**5. State of the Nation**

*Read Hosea 6:7-7:16*

In 6:7 Hosea declares that Israel has broken God’s covenant (6:7), and he shows us how. First of all he peels back the curtain and gives us a glimpse of the moral temperature in Israel at that time. These questions are here to help you unpack the passage of Scripture – don’t feel that every question needs detailed discussion in the group.

**A. Domestic turmoil *(Hosea 6:7-7:7)***

In explaining how Israel has *broken the covenant* (6:7), it is interesting that Hosea doesn’t list here more religious failings, but looks at the general conditions in Israel, and specifically in its capital Samaria.

1. In 6:8-9 Hosea points to a wicked plot, most likely it is the assassination of one of Israel’s kings, Pekahiah (you will find the account in 2 Kings 15:23-25). Taking both passages into account, what is so reprehensible about this crime? How does God regard it (v10)?

2. The connection of 6:11 to 7:1 is not clear (compare NIV with ESV) – here we will follow the NIV (which links 11a with the preceding verses and 11b with what follows). Notice that in 6:11b and in 7:1a God’s desire and readiness is to *restore* and *heal* his people. Despite God’s readiness, he finds only Israel’s wickedness.

1. From 7:1, what characterises Israel’s capital city, Samaria?
2. 7:2 reveals the delusion that enables God’s people to behave like this. What is it?
3. Verse 2 literally reads: *They do not say in their heart…* Why is this an important concept in Hosea’s prophecy (and in our relationship with God)?
4. What is the reality about God in 7:2 that needs to be grasped? What does this truth about God mean for us as Christians?

3. Read 7:3-7 again. These verses tell the story of a murderous plot (maybe the same plot as mentioned in Q1). From these verses, summarise the details of what happened. Note the multiple uses of heat imagery to describe the evildoers here. What does that imagery convey?

4. The perpetrators of this assassination are described as *adulterers* (7:4), similarly Israel was described as being *given to prostitution* (6:10). We’ve already seen this imagery used to describe Israel’s worship practices, yet here it is Israel’s conduct as a society that God sees as breaking the covenant.

1. What does this tell us about the nature of a relationship with God?
2. In what ways can we compartmentalise life (i.e. thinking God is interested in some bits, and not interested in others)? What practical steps can we take to avoid this?

**B. International Folly *(Hosea 7:8-16)***

The imagery of a baker’s oven (7:6) continues into v8, this time the focus is on the bread. Ovens were made of clay – a bit like outdoor pizza ovens. The bread would be placed in the oven, on the coals, and so would need to be turned occasionally so as to bake evenly and not burn. Israel (Ephraim) is presented to us again and again in this section as useless, like *a flat loaf not turned over* (7:8).

5. What has Israel done that makes her useless (v8)? From what we’ve already seen in Hosea and from 7:11, what might this ‘mixing’ include?

6. There is something tragic about 7:9-10. We have seen already that the calamity that falls upon Israel is God’s judgement upon them.

1. What does this experience fail to produce in Israel?
2. The opening line of v10 is repeated from Hosea 5:5. This shows that the same thing that lay at the root of their religious stupidity is also the source of their stupidity in international politics. What is that root?

7. The tragedy here is not just that Israel is going to be brought down like a bird trapped in a net (7:12), but that it did not need to be like this. Read through 7:13-16 and note down:

1. God’s disposition towards Israel and what he desires from them.
2. Israel’s chosen course of action.
3. What does this reveal about human nature?

8. Whenever God’s people fail to repent of sin, they not only dishonour God in their own lives, but they give those looking on an opportunity to deride God as well. We’re going to compare the closing words of Ch7 with another event in Israel’s history, the occasion when the Israelites, freshly freed by God from Egyptian slavery, worshiped a golden calf. God was ready to destroy them, now read *Exodus 32:11-14.*

1. Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel – what is his great concern in v12? How does this relate to Hosea 7:16?
2. How often do we realise that a Christian’s sin is something that reflects on God himself? Does that change our attitude? What is a healthy perspective to maintain on this?

*In your group…*

Share points for prayer.

Worship God for his attributes revealed in this passage

Ask God to reveal more and more of who he is to you through his word.

Pray over what has challenged you about this passage of Scripture?

Pray for each other’s needs.

**6. Reaping the Whirlwind**

*Read Hosea 8:1-9:9*

Chapter 8 opens with Hosea called again to be the watchman and sound the trumpet of warning – Hosea lays Israel’s sin bare and the inevitable consequences of betraying God. In reading these chapters, we must bear in mind the imagery of Hosea’s adulterous wife that opened the book – however bad Hosea’s wife had been, he pursued her, kept loving her and took her back. This is what God promised to do for Israel – the more we see Israel’s sin, the more we see God’s gracious love.

1. God is portrayed as a bird of prey in 8:1 (*eagle*, NIV). God is described as an eagle elsewhere in his dealings with Israel – cp. Exodus 19:4 & Deuteronomy 32:10-11. What is the big difference between those references and the description here in Hosea 8?

2. In 8:2 Israel call out to God: *Our God, we acknowledge you!* [*know you*, ESV].

1. What are the evidences in vv3-6 that this claim is empty?
2. Read *Matthew 7:21-23*. This makes up part of the Sermon on the Mount. What parallels do you see with this section of Hosea 8? What is more important than the *claim* to know Jesus?

3. A prominent sin in Israel is that of idolatry, notice the specific references to the *calf of Samaria*. When the nation divided, Jeroboam the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel set up two golden calves to enable the people in the north to ‘worship’ without having to go to Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25-33).

1. Why should it have been unthinkable that Israel would accept this? (cp. Exodus 32)
2. What does this tell us about the human capacity for sinfulness? Do we recognise this in ourselves?

4. The opening words of v7 are a well known metaphor, but what do you think they mean? Discuss the implications of this spiritual principle considering Galatians 6:7-10.

5. In Hosea 8:11-14 we find a number of things that Israel had substituted in God’s place. What are they? Why were they attractive substitutes for God?

6. For God to give his people the Law (v12) was his gracious revelation of himself to Israel. What does Israel’s response to this reveal?

7. Consider Hosea 9:1-6. This outlines the punishment God will bring on the ‘unfaithful’ ‘prostitute’ Israel. What will this mean for:

1. Their wealth and provision (vv2, 6)?
2. Their status as a nation (vv3, 6)?
3. Their ability to worship God (vv3c-5)?

8. Verse 7 & 8 appear to give us an insight into how the prophet Hosea was received in Israel.

1. How would you describe his reception here? Is the location of some of the hostility surprising?
2. Compare this to the experience of Amos a near contemporary of Hosea in Amos 7:10-13. Why are God’s messengers rejected?
3. Consider John 15:18-21. What similarities do we see here to the rejection of Hosea and Amos? What should we expect as followers of God’s supreme Messenger, Jesus Christ?

9. Lastly, look at the language of certainty used to describe the punishment that will fall on Israel in v9 (also in v7). Why MUST God punish their sins? If God must punish sins, how can any of us ever hope to be right with him? (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-26).

*In your group…*

Share points for prayer.

Worship God for his attributes revealed in this passage

Ask God to reveal more and more of who he is to you through his word.

Pray over what has challenged you about this passage of Scripture?

Pray for each other’s needs.