

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 7, Hosea 8

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You can spend a long time reflecting on that hymn. It is so profound in terms of its understanding of what the holy life is, this love, and needs. So, hold that thing home with you and study it in your devotions.

We're looking at chapter 8 this evening, and in each of the last three sessions we've talked about the chaotic political situation in Israel in the time that Hosea is writing. As I said, probably from about 755, toward the end of Jeroboam II's reign, and then down into the 720s or the 17s, when Hezekiah begins to reign. Those are the two kings that he sort of uses as bookends for his writing.

So that we need to keep that chaos in mind as we look at this chapter. In chapters 8 down through 9-9, he has a list of the sins of the nation. And we're going to look at those that are in chapter 8 tonight, and see how he's categorizing their condition.

What is it that is responsible for what's lying ahead for them? He begins in verse 1, Put the trumpet to your lips, an eagle is over the house of the Lord. Eagles were not nice birds in the Bible. Often times, they're synonymous with vultures.

They're a bird that you don't want to leave your child outside or who might not have it. An eagle is over the house of the Lord. Because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law, Israel cries out to me, O God, we know you.

But Israel has rejected what is good. An enemy will pursue it. So, if we look at 1-3 as an introduction to this list of sins, why is disaster facing them? They have broken the covenant.

I want to spend some time this evening talking about the covenant. I hope to reinforce some things you have already learned. But what are we talking about? They have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law.

They say, we know you, but we've rejected what is good. What was the covenant supposed to do? Three things. Number one is what? Number one is, and it wouldn't hurt my feelings at all if you wrote this down.

Number one is revealing the character of God. They say, we know you. He says, no you don't.

No, you don't. Your behavior shows you don't know me at all because the second purpose of the covenant is to reveal the character He wants for us.

You must leave. What? Home. Why? Because I am home.

Here's my character, and I want you to share it. Now again, we have overlaid homely with all of this stuff. I love to say when talking to teenagers that holiness is a little old lady with a flat back, black hat, long sleeves, long hems, a sweet smile, and a wicked umbrella.

Who would be caught dead being that? That's not what we're talking about. It revealed the character of God. It revealed the character that He wants for us.

Third, it revealed that we have a terrible problem. Again, I feel bad for repeating myself all the time, but sooner or later, I hope you'll get it. They weren't insincere at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Moses recited the law, and he said, are you going to do this? And they said, why sure. Why wouldn't we? There's nothing bizarre here. You've got to jump 15 feet straight up and stay there for five minutes.

No. There is nothing destructive here. You've got to eat dirt three times a day.

There's nothing brutal here. You've got to eat your kids. Sometimes, yes, well, but anyway.

No, no, it's all. This is the way you treat your animals. This is the way you treat your servants. This is the way you treat one another.

Don't worship any other gods than me. They didn't have their fingers crossed. They didn't have their toes crossed.

They were not saying, well, yeah, we say we're going to do it, but we're not. No. And yet, in five weeks, they're dancing around a golden idol, thanking it for having delivered them from Egypt.

And we say, my students have told me over the years that I have a habit. What are they doing? I don't know what's going on.

And that's just the beginning. The whole rest of the Old Testament, right up here to Hosea and on through, is one of the things that destroyed communism was Karl Marx, a good Jew's failure to believe in original sin. He thought the problem was social inequality.

If we forcibly make everybody poor, then everybody will be happy. No. God, something is wrong with us.

Something's wrong with our hearts. Something's wrong with our spirits. So, what's going on here? Now, I'm going to ask you to repeat after me.

Repeat after me. The covenant is not. The covenant is not.

The way to God. The way to God. But.

But. The walk with God. The walk with God.

Let's say it again. The covenant is not. The covenant is not.

The way to God. It is the walk with God. There's a lot wrong with a lot of Protestant theology right at that point.

Oh, for Jews, the way to God was walking. But for Christians, the way to God is grace. And I say it reverently, hogwash.

It is not true. Good people, as they say. Some of my best friends are Republicans. Some of my best friends are dispensationalists.

And that's dispensational theology, is that God worked in these isolated ways in different periods in history. Well, it is not true. Notice how the covenant begins.

Exodus chapter 20, verse 1. I am Yahweh, your God, who beat the tar out of you. That's what my Bible says. I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you up out of the land of slavery.

What's all the rest of this about? It's about walking with your Savior. They were not saved from Egypt by keeping the covenant. The covenant, as far as they knew, didn't exist while they were slaves in Egypt.

God delivered them from Egypt for love. He delivered them for nothing. They were good for nothing.

And he delivered them. So, what we have then is a tremendous innovation in the ancient world. In the ancient world, there were law codes.

We know four or five that predated Moses. The law codes supposedly came from God. I don't want a big G there.

But after saying that's where he got it, it is about a king. And the king says, in my kingdom, this is the way you're going to behave. And if you don't, you're going to regret it.

It's coercion. There were covenants. Covenants were between a king and a subject people.

And these people were subjects because he had brought his army there and beat the tar out of them. And he says, now, if you will serve me, I will protect you from your enemies. I will take care of you.

But here's what you have to do. These covenants typically have a preamble that tells who it is that is offering this covenant. Namely, the king.

A historical prologue that tells something about what has happened in time and space: not in Never Never Land. Not in the world of myth.

But something has happened in time and space that makes this thing possible. Then come the stipulations. If you want to be in a covenant with me, here's the way you need to behave.

Then you typically have witnesses who are a whole collection of gods. He is god and you're god and everybody else is god. Then you may have a covenant meal.

And then you have the sealing. Not that. And the sealing is composed of blessings and curses.

If you keep this agreement with me, everything's going to go well with you. If you don't keep this covenant with me, you're going to be in big trouble. So, there are covenants and law codes.

What does the Hebrew Bible do? It puts the law code in a covenant setting. Why do we do these things? Because of who he is and what he has done. All of a sudden, keeping these laws, like not breaking into your neighbor's house, all of a sudden, they become religious things.

Oh, my goodness. I do these things as an expression of my relationship to him. It changes everything.

And that's what God did. It's not the king, and it's God. He did not enslave them.

He delivered them from slavery. That's who he is. That's what we have in the preamble.

We also have the historical prologue there. So again, it changes everything. Here, well, I'll do this or that king will show up again and bring me.

No, I'll do this because he delivered me because of grace.

As I said, the stipulations are many of the ones found in law codes. God's very economical. If something is useful from someplace else, he'll use it.

I've told you before that one of my favorite laws is one that is repeated in every law code we've found. The law of the roaring ox. You have an ox that's mean, and you don't pan him up, and he kills your neighbor, you're a murderer.

On the other hand, if your ox was the pertinent bull who likes to hop around with butterflies, then you don't pen him up. And one day, maybe he gets a bumblebee instead of a butterfly, and he kills your neighbors. You're innocent.

Well, I like that law because I don't have any oxen. But there's a principle there that knowledge is responsibility. You knew and didn't take appropriate action.

You didn't know and didn't take action. All the difference in the world. Well, smart people thought about that, and God said, good, let's use it.

But we're going to use it in a completely different context. You better pen your ox up, because if you don't, I'm going to kill you. I, the king, am going to kill you.

So, we look at, then, the Ten Commandments. Two tablets. One that I saw this evening. Moses was the first digital technician. He used a tablet to download from the cloud. Four things on the first tablet, and they all have to do with God.

Okay, yeah, yeah, right. This is a covenant between us and Yahweh. Okay.

No other gods. Again, I'm a good man, I've said this to you before. God is teaching monotheism.

There are only three monotheistic religions in the world, and all three of them come from this one single source. Don't believe that one God is just sort of the ordinary evolution of religion. It is not.

One day, ABL goes to Zeke and says, Zeke, Zeke, I'll bet there aren't any other gods. Zeke says, oy vey. What? He's teaching transcendence.

God is not this world, and this world is not God. Carl Sagan didn't believe that. He knows better now.

He thought this world is all there is, honey. There ain't no more. This is it.

Do you want to talk about God? This is God. And God says, you want to walk with me? Do you want to be in a covenant with me? Yeah, we saw what happened to the Egyptians. Yeah, we want to be in a covenant with you.

You can't make anybody. Now, I think before we're too hard on the Hebrew people, both of those things are just totally, totally off the radar. Well, look at the world.

Of course, there are many gods. And have you ever seen anything that's not the cosmos? No. So, but there it is.

We've talked a lot about God's name. His nature. So, what is it to make God's name empty? Yeah, it may be doing something with His label, like trying to use it for magical purposes.

It may be to use it in a casual oath that you don't ever need to keep. By God, I will. But there are quite a number of ways to profane God's name.

You don't care about my reputation. You don't care about what the world sees. And you see our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

The Lord's Prayer is the Ten Commandments. All your time is His, and you show it by what you do with one's sacrifice.

The Sabbath. A gift from God. And everybody has to go back to work on Monday to recover from Sunday.

But that's it. That's it. Do you want to be in a covenant with God? There it is.

But then, look what comes next. In the second tablet. Don't you dare think you are self-made.

Why are those people who failed you so desperately worthy of honor? Because they're your originators, that's why. You didn't make yourself. You're a gift.

Remember that. And I think, ultimately, he's pointing to who we are as spirits. You're a gift.

A gift from God to your parents. And then cherish their life. Cherish their sexuality.

Cherish their stuff. Cherish their reputation. Now, you see, often, and I'm certainly not going to say this shouldn't happen.

But all too often, it's about me. That's exactly what Jesus is getting at in the Sermon on the Mount. I don't murder.

I have never committed adultery. I don't steal, even in Walmart. I don't tell lies.

But that's not really the point. The point is, can my neighbor trust me with his life? Or will I dismiss him as a stupid fool and kill him? Whoa! Will I mentally undress every woman I meet? Will I... Barber stuff for my neighbor never changes. Will I master the art of telling the truth about you that really makes you look bad? And then, of course, the last one.

And as many people have said, to break the last one is to break the first one. If I just had as big a house as you have, I'd be happy. If I just had that Dodge Dually crew cab.

I'd be happy. God says, don't you believe it? Happiness is not found in a multitude of possessions. We don't believe that.

We don't believe that. Our houses are full to the brim with junk. And I look, I look at our house and think, our poor children.

And then I think, yes, Lord, take me now. Don't let them mess with it.

Bill Pierce told a wonderful story in the sermon that he preached at the Ole Miss Preaching Conference. His father was dying. They didn't know how quickly. In fact, it was going to be within three weeks.

And he said to his children, come, come and get rid of this stuff. His wife, who was a schizophrenic, Bill's mother, was a hoarder. The house was full to the brim with stuff.

Bill hired a dumpster. And everything that he or his father would carry out of the house, their mother in her nightgown, would cling to it and scream, no, no, no. And he had to put her in the bedroom.

His father was a very, very confident amateur golfer. And Bill said, shot a par, I'm not sure what that means, but it's good—had a lot of trophies.

Bill said to his father, we won't be doing it. And he said, well, do you want them? Bill said, well, I'd like them, but they have your name on them. Well, throw them out.

He said as I hurled those trophies over the wall of the dumpster. I heard them crashing on the bottom. I thought of my dad's favorite thing, the old rubbing cloth.

I lay my trophies down. No, if I just had what you have, I'd be happy. Now, what I'm trying to impress on you here is, this is kind of bizarre.

This is a religious covenant. This is a covenant between me and Almighty God. Where's the stuff about prayer? Where's the stuff about timing? Where's the stuff about going to church? You understand I'm overstating my case here.

There are other places, but it's here. Do you want to be in a covenant with me? Four things about me and you. And the other six are all about other people.

Why? Oh, I've erased it. What was the first point? Now, what does this tell us about the character of God? Selfless? Wants you faithful? He loves us. He is a God who cares about people.

You, me. He cares. He doesn't want you taking my stuff.

He cares about my stuff, can you believe that? He doesn't want you murdering me with your words. He doesn't want me breaking those promises that I made as a 22-year-old child.

Gee, I thought I was so mature. Then I looked at the pictures and thought, what in the world were our parents doing letting children get married? I've spent all of our time, quite all of it, on three verses. How can God say they don't know you? They've broken every one of their covenant promises.

If you knew me, you wouldn't live like that. So, in verse 4, what's their first sin? They set up kings without consent. Give that woman a gold star.

Because they would not serve the king, they had to make kings of their own. Who would take care of them?

Does anybody remember how many assassinations in those 30 years? Four. Five kings, four of them died by assassination. You can write that down, it would be alright.

Four of them died by assassination. Well, that guy said he'd take care of us. Fat chance, kill him.

We'll put in Bill here, and he'll do it. What in the world is the matter with Bill? He's the worst wimp I ever saw. Kill him.

Right through the Bible, the issue is who supplies my needs. That's the beautiful thing that we often don't recognize, and we love it, but the beautiful thing about Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, I will not be in need.

Now, it's very easy for us to say the Lord is my shepherd, and I will have everything I want. That's not what he said. Yes, so we build a political world to take care of ourselves, and we don't involve God in it for a second.

Now, we've talked about this a little before, and I have to be careful to avoid politics here, but we've got a couple of pretty poor choices facing us. God, what do you want to do? Spend more time in prayer and less time in political rallies. I'm just saying.

Amen. OK. What's the second sin beginning in the second part of verse four? I don't, I don't.

And again, forgive me. I ran on this every week, but I'm going to run again. What in the world are we doing? Giving a sexy young singer who didn't have that great a voice. Billions.

Ishtar. Inanna. Ana.

Oh, we don't worship her. Oh, really? Put your money where your mouth is. We have.

And what will history say about a people who gives a guy with a strong right arm? Twenty-three million dollars. For six months worth. It's idolatry, folks.

How much time do we give the one-eyed God in our family room? To sixty-four. How much money do we pay for that thing? All right. No, I'm not.

I was serious. We're not going to prostitute ourselves to sports figures. We're not going to prostitute ourselves to singers.

We're not going to prostitute ourselves to entertainers. Again. Well, you're stuck with me tonight.

I worry about the number of our college kids whose life purpose is entertainment. That's what's the feeling you get here in for a through six? But what's the tone? Anger. Anger.

Yes. Anger. I think there's a thunderous reaction. A thunderous reaction. Contempt.

Throw out your Catholic. How long will they be incapable of purity? My land. Does God say that over us? How long will they be incapable of pure hearts? They're given solely to me.

And he's given us entertainment. I'm not talking about all of us becoming monks and nuns. And I'm talking about the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us able to be the rulers of our lives.

This calf, a metal worker, made it, not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria. And, of course, that's exactly what the Assyrians did when they came.

We don't have any record of it, but we know what they did elsewhere. They broke up the idols, melted down the gold and silver, and carried it off, which is, of course, what Sennacherib says to Hezekiah.

Hezekiah, do you think your God can deliver you from me? And again, it's just so fascinating to me, there in Isaiah. It's not a conflict between the God Asshur and the God Yahweh. It's a conflict between Sennacherib and Yahweh.

He understands. He understands. Don't you know what I did to the God of Samaria? And do you think your Yahweh can deliver to you? Well, for one thing, Sennacherib, if you do catch this, you're really, really going to be upset.

Because we don't have a calf, oh, we've got the box. Lovely box.

The box. It will be broken into pieces. And again, again, America, America.

What's going to be broken in pieces of ours? Now, I can't tell you, you can live in this big house, but not that big a house. I can't say to you that you can drive a Chevy, but you can't drive a Buick. Or a Camry, but not an Avalon.

I can't say that to you. But I simply want to say to you, oh, oh, will we be people of the covenant? Will we be people whose lives are shaped by the God who is not in this world? Who cares about people? Well, let's rush on here. The third sin, the first one, is, and what I've said is, they broke the covenant is the overarching thing.

All these other things follow because they broke the covenant. Number one, they set up kings without consent. Number two, they made calf idols of me.

Of me. A calf at Samaria was supposed to be Yahweh. And one of the commentators that I read, I think, said it very correctly.

And for the common people, they didn't make any difference between Baal and Yahweh. It's all the same. Okay, what's the third sin, starting there in verse seven? I think you see it, especially in eight and nine.

They trusted other nations. They trusted other nations. They trusted in the kings that they made.

They trusted in idols that they made. And they trusted in other nations. Israel is swallowed up.

Now, she is among the nations like something no one was. They have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey, put it in a new living home, swallowed virtually in heat. Ephraim has sold herself to love.

Later on, he's going to say, what a strange kind of prostitute. She pays her lovers rather than them paying her. But look what the next line says in verse 10.

I will gather them together. Again, I want to impress on you the amazing chutzpah of people in a little nation about the size of Jesmon County. What? Yes.

Judah is. Judah said, our God rules the world. Assyria is operating under our God.

By this time, Samaria was about the size of Jesmon County. Wow. Talk about faith.

That's faith. Everything is against you. You can't believe that.

You can't believe that your Yahweh rules the world. Look at Assyria. Look at Egypt.

Look at Moab. I think of our situation as Christianity rapidly declined in America. It was easy to believe that Yahweh was the only true God when everybody went to church.

Are we still going to believe as in Britain today when 3% of the British public is in church on Sunday morning? What does your faith look like? What does mine look like? Who's there that doesn't have any trouble? All right. So, make kings without my consent. They make calf idols of me.

They make deals with the nations. 11, 12, and 13. What's the sin here? The war.

The war. Rituals. They're still doing all the rituals to Yahweh.

They've got altars all over the place for trying to magically manipulate Him to forgive their sins. So, what is He called? What kind of altars? Sinful altars. Sinful altars.

Let me ask you. I like the way the NIV says altars for sinning. Are there any churches for sinning? What does a church for sinning look like? Like a show of religion.

A place to make a show of religion. Marrying gay people. Marrying gay people? What's your own agenda? Your own agenda? A church for sinning.

A culturally oriented church. And that is such a fine line.

We need to be able to address the culture and yet not be part of it. There aren't easy answers to that one, but there is.

We've got to keep trying. I'd like to suggest another one. I'm not talking about any particular denomination or... Where we go to get forgiven so we can go out on Monday morning and sin.

Where we go to feel really good about our religion. Really happy and excited. What a wonderful God.

And it doesn't change us in one degree. God have mercy on us. Would any church that's not seeking Him qualify? Yes, I think so.

But I'm particularly interested here that we can tell ourselves that we are qualified. We can tell ourselves we are worshipping God when really we're worshipping ourselves worshipping God. And it's not changing our lives.

Very weak. Making dreams without my consent and making idols.

Idols of me. Depending on foreign nations. Depending on a form of religion.

Let me say it's a form of true religion. I want to point out something else in 11, 12, and 13. No, actually, it was way back, way farther back.

Okay, okay. Oh, I'm going to let go. Our time is fleeting away.

I think it's fascinating that Hosea not only sees them going to Assyria in exile. If you look at the end of verse 13, they're going back to Egypt. Now, in fact, that literally happened.

They did, and many of them fled to Egypt. Israelites now, and 150 years later, Judeans, taking Jeremiah with them. I always think, poor Jeremiah.

He doesn't even get to die in the promised land. He gets to die in Egypt, which he mocked for years. Dear God.

Talk about not being fair. Verse 14. What have they done here? Woo! They forgot their maker and did what? Built palaces and fortified many palaces.

Yeah, yeah. Keep drinking the American, or tomorrow we die. We take the Wall Street Journal; it's probably in the newspaper; I can barely read it anymore.

They have a section that is on Saturday called Mansion. The last one I saw was \$400 million. \$85 million.

For two people. Eat, drink, and be merry. We got the money, and we might as well blow it.

Unfortunately. Should we spend money on defense? Yes. Again, I say, as I've said before, America is not injured.

I'm not the promised people. The government has a duty to protect its people. But then again, how much is too much? When Queen Victoria had her first diamond jubilee in 75 years, the Times of London gave Frederick Kipling, the Poet Laureate of the country, a job.

He was to write a poem. He did. The title is Requiem.

And in it, he talks about and I can't quote it all, I can quote pieces of it, far calmed on dune and headland sinks the fire. Wait, no, no, no, we're at the peak of Britain's imperial glory. And guarding calls not thee to guard.

Lord God of hosts, forgive us, lest we forget, lest we forget. Eight stanzas, every one of them ends with that refrain. You can guess the Times of London was not terribly happy.

Yes, we have to defend ourselves and how much is too much. And how much without God is worth anything. They have forgotten the colors.

They do not know me. I would pray for you and for myself that I would give a great deal to know God. To reflect his life in my life.

Thus, they have a solid foundation upon which to make all of these other judgments. Conscience is a very dangerous thing because consciences can be shaped. I've never, ever forgotten the story of a 12-year-old boy in New York who was consumed with guilt because he could not bring himself to shoot an old lady as the gang was commanding.

His conscience was bothering him. So, this is what shapes our conscience. It's not enough to be able to live in a world that says, well, you shouldn't do that, or You shouldn't do this.

Who says? Or you shouldn't do this. Who says? Would you say it with me one more time before I let you go? The covenant is not the way to God. The covenant is the walk with God.

One more time. The covenant is not the way to God. It is the walk with God.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the clarity with which you led Hosea to speak. He named each of the conditions that was destroying him and yet, at the same time, declared your unchanging love for them. Oh God, praise you.

Praise you that you are good and true and upright and right and love. Help us, Lord. Help us to be people who know you and demonstrate it by the way we walk. In your name, Amen.