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Gottes Land: Exegetische Studien zur Land-Thematik im Hoseabuch in kanonischer Perspektive

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Keita's Bethel dissertation (supervised by Frank Crüsemann) investigates the theme of the land in relation to the book of Hosea and its larger context in the Book of the Twelve Prophets and the Hebrew Bible canon as a whole. Her interest in doing so is twofold, first because the theme of the land is so seldom treated in modern biblical scholarship as a basis for Israel's national and religious identity, and second because of the importance of the land as an ideological factor in the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Standing behind these factors are the negative characterization of Israel's relationship to the land in Christianity, her own marriage to a Gazan-born educator, and her hope to offer a study that might provide a biblical perspective that could enable Israelis and Palestinians to achieve some basis for living together in a land that would be characterized as paradise.

Keita's interest in the book of Hosea and its understanding of the theme of the land is rooted in four basic considerations: (1) the book of Hosea presents a critical view of the question of Israel's relationship to the land that does not necessarily correspond to the negative views of land in contemporary postcolonial discourse; (2) the book of Hosea is fundamentally concerned with the question of land; (3) the book of Hosea was formed in relation to the collapse of northern Israel so that the question of land in Hosea has both a political and a theological dimension; and (4) the book of Hosea can be viewed as a prototype for the prophetic literature of the Bible due to its relatively early formation and

its placement and function at the head of the Book of the Twelve. Keita maintains that the book of Hosea offers a different viewpoint from that of the pentateuchal land promise tradition insofar as Hosea raises questions about Israel's relationship to the land in the aftermath of the collapse of northern Israel in 722/1 B.C.E.

Keita identifies seven major characteristics of the book of Hosea that are operative throughout her analysis: (1) many of Hosea's historical references are no longer fully understandable to the modern reader; (2) the intended readership of Hosea was an ancient audience that would have understood its references and its largely oral character; (3) Hos 4–14 presupposes a group of addressees that is distinct from the "speaker" of the book; (4) the speaker's perspective of the book of Hosea is predominantly the "I" of YHWH, although Hosea's own speech also appears; (5) Hosea makes extensive use of metaphor to characterize its referents; (6) the book of Hosea makes extensive use of semantic wordplay that calls upon the reader or hearer of the text to comprehend a very wide range of references and allusions; and (7) the book of Hosea employs unique linguistic usage, with many *hapax legomena* and terms of uncertain meaning.

Keita accepts a relatively standard view of the literary structure of the book, comprising Hos 1–3, in which the person of the prophet is evident, and Hos 4–14, in which YHWH is the speaker. She has a great deal of difficulty in understanding the substructure of Hos 4–14 and finally states that the book presupposes "a general oriental principle of composition" ("ein allgemeiner orientalisches Kompositionsprinzip," 20) evident in ancient Arabic anthologies. Within these two major parts of the book, the theme of the land functions as an element of the larger whole.

The bulk of the dissertation examines selected text elements within that whole that either address the theme of the land directly or employ language, imagery, and concepts that have some bearing on the land. Themes addressed in her exegesis include the land as people and the land as wife; loss of land and living in wilderness tents; the mountains of the land; the names of the land; the loss of land and exile; YHWH's land and Israel's land; the future of the land; and land as ideological concept. Keita maintains that her analysis shows that understanding of the land is an object of contention in Hosea. Hosea's opponents maintain that the land will flourish at any cost due to YHWH's election of Israel and promise of the land. Hosea questions these premises by stating that the land belongs to YHWH, but the experience of exile and invasion calls Israel's place in the land into question. In Hosea's view, the evil deeds of the people lead to exile, prompting YHWH to renew the relationship with Israel in the wilderness before returning Israel to the land from exile. In this respect, land serves an ideological function in the book of Hosea, both to Hosea's opponents and to the prophet and authors of the book. Ideology cannot be dismissed as a counterproductive factor, as many postcolonial thinkers now

contend, but it serves as the foundation for identity and worldview in both the ancient and modern worlds. Security in the land depends on YHWH, not on a sense of promise or entitlement, whether Jewish or Muslim, or on the use of weapons by either side.

Keita's briefer examination of the theme of land arrives at similar conclusions; that is, the land is YHWH's, and Israel may go into exile and return to the land afterwards. Her examination of the theme of land in the other books of the Twelve Prophets finds the concern with land not to be pervasive—it appears in only four of the other books—although Hosea plays an important role in signaling concern with the land at the outset of the sequence. Her examination of the land in a broader canonical context—actually only in Gen 1–3—points to the conceptualization of the land as paradise, which places the land at the center of creation and of all humanity.

Keita's study is both well-intentioned and nonpolemical, and it offers some opportunity to engage the theme of land in Hosea as a theological and ideological category devoid of the negative portrayals of the issues in both Christian and postcolonial contexts. But the study also suffers from a number of important limitations.

First, her understanding of the literary structure of Hosea overlooks an important factor, that Hos 1:2–2:2 represents the voice of the anonymous narrator of the book, and 2:3–14:9 presents the prophet's presentation (once again through the narrator) of YHWH's words. Keita assumes that Hosea presents authoritative words of YHWH, but her analysis overlooks the importance of narrative context. YHWH is just as much a character and a construction of the book as Hosea himself, and it therefore represents an attempt to discern YHWH's will, character, and intentions. She is correct to recognize that Hosea represents a different understanding of land than that of the pentateuchal tradition as a object of contention. But this observation has implications well beyond her understanding of the issue: the book of Hosea represents a debate between the book of Hosea and the pentateuchal tradition in the aftermath of a tragedy. Hosea does not trump the Pentateuch (or the other prophets, for that matter) or replace it with a "true" view of YHWH's will but represents an attempt to discern if YHWH's promises hold true and if YHWH can be trusted in view of the destruction of northern Israel. Keita misses an important point here: Hosea is an attempt to defend YHWH's righteousness, character, presence, and integrity in the aftermath of northern Israel's destruction by arguing that the people have done wrong (whether they did or not) and that YHWH brought punishment in response to the alleged wrongdoing.

Second, Keita may be commended for undertaking a synchronic examination of Hosea as the basis for engaging the task of biblical theology, but her limited choice of texts leaves out some important considerations. One consideration is the full position of the parties in

debate as portrayed in Hosea; the other is the diachronic context on which the book looks retrospectively. She recognizes that there are diachronic references in the book that the modern reader might not understand, but despite considerable effort her focus on the theme of land does not allow her sufficient opportunity to do so. Indeed, the question of textual demarcation and the interrelationship between subunits in Hos 4–14 is a key lacuna that adversely affects her exegesis; land is not an isolated concern in Hosea but appears in relation to other concerns expressed throughout the text. Major issues in the book of Hosea are Israel's relationship with Assyria and the role of the house of Jehu in that relationship. During much of the reign of the Jehu dynasty, Israel was allied with the Assyrians as a means to check the Arameans, who had attacked Israel throughout the reign of the Omride dynasty. Evidence for such a relationship may be found in the Black Obelisk of the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III, which portrays King Jehu's submission to the Assyrian monarch, and the Tel Rimlah Stela of the Assyrian King Adad Nirari III, which lists the Jehu king Joash ben Jehoahaz as an Assyrian vassal. The book of Hosea clearly condemns the house of Jehu for its relationship with Assyria and calls for a return to alliance with Aram from which Israel's ancestors came. The Assyrian invasion of northern Israel came in the aftermath of King Pekah's realignment from Assyria to Aram. Even though this is a diachronic issue, synchronic analysis of the book must take this into consideration insofar as the final form of the book of Hosea looks retrospectively on this issue as part of its effort to understand the loss—whether potential or realized—of the land in 722/1 B.C.E.

Finally, the actual loss of land demands far greater consideration than Keita's analysis allows. The loss of land entails destruction, and the concomitant threat of destruction informs the book of Hosea's concern with land as well as both the Israeli and the Palestinian understanding of their respective links to the land in modern times. The book of Hosea takes up Israel's destruction in the aftermath of 722/1 B.C.E., and the projection of return to the land in the book constitutes a means to answer the question of destruction as well as the question of YHWH's integrity in the light of destruction. Modern Israel believes that it faces destruction, particularly in the aftermath of the experience of the Shoah as well as attack and invasion by Arab or other Muslim powers, including not only the Palestinians but also Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria—and now Hamas and Iran—beginning well before the independence of Israel in 1948. For their own part, Palestinians believe they face destruction at the hands of Israel as a result of their displacement, whether voluntarily or by force. Those fears need to be addressed, and both sides know from long experience that they cannot rely on the outside world, particularly Christian theologians, to meet their respective needs. Keita's contentions that the land belongs to YHWH and her hopes that Israelis and Palestinians might live together in the land in peace are well-intentioned, but such simple assertions can only

serve as a minimal basis for realizing the ideals for which she hopes. Granted, she is writing a theological dissertation on Hosea, but the issues she raises, both in Hosea and in the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are far more complex than portrayed here and demand far more treatment and engagement than her dissertation can provide. Although her dissertation is a worthwhile study, it constitutes only a very tentative beginning.