

3.0 The Book of the [Prophet Hosea](#)¹

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Historical Background

While very little is known of Hosea, son of Be'eri, much is known of his times and background. He ministered in the last days of the [Northern State of Israel](#), sometime in the period 750-732 BCE. Hosea was not a Judean, but an Israelite. During his lifetime, Israel was dominated by [Assyria](#). During the first half of the eight-century BCE, Assyria was quiescent as she contended with enemies near to home. During this period [Jeroboam II](#) (786-746 BCE) ruled Israel and made it a prosperous kingdom. Just after Jeroboam's death, Assyria gained a new ruler, [Tiglath-pileser III](#) (745-727 BCE). Israel was so pressurized by the new Assyrian ruler, that she was torn asunder by palace revolutions, assassinations and dynastic changes. As we have already seen, Tiglath-pileser's successor, [Shalmaneser V](#) (727-722 BCE), captured Samaria deporting its population and making Israel a province of the Assyrian Empire.

3.1.2 Hosea's Doctrine

Hosea's main concerns were as follows:

- The political folly and anarchy of Israel's last days.
- Ba'alism.
- YHWH as saviour of Israel.
- A future of hope.

(a) The Political Folly and Anarchy of Israel's Last Days

Hosea roundly condemned the people for their preoccupation with external cult, while taking pride in wealth and military power. For Hosea, criticism of the cult is central. He not only exposed the religion of his day as ineffective, but he exposed the Ba'alism hidden within the cult of YHWH, which was degenerating it. He condemned also Israel's irresponsible and self-seeking kings. Yet Hosea's disagreement with the monarchy was not

1 Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Period of Assyrian Expansion," in *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 82-97; John W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) 65-89.

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with the idea of the monarchy as such. Rather he disagreed with the whole idea of the Northern Kingdom, separated from Judah and the legitimate kingship of David's successors.

(b) Ba'alism

For Hosea the political folly was symptomatic of a more significant disorder. Israel had rejected YHWH and embraced the cult of Ba'al. Accordingly, Hosea rejected the overt cult of Ba'al and, more importantly, any contamination of the cult of YHWH with Ba'alism. The Ba'alist cult of YHWH was rejected as harlotry. Behind this image is an allusion to Israel rejecting her lover, and also an allusion to the sexual abuses of the Ba'alist cults. Hosea maintained that the people would suffer as a result of their choices. Their punishment would be the natural outgrowth of their sins. This punishment would consist of YHWH abandoning his people, the loss of all cult, famine and barrenness.

(c) YHWH as Saviour of Israel

Hosea's message was not all condemnation. He was very positive in proposing Yahwism and YHWH as Israel's Saviour. Hosea stressed over and over again YHWH's *hesed* (חֶסֶד - Hebrew: *loving-kindness*). *Hesed* was born of YHWH's pity for his people. YHWH's pity is to be understood as his personal devotion to humanity, his eagerness to protect and help humankind. The best image, which Hosea used to portray YHWH's love, was that of YHWH and Israel as husband and wife. Hosea's God is infinitely compassionate, torn by a situation that is no longer bearable. From the very beginning of the Book of Hosea, a new future salvation shines through. In this Hosea is very different from Amos.

(d) A Future of Hope

Despite Hosea's message of judgement and punishment, he did hold out for better times for Israel in her relationship with YHWH. He offered images of a paradise-like peace, followed by a new and everlasting covenant with YHWH.

3.1.3 Authenticity

How much of the Book of Hosea is authentically the prophet's own work? To-day scholars agree that the substantial part of the book comes from the prophet. Scholars do not agree when and how it was composed. It is assumed that the prophet's followers noted

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down his sayings, which were subsequently gathered together and combined with other sayings, until the book emerged.

3.1.4 An Outline of the Book of Hosea

1. Hosea's Marriage (1 – 3)
 - a. Hosea's Family as a Symbol of YHWH's Judgement (1:2-9)
 - b. The Great Day of Jezre'el (1:10 – 2:1)
 - c. Legal Proceedings Against Unfaithful Israel (2:2-15)
 - d. The Day of the New Covenant (2:16-23)
 - e. How YHWH's Love Works (3:1-5)
2. Condemnation of Hosea's Contemporaries (4:1 – 9,9)
3. Sin and History (9:10 – 14:1)
4. Epilogue: Repentance and Salvation (14:2-9)

This course will study Hosea's Marriage (Hos 1-3). Since there is a divergence between the manner in which the Hebrew Bible and modern translations arrange the chapters and verses of the Book of Hosea, this outline will follow the NRSV translation and its division into chapters and verses.

3.2 Text #5: Hosea's Family as a Symbol of YHWH's Judgement (Hos 1:2-9)

3.2.1 Introduction

Hosea 1:2 When YHWH first spoke through Hosea, YHWH said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking YHWH." 3 So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 And YHWH said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." 6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then YHWH said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on

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the house of Israel or forgive them. 7 But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by YHWH their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen." 8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then YHWH said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God."

This passage is a narrative unity that combines the commands of YHWH (Hos 1:2.4.6.9) within the account of the birth of Hosea's children (Hos 1:3.6.8). The author of the passage is not considered to be the prophet as the text narrates the story in the third person. Hosea does use a first-person account in Hos 3. Hos 1 seems to have been written with the retrospect of past years. Many scholars consider that a disciple, a contemporary of Hosea, probably wrote the text.

3.2.2 The Interpretation of Hos 1:2-9

When YHWH first spoke through Hosea (v.2): This phrase places Hos 1 chronologically before Hos 2-3. The account here is not the beginning of Hosea's call because four separate events, spanning some years are told in all:

- Marriage to Gomer (1:3)
- Birth and naming of the first son (1:3-4)
- Birth and naming of the first daughter (1:6)
- Birth and naming of the second son (1:8-9).

Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom ... (v.2): Hosea's activity as messenger begins with the command to go. Scholars disagree on what "wife of whoredom" means. The term *whoredom* also occurs in Hos 4:12 and 5:4, where whoredom is synonymous with falling away from YHWH. Hans W. Wolff² suggests that the term means a woman endowed with the spirit of a faithless people. The term has nothing to do with the wife's morality *per se*, but with Israel's apostasy. Yet Hos 2:2 suggests that this whoredom leaves visible marks. Thus Wolff concludes that Hosea's wife was a young Israelite who had submitted to Ba'alistic bridal rites of initiation, which involved some cultic sexual act. There were ANE rites for opening the womb, in which a priest as a representative of the god undertook

² Hans W. Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 13-14. Wolff's theory is disputed: See also Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: Volume 1 - The Assyrian Period* (London: SCM, 1978) 79-80.

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intercourse with a virgin. It is reasonable to suppose such rites existed in Israel. Gomer is thus an average Israelite girl. Because this Ba'alistic rite takes place in YHWH's name, Hosea rejects it, and Gomer is regarded as a "wife of whoredom."

Children of whoredom (v.2): This term has nothing to do with children born out of wedlock. They are called such because the ability of the mother ("wife of whoredom") to give birth is attributed to Ba'al.

The land commits great whoredom (v.2): The land stands for Israel. Israel is supposed to be YHWH's bride, but through apostasy has given herself to Ba'al.

So he went and took Gomer ... (v.3): The text shows that Hosea responded immediately to YHWH's command. The woman's name, Gomer, is given to show that Hosea chose a specific woman from a number of people. She was Hosea's choice and was not foisted on him by YHWH. The text says "and bore him a son." This son was born to Hosea and Gomer within wedlock.

And YHWH said ... "Name him Jezre'el" ... (v.4): Hosea gives the name to his son at YHWH's command. The child is given the unusual name, Jezre'el. The name means *God sows* and refers to the [fruitful plain](#) between [Galilee](#) and Samaria. In this plane [Omri](#) (876-869 BCE) set up a [second capital](#). "Blood of Jezre'el" is a reference to the bloodthirsty extermination of the House of Omri in 843/2 BCE by [Jehu](#) (842-815 BCE). Thus by naming his child Jezre'el, Hosea reminds the reigning dynasty that it is not in accordance with YHWH's will. In short the message was: a monarchy based on bloodletting was not one supported by YHWH.³

...I will break the bow of Israel ... Jezreel (v.5): This saying is to be understood in the context of the events of 733 BCE when the valley of Jezre'el was lost to [Tiglath-pileser III](#). The term "bow" stands for the whole military strength and power of Israel. According to Hosea that power was to be broken. Since an unjust act had been committed in Jezre'el (v.4), YHWH's punishment would also be suffered in Jezre'el.

Name her Lo-ruhamah ... (v.6): A daughter is born to Hosea. She is also given a symbolic name. The NRSV leaves the Hebrew name *lo-rûḥāmâ* (לֹא רַחֲמָהּ) untranslated. Other modern translations render it as *Not-Pitied*, while the NJB translates it as *Unpitied*. A better translation of the Hebrew is *Without-Mercy*. Through his daughter's symbolic name, Hosea proclaims that YHWH has declared an end to his love for Israel, and that His intimate relationship with Israel is now ended.

... I will have pity on ... Judah ... (v.7): This verse is a gloss on v.6. The manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures were written by hand. It happened very often that in the process of copying a text, that a scribe would add a comment of his own to the text in order to explain a difficult word or phrase in the text. Such scribal additions were known as glosses. The difficulty here is raised by YHWH's threat to withdraw his mercy from Israel. Would this threat be extended to Judah also? According to the glossator it would not.

³ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

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... **She conceived ... bore a son (v.8):** In the ANE a child was nursed for three years, and then the weaning was festively celebrated. Why are we told that more than three years had passed before the birth of Hosea's next child? The text implies that YHWH waited three years before issuing his next threat. Why? The text seems to suggest that YHWH was waiting for Israel to return to him.

Name him ... Lo-ammi... (v.9): The Hebrew name *lo-'ammi* (לֹא אֲמִי) means *Not-My-People*. This verse answers the following important question: how can YHWH's threat be reconciled with his promise to, and election of, Israel? In the Book of Exodus⁴ God's name is given as *I-am-Who-Am*. The Hebrew text of Hos 1:9 is best translated as "Call his name *Not-My-People*, for you are not my people and as for me, *I-Am* is not yours." In short YHWH rejects his people. His rejection, which is the reverse-side of his free election, must be proclaimed to those who forsake him.

3.2.3 Conclusions

Hos 1:2-9 has three important characteristics:

- Israel has turned from YHWH to Ba'al and Ba'alistic cult. Therefore Hosea's message begins by describing Israel's practice as whoredom.
- YHWH's negative reaction is the consequence of Israel's attitude and conduct. YHWH does not break his covenant. He states what has happened: Israel has become the people of another god.
- YHWH's judgement against Israel is accomplished step by step.

Hos 1:2-9 must be read as a Preface to Hos 2-3. Only when the bitter sayings about YHWH's divorce from Israel have been carefully heard, can the message of Hos 2-3 be fully understood.

3.3 Text #6: The Great Day of Jezre'el (Hos 1:10 – 2:1)

3.3.1 Introduction

Hosea 1:10 Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." 11 The people of Judah and the people of Israel

⁴Exod 3:14.

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shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. 2:1 Say to your brother, Ammi, and to your sister, Ruhamah.

Wolff considers Hosea to be the author of this text. After the events of 733 BCE in which the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III launched a campaign against Damascus and incorporated part of Israel (the Jezre'el Valley and Galilee) into the Assyrian Empire, Hosea repeatedly proclaimed the salvation of Israel. He proclaimed the day of this salvation as the Great Day of Jezre'el (Hos 1:11). For Wolff, the basic content of the passage is Hosean, but that editor(s) have finalized the shape of the passage.

3.3.2 The Interpretation of Hos 1:10 – 2:1

... **The number of the people of Israel ... like the sand of the sea ... (v.10):** At the time of this text's proclamation there lived in Israel only 60,000 free people capable of paying taxes. In this context Hosea's proclamation must have seemed like a miracle. The reference to sand recalls the promise made to the ancestors.⁵ Since the dwindling number of people was a sign of YHWH's judgement, the increase proclaimed here was a sign of the reversal of that judgement.

... **You are not my people ... (v.10):** The name *Not-My-People* symbolized the end of YHWH's covenant with his people. That name is now replaced with *Children of the Living God*. Hosea uses this phrase in contrast to *Children of Whoredom* (Hos 1:2), which derived from an allegiance to a foreign god. If Israel were to return to YHWH she would be given unsuspected fertility and the people born of this new relationship with life-giving YHWH would increase in number.

...**Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered ... (v.11):** Hosea saw both the end of the hostility between Judah and Samaria and of their political separation, as a sign of future salvation.

...**One head ... (v.11):** The word "head" refers back to the time of the monarchic leaders. Future salvation according to Hosea would lie in the future unification of Israel and Judah.

... **They shall take possession of the land ... (v.11):** The Hebrew expression used here reads literally "they shall go up from the land." In the Hebrew Bible, the expression *to go up (escape) from the land* is one which means *to take possession of the land*.⁶ Hosea proclaims the future salvation in terms of a united nation, under one ruler who would repossess the land from the Assyrians.

⁵ Gen 22:17; 32:12.

⁶ See for example Exod 1:10.

...For great shall be the day of Jezre'el (v.11): Jezre'el means *God sows*. On the day that God sows, there would be a going up from the land, a sprouting up, and a possession. On that day a populated Israel would live in freedom in her land.

Say to your brother, Ammi, and to your sister, Ruhamah. (Hos 2:1): The Hebrew expression *'ammî* (עַמִּי) means *My-People* and *rûḥāmâ* (רַחֲמָה) *Mercy*. Hos 1:11 suggests that the brother and sister here refer to Judah and Israel respectively. Future salvation, according to Hosea, would be manifest, when these two nations would address each other with the signs of the new covenant.

3.3.3 Conclusions

Hos 1:10 – 2:1 is dominated by the coming day of salvation. This day of salvation is characterized by:

- A reunification of the two kingdoms.
- A single leadership.
- The restoration of freedom in the land. This message was directed to the community of YHWH, which had been both threatened and ultimately conquered by a world power. The people had experienced YHWH's punishment in terms of inner strife. They hoped to experience his salvation in terms of unity and harmony.

3.4 Text #7: Legal Proceedings Against Unfaithful Israel (Hos 2:2-15)

3.4.1 Introduction

Hosea 2:2 Plead with your mother, plead, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband, that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts, 3 or I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and turn her into a parched land, and kill her with thirst. 4 Upon her children also I will have no pity, because they are children of whoredom. 5 For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." 6 Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. 7 She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them,

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but shall not find them. Then she shall say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me than than now." 8 She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal. 9 Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. 10 Now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. 11 I will put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals. 12 I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, "These are my pay, which my lovers have given me." I will make them a forest, and the wild animals shall devour them. 13 I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewellery, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says YHWH. 14 Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

In this text the land is seen as YHWH's wife. The Israelites are seen as children of the invisible but real marriage between YHWH and the land. This marriage is spoilt by the unfaithfulness of the wife and children. All the sayings here are set in the context of a legal process against an unfaithful wife. That process is characterized by the following elements:

- The wife is spoken of in the third person.
- The husband brings the children forward to confirm the accusations (v.2).
- There is a threat of punishment (vv.3-4).

In this text the prophet uses various forms of juridical (legal) language. YHWH is plaintiff, judge and executor and his role changes with the different sayings. As *plaintiff* he addresses his children (v.2) while as *judge* he speaks of the children in the third person. These sayings are dated around 750 BCE during the last years of Jeroboam II when Israel was economically strong (vv.5.8-9) and enjoyed religious festivals (vv.11.13). Scholars hold that these sayings go back to Hosea himself.

3.4.2 The Interpretation of Hos 2:2-15

Plead with your mother ... (v.2): YHWH first appears as plaintiff against his unfaithful wife. It is strange that the children are asked to plead with their mother since both mother and children represent unfaithful Israel. Hosea's allegory contains many possible interpretations:

- The people of Israel are summoned against the land of Israel.
- The youth are summoned against leaders.
- The moral are summoned against the immoral.

... Or I will strip her naked... (v.3): If the children's plea is unsuccessful, then YHWH will take matters into his own hands. One of the obligations of a husband in the ANE was to cloth his wife. By stripping her naked, the husband (YHWH) indicates his freedom from these marriage obligations. Why does Hosea stress YHWH in masculine terms? It may be another case of a highly patriarchal society projecting the father image onto YHWH. YHWH is husband however, not necessarily because of perceived patriarchal authority, but because he is contrasted with another power (fertility), which is conceived of in feminine terms.

... Make her like a wilderness (v.3): Hosea is using Canaanite mythology here. The wife represents the land and the children the land's inhabitants. According to Hosea it is only YHWH who guarantees the land's fertility. Faith in Ba'al only leads to the land becoming a desert.

Upon her children ... I will have no pity ... children of whoredom (v.4): Now the children are the focus of attack. The inhabitants of the land are not guiltless; they are children of whoredom.

For their mother ... whore (v.5): Their mother is denounced as a whore and the disgrace of her punishment is evidenced by her own words "I will go after my lovers..." Hosea claims that Israel has consciously and deliberately divorced herself from YHWH. The list of gifts given to the mother, wool, flax, oil and drink, suggest that the inhabitants of the land are playing the prostitute with Ba'al and receiving all that nourishes, protects and gives pleasure in return.

Therefore I will hedge up her way ... build a wall against her (v.6): YHWH's response is to block the way of his wife with thorns or a wall. YHWH, as it were, places obstacles in the way of the people to stop their breach of faith.

She shall pursue ... shall seek ... shall say (v.7): She shall pursue lovers who are no longer to be found. Because of this she considers returning to her "first husband." In this

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announcement of Israel's desire to return to YHWH, all the sayings against Israel achieve their goal for the first time.

And she did not know ... (v.8): Here Hosea condemns the careless, thoughtless forgetting of YHWH. YHWH's bountiful gifts are listed: bread, wine, oil, silver and gold. The most precious gift, gold, is mentioned last. The phrase "that they used for Ba'al" is probably an addition of the glossator underpinning the way that Israel has used YHWH's gifts for Ba'alist cult.

... I will take back ... grain ... wine ... wool ... flax (v.9): If YHWH the Provider has been rejected by Israel, he will display his lordship over his gifts by withdrawing them. Note that each of the gifts has a first person possessive adjective (*my* grain etc.). The resources of Palestine belong to YHWH alone. If YHWH is rejected by Israel, then Israel cannot expect to receive these gifts.

Now I will uncover her shame ... (v.10): Since YHWH removes his wife's means of clothing, she must stand exposed. Her lovers are reduced to helpless spectators before her disgrace and shame.

And I will put an end to ... mirth ... festivals ... new moons ... Sabbaths (v.11): Now that YHWH has removed the resources of the land from Israel, her feasts must come to an end. It is during these feasts that Israel has played the whore by following Ba'al. YHWH will bring these holy days to an end since they are dedicated to Ba'alism and represent Israel's adulterous worship with her lovers.

... I will lay waste ... I will punish her (v.12): The way in which YHWH will dispose of these feasts is outlined in v.12. By destroying the harvest, the feasts will come to an end. By destroying the feasts, Israel's peace and prosperity will be shattered.

... I will punish her for the festival days of the Ba'als ... (v.13): Canaanite cult⁷ was characterized by:

- Burning incense.
- Wearing jewellery.
- Ceremonial processions.

While YHWH threatens punishment, he does feel sorrowful regret, which is found in the final phrase of the verse "and [she] forgot me, says YHWH." YHWH suffers because of Israel's unfaithfulness.

... I will now allure her ... (v.14): YHWH is now presented as a seducer who allures a young woman. Israel will come to experience YHWH's persuasion. The phrase "I will ... speak tenderly to her" is the NRSV translation of the Hebrew expression "I will ... speak to

⁷ See Wolff, *Hosea*, 38-40, on *Ba'al Divinities*; see also Koch, *Prophets/I*, 84-86.

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her heart.” This expression is used in the Hebrew Scriptures in the context of courtship.⁸ It is also a way of speaking which brings comfort.

... **I will give her her vineyards ... (v.15):** YHWH’s declaration of love will be matched by his actions. He will restore to her that which the faithful wife should have, her vineyards, and which were lost by her unfaithfulness.

... **Valley of Achor ... (v.15):**⁹ The Valley of Achor has the nuance of “Valley of Misfortune.” This valley of misfortune will be transformed into a “Door of Hope,” which will be a sign of the breakthrough of YHWH’s love for Israel.

3.4.3 Conclusions

Hos 2:2-15 outlines how YHWH deals with unfaithful Israel. YHWH is presented as one who suffers because of Israel’s unfaithfulness and who refuses to accept the divorce. Because YHWH suffers in his love for Israel, he woos her yet again by:

- Admonishing her to turn from pagan gods.
- Threatening the destruction of all possibilities for pagan worship.
- Courting her with loving words and actions. All this is done to achieve one aim: that Israel return to YHWH.

3.5 Text #8: The Day of the New Covenant (Hos 2:16-23)

3.5.1 Introduction

Hosea 2:16: On that day, says YHWH, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. 18 I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. 20 I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know YHWH. 21 On that day I will answer, says YHWH, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; 23 and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I

⁸ Gen 34:3; Judg 19:3; Ruth 2:13; Isa 40:2.

⁹ Wolff, *Hosea*, 42-43.

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will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "You are my God."

This text is made up of a collection of sayings and given its unity by:

- Having all the sayings in the form of a speech by YHWH.
- By having all the sayings characterize the day of YHWH.

This text's function is to explain the idea of the day of judgement. For Wolff this text was probably put together by Hosea himself, and not by the Hosean redactor. Wolff dates the passage to 733 BCE when most of Israel had been absorbed into the Assyrian Empire.

3.5.2 The Interpretation of Hos 2:16-23

On that day ... (v.16): This verse introduces the day of YHWH as a day of salvation. "My husband" is an endearing expression signifying a deep personal relationship with one's wife, whereas "My Ba'al" has nuances of the husband as lord and owner of the wife. Hosea says that Israel will not just relate to YHWH as her legal lord, but also will be placed in a new loving relationship with him.

For I will remove the names of the Ba'als ... (v.17): It is YHWH who removes the name of Ba'al from Israel's mouth. Israel's new confession is YHWH's accomplishment.

... I will make ... covenant on that day with ... (v.18): Once Israel is restored to faithful relationship to YHWH, the restoration of the world follows. What is found in this verse is a threefold promise of restoration, which remains YHWH's action alone:

- Humankind's relationship with the animals will be restored. Note that the animals mentioned here are those that harm people, vineyards and crops. By this promise the sentence of judgement of Hos 2:12 will be reversed.
- Israel will be at peace with the hostile nations.
- YHWH will create rest and security for Israel.

... I will take you for my wife ... forever ... in righteousness ... in justice, in steadfast love ... in mercy ... in faithfulness (vv.19-20a): YHWH is not content to reconstitute the old marriage. Rather a new one is to be created. The Hebrew verb used here, *'āras* (אָרַס) is not well translated by *I will take you for my wife* (NRSV). A better translation is: *I will do everything to win your complete and lasting companionship*. In

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marrying Israel, YHWH will give her bridal gifts, righteousness, justice, love, mercy and faithfulness, thus creating a new intimate loving community.

... **And you shall know YHWH (v.20b)**: The result of YHWH's gift will be Israel's acknowledgement of YHWH as Lord.

And on that day ... heavens ... earth ... grain ... wine ... oil ... Jezreel (vv.21-22): This verse describes the way of salvation further. The line

YHWH → Heavens → Earth → Grain → Wine → Oil → Jezre'el

follows the route from YHWH to humankind. What does Jezre'el mean here? The day of salvation will be a day when God's sowing will produce food and nourishment for Israel.

And I will sow ... I will have pity ... I will say ... and he shall say ... (v.23): This verse demonstrates the grace and renewal of the covenant by indicating a reversal of names. Jezre'el means that God will sow peace and prosperity. **Lo-rûḥāmâ** (*Not-Pitied*) will have mercy and **Lo-'ammî** (*Not-My-People*) will be called *My-People*. As for Israel, she now refers to YHWH as *My God*.

3.5.3 Conclusions

Hos 2:16-23 explains further the new day of salvation, which has two characteristics:

- YHWH will make a covenant on that day.
- This new covenant will transform all areas of life and Israel's new relationship with YHWH will transform the world order.

3.6 Text #9: How YHWH's Love Works (Hos 3:1-5)

3.6.1 Introduction

Hosea 3:1: YHWH said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as YHWH loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." 2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. 3 And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you." 4 For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. 5 Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek YHWH their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to YHWH and to his goodness in the latter days.



This text indicates neither the period of Hosea's life nor the historical circumstances in which it was written. Therefore its relationship to Hos 1-2 must be examined. According to Wolff, Hos 3 is best understood in terms of Hos 2, with which it has three main points of contact:

- The isolation announced in Hos 2:6 is reflected in Hos 3:3-4.
- The expected return mentioned in Hos 2:7 is found in Hos 3:5.
- YHWH's love, promised to his unfaithful wife in Hos 2:14-15, is reflected in Hos 3:1.

It is probable that Hos 3 originally formed a conclusion to Hos 2:2-15 and was written by the prophet himself.

3.6.2 The Interpretation of Hos 3:1-5

And YHWH said to me ... (v.1): This is the typical formula used by the prophets to express their own experience of divine revelation.¹⁰

Go ... love ... adulteress ... (v.1): YHWH's command to go emphasizes that Hosea is called to a new action. YHWH commands Hosea "to love." The Hebrew verb *'āhav* (אהב - Hebrew: *to love*) does not mean to fall in love, or to have sexual intercourse. It does not refer to the legal aspects of marriage. Rather it has to do with YHWH's helping (Hos 11:1), healing (Hos 14:4) and all that is opposite to hatred (Hos 9:15). Hosea's love for his wife will be helping and healing in that he will win her back to himself. "Adulteress" is the NRSV translation of "beloved of a friend." Here "beloved" has the nuance of lusting adultery. Hosea's love for his adulterous wife mirrors YHWH's love for his unfaithful people.

... They turn ... other gods ... raisin cakes (v.1): The other gods mentioned here correspond to the Ba'alim mentioned in Hos 2:13.17 and 11:2. This phrase "other gods" suggests that Hosea was familiar with the Decalogue¹¹ and with Deuteronomy.¹² People who participated in cult ate cakes of raisins.¹³ Hos 3:1 says that even though Israel rejected YHWH for sensual pleasures, YHWH's love for pitiable Israel remains true.

So I bought her ... (v.2): The use of the verb "to buy" not only suggests that she become Hosea's legal possession, but that he had to bargain for her, paying silver and

¹⁰ Amos 7:15; 8:2; Isa 7:3; 8:1.3; Jer 3:6.11.

¹¹ Exod 20:3.

¹² Deut 5:7; 6:14; 7:4; 8:19; 11:16.28; 13:2-3.6-7.13-14; 17:3; 18:20; 28:14.36.64; 29:25.

¹³ 2 Sam 6:19; 1 Chr 16:3.



barley. The entire value of what Hosea paid was about thirty shekels of silver, the price of a slave.¹⁴

... **Remain as mine for many days (v.3):** “Many days” means temporarily and not forever. YHWH’s command is temporary and looks forward to an “afterward” (v.5).

For the Israelites shall remain ... without king ... prince ... sacrifice ... pillar ... ephod ... teraphim (v.4): Israel has defied YHWH’s will. Thus its leaders will come under YHWH’s judgement. Israel will lose its political existence. Sacrificial worship will cease. The sanctuaries will no longer function. “Ephod” and “teraphim” are Hebrew words for objects which remain unknown today, but which were used to determine YHWH’s will. Thus the customary ways of inquiring of God’s will be removed from Israel. **Afterward ... the Israelites shall return ... seek YHWH ... David their king ... they shall come ... to YHWH (v.5):** Israel’s return to YHWH will begin with its political and cultural nadir. Since YHWH will remove all forms of self-reliance from YHWH, Israel will depend on YHWH.

3.6.3 Conclusions

The theme of this chapter is summed up by the verb “to love” found in v.1. YHWH’s love is the model for Hosea’s love. According to the Torah¹⁵ a lawfully divorced and remarried woman could not return to her husband. YHWH compares his love to that of a husband who accepts back an adulterous woman who legally belonged to another. YHWH does what is impossible for the Torah! YHWH’s love does not choose easy and cheap ways for itself (v.2) or for the beloved (v.3). The deprivation promised Israel will be an act of love. Israel cannot find good apart from YHWH. His love impels Israel towards his goal: her return to him.

¹⁴ Exod 21:32; Lev 27:4.

¹⁵ Deut 24:4.



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