

Prayer

Lord God, speak to us above the noise of our world. Speak clearly, so that we might not mistake Your voice, as we have done so often in the past. Speak with wisdom, so that we might hear, learn, and do what You have said. Speak directly to our hearts so that we may know for sure that the voice we have heard is Yours. Speak to us, Lord Jesus, and make Yourself known. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Read through a television programme guide and use it to remind you of issues which need our prayers

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Christian families.** *Pray for Christian children who find it hard to maintain their faith during their years of schooling and growth*
- *Give thanks to God for the many things you enjoy about life*
- *Pray for small businesses struggling to gain financial backing*

Meditation

You know all things about everything, O lord;
and yet You give of Your time to me.

You hear the sounds of the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You listen to what I say.

You are truth and justice personified, O Lord;
and yet You save me from my sin.

You create new things every day, O Lord;
and yet You rejoice in all I do.

You speak Your Word to the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You whisper in my ear.

Forgive me when I am selfish, O Lord,
and fail to give anything to You.

Bible passage – Hosea 5:1-7

¹ Hear this, O priests!
Pay attention, O house of Israel!
Give ear, O house of the king!
For the judgment is for you;
for you have been a snare at Mizpah
and a net spread upon Tabor.
² The insurgents are deep in slaughter,
but I will discipline all of them.
³ I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from me;
for now, O Ephraim, you have played the
whore;
Israel is defiled.
⁴ Their deeds do not permit them
to return to their God.

For the spirit of whoredom is within them,
and they know not the LORD.
⁵ The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his
guilt;
Judah also shall stumble with them.
⁶ With their flocks and herds
they shall go to seek the LORD,
but they will not find Him;
He has withdrawn from them.
⁷ They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD;
for they have borne alien children.
Now the new moon shall devour them
along with their fields.

Bible Study

Review

Hosea is now in full flow, and his prophecies clearly demonstrate the spirit of a man who has been moved by God to speak out against the godlessness within Israel. There is no doubt about the target for these prophecies, for they are directed against the priests of Israel (5:1). These people were supposed to serve Israel by acting as intermediaries between the Lord God and the people of Israel by performing sacrifices and worship on their behalf according to the laws of Moses. Over time, however, they had developed practices that had more in common with the original Canaanite population of the land.

Nothing was hidden from the Lord, and He knew all about the sins of His people; all He needed was a man of integrity like Hosea, to speak out His message of judgement on the priests, and it was a message that the King and the people needed to hear as well (5:1). The religious rituals of the priests no longer helped the people come near to God, instead they had become a 'snare' and a 'net' (5:1) from Mount Tabor in the north to Mizpah in the south. Hosea's words graphically describe God's revulsion at the rebellion of the priests; *'the insurgents are deep in slaughter, but I will discipline them all!'* (5:2).

Verses 3 and 4 reveal the heart of Hosea. He had been insulted by the unfaithfulness of his own wife, Gomer (Hosea 1-3), and he now perceived the true nature of the insult Israel was committing against her God. We must be careful when reading these verses, because the names Ephraim and Israel are interchangeable and they refer to the same people. Earlier in the chapter, Hosea had called the people 'Israel' (5:1), but now he reverts to her common name, taken from the majority tribe of those times, 'Ephraim' (5:3,4), and uses both names to make his point. Israel (Ephraim) is like an unfaithful wife to her God, she has 'played the whore'. Now, this part of the prophecy is easy for us to understand, but what comes next is more difficult for us, even in Hosea. For the prophet says that the sins of the people have reached a point of no return; *'their deeds do not permit them to return to their God'* (5:4). Something critical has happened, and Hosea perceives, probably from his own experience, that the human heart can become gripped by the power of the sin it has accepted and grown to love. In this state, the heart will not return to God.

In the New Testament, we know this principle as *'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ...'* (Romans 3:23), but at the time Hosea said this it was a radical revelation. For all her history and the great revelations of God given to her, Israel has chosen to go her own way and confirmed the truth that humanity is fundamentally stricken with sinfulness, even when God is as close as a husband to a wife. In the following verses, Hosea has a tragic vision of a people seeking God but not finding Him; *'with their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord but they will not find Him ...'* (5:6). Tragically, the people were seeking the Lord only when it suited them, with flocks and herds ready for the slaughter of numerous sacrificial offerings (5:6) in an attempt to appease their God, but the eternal truth of God's justice was non-negotiable. Their hearts were not committed to the Lord, so they would *'seek ... but not find'* (5:6, a phrase found in the other prophets, e.g. Isaiah 31:1, Jer 45:5 etc.).

People do not always remember that when Jesus says 'seek, and you will find ...' (Matt 7:7), He is prophesying the radical change in human destiny that He brought as Israel's Messiah and the world's Saviour. This great saying of Jesus is of course not about people of faith deservedly getting what they want through prayer, but fallible people seeking God and finding Him not through their own merits but through the merits of Jesus, the Saviour. Hosea was faced with the reality of the human condition, and he struggled to express the extraordinary presumption and faithlessness of those who did what they pleased and thought they could please God by practicing religion however they wished. May God save us from doing the same today!

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does the passage of Scripture teach us about the nature of sin and the way that it affects us even now?
2. If this text is about the people of Israel, is it about the church today? To what extent does the church of God 'play the whore' today, or is there any good reason to reject this analysis today?

3. Read Matthew 7:1-14 and discuss in your group the connections between these two passages.

Topics covered by this text

- *Sin and judgement*
- *The tragic consequences of the sin of God's people*
- *Faithlessness and stumbling*

Personal comments by author

In the midst of this passage is a phrase that is quite distressing; 'their deeds do not permit them to return to their God' (5:4). I find this passage awful, and it is hard to accept that this is indeed within Scripture. Nevertheless, we all need reminding from time to time that it is simply not within our human capability to make ourselves right with God by doing things. Whenever I hear people in church saying things like 'why should this happen to X, she's such a good person', I am sadly reminded of the truth of this text, and that deeds do not make people right with God.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Occasionally, I find that I am working on the assumption that if I do things right, then I will be OK with God, and have to change my attitude. Is this something you need to check out with yourself?*
- *Look back over your recent life and ask yourself whether you have 'dealt faithlessly' with God. Remember, if you have, then the way to deal with this is to repent and be open with God about it. Appeal to Jesus for your salvation.*

Final Prayer

Lead me, Lord God, in a pathway of honest and righteous living. Lord God, I do not want to be the kind of person who is caught out by my own arrogance or found out because of my pride. Keep me in that place of spiritual need where I know that You are my Saviour, all the time. AMEN
