




Renewing the Covenant: Insights for Right and Just Living from the Book of Hosea

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Abstract

The book of the prophet Hosea (meaning: 'he saves') was written in the 8th Century CE towards the end of the northern Kingdom at a time when Judah and Israel were still relatively intact. The prophet Amos warned the people of Yahweh that they needed to accept the judgement of God who is just and realise that the Assyrians would most likely annihilate them. Hosea entered the picture and most of his utterances revolved around the fact that Israel was unfaithful, and this is the hallmark of his writing. The book of Hosea casts a gaudy light upon the ethical condition of Ephraim (Israel during its final years at a time when they adopted the debased practices of their Canaanite neighbours). Hosea found himself in a position to proclaim the truth of what would happen to the people who had lost their faith in themselves and also in Yahweh, but this was not necessarily Yahweh's final word. Hosea displayed great insight concerning the truth of God's mercy which was critical then as it is today. Hosea (5:6) warns "They will go with their flocks and herds to seek Yahweh, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them". Later in Hosea (5:15) Yahweh warns "I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me". God requires repentance from people and atonement with Him as Lord of all. This article pursues the issue of God's apostasy or "withdrawing" from His people. We may seek the Lord and not find Him because our attitude may be wrong, and how we seek Him is not acceptable – we are called to seek Him with a sincere and contrite heart and with all our soul (Deuteronomy 4:29). What is the theological exegesis of the selected verse and what were and are the dogmatic realities expressed in it. In addition, what can we in our current troubled world learn from the passage and what causes God to withdraw from us? What can Hosea teach the legal profession today? Though we may be dark as can be in spirit, and living in the shadows, God is by contrast an ever intensely radiant light holding out for the restoration of His people if they repent and place their faith and trust in Him.

Keywords: Hosea, Ephraim, northern kingdom of Israel, justice, compassion.

Introduction

Hosea *וּזְיִינ* was the first of the minor prophets and a member of the tribe of Issachar. He was the son of Beerī and lived during the reigns of various monarchs of Judah - the Southern Kingdom, including Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah and also through the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash who was the king of Israel. Jeroboam was one of the malicious kings of Israel and the nation was going through a trying period when Hosea was moralizing



and preaching God's word (Stedman, n.d.) People may seek Yahweh (YHWH) but may not find him because He has withdrawn from them. This is why one ought to seek Him with one's heart and soul. The book of Hosea speaks to inter alia the issue of leaders and their people breaking a covenant relationship with YHWH. The Talmud asserts that Hosea was the greatest prophet of his generation, and the period of his ministry stretched to over six decades. In addition, he was the only prophet of Israel of his time who left any written prophecy. He worked tirelessly in the eighth century before the birth of Christ, and he was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Amos and Micah in the Southern Kingdom. Hosea is considered to be the greatest prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel before it succumbed to the power of the Assyrian empire and ended up in captivity. He lived in an era in which there was great political upheaval as well as religious, economic and moral corruption and bloodshed (Laetsch, 1956). He lived in the northern kingdom of Israel throughout the period 740–725 BCE during the reigns of four kings of Judah, (the Southern Kingdom), and also during the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, who was the king of Israel. Hosea's extended ministry, began at the reign of Jeroboam II (787–747 BCE) and lasted up until the reign of Hoshea (731–722 BCE) (Anderson, 1985). It is likely to have concluded prior to the fall of Samaria in 721 BCE (Cate, 1987). When king Jeroboam II (748 BCE) died it heralded a period of doom and gloom. During this time, many Israelites had forgotten the true God YHWH, and worshipped idols. Hosea attempted to turn them again to the true faith by his wise counsels.

Hosea argued that when leaders who are responsible for justice and administration in a society display no religious commitment or faith and capriciousness emerges, then YHWH is likely to withdraw from them, be they either priests, princes, or chiefs of clans. Hosea argues that such leaders ensnare their people and treat them unjustly, consequently YHWH will discipline and teach them a lesson. In the discourses Hosea denounces the wickedness of the people of the northern kingdom Israel whom he refers to as Ephraim, and he declares to them the great misfortune that would befall them at the hands of the Assyrians and their removal into captivity. His prophecy essentially anticipated the total destruction of Ephraim and the mass deportation of the populace, however he also predicted the return from exile and the reconstitution of the prior order (Metzger & Coogan, 1993). The Assyrian monarch Tiglath Pileser III seized the throne and made Assyria into a global powerhouse. While Hosea chiefly lambasts the northern kingdom, Judah is also often mentioned alongside Ephraim and is also condemned (Metzger & Coogan, 1993). People that were conquered by his armies were displaced from their homeland and exiled to far-flung areas under the control of the Assyrian empire. The land of the captive people was resettled with foreign colonisers, and became Assyrian provinces (Cate, 1987).

While Hosea's prophecies were directed to all but for the most part to the northern kingdom of Israel, he also demonstrated a profound interest in the social conditions in his writings, but his primary consideration was Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH (Kent, 1993). He continually berated the people for deserting Yahweh and for accepting Baal as the deity of choice. Hosea expressed the opinion that when people strayed from the true God it was inevitable that they would ultimately face severe punishment. Israel had six diverse kings in two decades after Jeroboam died (Hosea 7:5-7). Hosea was the first of the Twelve Minor Prophets, whose collective writings were combined and systematized into a single book in the Jewish Tanakh by the time of the Second Temple period (Smith & Robinson, 1911). His writing style was somewhat abrupt and his sentences are full of metaphors. Hosea is regularly considered to be a "prophet of doom". He was in essence offering a message of promise and restoration while stressing God's love for his failing people. Hosea warns Ephraim (Israel) and Judah, that God's judgement will be at hand:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I would also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hosea 4:6)



The Talmud (Pesachim:87a) states that he was the supreme prophet of his era which is evident in his allegorical utterances especially in chapters 1-3. His prophetic discourses are composed in language similar to cult poetry (Metzger & Coogan, 1993). The period of Hosea's ministry was a lengthy approximately sixty years, and he was additionally the only prophet of Israel up until then who left any written prophecy. When Hosea began his work, Jeroboam II was the king. Hosea considered Jeroboam II to be a legitimate monarch while those ruling after him were considered to be of dubious character and intent, murderous and unworthy to reign (Hosea 7:17). We read in Hosea 8:4 that "They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have appointed princes, but I did not know it". Scant is known about the life of Hosea but as stated in the Book of Hosea, he obeyed God's command and married a prostitute named Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. His work is a book of contradictory passions and alternates between fury and compassion and has as its themes "the goodness and severity of God...the prophecy reveals the heart of God torn by powerful emotions: justice demands retribution; but grace cries out for forgiveness" (Metzger & Coogan, 1993: 292).

Baal Worship

Hosea lived in a difficult period of history when numerous Israelites had forgotten their God, Yahweh, and worshipped idols. The key god they worshipped was Baal who was selected as the god of fertility. Baal was often referred to as the son of Dagan in Ugaritic literature (Ayaili-Darshan, 2013). The Canaanites celebrated the festivals of the agricultural year and in a sense adopted the religion of the neighbours who they encountered in the land. They lived in a condition described by Hosea, as one in which there was an absence of any knowledge of the real God (4:1). The prophet Amos previously explained how the devotees were all involved in impure worship after the fall of Jeroboam in 743 BCE and we're quite happy "...to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Amos 2:7) which led to them having six successive kings and ultimately a destroyed kingdom. Saint Paul advised in Romans 1:28 that people need to have solid faith since "...as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up into a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting". In Psalms we read: "They mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves" (Psalms 106:35,36, 39).

Baal, a Canaanite god was referred to as the prince or lord of the Earth and life. He was similarly termed the lord of Rain and Dew and was thus viewed as indispensable for soil to be fertile in a mostly barren Canaan. In the mythology of Canaan, Baal was forever caught up in mortal combat with the god of death and sterility, Mot. When Baal prevailed over Mot, it was believed that a seven-year cycle of fertility would result. However, if she was victorious then there would be seven years of severe drought and immense scarcity. Ugaritic records depict Baal as the weather god, with power over rain and also fertility (Herrmann,1999a). The dry summers of the area were explained as Baal's time in the underworld and his return in autumn was said to cause the storms which revived the land (Herrmann,1999a). The Ugaritic texts inform us that Baal had relations with Anath who was his consort as well as his sister. He also presumably sired a divine bull calf from a heifer (Pope, 2007). All this was part of his important fertility role, which meant a cornucopia of crops and fertility for both animals and humans. Baal was similarly the king of all the gods. Baal gradually took over the important role of the chief god El. It was also believed that he could guide armies to victory in battle (Herrmann,1999).

The Israelites were utterly caught up in Baal worship, and over time, there was a syncretism in worship of YHWH and Baal. "The people in Hosea's days had done away with all the celebrations God had ordained. They neither celebrated the Day of Atonement, nor the Feast of Tabernacles. God always wants man to know the way of salvation in the pardon of his sins and the fact that all life on earth is like living in a tent. People who do not celebrate these two



crucial facts are lost" (Schultz, 2003:69). The situation became dire so that for the Israelites, "Their deeds do not permit them to turn to their God" (5:4) and their abandoning of YHWH was destructive "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone" (4:17). Holmquist (2017) asserts that leaders who allow the destruction of people associated with them, including themselves, through promoting destructive practices are detrimental, lethal, dark. Israel will pay the price for their infidelity.

God had after all promised to save His people after He judges them (Hosea 2). Hosea portrays the salvation of Israel as being dependent on new vows and fidelity, as in a new marriage ceremony at a new Sinai (Hosea 2:14–23). Cyril of Alexandria observes that the land of Israel fornicated by putting aside the testament it had contracted with YHWH, that is that people would seek to observe of His commandments (P.G. 71, 36 in Rokas, 2016). YHWH however never proclaims judgment as a necessary condemnation and whatever He warns us about is based on His love for humanity.

Hosea's Personal Issue

Personal challenges facing Hosea in his domestic life became a type of God's dealing with Israel. Hosea fell in love with Gomer after he was instructed by God during a meditation to take her as his wife. This was in a sense problematic because she was a harlot: "...a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord" (Hosea 1:2). The verse clearly relates to the state of Israel which had become a spiritual prostitute in that had departed from YHWH. Gomer's prostitution should be taken figuratively. Hosea married Gomer and their first child was named Jezreel, which was in essence a warning of the impending judgement of YHWH. This name of the child was important since it was in the Valley of Jezreel where YHWH had shown his judgement on king Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:22 – 23 (Lindsay, 1976), and it was also in the same valley where king Shalmaneser would lay siege and destroy Samaria the capital of Israel. The value of Jezreel is also the site where the battle of Armageddon will take place according to Revelations (Lindsay, 1976).

By the time his second child had been born Hosea came to the realisation that his wife had been unfaithful and the child that was born was named Lo-Ruhamah which means "not to be pitied" or "no mercy," and it is the negative of the Hebrew word *racham*, which means compassion (Schultz, 2003). A further child was born later and named Loammi meaning "not my people" which strongly suggests that Hosea disowned this child completely. Once the third child was born Gomer left her home to become a harlot and was offered on the slave market. Despite her many transgressions Hosea paid to get her back since he still loved her (Lindsay, 1976). He was instructed by YHWH to take her back according to Hosea 3:1-2:

3 The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels[a] of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.

God named these children in Hosea 2:23 as a sign to his people, but there would come a day of renewal: "23 I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" We thus see that even while YHWH was proclaiming judgment. His mercy is also being displayed. Hosea's love for Gomer also illustrates to us God's compassion in his dealing with Israel but also all of humanity:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?



How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboyim?
My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.

In Hosea 2: 6-13 God's verdict upon the northern kingdom is described as the putting up of hindrances, which thwart the nation in its efforts to reach unholy objectives. This is clear in the use of images such as a double fence, thornbushes and a wall. It applies to Gomer in that she will no longer be able to communicate with her lovers; As for the application of these images to the nation of Israel, "the antitype, means that her alliances with Egypt and Assyria will not be realized" (Schultz, 2003:13).

John Calvin stated: 'The Lord had bidden him (the prophet) to relate this parable, so to speak, or this similitude, that the people might see, as in a living portraiture, their turpitude and perfidiousness. It is, in short, an exhibition in which the thing itself is not only set forth in words, but is also placed, as it were, before their eyes in a visible form" (Schultz, 2003: 4).

Hosea Chapter 5 verses 1 to 14

Hosea chapter 5 verses 1 to 14 in some ways demonstrates a similar pattern to what is found in chapter 4 verses 4 to 19. It seems that the king and his royal house as well as the priests are condemned for acting corruptly and they are responsible for justice so in essence judgement is upon them (Garrett, 1997). The leaders have therefore created a disintegration of the covenant relationship with Yahweh (Davies,1993). Very poor leadership is not necessarily enough to excuse the failures of people. What is clear is that there is a lack of religious commitment which has resulted in faithlessness. Hosea pinpointing the participants and what they have done and what their punishment is (see verses one and two of chapter 5). The actions of the people demonstrate their stubbornness (4:16) and is what has ultimately alienated them from God. Even if they attempt to approach him by making sacrifices God has withdrawn himself and is essentially inaccessible to them. We're responsible pro justice but all three types including the priests and all The Chieftains and princes in the King's court have failed in their duties. It was incumbent on the priests to discern gods wishes and proclaim the divine law. The Chieftains we're responsible for justice been administered and it equally failed while the Royal Court is generally considered to be all those around the king. So, each of these failed to promote justice and where in fact nothing more than a pit, a snare and a net for the people to keep them away from serving YHWH as required. YHWH would then withdraw from such people and discipline them as needed (Anderson & Freedman, 1980).

They are thus godless and any ritual they seek is a waste of time. Consequently, their fields we'll meet with disaster (5:6) and this condition will make them easy targets for foreign invasion. The sins of both Israel and of Judah were to be punished as YHWH announced his the judgment upon them. So, each of the afore-mentioned order of prophets, chieftains and princes in Israel were beckoned to deal with the charge levelled against then, and to get their sentence (Hosea 5:1). They were accused of despising people and making idolatrous sacrifices despite being reprimanded and being told of the error of their ways (Hosea 5:1-2). Their adulterated spirits besmirched their personas (Hosea 5:3). Their unrepentant souls and the workings of unclean spirits within them (Hosea 5:4) had made them arrogant and this had led to them and Judah becoming victims of tragic circumstances. They were thus unable to garner YHWH's approval (Hosea 5: 5-6).

God longs for his people to be faithful to him despite his anger at human infidelities. Where there is infidelity between people and YHWH as was the case between Hosea and Gomer, this leads to a parting of the ways between them. YHWH nonetheless displays His immense



love for His people, and leaves room for sinners to repent, return and seek restitution and He is always gracious (Rokas, 2016). "Hosea 7:1-16 also expresses the ignorance of the people of Israel regarding the depravity of their leaders. They do not jointly reject the leader's actions or negative influence but follow them as an opportunity to break their covenant with God. Hosea describes their treachery as adultery that hurts God's heart" (Pakpahan & Pantan, 2022: 2).

Hosea was a despairing person because of the sin that had befallen his own family as well as for the evil that was in the process of destroying Israel. Just as Gomer was unfaithful to him so too, the Israelites were unfaithful to YHWH (Smith, 2001). God's love for humanity however surpasses His wrath. While dire punishment was inevitable for Israel, Hosea held that God is a God of love who still allows sinners an opportunity to atone and seek His forgiveness. Gomer was a prostitute, and a known reprobate, and is used figuratively as the Kingdom of Israel in Samaria, which openly worshipped idols. She was an adulteress who while lawfully married to Hosea sinned secretly by being with her lovers behind his back. She was akin to the Kingdom of Judah in Jerusalem, which, while having YHWH's favour, a Holy Temple, and the royal priesthood, surreptitiously worshipped Baal.

Hosea gives a stern warning: "For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods" (Hosea 3:4) and in the future: "Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days" (Hosea 3:5). YHWH says He knows Ephraim indicating that no one can conceal themselves from Him. Israel "played the harlot" (5:3) and has allowed herself to become defiled by observing cultic practices and rituals as she worshipped Baal (Honeycutt, 1975; Miller, 2000). People and even nations who are guilty of perversity and who have defiled themselves may not return to YHWH. They have opted for a life of sin and continue on their evil paths and thus display no love for YHWH. They have irrationally rejected YHWH and assumed a spirit that is analogous to harlotry which is contrary to YHWH's will. In addition, they are also proud and depraved and this deportment impedes a return to YHWH (Honeycutt, 1975; Hubbard, 1989).

Hosea's marriage to Gomer thus comes to symbolise the relationship between God and Israel. His wife may have been a prostitute, but he is nonetheless continually faithful to her. This is not to suggest that she will not be disciplined, but she will ultimately be cleansed by the total love of God when she casts aside her evil ways and repents (Achteimeier, 1996). Hosea undoubtedly used his experience of being married to a harlot as a figurative representation of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. The relationship between Hosea and his wife Gomer is thus similar to the relationship between YHWH and Israel. Even though Gomer runs away from Hosea and becomes a prostitute, he nevertheless still loves her and exonerates her. Similarly, as the Israelites worshipped false gods such as Baal, YHWH remained faithful to them and did not abandon the covenant He had made with them. Superficial and insincere worship is not acceptable for one to come into the presence of YHWH. Neither is pride acceptable, since this will lead to a nation stumbling (Hosea 5:5).

The prophet Micah warned that YHWH requires people to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8) and only in this way can one have a true meeting with YHWH (Achteimeier, 1996). Where people are treacherous and faithless and break their covenant with YHWH, they perpetually alienate themselves from Him. By their forsaking of YHWH they are shown to be deceitful and lacking in commitment to serve Him (Pentiu, 2002). YHWH says: "You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." (Hosea 3:3). Nonetheless as obnoxious as Israel's adulterous infidelity has been, it does not quench YHWH's enduring and redeeming love for humanity. YHWH does not allow Israel to go unpunished and neither does He give up on her and says: "Israel, how can I let you go?... My heart recoils, all my compassion kindles" (11:8). Ultimately



the desired objective is repentance and atonement with YHWH (Garrett,1997). Where there are pure spiritual people it is not possible to follow pagan practices. Where these do exist, they show us that sinners are not devoted to YHWH. The northern kingdom did in fact perish and was wiped from the surface of the earth.

We thus see in Hosea's writing that salvation involves the covenant between God and Israel which originated at Sinai, being viewed as a faithful marriage where being unfaithful is entirely unacceptable (Anderson, 1985). The covenant in the wilderness will be restored and Israel will refer to YHWH as "My husband" and not "my Baal" (2:16) (Neil, 1999). Israel's actions are nothing more than a spiritual adultery and they would suffer severe penalties for rejecting YHWH. In verses 8-12 Hosea states "I declare what is certain" alluding to the civil strife that engulfed Judah and Israel due to the degenerative leadership in Israel and the latter would have her day of punishment (5:9). YHWH would be destructive towards Israel just as a moth is damaging to fabric and dry rot would set in (5:12). YHWH advises us that when we are unrepentant: "15 Then I will return to my lair until they have borne their guilt and seek my face in their misery they will earnestly seek me." Hosea asks us an important question: "9 Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them" (Hosea 14:9 NIV). Hosea exhibits deep insight into the nature of Yahweh and informs us that He places ethical demands on people. Hosea invites people to return to YHWH and have a right relationship with him (Honeycutt,1972; 1975). He clearly looks forward to the time when Israel will return to YHWH who has withdrawn from them so that they can offer Him proper faithful service (Wolff,1974).

Hosea's Prophecy and Orthodox Christianity

The Kontakion (a hymn originating in the Byzantine tradition around the 6th century) of St Hosea in the Plagal of the Fourth Tone:

Initiated by divine illumination, thou wast deemed worthy of the lofty gift of prophecy and foretoldest of the promise of grace, O Prophet. O Hosea, since thou dwellest in God's glory now, do thou rescue from all manner of adversity us who cry to thee: Rejoice, thou vessel of grace divine.

For Orthodox believers, the Book of Hosea is a call for people never to forsake the Lord. When people turn down the opportunity to be children of YHWH just as prophesied there are severe penalties for our actions. Hosea cautioned his listeners to amend their ways and serve YHWH as best they could. They declined to respond to the call of YHWH and had to be punished and seek atonement. Roughly one thousand years before the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and through the inspiration of the *Paraclete*, (Holy Spirit), Hosea predicted the end of sacrificial offerings and of the royal priesthood of Aaron (Hosea 3:4-5). He also advised that the knowledge of the True God would spread throughout all the earth (Hosea 2:20-23). Hosea spoke of Jesus Christ, and how He would return from out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). He said that that He would be resurrected on the third day (Hosea 6) and conquer death (Hosea 13-14). He is thus another important Saint in the Orthodox Church. "Cyril of Alexandria grappled with the 'hidden truth' in the divinely inspired Scriptures when he wrote in Letter 4:7: It would be fitting for us when looking into the dark shadows of the law to say what one of the holy prophets rightly said, 'Whoever will be wise will understand these things; and whoever will be prudent will know them.'(Ferreiro, 2003:55)" (cited in Boshoff, 2005).

The Orthodox Church accepts the analogy of Hosea's marriage to Christ and his church. Christ is the faithful husband, and his church is his bride. They see in this book an analogous call to the church not to abandon the Lord. In addition, the buying back of Gomer from the market demonstrates the redeeming qualities of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice at Golgotha. Jesus will



come and water and revive us and finally raise us up again. “2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. 3 Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth” (Hosea 5:15-6:3 RSV). Apostasy is the core theme of Hosea’s prophecy and he prophesies the punishment of the people and the demonstration of God’s love towards them when Israel repents (Pentiu, 2002). YHWH’s punishment and love of Israel are denoted metaphorically in the book of Hosea by the marital relations of Hosea and his wife Gomer, the adulteress (Rokas, 2016). The comparison between one’s sexual depravity and unfaithfulness in communion with God is also highlighted by the apostle Paul when he asserts: “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:16,17). When Hosea buys back Gomer, this reminds us of the redemptive qualities of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice at Golgotha.

Paul asserts Ephesians (5:32) that the great mystery of marriage “refers to Christ and the church”. Jesus also referred to himself as the bridegroom of God’s *laos* or nation (Matthew 9:15). In terms of Orthodoxy, the members of the church, are the *Laos tou Theou*, (nation of God) share in each of the prophetic, high priestly and royal offices of Christ. Through divine grace, they become the communicants of all the blessings of the divine glory. They are all able to live out the abundance of God’s truth in the *Ekklesia*, as well as to live out the know-how of the variety of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacramental life (Nicolaidis, 2021a; 2021b:4). In Romans 9:24-26, Paul informs us that we are called to be God’s children, both Jews and gentiles. He reminds us that Christ is the bridegroom and He loves the church which is His bride (Ephesians 5:22-23). Jesus initiated a totally new covenant, which corresponds to the new wedding prophesied in Hosea 2:14–23 (see also 2 Corinthians 11:2). This marriage will end in “the marriage of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7), when “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb,” arrives “down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Revelation 21:9–11).

Centuries prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the prophet Hosea inspired by the Holy Spirit, prophesied the termination of sacrificial offerings and also the priesthood of Aaron (Hosea 3:4-5). Aaron and his successors as high priest had been given control over the Urim and Thummim (allegorically "revelation and truth") by which YHWH’s will could be ascertained. God assigned the Aaronite priests to distinguish between what was considered to be holy from the common, and what was clean from the impure, and they were thus to teach the divine laws (the Torah) to the Israelites. Hosea shows YHWH’s mercy "But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen" (Hosea 1:7). Hosea prophesies of the errant Israel will be disciplined by YHWH, who will assault them like a lion (Hosea 5:14). He also asserts that Israel will be driven into exile after which YHWH will raise his people from the dead on the third day (Hosea 6:2–3). The knowledge of YHWH would spread globally (Hosea 2:20-23). Hosea also refers to Christ, and how He would return from out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). In Matthew 2:15, it is stated: “He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

There are four places in the New Testament where Hosea is quoted directly. The first is Matthew 2:15 where he quotes Hosea 11:1, “Out of Egypt I have called my son” as being fulfilled when Jesus came out of Egypt after the death of Herod. The second is by the Lord Jesus Christ himself when he twice uses Hosea 6:6 “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice” against the Pharisees. The third time is Paul in Romans 9:25-26 where he quotes both Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 in relation to his arguments that the Gentiles would be accepted as well as the Jews. The fourth time is in 1 Peter 2:10 where Peter uses it in a similar fashion to Paul. (C.C Bible, n.d.).



From an Orthodox perspective and most likely all denominations, Hosea imparts many important aspects pertaining to human conduct and YHWH's expectations for His people. People have a tendency to tarnish themselves through sinful conduct and they invariably become trapped by it (5:3,4) rather than seeking His will for humanity and this is catastrophic (5:10). It is abundantly clear that YHWH holds priests, leaders' and others responsible for promoting sin and no one will be able to escape His wrath (5:1,10). He knows the hearts of all (5:3) and will judge people for their iniquities and discipline them (5:1,2). He is also entirely faithful to His people (5:4) and withdraws from people who are wicked (5:6). YHWH is the Lord of All and should be feared (5:14). Where there is sin, there will be punishment (5:12-13). Sinners need to repent and find YHWH who has withdrawn from them (5:15). YHWH will not withdraw from people if they adhere to His word (5:15). Where people are faithful, there will be no apostasy from YHWH. Looking at the Holy Bible on the whole, it is fair to state that God looked, in the story of Hosea, to way beyond the mere history of a recalcitrant Ephraim (Israel) to the deliverance of the entire world and to its redemption by the Jesus Christ, to His death and glorious resurrection (Schultz, 2003:75).

Paul advises us: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). We cannot even begin to imagine what transpires when a sinner seeks YHWH and confesses his or her sin with a contrite heart. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us the truth the Parable of the Prodigal Son who stated "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men". He did not anticipate his father's mercy and was embraced him. The father then stated: "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:17-19,22-24).

Hosea portended about Jesus Christ (11:1), and also His glorious resurrection on the third day after His crucifixion (6:2). He also heralds that Jesus Christ triumphs over death (13:13 -14). Various redeeming aspects as explained in Hosea are completed in Jesus Christ who "... was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (5:14 - 6:3). Hosea forgave Gomer for her adulterous conduct and bought her back at a slave market. In likewise manner Jesus Christ has laid down His life for the church that is His bride and buys us back from sin (Colossians 1:14; Ephesians 5:25). John the Baptist informs us "You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete" (John 3:28-29). He thus saw the word Messiah and Bridegroom as being one and the same. The Lord equally states the same: "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast" (Mark 2:19-20). In the Book of Revelation, the *Ekklesia* is compared to the Bride of Christ: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (Revelation 21:2-3) (Nicolaidis, 2010; Sizer, n.d.).

Jesus tells us of YHWH's love: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). This reality is difficult to comprehend. YHWH offers Himself to His *laos* (gk. Nation) as a servant does (Nicolaidis, 2010). However, Israel turned to Baal and served him as opposed to YHWH. Peter did the same the night Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Peter told Jesus: "No, you shall never wash my feet." And



Jesus responded: “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (John 13:8) indicating a withdrawal. “At Bethlehem God entered the slave market where the whole human race was putting itself up for auction, prostituting itself and its humanity to a cheapened life. But on the cross the Lord Jesus paid the price, the full price for our freedom, and bought us back. This is the story of God’s love and God’s heart -- his loving desire to make of his people the full persons he intended them to be” (Stedman, n.d.).

A sinner who refuses to confess and repent is a desperate case. It is evident that no sin is beyond forgiveness and no time for one to make a confession is too late. We need to remember that one criminal who was crucified beside Jesus said: “ ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise’” (Luke 23:42,43).

Hosea’s Message for Legal Professionals

The Holy Bible designates the promises made between God and His people (*Laos*) as covenants and this suggests a needed relationship of obligation and compliance by His people on an ongoing basis (Nicolaidis, 2010). All nations that are deceitful towards God will ultimately collapse (Hosea 7:13). When people lie about God, He holds them answerable (Proverbs 6:16-17; Acts 5:1-11). Hosea declares that any nation will tumble if they see God’s law as outlandish rules (Hosea 8:12). Of course people don’t not have the aptitude to guide them to everlasting security and peace on earth. Jesus Christ Our Lord states “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Thus God has given us guidelines to adhere to and we need to acquiesce with them. In the Book of Hosea, God presents deep themes of justice, compassion, as well as integrity. These same principles resonate with modern law. A lawyer’s work often-times involves navigating complex moral and ethical seas. Hosea’s messages can serve as a guide to uphold justice with not only empathy but with dedication. Hosea (12:6) states, "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." The pertinence of this quote should not be overlooked, especially in the modern world in which we live. Hosea did not preach a new-fangled social morality but rather urged the people to submit to the laws of Moses, who led Israel out of bondage in Egypt and received the law at Sinai on their behalf. Hosea 4:6, teaches us that Israel fell because of their deficiency in knowledge about Him and His desires. One needs to know laws and understand its lessons well as they relate to all situations so that no sin is perpetrated.

The Book of Hosea comprises numerous legal lessons, and it calls Israel to be faithful to the Law of God, as provided in the Pentateuch. Hosea presents a somewhat conservative and traditional message. One of the parallels that can be drawn from Hosea regarding the legal profession in the modern world is the inherent need for justice. Hosea continually strives to identify the vital foundations which promote social cohesion, not only in the immediate society, but in the entire world (Volanie, 2011). Hosea postulates that disregarding the law of Yahweh in the continuous scramble for power and affluence leads to injustice and inflicts immense suffering on Israelite society and inevitably leads to disaster (Kavusa, 2016). One is able to clearly ascertain that the same greed and injustice is evident in modern society and especially in the legal profession. Without the necessary moral code to preserve justice people have become entrenched in a perpetual cycle of injustice that only causes pain and suffering. Therefore, wherever humans enact various forms of injustice in the legal sphere, those same deliberate actions promote the integration of negative social and cosmic orders. This results in adverse consequences against the entirety of creation just as is the case in Hosea 4:1-3 (Kavusa, 2016). The book of Hosea is essentially also framed around five cycles of judgement



and renewal, with the leitmotif that God will always judge iniquity but He will always bring his people or nation (*Laos tou Theou*) back to himself (Nicolaidis, 2010). Hosea's message was that God's law invariably exposes sin and is a guide for one towards contrite daily living. It is interesting to note that "the work modern lawyers do has its roots in the Bible, specifically Luke 10:25-29" (TOW Project, n.d.). In addition "The law of Moses, as reframed by Jesus around the love command and as fulfilled by the transformation that comes in the grace of the gospel, is important. And for that very reason laws are important. And if laws are important then so are lawyers" (TOW Project, n.d.).

Similarly, another message which Hosea teaches the Israelites which is crucial for modern legal practice is the need for compassion. It is apparent that in Hosea's teachings compassion is an essential jigsaw piece in the larger puzzle of society. Its tendrils branch through various spheres but none more important than the legal sphere (Volanie, 2011). Compassion as an essential element in the legal profession encourages legal professionals to see beyond the mere surface value facts and legalities in each case they may be presented with. Learning compassion in the manner in which Hosea teaches it would inspire legal professionals to approach cases with empathy. If compassion leads to empathy, then empathy fosters a greater and more holistic view of justice. In this light the main goal of justice is not merely to enforce strict laws and mete out harmful punishments but to seek outcomes that support and foster the growth of personal well-being in the collective light of societal well-being (Laldinsuah, 2015). Hosea's wants people to remind themselves that justice must always be tempered with mercy especially in instances where strict legal applications may not necessitate a constructive or rehabilitative recourse. Through the integration of compassion into the legal profession, professionals can become better equipped to advocate for justice in a more holistic manner (Hooas, 1997).

Moreover, Hosea's teaching is also based on integrity which is essential in any part of the legal profession since it emphasises a prudent commitment to fairness, accountability and truth. These qualities form the foundation of justice (Rhode, 2013). In a complex field where professionals handle the very rights and lives individuals in the palm of their hand's, integrity is essential to ensure that all legal professionals pursue cases honestly and impartially (Pakpahan & Pantan 2022). Furthermore, they should not succumb to external forces or biases or even personal gain for that matter. In essence they should seek justice for justice's sake. Hosea's calls for legal professionals to uphold inherent ethical duties, particularly when facing circumstances that challenge their morals. Additionally, integrity fosters public trust, buttressing the rightfulness of the legal system. God's law is shown as a gift of grace to people he has already accepted, and should not be regarded as a way to attain God's favour. Hosea's teachings remind legal professionals that role they possess goes far beyond merely interpreting the law. In his view legal professionals must embody the very principles of justice they represent, working sincerely to defend society with honour and dependability (Rhode, 2013).

While God ought to and from time to time indeed does bring His justice upon evil humanity, His purpose is ultimately to reconcile fallen man and save humanity which is simply what Hosea's message is about. In the same way the laws that exist in a country are critical to be understood so that justice prevails and people keep on the 'straight and narrow path' as it were. This means then that human law must be carefully considered continuously so that God's righteousness transpires as His mercy and kindness extend to humanity. Legal ethics is all about injustices (Shaffer, 2003) thus lawyers should learn from Hosea that God established the law. Furthermore, we should note "that the world is ordered according to



systemic social distortion". Thus at the core of any nations problems there is a "terrible incongruity between the way of the world and the powerful will of [the Lord]" (Shaffer, 2003:476).

Conclusion

Hosea's greatness as a prophet lies in his profound insights into the nature of God's love, his willingness to embody the message in his personal life, and his passionate plea for repentance, justice, and faithfulness. Hosea's life demonstrates for humanity the mysterious purposes of YHWH who used the prophet and his wife Gomer as an object lesson for his people. The marriage relationship of Hosea and Gomer was used to describe the relationship of YHWH to Israel. Hosea proclaims that YHWH's relationship with the people was like that of a loving husband, and Israel was YHWH's 'wife'. Just as Hosea's wife Gomer had transgressed, so too, Israel had proved herself to be unfaithful by opting to observe religious practices such as worshipping Baal. Hosea also argued that all the political dangers facing Israel were evidence of her unfaithfulness to Yahweh who loved her but was disrespected and not loved in return causing His apostasy (Keil, 1954).

There are three key messages in Hosea. YHWH's ways are the only ways. People who seek righteousness will select to "walk" in the way YHWH requires them to and keep His statutes. Those who are depraved and live in darkness will "stumble" and bring destruction on themselves. The only way to salvation is through walking in the light. Hosea consequently endeavoured to bring Israelites who had forgotten YHWH the God of their forefathers back to the fold. He vehemently condemned the many sins of the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. He warned them of the approaching Assyrian armies and their impending captivity. He also anticipated the end of the sacrificial offerings and the royal priesthood of Aaron (Hosea 3:4-5). His own life was a demonstration of the faithfulness of YHWH and His willingness to forgive the transgressions of sinners. YHWH makes this very clear to his people, "Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you" (Hosea 3:3). Hosea anticipated that salvation was possible for Israel after her infidelity and that YHWH's people would reunite under the rule of a new king in the line of David (3:5). Hosea's prophetic language is known for being both poetic and penetrating, filled with vivid metaphors that evoke the passionate, almost distraught feelings of a loving God towards His unfaithful people. His use of imagery and emotional appeal helped to communicate God's desire for a sincere and faithful relationship.

Israel ultimately rejected Hosea's essential message and were ruined. YHWH is shown to be the one who stands beyond history but acts in history so as to reprimand His people who stray from His word. His actions are not punitive as such, but rather redemptive in nature. When YHWH withdraws from people, He is in essence guiding people to see their need for Him. In verse 5:15 it states that YHWH "...will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face". The only confidence people have is YHWH's constant love for humanity. This was manifest to Hosea by his marital experience which demonstrated the association between YHWH and the fallen Israel.

The New Testament speaks to the issue of justice using the law and explicates the wages of sin:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God



with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10:25-29)

Sadly people generally try to reframe God’s law to suit them and be much more limiting in harmony with their own particular partialities. Sin is defiling and infidelity towards YHWH and is likened to adultery in marriage (5:3). Adultery towards YHWH makes Him withdraw from sinners until they demonstrate a true spirit of redemption and atonement with Him. Those who sin clearly do not have a sound understanding of YHWH and lack fellowship with Him as they divorce themselves from a sound relationship with Him (5:4,5). What is needed to atone is for sinners to acknowledge their sin and seek God’s face and heed His word (5:11,15) and this may likely be after a severe punishment being meted out to them (5:8-9;13). Hosea reveals to us that YHWH is just and compassionate, but also firm when required (Anderson, 1985; Shamase & Nicolaidis, 2022). When Israel repented, YHWH healed their apostasy and He gave His blessings and love to them liberally, since was no longer angry with them. Hosea states: “Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them” (Hosea 14:9 RSV). The key lessons in Hosea are that iniquity distances people from YHWH (5:1-7). One’s evil actions make one liable to YHWH and His divine judgement (5:8-14). Sinners are consequently called to repent if they desire salvation (5:15).

The Book of Hosea offers thoughtful teachings on justice, compassion, and integrity—such principles that remain fundamental to the modern legal profession. By integrating Hosea’s teachings, legal professionals can rise above technicalities, embracing an all-inclusive approach to justice that values the well-being of individuals and society concurrently. In a world beset by multifaceted moral dilemmas and inequalities, Hosea’s everlasting message reminds legal professionals to maintain fairness, advocate with compassion, and embody the ethical principles that form the roots of justice.

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