

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus for the gift of this day. Lead me through its joys and trials, and through everything that happens help me understand something of Your will for me. May I continue to praise You through the whole of the day, and grow stronger in faith each hour. All glory be to You Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

In each circumstance in which you find yourself, give praise to God for His love and care

On-going prayers

- **Pray for major industrial nations** Pray for India and also Pakistan, which dominate the region politically and economically. Pray for peace
- Pray for world leaders soon gathering at Copenhagen
- Pray against the violence in your community and your country

Meditation

I am called by Christ, my Lord and God:

If I must change, may I do so boldly and with faith:

If I have sinned, may I repent and do what is right:

If I need to do something, may I do it with wisdom:

If I must speak, may I share my faith with all I know;

If I have been silent, may I open my heart to others:

If I need to listen, may I give others my full attention:

If I must be strong, may I rely upon the Spirit's strength;

If I have to show courage, may I be firm in love and faith;

If I need to wait, may I show patience by the grace of God.

I am blessed by Christ, my Lord and God.

Bible passage – Hosea 4:7-13a

⁷ The more the priests increased,
the more they wandered away from me;
they changed their glory into shame.

⁸ They feed on the sin of my people;
they are happy with their iniquity.

⁹ And it will be like people, like priest;
I will punish them for their ways,
and repay them for their deeds.

¹⁰ They will eat, but not have enough;
they will prostitute themselves, but not
benefit;
because they have deserted the Lord
to give themselves to ¹¹ fornication.

Wine and new wine
take away the understanding.

¹² My people consult a piece of wood,
and they are answered by a stick!

For a spirit of prostitution has led them
astray,
they are unfaithful and have forsaken
their God.

¹³ They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains,
and burn offerings upon the hills,
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,
because their shade is good.

Bible Study

Review

In this prophesy, Hosea launches an attack on the priests of Israel. The prophets were not content to gloss over the sins of God's people; they knew that sins had to be confronted specifically, and they did so. They were unafraid to identify how God's people had wandered from their path, and their words shone light into the dark recesses of Israel's national life. Her sins had to be measured against God's righteousness. The Lord had shown Hosea that Israel's sins were like adultery within a marriage; each transgression was like adultery to the Lord, and the full extent of the people's sin had to be brought out into the open.

As we read this passage we must therefore do our best to understand exactly what Hosea was describing and why they were sins; some are obvious but some are not. This can be difficult because of the great gaps of time and culture between then and now, but with care, we can see whether God's people today are liable either to the same or to similar sins. Although we have the benefit of knowing that Jesus is our Saviour and we may come to Him in repentance, sin is still rampant within our world and it affects people just as it has always done, including God's own people. We are not immune from sin, so the warnings of the prophets are still valuable to us today, and they can help us identify the sins of the church today.

This passage is about the sins of priests, about how they behaved and how they led God's people astray. The first point is this; the more priests the more God's people were led astray (4:7)! Here, we need reminding of what Hosea has just said, accusing the priests of not teaching the people or helping them to 'know God' (4:6). As a consequence, the people did not have a proper relationship with their God, and the problem then became worse with more priests doing the same. Eventually people were drawn further and further from the truth; but although the priests became 'happy in their iniquity' (4:8), the results of this for God's people were not good. Hosea knew that wrong religion could never satisfy, or as he said to those who had followed the priests' teaching and abandoned the Lord; 'they will eat, but not have enough' (4:10).

Next, Hosea attacked another religious practice promoted by the priests. Although it seems amazing to us, they were practising idolatry, mixed up somehow with the use of alcohol! Hosea describes drunken priests using wooden idols for divination (4:11,12)! It is rather difficult to know exactly what was happening, though it is a well documented fact that priests would offer sacrifices both to the Lord and also to the Ba'als without seeing any problem, as is suggested by verse 13. These priests probably had sex with prostitutes as part of their 'worship' of the Ba'als even whilst offering sacrifices to the Lord (4:12)! All in all, Hosea's picture of the degraded worship of gods is far removed from the true worship of God, as described in the first five books of the Bible.

We may turn away from all this, believing that nothing like this could happen today; but unfortunately, it does. Bad teaching can and does compromise the church, and when it becomes a trend in theological thinking, the same happens as described here by Hosea, and people lose faith. I recently saw the beginning of a nationwide TV programme about Christianity, and the scholar began by describing the Christian faith as 'a personality cult of Jesus'. Those I was with just switched off the television, bewildered. Here, bad teaching has compounded within some quarters of the church and resulted in the great sin of disbelief; scholars who teach Christianity in our universities frequently do not believe in God, let alone have faith in Jesus or believe that the Bible conveys 'truth' about God. It is not difficult to see how Hosea's words apply here; have we not prostituted the Christian faith to some of the gods of academia?

All this leaves us with more questions than answers, but I hope you see how we can find relevant points within Hosea's ancient prophecies. Sometimes, we can draw lessons from the obvious circumstances described by the prophets, but on other occasions, we will find that they speak to us today in unexpected ways. Just like the ancient people of Israel, we need to keep a pure relationship with our God, or suffer the consequences; but thank God we have Jesus. We can take all these problems to Him and He can lead us through them. Indeed, good Christian theology (not the bad) can still illuminate our faith today, but it needs our confession and Christ's redemption.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. From your point of view, what are the sins pointed out by Hosea in this passage that afflict God's people today?

2. Discuss in your group whether there is a limit to how many leaders, ministers or pastors we need within the Christian church. How may we know we have the right number?
3. In what ways do Christian people worship other gods today, and what and who are they?

Topics covered by this text

- *The importance of purity amongst Christian leaders*
- *The consequences of bad teaching within the church*

Personal comments by author

I find this a rather painful passage of scripture. I was taught theology at a good university department of theology, which a few years after I left and the retirement of the scholar who led it, became downgraded to a 'department of religious studies'. It was then able to cater for the need to teach people about a wide range of faiths and provide the skills required for those who wished to teach a multicultural 'faith' agenda in schools. And this was over twenty years ago! The result is that this university has compounded the teaching of 'bad' theology.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *When the word 'theology' is mentioned, what do you think? The word means 'words about God', so, remind yourself that when you are thinking about your Lord, you are, in fact, doing 'theology'! Do your best to be one of those who delights in the true historic teachings of the Christian church.*
- *Pray that God will come in judgement on the world of Theology and separate out the good from the bad. No one need fear such a prayer or its consequences, because it is a prayer that seeks the truth.*

Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how my life might reflect truth and integrity in the eyes of others; not so that I can claim anything for myself, but so that I might simply do Your will, and accomplish what is right. I ask this prayer in Jesus' name; AMEN
