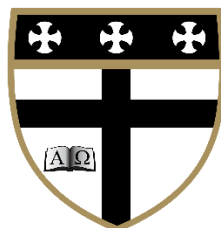


The Whitefield Seminary Papers

“Law & Religion Forum”

Volume 2, Apostolate Paper #8



A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“Hosea’s Prophecy: A Prologue to the New Testament”¹

by

Roderick O. Ford, Litt.D., LL.D.

Copyrighted Material © 2021

¹ Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). www.roderickford.org.

“Hosea’s Prophecy: A Prologue to the New Testament”²

by

Roderick O. Ford, D.Litt. (Law & Religion)



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1. Hosea’s Prophecy on the Assyrian Captivity of Israel	4
Chapter 2. Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel	7
Chapter 3. Paul’s Interpretation of Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel.....	9
Chapter 4. Augustine’s Interpretation of Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel.....	11
Chapter 5. Calvin’s Interpretation of Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel	13
Conclusion.	16

² Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). www.roderickford.org.

Introduction

The Prophet Hosea lived during the 8th century, BC, and he preached during a time of material prosperity in the northern kingdom of ancient Israel.

But Hosea has a message of dire warning: Israel's prosperity had caused it to drift away from its close relationship and obedience to God—i.e., spiritual apostasy and moral degeneracy.

To a very great degree, the execution of God's judgment against the northern Kingdom of Israel is a manifestation of divine Providence that governs not just ancient Israel and Judah but also every nation upon earth.³ The divine punishment which Hosea prophesies is the northern kingdom's Assyrian captivity.

However, the most important prophetic message in Hosea's prophecy is one of a redeemed and restored Israel. The Assyrian captivity of the northern Kingdom of Israel (circa, 722 BC) and the prophetic restoration of Israel under the leadership under "one head," are the general themes of the Book of Hosea.⁴

Since the death and resurrection of Christ, the Early Church has interpreted this restoration of Israel, that is mentioned in the Book of Hosea, to be the Christian Church; and this leadership under "one head" to be Jesus the Messiah.

³ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 158 ("God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence.")

⁴ "The period of Hosea's ministry extended to some sixty years, and he was the only prophet of Israel of his time who left any written prophecy.... In Hosea 5:8 ff., there seems to be a reference to the Syro-Ephraimite War which led to the capture of the kingdom by the Assyrians (c. 734–732 BCE). Hosea's long ministry, from the reign of Jeroboam II (787–747) to the reign of Hoshea (731–722), seems to have ended before the fall of Samaria in 722/721." Source: "Hosea," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosea>.

Chapter One

“Hosea’s Prophecy of the Assyrian Captivity of Israel”

In the Book of Hosea, the 8th-century Prophet Hosea described Israel’s falling away from its solemn covenant with God. During this period, Israel has achieved a measure of national prominence. “Outwardly, the nation (i.e., the northern Kingdom of Israel) is enjoying a time of prosperity and growth; but inwardly, moral corruption and spiritual adultery permeate the people.”⁵

Apparently, the ancient religious practices under the Mosaic ceremonial laws (e.g., the sabbath days, the sacrifices, and the burnt offerings) continued to be maintained. However, Hosea prophesied: “For I desired *mercy*, and not sacrifice; and the *knowledge of God* more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.”⁶

In the Orthodox Jewish Bible, this passage in Hosea 6: 6-7 states:

“For I desired **chesed**, and not zevach; and the **da’as Elohim** more than olot (burnt offerings). [*Mt 9:13 OJBC*] But they are like Adam, they have transgressed the brit (covenant); there have they dealt treacherously against Me.”

The Hebrew word for the “mercy” is “chesed.” *Chesed* means agape love, charity, good faith and fair-dealing, social justice, distributive justice, or corrective justice, compassion, and the general welfare of a community.⁷ The Hebrew word “da’as Elohim” means to know, to experience, and to be in a very intimate and personal relations with, another person or being (i.e., to have a covenantal relationship with God).

The Book of Hosea describes precisely how the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen away from practicing “chesed,” to wit:

⁵ “Commentary on The Book of Hosea,” *The Holy Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 2017), p. 1161.

⁶ Hosea 6:6-7.

⁷ See, e.g., “Chesed,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed>

- “[T]here is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.”⁸
- “They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity.”⁹
- “They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off.”¹⁰
- “Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.”¹¹
- “[Israel] is a merchant, that balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.”¹²
- “[t]hey sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.”¹³

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus utilized Hosea’s emphasis upon “chesed,” when arguing with the Pharisees, saying, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”¹⁴

⁸ Hosea 4:1-2.

⁹ Hosea 4:6.

¹⁰ Hosea 8:4.

¹¹ Hosea 10: 10.

¹² Hosea 12:7 (NOTE: the word “Ephraim” and “Israel” are often used interchangeably, because Ephraim was the largest, and most influential, tribe in the northern Kingdom of Israel).

¹³ Hosea 13:2.

¹⁴ Matthew 9: 13.

The Book of Hosea also described this falling away from practicing “chewed” as “adultery” and “whoredom,” as though the covenant between God and Israel was a conjugal or marital relationship.¹⁵

In fact, God instructs Hosea to marry a whore named Gomer, who bore him a son, named “Jezreel” (to symbolize God’s “vengeance” against the “house of Israel”);¹⁶ and a daughter named “Loruhamah” (to symbolize God’s refusal to show “mercy” towards the “house of Israel”).¹⁷ Hosea’s daughter, Loruhamah, later bore Hosea’s grandson, who was named “Loammi,” which signified the following:

“for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.”¹⁸

Hence, the Book of Hosea is a prophecy predicting that the northern Kingdom of Israel (i.e., the 10 northern tribes, of which the tribe of Ephraim was the largest and most influential) would go into captivity to the Assyrian empire:

Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers.¹⁹

It is important to note here, that the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin), which remained faithful to God and comprised the southern Kingdom of Judah, was not condemned in the Book of Hosea.

On the contrary, the Book of Hosea acknowledged that the southern Kingdom of Judah had remained faithful to God, stating: “I will have mercy upon the house of Judah”²⁰ and “Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.”²¹

¹⁵ See, generally, Hosea, chapter 1 and 2.

¹⁶ Hosea 1:4.

¹⁷ Hosea 1:6.

¹⁸ Hosea 1:9.

¹⁹ Hosea 8: 8-9. See, also, Hosea 9:3-4; Hosea 10: 3-6; and Hosea 11:5.

²⁰ Hosea 1:7.

²¹ Hosea 11:12.

Chapter Two

“Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel”

The Book of Hosea describes the return of the Israelites (i.e., the ten tribes of the northern kingdom) from Assyrian captivity and reunification with the nation of Israel (i.e., the kingdoms of Judah and Israel unified under “one head.”)²²

Hosea says that when these “children of Israel” shall return, they shall be “as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered.”²³

And these same “children of Israel,” says Hosea, shall be called “the sons of the living God,” and they shall again reside at the same place and location where God had once proclaimed that the Israelites “are not my people, and I will not be your God.”²⁴

Hosea’s reference to “the sand of the sea” is seemingly a parallel reference to God’s covenant with the Patriarch Abraham in Genesis 22: 15-18, to wit:

And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, **and as the sand which is upon the sea shore**; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and **in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed**; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

The Book of Hosea then states that this restored Israel (which is a numberless as the “sand of the sea”) “shall be gathered together” with “the children of Judah,” and shall “appoint themselves **one head**....”²⁵ For “shall the children of Israel

²² Hosea 1:11.

²³ Hosea 1:10.

²⁴ Hosea 1:9.

²⁵ Hosea 1:11.

return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”²⁶

²⁶ Hosea 2:5.

Chapter Three

“Paul’s Interpretation of Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel”

Now the Prophet Hosea used a most unique description of the restored Israel, stating that “ye are not my people,” while also stating “the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea” and “be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head,” together with “the children of Judah,”²⁷ and that Israel shall “seek the LORD their God, and David their king.”²⁸

The Apostle Paul interpreted Hosea’s description of this restored Israel to be the Gentiles who comprise many nations, thus exemplifying the “sand of the sea,” which shall be the New Testament Church.²⁹

Paul begins his Epistle to the Romans by making a very strong case for the redemption of the Gentiles, writing, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise”;³⁰ and “[f]or not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.”³¹

And, having thus firmly established the righteousness and redemption of the Gentiles— even those who were without the Mosaic law— Paul goes on to state:

Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and promises....³²

²⁷ Hosea 1:10-11.

²⁸ Hosea 2:4-5.

²⁹ Romans 9:25-27. See, also, Revelation 7:9 (“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues....”)

³⁰ Romans 1: 14.

³¹ Romans 2: 13-14.

³² Romans 9:4.

For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children....³³

That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seek....³⁴

As he saith also in Osee [i.e., Hosea 2:23], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. [i.e. Hosea 1:10]....³⁵

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone.³⁶

Therefore, according to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the Prophet Hosea's description of the reformed Israel was, in fact, a prophecy of Christ's New Testament Church.

³³ Romans 9:6.

³⁴ Romans 9:8.

³⁵ Romans 9:25-26.

³⁶ Romans 9:30-32.

Chapter Four

“Augustine of Hippo’s Interpretation of Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel”

Augustine of Hippo’s also interpreted the Prophet Hosea’s description of this restored Israel, to be the Gentiles who would come from many nations, and be as the sand of the sea, as the New Testament Church has been described.³⁷

In *The City of God*, Augustine of Hippo wrote:

The prophet Hosea speaks so very profoundly that it is laborious work to penetrate his meaning. But, according to promise, we must insert something from his book.

He says, ‘And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there they shall be called the sons of the living God.’

Even the apostles understood this as a prophetic testimony of the calling of nations who did not formerly belong to God; and because this same people of the Gentiles is itself spiritually among the children of Abraham, and for that reason is rightly called Israel, therefore he goes on to say, ‘And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together in one, and shall appoint themselves one headship, and shall ascend from the earth.’

We should but weaken the savour of this prophetic oracle if we set ourselves to expound it. Let the reader but call to mind the cornerstone and those two walls of partition, the one of the Jews, the other of the Gentiles, and he will recognize them, the one under the term **sons of Judah**, the other as **sons of Israel**, supporting themselves by **one and the same headship**, and ascending from the earth.

³⁷ Romans 9:25-27. See, also, Revelation 7:9 (“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues....”)

But that those carnal Israelites who are now unwilling to believe in Christ shall afterward believe, that is, their children shall (for they themselves, of course, shall go to their own place by dying), this same prophet testifies, saying, ‘For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, without an altar, without a priesthood, without manifestations.’ Who does not see that the Jews are now thus?

But let us hear what he adds: ‘And afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall be amazed at the Lord and at His goodness in the latter days.’ Nothing is clearer than this prophecy, in **which by David**, as distinguished by **the title of king, Christ is to be understood**, ‘who is made,’ as the apostle says, ‘of the seed of David according to the flesh.’

This prophet has also foretold the resurrection of Christ on the third day, as it behooved to be foretold, with prophetic loftiness, when he say, ‘He will heal us after two days, and in the third day we shall rise again.’ In agreement with this the apostle³⁸ says to us, ‘If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.’³⁹

Therefore, Augustine of Hippo, at Book XVIII of *The City of God*, demonstrates that the Prophet Hosea’s description of the reformed Israel, is, in fact, the New Testament Church; and that Hosea’s reference to “David their king,”⁴⁰ is a reference to Jesus Christ.

³⁸ Colossian 3:1

³⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 634.

⁴⁰ Hosea 3:5.

Chapter Five

“John Calvin’s Interpretation of Hosea’s Prophecy on the Restored Israel”

Finally, we consider the Reformed theologian John Calvin’s *Commentaries on the Bible* on The Book of Hosea.

Now in Chapter One, verses nine and ten of the Book of Hosea, the prophet used a most unique description of the restored Israel, stating that “ye are not my people” while also stating “the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea” and “be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head,” together with “the children of Judah”;⁴¹ and that Israel shall “seek the LORD their God, and David their king.”⁴²

In his *Commentaries on the Bible*, Calvin opined that Hosea’s words “the sand of the sea” were a clear reference to the Abrahamic promises made in the Book of Genesis.

The Prophet, therefore seeing that he had to do with proud men, who were wont to arraign the justice of God, says, *The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea*; that is, “When the Lord shall cut you off, still safe will remain this promise which was given to Abraham;

‘Look at the stars of heaven, number, if thou canst, the sand of the sea; so shall thy seed be,’” (Genesis 15:5.)⁴³

In addition, Calvin also expressly concurred with Paul’s interpretation of Hosea’s “restored Israel” as described in Hosea 1:10-11, as the Christian Church comprising of both Jew and Gentile, stating:

⁴¹ Hosea 1:10-11.

⁴² Hosea 2:4-5.

⁴³ Calvin’s *Commentaries on the Bible*, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/cal/hosea-1.html>

He afterwards adds, *And it shall be in the place where it had been said to them, (shall be said, literally,) Ye are not my people; there it shall be said, Ye are the sons of the living God.* **It has been asked, whether this prophecy belongs to the posterity of those who had been dispersed.** This, indeed, would be strange; for so long a time has passed away since their exile, and dejected and broken, they dwell at this day in mountains and in other desert places; at least many of them are in the mountains of Armenia, some are in Media and Chaldea; in short, throughout the whole of the East. And since there has been no restoration of this people, it is certain that this prophecy ought not to be restricted to seed according to the flesh. For there was a prescribed time for the Jews, when the Lord purposed to restore them to their country; and, at the end of seventy years, a free return was granted them by Cyrus. **Then Hosea speaks not here of the kingdom of Israel, but of the Church, which was to be restored by a return, composed both of Jews and of Gentiles.** So Paul, a fit interpreter of this passage, reminds us,

‘Whom he has called, not only of the Jews,
but also of the Gentiles; as he says by Hosea,
I will call a people, who were not mine, my people;
and her beloved, who was not beloved: and it shall be,
where it had been said to them, Ye are not my people;
there shall they be called the sons of the living God,’
([Romans 9:24](#), etc.)

Paul applies this passage, and that rightly, to **the whole body of the faithful, collected without any difference, from the Jews as well as from the Gentiles:** for otherwise, as we have said, the correctness and truth of prophecy would not be evident: and this view also agrees best with the design of the Prophet which I have just explained.⁴⁴

The Book of Hosea also says that “the children of Judah and the children of Israel [shall] be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head.”⁴⁵ Calvin interprets the words “one head” to mean Christ, stating:

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hosea 1:11.

But this passage clearly teaches, that the unity of men is of no account before God, except it originates from one head. Besides, it is well known that God set David over his ancient people until the coming of Christ. Now, then, the Church of the Lord is only rightly formed, when the true David rules over it; that is, when all with one consent obey Christ, and submit to his bidding, (*pendebunt ab ejus nutu* hang on his nod:) and how Christ designs to rule in his Church, we know; for the scepter of his kingdom is the gospel. Hence, when Christ is honored with the obedience of faith, all things are safe; and this is the happy state of the Church, of which the Prophet now speaks. It seems, indeed, strange, that what is peculiar to God should be transferred to men that is, to appoint a king. But the Prophet has, by this expression, characterized the obedience of faith; for it is not enough that Christ should be given as a king, and set over men, unless they also embrace him as their king, and with reverence receive him. We now learn, that when we believe the gospel we choose Christ for our king, as it were, by a voluntary consent.⁴⁶

With Calvin's commentary notes on Hosea 1:10-11, we may safely conclude that Reformed theology holds that Hosea's prophecy of the restored Israel is a reference to Jesus Christ and his Church, and that this Church shall be comprised of both Jews, who accept Christ as their king,⁴⁷ and Christians.

⁴⁶ Calvin's Commentaries on the Bible, <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/eng/cal/hosea-1.html>.

⁴⁷ Augustine of Hippo's interpretation. See *The City of God*, supra, p. 634.

CONCLUSION

Civil justice and equity jurisprudence are derived from the religious principle of “**chesed**” (i.e., charity, agape, social justice, distributive justice, corrective justice, good faith and fair dealing, and general welfare within a community).⁴⁸ Indeed, the *heart and the soul of the crisis* in the Book of Hosea is the lack of “chesed” within the northern kingdom of Israel. For, indeed, the “knowledge of God” (i.e., **da’as Elohim**) means to carry out “chesed” and to truly be in a covenantal relationship with God. Religious “sacrifice” and “burnt offerings,” without mercy and genuine relationship, are not sufficient to please God.

The Prophet Hosea wrote, “[c]ome, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After **two days** will he revive us: in **the third day** he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.”⁴⁹ Some have interpreted this passage to be a prophecy of the death and resurrection of Christ.⁵⁰

Where Hosea wrote, “[a]fterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek... **David their king**,” and “the children of Judah and the children of Israel [shall] be gathered together, and appoint themselves **one head**,” some have also interpreted these passages to symbolize or prefigure Christ.⁵¹

And, finally, where Hosea wrote, “[y]et the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered,” some have interpreted this passage to symbolize or prefigure the New Testament Church, as described in the Abrahamic covenantal promise in Genesis⁵² and in the prophetic description of the Christian Church in the Book of Revelation.⁵³

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Robert F. Cochran and Zachary R. Calo, *Agape, Justice and Law: How might Christian Love Shape Law?* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴⁹ Hosea 6:1-2.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 634.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Genesis 22: 17-18 (“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”)

⁵³ Revelation 7:9 (“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues....”)

THE END