

The Autopsy of a Nation

Hosea

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Bible Text: Hosea 13:1-16

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If you would, please turn to the book of Hosea the 13th chapter. We read beginning with the first verse. And the Lord said through Hosea these words.

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling;
he was exalted in Israel,
but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.
And now they sin more and more,
and make for themselves metal images,
idols skillfully made of their silver,
all of them the work of craftsmen.
It is said of them,
“Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!”
Therefore they shall be like the morning mist
or like the dew that goes early away,
like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor
or like smoke from a window.
But I am the LORD your God
from the land of Egypt;
you know no God but me,
and besides me there is no savior.

It was I who knew you in the wilderness,
in the land of drought;
but when they had grazed, they became full,
they were filled, and their heart was lifted up;
therefore they forgot me.
So I am to them like a lion;
like a leopard I will lurk beside the way.
I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs;
I will tear open their breast,
and there I will devour them like a lion,
as a wild beast would rip them open.

He destroys you, O Israel,
for you are against me, against your helper.
Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities?
Where are all your rulers—
those of whom you said,
“Give me a king and princes”?
I gave you a king in my anger,
and I took him away in my wrath.
The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up;
his sin is kept in store.
The pangs of childbirth come for him,
but he is an unwise son,
for at the right time he does not present himself
at the opening of the womb.
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 sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.
Though he may flourish among his brothers,
the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come,
rising from the wilderness,
and his fountain shall dry up;
his spring shall be parched;
it shall strip his treasury
of every precious thing.
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.¹

Let's go to the Lord together in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we have joy in our hearts this morning to be with our brothers and sisters and to be gathered here together to worship you. We thank you for your Word that is to us, Lord, sweeter than honey. It is greater treasure than anything this world could give us. It is precious. And, Lord, I thank you that it is for us a lamp, a light for our feet, for our pathway. You have made yourself known to us. You have delivered us from our sins. You have joined us to your son. You have given us your Spirit and now he leads us in understanding your Word so that we might know how to live, how to walk before you. We pray this morning that, Lord, you would be at work in the preaching of your Word, that you would be at work both in me as I preach and in us as we listen, communicating with us, Lord, through our Word, by your Spirit so that today we are instructed, where we need it, Lord, we are corrected, called to repentance, we are encouraged, we are

¹ Hosea 13:1-16.

strengthened. We look to you of this. We ask you of this. We also pray for anyone here with us who is dead in trespasses and sins even now, who stand in need of the life that is found only in Christ. We ask, Lord, that you would save them, that you would have mercy upon them and in that way bring glory to yourself and joy to our heart. We ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there is more than one kind of death or we could say there is more than one aspect of death. And we are taught that at the very beginning when Adam fell. The Lord had told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on the day he ate from it, he would surely die. He didn't believe the Lord. He disobeyed that commandment and through his one act of sin death made its entrance into our world, into this world in which we live. Everything was affected by it. Not just man, but the entire creation came under a curse as a result of his fall.

But you could look at the fact that he went on living, right? I mean, he didn't die physically immediately. You could say, "Well, did he really experience the penalty that God promised?"

Well, he did. He died right then spiritually. His relationship to God was immediately affected as he and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord or attempted to. Immediately their knowledge of themselves changed. They were aware that they were naked. They were aware that something is wrong and so their relationship to sin, purity, themselves, the Lord, each other, everything changes immediately. They are spiritually dead.

It wasn't long after the Lord demonstrated to them his gospel, I mean at the very beginning. You know, they are clothing themselves and God doesn't accept that and he clothes them through the death of an animal. I think there is a demonstration of sacrifice at the very beginning and a teaching of the gospel at the very beginning. And you move beyond that picture when they are expelled from the garden and you begin to see that spiritual death played out in human relationships as it is not wrong before Cain murders his brother Abel. So there is this social decay that is the fruit of and is the expression of the spiritual death. And then many, many years later our first father and mother died physically so there at the end of their lives they met with the physical expression of the death they were promised at the very beginning if they disobeyed the Lord.

So you have spiritual death. You have the social results of that spiritual death and finally you have the physical end that that spiritual death brings.

That same pattern has now been played out over and over again in this world since the fall. A different beginning, of course, we never again begin at the point of innocence that Adam and Eve knew originally, but nonetheless what you see played out in this world would be this, a good beginning with the Lord, maybe in the life of a nation like our nation, a good beginning, a conscious spiritual decision to reject God and to choose what he has commanded us not to choose so that there is an immediate spiritual result from that that sets us on a deadly course. Then the fruit of that choice being worked out in

social decay and then finally there is the physical end that is just simply the consummation of that spiritual fall, death, decay and finally physical, material destruction.

That is what you have in Hosea chapter 13. In fact, you may want to just make a note of this. What you really have in Hosea 13 is a spiritual autopsy. It is the autopsy of the nation of Israel.

Notice what God says in verse one.

“When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel, but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.”²

He died, but, you see, the nation is still living. There is still an existence. But throughout the life of the nation is all of this social decay that speaks of the death that was brought about because of the idolatrous choice that was publicly made in the life of the nation of the northern kingdom. They chose Baal worship, incurred guilt. There was a spiritual course that was set. Now the social decay is being worked out over time. The nation is still living though it is dead. It is like the walking dead. And what God is saying in chapter 13 is the end is coming. Material destruction is going to be the end of all of this.

You go all the way back to the garden. You see the original fall. That pattern is being worked out in the life of this nation.

I can't help but think about our own country. I can't help but think about how... what the story is of our beginnings. We would never pretend or imagine that all of our founding fathers were Christians. We know better. But we can say this, that the original story of this nation had to do with religious freedom, didn't it? It had to do with the idea of being able to worship God freely, being free from tyranny.

Somewhere along the line we have to ask: Have we as a nation made a conscious, deliberate, public choice to try to get rid of God? And then we have to ask what has been the social fall out from that? What has happened in our nation since we have made those choices? And apart from repentance where this all headed?

This is what is going on in the northern kingdom as Hosea preaches and writes.

The first thing I want you to see is found in verses one through three. We have a description of Israel's death.

“When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling.”³

Ephraim, the most prominent tribe in the northern kingdom traced back to Joseph's son Ephraim, the younger of his two sons. The older was Manasseh.

² Hosea 13:1.

³ Ibid.

Genesis chapter 48 tells us, however, that as the blessing is being given, Jacob crossed his hands and placed his right hand on the head of the younger son so that Ephraim was by the choice of God given prominence over his brother Manasseh. And so Ephraim becomes the most prominent tribe in the northern kingdom. So a place of favor, a place of respect is initially given to Ephraim.

“When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel.”⁴

John MacArthur commenting on this says, “When Ephraim, the most powerful tribe spoke early in Israel’s history it was with authority and produced fear.”

So the picture is prominence, favor, blessing, privilege. This was the beginning for Ephraim and Ephraim is being used here to speak of the entire northern kingdom.

So privilege, blessing is where this people had their beginning even before the dividing of the kingdom. It is talking about God’s people as a whole, a place of privilege.

But, verse one, “ ... he incurred guilt through Baal and died.”⁵

There was a fall. Ephraim fell and it was due to a commitment to Baal worship. The fall was due to idolatry. There was a conscious choice to choose the way of the surrounding culture instead of the way that had been set before them by the Lord. And in that choice to not believe God’s warnings about idolatry and in that choice to believe the lie and to go after the lie, a spiritual death occurred in the nation.

Charles Fineburg comments on this. He says, “The prophet recalls the days past when Ephraim was honored in the nation. When he spoke, all trembled. Men had respect for his power and prestige. One can hardly read the history of the 12 tribes without noting how prominent was the position of Ephraim. He was truly exalted in Israel, respectfully feared. But when he gave himself over to the worship of Baal under Ahab, 1 Kings 16:31, he died. His power was destroyed and broken. He died spiritually with consequent political decline.”

And Fineburg is right to trace this choice and this death back to Ahab. Realize, that is 150 years or so before what we are reading here. So the death occurred, but there was this 150 year period of time when they are still living in the land. They are dead. They just don’t know it. They just don’t know it yet.

Notice the social decay that is the fruit of this. Verse two.

“And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, ‘Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!’”⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The spiritual death in the nation manifests itself in social decay and when we remember this, when we remember that idolatry is not just the worship of physical images, when we remember that we are not to have anything before the Lord, when we remember that we can make idols and idols all being, always in the mind, not honoring God as God, not thinking about God as we ought, putting things or people or ourselves or whatever it may be in the place of God, when we think about idolatry that way, then what we have described in verse two can be the description of all of our sinning. I mean, we choose a life of sin, when we choose a life of disobedience to the Lord, this is what it looks like.

In verse two he gives us this description of decay, this description of idolatry.

Notice the aspects of it. First of all, idolatry represents wasted pursuits, verse two.

“And now they sin more and more.”⁷

Never forget that idolatry is an insatiable appetite. The reason why that is true is because we were created to be satisfied by our Creator. Man was created to find a satisfaction in God and if you don't find your satisfaction in the Lord, you can be sure of this. You will never be satisfied.

And so when man turns from the living God to pursue some other kind of God, what always takes place is there is just this increased pattern of sinning, because, you see, man can't find his satisfaction.

By the way, if you really know the Lord and really love the Lord, your heart will really be satisfied. If someone says, “Well, you know, I have been in church and I have been religious and I have done this and I have done that, but my heart is still unsatisfied,” well, it is only because you don't really have access to the true God. You can be religious and dissatisfied. You can be very religious and miserable.

But where there is true fellowship with this true and living God, the heart is satisfied. There is joy. There is purpose. There is meaning. There is peace. But you turn away from him and you begin to pursue some other God of your own making and you will never be satisfied. And so the result is this increasing pattern of sin.

Second, where you have idolatry it represents not only wasted living or wasted pursuits, it also represents wasted treasure. You will waste your treasure in idolatry because, notice, they make these images—and the Bible stresses this—these are metal images, notice, idols skillfully made of their silver. I mean, you are taking precious commodities. You are taking valuable things and forming some kind of image that you are going to bow down to or you are going to kiss. Things that have been entrusted to us that ought to be used for the glory of God, that ought to be invested in that which honors him and glorifies him instead, these precious things are being wasted on gods that are not really gods.

⁶ Hosea 13:2.

⁷ Ibid.

You think about the prodigal son when he leaves his father and he goes off to pursue his life of sin. He takes all that treasure that had been set aside for him by his father and he wastes it all in sinful living. That is just the picture of the sinful life. It is a wasteful life. You waste treasure.

Also notice idolatry involves wasted talents, because Hosea is stressing here the thought and then care and the skill that has been invested in their idolatry.

“And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen.”⁸

I mean you have these craftsman who know skill in the making of metal images and they are taking these talents, these abilities that ought to be used for the glory of the true God and they are investing these talents in making these images. It is wasted, wasted.

Can I say to you today God has put abilities within you, within each one of us that are meant to be used unto his glory? And when you take you mind and you take your hands and when you take the skills that you have and you waste them in sin, that is what idolatry is. It is vain. It is empty.

But notice what is, perhaps, the bottom rung of the ladder. Idolatry also represents wasted dignity, because it says, end of verse two

“It is said of them, ‘Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves.’”⁹

You may notice something different in your translation, right, if you don’t have the ESV, because literally the Hebrew is something like this. “Sacrificers of men.”

And it could be taken to refer to human sacrifice, right, sacrificing of men, but it also can be taken to mean sacrificers among men. So the idea would be those among men who are offering sacrifice. I think that is better.

There is no evidence at this time that Baal worship involved human sacrifice. So in all likelihood what Hosea is saying is this. Those among men who are offering these sacrifices have actually been kissing these images that have been formed by their own hands. They kiss calves.

So here is man created originally just a little lower than the angels given lordship over the creation, granted by God’s grace and mercy, the Creator’s purpose alone, this place of privilege and honor among his creatures and we are reduced in our unbelief and sin to the place where we actually kiss the work of our own fingers, wasted dignity.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Isn't it amazing how men are fighting to be like animals? I mean, here is man. We think about evolution and you think about what is going on in the name of science and all the rest. Isn't it amazing how men are fighting for the idea that there is nothing unique about us? Nothing uniquely human.

I mean, yes, we will acknowledge there are some things different about us, but it is all just a matter of chance, not anything the Creator would have done. So we fight to take away our own place of dignity and privilege given to us by God.

This is what sin does. It takes away human dignity and integrity.

Notice verse three where this is all headed, right? You have this spiritual death which then is demonstrated in this social decay which is idolatry. Notice where it all heads, verse three.

“Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes early away, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window.”¹⁰

All those images are very easy to understand, aren't they? You are not here very long, like a morning mist. It is here and it is gone. You walk out even on these hot summer days and your yard is just a little bit moist when you go out the door sometimes. But it is not like that very long, is it? It is gone. In the winter time you put some wood in the fire place and up goes the smoke through the chimney and it disappears.

The Lord is saying to this people, “You are the walking dead. Before you know it, your existence as a nation is going to be over. The physical destruction that is the end of the social decay that is the result of the physical death is coming.”

So God describes their death. He is giving them an autopsy.

How does this happen to a people? He not only describes their death, but now in verses four through six, he explains their death. How did this happen?

Verse four.

“But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior.”¹¹

The first way we can explain it is there is a... the first way God explains it. There is a willful rejection of God's self revelation.

What is verse four referring to? It is referring back to Exodus chapter 20, the beginning of the 10 Commandments when the Lord said to his people, Exodus 20 verse two:

¹⁰ Hosea 13:3.

¹¹ Hosea 13:4.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.¹²

I am the Lord, there is no other. I am your God. I have formed you. I have a relationship with you and you are never to put any other God in my place and if you do, it will mean your destruction. But if you honor me, I will have compassion upon you for the rest of your existence.

This is what God was saying at the very beginning of the nation's life.

He is reminding them of that in verse four.

“But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior.”¹³

Which means for them to have entered into this Baal worship they had to willfully reject what the Lord had told them here. They had to willfully reject prophets like Moses, like Hosea and like others. They had to willfully reject God's Word, because through these prophets he had given his Word. In the 10 Commandments you have the Word of God. So they had to the prophet. They had to reject his Word. But they also had to reject and to forget God's powerful deeds, because, notice, he says, “But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”¹⁴

I mean, how had they been delivered from the land of Egypt? All these plagues the Lord sends. Undeniable evidence of God's existence and his activity with them and then he parts the Red Sea and then he takes care of them in the wilderness. I mean, there were these powerful deeds throughout the history and the life of the nation that should have kept their hearts tied to the one true and living God, but they willfully reject all of that and make this conscious decision to worship Baal even to the point that now they are kissing the work of their own hands.

How do people die spiritually? Not in the sense of the original fall, because we are born dead into this world in trespasses and sins, but how do people make these spiritual decisions that result in their decay and then ultimately their destruction? It happens when we reject clear revelation from God.

¹² Exodus 20:2-6.

¹³ Hosea 13:4.

¹⁴ Ibid.

But there is something else that explains them. Not only willful rejection of God's self revelation, but a willful forgetting of God's gracious provision. Not only has God made himself known, but he has taken, he has actually taken care of them.

Verse five.

"It was I who knew you in the wilderness."¹⁵

This speaks of personal relationship, intimacy. I knew you. Right? I took care of you there. I supplied for you, provided for you.

Verse five.

"...in the land of drought."¹⁶

I mean, there was just no way for you to make it, but me and I took care of you.

Verse six.

"But when they had grazed..."¹⁷

The thought is there they had been brought into pasture, probably a reference to them entering into the Promised Land.

"...they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me."¹⁸

How do you head south spiritually? You don't listen to God. You don't listen to his self revelation. You reject what he has revealed about himself. But there is also something else you have got to do. You have got to forget how good he has been to you. You have got to forget how he has provided for you in the past. You have got to come to the place where you believe that you can actually supply for yourself.

So there is this pride. There is this sinful self confidence, this independent sense of self sufficiency where we have done this for ourselves, we believe. You see that in verse six?

"When they had grazed, they became full."¹⁹

Here they are now satiated with what God has supplied for them and the result of this is "they were filled and their heart was lifted up. They became proud and they forgot me."²⁰

¹⁵ Hosea 13:5.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hosea 13:6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

So you have the description of their death, verses one through three. You have the explanation for their death, verses four through six and the explanation is you reject his revelation and you forget his provision.

So what is the result of Israel's death? That is what verses seven through 16 address. What is the result of this choice against God?

Well, first of all, if we look back to verses one through six we can say the first result is you forfeit blessing. You could have had this place of blessing and privilege and high honor and favor, but you threw it away because you have chosen to reject God and go after your own God. So there is blessing that is forfeited.

But the second thing in what is being described in seven through 16 is God actually becomes your enemy. That is what has happened to them. God has now become their enemy.

Verse seven and eight he says, "I am going to judge you with great fierceness."

He says, "So I am to them like a lion; like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs."²¹

Each of those animals native to that area of the world at that time. So they well understood what Hosea was describing here.

I remember the trip that we took to South Africa to visit the seminary there that we support and on more than one day we were out in areas where, you know, there were these wild animals and, I mean, you were instructed not to even get out of your car. And I remember one day in specific where we heard early that morning a report of someone who was trying to travel into the country and they were on foot and a lion had eaten them. I mean, these animals are dangerous, to be feared, to be respected.

And God says in verse seven, "That is what I am to you now. I am like a lion. I am like a leopard that lurks beside the way."

You know, you better not get out of your call.

"I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs."²²

And notice what God says.

"I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open."²³

²¹ Hosea 13:7-8.

²² Hosea 13:8.

²³ Ibid.

These are not tame words, are they?

Listen, folks, Does God really get angry with sin? Does he hate it? Does he work to destroy it so that when someone is spiritually dead and they choose death and they choose the decay of sin now they are related to God not as a friend, but as an enemy.

The result of that, verse nine, is they don't have anybody to help them.

“He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper.”²⁴

And, by the way, you will notice, maybe a note in your Bible there. “He destroys you” can be translated “I will destroy. I will destroy you, oh Israel,” God speaking, “For you are against me, against your helper.”

If the Lord is not your helper, who is there to help you?

Good news. If the Lord is your helper, who is there to hurt you? But if the Lord is not your helper, who is there to help you?

When you, verse nine, when you are against your only helper, then the only thing left for you is destruction.

And notice that God is active in this. You know, one thing you will not find in the Bible is this idea that God only works to save people, but never works to destroy people. The fact of the matter is when you set yourself against the Lord, he is not your Savior, he is your judge. He judges sin.

So they will be left without help. In fact, if you want to know God's hatred for sin notice a third thing we see, verses 10 and 11. And this is a part of setting yourself against God. This is a part of being in a place of judgment. They are actually being mocked by the Lord, mocked.

“Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities?”²⁵

You have had such great faith in your kings. You think they are the answer for your problems. In fact, you called out for kings. You wanted to be like the other nations. You wanted a king. Well, where are they?

Verse 10.

“Where are all your rulers—those of whom you said, ‘Give me a king and princes’?”²⁶

²⁴ Hosea 13:9.

²⁵ Hosea 13:10.

²⁶ Ibid.

Where are they?

Doesn't this speak to our nation, folks?

It sickens me to hear us as a nation describe our past these days, because we describe ourselves as the greatest nation on the face of the earth and the way we explain us is us. What ingenuity we have, what bring minds we have, what material prosperity we enjoy, what stick-to-itiveness, what courage. Can we recognize and acknowledge that for all the blessing it is to live in this country—and it is a blessing—the only reason we enjoy any of it is the grace of God. We are just mere mortals. We haven't done this for ourselves. And if we think that our strength is found in our money, well, the Lord will take that away and ask, "Well, now where is it?"

And we think our strength is found in our wise leaders, well, the Lord won't give us any of those and he will ask, "Where are they?"

You see, when God is judging a people he often demonstrates their foolishness by asking them: Where are these things you have been trusting in? You can do it without me. So where are they? This is not the only place where this kind of mocking is found, is it? In fact, the Lord through Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal, 1 Kings 18:27.

"And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."²⁷

He is a God, isn't he? Where is he?

Jeremiah 2:26.

"As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, 27 who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.'"²⁸

I couldn't help last night. I was watching a... I love like nature shows and I was watching this television special about the ocean and there were divers down there was this picture of this giant jelly fish and a diver is swimming beside it and the narrator says, "We are trying to find clues about how we got our beginning."

[They] say to a tree, 'You are my father,'
and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.'
For they have turned their back to me,
and not their face.
But in the time of their trouble they say,
'Arise and save us!'

²⁷ 1 Kings 18:27.

²⁸ Jeremiah 2:26-27.

But where are your gods
that you made for yourself?
Let them arise, if they can save you,
in your time of trouble;
for as many as your cities
are your gods, O Judah.²⁹

How does God judge? With great fierceness. How does God judge? He leaves you to the helpers you have chosen. How does God judge? He asks you where your helpers are. Where are they?

There is a fourth picture here of what they have chosen in sin. They are going to be held accountable for every sin they have committed. Look at verse 12.

“The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is kept in store.”³⁰

God has got it all stored up. I haven’t forgotten. I know what you have done. And you are going to face the penalty for it.

And what makes this so painful or will make it one day so painful is that it was all so unnecessary. God had given them, again and again and again. In fact, we will see it in chapter 14 tonight, God keeps giving this people space and time and opportunity and invitation to repent. And if they will repent he won’t be this to them. He will be something else to them.

But you notice how he pictures this in verse 13? He says, :”The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son, for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb.”³¹

The picture is of a child in the process of being born and everything has been done for the delivery, but the child—attributing this to the child of the womb—is so unwise, he won’t make his entrance into the world. He won’t come.

And God is saying, “Here I am,” wanting to allow for a rebirth of the nation, as it were, calling for repentance and doing everything necessary to bring you to the place of being born, but you won’t present yourself. You won’t repent.

What is the result of that? Well, here is the next thing we see. They are not going to be rescued. They are going to be thoroughly punished.

Verses 14 through 16.

Verse 14.

²⁹ Jeremiah 2:27-28.

³⁰ Hosea 13:12.

³¹ Hosea 13:13.

“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 sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.”³²

Now there is a debate about how we ought to take those two statements.

“O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?”³³

And the reason why there is a debate is because you will recognize this is quoted in the New Testament as a promise of resurrection. But I think the immediate context here makes very clear. These are not compassion statements from God, not in this context. These are condemning statements from God.

What do you mean? Well, notice. Here is the question.

“Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?”³⁴

Answer.

“ O Sheol, come on with your sting. Shall I redeem them from death?”

God says, “Death, where are your plagues?”

In other words, let’s go.

Notice the last statement, end of verse 14.

“Compassion is hidden from my eyes.”³⁵

I do not see compassion. You will taste the sting of death. You will face the plagues of death. I am calling them forth upon you.

You say, “Well, then how could these verses be quoted in the New Testament in such a positive light?”

Well, listen. Here is the choice that is set before all of us, life or death. You choose death you meet with God in judgment. This is judgment. You choose life by repenting of your sins and trusting in God’s Son and now death has no sting. The grave has no sting. There are no plagues left for you because God poured out his wrath on his own Son in your place, in your stead, if you trust in Christ. There is no judgment left for you because your sins have been judged at the tree.

³² Hosea 13:14.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Folks, is that good news nor not? And God wants to make plain, not only will they not be delivered, they ought not to even dream that they will be.

Look at what he says in verse 15.

“Though he may flourish among his brothers...”³⁶

You see, they are just coming. When Hosea is ministering they were just coming out of one of the greatest times of prosperity materially speaking that the nation had ever known, a time of expanse, a time of growth, a time of prosperity. And they in all likelihood there were people listening to this message thinking this is insane. This is impossible.

And God through Hosea is saying this. Listen.

“Though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his [that is Ephraim’s] fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched; it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.”³⁷

Don’t imagine you are going to be saved by your material prosperity. I am going to take it all away. That is what God is saying.

Verse 16.

“Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword.”³⁸

And if you think that God’s judgment is not to be feared, if you think God’s judgment is mixed with compassion, notice what he says.

“...their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.”³⁹

And by the way, beloved, that had a very literal fulfillment when Assyria took them away. The Assyrians were a cruel people and there were people who faced that very thing.

But here is good news. Everything we have just said, everything we have just seen if you turn to the Lord on his terms with true, sincere faith coming... and the only way to turn to the Lord is through his Son, the Son of God who was given for sinners, died on a cruel cross as a substitute, taking the wrath of God upon himself so that we might be delivered from the wrath of God. When we trust in Christ everything we have just seen is reversed.

³⁶ Hosea 13:15.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hosea 13:16.

³⁹ Ibid.

Blessing is not forfeited, blessing begins in Christ. God is not our enemy or our judge, he is our Father. Christ is our friend. Even when we stumble and fall if there is true conversion, if there is true salvation, if the Spirit of God really lives in us, even when we fail there isn't mocking for our failure, there is comfort and encouragement and rescue and change.

Anybody here a believer who has stumbled and fallen in some area of your life? Aren't you glad that you are not condemned, Romans chapter eight? But, rather, the Lord is there to pick us up and dust off and help us along the way.

We are held accountable for our sins, but we are held accountable in Christ. When the devil comes to us with all of our sins and it serves his role as the accuser of the brethren, one who accuses us night and day, our advocate stands at the right hand of our Father who presents the merit of his own life and death and resurrection and argues on our behalf.

Oh, apart from Jesus we know what we deserve, don't we? But he died to save us from our sins. Instead of being reminded of our unwillingness to repent, we are brought to repentance again and again and again. Repentance is a life long thing for the believer. The Lord doesn't leave us alone in our sin and he doesn't let us get away with our sin and he brings us to the point where we must repent of our sin precisely because we are his.

We will be rescued. We are rescued. He is our helper. So we are not left and abandoned to destruction. And as we will see tonight, notice chapter 14 verse one. Notice the heart of God even when it comes to Israel. He is still calling out to them.

Verse one.

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.”⁴⁰

In fact, tonight we are going to be talking about how to come home, how to return home. What you have in chapter 14 is a play by play description from God of how to get right with God. It is an amazing thing for God to say to us, “Let me tell you how to get right with me.”

Where are you at this morning, my friend? Do you know the Lord? Is he your God? Do you know the Savior? Is he your Lord? Is he your King? Is he your Savior and friend? Have you been running after things that will not ever satisfy your heart? Will you listen to his self revelation and turn from your sin and take his counsel and invitation and submit your life to him? Will you meet with God as Judge or as Deliverer?

Life and death is set before you.

Let's bow together for prayer.

⁴⁰ Hosea 14:1.

Father, we thank you for your mercy to us. All of us who know you, Lord, all of us who have been saved by your Son, by you through your Son. Lord, we recognize that we were dead in sin and trespasses. And the decay was all around us in our living. The fruit of our death was being worked out every day and we were on our way to sure destruction because our life is like a mist. Even if our life is 70 years or 80 or 90 by reason of strength, we are here for a moment and we are gone. But you had pity and compassion upon us and not only did everything necessary to save us through the life and death and resurrection of your Son, but then, God, you brought it home to our hearts and granted us repentance and faith, granted us new birth and regeneration so that we could see who we were, we could see who your Son is. And we look to him for life and you have brought us out of darkness into your marvelous light. And you have brought us out of death into life. You brought us out of bondage into deliverance.

Let us, Lord, now live lives of true gratefulness and with thankful hearts pursue you with all that we are. And I pray for anyone who is a stranger to what I have just described, Father. I ask for their salvation and I pray for any brother or sister here who is on a wrong path right now and not listening to you, Lord, not heeding your voice. I pray that today their heart would be convicted and today they would turn from their sin and submit themselves in a fresh way to your Son. We ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.