

## Session 2: The Message of Hosea

### A. Wrestling Jacob

#### Activity 2.1

Read the following passages and make some notes on events in the life of Jacob, the ancestor of the people of Israel. Note especially what you learn about Jacob's developing relationship with God.

- Genesis 25:19-34 -struggling with Esau
- Genesis 27:1-46 - the theft of Isaac's blessing
- Genesis 28:1-22 - the vision at Bethel
- Genesis 30:25-43 - struggling with Laban
- Genesis 32:3-32 - struggling with God

#### Activity 2.2

Read Hosea 12:2-6

- How does Hosea portray the relationship between God and Jacob?
- What parallels does he find between this and the Israel of his day?

### A1. Where was the message given?

It is possible to make a good guess as to the PLACE and OCCASION where these words were spoken. Almost certainly, they would have been spoken at Bethel on the occasion of a great religious festival. Bethel was one of the two most important shrines of the nation of Israel. It was set up by King Jeroboam I soon after the northern kingdom separated from Judah as a counter-attraction to the Temple at Jerusalem:

#### 1 Kings 12:26-30

Then Jeroboam said to himself, 'Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah.' So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, 'You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan.

Map 4 shows how close Bethel was to Jerusalem and how well-placed to act as an alternative destination for people from the north.

Bethel was the site of Jacob's dream, recounted in Genesis 28. It would have been the place where the stories of Jacob would have been collected and retold. It was therefore the appropriate place for Hosea to go to give this message.

Notice that this "oracle" or message in verses 2 to 6 stands on its own. The verses before and after would have been spoken on another occasion. It is the editors of Hosea's words who have placed this message in its present position.

## **A2. Jacob, Then and Now**

Hosea refers to three of the passages you have read in Activity 2.1: the birth story, the vision at Bethel and the wrestling match with a "man" who turns out to be the Lord (in Hosea the "man" is an "angel"). In the background is the whole story of Jacob's life and career.

Hosea's point is that Israel is a "chip off the old block". Jacob was a liar and a double-dealer and so are the Israelites. Jacob "strove with the angel and prevailed" or, as Genesis 32:28 puts it, "you have striven with God ... and prevailed". Israel is doing the same thing in Hosea's day: striving with God. They are treating him as someone who has to be manipulated, like Baal.

But Jacob also sought God's favour, saying, "I will not let you go until you bless me," (Genesis 32:26). This is also what Israel should do. They need to "return" or "come back". This word "return" is one of Hosea's favourite words and means, in effect, "repent": "think again", "see things in a different way" and reorder your lives. In the end, Jacob did repent and so should Israel.

Not only should they return but they should also "hold fast" as Jacob did (Genesis 32:26). Israel is to "hold fast" to "love" and "justice". These are among the qualities that are missing in their national life. "Love" is sometimes translated "steadfast love". It is the Hebrew *chesed*, which means "faithful devotion". Instead of worshipping many gods, Israel should be devoted to Yahweh. "Justice" means putting law into action, living a life governed by law and right dealing in place of a "get rich quick" attitude, which reflects Jacob's life as a trickster and swindler. Instead, they should "wait": stop trying to get God to do what they want and trust him to keep his promises.