

Forgotten God

Hosea 8:1-9:7a

Today's technological world has a tendency to lessen our dependence on God. Technology works, until it doesn't. It has its limits and runs up against them, but in every age it enables a false sense of man's ability to solve his own problems. Imagine the first guy to forge a sword. He was king for a day. The plains Indians could not be defeated until the invention of the Colt 44 revolving chamber pistol and then the Gatlin gun. It was the atomic bomb that ended WWII. Antibiotics have greatly expanded the lifespan of mankind. Our hope in medical advancement often outpaces our hope in God.

We tend to take technology for granted and think little of its impact on our lives. When we are unconscious of the effect of any force, the results are always disaster. Consider how the printing press and books, birth control and abortion, radio and television, the internet and social media, the smart phone and wireless communication have altered the course of history and our lives personally.

Now, we are faced with AI, an artificial super intelligence that is smarter than any human or any number of humans and is getting smarter. AI companions, even romantic companions, are becoming commonplace. As these virtual relationships develop, people begin to lose grip on reality and the need for human interaction. The relationships become real. Marriages are now ending over virtual lovers. Need a therapist? AI can provide that.

It sounds crazy, but some are positing that demonic beings have given the technological know-how to humans to create AI as a pathway to destroy humanity.

The point I want to make is not that technology is inherently evil or that demons necessarily inhabit AI, but when we approach a super-intelligence to solve our problems, give us advice, meet our deepest personal and relational needs, be our friend, and give us answers to the issues of life—what do you call that?

Humans are prone to forget God and create substitutes for God. This is exactly what Israel did in Hosea's day.¹ And this was God's complaint against them (8:14a).

Why would Israel move from walking faithfully in covenant with God to

innovations in their religion and politics? Hosea has charged that the root of Israel's unfaithfulness was a lack of the knowledge of God (cf. 4:1,6; 5:4). This begs the question, *How could they not know God?*

Here, Hosea frames his text with Israel responding to God, *My God, we—Israel—know you* (8:2), and the LORD responding that what they will *know* is punishment (9:7a).

The reason they did not know God was *Israel had forgotten his Maker* (8:14a). This begs the question, *How could they forget God?* The LORD complained earlier they had *forgotten the law of God* (cf. 4:6c). This is not the forgetting of absent mindedness. It is more like the forgetting of Doc Holladay in the movie *Tombstone*, when he said to Johnny Tyler on the streets of Tombstone, *Oh, I apologize. I forget you were there. You may go now.* It is an arrogant, dismissive, forgetting, the forgetting of pushing something out of your mind as if it is unimportant. Israel had forgotten their Maker.ⁱⁱ

Hosea plays on the theme of Israel forgetting their *Maker*, by pointing their innovations that intensified overtime: Forgetting their Maker, they *made* kings (8:4), *set up* princes (8:4b), *made* idols (8:4c), then they *multiplied* altars (8:11a), and *multiplied* fortified cities (8:14b). Clearly, the NK had forgotten God and substituted the innovations of their day for God.

What happens when you forget God?

- 1. When people forget God, they think they know God but don't actually know him (8:1-3).**

In chapter 8 God is speaking. He calls on Israel once again to sound the alarm (8:1a; cf. 5:8). Israel seems to be unaware of their situation. They could not see *one like a vulture* circling overhead.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus charged the crowds in his day, *You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time* (Luke 12:56)?

In Hosea's day Israel had *transgressed the covenant* and *rebelled against the law* (8:1c,d). Through the covenant and the law, God had made himself known to Israel. In their rebellion, Israel had suppressed the knowledge of God.

They refused to see that they had made God their opponent. They sought to appease Assyria and Egypt as if that would solve their problems, unable to realize that ultimately they had made an enemy of God.

See the irony here: living is open violation of the covenant, the sure self-revelation of God to them, they cried, *My God, we—Israel—know you* (8:2). The verb tense (imperfect) implied this was their persistent claim. Hosea is fond of using both *Israel* and *Ephriam* to refer to the NK. Their use of the name *Israel* here seems to be asserting their favored status: *But we are, Israel, your people, we are the only ones who know you. It is impossible that you would cast us off.*

The LORD counters, *Israel has spurned the good.* To transgress the covenant is to spurn the good. The covenant came with blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (cf Lev 26; Deut 28). An enemy pursuing Israel and an eagle circling overhead were covenant curses (cf. Lev. 26:17,36; Deut 28:22,45,48).

Israel was in the grip of spiritual self-delusion.^{iv} Rather than believing the truth they believed what they wanted to be true. How sad at the judgement to so believe your own lies that you would assert, *Lord, Lord, I prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, did mighty works in your name, only to hear the LORD say, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness* (Mt. 7:22-23).

Part of Israel's self-delusion was their national identity. They were the children of the patriarchs. God was bound to them in their minds, regardless of whether they were bound to him.

The LORD charged Israel with covenant breaking (8:1-3). Now he will move deeper into the specifics of their covenant breaking. The details show that they had indeed forgotten God.

2. When people forget God, they create substitutes for God (8:4-14).

Because Israel *forgot their Maker, they made kings and idols* (8:4) and *multiplied altars* (8:11a) and *fortified cities* (8:14b). Basically, three substitutes for God are mentioned: kings and idols, alliances, and religion.^v These innovations were the result of their forgetting God in favor of self-reliance.

A. Their first substitute for God: kings and calves (8:4-6)

I am putting kings and golden calves together here for two reasons: they are together in the text, and the calves were a means of kings controlling the people.

1) Kings

First, they *made kings* (8:4a). The first king of the NK was Jeroboam I, not the Jeroboam of the house of Jehu mentioned in Hosea 1:1, but Jeroboam 200 years earlier. Solomon set in motion the division of the kingdom because of the idolatry he brought into the land (1Kgs 11:31-33). His son and successor, Rehoboam sealed the deal because of his folly (1Kgs 12:1-20). Because of that, the LORD himself made Jeroboam son of Nebat the first king of the NK. He promised Jeroboam that if he walked as David walked, he would build him as sure a house as he built for David (1Kgs 11:34-40).

Jeroboam son of Nebat thought he had to keep by his own cleverness what God had given him by grace. Fearful of the reunification of the kingdom if the people of the NK had to travel to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam multiplied shrines, appointed a priesthood and feast days, and set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan and said to the NK, *you have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt* (1Kgs 12:28).

Jeroboam could have been as great as David, but he sold his soul to gain what God would have given him. He used golden calves to control the NK.

As we move forward in history to Hosea's day, the NK no longer had a king of God's choice. The string of would-be kings who occupied the throne in the last 30 years of the NK was not anointed to lead but self-appointed strongmen enthroned by assassination and intrigue.

Hosea takes this issue up saying, *they made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I know it not* (8:4a). The egregious nature of seizing the throne by force can be seen by comparing it to the posture of David toward Saul. David knew that only God had the divine right to remove Saul and install him. This text indicts Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Hoshea. Seizing the throne was declaring independence from God, asserting the sovereignty of the state by denying the sovereignty of God.

2) The golden calf

They went even further in their creativity. They not only made kings, they made idols as well (8:4b). They took the good gifts God had given them (*silver and gold*) and made idols of them.^{vi}

The idol particularly in view here is the *golden calf*. The irony of the bull calf movement is its historical precedent was the calf Aaron made at Mt. Sinai. It was a monumental disaster then; did they expect a better outcome now?

The calf in Samaria (8:5a,6b), the capital of the NK, underlines the state using religion to control the people. Just like the calves Jeroboam son of Nebat set up 200 years earlier, the calf of Samaria, the state religion of the NK, was not of God (8:6). They invented bull calf religion themselves (8:6).

The tragedy was the people were all in, no longer able to distinguish between the truth and fiction.

When we forget God, the adoration-shaped void left in our lives will be filled by something or someone. We open ourselves to lies and manipulation. We simply cannot live without a god. Idols always lead to disappointment and cynicism.

They *spurned the good*, not realizing that God *spurned their calf* (8:5). The LORD asked, *How long will they be incapable of innocence?* Simply put, can't they do anything right?

God will break our idols to pieces (8:6b). When our idols fail, we experience disappointment and, perhaps, even anger. For example, if I idolize my mate instead of extending grace to him or her, I will live in a state of perpetual unhappiness and discontent—all the while blaming my mate for not meeting my needs. Have we stopped to consider that, perhaps, my unhappiness is God's messenger to point out my idolatry? You can apply this in every area of life. Our ability to make idols—of home, kids, jobs, cars, etc.—is astounding and the source of our discontent.

B. Their second substitute for God: Foreign alliances (8:7-10)

A second substitute for God was foreign alliances. When we forget God, we will look for saviors elsewhere. We assume things that are not true. Israel assumed foreign alliances would bring security. This proverb would be true of them: *they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind* (8:7).

We are familiar with sowing and reaping. We reap more than we sow. You can control your actions, but you cannot control the consequences. Israel *sowed wind* when they sought an alliance with Assyria. They would reap the whirlwind by being *swallowed up* by the nations (8:8a).

In seeking an alliance, they became a *useless vessel* (8:8b). God had chosen them not because they were great and mighty or more righteous than any other nation (cf. Deut 7:6-11). Rather, he chose them to be a kingdom of priests among the nations (Ex. 19:5-6). They abandoned that role and, thus, became useless, unfit for the purpose for which God had chosen them. Not like sheep, but like a *wild donkey wandering alone*, they approached Assyria (8:9a).^{vii}

They were like a prostitute reduced to paying her clients (8:9b-10). Their hired allies could not save them from God and would be nothing but a burden to them (8:10).

C. Their third substitute for God: religion (8:11-4)

Verses 11-14 are bookended by the term *multiplied* (8:11,14). They doubled down on their religion, not for the better but for the worse. Their religion served to multiply their sins, not take them away (8:11a,b). We know the history of the altars they multiplied. They were idolatrous from the beginning (cf 1Kgs 12:31).

The LORD complained that if he multiplied his laws exponentially, moving from 10 words to 10 thousands of words, they would still disregard them (8:12). The law word had no impact on them, no shaping influence in their lives.

Because the LORD rejected their offerings, their gatherings had become little more than an opportunity to eat, rather than be forgiven of their sins (8:13a). This poetic mention of *Egypt* means that the anti-exodus was set in motion (8:13b). The reversal of covenant blessing and the un-creation of Israel were underway.

They had forgotten their Maker, but he remembered their sins. This language (8:13b) is the reversal of the covenant renewal language in Exodus 34 when the LORD passed before Moses and proclaimed, *The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and sin...* (Ex.34:6-7).

God was their *Maker* (8:14a). He called them into being as a nation in the covenant at Mt. Sinai.

Substituting religious motions for God, Israel forgot his Maker and was reduced to multiplying palaces and fortified cities for protection.

Rather than trust God, they trusted in their substitutes for God. The LORD would destroy their idols.

3. When people forget God, they will know the judgment of God (9:1-7a)

There is a shift in speaker from the LORD in chapter 8 (cf. 8:1b,c, 2, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13,14) to the prophet announcing the resulting judgment of forgetting God in 9:1-7a.

When people forget God, they will experience the judgment of God. This is the last point of the sermon, so we are ending on a minor key, but it is a necessary key. It's there to awaken us to a sure and certain future. You cannot push God aside forever.

Hosea begins by telling the people to stop rejoicing: *Rejoice not, O Israel* (9:1a)! In other words, at their corporate gathering, Hoses interrupts and says, *Stop singing! You have nothing to sing about.* He adds, *Exult not like the peoples* (9:1b; cf. Deut 12:4). He means, *There is no qualitative difference between your gatherings and the assembly of pagans.*

Their singing was not true of their lives. They were living one way and singing another. Apparently, they were insensible to it. They were stepping out on God, with the Baals (9:1c,d), who were sure to disappoint them (9:2).

They were unfit to live in the *land* (9:3a). The law had warned them: *You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out* (Lev 20:22; cf 18:28).

Egypt and Assyria are used here as synonyms for exile (9:3b). Egypt reminds us of their past captivity and Assyria of their future captivity. The anti-exodus was upon them, the reversal of salvation history.

Sin promises freedom; it produces bondage. My Dad used to tell me, *Son, if you listen to the music, you have to pay the fiddler.*

In essence the prophet is saying to Israel, *You don't want to be the distinctive people of God, fine. Go eat the unclean food of Assyria.*

The time for show, for fakery, for meaningless religion is over (9:4). Your gatherings are like eating at a funeral—there's not a lot to be glad about. It is the bread of uncleanness—death.

To get them to the point of clarity, the prophet asked, *What will you do on the day of the feast of the LORD?* Memphis is the city of burial sites. It's a graveyard. Hosea is saying, *You are going to the realm of death.* Everything you have lived for and devoted your life to, all that you abandoned God for, you will leave behind.

Hosea has talked much about *knowing*: there was no knowledge of God in the land (4:1), the people were destroyed for lack of knowledge (4:6), they did not know the LORD (5:4). For all they did not know, they would *know* punishment and retribution (9:7a). Israel had forgotten God.

When people forget God, they think they know him, but they don't; they created substitute for God; they face the judgment of God. I'm persuaded of better things from you: you know the LORD, trust the LORD, and love the LORD's appearing.

ⁱ Hosea is still presenting the LORD's case under the weight of his opening metaphor of Israel as YHWH's unfaithful wife (cf. Chs 1-3). Hosea writes, *Ephriam has hired lovers* (8:9c); *Israel has played the whore and loved a prostitute's wages* (9:1c,d). This description of Israel's unfaithfulness refers not merely to sexual immorality but to that and their religious and political unfaithfulness.

ⁱⁱ That assertion is the chiastic center of this text. Dorsey identified this section as a chiasm, as he does every section of the book and the book as a whole. See Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the OT*, 269.

8:1-3 announcement of coming judgement
 8:4-6 condemnation for making kings and idols of silver
 8:7-13 condemnation for alliances with other nations
 8:14 Israel has forgotten YHWH
 9:1-4 condemnation for alliances with other nations
 9:5-6 punishment for cultic sins; loss of silver treasures
9:7ab announcement of coming judgment

ⁱⁱⁱ The Hebrew word is the same for eagle and vulture (neser). The ESV translators chose vulture. The difference is an eagle is a bird of prey and a vulture is a carrion eater. The question is Israel picture here as dead or about to be dead?

^{iv} John MacKay, *Hosea*, in the Mentor Commentary series, 225.

^v The previous section of text (6:11b-7:16) dealt with these same issues.

^{vi} They had the same mind set as the guy who cut down a tree, built a fire with it, and then carved an idol out of it and worshiped it (Isa 44:9-20).

^{vii} Prophetic poetic language is full of consonance, creating wordplays and puns. In 8:9, there is a word play on Ephraim and donkey. They share the same consonant sounds.