

Preaching courses tell you to write an introduction that captures the attention of your audience so they will listen to what you say. Our passage begins with the Lord saying, “I will destroy you” and ends with “their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.” If that doesn’t stir your interest, then nothing I write could possibly help.

Main Point: When we reject God’s help, we invite God’s wrath.

In **verse 9**, Hosea writes, **“He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper.”** I prefer the translation in the ESV footnote: **“I will destroy you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper.”** The context of the previous and following verses make it clear that Yahweh is speaking—and he is the one who will do the destroying. Two things we see here:

First, Yahweh is the one who will destroy Israel. “I will destroy you, O Israel.” The follows on the previous verse in which the Lord says: “I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.”¹

Second, we see why God’s wrath is going to fall on them: “I will destroy you, O Israel, for [because] you are against me, against your helper.” A “helper” in the Old Testament is not an assistant who makes things easier than doing it on your own. The idea behind a “helper” is one who is a *necessary* ally in a task. “Helper” is used most frequently for the Lord in relation to Israel. Israel *could not* accomplish what the Lord called them to do on their own. They needed a helper—God himself. But Israel repeatedly rejected the Lord, setting themselves against the Lord, against their helper.

In terms of application, ask yourself two things:

In what ways am I working against God’s help? God gives his help to us through many means—prayer, the word, the church. Ultimately, God gives us himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Where have you been living in self-sufficiency, stubbornly refusing God as your helper?

Do I grasp how serious an evil it is to reject God as my helper? When we reject God’s help, we invite God’s wrath. God is going to tear apart his people for rejecting him, their helper. Does that seem a little severe? It’s not. To reject God as helper is to say, “I don’t need God because I’m as great as God. I have his wisdom, his power, his might. Anything he can do, I can do. I don’t need his help. I don’t need him.”

That is an insult to God. His wrath proves it to be a lie. When his wrath falls, you will be unable to resist it or overcome it—thus proving that you are not as great as God.

This is serious. So we need to ask: **What does it look like to reject God as our helper?** Hosea lists two ways in which Israel did this.

¹ Hosea 13:7–8

1) We reject God’s help when we put our hope in human rulers instead of God.

In **verse 10**, the Lord asks, **“Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities?**

Where are all your rulers—those of whom you said, ‘Give me a king and princes’?”

Verse 10 hearkens back to **1 Samuel 8**, where the elders of Israel approached Samuel and said, "Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." Hosea recounts this as "Give me a king *and princes*." "And princes"—descendants of a king—indicate they wanted a ruling dynasty (and not *one King to reign forever*). This is why the Lord told Samuel, "They have rejected me from being king over them."

In **verse 11**, the Lord says, **“I gave you a king in my anger; and I took him away in my wrath.”** The people in Samuel’s day did not trust the Lord and believe that his reign was what was best for them. Instead, they lusted after political power, after a royal dynasty like the other nations. The Lord answered their request—not as a blessing, but as a curse. He gave them King Saul, whose physical stature was in line with the world’s values—unfortunately, so was his heart. Then he took away Saul—just as he took away so many kings that followed—**in his wrath.**

Our main point: **when we reject God’s help, we invite God’s wrath.** Samuel told them that the kings would rule in selfish ways—they would be a curse, causing them to cry out. This was Israel’s history with kings, even King David—the selfishness and worldliness of the people were represented in the king, bringing God’s discipline on the people. Ultimately, it became so bad that the kingdom split into two, with Judah in the south and Israel establishing its own kingdom *and its own king* in the north (the focus of our passage.)

Now the Lord mocks them, **“Where now is your king, to save you in all our cities? Where are all your rulers?”** Judgment was coming to Israel; their kings could not save!

How should we apply this to ourselves? God has given us a King—Himself in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. How do we reject him as king and ask for human rulers?

Anytime we look to our performance, religious deeds, good works, or the approval of others for our justification, we reject the reign of Jesus in the cross and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sin.

Anytime we condone moral compromise or turn a blind eye to unrighteousness for the sake of physical safety, political objectives, financial security, or job security, we refuse God’s benevolent reign.

Anytime we use gossip, libel, slander to sway the opinion of others and win their “friendship,” we betray a lack of faith in Christ as Lord.

When we reject God as King, we reject the only one who can help us. This brings God’s wrath.

Instead, we should turn away from such idolatry, and turn toward the Lord who saves. This brings us to our second point.

2) We reject God’s help when we refuse to turn from sin and pursue life. The Lord uses a double-metaphor of pregnancy and childbirth. In **verse 12**, he pictures Ephraim as a pregnant woman—**“The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is kept in store.”** Sin is like a child, bound up and stored inside of her. What needs to happen is that the child needs to come out. They need to get rid of the sin—but, instead, it is kept in store.

In **verse 13**, Ephraim is the child itself—**“The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son, for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb.”** The crisis they face, the pain of God’s discipline, is the pangs of childbirth. It signals that it is time for them to leave their present circumstances (to leave their sin) and to emerge into life. But this child is "foolish," too stupid to head in the direction of life. Like a breech baby, though labor has started, he is not properly positioned at the opening of the womb.

Today, doctors have ways of turning a breech baby in the womb. If those don't work, they can perform a C-section. In Hosea’s day, a breech baby meant almost certain death for mother and child. So it was with Ephraim—their unwillingness to repent of sin meant certain death for both the institution of the northern kingdom and its people.

This has a simple application: Repent. Turn away from your sin and run to the Lord. The disaster of God’s wrath *cannot* be averted unless the sin that brings it has been properly dealt with. This brings us to our final point.

3) The end of sin is unspeakable destruction. There is debate among Hebrew scholars on how to translate the first half of **verse 14**. The ESV translates it as a promise—**“I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death.”** That’s not uncommon in Hosea; he inserts abrupt promises of salvation in the midst of threats of wrath.

But notice the ESV footnote offering another translation, a rhetorical question—**“Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death?”** I prefer this because it fits the context, especially how this verse ends.

The Lord says, **“Compassion is hidden from my eyes.”** That should make every nation tremble—“I have no intention of saving you in your present condition. I have no intention of being gracious to you if you remain in your sin. I cannot see compassion; I see only wrath.”

Between these two statements are questions that likely sound familiar to you—**“O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?”**

Earthly tyrants like Hitler and Kim Jong-un loved to have military parades to show off their might to the world. You could picture the leaders of Israel doing this, thinking themselves invincible. So, the Lord says, “OK, two can play at that game.” He whistles, “O Death, where are your plagues—do you have them loaded? O Sheol, where is your sting—is it ready for action? Assemble yourselves before me, your hour has come. Let us see if Israel’s chosen leaders, storehouses of wealth, military alliances, and reinforced walls can keep you out!”

In **verse 15**, the Lord says:

"Though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched; it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing."

He speaks to the northern kingdom, which he has called "Ephraim." Ephraim means "fruitful." It was the name of Joseph's second son and his tribe, which settled in the hill country that would also be called "Ephraim." The region is both mountainous and fertile—offering both protection and prosperity. When the nation split in two, the confederate tribes in the north were sometimes called "Ephraim" after this region.

This verse shows us that they idolized and took refuge in their prosperity. They flourished. That's likely why they split off. "Yes, we know God's chosen capital city is Jerusalem. We understand the Temple is there. We know the line of David is from Judah. But, Rehoboam's taxes are oppressive! Look at how fruitful and safe we are! If we overlook a few moral compromises, we can find relief from big government and have the prosperity we desire!"

The idols of comfort and safety led Ephraim to behave in ways we see condemned throughout Hosea. They worshipped idols because they promised to make them flourish. They oppressed the poor for their own gain. They even assassinated one king after the other because—"Look, we all know assassination isn't ideal. But the king we've got now is going to run the kingdom into the ground! It's the only choice we've got. We take the lesser of two evils, and the new guy will appoint judges who will rule in the way we want and make us great again. *Not* ideal, but *pragmatically* necessary." Thus, under the banner of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, they rejected God's ways while pleading desperation as a justification.

But God sees through it and promises that they shall not escape. Though they flourish now, the Lord will call an enemy like he sends the east wind. Ephraim will dry up and be parched; the economy will be utterly destroyed. **"Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God."** (16a) Samaria—the capital city of the northern kingdom, representing the entire kingdom—has rebelled against her God. **When you reject God's help, you invite God's wrath.**

Hosea's description of this wrath is nothing short of horrific: **"they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open."** This is standard terminology for warfare in the Ancient Near East. Assyrian invaders would come with the sword and slaughter them. To guarantee the nation would never rise again, soldiers would obliterate the youngest generation. They would take the children by the leg and dash their heads on rocks. They would take their swords and rip apart babies in the womb.

That description of God's wrath is horrifying and stomach-turning. It speaks *literally* of what would happen to Ephraim. Figuratively, it represents what will happen in hell to sinners who do not repent. (As ugly as this verse is—the reality of hell is one-billion times worse.)

This verse threatens to capture all of our attention with questions of how God should

ordain such a thing. But notice—Hosea's attention does not linger on the evil of Assyria's sin or the wickedness of ripping apart babies in the womb. The thrust of this chapter—the emphasis of Hosea's message as a whole—is on the sin of God's people, the sin which brings the curse of babies ripped apart in the womb.

He focuses on the sin of God's people because the curse cannot be removed until the sin that brought it is first removed. As horrendous as babies being ripped apart in the womb is, that curse will not be averted until the sin that brings it is dealt with.

Hosea is a true prophet. He risks the ire of God's people by addressing their sin. Like Satan, false prophets rarely speak outright lies. The demonic strategy of false prophets is often to distract you with truth. A false prophet comforts you by pointing only at the sin of others so that you are *not* concerned about your own sin (and feel self-righteous in condemning the obvious sin of others). So, a false prophet would camp out on the sin of the Assyrians and ignore the sin of Israel. It is easy and safe to condemn the Assyrians for ripping apart babies in the womb. That will win you the applause of the Israelites every time.

It is hard and dangerous to point the finger at Israel and say, "The world will wickedly rip apart babies in the womb because you, the people of God, have wed yourself to wealth at the cost of the poor and sacrificed your witness to the world on the altar of political power. Your greatness cannot be restored until you divorce yourself from such worldliness, turn away from evil, do good, and trust in Yahweh alone." That message—the message of Hosea—will get you stoned or sawn in two every time by those who claim to be God's people (but are not).

Friends, here is our application: Flee from the wrath to come. God's wrath is coming. Unless you repent, you will perish. You might say, "Well, that's not the Jesus I know!" Well, then you don't know Jesus. Jesus spoke of hell more than anyone else. Jesus spoke of hell as a literal place of eternal, conscious torment. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus said people will be bodily cast into hell "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."²

If your picture of Jesus is a picture without wrath, then your picture of Jesus is wrong. Jesus Christ does not avoid wrath—he both unleashes and endures it.

Right now, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, enthroned as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Listen to the description we hear in Revelation when Jesus breaks just one of the seals on the scroll of history and brings all things to their appointed end:

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.³

Who is being called? Death and Hades—the same ones called in our text. What are they given? Authority to execute God's wrath by means of sword and famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. No one on earth will be able to stop it. Jesus will call on Death and Hades, releasing

² Mark 9:48

³ Revelation 6:7–8

them to devour the earth his wrath. Jesus is the Lord spoken of in our text.

But I would have you see another picture of Jesus, one given later in Revelation, at the end of history:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.⁴ Again we have Jesus, enthroned in glory, calling for Death and Hades to come to him. This time he tells them to give up the dead. Having no more use for Death and Hades, Jesus casts them into the lake of fire. Then he judges all people. Those who are not found to be his will be cast with Death and Hades into the lake of fire—the place of eternal torment and destruction.

You see, Jesus reigns over death and the grave, the devil and hell itself. He reigns over them because he conquered them through his death and resurrection. When he was crucified for sins, he received God's wrath and bore the curse for the sins of all who will receive his help—the gift of his righteousness, given to all who trust in him. Because sin was removed, death and the grave could not hold him. He rose from the dead in victory. Because sin is paid for, Satan cannot accuse God's people—therefore, he is powerless.

This is how Jesus turns the words of **verse 14** on their head—as Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 15:**

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵

Our *only* help is Christ alone, crucified for sins and raised from the dead. When you reject Jesus Christ, you reject God, your only help. **When you reject God's help, you invite God's wrath.**

But when you receive Jesus Christ by faith, you receive God's help. When you receive God's help, you escape God's wrath.

Friend, why would you die? Look to Christ and trust in him today.

⁴ Revelation 20:11–15

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:54–57