

Hosea 13:12-16

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The LORD predicts that a powerful army will destroy Israel's villages in a brutal manner that includes the slaughter of children and the ripping open of pregnant women. However, Hosea also predicts that Israel will resurrect, and in doing so foreshadows the resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

This section begins with God's indictment of Israel (addressed here as *Ephraim*) for their long history of guilt. The Suzerain God declared, *The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; His sin is stored up* (vs 12).

The most prominent tribe in the northern kingdom is *Ephraim*, which means "doubly fruitful" (Genesis 41:52). It is used to represent the entire northern kingdom of Israel, perhaps to ironically point out their futility and fruitlessness, since they had been corrupted by their sin and *iniquity* (vv. 1-3).

Hosea states that *The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up*. The image is of *iniquity* in a sack Israel is carrying, as they carried their possessions *bound up* out of Egypt (Exodus 12:34, Isa. 8:16). The verb to *store up* raises the picture of *iniquity* that is like excess crops put in storage for future use. Together, these images describe Israel's accumulation of *iniquity*, which the Suzerain God kept in His record book as a testimony against the nation on the day of judgment (Deuteronomy 32:34-35). It would stand to reason that these sins have been stored up because Israel has refused God's invitation to repent and be restored (Hosea 6:1, 12:6).

Following the statement about *Ephraim's* store of accumulated sinful deeds being kept in a record book, the LORD illustrated *Ephraim's* spiritual insensitivity through the metaphor of childbirth: *The pains of childbirth come upon him; He is not a wise son, for it is not the time that he should delay at the opening of the womb* (vs 13).

The situation described here is that of a *son* who refuses to come out of his mother's womb during labor (*pains of childbirth*), causing a delay in the delivery process, and potential death of both mother and child. The image of a baby refusing to come out of the womb is an image that represents an absurdity. It is ridiculous to imagine a newborn thinking it knows better than its mother, refusing to leave the womb, stubbornly insisting upon its own demise. Such is the case of Israel. Israel is *not a wise son*.

The LORD described that *son* as unwise because his failure to cooperate with the contractions of childbirth could potentially jeopardize his life and that of his mother. In a similar vein, *Ephraim*, God's beloved *son* (Hosea 11:1), was unwise because he failed to notice that it was time to "sow with a view to righteousness and seek the LORD" (Hosea 10:12). Although God's judgment was approaching, *Ephraim* continued in his evil ways. So, when the day of judgment arrived, *Ephraim* would respond unwisely and inappropriately.

Such an unwise response on *Ephraim*'s part prompted the LORD to invite "death" and "Sheol" to serve as His instrument of judgment against His disobedient and rebellious people: *Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death?* (vs 14). The expected answer to these rhetorical questions is "No!" However, it appears that within this "no" is also a "yes," as we will see in the next phrase.

The phrases *shall I ransom* and *shall I redeem* are used together in the sense of delivering someone from a life-threatening situation. In this instance, God is going to remove His protection, and allow them to suffer the consequences of their behavior. They want to trust Egypt and Assyria, playing them off against one another (Hosea 7:11). They will get the natural result of playing such a dangerous game of intrigue with the world superpowers of that time: destruction.

The term *Sheol*, used in parallel with the term *death*, stands for the grave and represents the lowest and deepest place imaginable. It is the underworld, the realm of the dead (Deuteronomy 32:22). Through these terms, the LORD made it clear that He would not redeem His covenant people because they had been unfaithful for so long. It is now time for Israel to experience the provisions for disobedience in their covenant with their Suzerain (Ruler) God (Deuteronomy 8:19-20, 28:52, 64). The nation would surely die and go to *Sheol* in the day of God's judgment.

God proceeded to ask two additional questions involving "death" and "Sheol":

O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? (vs 14).

The words for *thorns* and *sting* often denote pestilence and plague (Exodus 9:3, 15). These verses are included in 1 Corinthians 15 as prophetic predictions of the resurrection:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."
(1 Corinthians 15:54b)

This verse from 1 Corinthians 15 quotes Isaiah 25:8, and Paul uses it to show that it predicts resurrection from the dead. It is followed with quotes from Hosea 13:14,

"O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"
(1 Corinthians 15:55)

Paul asserts these phrases from Hosea 13:14 prophesy resurrection from the dead. Following the principle that what happens to the nation of Israel is prophetically predictive of Israel's Messiah ([see commentary on Hosea 11:1](#)) this would then indicate that embedded in God's assertion that His *son* Israel will experience death as a nation, and *Compassion will be hidden from My sight* at the time of the discipline, it will happen to the Messiah as well.

However, embedded in the judgement is a promise of resurrection. This is similar to the promise in Jeremiah 29:11 where God asserts that the looming judgement of Judah will ultimately bloom into a blessing. Hebrew tradition holds that this verse could be read as:

“From Sheol itself I will save them,
Redeem them from very Death.
Where, O Death, are your plagues?
Your pestilence where, O Sheol?”

Perhaps this was the Jewish tradition held by the Apostle Paul, and would explain why he referred to this passage to prophesy of Jesus’s resurrection.

God promises to resurrect Israel from death as a nation (Ezekiel 37:11-12). This image also presages resurrection from the dead of Jesus the Messiah (Christ, or “Anointed One”). The promise of resurrection as a nation is also a provision of God’s covenant with Israel, that after they are exiled and scattered across the earth, they will be restored as a nation and their enemies defeated (Deuteronomy 32:36, 43).

God would inflict discipline on the northern kingdom of Israel, pursuant to the terms of the covenant (Deuteronomy 8:19-20). But discipline is also executed because God loves the Israelites (Jeremiah 31:3, Hebrews 12:5-6, Revelation 3:19). Israel will suffer judgement due to its own choices, but nothing can separate Israel from His covenant love (Romans 8:38-39, 11:28-29).

As He declared, God had been patient with Israel, giving them ample opportunity to repent, and return to following His covenant commands. But they refused to return to Him in faith. Therefore, judgment was inevitable. This time the LORD would not spare Hosea’s generation from judgment.

The LORD then pictured the severity of His judgment using the imagery of a wind. Playing on the name of Israel’s most prominent tribe *Ephraim*, which means “doubly fruitful” (Genesis 41:52), He stated, *Though he flourishes among the reeds, an east wind will come* (vs 15).

The Hebrew word translated *the reeds* is “ah” and is usually rendered “brother.” Here *the reeds* appears to represent the surrounding “family” of nations. Israel is like a marsh plant that *flourishes among the reeds* until it is decimated by an *east wind*. This is an image of Israel’s looming demise, as its neighboring “brother” nation, Assyria will conquer and exile Israel (2 Kings 17:5-6).

The *east wind* likely refers to the deadly “sirocco,” a hot *wind* blowing in across the land from the eastern Arabian Desert (Hosea 12:1). Because such a *wind* could potentially destroy human endeavors (Ezekiel 27:26, Psalm 48:7) and blight vegetation (Ezekiel 17:10), it became a metaphor for anything that made desolate and worthless. God’s point is that although *Ephraim* was fruitful among his brother nations and allies (Assyria and Egypt), he would be reduced to nothing in the day of judgment because a strong *wind* would destroy him.

The *east wind* that would destroy *Ephraim* is further identified as *the wind of the LORD coming up from the wilderness* (vs 15). The arrival of such a *wind* would have negative effects on *Ephraim*’s life because *his fountain will become dry and his spring will be dried up* (vs 15). This pictures a drought, leading to famine.

The *fountain* becoming *dry* likely pictures the ceasing of the flow of running water, which is naturally attended by water ceasing to flow from the *spring*. *His* here refers to Ephraim, the personification of the nation of Israel through its most prominent tribe. Israel's productivity is about to be decimated, but it will only apply to *his spring*, it will not be a widespread event. Although judgment will come upon Israel like a withering drought, God will tell Israel that He will be "like the dew to Israel" and bring them back to life, another picture of resurrection (Hosea 14:5).

Not only would the *east wind* cause a drought in *Ephraim's* land, but it would also cause a military defeat as *it will plunder his treasury of every precious article* (vs 15). This further indicates that the *east wind* represents Assyria, the nation God used as His tool to carry out His judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings. 17:5). The plundering will be complete, involving not just a part of Israel's wealth, but *every precious article*. The picture is one of complete devastation. This is, again, what Israel signed up for when they agreed to abide by their covenant with God (Exodus 19:8, Deuteronomy 8:19-20).

As God concludes the chapter, He shifts from calling Israel *Ephraim* to identifying it as *Samaria*. *Samaria* was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, and was often used to identify the entire northern kingdom. In New Testament times, the region still carried the name *Samaria* (Luke 4:4). Hosea exposed once again the reason for God's judgment: *Samaria will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God* (vs 16).

Despite all the warnings, *Samaria* refused to listen to God's commands. It broke God's covenant, and would now incur the prescribed penalties for disobedience in its covenant with God (Deuteronomy 8:19-20, 28:15-68). God's covenant with Israel was fashioned after the Suzerain-vassal treaty structure common in that era ([see our article on suzerain-vassal treaties](#)). In Israel's case, God made the covenant with the people of the nation, rather than just the king.

Since it is the nation's capital, the reference to *Samaria* might highlight the rebellion of Israel's leaders, as they have become corrupt (Hosea 5:10). However, Hosea highlights that the entire nation has rebelled against Him, having become ignorant of His laws (Hosea 8:12). This ignorance has resulted in the nation descending into a pagan culture of exploitation and pleasure-seeking (Hosea 9:1, 4:2, 11:12).

As prescribed in their covenant contract, the remedy for Ephraim/Israel's contract violation is described in three parts:

(1) *Samaria and her residents will fall by the sword* as a foreign army would come swiftly to invade the land (2 Kings. 17:5),

(2) *their little ones will be dashed in pieces, and*

(3) *their pregnant women will be ripped open* (vs 16).

This idea of children being *dashed in pieces* and *pregnant women* being *ripped open* by the invaders highlights a picture of complete devastation by a brutal and cruel nation. Although God

uses Assyria as His instrument to invoke the covenant prescriptions against Israel's covenant violations, Assyria does not go without judgement. The book of Nahum pronounces God's judgement upon Assyria and its capital Nineveh for its cruelty and insatiable appetite for human and material plunder at the expense of other nations (Nahum 2:9, 3:1).

The Suzerain (Ruler) God of Israel predicted that the warfare to come would destroy the town and villages of the Israelites, and not even children and women would be spared from the rampaging army.

We can end this chapter by returning to how Paul used Hosea 13:14 in his letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 15:55, Paul stated, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" Paul used the verse to show that death (the last enemy, v. 26) has been defeated. In Paul's letter, the verse describes the victory that is found in Jesus Christ. In spite of the death and misery that entered the world when Adam sinned, Jesus has redeemed the world, and we can look forward to a New Jerusalem and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:2-3).

Biblical Text

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