

## Session 2: The Message of Hosea

### B. The Broken Covenant

#### **Hosea 8:1**

Set the trumpet to your lips!  
One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord,  
because they have broken my covenant,  
and transgressed my law.

Hosea urges Israel to sound the alarm because they have broken "my" covenant.

### B1. "Your God from the land of Egypt"

For Hosea, the history of Israel as a nation began when they wandered in the wilderness, having been set free from Egypt. Here are some key verses:

#### **Hosea 2:14-15**

Therefore, I will now persuade her,  
and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.  
From there I will give her her vineyards,  
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.  
There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,  
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

#### **Hosea 9:10**

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel.  
Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors.

#### **Hosea 11:1**

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

#### **Hosea 12:9**

I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt.

### **Hosea 13:4-5**

Yet I have been your God ever since the land of Egypt;  
you know no God but me, and besides me there is no saviour.  
It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.

## **B2. The Terms of the Covenant**

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was the time when Yahweh had made a covenant between himself and Israel.

### **Exodus 19:1-6**

At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.'

A covenant was a relationship between a vassal and an overlord. It was a relationship of protection and obedience. Yahweh promised to protect Israel and provide for her. They were to be his own special possession: a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation". "Holy" means "set apart" to God, as priests are separated to the service of God. In return, Israel was to obey God by keeping the "Torah". usually this is known as "law" although literally it means "teaching". "Torah" was a God-given way of life. Thus the parallel to "broken my covenant" in Hosea 8:1 is "transgressed my torah".

The covenant established a relationship of commitment between God and Israel. Israel's life as a nation was to be based on that commitment. Hosea's message is: "God is committed to you, but are you committed to him?" In 8:2, they cry "my God", but it is all false. They say, "We know you," but in reality they do not know him.

## **B3. The Ten Commandments**

The most important expression of Israel's covenant commitment was the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Hosea 4:1-2 is another message in the form of a law-suit. This time the indictment is the failure of Israel to keep these commandments.

**Hosea 4:1-2**

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;  
for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.

There is no faithfulness or loyalty,  
and no knowledge of God in the land.

Swearing, lying and murder,  
and stealing and adultery break out;  
bloodshed follows bloodshed.

In verse 2, five of the commandments are mentioned, all of which Israel has broken: there is swearing, lying, stealing, murder and adultery. In addition, as we know, the Israelites were worshipping Baal and setting up idols. To break these commandments was to break her covenant with Yahweh.

But these verses also make clear that loyalty to Yahweh involved more than outward obedience. What Yahweh was looking for was not just compliance with his commands but the inward values that should have flowed from the covenant: faithfulness, loyalty (that is *chesed* or steadfast love) and the "knowledge" of God. As we saw in the previous session, the "knowledge" of God is always practical: it means doing his will in a way that reflects his character. It also carries overtones of deep intimacy, such as exists in a sexual relationship.

A people who "know" God will demonstrate covenant values. The character of God will be reflected in the people who are his special possession, who are "holy", separated out for him. They will demonstrate qualities like the ones we saw listed in 2:19-20: righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy and faithfulness, the qualities God promises to give as his wedding gift when he betroths Israel again.