



Hosea - Chapter Thirteen

II. Hosea 4:1-14:9 - Hosea Spells Out His Parable with Accusations, Warnings, and Promises (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

God never blessed Israel when they worshipped Baal, but that did not stop them. They shall be as the morning cloud and the early dew that passes away. Like a lion, the Lord will tear Israel apart. The Lord is Israel's king - where is any other? The sorrows of a woman in childbirth shall come upon Ephraim. Dryness and barrenness is prophesied.

II.k Hosea 13:1-16 - Relentless Judgement on Israel

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.k.i Hosea 13:1-8 - Worship of Man-made Gods

The man-made gods that Israel worships are nothing compared to their actual God, who is living, active, and true to his word.

- ¹ When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling;
he was exalted in Israel;
but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.

Hosea 13:1

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling. The idea seems to be that at one time Ephraim's word commanded respect.

He incurred guilt through Baal and died. This is primarily spiritual death such as that felt by Adam and Eve: *<<And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of*

good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die'>> (Genesis 2:16-17). Many would also die physically at the hands of the Assyrian army but it is spiritual death that has eternal consequences: <<*But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!*>> (Luke 12:5), and: <<*Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire*>> (Revelation 20:14-15).

² And now they keep on sinning
and make a cast image for themselves,
idols of silver made according to their understanding,
all of them the work of artisans.
'Sacrifice to these', they say.
People are kissing calves!

Hosea 13:2

And now they keep on sinning. God never blessed Israel when they worshipped Baal, but that did not stop them. They kept up their idolatry more and more.

All of them the work of artisans. God had forbidden man-made images of himself: <<*You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*>> (Deuteronomy 5:8). Even the articles made in his honour were to be of unhewn stones so that people would not look at the artistry of the object but would consider its purpose: <<*Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the Israelites, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, 'an altar of unhewn stones, on which no iron tool has been used'; and they offered on it burnt-offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed offerings of well-being*>> (Joshua 8:30-31).

Sacrifice to these has the idea of engaging in human sacrifice, and could be translated 'the sacrificers of men.' In ancient Israel human sacrifice was almost always child sacrifice. Hosea has already spoken of this horrible practice in Hosea 9:13 and perhaps in Hosea 5:2. Hosea's contemporary confirms this practice: <<*Whom are you mocking? Against whom do you open your mouth wide and stick out your tongue? Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit – you that burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree; you that slaughter your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?*>> (Isaiah 57:4-5).

People are kissing calves. Kissing is a way of paying homage: <<*Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him*>> (1 Kings 19:18). The excavations at Ashkelon have uncovered an example of calf worship in a sanctuary from the 16th Century BC. A small, solid bronze calf was discovered, and around it were remains of a pottery shrine that housed the calf. Calf worship, of course, was a problem throughout the history of Israel as described in Exodus Chapter 32 and 1 Kings Chapter 12.

³ Therefore they shall be like the morning mist
or like the dew that goes away early,
like chaff that swirls from the threshing-floor
or like smoke from a window.

Hosea 13:3

Therefore they shall be like the morning mist. Because Israel trusted in themselves and in idols, they could not stand. The similes of mist, dew, chaff, and smoke liken Israel's end to vapours that quickly dissipate: <<*Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again?*>> (Job 10:9), and: <<*For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust*>> (Psalm 103:14).

⁴ Yet I have been the Lord your God
ever since the land of Egypt;
you know no God but me,
and besides me there is no saviour.

⁵ It was I who fed you in the wilderness,
in the land of drought.

Hosea 13:4-5

Yet I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt. Israel had changed, but the Lord God did not. He is still the only God and the only Saviour: <<*For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you*>> (Isaiah 43:3), and: <<*They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world'*>> (John 4:42), and his people will be left desolate when they leave him. In contrast to fleeting vapours, this is a solemn statement that rehearses Exodus 20:2. The passing work of the craftsmen who make idols

(v.2) stands in vivid disparity to the God who sustained Israel in the land of drought by his devoted care.

6 When I fed them, they were satisfied;
they were satisfied, and their heart was proud;
therefore they forgot me.

Hosea 13:6

When I fed them, they were satisfied. Their devotion in the wilderness diminished with prosperity: <<*She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal*>> (Hosea 2:8), and: <<*Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars, and destroy their pillars*>> (Hosea 10:1-2).

They were satisfied, and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me. It is a strange and terrible aspect of human nature that when times are good, people often forget the God who blessed them. When times are bad they are often more likely to turn their hearts back to God: <<*You have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. You fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction. But where is the fury of the oppressor?*>> (Isaiah 51:13).

At the end of the 20th Century, Americans were in a season of unprecedented prosperity. Yet statistics show that in the 1990s churchgoers gave the smallest percentage of their income in tithes and offerings since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Sadly, often when Christians are filled, then they find their hearts exalted, and soon they forget God. The same is almost certainly true of western European Christians including those in the UK.

7 So I will become like a lion to them,
like a leopard I will lurk beside the way.
8 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs,
and will tear open the covering of their heart;
there I will devour them like a lion,
as a wild animal would mangle them.

Hosea 13:7-8

So I will become like a lion, a leopard, a bear. When people neglect and affront God as he blesses, they then will often face the chastening hand of God. It is not because God hates them, but because they have demonstrated that they will only turn to him when times are bad. Hosea's contemporary and fellow prophet to the northern kingdom Amos also depicts Israel as the prey of wild beasts, an image of God's judgement: <<*Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed*>> (Amos 3:12). The three animals mentioned - lion, leopard, and bear - were all native to Palestine and known for their relentless manner of killing prey. This can be seen from David's confrontation with Goliath: <<*Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.*' David said, 'The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you!''>> (1 Samuel 17:36-37). Lions and leopards are referenced in the Song of Solomon: <<*Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amanah, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards*>> (Song 4:8).

II.k.ii Hosea 13:9-16 - Rejecting the only hope they have

Ephraim, by its stubborn refusal to return to the Lord, rejects the only hope that God offers. Three figures of judgement are pronounced in these verses: the incompetent king (vv.10-11), the unborn child (vv.13-14), and the withering wind of God (v.15).

- ⁹ I will destroy you, O Israel;
who can help you?
- ¹⁰ Where now is your king, that he may save you?
Where in all your cities are your rulers,
of whom you said,
'Give me a king and rulers'?
- ¹¹ I gave you a king in my anger,
and I took him away in my wrath.

Hosea 13:9-11

I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you? This is a rhetorical question showing that only God can save his people. Even when Israel feels the sting of God's chastening hand, they can still find help from the Lord, if they would only turn to him. Jesus confirms this by quoting Isaiah: <<*He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them*>> (John 12:40).

The question where now is your king need not mean that Israel had no king but that the royal leadership was unable to save his people, for the kings were acting against their Saviour.

I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath may be a reference to Saul, the first king of Israel; Israel had asked for the wrong kind of king in 1 Samuel 8:4-9, and still does.

God wanted to be recognised as the King of Israel, no matter which man sat on the royal throne. When the people rejected the Lord as King, he gave them the kind of kings their hearts wanted and deserved, and then even took those kings as further judgement. Those who remain true to the Jewish faith in Israel and do not accept Jesus as their King will never know what it is like to have the full protection of God as their King, yet he does still care for them as his own and always will: <<*And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again*>> (Romans 11:23).

- ¹² Ephraim's iniquity is bound up;
his sin is kept in store.
- ¹³ The pangs of childbirth come for him,
but he is an unwise son;
for at the proper time he does not present himself
at the mouth of the womb.

Hosea 13:12-13

Ephraim's iniquity is bound up; his sin is kept in store probably suggests that Ephraim holds on to its sins and will not let the Lord take them away. In their case, the sins will not be forgotten or forgiven: <<*Is not this laid up in store with me, sealed up in my treasures?*>> (Deuteronomy 32:34)

The pangs of childbirth come for him. Labour pains often come unexpectedly, are intense, and increase in their pain and duration. In the same way, judgement will

come upon Israel: <<*For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs*>> (Mark 13:8).

He does not present himself. Ephraim, in its refusal to repent and be healed, is likened to a baby who refuses to be born, which would be most unwise, since it would be fatal (v.14). This is not the way of God: <<*Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God*>> (Isaiah 66:9).

14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?

Shall I redeem them from Death?

O Death, where are your plagues?

O Sheol, where is your destruction?

Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

15 Although he may flourish among rushes,

the east wind shall come, a blast from the Lord,

rising from the wilderness;

and his fountain shall dry up,

his spring shall be parched.

It shall strip his treasury

of every precious thing.

16 Samaria shall bear her guilt,

because she has rebelled against her God;

they shall fall by the sword,

their little ones shall be dashed in pieces,

and their pregnant women ripped open.

Hosea 13:14-16

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? In the OT, Sheol is a proper name and can be a poetic personification of the grave, for example: <<*Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his grey head go down to Sheol in peace*>> (1 Kings 2:6), and: <<*Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the land, so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol*>> (Psalm 141:7). However, it can also designate the grim destination of the wicked after

death: <<*Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me*>> (Psalm 49:14-15). The parallel wording with Psalm 49:15 suggests that Hosea sees Ephraim's 'death' as leading to Sheol in the second sense, i.e. as damnation. Thus God asks himself whether he should rescue Ephraim from such consequences.

Shall I redeem them from Death? The sin and judgement of Israel is great, but not greater than God's ability and power to redeem. He can even redeem from death, so that death and the grave are mocked as defeated foes.

O Death, where are your plagues? If the Lord is their strong deliverer, then not even death will be able to terrify them or harm them. In 1 Corinthians 15:55 Paul cites part of v.14. In that context, he is viewing the general resurrection of the faithful as God's triumph over not only bodily death but also eternal judgement. Sadly, in Hosea's time, Israel is rejecting the only power that can save them. Thus **compassion is hidden from** God's **eyes**, and Israel will perish miserably.

Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God. In the long term, Israel will see the glory of God's redemption and his power over sin and death. In the near term, Israel will be chastened for their rebellion against God.

They shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open. This describes their fate when the Assyrians come and sack their towns and cities. The barbaric acts against women and children were common place in the aftermath of such battles. Women and children have always been and, it seems, always will be the greatest sufferers in wars for these practices continue even in the 21st Century.