

# Hosea 13

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Would you turn with me and your Bibles to Hosea chapter 13? Hosea chapter 13, in the Pew Bibles, it's found on page 758.

We are in our next to last sermon in our series this fall on Hosea. So Hosea 13, we're reading the whole chapter today. When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling.

He was exalted in Israel, but he incurred guilt through Baal and died. And now they sin more and more and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen.

It is said of them, those who offer human sacrifice kiss cause. Therefore, they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes early away, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window.

But I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt. You know no God but me. And besides me, there is no Savior. It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.

[ 1 : 17 ] But when they had grazed, they became full. They were filled, and their heart was lifted up. Therefore, they forgot me. So I am to them like a lion, like a leopard.

I will lurk beside the way. 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. He destroys you, O Israel.

For you are against me, against your helper. 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 princess?

I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up. His sin is kept in store. 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. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O death, where are your plagues?

[ 2 : 17 ] O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes, 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, and his spring shall be parched. It shall strip his treasury of every precious thing. Then 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. Let's pray. Lord, what a striking and even horrifying picture of death we see in this passage.

Lord Jesus, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

We pray that even through this passage that we might see you as the one that we need and as the one who has conquered death for us.

[ 3 : 28 ] That we might find hope in your promise. Amen. Well, nearly 600 years ago, a German man named Thomas Akempis, who was the author of a book called The Imitation of Christ, which became one of the most widely read devotional books of all time, wrote the following in that book.

Very soon, the end of your life will be at hand. Consider, therefore, the state of your soul. Order your every deed and thought as though today were the day of your death. More recently, 250 years ago, Jonathan Edwards, right here in Connecticut, taught his children and had them write over and over in their notebooks.

Nothing is more certain than death. Take no delay in the great work of preparing for death. And in the Bible itself, the author of Ecclesiastes, in chapter 7, verse 2, said, It's better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.

For death is the destiny of every person, and the living will lay it to heart. Now, in our culture, our modern Western culture, statements like these are rare. And to many people, perhaps to you, they sound morbid and negative.

We're not usually comfortable talking about death. For the most part, we try to avoid dealing with death and things that we associate with death, like sickness and suffering and old age.

[ 4 : 50 ] Our first reaction to those things is to fight against them and withdraw from them. If you turn on the TV, right, the heroes and main characters are almost always young, strong, and good-looking.

Or at least two of those three. And that's true whether you're watching pro football, or American Idol, or Dancing with the Stars, or Following Justin Bieber, or whatever else is happening in pop culture that I may or may not know about.

Or if you work... Those of you who know me are laughing at that one, because I don't know very much of pop culture anyway. If you work in the medical field, right, the goal of almost all medical treatment is to prolong life by almost any means possible.

And for the most part, that's right. But many people live in denial of the fact that one day they will die. And if you're a doctor, or if you work in health care, you know that for many people, the fear of death motivates them to pursue even futile or even foolish medical treatments.

You know, even if all the facts are clearly known, most doctors find it very difficult to say to a patient, you have a terminal illness, and you will most likely die soon. Now, of course, some doctors have said those things and later been proved wrong.

[ 6 : 08 ] But in most cases, studies show that doctors are more optimistic in their predictions than is warranted, usually. Now, the reality is, in many cases, we simply don't know. And, you know, this isn't just a tendency in our culture.

This is also a tendency in the Christian church. Recently, I was looking at a book called Finishing Well to the Glory of God by a doctor, a geriatric doctor named John Dunlop. It's actually downstairs on the bookstall if you're interested.

I'd highly recommend it. It's about how to make the most of your later years or how to help aging friends and family members or parents, how to make wise decisions about medical technology and how to face death and dying from a Christian perspective.

Now, in his book, Dr. Dunlop tells how he offered a series of four seminars on those topics to his church community. And about 250 people came to three of the seminars.

But for the seminar on death and dying, how to face death and dying from a Christian perspective, only about 60 people came. Now, the point is, or maybe a question is this.

[ 7 : 11 ] If we offered a Sunday school class at Trinity on how to face death and dying from a Christian perspective, how many of you would attend? Maybe we should offer a class like that someday.

Because often those of us who are Christians find it just as hard to face death as our secular or nominally religious neighbors. And yet, try as we might to avoid it, all of us will one day die.

And the Bible in general, in this chapter of Hosea in particular, confronts us with this reality. Hosea portrays death here in striking, vivid, and even horrific images.

Verse 3, they will be like mist or dew or chaff or smoke, fleeting like a breath.

They will vanish without a trace. Or in verses 7 and 8, death is compared to being torn apart and devoured by a predatory animal. The people are helpless to resist its fury.

[ 8 : 12 ] Verse 13, death is compared to a baby in the womb who fails to present. All the anguish and anticipation of pregnancy and childbearing without any life-giving result.

Now, in the ancient world, in the absence of surgical technology, if a baby failed to present properly, it would often result in the tragic death of both mother and child. And verses 15 and 16 portray a violent death at the hands of invaders from the east who would brutally kill not only men but also women and children who would strip the land and leave it devastated and dried up.

Now, what's Hosea referring to in all these images, in all these things? Well, he's not talking about the death of any one particular person. He's talking about the death of a whole nation, the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom of Israel.

This chapter seems to have been one of Hosea's last prophetic words. Perhaps very soon before the Assyrians would come and invade and destroy the capital of Samaria and decimate the whole kingdom.

Hosea's like a doctor standing before his patient and saying, your illness is terminal and you will certainly die soon. God himself has decreed it. Verse 1, Hosea says, Ephraim was exalted in Israel, but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.

[ 9 : 35 ] And so in one sense, Hosea's saying, the northern kingdom was already spiritually dead and lifeless. It had been spiritually dead for many years, even though politically it continued to exist. But here Hosea's saying, soon you will be dead in every sense of the word.

Now, if you read this chapter without any other context, you might think that the God Hosea's talking about is cruel and impatient. But this chapter comes only after 200 years of God sending prophets like Amos and Elijah and Elisha over and over and others to the northern kingdom, repeatedly calling the people to turn from their sinful ways and turn back to him, expressing his willingness and desire to forgive them, warning them of the consequences if they don't.

And so now he says to Hosea, time's up. For generations you've been dead. You've been unresponsive to me. You keep on drinking the same poison that killed you in the first place.

And so now you'll reap what you've sown all along, death. You know, just as God did with the northern kingdom of Israel, God extends forbearance to people and even nations today.

For years, sometimes even generations. God allows people who reject him and hurt one another to continue to exist and even to enjoy many of his blessings, even as he pleads with them and longs for them to come back to him.

[ 11 : 01 ] And yet God will not allow evil and sin to go unpunished forever. The New Testament in James chapter 1 verse 18 says, sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

And as we see, death comes not only to individuals, but also to nations and movements. Think about all the great empires in the ancient world that no longer exist. Babylon, Rome, Greece.

Well, Greece still exists, but it's hardly an empire, let alone it's barely surviving. The Incas, the Aztecs, the Mongol Empire that once stretched all the way from China to the Middle East, more recently the British Empire.

No offense to those loyalists who are here. Or the USSR, right? All things that were not what they once were. Perhaps one day the United States too will perish.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not an Old Testament prophet and I'm not predicting the imminent decline and fall of the United States. But if you said to someone who lived in ancient Rome, your empire will one day fall and be no more, they would have said, you traitor!

[ 12 : 08 ] That will never happen. And yet it did. We can be in denial about our own personal death. We can be in denial about the possible or even imminent death of a nation or movement that we belong to.

Even churches can die. Now Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not stand against it. Matthew 16, 18. So the church as a whole will never completely pass out of existence.

God has promised to preserve a remnant throughout history. But a local congregation or even a denomination will eventually perish if it becomes disconnected from Jesus Christ, its source of life, and from the scriptures who reveal us who Jesus is.

In the year 635 AD, the first Christian missionary that we know of arrived in China. He was a Persian Christian named Al-Opin. And soon other Christians from Persia came to join him.

They translated some of the Bible into Chinese. They built churches in several cities. They wrote Christian books. They found favor with the Chinese emperor. But over the years, the church became compromised.

[ 13 : 15 ] Instead of depending on Christ, they started depending on favors from the emperor. Instead of holding fast to the uniqueness of Jesus, they began to mix in all kinds of ideas from Buddhism and Taoism.

And instead of developing Chinese Christian leaders, they remained primarily a foreign religion. And so by the year 1000, about three centuries later, Christianity had completely vanished from China and didn't reappear until sometime later.

It's possible for whole nations, whole movements, whole churches to perish. So Hosea confronts us with this reality. But you might ask, why?

Why do we all die? Why do we face such a terrible fate? Well, in the case of the northern kingdom, Hosea points to one core problem and three particular symptoms.

And the core problem is indicated in verse 4. Verse 4 says, I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt. You know no God but me, and besides me there is no Savior. It's a reference almost verbatim if you remember the first of the Ten Commandments where God says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

[ 14 : 27 ] You shall have no other gods before me. In other words, God tolerates no substitutes, no rivals. As we've seen in Hosea, God is like a jealous lover, a passionate husband who is devoted to his people and rightly demands exclusive loyalty in return.

In verse 5, God says, It was I who knew you in the wilderness. In other words, during the hardest season of your history, during the hardest time of your life, your times of deepest adversity, I knew you, I walked with you, I cared for you, I fed you, I loved you, and yet you betrayed me.

You see, Israel's core problem is that they substituted other things for God himself. And the three symptoms of this core problem are in verse 2, verse 6, and verse 10.

In verse 2, they substituted metal images for God. In verse 6, they substituted material wealth for God. In verse 10, they substituted political leaders for God.

These are three particular symptoms, but they all point to the same core problem, the same underlying deadly disease. They had substituted other things from God, and so it cut themselves off from the source of life itself.

[ 15 : 43 ] It's like doing an organ transplant. But instead of transplanting someone, taking out a heart and putting in a working heart, it's like taking out a heart and putting in a kidney.

A kidney's a good thing, but a kidney can't replace a heart. The same with any other organ. And in the same way, we'll see that each of these things, each of these things were good gifts from God, but they became substitutes, deadly substitutes for God.

So let's look at these three things. First, metal images in verse 2. Verse 2 says, Now they sin more and more. They make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen.

And Hosea makes it a point to show how skillfully made these images were. Points out they're made of silver. They're the work of craftsmen, skillfully made. They weren't cheap, mass-produced toys.

They were carefully crafted, intricate works of art. And from the beginning, art and beauty were gifts from God to his people. If you read passages like Psalm 104 that describe God's creation, God himself is compared to an architect or a builder, stretching out the heavens like a tent, laying the beams of his chambers on the water, setting the earth on its foundations.

[ 17 : 02 ] Or Genesis 1, when God finishes creating the world, he rests on the seventh day like an artist admiring his handiwork. And he says, It's very good. You see, part of being human, part of being created in God's image, is that we can appreciate and even make art and beauty, even display God's image by making beautiful and useful things.

And for some of you, perhaps this God-given drive has led you into the field of architecture or design or art, whether it's a career or a hobby. Actually, in Exodus 31, God set apart two men named Bezalel and Oholiab to supervise all the design work in the tabernacle.

And it actually uses some of the same words that come up in this verse 2 in Hosea. It says he filled them with his spirit, with ability, with intelligence, with craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones, and in carving wood to work in every crafts.

In other words, God gave them a spiritual gift of artistic production so that his tabernacle, his dwelling place, could be beautiful and reflect his splendor.

So art and beauty are good gifts from God. The problem is when our productions, the things that we make, begin to define us more than God.

[ 18 : 25 ] And that's when they become a substitute for God. So for the people of Israel, they might have had their own reasoning for making metal images. They might have thought, well, it's a way of broadening or diversifying or enriching our worship of God.

Well, the problem was that God has explicitly said in the second commandment, you shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or the earth beneath or on the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them. Now, God wasn't prohibiting all art. As we've seen in that same book, Exodus, he set apart two men to supervise the design of the temple and create beautiful things.

But he was prohibiting the use of images in worship because God is the creator of all things and he can't be confined to or manipulated by a physical image of any one particular created thing.

And furthermore, Genesis 1 teaches that human beings bear the image of God, not statues or any other thing that we make. And so we honor God not by bowing down to an image of an animal or not by kissing calves and certainly not by offering human sacrifice, if that's actually what Hosea was referring to in verse two.

[ 19 : 37 ] It's a little bit ambiguous. But we honor God not by doing either of those things, but by honoring and respecting other human beings who are created in his image. Well, now most of us here probably don't bow down to statues of calves.

But do our productions define us more than God does? That's the question. Do we disregard God's commands when God's commands get in the way of our ambitions? Now this is a particular temptation if you're a highly skilled worker or if you have a job that you like, let's put it that way, if you produce valuable things or if there's something in your job that you find inherently meaningful?

Are you driven by a desire for perfection to work more than you must, more than is good for your family, or more than is good for your relationship with God?

Have your production, your productions begun to define you more than God? Or maybe you've been gifted in the arts. Is your art a means by which you glorify God and serve other people or has it become an end in itself?

An all-consuming passion that defines you. Well, here's a couple questions to discern that. If you visit a church and find that the musicians are of low quality, if you're traveling somewhere else, or if you find them not to your taste, we have some wonderful musicians at Trinity, we can praise God for that.

[ 21 : 05 ] But if you go to some church and you find the music is not to your liking, do you find yourself becoming critical and disengaging from the worship songs? Or even avoiding the singing time altogether?

Or if you hit a low, you have writer's block, or you get injured and you can't practice for some time and you regress, or you just can't seem to get to the level that you want to no matter how hard you try, do you become irritable and moody?

Well, those are signs that if those things are true, if your artistic production has begun to define you more than God. But you know, this isn't just a problem for artists, it can also be a problem for athletes.

Maybe you're on a high school or college sports team, or maybe you're an avid runner or rock climber. What if you were offered the opportunity of your life to join the Olympic training team for your sport, what you've been working for your whole life?

But let's say that it would require you to participate in all-day training events every Sunday for the next two years. So it would be impossible for you ever to go to church for the next two years.

[ 22 : 16 ] Now, how would you think through that decision? Would you say, of course I'll join the team, I would look foolish to everyone else if I didn't, and I could never be satisfied with myself if I turned down such an opportunity?

Or would you bring your decision before God? Could you say, God, I love this sport. I want to join this team. But I want to treasure you above all things. And your word tells me I need to be in fellowship with your people.

And I need your wisdom to discern whether this would be a good thing for me. And whether I could glorify you on this team. I want to find my greatest delight and joy in you whether I do it or not.

Could you say that? You see, art, sports, music, they're all good gifts from God that He's given us to enjoy. But when they become substitutes for God, they can deaden our relationship with Him.

So that's the first thing, a good gift from God that became a substitute. The second thing is in verses 5 and 6, material wealth. Hosea says, I knew you in the wilderness and the land of drought, but when they had grazed, they became full.

[ 23 : 31 ] They were filled and their heart was lifted up. Therefore, they forgot me. Now in this passage, Hosea is referring to Deuteronomy chapter 8. We looked at it over the summer. God speaks about the abundant prosperity that the Israelites would receive in the promised land.

The promised land would be a land of fountains and springs and wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, olive trees and honey, a land in which you will lack nothing. That's what God had promised to them.

But then he says in that chapter, take care, lest when you've eaten and are full and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God.

And in this verse, Hosea is saying that's exactly what happened. Now material wealth, again, it's a good gift from God. It's a demonstration of God's kindness and His generosity, giving us more than we need and far more than we deserve.

Many of us this week enjoyed turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, green bean casserole, cranberry sauce, squash, salad bread, pumpkin pie, apple pie, chocolate pie, probably far more than we needed to survive on Thursday.

[ 24 : 37 ] And you know, every once in a while, it's good to have a meal like that. It's good to remember God doesn't only give us bread and water, bare rations to survive. He provides abundantly.

He is kind and generous and He feeds us. Now at the same time, Hosea is warning that material wealth can be a danger because it so easily becomes a substitute for God.

And just as a big Thanksgiving meal can lull you off to sleep, being full of material things, enjoying material wealth can make us spiritually drowsy. And I think that this is one of the deadliest and most challenging temptations for American Christians today.

Compared to almost everyone else in the history of the world, we are full and comfortable most of the time. And we can be hardly even aware of how full and comfortable we are.

And we can easily become complacent and apathetic toward God as a result. Hosea says, they were filled and their heart was lifted up and therefore they forgot. You know, they didn't get angry at God and run away from Him.

[ 25 : 49 ] They didn't find some, they didn't have some rational reason to doubt God's existence that caused them an intellectual crisis. They just forgot. Their past experience with and their past knowledge about God simply faded into the background because other things filled their mind and captured their imagination.

And this can happen very easily. We can be almost unconscious of it. It's forgetting is a gradual process. It's like a bonfire left unattended that gradually dies out and leaves you in the dark.

Or it's like falling asleep. You know, you're never actually conscious of when you fell asleep. You're only realized later on if something jolts you awake. Somehow I fell asleep.

Well, if you've become spiritually sleepy or complacent or apathetic, I pray that today would be a wake-up call for you from God and that the surpassing greatness and glory of God in Jesus would shine in your heart more brightly than all your material possessions, than all your artistic productions, that your love for God would be rekindled and that you would find fullness in your relationship with Jesus.

So, so far we've seen metal images and material wealth, good gifts from God that can become substitutes for God and in verse 10 and 11 we see the third thing. Verse 10, Hosea says, Where now is your king to save you in all your cities?

[ 27 : 23 ] Where are all your rulers, those of whom you said, Give me a king and princess? I gave you a king in my anger and I took him away in my wrath. Most likely, Hosea is referring to 1 Samuel chapter 8 when the people of Israel first asked for, actually when the people of Israel first demanded, a king.

They said to Samuel, Give us a king to judge us and go before us and fight our battles. And Samuel was displeased with their request and he prayed to God.

And God said to him, Obey the voice of the people for they have not rejected you but they have rejected me from being king over them. Now both Hosea and Samuel seemed to have a negative view of the king.

But actually, from the beginning, God had promised that he would provide a king for his people. A king wasn't inherently a bad thing. Back in Genesis, Genesis 17, 6, God had promised Abraham and Sarah, kings will come from you.

Deuteronomy 17, God said to the people, When you go into the land, you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. The people's request for a king wasn't wrong in itself.

[ 28 : 35 ] It was part of God's plan all along to give them a king. Ultimately, they'll be fulfilled in Jesus. The problem was that the people demanded a king now on their terms instead of asking God for a king in his time and on his terms.

They said, We want a king to save us, to go before us and fight our battles, but that's exactly what God had promised that he would do for them, that he would go before them and he would fight their battles.

They wanted the king to be a substitute for God instead of a good provision from God. So the question for us is, do we demand things from God or do we ask God for what we want or what we need?

You know, if you're a parent, there's a clear difference between your child demanding something and refusing to be satisfied unless you give it to them exactly as they want and asking you for something and then being willing to trust your answer.

Jesus says, God is a good father. He loves to give good gifts to his children, so seek, ask, seek, knock, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened.

[ 29 : 54 ] But the people of Israel didn't ask, they demanded. He said, we want a king now on our terms and we won't be satisfied unless you give it to us now.

And so God said, okay, I'll give you what you want. But Hosea says, God did so in his anger. In his anger, he let them have what they asked for and they reap bitter consequences as a result.

Sometimes in his anger, God gives us exactly what we demand. And sometimes in his love, God refuses his children's foolish requests.

Sometimes in his mercy, God may refuse to give you something until you get to the point, until he, he may refuse to give you something that you desperately want, until he brings you to the point where you can say to him, I can live without it.

In the book of Genesis, Rachel was unable to bear children. And she went to her husband, Jacob, and she said, give me children or I'll die.

[ 31 : 03 ] She didn't even talk to God at all. She just became angry and demanding and placed an impossible demand on her spouse. God eventually gave Rachel two children, but she died in childbirth with the second one.



1 Samuel 1, Hannah was in the same situation. She was childless. And she came before the Lord and it says that she wept bitterly and she poured out her heart before the Lord in prayer.

And she spent a long time in the Lord's presence. And she said, Lord, if you give me a son, I'll give him back to you all the days of his life because he's yours ultimately before he's mine.

So if you're longing for a child or longing for a spouse or longing that the spouse and children that you do have would be different than they are, pour out your heart to the Lord and ask him for what you want.

Spend a long time in his presence asking him, but trust his wisdom and his love for you that he will only give you what is best.

[ 32 : 18 ] Psalm 37 says, delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. You see, when we delight ourselves in the Lord, our desires become conformed to his.

And then, as our desires become conformed to his, he graciously gives us good gifts. Just as the people of Israel did, we do the same thing, right?

We make God's good gifts into deadly substitutes for God himself. We've done it ever since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gave them a good gift and they took the one thing that God reserved for himself alone and made it a deadly substitute for him.

And ever since then, we've been cut off from God, from the source of life himself. This is what the Bible means when it talks about sin or idolatry. Making good things into substitutes for God.

And Romans 6.23 says the wages of sin is death. Spiritual death, social death, physical death, and ultimately eternal death. And when we truly face the reality of death, it's a terrible, horrible thing.

[ 33 : 27 ] And when we realize that we're caught in the cause of our own death, that we're caught in these patterns of sin, and that we've substituted other things for God and have cut ourselves off from him, we realize that we have no remedy.

And yet, in the midst of this chapter, there's one verse that does point to a remedy. If you look down at verse 14, verse 14 is translated in the ESV as follows.

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Sheol is the Hebrew word for the grave, so I'm just going to call it the grave from now on where it says Sheol. Shall I ransom them from the power of the grave?

Shall I redeem them from death? O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. Now, this verse is very unusual because in the Hebrew, it's actually ambiguous, and it means it can be interpreted in two different ways.

If you look at the context of the chapter, it's possible to understand this verse as simply a proclamation of God's certain and relentless judgment. In other words, it would mean this.

[ 34 : 39 ] Shall I ransom them from the power of the grave? Shall I redeem them from death? And the implied answer would be no, because if you look at verse 12 and 13 and verses 15 and 16, it's about how God is going to give the Israelites over to death because of their stubborn refusal to turn back to him.

And so it's possible to see these two sentences as questions with the implied answer no. O death, where are your plagues? O grave, where is your destruction? In other words, bring them on.

God's summoning death in the grave to carry out their plagues and destruction on the people of Israel. And then he says, compassion or relenting is hidden from my eyes. I'm not changing my mind.

You're going to be gone. It's a message of God's relentless judgment. And it's possible and even likely that this is what Hosea originally meant. because in verses 12 through 13 and 15 through 16 that's basically what God is saying.

And so it would seem that this verse simply carries through that line of thought. But there's a second way to interpret this verse. Now the ESV, this is a little complicated but hang with me here.

[ 35 : 50 ] The ESV translates the first two sentences as questions. Shall I ransom them? Shall I redeem them? And it's possible as we've seen given the context to translate them that way. But actually in Hebrew there's not a question mark.

And there's not always a question mark in Hebrew. But on the basis of the grammar alone we would normally translate these words, these sentences as statements. In other words, I will ransom them from the power of the grave.

I will redeem them from death. And so if you have the NIV, that's how the NIV translates this verse. And so does the King James and even all the way back to the Greek Septuagint. It's not an announcement of certain death, but a promise of God's certain rescue.

And then look down at verse, O death, where are your plagues? O grave, where is your sting? Now look up at verse 10. Hosea says, where is your king to save you? Where are all your rulers?

And the implied answer to that question, where are they, is they're nowhere, they're powerless, they're defeated. And then in verse 14, Hosea asks that same question of death and the grave.

[ 36 : 57 ] O death, where are your plagues? O grave, where is your sting? And the answer would be nowhere, defeated, powerless. And so you think, what in the world does this verse mean?

It seems like there's two opposite interpretations. How could it be this ambiguous, how could it be this unclear? How do we know what this means? And the second interpretation might seem almost too good to be true.

in the midst of this chapter, God proclaiming certain judgment and death, a promise that God will certainly redeem and ransom his people and defeat death?

But that's the pattern we've seen all along in Hosea, hasn't it been? God's alluring love for his wayward people, God's pursuing and triumphant love that wins back his sinful and wayward people.

That word ransom, it means to pay a price, to set somebody free from slavery. And that word redeem, it refers to the Hebrew custom of a kinsman redeemer.

[ 38 : 03 ] It's what the book of Ruth is all about. But it's basically the nearest relative who had the legal right, the legal authority to acquire something as his own by paying a price.

It could be a piece of land or something else. The nearest relative who had the right to buy something back by paying that ransom price. And you know both of those words describe exactly what Jesus Christ came to do.

On the cross he paid the price. He faced death and judgment, the worst of it, being torn apart, facing God's righteous judgment against our sin, all its plagues and all its destruction.

Jesus also became our closest relative. He became our brother, made like us in every way, yet without sin, so that he could have the right to redeem us and to buy us back from the power of death and the grave and sin.

You see, we had substituted ourselves and other things for God and reaped only destruction. And in Jesus Christ, God substituted himself for us on the cross so that we might enjoy eternal life.

[ 39 : 25 ] You see, in other words, what was once a word of sure and certain death and judgment has become in Christ a word of certain victory and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ. As we read earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul quoted from these verses. He quotes rather freely from them. He says, 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. Jesus took our sin and his rightful punishment on the cross.

And by doing that, he took the sting out of death. He took the judgment that Hosea was talking about in our place. And if we stand under the cross of Jesus, we need not fear that one day God will come and devour us and tear us apart like a hungry lion seizing its prey.

We need not fear that God will one day say to us, death, bring on your plagues. Grave, bring on your destruction. Compassion is hidden from my eyes. Because that's what happened to Jesus in our place.

[ 40 : 36 ] And instead, we can stand in a sure confidence that Christ has redeemed us. He's paid the price to bring us back. He's become our nearest relative, our brother, to make us his own.

And so we can face death without fear. And we can say, oh, death, where is your sting? It's defeated. It's powerless in the resurrection of Jesus.

Grave, where is your victory? John Dunn was an Anglican minister in the 1600s, and he suffered a major illness that brought him close to the point of death.

And during that time, he wrote these words. He said, Death, be not proud. Though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, thou art not so. For those whom thou thinkest, thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die. that's the hope and the confidence that you can have, that you and I can have through Christ Jesus.

[ 41 : 42 ] Death is still an enemy, but it's now a defeated enemy. So we can say thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let's pray. God our Father, we thank you that you sent Jesus Christ, that he might stand in our place, that he might receive the judgment that we rightly deserved for our idolatry, for our sin, for substituting other things in your place, and cutting ourselves off from you.

And we thank you for the promise that in him there is, that we are ransomed, we are redeemed. Lord, I pray that if there are, for any who have not yet come to him, to Jesus, that you would draw their hearts toward you, and for those of us who have, that you would renew our hearts with his promise.

And Lord, that because of that, that we would turn away from our idols. Lord, that we would no longer cling to substitutes, but that we would cling to you, and rejoice in the victory that you have brought for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.