

## Prayer

You, Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, make my life possible;  
 You, Lord Jesus Christ, are the One who gives me my salvation;  
 You, Almighty Father, are the One who has given light to my life;  
 You, Holy Spirit, are the One who enables me to reach my potential;  
 You are always alive and active in my life, and I give You all my praise!

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Plan to do something different from usual today, however small, and see what God will do with this*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who are growing old** *Pray for those who are dying and pray that they will be cared for properly and with dignity*
- *Pray about food distribution, and pray for those who starve*
- *Give thanks to God for the evidence of His love in the world*

## Meditation

Breathe on us, Holy Spirit; breathe.

May we feel the breeze that comes from heaven,  
 And breathe more deeply of the things of God.

May we accept the unconditional love of Christ,  
 Which sweeps away our troubles and our fears.

May we rejoice in the challenge of the Spirit's power,  
 By which the impossible is done within our world.

May we fully accept those unrestrained gifts of God,  
 Which guarantee our faith, and enable ministry.

May we be comforted by the Holy Spirit's presence,  
 God's generous strength to help and touch to heal.

May we wonder at the mystery of His graciousness  
 With joy unbound at all He promises ahead.

Breathe on us, Holy Spirit; breathe.

## Bible passage – Hosea 10:9-15

<sup>9</sup> Since the days of Gibeah  
 you have sinned, O Israel!  
 There they stand.  
 will not war against the unrighteous  
 reach as far as Gibeah?  
<sup>10</sup> I will come to punish them;  
 nations shall be gathered against them  
 when I bind them for their double sin.  
<sup>11</sup> Ephraim is a trained heifer  
 that loves to thresh,  
 But I will break her in;  
 I will make Ephraim work;

Judah must plough;  
 Jacob must harrow for him.  
<sup>12</sup> Sow righteousness for yourselves,  
 reap the fruit of covenant love;  
 break up your fallow ground;  
 for it is time to seek the LORD,  
 so that He might come  
 and rain righteousness on you.  
<sup>13</sup> You have ploughed wickedness,  
 you have reaped injustice,  
 you have eaten the fruit of lies.  
 For you have trusted in your own ways

and in plenty of warriors,  
<sup>14</sup> A battle-cry will rise against your people,  
and all your fortresses will be destroyed,  
as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel in battle  
and massacred mothers and children

<sup>15</sup> This is what will happen to you, Bethel,  
because of your great wickedness.  
At dawn the king of Israel  
will be totally destroyed.

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## Bible Study

### Review

As we read the Old Testament prophets, it is obvious that they speak about God's judgement on the sins of God's people. Indeed, this is what most people remember about the prophets. Certainly, the majority of Hosea's prophecies are about God's decision to act to end the sin and injustice found within the northern Kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BC, and we have dealt constantly with this theme throughout Hosea.

The warnings continue in this passage, and verses 9 and 10 notify Israel that God will punish her sins through war. Israel is to be punished for her '*double sin*' (10:10), which Hosea links with Gibeah, as he has before (see 5:8, 9:9 and Judges 19,20). But what does Hosea mean by a double sin? Hosea equates Israel's first national sin with the awful deed committed by Benjaminites in Gibeah, who murdered the Levite's concubine in an orgy of lust (Judges 19,20). The second sin was Israel's consequent lust for idolatry and sexual sin, to which Hosea constantly referred (see 2:2-9, 4:13f. etc.). There are many references to 'double sin' in Scripture (see Isaiah 40:2, 61:7, Jeremiah 17:18 etc.), and if we understand this here, we will understand it better elsewhere.

Verses 13 to 15 help us perceive the dynamic of Israel's sin. Hosea uses an agricultural picture of ploughing and reaping to illustrate the on-going nature of sin, and the graphic word picture 'eating the fruit of lies' (10:13) to illustrate its consuming nature. However, Hosea's most chilling warning is that because Israel has persistently chosen to trust her own judgement and her military strength (10:13), the destruction God will bring on her will be all the more terrible. He cites the example of a spine-chilling massacre of innocents at Beth-Arbel (10:14), something we know nothing about from the rest of Scripture, which was clearly a 'news item' of the day.

Yet Hosea says so much more. We should not ignore the importance of this message, both for the people of Hosea's day and for those of God's people who continue to sin today, but interlaced with this message is something very important. Hosea says that if God's people would indeed choose Him, then He wants to work with them to produce '*the fruit of covenant love*' (10:12) within the world.

Now Hosea, just like any other Israelite, was brought up knowing that God had chosen Israel and blessed them through Abraham and the forefathers. He knew that nation's purpose was to give glory to God in worship, and be obedient to Him by keeping His laws. This is well evidenced in Scripture within the book of Exodus (and others, e.g. Leviticus and Deuteronomy). Before the time of the prophets, however, Scriptures says little about God's long term plan for Israel beyond worship and obedience. Hosea was one of the first Israelites (together with others such as Jonah, Amos and Isaiah) to receive God's revelation that He was working on a long term plan requiring His people to make choices and do some work.

If you read verses 11 and 12, this new revelation becomes clearer. Hosea's prophecy does not speak about Israel as like a cow put out to pasture, rather, Israel was an energetic '*trained heifer*' with work to do (10:11). We are so used to the work ethic of our day that we do not necessarily notice the significance of this prophecy. To the probable astonishment of the people of the day, Hosea prophesied that Israel needed to choose to seek their God, and also to sow '*righteousness*' and produce the '*fruit of covenant love*' when blessed by the '*rain*' of God's '*righteousness*' (10:12). In this way, God's people had a task to do to show God to an unbelieving world!

So much follows on from this prophecy. Previous passages of the Old Testament show hints of it, but this is an important part of the spiritual journey of God's people. In decades to come, Isaiah would be given prophecies saying that God would send a 'servant' to complete God's work on earth, and do what Israel could not. When we read this passage, verses 11 and 12 sound like a forlorn hope in the midst of Israel's sea of sin; but God does not waste anything. They speak of much to come.

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## Discipleship

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

1. What can we learn from the condemnation of Israel in this passage of Scripture?
2. What can we learn about the choices we have to serve God from this passage of Scripture?
3. How do God's people today behave like the Israelites of Old, and how can they succeed where the Israelites did not?

### **Topics covered by this text**

- *The origins and consequences of Israel's sin*
- *The deplorable nature of the judgement coming on Israel*
- *The opportunity of God's people to choose to do His will*
- *The importance to God of His eternal plan of salvation*

### **Personal comments by author**

*In so many of Hosea's prophecies, I find myself discovering things I did not know were there. So, before I started this study, I was only vaguely aware of the fact that God gradually revealed to His people the need for them to choose Him just as they had been chosen by Him. This is of course essential New Testament theology. However, I did not realise where it comes from in the Old Testament. Of course, a variety of texts speak of it, but God in His mercy revealed it to Hosea at a critical time in the life of the nation. It reminds me of this additional fact; God often reveals important things to us at critical times!*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Are you aware of making choices about following God, and are you aware of making choices to do what is right instead of what is wrong? These things are not a matter of our natural inclinations and intent, but a matter of will. Pray that God will help you to be someone who chooses to do what is right and rejects what is wrong.*
- *Write down your own reactions to this passage of Hosea, because you will almost certainly forget it when you have read some more Bible studies! How else will you find again what God has said to you today?*

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## Final Prayer

Lord God, help me to be someone who chooses to do what is right, and is constantly willing to put my own feelings aside and seek for Your will. Make me a servant of truth and justice, and an opponent of prejudice and intolerance, I pray, so that I will become useful in Your service, O Lord: AMEN

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