

# Hosea 8:1-7

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*The LORD announces judgment on Israel because she has rejected Him and His covenantal laws. Israel will thus reap what she sows, and incur the consequences for their behavior, as spelled out in their covenant agreement with God.*

The Suzerain God opened this chapter with an abrupt summons to sound the alarm: *Put the trumpet to your lips!* (vs 1). The verb *put* is not in the Hebrew text but can be supplied to make sense of the sentence. The absence of an imperative verb demonstrates that the call was quite agitated and required immediate actions. The Hebrew word for *trumpet* in the phrase *Put the trumpet to your lips* is “shofar” and it is often used in the Old Testament as a signaling device made from a ram’s horn to rally the people to action (Judges 3:27; 6:34; Nehemiah 4:18–20). As in Hosea 5:8, the sounding of the *trumpet* here is a signal of an impending danger. As such, it served to set the Israelites in motion (Amos 3:6).

Having set the people in motion, God told them that *the enemy comes against the house of the LORD* (vs 1). The phrase *the house of the LORD* refers to the land of Israel, which the LORD gave to His covenant people. The Suzerain God would use an *enemy* nation (Assyria) as a tool to carry out His judgment on His covenant people. The *enemy* would invade Israel *like an eagle* that swiftly swoops down and catches its prey (Deuteronomy 28:49).

The reason for God’s judgment on the Israelites was *because they have transgressed His covenant and rebelled against His law* (vs 1). To *have transgressed* God’s covenant is to actively break its terms, to go beyond the norms and principles that God has set. Similarly, to rebel against God’s laws is to rise in opposition against His established precepts. While both types of disobedience are parallel, they reinforce each other. Together, they displayed Israel’s wicked behavior as covenant-breakers.

God established His covenant with Israel so that they would learn how to live in a self-governing manner that would lead to mutual benefit and collaboration with one another. The primary focus of God’s covenant law with Israel was summed up by Jesus as loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). The way to please God is to follow His commands, believing they are for our best. God’s commands are for our good (Deuteronomy 10:13). When we set aside selfishness and greed, and love others as we love ourselves, our communities thrive. Instead, Israel had sunk into following a pagan culture of exploitation, which has led to deception and violence (Hosea 4:2).

Israel’s obedience to God’s covenant laws would have caused God to elevate them “high above all the nations of the earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1). They would have enjoyed a special privilege to walk in fellowship with God and one another, and represent Him on earth as a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5). They had the opportunity to show other nations a better way—that self-governance and mutual cooperation leads to a superior society. But Israel missed the

opportunity. The people *rebelled against* God and *His law*. They decided to follow their own appetites.

Israel's rebellion against God took several forms, one of which was hypocritical worship. They cried out to Him, saying, *My God, we of Israel know You!* (vs. 2). But in actuality, they did not *know* God, because their words did not match their actions. Israel professed to *know* their God but it was only words. To *know* God is to follow His ways. The Apostle Paul stated that knowing Jesus was his top priority, and something for which he had endured the loss of all earthly goods:

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things.”  
(Philippians 3:8a)

Jesus prayed to His Father that His followers would know Him and the Father, because that leads to the greatest possible experience of life (eternal life) (John 17:3). To know God by faith is the ultimate opportunity of this life, to gain a righteousness on the basis of faith that God's ways are for our best (Philippians 3:8-11). Israel gave lip service to pursuing this goal, but they were apparently just treating God like one of their pagan idols. They would do their service and say the words in order to appease and manipulate God to do their bidding, but they did not believe that His ways were for their best. So they did not follow His covenant ways.

In choosing to follow after their own appetites, and seek what was best in their own eyes, rather than trusting that God's ways were for their best, *Israel has rejected the good* (vs 3). God gave His law to Israel because it was for their best, “for your good.” (Deuteronomy 10:13). God made the moral laws of the world just as He made the physical laws. So God knows cause-effect, because He designed it; He knows what works. And He set forth in His commands the things that will work, behaviors that will cause a society to flourish. That is, in summary, when each person decides of their own will that it is best to treat others as they desire to be treated (Leviticus 19:18). Genuine love must be chosen. When a society is filled with loving actions, it thrives.

But God's covenant people rejected the commands of God to love one another. They rejected caring for the poor, executing justice impartially, and walking in humility and service to one another (Amos 5:14, 15). Such qualities would have allowed Israel to continue to live in God's presence and enjoy His blessings (Amos 5:14). But Israel had done just the contrary. She had *rejected* everything that was truly *good*. She instead pursued something that appeared good, but actually led to death (1 John 2:15-17; Romans 6:23; Galatians 6:8).

Consequently, as a result of rejecting their covenant with God, the provisions for violating the covenant will be enforced (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). One of which is that *the enemy will pursue him* (vs 3). God would use an adversary as His instrument of judgment to *pursue* and defeat Israel (Deuteronomy 28:45, 49).

Having described in general terms how Israel *transgressed His covenant* (vv. 1–3), the LORD proceeded to give specific illustrations of such sins: *they have set up kings, but not by Me; They have appointed princes, but I did not know it* (vs 4). This verse seems to refer to the political turmoil that transpired after the death of King Jeroboam II of Israel in 753 BC. During that time,

Israel knew six kings, and four of them were assassinated (2 Kings 15:8–31). Rather than seek appointment of kings by God’s prophets, the *kings* and *princes* were being chosen through violence and intrigue. The northern kingdom of Israel rejected the authority of their Suzerain God. Therefore, the nation was headed for destruction.

It is noteworthy to say that Israel’s appointment of her kings and princes without consulting God was a clear violation of His commandment. In the book of Deuteronomy, for example, Moses said to the people: “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses” (Deuteronomy 17:14–15). But in Hosea’s days this commandment was completely ignored.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that the LORD always wanted to protect and preserve Israel because of His covenant relationship with her. Any king selected to rule should have relied on God for clear directions and wisdom. And as a result, the Israelite king would have been different from the kings of the other ancient Near Eastern nations, who multiplied horses and silver for themselves, at the expense of the people (Deuteronomy 17:14–17). Rather, the king would have learned to fear the LORD, and would have served the people. But this was not the case in Hosea’s days. It seems the kings not only failed to consult God, they were appointing themselves, with the assassins becoming the new kings (2 Kings 15:10,14).

Indeed, the Israelites were so rebellious against their covenant with God that *with their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves* (vs 4), thus violating the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8). Since *silver and gold* symbolize riches and wealth (Hosea 2:8), the LORD used them to show how the wealthy of Israel lived in abundance during the days of Hosea.

And it is because of their abundance or prosperity that they forgot the LORD their God. Thus, instead of thanking God for all the wealth and riches He had given them, the people used their *silver and gold* to fabricate idols: man-made objects that were often connected with fertility cults (Leviticus 18:21, 2 Kings 23:10). To make things worse, this wealth being multiplied was coming through the wealthy exploiting the poor (Amos 4:1).

But the disobedience and folly of the Israelites led to their own peril. They made those idols for themselves *that they might be cut off* (vs 4). It was clear in God’s covenant with Israel that worshipping idols and adopting the pagan culture of exploitation and pursuit of sensual pleasure at the expense of others was a clear violation of the covenant agreement (Deuteronomy 27:14–15).

The LORD now used wordplay to tell Israel that just as they had *rejected the good* (v. 3), and sought after idols: *He has rejected your calf, O Samaria* (vs 5). *Samaria* was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. But here it is likely used to refer to the northern kingdom as a whole, as is frequently the case, since there is no indication that a golden calf was established in the capital city of *Samaria* in those days.

If this understanding is correct, then the *calf* in view was likely one of the ones set up in Bethel and Dan by King Jeroboam I of Israel (1 Kings 12:29; Hosea 10:5). Jeroboam's rationale for setting up these calves in the north (Dan) and south (Bethel) of the northern kingdom was to prevent his people from making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship, lest they return their loyalty to the House of David (1 Kings 12:26-27). Therefore, Jeroboam set up two calves to worship, saying "Behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28).

Then, speaking personally against the inhabitants of the northern kingdom, the LORD declared, *My anger burns against them* (vs 5). Israel's idolatrous behavior caused God to become angry. He was displeased with His covenant people because they repeatedly ignored His laws, choosing sin, and their own destruction.

Their failures led God to boldly ask, *How long will they be incapable of innocence?* (vs 5). The word *innocence* can also be translated "cleanness" and refers to the quality of being morally upright or blameless. Israel does not even seem to have the capacity to walk in moral purity. They are currently *incapable* of walking in *innocence*. That God asks *How long* Israel will be *incapable* indicates that Israel's incapacity to do good is a willful choice.

*Innocence* was lacking in Israel in Hosea's days. Therefore, the question was asked to highlight the truth that Israel had been rebellious and guilty for a long time. It also highlighted the fact that God had long desired to see change in Israel. But she had no uprightness in her because she had *rejected good* (vs 3). She practiced evil continually.

Israel's guilt was demonstrated by her calf-idol: *For from Israel is even this! A craftsman made it, so it is not God* (vs 6).

Throughout the Old Testament, idols are regarded as nothing but man-made objects that have no value. In Deuteronomy, Moses told the people that these idols (gods) are "the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell" (Deuteronomy 4:28; Psalm 115:5). In Isaiah, God highlights the folly of humans chopping down a tree and using half as firewood with which to cook their meals and the other half to build an idol, saying "Deliver me, for you are my god" (Isaiah 44:17). This infers that humans know these idols are mere creations. But they suspend disbelief due to their desire to live in an illusion that they control supernatural power that will do their bidding.

Such a false illusion of control feeds a self-centric perspective that leads to exploitation of others. And this directly leads people away from loving their neighbors, and investing in their communities. Instead, they foster exploitation and violence.

Such idols would be destroyed by God at the appropriate time. He declared such destruction in this passage, *Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces* (vs 6). Jeremiah later echoes this sentiment when he states, "Every goldsmith is to put to shame by his idols. For his molten images are deceitful, and there is no breath in them" (Jeremiah 10:14).

Israel was choosing to live in deception, as though the idols were alive and had power. Interestingly, it is likely that Assyria broke down the idols in order to melt them down. God used Assyria as His instrument, even though God will later judge Assyria for its brutality (Nahum 1:1, 14).

The consequences of Israel's wicked behavior and deeds are here represented under the imagery of planting and harvesting: *For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind* (vs 7). The term *sow the wind* paints a picture of seeds being thrown from someone's hand, then blown away by the *wind* instead of falling onto the earth, and planted in the ground, where they can sprout and produce a crop. To *sow the wind* is to sow (plant) in a manner that is of no value, producing no productive benefit (Proverbs 11:29).

The term translated as *whirlwind* generally refers to high winds (Psalm 55:8) such as tornado-like whirlwinds (Jeremiah 23:19) or a destructive thunderstorm (Job 27:20; Ezekiel 13:11). It symbolizes that which is tumultuous or rapid. It speaks of increased destruction. Interpreted as such, this proverbial saying shows that Israel's choices have created natural consequences. They are choosing exploitation and violence (Hosea 4:2) and that is now escalating into a torrent of destruction.

Since Israel made no effort to seek God and seek good (for herself), she would fall under the destructive judgment of God (Isaiah 29:6). This principle is also illustrated in the book of Galatians, where Paul stated,

“Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”  
(Galatians 6:7–8)

A substantial portion of God's promised judgment for not following His covenant are the natural consequences of made choices. Israel has chosen exploitation and violence. It will now reap a torrent of exploitation and violence.

Continuing with the agricultural imagery, the LORD declared, *The standing grain has no heads* (vs 7). In this word picture, the seed that did make it into the ground only grew stalks, but there is no grain. No productive benefit. The seeds which Israel plants would produce a stalk that *yields no grain* (vs 7). Choosing behavior of exploitation and violence is like sowing to the wind, or planting seeds that yield no productive fruit. The societal fruit of exploitation and violence is destruction and decay.

Even if the seed did produce a crop with grain, it would be exploited by others. In a society of exploitation, productive labor gets extracted by others: *Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up* (vs 7).

Foreign nations (*strangers*) would invade Israel's land to swallow her grain. Since Israel turned to pagan idolatry, and the exploitative lifestyle that flows from it, God would turn them over to exploiters. This is an on-earth application of a principle from the Sermon on the Mount:

“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”

(Matthew 7:2)

This verse from Matthew says that we will all be judged by how we judge others. A corollary is that we will be treated by how we treat others. Israel has chosen a way of exploitation and violence (Hosea 4:2). So now she will be subjected to exploitation and violence at the hands of Assyria. All of Israel’s efforts would be futile because she turned away from the LORD, the one from whom all blessings flow.

### **Biblical Text**

***Put the trumpet to your lips!***

**Like an eagle *the enemy comes* against the house of the Lord,**

**Because they have transgressed My covenant**

**And rebelled against My law.**

<sup>2</sup> **They cry out to Me,**

**“My God, we of Israel know You!”**

<sup>3</sup> **Israel has rejected the good;**

**The enemy will pursue him.**

<sup>4</sup> **They have set up kings, but not by Me;**

**They have appointed princes, but I did not know *it*.**

**With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves,**

**That they might be cut off.**

<sup>5</sup> **He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, *saying*,**

**“My anger burns against them!”**

**How long will they be incapable of innocence?**

<sup>6</sup> **For from Israel is even this!**

**A craftsman made it, so it is not God;**

**Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces.**

<sup>7</sup> **For they sow the wind**

**And they reap the whirlwind.**

**The standing grain has no heads;**

**It yields no grain.**

**Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up.**