

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, when we read about what You did in Your life, we are amazed at the love and compassion You showed towards the people You met. Give us, we pray, a true love for those we meet and a genuine desire to do our best for them, not because we feel like it but because You have first loved us and done Your best for us. Transform our lives in the service of others and may all we do be worthy of You, our living Saviour: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Keep a look out today for things that can give you cause for joy and thanksgiving, and praise God

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who are growing old** *Pray for your own elderly relatives and ask God to bless them and help them in all they do*
- *Give thanks to God for the evidence of His love in the world*
- *Pray for the countries of Southern America and their economies*

Meditation

Praise God!

I found that God's own love had touched me,
A greater love than anything I'd ever known:
I found that boundaries were broken down,
And life was opened up forever by His love!

I knew that I'd received a gift from heaven,
A sense of wondrous joy within the heart;
I felt emotions rise within my soul, so now
I join a celebration of God's eternal 'Yes'!

I discovered rest within the peace He gave,
A quality of wholeness, surpassing thought;
So now I hold the warmth of love's acceptance,
And dwell within the sanctuary of His 'Shalom'.

Bible passage – Hosea 10:1-8

¹ Israel is a productive vine
yielding fruit in its own likeness.
The more his fruit increased
the more altars he built;
the richer his land,
the better pillars he made.

² Their heart is split;
So now they are found guilty:
The LORD will break down their altars,
and destroy their pillars.

³ Look, they will now say:
'We have no king,
- we do not fear the LORD,
and this king - what can he do for us?'

⁴ They utter mere words;
they make covenants with empty oaths;
so lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds
in a ploughed field.

⁵ The inhabitants of Samaria
fear for the calf of Beth-aven.
Its people mourn for it,
and its idolatrous priests,
They wail over it and over its glory,
which has departed from it.

⁶ The thing itself will be carried to Assyria
as tribute to the great king.
Ephraim will be disgraced,
and Israel will be ashamed of its counsel.

⁷ Samaria's king will perish
like a twig on the surface of the water.
⁸ The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,
will be destroyed.

Thorn and thistle will grow over their altars.
They shall say to the mountains,
Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us.

Bible Study

Review

Hosea's tragic call obliged him to stand against the popular consensus of the day, and in the same way that he dealt with his prostitute wife, call shame on Israel for her denial of her God. This reading today contains Hosea's fourfold call of 'shame' on Israel, with each stanza (1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8) using a set of words and themes to make the point. Shame on Israel for her two-faced ignorance of God's ways (10:1,2), shame on Israel for her abandonment of proper authority (10:3,4), shame on Israel for her religious rebellion and attachment to a golden calf (10:5,6), and shame on Israel for her persistent sinfulness (10:7,8).

Hosea begins by continuing to use the image of the vine (10,1,2), following on from the previous chapter ('I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness' - 9:10). The vine found by God and tended by Him has now produced the wrong type of fruit. To explain this, Hosea refers back to Genesis (he does so again in verse 8). God had created people in His own image (Gen 1:26,7), and He had chosen Israel to be a nation that showed Him to the world. But here, the vine of Israel produced fruit like herself, and not fruit designed by the Creator for His purposes! Hosea perceived that it was impossible for Israel to be like her God, for she was hopelessly split in two, with a divided heart (10:2). She tried to worship both God and the Ba'als, so God would act in judgement against her to destroy her 'altars' and 'pillars', the implements of worship to Ba'al.

As we have seen in recent studies, the people of northern Israel were enduring a torrid time in which their kings were being slaughtered in palace coups, and foreign powers were interfering in state politics. People had become disillusioned, and Hosea reports them as saying '*we have no king – we do not fear God, and this king, what can he do for us?*' (10:3). The consequences of such cynicism within society resulted in people making '*covenants with empty oaths*' (10:4), that is, making agreements without meaning to keep them. Hosea also says that in such a poisonous atmosphere, litigation became the norm (10:4), something that foreshadows the collapse of society, '*like poisonous weeds in a ploughed field*' (10:4)

Thirdly, Hosea continued to expose the sinfulness of Israel's worship of the golden calf set up by its first King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:16f.) first after their split with Judah (10:5,6 - see also 8:5,6). One can almost hear his cynicism as he speaks about people mourning for the calf (10:5) as it was taken away to the king of Assyria (10:6), probably in payment of a national debt. The Assyrian empire notoriously made itself rich on the proceeds of extortion, as it progressively overwhelmed the small states on its borders, such as Israel. Yet Hosea was not afraid to pronounce God's judgement, and the fact that the people mourned the loss of this calf was a matter of shame and disgrace (10:6).

In the fourth stanza (10:7,8), God's judgement was pronounced on Israel's sin, and Hosea chose a dramatic way of doing this. He quoted the curse of the ground from Genesis, where it says,

'cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.' (Genesis 3:17,18)

Hosea then finished with a prophecy of doom. People would call on the mountains themselves to offer them protection and 'cover' (10:8) instead of seeking protection from God!

Remarkably, this last prophecy is more significant than most people realise. Jesus quotes this prophecy about 'mountains ... and hills' (10:8) when addressing the professional mourners who accompanied those to be crucified (Luke 23:30). Jesus' use of this prophecy reinforces our interpretation here. This is a prophecy of doom addressed to those who have the evidence of God but will not worship Him, preferring to place their trust in other gods or in kings or other false religions.

These words carry God's prophetic message for all who turn away from the traditions of faith they have been given. Today, many nations with a Christian past are keen to throw off the shackles of their heritage. They produce fruit 'in their own image' (see 10:1), they abandon both God and 'king' (10:3), they mourn for their own petty gods (10:5), and they are becoming rotten to the core (10:8). Hosea's words are as good a definition of a rotten nation as you can get in the Bible, and they are not to be taken lightly!

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How does this passage warn nations and people today about their obligations towards God.
2. In your group, discuss whether Hosea is being cynical in this passage of prophecy, and if so, why?
3. Why is it that people persist in saying they worship God but continue to worship other, more modern 'gods', whether these are made out of wealth, drink, cars, TV, or anything else?

Topics covered by this text

- *The likeness of God seen in the world*
- *False religion and the value people place on it*
- *The seeds of corruption in society*
- *The judgement of God*

Personal comments by author

Hosea called 'shame' on the people of Israel for what they were doing. I guess it took great courage to do this, because it would be like standing up in church today and confronting everything happening! Hosea was able to see God at work in almost everything, but today, we tend to be very abstract in our discussions about God. We talk about whether we believe in Him and whether He deserves our trust (when things do not go our way!) but many people struggle to look at the world and see God at work within it quite naturally, as Hosea did. His prophecies were extraordinary, but his vision was amazing.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Try to write down some of the things Christians may be tempted to place higher than God. Ask yourself whether you have not been guilty of this, and pray to ask the Lord for His forgiveness, if you have.*
- *If this passage of Scripture has made you feel that there is any idolatry in your own church or fellowship, then resolve to do something about this. At least, talk to someone else about this. Be the Lord's servant, and do His will!*

Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, hear our prayer, and help us live our lives exclusively for You. May we give our undivided attention to You and Your will as You are at work in our lives. Take away from us any temptation to live for what the world has to offer us, and focus our hearts on You. We praise You, Lord God; You, and You alone. AMEN
