

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You bless us by helping us in the midst of the most difficult of situations. Stay close to us, we pray, so that when we do not know what to do or fail to understand what You required of us, we may call upon Your assistance and have confidence in Your wisdom and authority. You are our inspiration and we delight in praising You for everything You have done for us. Thank You, Lord Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Look realistically at the problems in each situation you face today, and offer them to God in prayer

On-going prayers

- **Pray for major industrial nations** *Pray for the UK and its contribution to world affairs, pray for its government, facing elections next year*
- *Give thanks for the children now being born into the world*
- *Pray for world leaders soon gathering at Copenhagen*

Meditation

Think again; think about the people you see,
The people you meet and those you pass by.
There are none whose mind and heart,
Whose body, soul, spirit and feelings
Are not precious to the heart of God.

Think again; think about the person you are,
Moulded by your choices and experience.
There is no part of past or present,
Precious memories or future's promise,
Which is not precious to the heart of God.

So think again; think about the family of God,
Those you know who love and worship Him.
There's none within the Kingdom
Less or greater, better or worse than you,
For all are precious in the heart of God.

So think again, and reckon this O child of God,
Who are you to think more grandly of yourself
The Saviour knows the engaging truths
Of every soul yet loves without complaint;
No partiality is found within the heart of God.

Bible passage – Hosea 4:13b-19

^{13b} Therefore your daughters play the whore,
and your daughters-in-law commit
adultery.

¹⁴ I will not punish your daughters
when they play the whore,
nor your daughters-in-law
when they commit adultery;
for the men themselves go aside with
whores,

and sacrifice with temple prostitutes;
thus a people without understanding comes
to ruin.

¹⁵ Though you play the whore, O Israel,
do not let Judah become guilty.
Do not enter into Gilgal,
or go up to Beth-aven,
and do not swear, 'As the Lord lives.'

¹⁶ Like a stubborn heifer,

Israel is stubborn;
can the Lord now feed them
like a lamb in a broad pasture?

¹⁷ Ephraim is joined to idols
-- let him alone.

¹⁸ When their drinking is ended,

they indulge in sexual orgies;
they love lewdness more than their
glory.

¹⁹ A wind has wrapped them in its wings,
and they shall be ashamed because of
their altars.

Bible Study

Review

Since the beginning of Hosea, we have become used to his talk of prostitution and what this means. Nevertheless, there are some surprising twists and turns within this passage. Hosea uses the image of prostitution and 'Temple prostitutes', to say more about how God's heart was broken by Israel's worship of the Ba'als. He shows disgust at the sexual promiscuity of Ba'al worship (4:13,14), he likens Israel's religion to prostitution (4:15,16) and ends provocatively by talking about the 'drunken orgies' of her worship (4:18,19). It is all graphically unpleasant, and as people say today, we 'get the picture'! However, just beneath the surface of this, Hosea says far more.

Firstly, we are struck by Hosea's description of the prostitutes here as 'your daughters'. Now, the daughters of Israel were supposed to remain virgins until they were married to keep the ancestry of Israel pure. This was part of Israel's covenant commitment to the Lord, and at other times in the history of God's people (as when Jesus was born) virginity was honoured. Later on in Hosea we will find that the prophet has more to say about the consequences of sexual promiscuity for future generations.

Another interesting point arises in verses 13 and 14, where Hosea does not so much describe the sins of prostitutes, as condemn the men who committed adultery. Perhaps influenced by his disgust at the men who leered at his wife, Hosea said that God would condemn the men, not the women! These were days when men could do what they wanted, and even dismiss women with a 'note', (see Deuteronomy 24:1f.). Hosea's prophecy is the first ever defence of women as the objects of manipulation and rape! Moreover, it says that the ruin coming on Israel was the fault of men, not women.

In verse 15, Hosea makes an appeal lest Israel's sins affect the people of Judah. Now, there were local shrines to the Ba'als throughout Israel together with well known sites venerated because of their connection with the forefathers and the worship of the Lord God. Bethel, for example, was where Jacob had seen a vision of the heaven (Gen 28:1-15), but this shrine was polluted by the worship of Ba'als (as Amos tells us – see 4:4, 5:5,6 etc.). In Judah, people worshipped the Lord only at Jerusalem, where Solomon's Temple still existed and where God 'lived'. Woe betide God's people if the faithful of Judah were attracted to the shrines of the north such as Bethel, where the honest intent to worship would be met by the sexual temptations of Ba'al worship!

One feature of Hosea's prophecies is the mention of place names, and here, he mentions 'Gilgal' and 'Beth-aven' (4:15). We will discuss this further in later studies, but 'Gilgal' was the place where Joshua compromised the occupation of the Promised Land by doing a deal with the Gibeonites (Joshua 10:1f.); so 'Gilgal' is code for 'religious compromise'. 'Beth-aven' is not a place, but a play on the name 'Beth-el', the famous shrine (see above) whose name means 'house of God'. 'Beth-aven' means 'house of sin', and it is Hosea's sarcastic name for a place that had long since led people astray.

All this paints a picture of the dangers and offence to the Lord of 'Ba'al worship'. In addition, the 'heifer' in verse 16 stands for the people of Israel, who distinguished themselves from Judah by worshipping a 'golden calf' (see 1 Kings 12:28f.). Did Hosea know David's famous psalm (23), 'The Lord is my shepherd ...' and comment about heifers and lambs sarcastically to question whether Israel could ever be led by the Lord again? Lastly, Hosea sees little hope for Israel; she must be left alone to wallow in her indulgence of sex and drinking (4:18), like some Old Testament 'Prodigal'!

The people of God play with religion at their peril. In our own times, we must be challenged by Hosea to question the loose manner in which this happens today, religious prostitution stands close by in a world where 'anything goes' and freedom is mistaken for license. In addition, we should be careful to identify those who bring God's wrath on our heads with as much courage as Hosea, who defended women as victims in a culture where men did as they pleased. The more you examine Hosea's prophecies, the more you find!

Discipleship

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In the course of this study, what have you learned about Hosea that is new and helps you understand his prophecies better?
2. Discuss whether these prophecies speak to people today. What can they mean for the church as God's 'New Israel'?
3. What are the real problems of sexual promiscuity within our world today, and how may God's people address them?

Topics covered by this text

- *The exclusive worship of God*
- *The dangers of sexual temptation*
- *The responsibility of men for sexual misdemeanour*

Personal comments by author

This is one of those studies of God's Word that caught me out. I was expecting a rather straightforward passage of scripture and found that I was faced with a text which said far more than I imagined! I would have preferred to be writing a full study to try and do justice to the whole text rather than write a short piece and try and explain all that the Lord put on my heart as I wrote! But this is what happens when we give the Lord control of what we are doing. There are many implications for what has been described in this passage, and I hope that readers are able to pick them up.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *It may be helpful whilst studying Hosea, to try and write down a list of his references to prostitution, and what they mean. It is all very unpleasant, but by doing this, you may get a fuller picture of Hosea's work.*
- *Make a list of religious movements and attitudes that are a danger, in your opinion, to the life of the church. Pray to the Lord and ask Him to remove these from God's people.*

Final Prayer

If I have become tired or sorrowful this day, my Lord, please accept my apologies. I have been wrapped up in my own feelings and have failed to see the bigger picture, which is coloured by Your gracious love. Save me from my problems, and lead me to trust in Your guidance and providence. Thank You, my Lord, AMEN
