

God is Righteous in His Judgment of Sinful People

Hosea 13

Hosea 13:1-11 - *“When Ephraim spoke, trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended through Baal worship, he died. ² Now they sin more and more, and have made for themselves molded images - idols of their silver, according to their skill. All of it is the work of craftsmen. They say of them, “Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!” ³ Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney. ⁴ “Yet I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; for there is no savior besides Me. ⁵ I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. ⁶ When they had pasture, they were filled; they were filled and their heart was exalted. Therefore they forgot Me. ⁷ “So I will be to them like a lion; like a leopard by the road I will lurk. ⁸ I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs. I will tear open their rib cage, and there I will devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them. ⁹ “O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. ¹⁰ I will be your King. Where is any other, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, ¹¹ I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath.”*

Background Notes

Background knowledge is important for properly understanding the Bible. If you were to just randomly open your Bible and, without any background, begin reading at Hosea 13, most likely you wouldn't have any idea what Hosea was talking about! For example: *“Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!”*(v2). What does that mean?

“The calves” refer to the two golden calf idolatrous shrines that existed in the northern kingdom of Israel – one in the far north at Dan and the other near the border of the kingdom of Judah at Bethel. King Jeroboam I set up these calf idols in the 10th century BC, when Israel (sometimes called “Ephraim” in the book of Hosea), had separated from the southern kingdom of Judah and formed an independent kingdom.

The northern kingdom of Israel continued to go downhill, morally and spiritually. Idolatry increased, even to the point of child sacrifice. In fact, some translations indicate this in verse 2, but we don't know for sure if human sacrifice was involved at this time. However, we do know that human sacrifice was practiced in the northern kingdom of Israel, and to some degree in the southern kingdom of Judah

2 Kings 17:16-17 provides the reasons why God removed the northern kingdom of Israel: *“So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and*

worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.” The phrase, “they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire” does not mean fire walking, as is practiced in some cults. No - it was **human sacrifice**. The people were actually sacrificing their children as part of the worship of pagan gods! The northern kingdom slid downhill to the point of human sacrifice, and later it was also practiced in the kingdom of Judah (2 Chronicles 33:6).

Hosea is one of the prophets that God sent specifically to the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th Century BC, to warn Israel of the coming judgment of God at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. Most of the book of Hosea consists of excerpts from Hosea's sermons that were given over at least a forty-year period. However, because this is the Word of God, there are plenty of applications for us today.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is righteous in His judgment.

Because of Israel's sins, God said that He would have to judge them. They would disappear like a morning cloud – evaporate like dew or like vanishing smoke. They would be like chaff blown away by the wind (v3).

Verses 7-8 are a very unpleasant description of the treatment that Israel would receive from the Lord - especially because these verses seem to picture Israel as a flock of sheep: “So I will be to them like a lion; like a leopard by the road I will lurk. ⁸ I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs; I will tear open their rib cage, and there I will devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them” (v7-8).

At this point, someone might ask, “Is it fair of God to treat Israel this way?” That’s exactly the point of the passage. Yes - **it is fair, and it is just**, because God is righteous in His judgment.

God did not forsake Israel - Israel forsook God! The nation started out with great potential (v1). Ephraim was the biggest and largest tribe in the northern kingdom. They were a great and blessed tribe in Israel. But the people of Israel, or Ephraim, died spiritually when they turned to idolatry (v1). They sinned more and more (v2). God had led them out of Egypt. He had provided and cared for them in the wilderness - but when they came into the rich pastures of the Promised Land, Israel's heart was exalted and they forgot the Lord (v4-6). How sad.

I trust the Lord will never have to say verse 6 to any of us: “When you were filled, your heart was exalted with self-satisfaction - and you forgot Me.” Unfortunately, some believers have followed this same path. The Lord has blessed them, but in response they have become self-satisfied and proud, and they have forgotten the Lord.

In verses 9-11, in essence the Lord said that Israel had tied His hands. He had wanted to help them and be their King, but they wanted their own human king and princes, like the other nations. This was not God's will, but He let them have their own way. He gave them kings - but where were these kings now? Could their kings save them? Both the kings and the nation would be removed and destroyed. But this was not God's fault. This was the righteous consequence of their sinful ways.

Many people today question God's fairness and justice. Have you ever questioned God's ways? Have you ever thought what God allows doesn't seem fair? Remember: God has the big picture, and whether we agree or disagree, the Bible teaches that God is righteous in His judgment.

2. God is resolute in His judgment.

Hosea 13:12-16 - *"The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up. His sin is stored up. ¹³ The sorrows of a woman in childbirth shall come upon him. He is an unwise son, for he should not stay long where children are born. ¹⁴ "I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes."*

¹⁵ Though he is fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come; the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness. Then his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up. He shall plunder the treasury of every desirable prize. ¹⁶ Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword. Their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child ripped open."

God is resolute in His judgment. And I'm not using the word "resolute" just for alliteration of the doctrinal points! "Resolute" means firm and determined.

Israel's capital city, Samaria, fell to the armies of the Assyrian Empire in 722BC. The atrocities mentioned in verse 16 literally took place when the Assyrians conquered Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel. In ancient history, the Assyrians were well known for their atrocities and extremely cruel treatment of conquered peoples.

In verse 15, the Assyrians were likened to the *sirocco*, the scorching east wind from the desert, a wind that dries up and shrivels everything it touches. So much for Ephraim's fruitfulness, and her flowing springs and fountains!

The point of this passage is that judgment would come, make no mistake about it. The iniquity and sin of Israel was stored up (v12). There would be no escape from God's judgment. As a woman and her child both die in childbirth if the child is not born, so Israel was doomed (v13). The judgment of God was sure.

Verse 14 has been translated and interpreted a couple of different ways. I prefer the interpretation that sees verse 14 as a note of hope in the midst of the pronouncement of judgment. *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.”* In other words, verse 14 contains a prediction of Israel’s **future national resurrection** - after her judgment is over.

I lean this way because this verse is partially quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:55. Verse 14 says, *“O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!”* And the apostle Paul quoted it in a positive way: *“O death where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?”* So, hermeneutically, I think this verse should be seen in a positive way, in the context of Hosea 13.

By the way, this verse is not saying that people get a second chance after death. No way. In context, this verse has to do with God’s dealings with the nation Israel. How thankful we can be for God’s grace in the midst of His resolute judgment.

Practical Application

Do you know the one true Savior?

Verse 4: *“And you shall know no God but Me; for there is no savior besides Me.”*

God is righteous in His judgment, and He is resolute in His judgment. But in His great grace and love, **God has provided a way of salvation** from His judgment on sin!

However, there is only **one way of salvation**, and it is **God’s way**. God’s way is through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, because He died for our sins.

Listen to what Acts 4:12 says about salvation in Jesus Christ: *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”* Jesus Christ is the one way of salvation that God has provided for us!

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