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## Prayers

### To God

Weekly theme: God's provision

*Talk to Lord about your finances. Ask Him about the wisdom of how you manage your money, and talk to Him about whether you need more, or less.*

### For myself

Lord God, the beauty of Your world astounds me and the cruelty of humanity shocks me. Show me to how live according to Your Word, and demonstrate the eternal power of faith, hope and love. Give me the strength to stand against all that is evil and morally corrupt, and maintain the cause of the Gospel and the Church within the fiercest of life's battles. And by Your grace, may I make a difference. AMEN

### For others

*Pray for those who suffer because of extremes of weather. Pray for those who experienced drought, and pray for those who have to battle storms or floods.*

## Meditation

Be comforted, you who have felt the power of sin,  
There is One who has the victory over Satan's evil sway.

Be strengthened, you who know cruel oppression,  
There is One who has the courage to bring you freedom.

Be heartened, you who struggle with your burdens,  
There is One who takes the weight you suffer on Himself.

Be encouraged, you who need to hear good news,  
There is One who broke through death to bring you love.

Be enlightened, you who have the heart to understand,  
There is One who taught the way of life, and lived it perfectly.

Be enthused, you who are willing to speak your faith,  
There is One who works through you in authority and power!

Be blessed, you who have walked in hope and joy,

There is One you know who has a place for you in heaven!

## Bible Passage

### **Hosea 4:1-6**

- <sup>1</sup> *Hear the word of the LORD,  
O people of Israel;  
for the LORD has an dispute  
with the inhabitants of the land.  
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,  
and no knowledge of God in the land.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Swearing, lying, murder,  
stealing and adultery are breaking out;  
bloodshed upon bloodshed.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Therefore the land mourns,  
and all who live in it waste away;  
along with wild animals and the birds,  
even the fish of the sea are perishing!*
- <sup>4</sup> *Now, let no one find fault, and none reprove,  
for my dispute is with you, O priest.*
- <sup>5</sup> *You shall stumble by day and night;  
Even the prophets will stumble with you,  
and I will destroy your mother.*
- <sup>6</sup> *My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge;  
because you have rejected knowledge,  
I will reject you as a priest to me.  
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,  
I also will forget your children.*

## Review

After the amazing story of his life and extraordinary personal call to prophecy (Hosea 1-3), we are now plunged into the beginning of Hosea's classic prophecies. However, while most people know something of his story, and remember his place in the Old Testament prophets accordingly, we must put this dramatic story in perspective. Most of the book of Hosea, chapters 4 to 14, contain prophecies typical of the eighth century prophets (at least, Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah of Jerusalem). In these prophecies, Hosea, like many of the great prophets, berates Israel (the northern kingdom of Israel) for her wandering away from the Lord to the worship of other gods. We know from the beginning of the book that Hosea believes in the faithful and unconditional love of God. But this does not stop him speaking out in the most forthright terms against sins of the people, and the consequences of those sins. As we read the rest of Hosea, we will spend most of our time reading about these things.

There is no doubt that our reading today is a significant prophecy with profound implications, and we will look at it closely to see how it applies both to the life of God's people in Hosea's day and to our own day. We must not lose sight of the powerful motivating force behind

Hosea's words and his personal understanding of the love and justice of God as a Husband and Father, but this does not figure in our reading today. In general, Hosea always balances God's absolute justice with a conviction that God will never cease to love, and we certainly find this when we reach the famous verses found in chapter 11, and also, arguably, chapter 6. There is no message of compassion in our passage today, however, and for the time being, we will have to wait to find out how God will show His love to Israel.

Hosea begins these prophecies with a call to the people of Israel to listen; '*hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel ...*' (4:1). The Lord is said to have a '*dispute*' with His people that must be resolved, and in verse 1, God addresses Israel both as His people, but also '*inhabitants of the land*'; and he does not do this merely for poetic reasons. With these words Hosea reminds his hearers that they live in Canaan, the Promised Land given to Israel by God after their eviction from Egypt. Now if we read the story of what happened when Israel entered the land, we find there that the people agreed freely to the conditions of God's gift (see Deut. 26 to 31), which constituted a '*covenant agreement*'. In this, God promised to bless the people as they lived in the land if they remained obedient. On the other hand, the people agreed that if they did not remain obedient to God's laws, they would deserve to be cursed by God, and punished! As a general rule, it can help our reading of the great Old Testament prophets if we read these and other chapters of the book of Deuteronomy.

Hosea states God's case against His people succinctly and clearly. By turning to the worship of other gods, they have failed to be faithful and loyal to the Lord; they have given up on the '*knowledge of God*' (4:1) that is their birthright. The words of Hosea's accusation are all important. Faithfulness and loyalty are words that describe God Himself, and His people are supposed to demonstrate these qualities to the world; it is their divine mission which cannot be allowed to fail. The phrase '*knowledge of God*' means something different today, because we tend to think of it as something to do with learning or 'theology'; but we are wrong. In the Old Testament, to 'know' God means to have a relationship with him, so when Israel has '*no knowledge of God*' this means that they have no relationship with him at all. Instead, the world's values taken over, and Hosea writes down a list of such sins; 'swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery' (4:2). This reads like one of Paul's lists of sins within the New Testament, such as the 'works of the flesh' (Galatians 5:19f.); perhaps Paul's style of writing was influenced by Hosea!

Hosea's prophecy predicts that the results of this sin and disobedience will be the mourning of '*the land*' (4:3). Perhaps even in those days Hosea had seen that without the godly attitude of stewardship as described by Genesis 1:28f., the land was abused rather than managed in a sustained way. He speaks of the land wasting away affecting animals and birds (4:3). Then in a unique phrase, Hosea says '*even the fish of the sea are perishing!*' It may be only a small point, but the other significant Old Testament reference to dying fish comes from the story of the plagues in Exodus. Hosea may have been warning the people of Israel that their sin meant they were being judged just as Egypt had been judged!

As Hosea continues, we discover more. In their rush away from the Lord, they had become cantankerous. He castigates the sinful faultfinding that quickly permeates worldly religion, and bewails the fact that the true worship of God has been compromised. He turns on Israel's priests who have left their duties to offer sacrifices to Ba'al, '*my dispute is with you, O priest*' (4:4). It was the priest's job not just to perform the religious rituals but to maintain the people's relationship with the Lord, and they had failed to do this; they had succumbed to Ba'al worship with the people, they had '*stumbled*' (4:5).

Then, in a hint of the importance of Israel's mothers to the passing on of religious faith, Hosea reports God as saying, '*I will destroy your mother*'. This is not nice to read, but it is Hosea's prophecy that God will stop Israel's mothers from handing over Ba'al worship from one generation to another. The rejection of God is complete; the people do not know God,

they have *'forgotten the law of your God'* and their priests have rejected God's commission (4:6). The end of our passage today declares the awful consequences of this rejection; God will forget his people, He says, *'I also will forget your children'* (4:6). This is a harrowing prophecy, perhaps coming from the agony of Hosea as he strove to understand whether he should or could provide for the children of his wife's adultery (1:10, 2:1f.).

Of course, this cannot be the end of prophecy; it is only the beginning. But how important it is that we hear these words, and remember that there are consequences to sin. As Hosea points out, sin is rejection of God, and if we reject God, then we call down his rejection on ourselves. Later on, Hosea will tell us how the Lord God will overcome the sin of humanity through His love. Salvation awaits all who turn to the Lord, but that does not mean we should ignore the consequences of sin here and now. Perhaps the knowledge of this will help sting our hearts into making the necessary repentance!

## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***Getting acquainted with sin!***

Today, with the Gospel message of Christ's salvation ringing in our ears, we still need to know more about sin. Sin is what separates us from God, and the more we understand what God counts as sin, the more we can begin to understand how, knowingly or unknowingly, we sometimes cut ourselves off from the God we claim to love. In this passage of Scripture, Hosea identifies a significant number of such sins, and some of them cut us off from God even today. A list of sins is found in verse 2, and to these, Hosea adds the sins of turning away from the one true God towards idolatry, and the worship of worldly objects and human religious beliefs.

#### ***Facing the sin of idolatry***

It is staggering that such things still afflict Christian people, their leaders and their churches today, just as they afflicted Israel and her priests in ancient times. But they do. The more we delve into this we find that Christians are perfectly capable of having passions about buildings, church seating, music, dress, systems and liturgies and a host of other things that are far greater than their apparent zeal for the Kingdom of God. This is the 'give-away'. Our passions for Christ must exceed all else, not just because we say so, but because this is evident in our words and deeds. Unfortunately, such godliness is not always evident, however much it may be claimed, and there is much more to this matter than can be explored fully here. Suffice to say that we cannot look on Israel and think her sin is something different to what we experience and observe in the church today.

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

- What do you believe the faults of the church to be today, and do these coincide with what Hosea says here? You may find some coincidence, or perhaps not. However, we must to exercise discernment in this way in order to find out how the text applies to us today.
- What does it mean to you to have a relationship with God, and how does this show in your life? Answer this question to yourself with Hosea 4:1-6 in mind.

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

1. What does this prophecy tell us about the people of God in Hosea's day, and how does it connect with what we read in Hosea 2?
2. Why does Hosea describe the consequences of Israel's sin as having an effect upon the land and life on land, sea and air?
3. What does this passage tell us about God's people today and how can we learn from this passage today?

## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, speak to me when I do not know where to turn; when I am scared of what is happening to me and find it hard to explain or pray about things. Send Your Holy Spirit to comfort me and give me peace, so that I am able to hand over all my problems to You and deal with them in faith and peace. All thanks be to You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

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