

## Prayers

### **To God**

Hold me firmly with Your abiding love, heavenly Father, and show me how to live a life which honours the sacrifice that was made for my redemption and salvation. Give me the courage to live for the One who gave His life for me that I might live, and enable me to fulfil my commission to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour; AMEN

### **For myself**

*Ask the Lord to help you value each moment of the life He has given you*

### **For others**

Weekly theme: Television

*Pray for your local and regional television services, especially their influence in local politics, crime and law enforcement.*

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## Meditation

Take in the breath of the Holy Spirit  
And breathe more deeply of the things of God.

Accept the peace and the love of Christ  
Which sweeps away all trouble and fear.

Rejoice in the challenge of the Spirit's power  
To achieve the impossible within this world.

Receive the unconditional gifts of God  
The guarantee of faith and the means of ministry.

Be comforted by spiritual presence of Christ  
And know the healing of your body and soul.

Wonder at the mystery of the wind and the fire  
That purifies, guides and enraptures soul.

Take in the breath of the Holy Spirit  
And be transformed by the things of God.

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## Bible Passage

### Hosea 1:6-11

<sup>6</sup> Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter, and the LORD said to Hosea,

***"Name her Lo-Ruhamah (No Mercy), for I will no longer show mercy to the house of Israel, that I should ever forgive them. <sup>7</sup> Yet I will be merciful to the house of Judah, and I will save them, not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God."***

<sup>8</sup> When she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah (No Mercy), Gomer gave birth to another son, <sup>9</sup> and the LORD said,

***"Call him Lo-Ammi (Not my people), for you are not my people, and I am not your God. <sup>10</sup> Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which can neither be measured or counted, and in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', it will be said 'You are sons of the living God'. <sup>11</sup> The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint one leader and will arise from the land, for the day of Jezreel (God's sowing) will be great."***

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## Review

Yesterday, we read the first few verses of the book of Hosea. We quickly discovered the incredulous story of a faithful Israelite man who received a heartbreaking call from God to marry a prostitute, and attempt to raise a family with her. The first child was named 'Jezreel', and the name appears to have indicated Hosea's hope that God would do a new work amongst His people and purge them of idolatry (see yesterday's study - 1:4,5). Today, we read about further developments in Hosea's young family, and things are not what they may appear at first reading.

With a little scrutiny of the Bible record, we will discover that the births of Gomer's second and third children raise serious questions for Hosea, and this is reflected in the strongly negative names they are given. The fact that the Lord's message is contained in these names is astonishing. In the story of Hosea, the prophet is not someone who can just live like everyone else and raise his head to say God's Word when so inspired. He is someone whose very life is an example God's message, and the reality of it is painful. As we read Hosea's prophecy the message for Israel becomes clear enough, but we should never forget that this prophet had to live out God's Word in a remarkable way.

Our reading continues with the story of Gomer's second child, and verse 6 tells us very tersely about the conception and birth of this child, who is a daughter. At this point, we must go back to have a look at the way the birth of the first child is reported in verse 3, and compare this with verse 5:

*'Gomer ... conceived and bore him a son.'* (1:3)

*'Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter.'* (1:5)

You might think there is little difference between these two reports, but there is. It is easy to miss the subtle change of language from one to the other, but the significance of it is huge. In the first report, the child born is Hosea's; the words *'bore him a son'* make this abundantly clear. However, when you read the report from verse 5 about the second child, the words *'gave birth to a daughter'* markedly say nothing about the father. We are simply told that Gomer conceived and had a daughter. Is it possible that that child was born out of wedlock, due to Gomer's return to work as a prostitute?

If we read on, the same mystery surrounds the birth of the third child reported in verse 8. The passage reports matter of factly that *'Gomer gave birth to another son'*. The question we must answer then is whether the story of Hosea bears out the theory that the second and third children are not Hosea's. You may be tempted to think that this is insignificant, but there are two good reasons for accepting this interpretation. Firstly, Hosea later calls these two children *'children of adultery'* (2:1-4), and adds, *'she who conceived them acted shamefully, saying, I will go after my lovers'* (2:5). Secondly, when called on to name these two children, Hosea begins with the emphatic Hebrew word for 'No', which is 'Lo-'. Their names are respectively, *'No-mercy!'* and *'Not my people!'*, which are extraordinary names even by Hebrew standards and are best explained at first by the theory that they are not Hosea's children.

What heartache this must have been to Hosea! But Hosea knew his call to prophecy, and in the naming of the children he began to deliver his first and considerable prophetic word. The names of these two children are presented to us with two associated prophecies, speaking out against Israel for her godlessness. The first prophetic word attached to the name of the first child, *'No-mercy'* (1:6) announces the Lord's withdrawal of His mercy from His people Israel, and the prophetic word attached to the second child, *'Not-my-people'* (1:9) warns Israel that she is no longer God's covenant people. This is dramatic stuff!

You may well have spotted something about these prophecies however that leads you to wonder whether I am on the right track, because each of these prophecies quickly changes tack! After Hosea has prophesied God's withdrawal of mercy from Israel, he declares that Judah will be saved (1:7), and after his declaration that Israel are no longer God's people, he does an 'about turn' and prophesies the coming together of both Israel and Judah to be God's people once again (1:10,11)!

What does all this mean? It could simply be that after the shock of not being the father of these two children, Hosea decided that he would still love them and care for them. This then becomes the message for God's people; God is utterly aghast at their sin but He has a plan to deal with it and look after them. This thought is worth holding on to as we study Hosea further; for Hosea repeatedly condemns Israel for her wandering from God (e.g. 4:1f.), but he never gives up on the idea that God will turn in fatherly passion to restore His people out of sheer generous, magnanimous and long-suffering love (e.g. 11:1f.).

Alongside this important message that lies at the very heart of Hosea's prophecies, there is one other idea worth giving attention to. If we look carefully at Hosea's prophecies here, although Israel is condemned, the prophecies are only turned around with the inclusion of Judah. It seems that Hosea, a northern Israelite, was condemning the godlessness of his own nation (capital Samaria), but was not so negative about the southern kingdom of Judah, ruled over by an ancestor of David and with its capital in Jerusalem. This is a reminder to us that when reading the prophecies of Hosea, we must be careful to remember that in his day, Israel and Judah were not the same nation; God's people were divided. As I pointed out in yesterday's study, Israel was totally destroyed by the Assyrians only a couple of decades after Hosea spoke these words yet Judah survived. People quickly recognised that Hosea's

gloom about Israel was correct, and his positive prophecy about Judah was also fulfilled. Hosea's core message remains consistent; God's mercy is never exhausted and His people are never completely defeated.

To end our study, it is worth turning to the end of verse 7. Hosea prophesies that when God saves Judah, He will not do this by military means or through battle, He will do this by some act of sovereign power. Here, we see the strength and power of this great prophet, for Hosea's words anticipate the Messianic work of Christ, who delivered salvation not through defeating the Romans, but by delivering God's victory over Satan!

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## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***The supremacy of love***

The key feature of this passage is the love of a father for a child. Hosea is shocked at the circumstances under which he must be a father, but he perceives from his own circumstances that God is the same. So here in the Old Testament we find an example of a prophecy that points forward dramatically to the New, and announces that God's 'father' love is absolute. Let us never be so ignorant as to say that the God of the Old Testament is all about 'wrath', but the God of the New is all about 'love'.

#### ***Justice and mercy***

Hosea's prophecies capture in a quite remarkable way the agony of God's love as He decides between justice and mercy. On the one hand, justice demands the rejection of wrongdoing, but because He is dealing with 'family', love takes precedence over pure justice. We are so used to the message of Jesus in which God's final answer to this conundrum is given in favour of love, that we may not fully understand the anguish felt by earlier Israelites such as Hosea. Without the example of Jesus, He believed that God would act in love even though His people had rejected Him. It is a message we should not forget.

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

- *Recall those times in your own life when you have had to choose between an issue requiring either 'justice' or 'mercy'. How did you decide, and do you think that you made the right decision?*
- *Pray for those who face tough choices today; you may well recall a number of people and circumstances that fit this description. As you are led, pray that love will prevail.*

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

1. Share in your group what you feel you have gained from studying Hosea chapter 1.
2. Are there any aspects of this passage that you do not understand? Discuss this in your group and seek to help each other understand the passage.

3. Is it possible to imagine some similar story today, or are these circumstances too ancient for us to translate into a story for today?

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## Final Prayer

Great and mighty God, who hears our prayers even before they are formed in our minds; mould our lives into the pattern of your great will both for us and also for all humanity. So may we be fulfilled in our inner spiritual life, and in our relationships with others. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

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