

## Prayers

### To God

*Praise God for the perfection of His creation and the glory of His revelation*

### For myself

*Ask the Lord God to show you more of His will for your life; be open to being led in new directions and ways, this very day.*

### For others

Weekly theme: Television

Lord God Almighty, bless those who have the privilege of appearing on television and have been given the power to influence many lives. Make Your wisdom known through Christian and secular media, and reveal to all the difference between good and evil within this world, we pray. Transform our television networks and broadcasters for good, we pray: AMEN

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## Meditation

It is an awesome day when the Spirit of God  
Moves in the heart of a man or a woman,  
To bring salvation's bright and glorious dawn  
And change all things, for one soul, forever.

For in Christ, the colours of the world are different,  
And the faces of the saved are radiant, elated;  
The Bible is alive with meaning and purpose,  
And the love of God leaps from its every page;

Prayer feels as natural as breathing clean air,  
And the soul that breathes the Spirit says 'Yes!'  
The potential of all who yield freely is tapped,  
And the prospects of life are infinite in Christ.

The truth has been held and brought blessing!  
The heart has rejoiced in its source and its destiny.  
The offer of Christ has been irreversibly received  
Transforming all things past, present and future.

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## Bible Passage

### **Hosea 1:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Be'eri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to him,

***“Go, take an unfaithful wife and have children of unfaithfulness, because the land is committing great adultery by departing from the LORD.”***

<sup>3</sup> So he proceeded to marry Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Hosea,

***“Name him Jezreel (God’s sowing), because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. <sup>5</sup> On that day I will break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel (God’s sowing).”***

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## Review

It is always exciting to begin the study of another book of the Bible, especially one with a well known story and a powerful message, such as Hosea. The prophets of the Old Testament present us with a fascinating insight into God’s revelation, and together, they hold the key to our understanding of how the Old and New Testaments are connected, and how God’s covenant will extend through history, even to us. For when Jesus was asked about God, He often quoted the Old Testament prophets (e.g. Matthew 15:8,9, Luke 4:8,18, 7:27, 19:46 etc.); if they were important to Jesus, they must be important to us.

The beginning of Hosea, however, presents us with a significant number of problems! Firstly, most who read the book know little about the kings mentioned in the first verse, and secondly, they know nothing about the strange names given to the children by Hosea; except, that is, for the cryptic explanations given by Hosea himself (1:4,5). Yet as we study, we will discover that it is perfectly possible to unravel these features of the text, and find the richer meaning of the text. Every word of this book is important, and the purpose of study is to bring out the significance of all of Hosea’s message including all its details.

In common with nearly all the prophetic books, Hosea begins with a list of kings, which is designed to date the prophecies accurately. Why do we need to know such details? They help us understand the background to the whole story of Hosea. For example, the kings mentioned by Hosea (1:1) date his prophecies to around 740 to 750 BC, which is only a decade after the prophet Amos, and about the same time as Isaiah’s earliest prophecies. They also confirm that Hosea prophesied in the northern Kingdom of Israel, just a couple of decades before the northern kingdom of Israel was invaded and destroyed by Assyria, in 721 BC. This is important information, because it explains something about Hosea’s more gloomy prophecies and predictions which come after the well known and powerful story in the first 3 chapters. Together with Amos, his prophecies of judgement were fulfilled shortly after they were given, and this meant that the people of his day quickly accepted that his words were indeed from God.

The first part of Hosea is however quite different from any other prophetic book. The first three chapters describe Hosea's unhappy marriage to a prostitute at the command of God (1:2, see also chapter 3). This is a story about faithfulness, which likens God's love to love within marriage love, a love that bleeds with unhappiness when it is rejected. The basic message of Hosea arises directly from the tragedy of Hosea's marriage. Israel is like an unfaithful wife who has gone astray and worshipped other gods, so God both condemns her and appeals to her to return and accept His love. This basic message of Hosea's prophecy is confirmed in God's first word to Hosea in verse 2.

It would have taken great courage for an Israelite to be obedient to an instruction from God to marry 'an unfaithful wife' (1:2,3). Such a thing would have gone against every fibre of Hosea's moral being, and against every spiritual sense in his body. An Israelite expected to marry a virgin daughter of Israel, because in this way, his offspring would count as worthy to continue his ancestral heritage. Moreover, although the English translations do not make this entirely clear in the first chapter, it is likely that the woman Hosea married was not a prostitute in the normal sense of a 'loose woman' who received pay for sex. The Hebrew word is most commonly used to speak of someone we might call a 'temple prostitute'.

But yet again we are left wondering what this might mean! Now in Hosea's day, Israelites tragically worshipped more than one God. The Lord was indeed their God, but many, including the kings of northern Israel worshipped the 'Ba'al' gods (see 1 Kings 16,17,18), which were localised Canaanite fertility gods who were believed to be responsible for providing good crops. Worshipping them could involve having sex with these prostitutes to supposedly assist in the fruitfulness of the land! This seems unbelievable to us but it was unfortunately a tragic truth that lay behind much angst between God and His people in Old Testament times. Social norms were disappearing in the northern Israel in the decades before it was invaded by Assyria, yet following the examples of the greats, Elijah and Elisha, Hosea spoke out. The Lord led him to make a great personal sacrifice in marrying a temple prostitute, and when he prophesied, the people understood fully what he was saying. His journey of prophecy had begun.

After the marriage, Hosea's wife Gomer became pregnant, and our passage today confirms that the first born son was indeed theirs (see '*she bore him a son*' – 1:3). It is only a small point, but we will discover later in the chapter that it is not entirely clear whether Hosea's next children were his or not! Nevertheless, Hosea had the privilege of naming his firstborn, and at the Lord's instruction, he named his son 'Jezreel', meaning 'God sows' (1:4,5). This was probably a good name in its day, being the name of a fertile plain within northern Israel. It also seems to suggest that God was looking for a new start for His people not with the fertility of then Ba'als, but with His blessing.

But there is more to the name than this, and verses 4 and 5 begin to explain this. Jezreel was the valley where a past king named Jehu had slaughtered the dynasty of Ahab and his Queen, Jezebel (see 2 Kings), just 90 years previously. The significance of this cannot be underestimated, for this was where God had acted once before to wipe out the dynasty of the king who had re-introduced 'Ba'al worship' back into Israel, a hundred years previously. For Hosea, his son was to be a sign that God was active once again.

Clearly, there is a long way for this prophecy to go, and much more to the story of Hosea's marriage to tell. Within the name of Hosea's first son, however, there is a hint that God was about to work again to shake up kingdoms and change the world according to His justice and His design. If we keep with our study of Hosea we will soon find out much more about what God planned both for His Old Testament people and us.

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# Discipleship

## ***Application***

### ***Ready to do God's will***

Today, if someone went to a pastor and said 'God has told me to marry a prostitute', the response would be predictably short and dismissive. So one lesson we must learn from Hosea is that God sometimes requires extraordinary things from people, and we should not be surprised at them. As the Bible says (Deuteronomy 18:18-22), time will tell whether someone is a true prophet or not.

Personally, I find it hard to imagine that an Israelite would do what Hosea did, because by following God's commands, he compromised every possible avenue of success for his private life as an individual living in Israel. I am forced to ask myself whether I would be willing to do the same, or indeed anything that the Lord asked me, and I ask myself whether I would indeed even hear such a call. Would I dismiss it out of hand? I hope not.

Hosea is possibly the most amazingly obedient man in the Old Testament, and he holds a very special challenge for all God's people. Are we ready to do God's will, even as radically as to do something incomprehensible and apparently godless? It is a tough call, be we belittle Hosea if we do not countenance this

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- *What does this passage tell you about your own relationship with God? Would it withstand the shock of being told to do the opposite of what everyone else expects of you? Think about this for a few days.*
- *What kind of attitudes are there towards prostitutes within the church today? Given that Jesus forgave such a woman in his own ministry, should we be more demonstrably open towards sinners?*

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Discuss why the Lord might want to ask a man to marry a prostitute in order to make a prophecy known.
2. If you have access to a Bible dictionary, look up the names of the kings mentioned here in order to fill in your knowledge of the history of the times.
3. What does the story of Hosea mean to you, and what would such a story mean today, if anything?

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## **Final Prayer**

I praise You, Lord God, for You have saved me and provided for all my needs. Help me take hold of this truth when I feel vulnerable, unloved, challenged or rejected; and as I do this, strengthen my faith and draw me closer to the path of holiness. Open up my heart to enjoy the great life You have given me. Alleluia!

