



Hosea 7:1-16 and Destructive Leadership Theory: An Exegetical Study

Daniel B. Holmquist
Regent University

This qualitative hermeneutical study of Hosea 7:1-16 examined Hosea's insights into leadership and how they might enhance, critique, or refine destructive leadership theory (DLT). After performing a general hermeneutical and genre analysis of the biblical text and uncovering its leadership implications, these implications were intersected with the three domains of the toxic triangle theory of DLT: destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. Although the situation in Hosea 7 illustrated well the toxic triangle of DLT, a number of areas for potential refinement of DLT emerged, especially related to the theory's reliance upon modern psychology, ethics, and views of culture. DLT remains in the formative stages of development and could benefit from building stronger ethical foundations, investigating additional processes involved in destructive leadership situations, studying the interaction between the three domains of the toxic triangle, and exploring potential solutions to destructive leadership. Insights from Hosea 7, as well as from additional exegetical research of scripture, show promise for further gains toward a more robust theory of destructive leadership.

Many leaders have destroyed their organizations, those associated with them, and even themselves. Researchers have referred to such leaders and their leadership as negative, toxic, dark, and destructive, and have developed various theories of destructive leadership to explain the phenomenon, its dimensions, and its processes. Since researchers have only recently begun to investigate and describe destructive leadership—it is a set of theories under development—this would seem to be an opportune time to bring in exegetical research from Scripture to inform and assist with theory development. The prophet Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel in the mid-eighth century BC during a time of severe social and religious decay among the people and political intrigue under the leadership of highly destructive leaders who would eventually bring the nation to its end in complete destruction. All of his speeches

have provided insight into destructive leadership, yet, his speech in Hosea 7 has supplied a particularly excellent summary of the problem.

Research question: What is the relationship between Hosea 7:1-16 and destructive leadership theory? This qualitative hermeneutical study will begin with an exegetical analysis of the prophet Hosea's message to the political, religious, and community leaders of Israel in the mid-eighth century BC. After completing the analysis and gaining understanding of Hosea's view of leadership quality, the results will be compared with the constructs of destructive leadership theory to explore the detailed relationship between Hosea 7:1-6 and modern views of destructive leadership.

Genre Analysis

In this exegetical study of Hosea 7:1-16, general hermeneutics and prophetic genre analysis will be used in order to draw out implications for leadership. General hermeneutics involves examining the context of the text, the grammar, semantics, and syntax, and the historical-cultural background (Osborne, 2006). When interpreting prophetic literature in scripture, the interpreter must pay especially close attention to the historical context; the prophets under the old covenant functioned primarily as covenant enforcers of the Torah and usually were addressing specific historical situations (Osborne, 2006; VanGemenen, 1990). The key steps involved in interpreting prophetic texts that have been used in this exegetical study include (a) delineating the unit of analysis from the whole book while understanding its place within the book, (b) identifying the type of literature being used within the prophetic genre, and then (c) carefully exegeting the prophetic unit within the context of the whole prophetic book, while attending to its literary form, historical realities, and use of images and symbols (Osborne, 2006; VanGemenen, 1990).

In this study, the exegetical process has followed the structure of the passage itself, considering this to be the most helpful organizational approach for analyzing the speech form. Each section of the biblical passage has incorporated observations and analyses from general hermeneutics and the interpretive methods for the prophetic genre. Prior to the exegetical presentation, general historical-cultural background has been provided. Throughout the analysis, this study has highlighted significant observations about leadership from the prophet Hosea.

Background

Hosea served Yahweh as a prophet to Israel (northern kingdom) for approximately 30 years between 760-730 BC and was a contemporary with the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Micah (Bullock, 1986; House & Mitchell, 2007). During this time period, both Israel and Judah experienced national expansion and enjoyed economic opportunity that was reminiscent of the golden age of David and Solomon (Harrison, 1969; VanGemenen,

1990). Parallel with this material blessing came pride, and the syncretistic use of religion, any and all available religions, for personal gain and pleasure. Worldliness has often paired easily with being very religious. The leaders led the people astray into unholy political alliances and into service of the pagan religions around them, the most famous being the worship of Baal. In doing so, “Israel cheapened grace, the covenant, and her unique covenantal relationship with Yahweh by a narcissistic way of life” (VanGemeran, 1990, p. 110).

Perhaps the most well-known fact about Hosea has been his marriage to a shallow and wayward woman named Gomer. The marriage reflected the nature of Yahweh’s relationship to his people, so much so, that Garrett (1997) suggested that “what many would consider a disqualification for the office – a prophet whose own wife was morally out of control – serves in this case as his credentials” (p. 36). Yahweh’s ultimate solution for Israel’s waywardness, spiritual adultery, and all its associated corruption and social evils would be his use of the Assyrians to exile his people, and then in the exile show the unity of his holiness and his love (VanGemeran, 1990). Kidner (1981) referred to this as “a complex answer to a complex situation” (p. 13) in order to bring about the required true repentance and spiritual renewal of the people. God promised that this outcome from the exile would be seen as a work of his grace in the people of the remnant and in his glorious restoration of their community (Hosea 2:14-23). Ultimately, they would place their hope in the Davidic Messiah to come (Hosea 1:10-2:1). The book of Hosea ended up serving Judah (southern kingdom) as well, because they had the same need, which became especially clear after the judgment of God in 722 BC on the northern kingdom of Israel, the end of their world and the beginning of their exile (House & Mitchell, 2007).

Delineation of Unit of Analysis and Identification of Literary Form

The prophetic book of Hosea contains two major sections, the marriage allegory in chapters 1-3 and the speeches of Hosea in chapters 4-14 (Dearman, 2010; Stuart, 1987). Overall, the speeches of Hosea fit within the genre of lawsuit oracles in which a trial setting is envisioned, witnesses are called to bring evidence of guilt, and judgement is pronounced (Osborne, 2006). The book of Hosea also frequently uses the divine speech form, in which the prophet speaks for God in the first-person, and most often in the form of laments (Stuart, 1987). Chester (2014) observed that “Hosea uses more metaphor and word play than almost any other prophet” (p. 18), a reality which has been taken into account in this exegetical examination. In chapters 4-5, Yahweh established his legal case against the people as whole, and then against the priests, the kings, and various other leadership groups. Throughout the remainder of his judgment speeches, Hosea interspersed warnings along with calls for repentance. In his analysis of the structure of Hosea’s speeches throughout chapters 4-14, Silva (2007) highlighted this cycle of restoration. As the book unfolds, indictment turns into more graphic depictions of judgement and the certainty of exile, but in the end, the promise of

restoration after the exile concludes the book (Wood, 1995). Chapter 7 summarizes Yahweh's complaints against the leadership of the nation for their rebellion against him and their unfaithfulness to his covenant, for they had chosen to lead the nation and live lives of intrigue in order to serve themselves (Dearman, 2010). This section, or unit of analysis, actually begins in 6:11b with Yahweh's declaration that he stands ever ready to restore and heal, and then concludes with 7:16 before the trumpet blast in 8:1 introduces a new section (Dearman, 2010; McComiskey, 1992).

Exegesis of the Prophetic Unit of Hosea 6:11b-7:16

In the time of Hosea, and for decades preceding, Israel's leaders had lived lives of intrigue, involving secret plots, schemes, trickery, conniving, and double-dealing to achieve their political and personal agendas. Israel had been busy making political alliances and maintaining them through gifts and deep cultural integration. Addicted to manipulation, the leaders believed they were powerful; however, God viewed the nations as fretfully looking for help against threats everywhere else but in him, "Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria" (Hosea 7:11, English Standard Version). In chapter 7, Hosea called upon God's people to pursue life without scheming and live with sincerity before God because their political intrigue had led to the decay and destruction of the nation of Israel and its people.

Verses 1-7. This section actually begins in verse 11b with Yahweh's declaration that he stands ever ready to restore and heal, using the image of a physician. In fact, God has repeatedly offered social and spiritual remedies by sending his prophets, such as Hosea, to his people (emphasized through synonymous parallelism). Instead of taking his offers, and this particular offer through the message of Hosea, the people displayed their deceit, robbery, and marauding, taking advantage of one another within their own society of Israel (7:1). By use of synthetic parallelism in verse 2, Hosea revealed the depth of the depravity of the society: not only have the people not considered that Yahweh always sees their sins and remembers them, but they cannot escape their sin any longer because it has surrounded them and destroyed their lives (Osborne, 2006). The verse concludes abruptly stating that their sin "stares God in the face" (Kidner, 1981, p. 69). The Israelites thought they could live well on their own terms before God, however, they and their society simply grew more depraved and self-destructive.

In verses 3-7, the prophet described the royalty of Israel and their multiple regicides, or perhaps he referred specifically to the assassination of Pekah and the Assyrian appointment of Hoshea (Dearman, 2010; Harrison, 1969; Stuart, 1987). Regardless, in the final 30 years of Israel before their exile by Assyria, those who sought the kingship used court intrigue and murder; actually, these men completed four of the six regime changes through assassination (2 Kings 15; Hubbard, 2009). In addition to regicide upon regicide, the evil and lusts of those involved held no limits according to the extensive description in verses 3-7, a description heightened by multiple images and the use of

parallelism. Hosea called them all adulterers, heated like an oven that need no further stoking. They share their lusts in the chaos of a drunken orgy and follow their passion of anger all the way to murder. Dearman presented another more specific interpretation of this section in which the burning hot oven serves as a metaphor for the heat of political intrigue. This would not exclude the more general interpretation of immorality, but attempt to focus on the current politics of the time. Those in verse 3 would refer to certain plotters and their scheme would unfold through verse 6. The lack of stoking the oven would indicate that their plan is working and just needs a little more time. The baker in verse 4 could refer to an accomplice or an unaware loyalist whose lack of tending the fire allows the coup to develop. The day in verse 5 might refer to a special day or coronation, of a treaty, a birthday, or some other celebration. Finally, in verse 6 the plot breaks out to completion. Whether verses 3-6 tell a specific story or uses stimulating imagery to describe the national leadership culture, in verse 7, God through Hosea provided his commentary on their attitudes, values, and behaviors—they are all inflamed with immoral passions and political ambitions, destroying themselves and the nation in the process. They call upon one another and leaders of other nations, even foreign deities, but they have not called upon Yahweh.

Leadership reflections. The leaders of the Israelites displayed wickedness and treachery both in their personal lives and in their public behaviors, with hardly any sense of boundaries or restraints remaining. They filled their lives with sexual immorality, syncretistic worship, scheming for personal material gain, and plotting to attain more and more power, even willing to commit murder. The people seemed to have followed them embracing similar lifestyles, but within their own social and economic levels. Perhaps, some sought to take advantage of the political intrigue and depravity to serve their own ambitions; however, the people themselves would really have held no power to influence the political leaders in an ancient near-eastern ruralized society (Malina, 2001). The political and social values of Israel had been deteriorating for decades (a) under poor leadership, (b) under evil leaders, at times, and (c) because of the constant pressure from neighboring cultures and threats from outside political entities (1-2 Kings; Bullock, 1986). Because the leaders and people alike stopped looking to Yahweh for solutions, but rather pursued life, business, and politics in their own wisdom and on their own terms, they destroyed themselves, one another, and their society.

Verses 8-16. This section of Hosea's speech focuses upon international intrigue, how the leaders sought to play politics with the nations around them, and how in doing so the leaders of Israel opposed Yahweh with pride (7:8-10), rebelled against him (7:11-13), and dealt treacherously with him (7:14-16). Emphasis of divine judgment builds within the speech at the end of these sub-sections in verses 10, 13, and 16 (McComiskey, 1992). Again, throughout this section, the use of parallelism and multiple images serves to amplify the impact of this recorded speech. Verse 8 begins with a return of the bakery

imagery, describing the Israelites as a mixture of false religions and practices from other cultures that ends up being a useless half-baked loaf of bread! They think they know what they are doing, but they do not know what they are doing, for their strength has been stolen by strangers. Sin has devoured their lives and the life of their nation so much so, that Paul (1968) noted this image of “not turned” (7:8) described them as being left in a permanent state of lethargy. Synthetic parallelism leads into the image of “gray hairs” (7:9) upon them; in other words, they are close to death as a nation, the northern kingdom is now in old age. God provided his commentary through Hosea by declaring that their pride is in themselves and their alliances with other nations and cultural religions; it is not placed where it should be, in him, Yahweh their God. They have not and will not repent and seek him even in all their international losses (5:5).

Verse 11 describes Israel as a silly dove that flits about pursuing food even though threats linger nearby; they flit about seeking prosperity and protection from Egypt and Assyria and other nations without loyalty to them and without real security (Kidner, 1981). The image continues in verse 12 where Israel seeks to fly away from Yahweh, but he will bring them down and send them into exile. He will discipline them according to the “report made to their congregation” (7:12); this report could refer to one of their treaties or ceremonies, or to an announcement that would be made by someone, or to the words of the prophets in reference to the Mosaic Law (Dearman, 2010). Nevertheless, in verse 13, Hosea pronounced God’s woe to them, God would soon destroy them because they have strayed from him, his ways, and his covenant, and have become rebels against him and his authority as their true king. They have continually lied to God about their repentance in the past, demonstrated by the quick return to join themselves to false religions and all the immoral values and practices associated with them (7:13-14).

Instead of Israel calling out to the true God from a true heart, Kidner (1981) described Israel as lying on their beds and throwing “tantrums to Baal” (p. 74), cutting themselves to gain wine and grain from the gods (7:14). With this wine and grain, they would make payments to the nations around them, perform worship of false gods, and even bring them before Yahweh to worship him. In verse 15, Yahweh declared through Hosea that he had trained them in his law and strengthened them with material blessings, yet they rebelled against him as their king and used his blessings against him to oppose him and his revealed truth in the law and through the prophets. Using the image of a “treacherous bow” (7:16), Hosea described the Israelites as insincere in their prayers and repentance toward Yahweh the Most High — just as it looks like the bow works but fails and hurts the user, so their prayers and repentance fail to convince God and so add to their guilt rather than remove it. Their plans with the nations will fail and they will be humiliated by the treaties they have made with their own tongues (7:16). Hosea concluded his speech with a statement of God’s mockery that they would be defeated,

exiled, and taken captive by the Assyrians, experiencing “derision in the land of Egypt” (7:16), just as if it were a reversal of the Exodus (Dearman, 2010).

Leadership reflections. The leaders displayed extreme pride, rebellion, and treachery, not only against one another, but against God himself. They fully embraced international intrigue, pursuing involvement on the international scene according to their own worldview and relying upon their own resources without subjecting themselves to the Mosaic law and covenant and its further mediation through the Yahweh’s prophets. This international game played by the leaders placed a heavy burden on the lower unsophisticated people of Israel who had to provide supplies and other resources for the treaties, payments, military excursions, and lifestyle expenses of the leaders in an ancient near east society that valued maintaining stable social status, operated with a limited goods mentality, and attached honor to all of this (Malina, 2001). In 7:8-16, God clearly announced that he would cause events to fall out in ways that would punish evildoers in accordance with their own devices; additionally, he would actively bring destruction upon Israel through his control of the surrounding nations. Although it would appear too late for these leaders and many of the people who followed them, God offered a solution through Hosea – true repentance of sin and true seeking after God, which would be followed by God’s true healing of their lives, leadership, and society (6:1-3 11b; 7:1, 7, 10, 13-14). In the midst of all this judgment and the deteriorated situation, God through Hosea offered hope to destructive leaders that they could be forgiven and healed, even restored to godly leadership after the pattern of Moses and David, which would include following God wholeheartedly, obeying his law and prophets, caring for his people, protecting and providing for them, leading and teaching them, and ruling for God to bless them (Laniak, 2006). However, in spite of everything, God promised that he would bring to them the fullness of spiritual and social restoration under the leadership of the Davidic Messiah (1:10-2:1; 2:14-23; 14:1-7).

Destructive Leadership Theory

In the early description of his transformational leadership theory, Burns (1978) discussed the core of transforming leadership as leadership that appeals to the moral values of followers, seeks to elevate their ethical awareness, and motivates and involves them in the organizational mission. In return, followers trust, admire, give loyalty to, and respect their leaders (Yukl, 2013). Northouse (2016) referred to the opposite of this visionary ethics-based leadership as “pseudotransformational leadership” (p. 339), which is a self-serving unethical leadership that leads to destruction of organizations and the people associated with them. In his article “The Dark Side of Leadership,” Conger (1990) identified a number of reasons why some visionary leaders fail and fail miserably, highlighting leaders who place their personal needs as paramount, chase their visions while miscalculating circumstantial realities, and use their communication skills to deny flaws in their vision and manage their personal image. Lipman-Blumen

(2005) described destructive and toxic leaders in terms of highly dysfunctional personality characteristics, but also placed blame upon followers who seek out leaders in the midst of challenging and often fearful circumstances; additionally, both leaders and followers rationalize their views and mutually support and advance a system of destructive leadership. In reviewing over 200 articles on destructive leadership, Schyns and Schilling (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of 57 research studies on destructive leadership and its outcomes. They reported over 12 different forms of destructive leadership theories and noted that almost all of the research focuses on leader behavior. They noted many gaps in the research and suggested, for example, that future research examine what triggers destructive leader behavior; furthermore, they noted that much more research needs to be conducted about followers in destructive leadership situations and the conditions facilitating destructive leadership.

In the development of destructive leadership theory (DLT), Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) have attempted to provide a useful definition of destructive leadership in terms of a toxic triangle composed of the “confluence of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments” (p. 176). Destructive leaders exhibit the characteristics of “charisma, personalized need for power, narcissism, negative life history, and an ideology of hate” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 182). Susceptible followers come in two groups, conformers and colluders, “conformers comply with destructive leaders out of fear whereas colluders actively participate in a destructive leader’s agenda” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 183). Conformers make themselves vulnerable because of their “unmet basic needs, negative core self-evaluations, and immaturity” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 180); colluders actively support destructive leaders because of the opportunity to enact their “similar ambitions, worldview, and values” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 180). Conducive environments for destructive leadership include four factors: “instability, perceived threat, cultural values, and absence of checks and balances and institutionalization” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 185). This exegetical study of the relationship between Hosea 7:1-16 and DLT has used the three DLT construct domains of Padilla et al. in its analysis, namely, destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments.

Exegetical Critiques, Enhancements, and Refinements

In the situation Hosea faced, the toxic triangle operated in clear view with the highly destructive behaviors of the leaders, the followers living by similar values, and the environment sometimes driving and at other times supporting the destructive system. All of the leaders demonstrated some aspect of charisma, even if nothing more than impression management (Yukl, 2013). Padilla’s et al. (2007) four other elements of the destructive leader domain stood out starkly in the exegesis: personalized power orientation, illustrated by the political intrigue; narcissism, shown in the boundless appetite for self-display and personal pleasure; negative life themes, which pervaded the elite society; and ideology of hate, seen in attitudes toward “vanquishing rivals” (p.

182) and even in opposing Yahweh himself. The followers, the common people of Israel, certainly suffered unmet needs due to the cost of the political payoffs and supporting the decadent lifestyle of the leaders. Their core self-evaluations would not have included particularly high senses of “self-esteem, locus of control, and self-efficacy” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 183) primarily because these aspects of the psychological self did not exist in the ancient near east (Malina, 2001). Likewise, the modern Western value placed on higher order psychological development and sophisticated moral reasoning did not exist in the ancient near east (Malina, 2001). However, in Hosea’s time, many of the followers would have conformed to the destructive leaders out of fear and lack of power. Others would have colluded, being set free to achieve their own personal ambitions, if only at their own social status levels, because of the opportunities provided and modeled by the leaders within their worldview and value system. The conducive environment in Israel at this time suffered from many instabilities, such as the cultural and religious pressures for syncretization from surrounding peoples and nations, the constant and increasing external political and economic threats, and the obvious lack of checks and balances in the systems of ancient near east institutions (Malina, 2001). Luthans, Peterson, and Ibrayeva (1998) proposed that destructive leaders more easily emerge from within cultures displaying an avoidance of uncertainty, collectivism, and high power distance orientation, which would fit the culture of Israel in Hosea’s time. Certainly, the destructive leadership situation in Israel in the mid-eighth century BC has illustrated the toxic triangle of Padilla et al. (2007) at work.

However, three elements of the toxic triangle remain open to criticism resulting from a reliance upon modern psychology, cultural interpretations, and modern ethics. First, the susceptible follower domain related to conformers has defined negative core self-evaluations completely in terms of low “self-esteem, locus of control, and self-efficacy” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 183). This definition of positive and negative self-evolution, including the very notion of self-reflective evaluation, belies an individualistic (Western) and post-Freudian view of personhood. The world of Hosea and the reality for most people living in the world today involves a collective view of society and self, an external locus of control, and little experience with self-efficacy. This aspect of the susceptible follower domain of the toxic triangle should be expanded to reflect wider global realities. Related to this, the conducive environments domain has cited the cultural values of collectivism, preference for strong leaders, and acceptance of asymmetric power distribution as particularly conducive to destructive leadership. Be that as it may, this appears to offer only a surface explanation for the emergence of destructive leadership. Research and voices from within such cultures could be analyzed for alternative and deeper explanations, for example the voice of Hosea himself has offered additional perceptive and penetrating insight into cultural values that led to destructive leadership related to abandoning Yahweh’s prescribed morality. This leads to the third criticism of modern ethics, or low maturity in toxic triangle

terms. Low maturity has been put forth as an element of the susceptible followers' domain for the conformers; yet, Padilla's et al. definition relies exclusively upon cognitive human development theories and ultimately upon Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development. As helpful as human psychological developmental theories are for examining the structures of moral development, Hosea presented a higher standard of morality than universally (or even locally) agreed upon ethics. From Hosea's perspective, the low maturity might better be defined as renouncing the explicit moral code of Yahweh and embracing the more culturally acceptable codes of the surrounding peoples; it would make little difference what stage of Kohlberg's reasoning taxonomy would be used to support their lifestyle decisions.

As Yahweh's prophet, Hosea presented God as requiring adherence to his morality, as able to enforce it through passive and active involvement for destruction, and as providing a solution for destructive leadership. These three elements provide potential enhancements to destructive leadership theory. First, much of the destruction experienced in Israel resulted from the leaders and the people rebelling against Yahweh, proper worship of him, and obedience to his laws. Since DLT suffers from the weakness of lacking a strong ethical or moral base, perhaps the ethics and morality of God's word could strengthen this area of DLT. Second, Hosea made it abundantly clear that God allowed destructive leaders and susceptible followers to destroy themselves, and that God actively worked through foreign nations to bring destruction upon them. This perspective of God's involvement through what appears as natural processes of self-destruction and external organizational forces could serve as a supplement to DLT in examining processes underlying destructive leadership. Third, Schyns and Schilling (2013) observed that DLT has not yet offered many solutions to destructive leadership situations. The message of Hosea consistently offered solutions that involved spiritual practices such as repentance, forgiveness, and prayer. Future research could explore how such spiritual practices might work to dismantle the toxic triangle and add to the development of DLT.

Researchers in organizational leadership have recognized that DLT is a relatively new theory and still undergoing significant development. In their meta-analysis, Schyns and Schilling (2013) reported a lot of research activity utilizing a multitude of working theories, yet mainly focused on the behaviors of destructive leaders. Padilla's et al. (2007) model of the toxic triangle has brought helpful clarity by examining the three dimensions of leaders, followers, and the environment, and the role they each play. However, future research could probe the depth of each of these dimensions, including necessary and sufficient conditions within each dimension, and also investigate how the dimensions interact with one another. This exegetical study of Hosea 7:1-16 has revealed that scripture contains examples of destructive leadership that are beneficial to examine (and there are many more examples besides Hosea), offers additional understanding into how destructive leadership situations emerge and develop, and

includes insights into the resolution of destructive leadership situations. Future exegetical research from scripture that related to destructive leadership could prove very useful and helpful for the development and refinement of DLT.

About the Author

Daniel Holmquist is a second-year Ph.D. student at Regent University, where he is studying organizational leadership. He is President of Church Assistance Ministry, a nonprofit consulting group that provides leadership development assistance to churches and missions in the United States and globally.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel Holmquist at daniho3@mail.regent.edu.

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