

Further Prophecies Against the Northern Kingdom

Hosea 8

Hosea 8 - *“Set the trumpet to your mouth! He shall come like an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law. ² Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!’ ³ Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him. ⁴ “They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge them. From their silver and gold they made idols for themselves - that they might be cut off. ⁵ Your calf is rejected, O Samaria! My anger is aroused against them. How long until they attain to innocence? ⁶ For from Israel is even this: a workman made it, and it is not God; but the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.”*

Background Notes

After King Solomon died in 931BC, the united kingdom of Israel split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Hosea's ministry was focused on the northern kingdom. Over 150 years after the division, King Jeroboam II was in power. He was one of the twenty kings of the northern kingdom of Israel - all of whom were bad kings. The kings of the northern kingdom were not from the tribe of Judah, and they were not in the line of David. Notice verse 4: *“They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge them.”*

God never intended the split in the united kingdom, and He certainly did not approve the setting up of the northern kingdom and a new line of kings. The Messiah was to come through the tribe of Judah, from the royal line of David. But in His grace, God still considered the people of the northern kingdom of Israel as His people. In fact, He even included them in His *“house”* (v1).

And God continued to send His prophets to the northern kingdom. Before Hosea's time, the ministries of Elijah and Elisha were centered in the north, and the prophet Jonah lived and prophesied in the north. Amos, who lived in Judah, traveled to the north as a missionary. Hosea's ministry to the north was at least forty years in length. So, in His great grace, God still reached out to this ungodly kingdom - even though the northern kingdom had been rebellious from the very beginning.

God is just as gracious to rebellious people today. Is it possible that you have rebelled against the Lord in some way, and you've "set up your own kingdom"? Listen! God is gracious, and He's still reaching out to you, but you must respond to God's grace.

Sadly, there was no response to God's grace from the northern kingdom. The people of Israel transgressed God's covenant, and they rebelled against God's laws (v1). When the going got tough, they would cry out to the Lord (v2) - but it was not a cry of true repentance from the heart. It was like the "prayer" of a man in a foxhole under enemy fire - a plea that sounds like repentance, but as soon as the pressure is off, he goes back to doing his own thing.

“Set the trumpet to your mouth!” Because there was no response to God’s grace, the northern kingdom of Israel would be overrun by the Assyrians. The Assyrian armies swept down from the north like an eagle, and there was no escape. The northern kingdom of Israel with its capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians in 722BC - right in line with Hosea’s prophecy.

Doctrinal Points

1. God rejects all forms of idolatry.

“They have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law...” (v1). How did Israel transgress God’s covenant and rebel against His law? Well, how about idolatry, for starters? *“From their silver and gold they made idols for themselves...” (v4).*

But God rejects all forms of idolatry. “Samaria’s calf” would not only be rejected (v5) – it would be broken in pieces (v6). What’s all that about? Remember, the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I, set up two idolatrous golden calf shrines - one at Dan in the far north, and one at Bethel, near the southern border with Judah. Most likely the “calf of Samaria” referred to the Bethel shrine, because it was considered a royal shrine. There was even a royal residence at Bethel.

God’s anger was aroused by this idolatry. In fact, God rejects **all** forms of idolatry. You may think, “Well, that leaves me out – there’s no form of idolatry in **my** life!” But wait a minute! **Anything** that takes priority over God in our lives is idolatry!

“From their silver and gold they made idols for themselves...”(v4). What are you doing with your “silver and gold”? Are you using it for the glory of God - or are you using it to make “golden calves” for your own selfish purposes? If you’re a Christian, and you’re giving only token amounts of your silver and gold to the Lord, there’s a very good chance that you are indeed involved in idolatry.

As He said to ancient Israel, God says to us: *“How long until they attain to innocence?”*

That’s another way of saying, “You profess to be a believer? How long before you get your act together?” When will we ever learn that the material things we treasure so much in this life are manmade - and they are not God? *“A workman made it, and it is not God” (v6).* When will our lives be pleasing to God? God rejects all forms of idolatry.

2. God judges all forms of idolatry.

Hosea 8:7-14 - *“They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.*

The stalk has no bud. It shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up. ⁸ Israel is swallowed up. Now they are among the Gentile like a vessel in which is no pleasure. ⁹ For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey alone by itself, Ephraim has hired lovers. ¹⁰ Yes, though they have hired among the nations, now I will gather them, and they shall sorrow a little because of the burden of the king of princes.

¹¹ “Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, they have become for him altars for sinning. ¹² I have written for him the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange thing. ¹³ For the sacrifices of My offerings they sacrifice flesh and eat it, but the Lord does not accept them. Now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. They shall return to Egypt.

¹⁴ “For Israel has forgotten his Maker, and has built palaces. Judah also has multiplied fortified towns, but I will send fire upon the cities and it shall devour the palaces.”

Because Israel refused to give up her idolatry, Israel would be judged. Her crops would fail (v7). She would be scattered among the nations (v8). Instead of turning back to the Lord, like a stubborn donkey Israel looked to Assyria for help (v9). Assyria - of all places to look for help! This was *spiritual adultery*. Because God judges all forms of idolatry, Israel would waste away under the oppression of the Assyrian king (v10).

Idolatry is not only the worship of false gods - ***idolatry is also the false worship of the true God***. God had decreed that there was to be only one altar for sacrifice and worship - at the Temple in Jerusalem. But Ephraim (another name for the northern kingdom) had set up many altars, and these altars had become altars for sinning (v11). They broke God’s Law, and treated God’s Law as something that was foreign to them (v12). Even when the people used God’s altar, they didn’t follow God’s Law as to how the sacrifices were to be offered, such as what parts of the sacrifice could be eaten, and what parts were not to be eaten (v13). They just went through the motions, and proceeded in any way they chose. As a result, they would “return to Egypt” - to the condition of slavery from which they had once been delivered (v13). God judges all forms of idolatry.

The bottom line of all idolatry is ***forgetting your Maker*** (v14). Notice that God considered the building of dwellings was a form of idolatry, because they forgot Him. It was not the actual act of building, but forgetting God as a result.

America is filled with various forms of idolatry. Whenever God is not acknowledged as Creator and Maker, idolatry exists to one degree or another. Idolatry may be building structures that dishonor God and glorify man, or it may be building theories and concepts that leave God out - such as the theory of evolution, or the theory that the universe created itself out of nothing. God will eventually judge all forms of idolatry.

Notice that this picture included Judah, the southern kingdom (v14). The southern kingdom was also denounced for her idolatry. God judges all forms of idolatry!

Practical Application

Are you investing in wind?

This practical application comes right from verse 7: “*They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.*” The following paragraphs are an excerpt from a “Devotions for Growing Christians” that I wrote. It is entitled “Investment in Wind.”

"In the figure of sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind, two natural laws are in view: the **law of the harvest** and the **law of multiplication**.

According to the law of the harvest, you reap what you sow. If you sow wheat, you reap wheat; if you sow weeds, you reap weeds; if you sow wind, you reap wind.

The "law of the harvest" operates in the spiritual and moral realms as well as the physical. The people of Israel had invested their time, their resources, and their energies into that which would bring **no eternal benefit**. The folly and futility of their self-centered, idolatrous way of life is succinctly captured in the figure of "sowing wind."

Are we sowing wind? We should guard against sowing too much time, energy and money on clothes, houses, recreation and entertainment - and any other areas of self-indulgence. Did you ever try to grasp a handful of wind? What a picture! In the end, we will reap nothing of eternal well being by sowing self-indulgent seeds!

No wonder the apostle John warned growing Christians to "*keep yourselves from idols!*" (1 John 5:21). Idols are not just the images of wood and stone that Israel turned to. Anything that steals our hearts and minds away from total commitment to the Lord is an idol. The irresistible idols of this world are just seeds of wind, and they yield nothing but a harvest of wind.

The "law of multiplication" means that you get back more than you put in. Sow a few wheat seeds and you reap a field of wheat - but sow the wind and you will reap a whirlwind. Reaping a whirlwind implies not just more wind - it pictures reaping a violent, devastating and destructive tornado!

Like the law of the harvest, the law of multiplication also holds true in the moral and spiritual realms. If we invest our lives in the empty nothingness of what this world has to offer, we will reap a harvest of nothing - and our lives will be destroyed as well. The lives of many Christians are disordered, chaotic and shattered because they have invested only in the wind of this world. The law of multiplication means that the destructive tornado will eventually come!"

The question, once again: Are you investing in wind?