

## Prayer

Almighty and Everlasting God, we praise You for the mystery of Your ways. Within Your plan for the salvation of the world we are but a tiny breath within a vast expanse of air; but You can and will use us either visibly and invisibly, either with delicacy or with thunderous power. We are happy to make our contribution to Your rule throughout the earth, and we know we have a place within Your immense, eternal plans. AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Sing one of your favourite worship songs; sing it to the Lord, as if He alone is listening to your voice*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for Your home church** *Pray for those on the edge of your fellowship, and ask the Lord to help you understand why they will not commit*
- *Give thanks to God for the many miracles He performs all the time*
- *Pray for the millions of people who do not yet have clean water*

## Meditation

All praise to You, Lord Jesus:

You alone have challenged me to live for You;

You alone have walked with me and know my heart;

You alone have known me since the beginning of time;

You alone have cared about all that has happened to me;

You alone have touched my heart and given me love eternal;

You alone have heard the spiritual tones within my voice;

You alone have inspired me to be a truly better person;

You alone have given me the path to perfect peace;

You alone have answers to my deepest needs

All praise to You, Lord Jesus: AMEN

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## Bible passage - Hosea 7:11-16

<sup>11</sup> Ephraim is like a dove,  
fickle and with no sense,  
calling to Egypt, then going to Assyria.

<sup>12</sup> Wherever they go,  
I will throw my net over them;  
I will bring them down  
like the birds of the heavens;  
I will chastise them  
in public humiliation.

<sup>13</sup> Woe to them,  
for they have strayed from me!  
Destruction to them,  
for they have rebelled against me!  
I would redeem them,

but they speak lies against me.

<sup>14</sup> They do not cry to me from the heart,  
but they wail upon their beds;  
they gather together for grain and wine,  
and yet they rebel against me!

<sup>15</sup> Though I trained and strengthened them,  
yet they plot evil against me.

<sup>16</sup> They do not turn back up to me,  
they are like a faulty weapon.  
their officials will fall by the sword  
because of their impudent words.  
They will be ridiculed for this  
in the land of Egypt.

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# Bible Study

## Review

Hosea was distraught at the state of Israel. She was acting with immense folly and godlessness, and Hosea prophesied very clearly what God thought about His people. God knew what was happening in Israel and would not allow Israel to escape His justice (7:12). The people were still performing some acts of worship (see '*gather together for grain and wine*' – 7:14), yet they had no 'heart' relationship with their God. Moreover, even though these were the same people with whom God had previously enjoyed a good relationship and had redeemed from Egypt, they lived in rebellion against Him (7:13,15). Surely, the nations would laugh at a people who treated their God like this (7:16)!

Now it may seem too easy to say this about our passage, but what exactly was happening in Israel when Hosea was prophesying? What did these words mean to the people who first heard them? The answer to these questions is plain, and can be found within Scripture, but getting to the bottom of it takes a little care.

The first verse of Hosea's prophecy dates his work around 755 to 720 BC, but strangely, this dating is given by reference to Kings of Judah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). Only one Israelite King is mentioned, being Jeroboam II (790-749BC). It is odd that Hosea, who spoke almost wholly to the northern people of Israel, does not mention the Kings of Israel who came after Jeroboam, because for most of his life as a prophet, it was they who reigned (755-720BC)! It is likely that these kings were so abhorrent to Hosea he could hardly bring himself to name them, for if we turn to 2 King 15, we will discover what was happening at the time, and it is a very sorry tale.

In 749BC Jeroboam died and his son succeeded him, but was murdered six months later in a public coup by a man named Shallum (2 Kings 15:8-11). Shallum himself committed some dreadful atrocities (see 2 Kings 15:13-16) and was murdered by the leader of a revolt, named Menahem. Menahem lasted for ten years, largely by paying off the Assyrian King with a fee of 1,000 talents of silver, extorted by a toll of 50 shekels of silver on all the senior men of Israel (2 Kings 15:17-22). After his death, his son Pekahiah lasted only two years before he was slaughtered by an army captain named Pekah. A short time later, Pekah was murdered in another army revolt, and Hoshea, the leader of the army, was named King (2 Kings 15:29-31). It was not long before the King of Assyria took a disliking to the unstable nation on his southern border and invaded Israel, eventually destroying the nation completely (721BC – see, in particular, 2 Kings 17).

I have written all this down as succinctly as possible to help us understand that Hosea words here were not empty gestures! Imagine yourself living at such times. The nation was in turmoil, led by a succession of military dictators with no interest in the nation except their own survival. No wonder Hosea called Israel '*fickle and with no sense*' (7:11); his picture of the intrigues of court life (see yesterday's study) sound realistic.

Yet God would not let His people go. Hosea agonised over what God would do, knowing that He would not tolerate injustice and rebellion against Him would surely have consequences. Hosea lived to see at least two invasions of his beloved Israel by the tyrant Assyria, firstly under Tiglath-pileser (see 2 Kings 15:29) and then several years later under Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:5f.). What incredible public humiliation for Israel (7:12)! Hosea saw this as the justice of God wrought on His rebellious people (7:13,14).

Yet Hosea spoke words that only he could say as God's prophet for those days, and in the midst of his condemnation, we hear echoes of the heart of a father and a husband. Hosea appeals on God's behalf for a relationship of the heart (7:14), he remembers the 'good times' when the Lord trained His people for war (7:15). Nevertheless his heart is full of pain because the object of His love has become estranged, '*they wail upon their beds*' (7:14) and has become like a useless weapon, unable to defend herself against her enemies (7:16). Perhaps worst of all, Israel and her God would become a laughing stock (7:16); were these the people to be a 'light to the nations' (Is 42:6, 49:6).

We may have read this all too quickly when we began, but the more we delve into the meaning of the passage, the more it reveals a critical question. In the face of utter rejection by His own people, what will God do? There is no practical answer to be found in this text, but we are left with the clear impression that Hosea knew God would be nothing less than just, and He would never stop loving. A light was going out in Israel, and the new light was yet to dawn.

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# Discipleship

## **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. Does this passage of Scripture remind us of things that are happening in the life of the world now, and if so, what?
2. How does the Lord God show His justice in the world today, and how may we know that it is Him at work?
3. How does the Lord God show His love in the world today, and how may we know that we may trust Him?

## **Topics covered by this text**

- *The fickle nature of nations and politics*
- *The sadness of God at those who go their own way*

## **Personal comments by author**

*There are a number of places within the Old Testament that have always fascinated me, and the chapters of 2 Kings that speak of the end of Israel as a nation are some of the most fascinating. It is as if the author of these documents is speaking to us to tell us why he is writing the books. Clearly, he is writing to record history, but he does so with a purpose, and wants us to learn from the history of God's people in the past. The question as to whether we have learned those lessons is, I think, still open.*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Ask yourself this question; is rebellion a matter of age, or is it evident within every 'age'? It seems that people often think of 'rebellious teenagers', yet people at every age have ways of rebelling and some are better at it than others! Within your church, how do people rebel against leadership, against each other, and against God? Why is this so and what can be done about it?*
- *Pray for those who feel the prophetic voice of God within them and yet remain uncertain how to let it out. In the age of the Holy Spirit, pray that God will give His people a true voice of prophecy*

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## **Final Prayer**

You love, Lord God, has chased us throughout the ages, and we have not always responded. Forgive us Lord God, for those times when we have been insensitive to Your Word and unresponsive to Your will, and lead us on to overcome these problems in the power of Your Spirit. Lead us higher, Lord God, higher still!  
AMEN

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