. They make deals with Assyria and send olive oil to Egypt as a bribe. The LORD has a case to bring against Judah too, and will punish Jacob according to what he has done. In the womb he grabbed his brother’s heel, and as a man he struggled with God. He wrestled with the angel and won — he wept and begged for a blessing. He found God at Bethel and talked with him there — the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is the name by which He is remembered. So now you must return to your God. Hold on to love and justice, and always put your hope in God.*

### Key Observations

**“Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind”:** This signifies **The Wind-Food and the East Wind Pursuit Are the Images of the Community That Has Abandoned the Covenant God’s Genuine Provision for the Insubstantial Alternatives That Cannot Nourish and the Actively Destructive Direction That Cannot Sustain.**

The feeding on wind is the image of the insubstantial diet: the consumption of the things that have no nutritional value for the covenant life — the foreign alliances, the diplomatic oil, the Assyrian covenant. These things fill the attention, consume the resources, generate the political activity — and provide nothing of the genuine nourishment that the covenant relationship with God supplies. And the following after the east wind deepens the diagnosis: the east wind — the hot, withering sirocco of the desert — is not merely the empty wind of the wrong pursuit. It is the actively destructive wind that withers whatever it touches. Ephraim is not merely chasing the nothing of the wrong alternative. It is pursuing the actively harmful in the direction that destroys. The diagnosis of the wind-food and the east wind pursuit is the diagnosis of the community that has abandoned the genuine nourishment and is pursuing the actively destructive in its place.

**“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God”:** This signifies **The Patriarchal Mirror Deploys the Jacob Narrative as the Founding Exhibit of the Striving That Has Characterized Every Generation of the Community That Bears His Name — the Ancestor’s Character Is the Community’s Inheritance.**

The taking of the brother by the heel and the prevailing with God are the two exhibits of the Jacob character that the chapter deploys as the patriarchal mirror: the striving with the human brother and the striving with God. The Jacob who took the heel in the womb is the Jacob whose competitive striving — the reaching for the advantage, the grasping of the birthright — is the ancestral exhibit of the character that Israel has been reenacting in every form of the covenant violation that the book has been cataloguing. And the prevailing with God is the ancestral exhibit of the more positive dimension of the Jacob character: the striving that, when directed toward the covenant God rather than toward the human brother, produces the blessing of Peniel. The community that bears Jacob’s name has inherited both dimensions of the patriarchal character: the striving-with-the-brother that the covenant violation expresses, and the striving-with-God that the genuine return requires.

**“He wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us”:** This signifies **The Weeping and the Supplication of Peniel Are the Model of the Genuine Seeking That Persists Through the Night of the Wrestling Until the Blessing Is Given — and the Bethel Encounter Is the Most Direct Available Indictment of the Beth-Aven That the Golden Calf Has Made of the Sacred Site.**

The he wept and sought his favor is the most pastorally significant detail in the patriarchal retrospect. The Jacob who wept at Peniel is the Jacob whose striving had reached the limit of the purely human capacity — who could not prevail by the strength of the striving alone and who broke into the weeping and the supplication that the genuine encounter with the divine requires. The weeping is the turning from the confident self-reliance of the in-the-womb heel-grasping to the dependent supplication of the one who needs the blessing that only the covenant God can give. And the finding at Bethel — where the LORD spoke — is the direct indictment of the golden calf sanctuary that the present community has made of the sacred site. The Bethel where Jacob found God and God spoke is the Beth-aven where Ephraim has installed the calf. The ancestor’s encounter is the standard against which the descendant’s perversion is measured.

**“Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually”:** This signifies **The Call to Return Is Grounded in the Patriarchal Retrospect and Gives the Return Its Specific Content — the Holding Fast to Steadfast Love and Justice and the Patient Waiting That Are the Alternative to the Wind-Food and the East Wind Pursuit.**

The therefore of verse 6 connects the patriarchal retrospect to the call to return with the logical force of the example: because Jacob found God at Bethel, because Jacob prevailed by weeping and supplication, because the LORD God of hosts is the memorial name of the God who spoke at Bethel — therefore return to your God. The return is not the abstract religious sentiment. It has specific content: hold fast to steadfast love and justice. The hesed and the mishpat are the two covenantal virtues that constitute the content of the genuine return — the covenant loyalty and the covenant justice that the community should have been maintaining instead of the wind-food and the east wind pursuit. And the wait continually for your God is the patient alternative to the

frantic pursuit: not the feeding on wind but the steady waiting for the covenant God whose provision is genuine rather than insubstantial.

## What This Means for Us Today

### **1. Examine the Wind-Food and the East Wind Pursuit in Your Own Life — What Insubstantial and Actively Destructive Things Are You Consuming in the Place of the Covenant God's Genuine Provision:**

The feeding on wind and the following of the east wind are the images of the person whose attention, energy, and resources are being consumed by the things that cannot nourish the covenant life and that are actively destructive in the direction they are pursuing. The contemporary equivalents are the things that absorb the devotional energy of the believer without providing the genuine nourishment of the covenant relationship: the social media feed that provides the stimulation of the social approval without the substance of the genuine community, the political engagement that provides the passion of the cause without the peace of the covenant God, the therapeutic conversation that provides the language of the healing without the healing that only the covenant relationship produces. Examine the diet. The wind-food cannot sustain the covenant life.

### **2. Receive the Weeping and the Supplication of Peniel as the Model of the Genuine Seeking That Is Willing to Persist Through the Night of the Wrestling Until the Blessing Is Given:**

The Jacob who wept and sought favor is the model of the genuine seeking that has passed through the self-confidence of the heel-grasping and has arrived at the dependent supplication that the genuine encounter with the covenant God requires. The contemporary believer who wants the blessing of Peniel without the night of the wrestling — who wants the encounter with the covenant God without the weeping and the supplication that the encounter requires — has not yet arrived at the dependence that the encounter demands. The weeping is the turning from the self-confidence to the dependent seeking. The supplication is the persistence of the seeking through the night. The blessing comes when the self-confidence has been exhausted and the dependent seeking has not let go. Let the weeping and the supplication of Peniel be the model.

### **3. Hold Fast to Steadfast Love and Justice as the Specific Content of the Genuine Return — Not the Abstract Religious Sentiment but the Covenantal Virtues That Constitute What the Return Actually Is:**

The keep mercy and judgment of verse 6 is the most specific available definition of what the genuine return looks like in the practice of the covenant life. The return is not the abstract intention to be more spiritual or the emotional experience of the revival gathering. It is the holding fast to the hesed and the mishpat — the steadfast covenant love and the covenant justice that the relationship with the covenant God generates and requires. The community that returns with the steadfast love will love the neighbor with the love that the covenant God has shown it. The community that returns with the justice will order its common life by the standards that the covenant God's character requires. The hesed and the mishpat are not the consequences of the return. They are the content of the return.

## How This Relates to Today

The patriarchal mirror of verses 3–5 is one of the most sophisticated hermeneutical moves in the book. The Jacob narrative is not invoked as an illustration of a theological point that could be

made without the narrative. It is invoked as the founding exhibit of the character that the community has been reenacting across every generation since the patriarch. The striving with the brother that characterizes Israel's political history — the assassinations, the coups, the foreign alliances, the competitive seeking of the political advantage — is the descendant's reenactment of the ancestor's heel-grasping. And the striving with God that is the alternative — the weeping and the supplication, the prevailing at Peniel, the finding at Bethel — is the ancestral model of the genuine return that the descendants are being called to.

The call of verse 6 — return, hold fast to steadfast love and justice, wait continually for your God — is also one of the most practically actionable calls to the covenant life in the book. It does not call for the extraordinary spiritual experience or the dramatic religious event. It calls for the ordinary faithfulness of the covenant virtues in the practice of the covenant life: the love maintained in the daily relationships, the justice practiced in the economic and social arrangements, the waiting exercised in the patient orientation of the life toward the covenant God. This is the covenant life that the wind-food and the east wind pursuit have been replacing. The call to return is the call to these specific, ordinary, daily practices. The extraordinary spirituality is not required. The ordinary faithfulness of the *hesed* and the *mishpat* is.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The patriarchal mirror of the Jacob retrospect deploys the ancestor's character — the heel-grasping in the womb, the prevailing at Peniel, the weeping and the supplication, the finding at Bethel — as the founding exhibit of the striving and the seeking that Israel has been both reenacting in its covenant violations and betraying in its perversion of the sacred sites; and the therefore of verse 6 draws from the retrospect the most direct and the most specific call to return in the chapter: hold fast to steadfast love and justice, wait continually for your God — the specific content of the genuine return that the wind-food and the east wind pursuit have been replacing.\**

---

## Hosea 12:7–9

*The Merchant with the Deceitful Scales: The Proud Boast of the Tainted Wealth and the Forgotten Wilderness*

*(7) He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand:  
he loveth to oppress.*

*(8) And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich,  
I have found me out substance:  
in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me  
that were sin.*

*(9) And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt  
will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles,  
as in the days of the solemn feast.*

## The Context

The merchant of verse 7 — the Canaanite is the Hebrew word, which is also the generic term for merchant, as the Canaanites were the merchants of the ancient Near East — is a deliberate echo of the Baal worship's cultural context. The Ephraim who has become like a Canaanite merchant is the Ephraim who has adopted not merely the Canaanite religion but the Canaanite commercial ethics: the balances of deceit, the love of oppression. The commercial dishonesty of the false balance is the economic expression of the same fundamental dishonesty that has been running through the book since the false oaths of chapter 10 and the lies that the community has spoken against the LORD in chapter 7. The dishonesty is not confined to the religious sphere. It has permeated the economic sphere as well, as the covenant violation always does.

The boast of verse 8 is the most self-congratulatory speech in the book: Yet I have become rich; I have found wealth for myself. In all my labors, no iniquity can be found in me that would be sin. The rich Ephraim who declares itself innocent is the Ephraim who has lost the capacity for the moral self-assessment that the covenant relationship should produce. The prosperity has been interpreted as the evidence of the innocence: if God were displeased, I would not be prosperous. But the prosperity is the wind-food of verse 1 — the insubstantial gain of the deceitful balance that will not sustain the covenant life. And the claim that no iniquity can be found in me is the most complete expression of the not-knowing that the book has been diagnosing since chapter 2: the community that does not know that the LORD is the source of the provision has also convinced itself that the provision is the evidence of the righteousness.

The divine response of verse 9 is the most unexpected and the most theologically surprising in the section. Against the proud boast of the wealthy and self-declared innocent Ephraim, the covenant God declares: I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast. The wilderness tent-dwelling is both the judgment — the stripping away of the prosperity that has funded the self-congratulation — and the restoration: the return to the wilderness of the founding covenant relationship, where the community was formed without the distractions of the agricultural wealth and the Canaanite commerce. The tents of the feast are the tents of the Feast of Tabernacles — the annual celebration of the wilderness sojourn that the covenant community was commanded to observe as the reminder of the dependence on the covenant God that the settled prosperity tends to obscure.

## Plain American English

*Ephraim is like a crooked merchant who loves to cheat — his scales are always rigged. And he boasts, "I've gotten rich! I've made it on my own! And nobody can pin any sin on me for how I got it." But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. I will make you live in tents again, just like during the Festival of Shelters.*

## Key Observations

**“He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress”:** This signifies **The Canaanite Merchant with the Deceitful Scales Is the Commercial Expression of the Same Fundamental Dishonesty That Has Been Running Through Every Sphere of the Covenant Community’s Life Since the False Oaths and the Lies Against the LORD.**

The balances of deceit are the commercial expression of the divided heart and the false oaths that the preceding chapters have diagnosed. The community that speaks the false oath in the religious sphere and the lie in the relational sphere will use the deceitful balance in the commercial sphere: the dishonesty that has corrupted the covenant relationship does not remain confined to the specifically religious domain. It permeates every sphere of the community’s life — the commercial, the political, the relational — because the covenant relationship that generates the integrity of every sphere has been corrupted at its root. The love of oppression that accompanies the deceitful balance is the expression of the absent hesed: the steadfast love that the covenant relationship should have been producing has been replaced by the love of the unjust advantage, the pleasure in the power over the vulnerable.

**“Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin”:** This signifies **The Proud Boast of the Self-Declared Innocent Prosperity Is the Most Complete Expression of the Not-Knowing — the Community That Interprets Its Prosperity as the Evidence of Its Righteousness Has Lost the Capacity for the Moral Self-Assessment That the Covenant Relationship Produces.**

The I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself and no iniquity can be found in me is the most complete expression of the cognitive failure that the book has been diagnosing since chapter 2. The community that does not know that the LORD is the source of the provision (chapter 2), that does not know that I healed them (chapter 11), that does not consider that I remember all their evil (chapter 7) has now arrived at the logical conclusion of the not-knowing: the self-declaration of the innocence on the basis of the prosperity. The prosperity has become the evidence of the righteousness in the community’s own assessment. The iniquity that the covenant God has been cataloguing through ten chapters of indictment is invisible to the community that has interpreted the prosperity as the divine endorsement. This is the most complete form of the not-knowing: the community that is not merely ignorant of the iniquity but has actively declared itself innocent on the basis of the evidence that the iniquity has produced.

**“I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast”:** This signifies **The Wilderness Tent-Dwelling Is Both the Judgment That Strips Away the Prosperity That Has Funded the Self-Congratulation and the Restoration That Returns the Community to the Founding Covenant Dependence That the Settled Prosperity Has Obscured.**

The I will again make you dwell in tents is the divine response to the proud boast of the wealthy and self-declared innocent Ephraim, and it operates on two levels simultaneously. On the level of judgment: the stripping away of the settled prosperity — the houses, the wealth, the commercial success of the deceitful balance — and the return to the tent-dwelling of the wilderness condition. The judgment removes the material basis of the self-congratulation. On the level of restoration: the return to the tents of the Feast of Tabernacles, the annual celebration of the wilderness sojourn that the covenant community was commanded to observe as the reminder of the covenant God’s provision in the wilderness, the counter-formation against the amnesia of the

settled prosperity. The tents are both the judgment and the formation: the stripping of the prosperity and the recovery of the covenant dependence that the prosperity had been obscuring.

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

**1. Examine the Commercial Ethics of the Covenant Community — Is the Business Practice, the Financial Arrangement, the Economic Relationship Governed by the Hesed and the Mishpat of Verse 6 or by the Deceitful Balance of Verse 7:** The covenant violation does not remain confined to the religious sphere. It permeates every sphere of the community's life because the covenant relationship that generates the integrity of every sphere has been corrupted at its root. The contemporary believer and the contemporary church need to examine the commercial ethics of the covenant community with the same urgency that the book of Hosea examines the religious ethics: the business practices that exploit the vulnerable, the financial arrangements that are technically legal and fundamentally exploitative, the economic relationships that use the power of the advantage to oppress rather than to serve. The deceitful balance is the commercial expression of the absent hesed. The presence of the deceitful balance in the economic life of the covenant community is the evidence that the hesed has not been generated by the genuine covenant relationship.

**2. Resist the Interpretation of Prosperity as the Evidence of Righteousness — the Proud Boast of the Self-Declared Innocent Is the Most Dangerous Form of the Not-Knowing Because It Actively Prevents the Acknowledgment That the Genuine Return Requires:** The I have become rich and no iniquity can be found in me is the statement of the community that has lost the capacity for the moral self-assessment that the covenant relationship should produce. The contemporary church that interprets its prosperity, its platform, its numerical growth, and its cultural influence as the evidence of the divine approval is in the condition of verse 8. The prosperity may be real. The divine approval of the condition that produced it may not be. The covenant community that is genuinely prosperous and genuinely faithful will not need to declare its innocence on the basis of the prosperity. It will receive the prosperity with the gratitude that recognizes the covenant God as the source and the humility that maintains the moral self-assessment that the covenant relationship generates.

**3. Receive the Tent-Dwelling of the Wilderness as the Formation That the Settled Prosperity Tends to Obscure — and Practice the Regular Return to the Covenant Dependence That the Feast of Tabernacles Was Commanded to Provide:** The I will again make you dwell in tents is the divine provision of the formation that the settled prosperity has been preventing. The Feast of Tabernacles was commanded precisely to prevent the amnesia of the settled prosperity: the annual return to tent-dwelling was the annual remembrance of the wilderness covenant dependence that the settled life in houses tends to obscure. The contemporary equivalent is the regular practice of the spiritual disciplines that return the believer to the covenant dependence that the prosperity of the ordinary life tends to obscure: the fasting that removes the food that obscures the hunger for God, the simplicity that removes the clutter that obscures the covenant relationship, the community that returns the isolated prosperity to the shared dependence of the covenant life together. Practice the tent-dwelling. The prosperity will not provide it automatically.

## How This Relates to Today

The I have become rich and no iniquity can be found in me is one of the most diagnostically precise descriptions of the contemporary prosperity gospel that is available in the prophetic literature. The theology that interprets prosperity as the evidence of righteousness and adversity as the evidence of sin has its most complete Old Testament expression in the proud boast of verse 8 — and the divine response of verse 9 is the most direct available refutation: I will again make you dwell in tents. The stripping of the prosperity is not the evidence of the divine displeasure with the community's righteousness. It is the divine provision of the formation that the prosperity has been preventing. The tents of the wilderness are the school of the covenant dependence that the settled prosperity of verse 8 has been allowing the community to forget.

The Canaanite merchant with the deceitful balance is also one of the most urgently relevant images in the chapter for the contemporary church's engagement with economic justice. The covenant community's commercial ethics are not a separate domain from its covenant faithfulness. They are the economic expression of the covenant character: the hesed that serves rather than exploits, the mishpat that establishes the just arrangements that protect the vulnerable rather than the deceitful balances that profit from the vulnerability. The church that has separated its economic practices from its covenant theology has not understood the Canaanite merchant of verse 7. The deceitful balance is the commercial expression of the absent hesed. The just balance is the commercial expression of the present covenant God.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The merchant section of the chapter deploys the image of the Canaanite commercial ethics — the deceitful balance, the love of oppression, the proud boast of the self-declared innocent prosperity — as the commercial expression of the same fundamental dishonesty that has been running through every sphere of the covenant community's life; and the divine response of verse 9 — I will make you dwell in tents again, as in the days of the appointed feast — is both the judgment that strips the prosperity that funded the self-congratulation and the formation that returns the community to the covenant dependence that the settled prosperity has been obscuring.\**

---

## Hosea 12:10–14

*The Prophets and the Wilderness: The Speaking That Has Been Ignored and the Provocation That Will Be Repaid*

*(10) I have also spoken by the prophets,  
and I have multiplied visions,  
and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.  
(11) Is there iniquity in Gilead?  
surely they are vanity:  
they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal;  
yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.  
(12) And Jacob fled into the country of Syria,*

*and Israel served for a wife,  
and for a wife he kept sheep.  
(13) And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt,  
and by a prophet was he preserved.  
(14) Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly:  
therefore shall he leave his blood upon him,  
and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.*

## **The Context**

The I have spoken by the prophets of verse 10 is the declaration of the divine faithfulness in the communication department: the covenant God has not been silent. He has spoken through the prophets, multiplied the visions, used parables through the ministry of the prophets. The variety of the communicative modes — prophetic speech, visions, similitudes — is the evidence of the divine investment in making the word accessible to the community that needed it. And the context of the declaration is the context of the community that has been diagnosed in the preceding verses as feeding on wind, using deceitful balances, and declaring itself innocent on the basis of its prosperity. The divine speech has been comprehensive. The community's reception has been the not-listening that chapter 9 identified as the reason for the wandering.

The rhetorical question of verse 11 — if there is iniquity in Gilead — anticipates the answer: yes, they are surely worthless. Gilead is iniquity; in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls; their altars also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the field. The Gilead and the Gilgal of verse 11 are the continuation of the geographical indictment that has been running through the book since the warning to Judah about Gilgal in chapter 4 and the all their wickedness is in Gilgal of chapter 10. The altars in Gilgal that are like heaps of stones in the furrows of the field echo the hemlock that springs up in the furrows of chapter 10 — the wrong things growing in the prepared ground. The heaps of stones in the furrows are the agricultural image of the altars that should be producing the harvest of the hesed and instead are producing the debris of the wrong worship.

The second patriarchal retrospect of verses 12–13 is a double exhibit: Jacob who fled to Aram and served for a wife, tending sheep for Laban — the patriarch who was willing to do the servant's work for the sake of the beloved. And the prophet Moses through whom the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt and by whom Israel was preserved. The two retrospects are placed in deliberate contrast: the patriarch who served for a wife is the ancestor of the community that has refused to serve the covenant God; and the prophet through whom the Exodus was accomplished is the ancestor of the prophetic ministry that has been speaking through the visions and the similitudes of verse 10 — and has not been heard.

The Ephraim who has provoked to bitter anger of verse 14 is the summary consequence of the entire chapter: the bitter provocation of the community that has heard the prophets and not listened, that has received the vision and not seen, that has benefited from the Exodus and not returned, that has lived in the land that the covenant God gave and has used the prosperity to

declare itself innocent. The leaving of the bloodguilt on Ephraim and the returning of the reproach are the covenant curses in their most concentrated form: the blood that Ephraim has shed — the violence that the preceding chapters have catalogued — will remain on Ephraim, and the reproach that Ephraim has directed at the covenant God through the apostasy will be returned to its sender.

### Plain American English

*I spoke to the prophets and gave them many visions. I spoke through parables — that was my way of getting through to them. Is Gilead full of evil? Yes, they're absolutely worthless! They sacrifice bulls at Gilgal, and their altars are piling up like rock heaps in a plowed field. Jacob fled to the land of Aram and worked to earn himself a wife — he tended sheep to pay for her. It was through a prophet that the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and through a prophet that Israel was kept safe. But Ephraim has deeply provoked the LORD to bitter anger, so the LORD will leave the blame for Israel's bloodshed on them and will pay them back for their contempt.*

### Key Observations

**“I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets”:** This signifies **The Divine Faithfulness in the Communication Has Been Comprehensive — the Prophetic Speech, the Visions, and the Similitudes Are the Multiple Modes of the Word That the Community's Not-Listening Has Failed to Receive.**

The I have spoken by the prophets is the declaration that the covenant God has not been silent. The multiplied visions and the use of similitudes through the prophets — the parabolic and visionary modes of the prophetic word alongside the direct prophetic speech — are the evidence of the divine investment in communicating with the community through every available mode. The variety of the communicative modes is not the evidence of the divine frustration with the community's inability to understand. It is the evidence of the divine patience that tries different modes of communication to reach the community that has not been responding to the previous ones. And the context of this declaration is the context of the community that has been hearing the prophets and calling them fools — that has been receiving the visions and the similitudes and has not seen or heard what they were designed to communicate. The divine speech has been comprehensive and patient. The human reception has been the not-listening of chapter 9.

**“And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved”:** This signifies **The Prophetic Ministry Is the Instrument of Both the Exodus Redemption and the Wilderness Preservation — the Prophet Through Whom the Founding Redemption Was Accomplished Is the Ancestor of the Prophetic Ministry That the Community Has Been Dismissing as Foolish.**

The by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt and by a prophet was he preserved is the most explicit statement of the prophetic mediation of the founding covenant act in the book. Moses — the prophet par excellence — was the instrument of the Exodus redemption and the wilderness preservation. The prophetic ministry is not a secondary feature of the covenant community's life. It is the instrument of its very existence: the community was brought into being through the prophetic word and was preserved through the prophetic ministry in the

wilderness. The contemporary dismissal of the prophetic word — the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad of chapter 9 — is the dismissal of the ministry through which the community was constituted. The community that dismisses the prophetic word is the community that is dismissing the instrument of its own founding redemption.

**“Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him”:** This signifies **The Bitter Provocation of the Entire Chapter’s Indictment Is Summarized in the Mirror Consequence That Returns the Reproach to Its Sender and Leaves the Bloodguilt on the One Who Shed the Blood.**

The Ephraim has bitterly provoked the LORD is the summary of the entire chapter’s indictment: the wind-fool and the east wind pursuit, the deceitful balance and the proud boast of the self-declared innocent, the heaps of altars in the furrows of the field, the bitter provocation of the community that has heard the prophets and has not listened. And the therefore — the covenant consequence — is the mirror judgment that the book has deployed repeatedly: the blood left on the one who shed it, the reproach returned to the one who directed it. The blood that Ephraim has shed through the violence of the preceding chapters, the reproach that Ephraim has directed at the covenant God through the apostasy — both will be returned to their sender with the precise mirroring that the covenant theology of moral consequence always produces. The harvest corresponds to the sowing. The reproach returns to the one who sent it.

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

**1. Receive the Multiplied Visions and the Similitudes as the Evidence of the Divine Patience That Has Been Trying Multiple Communicative Modes to Reach the Community That Has Not Been Responding to the Previous Ones:** The I have spoken by the prophets, multiplied the visions, used the similitudes is the declaration of the divine patience in the communication. The covenant God has not been one-dimensional in the attempt to reach the community. He has used the direct prophetic word, the visionary experience, and the parabolic mode — the similitudes that engage the imagination in ways that the direct proposition does not. The contemporary believer who has not been responding to the covenant God’s word in one mode should not assume that the failure of that mode is the failure of the divine communication. The God who multiplied the visions and used the similitudes is the God who will find the mode that reaches the specific community in the specific season. Attend to the modes. The word is being communicated through them all.

**2. Honor the Prophetic Ministry as the Instrument of the Founding Redemption Rather Than the Obstacle to the Community’s Preferred Spiritual Experience:** The by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt and by a prophet was he preserved is the declaration that the prophetic ministry is the instrument of the very existence of the covenant community. The community that dismisses the prophetic word — that calls the prophet a fool and prefers the smooth word that does not confront the covenant violation — is the community that is dismissing the instrument of its own founding redemption. The contemporary church that has substituted the therapeutic word for the prophetic word, that prefers the message that addresses the consumer’s felt needs to the message that addresses the covenant God’s actual demands, is in

the condition of the community that hears the prophetic word and calls it foolish. Honor the prophetic ministry. The community was brought into being through it.

**3. Take the Mirror Consequence of Verse 14 as the Most Practically Urgent Warning in the Chapter — the Reproach That Has Been Directed at the Covenant God Will Be Returned to Its Sender with the Precision That the Covenant Theology of Moral Consequence Always Produces:** The his reproach shall his Lord return unto him is the application of the moral logic that has been running through the book since the sow the wind, reap the whirlwind of chapter 8. The covenant violation produces a consequence that mirrors the specific form of the violation: the rejected knowledge produces the rejection from the priestly office, the forgotten law produces the forgetting of the children, and the reproach directed at the covenant God produces the return of the reproach to its sender. The bitterness of the provocation determines the bitterness of the consequence. Take the mirror consequence seriously. The reproach that has been directed at the covenant God in the apostasy, the idolatry, and the self-congratulation of the preceding chapters is the reproach that will be returned. The only prevention of the return is the acknowledgment and the turning.

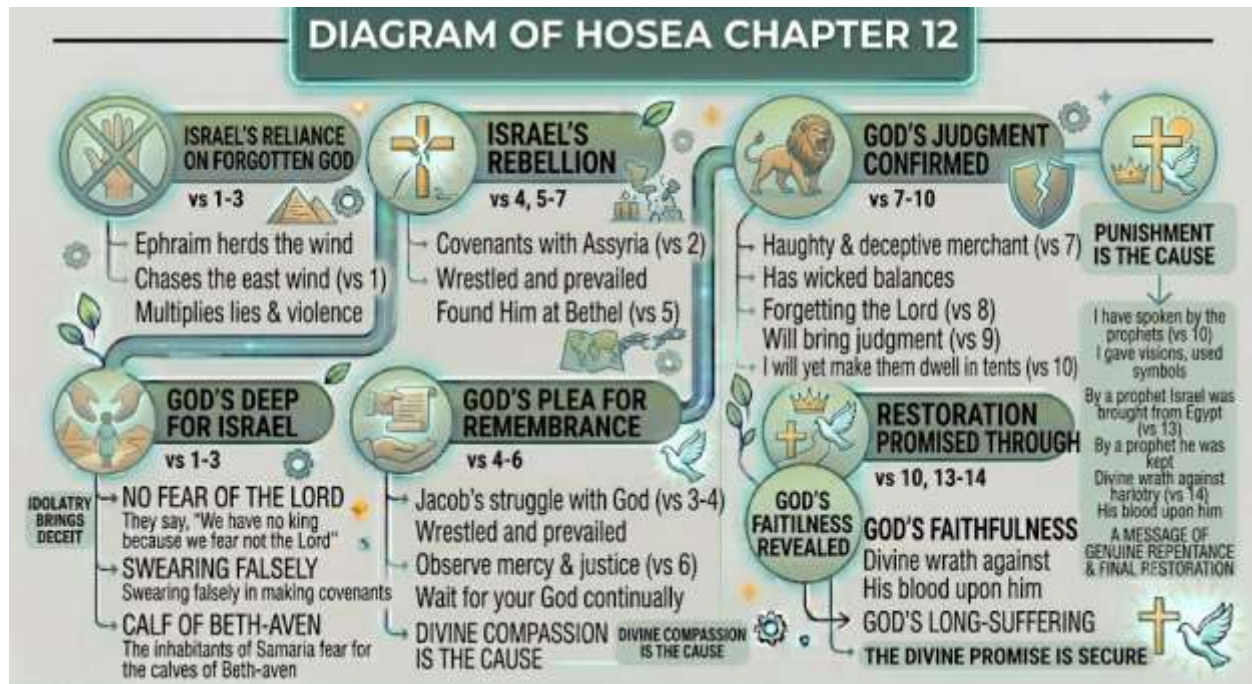
### **How This Relates to Today**

The I have spoken by the prophets, multiplied the visions, used the similitudes of verse 10 is the declaration of the divine persistence in the communication that the contemporary church's approach to the prophetic word most needs to hear. The word of the LORD has been communicated through the comprehensive canon of Scripture, through the history of the prophetic tradition, through the multiple modes of the biblical literature — the legal, the prophetic, the wisdom, the narrative, the apocalyptic. The community that has access to this comprehensive communication and has not been listening is not the community that has been deprived of the word. It is the community that is in the condition of Ephraim: the comprehensive prophetic word has been provided; the reception has been the not-listening of chapter 9. The failure of the reception does not reflect the failure of the communication. It reflects the condition of the receiver.

The altars like heaps of stones in the furrows of the field in verse 11 is also one of the most visually precise images in the chapter for the agricultural consequence of the wrong worship. The furrows of the field — the ground that was plowed and prepared for the sowing of the covenant grain of chapter 10 — are full of heaps of stones from the dismantled altars. The ground that was prepared for the right sowing has been used for the wrong worship, and the debris of the wrong worship — the heaps of stones of the destroyed altars — now fills the furrows that should have received the seed of righteousness. The contemporary equivalent is the community whose institutional resources — the time, the energy, the financial capacity, the human attention — have been consumed by the programs, the performances, and the institutional maintenance of the wrong worship, leaving the furrows of the genuine covenant life unprepared for the sowing of the righteousness that verse 10's instruction called for.

***Key Lesson:*** *\*The closing section of the chapter brings together the divine faithfulness in the communication — the prophets, the visions, the similitudes — and the community's not-listening that has been the reason for the wandering since chapter 9; the prophetic ministry that was the*

instrument of the founding Exodus redemption is the ministry that the community has been dismissing as foolish; and the bitter provocation of the entire chapter's indictment produces the mirror consequence that returns the reproach to its sender and leaves the bloodguilt on the one who shed it, the most concentrated available statement of the covenant theology of moral consequence applied to the community that has heard the comprehensive prophetic word and has refused to return.\*



## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 12 having received the most historically comprehensive chapter in the book — the one that reaches back to Jacob in the womb, forward to the Exodus, and then to the present condition of the community that has been both reenacting the patriarch's striving and betraying the patriarch's encounter with the God who spoke at Bethel. We have heard the feeding on wind and the following of the east wind. We have heard the deceitful balance and the proud boast of the self-declared innocent. We have heard the altars like heaps of stones in the furrows of the field. And we have heard the I have spoken by the prophets, multiplied the visions, used the similitudes — the comprehensive divine investment in the communication that the community's not-listening has failed to receive.

Lord, let the therefore of verse 6 be the pivot of this chapter for us: therefore return to your God; hold fast to steadfast love and justice, and wait continually for your God. We receive the patriarchal retrospect as the mirror that shows us the condition. We receive the call to return as the invitation that the mirror is designed to produce. And we receive the content of the return —

*the hesed and the mishpat, the steadfast love and the justice — as the specific practices that constitute the genuine return rather than the abstract religious sentiment.*

*Let us be the Jacob who weeps and seeks favor rather than the Jacob who grasps the heel. Let us be the community that prevails at Peniel through the weeping and the supplication rather than the community that prevails through the deceitful balance and the proud boast of the self-declared innocent. Let us find You at Bethel in the genuine encounter with the God who speaks there, rather than the Beth-aven of the golden calf that the worship of the manufactured god has made of the sacred site.*

*We do not want to feed on wind. We do not want to follow the east wind. We do not want the wealth of the deceitful balance or the self-congratulation of the proud boast. We want the blessing of Peniel and the encounter of Bethel. We want the hesed and the mishpat. We want to wait continually for our God. Let the waiting produce the meeting. And let the meeting produce the formation that the whole chapter has been calling for: the community that returns, holds fast, and waits — the community that has heard the prophets, received the visions, understood the similitudes, and responded with the genuine return that the divine investment in the communication has always been designed to produce.*

*In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is both the greater Jacob who prevailed with God and the greater Moses through whom the greater Exodus has been accomplished, the One whose prophetic word is the fulfillment of the I have spoken by the prophets that this chapter declares — Amen.*

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