

Prayer

We praise You, Living Lord, for You have a plan for the whole of Your Creation, from its beginning to its end. You have given us the privilege of living in Your world; help us therefore not just to enjoy the great benefits of what we have received, but also to look after it, maintain it and manage it. May we find fulfilment in looking after this great gift You have given, to Your praise and glory. Thanks be to God, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Pray for your nation, and tell the Lord all your feelings about how it is run and what is not working

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Your home church** *Pray for those whose quiet witness of faith inspires others; pray that others will not forget to minister to them*
- *Pray for the millions of people who do not yet have clean water*
- *Pray that God will bless those who are organising aid to Haiti*

Meditation

Powerful Lord of all, Creator and Redeemer
How and where will the Spirit's cry be heard?
When will Your hurricane bring is cleansing
And show again that love will conquer all?

In this tawdry world of evasion and pretence
Where truth is private and appearance is all,
When will Your honest justice confront us
With the truth about the sins we won't confess.

In a world where those who govern lives
Manoeuvre round the edges of hidden power,
Shout a louder cry of 'justice' in the ears of all
And show the Gospel's teeth to topple empires.

In a world of strutting idols called celebrities
Where fickle daily fashions claim our worship,
Bring down the arrogant illusions of popularity
And raise up quality prophets of the Word.

Shock us with the truth of life, Lord Jesus Christ,
And change this world by love and justice, now.

Bible passage - Hosea 7:1-10

¹ However much I would heal Israel,
the sins of Ephraim are revealed,
and the crimes of Samaria;
for they practice deception;
thieves break in and thugs raid
in broad daylight!

² But they do not understand
that I remember all their evil.
Their deeds engulf them even now;
they are always before.

³ By their evil they make the king glad,

and the officials by their treachery.
⁴ They are all adulterers;
Like an oven heated by the baker
who ceases to stir the fire,
from kneading the dough till it rises

⁵ On the day of our king,
the officials made him ill, drunk with wine;
he held out his hand with scoffers.

⁶ For they brought their scheming
With oven heated hearts;

They baked all night in their sleep;
and in the morning it blazed
like a flaming fire!
⁷ All of them were as hot as an oven;
they devoured their rulers.
Now all their kings have fallen,
yet none of them calls on me.
⁸ Ephraim mixes himself with the nations;

Ephraim is like a cake not turned.
⁹ Strangers drain his strength,
and he knows it not;
his hair is speckled with grey,
and he does not know it!
¹⁰ Israel's pride testifies against him, yet
they do not return to the LORD their God,
nor seek him, for all this.

Bible Study

Review

To read a passage of scripture such as this can leave us somewhat shocked and uncertain as to how to deal with what we have read. Yes, this is Scripture, but it is the language of political dissent and radical unrest, and it is hard to work out how we should interpret such a prophecy. Indeed, does it have anything to say to us at all?

We all know what it is like to glance through an old newspaper and feel it is not worth reading because the issues have moved on; yesterday's comment is either proved to be wise and correct, or completely irrelevant. Certainly, to read Hosea's words is like delving into an ancient newspaper, moreover, the events that are lost in the mists of time and we have no way of knowing what they were. Yet despite this, Hosea's prophecy was preserved because later generations felt that it contained a message that history proved right. So as we read this passage today, we should try to uncover this message because it must surely have something important to say to us.

At the beginning of the reading, Hosea prophesies strongly, speaking in the place of God Himself, and saying, '*however much I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are revealed ...*' (7:1), and he stresses the fact that God sees everything and does not forget (7:1,2)! Then, at the end, Hosea cries in anguish, '*they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him, for all this*' (7:10). Between these two verses, Hosea has much to say, but the beginning and ending are revealing. They are typical of Hosea's characteristic portrayal of God as One who holds His out hands with love, longing to heal and save His people, but they continue to turn away. Just as Gomer rebelled against Hosea, God's people rebel, and He knows the anguish of their rejection. We have heard this message before in Hosea. So what is happening between verses 1 and 10 to touch Hosea's heart and make him prophesy?

In order to understand the message, imagine an oriental court in which a King sits in the centre of a room on a throne, with all the officials of the Kingdom around him together with prophets and 'wise men'. Everyone around the King is seeking to advise him and influence him, because he is the only one with real power. Implicit in the whole scene is the King's own rejection of God's ways; it is as if Hosea, like the other prophets, has been marginalised to the edge of the court, watching in dismay at the antics of those who are trying to influence the king's decision making.

I suggest you read our passage several times, and begin to understand why Hosea describes these evil officials, scurrying around the King in attempts to win his favour, as like an overheating oven, such as when a baker has forgotten to manage the fire in the oven whilst the dough is rising (7:4). Before long, the fire has become a furnace (7:6)! In verses 5 to 7, a tawdry scene develops, and Hosea uses this picture to our scorn on the government of his own country. The officials make the King drunk (7:5), whilst their own desires 'burn' within them, or as Hosea says, '*they brought their scheming with oven heated hearts ... all of them were as hot as an oven*' (7:6,7). These court officials and schemers have prevented the reason of the wise men and prophets at the edge of the court being heard, and speaking for them, Hosea says; '*they devoured their rulers, now all their Kings have fallen, yet none of them calls on me*' (7:7). Israel's problem was that her Kings had become corrupted by power and their strength was drained (7:9)!

We do not know whether Hosea was prophesying in reaction to any specific incident at court, but the prophecy reflects his general sense of gloom at the godlessness of those who should be godly; the leaders of Israel. However, we can take a number of things from this passage. On the one hand, it is a warning against the corruptions of power, but on the other hand, it is a warning about how the leaders of God's people themselves can be tempted away from godliness. This may lead us to think of any number of relevant issues in the life of nation or church today, but as we discovered at the beginning, the heart of

Hosea's message is that God is longing to bring His people back and save them. He never gives up on His people, despite the severest pressures and the most heinous of sins. His love is greater than them all.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage tell us about the life of the church today and the importance of its leadership?
2. What does this passage tell us about the life of your nation and its leaders today, and the significance of current affairs?
3. How can God continue to love and save people who persistently reject Him?

Topics covered by this text

- *The corruption of power*
- *The importance of leadership*
- *The love of God for His people*

Personal comments by author

Every time I delve into one of these passages of the prophets, I start with a certain amount of concern about what I am going to say about it. However, as I study each piece, a message arises from the text and the prophetic purpose becomes clear. So much of Amos, Hosea and Isaiah appears to be similar, just page after page of condemnation, but careful study reveals the wonderful truth that God has a message from these prophets even through these prophecies. They are not in God's Word for nothing!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *This reading makes us think about how difficult it must be, to be a leader of God's people. It is indeed true that there are many pressures on leaders, but we must be careful about what these are, given the nature of this prophecy. What can you do to help alleviate the pressures on your leadership, and help maintain their godly perspective?*
- *Pray for your own country and its leaders at this time, especially if something of Hosea's prophecies suggest the reasons why your own government is not as godly as you would expect.*

Final Prayer

Lord and Father of all, You see all things and you understand the affairs of churches and nations. Protect the godly people You have placed in positions of authority both in church and nation, and help Your people to support their leaders in prayerfulness and gratitude, all their days: AMEN
