

**COVENANT MOTIF IN HOSEA: ITS RESONANCES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS**

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Abstract

The covenant of Yahweh with Israel is central in understanding her religion and it dominates the entire Old Testament corpus. Indeed, Israel's origin, nationhood, survival, blessings, and victories, all swivel around covenant. Unfortunately, Israel's tendency of recurrent breaching of her covenant with Yahweh despite its values, seems to be a reality among Christians today. As a contribution to scholarly efforts on the relevance of the Old Testament to contemporary Christianity, this paper sets out to examine covenant motif in the book of Prophet Hosea, find out its resonance in the New Testament and explore its relevance for modern Nigerian Christianity. Adopting historical and theological approaches, the writers discovered in Hosea, covenant motif such as election and parental relationship, apostasy and harlotry, lack of knowledge, faithfulness and love, and curses and blessings of the covenant. These also resonate in the New Testament. It is also discovered that Christians in contemporary Nigeria do not take these motifs seriously as they relate with fellow humans and nature. The paper concludes that lack of commitment to covenant motif as exemplified in Hosea is at the root of corruption, violence and insecurity, underdevelopment, ecological crisis and others, being experienced in the world and in modern Africa. It is therefore recommended that Christians should tenaciously adhere to covenantal virtues such as faithfulness, obedience, committed sense of service to God among others, in order to enjoy the blessings of obedience to covenant and for the global society to be a better place to inhabit.

Keywords: Covenant Motif, Covenant, Hosea, Christianity, New Testament

Introduction

The centrality and relevance of covenant in understanding Judaism and Christianity cannot be overemphasized. By covenant, we mean, a formal agreement, oath, contract, promise, commandment, will or treaty between two parties, with specific obligations and responsibilities on each side (Udoekpo, 2022:10). In theological and Biblical scholarship, the term "covenant" refers majorly to any solemn agreement made between God and the Israelites in the Hebrew Bible, as well as to the new covenant, which is considered as the final fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant (Nyoyoko, 2012:211-212). The notion of God's covenant with Israel as a nation forms the bedrock and foundation of her nationhood. In fact, "the history of Israel is the story of her covenant relationship with Yahweh, her God." (Nyoyoko, 2012:211).

Covenant is the starting point of recognizing as well as comprehending the relationship of Yahweh with Israel, His sovereign rule over them, His revelation among them through their salvation history, His divine nature and their redemption from sin and captivities. It also forms the basis of understanding the wealth of Israel's history, persons, symbols and rites, cults, commandments, the roles of the prophets and their prophecies and fulfillments on them as a nation and eternal future as well. Thus, all Biblical history, according to Boadt (2012:146), may be designated as the theology of covenant.

Covenant ideals or motif dominates explicitly or implicitly the whole corpuses of the Old and New Testaments. It stretched back to the primordial period of the Pentateuch, permeates the Deuteronomistic history and extends to the gospels of the New Testament and it culminates in the future eschatological kingdom. Categorically, it was instituted and described in Exodus, renewed in Deuteronomy, experimented in the prophetic texts and resonated in the New Testament. According to Nyoyoko (2012:212), the pervasion of covenant motif in the entire corpus of Deuteronomistic history becomes the leading theology and preoccupation as it highlights the covenant demands, blessings and implications of Israel's election by God and relationship with him.

In understanding God's covenant with Israel, especially the Sinaitic covenant, numerous emphases are indispensable. These emphases such as faithfulness, loyalty, courage, obedience, committed sense of service to God and His commandments form the rationales that make the covenant's blessings a reality. Thus, the prophets in Israel such as Jeremiah, Hosea and others were raised with the presupposition to remind and call

back the people to fidelity to their covenant with God, especially at the verge of apostasy and spiritual whoredom.

Just like the society of northern Israel to which Hosea delivered his message, the immediate and primary ecclesial and civil milieus as well as socio-political and economic terrains of Nigeria seem to be antithetical to the true ideals of covenant with God. It is therefore the aim of this paper to examine the values of covenant motif as it is embedded in Hosea's utterances to the Northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II in the eighth century as well as its resonating features in the New Testament and its theological import for Christians in Nigeria. Motif here designates a theological concept or idea created and repeated throughout a book or section of Scripture, frequently through numerous literary devices such as symbolism, imagery, and typology. (Elwell, 1996).

Covenant and Its Values to Israel

For fuller comprehension of covenant ideals in Hosea's prophetic oracle, it is expedient to explore the historical and socio-cultural background to the original covenant enacted between Israel and Yahweh, her God. Sinai covenant was instituted by God with the nation of Israel after their liberation from the oppression and subjugation in Egypt around the 13th century B.C.E. (Nowell, 1996:246). God saw their afflictions and heard their cry in the land of their taskmaster – Egypt. He, therefore, sent Moses to redeem them because He (God) reminisced His covenant with their patriarchs (Exodus 19-24). After this deliverance from Egyptian slavery, God by election, invited Israel to enter into a commitment of an everlasting covenantal relationship with Him. God promised them the land of Canaan as a gift. He further promised to deliver and defend them from the hand of their enemies as well as providing all their needs and to become their sustainer. Based on this affiliation, Israelites became "Yahweh's special possessions," (Kessler 2013), or "a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priest, and a holy nation," (Exodus 19:5-6), out of all the nations of the earth. Scholars widely assert that this covenant is of a parallel form with a typical Hittite vassal – suzerain treaty, which possessed as foundational element amongst others, stipulations where specific obligations and responsibilities are prescribed. (Stein, 1994).

For the sustenance of this type of covenant, loyalty to the stipulations (Fee and Hubbard, 2011) or obedience to these covenantal responsibilities as gratuitous response to God's blessings is its hub and core (Udoekpo, 2022:9-10). In the Sinaitic theology, the law (*torah*) of God becomes the covenantal code. Fidelity to this code in the Decalogue (Exodus 20) will determine the fulfillment and sustenance of the corporate promised blessings from Israel's God (Deut. 28:1-14). However, violating or breaking the covenant code equals breaching the covenant and will attract God's judgment of curses such as disaster, war, death, defeat by enemies, and subsequent exile by the foreign nations (Deut. 28:15-28). This covenant code constitutes Moses' instruction to the Israelites as recorded in Deut. 4:44-26:19. It was renewed in Deut. 27; Joshua 8:30-35 and 24. This covenant was ratified with sprinkling of animal blood on the people and on the altar as the covenant blood.

The Mosaic covenant made at Sinai associated with other covenants made previously with Israel's ancestors, especially Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Davidic covenant was a kind of progression bond from the patriarchal covenant to national covenant for God chose him and promised him an everlasting dynasty that will prophetically be fulfilled in the Messianic kingdom of Christ. Thus, Davidic covenant will fully be revealed in the new covenant. Though other covenants were enacted by God such as with Adam and Noah, Sinaitic covenant, as asserted by Nyoyoko (2012:211), forms the fabrics of Israelitish history and has its resonance and fulfillments in the New Testament era. The Old Testament prophets, especially the eighth century ones, were well vested with these covenantal institutions as well as its reliance for Israel's prosperity and continuance of Yahwism. Thus, they were raised to a greater cultural prominence to confront and called back Israel to fidelity not only during times of great apostasy but periods of oppression from the foreign nations (Keener and Walton, 2016:1110). When Hosea prophetic message is read in the light of Deuteronomy and covenant motifs, it becomes apparent that he confronted his audience with "the essential content of the original Mosaic covenant's warnings and promises (curses and blessings)" (Fee and Stuart, 2003:215). Hence,

Hosea might have worded the covenantal curses and blessings in novel and captivating ways, as he was inspired without inventing them.

The significance and values of covenants to the Israelites cannot be overstated, for by virtue of their covenantal relationship with Yahweh their God, their social, religious, economic, political and legal daily living center around Yahweh and their allegiance to His covenant. Covenant is a major instrument employed to describe the relationship between God and His chosen people, Israel both in the Old Testament and New Testament. It therefore, becomes an inevitable lens to recognize and appreciate the biblical features about Israel. It becomes a permanent guiding principle for Israel; for in it, they were rewarded or judged based on their fidelity or disloyalty to it. Covenantal law instituted by Yahweh serves to bridge a personal relationship gap between Himself and the Israelites. By this, He made know His perfect will to them, showcasing His desire to have a personal walk and relationship with man (Nwankwo, 2015:9-10).

Equally, covenant in Israel was meant to establish a sacred society among the Israelites. It was to safeguard them against their incessant apostasy and other immoral actions that can defile the land to provoke God's wrath. It was the origin of both the social and communal values, morals and ethics of the ancient Israel. It became the determinant precept for her human values and life, self-discipline, parental respect and justice (Sheppard 2016:230). It configures the development of Hebrew nation over time.

The covenant between God and the patriarch, Abraham contained the bequeathal of the Land of Promise. (Gen. 15:18-21). "It is implied in nationhood to own a land over which people exercise right and utilize for their need, God's covenant with Israel guaranteed this." (Nyoyoko, 2012:212). Covenant guarantees God's eternal presence in the midst of Israel in all the time for Yahweh had bound Himself to be their personal God. This further guarantee not only God's persistent protection against foreign enemies, pestilence, sickness, famine and wars but also blessings of freedom from fear of the neighbouring countries, the fruitfulness of children and crops, and peace in the land.

The Book of Prophet Hosea: An Overview

Hosea, the son of Beeri, whose name means "salvation," has been generally accepted as the author of the book of Hosea, one among the twelve books of the Minor Prophets. He was a native of Israel and was commissioned to prophesy about the spiritual, moral, political and religious corruption of his people, Israel typically referred to as "Israel" and "Ephraim" in the book to designate the Northern kingdom (Stamps, 2003:1283). Hosea married Gomer, a promiscuous woman and bare three children.

The book of Hosea contains the prophetic message of God to the collapsing kingdom of Israel during its last approximately 40 years under the reign of Jeroboam II (Wilkinson and Boa, 1983:233). At the commencement of Hosea's ministry (about 755 B.C.), during the latter years of Jeroboam II, Israel was enjoying a period of pseudo sense of security because of impermanent political peace and economic affluence. Immediately after the death of Jeroboam II (753 BC.), the nation began to collapse and ran swiftly to its destruction in 722 BC due to the fact that Tighath –Pileser III (745 – 727 B.C.) has strengthened Assyria to recover its world domination (Stamps, 2003:1283). The reigns of Israel's last six kings, viz: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea, were relatively brief since four of them (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah) were murdered and the sixth (Hoshea) was expatriated to Assyria with other Israelites who were later dispersed among the nations. Thus, Hosea's prophetic message combined with his tragic marriage came as God's message to Israel during her last chaotic, confused and decline years to destruction (Wilkinson and Boa, 1983:97).

The period was also identified with the reigns of four kings of Judah, namely: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah; thus, making Hosea a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah (prophets of the southern kingdom), but a younger contemporary to Amos, a prophet to the northern kingdom (Essien and Nyoyoko, 2021:305). According to Stamps (2003:1283), the message of Hosea conveys two main purposes. One, the revelation of God's ending covenantal love for His covenantal people with the intense desire to redeem them from their spiritual bankruptcy. Two, the revelation of the tragic consequences when God's people persist in their infidelity to the covenant's stipulation and rejection of His redeeming love.

The book of Hosea has been an object of debate among scholars because of the fact that God commanded Hosea to marry “a wife of whoredom” (1:2) to illustrate Israel’s spiritual harlotry with other gods. Some scholars interpreted Hosea’s marriage as a fictitious allegory; others consider it as dream or vision, while others see it as a parable (Bullock, 1986:84). Kaufmann proposed that it was a stage play (1976:368), while most interpreted it as literal. It is also debatable whether God was commanding a godly prophet to marry a prostitute as an epitome of God’s love to the backsliding Israel, or whether Hosea married Gomer when she was chaste but later became prostitute. The facts of these debate are beyond the scope of this paper. However, a vivid thematic conclusion of the book is glaring; that Hosea’s personal tragedy becomes an intense illustration of Israel’s national tragedy. Gomer’s infidelity is recorded as an illustration of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Gomer commits physical adultery by running after other men, while Israel plays spiritual harlotry by going after other gods. It is summarized by Wilkinson and Boa (1983:233) as follows:

It is a stamp of one-sided love and faithfulness – between a prophet and his faithless wife (Hosea and Gomer) and Yahweh and His faithless people. Just as Gomer is married to Hosea, Israel is betrothed to God. In both cases, the bride plays the harlot and runs after other lovers. But unconditional love keeps seeking even when it is spurned. In Hosea’s case, that means buying back his wife from the slave market; for Israel it means purifying punishment followed by restoration to the land of promise.

The literary style of the book is not uniform. Though form of Masoretic Text (MT) and its resultant forms in modern English versions suggest poetry, some chapters lack consistent exhibition of typical poetic features, and they are not prose either. Thus, its special literary style fixes between prose and poetry, a style characteristic of the prophets (Anderson and Freedman, 1980:300).

Covenant Motifs in Hosea

From critical survey of the history of Israel as a nation, there exists a repeated tendency of Israelites falling away from the original tenet and relevance of their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The Lord foresaw and predicted this adulterous tendency among them while they were yet to enter Canaan. In Deuteronomy 31:16, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake me and break my covenants which I have made with them.’” Based on this, the Old Testament prophets were called to act as covenant mediators and enforcers in their diverse periods. Hosea’s personal life and prophetic ministry centered on urging the people to return to the original Sinaitic covenant enacted at Sinai (Exo. 10-24) and renewed at Shechem (Joshua 24).

Yurchenko (nd) opines that the utterances of prophet Hosea should be understood as a reinforcement of Israel’s covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Thus, he agrees with other scholars that the text of Hosea’s prophecy is interspersed, explicitly and implicitly, with references, allusions and reflections of the covenant codes, curses as well as blessings resulting from Israel’s infidelity and loyalty to the *torah* respectively. According to Bass (2021:68), Hosea uses the term, covenant, five times: once to refer to Israel’s political coalition with Assyria (Hos 12:2); another to refer to a new covenant flowing from a new exodus (Hos 2:20); and three times the term is associated in one way or another to the Mosaic Covenant (Hos. 6:7; 8:1; 10:4).

Correspondingly, in the Scripture, themes or concepts can exist even where the technical term is not employed. Hence, Hosea’s covenantal thinking cannot be circumscribed to these five usages of the term. To illustrate this, Yurchenko (nd) draws thematic links between some verses of the book of Hosea and the text of Deuteronomy. Brinegar (2018:7) confirms further that Hosea’s themes are heavily connected to the covenant text of Deuteronomy; referenced to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants as well as Edenic/Adamic covenant (though the latter is debated among scholars) (Vang, nd: 190), and the promise of a “new” covenant to come (Bass, 2021:60). This paper discovers in Hosea, covenant motifs such as: marriage-contract, election and parental relationship, covenant-breaking, apostasy and harlotry, covenant lawsuits, lack of knowledge, faithfulness and love (mercy), and curses and blessings of the covenant. These motifs are discussed below:

The Marriage – Contract

The book of Hosea begins with God commanding Hosea to marry Gomer – “a wife of whoredoms” (Hosea 1:2), to illustrate the spiritual harlotry of Israel. Here, the concept of a marriage – contract is employed in parallel to the covenant – idea. Fensham (2010) opines that in Ancient Near East, marriage – contract was a common event and its infidelity was stressed. Hence, the idea of employing marriage – contract as the covenant – contracts figuratively is fully accepted. Here, Hosea, the prophet employs a uniquely human relationship and experience to illustrate God’s covenant with His people. He illustrates symbolically the wilderness experience and contractual covenant as entirely harmonious between Yahweh, the husband and Israel, the wife. This was followed by the settlement period. During this time, Israel the wife was enticed by Baalism of the Canaanites. This, she did, repeatedly most a time ignoring the calling back of her husband, like in days of Hosea. (Hosea 2:2). Despite her harlotry, Hosea depicts God as the compassionate husband, who longs to take back his wayward wife (Hosea 2:16-28). Similarly, the original covenantal relationship between God and His people was thought to be restored.

Election and Parental Relationship

Hosea claimed that Israel’s election was actualized as she was called forth from enslavement of the Egyptian’s Pharaoh. In his utterances, he reviewed Israel’s wilderness experience. Employing the first-person pronoun to speak for Yahweh, he proclaims, “Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel” (9:10). However, while he observed their present life, he saw the elected nation becoming a miserable harlot (Hosea 2). Moreover, he portrays the chosen Israel as Yahweh’s problem child who remains the object of his loving conscience. The prophet’s expression of election and parental relationship is more affectionate in the virtuoso poetry of Hosea 11:1-9 than elsewhere.

As submitted by Freeman, (1981:172), Hosea also upholds that Yahweh guided Israel as a loving father. Yahweh had tutored Israel on how to walk after redeeming them out of Egypt to the promised land with “cords of compassion” and “bands of love” (11:3-4). However, their backsliding had been gross in the succeeding years, thus, Yahweh laments, “my people are bent on turning away from me; so, they are appointed to the yoke” (11:7). Despite this, Yahweh cannot castoff His people which He still loves. This is reflected in his lamentation over Israel in Hosea 11:8, “How shall I give thee up O Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?” The covenant relationship between God and Israel has been broken by Israel while Yahweh has not said no on the matter. Yahweh is then seen as a faithful God and father who still grasps the unfaithful Israel with his love (Freeman, 1981:172).

Breaching the Covenant

In Hosea 6:7, a covenant idea is seen as Israel breaching the covenant and dealt faithlessly with God, when they entered Canaan. Hosea 8:1 states the punishment of the Lord that shall be exacted on Israel for covenant breaking and transgression of the law (torah). It is noteworthy that *berit* expresses the covenant – relation between God and his people and torah signifies the stipulations of the covenant which must be recited occasionally to the minor covenant – partner. The numerous offences of Israel stated in Hosea 8 are evidence of covenant transgression where the covenant – partner has promised to be faithful to Yahweh and to fellow Israelites of the amphictyonic league (Fensham, 2010). The offences of covenant stipulations are of two kinds. Firstly, a rebellion against the major partner in the treaty. This appeared in various parts of Hosea as they have acted unfaithfully against the Lord (Hosea 5:7); they have broken the covenant (Hosea 6:7), and they have committed idolatry and formed illegal treaties with foreign nations. This implies that the gods of the heathens are called in as witnesses and that the oath of covenant as taken in their names (Chisholm, 2002:348). From the message of Hosea, it is also glaring that the imagery representation of Yahweh was common in Northern Israel. one of the prominent reproaches of Hosea, according to Brinegar (2018:8), is that Yahweh is served as silver and gold (Hosea 8:4).

Secondly, the breach of covenant is committed by transgressing covenant laws made to ensure mutual social relations and ethical principles. All the offences listed by Hosea such as swearing, killing, stealing and adultery; removal of a landmark (Hosea 4:2 & 5:10); false balances and oppression of other people (Hosea 12:8), which have reference in the Decalogue, are numerous sins committed against fellowmen who are

covenant – partners. According to Fensham (2010), anything which conflicts with the spirit of the covenant is faulty and is a breach to the covenant.

Apostasy and Harlotry

Closely related to the breach of covenant is idolatry. In fact, idolatry is one form of flouting the covenant. It is the violation of the covenantal stipulations as enshrined in the Decalogue. Beyerlin (1963:139-140) opines that the idea of the Ancient Near East treaties under Sinaitic covenant's code, Israel is bound to one God, and that is Yahweh. No other is permitted to exist beside Him. The Lord, however according to Hosea, indicts his people of inquiring of a thing of wood (4:12) and of offending in Baal (13:1)

Gomer, promiscuous' life with her lover and the prophet's marriage with such adulterous woman epitomizes Israel's infidelity and Yahweh's disappointment with their unfaithfulness. Thus, adultery, both physical and spiritual, becomes the salient point of conflict between Israel and their God. (Yurchenko.nd). Hosea never conceived the Yahwistic covenant as a bargain between equals. But unfortunately, their cultic exercises at Bethel, Gilgal and Samaria have turned the covenant affairs to equal partner. They, by their Baalism as result of their whoredom, are guilty of idolatry and syncretism by Canaanites oracles and practices (Essien and Nyoyoko, 2021:312). This act means they have forsaken Yahweh for "they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images" (11:2).

Lack of Knowledge, Faithfulness and Covenantal-love

Another important expression for the covenant motif in Hosea is the knowledge of God (*da'at elohim*). Fensham (2010) comments that knowledge of the covenant constitutes the actual part of covenant – idea as in Hosea. This knowledge equals the knowledge of God, the initiator of the covenant. The covenant's contents and stipulations form the torah and the knowledge of the covenant and its stipulations is the knowledge of God and His will (Hosea 11:1). The knowledge of God to traditional Hebrew morality and moral integrity supersedes a mere intellectual function, as it encapsulates both the feeling and the will of man. Thus, it was the reflex of the total person, the response of one to God and His personal revelation in law, history, and prophetic utterances (Huffman, 1976: 171). Hosea 4:1 and 6:6, however, confirms that knowledge and covenant-love were sorely lacking on Israel's part.

McCarthy and Murphy (1990:217) opine that knowledge relates directly to the confession that was expected of Israel to accord to their God, who had revealed His name, nature and will to them at Sinai. But at this time, they had perverted their dealings with one another and corrupted their relationship with God. Israel's relationship with God and their brethren had been greatly ruptured by an ignorance as in Hosea's message in Hosea 4:1-2. According to these verses, the requirement by Yahweh was not the mindless practice of ceremonial religion, but a genuine knowledge of who and what kind of God He was, and an intrinsic understanding of the ethical implications of worshipping Him. According to Hosea, there is no "knowledge of God in the land." (cf Hosea 4:6). Garret (1997) emphasized that the threefold use of (אין) meaning, "there is no/not," is dominant and should be echoed in the translation. Thus, not only Hosea but Jeremiah and Isaiah, considered idolatry as symptoms of spiritual foolishness (Jeremiah 10:14; Isaiah 44:19). To Hosea, the people have willfully rejected Yahweh; consequently, they have forgotten and forsaken His commandments (Hosea 4:6). The outcome of this is the manifestation of overt sins in 4:2 such as cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery as contained in the Decalogue in Deut. 5:6-21 (Morris, 1981:254)

Hosea 4:2 opens with an accusation against Israel, "because there is no faithfulness (אמת) or kindness (חסד) or knowledge of God in the land." Both faithfulness and love (kindness) are the communicable attributes of Yahweh (Exo. 15:13; 34:6). The Israelites who were created in the image and likeness of God, were expected to portray these qualities by committing to goodness and truthfulness, not only in matters relating to their individual faith with Yahweh but also in their relationships with their neighbours. Thus, the absence of these characters among them implies that they had forgotten and forsaken Yahweh (Yurchenko, nd).

Covenant-love (*hesed*) was prominent in their covenantal relationship; thus, Hosea emphasized it and accord it a new and vital relevance with different nuances as "steadfast love" (2:19), "love" (6:4; 12:16) and "kindness" (4:1). This quality is significance for Israel's appreciation of her covenantal relationship with

Yahweh and devotion to Him. It also signifies their loyalty and responsibility to each other (Kinder, 2000). Israel's bankruptcy of love resulted in negative evaluation – "Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away." (Hosea 6:4)

Covenant Lawsuit

Another way the prophets communicated God's strong displeasure with the Israelites' sinful behavior was to call them to court to face God's judgment for failing to maintain their covenant relationship with God. This type of prophetic oracular formula is employed in Hosea 4:1-19, and 11:11-14:8. A typical prophetic lawsuit scenario, according to Fee and Stuart (2003:213), is composed of the following elements, viz: a summons, a charge, evidence and a verdict. The utterance in Hosea 4:1-19 possessed all these elements. However, Haffemann (2007:34) and Bright (1976) differ by remarking that the phenomenon in Hosea is incomplete because there exists a lack of appeal to the witnesses and historical prologue. Nevertheless, they agree that the existence of legal controversy (*rib*) of the Lord with Israel due to faithlessness, ignorance of God and lack of covenant-love is an indication of accusation during a covenant lawsuit. Here, Yahweh is the only Judge, who Judges the case of the guilty Israel and passes his judgment outrightly. The indictment against the offender is also explicitly stated- the broken stipulations of God's covenant (Fensham, 2010).

In addition to oral presentation as its main feature, Fee and Stuart (2003:215) observe that the approach of Hosea's utterance is also a feature of what is called, "enactment prophecy." This signifies the combination of oral words and parabolic actions that clearly reinforce the content of the prophetic utterance.

Curses and Blessings of the Covenant

Hosea presents the most essential component of the original Sinaitic covenant to the people of Israel. This component, as in all suzerain/vassal treaty was loyalty; for fidelity to these covenantal stipulations was promised blessings (Deut. 28:1-14). However, infidelity to this enactment results in curses (Fee and Hubbard, 2011). Fensham (2010) asserts that punishment was part of the lawsuit and it occurs in the forms of curse or malediction. He classified the curses highlighted in the book of Hosea as:

- Natural calamities overtaking the transgressor – Hos. 4:3
- Curses against the person of the transgressor – Hos. 9:11-10
- Curses against the property of the transgressor – Hos. 8:14
- Miscellaneous curses such as taking away of joy – Hos. 1:5; 8:3

Hosea acknowledged the woefully delinquency of Ephraim in being unfaithful to the covenant code; thus, he releases harsh threats and judgment against them. However, he also spoke of God's sadness in bringing catastrophe on Israel as well as his decision to maintain a personal relationship with his elected people. Okoronkwo (2020) maintained that, "the reality of Israel's heedlessness to divine expectation was set against the reality of Yahweh's extraordinary faithfulness."

Similar to the discussion on malediction, the clause of blessing is of relevance in the covenant – idea in Hosea. Hosea first mentions two covenant blessings in 2:18 and 2:23 to include the blessing of removing wild animals from the land and that of restoration of covenantal relationship. "I will say to those called, 'not my people', 'you are my people' and they will say, 'you are my God'" (NIV). This Biblical theme, signifies God's continuous dwelling presence amongst Israel if they are faithful to the covenant. Brinegar (2018:9) observes that the promise originates from the original covenantal promise in Leviticus 26:11 and is found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Jer. 30:22; Ezek. 11:20). Other blessings were highlighted by Guthrie (1983:279) to include blessings like rain instead of natural calamities (Hosea 6:3); deliverance from Sheol instead of death, (Hosea 13:14). In place of a waste land, the Lord Himself will be the dew to Israel so that he shall blossom as the lily and strike root like the poplar (Hosea 14:6ff). The greatest of all is the incomprehensible compassion of Yahweh for His elect (Hosea 11:9).

The Resonance of Hosea's Covenant Motif in the New Testament

A critical overview of Hosea's covenant motifs reveals their parallel resonances with the New Testament. Stamp (2003:1283) avers that Hosea contains numerous utterances that found its fulfillments in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. A few of these prophecies are covenant related. For example, the call of

elected Israel, God's Son out of Egypt in Hosea 11:1 finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Matthew 2:15). The New Testament stresses that the Gentiles, who were not God's people, are now becoming His people (Hosea 1:6, 9-10; 2:23 and Romans 9:25-29; II Peter 1:10). There exist echoes of God's desire for mercy and not sacrifice from his covenantal people (Matthew 9:13; 12:4); the dangers of disrespect to the covenantal *torah* (1 Cor. 1:22; Rom. 6:1; Heb. 6:4-6), and assurance of restoration due to divine mercy (Exo. 34:6-7; Psalms 103:12). Reflections of committed obedience stressed in Deuteronomy and in Hosea is heard in John 14:15-25; 15:10; these comprise Paul's ethics "of walking in the Spirit", "to fulfill just requirements" of the *torah* (Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 5:16). Loyalty and exclusive devotion to God alone emphasized in Hosea is evocatively echoed in New Testament passages such as Matt. 28:17; 1 Cor. 12:2; Heb. 1:6 2 Cor. 6:16 (Kesler, 2013).

Additionally, the New Testament expands Hosea's theme of God being the husband of His people, in that Christ is the bridegroom/husband of His redeemed bride, which is the church – the object of the new covenant (Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 19:6-9; 21: 11-2, 9-10). This covenant imagery including others are couched in the New Testament, namely, the parent child imagery (Matt. 6:9-15), the bridegroom – bride imagery (Matt. 9:15; 25:1-13), and the Christian and God (Hamilton, 2019). Other resonances include Hosea as well as the New Testament message of true knowledge in order to enter into life (John 17:1-3). According to Stamps (2003), "Hosea shows clearly the direct relationship between persistent sin and inescapable judgment. The two main emphases in Hosea are summed up by Paul in Romans 6:23; 'for the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord'". God's links adultery to idolatry in Hosea 4:12 is concurrent to association of adultery with lust by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:27-30. Also, Hosea's pleading of Israel to repent and turn from their "lovers", the Canaanite gods (Hosea 2:5; 8,12) is persistently echoed in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Cor. 8:1-13).

Hosea also prophesies of the sinful nation of Israel being struck down by Yahweh, who comes at them like a lion (Hos. 5:14). But, with striking echoes of future salvation events, the prophet says that this death of the nation will happen when the people are driven into exile. Then, after the exile, Yahweh will raise his people from the dead on the third day (Hos. 6:2-3). These redemptive themes in Hosea's prophecy are supremely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus came as Israel's representative, and in his death, he became the one who bore the curse of the covenant (Gal. 3:13). He was struck down under the wrath of God, and "he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4; cf. Hos. 5:14-6:3)(Hamilton, 2019).

The Nigerian Christians

Generally, it is believed that biblical doctrines of Christianity do not only prepare adherents for life eternal, but they also enshrine and teach good and sound moral values such as integrity, patriotism, loyalty, covenant-keeping, truthfulness, honesty, fidelity, transparency, righteousness, social justice and solidarity, amongst others, as Christianity's basic tenets to ensure that adherents live in covenantal relationship with members in the society. Regrettably in modern times, despite the high level of religiosity in Nigeria, corrupt practices and other forms of moral bankruptcy have pervaded almost all facets of Christendom. Christianity as practiced by both religious leaders and adherents in Nigeria today has become corrupted and commercialized from embezzlement of church fund to commercialization of every process and item, from deceits by religious leaders to ritual killing, from sexual perversions and scandals by church leaders to hero worship of politicians among others (Uyanga, 2023:117). Corruption and corrupt practices in the religious circle, judiciary, educational sector, economic sector, politics among others, in Nigeria take different shades with negative tendencies of greed, selfishness, licentiousness, covetousness, lust, pride, materialism, envy, wickedness, war-mongering, and callousness. Like in the days of Prophet Hosea, "There is no truth or mercy, or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed." (Hos 4:1-2 NKJV).

Implications of Covenant Motifs in Hosea for Nigerian Christians

The implicational import of the covenant of Yahweh with the Israelites in the message of Hosea to the Israelites as well as to contemporary Christians in Nigeria are obvious. By virtue of Christian's relationship

with God, their entire existence revolves around God and their faithfulness to His Covenant. Thus, the idea of covenant should affect individual believer and Christian communities all over the world and in Nigeria in particular. The covenant law that Hosea emphasized is significant because it was capable of creating a moral society in which the Israelites revered Yahweh and related with each other equitably. However, the failure to follow this Covenant code, and its negligence by claiming that “we are no more under the law, but under grace,” consequently results in a perverted society characterized with syncretism, juvenile delinquencies, poverty, political upheavals, rancour and vindictiveness, social bewilderment, economic hardship, all forms of sexual perversion, jealousy, misery, war, injustice, terrorism, division, anthropocentrism and ethnocentrism, selfishness, tribalism, the excessive desire for materialism, family and ethnic conflict, betrayal, violence, and abuse of religions.

The contemporary Nigeria, is bedeviled with numerous acts of violence and insecurity with their attendant loss of lives and properties worth millions of naira (Olusakin and Sibani, 2023:59, Paul, Olusakin and Essien, 2023:158). The lawless contemporary society, as is the case in current Nigerian socio-political milieu, is parallel to the days of Hosea, where “there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.” (Hosea 4:1-2; KJV). This, too, is similar to Amos’ days when the righteous were sold for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes (Amos 2:6). Yurchenko (nd) observes that “the prophet’s application of what at least some of his listeners perceived as ‘old covenant’ stands in direct opposition to the tendency among some hyper-grace movement churches to underestimate the role of the Old Testament law for a modern believer.” Olusakin (2017:32-33) confirms that amongst various social vices in Nigeria, bribery and corruption, nepotism and favouritism, and unbridled quest for power are predominant and pervasive even among church leaders and members, due to paucity of those godly virtues preached by Hosea.

Hosea’s prime message of maintaining covenant ideals was a warning against backsliding or apostasy and idolatry, specifically Baalism. Hosea prophesied during a dark time in Israel’s history, where Yahwism was abandoned for idolatry, which resulted in exile. The book of Hosea demonstrates the impishness, destructiveness and foolishness of this spiritual whoredom and contrastingly, points to the one true God, who not only provided all the needs of His people but also displayed His willingness to forgive them despite their rejection of Him. Idols in both Hebrew religion and Christianity denotes anything that displaces trust in, allegiance and reverence to God. It is described as spiritual harlotry, because trusting in or reverencing anything besides God deprive Him of the devotion and glory He alone deserves. As it was obvious in the Old Testament that lust and impurity often accompany idolatry, so it is in Christianity (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Therefore, Christians should be aware of seduction, whims and caprices, and pressure by Satan in idolizing anything in lieu of God, and His Son, Jesus Christ. The idolizing of materialism in contemporary Nigeria is obvious in both churches and political space. This has resulted in the unfortunate exploitation of and eventual degradation of the environment leading to global warming. The reality of the impact of this reflects in flooding, high temperature, change in weather among others (Olusakin and Udoh, 2018:72). Both Hosea’s personal story and the overall historical context to which it points demonstrate God’s way of salvation in Christ. God stands ready to forgive and restore those who turn to him, and He has provided the ransom from slavery through Jesus Christ. God said, “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them” (Hos. 14:4).

Christians should therefore appreciate the fact that the covenant ideals stressed in Hosea’s utterances and renewed in Christ, forms the basis of their relationship and fellowship in the new community of faith. By the commitment to divine relationship, God initiates Himself to be our personal protector, eternal defender and ever-present helper; not only against our enemies, but against sickness, disease, and chaos as well, for He has laid claim to be our God, and Christians as His own through Christ. Consequently, Yahweh has become a personal God, who will bring blessings to those that loyally trust in Him. This called for, among the community of faith, a life of uncompromised obedience; exclusive allegiance and reverential devotion of Yahweh alone.

It is noteworthy that, Christians' commitment to their covenantal responsibilities that is renewed in the new covenant in Christ with ardent faithfulness creates a genuine gratuitous responsiveness to God's kindness. Such grateful obedience is crucial in continued sustenance of Christian's relationship with God. Disobedience or breaching the covenant attracts God's fiery judgment. Those who assume upon God's kindness and refuse to repent of their sins incur God's anger, which Hosea depicts as God's coming like a lion who will "tear and go away" (Hos. 5:14). God upholds mercy to all the penitent, but those who rebuff that opportunity will eventually experience an eternal tearing. God's wrath is also portrayed as a cup or bowl that the wicked will drink (Ps. 75:8; Rev. 14:10); however, Jesus drank that cup, so that all who come to Him may evade it (Matt. 26:39).

Hosea's approach of prophetic references to the established scriptural authority which empowered him to demonstrate that the words he spoke as Yahweh's *nabi*, were indeed "the word of the Lord" (Hos. 4:1), should sets a precedent for the hermeneutical use of Scripture to address various emerging issues of covenantal unfaithfulness among God's people in Nigeria today which are really absent in various contemporary preaching platforms. Instead of crying for covenantal unfaithfulness among Christian communities, numerous end-time preachers in Nigeria are yearning to amass wealth and materials and their messages point to this.

Summarily, Christians in Nigeria are called to lives of steadfastness to God's knowledge, faithfulness and mercy towards others; which are the basic ingredients of covenant motifs in Hosea's prophecy. They are unequivocally challenged to be exclusively committed to God with a sincerity and undivided response to the requirements of sustaining the new covenant. This prophetic book sobers us and fills us with renewed hope. As horrible as Israel's adulterous faithlessness has been, it could not extinguish God's resilient, redemptive love that defies human scheming.

Conclusion

It is obvious from our study that covenant, be it Mosaic with its linkages in the decalogue and the Deuteronomistic history or other types, occupies not only a dominant place in Israelitish history and religion but also indispensable for their identity with Yahweh and survival as a nation. In fact, covenant becomes the hub and core of Israel as an elected people of God. Thus, the values of this important theme cannot be overemphasized. Covenant with its code, types and ideas are enshrined in the prophetic oracles of Hosea in the chaotic days of Israel's moral decline during the reign of Jeroboam II. Prophet Hosea was aware of the essential content of the original Sinaitic covenant's stipulations, warnings, and blessings. Thus, he arose to cry against the spiritual harlotry in the Northern kingdom. He revealed that God maintained His covenant love for His people and has been faithful and merciful in His love for them. According to him also, the consequences will surely ensue when Israel persists in their infidelity to God and their covenant code. These form the main crux of covenant motif in his prophetic utterances. The reflections of these ideals in the New Testament are discussed and its implication to the modern-day Christians highlighted.

Summarily, God's demands in covenant relationship, whether in the Sinaitic or new covenant, remain: faithfulness, loyalty, courageousness, obedience, knowledge of God, kindness, mercy, love and committed sense of service to God and His commandments. These qualities form the conditions that make the covenants blessings a reality, and they are significance for Christians' appreciation of their covenantal relationship with God and devotion to Him as well as their loyalty and responsibility to each other.

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