Landas 31:1 (2017) 131–148

ISRAEL'S DEFILEMENT AND GOD'S WITHDRAWAL IN HOSEA 5:3–7

Felipe Fruto Ll. Ramirez, S.J.

Introduction

The notion that God can abandon his sanctuary because of defilement is ancient. It is the principal reason why the people and the Temple need to be ritually purified during the annual feast of Yom Kippur (Lev. 16). According to such rites, the priest must bathe and put on special garments before he enters the holy place to ensure that he does not pollute it. Then, after offering a bull sacrifice for himself and his family, the priest offers a ***ḥaṭṭā't*** sacrifice to "make atonement for the sanctuary, because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel …" (Lev. 16:16). This cleansing of the holy place once every year is meant to safeguard God's abiding presence among his people.

The origin of the Yom Kippur is obscure. The feast is found only in a few places in the Hebrew Bible: Lev. 16:1–34, 23:26–32, and Num. 29:7–11.[1] All the references are from the priestly source and are considered by some scholars to be retrojections to the time of Israel's wilderness sojourn. The feast is not on Ezekiel's list of holidays to be observed when the Temple is rebuilt (Ezk. 45), and neither does

[1]The purification rite in Exod. 30:10 may just pertain to the cleansing of the altar. Lev. 25:9 refers to the day of atonement at the beginning of the jubilee year.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Zechariah include it among the fasting days to be observed by those returning from exile (Zech. 8:19). The feast is also notably absent in passages where we would expect it to be mentioned, e.g., in accounts of activities during the month of Tishri (1 Kgs. 8; 2 Chr. 7; Ezra 3) and in lists of Israelite festivals (2 Chr. 8:13, Ezk. 45). For this reason, scholars generally regard the feast as having developed only in the Second Temple period.

It is remarkable then that Hosea, who prophesied in the second half of the 8th century BCE, may have anticipated at least the priestly teaching on defilement of the holy place, and God's withdrawal as a consequence of such. Indeed, the oracle in Hos. 5:3–7 gives witness to an early notion of sancta contamination that may have contributed to the development of the Yom Kippur.

Exegesis

Hosea's oracle may actually start with Hos. 5:1, which is addressed to the authorities in Israel such as the priests (הכהנים) and the house of the king (בית המלך);[2] whether Hosea may have a specific group in mind with בית ישׂראל is not clear.[3] However, it is obvious from v. 3 onwards that the whole nation (note Ephraim/Israel in vv. 3 and 5), and not just its leaders, is the target of his prophetic condemnation.

Contributing further to the obscurity of Hos. 5:1–2 are the cryptic references to a "snare of Mizpah" (פח … למצפה) and "a net spread upon Tabor" (רשׁת פרוּשׂה על-תבור). Mizpah and Tabor may be cultic places,

[2]Despite the obscurity of the passage, K. Elliger claims that Hos. 5:1–2 is a well-structured unit, separate from Hos. 5:3–7 ("Eine verkannte Kunstform bei Hosea [Zur Einheit von Hos 5:1f.]," *ZAW* 69 [1957]: 151–160). Ehud Ben Zvi's study of the structure of the chapter, however, takes vv. 1–7 as a unit (*Hosea*, FOTL [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005], 121).

[3]Because of its parallelism with "priests" and "house of the king," בית ישׂראל may refer to a more restricted group (of civil servants? aristocracy?) according to Horacio Simian-Yofre (*El desierto de los dioses: Teología e historia en el libro de Oseas* [Córdoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 1993], 36). On the other hand, it may also represent the nation Ephraim/Israel which stands accused in vv. 3–7.

https://publications.lst.edu/

but the nature of their offense is far from certain.[4] Verse 2 contains two unusual words that are interpreted variously: a) שחטה, unattested elsewhere, is thought to be a biform of שחת ("pit"), or a feminine noun derived from the verb שחט ("to slaughter"); b) שטים, also a *hapax legomenon*, may be the place called שטים ("Shittim") in Num. 25:1, or a noun coming from the verb שוט ("to swerve or fall away") which is then rendered as "acts of rebellion." In any case, v. 2 ends with an announcement of punishment: "I am chastisement for them all" (אני מוסר לכלם) is a more forceful way of saying "I will chastise them all" in Hebrew.

Hos. 5:3–7 is a more lucid text. It is for the most part a prophetic speech except for v. 3, which can be construed as a quotation of a divine saying.

אני ידעתי אפרים	3	I know Ephraim
וישׂראל לא־נכחד ממני		and Israel is not hidden from me;
כי עתה הזנית אפרים		For now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore,
נטמא ישׂראל׃		Israel is defiled.

The statement "I know Ephraim and Israel is not hidden from me" implies that God judges the nation on the basis of the people's internal motives and attitudes.[5] God or the prophet must have seen the disparity between Israel's external action and its inner disposition. Ephraim/Israel is personified here,[6] and so the verb ידע involves knowing a

[4]Gale A. Yee suggests that these places are singled out "not for their historical or cultic importance, but because they are wordplays on different kinds of traps: 'snare' (פח) at Mizpah, 'net spread' (רשׁת פרוּשׂה) upon Tabor, a 'pit' (שׁחטה) dug deep at Shittim" ("Hosea," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol. VII: *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Daniel, & The Twelve Prophets* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996], 244). Along a similar line of thought, Gert Kwakkel argues that Hos. 5:1–2 makes use of wordplays, ambiguities, and shifts of meaning as a rhetorical strategy ("Paronomasia, Ambiguities and Shifts in Hos 5:1–2," *VT* 61 [2011]: 603–615). See also Yair Mazor, "Hosea 5.1–3: Between Compositional Rhetoric and Rhetorical Composition," *JSOT* 14:45 (1989): 115–126.

[5]Knowledge here involves some element of judgment. 1 Sam. 2:3 calls YHWH "the God of knowledge (אל דעות) by whom actions are weighed (נתכנו)." Similarly: Job 23:10; 31:6; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 12:3.

[6]Compare the singular "you" in v. 3 with the plural "they" in v. 4.

https://publications.lst.edu/

person intimately, understanding his thoughts and actions (Ps. 94:11; 139:1f) and discerning where his heart is (Ps. 44:21f; Prov. 24:12). לא־נכחד is a figure of speech pointing to the impossibility of hiding behind pretension, dissimulation, or external appearance. The same transparency before the Lord is also acknowledged by the psalmist: "O God, you know (ידעת) my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden (לא־נכחדו) from you" (Ps. 69:6).

In v. 3cd, God or the prophet goes on to describe what he actually knows about the people: "for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore (כי עתה הזנית אפרים)."[7] The conjunction כי ("for/because") introduces the reason for the defilement that is declared in v. 3d. At the same time, it establishes a logical connection with the previous statement, for it demonstrates the knowledge that is claimed in v. 3ab. It can also be an emphatic particle in Hebrew and can be translated into English by the adverb "indeed" or "really": "Indeed, O Ephraim, you have now played the harlot." The adverb עתה ("now") points to the present state of affairs of the nation.

Harlotry is a standard description of apostasy in the Bible,[8] especially in Hosea.[9] The prophet depicts Israel as a promiscuous wife (Hos. 1:2 אשת זנונים) and the Israelites as children of harlotry (Hos. 1:2 ילדי זנונים, 2:6 בני זנונים), for the land has fornicated away from YHWH (Hos. 1:2 כי־זנה תזנה הארץ מאחרי יהוה). Indeed, the people have

[7]It is not unusual to find *hip'il* verbs being used with a simple *qal* sense, as is the case here of הזנית (also Hos. 4:10.18). The subject of this verb is the nation which is alternately depicted as a person (singular in vv. 3 and 5a) and as a people (plural in vv. 4, 5bc, 6, 7). Attempts to identify the subject with the leaders in v. 1 do not satisfactorily explain why הזנית is singular (so too is the object of ענה בפניו in v. 5).

[8]As a figure of religious apostasy: see זנונים in 2 Kgs. 9:22; Ezk. 23:11, 29; זנח in Num. 14:33; Jer. 3:2, 9; 13:27; Ezk. 43:7, 9; זנה in Exod. 34:16, 2 Chr. 21:11, 13; Jer. 2:20; Ezk. 16:35.

[9]The *qal* form of the verb זנה appears 6x in Hosea (2:7; 3:3; 4:13.14.15; 9:1), the *hip'il* form 4x (4:10.18; 5:3). The noun זנונים occurs 6x (1:2 [2x]; 2:4.6; 4:12; 5:4) and זנות 2x (4:11; 6:10).

https://publications.lst.edu/

abandoned him to practice prostitution (Hos. 4:10 יהוה עזבו לשמר זנות־כי־את). They hanker for a harlot's hire (Hos. 2:14; 9:1 אתנה), and did this in utter rebellion against their God (Hos. 4:12 ויזנו מתחת אלהיהם).[10] As such, since God has a covenant relationship with Israel analogous to that of husband and wife, her apostasy can also be dubbed as adultery (Hos. 2:4 נאפופים; cf. נאף in 3:1; 4:2.13; 7:4). She has forgotten her true husband and has gone after her lovers (Hos. 2:15 ותלך אחרי מאהביה; cf. 2:9), i.e., they have worshipped other gods (cf. Hos. 3:1 אלהים־אחרים הם פנים אל).

In relation to this, religious practices such as divination from a tree or a staff and sacrifices on mountain tops, upon hills, and under the oak, poplar, and terebinth are all traced to the spirit of harlotry (Hos. 4:12; 5:4 רוח זנונים; cf. 4:19) which has led the people astray. The promiscuous spirit has weakened the moral fiber of the nation, resulting in the infidelity of the women (Hos. 4:13de וכלותיכם תנאפנה תזנינה בנותיכם; cf. 4:14ab)[11] and the cultic aberration of the men who make offerings and sacrifices with the sacred prostitutes (Hos. 4:14cde הם עם־הזנות יפרדו ועם־הקדשות יזבחו).[12]

---

[10]The preposition מתחת ("from under") has the connotation of subversion (cf. 2 Kgs. 8:20.22).

[11]"Daughters" and "brides" are synecdoche for all women. There is no evidence for the charge that brides were placed under *paterna potestas* of the fathers-in-law, or that virgins performed sexual intercourse with strangers in the name of a goddess as alleged by Hans W. Wolff (*Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974], 86–89), Leonhard Rost ("Erwägungen zu Hos 4:13f," in Walter Baumgartner, ed., *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950], 451–460), Wilhelm Rudolph, ("Präparierte Jungfrauen?" *ZAW* 75 [1963]: 65–73), and Hans Klein ("Natur und Recht: Israels Umgang mit dem Hochzeitsbrauchtum seiner Welt," *TZ* 37 [1981]: 3–18).

[12]Such a custom was common in the ancient Near East and is attested to in the OT (Gen. 38:21.22; Deut. 23:17); the Code of Hammurabi #110, #127, #178–82; and the Middle Assyrian Laws #40 (translation from Theophile J. Meek, "The Code of Hammurabi," in James Bennett Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East* 3rd ed. [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969], here at 170–174, 183). See also William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion*

https://publications.lst.edu/

As a consequence for their apostasy, the prophet dissuades the people from going on a pilgrimage to Gilgal and Bethel and swearing "as YHWH lives" (Hos. 4:15). To do so would be a great hypocrisy, for how can the Lord nourish a stubborn people (Hos. 4:16 סרר)?[13] They have become joined to idols (Hos. 4:17 חבור עצבים) and a band of drunkards given to debauchery (Hos. 4:18 סר סבאם הזנה הזנו). Indeed, a whorish spirit has wrapped them in its wings (Hos. 4:19 צרר רוח אותה בכנפיה).[14]

V. 3d "Israel is defiled" (נטמא ישׂראל)—in this condemnation of the nation, Hosea thus employs the religious concept of impurity (טמא) that marks a person or a thing as unworthy of approaching God particularly in cult.[15] An unclean person contaminates everything he comes in contact with, including the holy, and so he cannot enter a shrine, go up to the altar, and offer a sacrifice.[16] Sin also pollutes both

of Israel (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1956), 75f, 158f; Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 299, n. 21; and Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB 7c (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 214–229. The existence of sacred prostitution in Israel during Hosea's time is doubted, however, by Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger ("JHWH, Hosea und die drei Frauen im Hoseabuch," *EvT* 55:2 [1995]: 114–140).

[13]The injunction not to enter Bethel and Gilgal is probably addressed not just to Judahites but to all the people (note the plural verb in v. 16 in contrast to the singular verb in v. 15).

[14]Instead of "wind" (NRSV, NKJV, NJB, NIV), רוח refers to the "spirit of harlotry" mentioned in 4:12 and 5:4. The third person feminine singular object-pronoun (אותה) represents the totality of Israel/Ephraim which is depicted as a stubborn heifer (4:16).

[15]Richard E. Averbeck, "טמא," in W. A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 365–376.

[16]See Lev. 7:19–21; 22:3–7; Num. 18:11.13. The non-P literature also has many attestations to the notion (e.g., 1 Sam. 21:4–7; Deut. 12:15.22; 15:22; Hag. 2:14). Sacrificial rites and cultic feasts demand the purity of both the officiating priests and the lay participants (1 Sam. 16:5; 20:26; Joel 2:16; Ezra 6:20–21; Neh. 12:30.45; 2 Chr. 5:11; 29:34; 30:3.15.17–20; 35:6).

https://publications.lst.edu/

land and people (Hos. 5:3; 6:10)[17] such that, as an act of cleansing or punishment, the people may be destroyed or exiled (Hos. 9:17)[18] and the land may languish unproductively (Hos. 2:11f; 4:3; 5:7; 9:16).[19]

The sources of defilement range from those that are quite innocuous (e.g., Hos. 9:3–4 unclean food, mourners' bread) to those that arise from serious sin (e.g., Hos. 6:10 whoredom). Hosea traces the nation's impurity to its source in the moral degradation of the people, particularly through their association with idols and prostitutes (Hos. 4:11–19; 5:3–4; 6:10)[20] and contact with implements of idolatry (Hos. 4:12–13; 8:15f).[21]

לא יתנו מעלליהם	4	Their deeds do not permit (them)
לשוב אל־אלהיהם		to return to their God.
כי רוח זנונים בקרבם		For the spirit of whoredom is within them;
ואת־יהוה לא ידעו׃		and they do not know the Lord.

In v. 4ab ("Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God"), מעללים (deeds) is a general term designating, here as elsewhere in Hosea (4:9; 9:15; 12:3), not just the sexual immorality and idolatry mentioned in the previous chapter but all the wrongdoings of the people as well, including "swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery" (Hos. 4:2). The rest of the statement refers to the futile attempt of the people to achieve reconciliation with God.[22] The verb שוב is the word

[17]See also 2 Sam. 22:25, 27 (= Ps. 18:27); Mic. 2:10; 6:11; Jer. 33:4–9; Ezk. 14:11; 20:38.43; 22:2–14; 24:11–13; 36:25–32; 37:23; 39:23–24; Isa. 64:4–11.

[18]Mic. 2:10; Ezk. 20:38; 22:2–14.24.31; 24:11–13; 39:23–24; Isa. 64:4–11.

[19]See also Gen. 3:17; Isa. 24:5–7; Jer. 12:4. Cf. Michael de Roche, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea," *VT* 31 (1981): 400–409.

[20]Cf. Ezk. 16:20.23; 36:17. According to Jacob Milgrom, the eighth-century prophets never used טמא for idolatry because the state-sponsored Baal cult was no longer an issue at that time; the defilement in Hos. 5:3 and 6:10 has to do more with drunkenness and harlotry (*Leviticus 17–22*, AB 3a [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 1384).

[21]Cf. Isa. 30:22; Ezk. 7:19–21; Deut. 7:5.25; Lev. 19:31; 20:2–5.

[22]Marvin A. Sweeney thinks that Hosea is describing here an attempt at reconciliation after divorce (*The Twelve Prophets* Vol. 1: *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah,*

https://publications.lst.edu/

for repentance in the Bible. Of the twenty-two occurrences of this word in Hosea, it is used eight times for repentance (3:5; 5:4; 6:1; 7:10; 11:5; 12:5; 14:2, 3). The context suggests some form of a penitential rite involving the sacrifice of animals (Hos. 5:6 "flocks and herds") like the one mentioned in Mic. 6:6–8 ("Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?").[23] The penitential rites in Hos. 6:1–6 ("burnt offerings") and Hos. 14:2–4 (MT פרים "calves") also presuppose animal sacrifice. Hosea declares that such cultic ritual is ineffective because the people are not in the proper disposition to approach God; they are defiled.

V. 4c "For the spirit of whoredom is within them" (רוח זנונים בקרבם כי) explains why the people are incapable of returning to God. ***Rûaḥ*** refers to the internal disposition of the people that manifests itself in their attitude and actions (e.g., Exod. 6:9; 1 Chr. 5:26; Jer. 51:11). Hence, ***rûaḥ zənûnîm*** refers to the inclination toward promiscuity in both literal (real) and metaphorical (religious) senses. It is this lust for sex and idols that has led the people astray (Hos. 4:12 תעה).[24]

Jonah, Berit Olam [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000], 56–57). The vocabulary and imagery, however, pertain more to cultic sacrifice: e.g., "defiled" (v. 3), "with their flocks and herds … they shall seek the Lord" (v. 6).

[23]It is reasonable to assume that penitential rites involving animal sacrifice already existed in Hosea's time (cf. Hos. 6:1–6; 14:2–4; Mic. 6:6–7). The fact that much of P's sacrificial vocabulary is not attested to in pre-exilic writings or used in an entirely different fashion does not prove that sacrifices of expiation were not practiced before the exile. In fact, the study of R. J. Thompson has shown that expiation and atonement were already operative concepts in sacrifice outside of P (*Penitence and Sacrifice in Early Israel Outside the Levitical Law* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963], 61–62, 76–77, 180–181, 212–214, 245). Furthermore, Moshe Weinfeld offers many other examples of expiatory sacrifices from the ancient world ("Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source Against Their ANE Background," in *Proceedings of the VIII World Congress of Jewish Studies* [Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982], 105–106).

[24]The verb תעה has an ethical sense (Isa. 3:12; 9:15; Amos 2:4; Mic. 3:5).

https://publications.lst.edu/

Is Hosea using here the language and imagery of spirit-possession[25] (cf. Hos. 9:7 איש הרוח "a person possessed by a spirit")? Is he portraying the people as possessed by an evil or unclean spirit that makes them lustful and lascivious?[26] The use of *rûaḥ* here as an indwelling spirit is unlikely—Hosea emphasizes human sin (note the stress on מעללים in Hos. 5:4a), not some evil spirit, as the reason for the inability to turn back to God.[27]

A further impediment to reconciliation is that "they do not know YHWH" (Hos. 5:4d את־יהוה לא ידעו). Ignorance of God is another stereotyped idiom for apostasy in the Bible.[28] Those who do not know God "rebel against him" and "prophesy by Baal" (Jer. 2:8 בעל נבא … פּשׁע; cf. Isa. 1:2–3), "abandon him" (Hos. 4:10–11; Isa. 1:3–4 עזב), "despise him" (Isa. 1:4 נאץ), "forget him" (Hos. 4:6 שׁכח), and "sin against him" and "disdain him" (1 Sam. 2:12–30 בזה … חטא). Isaiah speaks of Israel's apostasy in the following manner: "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity …" (Isa. 1:3–4).

---

[25]Friedrich Nötscher, *Zwölfprophetenbuch: oder Kleine Propheten*, Echter Bible (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1948), 17. בקרבם can mean either "in their midst" or "inside them." The evil spirit may have been used on the analogy of the spirit of God that is said to possess the prophets (Num. 11:17.25.26.29; 1 Sam. 10:6.10; 19:20.23) or people who live by YHWH's statutes (Ezk. 36:25–28).

[26]Cf. Zech. 13:2 רוח הטמאה (unclean spirit). On the nondemonic character of impurity in the Bible, see David Pearson Wright, "Unclean and Clean (OT)," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 739.

[27]According to A. A. Macintosh, the "spirit of harlotry" refers to the *Zeitgeist*, i.e., the mode of thoughts and behaviors prevalent among the people as a whole (*Hosea*, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997], 184).

[28]G. Johannes Botterweck, "ידע *yāda'*," in G. Johannes Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 5, trans. J. T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 469.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Note that ignorance of God manifests itself in disregard for the religious and moral precepts that are expressions of the divine will, e.g., the priest who rejected knowledge is said to have forgotten the Lord's ***tôrāh*** (Hos. 4:6 שכח תורת אלהים). Hence, it is equated with various offenses like "fornication" (Hos. 5:4 זנונים); "swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery" (Hos. 4:2 אלה וכחש ורצח וגנב ונאף); "ungodliness" (Job. 18:21 עול); and "treachery, falsehood, supplanting, slander, deception" (Jer. 9:1–4 בגדים, שקר, עקב, רכיל, תלל).

That is not all, however. In some intances, Hosea seems to explain the lack of knowledge of God as forgetfulness of YHWH's goodness and providence toward Israel in the past: "She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal" (Hos. 2:10). Indeed, the prophet sometimes uses the very word *forgetfulness* (שכח) in his accusations (Hos. 2:15; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6). Such ignorance attains poignancy especially with regard to the event of the Exodus in which YHWH's love for Israel is portrayed with parental tenderness: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me.… Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them" (Hos. 11:1–3). Knowledge of God, therefore, presupposes a certain respect for the sacred historical traditions of Israel.

ועָנה גאון־ישׂראל בפניו וישׂראל ואפרים יכשׁלו בעונם כשׁל גם־יהודה עמם׃	5 The pride of Israel has testified to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in their iniquity; Judah also shall stumble with them.

When applied to nations, the word גאון (LXX ὕβρις) in v. 5a ("Israel's pride testifies to his face") has the usual negative sense of smugness, presumption, conceit, etc. (Amos 6:8; 8:7; Isa. 13:19; 16:6; Jer. 13:9).[29] Most commentaries would explain the entire verse as follows: that there is no way Israel can hide his arrogance because it

[29]Pride here can reflect "a nationalistic arrogance, a heedless sense of self-importance, and a related stubbornness of will," according to J. Andrew Dearman (*The Book of Hosea*, NICOT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010], 174). It is "the undisturbed confidence which Israel places in the cultic activity mentioned in

https://publications.lst.edu/

shows; it is a smack in the eye, a slap on his face (ענה … בפנים).[30] The word גאון, however, can also have a positive meaning which the nation can be proud of, e.g., its wealth, its city (Amos 6:8; cf. Isa. 13:19), its patrimony (Isa. 4:2; cf. Psa. 47:4; Jer. 13:9), etc.[31] It may thus have an ironic sense here, for Hosea may have meant exactly the opposite: "Israel's decrepit state testifies to his face!" (cf. Hos. 7:10).

When applied to nations, the verb כשׁל ("to stumble, totter") in v. 5b ("Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in their iniquity")[32] is a figure of military setback or political overthrow (Hos. 14:2; Jer. 6:15=8:12; 2 Chr. 25:8; 28:23).[33] Their downfall will be the result of their iniquity (בעונם); indeed, the *niphal* verb יכּשלו has a medio-reflexive sense that further stresses the people's responsibility for their own misfortune.

The originality of v. 5c ("Judah also shall stumble with them") is contested, for while the repetition of the verb *kšl* may be part of Hebrew rhetoric, the use of גם ("again") probably betrays the hand of the redactor.[34]

---

the next verse," according to James L. Mays (*Hosea*, OTL [London: SCM Press, 1969], 84).

[30]The expression ענה ב need not indicate here a lawsuit genre since it is used even outside of a legal context. The longer idiom ענה בפנים (Hos. 7:10; Job 16:8) speaks specifically of being confronted ("to his face") by a self-evident truth.

[31]There is no attestation of גאון referring to a patron god of a city or nation.

[32]The subjects "Israel and Ephraim" seem strange because the two names are equivalent in Hosea. Douglas K. Stuart's appositive translation ("Israel, i.e., Ephraim") does not really remove the awkwardness of the verse because the name Israel already appears in parallel with Ephraim in v. 5b (*Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987], 93). Besides, v. 5b has an unusual four stress-count in contrast to v. 5a and v. 5c which have only three.

[33]When applied to individuals, כשׁל can mean to suffer misfortune, injury, or death (Hos. 4:5; Prov. 4:16; 24:17) or to transgress (Hos. 14:9; Prov. 4:12).

[34]Wolff, *Hosea*, 70–71, n. *c* and *n*.

https://publications.lst.edu/

בצאנם ובבקרם ילכו	6	With their flocks and herds they shall go
לבקש את־יהוה		to seek the Lord,
ולא ימצאו		but they shall not find (him);
חלץ מהם׃		he has withdrawn from them.

In v. 6ab ("With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord"), the Israelites appear to be reaching out to God (externally at least). They continue, as was their custom, to offer animal sacrifices in their sanctuaries and on high places. Indeed, the verb בקש ("to seek") commonly designates a cultic act with God as its object.[35] Sometimes it has the meaning of "ask, implore, pray" (Psa. 27:8; Exod. 33:7), although in general the word does not specify the manner in which the cultic act is performed.[36] The context of Hos. 5:6, however, clearly indicates the offering of sacrifice—בצאן ובבקר can mean either *associatively* ("with flocks and herds") or *instrumentally* ("by means of flocks and herds"), i.e., through animal sacrifice. The image that is evoked thus is either of people bringing animals for sacrifice to the shrine or of the actual rite of sacrifice: "by means of flocks and herds [*sc.* sacrifices] they seek the Lord."[37]

The purpose of the sacrifice is further clarified by Hos. 5:4 ("to return to their God") whose syntactic structure interestingly enough is mimicked by Hos. 5:6 ("to seek the Lord"): both have a verbal idiom consisting of an auxiliary in the imperfect followed by a ל-infinitive.

לא יתנו	do not allow (them)
לשוב אל־אלהיהם	to return to their God. [5:4]

[35]E.g., Exod. 33:7; 2 Chr. 11:16; 20:4; 30:19; Jer. 50:4; Zech. 8:21–22; etc. The idiom "seek the face of God/YHWH" (… בקש פני) in particular has a strong cultic connotation: e.g., Hos. 5:1; Ps. 27:8; 105:4; 1 Chr. 16:11; 2 Chr. 7:14.

[36]Siegfried Wagner, "בקש *biqqēš*," in G. Johannes Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 2, trans. J. T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975/77), 231.

[37]Commentators generally favor reading the preposition ב of בצאנם ובבקרם as *bêth accompagnis* because of the verb הלך ("to go"); but ילכו לבקש is an idiom that need not describe an actual movement to a shrine. The people may already be offering the sacrifice there!

https://publications.lst.edu/

ילכו	they go
לבקש את־יהוה	to seek Yahweh. [5:6]

In fact, not only the syntax but the thoughts too are parallel. The word-pairs are either synthetic or synonymous (בקש // שוב; הלך // נתן; יהוה // אלהים).[38] The parallelism may indicate that the two verses refer to the same activity; in other words, one verse explains the other—the people's attempt to seek reconciliation with God (שוב) is described further as a ritual act (בקש) involving animal sacrifices (בצאן ובבקר). Such an attempt fails, we are told, because the people are "defiled" (Hos. 5:3d) and "their deeds do not allow them to return to their God" (Hos. 5:4ab); God thus recoils from them (Hos. 5:6).[39]

Hosea continues to use the concept and imagery of cultic impurity in v. 6cd ("They shall not find [him], he has withdrawn from them"). The sins committed by the nation pollute not only the people but also the place of sacrifice such that God eventually avoids the people and abandons the earthly sanctuary.[40] As a result, the empty ritual has become a seeking merely of the shrine rather than of God—in the words of Amos 5:4, "Seek me and live, but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal.…"

ביהוה בגדו	7	They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord;
כי־בנים זרים ילדו		for they have borne alien children.
עתה יאכלם חדש		Now the new moon shall devour them
את־חלקיהם׃		with their fields.

In the concluding statement of Hos. 5:7, Hosea once again takes up the symbolism of harlotry in depicting the ruptured relationship between God and Israel (cf. Hos. 1): "They have dealt faithlessly with

[38]בקש also stands in parallel with שוב in Hos. 5:5 and 7:10.

[39]In Hos. 5:15, God issues a threat to return to his heavenly sanctuary: "I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favor."

[40]See Hos. 5:14–15; Deut. 31:17–18; 32:20; Ezk. 8:6 for motifs of the absent God. On the priestly theology of sancta contamination and God's departure from the temple, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 976–985, esp. 982.

https://publications.lst.edu/

the Lord; for they have borne illegitimate children."[41] Moreover, in accord with ancient Canaanite belief,[42] the consequence of the estrangement with God affects not only the people but also the land: "Now the new moon shall devour them with their parcels of land (עתה יאכלם חדש את־חלקיהם)."[43] Whatever explanations are given for this enigmatic saying, all agree on its punitive import:[44] both the land and its people shall languish as a consequence of the infidelity of Israel/Ephraim.

---

[41]In Jer. 3:20, בגד is used for a wife's infidelity to her husband; זרים refers to those outside the family or clan (Deut. 25:5; Lev. 22:12; 1 Kgs. 3:18).

[42]See e.g., Aqhat C, col i, lines 18–19; col ii, lines 61–74 (translation from Harold L. Ginsberg, "The Tale of Aqhat," in James Bennett Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East* 3rd ed. [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969], 153). The same belief is reflected in Gen. 3:15; 2 Sam. 21:2; Isa. 24:5–7; and Jer. 12:4. For the interpretation of the relevant passages in Aqhat, see Simon B. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*, SBL Resources for Biblical Study 24 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 122, 131.

[43]A. A. Macintosh takes the more fundamental meaning of חדש and paraphrases it to mean "a renewal of circumstances" or "a time of misfortune" on the basis of a similar usage in Jer. 2:24 (*Hosea*, 189–190). According to Daniel J. Simundson, "it may refer to festivals that, rather than pleasing God, only add to Israel's guilt and guarantee their destruction" (*Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,* AOTC [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005], 55). See also Thomas Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 79. Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman revocalize ***ḥodeš*** to ***hādāš*** and interpret this as "a threat of YHWH to give up on Israel and to fulfill his purpose with a new people" (*Hosea*, AB 24 [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980], 397).

[44]1) Some commentators change חדש "new moon" to חסיל "locust" or משחית "destroyer"; 2) Stuart reads יאכל עם חדש as "a new people shall devour…"; 3) Rudolph tries to make sense of the MT in this fashion: in a single month (חדש) both people and fields shall be destroyed.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Conclusion

Hos. 5:3–7 provides an interesting example of how the eighth century prophet Hosea employs the ancient notion of religious impurity *(ṭāmēʾ)* to explain to his contemporaries why God has abandoned his earthly sanctuary, thereby rendering their cultic attempt at reconciliation with him meaningless and ineffective. We thus find in Hosea's oracle the notion that God can abandon his shrine because of the defilement of his people, a notion that may have presaged the later priestly theology of sancta contamination. In keeping with the prophetic tradition, however, Hosea emphasizes religious and moral offenses as the reason for Israel's defilement, with its disastrous consequence affecting both the land and its people.

A century and a half later, Ezekiel's vision of the abominations of the Temple (Ezk. 8:1–18) convinced him that God had already forsaken it and was now with the exiles in Babylon (Ezk. 11:16). Therefore, as a provision for the future Temple that was going to be built, Ezekiel gives an instruction regarding a temple purification rite similar to those of the Day of Atonement: "Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish, and purify the sanctuary …" (Ezk. 45:18–20).[45] This instruction may have provided the initial impetus for the later development of Yom Kippur. The later priestly prescription of offering a goat as the ***ḥaṭṭāʾṯ*** sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people and to cleanse the Temple of defilement in the annual observance of Yom Kippur (Lev. 4:1–5:13; 16:3–20.30; Num. 6:6–8) may have evolved in the Second Temple period to ensure God's enduring presence in his Temple, among his people.

[45]Ezk. 45:10–20 also attests to a temple purification rite similar to those of the Day of Atonement.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Bibliography

Albright, William F. *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1956.

Andersen, Francis & David Noel Freedman. *Hosea*. Anchor Bible 24. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980.

Averbeck, Richard E. "טמא." *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* Vol. 2, ed. W. A. VanGemeren, 365–376. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.

Ben Zvi, Ehud. *Hosea*. Form of Old Testament Literature. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Botterweck, G. Johannes. "ידע *yāda'*." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 5, ed. G. J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, trans. J. T. Willis, 448–481. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.

de Roche, Michael. "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea." *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981): 400–409.

Dearman, J. Andrew. *The Book of Hosea*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

Elliger, K. "Eine verkannte Kunstform bei Hosea (Zur Einheit von Hos 5:1f.)." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1957): 151–160.

Ginsberg, Harold Louis. "The Tale of Aqhat." *The Ancient Near East* 3rd ed., ed. J. B. Pritchard, 149–155. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Klein, H. "Natur und Recht: Israels Umgang mit dem Hochzeitsbrauchtum seiner Welt." *Theologische Zeitschrift* 37 (1981): 3–18.

Kwakkel, Gert. "Paronomasia, Ambiguities and Shifts in Hos 5:1–2." *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (2011): 603–615.

Macintosh, A. A. *Hosea*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1997.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Mays, James L. *Hosea*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press, 1969.

Mazor, Yair. "Hosea 5.1–3: Between Compositional Rhetoric and Rhetorical Composition." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 14 (1989): 115–126.

McComiskey, Thomas Edward (ed.). *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992.

Meek, Theophile J. "The Code of Hammurabi." *The Ancient Near East* 3rd ed., ed. J. B. Pritchard, 163–180. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 1–16*. Anchor Bible 3. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

———. *Leviticus 17–22*. Anchor Bible 3a. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Nötscher, Friedrich. *Zwölfprophetenbuch: oder kleine Propheten*. Echter Bible. Würzburg, Germany: Echter Verlag, 1948.

Parker, Simon B. *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*. Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 24. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.

Pope, Marvin. *Song of Songs*. Anchor Bible 7c. New York: Doubleday, 1977.

Rost, Leonhard. "Erwägungen zu Hos 4:13f." *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet*, ed. Walter Baumgartner. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950.

Rudolph, Wilhelm. "Präparierte Jungfrauen?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75 (1963): 65–73.

Schäfer-Lichtenberger, Christa. "JHWH, Hosea und die drei Frauen im Hoseabuch." *Evangelische Theologie* 55:2 (1995): 114–140.

Simian-Yofre, Horacio. *El desierto de los dioses: Teología e historia en el libro de Oseas*. Córdoba, Spain: Ediciones El Almendro, 1993.

Simundson, Daniel J. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Speiser, Ephraim A. *Genesis*. Anchor Bible 1. New York: Doubleday, 1964.

Stuart, Douglas K. *Hosea-Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary 31. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.

Sweeney, Marvin. *The Twelve Prophets* Vol. 1: *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Berit Olam. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000.

Thompson, R. J. *Penitence and Sacrifice in Early Israel outside the Levitical Law*. Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1963.

Wagner, Siegfried. "בקש *biqqēš*." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 2, ed. G. J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, trans. J. T. Willis, 229–241. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975/77.

Weinfeld, Moshe. "Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source Against Their ANE Background." *Proceedings of the VIII World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 105–106. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982.

Wolff, Hans W. *Hosea*, trans. G. Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1974.

Wright, David Pearson. "Unclean and Clean (OT)." *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6, ed. D. N. Freedman, 729–741. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Yee, Gale A. "Hosea." *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol. VII: *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Daniel, & the Twelve Prophets*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996.

https://publications.lst.edu/

CONTRIBUTORS

Albert E. Alejo, S.J., is Assistant Professor of Sociology, Anthropology, and Systematic Theology at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. He obtained his doctorate in Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. His book *Ehemplo: Spirituality of Shared Integrity in Philippine Church and Society* was published by the Institute of Spirituality in Asia (Quezon City). Aside from researching and writing on various social issues, he also writes Tagalog poetry, and has translated and published a number of mystical poems in *Nabighani: Mga Saling Tula ng Kapwa Nilikha* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publications, 2015).

Francis D. Alvarez, S.J., is Assistant Professor at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. He finished his STL and PhD at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, having written his dissertation under the direction of the late Fr. Daniel Harrington, S.J. His scholarly interest is in studying how Scripture can be used more effectively in religious education. He also writes a Sunday column—"God's Word Today"—in the *Philippine Star*.

Manuel V. Francisco, S.J., obtained his licentiate and doctorate in theology from Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Aside from teaching courses as an Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, he is often invited to give public lectures, retreats, and recollections to various groups. He is also a well-known liturgical songwriter, a co-founder of Bukas Palad Music Ministry, and the Executive Director of Tanging Yaman Foundation which is engaged in relief efforts and home building for victims of war and natural calamities.

Jojo M. Fung, S.J., hails from Sabah, Malaysia, and is faculty member of both Loyola School of Theology and the East Asian Pastoral Institute. He obtained his Master in Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; licentiate in Sacred Theology from the Jesuit School of Theology & Graduate

https://publications.lst.edu/

Theological Union, Berkeley; and doctorate in Contextual Theology from the Association of Theological Colleges, Chicago. As director of Sacred Springs: Dialogue Institute of Spirituality and Sustainability, research fellow at the Research & Training Center for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC), and coordinator of the Jesuit Companions in Indigenous Ministry (JCIM), he conducts courses and research on issues related to indigenous peoples. His latest book is *A Shamanic Theology of Sacred Sustainability: Asian Church in Dialogue with Shamans for Liberative Struggle* (2014).

Norlan H. Julia, S.J., obtained his bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology from Loyola School of Theology and masters in Theological Studies from Ateneo de Manila University. From 2009–2013, he took up doctoral studies in Heythrop College, London. After earning his doctorate and completing his Jesuit formation in 2014, he has since been reassigned to St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Cagayan de Oro City where he is currently the rector and a professor of fundamental and systematic theology.

James H. Kroeger, M.M., has served mission in Asia (Philippines and Bangladesh) since 1970, working in parishes and serving mostly in the education-formation apostolate of seminarians, catechists, and lay leaders. He currently teaches Christology, Ecclesiology, Missiology, and "Asian Theology" at Loyola School of Theology, East Asian Pastoral Institute, and Mother of Life Catechetical Center in Metro Manila. He has written extensively on Asian (FABC) and Philippine theology, mission, interfaith dialogue, and the Second Vatican Council. His recent books include *Exploring the Priesthood with Pope Francis* (Manila: St. Paul's Publications), *Telling the San Jose Story: Historical Perspectives* (Manila: San Jose Seminary Alumni Association), *Asia's Dynamic Local Churches* (Manila: Claretian Publications), *Becoming Missionary Disciples* (Manila: PMS), *A Vatican II Journey: Fifty Milestones* and *Walking in the Light of Faith* (Manila: St. Paul's Publications), and *The Gift of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books).

https://publications.lst.edu/

Timoteo J. M. Ofrasio, S.J., earned his licentiate and doctorate from the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of St. Anselm in Rome, Italy in 1990, and spent fourteen years (with six of them also as rector) as formator and professor at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Cagayan de Oro City. He was also Regional Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific at the Jesuit General Headquarters in Rome, as well as parish priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Camarín, Caloocan City. He currently teaches Liturgy and Sacraments at Loyola School of Theology, and his published works include "Liturgy and the Eucharist in Light of the New Evangelization" (*Landas* 29:2 [2015]); "Music for the Solemnities and Feasts of the Lord in Ordinary Time" (*Landas* 29:1 [2015]); "On the Reformed Mass of Vatican II and Benedict XVI's Letter *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*" (*Landas* 23:1 [2009]); and "The Baptistery and the Baptismal Font: Symbolism and Pastoral Relevance" (*Landas* 6:1 [1992]).

Reynaldo D. Raluto is a priest from the Diocese of Malaybalay as well as the current Academic Dean and a theology professor at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Cagayan de Oro City. He earned his doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium and his main scholarly interest is on the ecological perspective of liberation theology in the Philippine context. He has published a number of scholarly essays on ecology in addition to his book, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads: Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015).

Felipe Fruto Ll. Ramirez, S.J., is a professor and the former Dean of Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. He obtained his licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute and his doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Gregorian University in Rome. He teaches various courses on the Hebrew Bible as well as Biblical Hermeneutics, Textual Criticism and Research Methods, History of Ancient Israel, and Biblical Hebrew. He has also published a number of scholarly essays on the eighth century prophetic literature of Israel, and is a founding member and trustee of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines. He is currently the editor of *Landas*.

https://publications.lst.edu/