

Hosea 13:4-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hos/hos-13/hosea-134-8/>

Although the LORD blessed Israel, they have become prideful and forgotten Him. They have broken His covenant. God warns Israel that He will send an invader to attack and destroy their nation like a vicious wild animal to tear them to pieces, which is consistent with the provisions for breaking their covenant agreement.

To expose the ingratitude and rebellion of the Israelites, the LORD reviewed His past relationship with them, thereby explaining the reasons for His judgment. Speaking directly to His covenant people, the LORD stated, *Yet I have been the Lord your God since the land of Egypt* (vs 4). Although Israel has not acknowledged Yahweh as their God, He has still been their God notwithstanding. This has been true since Israel left *the land of Egypt* (Exodus 12:51).

The pronoun *I* in the phrase *Yet I have been the Lord your God* is emphatic in the Hebrew text, indicating that God alone was with the Israelites while they were enslaved in *the land of Egypt*. This divine declaration demonstrates that the Suzerain (Ruler) God was Israel's only deliverer. The LORD alone redeemed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 20:2) and chose them as His "own possession among all the peoples" (Exodus 19:5).

Continuing His speech regarding Israel's indifference and ingratitude, the LORD alluded to the first of the Ten Commandments, saying, *And you were not to know any god except Me, for there is no savior besides Me* (Exodus 20:2-3).

As people who belonged to the LORD, the Israelites were supposed to worship Him alone. They were not to worship any other gods or have any relationship with them. These gods were mere idols with no real power (Deuteronomy 32:21). But the LORD alone is all-powerful. He was the only one who was their *savior*, and who delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt. This was the first and greatest commandment. To love the Lord with all our being leads to the second greatest command, to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Loving God creates an external focus, which prepares us mentally to focus on serving the best interest of others. Worshipping idols does the opposite. Idolatry creates a moral justification for exploiting others to satisfy our own sensual appetites.

Besides delivering the Israelites from slavery, the LORD also protected them and cared for them. As He declared, *I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought* (vs 5). This refers to God's protective care for Israel as they departed Egypt and wandered through the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:3-5).

The Hebrew verb translated as *cared for you* in the phrase *I (God) cared for you (Israel) in the wilderness* is from the same root verb which occurs as "to know" in the previous verse, as "you were not to know any god except Me." God knew Israel, *cared for* him, and provided for his needs.

God was faithful to His covenant relationship with Israel. After rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the LORD *cared for them in the wilderness*, even though they traveled through a *land of drought*. God miraculously fed and watered them while they were wandering in the *wilderness*, where there was inadequate resources to provide for Israel (Exodus 17:6, 16:13-16). God then allowed them to enter Canaan, “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:17).

God knew Israel’s true needs. It is noteworthy that God provided for Israel’s needs, but did not prioritize Israel’s comfort. Rather God gave the children of Israel opportunity to mature in their faith and knowledge of God (Deuteronomy 8:3-5). To know God is the path to our greatest experience in life (John 17:3).

By God’s blessing, Israel prospered. But Israel’s prosperity caused them to become ungrateful: So, as *they had their pasture, they became satisfied, and being satisfied, their heart became proud* (vs 6).

The term *pasture* refers to grazing land for sheep and cattle, which was a primary source of prosperity at that time. Here, the term is used for Israel’s material wealth. As a shepherd, the LORD led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Because of the LORD’s upbringing, the Israelites prospered and became *satisfied*. This was just as God predicted through Moses:

“For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied [same Hebrew word] and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.” (Deuteronomy 31:20)

The problem was not just that the people were *satisfied*. The problem was that as the people prospered, they *became proud*. Their perspective became warped. Rather than realizing that their blessings came from following their covenant with God, they began to believe their prosperity was self-determined; it was deserved. Such a perspective leads to entitlement, which in turn can lead to exploitation of others. Such a decay in culture leads to widespread deception and violence (Hosea 4:2).

Pride is seeing oneself without proper reality. It is the root source of unrighteousness, which is being out of sync with God’s design (Habakkuk 2:4). It is a human tendency to attribute success to ourselves when we are *satisfied* with material prosperity. When we do this, we become *proud*. Humility is seeing reality as it is, and reality is that God is the source of all blessing (James 1:17).

Israel should have maintained a true perspective that their blessings flowed from obedience to God’s covenant, and remained grateful to God. Instead, *they forgot* (vs 6) God and began to violate their covenant with Him. Their covenant with God required them to honor God with all their being, and in doing so to love their neighbors as themselves (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-39).

Therefore, the LORD announced Israel’s upcoming destruction using five vivid comparisons.

The first two comparisons picture God as both a lion and a leopard: *I will be like a lion to them; like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside* (vs 7). The image of *lion* evokes the notion of ferocity, destructive power, and irresistible strength. The *leopard* was known for its speed and ferocity. God will destroy Israel swiftly and thoroughly.

The last three comparisons portray God as a bear, a lioness, and a wild beast: *I will encounter them like a bear robbed of her cubs and I will tear open their chests. There I will also devour them like a lioness, as a wild beast would tear them* (vs 8). The statement *a bear robbed of her cubs* evokes the idea of ferocious aggressiveness (2 Samuel 17:8) and speaks of extreme danger (Proverbs 17:12, 28:15). In His action against His covenant people, the LORD would act as a ferocious animal to *tear open their chests*, whose ribs protect the heart. Right on the spot, the LORD would *devour them*.

This predicted fatal attack would ultimately lead to the nation's death, which occurred in 722 BC when the Assyrian empire invaded Israel and besieged Samaria, the capital city (2 Kings 17:5). This fate is completely consistent with the covenant agreement Israel entered into with their Suzerain (Ruler) God. The agreement clearly spelled out this result as a consequence for disobedience (Deuteronomy 8:19-20, 28:15-68).

Biblical Text

**⁴ 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.
⁵ I cared for you in the wilderness,
In the land of drought.
⁶ As they had their pasture, they became satisfied,
And being satisfied, their heart became proud;
Therefore they forgot Me.
⁷ So I will be like a lion to them;
Like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside.
⁸ I will encounter them like a bear robbed of her cubs,
And I will tear open their chests;
There I will also devour them like a lioness,
As a wild beast would tear them.**