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## Prayers

### To God

*Pray to give thanks to the Lord for all that has happened to you in the last few days. Pray in thanks and in anticipation of all that lies ahead, and ask for the Lord's provision for your future.*

### For myself

Lord God Almighty; give me peace in my heart, and remove my sin and guilt. Turn my heart towards You, and as a consequence, may I love others more and more. Teach me the truth, and give me a passion for Your Word. Give me the gifts of Your Spirit, so I may live and bear fruit. I ask these things knowing that You delight to give 'good things' to those who love You, and Your graciousness outweighs your judgements. **Hallelujah!**

### For others

Weekly theme: Television

*Pray for producers and directors who bear responsibility for what is shown on TV. Pray that Christian faith will be accurately and properly conveyed on your national TV.*

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## Meditation

Teach us, Lord God, what we need to know,  
So that we may be useful in Your Kingdom.

Teach us, Lord God, what we do not want to know,  
So that we may learn Your spiritual disciplines.

Teach us, Lord God, what we ought to know,  
So that we are strong to face the enemy.

Teach us, Lord God, to learn again what once we learned,  
So that we are not presumptuous about our faith.

Teach us, Lord God, what we fear knowing,  
So that we may face the truth and stand tall.

Teach us, Lord God, what we can never fully know,  
So that we embrace the mysteries of grace.

Teach us, Lord God, to maintain what we know,  
So that we never let go of Your love.

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## Bible Passage

### Hosea 2:1-8

<sup>1</sup> *"Say of your brothers,  
'Ammi' (My people),  
"and of your sisters,  
'Ruhamah' (Mercy).*

<sup>2</sup> *"Contend your mother, contend with her (for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband), perhaps she will remove adultery from her face and unfaithfulness from between her breasts.*

<sup>3</sup> *"If she does not, I will strip her naked and expose her as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. <sup>4</sup> I will not show mercy to her children, because they are the children of unfaithfulness.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Their mother has played the prostitute and she who conceived them has acted disgracefully. She said,*

*'I will pursue my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'*

<sup>6</sup> *"So I will hedge up her path with thorns; I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her way. <sup>7</sup> She will chase after her lovers but not overtake them; she will seek them but not find them. Then she will say,*

*'I will go back to my husband as at first, for it was better for me then than now.'"*

<sup>8</sup> *"But she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold, which they used for Baal worship!"*

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## Review

In this heartrending passage, we hear the voice of Hosea crying out in pain at the unfaithfulness of his wife. He had married her in hope that their unity might draw her away from her past, but as we saw yesterday, Hosea came to recognise that of the three children borne by Gomer, only the first was his. He had to address the painful reality of his situation, and decided to confront both her and her children with the truth. While this whole passage reads like Hosea's complaint against Gomer, we must remember that it will not be long before the prophet switches to prophesying God's complaint against Israel using virtually the same words. In the early chapters of Hosea, there is only a thin difference between the two.

The opening verse of this passage is difficult to understand, and scholars have debated it for years. Clearly, Hosea is saying something to his children named '*Lo-ruhamah*' (no-mercy) and '*Lo-ammi*' (not-my-people). But who are the 'brothers' and 'sisters' mentioned in the verse? And although Hosea is obviously making an appeal to his rejected children, what does this mean?

I will present to you my theory about this verse, which is based on the idea that some time has passed, and Hosea is now speaking to his children at the age of around 12 or 13. At this

age, they were regarded as entering the early stages of adulthood and had to be taught accordingly. So here, Hosea tells his children, who know full well that their names are 'No-mercy' and 'Not-my-people', that these negative names are not to define them and the rest of their lives. As they embark on adult life amongst the 'brothers' and 'sisters' of God's people Israel, Hosea declares that they are '*Ammi*', meaning 'My people', that is, the true people of God. Moreover, they are to believe in a God of '*Ruhamah*', which means 'mercy'. This is an astounding act of fatherhood on Hosea's part, because contrary to the prevailing attitudes of the day, he was willing to release his children and future generations from the painful memories of the past. Of itself, this prophetic act reveals a powerful truth about the Father-heart of God.

In verse 2, Hosea tells his children to direct any anger they may have about their dreadful names towards their mother, whose adultery had created the broken marriage and home life they had experienced. Hosea does not shield these youngsters from the truth of their past. Indeed, he appeals to them to '*contend*' with their mother to try and make her turn from her adulterous ways (2:2). It is a heartbreaking plea. Perhaps these two children, who must accept that they do not know who their true father is, can shame their mother into admitting her sinfulness?

Whatever happened to Hosea's family is not known, though we would love to know the outcome of Hosea's parenting of these children. The rest of our passage deals with Hosea's own reaction to the family circumstances. It appears that Hosea has fulfilled his role in parenting the children, but mostly without the regular support of his wife, who has spent her time absconding from the family home to engage in the 'cult' prostitution practices of Ba'al worship.

These practices are explicitly revealed in verses 5 and 8, which speak of the regular sacrificial offerings brought to Ba'al in order to win his favour and promote the fertility of the land. As an aside note, while the worship of God almighty was driven for-mostly by the sacrifice of animals (see Leviticus 1-4), the worship of Baa'l seems to have necessitated the offering of all manner of agricultural products and goods; grain, wine, oil, wool, linen, gold and silver, food and drink. The most devastating insult of all is mentioned last of all, where Hosea complains in exasperation that Gomer has used his own wealth to pursue her ends. He has provided for her, and ended up supporting her 'habit', as we might say today (2:8).

Most of our passage today consists of Hosea's declaration of how he will attempt to deal with his wife (2:3,6,7). His pronouncements contain the emotions of both rage and compassion, and many others in between. At first, Hosea seems to speak with anger, saying he will '*strip her naked and expose her ... make her life like a desert ... slay her with thirst*'. This language may not be what it seems, however. In Hosea's day, such words drew the imagination not towards rampant anger, but to something very different. Talk about 'making life like a desert' was used in the same way we might talk today about 'getting back to our roots'. This is because God formed the people of Israel into a nation 'in the desert' when they escaped from Egypt, and the experience was etched onto the mindset of all Israelites. This picture language appears frequently in Scripture.

It seems that Hosea wanted most of all to start again with Gomer; we can understand his emotions. To this end he speaks here of '*hedging up her path with thorns ... build a wall*', to prevent her from finding her '*lovers*' (2:6,7). In hope, he sees her pursuing her lovers but failing to find them or '*overtaking*' them; this, he hopes, will lead her back to him (2:7). But Hosea's words seem to be short on confidence that this will indeed happen; he bewails Gomer's ignorance and deceit, using his provision to pursue her adulterous behaviour (2:8). Perhaps Hosea's most negative moment comes when he declares that he will no longer '*show mercy*' to her children (2:4); it is rather difficult to interpret these words when Hosea has just spoken kindly to Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi (2:1), but perhaps it means that

Hosea has now exhausted his ability for compassion. He does not know where any more can be found in him.

As we read this heartbreak, we can feel the sheer sense of rejection felt by Hosea as he dealt with his wife and attempted to deal with the children that she had borne in his family. But if we are to get to grips with the prophecy of Hosea, we must realise that this is all written to help us know something about the relationship between God and His people. As Hosea speaks out prophetically about his own feelings and emotions, he begins to reveal something of the Father-heart of God. And as we read about the sinful Gomer, we must realise that this is a parable of God's sinful people, certainly in the Old Testament, but perhaps, at times, in New Testament times as well.

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## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***The Father-heart of God***

It is profoundly moving to read this Scripture knowing that it reveals something of God's heart. Hosea struggles with his marriage and his words become a prophecy of God's love for His people! This passage, together with Hosea 11 is probably one of the most significant Scripture passages to speak of God as a loving 'father', who overcomes every emotions to do what is right and loving whether for wife or for children. It is highly likely that Jesus knew this prophecy well, because He constantly referred to God as His 'Father', something that infuriated the people of His day. How important it is then then for God's people today to treat their God as a heavenly 'father', whose fundamental property is to love His own. Unfortunately, the church has not always been good at proclaiming this truth, to the detriment of its mission.

#### ***The sinfulness of God's people***

We may be used to the idea that God is heart-broken at human sin, but we are here told something more profound. He is heart-broken at the way His own people reject Him! As a Biblical theme, this is far more specific and pointed. We cannot just say that the people of the Old Testament were sinful but we are not today, for that is blatantly untrue. Today, even those who claim faith in Christ sometimes go their own way and worship the gods of their age, whether this is materialism or sex or financial gain. When God's people give their time to things other than the pursuit of the Gospel, then they reject the God whose whole work is to bring 'Good News' to the world. Yes, we can easily procrastinate and say that this Bible theme is about people in past centuries, but God has placed it within His Word for a purpose, and we need to hear it.

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

- *It is hard to see how we might find discipleship issues within such a text, but at the least, we must ask ourselves whether we are in danger of being like Gomer and worshipping other gods; for example, the gods of lifestyle and convenience, or the gods of personal choice and fashion ...*

- *Pray and ask the Lord God to reveal to His people the errors of their ways, and any sins that they commit, and pray that God's people will have the courage to accept God's Word, confess their sins and return to Him.*

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

1. To what extent is the church of God like the Israel of the Old Testament? How do God's people go astray from Him today?
2. What do you make of verse 1? Read this verse and discuss this in your group.
3. How does God go about stopping His people from doing what is wrong today? Does he speak to people or do things in the world to warn us?

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## **Final Prayer**

Your will, Lord God, contains the secrets of the Universe; its origins, its workings and its future. Show me how I am placed within your plan for the world and give me inner peace. May I show confidence in You as my Maker and my Redeemer, to the praise and glory of Your Name. AMEN

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