

Prayer

Almighty God and Saviour, Jesus Christ; the thought of Your presence fills us with joy because You love us, with fear because You are awesome, with wonder because of Your great power, with excitement because of Your surprises, and with comfort because of the love You have already shown us. May we never take your presence for granted, and may each moment show us something more of Your glory! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Give thanks to God for the different leisure activities you do, and ask Him to bless your spirit through them

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the security of the world** *Pray for the leaders of the armed forces in your country; pray for their integrity and wisdom*
- *Continue to pray for Haiti in the aftermath of its tragedy*
- *Give thanks to God for charities working with children*

Meditation

Lord God, may we be inspired by Him to whom we owe all,

Let us be compassionate because of Jesus' love for us,
 Let us be brave because we trust in the Lord's protection,
 Let us be careful because God's Word tells us to be wise,
 Let us be peaceful because Jesus taught the way of peace,
 Let us be victorious over evil because Jesus has won the battle,
 Let us be forthright because we believe the Gospel of Truth,
 Let us be caring because we know the depth of His love,
 Let us be honest because Jesus respects all people.

Lord God, give us courage to act according to what we believe,
 Through our Saviour and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible passage – Hosea 9:10-17

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| <p>¹⁰ I found Israel,
 like grapes in the desert;
 I saw your fathers,
 like the first fruit on the fig-tree.
 But they came to Baal Peor
 and consecrated themselves to shame,
 they became as vile
 as the thing they loved.</p> <p>¹¹ Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird
 - no birth, no pregnancy, no conception.</p> <p>¹² If they raise children,
 I will make them bereft among nations.
 Woe to them when I leave from them!</p> <p>¹³ I once looked at Ephraim
 as like a palm planted in a meadow.
 But she has given her children to death.</p> | <p>¹⁴ Give them something, O LORD?
 what will you give them?
 Give them wombs that miscarry
 and breasts that are dry.</p> <p>¹⁵ All their wickedness began in Gilgal;
 I came to hate them there.
 Because of their evil deeds,
 I will drive them out of my house.
 I will no longer love them;
 all their leaders are rebels!</p> <p>¹⁶ Ephraim is struck down,
 their root has withered,
 They will never bear fruit.
 For even if they give birth,
 I will destroy their cherished offspring.</p> <p>¹⁷ My God will reject them
 because they did not listen to Him;</p> |
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They will be wanderers among the nations.

Bible Study

Review

This passage is not easy to read, and despite the passage of time and the fact that we are reading about God's people Israel, the message can hardly be mistaken. Hosea stands before a group of celebrating Israelites and pronounces God's word of rejection in compelling terms. The message uses graphic imagery to say one thing alone; unrepentant sin will eventually lead to a complete breakdown in the relationship between God and His people. Those God once knew and loved (9:10) will become '*wanderers among the nations*' (9:17), and their inheritance of a relationship with the living God has no future.

Yesterday, we used clues from the text to understand the circumstances in which Hosea spoke, and it seems he sought out the time and place to deliver his forceful message. The people of Israel had gathered for their annual harvest thanksgiving after a turbulent year. In their festival, they performed the ancient ritual worship of their founder God, 'the Lord', and they also revelled in the sexual 'worship' of the fertility god Ba'al believing this would give them good crops next year. But Hosea was overcome by the parallels between Israel's unfaithfulness and the unfaithfulness of his own wife Gomer, and spoke against Israel with stunning power. He was so ashamed that he felt unable to use the historic name of God's people, 'Israel', so he used the more common name, 'Ephraim'.

If we read the passage again with this in mind, then each picture of this prophecy forces the home message, and it cannot have been received well. In days when people regarded their gods, their life and their culture as 'all of a piece', Hosea's prophecy of the damnation of Ba'al and the rejection of 'the Lord' would have struck at the heart of people's belief. Were the people not celebrating stability after the turmoil of the past year? What did this madman (9:7) mean by, '*Ephraim is struck down, their root is withered ...*' (9:16)? Perhaps there were people present who understood Hosea and protected him, but others may have sought his life; prophets were killed in ancient times for saying less.

This outburst of prophecy begins with simple and beautiful poetry describing God's first love of Israel; '*like grapes in the desert ... like first fruit on the fig tree*' (9:10). Israel's 'adultery' with other gods is then illustrated by the incident at 'Baal-peor' (Numbers 25:1f.), where the people of Israel had sex with Moabites. This blighted God's relationship with Israel, because it explicitly linked sex with the worship of other gods. Later on, Hosea also speaks of the terrible sin at Gilgal, where Joshua compromised God's command to remove all other people (and their gods) from the Promised Land (9:15 see Joshua 10); a concession that had fatal consequences.

We do not remember the details of all this today, but Scripture gives evidence of the sacrifice of first born children amongst those who worshipped the gods of Moab and also the Baal's (e.g. 1 Kings 16:34), and this seems to have influenced Hosea. His stunningly awful prophecy of verse 11 and 12 describes the loss of children who will bear Israel's inheritance (probably meaning the firstborn). This inheritance was her covenant relationship with God, something that Hosea saw flying away from Israel like a bird (7:11)! Looking back, Hosea bewailed '*no birth, no pregnancy, no conception!*' Indeed, if children were conceived Israel could not carry or raise them (9:14), and children remaining were handed over to other gods, as if to slaughter (9:13). What a damning indictment of what Israel was doing in her worship!

God gave Hosea this message, and it did its job because it was clear. When Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721BC, supporters of Hosea who escaped that onslaught took his prophecies south, perhaps to Jerusalem, where they were used together with others (such as Amos and Isaiah) to warn people not to turn away from the Lord. Many turn away from their heritage of faith even now. Who will warn people of the consequences of this? Perhaps we will have to use something similar to Hosea's dramatic language if people are to take notice of this message. We cannot use the same terrible illustrations, but God knows that others will suffice for our age. Listen for the prophets.

Discipleship

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In your group, list the illustrations used by Hosea, and note how they overlap. What does each one mean?
2. What illustrations might warn people of the dangers of abandoning faith today?
3. Discuss in your group whether Hosea is delivering the same message as before, or whether he is saying something new in this passage?

Topics covered by this text

- *The consequences of walking away from the Lord*
- *The judgement of God*
- *The consequences of past actions played out in the present*

Personal comments by author

Chapter nine of Hosea's prophecy, more than any other, appears to suggest a real event at which Hosea addressed people with his message. No one can do this and not be affected by what happens. We do not know how Hosea was affected, though we do know how other prophets responded to what happened when they prophesied (e.g. Jonah 3,4). From the early chapters of Hosea, we sense that Hosea was a humble yet just man, and I find it amazing that God used him to say such penetrating and downright awful words such as this. Perhaps Hosea was prepared for this by his own experiences of Gomer's pregnancies by prostitution during the worship of Baal.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Have you been tempted to abandon your faith? It is far better to confess weakness and deal with it than try and suggest it is not there and let the weakness fester.*
- *Discuss with your friends in house group or with others at church, the nature of your inheritance of faith. What do you have as a church that must be handed down to the next generation, and how do you do this in practice? This may feel like recycling standard church issues, but discussing these things in the light of a prophecy such as this will help us see things in a new light.*

Final Prayer

Lord God, Almighty Father and creator of all things. You long to use us to pass on the faith to those who came after us. Instil within us a desire to pass on our faith, and may we never stop seeking every opportunity to witness to our faith, within the home, within the church, and in the world. AMEN
