

Lesson 44

Hosea 13:7–8 (Continued)

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.

There is an interesting similarity between these two verses in Hosea and two other books in the Bible – Daniel and Revelation.

Here in Hosea 13:7–8 we see four animals: a lion, a leopard, a bear, and an unidentified wild beast.

In Daniel 7:3–7, we also see four animals: a lion in verse 4, a bear in verse 5, a leopard in verse 6, and a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong, in verse 7.

And in Revelation 13, we again see four animals.

Revelation 13:1–2 – And I saw a **beast** rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a **leopard**; its feet were like a **bear's**, and its mouth was like a **lion's** mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

When we studied Daniel, we discovered the identity of those four animals. The great beast

was Rome, the leopard was Greece, the bear was Persia, and the lion was Babylon.

And here in verses 7–8 we see the same four animals. Is that correspondence just an interesting similarity, or is there a connection of some sort?

We can't say for sure, but perhaps God in these two verses is once again looking forward through time to the day when Christ would come during the days of Rome to bless the entire world.

In Hosea's day, God had raised up Assyria to do his will on earth, but before Christ came, God would also raise up Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome to accomplish his plans. And it would be during the days of those first century Romans kings that Jesus would come to establish his eternal kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

If there is a connection between Hosea 13, Daniel 7, and Revelation 13, then I think the message is simple, and it is a message that we have already seen in this book with regard to Assyria – **these great kingdoms of the earth were raised up by God to do the will of God.** When God whistled, these nations all came running.

But Assyria did not understand that. When the Assyrian envoy later came to Jerusalem here is what he said:

Isaiah 36:18–20 – Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, "The LORD will deliver us." Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where

are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?'"

But here is what happened in the next chapter.

Isaiah 37:33-36 – Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David. And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

Assyria was just a tool in the hand of God for God to use however he pleased and whenever he pleased. Assyria did not understand that at first, but Assyria learned that lesson the hard way!

And that was also a lesson that the great king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon also learned the hard way after we bragged about all that he had done and then was sent by God to live in the field like an ox for seven years! Yes – the great King Nebuchadnezzar really was outstanding in his field!

We must never doubt the lesson that King Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way in Daniel 4.

Daniel 4:25 – You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass

over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

That was true of Assyria. That was true of Babylon. That was true of Persia. That was true of Greece. And that was true of Rome. If there is a message in the particular choice of animals in verses 7-8, then I think it is that.

So where are we at the end of verse 8? Here is how one commentary answers that question:

This attack leads to the nation's death, not just its wounding! Israel will be left after God's judgment like the carcass of a sheep slain by a beast of prey – jackals and dogs will devour the leavings. The end is absolute. In this oracle, Hosea sees no future but total annihilation for the Israel to which he speaks. They have refused to heed the chastisements of history and messages of his oracles, and they persist in idolatry and self-sufficient schemes. God himself will enforce the curses that their conduct invokes upon them.

I think that once again in verses 7-8 we are seeing God give the people exactly what they wanted.

They wanted to worship animals, and so God says fine – I will give you an animal, but it won't be a harmless calf. Instead, it will be a lion, a leopard, a bear, and a wild beast! And the animals I give you will kill you and eat you!

But what about the shepherd? Where is the shepherd when the flock needs protection from these terrible wild animals?

What shepherd? Do we mean that shepherd that the people forgot all about back in verse 6?

They didn't need any shepherd in verse 6 – and now they suddenly need a shepherd in verse 7? Oh, the irony!

Hosea 13:9

9 He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper.

“He destroys you.” Who is he?

For starters, I think the ASV translation is better here – “It is thy destruction, O Israel.” But that translation changes our question only slightly – what is it?

The most natural answer is Assyria. And, as we have said, there may be a very subtle reference to Assyria with some wordplay in verse 7. In any event, we know that God would soon use Assyria to destroy Israel.

But it is also possible that verse 9 is taking a broader view of things. And perhaps that broader view is suggested by the four animals we saw in the previous two verses.

If so, then perhaps the destroyer in verse 9 is not Assyria, but is what was behind Assyria – the power of God and the wrath of God. Assyria was not pulling the strings here. As we see in Isaiah 7:18, Assyria showed up whenever God whistled for them.

Whether the “it” in verse 9 is Assyria or the wrath of God, the message is the same: Israel was going to be destroyed at God’s command.

But why? Why was that going to happen? We have seen the answer to that question many times in this book, and we see it once again here in verse 9: “for you are against me, against your helper.”

God’s people had turned against God. They had rejected God, they had forgotten God, and they had cast away the word of God. And so they were going to be destroyed. As God told them in Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” They did not know God, and that lack of knowledge destroyed them. Yes – we can be destroyed by what we don’t know!

And did that make God happy? Was God gleefully saying, “I told you so!” We have also seen the answer to that question many times in this book, and we see it once again here in verse 9 with that final phrase: “against your helper.”

God was their helper. God was the only one who could help them, and God wanted to help them.

How do we know that? We know that because God sent Hosea to warn them. And God sent Amos to warn them. And God sent other prophets to warn them. We know God wanted to help them because God was the one pulling the fire alarm!

If God had wanted them to perish, then Hosea’s phone would never have rung! God would never have called Hosea or sent Hosea to do anything!

But God did call Hosea. Why? Verse 9 tells us – God wanted to help them! God called Hosea to warn them because God was their helper.

But the people had turned against their helper. The people did not want God's help. And so they would soon be destroyed.

The people would soon perish in that fire even though God had warned them about that fire, had repeatedly offered to rescue them from that fire, and was at this very moment pulling the fire alarm through Hosea's message!

God had told them about the way to safety, but the people had ignored him. They didn't need God to save them! They could save themselves! And how did that turn out? It turned out the same way it always does when people think they can save themselves.

And again, that is a lesson they should have learned from the exodus.

Psalm 44:3 – For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

Hosea 13:10

10 Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities? Where are all your rulers-- those of whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"?

There is a word for what we see here in verse 10 – it is a **taunt**! Where now is your king? Where are all your rulers?

There is a tendency today for people to believe, **despite all of the evidence to the contrary**, that if we can ever just get the right person into office, then all of our problems will be solved. I don't think that belief is just a modern phenomenon. I think we see that same attitude here in verse 10.

If God asks the people where their king is to save them, that tells us that the people must have been hoping that their king would save them, but he had not.

And while kings were not elected, they were raised to power – either by themselves or by others, often through assassination of the previous occupant of the throne.

And we know that the people were involved in that process – we see that right here in verse 10 where the people say, "Give me a king and princes!"

That phrase may point us all the way back to King Saul, but I think it more likely points back only so far as the people's attitude toward their current batch of evil cut-throat kings.

And each new king, no doubt, came to power with a promise to fix all of the problems. But the problems remained, and in fact, the problems got much worse.

And why did the problems remain? Why did the problems get much worse?

Because, while the people wanted to change their leaders, the people had no desire to change themselves. And, again, we may see a modern parallel in that.

So what is the point of verse 10?

The point of verse 10 is that no earthly ruler could possibly save the people from the coming Assyrian invasion. Only God could do that, and, in fact, God did that – but not with Israel. God did that with Judah as we saw earlier in Isaiah 37.

God would later turn the Assyrians back from Jerusalem, but God would not turn the Assyrians back from Samaria.

Hosea 13:11

11 I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.

In the ESV, the verbs in verse 11 are past tense – I gave and I took. And most translations also use the past tense, but one commentary says that “the grammatical forms [in verse 11] imply future tense.” And a few translations use a future tense or a present tense instead of a past tense.

- **[Young’s Literal Translation] I give to thee a king in Mine anger, And I take away in My wrath.**

- **[New American Bible]** I give you a king in my anger, and I take him away in my wrath.
- **[Latin Vulgate]** I will give thee a king in my wrath, and will take him away in my indignation.

If the past tense is correct, then which king did God give them in his anger?

Most likely that past king would be King Saul. The people asked for a king, and so God gave them one. And God later took that same king away when Saul was disobedient.

1 Samuel 8:6-7 – But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”

And that interpretation may be correct. Verse 10 may be pointing back to King Saul (“Give me a king”), and verse 11 may also be pointing back to King Saul (“I gave you a king” and “I took him away”).

But what if the correct tense is not the past tense?

In that case, I think what we see here in verse 11 is something we have already seen several times in Hosea – I think we see God punishing the people by giving them exactly what they want!

If so, who is the king that God would give them? And who is the king that God would take away from

them? I think both of those questions are answered by a single verse.

2 Kings 17:4 – But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.

The people wanted a king? Fine – God would send them the King of Assyria!

And what about their current king? God would take King Hoshea away!

Nothing in the Hebrew requires the king who is given to be the same king who is taken away.

So which view is correct? We can't say for sure, but I lean toward the second view – the people wanted a king, and so God would send them one – the King of Assyria!

That view fits very nicely with what we saw in verses 7–8, where we also saw God giving the people exactly what they wanted. They wanted to worship animals, so God said fine – I will give you an animal, but it won't be a calf. Instead, it will be a lion, a leopard, a bear, and a wild beast! And they will kill you and eat you!

And here in verse 11 the people wanted a king, so God says fine – I will send you a king – the King of Assyria!

We have seen it now so many times that perhaps we should call it a theme – sometimes the worst

punishment from God is when God gives us exactly what we want!

Hosea 13:12

12 The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is kept in store.

This is a difficult verse, and the commentaries differ greatly on its meaning.

Does verse 12 mean that Ephraim had been concealing its sin? I don't think so. Their worship of Baal had been done in public, and, in fact, they didn't think it was wrong – they would have seen no need to conceal it.

Does verse 12 mean that Ephraim had been treasuring their iniquity and carefully binding it up and storing it away? Again, I don't think so. They did not recognize any iniquity in their lives, so it's not clear how or why they would have been binding it and storing it.

Does verse 12 mean that God was keeping their sin bound up and stored away so that the punishment for that sin could occur at a later date? This option is better than the first two, but again it presents us with a very strange metaphor. Where and why is God storing sin?

The Hebrew verb in verse 12 translated "kept in store" is used elsewhere for concealing treasures, so some suggest that the word in verse 12 refers to the secure concealing of an important document on which God recorded Ephraim's sins so that they could be revealed at

a later time as “a permanent and inescapable record of Ephraim’s culpability.”

So which is it? What is the point of verse 12?

I think it is helpful to look ahead to verse 13. In that verse, we will see childbirth, and verse 13 is linked to verse 12 by the pronouns that refer back to Ephraim.

That context of childbirth suggests that the sin bound up and stored in verse 12 may correspond to the unwise son we will see in verse 13.

If so, then the binding and storing in verse 12 may refer to the time between when that unwise son was conceived and when that unwise son was ready to be born.

I think the point in verse 12 is that, although Ephraim’s sins may have started long ago and may have occurred over a long period of time, the consequences of those sins would be felt all at once – like a childbirth. The child was stored for many months, but the birth would happen suddenly.

But why did the people need that message?

Hoses has now been prophesying about a coming disaster for 13 chapters, but perhaps the people were doubting his prophesies because nothing too terrible had happened so far. Perhaps the people had the same attitude that Peter would later describe:

2 Peter 3:4 – They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the

fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

If so, then verse 12 gives us Hosea’s response – **it’s coming!** Your sin has been building and building for many years now, but the punishment for that sin will certainly come, and, when it does, it will come quickly.

Hosea 13:13

13 The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son, for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb.

The “him” in verse 13 is Ephraim from verse 12, and the message of verse 13 is that great pain was going to come upon Ephraim, like the agony of childbirth.

But, instead of pain that results in the great joy of a baby, this pain would lead only to more anguish because the child would never be born.

In fact, both the mother and the child would die because verse 13 is describing a breech delivery, and such an event in Hosea’s day would have resulted in the death of both the mother and the child.

Who is the unwise son in verse 13?

It may be Ephraim, and, if so, we have a mixed metaphor in which Ephraim is both the mother and the child.

But that sort of mixture should not surprise us because we have already seen that same mixed metaphor in this book.

On one hand, Ephraim corresponds to faithless Gomer, the wife of Hosea. But on the other hand, Ephraim also corresponds to Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine, the three children of Gomer.

And, as we said earlier, Ephraim as a wife may correspond to the leadership and institutions of Ephraim, while Ephraim as a child may correspond to the ordinary people of Ephraim who had been led astray by that leadership and by those institutions.

But it is also possible that the “unwise son” in verse 13 is simply the child who, in a sense, refuses to be born and so is called “unwise.”

Some commentaries suggest that the phrase “unwise son” was “a technical term in Israelite midwifery for a fetus that was not properly turned or in some other sense was not ready for birth.”

And I don't think we have to choose between those two options.

Hosea may have taken a technical term for a breech birth and used that term to describe the people of Ephraim in the same way – as an unwise son. And that unwise son, the people of Ephraim, would die along with his mother, the leadership and the institutions of Ephraim.

Hosea 13:14

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.

Verse 14 is truly one of the very greatest verses in the Bible, and our first question about verse 14 is whether it opens with two questions or with two declarations.

In the ESV it opens with two questions, but the ESV is not the only possible translation.

- **[ASV] 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.
- **[KJV] I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death:** O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

Those translations have quite a different message from what we see in the ESV!

If verse 14 opens with two questions, then it is not clear whether God will actually ransom his people from death. God may be thinking about doing it, but verse 14 doesn't tell us what he plans to do. "Will I ransom them? Will I redeem them?"

But if verse 14 opens with two declarations, then what we see here is God's determination to save Israel. "I will ransom them. I will redeem them."

So which is it?

On one hand, some might say that a sudden declaration of deliverance is out of place in this terrible chapter of death. They might say that verse 14 is instead a taunt against the people: Do you really think I would ransom you? Do you really think I would redeem you? Think again!

If that view is correct, then the second half of verse 14 is simply a divine summons for death to come and do what death does best – kill people!

Under that view, we could paraphrase 14 this way: “Do you really think I am going to save you? If so, you are badly mistaken. I’m not coming, but let me tell you who is coming – death! Come on death! Bring your plagues and bring your sting!”

And if all we had was Chapter 13, then that view might be correct. It does fit well with the immediate context of verse 14, which is death.

But Chapter 13 is not all that we have to help us in understanding verse 14 – we also have the New Testament. We have what is personally my favorite verses in my favorite chapter in the entire Bible!

1 Corinthians 15:50–58 – I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable

body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." **"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. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Yes, Paul quotes Hosea 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 15:55. But what are we to do with that quote?

The modern liberal scholar tells us that we are to do nothing with that quote.

They tell us that nothing written in the New Testament should ever be used to interpret a verse in the Old Testament. Instead, they say, we should interpret those Old Testament verses using only what the people knew at the time when those verses were written.

But that view is as wrong as anything can be!

The same Holy Spirit that gave us Hosea 13:14 also gave us 1 Corinthians 15:55, and if we interpret Hosea in a way that contradicts 1 Corinthians 15 then we can be absolutely certain that our interpretation is wrong. We must consider the entire word of God each time we interpret any verse found anywhere in the Bible.

So, when we do that, what do we discover about verse 14?

What we discover is that Paul's use of verse 14 in 1 Corinthians 15 answers our questions about how we should interpret that verse. Verse 14 is, in fact, a sudden promise of deliverance even if that might seem out of place to some in this context.

But is that criticism legitimate? Is it out of place? I don't think so.

In fact, we have already seen sudden promises of deliverance in this book.

Do we remember Hosea 1:10?

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

And do we remember Hosea 2:23?

And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

And how about Hosea 6:3?

Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

We have seen many sudden promises of deliverance in this book, and I think we see the same thing here in verse 14.

When we interpret verse 14 in the light of 1 Corinthians 15, what we discover is that, yes, there is a taunt in verse 14 – but that taunt is **not** directed at Israel. That taunt is instead directed at death.

I think what God is saying in verse 14 is this: “Yes, death, you are having quite the day in this chapter of death! But, death, don’t think for a moment that you will win! Don’t think for a moment that you will have the last word! I have a plan that will defeat you forever! I have a plan that will offer redemption to Ephraim and to everyone else in the world!”

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.

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 this people who would one day enjoy those great blessings.

And I think Paul's use of Hosea 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 15 confirms that we are correct in our understanding of verse 14 as a sudden promise of great blessing.

Here is how one commentary describes it:

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 wonderful 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? And didn't that happen when we also came in contact with the blood of Christ? 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.

But did Hosea really talk about Jesus? Did Hosea talk about the grace of Christ? Did Hosea talk about the sufferings of Christ and the glories of Christ? Did Hosea really have a message for Christians? Peter answers all of those questions.

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 it through the prophets and bringing it to pass through the Messiah.

That is the wonderful message of verse 14, but verse 14 is not over.

There is one final phrase at the end 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 the entire world would be blessed by his perfect sacrifice. As Paul tells us, we see that wonderful good news right here in verse 14:

"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:

- [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.

Also, Hoses hasn’t really been focused on the other tribes, which is understandable given that

fact that Ephraim was the only one 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 more generally to wetlands in which cattle and sheep can thrive. We see that 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 anytime we find a reference to the exodus in Hosea we need to sit 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 has the exodus in mind here.

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 fled to Egypt because of a drought – and God protected them there. But 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.

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 is interesting. Why? Because during the exodus God sent an east wind, 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 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.

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

Why? Because they 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 in the original Hebrew – at least some commentaries claim that there is. One even says that Hosea “has adapted a noun to criticize Ephraim with a pun on a pun” by which the Hebrew word for “fruitful” is very close to the Hebrew word for “wild ass.” (We recall that the name Ephraim means doubly fruitful.)

Maybe. But when we start looking for Hebrew puns within other Hebrew puns, it is probably time to move on to the next verse.

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.

Verse 16 asserts that Samaria is guilty ('āšam) before YHWH her God. The verb is used by Hosea elsewhere and applied to the people generally (5:14), Israel (10:2), and Ephraim (13:1). **Surprisingly, the verb is uncommon among other 8th-century prophets. Moreover, there are few explicit references to Samaria in Hosea.** Perhaps in Hosea's mind there is little difference between Samaria and Ephraim (cf. 7:1). Ephraim is the central tribe of Israel and is often by metonymy used to refer to the national entity. As with any capital city, Samaria too can stand for the nation or its government. **However, Samaria is not cited explicitly with the frequency in Hosea that Jerusalem, her counterpart in Judah, is cited in Judean prophetic collections like Isaiah or Jeremiah.** Nevertheless, metaphorically speaking, "she" is related by covenant to God (cf. Ezek. 16, 23). Hence, in her representation of the people, she can be held in violation of her covenantal responsibilities and described as

guilty and engaged in rebellion (mārâ). **The verb occurs only here in Hosea, but it is used several times in Deuteronomy to describe Israel in times of its rebellion (9:7, 23-24; 31:27)⁵³ and for a stubborn, incorrigible son (21:18, 20).**

The gruesome description of the city's inhabitants is part of a recognized trope for the treatment of conquered peoples who have resisted takeover or who have broken solemn agreements. The dashing of children is described elsewhere in Hosea in a battle at Beth-arbel (10:14; cf. Nah. 3:10). In 2 Kgs. 8:12 Elisha weeps at the thought of the Aramean Hazael and his cruelty toward Israel, and names the deadly triad of killing by the sword, dashing infants, and ripping open pregnant women. While Hosea charges that Samaria has rebelled against her God, the predictions of death would come as a result of an assault on the city by a hostile army. **Samaria endured a three-year siege at the hands of the Assyrians before finally falling to them (2 Kgs. 17:5-6).** It is not clear whether v. 16 anticipates a tragic conclusion or reflects back on it. The former is the more natural reading. Samaria's fate is the same as that of the unwise son. A missed opportunity will result in death.

Thus concludes the last verse of the judgment texts in ch. 13. Samaria's coming demise, based on her guilt, reinforces the beginning of the chapter, where Ephraim is declared guilty for past failures and declared dead. **Verses 1 and 16 bracket some of the harshest language in the book**

of Hosea. Thank God they are not the prophet's
last words.

Absent Jesus, verse 16 would have been the final verse in the book of Hosea.

Hosea 14:1-3

1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. 2 Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. 3 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy."

Hosea 14:4-7

4 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. 5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; 6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. 7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the

vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Hosea 14:8

8 0 Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.

I will answer him and care for him (14:8). Although the rendering of the niv is accurate, the prophet's words lose something important in translation. The Hebrew word translated "care for" ('ašûr) is not the one expected in this context since it normally means "to look upon" one's prey (as in 13:7). In light of this, McComiskey has suggested that this word in the first singular form is used because (at least without the suffix) it sounds in Hebrew like the word for Assyria ('aššûr). He thus suggests that Hosea was making a subtle wordplay to imply that it is God—not Assyria—who takes care of Ephraim.

However, Hosea likely makes a different wordplay. The same word "care for" mentioned above also sounds like the name of the goddess Asherah,

whom, as we have seen, idolatrous Israelites worshiped alongside Yahweh. Furthermore, the other verb used in the same breath here is ‘ānîî (“I will answer”), which sounds like (and in fact has the same Hebrew letters as) the well-known Canaanite goddess Anat.

What point is the prophet making? True to his character as a stinging poetic prophet, Hosea likely has chosen these words in order to bring to the hearers’ minds the names of two Canaanite goddesses (Asherah and Anat) to whom Ephraim turned instead of to the true source of care and attention: Yahweh. On this understanding Hosea adds subtle irony to the rhetorical question that immediately precedes: (lit.) “What relationship do I [God] still bear with false gods?” What sounds like the names of these pagan deities falls from the prophet’s mouth at the same time that Yahweh pronounces that he alone responds to and cares for Ephraim.⁸⁶

So daring a wordplay might seem surprising, but is perhaps part of the poet’s intent. His uncompromising imagery continues in the next sentence, where Hosea calls God an evergreen tree (a common symbol of fertility) in order further to illustrate that it is God alone who abundantly provides. When it comes to Israel compromising the identity of Yahweh with pagan deities, Hosea is prepared to take strong, biting measures to ensure that Israel understands just how inappropriate such syncretism is.

Walton, J. H. (2009). Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (Vol. 5, pp. 34–35). Zondervan.

Hosea 14:9

9 Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

I have greatly enjoyed our study of Hosea, and I hope you has as well. But if you haven't, I certainly understand – remember, I used to teach math! And I had very few students who enjoyed that subject as much as I did!

