

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father, I have searched and I have found You there in the midst of Your creation, for You were waiting to be found. Forgive me for straying from the pathways of the soul and failing to look for You, and thank You for reminding me to search for You. Lead me on to discover more about You, my faith, and Your glorious work throughout the world. Alleluia, AMEN.

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Be still, and wait for the Lord to place prayers in your heart and your mind; pursue these with His help.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Christian families.** *Pray for Christian families to maintain the witness of worshipping together for their own good and the good of all*
- *Pray for those who are struggling because of the weather*
- *Give thanks to God for the many things you enjoy about life*

Meditation

Lord, I learn about You through opening my heart
To appreciate what is happening all around me.

Through smiling, and seeing other people smile too;
through silence in the face of deep suffering.

Through watching a child learn to walk;
through steadying the hand of an elderly person.

Through eating a meal with friends and family
through sharing what I have with those who have less.

Through listening to the song of birds;
through enjoying the rhythm of a popular song.

Through finding faith and hope and love;
through resting in peace because I know my Lord.

Bible passage – Hosea 5:8-15

⁸ Sound the trumpet in Gibeah,
the horn in Ramah.
Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven;
lead on, O Benjamin.

⁹ Ephraim will be laid waste
on the day of reckoning.
Among the tribes of Israel
I proclaim what is certain.

¹⁰ Judah's leaders are like
those who move boundary stones.
I will pour out my wrath on them
like a flood of water.

¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed, broken in judgment
and intent on living by regulations.

¹² I am like a moth to Ephraim,
like rot to the people of Judah.

¹³ When Ephraim saw his sickness,
and Judah his sores,
then Ephraim turned to Assyria,
and sent to the great king for help.
But he is not able to cure you,
not able to heal your sores.

¹⁴ For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
like a great lion to Judah.
I will tear them to pieces and go away;
I will carry them off,
with no-one to rescue them.

¹⁵ Then I will go back to my place
until they admit their guilt.
And they will seek my face;
in their misery they will earnestly seek
me.

Bible Study

Review

In deep sadness, Hosea continues to prophecy about the state of Israel. Here, he uses different word pictures to describe Israel's desperate state, now they have rejected the support of their God and King, the Lord who saved them from Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land.

There is not much here to remind us of Hosea's general theme about the marriage between God and His people, though the passage is all about brokenness and its consequences. Hosea could not understand how his wife could continue to rebel against him and enjoy her prostitution, and in the same way, God is astonished at the reckless behaviour of Israel and Judah despite the evidence of His love and guidance. We can either read such scriptures as ancient stories with little meaning for us today, or accept that they can speak to us now because Christians wander from their Lord even today. Moreover, when this happens, the patterns of our behaviour are similar to those of Israel, many years ago.

To begin with, verses 8 to 10 read like a call to arms, but a close look at the place names reveals something more harrowing. Gibeah is a town in the region of Benjamin, renowned for the most atrocious rebellion against the moral standards of God's people in the history of Judaism. The story of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19-21) remains the most dire story of moral depravity within the entire Old Testament. Ramah, a nearby city of Benjamin, was the home city of Samuel, but one associated with considerable sadness throughout the Old Testament. Its association with tragedy is so strong that when King Herod killed all the children of Bethlehem after Jesus was born, Matthew quotes the harrowing prophecy of Jeremiah about '*a voice heard weeping in Ramah ... Rachel mourning for her children and refusing to be comforted*' (Jer 31:15, Matt 2:18).

All these word pictures draw a tragic picture of Israel warring against her own God, and the phrase '*raising the battle cry in Beth-aven*' (5:8) is a none too subtle description of fighting a sinful battle! What will God do with His people who rebel against Him like this? He declares; '*I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water*' (5:10)! God is not ignorant of what happens on earth, and He will meet rebellion with its consequences.

Then, in an astonishing phrase hidden away within these prophecies so that few would spot it or realise its power, Hosea says, '*Ephraim is oppressed, broken in judgement and intent on living by regulations*' (5:11)! Here is God's analysis of the predicament of His people; they think that all they have to do to keep right with their God is to keep His commandments! Such an attitude towards faith in God is like one who thinks that a good marriage is based on meeting obligations and putting on a good show of unity. Such attitudes merely obscure the truth, for if two people do not love each other, then the heart of a marriage has gone, and if God's people do not love Him and battle against Him, then they can hardly call on Him for help and succour.

Hosea knows that despite warring with their God, the people of Israel and Judah are ill and in need of help; they are spiritually sick and unable to make sound judgements (5:13). But they will do anything except call on their God for help (5:13), even appealing to the king of Assyria, Israel's enemy, who will eventually invade her land. God's people have become blind and cannot even see their stupidity! In truth, the only one interested in them is their husband, their God, but because of their rebellion, He must punish them even if they should turn to Him; '*they will seek my face, in their misery they will earnestly seek me.*' (5:15).

The stage has now been set for a further stunning revelation from Hosea (Hosea 6, coming next). However, this troubling and brief passage must surely warn God's people of the futility of following their own ways and imagining they have some importance in the world, instead of keeping close to the Lord. It is a disease as prevalent today as it ever was.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How does this passage of Scripture teach us about attitudes within the church today, and what can we do about this?

2. Discuss verse 11 in your group and try to ascertain what this might be saying to us who live thousands of years later.
3. How significant is the church of God in the affairs of the world today? Are we more important than we think we are?

Topics covered by this text

- *The rebellion of God's people*
- *God's judgement*
- *The sin of living religiously by 'regulation'*

Personal comments by author

I find it hard to write about passages which seem to be so distant that the message of prophecy is remote from today. However, Hosea is absolutely right that God's people are broken and oppressed when they 'live by regulations' (5:11). You will find that in the various Bible versions this verse is translated in rather different ways. However, I have had a good look at the Hebrew words here, and have come up with a translation that I think is most meaningful both in its context and for today; indeed, I suspect that some translators have attempted to avoid the clear message of the verse because it is frankly embarrassing for some in the church today. Too many of God's people are required to live their faith 'by rote', as if being a Christian was like reading off the right prayers, or speaking in tongues when required to prove that you can do it. We must surely dispense with such awful rubbish wherever we see a hint of this.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How easy do you find it to trust God, and, if necessary, confess that your faith has been lived out as a matter of course rather than in the free spirit of a marriage? Think about this issue carefully, and pray about it in a spirit of self examination*
- *What good things about the life of faith have become regulations? If you do certain things by habit and do not know the reasons for them anymore, then try to root them out of your life and replace them with God's free inspiration.*

Final Prayer

Light of my life, Lord Jesus Christ, enter my heart and change me. I cannot know what You will do, how You will change me or what You will do with me, but I welcome You and I am willing to risk all for You. Come and do Your work of grace in my life now, so that I waste no more time thinking about living for You, but do now what I know to be right and true, according to Your light and revelation: AMEN
