

Lesson 43

When we stopped last week we were looking at the very difficult phrase at the end of Hosea 13:2 – **“It is said of them, ‘Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!’”**

Based on what we looked at last week, we know that child sacrifice was practiced on occasion by at least a few of the leaders, but was it a regular practice by the people? That is our question.

The obscure phrase at the end of verse 2 in the ESV suggests that perhaps it was: “It is said of them, ‘Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!’”

But the ESV translation of verse 2 that gives us the phrase “human sacrifice” is not the only possible translation.

- [KJV] – They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.
- [RSV] – Sacrifice to these, they say. Men kiss calves!

As we see in the KJV translation, the Hebrew phrase translated “human sacrifice” in the ESV can simply mean “humans who sacrifice.”

In my opinion, either the KJV or RSV translation is better than the ESV translation of verse 2, and I prefer the KJV over the RSV. And I do **not** think that human sacrifice was a regular,

widespread practice in Israel at this time (and perhaps not at any time).

Why not at this time? Well, by now we know Hosea pretty well, and so let's ask ourselves a question about Hosea the person: if the people were regularly sacrificing their children to Baal, do we think we would really be struggling here in verse 2 near the end of his book to figure out whether or not Hosea had anything to say about it?

Would we expect to see only a passing reference to child sacrifice by Hosea (as perhaps we see here)? Or do we instead think that Hosea would be boldly charging the people with that unthinkable sin at each and every opportunity? I think it is the latter. I think one thing we can say now with certainty about Hosea is that he was not shy!

There is no explicit condemnation of child sacrifice in the book of Hosea, and that fact alone makes me conclude that child sacrifice was **not** a regular and widespread practice by the people.

If that view is correct, then what does the second half of verse 2 mean? Let's read it again from the KJV – "They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves."

As we saw last week, the first half of verse 2 described how they **made** their silver idols. I think the second half of the verse is now describing how they **used** those silver idols – not

only did they **worship** those idols and **sacrifice** to those idols, but they even **kissed** those idols.

As we know, our immediate context here includes Bethel, and we know that the calf worshipping cult was based in Bethel, having been established there by the first northern king, Jeroboam, in 1 Kings 12:28-29.

And we know that our immediate context also includes the exodus, and we know the original calf worshipping episode occurred shortly after the people left Egypt in Exodus 32.

So, with Bethel and the Egyptian exodus as our context, we are not at all surprised to see the worship of a golden calf here in verse 2.

The people were **crafting** those golden calves. The people were **worshipping** those golden calves. The people were **kissing** those golden calves. And in doing those things, the people were **sinning** more and more. I think that is what verse 2 is telling us. They were crafting, worshipping, kissing, and sinning.

There is one more thing we should say about this kiss in verse 2 before we move on. There is another kiss we should consider, and that kiss comes from the great Messianic Second Psalm.

Psalm 2:12 – **Kiss the Son**, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The honor the people were giving that golden calf was the honor that they should have instead given the Messiah. That kiss of theirs is perhaps the

surest indicator yet of just how far these people had fallen. They were kissing the calf (verse 2) rather than kissing the Son (Psalm 2).

Paul later penned the perfect description of such people.

Romans 1:25 – They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!

They worshipped the creations of their own hands rather than the Creator.

Hosea 13:3

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.

This verse expands upon a verse from the previous chapter.

Hosea 12:11 – If there is iniquity in Gilead, they shall surely come to nothing.

The people may have thought that they were big players on the world stage. They may have thought that they were heavyweights when it came to spiritual matters. They may have thought that they were permanent residents on their promised land. But none of that was true.

Instead, the people were like a morning mist or like swirling chaff on a threshing floor or like

smoke coming out of a window while someone is cooking.

One of the most important things we should do whenever we study the word of God is to always endeavor to see things as God sees them. Why?

Because if we want to know the truth about something, then the way to do that is to see that thing as God sees it. And how do we know how God sees something? The Bible tells us.

How does God view me? How does God view this world? How does God view the universe? How does God view the nations of the world? How does God view the church? The Bible answers all of those questions. And if we want to view all of that correctly, then we need to determine that Biblical view.

What was the big problem among the people here in Hosea 13? I think it was that they were not seeing things as God saw them. And, in particular, verse 3 tells us that they were not seeing themselves as God saw them.

In their mind, they were permanent heavyweights. But God did not see them that way. Instead, God viewed them as transient lightweights.

So which was it? Heavyweight or lightweight? Permanent or transient? Once we know how God viewed them, then we have an answer to that question – and that is always the case. God's view of something is always the true view of that thing.

The people here did not see themselves as God saw them, and that tells us the people did not have a correct view of themselves. And the first thing that had to change if they were to repent and turn to God was that they needed to see themselves as God saw them.

And the same is true today. The first step in reaching people with the gospel is to show them how God sees them – yes, that God loves them, but also that they are lost while they are outside of Christ.

Verse 3 begins with the word “therefore,” which tells us that the condition of the people in verse 3 is a result of their sin in verse 2.

The people would come to nothing because of their idolatry. They would float away like smoke because they had placed their trust in Baal.

And, yes there is a sense in which the condition in verse 3 is a condition that applies to all mankind.

James 4:14 – What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

But I think verse 3 is saying more than that. I think verse 3 is describing how quickly and how easily the people would be carried off by Assyria.

They may have seen themselves as permanent heavyweights, but that would not be at all how Assyria saw them! To Assyria, Ephraim would be –

not a mountain – but a speed bump. As one commentary describes them:

“The Ephraim that once struck terror in the hearts of its neighbors has become a vanishing smoke.”

That was how they ended. But how had they started? What had Ephraim been promised?

1 Kings 11:38 – And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.

They had been promised an enduring house, like that of King David, but that promise had been a conditional promise – and Ephraim had not satisfied that condition.

And the result? Rather than being an enduring house, Ephraim had become just a brief blip on the timeline of history. They would not endure, and they would lose their house.

Hosea 13:4

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.

Verse 4 is the final place where Egypt is mentioned in the book of Hosea. As we have seen, the Egyptian Exodus has been a major theme of the book, with God promising in effect a reverse

Exodus at the end of Israel's history because of their disobedience.

And once again we see God reminding the people about who he is – “But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”

The word “but” in that phrase contrasts God with Baal. They had been worshipping Baal and looking to Baal for their deliverance – but it was God who had delivered them from Egypt, not Baal.

If it were not for God, they would all still be living as slaves in Egypt. Baal had done nothing for them, but God had done everything for them.

And what happened after God led the people out of Egypt? God gave them his law. And I think we also see that event in verse 4.

Once again, I do not like the ESV translation here – “you know no God but me.” I think the KJV is better – “thou shalt know no god but me.”

That verse is a commandment (as in the KJV) rather than a statement of fact (as in the ESV). In fact, far from a statement of fact (“you know no God but me”), Hosea has made it clear that the people did not know God. And so I prefer the KJV: “thou shalt know no god but me.”

And, with that translation, we see the law of God in verse 4 because verse 4 reminds us immediately of the first commandment in Exodus 20.

Exodus 20:2-3 – 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.

Exodus 20:2 sounds just like the first half of Hosea 13:4, and Exodus 20:3 sounds **almost** like the second half of Hosea 13:4.

Why do I say **almost**? Because there is a slight difference between the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 and what we see here in verse 4.

Exodus 20:3 – You shall **have** no other gods before me.

Hosea 13:4 [KJV] – Thou shalt **know** no god but me.

Here in verse 4, God restates that first commandment, but he does so in a way that emphasizes what is perhaps the central message of Hosea – knowledge of God. “Thou shalt **know** no god but me.”

Now, we understand that the word “know” in the Bible sometimes refers to marital relations. But, of course, we also understand that is not always the case. What about here?

I think the word “know” here in verse 4 does include that knowledge between a husband and wife. Why? Because it reminds the people of their spiritual adultery. God had protected them as a husband protects his wife, but they did not **know** him. Instead, they knew Baal. They had left God for someone else.

As we know, spiritual adultery is the central metaphor of Hosea. But, as we also know, it was

much more than just a metaphor for Hosea – it was his actual life with Gomer.

That central metaphor, I think, is why God here restates this command in a way that emphasizes the lack of knowledge that would destroy this adulterous people (Hosea 4:6).

The book of Hosea started with that theme, and the book of Hosea ends with that theme. Israel had committed spiritual adultery – even though the very first command of the ten commandments required them to remain faithful and loyal to God.

But maybe Israel would fare better with her new husband. Perhaps Baal would be able to protect and deliver the people. Verse 4 says no – “besides me there is no savior.” Baal could not protect anyone. Baal could not deliver anyone. Baal could not save anyone.

And what about us today? We, like Israel, have also been delivered from bondage.

Hebrews 2:14–15 – Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And **deliver them** who through fear of death were all their lifetime **subject to bondage**.

And we, like Israel, are sometimes tempted to look elsewhere for deliverance – maybe politics, or science, or money, or military might.

But the message for us today is the same as the message in verse 4 – “besides me there is no savior.”

Acts 4:12 – And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

The church is the bride of Christ, and we must always be faithful and true to our husband. If we ever look elsewhere for salvation, then we like Ephraim will be guilty of spiritual adultery.

Hosea 13:5

5 It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought;

In verse 4, we said that the word “know” included the knowledge between a husband and wife and was pointing us to our central theme of spiritual adultery. Verse 5 confirms that we were on the right track with verse 4.

“It was I who knew you in the wilderness.” That phrase brings us back to something we read near the beginning of the book.

Hosea 2:14-16 – Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’

As we saw in Lesson 12, those verses from Hosea 2 were looking to the restoration of the marriage bond that would occur later under the Messiah.

But here in verse 5, we are not looking forward, but rather we are looking backward. God is remembering the days of Israel's youth when God rescued them as a husband rescues his wife and when God knew them in the wilderness as a husband knows his wife.

Verse 5 tells us that God was Israel's husband, but we know that marriage bond had broken down. We know that Israel had committed spiritual adultery, and we know that now God called them Not Loved and Not Mine. God had cast them away, and they would soon find themselves back where they had started – in bondage.

And why had the people done that? Why had the people rejected God as their husband? Why had the people run off with someone else? Why had the people forgotten how God had protected them in the wilderness, in the land of drought?

Verse 6 answers those questions.

Hosea 13:6

6 but when they had grazed, they became full,
they were filled, and their heart was lifted up;
therefore they forgot me.

In verse 1 we saw that Ephraim had been exalted by God. Ephraim had received great blessings from God.

But Ephraim grew wealthy and forgot God. Ephraim had been given much but gave little. Why? Because Ephraim believed its blessings came from its own power and from its own might.

“But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.”

We also saw that attitude in the previous chapter.

Hosea 12:8 – “Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin.”

Here in verse 6 the imagery is that of sheep with a shepherd (“when they had grazed”). That image is even easier to see with the KJV translation: **“According to their pasture, so were they filled.”**

The picture we see in verse 6 is that of sheep who are cared for by a shepherd, but who forget their shepherd and start acting like they are the ones who placed themselves in that pasture. These people are not just sheep – they are sheep in charge!

Yes, it is a ridiculous image when we think of it in terms of sheep forgetting their shepherd – but is the situation any less ridiculous when the people of God forget God? The Lord is our shepherd! What if we forget our own shepherd? What if we act like sheep in charge?

God had earlier warned the people about ever having such a view of their blessings and their wealth.

Deuteronomy 8:17-19 – Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

And here in Hosea 13 we see a fulfillment of that prophecy from Deuteronomy 8. As we read earlier in Hosea 13:1, Ephraim was exalted, but Ephraim “incurred guilt through Baal and died.”

Ephraim did not remember the true source of their blessings and their wealth, but instead Ephraim was thanking Baal for those blessings.

And Hosea 12:8 told us that Ephraim was also thanking themselves for those blessings – “I have found wealth for myself.” I think we see that same attitude here in verse 6 – “their hearts were lifted up.” Once again, we see a self-made man with no need of God.

But whether they were thanking Baal or thanking themselves, one thing is certain – they were not thanking God. Verse 6 tells us that they had forgotten God.

They became full. They were filled. Their heart was lifted up. And they forgot God. They were complacent. They were ungrateful. And they were

focused, not on God, but only on the blessings God had given them. And eventually they forgot the source of those blessings.

There are many lessons for us in verse 6.

First, we need to recognize that a time of great blessings can also be a time of great spiritual peril. Why? Because it is easy to forget the source of those blessings and to fall into the same trap in which Ephraim fell.

Paul described the danger:

Philippians 4:11-12 – Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, **and I know how to abound**. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing **plenty** and hunger, **abundance** and need.

In which circumstance is it easier to trust in God? When I am brought low or when I abound? When I face hunger or when I face plenty? When I face need or when I face abundance? I think we all know the answers to those questions.

The great temptation that arises when we are greatly blessed is to start viewing those blessings as something we did for ourselves. That is what Ephraim did, but we know that they were not the only people ever to have done so. Ephraim provides a lesson for us about the danger of abundance.

And there is second lesson we can learn here. For those who are greatly blessed by God – either then or today – something else comes along with

those great blessings – they bring with them great responsibility.

Luke 12:48 – Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.” That statement should be a constant and sobering reminder to all who have been greatly blessed by God.

Ephraim misused their great blessings. They did not use their blessings for the glory of God. Instead, they forgot God. And, again, we know they were not the only people ever to have done so.

Hosea 13:7–8

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.

We have seen some strange metaphors in Hosea, but these in verses 7–8 are some of the strangest. God is like a lion. God is like a leopard. God is like a bear. God is like a wild beast.

The first thing that strikes us about these verses is their brutality. God is lurking like a leopard. God is falling upon them like a bear. God is tearing them open and devouring them like a lion. As one commentary describes it:

To hear God described as beastly in his brutality – devouring human flesh like a vicious carnivore – is jolting. The purpose of such a depiction is to cut through the foggy notion of an indulgent God that their theology and ritual had given them and so awaken the audience to the reality of divine fury.

What we see here is a perfect example of what we learned in Hosea 12:10 about how God speaks to people who need to be awakened. God knows what we need to hear, and God knows how we need to hear it. And here we again see God delivering his perfect word in the perfect way.

What if you saw a fire back in the kitchen during our Bible class today? What would you do? What would you say? How would you say it? And if you failed to get our attention, would you just give up? Or would you try some other way to get our attention – to let us know the danger we are in?

Here in Hosea 13, Ephraim's house was on fire, and God through Hosea was trying everything possible to get their attention. When we see the brutality in verses 7-8, I think we can picture God pulling the fire alarm! Maybe this will jolt them out of their stupor! Maybe this will wake them up!

As for the specific metaphors in these verses, I think most are self-explanatory.

But there is some word play in verse 7. As always, these words have been chosen very carefully. With just a slight change in pronunciation, the phrase "like a leopard I will

lurk beside the way” would instead mean “and Assyria shall be like a leopard by the way.”

The metaphor of a bear robbed of her cubs reminds us of a verse in Proverbs.

Proverbs 17:12 – Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.

Here in verse 8, God is that she-bear, and his people are his cubs. But God has been robbed of those cubs. They have been stolen by Baal and by the priests of Baal. And so God will fall on those who stole his children just like a she-bear would fall on those who stole her cubs.