

A CALL FOR REPENTANCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: AN EXEGESIS OF HOSEA 6:1-3

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INTRODUCTION

With rapid modernisation, Melanesians no longer live in isolation, rather, there is pressure for us to catch up with, and adapt to, the rest of the world. External pressures of globalisation affect our economy, with acute inflation in living costs. Social dilemmas, such as corruption and laxity in high places, exist within our communities and societies. Our leaders, at all levels, compromise their convictions, for convenience. Our moral values are in decline. Social problems, such as unemployment, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, rape, and abuse of women and children, injustice, bribery, and many other forms of moral and spiritual debauchery are on the rise, at a phenomenal rate.

The Preamble to the Constitution of Papua New Guinea states, “we pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions, and the Christian principles that are ours now . . . and declare ourselves, under the guiding hand of God, to be the independent state of Papua New Guinea.”¹

¹ Part of the Preamble to the Constitution of Papua New Guinea, quoted from Fugmann, Gernot, “Preamble to the Constitution of the Papua New Guinea”, in *Point* 9 (1986), pp. xi-xii.

By inserting this statement into our national constitution, the founding fathers of this nation made a covenantal agreement that solemnises Papua New Guinea's relationship with the living God of the Bible, the Creator and Lord of the universe. In everyday language, Papua New Guinea passes as a Christian nation, a nation that pledges to abide by the moral and spiritual guiding principles of the Christian God, and of moral traditions.

Moreover, our constitution guarantees religious freedom, and Christian faith heritage, in particular; however, our moral decline has led many people away from the vision and spirit of the constitution. Instead of loving God, and following His ways, we have turned to many forms of idolatry. There is an increase in occult practices, such as witchcraft, sorcery, and a revival of animistic practices. In addition, there is a steady influx of non-Christian Eastern religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, and others, which seek to draw adherents from within our communities. Moreover, agnostic antagonism and pessimism is rapidly taking its toll among many of our leading politicians, academics, and bureaucrats. Furthermore, a new form of "cargo cultism", such as money scams and materialism, is creeping into the church and its leadership. They have discarded the integral Christian moral and spiritual impetus of the constitution that governs Papua New Guinea. It looks as if there is no end, and no answers, to these problems.

Therefore, we need to turn to the Word of God, as the source and guide of our faith and practice, to lead us back onto the right track again. The inerrant Word of God, the Bible, has answers to all of our dilemmas. Through an exegesis of Hos 6:1-3, this article seeks to explore and draw out some theological principles and practical applications, relevant to our perennial problems.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL SETTING OF HOSEA

Many years before Hosea, God entered into a special covenant relationship with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). Later, at Mt Sinai, under Moses' leadership, God established his special covenant relationship with the children of Israel.

However, despite God's faithfulness in keeping the covenant, Israel was never faithful in her part of keeping the covenant.

Only during the reigns of King David and Solomon, did Israel really reach the "golden peak" of her peaceful and blessed years. Towards the end of Solomon's reign, the nation began to show signs of spiritual and moral decline. Not long after Solomon's death, the great nation of Israel divided itself into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom, under Jeroboam, had ten tribes, and retained the name Israel, while the southern kingdom, composed of two tribes, Judah and part of Benjamin, gained the name Judah. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, became the first king of Judah.

The northern kingdom of Israel quickly turned away from her covenant relationship with Yahweh, her God-king. King Jeroboam made two golden calves, and built two places of worship, one at Bethel and the other at Dan, and prevented the people from the northern tribes from going down to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to God (1 Kings 12:25-33).

Around 841 BC, about 50 years after Solomon's death, Omri became Israel's king, and set up Samaria as his capital. He established diplomatic relations with the other kingdoms around him, like Tyre and Sidon. Through these ties, he brought Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre, to marry his son Ahab. He was a good politician, such that, many years later, the Assyrians were still calling Israel by the name "house of Omri". Omri, however, permitted Jezebel to set up a temple to the pagan god, Baal. This stirred up the prophets against his house, and thus began a contest for religious domination that brought down Omri's own dynasty, in a bloodbath under Jehu, some 30 years later.² Jezebel proved to be a very possessive queen, who dictated Ahab's decisions. Ahab feared her, and she corrupted him. Her influence was so devastating that it even spilled over, corrupted, and degraded the moral and spiritual life of Judah, the southern kingdom, through the marriage of

² L. Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, Makati Philippines: St Paul's Publications, 1993, pp. 297-298.

Athaliah, her stepdaughter. Furthermore, the political relationship between Israel and Judah was in a constant state of conflict.

Meanwhile, in the more international scene in the ANE (ancient Near East), Assyria became resurgent as a super power (745 BC). Under king Tiglath-Pileser, Assyria invaded the surrounding small nations, including Israel and Judah. Israel then turned to Egypt for help, but, by then, Egypt, herself weakened by divisions, could not help Israel. Finally, Assyria, under Tiglath-Pileser's son, Shalmaneser V, attacked king Hoshea of Israel, and laid siege for three years. Samaria finally fell, and the people were deported to other areas in the Assyrian empire in 722 BC (2 Kings 17).³ Against this background, God called the prophets, including Hosea, into their prophetic ministry.

HOSEA THE PROPHET

The Bible does not divulge much of the family background of Hosea, except that he was the son of Beeri. However, the Bible states that, at God's command, Hosea married Gomer, a woman known for her life of prostitution. Gomer bore him three children, all out of marital infidelity (Hos 1:1-9).⁴

Chronologically, Hosea lived after Jonah, and was a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos. He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and the reign of Jereboam, son of Jehoash, king of Israel (Hos 1:1), from about 750 BC to 715 BC (2 Kings 15:1-17; 16:1ff; 2 Chron 26; 28:1ff). The duration of his prophetic ministry may have been 38 years.⁵ Israel experienced great material prosperity in these periods. Nevertheless, spiritual and moral decay was rampant all around. Great

³ K. Shimasaki, "OT Survey II class lecture notes" Manila Philippines: Asian Theological Seminary, 2nd semester, 2001, pp. 1-2.

⁴ *Ibid.* Scholars are uncertain about the place and date of writing, and authorship, of Hosea, as well.

⁵ See *The NIV Study Bible* notes on Hosea, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1985.

spiritual apostasy existed, as Baal worship infiltrated and permeated religious life. Israel abandoned righteousness and justice.⁶

From God's perspective, Israel's spiritual, moral, social, and political infidelity were as bad, and as damaging, as broken love, broken marriage, and broken covenant relationship, as depicted by Hosea's personal life experience of infidelity in marriage, and the message it conveyed.

LITERARY CONTEXT

The book of Hosea is a painful love story: Hosea married Gomer, a woman who strayed to prostitution. However, Hosea continued to love her and finally brought her back.⁷

GENERAL CONTEXT

Hosea has two main parts: (1) Hosea's problem marriage experience (1:1-3:5); and (2) Hosea's message to Israel, regarding her failed covenant relationship to God, and the impending consequences (4:1-14:9). Stuart sets the context of Hos 6:1-3 within the main division of Hos 5:8-7:16, and titles the section, "Wrath, return, restoration".⁸ Hubbard, on the other hand, titles Hos 5:8-7:16 as "Politics runs a mob", and outlines Hos 6:1-3, in the smaller context of Hos 5:8-6:6, as follows:

1. Folly and greed in foreign affairs – 5:8-15.
2. Song of feeble penitence – 6:1-3.
3. Divine complaint of Israel's fickleness – 6:4-6.⁹

⁶ For further reference, see R. B. Dillard, and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1993, pp. 353-362; Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 320-324; and Gary V. Smith, *OT Survey Part II: Job-Malachi*, Wheaton IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1991, pp. 45-47.

⁷ E. P. Blair, *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1975, p. 168.

⁸ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Bible Commentary, vol 31, Waco TX: Word Books, 1987, p. 96.

⁹ D. A. Hubbard, *Hosea*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, D. J. Wiseman, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1989, p. 124.

The *NIV Study Bible* further suggests that Hos 6:1-3 depicts Israel's political situation.¹⁰ God brings His judgment against Israel and Judah, because, instead of trusting God, when facing political dilemma, they sought security from foreign nations, Egypt, in particular. However, when Egypt fails to protect them, out of their misery, Israel returns to Yahweh. Yahweh will keep His promise, heal, and restore her.

Hosea depicts a blending of both prosaic/narrative and poetry, commonly used in the 8th century BC.¹¹ He also gives the impending judgment speech, and speeches of salvation and restoration.¹² He reports no vision.¹³

Other literary forms in Hosea are:

1. Proverbs used to summarise at crucial points (4:9, 11, 15; 8:7; 10:12).
2. Battle warnings given about impending judgment (5:8; 8:1).
3. Exhortation to repentance (6:1-3; 10:2; 12:6; 14:3). These reinforce the constant emphasis on return (cf. 2:7, 3:5).

Thus, the book of Hosea is “primarily poetic, though prose is found in two major places (1:1-2:1; 3:1-5). The most striking feature of the poetic/literary nature of the book is the use of metaphor and simile.”¹⁴

¹⁰ *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1328.

¹¹ Hubbard, *Hosea*, p. 124.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Dillard and Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 359.

SPECIFIC LITERARY CONTEXT OF HOS 6:1-3

Genre and Form

The text is in poetic form. A careful observation shows that even each verse structure is in an entirely different type of parallelism. Verse one is in antithetical parallelism, verse 2 is in synonymous parallelism, while verse three is in synthetic parallelism.¹⁵

v.1 *Antithetical parallelism:*

“Come let us return to the Lord.
He has torn us to pieces
But He will heal us;
He has injured us
But He will bind up our wounds.”

v.2 *Synonymous parallelism:*

“After two days, He will revive us;
On the third day, He will restore us,
That we may live in His presence.”

v.3 *Synthetic parallelism:*

“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 will water the earth.”

Outline of Hos 6:1-3

According to Stuart, this passage follows the “alternating doom-hope pattern that characterises the entire book.”¹⁶ Stuart further states, “It represents a

¹⁵ Author’s observation.

¹⁶ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p. 107.

faithful presentation of covenant teaching, because its orientation is eschatological, not immediate.”¹⁷ Hos 6:1-3 can be outlined as follows:

1. A call to return to the Lord (6:1).
2. A call to strive to know the Lord (6:3).
3. An example of Yahweh’s faithfulness to heal and restore (6:1b, 2, 3b).

NOTES

A Call to Return to the Lord (6:1)

In this penitential prayer, Hosea pleads with his people to return to the Lord. “He has torn us to pieces . . . but He will heal us, He has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds”, indicates that God, Himself, is using earthly instruments, like the Assyrians, to bring distress upon them. It is imperative to note that God did not sit down, watch passively, and allow the situation to come upon them. Rather, God was directly involved in their discipline (cf. Heb 12:1-12).

Hosea pleads with his people to return to the Lord, based on God’s covenant promises. For Hosea knew that God would never ultimately reject His people. God is consistent and dependable, and, therefore, will heal and restore them to full blessing. However, there is no elaboration of how God will bandage, heal, and restore them. It is something in the future. Nevertheless, the duration of their punishment and suffering is brief, “two days . . . on the third day, He will restore”.

A Call to Strive to Know the Lord (6:2)

“Let us acknowledge the Lord, let us press on to acknowledge Him.” Certainly, there is a deep desire or cry to know God. A proper knowledge of God produces a special relationship. There are times, when the knowledge of God is absent, when people hunger to know God. Yet knowledge, followed

¹⁷ Ibid.

by an expression of reliability of Yahweh, indicates that, in fact, God is knowable. “To know Yahweh means to accept His covenant relationship” (see 4:1).¹⁸

The comparisons to dependable occurrences, “the sun . . . the spring rain”, implies that God is faithful, and never changes. As Stuart states, “He will continue in the future to make Himself available to be known”.¹⁹

An Example of Yahweh’s Faithfulness to Heal and Restore (6:3)

Hosea’s call to Israel to come to the Lord to be bandaged, to be healed, to be restored, is based on God’s faithfulness. God will do it in the latter times. Although Hosea’s audience did not come to the Lord immediately, yet there was certainty that this would be fulfilled in the future.

Summary

Hos 6:1-3 is a penitent prayer, in which Hosea calls his people to return from their misery. Hosea knows that God is directly involved in their punishment. Their punishment, though very severe, is only for a short time. When they come to Him, or when He returns, He will bandage them, heal them, and restore them to full blessing. Hosea calls his people to strive for full acknowledgment of God – to know the Lord, and remain under His Lordship. This assurance of full, or total, restoration and blessing is eschatological in nature.

GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL DATA (WORD STUDY)

WORD STUDY – “RESTORE/RESTORATION”

To “restore” (or “restoration”) is the key word study in this scripture portion. A careful study groups them into the following categories of meanings.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

1. To restore to one's position, as in a career (Gen 40:13; Job 8:6; 2 Sam 8:3; 9:7; Is 1:26).
2. To restore life (Ps 71:20; 80:3, 7, 19; 85:4).
3. To restore physical, mental, emotional wholeness (Ps 43:1; 57:18; Jer 30:17).
4. To restore one's possessions and fortunes (Hos 6:11; 2 Sam 9:7; Ps 69:4; 126:4; Jer 30:18; 32:44; 33:11, 26; 48:47; 49:6; 39; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:11; Zeph 2:7).
5. To restore, by returning to the land after exile or displacement (Deut 30:3; Is 44:26; 61:4; Jer 16:15; 27:22; 30:3; 32:44; 33:26; 42:12; Nah 2:2; Zeph 3:20; Zech 9:12).
6. To restore from sin to God (Ps 51:12; 60:1; Jer 15:19; Lam 1:16; 5:21; Gal 6:1; Hos 6:2).
7. To restore all things, including the remnant of Israel, in the eschatological age (Is 49:6).

In the context of this passage, the usages of the word “restore” have several shades of meaning. It encompasses physical, mental, and emotional healing, and restoration of the people to their land. It implies spiritual or covenantal restoration to God. However, the total restoration, after punishment, is in the eschatological age. The *New Concise Bible Dictionary* rightly states:

The OT prophets looked forward to the day when God would restore His people to their own land, in a time of prosperity and bliss, example, Jer 27:22. This came to be associated with the Messiah, but Jesus pointed out that it began with John the Baptist (Matt 17:11) . . . Jesus did not deny there would be such a restoration in the future (Acts 1:6). And Peter looked forward to it at Jesus' return (Acts 3:21).²⁰

²⁰ *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1989, p. 472.

The *New Bible Dictionary* also contends that restoration is more eschatological in nature, when full restoration of everything, including the people of Israel, will be realised, with the return of Christ.²¹

SUMMARY

From this context, it is safe to infer that:

1. The punishment inflicted upon the people, by the Lord Himself, is likened to two or three days, an imminent occurrence. However, restoration is assured.
2. Restoration may have immediate implication, but it is more eschatological in nature – the final, complete, and full restoration of all things.
3. God Himself will restore His people and everything to Himself – for His purposes and pleasure. The Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the agent of all eschatological restoration.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

There are some significant theological themes cited in this passage. Firstly, sin is a serious matter in God's sight. It is a betrayal of love and commitment. It is adulterous in nature. Therefore, God must judge and punish sin. Secondly, God's love for His people remains deep and strong. Out of His great love, He punishes those who sin, but forgives, heals, and restores those who come to Him in sincere repentance. Thirdly, the length of God's punishment is only brief, but His restoration purposes for His people, and the rest of creation, are forever.

In conclusion, this passage shows:

²¹ *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edn, Leicester UK: IVP, 1996, pp. 1009-1010.

1. God judges and punishes those He loves, when they sin.
2. The purpose of His punishment, and infliction of pain, is to cause His people to repent, and turn to Him.
3. Punishments, afflictions, and sufferings are short-lived, from God's perspective.
4. When His people truly humble themselves, repent, and seek His ways, He keeps His promises. He forgives their sins, heals all their wounds, and restores them completely to Himself. True repentance, and a real desire to know God, is the only sure way to a complete healing and restoration.
5. Only God knows how long, or when, He will finally, completely restore His people, and His whole creation, to His ultimate purposes and glory, in the age to come.

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

When we put our faith, trust, and confidence in others, and ourselves, rather than in God, we lose our vision and direction. When one fails to love God, and obey His commands, he commits spiritual adultery. On God's part, He loves His people. He is faithful, and keeps His covenant promises. However, God is no pleaser of man. God must judge and discipline those who do not keep faith with Him. In many cases, God disciplines His people, by letting them go through hardships, and face up with miserable circumstances, to cause them to repent, and return to Him. Only through a sincere repentance, and a real desire to know God, can He forgive, heal, and restore our fellowship with Him, and give credence to the epitome of our national constitution. Therefore, we must refocus, and strive for our vision, in the eternal hope of the full restoration we have in the living God of the Bible, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The crux of Hos 6:1-3 challenges us, as Papua New Guinean preachers, pastors, prophets, and evangelists to love our people, and to preach and present the gospel of Jesus with clarity and vigour. We should intercede and

plead with God for our people, and lead them to a sincere repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. This calls for both personal repentance, as well as communal and national repentance. God loves people, and is willing to forgive their sin, and restore them to fellowship with Himself. This challenge, and call to repentance, must be daily occurrences, just as 2 Chron 7:14 reminds us, “if my people, who are called by My name, humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land”.

Finally, God assures us that there is a hope for a complete restoration for all of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the whole creation, on the day when Christ returns, judges the ungodly, and establishes His eternal kingdom. That is our greatest hope!

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