

Prayers

To God

Praise God for the way he has led you to where you are today. Praise Him for your salvation and for His grace.

For myself

Almighty and Everlasting God, I praise You for the mystery of Your ways. Within Your plan for the salvation of the world I am but a tiny breath within a vast expanse of air. But You can and will use me as You work within Your world both visibly and invisibly, sometimes with delicacy or sometimes with thunderous power. I am happy to make my contribution to Your rule throughout the earth, and I know I have a place within Your immense, eternal plans, and I praise You. **AMEN**

For others

Weekly theme: The Untied Nations

Give thanks for the work of the United Nations, and pray for its leader Ban Ki-moon.

Meditation

All praise to You, Lord Jesus:
You alone have challenged me to live for You;
You alone have walked with me and know my heart;
You alone have known me since the beginning of time;
You alone have cared about all that has happened to me;
You alone have touched my heart and given me love eternal;
You alone have heard the spiritual tones within my voice;
You alone have inspired me to be a truly better person;
You alone have given me the path to perfect peace;
You alone have answers to my deepest needs
All praise to You, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Bible Passage

Please note that this is the last of our studies in Hosea, for the time being. Frankly, the next few chapters of Hosea continue the same themes, and we will come at them again with fresh

eyes if we leave a break here. After a couple of psalms in the next few days we will soon return to our studies of Luke.

Hosea 7:11-16

¹¹ Ephraim is like a dove,
fickle and with no sense,
calling to Egypt, then going to Assyria.

¹² Wherever they go,
I will throw my net over them;
I will bring them down
like the birds of the heavens;
I will chastise them
in public humiliation.

¹³ Woe to them,
for they have strayed from me!
Destruction to them,
for they have rebelled against me!
I would redeem them,
but they speak lies against me.

¹⁴ They do not cry to me from the heart,
but they wail upon their beds;
they gather together for grain and wine,
and yet they rebel against me!

¹⁵ Though I trained and strengthened them,
yet they plot evil against me.

¹⁶ They do not turn back up to me,
they are like a faulty weapon.
their officials will fall by the sword
because of their impudent words.
They will be ridiculed for this
in the land of Egypt.

Review

The gist of this prophecy is clear enough; Hosea was distraught at the state of Israel. She was acting with immense folly and godlessness, her priests had failed to lead the people towards God (ch.4,5), and her kings were listening to the chattering of influential people not to God (7:1-10). The people of Israel were not interested in turning back to their God, and Hosea therefore continued to prophesy very clearly what God thought about His people. The Lord God knew what was happening in Israel and would not allow Israel to escape His justice (7:12).

The passage we have read today reveals that some of the people were still performing acts of worship (see '*gather together for grain and wine*' – 7:14), but it seems that the lord did not believe they were putting their hearts into this; '*they do not cry to me from the heart*'. Moreover, even though these were the same people God had had redeemed from Egypt and with whom He had previously enjoyed a good relationship, they now lived in rebellion against

Him (7:13,15). Surely, the nations would laugh at a people who treated their God like this; *'they will be ridiculed for this in Egypt'* (7:16)!

Now it may seem relatively easy to say this about our passage today, but we can go further if we ask what exactly was happening in Israel when Hosea was prophesying, and what might have caused him to say such things? For a significant part of our study today we will look further at what these words meant to the people who first heard them. If we dig further into Scripture and take a broad view of the history of God's people in those days, we will get some understanding of the politics of northern Israel and why it was driving godly people like Hosea to distraction.

The very first verse of Hosea's prophecy (1:1) dates his prophetic work by referring to a number of kings of both Israel and Judah who lived at the time Hosea was prophesying, around 755 to 720 BC. These dates can be relatively easily worked out by reference to the books of Kings and Chronicles, and working back from fixed dates known independently from history, such as the invasion of Israel by Assyria in 721BC. There is one strange thing about the beginning of Hosea however, and this is the fact that there are more Judean kings (southern kingdom) mentioned than Israelite kings (northern kingdom). The southern kings are Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and the only northern king mentioned in Jeroboam II (790-749BC). It is odd that Hosea, who spoke almost wholly to the northern people of Israel, does not mention any other Kings of Israel, especially those who came after Jeroboam, because it was they who were on the throne while he prophesied (755-720BC)! However, it is likely that these kings were so abhorrent to Hosea he could not bring himself to name them!

Now, if we turn to 2 King 15, we will discover what was happening in Israel and Judah while Hosea was prophesying, and it is a very sorry tale. In 749BC Jeroboam died and his son Zechariah succeeded him, but was murdered six months later in a coup by a man named Shallum (2 Kings 15:8-11). Shallum himself committed some dreadful atrocities (2 Kings 15:13-16) and was then murdered by the leader of a revolt, named Menahem. Menahem lasted for ten years, largely by paying off the Assyrian King with a substantial fee of 1,000 talents of silver, extorted by a toll of 50 shekels of silver on all the senior men of Israel (2 Kings 15:17-22). After his death, his son Pekahiah lasted only two years before he was slaughtered by an army captain named Pekah. A short time later, Pekah was murdered in another army revolt, and Hoshea, the leader of the army, was named King (2 Kings 15:29-31). It was not long before the King of Assyria took a disliking to the unstable nation on his southern border and invaded Israel, eventually destroying the nation completely (721BC – see, in particular, 2 Kings 17).

I have written all this down as succinctly as possible to help us understand that Hosea words here were not empty gestures! The story in 2 Kings 15,16,17 is clear enough; imagine yourself living at such times! The nation was in turmoil, led by a succession of what could best be called military dictators rather than kings, and they clearly had no interest in the nation except for their own survival. No wonder Hosea called Israel *'fickle and with no sense'* (7:11); his picture of the intrigues of court life (see yesterday's study) sound realistic.

Yet still, God would not let His people go. Hosea agonised over what God would do in these circumstances, knowing that He would not tolerate injustice and rebellion. Hosea lived to see at least two invasions of his beloved Israel by the tyrant Assyria, firstly under Tiglath-pileser (see 2 Kings 15:29) and then several years later under Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:5f.). What incredible public humiliation for Israel (7:12)! Hosea saw this as the justice of God wrought on His rebellious people (7:13,14).

Yet Hosea spoke as openly a prophet could in those days, and in the midst of his condemnation, we hear echoes of the heart of a father and a husband. Hosea appeals on God's behalf for Israel to leave her ways and return to a relationship of the heart (7:14) with

her God, he remembers the 'good times' when the Lord trained His people for war (7:15). Nevertheless his heart is full of pain because the object of His love has become estranged, 'they wail upon their beds' (7:14) and has become like a useless weapon, a 'faulty weapon' unable to defend herself against her enemies (7:16), and perhaps worst of all, Israel and her God would become a laughing stock (7:16). Were these the same people intended by God to be a 'light to the nations' (Is 42:6, 49:6)?

We may have read this passage all too quickly when we began, but the more we have delved into the meaning of the passage, the more it reveals the sheer godlessness of Hosea's age. Today, we must therefore be careful, for it is difficult for us to claim that we are very much better!

Discipleship

Application

The wars of ancient Israel and wars of today

Reading about the ancient politics and wars of Hosea's day in the book of 2 Kings is a salutary reminder of parts of Scripture we would rather not read. It is far easier to picture Israel as God's obedient people who are an example to us today, but such times rarely existed, as any scholar of the Old Testament knows. The message of the Old Testament is far more about how God's people survive through difficult times; this goes to the heart of Hosea's prophetic ministry.

Today, this passage represents to us a challenge to get to know God's Word. Few people know the details of 2 Kings 15,16,17, and I have to confess that each time I refer to it I have to look it up because I cannot remember the exact sequence of kings in the terrible story. However, my knowledge of this (and the rest of the Old Testament) helps me interpret Scripture in way that would be impossible if I did not know anything about such times.

I reckon it is important to know how God's people survived at difficult times in the past because this will help us do the same today. We have the love of God in Christ to help us, but this is no 'get out clause' for real life, and if we know the Bible well, we will better understand how Christ can help us in the midst of our own difficulties.

Ideas for what to do

- Ask yourself this question; is rebellion a matter of age, or is it evident within every 'age'? It seems that people often think of 'rebellious teenagers', yet people at every age have ways of rebelling and some are better at it than others! Within your church, how do people rebel against leadership, against each other, and against God? Why is this so and what can be done about it?
- Pray for those who feel the prophetic voice of God within them and yet remain uncertain how to let it out. In the age of the Holy Spirit, pray that God will give His people a true voice of prophecy

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Does this passage of Scripture remind us of things that are happening in the life of the world now, and if so, what?
2. How does the Lord God show His justice in the world today, and how may we know that it is Him at work?
3. How does the Lord God show His love in the world today, and how may we know that we may trust Him?

Final Prayer

You love, Lord God, has chased us throughout the ages, and we have not always responded. Forgive us Lord God, for those times when we have been insensitive to Your Word and unresponsive to Your will, and lead us on to overcome these problems in the power of Your Spirit. Lead us higher, Lord God, higher still! AMEN
