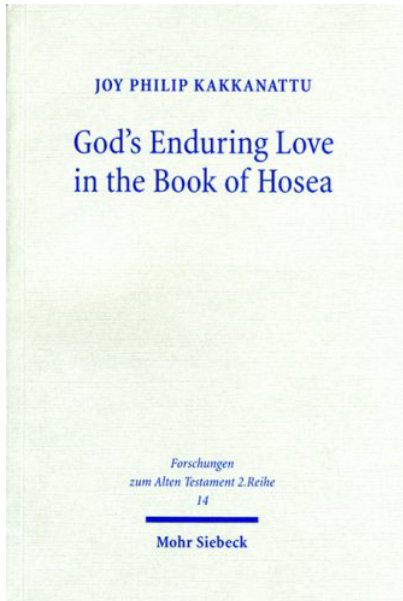


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God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis of Hosea 11,1-11

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This book is a slightly modified version of a doctoral dissertation presented to the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, in May 2005. The author states the purpose of his study as follows: “The principal aim of this study is to offer a thorough analysis of Hos 11,1–11 by means of a synchronic and diachronic reading of the text with reference to its context in the book of Hosea and in the book of the Twelve Prophets” (1). After an “Overview of Research on the Book of Hosea” (2–7) Kakkanattu gives short methodological definitions of “synchronic reading” and “diachronic analysis” (7–8).

Part 1, dealing with the synchronic reading of the text, is subdivided into three chapters. Chapter 1 (12–30) provides the reader with a translation (12–13) accompanied by critical notes (13–30). Chapter 2 offers an “Exegetical Analysis Of Hosea 11,1–11,” starting with comments on the delimitation and the structure of the text. Kakkanattu regards Hos 11 as a literary unity consisting of two sections, verses 1–7 and 8–11, which are further divisible into the subunits 1–4, 5–6, 7 and 8–9, 10–11.

Hosea 11:1 (ch. 2.1, pp. 32–44) highlights the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. “The idea of divine sonship of Israel is a metaphor used to describe God’s election of Israel as his own, which is the essence of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel” (44).

Hosea 11:2 (2.2, pp. 44–52) presents “the immediacy and magnitude of Israel’s sin” (44), namely, apostasy from Yahweh. The employment of *Ba’alim* refers to the defective relationship between Israel and Yahweh and at the same time points to Israel’s illegitimate worship (49). Following others, Kakkanattu considers the *pesilim* as “calf idols, which represent the Baal” (52).

Hosea 11:3 (2.3, pp. 52–57) refers back to Yahweh’s love toward Israel as expressed in verse 1. For Kakkanattu, the expression “To be on the arms of Yahweh ... means to be under the protective power of Yahweh” (54). He notes that the arm of Yahweh serves as a symbol of divine power and strength in general and as an element of the idiom “Yahweh’s outstretched arm” with reference to the exodus (cf. Exod 6:6; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 2 Kgs 17:36) in particular. The concept of knowledge of God (root *yd’*) is presented as being of primary importance in the book of Hosea (cf. 3.2.2 “Lack of Knowledge” [117–26]). With reference to the debate whether to understand “to know” as cognitive knowledge or as subjective realization and acknowledgment, Kakkanattu states that “the concept of knowledge of God ... is marked with objective and subjective aspects” (126).

Regarding Hos 11:4 (2.4, pp. 57–63), he points out that the understanding of the verse very much depends on whether its metaphor belongs to the field of animal husbandry (vocalization of *l* as “yoke”) or relates to parental care (vocalization as “infant”). Kakkanattu goes for the second option and summarizes Hos 11:1–4 as a presentation of the exodus and the wilderness experience “as a unilateral act of love in favour of Israel” (63).

Hosea 11:5 (2.5, pp. 63–69) is taken together with verse 6 as a subsection that is considered a declaration of punishment. The break between verses 4 and 5 is indicated by “a sudden shift in the style of the speech” and “a change in the time reference” (64). The threat of a “return to Egypt” (8:13; 9:3; 11:5) is interpreted “as symbolising the reversal of the exodus and revocation of Israel’s election” (68). In Kakkanattu’s view, verse 5 alludes to the Assyrian deportation, whereas 11:6 (2.6, pp. 69–71) “points to the imminent Assyrian conquest” (69). Assyria, represented by the subject of the verbs in verse 6, “the sword,” is Yahweh’s tool to punish his people. Due to the military context and following Andersen and Freedman, *baddim* is understood as “strong men,” probably military functionaries, although Kakkanattu does not exclude other interpretations.

Hosea 11:7 (2.7, pp. 71–75) belongs neither to the preceding verses 1–6 nor to the following verses 8–9 alone but is rather “Hosea’s reflection over the question why Israel has failed to change its heart” and “a transitional verse that summarises the previous section and introduces the following section” (73). With verse 7, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel reaches an impasse, as continuous apostasy is the basic sin of Israel.

Hosea 11:8–9 (2.8, pp. 75–93) are taken as a separate section due to changes in style, form, and content. Referring to Janzen, Kakkanattu understands the self-questioning of Yahweh not as being rhetorical but as “an existential question, whose answer determines the future of the Yahweh-Israel covenant relationship” (77). The passionate tone of the question is emphasized by the fourfold repetition of the interrogative adverb *’yk*. The phrase *nḥpk ’ly lby* “my heart recoils upon me” is taken as an expression of Yahweh’s “intense inner tension ... before reaching a fundamental decision” (81). Hosea 11:9 answers the questions raised in verse 8 and states Yahweh’s decision. He will not execute his fierce anger and annihilate Ephraim but offer him the possibility of starting anew. This decision is based in the character of God, who is not a human but “the Holy One in your midst.” “The Hosean God is Holy in that he is near to his people and continues to love them even when they are unfaithful and rebellious” (91). Yahweh’s love is the ultimate determiner of his character and actions.

Hosea 11:10–11 (2.9, pp. 93–99) “refer to a new era, when ... Israel will have a changed attitude towards Yahweh. Thus these verses speak of the restoration of the covenantal relationship” (93). The lion imagery points to the salvific nature of Yahweh (in contrast to 5:14 and 13:7–8); the lion’s roaring is a simile for Yahweh’s voice, “a signal of hope that calls the wandering people home” (97). Alongside other observations (see 179–80), the geographical indication “from the west” is taken as an argument that verse 10 is a secondary insertion, since the awareness of a western Diaspora is limited to postexilic times (see Joel 4:6). Hosea 11:11 reverses the punishment declared in verse 5 and in its imagery reflects 7:11–12. The significance of the bird imagery is “not to depict the character of the returning people, but to illustrate the manner of their response to the voice of Yahweh” (99).

Concluding the exegetical analysis of Hos 11:1–11, Kakkanattu states that the chapter “depicts the history of Yahweh with Israel as a parent-child relationship between a loving parent and a careless and rebellious son.... Hosea’s concept of divine holiness is unique in that his otherness and transcendence is manifested in his ability to hold back his judgment and thus provide the estranged child with another chance of returning home.... What is hoped for is the reestablishment of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the people of God. Thus Hos 11 can be entitled as ‘the hymn of the enduring love of God for Israel’, which is a manifestation of his divine nature” (100).

Chapter 3 aims to discuss the “Major Theological Themes of Hos 11 in Relation to the Book of Hosea” and to provide a “theological synthesis to the synchronic reading of the book” (101). Thus three areas of concern are identified: (1) “The Historical Retrospect: Its Meaning and Scope (3.1, pp. 101–10); (2) “The Sin of Israel” (3.2, pp. 111–26); and (3) “The God of Hosea” (3.3, pp. 127–36).

Outside Hos 11, historical retrospectives can be found in the book of Hosea in 9:10; 12:10; and 13:4–5. Whereas 9:10 implies Yahweh’s election of Israel, the other three texts refer to the exodus. Kakkanattu “tend[s] to agree” with Holt that the motif of finding in 9:10 is a different image for election but does not represent a finding tradition different from the exodus tradition. He notes that, according to the majority of scholars, the self-introduction formula in 12:10 and 13:4 stresses the exclusivity and uniqueness of Yahweh for Israel and refers to the beginning of the Decalogue (see 103 with n. 12). “For Hosea, Yahweh’s claim on Israel has its foundation in the election, which has its manifestation in the liberation from Egypt and his continuous care for and protection of them” (106). The purpose of presenting “the history of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh as a history of basic infidelity and ingratitude ... is not to depict an early history of Israel” but “to make use of past events to interpret the present” (109).

According to Hos 11 Israel’s sins “are: 1) Israel’s going away from Yahweh and his call by offering worship to idols; 2) Israel’s failure to realise ... Yahweh’s healing them; 3) Israel’s persistence in turning away from Yahweh.” Indicators of faulty worship (3.2.1) are Baal worship and idolatry. “Hosea condemns the worship of Baal and the fabrication and adoration of any form of idols as illegitimate and sinful. For him, idolatry is nothing other than a form of Baal cult.... Any form of worship that undermines the exclusive relationship between Yahweh and Israel is illegitimate and idolatrous” (117). Concerning the meaning of the notion “Lack of Knowledge” (3.2.2), Kakkanattu finds two major trends. The first, initiated by Baumann, holds that the root *yd’* in Hosea does not allude to intellectual knowledge but to relation, whereas the second, proposed by Wolff, suggests a cognitive understanding, which is knowledge of the revealed law of God. Kakkanattu opts for a combination of both aspects in the concept of the knowledge of God: “Objectively it is to know Yahweh as a result of the study of divine intervention in the salvation-history handed over through sacred tradition. Subjectively it means to acknowledge Yahweh and his acts and manifest this recognition in a righteous relationship with him” (126).

The God of Hosea is characterized as “Yahweh, the Loving Parent” (3.3.1) and as “Yahweh, the Holy One among Humans” (3.3.2). Although syntax and grammar justify seeing Yahweh depicted as Israel’s father, some of Yahweh’s activities “are usually regarded as maternal and give certain credence to a feminine interpretation of Hos 11,1–11” (128). Therefore Kakkanattu favors interpreting Hos 11 as an expression of Yahweh’s parental love and care toward Israel. It is this parental love in which “Hosea finds a reason for Israel’s survival” (130). As the “Holy One in your midst,” Yahweh is totally different from humans but at the same time present among his people.

Part 2 of the book attempts to study “the process through which the text has reached its final form” (9) Chapter 4 (138–80) aims to illuminate the “History of Redaction of Hosea 11 in the Context of the Book of Hosea” and is subdivided into three main sections: (1) a discussion of major studies from the last two decades; (2) a discussion of the views of the recent major commentaries on Hosea; and (3) an “Evaluation and Conclusion” (177–80) that presents “the probable redactional levels of Hos 11,1–11” (138).

The recent major studies Kakkanattu deals with are those of J. Jeremias, which offers in his view “a conceivable model of redaction of a prophetic book” (143), G. I. Emmerson, G. A. Yee, M. Nissinen, Th. Naumann, and R. Albertz. The commentaries he considers are those of F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, G. I. Davies, and A. A. Macintosh. According to his evaluation, the theories of the redaction history of the book of Hosea can be grouped into two categories: (1) “the theory—held by majority of scholars—that considers the book to be a planned literary composition by someone other than the prophet” basically formulated and written “before it was taken to Judah after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.”; and (2) “the model that considers the book of Hosea as principally the work of a postexilic redactor” (177). Kakkanattu holds that the second model, represented by Yee and Nissinen, to a great extent predicates on the postulate “that oracles of judgment and oracles of hope and salvation cannot be from the same hand” (177). Therefore he prefers the first of the two models, “as it does more justice to the prophetic ministry” (178). Regarding the redaction history of Hos 11, he proposes that two originally separate sayings (or complexes of sayings?) of the prophet (vv. 1–7 and 8–9, 11) were composed by the tradents of Hosea as a depiction of Israel’s history as a history of Yahweh’s persevering love. Only verse 10 is a later insertion, probably to connect Hosea to Amos and Joel.

Chapter 5 (181–86) offers a short survey of several hypotheses concerning “The Book of Hosea in Relation to the Book of the Twelve Prophets” and closes with the proposal that, through its depiction of Yahweh as the God of love, Hos 11:1–11 may be considered “as an orientation text for the book of the Twelve as a whole” (186). The study is rounded off by a “Summary” (187–92) and a “Concluding Reflection” (192–94).

I read especially the first part of Kakkanattu’s clearly written study with joy. Chapter 2 does offer a thorough analysis of Hos 11, with many interesting observations and balanced discussions of possible interpretations. In this respect, the principal aim of the study stated at its very beginning is achieved. In general, the same holds true for the theological synthesis in chapter 3. I found many arguments quite convincing, although I have strong doubts concerning the confrontation of Israelite versus Canaanite religion presupposed in 3.2. If at all, one should at least not assume an antithesis of Israel and Canaan in preexilic times without giving reasons, since the recent debate on the development of

Israelite religion has provided good arguments for the assumption that the religion of Yahweh originally was nothing but Canaanite. In fact, “Canaan” as depicted in the Hebrew Bible can very well be seen as an anti-Israel, representing anything Israel is not (and in retrospect never was) allowed to be. As Kakkanattu rightly observes, the Baal in Hosea “is not a god among many gods, but ... a cipher for misguided relationship with Yahweh and especially for corrupted Israelite worship” (49). Accordingly, his view that Hos 11:2 points to a transgression of “the first and second commandments of the Decalogue” (52) is reasonable. However, Kakkanattu does not consider the intruding consequences of this notion in light of increasing scholarly insight, that the first and second commandments of the Decalogue hardly date from preexilic times.

Kakkanattu’s view that “the book of Hosea should continue to be appreciated as containing much original Hosean material” (154) is explicitly communicated to the reader only in the second part of the study. However, one can deduce this assumption while reading the first part from scattered hints in the text and from some footnotes. The diachronic reading provided in chapter 4 is basically a presentation and discussion of some major theories of the last decades. As Kakkanattu notes, he could have considered more proposals, if the scope of the study allowed it. At any rate, those he chose are sufficient to illustrate the two major trends he rightly works out. I see problems in how the first one fits the picture of Israelite religion as it is currently drawn from external evidence and the interpretation of other parts of the Bible (for a survey of the various problems related to the “traditional” picture, see, e.g., Matthias Köckert, “Von einem zum einzigen Gott: Zur Diskussion der Religionsgeschichte Israels,” *BThZ* 15 [1998]: 137–75). However, I do not criticize Kakkanattu for choosing the “first model” but for the way in which he rejects the second one, especially given that he himself rightly presents the insight “that the prophetic books in their present form are the outcome of a long process of editorial activity” as “an established fact” (138).

When Kakkanattu writes, “Choosing between the two models, the first model is to be preferred as it does more justice to the prophetic ministry. The prophet Hosea, being a man of God, would not only have announced chastisement for his people, but also hope of a possible renewed relationship with Yahweh once they made good their sins” (178), I cannot see how he comes to this understanding of Hosea’s ministry without assuming that Hos 11 as well as the rest of the book in its basic written form were composed by the immediate followers of the prophet before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. and were “not subjected to any thoroughgoing editorial reworking, but only to some redactional modifications for the purpose of making the text relevant to newer situations” (180). However, if one bears in mind that exactly this is open to question, one can certainly profit from Kakkanattu’s presentation of the theological richness of Hos 11.