

Lesson 29

As we saw last week, the problem with the people of Israel was that they did not know God. If anyone on earth should have known God, it was Israel – but they did not.

But did they **know** that they did **not know** God? No. They did not know that. Instead, they believed the opposite was true. They believed that they did know God. That is what we see in verse 2. And it is a very common attitude among those who do not know God.

They never open the Bible, they disobey God at every step, they encourage others to do the same – and yet they claim to know God. We meet such people in verse 2.

Hosea 8:2–3

2 To me they cry, "My God, we – Israel – know you." 3 Israel has spurned the good; the enemy shall pursue him.

What are verses 2 and 3 telling us about the people? We can turn to the New Testament for an answer to that question.

Titus 1:16 – They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

We can shout all day that we know God – as many people did then and as many people still do today – but whether we know God is not determined just

by what we say or by what we shout – it is also determined by what we do.

Matthew 7:21 – Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Not those who say – but those who do.

And if saying things is not enough, we can be certain that thinking things is also not enough. We cannot think our way into Heaven.

Not those who say – but those who do.

Here, the people were telling God, “we know you!” But they did not know God.

And how do we know that? Because they spurned the good.

No one who knows God will ever spurn the good. Yes, people who just know **about** God might spurn the good – but no one who knows God will ever do that.

And, of course, that wonderful knowledge of God is a great prophecy about everyone in the church that we find in Jeremiah 31 and that is quoted in Hebrews 8:11.

Jeremiah 31:34 – And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”

That knowledge of God is true of spiritual Israel, but it was not true of physical Israel at this time.

And when did the people utter this cry to God? Almost certainly it was during their false worship of Baal, which we know they had mixed with the worship of God.

They thought they had covered all the bases. They thought they were saying all the right things. But they had not, and they were not.

What we see here is a very religious people who were about as far away from God as it was possible for them to be! They were no better than the “very religious” Gentiles in Acts 17:22–23 who were worshipping the unknown god along with all their other gods!

Hosea 8:4

4 They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.

“They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.”

Our first question about this statement is how far back does it go?

We have two options. Either it applies just to the current batch of kings, who we know were largely just a bunch of cut-throat assassins. Or perhaps it goes all the way back to Israel’s

first king – Jeroboam I, who was the first king to reign over the north after the kingdom was divided.

As we have seen, the focus here is on those in the northern kingdom who were listening to Hosea and who were experiencing the curses brought on by their disobedience at the end of Israel's history. And so, because of that context, I think the kings and the princes in verse 4 are the rulers of Hosea's own day (or least some of them) that we have already discussed many times.

But another reason I think that view is correct is that it is not clear at all that the statement in verse 4 would apply to Israel's first king after the kingdom was divided, Jeroboam I.

Yes, Jeroboam was evil – as were all the kings of the north – but I don't think we can say that Jeroboam I was made king by the people but not through God.

In 1 Kings 11, the prophet Ahijah met Jeroboam on the road, and here is what the prophet told him:

1 Kings 11:30-38 – Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes ... 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you,

and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.
And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.'”

And, yes, (as we see on the Handout for Lesson 29) 1 Kings 12:20 does say that the people “made him king,” but in 1 Kings 14:7, God says, “I exalted you ... and made you leader over my people.”

And so I don't think we should list Jeroboam I among the kings in Hosea 8:4 that were made king by the people, but not through God.

For the same reason, I don't think we should include the dynasty of Baasha. Yes, Baasha and his son, Elah, were evil, but again in 1 Kings 16:1-2, God says that he exalted Bassha and made him leader over the people.

And I don't think we should include the house of Jehu either.

2 Kings 9:6 – So he [Jehu] arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel.”

2 Kings 10:30 – And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”

That promised third and fourth generation was King Jeroboam II and King Zechariah, and so I don't think we can include Jeroboam II and Zechariah among the kings of Hosea 8:4 even though they were kings during Hosea's own day.

If you look at the Handout for Lesson 29, the dynasties highlighted in green are the ones for which God says that he made them king, or made them leader, or had them anointed king. And the dynasties in red are the ones for which either we are told only that the people made them king or for which the Bible is silent about who made them king.

And while we could go back to Zimri, Tibni, and the house of Omri, I think the context here suggests we should look at the more recent kings – the ones about whom Hosea's listeners would be most familiar.

If we do that, then I think we should start with Shallum, who murdered Zechariah, and also include the evil kings that followed Shallum: Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. I think those five kings are the kings and the princes in verse 4 who were not made by God but who were instead made just by the people.

And how did that work out? How did things go after the people started picking their own rulers without any thought for what God wanted? Civil war. Assassinations. Invasion. Destruction. Scattering. Exile. Death.

In short, the train went off the rails very quickly once the people starting making plans apart from God. And isn't that always the case?

James 4:13-16 – Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”– yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

So the people were relying on themselves – **or were they?** Let's look at the second half of verse 4.

“With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.”

Were the people relying on their false gods instead of relying on themselves? No, they were not. Yes, they had false gods, but they themselves had made those false gods! And we can be sure that those false gods followed the bidding of their creators!

In fact, verse 4 itself tells us that fact. How does the verse start out? **“Their false gods** made kings”? No. **“They** made kings!”

Yes, the people had made false gods – but they had also made those kings. The people were the ones pulling the strings here. They were making the decisions. And – surprise! – their false gods always agreed with them!

There is a lesson there for us. What did Paul tell us about the word of God?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, **for reproof, for correction**, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Now here is my question – when was the last time the Bible reprovved me? When was the last time the Bible corrected me? And you can ask yourselves those same questions.

If the answer is never or not often – then perhaps I should wonder who is really in charge? Do I read the Bible just to validate how I am already living – or do I read the Bible to discover how God wants me to live? If the Bible never reprovves me or corrects me, then I think I have my answer.

It is very telling here in verse 4 that the people were creating gods – but the people were still very much in charge.

One more question: Who is speaking in verse 4?

“They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.”

Who said that? All commentaries agree that question is an easy question, but not all commentaries agree on the easy answer to that easy question.

For those of us who believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that Hosea, as a prophet of God, proclaimed the words of God – the easy

answer to the easy question of who is speaking in verse 4 is that God is speaking in verse 4. The pronouns “me” and “I” in verse 4 are pronouns that God is using to refer to himself.

For those commentaries that reject the inspiration of the Bible, the question is just as easy – but they have a different easy answer. They say that Hosea was just writing his own opinions, even when he sometimes made it look as if they were God’s opinions. So that when Hosea 8:4 criticizes the monarchy, they say that was just Hosea’s opinion about the monarchy and not anything that Hosea received from some supernatural source.

Here is an example from a commentary in that second category:

“This disclaimer does not indicate how far **Hosea’s disapproval** of the monarchy went. Did **he dislike** the kings of the north, for disloyalty to David and Jerusalem; or the kings of both kingdoms, including David; or only selected kings chosen by people, in contrast to the ones chosen by God; or simply the upstart kings of Israel’s decline such as Shallum and Menahem?”

I agree that verse 4 is giving us **someone’s** view of the monarchy – but it is **not** giving us Hosea’s view. Verse 4 is giving us God’s view of the monarchy. Yes, Hosea most likely agreed with God’s view, and yes, Hosea wrote it down – but it is God who is speaking in verse 4.

And we can expand that principle to the entire book. Whether or not Hosea is quoting God (as Hosea is doing here in verse 4), the words of Hosea are coming from God and not from Hosea. The

book of Hosea is giving us God's views, not Hosea's views. That is the easy answer to our easy question, at least for those of us who believe in the Bible's inspiration.

2 Peter 1:21 – For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Hosea 8:5–6

5 I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? 6 For it is from Israel; a craftsman made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

In verse 1, we saw a reference to the Exodus – God had protected the people like an eagle protects its nest – but now God was sending an eagle against them.

We also saw in verse 1 a reference to the curses that God told the people would come upon them if they disobeyed God and broke their covenant with God. And we know that the people who first heard those warnings had recently come out of the exodus.

- Later in verse 13 of this same chapter, we will see another reference to the exodus: “they shall return to Egypt.” God had rescued them from Egypt, but now God says they will return to Egypt.
- We will also see that promise in Hosea 9:6: “Egypt shall gather them; Memphis shall bury them.”

- In Hosea 11:1, we will see yet another reminder of the exodus – “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” And, of course, we know that verse also looked forward to the Messiah (Matthew 2:15).
- We will see the exodus again in Hosea 12:9 – “I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”
- And again in Hosea 13:4 – “But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”

So what can we say? What we can say is that we have another theme! The exodus out of Egypt is a major theme of at least the second half of the book of Hosea. And so, as a theme, we should be on the lookout for it.

Here in chapter 8, do we see that theme in verse 5? And the answer is yes, we do.

“I have spurned your calf, O Samaria.”

At the end of verse 4, we saw the people making golden idols for their own destruction. And at the beginning of verse 5, we find a calf. We are immediately reminded of a very shameful event that followed the exodus.

Exodus 32:1-4 – When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he

received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

The handout for Lesson 28 shows a golden calf that dates to a time just before the exodus. It seems that the people did not waste any time following the bad example of the surrounding nations. That handout also gives a timeline of the golden calf – from the first one they made at Mount Sinai in 1447 BC up the last ones that were destroyed by Assyria in 722 BC.

As we saw in verse 4 about their current golden idols, the people also made that first golden calf for their own destruction.

Exodus 32:35 – Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

Did they learn a lesson from that experience? No, it seems they did not. When we look at how the northern kingdom began, here is what we find:

1 Kings 12:26–29 – And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

If we fast-forward from the days of Moses and from the days of Jeroboam I to the days of King

Jehu (whose dynasty had recently ended with Zechariah as prophesied of Hosea 1:4), here is what we find:

2 Kings 10:27-29 – And they demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin – that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan.

So what does that tell us? What it tells us is that the people of the north had worshipped golden calves from the very beginning of their history. And what it tells us is that in the days of Jehu, almost 1000 years after Moses, the people were still worshipping golden calves!

And we also see that those golden calves had been set up in Bethel, a city about which Hosea has already had much to say – even to the point of calling it Bethaven, meaning House of Emptiness, rather than Bethel (meaning house of God).

And so, the reference to Samaria in verses 5-6 is most likely a reference to the people of the northern kingdom rather than the city of Samaria. Why? Because it seems that the golden calves were likely in Bethel and Dan rather than in the city of Samaria. But the people of Samaria likely still traveled to Bethel to worship those golden calves as they did in 1 Kings 12.

Now, the translation of verses 5-6 is interesting. When we read it in English it seems choppy.

I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel; a craftsman made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

And, in fact, apparently it also seems choppy in Hebrew. Here is how one commentary describes the original language:

The language is more like rhetoric than poetry, and the grammar is challenging. ... The topic is an idol called the "calf of Samaria," ... which God rejects in what one may reverently call almost apoplectic anger. The broken grammar and uneven lines portray God as vexed in the extreme over the perversity of [what Israel had done].

I certainly don't think that God was what we might today call "spitting mad," but I do think that God is likely portraying himself that way here to show us the depth of his anger at what the people were doing.

- After God led them out of Egypt, what did they do? They made golden calves and worshipped them.
- After King Solomon died and the kingdom was divided, what is the first thing the people of the north did? They made golden calves and worshipped them.
- After Jehu almost completely destroyed Baalism in the north, what did the people do? They kept the golden calves and worshipped them.
- And now, at the end of their history, what are the people doing? Worshipping golden calves.

I don't know – maybe God was spitting mad! That is how God portrays himself in verses 5–6.

And what does God tell them? He rejects their golden calf. His anger burns against them. They are unable to be innocent, and God asks if that will always be true. They themselves made that calf; it did not come from God. And it will be broken in pieces.

And how and when will it be broken in pieces? Hosea will answer that question when we get to chapter 10.

Hosea 10:5–6 – The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests – those who rejoiced over it and over its glory – for it has departed from them. The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king.

Not only could their golden calf not protect them, **but it could not even protect itself!** It would very soon be carried off to Assyria and broken in pieces.

Hosea 8:7

7 For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; it shall yield no flour; if it were to yield, strangers would devour it.

This is one of the most famous verses in the book of Hosea.

While it is tempting to say that verse 7 simply means that you reap what you sow, I don't think

that is what verse 7 is telling us at all. Instead, I think that perhaps what verse 7 is telling us is that sometimes you reap **a great deal more** than you sow! Sometimes you just sow the wind, but you reap the whirlwind!

But there is another way to read verse 7. After all, it is a bit difficult to understand what it means to sow and reap wind. Perhaps the wind and the whirlwind in verse 7 are not the objects of the verbs but are instead describing the conditions in which the sowing and the reaping occur.

If that is what is being said here, then we might translate the phrase this way: “For in wind they sow, and they shall reap in a storm.”

And the message in that case would be that things are about to get much worse. If you thought trying to sow seed during a windstorm was bad, just wait until you try to reap those crops during a hurricane!

Either of those views could be correct, but I favor the first view, which we might call the traditional view – that sometimes you reap a great deal more than you sow!

And as for it being unnatural to sow and reap the wind, that strange use of the wind may just be part of the illustration. After all, elsewhere we see someone who **inherits** wind.

Proverbs 11:29 – Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart.

So I think the better view is that verse 7 is telling us that the people were about to reap a whole lot more trouble than they had sown.

I suspect they thought their departures from God were minor matters, and perhaps that God would overlook those faults. But disobedience to God is never a minor matter, and such sins will always catch up with us.

Numbers 32:23 – But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, **and be sure your sin will find you out.**

The second half of verse 7 describes what is being reaped in that whirlwind.

As one would expect, the grain reaped in that whirlwind has no heads and so will yield no flour. The grain has been destroyed by that whirlwind and is no longer useful.

And even if some of that grain could be saved, it wouldn't matter because strangers would devour it. Even that small harvest gathered during a whirlwind would not go to the ones who gathered it; it would be stolen by others.

Here is our question about the end of verse 7 – are we talking about actual grain, or is something else in view here?

We could be talking about actual grain.

Remember that the people were depending on their false fertility god Baal to ensure a good harvest. And so perhaps God is reminding them here who is really behind their harvests – and

when God says there would be a bad harvest, that is what would happen. And when God says that strangers would eat their grain, that is what would happen. The people had placed their trust in a powerless false god, and that false god would not save them.

But we could also be talking about something else here with this grain. The useless headless grain could be a metaphor of the useless headless leaders who were leading the people to their destruction.

They thought their leaders would provide them peace and prosperity, but they would enjoy neither of those things. Instead of peace and prosperity, they would experience failure and theft. Their leaders were like headless stalks of grain.

Hosea 8:8

8 Israel is swallowed up; already they are among the nations as a useless vessel.

As we have already seen, Israel's view of itself did not match other's view of Israel. Israel saw itself as a major player in the national politics of its day. Israel talked a big game, but Israel had nothing with which to back up that big talk.

Israel first tried to deal with Assyria, but later Israel tried to deal with Egypt instead. And how did that work out for them? Assyria invaded while Egypt laughed.

The great powers of the day did not see Israel in the same way that Israel saw itself.

And, yes, Israel had once been a great power, and yes, Israel could have been a great power once again. But that was not going to happen apart from God.

When we see Israel strutting around here like it was still a great power, it reminds us of someone else in the Bible.

Judges 16:20-21 – And [Delilah] said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” **But he did not know that the LORD had left him.** And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

He did not know that the Lord had left him.

Likewise, Israel did not know that God had left them. Their power and their usefulness had come from God, but now that God no longer saw them as his people, Israel was left powerless and useless.

The surrounding nations did not see Israel as a great power. Instead, as verse 8 tells us, they saw Israel as a cup that had been drained of its contents and that was now ready to be discarded.

In fact, Israel had already been swallowed up by those nations. By this time, most of Israel had already been taken over by Assyria, and only

Ephraim remained. And Ephraim would soon be swallowed up as well.

Assyria and Egypt each had the same thing in mind when it came to Israel – drain from that cup all of its wealth and then discard it. Israel had paid Assyria for protection, but Assyria had no interest in providing that protection – and especially now that the cup had been drained and the wealth was gone. There was no longer anything left to protect.

Hosea 8:9a

9a For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey wandering alone;

Rather than going up to God, the people had gone up to Assyria. Rather than turning to God, Israel had turned to Assyria for help and for protection.

Israel wanted to ally itself with a great power, but rather than allying themselves with God, they allied themselves with Assyria.

And how had that worked out for them? Had they found protection? Had they been given help?

No. Instead they found themselves just like a wild donkey wandering alone. They were just like a lonely donkey that had been left to fend for itself with no one to help and no one around even to care what happened to it.