

# “THE SELFISH VINE BECOMES A SMALL STICK ON THE WATER”

Hosea 10:1-8

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## INTRODUCTION

Once again the Lord through His prophet Hosea takes up the figure of the vine to represent Israel (cf. 9:10). In John 15 Jesus compares himself to a vine and the believers are the branches. When God saved Israel and brought them into the land He compared His people to a vineyard (Isaiah 5). The Lord “worked hard” to prepare the soil and to give the vine every chance to be productive for Him, but instead it produced only worthless grapes (Is. 5:2).

In this passage Hosea changes the figure somewhat; the vine is prolific (v. 1). But the grapes were intended only for Israel’s own selfish enjoyment—not for her Master’s enjoyment. More grapes, more grapes, more grapes—but every benefit went to Israel’s false lover-gods and not to the Lord.

As the result, this vine becomes a measly twig thrown about on the water at the whim of the violent tides and waves (v. 7).

So it has always been and will be. If we take our divine gifts and privileges and waste them on ourselves, we become wicked and worthless and fit only for ruin and destruction.

**Do not use your divine gifts for yourself or you will be worthless and ruined.**

### I. THE DYSFUNCTIONAL NATION

Israel became useless in every way: religiously, politically, and socially.

#### A. Religious Vanity (1-2; 5-6, 8)

1. Prosperity expended upon “altars” and “pillars”—pagan religious objects (1)  
“The more his fruit, the more altars he made; the richer his land, the better he made the sacred pillars.” *What perversion!*
2. A “slippery” heart (literally “smooth”). Elsewhere in Scripture this word is used for flattery and deception. Israel pretends loyalty to the Lord but vainly ignores His commands and ways and lives for self.
3. The “calf” built for worship is a perfect example of selfish and unfaithful worship (5).
  - There were actually two calves.
  - One was in Bethel; the name is here changed to Bethaven: *The “house of God” has become the “house of vanity and worthlessness.”*
  - The calf is disrespectfully called “the thing itself” in v. 6.

4. High Places proliferate in the land (v. 8).

- Note that the true place of worship was on a high mountain—Jerusalem’s temple.
- God had forbidden Israel to build other “high places” in the land lest they lead the hearts of God’s people away from Him.
- The Canaanites and other nations commonly built altars and worship centers on high mountains, hills, and under leafy trees.
- God again refers to the chief corrupt worship center in the n. kingdom—Bethel.
- Here he shortens the “Bethaven” of v. 5 to Aven.
- He also calls the worship center “the Sin of Israel.”

But the nation has more than religious vanity; it has political vanity.

B. Political Vanity (vv. 3, 7)

1. Their kings were not genuine (3)

- God was to be their true ruler; but they did not **fear the Lord**.
- All the kings they had ruled in unrighteousness and led the people away from the genuine worship of God—either to calf worship or even worse, Baal worship.
- Therefore, they have no genuine king.
- The actual king cannot help them; he can do nothing for them.

2. Their “king”—i.e. monarchy—will be cut off because it is worthless. The line seems best to read: “As for Samaria, her king will be cut off.”

C. Social Vanity (4)

*Because of dishonesty:*

- Words are mere “words”—they mean nothing and are unreliable.
- Oaths are meaningless—“worthless.”
- Covenants are regularly broken—**Marriage, business, political, etc.**
- “Justice” is really injustice and is therefore compared to “poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.”
- All genuine “crops” (remember the grapes!) are ruined by the “poison”.

Yes, the nation is dysfunctional religiously, politically, and socially. As the result they reap the Lord’s **devastating judgment**.

II. DEVASTATING JUDGMENT

A. False Religious objects are destroyed—proving their worthlessness (2, 6, 8).

1. Altars “broken down” (2)
2. Pillars “destroyed” (2)

3. The Calf is “carried to Assyria” and becomes a “tribute to King Jareb”—the “avenging king” and mighty one of Assyria.
    - Note that the insult of Israel toward the Lord is turned upon their own heads—their sacred objects treated shamefully.
  4. High places destroyed (8)
  5. Thorns and thistles (cf. the curse of Gen. 3) grow on the sites of their altars (8).
  - B. Israel bears its Guilt (2) (cf. the “double guilt” of v. 10)
  - C. Israel’s Glory departs (5).
  - D. Israel experiences fear, mourning, and trembling (v. 5).
  - E. Israel experiences Shame (6) and is ashamed “of its own counsel.”
- When we follow our own ideas and advice instead of God’s we are in BIG TROUBLE!**
- F. Israel experiences isolation and helplessness (7).
  - G. Israel prefers **death over life (v. 8)**: “Mountains, cover us; hills, fall on us.”
    - Compare Jesus in Lk. 23:30—verbs in reverse order (Jerusalem’s ruin).
    - Compare Rev. 6:16 during the tribulation period.
    - See Rev. 9:6 where men seek death.

How sad when life becomes so unbearable due to our sinful rebellion that we prefer death over life.

## CONCLUSION

Do not waste your gifts on yourself. Yield yourself to the Lord and let Him use you.

Do not become a stick on the surface of the water. Be a vine that produces good fruit for the Master.