



UNIT 8 H O S E A LESSON 10

HOSEA CHAPTERS 13 AND 14.

Chapter 13 serves well as a summary of much that has gone before: the early promise of Israel and Yahweh's tender care; Israel's forgetfulness and apostasy; the failure of kings and the stubborn stupidity of the people; and finally the inevitability of the coming judgment. This is indeed a dark chapter, for it contains the prospect of unmitigated doom and destruction, the death knell for the nation.

Hosea 13:1 - 3.

Again judgment is the theme, the specific cause being Israel's idolatry both with the Baals and Jeroboam's calves. God will sweep them away as something of no substance. (verse 3).

Hosea describes the circumstances by which Ephraim (the tribe, not the nation Israel as he often calls them) fell from the height of favour with God and man to the lowest depth. Ephraim's death warrant was signed when he allowed idolatry to enter his midst. The Israel of Hosea's day is no better than was the Ephraim of old. The nation had accelerated its pace of sinning against Yahweh. From a perverted worship of Yahweh through the figure of the calf they had moved to worship the idol itself. Then they increased their sin by making metal images and by expressing their devotion by kissing the calves.

Hosea 13:4 - 11.

Israel is reminded of God's love and provision in the past, especially in the wilderness period but Israel's response is heart-breakingly the same. Having obtained what they wanted from Him they forgot God (verses 4-6). His reaction is described in the graphic picture of the wild beast who tears its prey to pieces (verses 7 - 8). Nothing can save Israel (verse 9). Her kings, whom Israel had asked for (1 Samuel 8) and to whom they looked for so much are powerless. The frequent changes in the monarchy had not just been the doings of men but the evidence of God's anger. (verses 9-11).

Hosea 13:12-16.

In verse 12 Hosea assures Israel that none of her sin will be forgotten. The picture is that of a book which is bound up for further reference. In quite a different image in verse 13 Israel is described as an unborn child who is powerless to be born at the very moment when birth is in process. Any such foetus which doesn't come forth from the womb, whatever the cause, faces certain death. God's prophets on numerous occasions had proclaimed to Israel the possibilities of a new life and had set forth the manner of entering into it, but the nation had stubbornly refused to enter. When an individual or a nation refuses life, the only alternative is death.

So Israel has failed to repent when the opportunity presented itself. Now only destruction awaits them. In verse 14 the prophet's point is clear. There is a limit to the patience of God; He will no longer show compassion to Israel. So the Lord will not ransom them from the power of Sheol, or redeem them from death. Instead He calls upon both Sheol (world of the dead) and death to do their worst against Israel.



The threat of destruction is carried further in verses 15 and 16 where the invading Assyrians are described as a blasting east wind which dries up all in its path and the gruesome barbarities of the invasion are depicted.

Hosea 14:1-9

The whole tone of the prophecy alters in this final chapter and hope of repentance and restoration burns bright. The chapter is so different from what precedes it that many critics want to credit it to some other author but this is to deny the persistently recurring suggestions of hope that occur throughout the prophecy and the underlying story of Gomer's restitution to Hosea. Surely Hosea who saw so clearly the nature of God's persistent redeeming love must also see the hope of such love triumphing even through pain and necessary judgment.

Hosea has used numerous forms of discourse in his prophetic utterances. In this last chapter he makes use of the form of a "liturgy of repentance" including the call to repentance (v.12a), the penitent's prayer (vv. 2-3), and the divine response (vv. 4-8). The whole passage and verse 9 provides an excellent conclusion and an appropriate summary of the prophet's message to Israel.

Israel needs to return to God with an honest confession of her sin and a willingness to change her attitude to idols and foreign alliances (verses 1-3). Therefore when Israel repents and comes before Yahweh, instead of Canaanitish sacrifices and idol worship she will offer sincere words of confession and supplication - words indicative of heartfelt repentance (v.20).

Such an attitude is assured of the forgiveness of God and His blessing on their land (verses 4-6).

Hosea makes use of metaphors drawn from mother nature in verses 5 - 8. Yahweh will be "as rain in a dry land", it represents that which refreshes and renews life. Yahweh will be to his repentant people as the refreshing dew or rain, reviving them as the abundant dew of Palestine revives vegetation withered by a burning sun. Then Israel, in the right relationship with Yahweh, will grow luxuriantly. The entire picture is one of renewal, life, growth, beauty and productivity - all of which are the results of repentance.

As the NRSV translates verse 8 it becomes a final cry from God to Israel to understand his nature and realise it was He who cared and provided for them. In the divine response to Israel's repentance, Yahweh has said, "I am like an evergreen cypress"" (v.8). The simile's main emphasis is on the tree's continuing greenness, undiminished by changing seasons. The evergreen is referred to not so much as a particular species or type, but as indicative of that which is constantly alive. In Yahweh alone then will Israel find true life.

The final verse of the prophecy, verse 9, is an exhortation (perhaps from the editor) calling for reflection on the teaching of the book and asserting faith in the ultimate justice and righteousness of God. Dobbie's remark about this verse is a fitting conclusion for these studies in Hosea. "A dependable God makes for a dependable life; a just God for a just life; but Hosea would remind us, a loving father for a loving and obedient son."

Man's hope and help reside in the God who in spite of man's stubborn refusal to be upright and walk in His ways still loves and forgives. Aside from such hope there is no hope at all.



QUESTION 1:

God was the giver of blessings (Hosea 13:4-6). What were these blessings? (see Deut. 6:10-12; 8:7-20).

QUESTION 2:

What were the dangers of the blessings listed in Question 1 and what in fact happened as a result?

QUESTION 3:

Hosea uses many images. What is the meaning of his image of Israel being like an unborn baby (Hosea 13:13)?

QUESTION 4:

What is the meaning of Hosea's image about God being like the rain or dew? (Hosea 14:5-7).

QUESTION 5:

Explain the image of God being an evergreen tree. (Hosea 14:8).

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

Note the changes needed in Israel's attitude in Hosea 14:1-3. What should be our attitude and prayer before God can forgive today?

Is there too light an attitude to sin in the Christian community and too easy a reliance on God's forgiving love? What can you personally do about it?