

## Prayer

Father, from the greatness of Your majestic creation to the wonder of Your love for every person You have made, Your works are glorious and perfect in execution and intent. Forgive us for our part in the evils of this world and all that prevents others from seeing the full glory of Creation, and make us into beacons of hope and love. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Pray about an issue that troubles you, but instead of talking to God about it, listen for what he says*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the United Nations.** *Pray for the World Health Organisation, which does significant work and monitors health issues world-wide*
- *Give thanks to God for His care and love, and His guidance of your life*
- *Pray about the forthcoming Copenhagen climate summit*

## Meditation

It is an awesome day when the Spirit of God  
Moves in the heart of a man or a woman,  
To bring salvation's bright and glorious dawn  
And change all things, for one soul, forever.

For in Christ, the colours of the world are different,  
And the faces of the saved are radiant, elated;  
The Bible is alive with meaning and purpose,  
And the love of God leaps from its every page;  
Prayer feels as natural as breathing clean air,  
And the soul that breathes the Spirit says 'Yes!'  
The potential of all who yield freely is tapped,  
And the infinite prospects of life are in Christ.

The truth has been held and brought blessing!  
The heart has rejoiced in its source and its destiny.  
The offer of Christ has been irreversibly received  
Transforming all things past, present and future.

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## Bible passage – Hosea 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Be'eri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to him, 'Go, take an unfaithful wife and have children of unfaithfulness, because the land is committing great adultery by departing from the LORD.'<sup>3</sup> So he proceeded to marry Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Hosea, 'Name him Jezreel (God's sowing), because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.'<sup>5</sup> On that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel (God's sowing).'

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# Bible Study

## Review

It is exciting to begin the study of another book of the Bible, especially one with a well known story and a powerful message, such as Hosea. The beginning of this book, however, presents us with a significant number of problems! Firstly, most people know little or nothing of the kings mentioned at the beginning, and secondly, they know nothing about the names given to the children in Hosea 1, except for the sometimes cryptic explanations given by Hosea himself. Yet all of this is important to Hosea's prophecies, and the purpose of study is to bring out the significance of these details and delve further into the text.

Some, but by no means all of the Old Testament prophetic books begin with a list of kings, and where they do, this dates the prophecies accurately. This means we can interpret the historical comments within the prophecies about wars and battles, for example. Here in Hosea, the kings mentioned date his prophecies to around 740 to 750 BC, only a decade after Amos, and about the same time as Isaiah's early prophecies. Hosea prophesied in the northern Kingdom of Israel, a few years before the northern kingdom of Israel was invaded and destroyed by Assyria, in 721 BC. In the light of this, we can understand why later generations regarded Hosea's prophecies of doom as entirely justified, and indeed, as the 'Word of God'.

Most of us know about Hosea's marriage to a prostitute at the command of God (1:2, see also chapter 3), and the basic message of Hosea arises directly from the tragedy of this marriage. The relationship between Hosea and his wife is like that between God and His people; Israel has gone astray and worshipped other gods, so God condemns her, yet appeals to her to return and accept His love.

It took great courage for an Israelite to be obedient to God and marry 'an unfaithful wife' (1:2,3). To do this went against every fibre of his moral being and every spiritual sense in his body. An Israelite expected to marry a virgin daughter of Israel, so that his offspring would count as worthy to continue his ancestral heritage. Moreover, although the Hebrew text does not make this entirely clear in the first chapter, it is likely that the woman Hosea married was not a prostitute in the normal sense of the word. She may have been a 'temple prostitute'. In Hosea's day, people worshipped the 'Ba'al' gods, which could involve having sex with these prostitutes to supposedly assist in the fruitfulness of their crops! Social norms were disappearing in the tragedy of what was happening to Israel in the decades before it was invaded by Assyria, yet Hosea was obedient to the Lord, and his journey of prophecy began.

After her marriage to Hosea, Gomer became pregnant, and our passage today tells us that Hosea's first born son was indeed his own son (see 'she bore him a son' – 1:3). It is only a small point, but later in the chapter, it is not entirely clear whether the children born later were Hosea's or not! Nevertheless, Hosea had the privilege of naming his firstborn, and at the Lord's instruction, he named his son 'Jezreel', meaning 'God sows' (1:4,5). This was probably a good name in its day, being the name of a fertile plain within northern Israel. However, the Lord told Hosea that the name meant more than this. Jezreel was the valley where a past king named Jehu had slaughtered the dynasty of Ahab and his Queen, Jezebel (see 2 Kings), just 90 years previously.

Clearly, there is a long way for this prophecy to go, and much more of the story to tell. Yet within the name of Hosea's first son there is a hint of the way God intended to work. The name 'Jezreel' means 'God sows', and the connection with the valley of Jezreel implies that God was about to work again to shake up kingdoms and change the world according to His justice and His design. We will soon find out how!

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## Discipleship

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

1. Discuss why the Lord might want to ask a man to marry a prostitute in order to make a prophecy known.
2. If you have access to a Bible dictionary, look up the names of the kings mentioned here in order to fill in your knowledge of the history of the times.
3. What does the story of Hosea mean to you, and what would such a story mean today, if anything?

## **Topics covered by this text**

- *Obedience to the Lord God*
- *The connection between prophetic call and real life*

## **Personal comments by author**

*I find it amazing to read this. I find it hard to imagine that an Israelite would do what Hosea did, because by following God's commands, he compromised every possible avenue of success for his private life as an individual living in Israel. I am forced to ask myself whether I would be willing to do the same, or indeed anything that the Lord asked me, and I ask myself whether I would indeed even hear such a call. Would I dismiss it out of hand? I hope not. Hosea is possibly the most amazingly obedient man in the Old Testament!*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *What does this passage tell you about your own relationship with God? Would it withstand the shock of being told to do the opposite of what everyone else expects of you? Think about this for a few days.*
- *What kind of attitudes are there towards prostitutes within the church today? Given that Jesus forgave such a woman in his own ministry, should we be more demonstrably open towards sinners?*

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## **Final Prayer**

I praise You, Lord God, for You have saved me and provided for all my needs. Help me take hold of this truth when I feel vulnerable, unloved, challenged or rejected; and as I do this, strengthen my faith and draw me closer to the path of holiness. Open up my heart to enjoy the great life You have given me. Alleluia!

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