

Hosea 13-14 - John Karmelich

1. So how do you end a "downer" of a book like Hosea? For those of you who have read some or all of these lessons, we have to admit Hosea is a depressing book. He writes to the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom. His basic message is they are really messing up and now they're going to get wiped out. Yes, I've been saying that over and over again and my guess is by this point in the book Hosea himself is tired of repeating it. As I studied these last two chapters, the idea that kept popping up is that of "death and resurrection". Paul, who lived eight centuries later, quotes a verse from these chapters when he was describing the effects of Jesus death and resurrection. However, I believe the issue here is about our death and resurrection as God's witnesses. Let me explain:
 - a) One of the hardest things to regularly grasp about living the Christian life the idea of "Let go and let God". Most of us Christian veterans have heard that expression for many years, but my point here is a big mistake Christians can make is getting in the way of His plans. I learned that a common mistake believers can make is building a "flood control channel" for God to work through, implying we expect Him to only work through our plans. That means the challenge of living as God desires, is to figure out how He's working in a given situation and work His way. It usually means going through trial and errors to figure out how He's working, but the key point is it's God job to lead, and our job is to follow Him.
 - b) The other mistake we make as Christians is laziness. He can be blessing our lives and we don't take Him as seriously. Studies have been done, about Christian giving: we give less when things are good, versus tough times. My point is the two great dangers of living for Jesus is either ignoring Him or doing things He doesn't desire. Either way, we're ignoring His will of being a witness for Him and we're not living as He desires we live.
 - c) That little speech leads me perfectly back to Hosea. As most of you know by now, most of this book has been Hosea lecturing the Israelites on the issue of ignoring God. By now, we will read of Hosea telling those Israelites life as they know will soon be over. From God's perspective, those Israelites are "dead meat". I've been pounding the point all through this book that the issue isn't individual salvation, but our witness for Jesus. I'm saying that the key point of this whole book is that God desires we use our lives as a witness for Him.
 - i) That's the greatest joy one can have in this life and that's why God's called us to be separate from how nonbelievers live us as a group of believers in the first place!
2. Speaking of getting back to Hosea, I said earlier the text of these last two chapters focuses on the issue of "Death and resurrection". To state the obvious, God isn't through with Israel as a unique group of people. My evidence is the fact that Israelites still exist today and they are back in Israel after several thousand years! The key point of this lesson is just as Jesus died and was resurrected so the nation of Israel was effectively killed and resurrected. My point is God can and does work with you and me to "resurrect" us for His glory. Let me explain:
 - a) The obvious of course is when we first give our lives to Jesus. We start to see the world in a different light. The bible makes more sense to us. The purpose for living makes sense to us, as we understand God wants us involved to use our lives for His glory. That's Hosea's message in one key thought. The point for us Christians is since we've already effectively been resurrected, the key question is, "What have we done with our lives since then?"
 - b) Let me give a related example: I suspect most of us know of at least one person who was on fire for Jesus, cooled off for a long time, but then got back on the bandwagon. That too, can be a form of a resurrection. Most of us know the expression a "back-sliding Christian". An important idea woven throughout the bible is as long as one is breathing, it's never too late to use what's left of our life as a witness for Jesus. Even many on their deathbed have realized Jesus is God and used some of those final moments to express gratitude to Jesus for their salvation. The question for you and me is why do we wait so long to do so?

- c) Let me also say a few words to those who think, "Why should I dedicate my valuable time to make a difference for Jesus now? After all I still have a lot of life left. I can get salvation right before I die and still be saved!" That's true. At the same time, one has wasted what I would consider the most valuable gift God has given you, your time! What is a better use of time than things that matter for all of eternity? Even if you don't know what to do, the answer is to do something. Pick something one enjoys doing, and figure out a way to use that joy for God's benefit. At the same time, I know people who go to church regularly for years, but never use their time to make a difference for Jesus. That's the point here!
3. OK John, you're slipping into the habit of preaching to the choir again. Most of us who read this are already devout Christians who use their lives to make a difference for Jesus. Why should we read these last few chapters of Hosea? What's in it for us? Thought you'd never ask!
- a) First, it's a reminder of how easy it is to either slip into "laziness" mode when it comes to us using our lives to Jesus, or else working on our "flood control channels" expecting God to work a certain way. Hosea's desire is to get people to trust in God through good and bad times in life. To realize He wants to guide us through both situations and He wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. All I'm saying is it's easy to go down the wrong path, even as a long-time Christian. It's easy to get lazy or get involved in projects that whether we realize it or not, are wasting God's time as well as ours! The point is to think about the use of our time from God's perspective and what He desires we do with that time!
- b) Let me give a practical example here. One of my favorite questions to ask young people is what do you want to do with your life? If money were irrelevant, what would make you happy to do all day? Unfortunately, too many people would probably say something like play video games all day. We have to think in terms of making a difference in the world. All I am saying is even if we're still in school we don't know long we will live. We have to be willing to find a way to use our life to make a difference for Jesus even as we work to accomplish our long term goals. The point is life is short, if we're not enjoying it now and not using it to make a difference for Jesus we're wasting our life.
- c) In close, I'd like you to read the rest of this lesson, if for no other reason than the fact it is a big reminder of our own "resurrection". No not "that one" but the fact we get the privilege of using our lives to make a difference for Him. It's the reminder to avoid both laziness as well as "waste of time" projects as the greatest use of our time is when we use it to make a difference for Him in the world. The rest of this lesson is the details, which I'd love you to join me as I go through them. Let's start.
4. Hosea 13, Verse 1: When Ephraim spoke, men trembled; he was exalted in Israel. But he became guilty of Baal worship and died.
- a) If you've been with me throughout this book, you'd know by now that Hosea likes to use the name Ephraim as a nickname for the Northern Israel Kingdom. (For my newcomers, Israel at this period in history was split into two kingdoms, that I call the North and South to keep it simple.) The point here is that of the 12 original tribes of Israel, Ephraim became the dominant one in the Northern Kingdom and therefore that name was respected there.
- b) One has to understand that Hosea loves "puns". I'm not talking about humor, but simply the idea that Hosea loves double-references. It's the idea that Ephraim was respected as a tribe in the North as the leader, and the Israelites themselves were respected as a force to be reckoned with in that region. The point is God was blessing that nation financially. At the same time the Israelites had abandoned God for "Baal" worship.
- i) Like I said in my introduction, studies have been done of church giving. What we give goes down in good times. Sometimes I wonder if God allows bad times to be a part of our lives just so He can say, "Hey, good to hear from you, it's been awhile since we spoke last!" Anyway, a big part of God's message to us when life is going well is He's the one who behind that blessing! That was the case here in the North when Hosea wrote this. The net effect is it caused the death of that nation!

- c) Another thing we're to grasp by reading Hosea is that God isn't to be messed with. A big theme of this book is that when those who've been called by God turn from Him there are consequences. The worst of those consequences is when God effectively says to us, we're done as a witness for Him! Again, the issue isn't salvation, it's our willingness or lack of it to be used by God as a witness for Him. If we, who've been called by God waste the most valuable thing He gives us, our time for things other than Him, we've wasted that time He has given us. I'm not saying we have to be perfect or we can't have time to relax. All I'm saying whatever we do, we should live a God-centered life. To use a classic saying, "Take God with us, wherever we go". That's the underlying point here and one of the big themes that Hosea is preaching in this book.
 - d) Speaking of this verse, while most of us barely understand what "Baal" worship is, we too as a society make our own idols. I'm not talking about little statues, but the idea that we'll worship anything but God. Let me put it this way: If the most important thing in our life is fame, fortune or power and we don't care what we have to do to get those things, that is our "Baal" as we worship whatever is the center focus of our lives.
 - e) With that tough statement out of my system, time for Verse 2.
5. Verse 2: Now they sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people, "They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calf-idols."
- a) Another theme that's common in the book of Hosea, is how people would build statues of what they worshipped. They'd hire people who are skilled in building such idols. At that time, they were commonly made out of silver. If you think this was just something big in Hosea's time (about 700 BC), realize that in the Roman Empire about 800 years later, there was a city whose main source of income was making idol statues. (Acts Chapter 19.) My point was until Christianity started to dominate the western world, idol statues still were a big cultural item. Even today in the eastern world, icons representing what's worshiped in that world. So am I condemning art as an idol? Hardly. It's one thing to study a great painting to help visualize an event. It's another to say a piece of art should be worshipped as something representing God. If we bow down to worship in front of a statue that we do consider a representative of our god, that's an example of idol worship as we look to that "thing" as having real power.
 - b) Today the western world does something worse: many look to "nothingness" thinking the world created itself, as they believe god doesn't exist. Another common bad idea is when people credit our own hard work and not realize there is a God who's been guiding us the whole time. All I'm saying is even though "Baal" is no longer an issue in our world today, idolatry is very common.
 - c) Before I move on, let me discuss the "literal" a little more. To prove one's loyalty to Baal, one would offer their own children as a sacrifice. It's a sickening way of saying, we trust you (this fake god) so much, we're willing to offer our own children to prove our loyalty. One reason God wanted Abraham to offer Isaac was effectively to ask God, "Abraham, do you love Me as much as those idol worshippers love their false gods?"
 - i) If you wondered why the sin of Baal worship disgusted God so much, remember that the people called to be God's servants were not only turning to Baal, but also offering their children in sacrifices to prove their loyalty to Him. Today we offer up "abortions" as unwanted children, so in that sense life hasn't changed!
 - d) Finally, let me explain, "kiss the calf-idols". As I explained in an earlier lesson, oxen were worshipped as they are the biggest animals that can be domesticated. Therefore, they're thought of as the god's coming down to help us by working through animals that help us say in a farming community (before tractors). Just as much of India still consider oxen to be sacred today, so "oxen" were sacred in societies that believed in multiple gods. To kiss a calf was a way of expressing honor to a "calf-god".

- e) OK John, we get the idea that the Israelites were a pretty-messed up group, offering their children to a false god and honoring calves as god-filled creatures. However, you're now preaching to a bunch of Christians who honor Jesus as God. A reason for that little lecture is for us to realize what we've turned from. When we turn from worshipping what much of the world worships is when we turn to the true and living God. We also are to learn of these practices so when we start thinking we can solve our problems solely based on hard work or on our trust in our human leaders, that's when we mess up by ignoring the God who created us in the first place. All I'm saying is idolatry is an easy thing to slip into, so it is something to be watched, even by us long term Christians. Again realize the key issue is about failing to be a witness for the God who's called us to be that witness to start with!
6. Verse 3: Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.
- a) A term that Hosea likes to use is "mist". It's like morning fog that rolls in and disappears as the day progresses. Hosea's painting the picture here of something that will disappear quickly. Remember that we're talking about the end of a nation. People's lives are about to come to a crashing end. Even the survivors will be separated from each other and live out the rest of their lives in a foreign land. As sad as that reality was, the point for us is if we choose to ignore the God who created us, our lives too will be like a mist that appears for a short time and then disappears.
- b) Most young people never stop to consider how quickly life goes by. It's amazing how fast the years will add up. There is no guarantee how long we get to live. We each have some undefined period-of-time to live. My point is as quick as that goes by, the best use of that time is for God's glory. I know I pound that point home a lot in these lessons, but as one who's now lived a good while, I can tell you just how true that is! That's the point here.
7. Verse 4: "But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me. ⁵ I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat.
- a) Speaking of honoring no one but God alone, here's the reminder to the Israelites that God was responsible for bringing their ancestors out of Egypt and guided them through the 40 years of wandering in the desert. The point is the Israelites wouldn't even be there in the first place if it wasn't for God guiding them there in the first place.
- b) For those of us who are non-Jewish by birth, the point is not much different. I can assume all of us who are devout Christians have at one point in our lives realize that God loves us enough that He was willing to die on our behalf so we can live forever in His presence. A short "midst" life becomes an eternal life when we realize He exists, He died for us and we don't have to prove our worth to Him by our efforts. What God asks of us once we realize all of that, is that we use our time to be a witness for Him! That's what Hosea's pounding over and over again. Obviously, the Israelites failed to learn that lesson, which is why the years of captivity occurred. For us, God doesn't expect perfection. However, He wants us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. That's an underlying theme of this book.
8. Verse 6: When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.
- a) This could be referring to the "manna in the desert", but I suspect it's more likely about the fact their economy was doing well right before the Assyrians destroyed them. Remember that Israel depended upon rain to make the crops grow. They were a farming community. Apparently they had some good years and were able to sell their excess crops to buy what they need to survive and thrive. However, in that success, they forgot about God and did credit to "Baal", who was a god associated with the weather.
- b) Like I said earlier, studies have been done of church given, and it goes down during good times as we start to enjoy our success and forget the God who's given us that success even before we had it! Sometimes I picture God bringing us tough times just so He can ask us, "Hey good to hear from you, it's been awhile!"

- c) What if you're thinking, "That's not me. I'm struggling to pay the bills and I honor God in all that I do." Then keep this principal in mind if and when things are going well. It's our reminder to not forget God in the good times. Just remember He's guiding us through all of those cycles. The point is not to think, "I'll honor God when things get better". Get into a habit of honoring Him now based on what we do have, and it'll help us to keep the habit going when the good cycles come.
 - d) OK then, here comes the consequences of turning from Him once again:
9. Verse 7: So I will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. ⁸ Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will tear them apart. ⁹ "You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your helper.
- a) Like I said in my introduction, Hosea is a "downer" as he harps on that same theme over and over again in this book. That is, of the Israelites "blowing it" by ignoring God who is responsible for their existence and success in the first place. Here once again we will get a description of how life as they know it is about to end.
 - b) Before I get into the specifics of these verses, let me ask, why does Hosea get so repetitive? Couldn't the letter be a lot shorter and essentially just say, "Hey you guys, you've ignored God for a long time and now you're about to pay the consequences"? Isn't that the entire message of this book in one thought? Why repeat it over and over again and get into all of these analogies to essentially describe the same thing? The answer is that is the only way we take God seriously when His message to us is repeated over and over again.
 - c) There is an understanding among bible preachers and teachers that often we can say some message over and over again, and it never sinks in. Then a guest speaker can come along, essentially preach the same message and we can see people get it! First, we shouldn't get mad that it wasn't "us" that got people to believe it, but that God did what He could for us to get that message. My point is that the bible will often speak the same themes over and over again, as that's what it takes to sink in! Ever paused to realize there is no key chapter on any major bible theme? There is no "holy spirit chapter" or a single chapter explaining why Jesus had to die for our sins. My point is God's message of salvation is spread out in the entire book so we can't remove one page or one chapter and lose that message!
 - i) The reason I'm giving this little lecture here is to understand why Hosea wanted to get so repetitive! Because it usually takes repetition for any key message to sink in our hearts. All parents understand that principal as well!
 - ii) Bottom line is Hosea repeats his themes over and over again so they sink in!
 - d) Meanwhile, let me get "literal" about these verses. The verses mention lions, leopards and bears as a threat to Israelites way of life. All three of those predators existed in Israel. Yes those animals were more of a threat to the livestock that Israelites owned, but the point is that they were real predators. At the time of Daniel, roughly 100 years later, he described three great empires that would rule over Israel in the future as a lion (Babylon), a bear, (a reference to the Medo-Persian Empire) and a leopard (Greek Empire). I'm not saying that Daniel stole from Hosea. I'm saying that bible prophets liked to use imagery that people can relate to. Just as those three predator animals can do damage when we're not looking, so Israel will suffer at the hands of not only the Assyrian Empire in Hosea's day, but also by other empires who desired to rule all of the Middle East, let alone much of the world at that time. It's always amazing to me to consider the empires that have risen and fallen in the last few millenniums, yet the Israelites as a people still exist.
 - i) But can't you say the Greeks or Egyptians have lived just as long? As I've stated earlier, many nations have been conquered. The amazing thing about Israelites is how they've been conquered, scattered and came back together again to be a single country. No other nation in world history has ever done that once, let alone twice!
 - e) Bottom line again: we too will be conquered and scattered if we ignore God enough!

10. Verse 10: Where is your king, that he may save you? Where are your rulers in all your towns, of whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes'?
- a) So here is Hosea in the last few verses reminding the Israelites that they'll be destroyed as quickly as a lion or a leopard pounces on its prey. Then Verse 10 effectively asks, "Where are your leaders at that time?" This is Hosea's subtle way of saying, their leaders won't be able to save them in their hour of need.
 - b) A few quick words about politics while we're in the neighborhood. God isn't against the concept of human government. He ordained the idea. Romans Chapter 10 teaches us to pray for our government leaders. Are there leaders I'm not crazy about? Of course. One thing I like to point out is that when Paul told us to pray for our leaders, Nero was Caesar at that point and he wasn't kind to Christians or Jewish people to put it nicely.
 - i) When the Israelites first wanted a king, God essentially asked, why do you want a king when I will protect you? The Israelites said even though he is going to cost a lot in taxes, we want a king like other nations around us. Therefore, God gave in to them. (That's His "permitted-will" versus His desire for our lives).
 - ii) By the time Israel split into two kingdoms (at the time of David's grandson), none of the kings in the Northern Kingdom were ever good kings. The bible puts all of them down as non-God fearing men. Which surprisingly leads me to Verse 11:
11. Verse 11: So in my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I took him away.
- a) So why does the bible say that God gave them a king in anger? Like I said, God wants us to look to Him for our protection, not any local kings. As I implied earlier, scholars refer to this as God's "permissive" will, versus what He desires for us. It's like when we give to our kids something that we know isn't the best decision, but out of love, we allow it.
 - b) But wasn't David a man after God's own heart? Sure. God knew the Israelites were going to pick a king and God choose the man He wanted to lead them.
 - c) Anyway, the kings God allowed to rule up north were all "bad eggs". That's the idea with the concept of God's "anger" at giving them a king.
 - d) As I've beaten the point home over most of this book, the Northern Kingdom is coming to an end. That's why the text referring to God's wrath when He takes away the king.
 - e) The general idea is the king is as guilty as everyone else in the Northern Kingdom of not being a witness for God, and let's just say the whip is coming down hard!
12. Verse 12: The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record.
- a) One of the basic ideas that most people accept about God's existence is that He knows all things and keeps records of all things. There is a classic line that Christians aren't going to heaven because we're better people, but only because we accept God's free forgiveness of all our sins. If Old Testament people were saved based on what they do know about God and what they did with that information, why does Hosea say Ephraim's in big trouble?
 - i) For the reason I just stated. God judges us based on what we do know about Him or should know based on what information is out there and what we did with that information. People living in the Northern Israel Kingdom then at the least knew enough about God that He exists and He was responsible for them being there. In spite of that information, this group collectively turned their backs on Him. That's why punishment came down and came down hard!
 - ii) For most of us, this is old news by now. Hosea's been pounding that point through most of this book. Now that we're near the end of it, why repeat it here? To start, as any teacher can tell you often repetition is the necessity of learning.
 - iii) Next, think about this verse in context of the surrounding verses. Here is Hosea as he tells the Israelites "doom is coming". This is a group that knows who God is, but have been collectively ignoring Him. Hosea's reminding those Israelites how He's aware of all things and keeps records of all things. He's not "among the god's", but is the only God. Since He knows all things, we're accountable to Him.

- b) Before I move on, let's back up and put this thought about God knowing all things into a perspective we can relate to: If He knows all the things we've ever done wrong, why does He still want to use us? We're back to God picked us, because God picked us, so accept it and deal with it. What God expects of us in exchange for that complete forgiveness is our willingness to be used by Him to make a difference for Him. In other words, we are to do our best to avoid sin as much as possible. God isn't asking us to be perfect, but to make an effort to separate ourselves from how nonbelievers act as to make that difference for Him.
 - i) My point here is that God has records about our lives just as He has records about those Israelites back then. He doesn't look at our lives and say, "Well, it looks like your good deeds are better than your bad ones, so I'll let you in!" Instead, He will ask in effect, "Do you plead innocent or guilty to your sins?" The correct answer is we are guilty but we're asking God Himself to pay for those sins. Yes He is aware of all our faults, but because we plead guilty as charged, He's willing to forgive us and in turn He asks us to forgive others, which is the essential idea of how we love others, by putting other's needs as priority over our own needs.
 - ii) What I'm getting at in all of this fundamental Christian theology is the reason that we're saved is so we can then use our lives to make a difference for God. We read of God condemning these Israelites for the same reason, they're refusal to be part of His people and use their lives as a witness for Him.
 - iii) Therefore as we read of God keeping records on us, it should bring us to a healthy fear that we're going to be judged, and we're only saved based on what He's done for us. We like those Israelites can also be "taken out of the ballgame" if we fail to use our lives as a witness for Him. That's the key scary point that I'm making by explaining all this theology about God and "record keeping".
 - iv) OK then, Verse 13.
- 13. Verse 13: Pains as of a woman in childbirth come to him, but he is a child without wisdom; when the time arrives, he does not come to the opening of the womb.
 - a) One of the popular idioms in the bible is comparing a big event to giving birth. The point is both events start slow and without warning, and then gets aggravating until the baby is out of the womb. I remember my mother described giving birth like, "Taking your lower lip and trying to pull it over your head". (I get my humor from my mom.). Hosea wants to get the point across that this horrid destruction is coming soon and the pain is going to get worse and worse.
 - b) This passage also uses a strange reference to a child without wisdom who won't come out of the womb. The point Hosea's trying to make is Israel's refusal to do the right thing and turn to God before all this destruction is going to happen.
 - c) With that said, I have some good news. If you remember in my introduction, I called this lesson the "Death and Resurrection" section. My point is these two chapters are not just a bunch of doom and gloom predictions, there's also some positive verses about Israel being "resurrected" as a nation. That's why I went on for a page or so discussing what it means and why it's relevant to us. The issue isn't so much our actual resurrection as much as it is the idea of turning back to God after we've gone "off the deep end" for a bit.
 - d) With that said, I present Verse 14:
- 14. Verse 14: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"
 - a) If this verse sounds familiar, Paul quotes it in 1st Corinthians 15:15. Realize Paul used the Greek translation. My point is the Old Testament is Hebrew to English. The quote in the New Testament is Hebrew to Greek to English, which is why it is a little different. Paul is making the point that despite the pain of death, it is in effect, painless for the Christian as we get to avoid death. I'll come back to that in a moment.
 - b) First, let me discuss the verse in context of Hosea's "doom and gloom" speech:

- i) We can tell how it happened historically: Israel as a nation died and the ones who lived through the conquering of that nation were scattered over a large empire. It is only because God cares for and wanted to resurrect that nation that they existed after that. They were scattered again over a half-millennium later by the Romans. It wasn't until about 2,000 years later that the only nation in world history that did end, was scattered and came back together in the same geographical location to be a nation again and with a dead language brought back to life. My point is if that is not a resurrection on a grand scale, I don't know what is.
- ii) On an individual level, anyone who's changed their lifestyle to be a living witness for God is in effect a living example of a resurrection. When we develop a reason to live that is greater than ourselves, that's used for God's glory, that's an excellent example of a resurrected life.
- c) Let me return to the idea of a physical resurrection: How can a "thing" die and come back to life again? Paul spends a long chapter talking about that in 1st Corinthians Chapter 15. The way I view it is I think of a blank computer or music "CD". If there is no label on it, it weighs the exact same if it is blank or full of music or programming. My point is software on the CD has no weight. Part of us has no weight. That's the soul within us that realizes we're more special than the other animals on earth and there is more to life than what we can eat or drink. Our "software" gets transferred to a new body that doesn't wear out and will live forever.
 - i) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me ask a common objection that atheists use to argue against God: If God is this all loving God, how can He send people to hell forever? The answer has to do with free will. We're free to chose to be with Him forever, or we can chose to ignore Him forever. Essentially spending eternity in a heaven or a hell is giving people what they want for all of eternity. Yes that's oversimplifying the point, but essentially that's why we're sent to either place.
 - d) OK, I've wandered away from the verse, but since Hosea brought up the topic of how we are resurrected, I wanted to throw in those comments. Back to the text.
- 15. Verse 14 cont.: "I will have no compassion,¹⁵ even though he thrives among his brothers. An east wind from the LORD will come, blowing in from the desert; his spring will fail and his well dry up. His storehouse will be plundered of all its treasures.¹⁶ The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open."
 - a) Before one can be resurrected, one has to die first. Therefore, Hosea wanted to come back to His point about why the nation had to die in the first place.
 - b) An advantage of living in Southern California is we have a similar weather pattern to that of Israel. While it's not as hot here as it gets there, in both places we understand that if the wind is blowing from the east, that means hot weather is coming. In context here, Hosea's saying that just as a hot wind from the east means a change in weather is coming, so life is about to change dramatically. One of the idea's I've been stating all through Hosea is that their economy was going well when the disaster struck of being destroyed. Therefore, we once again get the reminder of why this death was necessary.
 - c) Let me ask the tough related question: Where's our explanation of when disaster strikes? Why doesn't God explain from His perspective why we had to go through horrid times or say allow a loved one to die so painfully? First, God doesn't owe us one! He never made a deal with us to explain every disaster to us. There's a classic joke that says when we get to heaven, the only word we get out of our mouth is "oh", as in "Oh that's why you let this occur or that event to occur". All I know is life is short, and the best use of the time we're given is to use it for His glory. That's why I get so obsessed with the concept of time and using some of it for Him. That's why He "resurrected" us now to live for Him!

- d) With that positive thought snuck in there, let me get back to the text. A great question to ask is why did God allow them to suffer so much? After all, if God wanted to end Israel's existence as a nation, I suspect there could have been less painful methods to do so. As an example, the last verse of this chapter talks about how the Israelites will fall by the sword and even the pregnant women will have their children die in a horrid way. Why does this enemy have to be so cruel? Yes war makes people do horrible things. The soldier's orders were to force the residents to be taken captive and then settle them all over the empire as to not have them reunite and consider rebelling against them. Killing resistors was a way of making the point that they are not to be messed with! Killing innocent people and even do things as horrid as killing babies is a way of saying, "Don't mess with us".
- i) I remember years ago, hearing an interview between a radio broadcaster, (Dennis Prager) and a man he met from Iraq. Dennis effectively asked him, what are your people like? He responded, "We are the cruelest people on earth". Between what we've read in the bible and what the terrorist group "ISIS" is like today (who has their roots in Iraq), that reputation is well earned. I'm not saying all people from Iraq act that way, I'm just saying that reputation is historically accurate!
- ii) Coming back to the cruelty of this situation, the short answer is that's what it took for God to get His people out of that land for disobedience as cruel as that was!
- e) If there is a lesson to get out of these verses is that "God isn't to be messed with". If we've given our lives to Jesus, He expects us to use it for His glory and don't mess with Him. If that doesn't scare you into using our lives accordingly, I don't know what will!
- f) OK, enough terror for one lesson, let's move on to the last nine verses of this book:
16. Chapter 14: Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall!
- a) After that horrid "doom and gloom" speech that ended the last chapter, why would Hosea want to say, "Return to God"? If it's too late for that nation and their fate is sealed, why is Hosea saying, "come on back to God?" Yes, Hosea is asking people to turn to God in order to have eternal life, and yes their destiny is sealed, but one has to separate the idea of our eternal salvation from "group salvation". God can and does bring specific churches and a group's purpose to an end if it's no longer serving His purpose, but that's different from a person's individual commitment to serve Jesus and that may be the issue here.
- b) Also, since Hosea brought up the issue of resurrection, that is the underlying message in this part of the text. It's as if God is saying to future Israelites since I will resurrect you as a nation, don't be like your ancestors who rebelled against Me. Learn from their mistakes as you use your lives for God's glory. What God wanted is future Israelites to learn from this disaster as a motivation tool for them to turn to God. It's like the old saying that God will do what He has to do to get our attention even it means the death of people who have been called to be a witness for Him. Remember how I said we can't explain all the horrid things that occur in our world? Often one reason He allows it is as a witness to those who will live in the future. No that's not the reason for all tragedies, but I've always amazed of how good things do come out of the most horrid situations and are used to glorify Him.
17. Verse 2: Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. ³ Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion."
- a) If there is one thing one gets from studying the entire bible, is that God never gives up on asking people to turn from Him. Earlier I discussed the permanency of both heaven and hell. I asked what atheists ask, "If God is so loving, why does He send people there?" The answer can be found in these verses among many others in the bible. It is that God doesn't want to send anyone there, but He had to create a place for people to exist forever where they can be without Him forever. In some ways the bible is a "beg-a-thon" to remind us of what hell is like and we should turn to God to avoid the horrors of that place!

- b) In effect, we get a reminder here of how people will often turn to God as a last resort! We see a reference to the Assyrians army as if people are asking, "Can this group save us from our eternal fate?" Sometimes I can just picture people still trusting in anything other than the true and living God saying, "Why do are allowing this to happen to me?" It's amazing how people will avoid God even as the worst is occurring. I'm positive that God made us with a need to worship something and it never ceases to amaze me what people will turn to in order to fill that avoid as opposed to turning to the living God Himself.
 - c) OK that's a tough reality to digest. I bring that up here, because in effect that's what Hosea is doing as well. He's preaching to a group of people that were called to be God's witness to the world. Instead of honoring God as God, they've turned to idols and they're dealing with a foreign army knocking on their front door demanding their surrender or else! The point for you and me as devout Christians is we are to look at the people around us not to feel sorry for them, but to see them as needing to fill that void in their lives that only Jesus can fill whether they realize it or not. The mistake we make is we think that just by telling people the Gospel Message, they will all immediately get it. Once in a while the right time comes for us to "close the deal", but most of the time, it's just a matter of being a witness to others and letting the message sink in all by itself.
 - d) Enough lecturing for these verses. Time to move on.
18. Verse 4: "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. ⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; ⁶ his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.
- a) I said these last two chapters are about death and resurrection on a group level and these verses emphasize that point. I can hear critics say, "If God loves the Israelites as He claims He does, why does He allow them to suffer so much through history? Even after all of this let's be honest, the history of the Jewish people included a lot of suffering. Persecution of the Israelites has been a historical fact for millenniums. What I'm asking is if God says in these verses that I will " love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them", why have they suffered so much since this event occurred over 2,500 years ago? Does it mean all Israelites go to heaven? Of course not. Again, one has to separate individual salvation from group salvation. Whether the Israelites like it or not, God has picked them to be His witnesses to the world. As long as Jewish people exist, the existence of God exists and an existence of a Jewish nation means that God exists! That's why there's effectively a never ending effort to wipe them out as a nation.
 - b) So are you saying the fulfillment of these verses haven't happened yet? Yes and no. Just the fact that Israel is back in the land again, is a partial fulfillment of this verse. However we also have to realize that God loves to work in "patterns". Just as they are back there in the land today, doesn't mean they won't stop facing dangers of their existence. A reason that I am sure God still has a future plan for Israel as a nation, is because verses like these have not had their complete fulfillment yet. There are Christians who do argue that God's done with Israel as a nation. If that's true, then God's unconditional promises to them are not fulfilled. It'd be selfish of Christians to think that God's unconditional promises to us of our resurrection is the only promise that count today! If we accept His promise of our eternal life, then we must also accept His promise of His eternal plans for Israel.
 - c) So does that mean all Israelites will be resurrected to live there? Of course not. Just as we have many people who claim to be Christians but never put their hearts into it, so most of the Jewish people don't get what God has promised them and won't get everlasting life as they refuse the free gift of Jesus' salvation. To put it simply Jewish people will exist when Jesus returns and somebody has to be there in order for Jesus to rule the world from Israel as is promised throughout the bible. An angel told Mary that Jesus would get the throne of David, and that throne isn't in heaven, but in Jerusalem. (Luke 1:32.)

- d) OK then, time to stop preaching and get back to the verses themselves. These verses focus on ideas that Jewish people at that time could relate to. Notice that all the idioms used in this section are positive and they allude to a resurrection of the nation!
 - i) One of the common idioms that Hosea likes to use is "dew". Think of it as a mist that appears and disappears quickly. In this context, it is about the realization that God is working. It's like "You can see Him and not see Him at the same time", like when we realize He's working in the background, but we can't see Him. Dew is a way of Hosea expressing the idea of God working in the background here.
 - ii) From here we get a handful of references to plants and trees. The simple point is that the nation will bloom again and Hosea uses agricultural examples to illustrate that point. The specifics are pretty self explanatory, so I'll move on.
19. Verse 7: Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.
- a) Stop and consider again, what I said to start this lesson that Hosea's a depressing book to study. After all those chapters of "doom and gloom" that this particular kingdom will see it's ending very soon, we finally get some good news the last handful of verses about how it will be resurrected. Even before I get into the specifics of these verses, it's nice to realize that just as Jesus had His own death and resurrection and just as many of us had our own resurrection in the sense of us committing our lives to serving Him, so we read here of the nation of Israel fitting that same pattern. OK then, onto specifics.
 - b) Let me start with "His shade". The idea isn't that God has some sort of shadow we can sit in. It's another idiom representing the idea that the Israelites will be back in that land. To say they are "sitting in God's shade" is a colorful way of saying they are in "God's land" as a reference to the land of Israel. For a group of people who are about to be kicked out of it this has to be a nice promise to keep in mind as they are then scattered around the region.
 - i) Imagine losing everything you value. Imagine having your family killed with the one's who survived being separated from you. All possessions are gone. After all of that, and the fact your nation has been guilty of ignoring God, here's a promise that despite all of that your descendants will return to this land and flourish there!
 - ii) For those of you reading this going through your own time of despair, realize just how much God loves you and has great plans for you and your descendants if you are willing to trust God through such times. It's verses like these that should keep us trusting in God despite the worst of circumstances.
 - iii) For the rest of us who realize that life is hard and we're not sure what will happen next, verses like this are an encouragement that we're not in it alone and God will guide us through life for His glory. No it doesn't mean we're free to go do a dumb thing with our resources and our lives. God still expects us to be responsible. All I am saying is despite the worst of circumstances, God is still there, He still wants to guide us and help us through whatever we have to deal with. If you see that, you realize that's how God wants to guide us through this life.
 - c) In the meantime, I've wandered away from the verse again. Hosea uses grain fields and vineyards as a way of expressing growth in the land of Israel. Remember that Israel then was mainly an agricultural society. Growing wheat and grapes were staples of that land back in those days and still they both exist there today. People think of Israel as a couple of big cities such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Truthfully much of the land is used to grow what is needed to feed the people living in the bigger cities. Without having the fields to grow what's needed to survive, no society would be able to survive. God's promising the Israelites that despite the fact they're about to be kicked out of that land for ignoring Him the punishment is not permanent. There, I've beaten that point home for a page now, I'm confident I can move on now that we get the point that God never permanently abandons those of us who've committed their lives to serving Him.

20. Verse 8: O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me."
- a) The first sentence of Verse 8 is a summary of the main purpose of the book, "That God has had it "up to here" with idolatry and now punishment has to come in order to get those of us called to serve Him from serving god's other than the true God."
 - b) As I also love to point out, as bad as all this history was, it worked. Archeologists confirm that life among the Jewish people before versus after this era, ended their worship of idols in that land. Since God's willing to go to that drastic a measure to keep His people focused on Him, what does that say for you and me who've committed our lives to serving Jesus? My point is He's willing to do whatever it takes to get those of us called to be His witness to the world to do "just that", be His witnesses to the world around us. All I'm saying is if we want a motivation to use our lives for God's glory, the fate of the Israelites is all we do need to remind ourselves that God's willing to go to those extremes to keep us focused on Him! Yes there are positive motives too, but God uses the "stick and the carrot" on us!
 - c) Speaking of the positive motive, look at the second sentence of this verse. It says that God will "answer him" (i.e., respond to our prayers to help us) and care for him. God is saying He is like a "green pine tree" (an image of something big, powerful and full of life). Then comes the key point, "Our fruitfulness (our ability to use our lives to make a difference for Him comes His power working through us) comes from Him.
 - d) Throughout this lesson and most of Hosea, I've been preaching about us using our lives in a way to make a difference for Jesus. I've barely touched the "how", because that's usually an individual calling. My point is how God has called me to make a difference is different from how God's asked you to make a difference. The way to start is to ask God how can I use my life for His glory? I find that God can't resist a prayer of surrender of our time and our life to Him. He'll usually make it obvious to us how He wants us to do it. It is usually easier than we think. Often it is just a matter of doing what we enjoy doing and finding a way to combine that talent with making that difference for Him in the world around us. Churches are always looking for volunteers to help. All I'm saying is to start somewhere and let God guide you to make that difference. That's what Hosea is saying as well as he's about to end this letter. Speaking of endings, last verse:
21. Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.
- a) How many of you would like to be thought of as wise and discerning? Wisdom begins in the belief of God's existence and a fear of His judgment. The book of Proverbs effectively begins with that idea. Let me explain this another way: I've known lots of people who've got a gift for making money or achieving fame. Few of them understand Godly wisdom. Such people may achieve fame or fortune in this lifetime, but that's all they will ever get! Those of us who put God first develop wisdom far greater than anything and everything this world has to offer. Of course we still have to live life and provide for ourselves. All I am saying is trusting in the basic facts of the Gospel message give us wisdom far greater than anything and everything this world has to offer. That's why the book ends with the point that those people who realize God exists and follow His ways are the really wise of this world. We "walk in them" simply by studying His word and considering what it says to us. Those who rebel against God stumble over His desire for our lives. If you get all of that, you understand not only why Hosea had to be so negative in this book, but also how God's called us to live as a witness for Him. That's the resurrected life God desires we do live here and now. If you get that, you get the purpose of Hosea!
22. Heavenly Father, First we thank You that You have called us into eternal life with You. Help us to use our time to make a difference for You. Help us not to waste the most valuable asset you've given us. Provide us with the wisdom as to how You desire we live our lives, so we can use them for Your glory! We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.