

Hosea 8:1-9:9
The Covenant Love of God and the Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction

- A. Structure of 4:1-14:9:¹
1. 4:1-6:3 — Evidence of ignorance of God and statement of hope
 2. **6:4-11:11 — Evidence of disloyalty to God and statement of hope**
 3. 11:12-14:9 — Evidence of faithlessness to God and statement of hope
- B. Note: throughout the rest of the book there will be a back and forth between Yahweh and Hosea. If you follow the personal pronouns you will notice that it switches from “I” to “we”, and then from “I will do...” to “Yahweh will do...” These are antiphonal proclamations.²

II. 8:1-14 — Yahweh’s complaint

- A. 1 — Hosea calls Israel to blow their trumpet because of the coming enemy. Whether this is an eagle or vulture is irrelevant, what is important is that this connects to the covenant curses in *Deuteronomy 28:49* — ***“The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.”*** This judgment is part of the covenant curses and it finds its reality in the exile soon to take place.
- B. 2-3 — Consider what their statement is to Yahweh.
1. **“My God”** — They claim that Yahweh is their god.
 2. **“Israel”** — Some translations have this as the subject of the verb “cry out.” However, there does seem to be some indication to say that the ESV get’s it right here. If this is the case, then the implication is that they are saying, “We are Israel, the chosen people, the ones who have the covenant.”
 3. **“Know you”** — We have already seen that this is an untrue claim (5:4).
- C. **What does it mean that they “spurned the good?”** Garrett defines good this way, ***“It refers to God himself as the ultimate good, the good teachings of the Torah, the right way of living, and the benefits that come from faithfulness to God.”***³

Who determines what is good? If God, our Creator, has determined all that is good for us and all that was good for Israel, then we should act in faith knowing that He has our best in mind. To reject Him and the good, is to reject what is best for our lives — though this doesn’t mean it will be easy.

D. 4-6 — How Israel Spurned the good

1. 4a — They chose their own leaders rather than asking Yahweh to lead them. They acted on what they thought was best, rather than seeking Yahweh’s face to determine what was best.
2. 4b-6 — The text begins with the same verb “reject/spurn” that is in verse 3. Their Israel rejects the good Yahweh has offered to them. Here Yahweh is going to reject there false gods. Instead of turning back to Yahweh and trusting that He has their best in mind, they sought to take matters into their

¹ Michael Barrett, 19.

² Garrett, 177.

³ Garrett, 181.

own hands, literally, and create their own gods. Like the golden calf in Exodus 32:4, this one would also be broken. Garrett says that this calf was likely the calf-idol that Jeroboam placed at Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-29).⁴ Yahweh's anger is clear, and the lifelessness of the idol is also very clear.

3. **6 — What is the referent of “it”?** Context informs us that the calf is in mind. Consequently, the idols dependence on a craftsman for life is highlighted. It is not God, it was fashioned by hands, and is lifeless.

Garrett writes, *“The idea that Israel, after all her experiences, could embrace such idolatry is beyond comprehension. Israel had to learn the same lesson over again. Just as the calf that Aaron made was ground to powder (Exod 32:20), so would this idol be smashed to pieces.”*⁵

E. 7-10 — Israel's futility in their pursuit of foreign help

1. 7 — **What point is Hosea making crystal clear in this passage?** Yahweh reinforces the idea that Israel will discover famine. Though they turn to their idols and go through the fertility rituals, they will only find standing grain without heads. Even if they discover some food, it will be taken away. The first part of this verse could be translated slightly different, “For they sow **in** the wind, and they shall reap **in** the whirlwind.” If this is the case, then it follows the trajectory of the verse. **However, there is a good argument made for it being metaphorical, in that they sow futile activity in the wind and will reap the consequences of a destruction.**⁶ **This is probably the best way to take it.**
2. 8-10 — In these three verses Yahweh makes it clear that though Israel turns to foreigners for help, they are unable to find what they are looking for. As we have noted before, they are willing to turn anywhere but to Yahweh. Only by turning to Him will they find help. As Yahweh said in verse 3, they rejected the good and thus their enemies pursued them.
3. 8 — Israel is compared to an empty cup that is useless. It's as if the foreign power has used up all their resources and their tribute, and now they are a useless nation.⁷
4. 9 — The emphasis here is that they went to Assyria for help, but in the end they were alone.
5. 10 — In their pursuit to hire lovers, they find themselves under the burden of paying tribute.

F. 11-14 — Israel's “Religiosity”

1. 11 — That Israel multiplied altars was against the requirement to have one place to sacrifice (Deut 12:5). What seems to be taking place here is that they created altars to offer sin offerings, but instead of them helping Israel, they lead them into more sin. A great example of this is seen with Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 12.⁸
2. 12 — This highlights the reality that Israel's laws were foreign to them. Their spiritual leaders had failed to teach them, and they had failed to seek them out. What should have been with them wherever they went, was something they knew little about (See Deut 11:18ff).

⁴ Garrett, 183.

⁵ Ibid, 184.

⁶ Chisholm, 37.

⁷ Garrett, 186.

⁸ Jeroboam created two more altars to keep the Israelites from going back to Jerusalem to worship, out of fear that they might turn on him as their king.

3. 13 — Israel is making sacrifices again and Yahweh is still not interested. They strive to be religious, but it does not produce any results, because their hearts are far from Him.
4. 14 — Israel forget their Maker; the One who formed them into a nation, gave them life, and so much more.⁹ They relied on their own abilities to defend themselves by creating strongholds, but failed to remember that the Creator is not hindered by their efforts to shield themselves from destruction.

III.9:1-9 — Prophetic Complaint

- A. **1-3 — Don't rejoice! Baal has no control over the harvest.** The message that Hosea gives in these first three verses relates to Israel's need to not rejoice, because, though they hope for a plentiful harvest, they will not find one. Yahweh demonstrates that their desire to turn to pagan gods to have a successful harvest will not play out well. Yahweh is the one who controls their food (see 2:9).
1. 1 — We see that they are told to not rejoice. Why? Because they will not find success in their harvest. They turned to the fertility cults to have success in the land, yet that was not the basis for the harvest's growth. Because they had forsaken their God, they were forsaking the true source of their harvest. Once again, the picture of their idolatry as an unfaithful wife is introduced.
 2. 2 — It is important to note that the use of threshing floor has a sexual connotation to it. Typically in the context of harvest time there would be a party that would lead to immorality.¹⁰ However, their harvest will not prove successful.
 3. 3 — That it's "the land of the LORD," is a reminder that Baal has no control over what it does. McComiskey explains that Egypt functions as a motif of bondage.¹¹ Deuteronomy 28:38-41 demonstrates that famine is a precursor to Israel's departure from the land.¹²
- B. **4-6 — The result of the Famine.** The famine of verse 1-3 has a direct impact on their ability to worship. We know from previous passages that their worship was already tainted by ill-motives and lack of knowledge. Now, as a consequence of their sin, they will be hindered from turning back to Yahweh.
1. 4 — Though they bring drink offerings and bread, they are not able to use them for worship. They are unsuitable. The "mourners' bread," is defiled because those who deal with dead bodies touch it and defile it. The only thing food is able to do is allow them to survive. **There is no hope for bringing an offering of worship.**
 2. 5 — This verse should remind us of Israel's attempt to follow the ritual festivals that Yahweh gave them, yet in the midst of doing it, they are not pleasing Yahweh. Furthermore, because of their famine they are unable to keep the festival.¹³
 3. 6 — In Israel's attempt to escape judgment, what they discover is that the very nation they left in the exodus would be the one to lead them to destruction. Chisholm says that Memphis is a well known burial place in Egypt.¹⁴

⁹ Smith, 136.

¹⁰ Garrett, 191.

¹¹ McComiskey, 137.

¹² So Garrett, 191.

¹³ See Garrett, 193 for more on this.

¹⁴ Chisholm, 39.

- C. **7-9 — The prophets are rejected, and sin is prevalent.** Hosea explains the irreversible judgment that is coming upon Israel. In this midst of this, the people drive the prophet's mad because of their sin. These prophets were intended to be watchmen to warn the people of judgment because of sin. Though the prophets would attempt to steer the Israelites back to Yahweh, they would be met with snares along the way. Verse 9 compares the evil that is taking place in Israel with the evil that took place in Judges 19 in Gibeah. As in Gibeah, their sin will be punished.

IV. Conclusion

Israel has turned to every nation and to every god except the true God. Though they may claim that they still perform (or attempt to perform) the rituals like sacrificing and festivals, the reality is that God does not accept them. They may honor God on the surface, but when it comes down to where they turn for help, they leave Yahweh behind. The result is that they will face a famine in the land, and through that Yahweh shows that he is truly the one who provides for their needs (see 2:9)

V. Application

- A. **How does knowing who decides what is good impact our daily lives?** So often we have a wrong view of what is "good." Good to me might mean comfort, happiness, possessions, etc. But these are not always the same things that God says are good. God's good might be obedience in difficult circumstances, or sacrifice of personal desires, etc. **Why then should we follow what God says is good, if that definition of good does not align with our definition?**

Israel's attempt to pursue what they thought was good (e.g. fertility, protection, security, etc.) ended with them finding destruction.

- B. **Why didn't Hosea call Israel to perform more sacrifices or rituals?** Hosea 6:6 says, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hosea could have called Israel back to more sacrifices, but that would never have addressed their real issues — their issues were at the heart level.

When someone is devoted to God with all their affections, following Him in obedience is much more natural and is a byproduct of that love.