

Prayer

Almighty God, write Your will upon our hearts, we pray, so that our lives are lived according to the fruit of the Spirit instead of the desires of our hearts and the influence of all we see and hear in the world around us. Give us the courage to say 'no' to all that would stand in the way of Your direct guidance of every aspect of our lives, for our eternal good. We praise You, Almighty God: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Listen to what other people say to you today, and whatever is appropriate of what you hear, turn into prayers

On-going prayers

- **Pray for your neighbours** Pray that God will enable all of you who are willing to support each other with acts of neighbourliness and care
- Pray for the continuing work to help people suffering in Haiti
- Give thanks to God for people who help others selflessly

Meditation

When I feel like letting go, Lord Jesus, hold me close;
and when I want to run away, then stay with me, dear Lord.

When I know that I am lost, Lord Jesus, rescue me;
and when I lose direction, then be my compass, dear Lord.

When I see there's trouble ahead, Lord Jesus, clear my mind;
and when I feel the threat of fear, then soothe my soul, dear Lord.

When I hear the call to action, Lord Jesus, make me ready;
and when I stumble on the way, then lift my spirit, dear Lord

When I sense the time is right, Lord Jesus, lead me onwards;
and when I open my lips to speak, then fill my mouth dear Lord.

When I'm sure I'm on the right track, Lord Jesus, keep me whole;
and when I grasp the call of God, then fill my life, dear Lord.

Bible passage – Hosea 8:1-6

- ¹ Put the trumpet to your lips!
An eagle hovers over the house of the LORD
because they have broken my covenant
and rebelled against my law.
- ² They cry out to me – 'O my God!
we are Israel – we know you!'
- ³ But Israel has rejected what is good,
so an enemy will pursue him.
- ⁴ They set up kings, but not through me;
they choose princes without my approval.
With their silver and gold they made idols
In order to cut themselves off!
- ⁵ He has rejected your calf-idol, O Samaria!
My anger burns against them.

How long will they be incapable of purity?
6 This thing is the product of Israel!
A craftsman has made it, it is no God!
The calf of Samaria will be broken in pieces!

Bible Study

Review

Throughout this prophecy, Hosea identifies the sin present within God's own people. When reading Hosea we may be strongly affected by his message of God's love in the midst of rejection, as found in the first three chapters of the book. But we may be taken aback by the rest of Hosea's ferocious prophecies, which are relentless in their damnation of Israel. Hosea's point is that love does not overcome sin by ignoring it, and mercy is not achieved through forgetting judgement. If there is to be reconciliation between God and His people, then sin must be exposed and accounted for.

In Hosea's day, people thought of a prophet as a herald of God, warning the people of what was to come. Hosea had already performed this role in previous prophecies, warning of coming judgement (see ch.5). The opening words '*put the trumpet to the lips*' (8:1) pick up this theme, but with a surprise. While the prophet's trumpet blast rallies people to peer at the horizon for signs of invasion, '*an eagle hovers over the house of the Lord*' (8:1); in flight, an eagle flies so high it is hard to see. Years before, Moses used the picture of an eagle to speak to Israel about God's guidance (see Deut 28:49, 32:11); but the eagle's nurturing instincts could also be used to swoop and kill prey. The '*house of the Lord*' in Hosea's prophecy was God's people, not the Temple; it was hovering, with its piercing eyes watching the sin down below.

The analysis of Israel's sins is stunning and severe; the Covenant was broken, the Law was broken (8:1) and '*Israel has rejected what is good*' (8:2). Together, these sins cover every part of Israel's religious, social, legal and moral life. Sin was not a small feature of personal and national life; its nature was (and is) to be endemic. In the face of such accusations, the people all said 'Oh my God! We are Israel – we know You!' (8:2), but it was too late, the nature of their sin was already exposed. Hosea's approach to sin is helpful, even today, because it shows that we must examine sin and break it down; generalities are insufficient, and specific revelation is everything. For example, ritual confession and oversimplification will not help people deal with sin today; we need the courage of Hosea to expose the facts of sin now, both in private and in fellowship.

Hosea firstly tackled the sin of Israel's deeply disturbing succession of kings. In the latter part of the eighth century princes and military leaders gained power by coup (see study on Hosea 7:11-16), and God had nothing to do it; the sword determined who ruled; '*they set up kings, but not through me ... princes without my approval*'. Secondly, he tackled Israel's shameful historic sin of the worship of golden calves (8:4-6). Hosea ridiculed the idea that people might worship 'man-made' objects (8:5,6) just like Isaiah (Isaiah 1:8, 44:16-19). The people may have said to Hosea 'But this was in the past, in the desert (Exodus 32) and when Israel separated from Judah (1 Kings 12:28f.)'. But by speaking of these two dreadful incidents, Hosea reminded Israel of the fact that there was never any difficulty in gaining sponsors for her worship of other gods; gold for the production of these idols had flowed freely, and sin ran deep. Such things '*cut off*' Israel from her God, and His anger '*burned*' against them (8:4,5).

This is not simply a lesson in ancient history. We can look at churches today, it is possible to see people take power and authority into their own hands to manipulate the church for their own ends. It happens because of ignorance about God's Word, lack of communication and trust amongst Christians, and inappropriate freedom given to strong characters who impose themselves on others. Much of this is shocking, given that the Bible has much to say about good leadership (e.g. in 1 and 2 Timothy); Hosea would say it is sin, and so must we when we see it. We can also find outrageous idolatrous practices within the church today; this happens when God's good gifts, such as music, buildings, liturgy and much more have been allowed by some to become idols that are worshipped rather than means of grace. Pitched battles about such things, within and between churches, tell the tale that sin lurks here, and those who will not identify it and deal with it risk condemnation!

It is wise if we read Hosea's denunciations with care, for they are in God's Word for a purpose. They spoke to the people of Hosea's own day and they speak to us, if we will let them.

Discipleship

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Is it right to try and find connections between this passage and the life of God's people today, or is this search unwise?
2. What 'sins of God's people' are you reminded of by this passage, and what do you think should be done about this? Is it important?
3. What are the best models of leadership within the life of the church today, and how can they be used to better effect?

Topics covered by this text

- *The nature of sin amongst God's people*
- *The signs of godlessness amongst people*
- *The idols of worship that can exist amongst those who worship*

Personal comments by author

Writing this piece today, I feel the force of its condemnation, and wish that Hosea spoke more directly about sins other than ones of leadership and idolatry; they are well covered in Scripture as a whole! But this is because they are important issues, and we must take them seriously. However, I firmly believe that we must all apply these texts as we see them according to our circumstances. I write it as I see it, and hope that you apply it as you see it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How does God provide His people with warning about sin today? Indeed, is there any way that God can use to warn His people about sin in their ranks, at least, in a manner that will be heard? It is an important issue, so think about this and pray about it. As you attend church meetings or services, keep these things in mind, and let the Lord guide your thoughts and prayers.*
- *Do you know any church leaders? If you do, then talk to them about what this passage means. See if they find this relevant, and listen to what they have to say about the problems of leadership in the church today.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord and heavenly Father. We are sinful people, and Your word is always reminding us of this, even though we have submitted ourselves by faith, to our Saviour Jesus. Help us gain a good perspective on how to deal with continued sin in our own lives and that of the church community, that we may deal with these things properly and graciously, for Your names sake: AMEN
