

Prayer

We know our sins and we long to be free of them; Jesus Christ, have mercy. Our failures overwhelm us and we struggle for liberation; Jesus Christ, have mercy. The enemy attacks us and we do not understand how he assails us; Jesus Christ, have mercy. Now, in Your mercy, envelop us in Your love, empower us by Your Holy Spirit, and lift us up to rise above all trials and strife to stand victorious with You, and confident in the glorious hope of eternal life! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Ask the Holy Spirit to come and help you show the fruit of the Spirit in all you do today

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the security of the world** *Pray today for those lawless regions of the world where there is a great need for increased security*
- *Give thanks to God for charities working with children*
- *Pray for Northern Ireland and the current talks about policing*

Meditation

The Word of God is a mystery
That is open to all who read it:

The Word of God is a 'means of grace'
By which we may all be saved:

The Word of God is a bright light
Shining on the pathway of life:

The Word of God is a signpost
Showing only one way to heaven:

The Word of God is a river of life
Flowing out to the sea of eternity:

The Word of God is a place of safety
Where all can find true peace:

The Word of God is a stirring challenge
Which always demands a response:

The Word of God is always with us
Written in the Bible and our hearts.

Bible passage - Hosea 9:1-9

¹ Do not rejoice, O Israel;
do not revel like the other nations.
For you have committed adultery
against your own God;
you have loved a prostitute's fee
at every threshing-floor.

² Threshing-floor and winepress
will not sustain them;
the new wine will fail them.

³ They will not remain in the LORD'S land;

Ephraim will return to Egypt
and eat unclean food in Assyria.

⁴ They will not pour gifts of wine to the LORD,
and their sacrifices will not please him.
For them, it will be like mourners' bread;
all who eat them will be unclean.
Their bread will be for themselves;
it will not come to the house of the LORD.

⁵ What will you do on the festival day,

on the day of feasting to the LORD?
6 For look, they escape from violence,
but Egypt will gather them,
and Memphis will bury them!
Weeds will inherit their treasures of silver,
and thorns will overrun their homes!
7 Let Israel know this:
Days of punishment have come,
Days of retribution have come.
The prophet is considered a fool,
The man of the spirit is considered mad;

Because of the greatness of your sins,
Because of the greatness of your hatred.
8 The watchman of Ephraim is with my God
And the prophet is a trap that is set
Because of all his acrimonious ways
in the house of the Lord.
9 They have gone deeply into corruption,
as in the days of Gibeah.
God will remember their wickedness
He punish their sins.

Bible Study

Review

As we have studied Hosea, we have followed his anguish at the state of his own country, trapped as it was in godlessness like an adulterer trapped in corruption and rebellion against marriage. Here in this passage, probably more than in any of his other prophecies, it is possible to detect the feel of a real event at which Hosea spoke out in anger against what he saw happening in his beloved land. We will set the scene and then imagine what could have happened as Hosea spoke.

In the first half of this passage (9:1-5), Hosea mentions threshing floors, wine-presses, sacrifices, festivals, gifts of wine and feasting. This all suggests the setting of a major agricultural festival in the life of Israel, probably the feast of 'Ingathering' when the final harvests of the year were gathered, and 'first-fruits' were offered (see Ex. 23:16f. and Lev. 23:10f.). However, from all that Hosea has told us about Israel, the agricultural festivals of his day had been infiltrated by the worship of Ba'al, and it was common for them to become something of an orgy. In verse 7 there is another clue to the setting of this event; in the Hebrew of the word 'retribution' there is a strong hint of the name of a king of Israel named 'Shallum', who reigned for just one month during one of the bloodiest years of Israel's history. Did this festival take place later in the year, after Shallum's military coup and his murder one month later (in 748BC)?

In the first few chapters of Hosea, we recall that the Lord had told Hosea that the covenant relationship between God and Israel was like a marriage; and just as Hosea had to deal with his wife's infidelity, so God had to deal with the infidelity of Israel. What better place to confront the people with God's word than at a major religious festival, where Hosea could confront the people at the threshing floors extracting the grain from the harvest and beginning their celebrations of Ingathering, and the 'first-fruits'!

With a prophet's anger and wrath, Hosea boldly castigated the people's worship of Ba'al and the fees paid to prostitutes (9:1), all taking place before his eyes. What had this to do with the worship of God? Their religious adultery meant that God's blessing was withdrawn and the land would no longer sustain the people; the wine would fail (9:2), and the bread become insufficient for sacrificial purposes (9:4), making the people unclean! Moreover, the long held tradition of presenting bread before the Lord (Ex 29:2f.) would cease (9:4). But Hosea had not just come to shout at the people in the midst of their festival, he had come to deliver a specific message. He told the people that Israel had escaped the military violence of the past year (9:6), but they should beware, because '*days of punishment*' were yet to come (9:7f.).

After reprimanding the people for false worship, Hosea warned that Israel would lose her inheritance; she would return to Egypt (9:6), and everything the people held dear within the 'Promised Land' would be overtaken by '*weeds ... and thorns*' (9:6). This was a clear prophecy of exile! Then, in verse 7, Hosea gave an emphatic message declaring that God's punishment was coming. Twice, he derided Israel for thinking God's prophet a fool; and twice, he told the people that they would be punished for their sins. Lastly, as if to emphasise this, verses 8 and 9 describe the prophet as setting a trap for Israel because of her deep-rooted sins and wickedness (9:8), similar to the lawless days of the Judges when the citizens of Gibeah had sexually abused and slaughtered a Levite's concubine at Gibeah (9:9 – see Judges 20f.).

It may be easy for us to imagine all this and side with Hosea in this dangerous situation. We perceive the truth of his prophecy, we admire his courage in speaking out, and we hope we can do the same. However, we must be careful lest his prophecies are heard by us rather than observed. If our own religious festivities become dominated by anything other than the Lord God, be this self, materialism, superstition or worldly tradition for example, then we prostitute ourselves no less than the people of Israel. Let us be under no

illusions, this can happen when we take our eyes away from the Lord. One of Hosea's most pertinent warnings here is that when God's people have gone astray, they do not recognise prophecy (9:7); we should certainly not ignore this word.

Discipleship

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways does this text challenge us about the practice of our faith today?
2. What are the highlights of Hosea's warnings against Israel in this text, and what does he envisage will happen to Israel?
3. What place does prophecy have within the life of your church; and remember, God speaks through His prophets in more ways than we often recognise.

Topics covered by this text

- *The role of the prophet*
- *The religious adultery of Israel and its consequences*
- *The nature of sin within the people of God*

Personal comments by author

As we read through Hosea, we gain different glimpses of what is basically the same message. As we dig deeper into the text, these things become clearer. It should not surprise us that the message is repeated in different ways, because we all repeat things for emphasis. We tend not to like it when other people do this and we think we have heard enough, but few people do not do it in one way or another! Repetition is part of the language of humanity, and just as in human relationships, we need to hear the subtleties of language and read the heart of what is going on behind the text.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Have you known what it is like to receive a warning from the Lord? If not, then it would perhaps be wise to ask whether you have really heard all that the Lord has to say, for none of us is without faults. There are always consequences to our actions and there are always consequences to sins, and the Lord will warn us if we are listening. Take time to listen.*
- *Pray for those prophets of God who find it hard to sustain their work because of opposition, and pray for the church, that it will hear God's call.*

Final Prayer

Dear Jesus, speak to us in Your love about all that holds us back in our fellowship with You, and reveal to us everything that stunts our spiritual growth within this world. Help us to keep close enough to You to perceive what You would say to us, and help us to be bold enough to act on what You have said. Thank You, Lord Jesus, AMEN
