

# Lesson 45

## Hosea 13:14 (Continued)

14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?  
Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where  
are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?  
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

As we said last week, verse 14 is one of the great texts of the Bible.

And, as we also saw last week, we cannot understand Hosea 13:14 without considering how Paul used that same verse in 1 Corinthians 15.

And when we consider 1 Corinthians 15, what we discover is that verse 14 is in fact a sudden declaration of deliverance, even though to some that might seem unexpected in this chapter of death.

But while some might say that a declaration of deliverance is out of place here, we know that it is not out of place at all. Why not? Because we have already seen such promises of deliverance several times earlier in this book.

Rather than being surprised by finding verse 14 in Hosea 13, I think the real surprise would have been if Hosea 13 did not include verse 14. I think after studying Hosea this far, we would have been shocked if God could give the people these terrible pronouncements of death without also letting them see a small ray of sunshine for what lay in store for their descendants – despite

what these people had done in rejecting God and looking to Baal for their salvation.

For those reasons, I think the ASV translation of verse 14 is much better than the ESV.

**I will ransom them** from the power of Sheol; **I will redeem them** from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O Sheol, where is thy destruction? repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

The opening sentences are **declarations** (as in the ASV). They are not questions (as in the ESV). God **will** ransom them. God **will** redeem them.

And how do we know that? We know that because we have 1 Corinthians 15. God is taunting death in verse 14; he is not taunting the people.

Yes, God was about to send a terrible punishment against Israel because of their idolatry and their disobedience, and yes, that was what God had told them would happen back in Deuteronomy 28. But God still had a plan to bless the entire world through the Messiah, and there would be descendants of these people who would one day enjoy those great blessings in Christ. We meet such a person in John 4.

Here is how one commentary describes verse 14:

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth about death and resurrection, he quoted from this thirteenth chapter of Hosea. ... The two questions from Hosea 13:14 are placed at the climax of Paul's discussion of death and resurrection. In this new context they are not commands, but victory cries: "O death, where is thy victory?" (Nowhere! Death itself has been

defeated.) "O death, where is thy sting?"  
(Nowhere! It has been taken away.)

Although both Hosea 13 and 1 Corinthians 15 deal with the theme of death and are linked to one another with this quotation, it would be difficult to find two more contrasting presentations. ... The next-to-the-last chapter of Hosea ends with the sounds of defeat and dying, a mother weeping for an unborn child; the next-to-the-last chapter of First Corinthians concludes with the sound of the trumpet, announcing victory and resurrection through Jesus Christ.

What accounts for this total change from defeat to victory, from disaster to good news? The answer is what God has done through Christ.

The sayings of the prophet in Hosea 13 reek with the stench of death. The sermon of the apostle rings with the sound of the trumpet, calling all who hear to give thanks to the God who has given the victory through Jesus Christ.

Yes, Hosea 13 is a chapter of death, but verse 14 is where the blood of Christ meets that terrible chapter of death. And, as Jesus does with whatever he touches, Jesus transforms this chapter of death and despair into a chapter of life and hope.

And hasn't Jesus done that for each of us as well? Haven't we also gone from death and despair to life and hope through the power of Christ?

Those liberal scholars who ignore the New Testament when they study the Old Testament are missing a great deal! We cannot understand the Old Testament apart from the New Testament, and we should never try to do so.

**1 Peter 1:10-12** – Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Hosea may not have known it. His listeners may not have known it. Angels may not have known it. But God knew it. It was God's great plan of redemption, and God was announcing that great plan through the prophets and bringing it to pass through the Messiah.

That is the wonderful message of verse 14, and perhaps we might wish that verse 14 had ended with that wonderful message, but verse 14 is not over.

There is one final phrase at the end of verse 14 that is **not** quoted by Paul: "Compassion is hidden from my eyes." What does that mean?

The first half of verse 14 took the people to a **future** time when the Messiah would come and bless the entire world.

The second half of verse 14 takes the people back from that glorious future to their **present** time when God is sending the Assyrians to punish them for their idolatry.

In this one verse we see both the great **punishment** that lay in store for Israel with the coming of **Assyria** and the great **blessing** that lay

in store for Israel with the coming of **Christ**. Assyria would come in Hosea's day, but the Messiah would not come for seven more centuries.

But Jesus was coming. And, when he came, the entire world would be blessed by his perfect sacrifice.

And, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, we see the wonderful gospel of Christ right here in Hosea 13:

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Hosea 13:15**

15 Though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched; it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.

**"Though he may flourish among his brothers."**

Once again we have a phrase with some translation issues. Here are some of the possibilities, starting with the one we just read:

- [ESV] "Though he may flourish among his brothers."
- [KJV] "Though he be **fruitful** among his brethren."

- [RSV] “Though he may flourish as the **reed plant.**”
- [NRSV] “Although he may flourish **among rushes.**”

So which is correct?

If “brothers” is the correct translation, then the verse is telling us that Ephraim flourished among the other tribes.

But there is a problem with that view – the other tribes (except for Manasseh) were **not** Ephraim’s brothers but rather were Ephraim’s uncles. Ephraim’s father, Joseph, was their brother, but Ephraim was their nephew. But, the word “brother” may be used here in the broader sense of “kinsman.”

But another potential problem with this this view is that Hoses hasn’t really been focused on the other tribes, which is understandable given the fact that Ephraim was the only tribe that was left in the north.

So, for those reasons, I tend to favor either the RSV (“he may flourish as the **reed plant**”) or the NRSV (“he may flourish among **rushes**”).

But we still have to figure out what that means.

The word “rushes” in the Bible can refer to plants, but can also refer more generally to wetland areas in which cattle and sheep can thrive. We see that usage for example in Genesis 41.

**Genesis 41:18** – Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass.

And any time we find a reference to the exodus in Hosea we need to sit up and take notice.

Here the reference would not be to the **end** of Israel's sojourn in Egypt under Moses, but rather to the **beginning** under Joseph. But even so, I think we can say that the text may have the exodus in mind here with this reference to the rushes or the reed plant.

And this view fits well with the immediate context. What did we see in verse 5?

**Hosea 13:5** – It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.

God had taken care of Israel in the wilderness like a well-fed flock of sheep protected from drought. But that protection had caused them to forget about God.

And now? Now God again pictures them as well-fed flock, but God will strike them with drought rather than protect them. That is what the next phrase in verse 15 tells us – **“the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched.”**

And again, I think we see a reference back to Joseph in Genesis 41. At that time, Israel had fled to Egypt because of a drought – and God had protected them there. And now the people would once again turn to Egypt during a time of

drought, but God would not protect them. Instead, God would send an east wind – the Assyrians – to punish them.

And so here at the end of Hosea we are reminded of a verse that we saw at the beginning of Hosea.

**Hosea 2:3** – Lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.

God was going to turn their land into a desert.

That reference to the east wind in verse 15 is interesting. Why? Because during the exodus God sent an east wind, not to punish them, but to save them. And God dried up the waters, not to punish them, but to save them.

**Exodus 14:21** – Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

God's method of salvation in Exodus 14 has now become a method of punishment in Hosea 13.

What about that final phrase in verse 15 – **“it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing”**?

Back in verse 12 we were told that the sin of the people had been stored up. They had been sinning for a long time, but the consequences of that sin would come quickly.

Here at the end of verse 15 (which I think points back to verse 12), what we see is that people had



been storing something else as well – they had been storing and concealing their wealth so that they could escape with it to Egypt. Earlier, they had plundered the Egyptians and left with their wealth, but now they were gathering up their wealth and heading back to Egypt.

But they would lose all of that wealth. The Assyrians would find it, and the Assyrians would plunder it.

Why? Because the people were not just storing their wealth (verse 15). They were also storing their sin (verse 12).

Before we leave verse 15, we should note that there may be a lot of wordplay going on here in the original Hebrew – at least some commentaries claim that there is.

One commentary even says that Hosea “has adapted a noun to criticize Ephraim [which means doubly-fruitful] with a pun on a pun” by which the Hebrew word for “fruitful” is very close to the Hebrew word for “wild ass.” **Maybe**. But when we start looking for Hebrew puns on Hebrew puns, I think it is probably time for us to move on to the next verse. (Maybe past time!)

## **Hosea 13:16**

16 Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom, just as Jerusalem was the capital city of the southern kingdom. Hosea never mentions Jerusalem by name, but he mentions Samaria by name six times, with this mention being his last.

That presents a question for us – **why so few?**

Isaiah mentions Jerusalem 47 times, and Jeremiah mentions Jerusalem 99 times. Why do we see only six mentions of Samaria in Hosea?

Most likely it is because there was very little difference at this time between Ephraim and Samaria and so the tribe and the city were almost synonyms. Even today we sometimes use a capital city to denote the entire government or even the entire country.

But, for whatever reason, it is interesting that most of the preaching in Hosea is directed to the **tribe** (Ephraim) rather than the **capital city** (Samaria), while most of the preaching in Isaiah is directed to the **capital city** (Jerusalem) rather than the **tribe** (Judah).

**“Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God.”**

Samaria shall bear her guilt. The KJV translation is: “Samaria shall become **desolate**.”

That translation in the KJV reminds us of another event. That word “desolate” makes us think of what Jesus would later say, not about Samaria, but about Jerusalem.

**Matthew 23:37-39** – O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you **desolate**.

Jesus was telling his disciples that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed by the Romans as a punishment for her rebellion.

Was Jesus happy about that? We know he was not. We know how Jesus felt about that event: “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Likewise, Samaria would soon be destroyed by the Assyrians as a punishment for her rebellion. Was God happy about that? We know he was not. We have seen God’s sadness about Ephraim all throughout this book of Hosea.

But happy or not, Samaria would bear her guilt by the Assyrians in 722 BC, just as Jerusalem would later bear her guilt – first by the Babylonians in 586 BC and then by the Romans in AD 70.

And what did they all have in common? They had each been the people of God. But they had disobeyed God; they had rejected God; they had turned their back on God. Each had rebelled against God, as verse 16 tells us about Samaria. And so God punished them. Their house was left desolate.

The Handout for Lesson 45 lists some other similarities between the fall of Samaria under

Assyria and the two later falls of Jerusalem under Babylon and Rome.

The Jews in Jerusalem should not have been surprised by what happened to them in AD 70. The same thing had happened twice before to the Jews for the same reason.

The Hebrew word translated “rebelled” is used only here in Hosea. In fact, this is the only place in the Minor Prophets where that Hebrew word is found.

But we do see that Hebrew word used in Deuteronomy to describe the people of the exodus and to describe a rebellious child – both of which fit very nicely with our context here.

**Deuteronomy 9:7** – Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.

**Deuteronomy 21:20** – And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’

Verse 16 ends with a particularly gruesome and brutal description of what lay in store for Samaria: **“they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.”**

These horrible punishments are what typically happened in ancient times when a city resisted its takeover by a stronger power. By inflicting

such horrors, the stronger power would encourage the next city to peacefully open their gates.

But are these horrors part of the punishment from God? Dashing babies in pieces and ripping open pregnant women?

I think we have to conclude **yes**, at least in a sense. God was most certainly sending Assyria to conquer Ephraim, and these actions were most certainly what Assyria typically did when a city resisted their invasion.

But there are some caveats to that conclusion.

First, Samaria could have opened their gates to the Assyrians, thereby avoiding these horrible punishments.

Second, if Assyria went too far in punishing Ephraim, then God would hold Assyria accountable for those excesses. That is what God did with Babylon.

**Isaiah 47:6** – ...I gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy...

And we know that God later punished Assyria by striking its own capital city, Nineveh.

**Nahum 3:5-7** – Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, "Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?"

And third, even if Assyria had not gone too far, even that would not mean that Assyria would escape punishment.

It is a common misconception about prophecy to argue that if I am prophesied by God to do some action, then God cannot punish me for that action. We sometimes hear that argument, for example, about Judas betraying Christ or about Peter denying Christ. That somehow they are less culpable because what they did had been prophesied to happen. But that is **not** what we find in the Bible.

In fact, when we turn to Romans 9, we find the Jews making that same argument to God – you used what we did to bless the world, so how can you punish us for something that we were prophesied to do and that you used to bless the world?

**Romans 9:19** – You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

And God’s answer? We see it in the next verse.

**Romans 9:20** – But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”

Just because God knew someone was going to commit some evil action and then used that evil action to accomplish something good or to further his plans does not mean that person is not fully responsible for that evil action.

We are responsible for what we do even if what we do was prophesied and even if God somehow uses

what we do to further his plans. That was true of Assyria, that was true of Babylon, that was true of the faithless Jews, and we could point to many other examples.

And so verse 16 gives us a terribly brutal description of what was coming for the city of Samaria.

What specifically happened to that city? We find that answer in 2 Kings 17 – Samaria suffered a three year siege.

**2 Kings 17:5-6** – Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Amos also describes that exile in which people were carried away with hooks.

**Amos 4:2-3** – “The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon,” declares the LORD.

Very often, those people in a besieged city would resort to cannibalism. We see that with an earlier siege of Samaria by Syria.

**2 Kings 6:24** – Afterward Ben-hadad king of Syria mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a

donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.

**2 Kings 6:28-29** – And the king asked her, “What is your trouble?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him.’ But she has hidden her son.”

And, as bad as that siege was at the hands of Syria, we can be sure that the three year siege by Assyria was much worse. For starters, God miraculously rescued the city from Syria in 2 Kings 7:6-7, but God did not do that with Assyria.

And so with verse 16 we come to the end of Hosea 13, this terrible chapter of death.

This chapter includes some of the most brutal language in the Bible, and it was all coming for Ephraim – a people who had once been the people of God, a people who had been greatly blessed by God, and a people bearing the name of Ephraim, who was Jacob's grandson and Joseph's son.

And, for that blessed and exalted people, the final words of this chapter are these: “their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.”

What can we say about that?

One thing we can say is that, absent Christ, those would have been the last words in the book



of Hosea – and they would have been the last words in our own history as well.

If it weren't for Jesus, the ending of Hosea 13 would be our ending as well – all we would have to look forward to would be hopelessness and death.

We should all thank God that the book of Hosea doesn't end with verse 16!

Let's look now at how the book of Hosea does end.

## **Hosea 14:1**

1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Having almost finished our study of Hosea, we have by now become quite used to seeing abrupt changes in topic and tone, but the change in topic and tone between the end of Hosea 13 and the beginning of Hosea 14 still comes as a shock. Let's read the end of Hosea 13 and the beginning of Hosea 14 together:

“Their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open. Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled...”

As one commentary describes the first verse of Chapter 14:

“It is a jarring call, but also a relief, to set beside the somber account of destruction with which Chapter 13 ended.”

Yes, verse 1 is a relief. The end of Chapter 13 seemed so final, and yet it was not the final word. We also have Chapter 14, and yet again God is calling upon the people to repent and to return to him.

We have a big question right at the beginning of this final chapter of Hosea – when was it written?

Is this chapter a final call for the people of Hosea's day to repent so that they can avoid their coming invasion, destruction, and exile at the hands of the Assyrians? Or is this final chapter something else? I think this final chapter is something else.

Yes, we have seen promises of restoration and deliverance in this book – but those promises have all looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come to bless the entire world, including Israel.

Those promises have not looked to a restoration of these people listening to Hosea who had forgotten God and gone after Baal, but rather to their descendants who one day would see the promised Messiah with their own eyes.

So we have some questions – when was this final chapter written? And to whom was it written? And where was Hosea when it was written?

Why do I ask where Hosea was? Because we have to wonder what happened to Hosea when Assyria invaded. Was Hosea killed? Was Hosea carried off into exile?

Of course, we don't know for sure, but we have seen Hosea's interest in Judah off and on throughout the book starting with the very first verse of the book where Hosea named four Judaeen kings.

In my opinion, Hosea escaped to Judah before the Assyrians showed up.

And, if so, we have yet another comparison between the destruction of Samaria and the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus warned his followers in the three gospel accounts written prior to AD 70 (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to flee the city of Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans, and Jesus gave them the warning signs to let them know when they needed to run.

Did Hosea have warning signs? We know that he did because he has been relaying those warnings from God to his listeners. We have seen Assyria get closer and closer to Samaria as we have move closer and closer to the end of the book. Hosea knew better than anyone that Assyria was coming soon.

I think Hosea escaped the fall of Samaria just like Jesus' followers later escaped the fall of Jerusalem. They were warned, and they fled in time to escape the onslaught.

And if that is correct, then perhaps Hosea penned this final chapter from his new home in Judah after his escape from Ephraim, after Samaria fell, and after the people of Israel were killed or exiled.

If that is correct, then who is Hosea talking to here in Hosea 14?

I think Hosea is talking to the **descendants** of those who refused to listen to him before the fall of Samaria. I think this final chapter is Hosea's message to the **Samaritans** – those descendants of Israel who would one day have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel of Christ.

And how would that happen?

Verse 1 answers that question – the people would have to return to God.