

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ; as the day unfolds, so Your presence becomes ever clearer to each of us who yearns for Your company Your friendship, Your compassion, Your healing, Your encouragement and Your salvation. For in the details of everyday events, we can see glimpses of Your hand at work moving, changing, challenging, touching, and taking hold of us in the midst of what we do. We praise You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Use the internet, an encyclopaedia or atlas to find out more about countries you know little about, and pray for them

On-going prayers

- ***Pray for your neighbours*** *Pray that God will bless you and your neighbours with a true spirit of friendship, help and support*
- *Give thanks to God for aid and relief workers throughout the world*
- *Pray for the continuing work to help people suffering in Haiti*

Meditation

Praise is the outpouring of love from a heart;
We reserve our highest for Jesus!

Honour is a flow of respect we give a greater power;
We give our tribute to Jesus!

Glory is the dawning of spiritual magnificence;
We see it supremely in Jesus!

Power is untouchable and unstoppable energy;
We are blown by the Spirit, because of Jesus!

Awe is breathtaking, heart stopping wonder;
We are blown away by Jesus!

Worship of God is the highest privilege of humanity;
We have this great freedom in Christ!

Bible passage – Hosea 8:7-14

⁷ They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.
The standing grain has no head,
so it will not yield its fruit.

And without it making flour,
perhaps strangers will swallow it!

⁸ Israel is swallowed up;
now she is among the nations
like an object with no purpose.

⁹ For they have gone up to Assyria,
as a wild donkey wandering by itself.
Ephraim has hired lovers!

¹⁰ Now look, they hired nations,
when it was I who should gather them;
So the kings and princes

will soon be oppressed by taxes.

¹¹ Though Ephraim had many altars for sin,
They became altars that led him astray.

¹² If I wrote for them thousands of laws,
they would have regarded them as alien.

¹³ They offer me sacrificial gifts
they kill and eat the meat,
but the LORD is not pleased with them.

Now he will remember their guilt
and punish their sins:
They will return to Egypt.

¹⁴ Israel has forgotten his Maker
and built palaces;

Judah has built even more
of her fortified cities.

But I will send fire upon their cities
that will consume their strongholds.

Bible Study

Review

In this startling prophecy, Hosea speaks directly to the people of his day to point out their sins and God's reaction to them, but as soon as we dig beneath the surface of his complicated illustrations, he gives us even more to think about. Today, I must warn that the translation I have provided is very different than most Bible versions. These few verses are some of the most obscure in Hosea, and I have come to very different conclusions about the meaning of the text than others. There are some stunning phrases and verses, such as '*sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*' (8:7), but it can be hard to follow exactly what Hosea is saying. However, I hope that as you read the study you will discover that it has plenty to say.

Before going further, it is worth looking more carefully at how we interpret these Scriptures. Hosea's prophecies (and others) describe how God deals with Israel, and Israel is both the Lord's covenant people and a nation involved in day to day politics; this is why many prophecies speak about both politics and religion. For example, today's passage begins by describing a bad harvest (8:7,8), moves on to paying taxes (8:10) and other political matters (8:9,10), and then turns to religious issues such as the 'Law' and sacrifices (8:11-13). To interpret such prophecies, we must recall that God's people are the church, not a nation, so we must not mix up politics and religion in the same way. We must discover the spiritual connections between Old Testament Israel and the church today, and then see if it has any application to the affairs of nations, and if we maintain this focus, we will not be led astray unnecessarily.

Hosea's astonishing 'sound bite' '*sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*' (8:7) is now well known, but few know where it comes from! This saying suggests the moral 'be careful what you do (sow) if you do not know the consequences (*whirlwind*), so Hosea was pointing out to Israel that in general, she had acted foolishly and did not know what might happen next. Under threat of invasion, Israel had attempted to hire the armies of other nations (8:9,10), but this was like '*sowing the wind*'; with more than a touch of satire, Hosea also described it as the wanderings of a wild donkey and the hiring of lovers (8:9)!

Now, to hire armies costs a great deal of money and in ancient times, this was often paid in supplies of the most precious of all commodities, which was food. Verse 7 describes the depressing circumstance of a bad harvest, which produced grain that was unusable for food; nevertheless, Israel tried to get away with using bad grain to pay their dues ('*perhaps strangers will swallow it!*'). Such idiocy would soon be found out, of course, and if they were not paid properly, the hired nations would soon turn against Israel. Hosea was aghast; God alone could gather Israel together effectively in time of need (the technical meaning of the term 'gather' as found in verse 10); no such foreign nations were required. Moreover, the nation would soon be overcome with the burden of a tax they probably could not pay (8:10)!

Then (8:11-13), Hosea spoke about the idiocy of Israel's religion, and described the broken relationship between God and His people. Israel was proud of her many altars, used for multiple sacrifices and 'sin' offerings, and yet because few had any true knowledge of God (4:4-6), the altars and the rituals performed on them had become meaningless (see 4:12,13). In comparison to Israel's great past, the people were now far from God, and Hosea illustrated this in a remarkable way. In the past, when Moses had been faced with

a recalcitrant Israel in the desert, God gave the 'Ten Commandment' (Ex 20,24, 31:18), to keep the nation of Israel in order. Mockingly, Hosea prophesied, 'if I wrote for them thousands of laws they would regard them as alien!' What a tragedy! The people had forgotten their God (8:12,14) and the time had come when they would have to be sent back from whence they came, to Egypt (8:13)!

Nations will always do deals with nations, and taxes will always burden people. However, the church needs no other allegiance than to its Lord. The church has one duty towards the world today, and it is not to fight it, negotiate with it, appease it, do deals with it or succumb to its subtle influences; it is to win it. Moreover, it is won through the love of our Saviour. The message of the second half of this passage is not unrelated, which is that we cannot be seen to be playing with religion. How the world laughs when we become entangled in our practices and our laws, and cannot give an account of our faith or live with decent moral standards. This passage suggests much that we can think about today.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What connections do you make between this passage of Scripture and the life of the church today?
2. In what ways does the church compromise with the world today, and is this sometimes necessary if we are to maintain a witness?
3. In your group, read through other versions of this passage in your Bibles. Are you able to find more within the official translation, or do they make anything clearer?

Topics covered by this text

- *The relationship of church and state*
- *The duties of the church towards God*
- *False religion*

Personal comments by author

This was an extremely difficult passage to translate and write, because at every stage of the translation, I found myself drawn into deeper issues to do with the meaning of the text. Frankly, I do not know how people can find any coherence in many of the Bible versions, which read like a concoction of semi-related sentences and phrases. I may be naive, but I am sure that Hosea had an agenda when speaking, and the job of the translator today is not just to translate 'word for word', this is impossible between any two languages. In Hebrew poetry where there is much uncertainty about the meaning of many words, we must continue to seek the coherence of thought and message that was undoubtedly there in the mind of Hosea, and of God.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How much of a problem for a Christian is religious compromise? The answers to this may well be different in different countries. It is certainly something to watch out for as we go about our daily lives. We will probably not spot it 'in church', but certainly in the workplace and in the world.*
- *Come before the Lord in prayer and ask Him to show you any area of compromise that you make, which is ungodly. Ask for His help to deal with this and set out an agenda to deal with these things as you are led.*

Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, You came to resolve the historic impasse between God and His people Israel. May your people today always be willing to listen to Your Word and change what they do according to Your will, so that the world may see we worship a living Lord, the God who made the world! Thanks be to God: Alleluia!
