

Exegetical Analysis – Hosea 6:7

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7 – But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me.

זִנְיָהָם כְּאַדָּם עָבְרוּ בְרִית נֶשֶׁם כְּגִדּוֹ כִּי

Covenant Theologians have often used this passage to solidify their belief that there is a Covenant of Works formed with Adam in the garden. As is proper in all studies we must understand the contextual nature of the passage and how it ties into the greater historical reality that Hosea is portraying before we make a conclusion. Far too often scholars attempt to pick passages that seem to align with their beliefs, but take little regard for the context. I will attempt to demonstrate through a thorough study of the passage that this text cannot be used as a point of reference for the belief in a Covenant of Works, as Covenant Theologians have attempted to argue.

In order to understand (vs.7) we need to go back to the previous verses to understand what transpired to claim that “*But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me.*”. In the previous verses (vs.1-6) we see that Israel’s faithfulness is called into question and what appears to be genuine repentance is all but lacking. Israel’s transgressions are mounting, they would continue in their rebellion, and would pay severely for their continually disobedience. Israel requires a completely new heart, a heart of flesh. It is steadfast love and not sacrifice, because obedience is better than sacrifice, a theme that Israel continually fails to understand.

In Hosea 4:9 we see this wickedness in Israel fully drawn out: “*And it will be, like people, like priest; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds.*”

In moving to (vs.7) we need to keep in mind the context of the passage lest we fail to understand the point that is being made. The first thing that must be dealt with is “But like Adam they” (זִנְיָהָם כְּאַדָּם)

Who or what is Adam? Much speculation exists surrounding the phrase כְּאַדָּם. Some believe that it is better translated “like men”. The KJV renders Adam as “like men”, but it appears the vast majority of scholarship sees this as “in/at Adam”. If “Adam” is to be understood here, it must be recognized that translators view “Adam” in a personal sense (like Adam/kě’ādām) or in a geographical sense (in or at Adam/bě’ādām). So, the question is, how is it best to understand this word?

After studying the varying positions, the more likely interpretation of the word is “at Adam” due to the context of Hosea 6:7-9. This would mean that Hosea is referencing the city called “Adam”,

and not a Covenant of Works transgressed by Adam in the garden. It seems odd that Covenant Theologians would isolate a single verse to make it apart of their framework.

The city of Adam was referenced in Joshua 3:16, which was on the Jordan River beside Zarethan:

Joshua 3:16 NASB

the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam [bē'ādām], the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho.

So, we now have a case that it could be possibly (a geographical location), but we still require more reason. To further anchor this position, it is important to note the geographical locations mentioned in the proceeding verses (i.e. Gilead (Hos. 6:8) and Shechem (Hos. 6:9)). Also, as Williamson points out the third point is that [there/שָׁם] is used to denote location:

“Although several translations and commentators interpret kē'ādām in a personal sense, meaning ‘like Adam’, most interpreters emend the key word to read bē'ādām (in/at Adam), taking the proper noun in its geographical sense—referring to the first town Israel reached after crossing into the Promised Land (Josh. 3:16). Indeed, arguably, a geographical interpretation may not necessitate a textual emendation at all (cf. the similar syntax kammidbār [Lit. ‘as in the wilderness’] in Hos. 2:3; MT v. 5). Further support for this geographical understanding is found in the reference to Gilead (Hos. 6:8) and Shechem (Hos. 6:9) in the immediate context, and especially in the deployment of the locative šām (there) immediately after bērit in Hosea 6:7.”¹

Others have noted the geographical context of Hosea 6:7-9:

“A prime candidate is the Adam in the Jordan River above the place where the Israelites crossed at the time of the conquest (Josh. 3:16).”²

“(3) If this rendition is followed, the meaning is that Israel’s breaking the covenant with God was like that which had occurred at a place called Adam (usually identified with Tell ed-Damijej, one of the fords of the Jordan river), This third rendition is very attractive to most scholars because it rounds out the list of place-names appearing this summary of Israel’s treachery: Adam, Gilead, Shechem, and the house of Israel (Bethel).”³

Looking at a map, we can see the general area that is being discussed by Hosea, around Adam, Gilead, and Shechem. We will see momentarily that the events surrounding the city of Adam,

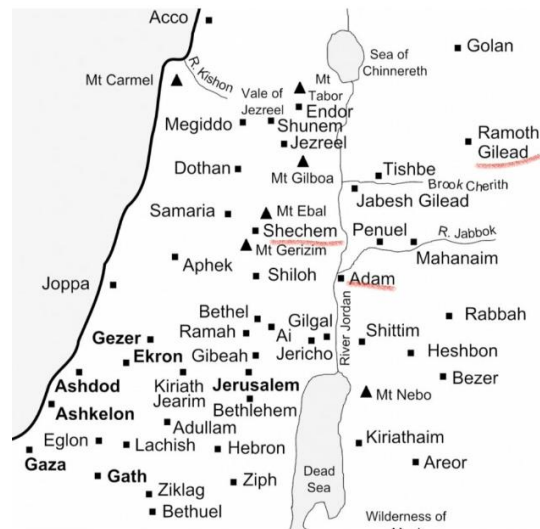
¹ Paul R. Williamson, & D. A. Carson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (New Studies in Biblical Theology, IVP Academic, Volume 23, 2007), 55.

² Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Hosea*, The Preacher’s Commentary, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, Volume 22, 1990), 116.

³ James Burton Coffman, *Hosea*, Commentary on the Minor Prophets, (Revised Edition, Volume 2, Houston Texas, ACU Press, 1986), 117-118.

located on the road to Shechem, would be the point Hosea would be referring to in (vs.8-9), and the transgression that occurred in (vs.7).

Image 1: Map of Ancient Israel.⁴



“Considerable progress can be made by supposing that the passage is about one act of unexampled wickedness, done by one group of people at one time and place. We suggest that that crime was murder, done at or near Adam by a gang of priests; the victim (or victims) was on the way to Shechem. This involves the identification of Adam as the town at the Jordan crossing on the main road linking Shechem to the Israelite centers in Transjordan, notably Succoth and Mahanaim. This identification, which restricts the activity to one place and one time, is a key to the interpretation which can be demonstrated with more certainty than has been possible hitherto. It has been usual to suppose that there are two or even three different places mentioned in the strophe -Adam, Gilead, and Shechem. Note, however, that v 9b does not locate anything at Shechem as such; it says that people committed murder on the road that leads to Shechem, and this could be the east-west road that crosses the Jordan at Adam. The murder could have been committed in Adam itself or else-where on the road. Further, Gilead is not a city, but a district. If it were not for the apparent meaning of 6:8, the identification of Gilead as a city would not have appeared in the lexicons. Gilead refers to individual towns only in the double names Jabesh-Gilead and Ramoth-Gilead, where “Gilead” is attributive. Since Adam is a town in Gilead, the name “Adam-Gilead” may have existed to distinguish the city from an Adam in another district; this name, we suggest, is broken up and distributed between v 7 and v 8; it is the same town that is further designated “the city of evil-doers.” This supports the hypothesis that Adam was the scene of terrible crime. The statement that Gilead is a city of evildoers is eliminated.”⁵

Next, we evaluate what wicked behaviours have “they transgressed” at Adam, at a Covenantal level. If we go back to chapter 5, we can gather more information.

⁴ <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/22-the-world-of-the-old-testament-journeys/ancient-israel/>

⁵ Francis I. Andersen, *Hosea* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 435-436.

Hosea 5:7 NASB

They have dealt treacherously against the LORD, For they have borne illegitimate children. Now the new moon will devour them with their land.

There appears to be “treacherous” behaviour, which aligns with the end of Hosea 6:7. The words here are best understood as marital infidelity (they have borne illegitimate children), and shows a violation of the command of God.

Hosea 6:7 NASB

But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me.

Here it appears that this treacherous and wicked behaviour is noted in (vs.8) includes marital sin but Hosea further explains this. So, Adam, the city was known for its “wrongdoers” or “evildoers”.

Hosea 6:8 NASB

Gilead is a city of wrongdoers, Tracked with bloody footprints.

This group was also known for tracking of bloody footprints across the land, for their wrongdoing.

Hosea 6:9 NASB

And as raiders wait for a man, So a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem; Surely they have committed crime.

These are raiders or priests [כֹּהֲנִים] who would wait and murder those on their way to Shechem. This murderous activity was a clear deviation away from the Covenant. This wicked behaviour was completely indecent and appalling. This is the transgression that is being referred to here.

The last question that can be addressed is what Covenant was deviated from. This would be the Mosaic Covenant as outlined in chapter 8 of Hosea.

Hosea 8:1 NASB

Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the Lord, Because they have transgressed My covenant And rebelled against My law.

It is best to understand that the murderous acts are a clear violation of the law, and not merely Adam’s violation of the covenant of works. This is the best way to understand the covenant in this book.

“First, we need to consider the options we have for translating this verse as all competent modern translations list in their footnotes. This verse can be rendered with the following options concerning the phrase in question: “Like Adam (or “as at Adam” or “Like men”), they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there.” Although, at first glance this text seems to say that there was a Covenant of Works that God made with Adam, a second glance may lead

to another conclusion. Not only are there other interpretive options for this text, such as taking Adam as the name of a location (Joshua 3:16) at which some rebellion occurred, but also within the ranks of Covenant Theology there are many who do not see this text as supporting the existence of a Covenant of Works in the garden. Even if one were to grant that this text does refer to the relationship in the garden between God and Adam (which is something this interpreter cannot grant), we must ask the question: Can this verse bear the full weight of the massive doctrine of the Covenant of Works in Covenant Theology?”⁶

In answer to Steve’s question; “Can this verse bear the full weight of the massive doctrine of the Covenant of Works in Covenant Theology?” the answer is no. There are alternatives that better address the context.

⁶ Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questioned Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006) 43-44.