



UNIT 8 – LESSON 3

CHAPTERS 1-3:

In our last study we gave general consideration to the problem of Hosea's marital relationships. In this study we will examine the first three chapters in more detail.

CHAPTER 1.

Hosea 1:1. Hosea's prophecy begins with a significant statement; "The word of the Lord that came to Hosea" which may be translated, "The beginning of that which Jehovah spoke by Hosea". God was not only speaking to Hosea but through him to others. The nation he spoke to was deaf to his appeals and the exile became its grave. But his message was preserved and passed on, and succeeding generations, including ours, have been blessed by it. Thus Hosea's ministry was certainly not in vain.

Verses 1 and 2 have been discussed in the first and second studies. Verses 4-5 'Jezreel' (literally "God sows") is the name of the valley in which Naboth's vineyard was located (1 Kings 21:1) and where Jehu murdered Joram (2 Kings 9). Here the significance of the name is that Jehu's dynasty will also be terminated in bloodshed (2 Kings 15:8-12). But as verse 5 indicates not only would the house of Jehu be judged but the military power of Israel would be broken when God's judgment came 'in that day' (a technical term used by the prophets to refer to some future time when God will visit His people in final blessing or judgment).

Verses 6-7 "not pitied" ('Lo-ruhamah') the names of the last two children are quoted by Paul in Romans 9:25 and Peter in 1 Peter 2:10 where this phrase is rendered 'not beloved' and 'had not received mercy.' Perhaps 'unloved' or 'disliked' would be a better translation here. The child's name was to indicate to the people of Israel that they could expect no mercy from God. As the "unpitied one" she symbolized the plight of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which had sinned against Yahweh and was ripe for judgment. Verse 7, which the critical school dismisses as a Judaistic insertion, is one of the many side-glances at Judah, some favourable as here (cf. 1:11, 4:15, 11:12), others unfavourable (5:5, 10-14; 6:4Y11; 8:14; 10:11; 12:2). The general sense is clear. Judah will escape the judgment (she lasted 130 years after Samaria's collapse) but Israel is doomed to early destruction.

The reference to the method of deliverance may be connected with the story in 2 Kings 19:35.

Verses 8-9. 'not my people' (Lo-ammi) taken by some to imply that Hosea recognised the child as not his own but it is clearly a rejection by God of Israel as His covenant people. 'I am not your God' is a direct reversal of Exodus 3:14 - literally 'Not Yahweh to you'.

At Sinai Israel had covenanted to be Yahweh's people and He to be their God (Ex. 19:1-8). They repeatedly broke that covenant, so Hosea declares that they will be rejected, a rejection that will result in the exile and destruction of the Kingdom of Israel as a political entity.

There may be an ascending scale in the prediction of Israel's doom: Jezreel is an announcement of coming judgement; Not Pitied, the withdrawal of Yahweh's love; Not my People, Israel's rejection from the covenant relationship.



Chapter 1:10 - 2:1

The Hebrew Bible ends Chapter 1 with verse 9 and begins its second chapter with verse 10.

These verses, by contrast with the preceding ones, carry a message of hope and restoration. The people of Israel will increase to extra-ordinary numbers and the old covenant relationship with God will be restored.

Judgment deserved is matched by mercy undeserved, to the extent that the latter blessings surpass the former. An innumerable company "like the sand" was originally promised in the covenant with Abraham and reiterated to Jacob. (Gen. 22:15-18; 28:13-15 cf. Rev. 7:9).

The kingdoms of Judah and Israel will be re-united under one leader. Some see this as a political union; others see it as a future hope yet to be realised; others transfer this promise to the Christian Church. Certainly, centuries later in the place of Israel's judgement the Son of God came offering the promises of divine sonship to all His believers. (John 1:12,13, Gal. 6:16; Romans 9:22-26; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Verse 11. 'The day of Jezreel' is perhaps a reference to some future victory to be won by the Israelites in battle at Jezreel or more probably a reference to the meaning of Jezreel 'God sows'. That is, Jezreel becomes, instead of a place of judgment, a promise of the outpouring of God's blessing, the place where God would once again sow Israel with the seed of life.

Chapter 2:2-13.

This passage is concerned with Israel and her service of the Baals but has as its background Hosea's wife and her faithless conduct and pursuit of her lovers. The children of verse 2 are the individual Israelites who will suffer for the sins of the nation, mother Israel. The whole passage is one of grim warning of the inevitability of punishment for apostasy mingled with the frustrated longing of the forsaken husband (thus 'plead', v2, and the sad cry of v.8). Note also that the intention of punishment is to bring about restoration (vv. 6-7).

Verses 5 and 8 suggest a modern parallel for discussion. Are we not in danger of attributing our material gains to our scientific know-how, our commercial prowess, our standard of living, our go-getter spirit etc., and paying lip service, if that, to God as the "giver of every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17 cf. Judges 7:2)?

The punishment described here has three phases:

- (1) Yahweh will frustrate Israel's plans to indulge in adulterated Baal worship (v7);
- (2) Yahweh will prove that He and not Baal is the Lord of nature by withholding the crops (vv.9,12) and so exposing Israel in her nakedness, the normal prelude to stoning for an adulteress;
- (3) He will take away the religious celebrations in which the people indulged (vv.11,13).



Chapter 2:14-23.

Just as 1:10 - 2:1 provided a promise of mercy against the background of the judgement found in 1:2-9, so these verses speak of the establishment of a new marriage bond and a new covenant in contrast to the judgment picture of 2:2-13.

In verse 14 Yahweh appears as a lover who woos Israel away from her false lovers and takes her back to the wilderness, the symbol of the days when Israel first became betrothed to Yahweh. He will use the language of a lover ('speak tenderly' cf. Ruth 2:13, Gen. 34:3, Is. 40:2).

Verse 15, Valley of Achor – this was the scene of Achan's sin (Joshua 7:24) but also the way into the land of Promise so here it contains promise of restoration. These two verses look back on the wilderness experience of Exodus as the time when Israel's relationship to Yahweh was pure before the influence of Canaanite worship led her into apostasy.

Verse 16. A play on the meaning of Baal which also means, 'Lord, master, husband'.

Verse 17. Later scribes removed the name Baal from many Old Testament names, e.g. Saul's son 'Ishbaal' was written as 'Ishbosheth' (2 Sam. 2:8).

Verse 18. The promise of universal peace and harmony between man and beast are common Messianic pictures. That is, they are word descriptions of the peace that will exist when the Messiah (Christ) is in complete control. (cf. Is. 11:6-9; Is. 2:2-4).

Verses 19-20. Again these ethical qualities, which are here expressed in terms of the marriage relationship, are typical of the right relationships which still exist between man and God and man and his fellows in the Messianic age. Note the contrast with the present apostasy and unfaithfulness.

Verses 21-22. Nature is involved in the future blessing just as it was involved in the judgment (2:9,12). Material prosperity is always a part of Old Testament Messianic thinking. (Further thought here could centre round our understanding of the Biblical idea that the general disharmonies of nature, e.g. nature red in tooth and claw, are the direct results of man's sin. cf. Romans 8:22,23; Gen. 3:14-19 etc).

Verse 23. the name Jezreel is taken up in its meaning 'God sows' in accordance with the promise of abundant harvests. Similarly the reversal of the other names, as in 1:10 and 2:1, shows the completeness of the restoration of Israel to God.

Chapter 3:1-5.

The personal story of Hosea and Gomer is resumed. Under God's leading Hosea seeks out Gomer, buys her freedom (possibly from temple prostitution) and restores her to his household but under certain unspecified restrictions.

Verse 1. Hosea's love for Gomer is directly paralleled to Yahweh's love for Israel. The phrase 'love raisin cakes' is descriptive of Baal worshippers who offered raisin cakes to Baal as part of the harvest thanksgiving festival. Also dried grapes were used in the worship of fertility gods, who were believed to give abundant harvests to their worshippers.



Neither mere affection (ahaba) nor even parental affection (rahamim) makes a marriage: a stronger deeper love (hesed) is needed. It is this that redeems Hosea's wife and teaches the manifold love of God.

Verse 2. The total price was thirty shekels of silver, the price of a slave, which Hosea paid half in kind and half in money.

Verse 3. "Remain as mine" (NRSV), "live with me" (NIV) - the verb means 'live in seclusion' i.e. be denied normal conjugal rights for a period as punishment for her unfaithfulness.

Verses 4-5. God will treat disloyal Israel as Hosea treated his wife. The people will go into captivity before the full covenant relationship is restored.

Pillar, ephod and teraphim are all objects used in worship, particularly in discovering the divine will. They were probably used in pagan rites in Hosea's day, although on occasions the latter two are associated without apparent condemnation in Israelite worship. The meaning here is that Israel will be deprived, at least temporarily, of their leadership and means of guidance and worship.

These three chapters form the background for the rest of the book which consists of a number of sermons preached by Hosea warning of judgment to come upon His apostate people but containing promises of a future restoration. The warmly human character of the man seen in the intimacy of chapters 1 and 3 may also be seen emerging in the message he brings in the succeeding pages of his work.

QUESTION 1:

What did God promise Abraham in the original covenant? (Gen. 22:15-18). What was the Israelite people's responsibility in the covenant agreement? (Exodus 19:1-8).

QUESTION 2:

How are the promises of Hosea 1:10 - 2:1 fulfilled by the Christian Church? (John 1:12,13, Gal. 6:16; Romans 9:22-26, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Rev. 7:9).

QUESTION 3:

In Hosea 2:3-13 Gomer is punished as Israel will be punished by exile. What is the purpose of these punishments and what may be the purpose of punishment or discipline we receive from God? (Hebrews 12:7-11). What is the attitude of the one inflicting the punishment?

QUESTION 4:

What does "Messianic" mean? Briefly describe the Messianic pictures of universal peace and harmony between man and beast and man and his fellow man in Hosea 2:18, Is. 2:2-4; 11:6-9.

QUESTION 5:

What were Hosea's children's names changed to? What did this mean?



QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

Do you think Hosea 2:5,8 suggest a modern parallel where we attribute our material wealth to anything or anyone, but God? How do you do this? What should you do about it? (see James 1:17 cf. Judges 7:2).