

# Hosea 8:8-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hos/hos-8/hosea-88-10/>

*The LORD states that Israel is swallowed up because she has intermingled with foreign nations. She is not fulfilling her role as a priestly nation, so has become like a worthless vessel, that is no longer useful for its intended purpose.*

The LORD chose Israel to be His treasured possession. His desire for her was that she would be a holy (set apart) nation, a special example of how to live life in the most constructive possible manner. God wanted the Israelites to live separate from the other nations, devoted to God's service. Israel's assigned role was to serve as "a kingdom of priests" to represent God before the pagan nations so that they, in turn, might learn of His ways, and observe the superiority of a self-governing "love your neighbor" culture over a pagan tyranny based on exploitation and coercion (Exodus 19:4–6).

However, Israel failed to serve this assigned role. Instead of living consistent with her covenant agreement, following God's ways, Israel adopted the exploitative practices of the surrounding pagan nations, deserting God (vv. 1–7). So, *Israel is swallowed up* in pagan depravity (vs 8): *They are now among the nations* (vs 8), meaning *Israel* is now just like the pagan neighbors. She worships idols (Hosea 4:12). She has adopted the pagan culture, and has filled her land with exploitation and violence (Hosea 4:2). Israel flits back and forth between trusting two untrustworthy kingdoms, Assyria and Egypt, instead of trusting God (Hosea 7:11). She lost her economic and political power (Hosea 7:8–12). In short, Israel lost her identity as a holy nation of priests, dedicated to demonstrate the immense benefit of a "love your neighbor" culture.

Israel's desertion of God led directly to her own devaluation. Because her citizens failed to hear God's warning, the nation Israel was gradually weakened by the Assyrian empire in Hosea's days (Hosea 7:8–12). As a result, Israel was *now among the nations like a vessel in which no one delights* (vs 8). Israel had become worthless in her assigned role, like a pot that is broken and is ready to be thrown away in contempt (Jeremiah 22:28; 48:38).

The people of God no longer possessed anything desirable (Proverbs 8:11). They were assigned to show the superiority of a "love your neighbor culture" according to the terms of their "marriage" covenant with God (Exodus 19:8). But they were not performing their assigned task. Therefore, they were *like a vessel* that has no practical use, perhaps like a pot with a hole in it. They were not performing their assigned job.

All of this happened to the Israelites because they *have gone up to Assyria* (vs 9)—they sought an alliance with Assyria rather than rely on God. So, the Suzerain (Ruler) God compared Israel to *a wild donkey all alone* (vs 9), an animal known for its desire to go its own way by itself or to be free from all restrictions (Job. 39:5–8). Israel acted like a *wild donkey* wandering by itself because, despite all the warnings, she refused to submit to God's authority and instead put her faith in Assyria.

Israel's decision to reject God's authority caused her to miss God's presence and blessings. As a result, *Ephraim has hired lovers*. The name *Ephraim*, which means "doubly fruitful" (Genesis 41:52), is used here to apply to the entire northern kingdom of Israel. *Ephraim* is the largest tribe, and is the territory that contained the capital city of Samaria, so is often used to indicate the entire nation.

Using *Ephraim* here shows the irony of the situation: the once "doubly fruitful" (*Ephraim*) nation is now unable to sustain herself. The nation Israel had thus become like a harlot. But in this case, it is like a harlot who paid a fee instead of getting paid. Israel paid Assyria for her services (Ezekiel 16:32-34). The Israelites needlessly sought help from the Assyrian empire when God was waiting for them to call upon Him (Hosea 7:7).

Consequently, the Suzerain God pronounced judgment on His people: *Even though they hire allies among the nations, now I will gather them up; and they will begin to diminish* (vs 10). The Israelites became so removed from the presence and protection of their Suzerain God that they had to hire foreign nations (like Assyria) to protect them. But it was a protection racket; they were paying mainly to be protected from Assyria, or Egypt (Hosea 7:11).

Perhaps here the idea of God moving to *gather them up*, or assemble them together, carries the idea of separating Israel from their *allies among the nations*, in preparation for their judgment. In the case of Israel's alliance with Assyria, this could have been precipitated by Israel rebelling against Assyria (ceasing to pay tribute) and instead paying tribute/protection money to Egypt. We are told that the last king of Israel/Samaria changed his allegiance from Assyria to Egypt, which precipitated the Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 17:4-6).

The judgment God would bring upon the Israelites would cause them to *begin to diminish because of the burden of the king of princes* (vs 10). The phrase "king of princes" might refer to the king of Assyria named Shalmaneser, who invaded, defeated, and exiled Israel (2 Kings 17:3). *The burden of the king of princes* could refer to the LORD making it clear that the Assyrian king, from whom Israel had sought help, then betrayed, would be used as a tool to carry out His judgment on His covenant people (2 Kings 17:4-6).

There is another possible application of the phrase *they will begin to diminish because of the burden of the king of princes* (vs 10). The word translated *burden* is often translated "oracle" or otherwise is used to refer to a prophetic declaration (Nahum 1:1, Habakkuk 1:1, Zechariah 9:1). This could be saying that God or Jesus as the *king of princes* (Revelation 19:16) has spoken that the people will *diminish*, therefore it will be so.

Israel had forsaken the Suzerain God—her true source of blessings and protection—and hired Assyria. Now, the LORD would use Assyria, the one in whom they had trusted, to bring destruction upon Israel. This prophecy was fulfilled in 722 BC, when "the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria" (2 Kings 17:6).

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>8</sup> Israel is swallowed up;  
They are now among the nations  
Like a vessel in which no one delights.  
<sup>9</sup> For they have gone up to Assyria,  
*Like* a wild donkey all alone;  
Ephraim has hired lovers.  
<sup>10</sup> Even though they hire *allies* among the nations,  
Now I will gather them up;  
And they will begin to diminish  
Because of the burden of the king of princes.**