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THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PROPHETIC SYMBOLISM IN THE BOOK OF HOSEA AND  
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

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## ABSTRACT

Religion is a complex phenomenon, it concerns internal description which reflect itself through physical manifestations. However, the task of communicating religious experiences becomes difficult because its spiritual and physical natures. As a result, men adopted different means to make religious concept meaningful. One of such significant ways is through symbols. Symbols are needed to embody religious message and experiences for easy-comprehension and to elicit relevant responses from the audience.

This research work focuses on the use of symbols by prophet Hosea in his prophecy against the people of God, Israel and Ephraim. The choice of this book among other biblical books stemmed from the quantity and uniqueness of its symbols, especially the marriage symbolism and its contextual implication on his audience. This research work therefore seeks to explore Hosea's use of symbol with the aim of discovering, if in any way contemporary ministers of the gospel can benefit from it in discovering their duties. Ten symbols were selected from the books, nine are symbolic elements mentioned in different passages, while the entire marriage scenario (Hosea 1 – 3) was considered as a single symbol. The ten symbols are studied both exegetically, with the aim of discovering their meaning both within and without Hosea's prophetic context.

The first chapter forms the introduction with definitions of significant terms as they relate to the subject matter. The second chapter deals with the review of relevant literature on the topics namely; religion, Hebrew

prophetism, religion and symbols etc. The third chapter concerns itself with the variant interpretation of Hosea's marriage, diachronic analysis of 19 symbolic elements and synchronic analysis of the marriage symbolism. This focuses on the symbolic meanings of the marriage, the names of Hosea's children and the purchase of Gomer. Two chapter concludes by categorizing Hosea's symbol into three main division in accordance with the message of Hosea namely; indictment, judgment and restoration. Each of these is located within the religio-political contexts of Hosea's time.

The fourth chapter points out the implications of Hosea's use of symbols for pastoral ministry. Hosea's symbols throw more light into his message and facilitated the understanding of his audience. He participated in his message through his marriage. He compressed his three main messages into symbols to give vivid pictorial understanding. Chapter five concludes the whole research. This includes the fact that pastors should adequately make use of symbol adequately to make word of God meaningful. At the same time, they should participate in their sermons by living what they preach, and to preach balance message of God.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research work has basically focused on finding out the meaning of the prophetic symbolism in the book of Hosea. This includes Hosea's marriage symbolism in chapter 1 – 3 and other symbols, which cut across his entire prophecy in chapter 4 – 14. The first chapter of this study states the research problem, significance, purpose, methodology and scope of the research work. The second chapter deals with in-depth literature review of basic concepts and subjects that are in strong connection with the topic. This includes symbols, symbolism, religious and biblical symbolism, prophets, Hebrew prophetism, pastoral ministry, Hosea and his message. The third chapter deals with the study of Hosea's prophetic symbolism, beginning with variant interpretations of his marriage narrative. This ushers in word study of some symbolic element in Hosea's prophesy. It also focuses on their meanings in the general context without locating them in the book of Hosea. This is followed by exegetical study of some symbolic elements in Hosea's prophecy, with specific references to how those symbols are used in the religio-political contexts of Hosea. This also begins with Hosea's marriage symbolism (1 – 3) and some symbols in other chapters (4 -14).

Furthermore, attempt is made to discover and categorize these symbols in conformity with the three main division of Hosea's message namely; indictment of Israel of her sins, Pronouncement of God's awful punishment, and proclamation of restoration that is based on Yahweh's

covenantal love. The fourth chapter focuses on certain implications of Hosea's manner and use of symbols for contemporary pastors, while chapter five draws conclusion and recommendation for further study.

On a final analysis, the book of Hosea is unique in the use of symbols. This portrays Hosea as a skillful preacher, who knew so much about his message and his audience. He made use of symbols that adequately fit the diverse situations that surrounded his message namely; indictment, punishment and restoration. All these symbols enhanced vivid understanding of his message and at the same time, facilitate easy comprehension by his audience. His selection of symbols shows him as someone who knows so much about the religio-political situation of his audience and could minister at their level. His knowledge about the religious syncretism and political manipulation was unhampered, and upon this he carefully selected his symbols.

Although, Hosea denounced Israel's sin in a strong term with severe punishment that will follow, he also rekindled the hope of restoration. There are certain challenges presented by prophetic symbolism in the book of Hosea, which contemporary ministers must prepare to meet. Every preacher must learn to concretize his message through symbols or imageries that will facilitate understanding. Every preacher must recognize the fact that his lifestyle, family and disposition must be part of his message. That is, he should live what he preaches. The participation of a preacher in his message introduces some modicum of honour to his integrity. As a result, he will not always be hypothetical but practical in preaching the gospel. Preachers must preach within the context of his audience. As Hosea knew so much about his

people, every Christian preacher should know his church members by visitation and interaction. He should not be one-sided in his preaching but be balanced, taking note of God's strong condemnation of sin, His call for repentance and everlasting promise of restoration.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

This research work has treated some of the prophetic symbols in the book of Hosea within their appropriate contexts. Great efforts have been centered on word study and syntagmatic relationship of these symbols in the book of Hosea. However, there remain certain areas to cover in the study of the use of symbols by Hosea's prophecy. These include finding out the eschatological dimension of Hosea's symbols with respect to his message. This is necessary because every prophecy has both immediate and remote realization. Hosea's symbols as used in his prophecy, adequately fit into his contemporary time both in content and fulfillment.