

Israel's prophets were unified in insisting that Yahweh's kingdom would see the destruction of death and corruption and the renewal of all things. The coming of the kingdom meant the abolition and reversal of the curse (cf. Genesis 3:17-19 with Isaiah 53-55; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 14; etc.) and Paul recognized the fulfillment of this promise in the resurrection of the dead (and the attendant renewal of the non-human created order; ref. again Roman 8:18ff).

Paul drew his second citation from Hosea's prophecy (15:55; ref. Hosea 13:14). Hosea was a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah (8th century B.C.) and so prophesied in the decades leading up to the Assyrian conquest and captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel. His prophetic ministry was largely directed toward Israel, but also implicated Judah in the south since his prophecies spoke to Yahweh's purpose to reconcile Israel and Judah in connection with Messiah's coming. This reunification is a common theme in the prophets and draws on David's role as the great prototype of the coming messianic King.

- David was the prototypical fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham of a royal seed (cf. Genesis 17:1-16, 49:8-10; Deuteronomy 17:14-20) and, as such, was the Judahite in whom Yahweh established the Abrahamic kingdom (cf. Genesis 15:1-21 with 1 Kings 4:1-21). (Saul was Israel's first human king, but not authentically, first because he was not Yahweh's king – that is, he didn't rule on Yahweh's behalf – but also because he was not of the tribe of Judah to which the royal scepter had been assigned.)
- David secured the covenant *land*, but he also unified as one people the twelve tribes of Israel, thereby establishing the Abrahamic covenant *community*. Land, seed, and blessing came together in David, so that his kingdom represented the temporal fulfillment of Yahweh's covenant promise to Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-18, 15:1-21, 17:1-16).
- David unified Yahweh's covenant people – by securing their love and devotion, not through military conquest (2 Samuel 4:1-5:5), but his failure as king resulted in the fracture of that unity. He incurred Yahweh's judgment upon the Abrahamic covenant house and the result was the two sub-kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the latter constituting the remnant of David's kingdom and consisting of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (ref. 2 Samuel 11:1-12:12; 1 Kings 11:1-12:24).
- David's failure fractured the Abrahamic kingdom and served as the foundation for apostasy and judgment in exile and captivity. David had failed to fulfill the role of King of Israel, but God's covenant with him promised to him a son who would succeed in that calling (2 Samuel 7). That son would reunify the twelve tribes, restore the desolate kingdom and rule faithfully as Yahweh's Son-King. David's identity and calling were to be fulfilled in him, and thus the prophet Ezekiel went so far as to refer to that descendent under the name of *David* (ref. Ezekiel 34, 37:15-28).

This same theme is also present in Hosea's prophecy (3:1-5). This prophet, too, emphasized that a day of restoration and reunification was coming for Israel and Judah (cf. also Jeremiah 30-33; Isaiah 11:1-13, 49:1-7). And as David had unified the Abrahamic tribes under his rule (along with many nations of the Gentiles), so David's covenant son – the true "David" – would secure this future reunification of Israel and Judah (cf. Hosea 1:1-11, 3:1-5) and broaden His rule to extend to the nations (ref. again Isaiah 11:1-13 and 49:1-7; also Amos 9:11-12).

The passage Paul drew from is part of a larger context (chapters 11-14) in which Yahweh was affirming His undying love and restorative intention for the kingdom of Israel ("Ephraim"). Unlike the kingdom of Judah (which, again, was the remnant of David's kingdom), Israel had been appointed for destruction and enduring dispersion among the nations. Judah would also experience conquest and captivity in exile, but after seven decades Yahweh was going to begin to restore the Judean exiles back to Canaan (recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah). And yet, God wasn't done with Ephraim (the ten tribes of Israel); that portion of the Israelite nation would also see restoration, but as they were gathered in and reunified with their Judean brethren in the last days when they repented and returned to Yahweh by subjecting themselves to His messianic King (Hosea 1-3).

Thus Hosea's prophecy follows the predominant pattern in the prophets of coming judgment, desolation, exile and captivity followed by liberation and restoration. (Note again that judgment and restoration form the substance of the theme of the Day of the Lord.) Even Israel (Ephraim) – whose entire history as a separate kingdom was defined by disobedience and apostasy – was to see its justly deserved desolation and exile end in forgiveness and ingathering. Yahweh would yet restore Israel together with Judah, for it is impossible that He should renounce His faithfulness to Abraham (11:1-12; cf. again chaps. 1-3).

Israel's apostasy and unapologetic idolatry had incurred the sentence of *death* (12:1-13:16; note especially 13:1): They had departed from Yahweh in their affections and practice (2:1-13; 11:1-2) and their alienation from Him amounted to their death; they gave themselves to Baal and died. And yet, death was not to be the last word; Yahweh would yet give "life" to His wayward covenant son by healing his apostasy in the free exercise of His love. The withered vine that was Israel would yet sprout new shoots and blossom like the lily (14:1-6).

This is the larger context of 13:14 and the framework within which this verse must be interpreted, first as part of Hosea's overall prophecy and then in terms of Paul's use of it in his instruction to the Corinthians.

In its own context, Hosea's statement was referring to Ephraim (again, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel; cf. 11:1, 8, 12, 12:1, 8, 14, 13:1, 9, 12) and its relationship with God. Because of Israel's arrogant and unrepentant apostasy, Yahweh was going to bring death, destruction, exile and captivity upon them through the Assyrians (11:1-7; also 12:1-13:11; cf. 2 Kings 17-18).

In an ironic use of imagery, the prophet derided Israel's foolishness and self-destructiveness by likening the nation to a baby that doesn't recognize the time of its birth (13:13b). Like that baby which tenaciously clings to its place in the womb, refusing to be born into the world, Israel had long clung to the iniquity of its stubborn rebellion, refusing to be delivered and "born" into the new life of reconciliation with Yahweh (13:12-13a). C. F. Keil comments:

"Ephraim is an unwise son, inasmuch as even under the chastening judgment [of Yahweh] he still delays his conversion and will not let himself be new-born, like a child that, at the time of the labour-pains, will not enter the opening of the womb and so come to the birth."

Ephraim refused to be born anew into a restored relationship with the Lord, but this wasn't to be the last word. Yahweh regarded Ephraim as a beloved son and would not give up on him. Like a father who refuses to let his infant son die in the womb and so extracts him from his complacent refuge into the pains of delivery that he would be born, so Yahweh would intervene to bring Ephraim through the fires of judgment in order to deliver him from sure death and bring him into the new life of reconciliation: *"From the power of Sheol [the grave] I shall ransom them; from death I shall redeem them"* (13:14a). Four observations follow:

- 1) The first thing to note is the parallelism of these two statements. Parallelism is a common device in Hebrew literature, this instance being an example of synonymous parallelism. By essentially repeating the same statement twice, the prophet emphasized it and its importance.
- 2) A second observation pertains to the two verbs rendered *ransom* and *redeem*. They reflect the synonymy of the two statements, being closely similar in meaning: Both refer to the principle of redemption in which a ransom is paid for another's release. But the verbs differ in their emphasis: each highlights a different aspect of redemption as a scriptural motif having its ultimate meaning in God's work in Jesus Christ:

The first verb (*ransom*) associated with Sheol highlights the actual redemptive act and specifically the *ransom* itself – the price of redemption – which secures the captive's release. This aspect of redemption was in the forefront in the *Exodus event* in which Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage was secured by the blood of the firstborn (Exodus 11:1-12:36).

The second verb (*redeem*) associated with death places the emphasis on the *individual* – the person of the redeemer – who accomplishes the work of redemption. This aspect of redemption is most closely associated with the *redeemer-kinsman* principle.

In this way Yahweh took to Himself both aspects of redemption: He is the redeemer-kinsman who, in a second Exodus, pays the ransom for His own.

- 3) Third, it's important to note that some commentators (and English versions) have treated these parallel statements as a compound question: *Shall I ransom them...? Shall I redeem them...?* But the context – and especially what immediately follows – argues against this and the uncertainty it connotes. For, after Yahweh spoke about delivering Israel from death and the grave, the prophet addressed these two entities directly. And he did so with two rhetorical questions (13:14b) that correspond in chiasmic fashion with the preceding parallel statements. (Chiasm takes the form A B B' A'.) The connection, then, is as follows:

“From the hand of Sheol I shall ransom them. O Sheol, where, then, is your destruction?”

“From death I shall redeem them. O death, where, then, are your plagues?”

It's precisely in view of Yahweh's pronouncement to redeem Ephraim from death that the prophet can triumphantly ask of death, “Where are your plagues?” and of the grave (as death's repository), “Where is your destruction?” If, on the other hand, God were simply pondering this redemption or expressing it as uncertain (Shall I ransom...? Shall I redeem...?), Hosea's triumphal interrogation of death and Sheol would be premature and unfounded.

- 4) Finally, the closing statement of 13:14 must be considered. At bottom, this statement can be viewed *negatively* or *positively*, and how it is interpreted weighs heavily on the overall meaning of the passage.

If treated as a negative statement, the meaning is that God will not show pity or compassion toward Ephraim (at least for a season). This is the apparent meaning based on various English renderings (NKJ, NAS, ESV, etc.). The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it seems to nullify everything said to this point. In fact, it supports the view that regards the first two parallel statements as questions: Thus, after raising the question of whether or not to redeem Ephraim (Israel) from death, Yahweh declares that He has determined not to have compassion on him.

This interpretation is possible, but contradicts the message of the larger context, which is that Yahweh will punish His wayward son Israel by the hand of Assyria, but that will not be the last word. For the Lord's goal is restoration, not destruction; at the ordained time He will indeed arise and redeem and restore Ephraim who is beloved (cf. 11:1-11, 14:1-8).

Thus the context argues for a positive meaning to Yahweh's statement, but can it be interpreted in this way? The answer is that it can, and the key is the noun (*compassion* – NAS) and its interpretation. For this term, too, can carry either a positive or negative connotation, depending on the context.

The verbal cognate has a wide semantic range, embracing such ideas as sorrow, pity, comfort, repentance, regret, and relenting. But in all of its biblical uses, the general connotation is that of a shift in the subject's attitude or action. The particular noun form here in Hosea occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, and so its meaning must be determined from its usage within this context, but such that that meaning falls within the cognate's overall semantic range. When all considerations are taken into account, the statement is arguably best captured by something along this line: "*Relenting will be hidden from my eyes.*" Thus, after declaring His intent to redeem Ephraim from death, Yahweh affirmed that He will not change His mind or even consider a different course: The very possibility of relenting from His declared purpose is beyond His consideration.

Thus Hosea's meaning in context: Though destruction, exile and captivity were appointed for Israel at the hand of the Assyrians (which punishment was only a generation away), Yahweh would yet deliver them from the "death" of their waywardness and desolation and restore them to Himself; He would heal their apostasy and love them freely, causing them to blossom like the lily (14:4ff).

This was Hosea's meaning, *but how does this contextual meaning accord with Paul's use of this verse?* The answer lies in understanding the nature of Israel's restoration and how it plays into God's overall purpose in Jesus Christ.

- First and most importantly, Israel's restoration was to involve its reconciliation to its "sister" Judah. Israel (Ephraim) was to remain in exile from Yahweh until such time as He reconciled both Israel and Judah to Himself, thereby reconciling them to one another. And this great and final reconciling work was to occur in connection with the coming and redemptive work of *Messiah* – Yahweh's Servant and the Son of David (ref. again Hosea 1-3 and Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 34, 37).
- Israel's redemption was to be shared by Judah; Yahweh was going to redeem *both* from death and the grave (i.e., from their estrangement and exile from Him). But even more, this reconciliation and healing – this "life out of death" – for the two houses of Israel was to include *all the earth's peoples* (cf. Isaiah 11:1-13, 49:1-6, 53:1-55:13; also Amos 9:11-15). (This is precisely why Paul could cite Hosea 1-2 in support of his contention concerning God's salvation of Gentiles and Jews alike; Romans 9:22-26).

Thus Paul recognized that Yahweh's promise to Israel of its future redemption from death was His promise of resurrection in Christ. Life out of death – reconciliation and restoration to God – is actual and true in Him, and it is His triumph over death and the grave that secures the same triumph for His people. In view of resurrection – realized in Jesus, now true of the saints' spirits and pledged to them respecting their bodies, those in Christ can confront death and the grave with Yahweh's own triumphal assertion: *O death, where is your victory?*