

Prayer

Glorious Lord, You who have revealed Yourself to countless people throughout the world, show Yourself to me today. Give me eyes to see where You are, ears to listen to Your word, a mouth to speak to You, and a heart to accept the challenge of Your abiding presence and will. Change and transform my life daily through the power of Your divine love; I praise You, glorious Lord: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Look around you at your surroundings, and let them be a guide to your prayer of praise to God

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who preach** *Pray for the people who preach regularly at your church, and for their personal spiritual protection*
- *Give thanks for your friends and the help they give you*
- *Pray for Sierra Leone, where people still suffer after years of war*

Meditation

Teach us, Lord God, what we need to know,
So that we may be useful in Your Kingdom.

Teach us, Lord God, what we do not want to know,
So that we may learn Your spiritual disciplines.

Teach us, Lord God, what we ought to know,
So that we are strong to face the enemy.

Teach us, Lord God, to learn again what once we learned,
So that we are not presumptuous about our faith.

Teach us, Lord God, what we fear knowing,
So that we may face the truth and stand tall.

Teach us, Lord God, what we can never fully know,
So that we embrace the mysteries of grace.

Teach us, Lord God, to maintain what we know,
So that we never let go of Your love.

Bible passage – Hosea 2:1-8

¹ 'Say of your brothers, "Ammi" (My people), and of your sisters, "Ruhamah" (Mercy). ² Contend your mother, contend her (for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband) so that she will remove adultery from her face and unfaithfulness from between her breasts. ³ Otherwise I will strip her naked and expose her as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. ⁴ I will not show mercy to her children, because they are the children of unfaithfulness. ⁵ Their mother has played the prostitute and she who conceived them has acted disgracefully. She said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink."

⁶ Therefore I will hedge up her path with thorns; I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her way. ⁷ She will chase after her lovers but not overtake them; she will seek them but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go back to my husband as at first, for it was better for me then than now." ⁸ She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold (which they used for Baal).

Bible Study

Review

In this passage, we hear the voice of Hosea speaking out in prophecy because of the unfaithfulness of his wife. Hosea openly declares that his wife is a prostitute, and for most of the passage expands on what this means. Consequently, it is difficult for us to understand what the Lord might be saying through this prophecy, but we must remember that Hosea's wife, Gomer, is like Israel. There is a connection between her actions and Israel's sins; but we must stay with the illustration for a little while before Hosea begins to prophesy more extensively.

When we read Hosea 1, we learned that although the first child born to Gomer was indeed the son of Hosea ('Jezreel' – 'God sows'), the second ('Lo-Ammi' – 'Not my People') and third child (Lo-Ruhamah' – 'No mercy') may well not have been his. Rather, they may well have been conceived as the result of Gomer's prostitution. It is only here in this passage that we see the full evidence of this, for Hosea pleads with his second and third child, but not the first, to '*contend*' with their mother to put away adultery. It is a heartbreaking plea (2:2). Perhaps these two children, who do not know who their father is, can shame their mother into admitting her sinfulness?

There is one small point that may be hard to spot, and it comes in verse 1, before Hosea's plea to his children. You may have noticed Hosea said to these two 'say of your brothers, 'My people' and to your sisters 'Mercy' (2:1). Scholars have debated this difficult prophecy for years. Who is Hosea speaking about? We have not heard of his children having more than one brother, Jezreel (1:4f.). Some versions of the Bible even alter the words 'brothers' and 'sisters' in Hosea 2:1 to change their meaning and make it sound as if this refers to the first brother alone!

However, there is another explanation of Hosea 2:1. It is possible that as a prostitute, Gomer already had illegitimate children before she was married to Hosea, and these are the children referred to in Hosea 2:1? If this is so, then Hosea's prophecy calls on the two rejected 'children of Israel', to announce that the illegitimate children will one day be 'My people', and receive God's 'Mercy'! Is this one of the first prophecies to speak of God's ultimate intent to save Gentiles, the 'illegitimate children' who are not part of Israel? This is by no means certain, but it is worth considering seriously.

To continue with our passage, you will notice that after his plea to the children, Hosea declares that if Gomer will not listen, then he will expose his wife. As a good husband, he will not stand by and see his godly heritage destroyed by unfaithfulness. When he speaks about Gomer receiving 'bread and water' and other life essentials from her lovers, he is not simply talking about the results of getting paid. He denounces the fact that Gomer thinks she can receive all she needs from the worship of Ba'al, who, as a god of fertility, will supply her with food and produce. Hosea is shocked that even after marriage, Gomer lusts after prostitution; and in the same way, we should be shocked that Israel, who is 'married' by covenant to God, continues to worship the Ba'als.

So, Hosea prophesies that God will stop Gomer from finding her lovers (2:6-8). He paints a picture that takes us away from his own marriage with Gomer and invites us to see what God will do in His marriage with Israel. He will stop her and blind her so that she cannot find her way (1:6), believing she will find her way back to Him (1:7), even though she did not fully understand that God was the one who provided for her, not the 'Ba'als' (1:8). As we read, it is quite difficult to see the difference between Hosea's relationship with Gomer, and God's relationship with Israel, but this is the point of the prophecy.

As we read on in the rest of Hosea 2, we will hear more prophecies about what God will do to Israel (and what Hosea will do to Gomer), but the message is becoming clear. Israel may think she can do what she wants, but God is in control, and He will act to secure His name, and His plan for the salvation of the world.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. To what extent is the church of God like the Israel of the Old Testament? How do God's people go astray from Him today?
2. What do you make of verse 1? Read this verse and discuss this in your group.

3. How does God go about stopping His people from doing what is wrong today? Does he speak to people or do things in the world to warn us?

Topics covered by this text

- *The judgement of God and His justice*
- *God's pursuit of His sinful people*

Personal comments by author

I find this passage quite emotional, because in the first few verses, it seems as if we are looking in to a tragic family scene. Hosea has to talk with his second and third child about the unfaithfulness of their mother! It must have been an incredibly difficult moment. Yet although Hosea loves his wayward wife, he will act justly and not lie to the children at a time when they must know the truth. Behind this is a certain amount of supposition on my part, but I feel that the prophecy will have originated in some such real situation. Words of God such as this do not just arise, they are given in the midst of real situations and for a purpose

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *It is hard to see how we might find discipleship issues within such a text, but at the least, we must ask ourselves whether we are in danger of being like Gomer and worshipping other gods; for example, the gods of lifestyle and convenience, or the gods of personal choice and fashion ...*
- *Pray and ask the Lord God to reveal to His people the errors of their ways, and any sins that they commit, and pray that God's people will have the courage to accept God's Word, confess their sins and return to Him.*

Final Prayer

Your will, Lord God, contains the secrets of the Universe; its origins, its workings and its future. Show me how I am placed within your plan for the world and give me inner peace. May I show confidence in You as my Maker and my Redeemer, to the praise and glory of Your Name. AMEN
