

Lesson 42

Hosea 12:14

14 Ephraim has given bitter provocation; so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

We have already seen that Ephraim did not know God (4:6), that Ephraim did not love God (6:4), that Ephraim was not loyal to God (7:11), that Ephraim was sinning against God (8:11), and that Ephraim was lying to God (11:12).

Verse 14, I think, summarizes all of Ephraim's sins against God with a single description – Ephraim was **provoking** God. In fact, verse 14 tells us that Ephraim was **bitterly** provoking God.

And I think this word “provocation” points us to the root cause of **what** Ephraim had done and **why** they had done it – **idolatry**.

- Why did Ephraim not know God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why did Ephraim not love God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why was Ephraim not loyal to God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why did Ephraim sinning against God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why did Ephraim lying to God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.

Idolatry was the root cause of their numerous sins against God, and I think idolatry remains the same root cause today.

When we think of our own sins, can't we say that they begin the moment we place something between us and God? Something that prevents us from loving God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength? (Mark 12:30) That is idolatry.

Idolatry was the root cause of sin in Hosea's day, and I think the same remains true today, which explains the frequent warnings that we find in the New Testament against idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10:14 – Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 John 5:21 – Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

But back to verse 14 – why can we say that Ephraim's **provocation** of God is related to Ephraim's false idols? We can say that because of the Hebrew word translated "provocation."

What did Moses do after the people created their golden calf?

Deuteronomy 9:18 – Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to **provoke** him to anger.

That is the same word that we find here in verse 14.

And what did Moses tell the people shortly after the curses in Deuteronomy 28 and shortly before his death in Deuteronomy 34?

Deuteronomy 31:29 – For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, **provoking** him to anger through the work of your hands.

Again, that is the same word that we find here in verse 14.

That single word “provocation” here in verse 14 is taking us back to the golden calf in Deuteronomy 9 and back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28 – both of which are directly related to idolatry.

Deuteronomy 28:13–14 – And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, **if** you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, and **if** you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, **to go after other gods to serve them.**

Verse 14 tells us that God viewed Ephraim’s idolatry as a **bitter provocation**.

And what was the result of that bitter provocation?

We see two results of that bitter provocation in verse 14. First, Ephraim's bloodguilt would not be removed, and second, Ephraim would be repaid for its disgraceful deeds.

The word translated "bloodguilt" refers to the blood of either humans or animals. Figuratively, that word signifies violence.

2 Samuel 16:8 – ...See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.

2 Samuel 21:1 – ...There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.

Proverbs 1:11 – If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason."

Ezekiel 18:10 – If he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things.

But what was the bloodguilt of Ephraim? What violence had they committed?

It is possible that Ephraim's bloodguilt included child sacrifice.

In verse 2 of the next chapter, we will see a verse that **may** suggest that the people were regularly offering human sacrifices to their golden calves. I think that conclusion is doubtful, but let's save that discussion for Hosea 13:2.

But even without human sacrifice, Ephraim was still guilty of violence and bloodshed. In the

first verse of Chapter 12, we were told that “they multiply falsehood and **violence.**”

And we know that a big part of that violence was the violence from Assyria. But how was Ephraim guilty for what Assyria did to them?

We already know that answer to that question – Assyria invaded Ephraim because King Hoshea switched his allegiance to Egypt. There was a direct line between the violence inflicted by Assyria and the bad decision of King Hoshea. And, of course, we know that Assyria was sent as a punishment by God for Ephraim’s disobedience. So, yes, I think Ephraim could be blamed for the violence that came upon them.

But I think Ephraim was also guilty of its own violence – violence, not that Assyria committed, but that Ephraim committed.

We haven’t mentioned Jezreel in quite a while, but, as we recall, Jezreel was Hosea and Gomer’s first child. And we also recall why Jezreel was given that strange name.

Hosea 1:4 – And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu **for the blood of Jezreel**, and I will put **an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.**”

Again, as we recall, Jehu’s actions at Jezreel almost led to the complete destruction of the line of King David. And that outcome is quite ironic. Why? Because Hosea 1:4 tells us that

Jehu's actions actually led, not to the end of Judah, but to the end of Israel.

And Hosea has also pointed to Israel's bloodshed elsewhere.

Hosea 4:2 – There is swearing, lying, **murder**, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, **and bloodshed follows bloodshed.**

Hosea 6:8 – Gilead is a city of evildoers, **tracked with blood.**

So what then is the message of verse 14?

The first message is that “his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him” – that is, on Ephraim. That guilt would not be removed, but it would remain – and so the punishment for that bloodshed would also remain.

And the second message is that God “will repay him for his **disgraceful deeds.**” What does that mean?

I think the KJV translation is better: “and his **reproach** shall his Lord return unto him.” The Hebrew word translated “disgraceful deeds” in the ESV just means reproach or rebuke.

But upon whom was Ephraim casting that reproach? God.

By disregarding God's law and by giving honor to Baal, the people were showing their contempt for God – they were casting reproach upon God. And so God tells Ephraim that he would return that reproach to them.

And, once again, we are reminded of a truth that we have seen very often in this book – God always has the last word! In fact, when it comes to Israel, Hosea, in many ways, is that last word. Hosea was the last prophet to Israel giving God’s last word to Israel.

One more comment about verse 14 – notice the phrase, “**so his Lord.**”

In what sense was God still Ephraim’s Lord? Ephraim was disobedient; was God still their Lord? Here is how one commentary answers that question:

The word “Lord” denotes God’s ownership of Ephraim and at the same time downgrades the quality of the relationship between the two parties from a covenant relationship to one of master and slave.

And that may very well be the intent here, but I also think there is a lesson here for us.

Yes, the people Ephraim needed to do many things if they wanted to restore a right relationship with God, but one thing they did **not** need to do was to make God the Lord of their life! God was already their Lord – that is what verse 14 tells us. They didn’t need to make God anything – instead they needed to make themselves into obedient people!

I think that sometimes we see **ourselves** as the fixed point rather than God. We make Jesus Lord or we crown Jesus king, as if Jesus was not already Lord and already King. It is God who changes not (Malachi 3:6), not us. It is Jesus

who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), not us. We are not the fixed point in the relationship. We are the ones who are commanded to change.

We sometimes hear that we need to make Jesus the Lord of our life (and I suppose we could twist our necks in an attempt to view that phrase in a way that makes sense), but is that what Peter proclaimed in Acts 2? No, it is not. Is that what Peter told the people they needed to do? No, it is not. Peter said the opposite.

Acts 2:36–38 – “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Peter did not tell them that they needed to make Jesus Lord. Instead, Peter told them that Jesus was already Lord – and they needed to obey him!

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14) – and what that title means is that Jesus is everyone’s King and everyone’s Lord.

I think we see that fact right here in verse 14 when it comes to God the Father – God was Ephraim’s Lord even while Ephraim was on the side of Baal. In fact, these punishments were coming

because God was their Lord, and because they had been disobedient to their Lord.

Likewise, today, we do not obey Jesus to make him our Lord and our King – we obey Jesus because he is already our Lord and our King. If he were not, then why must we obey him?

We do not make Jesus Lord and we do not crown Jesus king. God the Father did both of those things. The only crown that mankind ever placed on the head of Christ was a crown of thorns.

The question is not whether Jesus is our Lord and our King – he is. Instead, the question is whether we are his faithful subjects.

Introduction to Hosea 13

Before we start with verse 1 of Hosea 13, let's look at the theme of this chapter. What is the theme of Hosea 13? I think we will find that the theme of Hosea 13 is found in the final word of verse 1 – **death**.

As one commentary noted, Hosea 13 is permeated with the stench of death. It begins with the death of Ephraim, and it ends with little ones dashed in pieces and pregnant women ripped open.

But there is something truly wonderful about this strange chapter of death, and it is this: later when Paul penned the most wonderful chapter in the Bible about the resurrection, he quoted a verse from this terrible chapter of death.

1 Corinthians 15:55 – O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

Hosea 13:14 – I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

We will have much more to say about that verse later, but for now we can certainly say this: even though those two chapters do cross paths in one verse, there is a great difference between the death and despair of Hosea 13 and the life and hope of 1 Corinthians 15. And we know the source of that great difference.

John 1:4 – In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

From death and darkness to life and light. Jesus transformed the terrible chapter of death in Hosea 13 into the wonderful chapter of life in 1 Corinthians 15. Absent Christ coming to this world, all any of us would have is Hosea 13. And for those outside of Christ today, all they have is Hosea 13.

Romans 7:24–25 – Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Let's begin with the first verse of this terrible chapter of death.

Hosea 13:1

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

We have talked a lot about the great prophecy of Deuteronomy 28. God told the people that if they proved faithless, they would be plucked off the land. And that prophecy was now being fulfilled with the Assyrian invasion of Ephraim.

We have also talked a lot about Jacob, and how Ephraim had inherited Jacob's bad qualities without inheriting any of Jacob's good qualities.

Verse 1 also points to the fulfillment of a great prophecy and also involves Jacob, but it is a **different** prophecy than Deuteronomy 28 and it is a **different** event in the life of Jacob – his blessing of Ephraim.

Genesis 48:17–19 – When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations."

You can see an artistic depiction of that event on the Handout for Lesson 42.

As Jacob was greater than his older brother Esau, so Ephraim would also be greater than his older

brother Manasseh. And we know that prophecy was fulfilled, not just by Ephraim the **person**, but by Ephraim the **tribe**.

We see that preeminence in the leaders who came from Ephraim. Joshua and Samuel were both from the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8, 1 Samuel 1:1).

We also see the preeminence of the tribe of Ephraim in Moses' blessing.

Deuteronomy 33:17 – ...they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

Ephraim was the most prominent northern tribe. It was located in the center of Israel between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and it was just north of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Ephraim was known as the heartland of Israel because of its plentiful resources, its favorable topography, and its robust and fertile soil. It was a hilly region that received more rainfall than Judah. (See the photos on the Handout.)

The northern kingdom was led by Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, who established Shechem as its first capital.

And so here in verse 1 we read: "When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel."

As one commentary says:

This verse “begins with a reference to the time when Ephraim’s position within Israel was so superior that even his speaking provoked apprehension and trembling among the rest of the tribes.”

That statement describes the fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy when he placed the younger son Ephraim over his older brother Manasseh. The tribe of Ephraim carried great weight among the people and was exalted over the other tribes.

Ephraim had been promised much, and Ephraim had been given much. Ephraim had been greatly blessed by God. But Ephraim was thanking Baal for those great blessings. And the result? Verse 1 tells us that Ephraim incurred guilt through Baal and died.

Ephraim died. Past tense.

I don’t think we need to conclude from the tense of that verb that Assyria had already carried them off. Instead, I think what we see there is the **prophetic past tense** – when something is so certain to occur than it is spoken about in the past tense.

The great tribe of Ephraim would soon pass into history never to return. And we know that happened when Assyria invaded Ephraim and removed the people from their land.

And **why** did Ephraim die? Was it because they chose Egypt over Assyria? Was it because they made some terrible military mistake? Was it because they chose the wrong earthly king to rule them? Was it because they didn’t vote for the other guy? Was it because their economy

collapsed? They could have survived all of that with God on their side – but they had cast God aside.

Why did Ephraim die? Verse 1 answers that question with a single word – **Baal**.

Verse 1 tells us that the root cause of Ephraim's fall from its high place was Baal. And that is the same thing we saw in the previous verse – idolatry was the root cause of their bitter provocation of God.

Ephraim died when Ephraim replaced God with Baal.

But here we should pause and recall what we have already learned about that shift from God to Baal – the people did not see it as a shift at all!

The people thought they were still worshipping God. They had mixed the worship of God with the worship of Baal, and they saw nothing wrong with that mixture. They were pleased by it, and they thought God must also be pleased by it.

And isn't that attitude still common today with religious error? That if like something, then God must also like it as well? You especially hear that a lot when people start deviating from the pattern of worship that we find in the New Testament. I like electric guitars, so God must like them also – right?

Here is how Ephraim saw things: "Yes, we are still worshipping God. Yes, we are still keeping the feasts and the festivals. Yes, we are offering sacrifices. But we are also doing these many other things. We are also worshipping Baal,

and keeping the feasts for Baal, and sacrificing to Baal. What could be wrong with that?"

God had told them long before what was wrong with that.

Deuteronomy 5:6-9 – 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 on 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 fourth generation of those who hate me.

Isaiah 42:8 – I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

And Jesus told us the same thing.

Matthew 6:24 – No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

When it comes to God, there is no such thing as divided loyalty. Why? Because once my loyalty to God is divided, then it is no longer loyalty to God at all. "No man can serve two masters." Not that we **shouldn't** do that – but that we **can't** do that. It is impossible. I cannot be loyal to both.

I think we all understand the problem of divided loyalty when it comes to a marriage. I think we all see the problem with a husband who tries to

mix his “love” for his wife with his love for another woman.

And if we see the problem in that marriage context, then we should immediately see the problem in this context in Hosea. Why? Because the central theme of Hosea is spiritual adultery.

If we know how a husband feels when he discovers that his wife is seeing someone else, then we know how God feels when his people are worshipping someone else. The entire book of Hosea is intended to make us understand that.

In neither case do we see divided loyalty, as if loyalty can be sliced and diced and still remain loyalty. Instead, what we see in both cases is a terrible betrayal. And Ephraim died because of it.

And there is something quite ironic in the death of **Ephraim** because of Baal? Why? Because Baal was the god of fertility, and the name “Ephraim” means “doubly fruitful.”

So here is the riddle – what do you get when you combine the god of fertility with the people of double fruitfulness? Do you get *triple* fruitfulness? No. You get death and devastation and despair and darkness and destruction. Oh, the irony!

Hosea 13:2

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!"

We can divide verse 2 into two parts – the easy half and the incredibly difficult half. Let's start with the easy half.

Verse 2a – 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.

That part of the verse is straightforward restatement of some things we have already been told about Ephraim – that their sin was increasing and that their idolatry was increasing.

And, as we have also seen, that sin is connected very closely to that idolatry. The idolatry itself was a sin, of course, but that idolatry led to many other sins such as sexual immorality, ingratitude, and deceitfulness.

The description here of their idols is interesting – "idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen."

That description reminds us of what Moses commanded regarding the construction of the tabernacle.

Exodus 35:10 – Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded.

Here in verse 2 the craftsmen were also very skillful, but they were not using their talent

for God. Instead, they were using their skill to honor Baal.

The crafting of molten images was expressly forbidden in the Law of Moses.

Exodus 34:17 – You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal.

But, despite that prohibition, every important archeological dig in Israel has turned up examples of such idols. They are usually highly-sexualized female figures, fashioned of precious metals or of clay.

And, once again, verse 2 points us back to the curses *in* (or, in this case, *near*) Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 27:15 – Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.

And there is an important lesson for us today in verse 2. The defining characteristic of all false religions is that they are all **man-made** – as we see here with these man-made images.

The church of Christ is the church that was built **by Christ** – the church is **not** a man-made organization. We see that wonderful truth about the church in the great prophecy of Daniel 2.

Daniel 2:44-45 – And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an

end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

An interesting study is to go through the Bible and see what God has to say about the works of human hands. Here is one example:

Acts 17:24–25 – God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

The world today is full of man-made churches! And many of them appear very large and very impressive by human standards. They were very skillfully crafted by the hand of man. But there is only one church built by Jesus Christ! There is only one church of Christ. (And that is not our name; it is our description.) There is only one body of Christ.

That was the easy half of verse 2. Let’s look next at the incredibly difficult half of verse 2.

Verse 2b – It is said of them, “Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!”

There are some translation issues with that part of verse 2, but before we look at those issues, let’s start with the big issue that is presented by the ESV translation: **were the people of Israel regularly practicing child sacrifice?**

And why do I say “regularly”? Because the Hebrew verb used here implies that this verse is concerned with a sin that the people routinely

committed rather than with occasional examples of some sin.

And we know that child sacrifice was practiced by the people at least occasionally.

2 Chronicles 33:6 – And he [King Manasseh of Judah] burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers.

2 Kings 16:3 – But he [King Ahaz of Judah] walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.

Jeremiah 32:35 – They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

So we know that child sacrifice was practiced on occasion by some of the leaders, but was it a regular practice by the people? That is our question.