

From Judgment to Joy: Embracing God's Mercy

Hosea 13–14

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Introduction

One of the saddest things in life is not when someone loses something valuable, it is when someone forgets something valuable.

Some people forget where they placed their keys. Others forget appointments. Some forget names.

But there is a far more dangerous kind of forgetting: forgetting the One who saved you.

Throughout history, people have cried out to God in desperation, when life was falling apart, when sickness came, when finances were tight, when family was hurting.

But once life got better... once blessings started flowing... some slowly forgot God. **How many times do we do this?**

The book of Hosea tells this tragic story. Israel was a nation blessed, rescued, and protected by God, but they turned away from Him and trusted idols instead.

In Hosea chapters 13 and 14, God shows us three powerful truths:

1. The danger of forgetting God
2. The destruction that follows sin
3. The hope of redemption and restoration

And the message for us today is simple:

- If you forget God, destruction follows.
- If you return to God, healing follows.

I. Israel's Past: A Nation Blessed by God

(Hosea 13:1–3) (ESV) 1 When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel, but he incurred guilt through Baal and died. 2 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!" 3 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.

At one time, Israel was strong and respected.

The tribe of Ephraim rose to prominence and often became synonymous with the northern kingdom of Israel. God blessed them with influence, protection, and prosperity.

But tragedy struck. The nation that once honored God began drifting away. They turned to idols.

Sin never stays small. It grows. It promises life but delivers death.

God compares Israel's future to fleeting things:

- The morning mist
- The early dew
- The chaff blown by the wind
- Smoke from a chimney

All of these vanish quickly, just as Israel would.

Why? Because their love for God disappeared first. When love for God fades, everything else eventually fades too.

II. Israel's Present: Forgotten Love

(Hosea 13:4–6) (ESV) 4 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. 5 It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought; 6 but when they had grazed,[1] they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.

God reminds them:

"You shall know no God but Me; for there is no Savior besides Me."

He recalls their history:

- He brought them out of Egypt
- Rescued them from slavery
- Sustained them in the wilderness for forty years

Yet verse 6 says:

"When they were satisfied, their heart became proud; therefore, they forgot Me."

Prosperity can be dangerous. Comfort often leads to self-sufficiency, making people forget the One who gave them breath, strength, and opportunity.

III. The Results of Forgotten Love

(Hosea 13:7–11) (ESV) 7 So I am to them like a lion; like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. 8 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. 9 He destroys^[2] you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper. 10 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”? 11 I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.

God describes the consequences: judgment will come like:

- A lion
- A leopard
- A bear robbed of her cubs

Overwhelming power will bring destruction.

God asks:

- “Where are your kings now?”
- “Where are your rulers?”
- “Where are your idols?”

Verse 9 is sobering:

“You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against Me, against your Helper.”

God calls Himself our Helper, yet Israel rejected Him.

IV. Death Is Not the Final Word

(Hosea 13:12–16) (ESV) 12 The iniquity of Ephraim 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 right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb. 14 I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death.^[3] O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. 15 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. 16 [4] 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.

Israel's sin brought destruction, but God asks:

“Shall I ransom them from the power of the grave? Shall I redeem them from death?”

The words ransom and redeem speak of freedom and rescue.

God declares victory over death:

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

Paul later quoted this in 1 Corinthians 15, applying it to Jesus' resurrection. Death does not win. Sin does not win. Jesus wins.

V. The Call to Repentance

(Hosea 14:1–3) (ESV) 1 Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. 2 Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows[1] of our lips. 3 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.”

God calls His people to return:

“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.”

Repentance means turning around, leaving sin and coming back to God. True repentance involves:

- Confession
- Turning from idols
- Renewed worship
- Dependence on God

God invites His people to seek His mercy with humble hearts.

VI. God's Promise of Restoration

(Hosea 14:4–7) (ESV) 4 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. 5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; 6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. 7 They shall return and dwell beneath my^[2] shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

God promises:

“I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely.”

God does not forgive reluctantly. He restores freely. Like a flourishing tree with deep roots, those who reconnect with God begin to flourish again and we are starting to see those examples now as spring is upon us.

VII. The Final Choice

(Hosea 14:8–9) (ESV) 8 O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you.^[3] I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit. 9 Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

God challenges us: why worship idols when He is the one who:

- Answers prayers
- Provides help
- Heals broken lives
- Redeems from death

“The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them.”

God’s Word is like a GPS, designed to guide us safely to life. God keeps us on track. Do we argue with our GPS when it tells us to go right and we decide to go left, no, we enter our destination and follow it and trust that it’s telling us the truth.