

Voices: Not-so-Minor Prophets: Hosea

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Exploration

Covenant community is the way of life that pleases God. This manifestation of the Abrahamic covenant reveals, not only will God's people be blessed, but also they will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

God prescribed this way of life to honor his name and bring healing to others. Throughout the Old Testament, the priests and prophets direct and demonstrate the way of God to his people. Three basic motifs are evident in this reality: creation, covenant and community.*

Each is sequentially necessary to understand the divine presence within the Bible by clarifying who God is, what is required of his people, and why these aspects are important to authentically participating in the God-life.

The God-life is a term signaling the nominalism—in name only—often associated with the word “Christian.” “Christian” is more than belief in God. The essence of “Christian” is responding to divine presence as an act of faith.

Prophetic literature illustrates what happens when the people of God deviate from this prescribed way of life.

Cultural, chronological and topical lenses are tools used to develop an understanding of the biblical material, and through which the reader can discern divine presence and intention historically and contextually. Each tool provides a different angle whereby the material can be engaged,

understood and applied.

Narrative reading, as described above, is the interpretive tool I will use below. Narrative reading enables the reader to see, think and feel the biblical material through the life of the character. It is a “boots on the ground” approach, as opposed to the aerial view of other disciplines.

Narrative reading enables the reader to engage the biblical material as subject—as someone directly involved. Subject provides a more human lens to discern the divine presence and the character’s response. In essence, Bible study as spiritual discipline demands a response to divine presence. Here, we observe Hosea’s response to that presence.

Engage

The Book of Hosea begins with this contention: “There is no faithfulness, or loyalty, or knowledge of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1). This pronouncement or oracle sets the stage for the entire document.

As a result of this lack of leadership, the community is comprised of liars, murderers and adulterers, and there is much bloodshed (Hosea 4:2). These social behaviors are the fruit of toxic leadership—a way of life that dishonors the divine presence, poisons God’s intentions for his people, and minimizes their influence and experience of authentic community.

Leadership has a direct influence on the quality of life of God’s people. Yet, Hosea reveals God no longer is making his appeal and rebuke to a single leader. Hosea reveals God is going to call his entire covenant community into court.

Thus, the images of Hosea 1-3—marriage, family and unfaithfulness—model God’s disdain for what his people have become. Hosea’s life is a preview to God’s main event—God’s relationship with his

covenant people.

The oracle in Hosea 4 identifies three key elements of covenant community: faithfulness, loyalty and knowledge. These three concepts influence compassion and service lacking in the community. God requires his people to live meaningfully in relationship with one another as an act of worshipping him (righteousness) and serving others (justice).* Righteousness and justice are generational concepts.

Jesus quotes Isaiah: "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Mark 7:6-7).

Apostle Paul states: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that she might be saved. For I bear them record, they have a zeal of God but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:1-2).

The generational concept noted by Jesus and Paul will lead to salvation of God's covenant people. Salvation basically is to heal, reconcile and/or restore. Both Jesus and Paul note God's imagination, generationally calling his people back to covenant relationship with him to experience covenant community.

The next seven chapters of Hosea enumerate the offenses of God's people, clarify God's faithfulness and record the prophet's appeal to the community for salvation (healing).

The prophet explores the history, the pains and the failures of God's people, while also expressing God's faithfulness, provision and presence with them through it all. This balance enables God to contend with his people regarding their unfaithfulness to him by noting their adulterous behavior in seeking other suitors.

Although God's people were worshiping at the temple, they were worshipping in vain. They had no knowledge of God.

Hosea notes the people entered God's presence during the day and were tipping out with other gods at night. They were unfaithful. This misguided exertion of energy deformed their sense of God, self and community.

God's people were doing all the right things for all the wrong reasons. This way of living resulted in a perverse and putrid lifestyle; they were rotten. Therefore, they had to be disciplined, but God would not utterly destroy them.

Exhort

Hosea continues to plead with God's people. He acknowledges God no longer loves Israel as a husband, but as a Father. This metaphor becomes more prevalent as the nation and monarchy are about to be dissolved.

No longer will God address a king or even a people; God now is clearly focused on his ultimate goal—the world. These generational qualities of righteousness and justice will now be prevalent in all those who seek the Lord.

In his most beloved parable—the Prodigal Son—Jesus demonstrates these same compassionate and intentional qualities necessary for participation in God's covenant community: mourning, patience, eagerness to heal, forgiveness, rejoicing and celebration.

God loves all, mourns for all, waits for all, expects all, seeks all, pursues all and embraces his children when they come home.

God's covenant love longs for a community that is faithful, loyal and knowledgeable of his love and is willing to experience and share that love with others.

We, too, fail God by practicing habits without correct form (faithfulness) or adequate fruit (knowledge). We, too, must change (become loyal). We, too,

must hear the conciliatory appeal of the prophet:

“Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hosea 14:9).

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