

## Session 2: The Message of Hosea

### C. The Prodigal Son

#### Activity 2.3

Read Hosea 11:1-11

- What strikes you as you read this passage?
- Make notes on your immediate impressions

#### C1. The Lord as Parent

In chapter 2, Hosea presented the image of husband and wife as a reflection of the Lord's relationship to Israel. Here the image is that of PARENT AND CHILD. In 2:14, he presented Israel's period in the wilderness as a courtship or honeymoon. Here, it is a time of parental bonding, the period when the Lord grew to love Israel. In the wilderness, he taught Israel to walk, he "led them with cords of human kindness" like a child in leading strings. He lifted them up, carried them and bent down to feed them. However, like a disobedient child, once they had learned to walk independently, they refused to come when called, preferring the Baals, since they did not "know" Yahweh.

#### C2. The Political Situation

The twin dangers are EGYPT and ASSYRIA. These were the two great world powers of the time. Israel, caught between the two of them, was in danger of being fought over and added to the empire of one or the other. In fact, successive kings of Israel had tried to maintain their independence through the dangerous game of playing off one against the other. The result of this, says Hosea, will be that they will become exiles in one or refugees in the other. They have refused to "return" to the Lord, and instead have "turned away", so they will "return" to Egypt.

#### C3. An Appeal to the Heart

Verse 8 is spoken directly as an appeal to Israel. In the background was the punishment for a rebellious son, which was stoning, the same as that for an adulterous wife:

**Deuteronomy 21:18-21**

If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.

Admah and Zeboiim were cities that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (see Deuteronomy 29:23). However, Hosea says that Yahweh is NOT going to exact this punishment. His decision is not governed by cold judgement but by warm compassion. He is not a remote, passionless God, but a suffering, caring, waiting God.

**C4. The Character of God**

Even though the immediate future looked bleak, Hosea believed in the EVENTUAL RESTORATION OF ISRAEL because he was convinced by his insight into the heart of Yahweh that he would not let his people go. Just as in chapter 2 judgement is to lead to eventual restoration, so here the lion's roar is to bring repentance and return. But the origin of this restoration is to be the grace of God. It is "I" who will "return them" in verse 11 and they will come trembling: chastened and awed as in 3:5.

In verse 9 there is triple affirmation that the Lord's actions are not to be dictated by his wrath, "for I am God, the holy one in your midst." Hosea is not simply applying a human metaphor to God. He is saying, "This is what God is like." Hosea is not speaking of God as if he were a human being; rather, our human nature is a reflection of God's nature.

**Activity 2.4**

Read Luke 15:11-32

What are the similarities and differences between the father in Jesus' story and the God whom Hosea portrays in chapter 11?