



## UNIT 8 H O S E A LESSON 5

### CHAPTERS 5:1 - 6:6.

A whole series of subjects is dealt with in the next three chapters involving every section of the community and every aspect of national life. The leadership of the nation and the people are condemned for their violation of the covenant and their wanton acts of sin.

### Hosea 5:1,2.

Chapter 5 begins with the condemnation of the priests and the princes who are considered to be responsible for the serious plight of the country. What evil deeds had occurred at Mizpah, Tabor and Shittim we are not told but probably some pagan cult was operating at each centre. Certainly the allusion to these places would refer to something well known to Hosea's listeners. Three ways to catch wild animals are named: snare, net and pit. These represent the seductions to idolatry by the leaders of Israel, religious snares by which people were caught when they thought they were worshipping the Lord.

In verse 2 Hosea uses the word "punish" or "chastise". The Hebrew word used is also used in the context of teaching and its discipline. Thus Hosea suggests the idea of a redemption which is grounded in discipline.

Though the leaders have failed and the people are not without fault, Yahweh remains their teacher. Through the discipline of history he will teach them the meaning of their status as the people of God, for whom punishment is not for the purpose of destruction but for salvation and deliverance.

### Hosea 5:3.

Return to God is now impossible for Israel. They have been alienated from God for so long that they have forgotten what He is like. Moreover, they are so much in bondage to sin they have lost the inclination to return.

T. Miles Bennett in his book "Hosea: Prophet of God's love" gives 4 reasons why Israel cannot return to God.

1. The "spirit of harlotry" that is within her which results in Israel's "playing the harlot" (v.3-4). The people are so obsessed with the sensuous appeal of the fertility rituals that they have lost all sense of moral judgment.
2. Another obstacle is Israel's pride. The nation is self-willed, haughty and arrogant. (v.5).
3. A third obstacle is her superficial worship (v.6). Worship centres thronged with people, music and sacrifices but God had withdrawn from them. Finding the Lord in worship is dependent on the manner of one's seeking.
4. A final hindrance is Israel's faithlessness (v.7).



The people have acted treacherously toward God themselves but worse still they have produced a generation of children who do not know God. As Gomer has borne children of whoredom to Hosea, so Israel had borne strange children to Yahweh. They have not been faithful in instructing their children in the covenant faith.

### **Hosea 5:5-7.**

When Ephraim and Judah fall they will seek in vain to placate Yahweh with their flocks and herds but their doom is certain. The alien children are the products of Israel's unfaithfulness i.e. children who worship idolatrously without any knowledge of Yahweh at all. The new moon, normally a festival of rejoicing, will be a time of judgment. The thought may be that very soon (at the next new moon) the people and the land will be desolated.

### **Hosea 5:-8-14.**

This section might be entitled "Cry havoc, and let loose the dogs of war." The alarm is sounded as the foe advances (verse 8) but no army can stand against God's wrath (verse 9). The princes who apparently have been guilty of interfering with time honoured property rights (compare Deut. 19:14, 27:17) will receive the full measure of God's anger (verse 10). Israel will be overthrown and crushed because she preferred to follow idols (verse 11). Many interpret this passage in terms of the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser's invasion of Israel in 733 B.C. when the country was forced to pay a heavy tribute. By contrast the figures of the moth and dry rot in verse 12 suggest a process of gradual corruption and decay.

Sin and judgment sap the strength and glory of a nation little by little. If there really is a sudden collapse it is like that of a house whose timbers have become empty shells by the attacks of termites.

In this oracle Hosea goes further. It is God who has been eating away the strength of Israel and Judah, like moth and dry rot. 'Moth' may be translated 'pus' in which case the terms of 'pus' and 'rottenness' (NRSV) suggest suppurating wounds and sores.

This introduces the thought of verse 13 in which Israel, aware of her weakness appealed to Assyria for help, a probable reference to either Menaham's tribute to Tiglath-Pileser in 738 or Hoshea's subjection to Assyria from 732 to 724 B.C. 'The great king' (King Jareb-AV) is a common term of personal reference used by the Assyrian kings in their inscriptions. However the Assyrians are powerless to help Israel since it is Yahweh who is attacking her and resistance to Him is useless (verse 14).

### **Hosea 5:15 - 6:6.**

These verses are among the most moving in Hosea's prophecy. Yahweh determines to withdraw Himself from Israel until He sees evidence of a genuine desire for repentance and renewal of the love bond of the covenant relationship on the part of the Israelites (5:15).

But what He sees is only an apparent repentance - a superficial confidence and false security in Yahweh's willingness to protect His people. The Israelites sought a painless return to their former prosperity. It is not so much that Israel is seeking a return to the Lord as removal of "the spectre of inconvenience from the midst of her enjoyment" (Jacob Myers). So she speaks of two or three days of suffering (6:2) and the certainty of forgiveness with the accompanying promise of life giving rains.



Their superficial optimism is plainly evident. They assume that the Divine mercy is at the beck and call of human expressions of repentance. There is no conception that it is possible to go too far, to leave things too late. Above all there is no indication that the lessons of chapters 1-3 have been understood and assimilated.

God has to tell them that what they lack above all is loyalty (v.4 and v.6). In a stranger, instability of behaviour may be excusable, but where there is a firm covenant bond, as between Hosea and Gomer, God and Israel, repeated expressions of repentance cannot take the place of the love and loyalty that is expected in the covenant. This does not suggest that there is not forgiveness in plenty with God, but that forgiveness is for the lapse from the covenant, not for its ignoring until the bitterness of circumstances draw a few perfunctory and stereotyped expressions of regret to the lips.

Such a shallow repentance causes the heart broken cry of 6:46. There is frustration and pathos in the cry "What shall I do with you?" Israel's covenant loyalty (hesed) was as transitory as a passing cloud or dew in the morning. God has attempted to hew (the word means fashion into shape as well as cut to pieces) the Israelites through the prophetic teaching and guide by the shining light of the covenant commandments (6:5) but to no avail. Verse 6 is the central verse of the prophecy. It is not ritual observance God desires but the right covenant relationships (hesed again) and an intimate personal knowledge of Him.

### **QUESTION 1:**

Summarize what these verses (Deut 8:5; Prov. 19:18; 13:1; Isa. 28:26) tell about the value of punishment and discipline for teaching. What is its application to Israel in Hosea 5:2?

### **QUESTION 2:**

What are the laws about boundaries in Deut. 19:14, 27:17? How have they been broken in Hosea 5:10?

### **QUESTION 3:**

What evidence is there in Hosea 5:15 - 6:4 that Israel's repentance is insincere?

### **QUESTION 4:**

Contrast the spirit of Israel's repentance in Hosea 5:15 - 6:4 with that of King David in Psalm 51.

### **QUESTION 5:**

Compare Amos 5:21-23, Isaiah 1:11-14 and Hosea 6:6. What is the central idea in all of them? What does God really want? (Amos 5:24, Is. 1:15-17).



**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

In what ways can we be guilty of shallow repentance? What are the costs of true repentance? (e.g. restitution of wrongs). Does the Christian worshipper today ever substitute ritual for “steadfast love” and knowledge of God? If so, when and how?