

## Prayers

### To God

*Weekly theme: God's provision*

*Praise God for His provision for you throughout your life.*

### For myself

*Pray for the courage to submit to God's will and accept His provision in each area of your life. Pray for the strength of heart to accept that He sometimes requires difficult things of you, but will always provide for you.*

### For others

Lord God Almighty, stay close to the people of the USA as they think about voting for their President. Help them to listen to Your will, and act with integrity and honesty, knowing that although they elect their own President, the man who fulfils this role will be an important world leader whose words and actions will affect far more people than those who voted for him. May the man elected this November enhance world peace and stability, and someone who does not stand in the way of the growth of Your Kingdom. AMEN

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## Meditation

Each fresh new day anticipates God's blessings  
And spiritual gifts are given to those who will receive them

Each moment spent with the sacred Word  
builds up a glorious treasure in heavenly places

Each prayer reaching out to the Lord our God  
brings peace with God and revitalises the soul

Each task conquered where yesterday we failed  
affords the opportunity to learn from Christ

Each occasion we speak of our Lord to others  
breaks satan's hold on the eternally bound

Each decision to walk life's narrow way  
creates real possibilities for discipleship and faith

Each venture we take in faith and love  
shows the Gospel message in a radical new light

Each deed of kindness to the poor and disadvantaged  
shouts the message of God's love to a needy world

Each fresh new day is a chance to give thanks to God  
for the endless opportunities He grants to us. Alleluia!

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## Bible Passage

### **Hosea 2:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> "Therefore;

*"I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready.*

*"I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness.*

<sup>10</sup> *"I will expose her shame in the sight of her lovers; no-one will deliver her from my hands.*

<sup>11</sup> *"I will put an end to all her revelry: her yearly feasts, New Moons, Sabbath days, all her appointed feasts.*

<sup>12</sup> *"I will ruin her vines and her fig-trees, of which she said,*

*'These are my pay from my lovers!'*

*"I will make them a forest, and wild animals will devour them."*

<sup>13</sup> *The Lord says,*

*"I will punish her for the days of Ba'al worship when she burned incense and decked herself with rings and jewellery, when she pursued her lovers and forgot me.*

<sup>14</sup> *"But I will now draw her back to me.*

*"I will bring her into the desert and speak tenderly to her,*

<sup>15</sup> *I will give her back her vineyards after I have done this,*

*"I will make the 'valley of trouble' into a 'doorway of hope'.*

*"She will respond to me there, as she did in the days of her youth, when she came up out of Egypt."*

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## Review

In this passage today, the prophecy of Hosea makes the discernible shift from a personal story to the prophetic words of God. Yesterday, it became obvious that this was happening,

for as Hosea was agonising over how to deal with his adulterous wife, he began to use the language of God's relationship with his people Israel (2:3,6). We were a hairsbreadth away from prophecy, and Hosea now launches into a powerful prophecy of God's saving love.

There can be no doubt, for although the words of our passage sound at first like Hosea speaking to Gomer (2:9-12), from verse 13 onwards, Hosea speaks like a true prophet. No Israelite would use the clarion words, '*the Lord says*', without accepting the mantle of a prophet who declares God's Word to Israel. So by the time we reach the end of our passage, where Hosea speaks of '*the days of her youth, when she came out of Egypt*' (2:15), the transformation is complete. It was Israel who came out of Egypt not Gomer, and Hosea is speaking to the nation on behalf of her God.

So, out of the cruel misery of a man dealing with an adulterous wife, and possibly a divided family, God has found a man whose words He can use to speak to His vagrant and adulterous nation Israel. As we read today's passage, we must therefore feel not just the heart of man in distress, but the heart of God that has been broken and rejected by His people. Both Hosea and God seek an end to their pain and are intent on administering a solution to their distress that balances love and punishment, in order to bring their wayward lovers home. It is amazing to think that out of pain and suffering, God is able to reveal His greater purposes, and it is amazing to see a downtrodden man like Hosea become a prophet of God's word.

Now to the text itself, which is divided roughly into two halves; 2:9-12 begins with the word '*therefore*', and 2:13-15 begins with the prophetic announcement '*the Lord says*'. The first passage describes Hosea's punishment of Gomer, but the second, a formal prophecy, quickly turns from punishment to the idea of restoration. Hosea is determined to win back his wife, and God is determined to save His people. Perhaps Hosea understood full well that it was only God who could enable him to forgive, and turn his heart towards restoration.

The first half (2:9-12) contains six forthright promises of punishment, each beginning 'I will ...'. The first two (2:9) and the last two (2:12) state that provision will be withdrawn. From Hosea's perspective as a husband he could withdraw provision from his wife, but there was a problem. Verse 12 says that Hosea will '*ruin her vines and her fig trees*'. But why would Gomer possess such things? Within Israel, women did not usually have possessions in their own right, they were held by a man and shared within marriage. Only rarely did women possess land, and usually because they were not yet married (Numbers 27:1f. 36:2, Joshua 17:3). But it seems that Gomer had acquired personal possessions outside of her marriage, through her prostitution. She had teased and belittled Hosea saying, '*these are the pay from my lovers!*' (2:12).

Gomer enjoyed a life independent of husband and family, and tragically, Israel acted similarly towards her God. By acquiring land as if it was her possession, the nation sought to live independently of the provision of her God and Saviour. It is doubtful that Hosea would have been able to destroy Gomer's possessions, but that did not stop him prophesying that God would destroy Israel's land and its fruitfulness (2:12).

In verse 10, Hosea promises to expose Gomer. In ancient times, a prostitute working for the fertility rites of Ba'al worship would disguise herself so that her face and identity was not known (there are hints of this in other Old Testament stories of prostitutes (Genesis 38:15)). Hosea's threat was therefore real; if she was exposed she might not be able to continue her lifestyle, especially at the festive events when Ba'al was worshipped, '*yearly feasts, new moons, sabbath days ...*' (2:11).

But it seems that Hosea recognised the limitations of punishment, and consequently understood that God's wrath was limited. By rights, he could have his wife denounced for adultery and in the right circles, he could have had her stoned (Lev 20:10); he could at least have divorced her (Deut 24:1f.). Hosea, however, was not interested in divorce; remarkably,

he remained interested only in restoration, and this is where his own passions mirrored God's love. Just as he longed for a new start with his wife Gomer, so, the Lord God longed for a new beginning with his people Israel, and this is the theme of the last part of our passage in verses 14 and 15.

We continue to read about the desire of a devoted man to love again a woman steeped in prostitution, but more than this, we now read about God's love for His people. When Hosea's prophecy speaks of '*bringing her back into the desert*' (2:14), he expresses the heart of God, which longs to take Israel back into the Sinai desert and teach her again of his love and provision, just as He once did (Exodus 16f.). After the experience of '*Desert*' the provision of the '*Promised Land*' makes sense (2:15), and God longed for Israel to response to Him and be obedient to His ways, just as they had done after they left Egypt and journeyed with Him through the deserts of Sinai (2:15).

In the midst of the last verse there is a beautiful phrase that speaks of turning the '*valley of trouble*' (often translated the '*valley of Achor*') into the '*doorway of hope*' (2:15). This is a powerful picture of God's redemptive and saving love, which sees beyond the problems of the present day to a new dawn, a new beginning, and everlasting hope. These are wonderful and powerful words from an Old Testament prophet, and they are there for us in Scripture because out of his suffering, one man, Hosea, had a vision of the loving heart of God and he spoke it out. Thank God he did, for from his words we learn again the truth that although God is always utterly just, beyond this, His heart of love defines everything. Love is at the heart of creation, God's salvation and redemption, and His eternal purposes.

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## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***To be just or to love - that is the question!***

You, like me, may have found yourself in a quandary, not knowing which way to turn. In some situation that develops we do not know whether to be correct or to be lenient, and we face in microcosm the dilemma faced by Hosea in his marriage. Of course, the stakes are higher in marriage than they are with more trivial matters, but we will often try and find ways of fulfilling both the need to be correct and a human desire to be gracious. It seems to be not just the character of God to be loving in the face of justice, but something he has placed within humanity too. We must not ignore this aspect of our very nature.

#### ***The primacy of love***

In the midst of the troubles of everyday life, however, it can be hard for some to sustain belief in the love of God. When troubles come, some, even people of faith will turn away from God and accuse Him of vengeful spite. They find it impossible to believe that the God they have placed their faith in can treat them so badly that they suffer. Invariably, the truth is that they have succumbed to the trials of life, as all people do. Their sufferings are very real, and they need help. But instead of seeking the Lord's help, they rejected Him, and once this step has been taken it can be very hard for the human soul to 'about-face'. Bitterness sets in and the soul becomes hardened against God's perceived injustice; it cannot be stated strongly enough how devastating such an attitude can be.

The only alternative is to stand fast in faith and receive from God the daily blessings that will enable us to hold our own in the midst of suffering, and eventually come through it, stronger

people. No one grows through rejecting other people or rejecting God. We grow when we accept that no one has a right to avoid trials and suffering in life, and the particular problems we endure are not to be thought of as a form of punishment by God. We grow most when we turn to our saviour with open arms, ready to receive all He will give us.

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

- *Have a look over the newspapers today, and observe the way in which decisions have been taken. To what extent have they shown 'justice' and to what extent have they shown 'mercy'? How do you respond to what has been decided? Do you naturally want to see one or the other?*
- *Write down a list of those things you feel are wrong with the church today. How many of them can be considered sins, and how many of them are merely matters of fashion or preference?*

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

1. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about the nature of God and people, and how does this affect us today?
2. Are God's people still dominated by the things of this world rather than the things of God, and what are the consequences of this?
3. How does God show His love for His wayward people today, or is this picture one that is not relevant?

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ; You can see the truth within all that happens to us today, both in our work, in our homes and in those things that remain private. Forgive us for our inability to perceive what is right, and by Your Spirit, teach us to be more sensitive to the moral teaching of Scripture and the guidance of Your Spirit. Lead us into all truth, we pray: AMEN

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