

Prayer

Bless us, Lord Jesus, as we make plans for the future. Keep close to us as we make decisions about our work, our homes, our finances and our relationships; in this way, we pray that our actions will be a true reflection of what You would do through us, and all You have created us to be. May we enjoy Your presence and Your guidance, and be excited by the possibilities of life you put before us. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Make a list of the things that are on your mind, and pray for them systematically, through the day

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who preach.** *Pray for those who will preach tomorrow; pray that their word will be heard and they will be blessed as they preach*
- *Pray for those affected by abuse scandals in the Catholic church in Ireland*
- *Thank God for the work of God's people amongst the poor*

Meditation

Find beauty in companionship,
For Jesus is our friend and respects our love:

Find beauty in simply duties,
For Christ empowers us all to do good:

Find beauty in helping the poor
For the Son of God brought hope to the world:

Find beauty in doing what is right,
For the Spirit creates the fruit of the Spirit within:

Find beauty in working with others
For the Father loves the unity of His people:

Find beauty in overcoming problems
For the Lord our God is victorious over all evil:

Find beauty in resting from all you do
For God Himself rested, and loves the Sabbath.

Bible passage – Hosea 2:16-23

¹⁶ 'In that day,' declares the LORD, "you will call me "my husband"; and you will no longer call me "my master". ¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her lips, and they will no longer be remembered by name.

¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant with you and with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures of the earth. I will abolish bow, sword and battle from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ I will make a marriage between you and me forever; my marriage to you will be made in righteousness, in justice, in love, and in compassion. ²⁰ My marriage to you will be made in faithfulness, and then you will know the LORD.

²¹ 'In that day I will answer,' declares the LORD. 'I will answer to the skies, and they will answer to the earth; ²² and the earth will answer to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will answer to Jezreel. ²³ I will sow her for myself in the land; I will show mercy to "No Mercy", and I will say to "Not my people", "You are my people"; and they will say, "You are my God."

Bible Study

Review

In the opening chapters of Hosea, we have read about the dreadful heartache of Hosea's marriage to Gomer. After all that had happened including Gomer's continued prostitution, something had to happen. Things could not continue, and it was not possible to sustain a meaningful marriage without a genuine and exclusive commitment to each other. This painful scenario perfectly illustrates the relationship between Israel and the Lord, and Hosea's prophecy slips almost imperceptibly between his own feelings about Gomer and the Lord's intentions towards Israel. This is a prophecy about what the Lord says He will do with His unfaithful wife Israel, yet as we read it, we hear the powerful emotions of a man who longs to make his marriage new, and start again.

Now in the first chapter of Hosea, we read prophecies derived from the names of Hosea's first son Jezreel (1:4,5) and the names of Gomer's two subsequent children (1:7,9-11). In each of these, the Lord promises that He will do a work in the future to deal with the unfaithfulness of His people Israel, and He will deal with Israel 'in that day' (1:5,11). We may not have thought too much about this phrase at the time because it is like a general comment about the future. Here in this passage, however, the phrase jumps from being a brief comment to being an essential part of the prophecy. Each of the three prophecies given by Hosea in this passage begin 'in that day' (2:16,18,21). Hosea is one of the earliest of the prophets, and this is the first instance of the use of this phrase in the Bible. Its use tells us that God has a plan to deal with His people Israel, and it will come about on a certain day and at a certain time. Here, there is no hint of any 'apocalyptic' vision of the end of all things, only this, that the Lord's promises to do what He says, 'in that day'.

To begin with, the Lord will remove all forms of temptation from Israel (2:16,17). The Ba'als have proved to be too great an attraction for the Israelites, and they are unable to deal with this themselves. Their state illustrates what Paul says in Romans, roughly quoting Psalm 14 (53) and Isaiah 59:7,8

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one. (Romans 3:12)

Hosea's insistence that God will have to remove the Ba'als (2:16,17) is a true and basic observation, which distinguishes his words as a prophet of God. Sin cannot be dealt with by those who have succumbed to its power; God alone must do the work.

Secondly, the Lord will remake the marriage covenant with Israel (2:18-20). He will make a new 'covenant' with Israel and all the earth (2:18), and this will dispense with violence. Hosea then makes a powerful connection with marriage, saying, '*I will make a marriage between you and me forever*'. This is the first time we read about a connection between marriage and covenant in Old Testament prophecy, and this connects powerfully with the description of the church in the New Testament. It is hard to convey the power of these Hebrew words in English, because of the different ways by which marriages were arranged in ancient times. However, this prophecy tells us that God alone will pay the 'bride price' of making this new and everlasting marriage. Remember, Hosea's remarkable phraseology was spoken centuries before the New Testament theology of grace or Paul's explanation of the price paid by Christ for all on the Cross (see 1 Cor 6:20, 7:23), and to add to this, Hosea spoke boldly about the heart of God for 'righteousness, justice, love and compassion'. This whole prophecy speaks to the very heart of the Gospel.

This is indeed a most powerful prophecy, reaching far beyond the times of the man who spoke them. The last three verses continue to tempt us to believe that there is yet more in these words. In an extraordinary turn of phrase, Hosea takes the idea of the spoken question and response lying at the heart of any marriage (today, it is 'will you?' and 'I will'), and delivers another stunning prophecy (2:21-23). The Lord will provide the answer that confirms the marriage, and it will be an answer witnessed in the '*skies ... the earth ... the grain, the wine and the oil*'. This answer will also change God's relationship with the world; 'No mercy' will turn to 'mercy', and those who are 'not my people', will become 'my people'. It hardly needs us to comment further to draw out the connections between such words and the Gospel of Christ's love.

Sometimes, we read prophecies in the Old Testament and feel rather underwhelmed; we struggle to find connections with the Gospel we know and love. This is not such a passage!

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What are the connections between this passage of Scripture and the Gospel of Christ we find in the New Testament?
2. How does the idea of marriage help us understand God's relationship with His people today, and is 2:18-20 helpful to us now?
3. What do verses 21 to 23 mean to us today, why does the prophet speak about the skies, the earth, and the grain (etc.) answering to one another? What does this mean?

Topics covered by this text

- *The power of God to remove sin*
- *God's marriage to His people – the marriage covenant*
- *The Gospel in the Old Testament*

Personal comments by author

Sometimes, even when preaching, I find myself saying things that I am not sure I fully understand. So I read these words today and wondered whether Hosea really understood what he was saying, or whether he was willing to sit lightly to his prophetic words and let the Lord 'take him away' in spiritual dreams and visions! One thing is sure, which is that these words are powerful beyond our comprehension even today, and the more we read them, the more they say; this is certainly God's Word.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *If possible, get hold of a set of words used for a service of marriage. You can find these on the internet under the resources of a major denomination such as the Church of England, or you can find out what is used in your own church. Have a good look at this and examine the connections between the marriage service and the Gospel.*
- *If you are married, talk with your spouse about how marriage reflects the relationship we may have with the Lord. If you are not, then pray about this or explore the idea further within Scripture.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus; draw me to Your perfect love, and as I seek to be like You, keep me mindful of my humanity; of where I have come from, as well as where I am going. May I learn from Your powerful and compassionate love how I can remain true to my calling throughout my life. Through Jesus Christ I pray; AMEN
