



UNIT 8 H O S E A LESSON 9

HOSEA CHAPTERS 11 - 12.

While there are still echoes of the coming judgment in these chapters there is now clearly heard the strong note of God's love for His people and the hope of ultimate salvation and restoration. Hosea's own experience of frustrated love gives him insight into the heart of God as the divine love for Israel is rebuffed and disregarded. Some of the passages in these concluding chapters throb with the passion of divine love in a way rarely achieved elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Chapter 11 has been fittingly described as "one of the greatest chapters in the Bible". It contains some of the most compassionate and tender verses in the entire book, and certainly nowhere else in the Old Testament is the depth of God's love so vividly portrayed.

Hosea 11:1 - 4.

The lovely picture of God the Father caring for the infant Israel is depicted delightfully in verse 3 where the toddler Israel is taught to walk, picked up in His Father's arms and his infant bruises and sores tended. But the tragedy of such love is brought out in verse 2 where the entreaties of God's love are spurned and Israel's love is poured out on the Baalim. How much like that is Hosea's own experience with Gomer. In some translations of the Bible verse 4 presents a different picture. Here God is a farmer who lovingly cares for his animals, removing the bit from their mouths and easing the yoke from their shoulders after a day's work, personally feeding them, not driving them but lovingly leading them in their work. The verses are a tender picture of the solicitous love and consideration of Yahweh for his beloved Israel. Other translations (e.g. T.E.V.) have verse 4 continuing the loving father theme. The original Hebrew is not clear. Either way the loving care of God is unmistakable.

Hosea 11:5 - 7.

With verse 5 there is a sudden change in tone in Hosea's message. Tender words of loving care are terminated and punishment is threatened. Despite God's love Israel's sin cannot be passed over. Judgment must fall by way of exile (verse 5), warfare and invasion (verse 6). Although God wants to ease the yoke from them (verse 4) Israel's behaviour means He cannot do this nor can anyone else (verse 7). Their yoke is, of course, the judgment of service to another power in exile. Note the reiteration of the cause of judgment in verses 2, 5 and 7. "The more I called them, the more they went from me." (NRSV).

Hosea 11: 8 - 9.

All this leads to the frustrated cry of these verses. George Knight calls this "The cross in the heart of God." God cries "How can I give you up Israel? How can I abandon you?" This heartrending cry expresses the undying love of a parent for a child. However unworthy the child, the father will never cease loving him. The struggle within the very heart of God is intense; justice demands one thing, but mercy and love temper its demands.

Admah and Zeboiim were either other names for Sodom and Gomorrah or else cities which suffered the same fate. (Deut. 29:23). George Knight comments on these verses that "Hosea reveals that God



must bear upon His own heart the pain which His foolish people causes Him. If for man there is no true love without pain, that must be true for God also when He enters into human life."

Because of His love God exceeds the limits of covenant obligation and acts towards Israel in the realm of pure grace (unmerited favour). How does God do this? The answer is found in God's own words, "I am God and not man" (v.9). Contrary to man, there is found with God that perfect union of love and grace which makes it possible for Him not only to forgive but to discipline and recreate. This He did with Israel and continues to do with His people in every age, individually and collectively.

This deep and forgiving love of God does not remove the penalties of His judgment upon man; these are inescapable. However, it does say to man that God's judgments, since they are controlled by love are redemptive and disciplinary rather than punitive and destructive.

Hosea 11:10-11.

Here the prophet looks beyond the exile to the moment when God's love will finally find response in Israel and they will return from their exile. The lion's roar may be used as a symbol to strike terror or in the sense of a call of the lion to his young. In the latter case they come trembling in the sense of eagerness, in the former, in fear. The general sense of the verses is clear. After a necessary period of punishment in exile Israel will be restored by God to her own land. Compare Hosea 3:5 and 2:14-23.

Hosea 11:12 - 12:14.

Return is made in these verses to the sins of Israel and Judah and a brief review is made of some historical incidents to show that deceit and sin were always evident in the Nation's history. Instead of looking to ancient sites and events for the sole purpose of showing the early and continuing character of Israel's sin (c.f. 9:10, 15; 10:9), Hosea presents episodes in the life of a patriarchal ancestor Jacob for the purpose of exhorting Israel to act in the same way.

Israel has surrounded God with deceit (verse 12). She is ready to go off on any wild-goose chase, to go after any empty and useless end ... ("herding the east wind" - the blighting scorching sirocco from the desert - as some translations have it) and in particular to pursue foreign alliances (12:1).

Verses 2 to 4 are a play on the meaning of Jacob where Smith suggests the sense is "Jacob was always a heel" (the name Jacob means one who takes by the heel or attacks from behind, thus a deceiver. See Genesis 25:19-34). Verses 3b and 4 suggest the other side to Jacob's nature. The struggle with God at Peniel (Genesis 32:24-32) and the revelation at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-22) are evidence of Jacob's personal encounters with God. So Israel is called on to be like Jacob and renew personal contact with God but unlike him in observing fair dealings with others (verse 6).

Reference to the history of the patriarch Jacob serves as a warning and an exhortation to Israel. It warned the nation of the deep-rooted nature of its love for lies and its dealings in deceit, and of the necessity to cease from such betrayal of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. At the same time it was an exhortation to the nation as Hosea pointed to Jacob as the one who through weeping and supplication found strength and favour with God. The power of Jacob to prevail was the power for Israel if they would return to God, demonstrate love and justice to their fellowmen "and wait patiently for your God to act" (v.6).



Ethical conduct is lacking in Israel where dishonest practices have resulted in great wealth but her wealth is unable to cover her sins (verse 7 and 8).

God will teach Israel by a return to the restrictions and privations of the wilderness life, away from the luxuries of their wealth and its attendant evils (verse 9). The wilderness is often thought of as the ideal period (cf. Hosea 2:14) when God and Israel were in genuine union. In Israel's past it had been through the prophets that God has revealed His will and led His people (verses 10 and 13 - the reference is to Moses). Now the prophetic ministry has been rejected and in its place is the worship of Gilead and Gilgal with its pagan and polluted sacrifice. But this will prove to be completely ineffective when trouble comes and the symbols of such worship will be destroyed (verse 11).

In verse 12 Hosea again refers to the example of Jacob. The historical threat broken off at verse 6 is resumed. Verses 12 and 13 contrast the hard lot of Jacob in one of his experiences, namely looking for a wife, and that of Israel in her deliverance from Egypt and entrance into the land of promise. Jacob served almost as a slave for some seven years for his wife. In contrast Yahweh delivered Israel from Egypt by a prophet and gave the nation its rich heritage as a gift. After they were in the land Yahweh continued to provide and care for them. But what was Israel's attitude and response? Instead of gratitude to Yahweh for His blessings Israel provoked Him to bitter anger with disobedience and idolatry. Therefore Israel's blood will be upon himself. Israel will bear the consequences of his own guilt (v. 14).

QUESTION 1:

What is the cause of God's judgment on Israel? (Hosea 11:2,5,7). What has this involved?

QUESTION 2:

What 2 meanings can be given to the "lion's roar" in Hosea 11:10? What is the general sense of both of them.?

QUESTION 3:

In Hosea 12:6 what is the relationship between ethical social conduct and personal communion with God? Can we have one in society without the other? Can true religion be expressed in one form but not the other?

QUESTION 4:

Chapter 11 of Hosea has been described as "one of the greatest chapters in the Bible". Do you agree? Why?

QUESTION 5:

Jacob is often remembered as a trickster. There is another side to the man represented in the name "Israel" given to him by God. How did Hosea make use of this better side of Jacob in his exhortation to the nation Israel? (Hosea 12:2-6).



QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

Read Hosea 11:8-9 and Matthew 23:37. Can God feel frustration? How and when? Does God feel frustration today? What is the effect of sin on God? Can the frustration of God's love be reconciled?