

Hosea 13-14 • The Brink of Inevitable

Introduction

Hosea's extensive treatment of the apostate—those who at one time were in a right relationship with God, or at least at one time knew what it takes to be in a right relationship with God, is summarized in these closing chapters, not only showing the steps taken to get into such a mess, but what it takes to recover. The very same things which the Northern Kingdom of Israel engaged in are mirrored in the many false activities taking place in the Church today. The underlying causes are not just the same, but so is any hope of recovery. But the real issue is not simply "if" someone will recognize their error, but "when". This is because when judgment for such behavior finally comes, the acknowledgment of what is taking place at that point is too late; those in such a spiritual state need to turn back **before** they reach the brink where there is no time or room to turn around.

¹When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling.
He exalted himself in Israel,
But through Baal he did wrong and died.
²And now they sin more and more,
And make for themselves molten images,
Idols skillfully made from their silver,
All of them the work of craftsmen.
They say of them, "Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!"
³Therefore they will be like the morning cloud
And like dew which soon disappears,
Like chaff which is blown away from the threshing floor
And like smoke from a chimney.

⁴Yet I have been the LORD your God
Since the land of Egypt;
And you were not to know any god except Me,
For there is no savior besides Me.
⁵I cared for you in the wilderness,
In the land of drought.
⁶As they had their pasture, they became satisfied,
And being satisfied, their heart became proud;
Therefore they forgot Me.
⁷So I will be like a lion to them;
Like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside.

[Read 13:1-3]

Q: How does v.1 define how this spiritual problem began? By what did it originate?

A: Ephraim—representing the apostate Northern Kingdom of Israel, "exalted himself", meaning man made themselves the authority in place of God. This is why, "When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling"—in other words, the fear of man was given higher regard than the fear of God.

Q: How does v.1 go on to describe the inevitable result of that persistent problem?

A: It led to false worship, which from God's point of view, sees the practitioners as already dead.

Q: What is the nature of the cycle of sin they are caught up in?

A: Having elevated themselves, they themselves make everything they worship.

Point: Anything man-made is false worship, even if it attempts to use biblical terms. It begins by placing one's self first so that all that follows is not in the image of God but of one's self. All apostasy has this in common.

Q: What does the reference to calves in v.2 mean?

A: Although they create these things with their own hands, they use them as if they are alive and real, even though outside observers see the absurdity of it all.

Q: What are the metaphors of v.3 illustrating?

A: The pursuit of false worship has caused them to forsake their greater calling and destiny in the One True God; they no longer have a future from God's point of view.

Application: Their **heritage** is being thrown away for one of their own **hands** and **making**.

[Read 13:4-8]

Q: Why might v.4 be particularly important in the overall message being given through Hosea?

A: This is the second time God has said this, previously stating in 12:9, "But I have been the LORD your God since the land of Egypt". Twice God has reminded them of His past faithfulness and working.

Q: How is v.6 reflected in what is first stated in v.5?

A: God took care of them in the bad times, but "being satisfied, their heart became proud". The result is that "they forgot Me".

Application: Perhaps this is why it is healthy to revisit both personally and as a church, the work of Christ on the cross, never forgetting the true Source of our current circumstances.

⁸I will encounter them like a bear
robbed of her cubs,
And I will tear open their chests;
There I will also devour them like a
lioness,
As a wild beast would tear them.

⁹It is your destruction, O Israel,
That you are against Me, against your
help.
¹⁰Where now is your king
That he may save you in all your cities,
And your judges of whom you
requested,
“Give me a king and princes”?
¹¹I gave you a king in My anger
And took him away in My wrath.

¹²The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up;
His sin is stored up.
¹³The pains of childbirth come upon
him;
He is not a wise son,
For it is not the time that he should
delay at the opening of the womb.
¹⁴Shall I ransom them from the power
of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from death?
O Death, where are your thorns?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion will be hidden from My
sight.

¹⁵Though he flourishes among the
reeds,
An east wind will come,
The wind of the LORD coming up from
the wilderness;
And his fountain will become dry
And his spring will be dried up;
It will plunder his treasury of every
precious article.
¹⁶Samaria will be held guilty,
For she has rebelled against her God.
They will fall by the sword,
Their little ones will be dashed in
pieces,

Q: What was the nature of the previous punishment in v.1-3 and why?

A: They made God disappear from their lives by elevating themselves, so they will be made to disappear.

Q: What is the nature of this punishment in v.7-8 and why?

A: They have forgotten God in their self-satisfaction, so He will send judgments which will overtake them suddenly and by surprise to end their satisfaction.

Point: Each literal and physical judgment is a response to each of their spiritual shortcomings.

Application: Their obsession with the **things** of this life led them to forget their **spiritual** life in the Lord.

[Read 13:9-11]

Q: First they exalted themselves, then they became self-satisfied, and what do v.10-11 describe as their next action?

A: They replaced God as their divine Leader with an earthly substitute.

Observation: Have you noticed that apostate churches, fellowships or even entire movements eventually coalesce around a false leader?

Q: So how does v.9 describe the end result of this series of behaviors and choices?

A: They actually wind up being against God.

Application: Their request for a **king** led to having no one because in the process they forsook the **True King**.

[Read 13:12-14]

Q: In v.12, what are the words “bound up” and “stored up” actually referring to?

A: This is biblical terminology usually used to describe treasures which are stored in a vault or treasury. In this case, it is a dramatic and poetic description of not just the worthlessness of their efforts, but that it is actually going to work against them.

Q: How is this revealed as an ultimate failure in v.14?

A: These worthless riches cannot “ransom them”. Their earthly legacy will fail them completely.

Q: How is this compared with the metaphor of birth in v.13?

A: Their spiritual legacy will utterly fail them as well.

Application: They are **blinded** by sin and prevented from **action** against its inevitable **results** and working toward things which will never **pay off** as intended.

[Read 13:15-16]

Q: What is v15 describing?

A: This is a poetic way of describing their current, self-satisfied position, which they falsely trust in because it temporarily “flourishes”. God’s judgment, “The wind of the Lord”, is also described as “an east wind” which will bring this to an end.

Q: Why might v.15 sound familiar where God’s working in Israel is concerned?

A: The drying up of the waters and plundering of the treasury sound like that which God enabled Israel to do to Egypt in the Exodus. It would appear that now God is going to allow those things to happen to Israel, a reciprocal response to v.4 when He reminded them of all He has done for them since Egypt. That which they valued and stored away for themselves will be lost.

And their pregnant women will be ripped open.

Q: How is all their ill behavior to this point summed up in v.16?

A: "For she has **rebelled** against her God."

Q: Why are the only guilty parties mentioned in v.16 pregnant women and children?

A: The greater message of Hosea is built around the metaphors of Lady Israel and her three children: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi. In the end, the judgment to come is not a literary device or simply symbolism, but will be actual and literal.

Application: The **consequences** of God's judgment for unfaithfulness are **unavoidable** once they begin to be **experienced**.

^{14:1}Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
²Take words with you and return to the LORD.
Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity
And receive us graciously,
That we may present the fruit of our lips.

[Read 14:1-3]

Q: How is this a picture of true and complete repentance of someone who has fallen away from the Lord, someone who at one time was in a right relationship with Him?

1. It begins in v.1 with acknowledging the source as "iniquity"—twisting God's Word and ways to suit one's self.
2. It continues in v.2 with a true confession from the heart.
3. In v.3, the things of this world are denounced in the reference to Assyria, a world power of that day, a symbol of trusting in the world instead of God..
4. Undertaking things by one's own power is renounced in the reference to horses, something only used in the ancient world in the course of war.
5. Renouncing all the things which were man-created to replace the One True God.

³Assyria will not save us,
We will not ride on horses;
Nor will we say again, 'Our god,'
To the work of our hands;
For in You the orphan finds mercy."

Point: Together, this is completely repealing all the dependencies built on one's self and the things of the world and returning to Christ as the sole source of salvation.

Q: What is the very last line of v.3 expressing?

A: That the previous path of unfaithfulness had led to being a spiritual orphan.

Point: How might this replay what takes place in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?

Application: Unfaithfulness cannot be overcome by an **apology**; it can only be remedied by **faithfulness**.

⁴I will heal their apostasy,
I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from them.
⁵I will be like the dew to Israel;
He will blossom like the lily,
And he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon.
⁶His shoots will sprout,
And his beauty will be like the olive tree
And his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon.
⁷Those who live in his shadow
Will again raise grain,
And they will blossom like the vine.
His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

[Read 14:4-8]

Q: Is v.4 an unconditional promise of something God will do no matter how His people choose to behave?

A: No, it is summarizing what He will do **IF** they "Return, O Israel to the LORD your God". (v.1)

Point: Apostasy is not an impossible condition from which no one can ever recover spiritually, but it takes more than merely being temporarily sorry; it requires an authentic recommitment to Christ.

Q: What are v.5-7 then describing?

A: That an authentic, faithful return to the Lord will result not just in restoration, but God's blessings.

Q: How is v.8 actually summarizing these closing chapters?

A: It's a statement of the reality of the futility of pursuing anything which replaces the One True God since it always results in loss and death, but faithfulness to His Word and ways always produces blessings and life.

⁸O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like a luxuriant cypress;

Application: Not just spiritual and physical restoration from **apostasy** is possible, but it will experience **blessings**.

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From Me comes your fruit.

⁹Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
Whoever is discerning, let him know them.
For the ways of the LORD are right,
And the righteous will walk in them,
But transgressors will stumble in them.

[Read 14:9]

Q: Who is being contrasted in this closing challenge?

A: The “wise”, “discerning” and “righteous” are juxtaposed against “transgressors”.

Q: What exactly is a “transgressor”?

A: Someone who rebels against God’s Word and ways, as in v.16, “For she has rebelled against her God”.

Q: So what distinguishes them from one another?

A: The former put God’s Word and ways into practice—“walk in them”, the latter do not—“stumble in them”.

Application: An apostate can **recover** when they put their **rebellion** aside and instead put into **practice** that which God has already made known.