

**Stop Kissing the Calf
From God: I Am the Lord Your God, That Isn't!
Hosea 13**

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As we learned from Hosea 12, the people of the Northern Kingdom turned from the Word of the Living God to the no-gods. The lessons from history provide the background material for tracing the degeneracy of the Israel of Hosea. They became no better than Canaanites. Their identity as YAHWEH's people was all but gone and now, they are characterized as dishonest, oppressive boastful, rich and deluded (Hosea 12:7-8) Canaanites.

Unfortunately, we also identified another comparison between the culture of Israel then and our culture today as well.

We measure success with metrics that are not in alignment with those that are important to the Lord, just like Israel did. This measure of success is riches and prosperity, if we have that, then we obviously have God's favor, and nothing could be further from the truth for us today.

The people of Israel lied to themselves and concluded that all was well, our culture today does the same and this attitude has migrated into the church of the last days, the Laodicean church we now see all around us.

Revelation 3:15–19

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see! All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent!” (NET 2nd ed.)

Like Hosea, the messenger of God today needs to evaluate the secular culture’s domination over the religious and social structures of modern society. All too often it appears that syncretism and pluralism is the politically correct posture of many religious institutions. Its power has affected definitions of the family, approved forbidden sexual behavior, and promoted economic prosperity over moral responsibility.

If preachers today hope to acknowledge God’s power over their lives and desire to remain loyally devoted to Him, they will need to identify and confront the deceptive love for self that parades as religion in society. This syncretism of divided loyalty is prostitution in God’s eyes. This prostitution should grieve the modern messenger as much as it tormented Hosea and God. God’s kingdom is not threatened by this rebellion, but His judgment will come if repentance does not. (Smith 1994, 84-85)

Here in Hosea 13, all that history just provided to us by YAHWEH shows us that judgment is inevitable; it is necessary for the Lord to discipline His people who have defected from Him so deeply that they are now referred to as Canaanites.

We will also continue to see the grace of God being reflected as well. Israel will be judged in the present.

But there is a future for the remnant.

Hosea 13:1–3

“When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling. He exalted himself in Israel, But through Baal he incurred guilt and died. And now they sin more and more, And make for themselves cast metal images, Idols skillfully made from their silver, All of them the work of craftsmen. They say of them, “Let the people who sacrifice kiss the calves!” Therefore they will be like the morning cloud And like dew which soon disappears, Like chaff which is blown away from the threshing floor, And like smoke from a chimney.” (NASB 2020)

We begin with another reference to history, once, when they were in obedience to YAHWEH, Ephraim had a totally different reputation. Before the fall, Adam had a different reputation as well. After the fall, he was a dead man walking, as we all are unless we respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ to accept the work, He did for us on the cross.

The fall of Israel was a work in progress beginning the moment Jeroboam I made the decision to create his own form of worship replacing that which was the only approved form under the covenant.

We get three pictures of the northern kingdom here, the past, the present and the future.

Recall that Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim. The tribe was prominent in the nation. Back at the beginning of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I, also from Ephraim, led the revolt against the southern kingdom.

The tribe was held in honor, a position they took pride in; and they were actively reading their own press clippings resulting in a pride problem that began with the King. He thought He could change the law. God’s Word is not relevant for the Northern Kingdom, we have moved on and realize there are other paths to God as well.

How do you rewrite the Torah? By simply ignoring the parts you do not like. Kind of like how we treat the Bible today. Ephraim took the lead in this action.

Consequently the tribe was at the centre of the nation geographically and politically, and when it spoke, the reaction of those who heard was one of trembling (possibly 'horror', a meaning found for this term in the Qumran scrolls and also here in the Vulgate here). He was the one who lifted up his face in Israel. There had been a time, particularly during the dynasties of Omri and Jehu, when Ephraim had been proudly self-sufficient (cf. 12:8). (Mackay 2012, 339)

There was a pride problem.

1 Kings 12:26–31

“Jeroboam then thought to himself: “Now the Davidic dynasty could regain the kingdom. If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the LORD’s temple in Jerusalem, their loyalty could shift to their former master, King Rehoboam of Judah. They might kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah.” After the king had consulted with his advisers, he made two golden calves. Then he said to the people, “It is too much trouble for you to go up to Jerusalem. Look, Israel, here are your gods who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” He put one in Bethel and the other in Dan. This caused Israel to sin; the people went to Bethel and Dan to worship the calves. He built temples on the high places and appointed as priests common people who were not Levites.” (NET 2nd ed.)

When you justify the reasons for establishing two new centers of worship, in violation of the law, and center them both on a golden calf, you have a pride problem. Jeroboam I was too big for his britches and thumbed his nose at God with actions that would result in the eventual destruction of the northern kingdom in a little over 200 years. The main offense...thank Ahab and Jezebel for this one.

Hosea 13:1b

“...But through Baal he incurred guilt and died.” (NASB 2020)

The central factor in the tribe’s and the Northern Kingdom’s decline was Baal worship. That was the main offense. (Guenther 1998, 200)

As far as God is concerned, Israel is as good as dead. They are a dead nation walking because of their turning towards Baal and worshipping this fallen divine being masquerading as a god. The law has specific language for this type of behavior.

Deuteronomy 17:2–5

“But if in one of your cities that the Lord your God has given to you there is found a man or woman who will do evil before the Lord your God, to transgress his covenant, and going they serve other gods and worship them, the sun or the moon or any from the host of the heavens that I did not assign, and it is reported to you and you seek it out very much and, look, the thing has taken place, truly this abomination has taken place in Israel; you shall even lift up this man or this woman and stone them with stones, and they will die.” (Lexham Press 2020, Deut 17:2-5)

But most of Israel, became Baal worshipers.

This was formalized in the northern kingdom “when Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, the couple established Baal worship (1 Kgs 16:30–31), and even persecuted those who worshiped Yahweh as prescribed by the Law (1 Kgs 19:10).” (Corduan 2016)

Who is Baal? Why is this a problem for Israel, a problem that was only solved by exile; when God got their undivided attention?

Who?

Baal was the son of El, the father of the gods and the head of the Canaanite pantheon, according to the tablets from Ugarit. He is also designated as “the son of Dagon” (Heb. *dāgān*, “grain”), an ancient Canaanite and Mesopotamian deity associated with agriculture. Baal was thus the farm god who gave increase to family and field, flocks and herds. He was likewise identified with the storm god Hadad, whose voice could be heard in the reverberating thunder that accompanied rain, so necessary for the success of the crops. (Unger 1988)

Why?

The inhabitants of Canaan were addicted to Baal worship, which was conducted by priests in temples and in good weather outdoors in fields and particularly on hilltops called “high places.” The cult included animal sacrifice, ritualistic meals, and licentious dances. Near the rock altar was a sacred pillar, or *maṣṣēbâ*, and close by was the symbol of the *āshērâ*, both of which apparently symbolized human fertility. High places had chambers for sacred prostitution by male prostitutes (*qdēshîm*) and sacred harlots (*qdēshôt*) (1 Kings 14:23–24; 2 Kings 23:7). The gaiety and licentious character of Baal worship always had a subtle attraction for the austere Hebrews bound to serve a holy God under a rigorous moral code. (Unger 1988)

What is a major problem for the church today? The fallen divine beings, the gods behind the antics of Baal worship no longer go by that name, but they are still just as powerful and active as they were during the time of Hosea. The why problem continues on today.

Ephesians 6:12–13

“For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age. So put on God’s armour now! Then when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist the enemy’s attacks; and after fighting to the end, you will still hold your ground.” (GNB)

For a Jew living in the time of Hosea, the supernatural was serious business. Today, most of the church discounts it. But this is spiritual warfare we are involved in against the exact same enemy, the no-gods that Hosea says Israel turned to worship.

Still disagree, here is what the Bible teaches. “The power of gods to assist or resist Yahweh in war, to hinder his answers to prayers, to influence “natural” disasters, to inflict diseases on people, to deceive people and the like is assumed throughout the Bible. Yahweh is unquestionably understood to reign supreme over the whole cosmic society of spiritual and earthly beings, but this sovereignty is never—even in Isaiah and Jeremiah—taken to imply either that he is the only divine being or that the other divine beings are mere extensions of his will. This dimension of significant self-determination and power, shared by the angelic and human society, opens up the possibility of conflict in the spiritual and earthly realms. This quasi-democratic view of the cosmos, this freedom to influence others for better or for worse, is the *sine qua non* of a warfare worldview.” (Boyd 1997, 118)

Israel neglected to fully understand this fact, we do too. So, Israel turned to actively worshipping Baal, a created fallen divine being in favor of the one who is the Creator.

This action carried the death penalty per the law. “In other words, the Ephraimites had broken the First Commandment. The consequence of this was that, as a nation, they ‘died’. The nation, or the individual, who deliberately turns away from the one true and living God is spiritually dead.” (Bentley 2000, 201)

What happens when we turn away from the living God and turn towards false religion, progressive Christianity or fall before the altar of materialism?

Hosea 13:2

“And now they sin more and more, And make for themselves cast metal images, Idols skillfully made from their silver, All of them the work of craftsmen. They say of them, “Let the people who sacrifice kiss the calves!”” (NASB 2020)

Not exactly the outcome that God had in store for them. But we clearly see in this the transition from being in their right mind to being in the end state described by Moses as he warned them centuries before.

What is it like to be a slave to sin? You lose control of your actions. “Ephraim continues in the way of sin like zombies, the walking dead, who have lost control of their actions. The explanation lies in their false faith in Baal. They believe him to be the god of fertility and life, so in their desperate need they fervently prepare images for use in the adoration of Baal (cf. 11:2). They seek salvation by means of what is actually sin, and so hope to find life in what works death. ‘Molten image’ (massēkā) is a figure of a deity cast of bronze and overlaid with a precious metal.” (Mays 1969, 172)

Deuteronomy 28:28–29

“The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.” (ESV)

They kissed the calf. This style of worship had started solely as a means to maintain loyalty to the state, but it morphed into much more resulting in idolatry. “Nevertheless, I’ve reserved 7,000 in Israel who have neither bowed their knees to Baal nor kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18, ISV)

Who in their right mind would increase activities associated with their demise, as if the description of “death” at the hands of Baal in the previous verse was not enough to convince hearers of the continuing threat posed by idolatry? (Dearman 2010, 320)

That is the issue, they are no longer in their right minds, and most of our culture today isn’t either.

God is crystal clear. This is a living relationship with the King of the Universe that Israel willingly pledged their obedience to back at Mount Sinai. It is not some old fairy tale to poo poo about.

God still insists today in exclusivity over all other gods. Nothing in our life should be more important than our relationship with Jesus Christ.

None of us are tempted to go worship a calf, but what do we put in front of being with other believers each week and worshipping together? What becomes our god? Is it the god of fishing, or golf, or barbecue, or etc. etc.

Exodus 20:3–6

“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.” (ESV)

We need to hear this today as well. God has not changed His mind about sin. We do not follow fairy tales.

Just as took place in Israel, we live in a culture today that is actively encroaching on us as believers. “If conservative Christians become fully disempowered and marginalized in the larger society, moderate and progressive Christians may well experience the type of animosity now directed at their conservative peers

to the degree that they offer a challenge to the political, cultural, and social goals of those with anti-Christian animosity." (Yancey and Williamson 2015, Kindle Locations 96-98)

During the early days of the church, the Roman Empire insisted that once a year, all citizens of the empire go to their local Caesar worship temple, take a pinch of incense, throw it on the incense altar and declare Caesar is Lord, but that was a problem for anyone who is a believer in Christ. It began as a small act but for the state, this became a serious test of loyalty.

"Little by little people within the empire came to believe that any allegiance in conflict with loyalty to the emperor, and therefore to the empire, could only lead to the disintegration of order. Worship of another Lord could only open the floodgates of chaos.

One final step remained. It came rather late, but under Emperor Decius (249–251) Caesar worship was made universal—and compulsory for every race and nation within the empire with the single exception of the Jews. On a certain day in the year every Roman citizen had to come to the Temple of Caesar and had to burn a pinch of incense there, and say: "Caesar is Lord." When he had done that, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had done so. After a man had burned his pinch of incense and had acknowledged Caesar as Lord, he could go away and worship any god he liked, so long as the worship did not affect public decency and order.

Thus, we see that Caesar worship was primarily a test of political loyalty; it was a test of whether or not a man was a good citizen. If a man refused to carry out the ceremony of acknowledging Caesar, he was automatically branded as a traitor and a revolutionary. Exaltation of the emperor, then, created a problem for the Christians. They had not failed to pray for the emperor in their meetings, but they would not pray to him in private or in public." (Shelley 1995, 43-44)

Today, to be good citizens, we are asked to reject Christ in favor of evolution and science. We are told there is no place in the public forum for any believers. We are told that abortion is politically correct, and God has winked at the same sexual deviancy that He sent Israel and Judah into captivity over.

We are also seeing the next step being taken in several western nations to limit free speech of Christians including couching questions about Christian doctrine into various social justice constructs that the Bible clearly rejects. And some are in the courts as a result, being persecuted just as Israel persecuted faithful Jews.

There is also the possibility that this verse is another reference tying human sacrifice with Baal worship. Today we would call that infanticide or abortion, both supported by the culture.

We know that did indeed take place thanks to Jeremiah 19. "They built the high places for Baal to burn their children in the fire as a burnt offering to Baal—something I didn't command, didn't say, nor did it ever enter my mind!" (Jeremiah 19:5, ISV)

The Septuagint shows the view of the rabbis translating this to Greek.

Hosea 13:2

"And they proceeded to sin, and they made for themselves a molten image from their silver; like an image of idols, the works of carpenters have been completed for them. They said, 'Sacrifice humans, for calves have come to an end.'" (Lexham Press 2020, Hosea 13:2)

Whether this is a reference to human sacrifice as part of their worship, or a diatribe on how low they will go in their worship, at the end of the day, the problem is they are following the enemy, not the Lord; just as many in the church today are doing.

What about kissing? "This was the common act of submission offered to kings and gods. Likewise the kissing of the idol involved kissing its feet in an act of homage, submission and allegiance. In the Mari

letters the governor of Terqa, Kibri-Dagan, advises Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, to come to Terqa to kiss the feet of the statue of the god Dagan.” (Matthews, Chavalas and Walton 2000, Ho 13:2)

Hosea 13:3

“Therefore they will be like the morning cloud And like dew which soon disappears, Like chaff which is blown away from the threshing floor, And like smoke from a chimney.” (NASB 2020)

Because of their choices and behavior, Israel will last just as long as the morning dew. Judgement is coming very quickly. There are four terms used to emphasize that point, a morning cloud, dew, chaff and smoke. Those who are engaged in idolatry do not have a very long shelf life when compared with the eternity that YAHWEH offers.

This people, sacrificing to demons and kissing calves, shall become nothing, just like the cloud, the dew, the chaff, and the smoke. (Harper 1905, 397)

They are still busy sowing the wind.

Hosea 13:4–8

“Yet I have been the LORD your God Since the land of Egypt; And you were not to know any god except Me, For there is no savior besides Me. I cared for you in the wilderness, In the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, And as they became satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore they forgot Me. So I will be like a lion to them; Like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside. I will confront them like a bear deprived of her cubs, And I will tear open their chests; I will also devour them there like a lioness, As a wild animal would tear them to pieces.” (NASB 2020)

The NASB translation is not as definitive as the Hebrew is here. In the Hebrew, the declaration in Hosea 13:4 is a strong definitive “I am” statement where He says “I am YAHWEH, your God.”

Hosea 13:4

“But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Therefore, you must not acknowledge any God but me. Except for me there is no Savior.” (NET 2nd ed.)

He is God, the no-gods aren't.

The ephemeral character and worthlessness of Ephraim's idols are sharply contrasted with the consistent reality and power of Yahweh, who, from the time of the exodus, was de facto the nation's God. The thought is solemnly expressed by use of the pronouncement (in the first person), placed on Yahweh's lips, which echoes the similar solemn pronouncement at Sinai in Exod 20:2. (MacIntosh 1997, 527)

The statement is clear. YAHWEH is God, He is the I am, He is the creator, He is the one who brought Israel out of Egypt, not anyone else and no one else assisted Him in that action. He is the only one worthy of worship, He is the only one who is the Living God.

They have known Him since Egypt, implying that there has been a relationship since then, the one established at Mount Sinai.

His statement is the same as seen in the first commandment.

Exodus 20:2–3

“I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” (NET 2nd ed.)

Because of His self-revelation of Himself to His people, God made an exclusive claim to the loyalty of the people. Just as Hosea made an exclusive claim on the love of Gomer, that picture was to be the same as God with His people.

He is the only savior they have ever known.

Israel is to know no other deity, a stricture designed to protect the intimacy of the national covenant, just as it would the exclusive intimacy of a marriage. Israel's knowledge of YHWH is a human reflex of what YHWH himself first brought to pass in knowing, i.e., claiming, Israel for himself. (Dearman 2010, 321)

Hosea 13:5

"I cared for you in the wilderness, In the land of drought." (NASB 2020)

God is the one who delivered them from Egypt, He is the one who took them out of slavery and set them free. He is the only one worthy of worship. He didn't stop there, as He took His people into the wilderness, He is the one who cared for them.

There in the wilderness, God taught them as He cared for them. They should remember this and remain faithful.

Wilderness Lessons

1. Trust God wholly and completely for everything to include even the most basic of daily needs.
2. When ready to complain about the situation or the apparent lack of basic daily needs...see 1.

If we only look at the issue of water for the nation while in the wilderness, or as Hosea puts it, the land of drought, what does YAHWEH's loving care mean?

How Much Water?

- Average usage per person for all aspects in a desert region = 50 liters per day.
- Active = 2 liters per hour.
- Daily need = 100,000,000 liters per day.
- 26,417,000 gallons per day
- Over 3.5 million CF of water per day
- Lake Powell, when full, would be a 50-day supply at that rate
- A lot of water and God supplied this for 40 years

So, what does God's loving care look like for a nation in the desert for 40 years. Total numbers look like 380,404,800,000 gallons or drinking a full Lake Powell dry 288 times. This does not include the flocks. The real numbers may be double what we see here.

Philippians 4:19

"And with all his abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, my God will supply all your needs." (GNB)

Israel did not stay in the wilderness, they entered the promised land, a land of milk and honey. As God blessed them their flocks grew, and crops multiplied. Things got to be really good, and they forgot all about who truly did it for them.

Hosea 13:6–8

"As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, And as they became satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore they forgot Me. So I will be like a lion to them; Like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside. I will confront them like a bear deprived of her cubs, And I will tear open their chests; I will also devour them there like a lioness, As a wild animal would tear them to pieces." (NASB 2020)

The future is grim, but there is more going on here than just series of metaphors involving animals. These are animals who show up later on in Daniel.

There is a prophetic sidelight here that is very interesting. In Daniel's vision (ch. 7) Babylon is pictured as a lion, Greece (under Alexander the Great) is pictured as a leopard, and the empire of Media-Persia is pictured as the bear. Now here in Hosea's prophecy God is saying that in the future He will come against them like a lion and a leopard, but in the immediate future He will come like a bear—represented by Media-Persia, which at that early date was dominated by Assyria. (McGee 1997, 654-655)

Hosea 13:9–11

“It is to your own destruction, Israel, That you are against Me, against your help. Where then is your king, That he might save you in all your cities; And your judges, to whom you said, “Give me a king and princes”? I gave you a king in My anger, And took him away in My wrath.” (NASB 2020)

Because Israel has relied on no-gods for guidance rather than the one who has been with them since Egypt, He will withdraw His help.

The fault lies with Israel for turning against Yahweh, their helper (v. 9b), and the chief crime or prime folly of Israel is arrogant self-reliance. (Laidinsuah 2015, 267)

God does not help those who help themselves. Contrary to what we have been taught in the past by the world, self-reliance is not the solution for Israel or for us.

Every element of self-reliance must be slain by the power of God. The people who say “I can't” are those who have a remnant of self-reliance left; a true saint never says “I can't,” because it never occurs to him that he can! Complete weakness is always the occasion of the Spirit of God manifesting His power. (Chambers 1996)

For Israel and for us, we must stop relying on ourselves to “fix” the situation. Our reliance must be on the one who promises to make our paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6)

We all know what reliance means. Well, Faith is reliance. But then, when the reliance is directed upon an Object infinitely great and good, when it reposes upon God in Christ, upon Him in His promise, His fidelity, His love, upon His very Self, what is not this reliance in its effects? It is the creature laying hold upon the Creator. It is our reception of God Himself in His Word. So, it is the putting ourselves in the way of His own almighty action in the fulfillment of His Word, in the keeping of His promise. (Moule 2005, 150)

In the past, Israel has relied upon their King to help resolve their military problems. He'll know what to do. God reminds them of that misguided faith. They should trust in Him and His abilities to protect them. God is saying, “Remember when you first asked for a King? I do. I remember what you said to Samuel.” “and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.”” (1 Samuel 8:5, ESV)

Samuel immediately saw how wrong this was to rely on a King when they should be relying on God.

1 Samuel 8:7–9

“And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”” (ESV)

The entire nation was carefully warned about what it was they were asking for. Now they are reaping what that request led to.

God is in essence asking, “How is that going for you?” “Now God is taking the kingship away. After the fall of Samaria and, a century later, the fall of Jerusalem, that kind of kingship will never be allowed again. Kingship led to the domination of man-made ideas. The end result has been a society full of murder and

idolatry, and a society programmed for self-destruction. They have forgotten what it was like to live dependent on God alone. They have only aroused God's anger. The supposed advantages of living in dependence upon human deliverers never materialised. Now they are helpless." (Eaton 1996, 187-188)

Hosea 13:12-13

"The guilt of Ephraim is wrapped up; His sin is stored up. The pains of childbirth come on him; He is not a wise son, For it is not the time that he should delay at the opening of the womb." (NASB 2020)

The northern kingdom of Israel has never had a good king who consistently honored YAHWEH, not one. Here God tells them He has been storing up all that guilt and sin in the cloud. It's all in storage and the opportunity to wipe the hard drive clean has passed.

The picture is one of childbirth making use of all the data on the hard drive. The picture is one of degeneracy, the record is one of failure.

The record could have been used to create something glorious, but instead, the results are severely deformed. "Israel's national archives contain the record of her failure. Monarch after monarch has added to the sins against God. What Israel has viewed as her glory, God declares to be her shame. This severely deformed fetus will never see the light of God's day of salvation. When it comes to the time of crisis (birth, 13:13), the nation cannot take the appropriate step of repenting and throwing herself in a new dependence on God." (Guenther 1998, 203)

It is too late to rewrite the drive. The record is now part of the operating system, and the results are an operating system that will never see the light of day. It is too severely deformed. "The plain message is that Ephraim's repetitive relational breaches are off limits and unforgivable. Perhaps the "binding and keeping in store" has the idea of inextricability, underlining the certainty of judgment." (Laidinsuah 2015, 269)

Hosea 13:14

"Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? Death, where are your thorns? Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight." (NASB 2020)

Some take this verse as a threat, others as a promise of grace.

Considering the history presented earlier, and the covenant violations outlined, God asks four rhetorical questions. The first two "Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death?" (Hosea 13:14a NASB 2020) again asking the same question He asked of Himself earlier (Hosea 11:8 – 9) and answering with grace. Here the answer is no.

He ties into the first two questions responses which would be logical extensions, "...Death where are your thorns? Sheol where is your sting?" (Hosea 13:14b, NASB 2020) This again implies the application of grace if the answer was yes, but it was no based on the context of where this verse falls in the chapter. There will be a remnant, there is to be a resurrection. But for the nation, judgement. "My eyes will not show any compassion!" (Hosea 13:14c. NASB 2020)

For our purposes here in Hosea, this is not a promise of grace. But Paul will take this verse and flip it as pertaining to the remnant.

He would have no pity on them. He appealed for death (like a thorn bush) to torment the Israelites, as though thorns tore their flesh. He called on the grave (as a hornet) to sting them fatally. Later in history God did provide a ransom for His people from the power of the grave, and He redeemed them from death. He did this when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again. God's future redemptive work for His people meant that death would not be the end for Israel even though judgment in the near future was inevitable. (Constable 2003, Ho 13:14)

Hosea 13:15

“Though he flourishes among the reeds, An east wind will come, The wind of the LORD coming up from the wilderness; And his fountain will become dry And his spring will dry up; It will plunder his treasury of every precious article.” (NASB 2020)

This verse begins with word play on the Hebrew for Ephraim. Even though they have flourished in the past, an east wind is coming. This east wind is the Assyrian Empire. There was a time that Israel pursued a treaty with Assyria, then reneged on that treaty. Now the east wind is coming to them.

The Lord is the one who is bringing in the armies of Assyria to judge His people. “This will happen not just because of the inherent folly of the policies they pursued, but because of the LORD’S intervention to ensure this outcome.” (Mackay 2012, 358-359)

Instead of Israel chasing the wind, now the wind is chasing Israel.

First Israel in their sin and insanity choose a way of destruction; then God “honors” the choice, takes control, and makes the chosen madness into his chosen means of punishment. The roles are thus reversed. Pursuing Israel is now pursued, and the redeemer-God becomes pursuer and punisher. (Beeby 1989, 173)

All the riches that was the pride of the northern kingdom, Assyria will take them all.

Hosea 13:16

“Samaria will pay the penalty for her guilt, Because she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword, Their children will be slaughtered, And their pregnant women will be ripped open.” (NASB 2020)

Israel chased after fertility gods. They engaged in prostitution as part of that worship and ignored the one who had brought them out of slavery and placed them in the land to begin with. The capital is Samaria, and it is that city which took the hardest impact from the Assyrian assault.

For a people who chased after increased fertility by sacrificing their own children to the false gods, now Assyria, goes beyond that and eliminates all possibilities of the continued growth of Israel by even killing pregnant women with their soon to be born children. The punishment exacted by Assyria is one that they would impose on a people who had rebelled against them throwing a previous agreement to the side, just like Israel did. Assyria held the penalty portion of the covenant they had with Israel as a necessity to be fulfilled. It also fulfilled the curses found in the covenant between Israel and YAHWEH.

The unfaithfulness of the people will be punished. God wanted to display His grace to His people but other than the remnant, they simply would not have it and insisted on their sin, which meant they insisted on judgement.

In spite of all of this, Israel still has a future, and we will examine that as we wrap up Hosea next time.

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