

Hosea 13

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[0 : 00] Now, as we look at this chapter, it has, in this 13th chapter of Hosea, there is both that which is encouraging and that which is warning. Perhaps the most, shall we say, alarming aspect of the chapter is what we read in the closing two verses, where it warns of what is undoubtedly a prophecy about the coming of the Assyrians, who would, in due course, destroy Samaria, the capital of northern Israel, who would commit atrocities, as we have read there in the closing verses.

And this is something which was done. These kind of acts of terror were designed to appall people. They were designed to terrorise people and to cow them, to cause them to be afraid and to cause them to fear these coming armies so that they would surrender and give in rather than submit themselves to these kinds of atrocities.

We read of such things occurring at various times throughout Scripture, almost always by pagan armies, those who worshipped false gods, those who engage in this kind of atrocity.

The Bible, whilst it does not mince words about what people do and the kind of terror and atrocities they carry out, nor does it go into graphic sort of indulgent detail.

And nowhere is that more perfectly illustrated than at the death of our Lord, where we have simply, in some instances, those simple four words, and they crucify him. And it doesn't go into all the graphic detail of all the horrendous suffering and sadistic brutality that crucifixion would involve.

[1 : 39] Likewise, we have undoubtedly here, yes, a statement of facts that were carried out by pagan armies when they oppressed, whether Israel or any other nation, the level of barbarity that was practised by armies in those days.

It's not that it couldn't happen now. Of course it could. In times of war, people's worst aspects tend to be unleashed. But we have in these closing verses 15 and 16 a prophecy of what would happen when Israel's northern capital fell to the Assyrians.

They are the ones almost certainly being described as the east wind coming from the wilderness, from the desert, coming from the east where Assyria was, based in Nineveh and Asher, from which it took its name at the top end of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and they would sweep down from the north in an ark down into Israel, besieging Samaria for, in the end, three years, and then taking it and destroying it in the terms described there.

It is just about the worst thing that can happen to a city. But at the time when Hosea is prophesying, and remember if we go back to chapter 1, we see that he prophesied in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Jehoash, king of Israel.

Hosea is a northern Israelite prophet. He's not based in Judea, in Jerusalem. He's prophesying to his people in northern Israel, Hefraim, that land, that northern kingdom.

[3 : 17] And in the days of Jeroboam, this is Jeroboam II, this was a reign of 41 years, a time of great political strength for northern Israel.

It was probably the zenith of their political power, great economic prosperity at the time. In other words, it would have been the time when it was most impossible to imagine the kind of destruction that was being foretold.

And yet, it was only about 40 years away from the end of Jeroboam's reign, during which Hosea was prophesying, to the time when this, like verse 15 and 16 is fulfilled, is only about 40 years. In that time, the kings of northern Israel chopped and changed again and again, as they murdered each other, then took the throne, then they survived and their sons took the throne, they were murdered by the next one, and so on, and it went on and on to the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

40 years may not seem like a very long time, depending on what age you are. I'd like you to stop and think for a wee minute. If we were to wind the clock back 40 years, to the end of 1975, the world was a different place then.

[4 : 37] If you think about all the upheaval in the Middle East, just like with ISIS and all these other kind of terrorist organisations and the radicalisation of Islam throughout the East and now into Europe, and so on.

End of 1975, the Iranian revolution, which kind of kicked off this resurgence of Islam again, the Iranian revolution that occurred in the beginning of 1979, hadn't happened.

In 1975, the Shah of Iran was still on his throne, looking very solid and very secure. In the Middle East and throughout North Africa, yes, there were countries that were Muslim in culture and background and most of their populations, but they weren't Islamic in the sense that how Iran became with the Ayatollah Comedi and all the other critics that followed him.

The spread of radical Islam, it just hadn't happened at that stage. What was thought to be the normal way of progression was the westernising of all these Islamic countries as they became more and more like the Europeans, as they dressed that way, as they tried to introduce a level of democracy or parliamentarianism, or even if they were dictatorships, they liked to go through the motions of having elections and so on.

They were mostly secular dictatorships with an Islamic population. And it was thought to be this was the way that everything was progressing, becoming more and more like the West, like Europe and Britain and America and so on.

[6 : 10] And these countries would come and take their place alongside all these other nations in the fullness of time. How wrong we can be as the future unfolds.

Forty years later, we have a country which is literally, we have rather a force that is literally seeking to set up an Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

It is literally tearing people to bits, beheading them and committing all manner of atrocity in Syria and Iraq. We've got the revolutions in Libya and Egypt and the ongoing civil war in Syria and all these places.

None of these things could have been foreseen 40 years ago. So when Hosea is prophesying all this that's coming 40 years away or more, it seems like, you know, what do you think?

Oh, that's nonsense. You know, look around. These things have never been so prosperous and King Jeroboam was on the throne. Long reign, 41 years he's on the throne. Economic prosperity, political stability.

[7 : 12] Israel's never looked so good. We can look down on our neighbors in Judah with their temple and their Jerusalem and so on. We're as good as them. We're as strong as them. We're stronger.

Things looked so good at the time in Israel when Hosea is making this prophecy. And yet, of course, in the fullness of time, it came to pass exactly as he prophesied.

If we go back to verse 1. If we can think of these two closing verses as almost the worst thing you could imagine happening, happening. Let's go back to verse 1.

When Ephraim spake trembling. In other words, how we should probably translate that is when Ephraim spake, everybody else trembled because he was strong. Ephraim was powerful.

They've used the tribal name Ephraim, which means fruitful. When he was strong, when he was powerful, everybody else was afraid. He exalted himself in Israel.

[8 : 09] But when he offended in Baal, he died. Now, we're going to think, well, if he's died, then how is he still there? This is poetic language in the same way as the Apostle Paul uses in Romans chapter 7, verse 9.

For I was alive without the law once. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. He wasn't physically dead, but rather sin put into death.

Just like in Genesis, you know, where it's said to Adam in the day when you eat the fruit, you'll surely die. Now, of course, he doesn't actually die until about 930 years later or whatever, but sin is in there now.

The rot is in there. The seed has been planted and it will bear its bitter fruit. in the fullness of time. When he offended in Baal, he died.

Now, the king who introduced Baal worship to northern Israel was Ahab. And he is described as being the worst king they ever had, not because he ruled so much worse than the others around

him, because he wasn't worse than the rest of them when you actually read the accounts of his reign.

[9 : 17] But what he did was he introduced this worship of not simply the golden calves, which some people could claim were worshipping Jehovah by a different means, but rather actual, totally different gods.

The Baal worship and all the false gods of the nations round about. It's rather like supposing someone was to abandon Reformed Christianity and say that they were turning to Catholicism and put up, say, you know, a hundred different saints' statues and they were praying to all these saints' statues and praying to Mary and all these other things and introducing, for want of a better word, idolatry into the worship of the true God.

And then they did this for a few hundred years and then somebody else came on and swept all that away and just introduced a whole bunch of, say, Hindu gods or occultic gods or whatever instead. Now, it's one thing to worship the true God with saints and so on and with an idolatrous form of so-called Christianity on the one hand. It's quite another to bring in completely false gods, completely, totally alien gods and worship them.

Then there's not even a pretense of serving the true God. That's what Ahab did. And when he offended in Baal, he died. When northern Israel turned away from the Lord to Baal, that's when you got the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

[10 : 48] That's when you got the warnings now coming from these powerful prophets against these powerful kings. You got God's men against Baal's men. And there's only one outcome there could possibly be.

Israel had sold his own destruction by turning away from the true God. You could also take verse 1 as being when Ephraim spake trembling. In other words, when he was humble before the Lord, he was actually stronger.

He exalted himself in Israel. He was more powerful than he realized when he was humble before the Lord. But when he offended in Baal, he died. Now they sinned more and more, have made them molten images of their silver and idols according to their own understanding.

All of it the work of the craftsmen. They serve and let the men that sacrifice kiss their calves. All of these false gods are of their own invention. Think of the gods of Egypt, for example.

You'll see that there are statues of them sometimes or pictures of them standing like with the body of a man but with the head of, say, either a dog or an eagle or something else like that.

[11 : 57] And it's a complete mishmash of people's imaginations. You've got a man with an eagle's head or a man with a dog's head or a jackal's head or an alligator's head or whatever it might be.

And all these kind of gods are just invented out of people's minds because they feel they've got to worship something but they don't want the true gods. Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves therefore.

It shall be as the morning cloud as the early dew that passeth away. Israel, it already referred to as the morning cloud in chapter 6 at verse 4. For your goodness this is a morning cloud as the early dew it goeth away.

These things are impressive while they are there. We see the clouds filling the sky and if it's early morning we see all the dew on the ground and we think, well, this is, it's such a wet day. Look, all the dew on the ground but when the sun comes up burns it all off particularly in a hot country.

As in the Middle East. As the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor as smoke out of the chimney. They didn't have chimneys like we do in the Middle East in those days.

[13 : 02] They'd often maybe have a hole in the wall and they'd light their fire against that wall and the hole in the wall would let in some light but also it would suck out the smoke out the side of the wall.

So it wasn't a chimney pot like we've got but still smoke out of the chimney you'd see it from outside coming out of the house but it'd just be blown away by the wind. The whole picture is of that which does not last.

It is highly visible. Smoke is visible when it comes out of a chimney. Dew is visible on the ground. You can touch it and it's wet. You can see the clouds in the sky. It's all highly visible like the false gods are highly visible.

Their statues, their images can be seen. Their worshippers bow before them but they will be like the whirlwind taking away the chaff. They'll be like smoke out of the chimney.

You can see for them wind blows it away and it's completely gone. Yes. The contrast with the true God I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt.

[14:02] It doesn't mean he comes from Egypt. He means that since they came out of Egypt he has always been their God as a nation. They think well surely he was their God before. Egypt.

Yes. But they weren't really a nation then. When they went down into Egypt it was really just Jacob's extended family. It was his sons and their wives and their children and so on.

He was the God of that covenant family. It's in Egypt that they multiplied to the extent that they became a nation. It is from Egypt that as it says you know earlier on in Hosea you know out of Egypt I called my son chapter 11 verse 1 because they were a nation by then and from the time of Egypt he had been the God of this nation.

Thou shalt know no God but me for there is no saviour beside me. Now again indication here verse 4 that a God if he is going to be trusted he's going to be able to do something but he's going to be able to help them in some way.

When people prayed to false gods they prayed for fertility for their fields or for conception and child birth or for blessing or their business affairs or whatever.

[15:18] They wanted things to be better in their lives and they prayed to these invented gods in the hope that they could help them and redeem them but none of them were able to actually do them any good much less were they able to save them from destruction or from their sins.

There is no saviour beside me. Throughout scripture there is this constant theme that there is no God but the true God the living God.

This we have for example in Isaiah 45 verses 21 22 tell ye and bring them near yea let them take counsel together who hath declared this from ancient time who hath told it from that time have not I the Lord and there is no God else beside me a just God and a saviour there is none beside me look unto me and be he saved all the ends of the earth for I am God and there is none else.

At no time in scripture do the inspired writers ever acknowledge or conceive any other gods but the one true God. The only hint you might have of that is in 1 Corinthians and it's quite clear in the context what Paul means when he says in chapter 8 verses 5 and 6 though there be many there be that are called gods whether in heaven or in earth as there be gods many and lords many but to us there is but one god.

He's not meaning there's actually lots of different gods. There's actually lots of different lords but rather though there be that are called gods whether in heaven or in earth. this is 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 5 and 6 to us there is but one god the father of whom are all things and we in him and one lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things and we by him.

[17:11] No way in scripture is more than one god ever acknowledged and this is the lord through Hosea trying to call Israel back everything wants okay because we don't actually believe in any other gods but the one true god.

No maybe we don't but Israel had this sort of practice that when things were good they would dabble in all this worship of other gods and then when things got rough well maybe we've offended you oh well let's come back again and hopefully he'll forgive us and we're so very different from that.

We set up other things in our lives to which we give our attention and devotion and time and resources and we pour the energies of our lives into those other things rather than into the lord and then when things go badly we either shake our fist at heaven and say lord how could you let this happen to me or else we may come back to the lord and say lord I realize that I have not been giving you the honour that's your due I've given these other things and my time and my devotion and my energy probably such as our ignorance and pride nowadays we probably don't even get that far we probably just want to blame God when things go wrong but not to bless God when things go right if things go right we multiply our idols we multiply the things to which we devote our time resources and energies rather than to the lord if things are going great why do I need the lord this is the great problem that the unbeliever of course has to overcome why do I need God in my life whatever he's going swimmingly

I'm doing okay my business is prospering I'm in health and strength I've got my family around me I'm good enough health what do I need God for and then when things go badly instead of saying well maybe I do need the lord how could there ever be a god of love that would let this happen to me so such is the heart of man it is as Jeremiah says desperately wicked and it takes a miracle of grace to break down that culture of blaming anything and everyone except ourselves and most

importantly of blaming the lord when things go badly but of not blessing him when things go well there is no savior beside me I did know thee in the wilderness in the land of great drought and here in verse 5 you see we've got a contrast with verse 6 according to their pasture so were they filled they were filled and their heart was exalted therefore have they forgotten me it's using a kind of imagery of blocks and herds in good pasture they're getting fat they're getting prosperous so they don't need the lord says look I knew you when you didn't have these pastures I knew you when you were hungry

I knew you in drought and in the wilderness in the land of great junk and I provided for you there I loved you when you were nothing I loved you when you were nobody and I still love you that's the message of the lord I didn't know thee in the wilderness in the land of great drought but according to their pasture so were they filled I often make reference to Deuteronomy chapter 8 I realize I do that quite a lot but it's a very great chapter for explaining again this problem that when the Israelites come into the promised land the lord warns them in advance you know when thou hast eaten and art full then thou shalt bless the lord thy god for the good land which he hath given thee beware that thou forget not the lord thy god in not keeping his commandments and his judgments and his statutes which I command thee this day lest when thou hast eaten and art full and hast built goodly houses and dwelt therein when thy herbs and thy flocks multiply thy silver and thy gold is multiplied and all that thou hast is multiplied then thy heart be lifted up and thou forget the lord thy god which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage verse 17 and thou say in thine heart my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth this is the days you were this over God said I knew you when you were nothing I knew you in the wilderness in great droughts and if you don't want my love then therefore I will be unto them as a lion as a leopard by the way will I observe them notice it doesn't say I'll pounce them but just observe them sometimes you see in his nature programs you know you see the lion of a leopard in the long grass and you can see it the way it sort of goes down low in its paws and its behind comes up a bit and it just edges forward and it doesn't strike right away it's watching it's observing waiting for the moment this is what it says here I will be unto them as a lion as a leopard by the way will

[22 : 11] I observe them the knowledge it can take down any one of the herd at any time I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her wealth well it's reckoned by some commentators of nature that this is the most violent kind of creature you can have is a mother bear a she bear that has been robbed of her cubs and then she's ready to tear anyone to bits and I will run the call of their heart that's the sort of a sack of liquid that's around it the pericardium we would call it nowadays it's a tearing rim from limb that is there and there will I devour them like a lion the wild beast shall tear and now of course God is not physically a lion he's not physically a leopard or a bear or one of these creatures he makes use rather of instruments he may either use wild animals or as we see in the closing verses of this chapter he may use foreign armies who when it comes to being vicious and brutal leave the animal kingdom way behind the Lord gives

Israel as he gives mankind an alternative there is the Lord in his love in his mercy with his wholesome commands and laws to keep us safe and to keep us in his embrace and in relationship with him or there's abandonment of the Lord and all the multiplicity of false gods and unpaid and lack of protection that we would expose ourselves to and if we do that then only death and a violent death awaits us there and an even worse eternity there will I devour them like a lion the wild beast shall tear them oh Israel thou hast destroyed thyself you can almost hear the yearning here at verse 9 thou hast destroyed thyself but in me is thine help still there is hope here for Israel still there is hope in the Lord it is as though might say you go and jump off a cliff and are about to land on shark rocks at the bottom you can't then say oh God is to blame for this destroy yourself you jumped off the cliff yourself just because God put in place the laws of gravity that mean you will hit the rocks at the bottom it's not

God's fault and it's not God who is to blame when we turn away from him and turn back to the world and its emptiness and the flesh and the devil and we destroy ourselves but in me is thine help therefore we understand in verse 9 there is still help there is still opportunity there is still power there is such a power that will to use the illustration we've just taken is able either to melt the rocks and turn them into a soft landing or a pool of water to land into or to reverse gravity itself and I think well that's ridiculous we never read in the Bible about reversing of gravity do you how can we imagine the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven that's not gravity is it that's the opposite of gravity the ascension we read with the Elisha and the prophets where the axe head falls into the water and he

throws in the stick and the island did swim it says in scripture the axe head floated to the surface now that's the opposite of the laws of nature because these are miracles now a miracle is that which will either reverse or overturn or overcome what we would expect in terms of the laws of nature

God has all these things at his disposal he is able to change nature he is able to direct nature he is able to change the hearts of men he is able to turn us from that self-destructive unbelief and rebellion and idolatry to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus oh Israel thou hast destroyed thyself but in me is thine help there is still time there is still opportunity we may think as though like

Joseph languishing in the cells there in Egypt the Lord is able to bring him out of it we may think of other saints of the Lord unjustly imprisoned you might think oh yeah but you know these are ones just in prison what about if they're actually in the process of dying well think of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace they're in the process they're being burned up but the Lord stops it he is able to bring them out of it as he does I will be thy king where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities and thy judges of whom thou saidst give me a king and princes I gave thee a king in my anger and took him away in my wrath now that could be applied either to Saul the first king of Israel or it could be applied to the kings in Hosea's day who were turning their backs on the Lord and one by one he took them away one by one they were murdered by upstarts and rebels who then took their places and they were murdered in turn and so on

[27 : 58] I gave you what you wanted you wanted the golden calves you got the golden calves you wanted idolatry you got idolatry you wanted kings I'm giving you more kings and you know what to do with because they keep changing every few years I will be thy king where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities the iniquity of Ephraim is bound up his sin is hurt now when you were going to hide treasure in the olden days you'd bundle it up tight bound it up before you buried it or secreted it in any way he says this is like your sin don't think that just because it's going to take like 40 years or just because it's going to take a while before judgement comes don't think that I've forgotten don't think that somehow it's gone magically away because it hasn't years and years ago when I was a wee boy and the team I supported were in trouble that season and they were in danger of going down and everybody was talking about relegation oh you lose more games you're going to be relegated that year and what I couldn't understand was there was a team even lower than us even worse off than us and they didn't stand a chance and they still hadn't been relegated and the months went by and the season went on and they still hadn't been relegated and I thought how come they haven't gone down everybody's talking about us like we're going to go down but these guys are even worse they haven't gone down why haven't they gone down and I didn't understand in my childish mind that only at the end of the season then does whoever goes down go down and whoever's coming up come up and I didn't realise you have to play out all the games to the end of the season

I thought well if they lose bad enough well that's them down and it hasn't happened why hasn't it happened yet the end of the season comes relentlessly and those who are going down don't go down those who may be coming up come up but there is the appointed time season by season and there is the appointed time with God the iniquity of Ephraim is bound up it is bound in the book the books will be opened at the last day as we read in Revelation and all that is written will be read and will be read out and will be known and will be declared you don't really want to be left to your own devices when that happens what is our only solution what is our only hope we are like Israel who has wronged himself who's wounded and injured himself destroyed thyself like we read in the Proverbs he that sinneth against me says the Lord wrongeth his own soul all that hate me love death because that's all that awaits us if we have not the Lord if we have not him as our king is our saviour the sorrows the iniquity of Ephraim Ephraim is bound up his sin is hid it is reserved against the day sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him it doesn't just mean the pangs it means that suddenly the pangs take hold the pain takes hold now if you're in that case obviously I've never been physically through that particular experience myself nor has any male person but such as it described in scripture that if there is a child that needs to be born and the pangs come upon there's no way out of it that will somehow stop the pains or somehow make it go away it is going to happen once it begins it's not going to stop and such is the judgment of the Lord once it starts it is too late to stop when it says he should not stay long in a place of the breaking forth of children the mixing of he's and feminine imagery here it's confusing like the father pacing up and down outside the delivery room he should not have stayed long in a place of the

breaking forth of children rather what it means is it's more an internal imagery it's like the sense of the child for whom the mother doesn't have the physical strength to bring it to the birth and so it remains sort of as it were in the channel there unable to be brought forth and it lingers there so long that mischief follows whether the life of the child is lost or some other disaster happens but it stays too long in the place of the breaking forth of children and the imagery here the symbol that's being intended here is that Israel has the opportunity of repentance the opportunity to turn and be saved but because he delays so long the opportunity passes and there is no way of being saved thereafter he has delayed so long in his repentance that he can no longer now be saved where the Lord says he should not have delayed he says I will ransom them from the power of the grave now if there is a ransom it means there is a price being paid we know that there is a price being paid this fully Israel would not have grasped this fully it is a messianic verse obviously we only recognize the fullness of it because we know what has happened but Hosea is still given the words to say he is still given the inspiration of what to prophesy I will ransom them from the power of the grave death is coming for them but I can free them from death I will redeem them from death I will be thy plagues I will be thy destruction of course this is the verse in Hebrew which is quoted by Paul in the Greek in 1 Corinthians 50 but that's not exactly the same no but

[34 : 15] Paul is quoting in Greek which means he's almost certainly quoting the Greek Old Testament when you put words from one language into another the words slightly change the meanings remain the same but the words slightly change and from the Greek into the Hebrew or vice versa that which is translated as plagues we may understand as sting in the sense of destruction and suffering and I will be thy destruction in other words I will have victory over you I will be thy destruction I will be thy plagues the senses of triumphant over something that was strong but the victory is stronger still oh death where is thy sting oh grave where is thy victory the thing that we all in one sense that we are honest fear that death that we fear because it is the unknown no matter how brave we may think we are about it it's only because we aren't really thinking about it the minute we have time to stop and contemplate going into the blackness of the unknown how people could face it without a saviour without the knowledge of one there who has redeemed them who has paid the price of it this is what he promises to do

I will ransom and pay their price from the power of the grave redeem them from death the sense of redeeming is buying back oh death I will be thy plagues oh grave I will be thy destruction repentance shall be hid from mine eyes in other words I will not change my mind on this that's the sense of it there no I don't want people to repent he does want people to repent it's his own change of heart which isn't going to happen once he has redeemed people from the grave and from death he doesn't go back to his word he doesn't say well actually you've turned out to be you've sinned so often you've fallen so many times that you know I've changed my mind I'm chucking you after all no repentance shall be heard from mine eyes when the Lord saves as Hebrews puts in chapter 7 saves to the uttermost them that come to him by faith this is the great hope it is the great promise it is that which is fulfilled in

Christ it is what Israel is promised and when the gospel comes it rightly comes to the Jew first to Israel for their Messiah and only when those who reject it do reject it then it is taken out of Gentiles as well but let's never lose sight of the fact it is the Messiah of Israel who pays the price the ransom for those who will be saved and if they won't be then what is the worst thing you can imagine the worst atrocities you could ever conceive or enduring it's not rocket science you've got blessing and redemption on the one hand you've got the worst thing you could ever imagine on the other this is the choice and the opportunity that is set before Israel it is that which is prophesied but because it seems so far away and because everything around seems so prosperous and seems so peaceful and seems so politically strong it's the house built on the sand when the sun is shining and the daylight is all around and it is summer and it seems great and there's the poor idiot slugging away still digging out the rock for now and when he has finished his house and the rains come and the wind blows and the floods lies then we see a different story the flood of iniquity reaps its own bitter reward we have need to be ransomed we have need to be redeemed the worst thing you can imagine is what is there in the closing verses of this chapter the best thing you could imagine or hope for is what is there just ahead of them in the preceding verses destruction is coming but God is in there first death is on its way but God was redeemed from death gets in there first he is always there with the primacy he is always there before the devil gets his clutches upon us he is always the first offer of grace he is always from the beginning of time to the end of the ages the

alpha and the omega he is the savior and there is no savior beside him let's pray ge