

===== Volume One =====

THE MINOR PROPHETS

A Commentary on Hosea, Joel, Amos

Edited by
THOMAS EDWARD MCCOMISKEY


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Abbreviations

Bibliographical

ANEP	James B. Pritchard, ed. <i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 2d ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ANET	James B. Pritchard, ed. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3d ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
BDB	Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1907; corrected printing in 1953.
BHK	Rudolf Kittel, ed. <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> . 3d ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937.
BHS	Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds. <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977.
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary</i> . Chicago: Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 1956–.
GKC	Emil Kautzsch, ed. <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Trans. A. E. Cowley. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.

HALAT	Walter Baumgartner, et al. <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> . 3d ed. Leiden: Brill, 1967–.
Joüon	Paul Joüon. <i>Grammaire de l'Hébreu Biblique</i> . 2d ed. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1923.

Bible Versions

AV	Authorized (King James) Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

General

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
par.	parallel to

Hebrew Transliteration Scheme

Consonants	Vowels
א '	א̇ ā <i>qāmeṣ</i>
ב b	ב̇ a <i>pataḥ</i>
ג g	ג̇ e <i>sěgôl</i>
ד d	ד̇ ē <i>ṣērê</i>
ה h	ה̇ i short <i>ḥîreq</i>
ו w	ו̇ ī long <i>ḥîreq</i> written defectively
ז z	ז̇ o <i>qāmeṣ ḥātûp</i>
ח ḥ	ח̇ ô <i>hôlem</i> written fully
ט ṭ	ט̇ ȳ <i>hôlem</i> written defectively
י y	י̇ û <i>šûreq</i>
כ k	כ̇ u short <i>quibbûṣ</i>
ל l	ל̇ ū long <i>quibbûṣ</i> written defectively
מ m	מ̇ a furtive <i>pataḥ</i>
נ n	נ̇ â final <i>qāmeṣ hē'</i>
ס s	ס̇ ê <i>sěgôl yôd</i> (ס̇י = êy)
ע '	ע̇ ê <i>ṣērê yôd</i> (ע̇י = êy)
פ p	פ̇ î <i>ḥîreq yôd</i> (פ̇י = îy)
צ ṣ	צ̇ āyw
ק q	ק̇ ă <i>ḥātēp pataḥ</i>
ר r	ר̇ ě <i>ḥātēp sěgôl</i>
ש ś	ש̇ ǫ <i>ḥātēp qāmeṣ</i>
ש š	ש̇ ě vocal <i>šěwā'</i>
ת t	ת̇ – silent <i>šěwā'</i>

Introduction

The corpus of biblical books we call the Minor Prophets has not enjoyed great prominence in the history of biblical interpretation. It is not difficult to understand why this is so. Where is the edification for a modern Christian in a dirge celebrating the downfall of an ancient city? How can the gloomy forecasts of captivity for Israel and Judah lift the heart today? The Minor Prophets seem to have been preoccupied with nations and events that have little relevance to today's world. How unlike the New Testament they are!

A careful study of these prophets, however, reveals that many of the themes they expound transit the Testaments. They speak of the love of God as well as his justice. Their prophecies are not all doom, but are often rich with hope. Hosea based his hope on God's compassion, while Joel envisioned a new era for the people of God. Amos spoke of the restoration of David's collapsing monarchy, and Micah foresaw the coming Ruler whose birthplace would be the insignificant town of Bethlehem. The fact that these prophets often expressed themselves in culturally and historically conditioned forms that seem foreign to us should not diminish the force of their messages. This fact should challenge us to discover how the prophets faced

the foreboding circumstances of their times, and how their words illumined the dark night of human rebellion and divine justice. Anyone who turns from reading the Minor Prophets hearing only words of recrimination and judgment has not read them fairly. Within the dismal events these prophets describe lurks the hand of God, and beyond these events is the bright prospect of a kingdom inaugurated by One whom Zechariah portrays as suffering betrayal, piercing, and eventual death. The Minor Prophets are not as time-bound as we may think.

The purpose of this commentary is to clarify the messages of these spokesmen for God by bringing the reader into the structures of language in which these messages found expression. While readers who do not know Hebrew may find the Exegesis section imposing, the authors have translated the constructions so that these readers may comprehend the discussion and have access to the Hebrew text. The readers may thus observe more deeply how the author has grappled with the problems of the text. Readers of English commentaries do not always have access to this level of interpretation.

The translations in parentheses following each Hebrew construction are keyed to the Author's Translation. This translation, which appears in the left column of

each translation page, is a literal rendition of the section that follows. The column on the right contains the translation of the New Revised Standard Version. The reader thus has at hand two perspectives on the sense of the text.

The Exposition section is designed to amplify the conclusions reached in the Exegesis section. The authors frequently discuss related theological and hermeneutical issues in the Exposition. The Hebrew appears in transliteration here. This alerts the reader who knows Hebrew to the constructions the author discusses without encumbering the reader who does not know Hebrew with unfamiliar Hebrew characters. It also aids the reader by facilitating pronunciation of the Hebrew constructions. The preacher will find in this section observations on the text that will stimulate ideas for using the Minor Prophets in contemporary preaching.

The Hebrew scholar, as well as the student of Hebrew, will appreciate the depth of interaction with the Hebrew text that characterizes the Exegesis section. The authors have made every effort to

utilize the highest standards of scholarly exegesis, and to interact with the current literature throughout their commentaries. The helpful introductions to the commentaries cover issues that touch on various aspects of the prophecy on which each author has written.

The editor and authors present this work to the world of biblical scholarship with the hope that it will contribute to a deeper understanding of the messages of the Minor Prophets and their relevance for us today. If this commentary causes the voices of these ancient men of God to ring with greater clarity in a world that sorely needs spiritual and moral strength, the effort will have been worthwhile.

I wish to express my appreciation to the authors for their scholarly contributions, their cooperation, and patience throughout the years in which this work has been in preparation. I owe a debt of gratitude to Allan Fisher of Baker Book House for his encouragement.

Thomas Edward McComiskey
Hawthorn Woods, Illinois
1991

Hosea

Introduction

Historical Background

Hosea was an Israelite prophet of the eighth century B.C. This fact is established by the content of the prophecy, which is consonant with the historical and societal conditions of that period, and the superscription of the book (1:1).

The span of Israelite history delineated by the superscription includes the reigns of several kings of Judah. Uzziah (Azariah), the first king cited, reigned from 792/91 to 740/39, and Hezekiah, the last Judahite king to which the superscription refers, reigned from 716/15 to 687/86. Jeroboam II, the only Israelite king mentioned in the superscription (see the Exposition at 1:1), reigned from 793/92 to 753.

This extensive period witnessed several outstanding national achievements. Uzziah formed a massive standing army and spread the influence of Judah well beyond its borders (2 Chron. 26:1–15); Jotham (750–732/31) founded a number of towns (2 Chron. 27:1–9). And most remarkable of all was the religious reformation fostered by Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:1–31:21). In the northern kingdom, Jeroboam II greatly expanded the territorial holdings of Israel (2 Kings 14:25, 28).

Yet there were dark, foreboding undercurrents. Uzziah angrily usurped the priestly function, and the light from the burning incense revealed the leprosy that marked God's displeasure (2 Chron. 26:16–21). During his regency, pagan high places continued to attract worshipers (2 Kings 15:4). The reign of Jotham witnessed the continuation of popular non-Yahwistic practices (2 Kings 15:35; 2 Chron. 27:2). In the time of Ahaz (735–716/15) the king himself encouraged the worship of Baal (2 Chron. 28:2–4), and the nation was threatened by both the Syrians and the

*To my son Bruce
for his devotion to
scholarship,
his strength
of character,
and his
companionship
through the years*

Contributor:
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McComiskey

Israelites. The revival under Hezekiah came at a propitious time, but it served only to slow the progress of Judah toward certain ruin. The propensity of the people to worship at pagan sanctuaries and the social decay that resulted from their departure from the Yahwistic tradition of humanitarian concern and social justice were like a dark specter lurking behind the changing national scene. This propensity was ultimately to destroy the kingdom of Judah as it had the northern kingdom. The policies of Jeroboam II in the north threatened his nation, for he followed the corrupt pattern begun by his earlier namesake, Jeroboam I (2 Kings 14:24).

At the death of Jeroboam II the northern kingdom entered a period of decline from which it would not recover. Jeroboam's successor, Zechariah, had reigned only six months (753/52) when he was assassinated by Shallum who acceded to the throne. Zechariah was the last king of Jehu's dynasty (2 Kings 14:29; 15:11). Shallum held the throne of Israel for only one month before he was assassinated by Menahem (2 Kings 15:14). Menahem reigned from 752/51 to 742/41, and was succeeded by Pekahiah who reigned from 742/41 to 740/39. Pekahiah was killed in a military coup by Pekah, one of his officers. Pekah took the throne of Israel and reigned until 732/31. The apparently stable reign of Pekah came to an abrupt end when he was assassinated by Hoshea (732–722), who virtually became a vassal of Assyria. When Tiglath-pileser III, the king of Assyria, died, he was succeeded by Shalmaneser V, and Hoshea apparently regarded this transition as an opportunity to strike for independence. He boldly withheld tribute from Assyria and attempted to establish a political alliance with Egypt (2 Kings 17:4). These courageous efforts ended in failure, however, for the Assyrians met his rebellion with decisive military action. They invaded Israel, and laid siege to the capital city of Samaria for three years. The citizens of Samaria ended their brave struggle by capitulating to the superior Assyrian forces, and Hoshea was imprisoned. Such was the ignominious end of the once proud kingdom.

As Hosea observed the troubled times in which he lived, he saw much that was disconcerting to him. He warned against the international alliances the political leaders of Israel were forging to rescue their faltering nation; he makes particular reference to the overtures made to Assyria and Egypt (Hos. 7:11).

Menahem made one of the most important efforts to curry favor with Assyria when he attempted to shore up his sagging political fortunes by forging an alliance with Tiglath-pileser as he was advancing westward. In this alliance Menahem agreed to pay heavy tribute to Assyria (2 Kings 15:19). Pekah made an alliance with Syria in an attempt to resist Assyrian efforts to advance their hegemony into Syro-Palestine (2 Kings 15:37). Hoshea's efforts to save his dying kingdom by seeking help from

Egypt actually cost Israel its national life (2 Kings 17:4), for Egypt was divided internally and could offer little help.

Israel's defection from Yahweh was not only evident to Hosea in these political intrigues, but he also saw the disregard the people had for their ancient spiritual heritage.

The ancestors of the hapless citizens of the northern kingdom had exulted in a covenant that promised national life and individual fulfillment, but that promise was for those who were faithful to the covenant's stipulations. The northern kingdom was separated from its ancient heritage by geographical boundaries and national biases, and the covenant was but a dim memory. Blindly the people removed themselves from their God to worship gods who were but an ephemeral projection of their own hopes and lusts. According to Hosea it was this syncretistic worship that, more than anything else, cost the people of Israel their national integrity.

This violation of the stipulations of the covenant was reflected in the social sphere. The burgeoning economies of the two kingdoms produced a rift between rich and poor, as an oppressing upper class brought misery to the less fortunate.

All of this, covenant violation and dependence on other national powers, demonstrated a lack of faithfulness to their God. No wonder Hosea called it fornication; no wonder his unhappy marriage is the theme of his prophecy.

Date

According to the superscription, Hosea's prophetic activity began sometime during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Since Jeroboam died in 753 B.C. we may place the commencement of Hosea's ministry sometime before this. He continued to function as a prophet into the reign of Hezekiah. Thus, a date sometime after Hezekiah's accession to the throne of Judah in 716/15 B.C. rounds out the general limitations of Hosea's ministry to Israel.

Author

Hosea was a prophet to both the northern and southern kingdoms, in that he addressed both kingdoms in his prophecy. However, he directed his strongest and most urgent words to the people of Israel, the northern kingdom. The fact that Hosea's castigations of Judah are sometimes tempered with benign statements (1:7; 4:15) may reflect his optimism at the positive spiritual influences he saw from time to time in Judah. The greatest of these were the sweeping religious reforms instituted by King Hezekiah.

Little is known of Hosea, and still less of his father Beer, but it is obvious from the book that Hosea was a man of deep moral

conviction. He was a devoted Yahwist who lived in a time of national defection from the principles and institutions of Yahwism. His dedication to God was so great that he could follow God's leading even to the extent of entering a marriage that meant deep personal sacrifice and bitter sorrow.

Text

The text of Hosea is one of the most difficult in the prophetic corpus. Commentators frequently attempt to resolve the textual difficulties in this book by extensive emendation or by redactionist methodologies. These methods frequently lead only to conjecture, however, because they lack objective controls. To be sure, the Masoretic tradition (MT) is not sacred, and the consonantal text has not come through the centuries unscathed, but we may wonder if the degree to which some scholars alter the text is not extreme.

Absolute objectivity in the interpretation of literature is, of course, beyond our reach, but we must nonetheless strive for it. The objectivity we seek in Old Testament studies lies in the symbols and structures of the Hebrew language. That which strikes us as broken or awkward may have been quite acceptable to the original reader. If we do not entirely understand the language in which an ancient writer's thoughts found shape, we have no right to resort uncritically to emendation. We are obliged first to attempt to understand his language better, or to try to comprehend the author's peculiar dialect or style of expression. Failing in this, we may have to reconstruct the text.

Our study of the text of Hosea has led us to conclude that the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint is essentially that of the Masoretic Text. It becomes apparent to the reader of both traditions that the translators of the Greek version struggled with the same problems in the text of Hosea with which we moderns struggle.

The textual problems are discussed in the body of this work. The major ones occur at 1:6, 7; 2:3 [2:1]; 4:11, 16; 5:8, 11, 13; 6:5, 7; 7:4, 12; 8:13; 9:1, 13; 10:5, 10; 12:1 [11:12]; 13:2; 14:3.

Analysis

Superscription (1:1)

I. Hosea's Marriage and the Birth of His Children (1:2–2:2) [1:2–11]

- A. The Command to Marry (1:2)
- B. The Birth of Jezreel (1:3–5)
- C. The Birth of Not Pitied (1:6–7)
- D. The Birth of Not My People (1:8–9)

- E. A Statement of Hope Based on the Reversal of the Meanings of the Children's Names (2:1–2) [1:10–11]

II. The Significance of Hosea's Marriage for the Nation (2:3–25) [2:1–23]

- A. A Command to Hosea's Children to Plead with the Nation That It Give Up Its Idolatry (2:3–8) [1–6]

- B. Israel Resolves to Return to Yahweh (2:9–11) [7–9]
- C. Israel Will Pay for Her Wantonness (2:12–15) [10–13]
- D. Israel Is Restored to Her Former Status (2:16–17) [14–15]
- E. The Blessings of Israel's Restoration (2:18–22) [16–20]
- F. The Effect Israel's Restoration Will Have on the Universe (2:23–25) [21–23]

III. Hosea Reclaims His Wayward Wife (3:1–5)

- A. Gomer Purchased Back from Her Paramour (3:1–2)
- B. The Significance of Gomer's Reclamation for the Nation (3:3–5)

IV. Yahweh's Controversy with His People (4:1–10)

- A. The Pronouncement of the Controversy (4:1–3)
- B. The Nation Will Fall (4:4–6)
- C. Priest and People Will Suffer the Same Fate (4:7–10)

V. An Oracle Based on a Proverb (4:11–14)

VI. A General Denunciation of Israel (4:15–19)

VII. An Oracle Addressed to Various Levels of Israelite Society (5:1–15)

- A. The People and Their Leaders Have Gone Too Far (5:1–4)
- B. Both Judah and Israel Will Be Judged for Their Unfaithfulness to Yahweh (5:5–7)
- C. The Final Doom of Israel (5:8–12)
- D. Israel's Dependence on Assyria Will Lead to Her Downfall (5:13–15)

VIII. A Plea for Repentance (6:1–11a)

- A. Yahweh Will Respond to the People's Repentance (6:1–3)
- B. The Ephemeral Love of Judah and Israel (6:4–6)
- C. Israel Has Broken the Covenant (6:7–11a)

IX. Israel's International Alliances Will Lead to Her Destruction (6:11b–7:16)

- A. Yahweh Will Expose the Treachery of Israel's Dependence on Assyria (6:11b–7:3)
- B. Israel's Corrupt Leaders (7:4–7)
- C. Israel's Unwise Political Alliances Are Responsible for Her Declining Strength (7:8–10)
- D. Israel's International Policies Will Cause Her Destruction (7:11–13)
- E. Because Israel Has Rebelled Against Yahweh She Shall Go into Captivity (7:14–16)

X. The Enemy Will Take Israel into Captivity (8:1–14)

- A. The Enemy Approaches (8:1–3)
- B. The Frantic Efforts of the People to Defend Themselves (8:4–6)
- C. Israel Will Eventually Suffer at the Hand of Assyria, the Nation with Which She Has Entered into an Alliance (8:7–10)
- D. Israel's Mosaic Institutions Will Do Her No Good: The Nation Will Perish (8:11–14)

XI. Results of the Captivity (9:1–6)

- A. The People Will No Longer Enjoy the Produce of the Land (9:1–3)
- B. The People Will No Longer Observe Levitical Rituals (9:4–6)

XII. The Captivity Is a Recompense for Israel's Sin (9:7–17)

- A. The Captivity Is a Recompense for the Sinful Attitude of the People toward the Prophets (9:7–9)
- B. The Captivity Is a Recompense for the People's Defection to Baal (9:10–14)
- C. The Captivity Is a Recompense for Israel's Syncretistic Religion (9:15–17)

XIII. Internal Corruption of Israel (10:1–15)

- A. Israel's Idolatry Increased in Proportion to Its Affluence (10:1–3)
- B. Israel's Society Was Riddled with Dishonesty and Deceit (10:4–6)
- C. Israel's Idolatry Will Lead to the Demise of Her King (10:7–8)
- D. The Spirit of "Gibeah" Continues in Israel (10:9–10)

- E. Israel's Unrestrained Disobedience to Yahweh (10:11–12)
- F. Israel's Internal Corruption Will Lead to the Fall of the Monarchy (10:13–15)

XIV. Yahweh's Love for Israel (11:1–11)

- A. Yahweh Loved Israel at the Exodus, but Israel Rebelled Against Him (11:1–4)
- B. Because of Israel's Rebellion She Shall Go into Captivity (11:5–7)
- C. Yahweh's Love for Israel Will Not Allow for the Absolute Destruction of the Nation (11:8–9)
- D. Yahweh Will Call His People from Captivity (11:10–11)

XV. An Oracle Against the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel (12:1–15) [11:12–12:14]

- A. Ephraim Practices Treachery but Judah Still Enjoys Fellowship with God (12:1–2) [11:12–12:1]
- B. Yahweh Has a Controversy with Judah (12:3–7) [2–6]
- C. Israel Is Like a Dishonest Merchant (12:8–11) [7–10]

- D. Israel Is Guilty Because of Her Violation of Covenant Standards (12:12–15) [11–14]

XVI. Hope for Ungrateful Israel (13:1–14:1) [13:1–16]

- A. Israel's Devotion to Baal Worship Will Bring Her to an End (13:1–3)
- B. Israel Forgot Her God Who Brought Her out of Egypt (13:4–8)
- C. Israel's Leaders Cannot Help Her (13:9–11)
- D. Yahweh Will Save His Nation from Death (13:12–14)
- E. The Northern Kingdom Will Fall, but There Is Hope beyond That Catastrophe (13:15–14:1) [13:15–16]

XVII. Yahweh's Poignant Plea to Israel to Return to Him (14:2–10) [1–9]

- A. Israel Learns How She Is to Repent (14:2–4) [1–3]
- B. Yahweh's Assurance of Israel's Restoration (14:5–8) [4–7]
- C. Yahweh's Ways Are the Best Ways (14:9–10) [8–9]

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Superscription (1:1)

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel.

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.

**I. Hosea's Marriage and the Birth of His Children
(1:2–2:2) [1:2–11]**

A. The Command to Marry (1:2)

² The beginning of the LORD's speaking through Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take a wife of fornications and children of fornications, because the land has committed great fornication [which has led them] away from the LORD."

² When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

1:1. דְּבַר־יְהוָה (the word of the LORD): In the prophetic books the term דְּבַר (word) occurs in conjunction with יְהוָה (LORD) in both the singular and plural. In the plural it denotes various divine sayings usually given over a period of time (Jer. 37:2; Ezek. 12:28; Amos 8:11; Zech. 1:6; 7:7, 12). In the singular it may denote either the word of the Lord in a general sense (Mic. 4:2; Amos 8:12) or as set forth in specific oracles (e.g., Joel 1:1; Amos 3:1; Mic. 1:1). The term is used in the latter sense in Hosea 1:1, indicating a divine origin for Hosea's prophetic oracles. אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֵל־הוֹשִׁעַ (that came to

Hosea): הָיָה is accompanied by the preposition אֶל (to) as it is in all prophetic formulas of this type. הָיָה (came) also occurs with עַל with little or no difference in meaning in several contexts (1 Sam. 16:16; cf. v. 23; note also the interchange of אֶל and עַל in 2 Sam. 8:16; 20:23; Judg. 6:37, 39; see BDB, p. 41, for others). הָיָה with אֶל is used to describe Saul's seizure by an evil spirit (1 Sam. 16:23), and with עַל describes the act of transferring the crown of the king of Rabbah to the head of David (2 Sam. 12:30). In these cases the collocation denotes the process by which something

1:1. The period of history delineated by the kings cited in the superscription was a time of great economic prosperity, second only to the halcyon days of the golden age of David and Solomon. Yet there was a virulent spiritual sickness sapping the vitals of the nations of Israel and Judah. The people had violated the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant by mistreating the less fortunate and by participating in the strange syncretistic worship of the day. It is this idolatrous worship that Hosea confronted, for he saw it as the cause of Israel's certain demise. It was a time of religious confusion as Israel grew weaker and attempted to strengthen the decaying structure with international alliances.

The word of the Lord was needed in this time of declension, and it is refreshing to read at the outset of Hosea's prophecy that the divine word had entered the prophet's consciousness. The word of God had come into the sphere of human history. The gloom of this time of national and theological emergency was to be illuminated by the will of God as it was communicated to Hosea, and through him to the people.

It is difficult to understand why Jeroboam II is the only Israelite king who appears in the superscription of the prophecy. In contrast several Judean kings are cited whose combined reigns are six decades longer than the reign of Jeroboam. One should not be too quick to regard this apparent historical imbalance as evidence for a late date for the superscription. We do not possess enough evidence to pass judgment on it with confidence, and there is nothing in the prophecy of Hosea that is not in accord with conditions in the period of time delineated by the superscription.

A significant bank of material in the prophecy of Hosea is consonant with conditions in Israel following the death of Jeroboam II. This period was marred by anarchy and intrigue, for of the six Israelite kings who succeeded Jeroboam II, four

were assassinated and only three managed to reign for substantial periods of time. Hoshea, the last king, was imprisoned by Shalmaneser. The northern kingdom was shaken by anarchy at the gravest time in her history.

Israelite leaders attempted to stay the mad race toward ruin by foreign alliances and political coups. The prophecy of Hosea reflects these dismal events in several graphic passages. Hosea depicts the plotting and intrigue of the time in 7:1–7 and 8:4. The factional strife and frenzied alliances that characterized this period are reflected in 5:13, 7:11, and 12:1. These verses depict, in particular, alliances with Assyria. Menahem, one of the kings of Israel in this desperate period, paid tribute to the king of Assyria, "that he might help him strengthen his grasp of the royal power" (2 Kings 15:19). The reigns of the Judean kings cited parallel this period of instability in the northern kingdom. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the superscription in that regard.

It is the mention of only one Israelite king, Jeroboam II, that is the problem. If possible, it is best to seek the solution to this question in the text of Hosea or in the historical period before resorting to explanations that entail the complexities of redactionist methodologies. It is important to note that Jeroboam II was the last significant king of the Jehu dynasty. His only successor in the dynastic order was Zechariah, who reigned a mere six months before he was assassinated. With the death of Zechariah, Israel's headlong plunge into oblivion began in earnest. It is possible that the superscription omits the Israelite kings who reigned after the fall of the Jehu dynasty because their legitimacy was questioned. It is clear that Hosea questions the legitimacy of a number of kings who reigned during the time in which he ministered. For example, he represents God as saying, "They set up kings, but not through me. They

external to the individual enters the sphere of that individual's experience. In Hosea 1:1 **הָיָה אֵל** occurs in a relative clause subordinated to **דְּבַר-יְהוָה** (the word of the LORD) by **אֲשֶׁר** (which). This structure indicates that it is Yahweh's word that enters the consciousness of Hosea and becomes a part of his prophetic experience.

2. **תְּחִלַּת דְּבַר-יְהוָה** (The beginning of the LORD's speaking): The Septuagint has **λόγου** (דְּבַר, word of) for the Masoretic Text's **דְּבַר** (spoke), reading the radicals **דבר** as a noun rather than a verb; but there is no need to emend. The use of a noun in construct with a verb is attested sufficiently in Hebrew (GKC §130d), and the Masoretic Text represents the more difficult reading which should

be preferred. When time-oriented words such as **תְּחִלַּת** (beginning) occur in construct with a finite verb they limit the action inherent in the verb to their time frame (**אַחֲרֵי נִמְכַּר**, after he is sold [Lev. 25:48]; **בְּעֵת-בִּקְרָתִים**, in the time that I visit them [Jer. 6:15]). Thus the construction **תְּחִלַּת דְּבַר** denotes the beginning of the process of communication by which the word of the Lord came to Hosea. The whole phrase serves as a formula that introduces the following account of Hosea's marriage and is not subordinate to the next clause (i.e., When the Lord first spoke to Hosea, the Lord said . . .). **תְּחִלַּת** introduces subordinate clauses when it occurs with a preposition or an implicit prepositional idea (see Ruth 1:22; 2 Sam. 21:9–10; 2 Kings

set up princes, but I do not know it" (8:4). The Jehu dynasty had prophetic legitimacy (see 2 Kings 10:30), but there is no evidence that its successors did. Perhaps the mention of only one Israelite king indicates that the writer did not acknowledge the legitimacy of Zechariah's successors. Zechariah's name may not appear here because of the extreme brevity of his reign. There seems to be no reason why the writer of the superscription could not have been Hosea himself, or an editor or amanuensis who was cognizant of the prophet's viewpoint.

2. The title, "The beginning of the LORD's speaking through Hosea," lends a degree of formality to the introductory section of the book. It serves to set off the command to marry as the first divine impulsion of which the prophet was conscious. It also reflects the fact that Hosea's prophetic activity extended over a period of time and was not limited only to the immediate events of his marriage, for the command to marry occurred at the "beginning" of his prophetic ministry.

When the word of the Lord began to make its powerful influence felt within the mind of Hosea, he became conscious of the fact that God was calling him to communicate that word in prophetic activity. Other prophets had given forth the word in act as well as speech. Ezekiel made a model of Jerusalem and pretended to lay siege against it (4:1–3). Zechariah communicated the word through a symbolic act in which he made use of the person of the high priest (6:9–14). The divine impulsion urged Hosea to perform a symbolic act that must have brought revulsion and anguish. He was to marry a woman who, unlike many women in Israel, was sexually promiscuous, and perhaps was a known harlot in the community.

Hosea must have wrestled in his soul, for he was a person of deep moral sensitivity. But he yielded to the divine urging to give up the prospect of a normal married life. His unfortunate marriage thus became a powerful vehicle for the communication of God's will in a time of spiritual wantonness.

We are told that the command to marry such a woman came to Hosea when the Lord began to speak through him. Since *wayyō'mer* (and [the LORD] said) introduces direct speech, we understand the command to marry to be the statement that initiated his prophetic experience. It does not appear to have come after the marriage as a result of Hosea's reflection on the unfortunate course it had taken. He was already conscious of his prophetic role when he gave a name of prophetic significance to his first child (1:4).

The moral problem that confronts the reader at this point is obvious. Would God command a prophet to marry an unchaste woman? The history of the interpretation of the book witnesses to the influence this problem has had. It is largely for this reason that there is such a broad spectrum of views on the prophecy.

The majority of commentators have espoused the proleptic view of Hosea's marriage. This view holds that Gomer was chaste when Hosea married her, and only after some time did her propensity to unfaithfulness manifest itself. In this view it is necessary to hold that only one group of children appears in the narratives, since Gomer had no children when Hosea took her as his wife. As a result of this, the proleptic view regards the children of 1:2 and 1:3–9 as the same. This makes it necessary to view the children of 1:2 as yet unborn, and the command to Hosea to mean that he should *have* children by Gomer—not adopt

17:25), but there is no clear linguistic signal that these conditions exist in the context of Hosea 1:2. Thus *וְהָיָה* functions as it does in Proverbs 9:10 and Ecclesiastes 10:13 to introduce an independent clause. The fact that this clause is followed by *וַיֹּאמֶר* (And . . . said), which also introduces an independent clause, does not determine the subordination of the clause beginning with *וְהָיָה*. The term *וַיֹּאמֶר* may introduce logically independent sentences as it does in Hosea 3:1. Imperfect verbs construed with *waw* introduce independent

clauses frequently in Hosea (see, e.g., 1:3, 4, 8, 9; 2:2 [1:11]). *בְּדֹחֶשֶׁעַ* (through Hosea): The preposition *בְּ* can connote the idea of instrument (by) as well as agency (through) when it occurs with the root *דַּבֵּר* (speak). The agential meaning is appropriate to the preposition here because *אֶל* is the preposition that connotes the concept of *to* in this context (vv. 1–2). *לֵךְ קַח לְךָ אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים* (Go, take a wife of fornications): The basic command to marry is given in the words *לֵךְ . . . אִשָּׁה* (lit. to take a wife/woman). This is the common expression for

children already born to her. Several versions reflect this understanding of the text (RSV and NASB have; NEB get children). This is not indicated by the text, however. The command states literally, “Go take to yourself a wife of fornications, and children of fornications.” The implication of this literal rendition of the command is that the prophet married an unchaste woman and, at the same time, adopted the children who were already hers because of her sexual promiscuity. Perhaps the best representation of the way in which the command is understood by adherents of the proleptic view is that of Andersen and Freedman: “The initial statement, 1:2, can only describe a reinterpretation of the first command after the marriage and family of Hosea were constituted. The original call must have been simply: ‘Go take for yourself a wife and build a family with her’” (*Hosea*, p. 162).

Many arguments have been put forth in favor of the proleptic view. Andersen and Freedman state, among other things, that *zēnūnīm* (fornications) always refers to betrothed or married women; thus we expect Gomer to have been married when she committed *zēnūnīm* (*Hosea*, pp. 157–59). They also state that 2:7 implies that Gomer became a harlot after the children were born (p. 162). William Rainey Harper rejects the view that Hosea married an impure woman because “Hosea would scarcely have attributed such a command to Yahweh” (*Amos and Hosea*, p. 207), because *zōnā*, the usual term for harlot, would have been used; and because marriage to an impure woman would not be consonant with the imagery of the Old Testament which depicts Israel as faithful to God at first (p. 207). He also asserts that Gomer “had in her a tendency to impurity which later manifested itself” (p. 207), but he gives no support for this. Leon J. Wood also appeals to the analogy between Gomer and Israel: “Perhaps the most convincing reason in favor of the preferred view is that it implies a significant

parallel between Hosea’s marriage and God’s experience with Israel” (*Hosea*, p. 166). Wood rejects the view that Gomer was unchaste when Hosea married her and observes that one would expect the word *zōnā* (harlot) in the command of 1:2 if such were the case. The birth of the three children of 1:4–9 “directly after the indication of the command to marry Gomer makes the conclusion all but necessary that they are the children in question” (p. 165), and, “It is quite unthinkable that God would have commanded anyone—much less a religious leader—to marry such a person” (p. 165).

This examination of the proleptic view shows that a concept must be inserted into the text if it is to have credence (*have* children). This is not an invalid approach to Old Testament exegesis, for the function of ellipsis is well known to interpreters of the Old Testament. Yet one should ask if a literal rendering of the text provides a view that is exegetically cogent and consonant with other aspects of the prophecy. The following discussion will follow the text literally.

The command to Hosea was to “take a wife of fornications.” “The expression *lāqah ʾiššā* (take a wife) is the way Hebrew expresses the concept of legal marriage. One of the most common arguments against the view that Hosea married an unchaste woman is that, if that were the case, the text would say *qah zōnā* (take/marry a harlot), but that suggestion is questionable because *ʾiššā* must be a part of the construction if the concept of legal marriage is in view. If the text said *qah zōnā* (take a promiscuous woman/harlot), it would have meant something other than marriage. Since *lāqah* (take) is often used to describe illicit relationships (see the Exegesis), one could not be sure that legal marriage was intended by the expression. The concept of marriage to an *ʾiššā zōnā* (harlot) could have been expressed in a much longer expression, but this would be out of keeping with the terse second clause which is simply *yaldē*

legal marriage in the Old Testament (see, e.g., Gen. 4:19; Exod. 6:20; Lev. 21:13; 1 Sam. 25:39), although other expressions exist such as *לָקַח* (to become a husband [Isa. 62:5]); *נָתַן* (give a place to dwell [Ezra 10:14; Neh. 13:23]); and *קָיָם* (take up [Ruth 1:4]). The word *קָיָם* (take) may connote legal marriage when it occurs without *אִשָּׁה*, but its meaning will almost always be made clear either by using *אִשָּׁה קָיָם* (take a wife) elsewhere in the context (Lev. 21:14, see v. 13; Deut. 22:14, see v. 13), by using another expression for marriage

(Gen. 24:67; 34:9; Deut. 22:19), or by establishing the fact of marriage in other ways (Exod. 34:16; Deut. 20:7; 25:7–8, see v. 5). Only rarely does *קָיָם* (take) connote marriage when there is no apparent verbal or contextual qualification (Gen. 38:2; Exod. 2:1; 1 Chron. 2:21). On the other hand, when *קָיָם* (take) occurs without *אִשָּׁה* (wife/woman) in passages dealing with sexual relationships, it almost always connotes an illicit relationship (Gen. 20:3; 34:2; Lev. 18:17; 20:17; 2 Sam. 11:4; Ezek. 16:32), that is, the taking of a female (or a male [Ezek. 16:32])

zēnūnīm (children of fornications). It is difficult to conceive of a more succinct way to express legal marriage to a promiscuous woman than the words in this command. The words *lāqah ʾiššā* connote legal marriage, and the use of *ʾiššā* (wife) in construct with the qualifying noun *zēnūnīm* (fornications) characterizes the wife Hosea was to marry as one who engaged in illicit sexual activity (Douglas Stuart [*Hosea–Jonah*, pp. 26–27] holds that *ʾēšet zēnūnīm* [wife of fornications] would describe any Israelite woman because they were idolators. This view reduces the force of Hosea’s marriage and gives prominence to the role of the sign-children).

Andersen and Freedman argue that “in every case of *zwnym* [*zēnūnīm*] the women involved . . . were married or betrothed . . . none was a typical prostitute” (*Hosea*, p. 158). In Nahum 3:4, however, the word describes the deceitful activities of the city of Nineveh which is called in that verse a *zōnā* (prostitute). The prophecy of Nahum nowhere depicts Nineveh as a wife or widow. Andersen and Freedman also argue that *ʾēšet zēnūnīm* describes “a wife who becomes promiscuous, not a prostitute or promiscuous woman who becomes a wife” (*Hosea*, p. 159). Characteristic genitives, however, always describe the present state of the *nomen regens*. Attributing the sense of becoming to the construct state strains its concrete function. In other cases where a verb occurs with *ʾēšet* and a *nomen rectum* (2 Sam. 12:10; Prov. 5:18; 31:10) the construct relationship describes the state of the woman at the time of the verbal action. There is no reason why we cannot understand the words *qah lēkā ʾēšet zēnūnīm* in Hosea 1:2 to command Hosea to marry a woman who was promiscuous. We must remember that when we assign the translational equivalent *wife* to *ʾiššāh* in the collocation *lāqah ʾiššāh* we are reflecting our categories of thought. To “take a woman” is to marry. To “take a

woman of fornications” is to marry a promiscuous woman.

It is true that the words of Hosea 2:9 [7] show that Gomer became an adulteress after her marriage to Hosea. This is the implication of the word *husband* (*ʾiš*) in that verse, but it says nothing about Gomer’s behavior before or at the time of the marriage. The events of this verse are analogous to the depiction of Gomer’s adulterous tryst in chapter 3.

The consonance of the marriage with the history of Israel is one of the strongest arguments for the proleptic view. If Israel was pure when God found her and took her as his bride, then the marriage of Hosea to Gomer should parallel that aspect of Israel’s history, and Gomer could not have been a harlot at the time of the marriage. Three passages in Hosea appear to describe Israel as pure when Yahweh took the fledgling nation to himself (2:17 [15]; 9:10; 11:1–4). Each passage refers to the period of the exodus and Israel’s subsequent defection to Baal.

The best support for the proleptic view is found in 2:17 [15] where Israel is depicted as answering “as in the days of her youth.” In this context she appears as an unfaithful wife (2:9 [7]) who will again enjoy unbroken fellowship with God (2:21–22 [19–20]). The passage represents God as her husband (2:18 [16]). It seems that her unfaithfulness manifested itself after her marriage to Yahweh, because she says, “I will go back to my former husband, for it was better for me then than it is now” (2:9 [7]). Thus it appears that her youth was a time of willing response to God.

We must observe, however, that the passage says nothing about Israel’s purity in the period before the defection to Baal. It says only that she responded to God when he called her out of Egypt, for the text precisely defines the “days of her youth” in 2:17 [15] by the parallel clause “as in the time that she came up from the land of Egypt.” It focuses on the simple trust exhibited

for purposes of sexual gratification and not for legal marriage. Thus, if the command in Hosea 1:2 were *קח זונה* (take a harlot) it would connote illicit sexual activity. It would not clearly refer to legal marriage. The idiom *קח אשה* (take a wife) is interrupted by *לך* (to you), but the sense is not altered. The same idiom is interrupted by *לו* (to him) in Genesis 21:21, and retains the meaning of “to marry.” Also, *אשה* (wife) occurs in construct form with *לקח* (take) in Leviticus 20:21 (as it does in Hos. 1:2) with the clear meaning of “marry.” Thus the command to Hosea is to marry a promiscuous woman. *אשה זנות* (lit. wife of fornications/promiscuous woman) is a genitival structure used

attributively (GKC §128p–v). It describes the *אשה* (woman) Hosea is to marry. This function of the construct state (characteristic genitive or attributive genitive) occurs frequently in the Old Testament. Note the following: *איש דמים* (man of blood: a murderer), *איש דברים* (man of words: an eloquent man), and *אשה מריבות* (a woman of contentions: a contentious woman). (See GKC §128p–v for others.) In Hosea 1:2 the construct state describes the wife Hosea is to marry as a “wife of fornications,” that is, a promiscuous woman. *זנות* (fornications) in usages outside Hosea describes fornication on the part of a woman, either married or unmarried (see the Exposition). *ילדי זנות* (and children of for-

by the people when they followed their God out of the Egyptian bondage to the status of a nation.

This time of faithful response to God is the ideal that the prophet sets before the people. The response they showed then will again characterize their relationship to God. The prophet extracts from their history a single event to illustrate this fact. This does not mean that Hosea understood the people to be pure at the time of the exodus; it simply points to the trust they once placed in God.

Two important traditions, however, depict the people as idolatrous and thus impure in their early history. One is in Ezekiel 20:1–9. That passage tells us that the people practiced idolatry while yet in Egypt. The other is in the Sinai traditions in the account of the giving of the law. There, within the structure of the ratification and codification of the law, the people worshiped the golden calf (Exod. 32:1–10), thereby revealing an early propensity to spiritual harlotry. These two traditions support the surprising fact that when Yahweh entered into a marriage relationship with his people at Sinai, he married a people already tainted with idolatry; they were guilty of spiritual fornication.

In Hosea 9:10 the prophet depicts the delight the Lord has in the people he freed from bondage. The nation is viewed not as a female of marriageable age, but as a people; they are called the “fathers” (v. 10). Nothing is said about their purity in this passage.

In 11:1–4 Hosea pictures Israel as a male infant. God gave Israel the tender care needed by a small child. Again, there is no reference to Israel’s purity; it is God’s tender love for his son that Hosea emphasizes.

This consideration of the three passages in Hosea does not lead to the conclusion that the

marriage analogy is clearly present in all three. The factor common to all of them is the defection of the people to Baal. Even if we ignore the traditions noted above and base our conclusions solely on these three passages, we cannot conclude that the prophet presses the marriage analogy all the way back to the wilderness experience. Israel’s rejection of God’s love and her resultant defection to Baal is the emphasis of 9:10 and 11:1–4. The emphasis of 2:15 [13] is only slightly different. It is the assurance that Israel will one day be freed from her allegiance to Baal to enjoy her former devotion to Yahweh.

Jeremiah 2:2 also seems to support the purity of Israel in her national youth. The emphasis of this verse is on the devotion (*hesed*) and bridal love (*ʾahābat kēlūlōtāyik*) that Israel showed to God when she followed him in the wilderness. Then God said, “Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest” (v. 3a, RSV). The fact that Israel was “holiness (*qōdeš*) to the LORD” does not necessarily mean that Israel was ethically pure. The phrase *holiness to the LORD* is defined by the parallel expression *the first fruits of his harvest* (RSV). According to the Mosaic legislation the first produce of the field went to God as his portion. Because Israel was the first fruits to God of the nations of the world, she was God’s special possession and enjoyed his protection. These verses set forth one fact: Israel was set apart to God as his special possession. That is what “holiness to the LORD” means. She was separated to God, and there is no indication in these verses that Israel was intrinsically or ethically holy. Many objects used in the levitical worship were set apart as “holiness to the LORD” (see, e.g., Lev. 5:15–16; 19:24; 27:28; Josh. 6:19). Because they were inanimate, there was nothing of an intrinsic ethical

nications): If we read these words literally, they comprise the second element in a double-duty verbal structure in which *קָח* (take) governs both “wife of fornications” and “children of fornications.” The double-duty structure is common to several Semitic languages (see GKC §117cc–ll; it is well known in Hebrew). A construction that uses *לָקַח* (take) in a way somewhat similar to the structure in Hosea 1:2 occurs in 1 Samuel 17:17, *אִפְתָּ הַקֶּלֶיָּא הַזֶּה וְשָׂרָהָ לָחֵם הַזֶּה* (take . . . an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves). A double-duty construction with *נָתַן* (give) occurs in Hosea 2:17 [15]. In this type of double-duty structure the action relative to the two objects is

contemporaneous with the time of the main verb. Viewed in this way the command of 1:2 requires Hosea to marry, and at the same time to adopt (*לָקַח*, take) children of a sexually promiscuous woman. The word *לָקַח* (take) denotes the process of adoption in Esther 2:7, 15. On the basis of this view *זְנוּנִים* (fornications) is the *nomen rectum* of a construct relationship that denotes either characteristic or source. If it is a characteristic genitive, it depicts the children as having the same propensities as their mother; they are sexually promiscuous. If it is a genitive of source, it indicates that they were born as a result of their mother’s illicit relationships with her lovers. The

holiness in them. Cultic ritual transferred them from the sphere of the common to the sphere of the holy.

No clear evidence exists that Israel was pure in the wilderness period of her history. On the contrary, there is positive evidence that she had engaged in spiritual harlotry before the finalization of her union with God at Sinai. This is a startling fact, and that is why Hosea’s marriage is so shocking. But against the dark background of that marriage the grace of God shines all the brighter.

According to the view set forth here, Yahweh commanded Hosea not only to marry a woman of ill-repute, but to adopt the children born to her as a result of her promiscuous relationships. This view construes the first genitive in the double-duty construction (*ʔēšet zēnūnīm*, wife of fornications/a promiscuous woman) as a characteristic genitive, and the second a genitive of source. This may appear questionable. However, we should not be overly analytical in our interpretation of the genitival relationship. After all, the Hebrew language has no morphological function for indicating whether a genitive connotes source or attribute. It is satisfied with the broad genitive structure. It is we with our sophisticated concept of language who make the refinements. We must overlay the Hebrew with our linguistic models in order to make it more intelligible to our thought forms. The Hebrew ear heard only the genitive relationship.

Perhaps we are too precise, and the distinctions are artificial. It is, in the final analysis, difficult to separate source from characteristic. If the children were “children of fornications” in the sense that they were born of their mother’s illicit relationships, they were still associated with promis-

cuity. The concepts of characteristic and source both apply. We must ask if the writer has defined the concept.

In Hosea 2:6–7 [4–5] we find that he has. In verse 6 [4] he uses a genitive to describe the nation. He says they are *bēnê zēnūnīm* (children of fornications). The next verse states that they are this *because* “their mother has committed fornications,” that is, they were born of their mother’s promiscuous acts. This is a genitive of source. Since the “children of fornications” (1:2) represent the nation, Hosea’s depiction of the people of his day as having been born as a result of the nation’s lust for idolatry (2:6–7 [4–5]) supports the view that *yaldê zēnūnīm* (children of fornications) in 1:2 is a genitive of source, not characteristic.

If the view presented here is correct, we must posit two groups of children in the structure of the prophecy—those born to Gomer before her marriage to Hosea, and the three born to her and Hosea in legal wedlock. Several passages in the early chapters of Hosea support the concept of two groups of children. In 2:3 [1] the Hebrew says literally, “Say to your brothers, ‘My people,’ and to your sisters, ‘Pity!’” (the NRSV reads “brother” and “sister”). The word “say” is in the plural (*ʔimrû*). It indicates that a group of people is addressed. The only logical referent of the word is the sign-children of 1:3–9. These children were the vehicles of Hosea’s prophetic message. They were commanded to convey to their brothers and sisters a message of hope based on the reversal of the significance of their names.

The plural construction of the words *brothers* and *sisters* makes it impossible to regard them as the three sign-children cited in 1:3–9. Hosea’s daughter, Not Pitied, could have addressed her siblings in the plural because she had two broth-

latter function fits best with the exegetical data in the book (see the Exposition). It is the view we have adopted in this work. This view requires the two genitives to have different nuances, however, since “wife of fornications” is a characteristic genitive while “children of fornications” is a genitive of source. This is not objectionable (see the Exposition). *כִּי־זָנְהָ תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ* (because the land has committed great fornication): *כִּי* (because) introduces the reason for the unusual marriage. It is because the *אָרֶץ* (land) has been unfaithful. The word *אָרֶץ* functions as a corporate designation for “people” in Hebrew. We see this in 1 Samuel 14:25, where *אָרֶץ* refers to the men of Israel under the command

of Saul [all the land *אָרֶץ*, RSV people] came into the forest, see v. 29; a similar function for the word occurs in Lev. 19:29; Ezek. 14:13; Zech. 12:12). *זָנְהָ תִזְנֶה* (committed great fornication) pairs a finite verb with an infinitive absolute. This intensifies the action of the verb (GKC §1131–r). Thus we may translate it “great fornication.” *בְּאַחֲרָי* (from after) is an element in the collocation *זָנְהָ בְּאַחֲרָי* (lit. fornicate from after). *זָנְהָ* (fornicate) frequently occurs with *אַחֲרָי* (after) to refer to illicit congress with objects displeasing to God, such as false deities (Exod. 34:15–16; Lev. 17:7; 20:5; Deut. 31:16), detestable things (Ezek. 20:30), the ephod of Gideon (Judg. 8:27), or one’s own desires (Num.

ers, but the brothers could not have addressed their only sister as “sisters.” If we accept the grammar at face value, we must conclude that Hosea envisions two groups of children in this passage. One, addressed by the plural word *say*, speaks to another group designated “brothers” and “sisters.” This gives strong support to the view that Hosea adopted the children born to Gomer before her marriage to him. This brood of children represented the nation, as did Gomer herself (see the discussion at 2:3 [1]).

In 4:4–6 Hosea condemns the prophets and priests of his day because of the effect they had on the nation. He pictures the nation as a mother (v. 5) and children (v. 6). Since the message of this passage relates to the nation, we must see it as drawn from the analogy of Hosea’s marriage. Hosea does not represent the nation by Gomer alone, but by Gomer and her children. The children here (v. 6) cannot be the sign-children, for these sign-children are separate from the nation. They speak to it. Their names have prophetic significance that relates to the nation. The literal reading of the command, “take a wife of fornications and children of fornications,” is consonant with the working out of Hosea’s marriage in the narrative framework of his prophecy.

In the proleptic view one must understand the words *yaldê zēnūnîm* (children of fornications) to refer to the children born to Hosea and Gomer in legal wedlock. How could legitimate children be called “children of fornications”? Harper says they are “children born to her after marriage and begotten by another than the prophet” (*Amos and Hosea*, p. 207). But this does not take into account the fact that according to 1:3 the first child, at least, was born “to him” (*lô*). This is an indication of legitimacy. Harper observes that some

manuscripts omit this word (p. 211). Andersen and Freedman observe that “some scholars have seen in the menacing names of at least the second and third children evidence that Hosea had by now discovered that the children were not his or not certainly his. The names express his outrage, even though he keeps his family intact” (*Hosea*, p. 168). But the threatening tone of these names is directed at the nation, and reflects their status in the sight of God. It is difficult to understand the word *lô* (to him) to be anything more than a straightforward statement that Jezreel (and probably the other children as well) was Hosea’s by Gomer. The “children of fornications” were the children that Hosea adopted, who were born to Gomer as a result of *zēnūnîm*, a word that always describes the illicit activities of a fornicator.

The clause “because the land has committed great fornication [which has led them] away from the LORD” (1:2) states the reason for Hosea’s marriage—it was because the people were guilty of spiritual fornication. They might have pointed the finger at Gomer and gossiped about the prophet who married her, but they were no better than she. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer was an eloquent depiction of Yahweh’s marriage to his errant people.

The motif of spiritual fornication in the prophecy of Hosea goes beyond the sexual rites of Baal worship. Fornication in the spiritual sense was far broader than cultic efforts to excite the lusty Baal. It involved primarily a denial of absolute devotion and loyalty to Yahweh. We may observe this in contexts where the idea of fornication describes such things as dependence on mediums and wizards (Lev. 20:6), and the misplaced loyalty of the people in the ephod erected by Gideon in Ophrah (Judg. 8:27). In contexts

15:39). On the other hand, when the collocation includes *מִן* (from), as it does here (*מִן־אַחֲרַי*, from after), the emphasis is not on the object of misplaced desire, but on the action of turning away from God. We may observe this concept in instances where *מִן־אַחֲרַי* is collocated with other verbs (Num. 14:43; 32:15; Deut. 7:4; Josh. 22:16). The sense of the idiom in 1:2 is not that the people committed fornication by turning away from

the Lord (RSV). The verb *זָנָה* (fornicate) is treated as a verb of motion with *מִן* (from) in this collocation and possesses an active sense. It says literally, “they fornicated away from Yahweh.” It is not merely that they turned from God; rather, their spiritual fornication, demonstrated in their allegiance to the fertility cult, was the cause of their separation from God (see 9:1).

where it applies to pagan deities the emphasis is often on the defection from Yahweh that such worship entails rather than on the distinctly sexual nature of these cultic practices (see, e.g., Exod. 34:14–16; Lev. 20:5; Deut. 31:16; Judg. 2:17). The sin of the people of Hosea’s time was their failure to give the Lord their undivided devotion, loyalty, and trust. Such fornication, since it is not limited to pagan sanctuaries, may be committed today. When Christians divide their affection between Christ on the one hand, and the flesh and the world on the other, there is spiritual fornication. The Christian is called to absolute devotion to God and Christ (Matt. 6:24). We too may feel the shock of Hosea’s marriage today.

The problem that emerges from the interpretation taken here is obvious. God demanded of a prophet that he marry a woman who was known for her promiscuous behavior. We may wonder, however, if some efforts that seek to avoid this problem succeed in doing so. Do not views that regard the marriage as symbolic or allegorical merely mask the problem? If one who holds the proleptic view acknowledges that God knew of Gomer’s evil propensities when he commanded Hosea to marry her, is the problem really solved?

The standard of morality in Hosea’s day was the law. It prohibited marriage to a harlot only on the part of priests (Lev. 21:7). They occupied a status of special holiness within the cultus. It was not a violation of the law for a man who was not a priest to marry a harlot. We may not regard the divine command to Hosea to be a violation of the

moral standard of his time. Rather, it is one of the most remarkable depictions of divine grace in the Old Testament. Hosea sacrificed a normal married life to call Israel to recognize its sin. At the same time he loved and sheltered an unfortunate woman and her more unfortunate children. Even when she reverted to her old ways after the marriage and went to live with another man, the prophet wooed her back to himself (3:1–3).

The marriage may seem questionable to us, but we must view it against the moral standards of its time. We must be careful not to stretch the principles of the law beyond their stated limit. We have no warrant for believing that because a priest could not enter such a marriage, it was wrong for others to do so. Priests were required to maintain a higher standard of holiness than any others in ancient Israel. They were forbidden to marry divorced women according to the same legal statement that prohibited their marriage to harlots (Lev. 21:7). Yet men who were not priests could marry divorced women, for the regulations relating to the remarriage of a divorced woman form an integral part of the Deuteronomic legislation (Deut. 24:1–4). One who was not a priest was not forbidden to marry a harlot.

The prophecy of Hosea is a tapestry of grace. As the prophet loved a woman whose crudeness and brazenness must have hurt him deeply, so God’s grace comes to his people in their unloveliness. Our spiritual condition is never so low that God cannot woo and receive us back to himself as Hosea received Gomer.