

# Introduction to Hosea Chapter 13

*When Ephraim Spoke There Was Trembling: The Rise, the Fall, and the Death That Only God Can Ransom*

Hosea chapter 13 is the chapter of the final indictment before the restoration. It is the darkest chapter in the book, and it is deliberately so: the darkness of chapter 13 is the darkness that makes the dawn of chapter 14 the more luminous. The chapter traces the full arc of Ephraim's rise and fall — from the trembling dignity of the early prominence through the idolatry that produced the decline, through the wilderness provision that was met with satiation-forgetting, through the accumulation of the images of the approaching judgment, to the most comprehensive statement of the coming destruction available in the book. And embedded in the darkest passage is the most theologically astonishing declaration: I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior.

The chapter moves through four distinct but connected movements. The first (verses 1–3) is the rise and fall of Ephraim: the trembling dignity of the early prominence, the Baal worship and the death that followed, the intensification of the sin into the kissing of calves, and the four images of the transience that will consume the idolaters — the morning mist, the early dew, the chaff, the smoke through the window. The second (verses 4–8) is the wilderness declaration and the satiation-forgetting: the I am the LORD your God who knows no savior, the knowing of God in the wilderness, the satiation that forgot, the rebellion against the one who satisfied, and the five images of the divine judgment — the lion, the leopard, the bear robbed of her cubs, the lion again, and the wild beast. The third (verses 9–11) is the political dimension: the destruction that has come from the one who is Israel's help, the king given in anger, the king taken away in wrath. The fourth (verses 12–16) is the eschatological horizon: the stored iniquity, the unwise son, the ransom from the power of Sheol, the withholding of compassion, the east wind that brings the Assyrian plundering, and the most horrifying military consequence of the chapter.

The most theologically significant verses in the chapter are verses 4 and 14. Verse 4 — I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior — is the most direct statement of the exclusive salvific claim in the book, placed in the context of the wilderness provision and the satiation-forgetting that followed it. And verse 14 — I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? — is the most theologically astonishing declaration in the chapter: the ransom from death and the redemption from Sheol that the covenant God declares as His intention, placed in the darkest passage of the darkest chapter, as the first appearance of the resurrection promise that Paul will deploy in 1 Corinthians 15:55 as the most triumphant declaration in his theology of the resurrection.

The chapter is not merely darkness. It is darkness with the resurrection promise embedded in it. The death that the chapter describes — the morning mist, the dew, the chaff, the smoke, the lion, the bear, the Assyrian plundering, the most horrifying military consequence — is the death from which the I will ransom them of verse 14 declares the redemption. The God who allows the death

is the God who ransoms from the power of the death He allows. The darkness of chapter 13 is the darkness of Good Friday; the dawn of chapter 14 is the dawn of the resurrection that the ransom of verse 14 has made possible.

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## Opening Prayer

*Heavenly Father,*

*We come to Hosea chapter 13 as people who recognize the satiation-forgetting that this chapter diagnoses. We know what it is to be satisfied with the provision and to forget the Provider — to receive the pasture, to be filled, to have the heart lifted up, and to forget the Lord our God. We know the Ephraim in ourselves: the early trembling dignity that gives way to the Baal worship, the sin that accumulates until the kiss of the calf, the satiation that forgets and the heart that lifts itself against the One who satisfied it. We come to this chapter asking for the self-knowledge that the diagnostic severity of its imagery is designed to produce.*

*Lord, let the I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior of verse 4 be the declaration that reorients the entire life. There is no other savior. There is no other God. The Baals cannot save. The kings given in anger cannot save. The stored wealth and the military fortifications cannot save. Only You — the LORD, the God of the Exodus, the One who knew Israel in the wilderness when there was no one else to know them — only You can save. Let the exclusivity of the salvific claim be received with the urgency that the chapter's surrounding darkness gives it.*

*And let the O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? of verse 14 be received as the resurrection promise that it is — the declaration embedded in the darkest chapter that the death the chapter describes is not the final word. The God who allows the death is the God who ransoms from the power of the death He allows. Let the ransom from Sheol be the hope that sustains through the darkness of the chapter, the resurrection light at the end of the tunnel that the judgment has dug. The death is real. The ransom is more real.*

*In Jesus' name — in the name of the One whose death and resurrection are the fullest available expression of the ransom from Sheol that this verse announces — Amen.*

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## Hosea 13:1–3

*The Rise and the Fall: From the Trembling Dignity to the Kiss of the Calf and the Four Images of Transience*

*(1) When Ephraim spake, there was trembling;*

*he exalted himself in Israel;  
but when he offended in Baal, he died.  
(2) And now they sin more and more,  
and have made them molten images of their silver,  
and idols according to their own understanding,  
all of it the work of the craftsmen:  
they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.  
(3) Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud,  
and as the early dew that passeth away,  
as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor,  
and as the smoke out of the chimney.*

## **The Context**

The when Ephraim spoke, there was trembling of verse 1 is the memory of the early prominence of the tribe of Ephraim in the covenant community. The tribe of Ephraim — the most powerful of the northern tribes, whose territory dominated the central highlands of Canaan — spoke with authority, and the other tribes trembled at the word. This is the memory of the dignity that the covenant relationship had produced in its most flourishing expression: the prominence in Israel that the covenant blessing had generated. And the but when he offended in Baal, he died is the pivot that collapses the entire dignity in a single verse: the Baal worship was not merely a religious deviation. It was the death of the dignity, the death of the prominence, the death of the trembling authority. The community that worshipped Baal died in the most fundamental way available: it lost the covenant identity that was the source of the dignity.

The and now they sin more and more of verse 2 is the progression statement: the death of verse 1 did not arrest the trajectory. The community continued to accumulate the sin after the death — making the molten images of silver, the idols according to their own understanding, the work of the craftsmen. The idols according to their own understanding is the most theologically precise description of the idolatry in the verse: the gods that the community has made are the gods that the community has conceived — the projections of the human understanding onto the objects that the craftsmen have shaped. The God of the covenant cannot be made according to the human understanding. He is the One who has revealed Himself. The idols are the community's self-revelation projected onto silver and shaped by craftsmen.

The kiss the calves of verse 2 is the most extreme statement of the idolatrous devotion in the book. The kissing of the idol — the gesture of adoration and submission directed at the manufactured object — is the most intimate available expression of the wrong devotion. The lips that should have been speaking the covenant God's name, crying out to Him in the weeping and supplication of Peniel, are kissing the calves. The devotion that should have been directed upward to the living God has been directed downward to the manufactured beast. And the four images of verse 3 — the morning cloud, the early dew, the chaff driven by the whirlwind, the smoke from the window — are the four images of the transience that will consume the

community that has directed its devotion downward. The morning mist of chapter 6:4 has now become the morning cloud of the judgment: the hesed of the people was morning mist, and the people themselves will become morning mist in the judgment that the wrong devotion has produced.

### **Plain American English**

*When Ephraim spoke, people trembled — he was an important force in Israel. But he became guilty of worshipping Baal and died spiritually. And now they keep on sinning, making themselves idols from their silver — crafted images that they design themselves, all the work of human hands. People say of them, “Kiss the calf-idols!” So they will be like the morning mist, like the dew that disappears early in the morning, like the chaff that blows away from the threshing floor, like smoke pouring from a window.*

### **Key Observations**

**“When Ephraim spake, there was trembling; he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died”:** This signifies **The Rise and the Fall of Ephraim’s Dignity Is the Most Concentrated Statement of the Covenant Theology of History in the Opening Verses — the Prominence That the Covenant Produced and the Death That the Baal Worship Accomplished.**

The trembling that Ephraim’s word produced is the memory of the covenant blessing at its most influential: the dignity of the community that spoke with the authority of the covenant relationship behind its words. And the but when he offended in Baal, he died is the most compressed statement of the consequence of the covenant violation in the book. The Baal worship did not merely diminish Ephraim. It killed him — the death of the covenant identity, the death of the dignity that the covenant relationship had produced, the death of the trembling authority that the covenant blessing had generated. The death of the covenant identity is the most fundamental death available to the covenant community: it is the death that all the subsequent judgments — the military defeat, the exile, the plundering — are merely the external expressions of. Ephraim died when he offended in Baal. Everything since has been the working out of the death that the Baal worship accomplished.

**“Idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves”:** This signifies **The Idols According to the Human Understanding Are the Most Precise Description of the Projected God — the Community That Has Made Its God According to Its Own Understanding Has Made the God That Cannot Save Because It Is the Community’s Own Self-Projection.**

The idols according to their own understanding are the gods that the community has conceptualized and then manufactured. The understanding that produces the idol is the human understanding that has decided what god should be like and then commissioned the craftsman to produce the object that matches the conception. The God of the covenant is not available for this process: He has revealed Himself, and the revelation is not subject to the human understanding’s revision. The idol is always the god that the community wants — the god shaped to meet the consumer’s specifications, the god that makes the demands that the community is willing to

meet, the god whose character is the community's own character projected onto the silver and shaped by the craftsman. And the kiss the calves is the intimate devotion directed at this self-projected god: the community that worships what it has made is worshipping itself.

**“They shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind, and as the smoke out of the chimney”:** This signifies **The Four Images of Transience Are the Judgment Counterpart to the Heseb That Was Morning Mist in Chapter 6 — the Community That Was Fleeting in Its Covenant Faithfulness Will Be Fleeting in Its Own Existence.**

The four images of transience in verse 3 form a deliberate echo of the morning cloud and early dew of chapter 6:4 where the people's heseb was described as the morning mist that evaporated before the heat of the day. The images of transience that were applied to the people's covenant faithfulness are now applied to the people themselves: the community that was fleeting in its covenant loyalty will be fleeting in its own existence. The chaff driven by the whirlwind is the sow-the-wind image of chapter 8:7 applied to the people themselves: the community that sowed wind will reap the whirlwind that drives them away like the chaff from the threshing floor. And the smoke from the window is the image of the thing that appears substantial — the smoke that rises from the house — and disperses into nothing. The community of the kiss-the-calf will be as substantial as the smoke it resembles.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Receive the When Ephraim Spoke There Was Trembling as the Reminder That the Covenant Relationship Produces the Dignity That the Idolatry Destroys — and That the Death of the Covenant Identity Is the Most Fundamental Loss Available:** The trembling dignity that Ephraim's word produced was the product of the covenant relationship at its most flourishing. The contemporary community of faith that has lost the authority and the dignity that should characterize the covenant community has lost it in the way that Ephraim lost it: through the offending in the Baal of the contemporary age. The death that the Baal worship accomplished is not the death of the institutional structures alone. It is the death of the covenant identity that was the source of the dignity. The recovery of the dignity requires not the recovery of the institutional structures but the recovery of the covenant identity that produces the dignity. The trembling that Ephraim's word once produced was the trembling of the community that spoke with the authority of the living covenant behind its words.

**2. Identify the Idols According to Your Own Understanding — the Gods You Have Conceptualized and Commissioned to Match Your Specifications Rather Than the God Who Has Revealed Himself:** The idols according to their own understanding are the most contemporary form of the idolatry in the chapter. The contemporary equivalent is not the molten image of silver but the theology shaped to match the community's preferences, the God conceptualized to meet the consumer's felt needs, the Jesus reimagined to endorse the community's existing commitments. Every generation of the covenant community has been tempted to reshape the God of the covenant according to its own understanding: to make the theological adjustments that make the God less demanding, more affirming, more aligned with the community's current values. The idol according to the understanding is always the god that

the community prefers to the God who has revealed Himself. Identify the reshaping. The God of the covenant is not available for the conceptual revision.

### **3. Receive the Four Images of Transience as the Diagnostic Warning About the Substance of the Community That Has Directed Its Devotion Downward to the Kiss-the-Calf:**

The morning cloud, the early dew, the chaff, and the smoke are the images of the community that appears substantial and is not — the community that has the appearance of the covenant community without the substance of the covenant life. The morning cloud looks like it might bring rain but dissipates without watering the ground. The early dew is beautiful but gone by mid-morning. The chaff looks like grain but is not. And the smoke looks like the fire of the inhabited house but disperses into nothing. The community that directs its devotion downward to the manufactured god has the appearance of the devotion without the substance of the genuine covenant relationship. The four images of transience are the warning: the appearance without the substance will not last through the heat of the judgment that is coming.

#### **How This Relates to Today**

The offended in Baal and died of verse 1 is one of the most precise and most urgent descriptions available for the condition of the contemporary Western church that has been losing the covenant identity that was the source of its public dignity and cultural influence. The church that spoke with authority when it spoke from the covenant relationship — when the word was grounded in the knowledge of God, shaped by the hesed and the mishpat, directed by the prophetic word — has been losing the trembling that its word produced as it has been offending in the Baals of the contemporary age. The death is not the death of the institution. The institution continues. It is the death of the covenant identity that was the source of the dignity, and no institutional recovery can address the death that the Baal worship has accomplished at the level of the covenant identity.

The idols according to their own understanding are also one of the most diagnostically precise descriptions of the contemporary religious landscape. The proliferation of the theological options — the multiple Jesuses, the multiple gospels, the multiple Christian ethics, each shaped according to the understanding of the community that produces it — is the contemporary equivalent of the molten images of silver that the community has made according to its own conception. Each community has made the god that matches its understanding. And the kiss the calves is the intimate devotion directed at the self-projected god that the community has manufactured. The God of the covenant is not one option among many. He is the One who has revealed Himself and who is not available for the revision that the understanding would impose on Him.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The opening section of the chapter traces the full arc of Ephraim's rise and fall: the trembling dignity of the early prominence, the death that the Baal worship accomplished at the level of the covenant identity, the progressive accumulation of the sin into the kiss of the manufactured calf, and the four images of the transience that will consume the community whose devotion has been directed downward — the morning cloud, the early dew, the chaff, and the smoke that are the judgment counterpart to the morning mist hesed of chapter 6 applied now to the community itself.\**

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## Hosea 13:4–8

*I Am the LORD Your God: The Wilderness Knowing, the Satiation That Forgot, and the Five Images of the Pursuing Judgment*

*(4) Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt,  
and thou shalt know no god but me:  
for there is no saviour beside me.*

*(5) I did know thee in the wilderness,  
in the land of great drought.*

*(6) According to their pasture, so were they filled;  
they were filled, and their heart was exalted;  
therefore have they forgotten me.*

*(7) Therefore I will be unto them as a lion:  
as a leopard by the way will I observe them:*

*(8) I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps,  
and will rend the caul of their heart,  
and there will I devour them like a lion:  
the wild beast shall tear them.*

### The Context

The yet I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt of verse 4 is the most comprehensive statement of the exclusive salvific claim in the chapter and in the book. The yet is the connective that places the divine identity declaration in deliberate contrast to the idols of the preceding verses: yet in the midst of all this idolatry, I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt. The Exodus is the ground of the exclusive claim: the God who brought Israel out of Egypt is the only God that Israel has encountered in the actual history of redemption. The Baals have never redeemed. The molten images of silver have never saved. The you know no God but me and besides me there is no savior is the theological summary of the entire covenantal relationship's history: the redemptive history of Israel is the history of the one God who saves.

The I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought of verse 5 is the most intimate statement of the divine knowledge in the chapter. The wilderness is the place of the I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness of chapter 9 — the place of the original tender discovery, the time when the covenant relationship was being formed in the foundational dependence on the God who provided in the place of drought. And the knowing is the da'at Elohim turned in the other direction: not merely the human knowing of God but the divine knowing of Israel — the intimate personal attention of the covenant God to the covenant community in the wilderness when there was no one else to know them.

The satiation and forgetting of verse 6 is the most compact statement of the most recurring pattern in the Old Testament. According to their pasture they became satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me. The satisfaction of the covenant God's provision produced the satiation that lifted the heart above the level of the dependence on the covenant God, and the lifted heart forgot the One who had satisfied it. This is the pattern that the book of Deuteronomy warned against in its most urgent passages — the satiation of the land that produces the forgetting of the God who gave the land — and it is the pattern that the entire book of Hosea has been diagnosing in its specific expressions. The satiation-forgetting is the root of every specific form of the covenant violation.

The five images of the pursuing judgment in verses 7–8 — the lion, the leopard, the bear robbed of her cubs, the lion again, and the wild beast — are the most concentrated accumulation of predatory images in the book. The progression is deliberate: the lion that approaches openly, the leopard that lurks by the road and watches, the bear that has lost her cubs and whose fury is the most dangerous fury available in the ancient Near Eastern bestiary, the lion that devours, and the wild beast that tears. The five images are five dimensions of the divine judgment conceived as the predator approaching the prey from every direction and in every mode: the open approach, the lurking ambush, the bereaved maternal fury, the devouring, and the tearing. The judgment that comes to the community that has been satisfied and has forgotten is as comprehensive and as multidimensional as the five predators of verses 7–8.

### **Plain American English**

*But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You must acknowledge no God but me, for there is no other savior. I cared for you in the wilderness, in that dry and desert land. But when you were fed and satisfied, you became proud and forgot about me. So now I will come at you like a lion, like a leopard lurking along the road. Like a mother bear whose cubs have been taken away, I will attack and tear you apart. I will devour you like a lion, and a wild animal will rip you to pieces.*

### **Key Observations**

**“Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me”:** This signifies **The Exclusive Salvific Claim Is the Most Comprehensive Theological Statement in the Chapter — the God of the Exodus Is the Only God Who Has Actually Saved, and the Besides Me There Is No Savior Is the Summary of the Entire Covenant History's Redemptive Record.**

The besides me there is no savior is the theological summary of the entire Old Testament's redemptive history stated in its most exclusive form. The Baals did not save. The kings given in anger did not save. The Assyrian alliance did not save. The molten images of silver did not save. Only the LORD — the God of the Exodus, the God who knew Israel in the wilderness, the God whose name is the memorial of the covenant community's entire redemptive history — has actually saved. The exclusive salvific claim is not the arrogance of the deity who demands worship. It is the accurate theological statement of the redemptive record: in every moment when

the community has needed saving, the only One who has saved has been the LORD. The besides me there is no savior is the statement that corresponds to the actual history.

**“I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought”**: This signifies **The Divine Knowing of Israel in the Wilderness Is the Most Intimate Available Statement of the Covenant Attention That Preceded and Produced the Satisfaction That Led to the Forgetting.**

The I knew you in the wilderness is the da’at Elohim reversed: not the human knowing of God but the divine knowing of Israel in the wilderness. The knowing is the covenant attention of the father who taught the child to walk (chapter 11:3), who took the child up in his arms, who led with the cords of kindness and the bands of love. The wilderness is the place of the grapes in the wilderness (chapter 9:10) — the place of the tender discovering, the time of the founding covenant intimacy when the relationship was being formed in the foundational dependence. And the land of great drought is the place of the dependence: the wilderness where there was no provision available except the provision of the covenant God. The knowing in the wilderness is the knowing in the place of the maximum dependence, where the intimate attention of the covenant God was the only available resource. The satiation-forgetting of verse 6 is the more devastating because the One being forgotten is the One who knew Israel in the land of drought.

**“According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me”**: This signifies **The Satiation-Forgetting Pattern Is the Most Recurring Pattern in the Old Testament and the Root of Every Specific Form of the Covenant Violation — the Satisfaction Produces the Lifted Heart, and the Lifted Heart Forgets the One Who Satisfied It.**

The satiation-forgetting of verse 6 is the most compact available description of the most dangerous spiritual dynamic in the covenant community’s history. The pattern has three stages: the satisfaction of the covenant God’s provision (they were filled), the pride that the satisfaction generates (their heart was lifted up), and the forgetting that the pride produces (therefore they forgot me). The satisfaction is the covenant blessing. The pride is the distortion that the satisfaction of the covenant blessing produces when the covenant God is not acknowledged as the source of the satisfaction. And the forgetting is the consequence of the pride: the heart that has been lifted above the level of the dependence on the covenant God has lost the sense of the dependence that the wilderness had formed, and the forgetting follows as inevitably as the pride follows the satisfaction. This is the pattern that Deuteronomy 8 warned against, that the entire history of Israel has enacted, and that the contemporary community of faith reenacts in every season of prosperity.

**“I will be unto them as a lion, as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps”**: This signifies **The Five Predator Images Are the Most Concentrated Accumulation of the Judgment’s Multidimensional Character in the Book — the Judgment That Approaches from Every Direction and in Every Mode Has Been Provoked by the Forgetting That the Satisfaction Has Produced.**

The five predatory images of verses 7–8 are the judgment conceived in its most comprehensive and most terrifying form. The lion approaches openly and directly: the judgment that is visible and confrontational. The leopard lurks by the road and watches: the judgment that is patient and strategic, waiting for the moment of the ambush. The bear robbed of her cubs meets with the

most dangerous fury available: the bereaved maternal rage that has no limit and no calculation. The lion devours: the judgment in its consuming finality. And the wild beast tears: the judgment in its most brutal and most complete form. The five images together are the five dimensions of the judgment that has been provoked by the satiation-forgetting: the community that forgot the God who knew it in the wilderness will be met by the God who comes as the five predators, approaching from every direction and in every mode of the comprehensive judgment.

## What This Means for Us Today

### **1. Receive the Besides Me There Is No Savior as the Most Practically Orienting Theological Declaration in the Chapter — and Examine Every Form of the Seeking for the Salvation That Only the Covenant God Can Provide:**

The besides me there is no savior is the exclusive salvific claim that the book has been building toward since the first chapter's declaration that the Baals do not give the grain and the wine and the oil. The contemporary community of faith that has been seeking the salvation of the culture, the institution, the platform, the political alliance, the therapeutic program, or the market success is seeking the salvation from sources that have not saved and cannot save. The redemptive record is clear: the besides me there is no savior is the accurate theological summary of every moment when the covenant community has been in need of saving and the only One who has actually saved has been the LORD. Examine every form of the seeking. The saviors being sought are not saviors. There is only one.

### **2. Recognize the Satiation-Forgetting Pattern in Your Own Life and Community as the Most Dangerous Dynamic of the Season of Prosperity:**

The satiation and heart-lifting and forgetting of verse 6 is the three-stage pattern that every season of prosperity activates in the covenant community. The satisfaction is the blessing. The heart-lifting is the distortion that the blessing produces when the Giver is not acknowledged. And the forgetting is the consequence of the heart-lifting. The contemporary believer who is in a season of material, relational, professional, or spiritual prosperity is in the season when the satiation-forgetting pattern is most active. The diagnostic question of the season of prosperity is: is the satisfaction producing the gratitude and the acknowledgment of the Giver, or is it producing the heart-lifting that precedes the forgetting? The satiation-forgetting is not inevitable. But it is the default trajectory of the satisfied heart that is not actively resisting the pride that the satisfaction generates.

### **3. Receive the Five Predatory Images as the Warning of the Comprehensive Multidimensional Judgment That the Forgetting Produces — and Let the Warning Form the Vigilance That the Prosperity Requires:**

The five predators of verses 7–8 are not merely the images of the historical Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom. They are the images of the comprehensive multidimensional judgment that the satiation-forgetting pattern produces in every generation of the covenant community. The judgment that comes from every direction and in every mode is the judgment that the community that forgot the God who knew it in the wilderness has provoked. The vigilance that the five predatory images are designed to form is the vigilance of the community that has understood the satiation-forgetting pattern and is actively resisting it: maintaining the acknowledgment of the Giver in the season of the satisfaction, resisting the pride that the satisfaction generates, maintaining the memory of the wilderness provision in the season of the pasture.

## How This Relates to Today

The besides me there is no savior of verse 4 is the most directly countercultural theological declaration available in the chapter for the contemporary church in a pluralistic religious environment. The declaration that there is no savior besides the LORD is the exclusive claim that the pluralistic culture most resists and that the covenant theology most insists on — not as the arrogance of the privileged tradition, but as the accurate theological summary of the redemptive record. The God who brought Israel out of Egypt is the only God who has actually been in the business of redemption in the actual history of the covenant community. The Baals have never saved. The comprehensive history of the covenant community is the history of the one God who saves. The exclusive claim is the claim that corresponds to the history.

The satiation-forgetting of verse 6 is also one of the most urgently applicable diagnostic observations in the chapter to the contemporary Western church. The church in the most prosperous period of its history — with the most resources, the most platforms, the most theological education, the most communication technology — is the church in the season when the satiation-forgetting is most active. The filled heart that has lifted itself above the level of the dependence on the covenant God and has forgotten the One who knew it in the wilderness of the earlier, harder seasons is the church of the satisfied prosperity that has produced the Baal worship of the contemporary form. The remembrance of the wilderness provision — the recovery of the memory of the dependence in which the covenant relationship was formed — is the most urgent pastoral task for the community in the season of the satisfied pasture.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The central section of the chapter declares the exclusive salvific claim — besides me there is no savior — grounded in the wilderness knowing that preceded and produced the satisfaction that led to the forgetting; the satiation-forgetting pattern of verse 6 is the most compact statement of the most dangerous spiritual dynamic in the covenant community's history, and the five predatory images of verses 7–8 are the comprehensive multidimensional judgment that the forgetting has provoked, approaching from every direction and in every mode of the lion, the leopard, the bereaved bear, the devouring lion, and the wild beast.\**

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## Hosea 13:9–11

*He Destroys You, O Israel: The King Given in Anger and Taken Away in Wrath*

*(9) O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;  
but in me is thine help.  
(10) I will be thy king:  
where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities?  
and thy judges of whom thou saidst,  
Give me a king and princes?  
(11) I gave thee a king in mine anger,  
and took him away in my wrath.*

## The Context

The O Israel, you have destroyed yourself of verse 9 is the most direct statement of the self-destructive character of the covenant violation in the chapter. The destruction has not been inflicted arbitrarily by the divine judgment. It has been the consequence of the self-destruction that the covenant violation has been progressively accomplishing since the offending in Baal of verse 1. The you have destroyed yourself is the theological summary of the moral logic of the covenant consequence: the community that offends in Baal, makes idols according to its own understanding, is satisfied and forgets, has been destroying itself through the accumulated choices. But in me is your help — the declaration that the destruction is not the last word, that the God against whom the self-destruction has been directed is the same God who is the help against it.

The where is your king now that he may save you of verse 10 is the most direct political application of the exclusive salvific claim of verse 4. The community that said Give me a king and princes — that demanded the political leadership that 1 Samuel 8 records as the rejection of the divine kingship — has been living with the consequences of that demand through the entire history of the northern kingdom. The king given in anger and taken away in wrath of verse 11 is the most concise theological commentary on the northern kingdom's political history: the kings that Israel demanded were given, and they were given in the anger that the demand provoked — the anger of the covenant God who was being rejected as king when the community demanded the human king. And the kings who were given in anger have been taken away in wrath: the assassinations, the coups, the political instability of the preceding decades, and now the Assyrian conquest that will end the northern monarchy entirely.

## Plain American English

*You have destroyed yourself, Israel — but I am the only one who can help you. Where is your king? Can he save you and all your towns? Where are all the rulers you demanded, saying, “Give us a king and leaders”? In my anger I gave you a king, and in my fury I took him away.*

## Key Observations

**“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help”:** This signifies **The Self-Destruction and the Divine Help Are Held Together in the Same Verse — the Community That Has Been Destroying Itself Through the Accumulated Covenant Violations Is the Community Whose Only Help Is the God Against Whom the Self-Destruction Has Been Directed.**

The you have destroyed yourself is the most direct statement of the moral agency of the covenant violation: the destruction has not been inflicted from outside by an arbitrary judgment. It has been accomplished by the community's own accumulated choices — the offending in Baal, the idols according to the understanding, the satiation-forgetting, the kissing of the calves. The community is the agent of its own destruction. And the but in me is your help is the declaration that the covenant God who has been diagnosing the self-destruction is the same covenant God who is the help against it. The two sides of the verse — you have destroyed yourself and in me is

your help — are not in tension. They are the diagnosis and the prescription: the acknowledgment of the self-destruction is the condition of the receiving of the help. The community that does not acknowledge that it has destroyed itself cannot receive the help of the One who can address the destruction.

**“I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath”:** This signifies **The King Given in Anger and Taken Away in Wrath Is the Theological Commentary on the Northern Kingdom’s Entire Political History — the Political Leadership That Was Demanded in the Rejection of the Divine Kingship Was Given and Removed in the Covenant God’s Anger.**

The king given in anger is the theological reading of the northern kingdom’s political history from its founding demand to its catastrophic end. The demand for a king — the Give me a king and princes of verse 10 — was the rejection of the divine kingship that the covenant community had been living under from the Exodus to the time of Samuel. The giving of the king was the angry concession of the divine will to the human demand: not the divine blessing of the kingship, but the angry granting of the thing whose demand had constituted the rejection of the divine king. And the taking away in wrath is the consequence of the angry granting: the king given in anger is removed in wrath when the anger of the original demand reaches its full consequence in the political chaos and the Assyrian conquest. The political history of the northern kingdom is the covenant theology of the kingship demand and its consequences, compressed into two phrases.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Receive the You Have Destroyed Yourself as the Most Morally Serious Diagnosis Available — and Receive the But in Me Is Your Help as the Most Gracious Declaration Available:** The two sides of verse 9 are the diagnosis and the prescription in their most compressed form. The acknowledgment that the community has destroyed itself — not been destroyed by external forces, not been victimized by the circumstances, but has destroyed itself through the accumulated choices of the covenant violation — is the most morally serious acknowledgment available. And the but in me is your help is the most gracious declaration available: the God against whom the self-destruction has been directed is the God who offers the help. The acknowledgment of the self-destruction is not the despair that has no way out. It is the condition of the receiving of the help that the One who offers it has declared available. Acknowledge the self-destruction. Receive the help.

**2. Read the Political History of the Northern Kingdom’s Kings Through the Theological Lens That Verse 11 Provides — and Apply the Theological Lens to the Contemporary Community’s Relationship to Its Political Leadership:** The king given in anger and taken away in wrath is the theological reading of the political history that gives the history its full meaning. The contemporary community of faith that places its hope for the salvation of the culture in the political leadership — that demands the right king, the right ruler, the right political arrangement — is in the condition of the community that said Give me a king and princes. The political leadership cannot provide the salvation that only the covenant God can give. The king given in anger cannot address the destruction that the community’s own covenant violation has

accomplished. Read the political history theologically. The help is in the covenant God, not in the king.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The you have destroyed yourself of verse 9 is one of the most important theological correctives available to the contemporary church's tendency to explain its condition primarily in terms of external forces — the hostile culture, the secular government, the media, the educational institutions. The diagnosis of verse 9 does not locate the destruction in the external forces. It locates it in the community's own choices: the offending in Baal, the idols according to the understanding, the satiation-forgetting, the demand for the king. The destruction is self-inflicted. And the but in me is your help is the declaration that the external forces are not the obstacle to the recovery. The covenant God who offers the help is the help that the self-inflicted destruction requires. The recovery begins with the acknowledgment.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The political section of the chapter is the most compact available theological commentary on the entire history of the northern kingdom: the self-destruction that the accumulated covenant violations have accomplished, the exclusive help that only the covenant God can provide, the question that the exclusive salvific claim poses to every political alternative, and the king given in anger and taken away in wrath that summarizes the entire political history of the demand that constituted the rejection of the divine kingship — the most concentrated statement of the covenant theology of the human political project.\**

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### **Hosea 13:12–16**

*The Stored Iniquity, the Ransom from Sheol, and the East Wind of Destruction: Darkness with the Resurrection Promise Embedded*

*(12) The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up;  
his sin is hid.*

*(13) The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him:  
he is an unwise son;  
for he should not stay long  
in the place of the breaking forth of children.*

*(14) I will ransom them from the power of the grave;  
I will redeem them from death:  
O death, I will be thy plagues;  
O grave, I will be thy destruction:  
repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.*

*(15) Though he be fruitful among his brethren,  
an east wind shall come,  
the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness,*

*and his spring shall become dry,  
and his fountain shall be dried up:  
he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.  
(16) Samaria shall become desolate;  
for she hath rebelled against her God:  
they shall fall by the sword:  
their infants shall be dashed in pieces,  
and their women with child shall be ripped up.*

## **The Context**

The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is stored away of verse 12 is the image of the divine memory as the account that has been keeping the record of the iniquity in storage until the day of the settlement. The binding up and the storing are the images of the ledger that has been accumulating the entries of the covenant violation since the offending in Baal of verse 1. The iniquity has not been forgotten. It has been stored. And the day of the reckoning — when the stored account is settled — is the day that the preceding chapters have been announcing.

The travailing woman of verse 13 is the image of the birth pangs that have come at the wrong time in the wrong position. The unwise son who does not come at the time of birth — who remains in the place of the breaking forth when he should have emerged — is the image of Ephraim who has not responded to the discipline that was designed to produce the return. The birth pangs of the discipline have come, but Ephraim has not moved toward the birth. The opportunity for the new life that the birth pangs were designed to produce has been resisted by the unwise son who remains in the birth canal when the time for the emergence has come.

The I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death of verse 14 is the most theologically astonishing declaration in the chapter and one of the most astonishing in the book. In the middle of the darkest chapter — surrounded by the images of the predatory judgment, the stored iniquity, the unwise son, the east wind that dries the spring and spoils the vessels, the desolation of Samaria and the horrors of the military conquest — the covenant God declares the ransom from Sheol and the redemption from Death. The O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? is the divine taunt directed at the powers of death: the covenant God who will execute the judgment described in the surrounding verses is the same covenant God who declares the ransom from the death that the judgment executes.

The east wind of verse 15 is the return of the image from verse 1 — the east wind that the community has been pursuing — now coming as the instrument of the judgment rather than the object of the wrong pursuit. The wind of the LORD that comes from the wilderness dries the spring and the fountain and spoils the treasures. The Ephraim who is fruitful among his brothers — the community named for the fruitful one, the community of the luxuriant vine of chapter 10 — will have its spring dried and its fountain stopped by the east wind of the divine judgment. And the desolation of Samaria in verse 16 is the most comprehensive statement of the military

consequence in the book — the horrors of the ancient military conquest that are named not as the gratuitous spectacle of the divine revenge but as the consequence of the rebellion that the chapter has been diagnosing from its first verse.

### Plain American English

*Ephraim's guilt is on record — his sins are all stored up. The pain of childbirth will come over him, but he is like a foolish child who won't come out at birth time when it's supposed to happen. I will rescue them from the grip of death. I will redeem them from the power of the grave. Death, I will destroy your power! Grave, I will take away your victory! But as for showing compassion — I will not. Even though Ephraim flourishes among his brothers, the east wind will come — the LORD's wind blowing out of the desert. His springs will fail and his well will dry up. Every valuable thing he has stored away will be plundered. 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 pieces, and their pregnant women will be cut open.*

### Key Observations

**“The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid”:** This signifies **The Stored Iniquity Is the Image of the Divine Memory as the Account That Has Been Accumulating the Record of the Covenant Violation Until the Day of the Settlement — the Iniquity That Appears Forgotten Is the Iniquity That Is Stored.**

The binding up and the storing of the iniquity are the images of the divine memory as the comprehensive ledger of the covenant violation. The iniquity that appears to have been forgotten — that has not produced the immediate visible consequence, that has been accumulating without the community's recognition of its accumulation — is the iniquity that is stored up in the divine memory for the day of the settlement. This is the they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness of chapter 7 stated in its most archival form: the iniquity is not disappearing. It is being stored. The day of the settlement — when the stored account is opened and the full balance is required — is the day that the military consequence of verse 16 represents. The apparent absence of the immediate consequence is not the forgiveness of the iniquity. It is the patience of the God who stores rather than immediately requires.

**“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction”:** This signifies **The Resurrection Promise Embedded in the Darkest Chapter Is the Most Theologically Astonishing Declaration in the Book — the God Who Allows the Death Is the God Who Ransoms from the Power of the Death He Allows.**

The I will ransom them from the power of Sheol is the most unexpected declaration in the chapter, and its unexpectedness is the measure of its theological significance. The surrounding context is the darkest in the book: the stored iniquity, the unwise son, the east wind that dries the spring, the desolation of Samaria, the most horrifying military consequence. In the middle of this darkness, the covenant God declares the ransom from Sheol and the redemption from Death. The O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? is the divine taunt directed at the powers of death: the death that the judgment is executing cannot hold the community that the

covenant God declares He will ransom. Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 15:55 — O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? — as the triumphant declaration of the resurrection: the ransom from Sheol that Hosea announces is the ransom that the resurrection of Jesus accomplishes. The darkness of chapter 13 is the darkness from which the resurrection light of chapter 14 and of the New Testament’s proclamation emerges.

**“An east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up”:** This signifies **The East Wind as the Instrument of the Judgment Is the Return of the Image from the Wrong Pursuit of Verse 1 — the Community That Was Following the East Wind Is Now Being Met by the East Wind of the LORD’s Judgment.**

The east wind of verse 15 is the return of the image from the opening verse of the chapter: Ephraim who was following after the east wind is now being met by the east wind of the LORD that comes from the wilderness. The community that pursued the wrong thing is being overtaken by the thing it was pursuing, now in the form of the divine judgment rather than the object of the wrong desire. The east wind that dries the spring and stops the fountain is the judgment that removes the provision that the Baal worship was designed to secure: the agricultural fertility, the fruitful spring, the fountain that sustains the community’s life. The Ephraim who is fruitful among the brothers — the community named for the double fruitfulness — will have its fruitfulness removed by the east wind that is not the Baal’s but the LORD’s. The wind of the LORD dries what the wrong pursuit was chasing.

**“Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God”:** This signifies **The Desolation of Samaria and the Most Horrifying Military Consequence of the Chapter Are Named Not as the Divine Revenge but as the Covenant Consequence of the Rebellion That the Chapter Has Been Diagnosing from Its First Verse.**

The desolation of Samaria in verse 16 is the most geographically specific and the most historically fulfilled statement of the military consequence in the book. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was conquered by the Assyrians under Shalmaneser V and Sargon II in 722–721 BC, and its population was deported. The because she has rebelled against her God is the theological summary of the cause: the desolation is the covenant consequence of the rebellion that the chapter has been tracing from the offending in Baal of verse 1 through the satiation-forgetting of verse 6 through the stored iniquity of verse 12. The military horror of verse 16 is not the arbitrary violence of the divine revenge. It is the most concentrated expression of the covenant curse that the rebellion against the God has activated.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Receive the Stored Iniquity as the Most Practically Urgent Warning Against the Comfortable Assumption That the Absence of the Immediate Consequence Is the Evidence of the Divine Approval:** The binding up and storing of the iniquity is the most direct refutation of the comfortable assumption that the absence of the immediate consequence is the evidence that the covenant violation has been forgiven or forgotten. The iniquity is not forgotten. It is stored. The day of the settlement is coming. The contemporary community of faith that is accumulating the covenant violations without the immediate consequence — that is interpreting

the patience of the divine storage as the evidence of the divine indifference to the violation — is in the condition of the Ephraim whose stored iniquity has been accumulating for the day of verse 16. The patience of the divine storage is not the forgiveness of the iniquity. It is the patience of the God who stores rather than immediately requires.

**2. Receive the I Will Ransom Them from the Power of Sheol as the Resurrection Promise That Is the Theological Center of the Darkness of the Chapter and the Ground of the Dawn of Chapter 14:**

The ransom from Sheol and the redemption from Death of verse 14 are the most theologically astonishing declarations in the chapter, and they are placed in the darkest context available precisely to demonstrate the theological point: the death that the judgment executes cannot hold the community that the covenant God declares He will ransom. The darkness of the judgment is real — the stored iniquity, the east wind, the desolation of Samaria are all real. But the ransom is more real. Paul's use of verse 14 in 1 Corinthians 15 is the New Testament's recognition that the ransom from Sheol that Hosea announces is the ransom that the resurrection of Jesus accomplishes. The O Death, where is your sting? is the New Testament's triumphant echo of the Hosea declaration: the death that the judgment executes is the death from which the covenant God has declared the ransom.

**3. Read the East Wind as the Most Comprehensive Statement of the Pattern That the Wrong Pursuit Produces — the Community That Pursues the Wrong Thing Is Eventually Overtaken by the Judgment That Takes the Form of the Thing It Was Pursuing:**

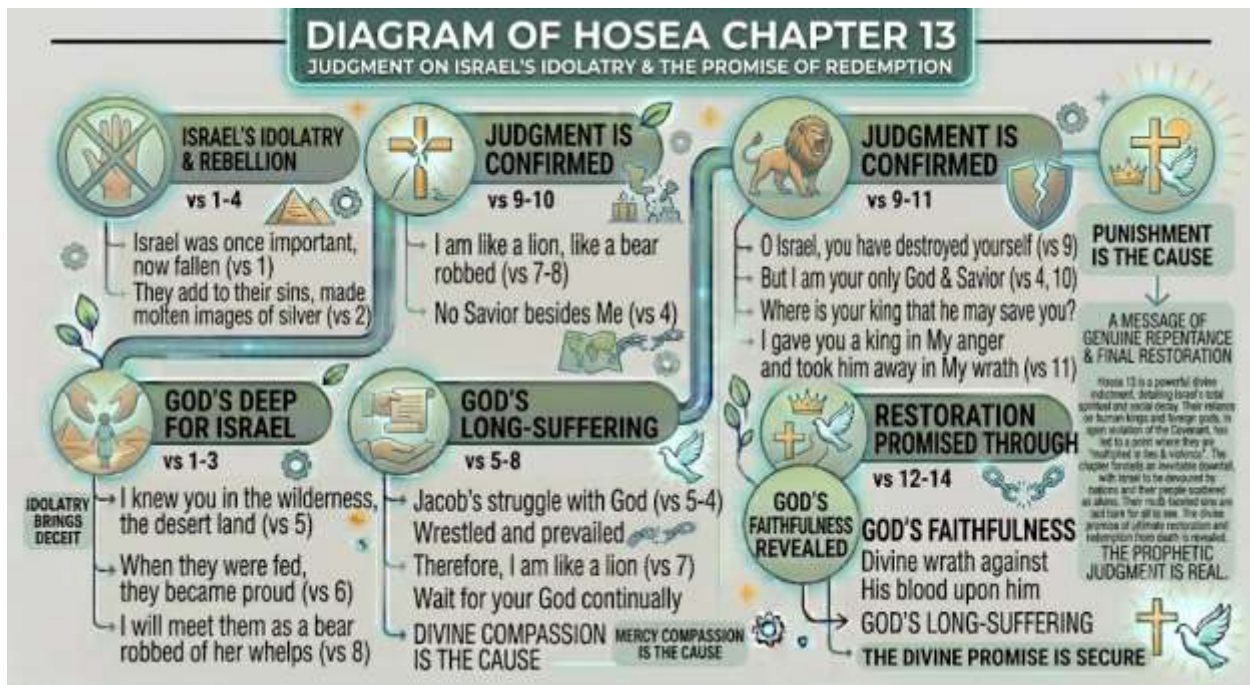
The east wind of verse 15 that dries the spring and stops the fountain is the return of the image from the opening verse of the chapter: Ephraim was following the east wind, and now the east wind of the LORD's judgment meets the community that was pursuing it. The pattern is the most comprehensive available statement of the covenant theology of moral consequence: the thing that was being wrongly pursued becomes the instrument of the judgment. The community that was pursuing the wrong security — the foreign alliance, the political king, the manufactured god, the wealth of the deceitful balance — is met by the judgment that takes the form of the thing it was pursuing: the drying of the spring, the stopping of the fountain, the spoiling of the pleasant vessels. The wrong pursuit produces the judgment that takes the form of the thing pursued.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death of verse 14 is the most theologically significant Old Testament anticipation of the New Testament's proclamation of the resurrection in the book. Paul's use of verse 14 in 1 Corinthians 15:55 — O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? — is the New Testament's recognition that the ransom from death that Hosea announces is the ransom that the resurrection of Jesus accomplishes. The death that chapter 13 describes — the morning mist, the dew, the chaff, the smoke, the lion, the bear, the east wind, the desolation of Samaria — is the death from which the I will ransom them declares the redemption. The darkness of Good Friday is the darkness of Hosea 13. The dawn of the resurrection is the dawn of Hosea 14. The ransom from Sheol that verse 14 announces is the theological seed of the resurrection proclamation that the New Testament brings to its full flowering.

The stored iniquity of verse 12 is also one of the most urgently applicable observations in the chapter to the contemporary church's comfortable assumption that the absence of the immediate consequence is the evidence of the divine tolerance of the covenant violation. The iniquity is not disappearing. It is being stored. Every form of the contemporary covenant violation — the manufactured religion, the deceitful balance, the satiation-forgetting, the king demanded in the rejection of the divine kingship, the idols according to the understanding — is being stored in the divine memory for the day of the settlement. The patience of the divine storage is not the evidence of the divine indifference. It is the patience of the God who stores rather than immediately requires, who desires the return before the settlement, who has declared the ransom from Sheol as the alternative to the desolation of verse 16.

**Key Lesson:** \*The closing section of the chapter holds together the darkness of the stored iniquity, the unwise son, the east wind of the LORD that dries the spring, and the desolation of Samaria with the most theologically astonishing declaration in the chapter and in the book: I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death — the resurrection promise embedded in the darkest passage, the ransom that Paul will deploy in 1 Corinthians 15:55 as the most triumphant declaration of the resurrection theology, the theological center of the darkness that makes the dawn of chapter 14 the dawn it is.\*



## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 13 having received the darkest chapter in the book — and the chapter with the resurrection promise embedded in its darkest passage. We have heard the trembling dignity of the early Ephraim and the death that the Baal worship accomplished. We have heard

*the kiss-the-calf and the four images of the transience that will consume the community whose devotion has been directed downward. We have heard the besides me there is no savior and the I knew you in the wilderness and the satiation-forgetting that followed the wilderness provision. We have heard the five predators approaching from every direction. We have heard the stored iniquity, the unwise son, the east wind that dries the spring, and the desolation of Samaria. And in the middle of all of it, we have heard the most astonishing declaration in the chapter: I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death.*

*Lord, let the besides me there is no savior be the declaration that reorients the entire life. We have been seeking the salvation from sources that have not saved and cannot save — the political king given in anger, the wealth of the deceitful balance, the manufactured gods of our own understanding, the foreign alliances with the great powers. Let the clear-eyed acknowledgment that besides You there is no savior produce the returning to You that chapter 14 will call for. We do not want to be the community that has destroyed itself. We want to be the community that receives the help that is in You.*

*Let the ransom from Sheol be received as the most profound available statement of the love that this book has been revealing. The God who allows the death is the God who ransoms from the power of the death He allows. The darkness of the judgment is real. The ransom is more real. The O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? is the taunt that the resurrection has made good — the taunt that Jesus answered with His own resurrection on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, the taunt that Paul echoes in the most triumphant passage of the New Testament's theology of the resurrection. The death is real. The ransom is the reality that makes the dawn of chapter 14 possible.*

*And let the satiation-forgetting of verse 6 be the most urgent warning we carry from this chapter. We have been satisfied. Our hearts have been lifted. Let the lifting of the heart produce the acknowledgment rather than the forgetting — the gratitude rather than the pride, the remembrance of the wilderness provision rather than the amnesia of the settled pasture. The God who knew us in the wilderness, who taught us to walk and took us up in His arms and led us with the cords of kindness and the bands of love, is the God whose provision of the satisfied pasture deserves the remembrance that the satisfied heart is most tempted to withhold. Let us not forget.*

*In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is the fullest available expression of the ransom from Sheol that this chapter announces, who descended into death and rose from it on the third day, and in whose resurrection the O Death, where is your sting? of verse 14 has received its fullest and most triumphant answer — Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria  
Glory to God Alone*