Hosea

# Introduction

The Hosea scroll is a message from God to his people, to which wise people will pay heed (Hos. 14:9 [10]). Calling it a message (literalistically, a “word”—1:1) implies that it has some coherence or unity. It comprises a challenge to pay heed to

* God’s confronting his people for its unfaithfulness
* his pointing out how its life is out of keeping with the beginnings of his relationship with it
* his warning of severe chastisement that is therefore to come
* his promising that chastisement will not be the end of the story
* his urging it to come back to him.

It would be interesting to relate different prophecies within the scroll to aspects of the history of Ephraim’s final decades (see “Messages of God in a Political Context” above), but the scroll does not give us concrete information that enables us to make such connections. “The intended and primary readerships” of Hosea “are not asked to historicize the text, to look at historical but ‘well-hidden’ clues, but to set it in the frame of that which is presented as essentially trans-temporal discourse” of “trans-temporal relevance.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

## The Issues in Hosea

The Hosea scroll is dominated by a critique of the life and worship of Ephraim as a people, whose dominant image is marital infidelity. Hosea speaks poetically, which makes it complicated to infer what he is literally referring to; there may be a number of aspects to this unfaithfulness.

1. Ephraimites worshipped Yahweh in ways that Yahweh had forbidden—specifically, with the use of images of Yahweh. Second Kings accuses Ephraim of worship following the innovations of Jeroboam I, which means worshiping Yahweh in forbidden ways.
2. While 2 Kings 10 tells of Jehu purging Samaria of the worship of the Master (“Baal”), worship of El as opposed to Yahweh may have continued in sanctuaries such as Beth-el.[[2]](#footnote-2)
3. Worshiping Yahweh in ways comparable to other peoples’ ways of worshiping the Master might be hard to distinguish from worshiping the Master and/or might be viewed by Hosea as little different.[[3]](#footnote-3)
4. Worship offered by people in their homes and villages and at local shrines (the “high places”) might be more affected by overt worship of the Master than the worship offered at a national sanctuary. Archeological evidence suggests that Israelites did not follow the Masters *rather than* Yahweh. They followed other gods as well as Yahweh, assuming it was possible to combine the two commitments. They did not see themselves as going back on their Israelite faith in Yahweh as the God who brought them out of Egypt (see 11:1-2) and enabled them to live in their land. They simply recognized other deities as well as Yahweh and sought their blessing in connection with the harvest and with human fertility. They saw the Master as the deity who could help to ensure that the crops grew and that animals and human beings were fertile, and they engaged in prayer and sacrifice to this end in the same way as they prayed and offered sacrifice to Yahweh.[[4]](#footnote-4) The requirement to pay taxes and the related necessity for the administration to pay tribute to Assyria will have put extra pressure on people to generate the equivalent of cash crops (grain, wine, oil), adding to the pressure to turn to other deities to make the harvest “work.”[[5]](#footnote-5)
5. Ephraim’s sealing of political alliances with Aram and Assyria would involve shared religious rites implying recognition of these peoples’ gods. Religion and politics are commonly interwoven, even though formally separate in some countries (at the first church service I attended in the United States, I noticed the prominence of the flag in the church, and the first thing we did was pray for the president as commander-in-chief). In effect, Hosea raises the question whether the separation of church and state is possible.[[6]](#footnote-6) Perhaps there was seepage between recognition of other gods at the international political level and such recognition in Ephraim’s own festivals and in ordinary people’s spirituality (see 4 above).
6. Hosea’s mixing critique of Ephraim’s praying to the Master with critique of Ephraim’s alliances with other nations points to another sense in which such alliances involved unfaithfulness. Seeking such alliances was itself an act of unfaithfulness. It implied a failure of trust in Yahweh. The politicians of Ephraim (and of Judah) who engaged in alliances with other nations did not see themselves as going back on faith in Yahweh. But Hosea’s talk of seeking the help of the Master may refer to implications of Ephraim’s political involvements. Ephraim pursued alliances with other nations as a means of protection and defense rather than regarding Yahweh as its protection and defense. Accepting such non-Israelite ideas about politics would mean a change in their understanding of Yahweh. He has become like the Master, in Ephraim’s thinking. They might as well have been asking the Master for help.
7. Ephraim ran its internal politics in a way that ignored Yahweh’s attitudes, specifically in the series of violent coups in which it engaged. Yahweh’s critique of Ephraim’s self-directed internal politics may extend back to Israel’s original institution of monarchy.
8. Ephraimites may have been involved in sexual activities in the context of worship. Following the traditional religion of the land might involve sexual initiation at the sanctuary, or further sexual intercourse with a priest as a kind of acted prayer for fertility, or a ritual enactment of the union of god and goddess. Herodotus speaks of such practices but it is not clear that his account is based on anything more than hearsay. In any case we have no account of such practices from the First Testament or from other Middle Eastern writings. While it used to be assumed that Hosea’s references to such activities were literal accounts, [[7]](#footnote-7) it is now usual to take them as a metaphorical way of portraying unfaithfulness to Yahweh through seeking the help of the Master.[[8]](#footnote-8)

## Poetry and Rhetoric in Hosea

Hosea is the premier poet among the Prophets; with the authors of Job and Song of Songs, he is one of the three premier poets of the First Testament.

Like all poetry, his work is dense, intense, closely-packed, involved, and complex. One way the poetry achieves this denseness is the general omission of some of the little words that facilitate communication in prose (see “How Prophets Spoke” above). Hosea’s poetry is more distinctively characterized by asyndeton, juxtaposing clauses without indicating their interrelationship. Both characteristics require people to listen or read carefully and to keep rethinking the significance of what they have heard or read; Hosea cannot be read quickly. The message of the Hosea scroll has parallels with Deuteronomy, but this link highlights the contrast with Deuteronomy’s rhetoric. Deuteronomy works by making things as clear as possible and by repetition. Hosea’s strategy is the opposite. Translations ancient and modern are inclined to make Hosea’s poetry easier to understand, and this is also an inclination of scholarly suggestions concerning the emending of the text, but they risk thereby moving away from what Hosea said and from what was transcribed.

A key aspect of poetry’s denseness is the use of imagery. The freight of Hosea’s message is conveyed by a profusion of imagery, which can be “audacious and bizarre”:[[9]](#footnote-9)

God is a husband (1:2—3:5)

God is like a moth and like decay (5:12)

God is like a lion and like a cougar (5:14)

God is a father (11:1)

Ephraim is a half-baked pita (7:8)

Ephraim is like a simple-minded pigeon (7:11)

Ephraim is like a slack bow (7:16)

Metaphors and similes do more than illustrate things that we knew already. They enable us to see new things through juxtaposing realities that do not usually come together. “What the poetry of Hosea—poetry that characterizes God—does is to load us with a world that is not available to us… until this utterance.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Further, images presuppose, testify to, and evidence the oneness of the reality that they describe. In a strange way, for the same reason the difference between the two realities means that images also obscure things in the sense of making them more mysterious. Images are confusing. God uses human images but points out that he is not human (11:9).

Hosea’s poetry mines the potential of words, especially in the use of paronomasia (see e.g., 3:3-5; 4:16-18; 7:16; 8:7; 9:3; 10:9; 12:4; 14:8 [9], with the notes and the comments). Paronomasia characteristically involves the juxtaposition of words that are similar, though unrelated in etymology and meaning. It thereby suggests links between the realities to which they refer, or (paradoxically) suggests contrasts between things that perhaps should be related. In a number of examples Hosea’s paronomasia involves his using words in distinctive ways or using unusual forms of words, another practice that makes it necessary to resist the temptation to suspect the text or conform it to more usual usage (e.g., 2:12 [14]; 5:2; 8:4). Related to paronomasia is the use of metonymy (e.g., 9:2; 14:5, 6 [6, 7]) and of irony (e.g., 2:7 [9]; 4:13; 5:3; 8:3; 9:16; 13:2-3; 14:9 [10]).[[11]](#footnote-11)

The nature of poetry is to explore, to draw attention to things, to defamiliarize in order that people may see things in a new way or for the first time. In this sense, its aim is not to persuade people to do something.[[12]](#footnote-12) Yet Hosea’s own aim is not simply to get his people to see. It is to drive them to turn back to Yahweh and thus deal with the issues he identifies in its life. He again shares this aim with Deuteronomy but has a different strategy for achieving it. While imperatives play a role in 4:1—9:9 and especially in his final exhortation in 14:1-8 [2-9], Hosea more often seeks to achieve his aim by running confrontation or critique, by retellings of Israel’s story, and by threats of punishment.

The reason why the God of all threatens punishment… is not to inflict it on those he threatens but to strike them with fear and lead them to repentance, and by ridding them of their wicked behavior extend to them salvation. After all, if he wanted to punish, he would not threaten punishment; instead, by threatening he makes clear that he longs to save and not to punish.[[13]](#footnote-13)

A converse role is played by promises. Prophets always have to deal thoughtfully or subtly with the relationship of threat and promise. Unmitigated threat may get them nowhere and it risks compromising the truth, given that Yahweh does not finally intend to destroy his people. But too much promising takes the edge off the threat. In Hosea promise is prominent in 1:2b—3:5 and in 14:1-8 [2-9]. I take this closing emphasis on promise to fit the role of this closing exhortation in the scroll in making one final attempt to pull Ephraim to turn back. I take 1:2b—3:5 as reflecting his message as formulated by him for his disciples and/or by them when the threats have been fulfilled.

## Structure and Outline

Whereas there is broad agreement about the structure of some prophetic books, for Hosea there are as many understandings as there are scholars writing on the subject. As a scholar, my natural instinct is therefore to declare, “At last! I can tell you the answer to the question that has defeated everyone else.” And/or I might infer that Hosea was not thinking in terms of a structure when he dictated the scroll, so that analyzing its structure might be compared to describing the form of a painting. There is no one right answer; many descriptions or analyses will be illuminating; and they interweave with interpretations of the text.[[14]](#footnote-14) My account of the Hosea scroll’s structure[[15]](#footnote-15) takes up what I think are key aspects of its nature, and it is either *the* answer, or *one* illuminating answer.

1:1 Prefatory notes: the opening of a frame around the scroll suggesting how to read it.

1:2—3:5 The first three chapters of the scroll, diverse in form, but having in common that each comprises a critique of Ephraim (with a side look at Judah), a declaration about discipline to come, and a promise about restoration. It is the prominence of this last feature in all three sections that distinguishes chapters 1—3 and points to their significance in the scroll as a whole. They provide a shocking yet hopeful introduction to the main body of the scroll and invite its hearers to listen to the rest of the scroll in light of it.

1:2a An introduction to these opening chapters

1:2b—2:1 [3] A story about Hosea and his family incorporating some semi-independent prophecies

 2:2-23 [4-25] A longer sustained address

 3:1-5 A story about Hosea and his wife as told by Hosea

4:1—9:9 A sequence of challenges to pay attention that introduce the sections that follow, with a puzzled question at the center. Each bidding leads into an indictment and a warning.

 4:1-19 Listen!—a confrontation about whoring

 5:1-7 Listen!—a confrontation about leadership

 5:8—6:3 Sound out!—a warning about invasion

 6:4—7:16 Tell me!—the puzzled question

 8:1-14 Horn!—a confrontation about political initiatives

 9:1-9 Don’t celebrate—a confrontation about worship

9:10—13:15 Yahweh’s unhappy recollections: a series of remembrances about Israel, leading into further indictments and threats. Perhaps “the overall conception of Israel's history justifies the application of the term salvation history to Hosea’s perception of Yahweh’s activity in this history.”[[16]](#footnote-16) But “it is characteristic of Hosea… to transform almost the whole of Israel’s history into ‘disaster-history.’”[[17]](#footnote-17)

 9:10-17 The grapes

 10:1-10 The vine

 10:11-15 The heifer

 11:1—12:1 [2] The son

 12:2-11 [3-12] The heel

 12:12—13:16 [12:13—14:1] The shepherds

14:1-8 [2-9] One last bidding: turn back! This bidding leads into a promise. The themes and motifs of 1:2—3:5 recur here.[[18]](#footnote-18)

14:9 [10] Concluding note: the close of the frame around the whole that suggests how to read it.

The rhetorical significance of this arrangement of 1:2—14:9 [10] is to persuade people

* To see themselves between chastisement and restoration
* To respond to the imperative exhortations
* To sense the poignancy of the recollections
* To turn back to Yahweh in hope

# Hosea 1:1: Preface

## Translation

1Yahweh’s message which became a reality to Hôshēa‘ ben Bə’ērî in the days of ‘Uzziyyāh, Yôtām, ’Āhāz, Yeḥizqiyyāh kings of Yəhûdāh and in the days of Yārob‘ām ben Yô’āš king of Yiśrā’ēl.

## Interpretation

The opening lines of Hosea (vv. 1-2a) form a double introduction to the scroll, and MT makes a section break after v. 2a. But v. 2a is an introduction to 1:2—3:5 in particular, whereas 1:1 relates to the scroll as a whole. It is a third-person preface to Hosea’s message provided by his disciples, parallel to the prefaces to the other five scrolls. The scroll thus begins by dating Hosea in relation to four Judahite kings, who reigned from the 780s until at least to the time Hezekiah became co-regent with Ahaz, about 730. The authors will be Judahites who recognized the truth of Hosea’s message when it was brought to Judah before or after the fall of Samaria in 722. Their preface implies an invitation to Judah to relate to the message. The claim that Hosea’s message came from Yahweh would have been disputed by most of the people to whom he originally delivered it, particularly people in authority in Ephraim; hence the fact that Samaria fell in 722. The authors now boldly but plausibly claim that his claim was justified.

While the First Testament commonly uses the expression *dəbar yahweh* to denote an individual declaration from God (4:1 may be an example; cf. Amos 7:16; 8:12; Jonah 1:1; 3:1), here the expression has come to apply to the collection of Hosea’s words, and the stories about him (cf. Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1). The singular word suggests that there is some coherence about the scroll as a whole. Its various parts form one declaration or statement or message. The expression “Yahweh’s message became a reality” or “happened”[[19]](#footnote-19) puts the focus on the objective content of the message, and on how it came to the prophet in thoughts or words without there needing to be a sense of Yahweh as speaker speaking. Describing Hosea as ben Be’eri ensures that readers do not confuse this Hosea with any other Hosea, such as the Hoshea who was the last king of Ephraim and was thus a contemporary of Hosea (in Hebrew the names are the same). It’s like saying “John Goldingay” and not simply “John.”

The four Judahite kings who are named here feature at the opening of Isaiah. In both scrolls the names come as a string without “and”; Micah 1:1 lists three kings in the same way. The omission is comparable to omitting commas in English; it ties the kings together and hints that they form one era. The parallels between these three occurrences with their distinctive form might suggest that they derive from the same Judahite group.[[20]](#footnote-20) The expression “Yahweh’s message became a reality” is most common in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, while accounts of the series of kings in the two kingdoms come in 1—2 Kings, all works that belong in the decades beginning in the late 600s.

The one Ephraimite king mentioned is Jeroboam II, who reigned from about 790 to about 750. But Hosea refers nine times to Assyria, and we know of no dealings between Assyria and Ephraim in Jeroboam’s time. Further, some of Hosea’s messages presuppose the time of the succeeding kings, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea, up to the eve of Samaria’s fall in 722. The preface to Hosea thus parallels those to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, which do not refer to the entire period covered by the scroll. Or is it that was expelled from Ephraim and delivered his later messages in Jerusalem?

The provision of information about the kings in this preface and in Amos and Micah stands in contrast to the persistent disinclination of the Prophets themselves to mention specific kings or events, which rather implies that people don’t need to know the specific context of the messages. As with the psalms, there is enough information in the text itself concerning the situation they address, and the absence of concrete references may reduce the chance of the messages being narrowed down in their significance and may increase the chance of their being applied to contexts other than the ones in which they were given. But the information does invite readers to see the message in relation to these kings’ time and/or to their portrayal in 2 Kings.

## Theological Implications

1. The existence of the Hosea scroll implies that God speaks to his people, not least when they’re unfaithful and rebellious. “No scriptural prophecy becomes a reality through personal interpretation, because no prophecy was ever generated by human will. Rather people carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20). Such are the implications of the opening of the Hosea scroll. Whereas it is common to speak of Hosea’s message, the scroll invites us to see what follows as God’s message.
2. The declaration that what we are to read came from God is a distinctive feature of the Prophets over against the narrative and Wisdom books. Oddly, it is also a distinctive feature that the agent is named—most of the Scriptures are anonymous. Whereas the expression “Yahweh’s message” sounds as if it will make the human speaker unimportant, actually he is named. While the message came to him, the speaking happened through him.
3. There is a third link in the chain. The message came to him; God spoke through him; he spoke to the people. To judge from what will follow, sometimes God gave him the words to speak. Verse 2b implies that he heard actual words. But sometimes he made up the words; this fact did not compromise its being God’s message. The singular term “message” rather than the plural “words” (*debar* not *dibrȇ*) may allow for some slippage in the notion of the message coming from God. When a messenger is commissioned to deliver a message, the messenger may formulate the words, without its lessening the message’s authority. So it may be with a prophet such as Hosea. It’s the message that comes, and Hosea doesn’t make it up, but he does make up the words. Thus the expression of the message varies between (say) Hosea and Amos as poets.
4. The scroll’s preface further implies that this particular message from God was significant not only for the people whom Hosea originally addressed but for the rest of the people of God at the time (specifically, for Judah) and for future generations. “The sacred scriptures… are able to make you wise with a view to deliverance through the faith that is in the Anointed one, Jesus. Every scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in right living” (2 Tim. 3:15-16). God may have given Hosea messages that were not incorporated in this scroll, and in our own world poets and songwriters and prophets may sense that something comes to them that they did not generate. The scroll’s inclusion of the prophecies that will follow reflects the conviction that they have something to say beyond their original setting. It is this fact that is explained by declaring that the Holy Spirit was distinctively involved in their coming into being.
5. The conviction of the people who assembled the scroll was that it was a statement from God, and evidently the Judahite community came to accept it, so that it became part of the Prophets and part of Judah’s Scriptures. There were Judahites who would have continued to dispute aspects of it (such as its insistence on worshiping Yahweh alone), but the community came to accept that Hosea was right. There have continued to be people who have disputed whether Hosea was right—for instance, in the way he talks about Gomer. The preface challenges us to conform our thinking to its rather than conforming it to ours.

# Part One: Hosea 1:2—3:5 The Metanarrative

After the preface the Hosea scroll begins with three chapters that take the listeners from the very beginning to the very end of the story of Yahweh’s dealing with “Israel.” Each time the word “Israel” occurs, it refers directly to Ephraim, but this metanarrative also embraces Judah, so that one can also see it as the story of Israel as the people of God. It is a *meta*narrative in the sense of an overarching theology. It is also a meta*narrative* in the sense of an overarching story. It takes Israel from (1) Yahweh’s entering into a relation with it through (2) Israel’s unfaithfulness and (3) Yahweh’s severe chastisement to (4) Yahweh’s reestablishing of the relationship and (5) Israel’s responding.

* Chapter 1 (strictly 1:2b—2:1 [3 ]) covers stages (1) through (4).
* Chapter 2 (strictly, 2:2-23 [24-25]) focuses on stages (2) through (4).
* Chapter 3 focuses on stages (4) and (5).

Chapter 1 presents itself as a story about Hosea incorporating short messages from Yahweh, chapter 2 as a message from Yahweh which refers back to chapter 1 (see 2:23 [25]), chapter 3 as a story by Hosea which also refers back to chapter 1 (see 3:1). The chapters are thus diverse in form, and one could peel off elements from them so as to identify each as an independent unit, but as we have the three chapters, they work as a whole. While they might have been dictated by Hosea, initially referring to himself in the third person, it seems more natural to assume that they were written by a disciple speaking in his name, “inspired” by him.

# Hosea 1:2a: Introduction to the Metanarrative

## Translation

2aThe beginning[[21]](#footnote-21) of when Yahweh spoke[[22]](#footnote-22) through[[23]](#footnote-23) Hôshēa‘.

## Interpretation

Like v. 1, this introduction to the first three chapters of the scroll has no main verb. “The beginning” suggests that the introduction presupposes the story’s place as the part of the prologue to a collection of Hosea’s prophecies. Maybe the story was written first and this introduction was added when the story acquired this position, or maybe the story was composed to lead into the collage that follows and the introduction was thus an integral part of it.

It was the task of prophets to speak and the task of disciples and secretaries to write down their words (Isa. 8:16; Jer. 36:1-4, 32), and it makes sense to take this introduction as deriving from such disciple(s)/secretary(ies), people among the minority in Ephraim or people in Judah who accepted his message.

The formulation “Yahweh spoke” as opposed to the formulation in v. 1a draws attention to the personal nature of the communication process, while “through Hosea” indicates that the message is mediated through someone. Only the introduction to Hosea speaks of the message coming “through” the prophet (*bə*); Haggai and Malachi have *beyad*, “by the hand of/by means of” (but Micaiah use *bə*: 1 Kings 22:28). In Hosea’s case it indeed comes “through” him and his family.

## Theological Implications

1. Only Hosea among the Twelve begins by describing how the prophet came to begin his work. As in other accounts of a prophet’s summons to his task, interest does not lie in the experience’s significance for Hosea nor does it presuppose that the account is instructive for ordinary members of the people of God since God may relate to them in the same way—rather the opposite. Nor does it provide a warrant for Hosea’s undertaking his task or a basis for urging his hearers to heed what he says. Interest lies in the account’s links with the prophet’s message and work. God commissions Hosea to undertake a series of prophetic actions (marrying and naming) that embody central themes of his messages. “Perhaps mime will succeed where words fail.”[[24]](#footnote-24)
2. The three chapters that will follow are the beginning of God’s speaking through Hosea. Indeed God’s speaking though Hosea was near the very beginning of God’s speaking through all those prophets whose speaking was so significant that it generated scrolls preserving the message God gave them. Their message was important enough to be written down. It is an epoch-making moment in the history of God’s involvement with his people and in the process that generates the Scriptures.
3. Every prophecy comes through a prophet. But God’s message comes through Hosea in a special sense. In his case it is through his life that God’s message comes to people. The message can be embodied in a person through whom God speaks. But in speaking “through” Hosea, God makes outrageous demands on him. “There is hardly any other sphere in which humans are so super-sensitive as when they are choosing a companion for life. Anyone who dares interfere has to watch his step!”[[25]](#footnote-25)

# Hosea 1:2b—2:1 [3]: Hosea and Gomer (i)

## Translation

2bYahweh said to Hôshēa‘, “Go, get yourself a downright whorish woman and downright whorish children,[[26]](#footnote-26) because the country totally whores[[27]](#footnote-27) from going after Yahweh.” 3So he went and got Gomer bat Diblayim,[[28]](#footnote-28) and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son for him.[[29]](#footnote-29) 4Yahweh said to him, “Name him Yizrə‘ē’l, because in a little while more I will attend to[[30]](#footnote-30) the bloodshed[[31]](#footnote-31) of Yizrə‘ē’l upon the household of Yehu’[[32]](#footnote-32) and bring the kingship of[[33]](#footnote-33) Yiśrā’ēl’s household to a stop.[[34]](#footnote-34) 5On that day I will break Yiśrā’ēl’s bow in the Vale of Yizrə‘ē’l.”

6She became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. He said to him, “Name her It-is-not-shown-compassion,[[35]](#footnote-35) because I will not any more continue to show compassion towards Yiśrā’ēl’s household. Yet I will definitely carry[[36]](#footnote-36) them, 7and towards Yəhûdāh’s household I will have compassion. I will deliver them[[37]](#footnote-37) through Yahweh their God; I will not deliver them through bow, through sword, or through battle, through horses or through riders.”

8She weaned It-is-not-shown-compassion, and became pregnant and gave birth to a son. 9He said, “Name him Not-my-people, because you’re not my people and I’m not ‘I am’ for you.[[38]](#footnote-38)

10But the number of the Yiśrā’ēlites will become like the sand of the sea, which may not be measured and may not be counted. And at the site[[39]](#footnote-39) where it’s said to them ‘You’re not my people’ it will be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’ 11The Yəhûdāh’ites and the Yiśrā’ēlites will collect themselves together, appoint for themselves one head,[[40]](#footnote-40) and go up from the country,[[41]](#footnote-41) because the day of Yizre‘e’l will be great.

2:1Say[[42]](#footnote-42) to[[43]](#footnote-43) your brothers, ‘My people,’ and to your sisters,[[44]](#footnote-44) ‘It is shown compassion.’”

## Interpretation

The main content of Hosea begins with a story about an acted prophecy that provides an introduction to Hosea’s ministry and message. The story tells of how Yahweh told Hosea to marry a “whorish woman,” and to have “whorish children” whose names would express Yahweh’s attitude to Ephraim. The account also incorporates several verbal prophecies of a more positive kind; it is a complex unit in combining narrative and prophecies. The narrative would hardly stand on its own without any of the prophecies, and some of the prophecies could hardly stand on their own without the narrative. Its third-person form implies that it was composed by a disciple rather than by Hosea. It could not have been composed until after the birth of Hosea and Gomer’s third child and it thus covers a period of some years.

One can peel off some the prophecies without disturbing the flow of the story, and Hosea or his disciples might have added them to an original briefer and tighter version of the story (vv. 2b-4, 6a, 8-9) to turn it into a more comprehensive introduction to the scroll for people in Judah. The story implicitly challenges them not to (continue to) make Ephraim’s mistakes, but to trust in Yahweh for their own destiny and to expect the restoration of Ephraim and the re-establishment of unity between the two nations. Both MT’s subsection or section break after 1:9 (followed by printed Hebrew Bibles) and the English chapter division after 1:11 obscure the logic in the text. As some LXX manuscripts recognize,[[45]](#footnote-45) 2:1 [3] is the conclusion of what precedes, though formally the reassurance it offers comes as an imperative, and this change will lie behind the English chapter transition; the subsequent imperative in 2:2 [4] has a different significance.

Tg renders Yahweh’s opening command “Go speak a prophecy against the inhabitants of the wayward town,” and it thus treats the story as an allegorical fiction, while Ibn Ezra and Calvin see it as a vision,[[46]](#footnote-46) but the story incorporates no pointers in these directions. But some of the enacted prophecies in Ezekiel 3—5 involve dramatic representation (e.g., of the siege of Jerusalem and of its 390/40 year history) rather than the event itself, and the same might be true in Hosea.

While Hosea’s action might seem scandalous, it would not contravene the Torah (though even if it did, that fact need not restrain Yahweh from requiring it; he can break his own rules). Resistance to a literal interpretation of the story issues understandably from its outrageous nature, though Jerome nicely comments, “We do not understand the prophet to have lost chastity, having had sex with a whore, but the whore to have gained a chastity which previously she didn’t have.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Such resistance might issue specifically from awareness of the shame Hosea’s action would bring on him,[[48]](#footnote-48) which helps us appreciate the cost of his action to him. While Western readers also live in an honor-shame culture, their honor and shame surface in relation to Hosea in other connections: e.g., if I get bad reviews for this commentary or am found to have committed plagiarism in writing it. Paradoxically, doing things that were shameful, or at least bizarre, was a way prophets could get taken seriously.[[49]](#footnote-49) Hosea’s action would be shocking, and that’s the point.[[50]](#footnote-50) But the command “was said only and specifically to the prophet”; it’s not the kind of command that is generally applicable.[[51]](#footnote-51)

How did the actions or the story form part of Hosea’s prophesying? What setting did they have? Perhaps the marriage and the children’s births provided sequential occasions for speaking about what was happening, in the manner of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Acted prophecies in Isaiah also involve marriage and children, though in acted prophecies, “only Hosea among the prophets ‘plays’ God.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Every time people met the children of Hosea and Gomer they might be faced with Hosea’s sayings. But the story as we have it could be told only after the three births as well as the marriage. And what counts in the scroll is the telling of the entire story of the acted prophecy, designed to have an effect on its hearers, rather than the acted prophecy itself. In either context, it’s the names not the actions that are directly significant to the message.[[53]](#footnote-53) There is thus some comparison and contrast with other accounts of acted prophecies, where the enacting was significant though it is the record of it that subsequently conveys its message.

Telling the story with its invitation to people to examine what had been going on in Hosea’s marriage would be designed to break through to Ephraimites to get them to face the implications of their stance towards Yahweh. Interwoven with the promises, it would invite them not to be confounded by facing up to facts, and/or it would help them face facts.

**Hosea 1:2b-5.** So the narrative begins with an account of Yahweh’s commissioning Hose to marry and of the birth of his first son.

Hebrew doesn’t have a word for “marry,” and “get yourself a woman” (v. 2b) thus denotes marrying someone. It needn’t imply that the woman has no choice over whether she is “got”; it was not so with Isaac and Rebekah. The First Testament rarely uses the Hebrew words for “husband” and “wife,” *ba‘al* and *bə‘ûlāh*, which etymologically suggest owner/master and owned/mastered*.* Its usual terms for “husband” and “wife” are simply the words for man and woman.

Western readers’ attention to the story may lie in the human interest, particularly in the context of our interest in the way the Scriptures speak about women and men. The focus of the story’s attention to the marriage arrangements lies elsewhere. Hosea and Gomer stand for Yahweh and Israel (notwithstanding Israel itself being a “he” rather than a “she”; the mixing of genders recur when Hosea and Gomer’s daughter also represents Israel). Hosea is not told to marry a specific whorish woman; maybe that is simply the kind of woman he must get.

*Zōneh* can denote someone whom men pay for sex,[[54]](#footnote-54) and Hosea refers to the whore receiving a fee from her lovers (2:12 [14]), but the reason for Hosea’s marrying a whore relates to the analogy with Yahweh’s “marrying” Israel and with Israel’s unfaithfulness. The notion of payment needn’t enter into the analogy and may obscure it. *Zōneh* has the same broader connotations as “whore.” Hosea is to marry someone who is known to be promiscuous, or who is not promiscuous at the moment but will become so. Given that whoring is a metaphor for following other gods, there might be no implication that Gomer is sexually promiscuous. She might rather be someone who follows other godsand who would expect to bear children through seeking their help.[[55]](#footnote-55) A command to marry such a person would actually be even more scandalous. Either way, Yahweh describes this whoring in extreme terms. It is not merely an inclination on the part of some individuals. The entire people is involved. So actually Hosea would have a hard time finding a wife who was not whorish.[[56]](#footnote-56) Gomer is simply a “*typical* Israelite, and this is an indictment in itself”—not merely of her but of the nation.[[57]](#footnote-57) In the description of Gomer, “it is not the wife’s morality but Israel’s apostasy from Yahweh that is called into question.”[[58]](#footnote-58) The nature of the nation’s whoring is left open, but the scroll will indicate that it embraces the realms of religion, internal politics, and external politics, and this introductory chapter will hint at those various facets as it unfolds.

The people likely saw themselves as worshiping the Masters as well as Yahweh not instead of Yahweh. For Yahweh it is either-or, them or me. In following other deities they are whoring “from after” him. They have turned away from him. It is the country (*’ereș*)that has done so. The life and destiny of people and land are tied up together. The land shapes the people, not least when it acts aggressively or parsimoniously (e.g., 2:9-23 [11-25]); the people shape the land, not least when they act faithlessly (e.g., 4:1-3). The two are symbiotically one; “the land reflects (almost ‘is’) the life of the people.”[[59]](#footnote-59) As a family or people can be seen as thoroughly wayward irrespective of the stance of particular members, so the country can be seen as thoroughly wayward irrespective of the stance of the rocks and the trees considered separate from the human beings who live with them.

If Gomer followed a particular deity alongside Yahweh, it might be Yahweh’s consort Asherah. Jeremiah 44 reports the later testimony of some Judahite women that they worshiped the Queen of Heaven, and many images of such a goddess have been discovered in Israel. This fact would complicate the metaphor: Gomer the devotee of Yahweh’s consort symbolizes Ephraim the supposed devotee of Yahweh.

Hosea does as Yahweh bids (v. 3). Like the story of Boaz and Ruth, the narrative doesn’t say whether Hosea already has a wife, which would not be important to the story. If he were single and if Gomer were single, both would likely be teenagers, since parents would usually negotiate marriages for their children in their teenage years. Whatever their age, presumably Hosea would have to get Be’eri (and his wife?) to negotiate a marriage with Diblayim (and his wife?) (compare Judg. 11). But the story is not interested in clarifying these elements in the background.

Further, “although Gomer has captured the attention of most readers, chapter 1 is primarily focused on the children of promiscuity, not the promiscuous woman.” [[60]](#footnote-60) Hosea’s marriage is significant only as the means whereby the children with their names are brought into being—again there is a parallel with Isaiah and his wife and children. The names are analogous to ones in Isaiah (e.g., 7:3, 14; 8:3; 9:6 [5]) that do not describe the children’s nature or destiny. They are not themselves the remnant, the God-with-us, the spoil, or the Mighty God. Their names turn them into signposts to something that’s nothing to do with them, like people carrying placards. As the description of Gomer needn’t mean she actually was a whore, neither were the children what their names say; it was something they symbolized, and they carried the cross, as she and Hosea did.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Jezreel (v. 4) is the fertile plain at the center of Ephraim, between the Samaria highlands and the Galilee mountains, strategically located on the route from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The name, “God sows,” has positive connotations, but the plain was the location of historic battles, a place of bloodshed (see Judg. 5:29; 6:23; 2 Kings 23:29 for battles fought within ten miles of the town of Jezreel).[[62]](#footnote-62) Further, the positive idea of scattering seed could become a negative one, of scattering a people (so Tg). Certainly Hosea is about to invert its implications from positive to negative. The town called Jezreel stands a prominent position on the southeastern side of the plain. It is Ephraim’s de facto second capital, closer to the northern part of the state, and the site of events related in 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 9—10. While both events involved bloodshed, the mention of Jehu suggests that Yahweh refers to the second (cf. Tg). Yahweh proclaims the end of Jehu’s dynasty, which was indeed terminated by the assassination of Jeroboam’s son Zechariah in about 750, but also the termination of any monarchy in Ephraim.

Yahweh goes yet further (v. 5). “On that day” can denote a new day quite distinguishable from the present, a day that will belong to a new age (e.g., 2:16, 18, 21 [18, 20, 23]). But it can also continue reference to a day that has just been mentioned (e.g., Mic. 2:4). We do not have to distinguish these two too sharply here. Yahweh’s day is commonly embodied is some event, yet not without remainder. “On that day” also frequently marks the beginning of a new message or a supplement to the preceding message. This further word from Yahweh extends Yahweh’s warning to threaten the end of Ephraim as a nation, which came in 722. Yahweh will destroy Ephraim’s military resources. Breaking Ephraim’s bow in the Vale of Jezreel suggests a military defeat, for which the Jezreel plain is a natural location, though in the event the key confrontation between Assyria and Ephraim took place at Samaria (2 Kings 17).

**Hosea 1:6-7.** The scroll doesn’t say that Gomer gave birth to her second child “for him” (v. 6), and if she had been promiscuous this omission might hint that he was not the father. But if there has been no indication that she was whorish in this sense, then the inference is unwarranted, and Yahweh’s simple instruction to Hosea about the name the daughter is to bear works against the inference. The prophecy becomes more succinct as it proceeds (v. 8 will have no “again” or “to him”).

“Have compassion”(*rāham*) is related to the noun for “womb” (*rehem*). Compassion is the feeling a mother has for the children of her womb or the mutual feelings shared by children from the same womb, though they are feelings a father can also have (Ps. 104:13). “With a shocking act of linguistic violence, and a disturbing triad of curses, Yhwh begins with the negative, and deconstructs his audience’s assumptions.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Hosea’s daughter is the offspring of a womb but she will stand for the withholding of womb-like feelings. Compassion is the first characteristic that Yahweh claims in his classic self-description in Exodus 34:6-7 (cf. also 33:19). This girl’s name indicates that Yahweh is ceasing to act in one of his most fundamental ways towards his people. It is only a decade or three since Yahweh acted in compassion in fulfilling promises made through Jonah (2 Kings 14:25-27). There will be no more such acts. Hosea’s warning matches ones issued through Amos, who uses similar phraseology: “I will not any more continue passing over” Ephraim (Amos 7:8; 8:2). Of course in both prophets it is a warning of what will happen unless the country responds.

Like her brother’s names and the names in Isaiah, the little girl’s name does not refer to the person to whom they are attached. There is no reason to infer that Hosea and Gomer had no compassion for their daughter. The verb “it is not shown compassion” is feminine and being a girl may have generated the feminine verb, but the country can again be the implicit subject, as in. v. 2.

As happened with the first child, the explanation of the name is then supplemented. Whereas the expansion of the first child’s name denoted a threat, this time the expansion indicates that threat is not Yahweh’s last word. “Carry”(*nasa’*) translates the Hebrew verb most frequently rendered “forgive.” Forgiveness means carrying someone’s waywardness for them (cf. 14:2 [3], where the noun appears); the shorter formulation here (literally, “carry for them”) involves an ellipse. Forgiveness means accepting responsibility for someone’s waywardness and paying the price for it rather than making them do so. At Sinai Yahweh had characterized himself as one who is compassionate and who carries (Exod. 34:6-7), and here he declares that in the end he will indeed carry Ephraim’s waywardness; (cf. Tg). The present abandonment of compassion is softened by the future emphatic “will definitely carry.”

Yahweh goes on to elaborate on the promise (v. 7). In keeping with the reference to Judah in v. 1, compassion will also characterize his attitude to Judah. Its deliverance will come “through Yahweh.” Such is the nature of “deliverance,” which by definition denotes something that human resources cannot bring about. It will be miraculous, in that it will not merely involve Yahweh helping Judah to win a victory by military means. It will be more like the conquest of Jericho than the conquest of Ai. The declaration will speak to Judahite issues in the period covered by the kings named in v. 1, especially when Judah faces the same challenges as Ephraim in the time of Hezekiah. Isaiah 30—31 directly confronts the administration in Hezekiah’s day for policies that contrast with ones implied here, and the story in Isaiah 36—37 tells of a miraculous deliverance. Bow and sword suggest long-range and close-combat; horses and riders adds cavalry to infantry. There is no indication of whether the deliverance will be a response to Judah’s turning to Yahweh or an act of grace designed to elicit a response to Yahweh. In addition, there is no reason why Ephraimites should not take the latter part of v. 7 as a promise for them, too.

**Hosea 1:8-9**. Gomer has her third baby (v. 8). Whereas she apparently had her daughter not long after her first son, her third conception followed the weaning of It-is-not-compassioned; babies may be at the breast for several years in traditional societies, so this expression implies a greater time interval. As with her second baby, the text does not describe Gomer as giving birth to this son “for Hosea,” but it is again Yahweh who tells Hosea how to name the child.

Each name is more devastating than the last (v. 9). “It-is-not-compassioned” was horrifying; “Not-my-people” is theologically devastating. It is “the final disowning of them.”[[64]](#footnote-64) “My people—your God” is a recurrent and elemental description of the relationship between a god and his people (e.g., Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12). It is shocking to declare that the formula no longer applies to Ephraim. “I’m not ‘I am’ for you” (or “I will not be for you”) recalls and reverses Yahweh’s “I will be/I am” in Exodus 3:12, 14. Hosea “becomes an anti-Moses” and declares that “the Exodus, and with it the entire prophetic vocation, is cancelled out.”[[65]](#footnote-65) No other prophet uses such words. It is theologically as radical a statement as Amos 9:7. While the phrase may or may not have a background in the mutual commitment of marriage, it anyway recalls that relationship (cf. Song 2:16; 6:3), and that link is significant in the present context.

**Hosea 1:10-11 [2:1-2].** It is as well that the subsequent promises are also more extravagant than the prophecies that follow the first two namings. The promises are threefold and comprise two or three or separate prophecies. Unlike Amos, Hosea doesn’t appeal to Yahweh not to act in judgment.[[66]](#footnote-66) In its extensive exposition of Hosea 1—2, b. Pesahim 87 has Yahweh urging him to do so, then has Yahweh agreeing—hence these promises that follow. Typically of prophetic promises, these promises take up Yahweh’s fundamental and historic undertakings and reaffirm them in this new situation.

The image of being as numerous as the sand of the sea (v. 10a [2:1a]is well-known; specifically, it is an image for the size of an army (Josh. 11:4; Judg. 7:12; 1 Sam. 13:5; 2 Sam. 17:11). While “Israelites” in the present context implies Ephraimites (cf. vv. 1, 4, 6, 11 [2:1]), as a promise about Israel’s descendants it gains further purchase from its association with Yahweh’s promise to Israel’s ancestors (Gen. 22:17; 32:12). That promise had been fulfilled in Solomon’s time (1 Kings 4:20) but it’s now been reversed, as Isaiah notes it can be (Isa. 10:22; cf. 48:19). But if v. 9 reverses the exodus, v. 10a goes behind it to the ancestors.

Yahweh goes on (v. 10b [2:1b]) to reverse the “not my people” declaration. The worship “site” where his declaration was being made would presumably be the sanctuary courtyard; compare the scene at Beth-el in Amos 7:10-17 or the similar scenes in Jerusalem in Jeremiah and in Jesus’s story. At this place of rejection Yahweh will reaffirm his commitment. The people will no longer be “children of whoredom” (1:2) but children of God again. Hosea nuances the promise’s wording by describing Yahweh as “the living God.” The particular formulation (*’ēl ḥay*) corresponds only to Joshua 3:10; Psalms 42:2[3]; 84:2[3], though whatever the precise form, the expression suggests that Yahweh is active and dynamic, and perhaps a different kind of deity from the Master, who died each year, whom people worshipped at the sanctuary or to whom they assimilated Yahweh in their thinking there.

Third promise (v. 11a [2:2a]) is that the division going back to the time of Jeroboam I and Rehoboam will come to an end. “Head” is most often a familial term, but in this context it may denote a head priest (“chief priest” is more literally “head priest”). While the head priest needs to be an Aaronide, as the king needs to be a Davidide, in neither case is there a rule about (e.g.) primogeniture. So within the relevant parameters the two peoples can appoint a head who will lead them when they “go up” to a festival “from the country,” the entire country:[[67]](#footnote-67) they will now go together to Jerusalem, even if the people continue to use sanctuaries such as Beth-el and Beer-sheba on other occasions. The implicit assurance to Ephraimites that they will be able to revert to their commitment to Jerusalem carries an implicit insistence that they must do so. “Collect” with the reinforcing adverb “together” also constrains Judahites from thinking that they can write off Ephraim. Neither nation is complete without the other. It is together that they are the people of Yahweh.

Thus “the day of Jezreel will be great” (v. 11b [2:2b]) A moment ago talk of Jezreel was threatening, but now it’s reassuring. People hearing the prophecy would now be able to remember that Jezreel does suggest “God sows.” The description ought to apply to this fertile vale (the point will be taken further in 2:21-22 [23-24]). They might also note that Yizrə‘ē’l and Yiśrā’ēl are verbally close and pick up a hint that the day of Israel will be great. No, Yahweh is not finished with Ephraim.

**Hosea 2:1 [3].** This imperative constitutes the direct instruction about the appropriate response to the section it concludes (like Isa. 2:5 concluding 1:2—2:4 or 52:11-12 concluding 51:1—52:10). It drives the message home. It is also implicitly a further promise, taking up the note missing so far in the reversing of Hosea’s threats. Jezreel (1:4-5) came in 1:11 [2:2]; not my people (1:9) in 1:10 [2:1]. What about “not shown compassion” (1:6)? To make more worrying the omission so far of this reversal, the word has been used in a positive way with regard to Judah (1:7). Will it ever apply again to Ephraim?

The verb and the suffixes are plural. Hosea and/or Yahweh are bidding Ephraimite men to take on their lips the words that Yahweh had previously outlawed, “my people,” which came already in the second promise. They are also bidding Ephraimite women to take on the other outlawed expression, “shown compassion.” In the context of Hosea’s ministry, the commission will be one that Ephraimites can take up if they respond to the challenge about repentance that Hosea leaves unarticulated. It is a commission that an Ephraimite remnant in Judah or that Judahites can also claim. The words further again implicitly bid the men and women of Ephraim and Judah to respond to the promise/bidding in 1:11 [2:2].

## Theological Implications

1. Hosea invites comparison with Paul, whom God compelled to acknowledge Jesus and then made suffer as the cost of the work he summoned him to (Col. 1:24). Hosea’s action involved what will have looked like foolishness to the wise and “the cross that he could not escape.”[[68]](#footnote-68)
2. Yahweh is the one God and Yahweh does not have a consort. Yahweh is like a husband in relation to his people who are like his wife; his people resembles a promiscuous wife and Yahweh resembles a disciplinary husband. In the Scriptures, Hosea and Ephesians make most far-reaching use of this analogy. Ephesians urges husbands to be like Jesus; in Hosea, the analogy confronts Ephraim with its being like an unfaithful wife who will pay a penalty for unfaithfulness.
3. In the background of both Ephesians and Hosea is a patriarchal understanding of the man-woman relationship as an example of patron-client relationships,[[69]](#footnote-69) not the egalitarian understanding that emerges from Genesis 1—2 and the Song of Songs. Hosea and Ephesians don’t simply accept the patriarchal understanding; they deconstruct it. In Ephesians, the husband’s authority lies in letting himself be crucified for his wife and the wife’s submission lies in letting him do so. In Hosea, the husband refuses to give up on the relationship, more like a parent than a husband (cf. 11:1-9).[[70]](#footnote-70) Both works thus undermine any claim that they validate the abuse of wives by husbands.
4. In taking marriage to provide an illuminating metaphor for the relationship between God and his people, Hosea 1 works with the framework of patriarchal marriage, but it is not concerned either to affirm that model or to question it. The model is simply the one that people know, and it provides an illuminating understanding of the relationship of God and his people, as the ideals underlying Western marriage such as intimacy, romance, friendship, and an egalitarian relationship do not. In the Scriptures, we are not God’s equal partners. God as the husband is the master, and Israel or the church as the wife is the subordinate partner. A good patriarchal marriage is one in which the man takes seriously and faithfully his responsibility to be in charge and a woman takes seriously and faithfully her responsibility to follow his lead and his bidding. It is not the Scriptures’ teaching about how marriage is supposed to be, but a starting point in how things are for understanding the relationship of God and his people.
5. The story not only clashes with a Western romantic understanding of marriage and concern for a positive view of womanhood. It presupposes that God is hardnosed and uncompromising in his insistence in using people and is prepared to take the risk of inspiring a story that could seem to validate spousal abuse.[[71]](#footnote-71) There are ancient and modern debates about whether the real God could commission Hosea to his action.[[72]](#footnote-72) The entire family carries a cross for God and for his people. Both the vocation and the sins of the parents are visited on the children. God’s tough stance compares with that described in Romans 9. But the blessing of peacemakers (Matt. 5:9) attaches to this family.
6. There is no indication in the Scriptures that God generally has a view on which individual one should marry. People have neither the obligation nor the right to try to decide whom to marry on the basis of who God wants them to marry. They should marry a fellow member of the people of God, not someone who will defile them and thus defile God. Yet God also assumes the freedom to break his own rules, if he is bidding Hosea marry someone who is not a faithful follower of Yahweh.
7. God assumes the right to give orders to someone he intends to use, orders such as make radical demands on their personal life. God then ignores questions about freedom and fairness. God does what he wishes in light of a purpose bigger than the freedom of or than fairness to a particular individual or family. God’s commission of Hosea coheres with his relationship with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the unnamed prophet who speaks in Isaiah 49, with Jesus and with Paul, and with the account of Jesus’s relationship with his followers. God tells Hosea he must love someone whom he would be expected to repudiate; Jesus tells his followers they must repudiate people whom they would be expected to love. Jesus’s bidding them take up their cross and follow him coheres with God’s bidding to Hosea. The actions embody the stance God himself takes. In Hosea God relates in toughness but also in faithfulness and compassion to Ephraim and to Hosea; in Jesus God relates in compassion but also in toughness to the world and to his followers.
8. Within Ephraim, too, the sins of parents are visited on children. In Hosea’s day Ephraim is no more faithless than in other times, but the ax is now to fall. The story takes for granted the unfaithfulness of the people of God to its lord, her unfaithfulness to her husband. The entire scriptural story works with this assumption, and church history does not suggest that things have changed. One challenge of the story is for the church to ask how unfaithfulness now manifests itself.
9. Hosea’s story illumines the way First Testament, New Testament, and church history portray God’s rejection of his people and his withholding his compassion. The church in the West currently undergoes this experience. God validates the decisions his people make. We turn to other gods; God accepts it and affirms that we will live with the consequences. But we should not underplay God’s deliberate decision-making. In Hosea God does not simply leave things to work out. He attends to, he terminates, he says “I will not be for you/I’m not ‘I am’ for you.” He can cease to be “I am” for us, though he does not cease to be “I am.”
10. But God will never finally cast off his people. Yahweh does not change the name of Jezreel and he cannot get away from the fact that it means “God sows,” and perhaps from the beginning the names that Hosea is given for his children “carry the seed of their reversal.” Certainly for people hearing the Hosea scroll read out a couple of centuries later they would do so. “They serve as markers pointing at the irrevocable character of the relation of these children (/Israel) to their father (/YHWH.”[[73]](#footnote-73) The Talmud imagines God telling Hosea to marry Gomer then telling him to send her away for her unfaithfulness: “If he is able to send her away, so will I too send Israel away” (b. Pesahim 87a).
11. Yahweh’s comment about Jehu contrasts with his involvement in Jehu’s coup in 2 Kings 9—10. Was Elisha mistaken in declaring that Yahweh was giving Jehu a commission? Was his disciple mistaken in elaborating the commission? Did Jehu exceed his commission in killing the Judahite king and the worshipers of the Master? Yahweh did commend Jehu (2 Kings 10:30). The implication is not necessarily that Hosea contradicts the account in Kings (or vice versa), perhaps unconsciously, and even if he did, we would still have to consider the relationship between the two accounts. The concept of progressive revelation might then make us choose 2 Kings rather than Hosea, since 2 Kings is later. Western people would more likely choose Hosea because we don’t like theology to get mixed up in approving violence. The presence of both accounts in the Scriptures could rather be considered in light of the way the Prophets talks about Assyria and Babylon (e.g., Isa. 10; 47). God summoned both powers to come to take action against Judah as his agents in a way that has some analogies with his commission to Jehu. God then critiqued and brought disaster to both powers because their action was motivated by their own ambition and/or was a cause of their own self-congratulation and/or was taken without compassion and with unmitigated harshness.
12. The vision of Judah and Ephraim coming together appears in the vision of a Judahite prophet in Ezekiel 37:15-23 (cf. 48:1-35; also Isa. 11:12-13; Jer. 3:6-18; 31:27-34) as well as in the message of an Ephraimite prophet. The people of God is one.
13. On the quotation of 1:10 [2:1] in Romans 9:26, see the “Theological Implications” of 2:2-23 [4-25].

# Hosea 2:2-23 [4-25]: Threat and Promise

## Translation

2Challenge your mother, challenge,

 because[[74]](#footnote-74) she’s not my woman,

 and I’m not her man,

So she puts away[[75]](#footnote-75) her downright whoring from her face,

 her adultery from between her breasts,

3In order that I don’t strip her bare

 and present her like the day she was born,

Make her like the wilderness,

 render her like a dry country,

 let her die of thirst.

4And towards her children I won’t show compassion,

 because they’re downright whorish children.

5Because their mother whored;

 the one who conceived them acted shamefully.

Because she said,

 “I’ll go after my lovers,[[76]](#footnote-76)

The givers of my bread and my water,

 my wool and my flax,

 my olive oil and my drink.”

6Therefore, here I am, I’m going to block your way[[77]](#footnote-77) with thorn-bushes;

 I’ll erect a wall for her,[[78]](#footnote-78)

 and she won’t find her paths.

7She’ll pursue hard[[79]](#footnote-79) after her lovers, but not catch up with them;

 she’ll seek help from them, but not find.

And she’ll say, “I’ll go, and turn back

 to my first man,[[80]](#footnote-80)

Because things were good for me,

 more so then than now.”
8But she—she hasn’t acknowledged

 that I’m the one who gave her

 the wheat and the new wine and the fresh oil,

and silver that I made manifold for her,

 and gold that they used for the Master.[[81]](#footnote-81)

9Therefore I’ll take back[[82]](#footnote-82)

 my wheat in its time

 and my new wine in its set season.

I’ll rescue my wool and my flax

 for covering[[83]](#footnote-83) her nakedness.

10And now I’ll expose her mindlessness

 before the eyes of her lovers.

None will rescue her from my hand,

 11and I’ll stop all her celebration,

Her festival, her new month, and her Sabbath,

 yes,[[84]](#footnote-84) every set occasion of hers.

12I’ll lay waste to her vine and her fig tree,

 of which she’s said,

“They’re a “gift”[[85]](#footnote-85) for me,

 which my lovers have given me.”

I’ll turn them into a wood,[[86]](#footnote-86)

 and the creature of the wild will eat them.

13I’ll attend[[87]](#footnote-87) to her for the days of the Masters,

 for whom she burns incense,[[88]](#footnote-88)

And has decked herself with ring and necklace,

 and gone after her lovers,

 and as for me—she’s disregarded me (Yahweh’s proclamation).

14Therefore, here, I’m going to entice[[89]](#footnote-89) her,

 and I’ll get her to go to the wilderness,

 and I’ll speak[[90]](#footnote-90) to her inner self.[[91]](#footnote-91)

15I’ll give her vineyards to her from there,

 and Trouble Vale as Hope’s Entrance.[[92]](#footnote-92)

She’ll aver[[93]](#footnote-93) there as in the days of her youth,

 as on the day she came up from the country of Miṣrayim.

16On that day (Yahweh’s proclamation) you’ll call, “My man!”

 and not call to me anymore, “My master.”[[94]](#footnote-94)

17I’ll put away the names of the Masters from her mouth;

 they won’t be brought to mind[[95]](#footnote-95) anymore by their name.

18I’ll solemnize a pact for them[[96]](#footnote-96)

 on that day

With the creature of the wild and with the bird of the heavens,

 and the thing that moves on the ground.

Bow and sword and battle

 I’ll break from the country,

 and let them[[97]](#footnote-97) lie down in confidence.[[98]](#footnote-98)

19I’ll betroth you as mine permanently;

 I’ll betroth you as mine with[[99]](#footnote-99) faithfulness in the making of decisions,

 with commitment and with compassion.

20I’ll betroth you as mine with truth,

 and you’ll acknowledge Yahweh.[[100]](#footnote-100)

21On that day I’ll aver (Yahweh’s proclamation):

 I’ll aver to the heavens,

 and they’ll aver to the earth.

22The earth will aver

 with wheat and with new wine and with fresh oil.

They’ll aver to Yizrə‘ē’l,[[101]](#footnote-101)

 23and I’ll sow her in the country as mine.

I’ll show compassion towards one who was It-is-not-shown-compassion,

 I’ll say to Not-my-people “You’re my people,”

 and he himself will say “My God.”[[102]](#footnote-102)

## Interpretation

Hosea 2:2-23 [4-25] is a reprise of 1:2b—2:1 [3] in the form of prophecy rather than of story. In this adroit and sustained piece of rhetoric, the most sustained in the scroll, Yahweh confronts Ephraim about its whoring, warns it of action he intends to take, but then promises that he will then take further action to reestablish their relationship.

It begins with verses that in themselves seem a straightforward, trenchant, and disturbing address by a husband to his children. Possibly in any society the men would be inclined to identify with the husband and to take his side while the women might be inclined to rush to the wife’s support. People in the West might see it as an attempt to involve the children in the troubles of a marital relationship and to get them to take the husband’s side, and would want to hear the wife’s side of the story. If Hosea declaimed it in a setting such as a public square or sanctuary courtyard, people unfamiliar with Hosea’s convictions and/or with his children’s names might be puzzled about what was going on, like Isaiah’s presumed listeners to his “song” (Isa. 5:1-7). Western readers have to be aware of another way in which assumptions about marriage in our culture is different from that in a traditional culture. There, marriage is especially (though not solely) an economic and work arrangement, though its patriarchalizing leads to a skewing of this aspect as the man gains authority over the woman and controls the family’s economy, and marriage breakdown thus has significant implications for the practical position of a wife.[[103]](#footnote-103)

But imagining the section declaimed in that way may be artificial, because it eventually (v. 23 [25]) presupposes that the hearers know something of the contents of 1:2b—2:1 [3]. In the reading out of the scroll, this section would be heard as a sequel to what precedes rather than on its own. It would still initially raise the questions just noted, but listeners might guess more quickly where it is leading, though they would nevertheless be thrown by the change of tone and message over against 2:1 [3]. We have ricocheted back into the attitude implicit in the bulk of chapter 1.

Verses 3b and 5 [5b and 7] might begin to raise the question whether there was more to Hosea’s declamation than the publicizing of a marital crisis, and succeeding verses would continue to do so, though they also continue with the imagery of a husbandly confrontation. The listeners would be driven into keeping both pictures in their mind, the offended husband threatening his wife because of her unfaithfulness and the offended God threatening his people because of their unfaithfulness, both religious and political.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Women and men in the audience could be troubled by the declamation. Women might be troubled on behalf of the wife being denounced, or judgmental of her, but might then come to see themselves as unfaithful in Yahweh’s eyes. But one point about the imagery would be to get home to the men, who would likely be the majority of the people who heard the prophecy declaimed. “Hosea… is calling the Israelites ‘women.’”[[105]](#footnote-105) He’s metaphorically castrating them.[[106]](#footnote-106) It is not the only way in which he undermines their masculinity.[[107]](#footnote-107) They come to see that the attitude they could imagine taking to an unfaithful wife is the one Yahweh is taking to them. Hosea is not resorting to “the literary expediency of physically victimized women for the sake of the androcentric interests of the biblical narrative” except in the sense that putting the men down is in their interests (but in the women’s interests too). [[108]](#footnote-108)

MT has subsection breaks after vv. 13, 15, and 19 [15, 17, and 21]. I rather take the section’s tricola as a clue to the its structure: it comprises six subsections marked each time by a closing tricolon and in all but one case by an opening tricolon. The subsections come in pairs, the latter in each pair (numbers 2, 4, and 6) heightening its predecessor in the manner of parallelism. Three subsections open with “therefore,” a common marker of such transitions in the messages of prophets: prophets speak like a representative of the village elders or of a town’s administration, who first denounces someone for an action and then with a “therefore” declares the restitution that the offender must offer. In this section, that metaphor covers only the middle of the three therefores. In the other occurrences, a different logic is at work. In the movement between the pairs, the first pair focuses on accusation; its threats are rather vague. The second focuses on threats, which become more concrete. The last begin with another “therefore,” giving the impression that things are going to become yet worse, but then move in an opposite direction. Throughout, “shifts of status are underscored by different uses of the particle *lo’* (not)—or by its strategic absence.”[[109]](#footnote-109)

Like the story, the prophecy would be designed to break through to Ephraimites to get them to face the implications of their stance towards Yahweh, yet in light of its promises, it would invite them not to be hindered from or confounded by facing up to facts.

**Hosea 2:2-3 [4-5].** The prophecy begins with a declaration that recalls the bringing of a case at the town gate when one member of the community issues a charge against another (e.g., Exod. 23:1-3; Prov. 18:17; 25:8-9).

The one who issues the bidding (v. 2a [4a]) addresses not the one he is accusing or the elders or the mayor but some potential witnesses or advocates. He thereby suggests the distance between accuser and accused. It is his children that he addresses in this way, which indicates the depth of the problem between him and his wife (it might already raise the question of how literal the audience should be about the language). The idea of the children bringing their mother before the authorities turns things upside down; the Torah speaks only of parents bringing their (grown-up) children before the authorities.

In isolation “She’s not my woman/wife and I’m not her man/husband”) would be tantamount to a speech act: the man is hereby divorcing his wife. In an actual legal context, the authorities’ responsibility would then include seeing that a woman received divorce papers (Deut. 24:1; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8), though circumstances such as unfaithfulness may mean there would be none. The expression is not a legal formula in such a connection, as far as we know, but it is a strikingly parallel negative equivalent to the adoption formula “You’re my son,” especially as adapted in phrases such as “I will be his father and he will be my son” (2 Sam. 7:14). It is a declaration that the marriage is over in all but the legalities. Yet the subsequent argument presupposes that all need not be over. A challenge which the children are to pass on to their mother with a view to her changing her behavior rather constitutes a protest that she is behaving as if they are divorced and an implicit warning that divorce is where her action will lead. The mother is offered a choice: change or disaster (“in order that…”).

Hosea now speaks of adultery (v. 2b [4b]) not only of whoring, which denotes any sexual activity outside marriage and does not presuppose that the “whore” is married. As the Torah makes clear, adultery is a matter of community concern, not just a private matter between three people. The reference to adultery heightens the parallelism in the line; so does the move from “face” to “breasts.” The former suggests a brazenness of look on a part of the body that is visible to anyone, while the latter refers to a part of the body that is hidden but comes into play in connection with sex; or perhaps both refer to clothing or jewelry that advertise the woman to be a “loose woman” or “tart.”

Stripping (v. 3 [5]) might be a way of shaming and/or an aspect of the husband’s taking back what he has provided. But the reference to bareness also prepares the way for the reference to the (bare) wilderness where lack of water is an issue. Dying of thirst suggests being deprived of water through being cast out. While Israel does not seem to have treated the Torah’s death penalty for adultery as a sanction designed for literal implementation, the effect of the action Hosea describes would be execution. But “like the wilderness/dry country” raises the question whether the woman is not simply a woman and the man not simply a man. When prophets speak of someone bringing a case against someone else, it’s usually a metaphor for Yahweh bringing a case against his people, though the people who first listened to Hosea might not yet be familiar with that metaphor. Yahweh is declaring that his relationship with Ephraim is over and that Ephraim is finished as a people unless it changes its ways.

Suppose listeners perceive Hosea’s point. In the rhetoric, they are the children. Who is their mother? Is Asherah the spouse Yahweh is divorcing?[[110]](#footnote-110) The section will indicate that The image of mother also refers to them, not as Israel/Ephraim (which is always treated as masculine) but either as the country (cf. 1:2; *’ereș* is feminine) or as the town to which they belong (towns are treated as feminine, not merely grammatically but metaphorically).[[111]](#footnote-111) While people reading the scroll might identify the town as Jezreel (1:4-5, 11 [2:1]), Samaria is the town Hosea most often refers to (in 8:5-6 it is explicitly feminine)—not surprisingly as it was Ephraim’s capital. The mother city or the mother country will be turned into a desolate wilderness.

**Hosea** **2:4-5 [6-7].** The second subsection moves from speaking to the children to speaking about them, without reducing the discomfort.

 Hosea continues (v. 4 [6]) to work resolutely with the image of a husband sounding off about his family. While people reading the scroll will be able to perceive that the prophecy is applying to the listeners the earlier talk about not being shown compassion, nothing in the subsection itself explicitly refers to Yahweh and Samaria/Ephraim. The children now hear themselves being talked about in the third person. They thus have to look at themselves from a distance. They are themselves now accused rather than simply summoned to accuse their mother. There is thus some heightening in the subsection.

Parallelism again adds a term to “whoring” (v. 5 [7]). This time it moves to whoring as a shameful act, which is linked to the idea of taking a case to the elders at the town gate. When you are accused there, and the accusation is true, you are publicly shamed. There are actions that a community regards as honorable and actions it regards as shameful. These are tied up with safeguarding the community’s stability, though they may also be associated with moral questions. Whoring is linked with morality and with community stability—less so than adultery, but it so tied. Like adultery, no sexual activity outside marriage is simply a private act between two consenting adults.

A husband is responsible for making sure his wife has food, drink, and clothing. This wife looks elsewhere for them. She “went after” her lovers; Hosea picks up the reference to the country “whoring from [going] after Yahweh” (1:2). “Lovers” suggests promiscuity (several partners) rather than simply one sexual relationship outside marriage. The plural also links with the implicit allegory. The lovers are the entities the children’s mother believed were givers of her everyday physical needs, bread and water, wool and flax (for making linen), olive oil and drink (in the context, “drink” will carry the same connotations as the word does in English).

On the assumption that the lovers are the Masters, the *bə‘ālîm*, it is noteworthy that they are connected with fertility not with storm or war.[[112]](#footnote-112) But Tg interprets the lovers as the nations, with which indeed Ephraim (and Judah) went astray, and political moves can be described in terms of love and adultery (7:3-4; 8:9-10).[[113]](#footnote-113) Alliances with other nations would mean compromising Ephraim’s relationship with Yahweh both in ceasing to rely on Yahweh and in engaging in religious rites that involved sharing in the other nations’ worship. Whoring might also be a way of categorizing trading relations with other nations, with the oppression that nascent globalization could bring to ordinary people.[[114]](#footnote-114)

**Hosea** **2:6-8 [8-10].** The first of three therefores introduces the third subsection. Though the language may reflect that of the administration at the gate, it leads into measures that are not punitive but constraining and reformatory.

Obstructing the woman’s paths (v. 6 [8])may be a general figure for constraining her life and in particular her moral path, but the object signified may have passed over into the signifier: the woman is in the habit of going to the shrines to pay homage to her “lovers”; Yahweh intends to make it impossible for her to get there.

“Seeking help” (v. 7 [9]) anticipates the use of this verb in connection with Yahweh, which will soon come in its proper connection (3:5; cf. 5:6, 15; 7:10). “Seeking” implies having recourse in order to ask for something. The language of seeking and not finding is ironically and poignantly similar to the girl’s language in the Song of Songs. While the Song would not have been in existence in Hosea’s time, its parallels with Egyptian love poetry indicate that it represents a longstanding tradition. Hosea and his audience could be familiar with poetry using figures like the ones that come here. This woman feels the freedom assumed in the Song to take an initiative in relation to a man, an aspect of the egalitarian relationship between the sexes. But as a married woman she’s not entitled to that assumption in relating to other men.

In Song 1.13, the woman's lover lies between her breasts like a sachet of myrrh; in Hosea… this is replaced by the signs of her adultery. In the Song the birth of the loversis an epiphany: the woman was “splendid to the one who gave her birth” (6.9), the man is awakened to love and to lifein a birth scene under an apple tree, full of cosmic significance (8.5). In Hosea, being reducedto one's birth state is evidence of utter dehumanization; nakedness is the subject of shame instead of celebration, as in the Song. The wilderness, in Hosea*,* is a sign of the woman's desolation and death by thirst; in the Song, it is the place of the lovers’ tryst, associated with exotic spices and sights (1.14; 3.6; 8.5). In the Song 4.8 the woman is invited to come down from Lebanon, the home of wild beasts; here, wild beasts threaten devastation.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Hopefully, her frustration leads her to return to her husband, her first “man” (v. 7b [9b]). “Turn back” (*šûb*)would be the appropriate word if Hosea were to speak directly of Ephraim repenting, but the link is ironic. The woman’s words signify no such turning. Peeping from behind the allegory is an awareness that Ephraim was better off in the time of Moses, Joshua, or David. Such a return might issue from the husband’s action, but it hasn’t happened yet.

Up until now she has not “acknowledged” who was her provider (v. 8a [10a]). It’s the first occurrence of *yāda‘*,a key verb in Hosea. The regular translation of *yāda‘*  is “know,” and it often has that meaning. But it commonly denotes not merely awareness but recognition, for which English conveniently has the verb “acknowledge” which is related to the verb “know.” The issue with the wife is not that she doesn’t know who her husband is, but that she doesn’t acknowledge it. In some contexts *yāda‘* suggests personal intimacy, but that is not the point here. In other contexts *yāda‘* denotes having sex, but in such contexts it does not imply personal intimacy, and this connotation is also not the point here, though one might note the irony in the fact that the lovers’ superficial, even quasi-sexual knowing is to give way to a deep committed acknowledgment of Yahweh (v. 20 [22]).

Combinations such as wheat, new wine, and fresh oil appear frequently in the First Testament to summarize the fundamental gifts of the soil that are basic to human life (e.g., Deut. 7:13; 11:14). The combination might also be significant because they are equivalent of cash crops that can be a medium of taxation and consequently of tribute and international trade (e.g., 2 Chron. 2:10), and thus be symbols of prosperity.[[116]](#footnote-116) New wine and fresh oil (*tîrôš*, *yiṣhār*) are different from regular wine and oil (*yayin, šemen*); they suggest the first fruits of the harvest. Wheat (*dāgān*, over against *šeber*) hints at the same implication. The husband imagines his wife acknowledging that his provision was superior to what she got from her lovers.

He then extends the area of their non-acknowledgment (v. 8b [10b]) from food and clothing to silver and gold. There’s no implication of remarkable prosperity in the time to which the prophecy belongs, and no such reference in the account in 2 Kings, though Jeroboam’s reign was one of stability which would imply prosperity. While silver is a medium of exchange in a non-monetary society, the main point of silver and gold is ornamental rather than functional. They are used for jewelry, but also for beautifying sanctuaries. At the climax of the subsection Hosea thus makes the first explicit reference to the reality behind the allegory. Samaria/Ephraim compounds its insulting of Yahweh: it not only fails to acknowledge where its silver and gold came from, but it uses it to beautify the Master’s sanctuary or to plate an image for the Master (cf. Isa. 40:19). To return to the allegory, perhaps the silver and gold were his marriage gift to her, so the scandal is the greater. The point is the closing shot in the third colon.

**Hosea** **2:9-13 [11-15].** Another “therefore” opens the fourth subsection, introducing a further stage in the husband’s response to his wife’s whoring. It follows logically from her regarding someone else as the supplier of her needs.

Their actual supplier (“my” comes four times) will therefore withdraw them (v. 9 [11]). The wife may be thinking about returning; meanwhile the husband is going to insist on the return of the things that derived from him. Harvest will come, the time when crops come to fullness, but it won’t do her any good. The implication may be that Ephraim’s harvest will fail: things will not ripen when they should, presumably because the rains haven’t come when needed. The husband will also snatch away her clothes and thus expose her sexually. Nakedness (*‘ervah*) denotes parts of the body one would cover. It’s a paradoxical threat, because a whorish woman is one who doesn’t mind exposing herself in that way.

She will also experience another exposure (v. 10a [12a]). As she thinks that the provision of food and clothing comes through having recourse to her lovers, this other exposure that will come in the context of that seeking: her husband will uncover her “mindlessness,” her *nəbālāh*. The word recalls the moral stupidity embodied in Nabal (1 Sam. 25), but it can carry the connotation of specifically sexual immorality (cf. BDB), which fits here.[[117]](#footnote-117) She will appear before her lovers at the shrine without the grain, wine, and decent clothes one needs for worship, and she will look stupid.

It will also mean their exposure (vv. 10b-11 [12b-13]), because they won’t be able to rescue her from her husband’s action. Outside the allegory, the potential rescuer is perhaps a political power such as Assyria (cf. 5:12-14; 7:11-12).[[118]](#footnote-118) The forcefulness of the action that would be required has already been signaled in the reference to rescuing or snatching in v. 9 [11]. The husband’s forcibly taking everything away and the lovers’ inability to do anything about it mean that there will be nothing to celebrate at the shrines, or celebration will have to become fasting and lament.[[119]](#footnote-119) The loss is explicated in terms of the annual festivals, the celebrations at the beginning of each lunar month, and the weekly Sabbath. Mentioning only the first two could simply imply reference to the Canaanite cycle of worship, but adding reference to Sabbath points in another direction. Only Israelites observed the Sabbath. The worship the husband will terminate is not simply worship of the lovers as if people were Canaanites but worship of Yahweh that preserves the form of Israelite worship but fills it with Canaanite content. “Stop” is *šābat*, so the declaration implies “I will stop her stopping day” (they are the first and last words in the line) or even “I will impose a sabbath on her observances and her Sabbath.”[[120]](#footnote-120)

The husband spells out further the action he intends. Vine and fig tree (v. 12 [14]) are key fruit trees (the olive is the third). The vine means wine; the fig is the chief source of sweetness. The collocation of these two also recalls the image of an ideal secure and happy life as sitting under one’s vine and fig tree.[[121]](#footnote-121) Wasting them restates the warning about turning the town into a wilderness in v. 3 [5]. The woman sees them as her lovers’ provision, so they resemble a “gift” given to a whore (it’s payment for services rendered, but it’s nicer to think of it as a gift). Here Hosea does speak in terms of the town as a prostitute, though his use of the word for “lovers” may suggest a relationship where the man is not merely paying for occasional sex but maintaining a relationship and giving the woman financial support.

The subsection ends (v. 13a [15a]) by restating the reasons for Yahweh’s action and making more explicit what the allegory refers to.[[122]](#footnote-122) The subsection as a whole thus parallels the previous one, but also takes it further. Yahweh intends to take action because of “the days of the Masters”—that is, those occasions that are really observed in honor of the Masters, even if Yahweh features on peoples’ lips. Hosea can move artlessly between speaking of “the Master” and of “the Masters.” Different expressions of the Master such as “Master of Pe’or” (9:10) were understood as different expressions of the same deity, but “Master” was also a general-purpose word for gods. The occasions are ones on which people offer incense, a synecdoche for offering sacrifice. Or perhaps we should translate “burn things in sacrifice,” though the attractive nature of the occasion is still in mind: compare our enjoyment of the smell of barbecue.

To revert to the metaphor of lovers (v. 13b [15b]), the people have been like a woman decking herself in her finery (it might include a nose ring or an earring) for her lovers in order to “go after” them (cf. 1:2; 2:5 [7]), which involves “disregarding” Yahweh. The verb (*šakaḥ*) is conventionally “forget,” but it denotes a deliberate putting out of mind, as “remembering” involves a deliberate keeping in mind (cf. v. 17 [19], of the Masters). With this word Yahweh’s indictment comes to a “grievous” conclusion.[[123]](#footnote-123) The subsection actually closes with the affirmation that this is indeed “Yahweh’s proclamation,” the first of three such affirmations in the section which underline the point. Ephraim really needs to take this message seriously. Yahweh is behind it.

**Hosea 2:14-18 [16-20].** Not surprisingly the fifth subsection begins with another “therefore,” but the logic in Hosea’s words, after what has gone before, is surprising, though the movement matches that within 1:2b—2:1 [3]. This comparison would suggest that the positive action in this subsection follows on the punitive action in what preceded, but there are other possibilities. Yahweh’s warnings are designed to get people to respond and to make their implementation unnecessary. A community that listens though this entire section, then, is invited to choose between the vv. 2-13 [4-15] and vv. 14-23 [16-25]. Yet another way of reading the “therefore” takes it to imply, “given what I will do if things continue as they are, I’ll undertake an alternative form of action to try to make it unnecessary to do what I’ve been threatening.” Or perhaps Yahweh himself has been facing different options but is eventually deciding on this one (cf. 6:4; 11:8).[[124]](#footnote-124) He has been challenging people to change, with the implication that he will then respond. He is reaching out to people, coaxing and acting, in the conviction or expectation or hope that they will then respond. Surely they will? It’s more a hope than a prediction, because the response has to come from them. God can’t predetermine it. If God did so, it wouldn’t be their response. But surely they will give that response?

Yahweh’s language (v. 14 [16]) doesn’t especially parallel the Song of Songs, but the picture is similar. A man is trying to win the affection of a girl or seduce her. But the time in the wilderness is to be a time of talking straight, not simply of lovey dovey talk. In its own wilderness context in Isaiah 40:2 the recurrence of the phrase about speaking to her inner self carries both the encouraging and the straight-talking implications. Once more, the language moves easily between the metaphor and its referent—or rather between the metaphor and another figure for that referent. That is, the wilderness is a figure for the place where things were good between Yahweh and Israel. There was no problem with the Masters there. It’s an idealization, given the story about the Master of Pe’or (to whom Hosea alludes in 9:10);[[125]](#footnote-125) it’s another figure of speech.

The speaking will be accompanied by action (v. 15 [17]) that contrasts with the action threatened in the previous subsection. Concretely put, Yahweh will give her (back) her vineyards “from the (the change that will come about) there.” Trouble Vale in the strict sense is one of the valleys leading into the mountains of Canaan from Jericho; Joshua 7 explains why it’s called Trouble Vale. The move into Canaan from the wilderness had indeed involved trouble in that valley. The new move back into Canaan from the wilderness will mean going the same way, but it won’t be spoiled as the first one was. The same valley will become an entrance into the land through which Israel can walk with confident expectation—it will be Hope’s Entrance (Petaḥ Tiqvāh, the name of an Israeli city on the coastal plain). Yes, it will be like the day they came up from Egypt (the name “Egypt” comes from the Greek equivalent of Miṣrayim). Yahweh will have to choose his day carefully. The day of the deliverance from the Reed Sea is really the only one to which this recollection can refer (see Exod. 14:31). Arguably, Hosea’s talk about Israel’s beginnings deconstructs.[[126]](#footnote-126)

Now (v. 16 [18]) for only the second time in the entire section Yahweh directly addresses his “wife”[[127]](#footnote-127) and declares that she herself will now move from proclaiming “My master” to proclaiming “My man/husband.” It is apposite that this move by both parties is attributed to “that day,” a day belonging to a whole new age (see the comments on 1:5). If Yahweh’s declaration in v. 2 was tantamount to a threat about divorce, the woman’s declaration is tantamount to another speech-act, like “you’re my son.” It’s a commitment to marriage.[[128]](#footnote-128) Apparently people are used to addressing Yahweh himself as Master (*ba‘al*). It’s another indication that the problem with Ephraim is not that they see themselves as having stopped worshiping Yahweh in order to turn to other deities but that they worship Yahweh among other deities and worship Yahweh as if he were like those other deities.[[129]](#footnote-129) In theory there would be nothing wrong with worshiping Yahweh as their Master; Israelite names with the word *ba‘al* in them (e.g., Saul’s son Eshba‘al) don’t have to indicate worship of the Master as opposed to Yahweh. But the title Master has become tainted through its association with *ba‘al*.

So the name will no longer be used (v. 17 [19]). The bringing to mind or mentioning will apply in worship, but also in contexts such as oaths and contracts. They will worship Yahweh as their man, their husband, the only one to whom they commit themselves and on whom they rely. It will be their action, their change, vv. 15b-16 [17b-18] have declared, but it will be a response to Yahweh’s coaxing and giving, promised in vv. 14-15a [16-17a]; thus Yahweh can revert to speaking of the change as something he brings about.

The further promises in this subsection (v. 18a [20a]) bring it to a climax and take Yahweh’s restoring action further. They will be fulfilled “on that day,” the day when Ephraim has renewed her commitment. The repeated occurrence of the expression is a good example of its dynamic. Yahweh is not talking about something eschatological in the sense of belonging to the end of history or bound to come only in the far-off future, but it is eschatological in the sense of being something profoundly new, which changes things radically and brings in a new age that brings to fulfillment the purpose that Yahweh always had.

It will involve the solemnizing of a pact (*bərit*); I avoid the conventional translation “covenant” because it has many overtones (“pact” has overtones, but not so complex). A pact is a formal commitment with practical implications, which one party makes to another or two parties make to each other, such as a contract or a treaty—or a covenant. Its seriousness as a commitment is signaled by its being “solemnized,” literally “cut,” by a ceremony that implies a self-curse on someone who makes the commitment and breaks it (see Gen. 15; Jer. 34:18). In substance this pact is a reaffirmation or remaking of the pact in the Torah, especially as it relates to provision from nature (e.g., Deut. 28). But there’s no need to attempt to relate all the “covenants” in the Scriptures to one another. God makes lots of commitments to his people. The promises here link more significantly with Genesis 1—3. There humanity is commissioned to rule over the animal world but it then submits to its rule and finds its relation with it disrupted. God doesn’t speak there in terms of a pact, though he does so after almost destroying the earth (Gen. 9:8-10). In effect Ephraim is promised that it will be able to rule the animal world instead of its creatures being in rebellion as they were in v. 12 and as the Torah threatened; one might also contrast Amos 5:19.[[130]](#footnote-130) Yahweh is not making a pact between himself and the animals (there is no need for one) but mediating a pact between Ephraim and the animals on Ephraim’s behalf (the humanity Hosea speaks of is Ephraim not the world).

Yahweh’s commitment has a second element (v. 18b [20b]), relating to the nation’s political needs. Its terms recall the earlier promise about deliverance (1:7). The reference to war suggests the time long after Jeroboam’s death when Assyria started behaving more aggressively towards Ephraim (see 2 Kings 15).

**Hosea** **2:19-23 [21-25].** The final subsection restates the penultimate one, but again goes beyond it in the manner of parallelism.

The restoration of the personal relationship becomes a “betrothal” (v. 19a [21a]), which is something in between engagement and marriage. The couple have not yet left their parents, set up home together, and united sexually, but they have made a commitment as serious and binding as marriage, and they have exchanged marriage gifts, so that breaking a betrothal implies divorce (cf. Matt. 1:19). But this betrothal will be permanent—in other words, it will be a marriage.[[131]](#footnote-131)

In spelling out the implications of the betrothal (v. 19b [21b]), the prophet again moves between language that works with the marriage metaphor and language that refers more strictly to the reality the metaphor refers to. “The borders between signifier and signified are blurred. The focus of the text shifts from Hosea-Gomer to Yahweh-Israel in a way so that it is impossible to mark the points of transition.”[[132]](#footnote-132) “With” could denote the marriage gift that a groom or his family makes to a bride or her family. The hendiadys “faithfulness in the making of decisions” (*bəṣedeq ûbəmišpāt*) is a key characteristic of Yahweh in Deuteronomy, the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets. The common translation of this expression as “righteousness and justice” gives a doubly misleading impression. The first word denotes doing right by the people with whom one is in a committed relationship—one’s community. The second denotes the exercise of legitimate power or government. The First Testament uses the particular form of the first (*ṣedeq* as opposed to *ṣədāqāh*) especially to denote this quality when exercised by God, as here. Yahweh’s use of the words here recognizes that having entered into a relationship with Israel, he cannot finally cast Israel off; it anticipates a use that will recur in Isaiah 40—55.

The second pair of words, commitment and compassion (*bəḥesed* *ûbəraḥămîm*) do not form a regular pair like the first two, but both come in the list of qualities that Yahweh claims in his self-revelation at Sinai following on his taking action against Israel for a deed that Ephraim’s deeds dangerously resemble (Exod. 34:6-7). From that self-revelation Yahweh first uses the word “commitment” (conventionally “steadfast love” or the like). It indicates the kind of unconditional steadfastness that goes beyond any regular loyalty or faithfulness in that it continues even when the other party has forfeited any right to its being maintained. Yahweh further uses the word “compassion,” whose related verb came with a negative earlier in the section, in v. 4 [6]. This occurrence of course gains extra significance through the section’s following 1:2b—2:1 [3] where the verb comes several times.

Yahweh takes the sequence of nouns further (v. 20 [22]) in speaking of truth in the sense of truthfulness and steadfastness (*’ĕmûnāh*: again compare Exod. 34:6-7, where *ḥesed* pairs with the related noun ’*ĕmet*). One could summarize Yahweh’s stance in relation to Ephraim in vv. 19-20a [21-22a] as “acknowledging Ephraim”; v. 20b [22b] is then the final stroke summarizing the correlative implications of the two verses. One could conversely spell out the implications of Ephraim’s acknowledging Yahweh as involving faithfulness in the exercise of authority, commitment, and compassion. The qualities in the two verses will characterize both parties in the renewed relationship.[[133]](#footnote-133) The two verses are prescribed for reciting each morning as Jews put on tefillin (phylacteries).[[134]](#footnote-134)

Yahweh’s promise leads yet further into some more averring (vv. 21-23aα [23-25aα]). Once again, “on that day” (cf. vv. 16, 18 [18, 20]) marks not a new subsection but a taking of the point further, suggesting a day within people’s experience and history when Yahweh’s creation purpose is fulfilled. Averring or solemnly declaring fits in the marital context. Yahweh describes a several-fold chain of such avowel: by him to the heavens, by the heavens to the earth, and by the earth to Jezreel in particular, though it is nevertheless to be seen as his own sowing there. The result will be the restoration of those key natural gifts of grain, new wine, and fresh oil (cf. vv. 4-5 [6-7]), and the reversal of the Torah’s warnings about the penalty for unfaithfulness. The reference to Jezreel once again indicates a link between this section and 1:2b—2:1 [3], specifically with the promises at the end of that section.

The link continues in the final tricolon (v. 23aβb [25aβb]) which rounds off the section with a reformulation of 2:1 [3]. It also a makes explicit Ephraim’s response which did not feature there, though it is equivalent to statements in 2:16 [18]. Thus on the maxi-scale, 2:2-23 [4-25] parallels 1:2b—2:1 [3]. But it also heightens it; Yahweh hardly every repeats himself so you have to stay alert until the very end of the line or subsection or section.

## Theological Implications

1. God has a corporate relationship with his people as well as a relationship with individuals. The people of God engage in unfaithfulness, God judges his people and does so now and not just at the End, the people of God as a body needs to turn back to God, and there is hope for the people of God as a body.[[135]](#footnote-135)
2. God acts against his people for several reasons. One is that he feels strongly, as a husband or wife does about their spouse’s unfaithfulness. While God is objective and rational, God is also involved and passionate. God is loving and merciful, and also jealous and wrathful. God has the entire range of emotions that belong to being a person, though of course he has them with a maturity and appropriateness that is often lacking in human beings who also have that range of emotions because they are made in his image.
3. In relating to humanity at times when he must act against them, God uses both logic and rhetoric. The therefores in this section draw attention to the role of logic. God wants people to understand his logic and to live in light of it. He acts on the basis of logic in seeking forcefully to halt his people’s wrongdoing, because of his commitment to shaping his people in the direction he wishes for them in relation to him. He acts on the basis of logic in initiating action against them for their wrongdoing (cf. Jesus’s parables in Matt 21—25; Rev 2—3); he is committed to acting against the wrongdoing of his people as against that of others (maybe more so). God acts on the basis of logic in restoring his people because of his commitment to being faithful no matter what happens, especially to his people. God “combines the sentence of punishment with the change for the better, as is the custom with the prophets, following the example in this of blessed David, who frequently in the Psalms both spoke of calamities and promised relief,… the purpose being to raise hope though the promise of good things as to instil fear through words of calamity” (e.g., Ps. 31).[[136]](#footnote-136)

So far as the written records go, Hosea was the first to declare expressly that the action of Yahweh in His covenant with Israel is in every respect and form the action of His love. He did so very graphically by using the picture of a marriage between Yahweh and His people; and his presentation is all the more impressive because it is set in contrast and connexion with the severest proclamation of judgment. God's action is that of love at the beginning of this relationship: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (111). But it is also that of love in the present which is so seriously jeopardised by its disobedience: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord" (219f.). It is also that of love in relation to the future: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him" (144); and "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor (woe) for a door of hope: and she will sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it will be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me "My husband"; and thou shalt call me no more "My Baal" (214f.).[[137]](#footnote-137)

1. God also uses rhetoric. He knows that people are mysteriously resistant to mere logic. Something else is needed to break through to them (one may again compare Jesus’s parables). “The overt messages of Hoseaare those of a baffled deity.”[[138]](#footnote-138)
2. Change in God’s people will come about through his action and though their action. God takes the initiative, but their action is also required. The relation between these two actions is a mystery, like the development in the relationship between two human beings.
3. God takes risks in the way he inspires his servants to communicate. There is the general risk involved in using metaphor. Any single metaphor is bound to be narrow and can be seriously misleading, so God uses a variety of images and metaphors to do justice to "the complexity and richness of the divine-human relationship.” We also must maintain this diversity of metaphors in order to realize the potentials in the richness of human experience. [[139]](#footnote-139)
4. “Who would not reasonably be astonished at the loving kindness of God, who though God and Maker and Lord calls himself *husband* and not master?”[[140]](#footnote-140) Yet “talk about sex and sexuality tends to provoke, rouse, humiliate, and captivate people.”[[141]](#footnote-141) And comparing God to a cuckolded husband is risky. No metaphor perfectly corresponds to the thing it is designed to illuminate. In the case of this metaphor, for women who have been the victims of domestic and sexual violence, the image of God as ravaging husband may be intolerable.[[142]](#footnote-142) Even if there is a renewal of the marriage, there is still a problem in a husband’s seeing himself as God.[[143]](#footnote-143)
5. Knowledge of God is not merely a matter of insight or awareness or intimate relationship but of acknowledgment.
6. It’s possible for worship to be formally given to the scriptural God but to be substantially pagan.
7. God is the giver of the crops. He “plainly shows that the whole order of nature… is in his hand.”[[144]](#footnote-144) If God does not make things grow, we have nothing to eat. Churches therefore properly celebrate harvest festivals. In addition, relationship with God and material provision are interrelated. The Scriptures do not assume that every famine issues from wrongdoing, but when famine happens, they invite us to ask whether we are guilty of wrongdoing.
8. The Day of Yahweh or “that day” is the ultimate day when God’s final purpose is achieved. It also happens periodically in an interim realization of what it stands for.
9. God promises a day when tension or conflict between the human world and the animal world will come to an end, in a reversal of the situation anticipated in Genesis 9:2.[[145]](#footnote-145)
10. Hosea has little interest in God’s relationship with the world beyond Israel. Paul quotes 2:23 as well as 1:10 in connection with God’s intention to bring into being a great people of God from all the nations (Rom. 9:25-26; cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10), but in these passages Hosea is referring to reestablishing Ephraim as his people. The quotations compare with the paradoxical nature of many other New Testament quotations. The First Testament knows that God intends to bless all the nations by means of Israel, so Paul’s argument coheres with the First Testament, and Paul knows that God is still committed to Israel, as the texts he quotes say, though he ignores this fact. The principle enunciated in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 declares that the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the process whereby the Scriptures came into being makes it possible for passages to be significant in a way that has little or nothing to do with their contextual meaning.
11. Hosea and Paul do have a principle in common: “Scripture proves that those who were not God’s people can by God’s gracious act become his people.”[[146]](#footnote-146) One might put the point the opposite way:

When Paul states that he sees the prophecy concerning Northern Israel fulfilled in the calling of the Gentiles we have to do with a conclusion a maiori ad minus.[[147]](#footnote-147) If God's mercy is so rich and powerful even upon Gentiles who were standing wholly under His curse and sentence of rejection, how much more so upon those to whom He has already promised it! Indeed we must even read and understand the Hosea quotations quite simply as a repetition of the prophecy originally—and as established by its comprehensive fulfilment, definitively—addressed to Israel, namely to that other, rejected Israel. In the course of speaking of the calling of the Gentiles they speak—and now that this has become event, they speak no less but all the more strictly—of the future of this rejected Israel. Admittedly they too… speak of the vessels of wrath and dishonour in which the history of Israel is uncannily rich. Of the twelve tribes, ten are in Hosea already assigned quite summarily to this side. So they, too, speak of the riddle of the Synagogue, of the elected people which can only be called Lo' Ru'ama, Lo' 'Ammi. They speak of it, however, in such a way as to keep before it as such the word of grace which applies to it, too, and in it to promise a future that will not be the work of God's wrath but of His mercy which applies to Israel also. This future of the lost people Israel already become present in the calling of the Gentiles justifies the God of Israel even as the God of Ishmael and Esau, even as the God of Pharaoh. The God who has given this promise precisely to the rejected among His elected people, and who has fulfilled this promise in the ten times rejected who had never been His elected people, cannot possibly be accused, but in view of the miracle of His mercy can only be praised, for His faithfulness and wisdom. Israel has only to recognise this miracle and hold to it as the consolation given to it, as the picture of its own future, and it will have no more occasion for complaints about the unrighteousness of God.[[148]](#footnote-148)

# Hosea 3:1-5: Hosea and Gomer (ii)

## Translation

­1Yahweh said to me further,[[149]](#footnote-149)

Go love a woman

 loved by[[150]](#footnote-150) a neighbor[[151]](#footnote-151) and committing adultery,

Like Yahweh’s love for the Yiśrā’ēlites

 though[[152]](#footnote-152) they turn their face to other gods

 and love pressings of grapes.[[153]](#footnote-153)

2I negotiated for her[[154]](#footnote-154) to be mine for fifteen silver pieces, a barrel of barley, and a half-barrel of barley,[[155]](#footnote-155) 3and I said to her,

 You’re to stay mine[[156]](#footnote-156) for a long time;

 you’re not to whore.

 You’re not to be a man’s,

 and so I too will be towards you.[[157]](#footnote-157)

4Because the Israelites will stay for a long time without king, without official, without sacrifice, without pillar,[[158]](#footnote-158) and without chasuble or effigies.[[159]](#footnote-159) 5Afterwards, the Israelites will turn back[[160]](#footnote-160) and seek help from Yahweh their God and from David their king. They will be awestruck[[161]](#footnote-161) towards Yahweh and towards his goodness at the end of the time.

## Interpretation

Broadly, the sequence of chapters 1, 2, and 3 tell a story, or rather two stories (Hosea’s and God’s), though the episodes overlap. Chapter 1 tells of the beginning of the marriage(s) and their breakdown, and looks forward to their healing. Chapter 2 starts from the breakdown and promises the healing. Chapter 3 presupposes the breakdown and initiates the healing. Chapter 1 could stand on its own, but chapter 2 requires chapter 1 (see especially 2:23 [25]). Chapter 3 also requires chapter 1: see the “further” in v. 1, while v. 3 is a distinctive restatement of the declaration in 2:23 [25]. One might see 3:1-5 as the prophet’s “seal” or “confirmation” or summary or conclusion to chapter 2.[[162]](#footnote-162) Thus in chapters 1—3 “readers face a kind of ‘loop’ in which themes addressed before are revisited and developed.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Yet the three parts are formally distinct: a third-person narrative, a prophetic message, and a first-person testimony. Did Hosea’s testimony come first, inspiring disciples to write the third-person testimony and to generate the prophecy in chapter 2?

Strictly, it is simply vv. 1-3 that are the first-person account, coming to their climax in v. 3 with that distinctive restatement of the declaration in 2:23 [25]. They are lines of verse set in a prose context (cf. Jeremiah’s testimony in Jer. 1:4-10). Verses 4-5 spell out the allegory more prosaically. The “because” make a link with vv. 1-3, and “for a long time” and “will stay” pick up phrases from v. 3 (“the Israelites” also recurs from v. 1). So vv. 4-5 are designed to follow vv. 1-3 and to interpret it. But the two expressions just noted have different meanings from the ones they had in v. 3, which might indicate that they are pieces of later inspired comment. It would then not be surprising if the David reference marks them as part of a Judahite redaction which envisages the collapse of Ephraim (v. 4), an eventual turning to Yahweh and to Judah (v. 5a), and a restoration of Ephraim (v. 5b). The section thus encourages Ephraim and Judah with the promise that Yahweh has not finished with Ephraim.

**Hosea 3:1.** Hosea thus provides his own formulation of the commission related in 1:2, though the “further” links back to Yahweh’s speaking in chapter 2 as much as to that in chapter 1. The woman is characterized in the sharper fashion of chapter 2: she is not merely whorish but adulterous. Presumably she is again Gomer: the message Hosea brings by talking about his marital relationship would not work if Hosea and Yahweh gave up on one spouse and sought out another.

The valuable aspect to understanding Hosea’s story as an allegory or vision[[164]](#footnote-164) is that his testimony is not directly concerned with his marriage, and we cannot with certainty infer what was going on in that marriage. His aim is to get his hearers to imagine a symbolic act that he undertook. Designating the woman as adulterous signifies that she represents Ephraim’s adulterous relationship with the Masters. Ephraim engages in this relationship by following the patterns of the traditional religion of Canaan and/or by its political involvement with its neighbors and allies which implies its trusting in such involvement rather than in Yahweh and/or by its engaging in religious observances associated with the making of treaties that entailed the recognition of these neighbors’ deities.

Yahweh refers four times to love (*’āhēb*). He presupposes a love that can be commanded, and thus one denoting commitment and action at least as much as emotion. Such love can have political as well as personal reference; the verb can be a social and political term for loyalty (e.g., Exod. 21:5; 2 Sam. 19:6 [7]; 1 Kings 5:1 [15]); cf. 8:9-10. The neighbor can likewise then stand for a neighbor people with whom one has friendly relations.

The third-person reference to Yahweh reflects both the ambiguity of the prophet’s position (he is himself and he is also Yahweh’s mouthpiece) and the ambiguity of his audience’s identity (since formally Yahweh is addressing the prophet but substantially the prophet is addressing his people and thus talking about their God’s relationship with them). The “Masters” of 2:13, 17 [15, 19] here become “other gods.” Among the Prophets, this expression comes only in Jeremiah; it is frequent there and in Deuteronomy. Elsewhere, its occurrence in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:3; see also 23:13) is noteworthy, especially in light of Hosea’s other parallels with the Decalogue (see e.g., 4:2). Hosea is accusing Ephraim of flouting one of the basic elements in its relationship with God. Deuteronomy 31:18 and 20 also speak explicitly of “turning one’s face” to other gods: one turns the face towards someone as a deliberate act expressing trust and confidence when one is in need (e.g., Psa. 40:4 [5]).[[165]](#footnote-165) That connotation further underscores Yahweh’s critique.

“Pressings of grapes” appear elsewhere in connection with love, and with a great worship occasion (Song 2:4-5; 2 Sam. 6:19); perhaps they were a sacramental food like the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

**Hosea 3:2-3.** Negotiating a price (v. 2) may imply that the woman has become a bondservant, which might mean an unclear marital status in her new relationship. Perhaps she had gone back to her former family and her father had let her become the bondservant of another family with the likelihood that she would become the wife or secondary wife of the head of the household or his son (see e.g., Exod. 21:1-11). In return the head of this household would make some provision for the indigent family as it sought to get back on its feet. The price Hosea refers to will then be the payment for this provision. Or perhaps the price Hosea pays is the dowry involved in that marriage, whose giving and receiving is a way of sealing the relationship between the couple and between the families and their communities. In either connection, the silver would be a medium of exchange for the family to whom Hosea gave it, while barley was an important staple in connection with the making of bread (itself key to Israelite diet) and perhaps of beer.

“You’re to stay mine” (*yāšab lî*) (v. 3) takes up the term “mine” from v. 2, which has already played an important role earlier in the scroll: see 2:19a, 19b, 20, 23 [21a, 21b, 22, 25]. In other words, the relationship is properly reestablished. While “a long time” could signify an extended but limited time (perhaps a period of discipline) after which something else would happen (which fits with what follows in v. 4), in the immediate context more straightforwardly “a long time” simply indicates that the relationship Hosea is establishing is to be a long-term one. It has no temporal limit (cf. Jer. 35:7) and it is to involve mutual faithfulness. [[166]](#footnote-166) There is of course to be no more whoring; the preposition on “mine” (*lə*)reappears in the next line in the contrasting statement, “You’re not to be a[nother] man’s.” The formulation “You’re not to be a man’s, and so I too will be towards you” is equivalent to expressions that came to a climax in 2:23 [25]. It indicates a long-term and mutually-faithful relationship between Yahweh and Ephraim. The commitment completes an abb’a’ sequence: there are two positive statements in the outer cola and two negative ones in the inner cola.

**Hosea 3:4-5.** Hosea’s moves from speaking allegorically of a religiously adulterous relationship to giving a literal account of the deprivation that Yahweh intends to impose on Ephraim.

A “long time” (v. 4) now has a different reference. Yahweh intends to remove a series of things; five times Hosea repeats the word “without.” The things are not in themselves wrong. Ephraim is to lose its kingship (cf. 1:4) and not to have any other form of administration or “official”; king and official[s] come together again in 7:3, 5; 8:4, 10; 13:10. The Ephraimites sanctuaries are to be destroyed, so there will be no more sacrifice. In the sanctuaries there will be no more pillars or commemorative stone columns; while these could come to be viewed inappropriately, they are not in themselves divine images and they could be unobjectionable (e.g., Gen. 28:18; 35:14; Exod. 24:4). There will be no more chasuble, the container for the Urim and Tummim. There will be no more effigies, images of family members who have passed whom people might consult on the assumption that they had information that the living might find helpful (chasuble and effigies come together in the story of Micah and the Levite in Ephraim, in Judg. 17:5; 18:14-18).[[167]](#footnote-167) So there will be no means of finding guidance. Hosea is portraying “a society in disorder;… deprived of everything crucial for meaningful political-religious survival.”[[168]](#footnote-168)

The Ephraimites have turned away from Yahweh and from David (v. 5a); “David” here means the Davidic line (cf. Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). Hosea envisages them returning to both. To associate recourse to David with recourse to Yahweh is to put the Davidic king in an exalted position, as “a messianic figure.”[[169]](#footnote-169) While there was nothing wrong in themselves with the elements in Ephraim’s national and religious life that Hosea listed, they were substitutes for the authentic thing that Ephraim abandoned long ago. The question about kingship is whether it is subject to Yahweh’s will.[[170]](#footnote-170) When Ephraim has been weaned from its ersatz administration and ersatz forms of religion it will see sense and turn back to seek the help of Yahweh its God and to acknowledge the Davidic king in Jerusalem as its king.

To put it another way (v. 5b), Ephraim will come to respond with awe in Yahweh and in his goodness. The unique construction “be awestruck towards Yahweh” takes up the “towards” in v. 3, while “his goodness” makes one think of the things in chapter 2 such as grain and wine and oil. Ephraim’s renewed enjoyment of these things will come “at the end of the time,” literally “the days.” In English “the end of the days” can sound like an eschatological term, but in the First Testament it is not a technical expression. It alludes to a period that lasts a long time but comes to an appropriate end (e.g., Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14, 20; Deut. 31:29; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24). Here it denotes however long Ephraim’s deprivation turns out to last. In this context, the “the time” takes up the reference to the long “time” (literally, “many days”) in v. 4.

The sequence “turn back” and “seek help” suggests that *šûb* denotes returning to Yahweh rather than returning from exile, which also fits the reference in v. 4 to removing features of nationhood and religious observance rather than to departing from the country. The motif of turning back is taken up from 2:7 [9]; it becomes a key term in Hosea (5:4; 6:1; 7:10; 11:5; 12:6; 14:1 [2]). But the verse as a whole does resonate with Deuteronomy 4:29-30, which presupposes that Israel has been taken into exile: “You will seek help from Yahweh your God from there, and you will find…. All these things will befall you in at the end of the time but you will turn back to Yahweh your God.” Both Hosea and Deuteronomy make declarations about what will happen that are based in Yahweh’s ongoing commitment to Israel, which Hosea has been commissioned to embody.

## Theological Implications

1. The embodiment or representation of the good news may be no less important than the announcement of the good news.[[171]](#footnote-171) Hosea’s testimony seeks to build up the faith and hope of Ephraim (and Judah) by asking it to recall or imagine the extraordinary display of marital commitment to which Hosea was commissioned.
2. Hosea’s representation is expected to go beyond anything a husband could be imagined doing and thus to point to the extraordinary nature of that divine commitment. Hosea’s point is not that he knew what it was like to continue loving when his wife had been unfaithful and that this awareness helped him understand God’s love. On the contrary, perhaps he was disinclined to have anything to do with Gomer or inclined to let her go, and perhaps that feeling lies at the back of the strength of the hostility expressed in chapter 2. Rather Hosea’s point is that God revealed to him what his love was like, and he realized that he was called to mirror and embody it in order that people should perceive it. This dynamic lies behind the way Hosea’s account of his marriage deconstructs: “The entire intention to teach about YHWH by telling a human story is undermined by the text's unwillingness really to tell that story. The story of Hosea and his wife is told in a very skimpy way; much of our sense of this story comes in fact from reading back YHWH's story into the human one. At a fundamental level, the text does not believe in its own project.”[[172]](#footnote-172) Or rather, its project is the opposite to the one readers often assume.
3. The love God manifests and the love God looks for is a love that can be commanded. It’s not primarily a feeling. Given that God is talking about love between a man and a woman, it would be odd if it had no emotional element. But at least as significant an aspect to God’s love for us is that it is effective not just affective. God is committed to us. And at least as significant an aspect to the love God seeks from us that it is effective not just affective. God is not very interested in us telling him that we love him (people in the Bible hardly ever tell God that they love him). He is interested in our acting in a way that denotes commitment to him. Because he has bought us, we are bound to honor him with our bodies.[[173]](#footnote-173)
4. In embracing the shame that comes through marrying a whorish woman, Hosea embodies God’s embracing the shame that comes through associating himself with a whorish people. It makes God look really stupid. But he accepts that experience in order to save Ephraim.[[174]](#footnote-174)
5. God will thus reach out to his people and will pay the cost for the repairing of the relationship with them, but the restoration of the relationship requires their response. To be a relationship, the commitment has to be mutual. Hosea reaches out to the woman, but there’s no indication of her response. God is reaching out to Ephraim. Will Ephraim respond? Even the all-sovereign God cannot compel a response from his people.
6. When God acts in love, God also engages in a form of tough action that takes away the ordinances of the people’s everyday life and their religious life. Ephraim is to experience “depressive asymbolia,”[[175]](#footnote-175) the incapacity to recognize signs; they will not be able to recognize them because the signs are actually gone.
7. Thus God is both good cop and bad cop. It follows from the fact that there is only one God. Roles cannot be divided between gods. Here, God first speaks tough, then acts loving, then acts tough. It seems plausible to see that sequence as God’s preferred way of operating. God imagines his people coming to their senses first in response to the loving action, then in response to the tough action.
8. God imagines his people coming to their senses. Like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), they will surely realize that they are dying of hunger because of their stupidity and that they should turn back and see if God will have them back. But did they ever do so? What is one to think of the succeeding history of Ephraim, of the nation’s fall and the exile of the bulk of its people, of the fact that some Ephraimites did move south to Jerusalem (perhaps taking Hosea’s teaching with them), of the desire of people living in Ephraim (now called Samaria) to join with Judahites in rebuilding the temple (was Zerubbabel the David of whom Hosea speaks?),[[176]](#footnote-176) of the history of the Samaritans and of the references to Samaria and Samaritans in the New Testament, of Jesus growing up and beginning his ministry in Galilee (once part of Ephraim), and of Paul’s declarations about the olive tree in Romans 9?

# Part Two: Hosea 4:1—9:9 Biddings

While chapters 1—3 have been solemn, compared with what follows in the bulk of the scroll they have been positive and encouraging; their intention has been “to communicate hope to their readers.”[[177]](#footnote-177) It is against the background of that encouragement that readers are now bidden to study the chapters that follow, which are going to be really solemn. Each opens with a call to pay heed and follows up the call with a challenge.

4:1-19 A confrontation about whoring

5:1-7 A confrontation about leadership

5:8—6:3 A warning about invasion

6:4—7:16 A puzzled question

8:1-14 A confrontation about political initiatives

9:1-9 A confrontation about worship

# Hosea 4:1-19: Listen (A Confrontation about Whoring)

## Translation

1Listen to Yahweh’s word,

 Yiśrā’ēlites.

Because Yahweh has a confrontation

 with the people who live in the earth.[[178]](#footnote-178)

Because there’s no truthfulness and no commitment,

 and there’s no acknowledging of God in the earth.

2Oath-taking, deception, murder,

 theft, adultery—they’ve spread out;[[179]](#footnote-179)

 bloodshed has followed hard on bloodshed.

3Therefore the earth will wither[[180]](#footnote-180)

 and everything[[181]](#footnote-181) that lives in it will be wasted.

With the creature of the wild[[182]](#footnote-182) and with the bird of the heavens,

 and also the fish of the sea—they will be gathered up.

4Yet “No one is to confront,

 and no one is to reprove.

Your [Hosea’s][[183]](#footnote-183) people being such as do[[184]](#footnote-184) confront a priest,[[185]](#footnote-185)

 5you will collapse today.[[186]](#footnote-186)

A prophet will also collapse with you by night[[187]](#footnote-187)

 and I will cut off[[188]](#footnote-188) your mother.”[[189]](#footnote-189)

6My people are cut off

 through lack of acknowledging.

Because you’ve rejected acknowledging,

 I reject you from acting as priest in relation to me.

You’ve disregarded your God’s instruction;

 I myself, too, will disregard your children.

7In accordance with the number of them,[[190]](#footnote-190) so they’ve done wrong in relation to me;

 their honor I will change[[191]](#footnote-191) to slighting.

8They eat off my people’s wrongdoing;

 they raise [each] his appetite[[192]](#footnote-192) for their waywardness.

9And it will be like people, like priest;[[193]](#footnote-193)

 I will attend to its ways for it,

 its deeds I will give back to it.

10So they eat but they won’t be full;

 they’ve whored, but they won’t spread out.

Because Yahweh[[194]](#footnote-194)—they’ve abandoned him to observe[[195]](#footnote-195) 11whoring,[[196]](#footnote-196)

 and wine and new wine that takes[[197]](#footnote-197) their mind.[[198]](#footnote-198)

12My people[[199]](#footnote-199)—it asks things of a piece of wood,

 of[[200]](#footnote-200) its stick that informs it.

Because a downright whorish spirit has led it astray;[[201]](#footnote-201)

 they’ve whored away from being under their God.

13On the tops of the mountains they sacrifice,

 on the hills they burn incense,

Under oak, poplar, and terebinth,

 because its shade is good.

Therefore your daughters whore,

 and your daughters-in-law commit adultery.[[202]](#footnote-202)

14I will not attend to your daughters because they whore,

 or to your daughters-in-law because they commit adultery.

Because those men go off with whores,

 and sacrifice with hierodules,

 and a people that does not consider[[203]](#footnote-203) will tumble.

15If you’re a whore, Yiśrā’ēl,

 Yəhûdāh is not to incur guilt,

So don’t come to Gilgāl,

 don’t go up to Bȇt ’Āwen,

 don’t swear “As Yahweh lives.”

16Because, like a cow running amok,

 Yiśrā’ēl has run amok.[[204]](#footnote-204)

Now Yahweh will pasture them

 like sheep in a meadow?[[205]](#footnote-205)

17’Eprayim is attached to idols;

 let it be.

18Though their drinking has stopped,[[206]](#footnote-206)

 they’ve whored and whored.[[207]](#footnote-207)

Its shields[[208]](#footnote-208) dearly[[209]](#footnote-209) love slighting;

 19a spirit has bound it up[[210]](#footnote-210) in its wings,

 and they will be shamed by their sacrifices.[[211]](#footnote-211)

## Interpretation

Hosea 4 is the first of the sequence of passages that begin with an exhortation to pay attention, go on to a confrontation about people’s shortcoming in their attitude to Yahweh, and warn them of consequences that will follow. One can imagine Hosea delivering his exhortation and declarations to people gathered at the sanctuary at Beth-el, possibly in the context of a festival of the kind presupposed by Amos’s declaration about Yahweh’s Day (Amos 5:18-20). He aims to get priests and people to listen, to think, and to respond and change their ways. While verses 1-3 could stand on their own, the verses that follow link with them through the references to “confronting” and then to “acknowledging” (vv. 4, 6). They also take up the theme of “whoring” from chapters 1—3 (vv. 10, 12, 18), though there are no indications of a political aspect to the whoring in this section. The next bidding to listen comes in 5:1, where MT (A) has a petuhah (L and C have a setumah). Although the chapter can be described as a “patchwork,”[[212]](#footnote-212) it resembles a collection of sayings that run into each other rather than a collection of sayings that could have existed separately. It works as follows:

Vv. 1-3 Hosea’s confrontation

Vv. 4-5 A priestly response to Hosea’s confrontation

Vv. 6-9 A challenge to the priests

Vv. 10-14 A challenge to the people as a whole

Vv. 15-19 A warning of calamity to come to the people

**Hosea 4:1-3.** In itself, the opening subsection is straightforward and succinct, yet not typically Hosean. Hosea elsewhere says virtually nothing about wrongs such as swearing, lying, murder, stealing, literal adultery, or bloodshed. In content the verses would not have seemed out of place in the scrolls of other eighth- or seventh-century prophets, though they have traits marking them as distinctively Hosean. As an introduction to the main collection of his messages, it might serve to integrate Hosea with the other prophetic scrolls, but in its immediate context, it will be when we come to vv. 4-19 that we see its significance.

It has a neat structure:

v. 1a Exhortation to listen

v. 1bα The reason (*kî*): Yahweh has an argument to set out

v. 1bβ-2 The content of the argument (*kî*): negative (v. 1bβ) and positive (v. 2)

v. 3 ` The consequences that will follow (*‘al-kēn*)

Variations on such formats appear elsewhere in the Prophets (e.g., Isa. 17:10; 24:6; 27:11; 30:15-16; Amos 3:1-2), sometimes concluding with *lākēn* rather than *‘al-kēn* (e.g., Isa. 30:12). The format was perhaps familiar and might recall an official confronting the community in the king’s name (cf. 2 Kings 18:28).

Hosea, however, addresses the people for himself (v. 1a), though in Yahweh’s name as a prophet. Unlike such an official, he does not quote his king’s words. While a prophetic exhortation to listen commonly leads into critique of the addressees (e.g., 5:1), this exhortation does not do so. A prophetic exhortation to listen can lead into critique of other people, whom the addressees are urged to think about for some reason (e.g., Isa. 1:2; Jer. 6:18, 19; Mic. 6:2). So it is here. He is not describing his Israelite addressees, “the people who live in the country,” but talking about a third party, “the people who live in the earth” (as in Isa. 24:1-5). The message is a succinct declaration that everything that could be wrong is wrong in the world’s relationship with God and in its people’s relationship with one another, and that this threatens total disaster.

When Hosea goes on to speak in terms of a confrontation (v. 1bαβ), one could alternatively see him as speaking like someone representing a complainant, urging the townspeople or the elders in particular to take note of a grievance. Arguments commonly arise between peers, and they come to the elders at the gate for them to take up (e.g., Exod. 23:2-6; metaphorically Mic. 6:1-2, and cf. Hos. 2:2 [4]; 4:4; 12:2 [3]), which is also the image here. Although the First Testament can speak of Yahweh having a “confrontation” or an “argument” (*rîb*) with someone, it’s a slightly odd thing to say about someone in authority: thus here Tg has the case coming “before Yahweh”[[213]](#footnote-213) and LXX and Vg translate by the more legal words *krisis* and *iudicium*. To speak of Yahweh having an argument or confrontation may suggest Yahweh’s generous willingness to treat people as free to argue back, and/or may indicate that the argument is one he takes up on behalf of the victims of the conduct that is about to be described (cf. Isa. 1:17, 23; 3:13; Mic. 7:9). In the Prophets, however, an exhortation like v. 1a commonly functions rhetorically: for instance, a statement about Israel addressed the mountains and hills or the heavens and the earth (e.g., Isa. 1:2) is designed for Israel to “overhear.” Hosea here addresses the Ephraimites about the people in the earth, and they will be the subject of what follows, but it will not be surprising if it turns out that something else is going on in this exhortation. “The meaning [of *’ereș*] may not be stable through the poem”;[[214]](#footnote-214) indeed, the meaning of 4:1-3 as a whole may not be stable.

The first two of the lacks that Yahweh finds in earth’s people (v. 1bγd) are common values in the First Testament, and they often come together as a hendiadys, “commitment and truthfulness,” in the opposite order to the one that obtains here, sometimes as attributes of Yahweh, sometimes as attributes expected of or manifested by human beings in their mutual relationships (e.g., Gen. 24:27, 49; Josh. 2:14; Pss. 25:10; 57:3 [4]; Prov. 3:3). The implication here is that the world as a whole is called to reflect Yahweh’s own nature in its mutual relationships, and is not doing so. “Acknowledging [*da‘at*]Yahweh” is a more distinctively Hoseanic theme; it came with those other two values in Yahweh’s promise about Ephraim in 2:19-20 [21-22]. Truthfulness and commitment constitute acknowledgment of Yahweh; acknowledgment of Yahweh is expressed in truthfulness and commitment. Hosea applies that assumption to the world, not just to Israel. “Acknowledging *God*” comes elsewhere in the First Testament only in Hosea 6:6 and Proverbs 2:5. Hosea can use “God” to refer to Yahweh (e.g., 11:9, 12; 12:3) and “acknowledging God” has similar meaning to “acknowledging Yahweh.” But speaking in terms of God rather than Yahweh fits a declaration about the earth’s people as a whole. Given the parallels with the second half of the Decalogue that will follow in v. 2, one might see the expectations implied in v. 1bγδ as analogous to those in the Decalogue. For Israel, at least, acknowledging God meant serving Yahweh alone, abjuring images, using Yahweh’s name properly, and keeping Sabbath, and committed truthfulness meant honoring parents and abjuring murder, adultery, theft, perjury, and coveting.

Yahweh finds other characteristics in the world (v. 2) in place of the virtues or values that he misses. The list is “a rather conventional inventory”[[215]](#footnote-215) but it supports the possibility that Yahweh is taking up an argument on behalf of the victims of these practices. Murder, theft, and adultery are three acts forbidden by the Decalogue. In that context, deception then makes one think especially of false testimony, though elsewhere the word refers more generally to deviousness designed to defraud or harm; and oath-taking makes one think of the wrongful use of Yahweh’s name, or specifically of cursing or calling down calamity on someone (e.g., Judg. 17:2; Job 31:30). Yahweh is not referring to occasional such acts. They’ve been breaking out like a baby bursting from the womb or a plague breaking out or wine vats bursting or an army breaking through a defense wall or prisoners breaking out of captivity. To underline the point yet further, one act of bloodshed has followed hard on another: literally, bloodshed touches bloodshed. The indictment recalls the indictment of humanity as a whole that led to the flood (see Gen. 6:11-13).

*Lākēn* (“therefore,” v. 3) can lead into an account of consequences that have already come about (it then means “so that’s why…”; cf. Hos. 6:5). But here v. 3 constitutes a threat rather than an explanation. In Jeroboam’s day the world was in a reasonably settled state. It will not stay that way. The threat takes up the references to “the earth” in v. 1. The world’s waywardness will issue in the world’s “withering.” The countryside will respond to its people’s waywardness by failing to produce a harvest and by “wasting away” (the two expressions come together in Isa. 24:4, 7; 33:9; Joel 1:10). “Everything” means “the creature in the wild” and “the bird in the heavens,” which recur from 2:18 [20], and “the fish in the sea” which replace “the thing that moves on the ground” and enhance the impression that v. 3 refers to the world as whole. Gathering up is what happens at harvest, but it is also what happens when you die.

Both sets of three make for a comparison with Genesis 1, but this variant comprises creatures that belong to land, sky, and sea. The combination of threats concerning the inanimate and the animate also corresponds more broadly with features of chapter 2, but there they were the subject of a positive pact. Here Hosea is giving warning. Ephraim is not to rest on those promises, as if the realities and dangers of the wider world were not real. Instead of being a friend, the natural world can be a threat.

**Hosea 4:4-5.** The opening of this next subsection is then a surprise. Hosea has put forward an argument that Ephraim would surely welcome; we like the idea of God condemning other people. Yet the world’s withering and wasting will be bad news for Ephraim as for anyone else. Ephraim is part of the world. Perhaps it’s also part of the world in its failure in its relationship with God and in its community lifestyle? Hosea’s critique could remind people of expectations that apply to Ephraim, as declaimed by Amos. Indeed, Hosea is taking up Amos’s ploy of declaring judgment on other people to soften up Ephraim for its own declaration of judgment.

So who is saying no one is to confront or reprove (v. 4a)? Tg provides the clue, in beginning “because they say….” and thus recognizing that the strong opening asseverative “yet” introduces Hosea’s quotation of something that contrasts with 4:1-3. Hosea has laid out an argument; now he quotes a voice declaring that people have no business laying out arguments or reproofs.[[216]](#footnote-216) Both argument and reproof can imply one member of the community chiding another for doing something objectionable (e.g., Lev. 19:17), though it more often denotes God chiding and it thus suggests that the reprover has some authority. It’s not surprising, then, if people are hostile to anyone who reproves at the gate (Amos 5:10; cf. Prov. 9:7-8). So the objector says, it’s the priest’s job to reprove and sort out arguments (e.g., Deut. 17:8-13). It’s not Hosea’s job. Succeeding lines will make more explicit that Hosea’s argument in 4:1-3 implies that the Ephraimite priest was failing in his job of instructing the people, which is a key aspect of a priest’s role (cf. Deut. 33:10; Tg has “teachers” for “a priest”). The priest’s response is that Hosea has no business finding fault with anybody.

Hosea is thus the immediate subject of the protest that he quotes (v. 4b-5aα), but “your people” are the company who identify with him. Conversely, there will hardly be only one Ephraimite priest (cf. 5:1; in 1 Kings 12:32 Jeroboam I is said to have installed a number at Beth-el). But the following lines confirm that Hosea speaks here of an individual priest, presumably the head priest: compare “the priest” Amaziah at Beth-el with whom Amos got involved in a not dissimilar altercation (Amos 7:10-17). It’s presumably this priest who voices the critique of Hosea and who goes on to issue a warning to him, again a little like Amaziah’s warning, but even more like threats later issued to Jeremiah. Hosea will fall “today” (that is, right now, very soon: see the use of this expression in Deut. 2:18; 9:1; Josh. 23:14).

The warning is not confined to him (v. 5aβb). Tg assumes Hosea is talking about false prophets, who become a serious problem in Judah, but they do not feature in the messages to Ephraim by Hosea or Amos.[[217]](#footnote-217) The prophet who will fall by night (when life is more dangerous) will be any other prophet who speaks like Hosea. “Falling” could denote divine judgment, but the parallel colon makes explicit that the priest is prepared to make sure the judgment falls: to add to the pressure, Hosea’s own mother will not escape the action that’s taken. The warning makes for an ironic comparison and contrast with Amos’s threat to Amaziah (Amos 7:17) and with the rule about a son who is rebellious and runs amok (Deut. 21:18-21).

**Hosea 4:6-9.** The response to the priest comes in the form of a word from Yahweh. As the priest’s rebuke in v. 4 took up the idea of Yahweh’s having an argument to bring, this response takes up the priest’s talk of cutting off.

Indeed, it makes a declaration concerning a cutting off (v. 6a) that is so certain it can be described as if it has already happened. As the priest spoke of “your people” (that is, Hosea’s company), Yahweh speaks of “my people” (that is, Ephraim). There is a poignancy and sadness about the juxtaposition of verb “cut off” and the noun “my people.” Explaining the cutting off brings another link with 4:1-3: it will happen because of the lack of acknowledging God of which Hosea spoke. It is now explicit that this failure extends to Ephraim itself.

Behind the people’s failure to acknowledge God lies the priest’s failure to do so (v. 6b). In fact it’s his rejecting acknowledgment of Yahweh that issues in the people’s failure and in their being cut off, as they follow the priest’s lead. Yet again, the parallel colon takes up a key word: you’ve rejected me, so I reject you from acting as priest. Whatever is to happen to the sanctuary where he ministers, this priesthood will not continue to operate there. And/or, whatever sacrifices you continue to offer in that sanctuary, I do not accept them. They are meaningless and ineffective. Yahweh restates the point by redefining refusal to acknowledge Yahweh as putting God’s instruction (*tôrāh*) out of mind. The conventional translation of the verb (*šākaḥ*) is “forget,” but it commonly denotes the kind of forgetting one does on purpose. It implies deliberately taking no notice. Yahweh is again referring back to the substance though not the words of the indictment in 4:1. Sometimes Yahweh’s “forgetting” is good news (see 7:2); it can forestall punishment (see v. 9). It’s not good news here. Yahweh then repeats this further key verb. The priest has put out of mind; Yahweh will put the priest’s children out of mind. The priest has threatened Hosea’s mother; Yahweh’s warning threatens the priest’s children. The warning again recalls the threat to Amaziah (Amos 7:17), though here the parallelism between the two lines also means that the disregarded children will be the sons who would take up his priesthood.

That comment leads into the plural reference that follows (v. 7). The arrangement and the problem with the sons of the Ephraimite priest compares with that at Shiloh (see 1 Sam. 2). All the priests are involved in the wrongdoing of which Hosea has spoken; “in relation to me” picks up the same expression in v. 6 and explains the statement there. Whether or not the wording implies that the priests have increased in number (cf. 8:11; 10:1), as many priests as there are, that is the number failing to acknowledge Yahweh and leading people astray. Yahweh will therefore take action against them. They are in a position of honor as priests. Their privilege is to facilitate the people bringing their needs, prayers, and worship before Yahweh and thus to open up the way to Yahweh answering people’s prayers, bestowing his blessing, and granting them increase and security in their relationship with nations around. The rejection which Yahweh declares will mean their losing their honorable position, and not merely being taken down to the same level of honor as lay people but being humiliated.

The similarity to the Shiloh priests continues (v. 8; cf. 1 Sam. 2:12-15): the priests are feeding off their people’s offerings. The Ephraimites bring sacrifices to make expiation for their wrongdoing (*ḥaṭṭā’t*) and waywardness (*’āwôn*): the first word suggests shortcoming and failure, the second a deliberate going astray. It would be in the priests’ interest for people to need to do so: the more sin, the merrier, because the offerings provide the priests with their livelihood. They “live off… immoral earnings.”[[218]](#footnote-218) The word for wrongdoing is also the word for an expiatory offering (cf. Tg), which would make for a nice double entendre: they eat off the offerings; they eat off the wrongdoing. This dynamic would apply if the people were offering the proper sacrifices. But the offerings are themselves wrong and wayward (vv. 10-19), so there is a collusion between priests and people. The people make illicit offerings and the priests like it because their livelihood comes from them. The parallel colon with its reference to their appetite heightens the point. Like the Shiloh priests, they eat well off these offerings.

So the people is as guilty as the priest and will pay the same penalty (v. 9). Yahweh will “attend” to its ways. The negative implication of the neutral verb (see the note on 1:4) is made specific in the second colon. There “give back” or “turn back” (*šûb* hiphil) again suggests the considered nature of Yahweh’s response and the appropriateness of the consequences that follow from the wrongdoing. It’s neither vindictive nor arbitrary. The abb’a’ order within v. 9b corresponds to the sense that the nature of people’s deeds comes back to them, and the tricolon marks the end of the subsection. “Literary artistry does not conceal a sober judgment”;[[219]](#footnote-219) paradoxically, indeed, it reflects it and draws attention to it.

**Hosea 4:10-14.** The plural verbs (“the people” in v. 9 was treated as singular) and the renewed reference to eating suggest a return to talk about the priests, though what follows applies to the people, too.

Allusion elsewhere to eating and not being full (vv. 10-11) suggests chastisement (e.g., Mic. 6:14), but here Hosea uses the motif in a different connection, since the allusion to whoring in the parallel colon implies reference to a festive meal in the context of worship offered to other gods. The priests with the people partake of such meals and pray for these deities to enable them to “spread out,” to increase as a people. The verb (*pāraṣ*) is the one in Exodus 1:12, though with irony it is also the verb in verse 2. Their prayer will not work. They’ve abandoned Yahweh to observe whoring instead. It’s a horrific statement. The proper object of “observe” (*šāmar*) is the Torah or the pact or Yahweh’s ways or Yahweh’s commands (e.g., Exod. 19:5; Deut. 4:2; Jer. 16:11; Amos 2:4; Mal. 2:9). The link between drinking and whoring is a common enough topic for critique; what’s distinctive here is their being brought into association with worship.[[220]](#footnote-220) People think to safeguard their future with their whoring (as opposed to being faithful to Yahweh), with the drinking of wine and new wine that forms part of the festival celebration. Actually the festive drinking has deprived them of their senses.

After all (v. 12), the people (“my people,” again with sadness and/or bitterness) is seeking guidance from something made of wood, a wooden column that represents a god (e.g., Deut. 4:28; 16:21), instead of from the living God. It’s just a stick! Ephraim expects a stick to tell it what it needs to know! Ephraim has been led stray by a mysterious spirit of whoring, instead of being led by a spirit of wisdom or the spirit of Yahweh—the two most frequent comparable phrases (see e.g., Isa. 11:2). No, it’s not a wise spirit, because it’s going to lead them into disaster, and it’s not Yahweh’s spirit but a spirit that leads them into unfaithfulness.

Hosea goes on to speak more concretely about the whoring (v. 13a). Deuteronomy’s specific instructions to Israel begin with a command to destroy the worship sites on the high mountains and hills with their spreading trees and their wooden Asherah columns (Deut. 12:2-3; cf. the critique in 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10). Maybe the references to the trees’ shade hints that people engage in the rites at these places because they are pleasant, so that the first accusation against their involvement in the rites is that they do it for their own pleasure.[[221]](#footnote-221) But Hosea brings out the horrifying irony of their ignoring the principles of proper worship by referring to oak and terebinth (*’allôn*, *’ēlāh*) whose names are close to the word for “their God” (*’ĕlōhȇhem*) but whose reality is so distant, and by referring to their “shade,” which is what Yahweh is supposed to be for his people (e.g., Hos. 14:7 [8]).[[222]](#footnote-222)

Hence (v. 13b) girls go there (the Ephraimites’ daughters and their sons’ brides) when they get married, to pray that they may conceive. There they offer their prayers and sacrifices to gods other than Yahweh, and these are therefore acts of whoring or adultery (the way Hosea speaks elsewhere does not suggest that he is referring to literal sexual activity, any more than when Ezek. 16 and 23 go in for detailed concrete description).[[223]](#footnote-223) Hosea switches from speaking of the Ephraimites as “them” (which invites them to look at themselves objectively) to addressing them directly (which presses them to face themselves). He does so with more force because he is talking about what they are doing to their own daughters and to their sons’ daughters.

It is they who are responsible (v. 14a). They might try to hide from the horror of what they are doing or to distance themselves from what they were colluding with, but Yahweh will not let them. He does not intend to hold the girls themselves responsible for the whoring and the adultery involved in their prayers and sacrifices. Perhaps we should not press the “not”; Hosea speaks rhetorically. Yet the girls would be teenagers when they married, and they were hardly to be held responsible for what their parents required them to do. In v. 9 Yahweh has said he will “attend” to the people as a whole that acts that way, but he will not “attend” to these girls.

And after all, their menfolk are involved in the same whoring (v. 14b). In Genesis 38 the parallel terms whores and hierodules (*qədēšôt*)are synonyms for prostitutes. Here they may be insulting terms for the (male) ministers at the sanctuary (a usage comparable with describing the Israelite men themselves as whores). Or they may refer to actual female ministers at the sanctuaries, as a slur if these ministers were not involved in literal sexual activity. But the parallel with 1 Samuel 2 is again suggestive, because Eli’s sons were involved in sexual relationships with women who assisted at the sanctuary. So Hosea may imply that the Ephraimite men had more than one reason for consorting with the women ministers. One way or another, then, the subsection works towards a coup de grâce in the last colon of v. 14, the third colon in the tricolon that marks the line as a semi-conclusion. It reaffirms succinctly the point made at the beginning of the subsection, in vv. 9-11).[[224]](#footnote-224) Perhaps it is an aphorism; the word for “tumble” otherwise comes only in Proverbs 10:8, 10 (its precise meaning is not very certain). In its theme and succinctness it pairs with v. 11, which might also be an aphorism.[[225]](#footnote-225) Ephraim’s whorish practices are mindless acts which will be its downfall. Tg appropriately expands on “consider” as implying “reflect on the Torah.”

**Hosea 4:15-19.** The implications are here worked out. There is of course no question whether Ephraim is a whore (v. 15a). In a snide note worthy of Amos, Hosea asks Ephraim therefore please to avoid leading Judah astray, which would mean Judah would also attract Yahweh’s negative attention. To judge from 2 Kings 14—15, a prophet would have less to critique in Judah in Uzziah or Jotham’s day, though things changed during Ahaz’s reign when political pressures on Judah increased (see 2 Kings 16). But the force of Hosea’s point does not depend on a particular assessment of Judahite religion.

So Hosea asks the Ephraimites to stay away from certain sanctuaries (v. 15b). His professed concern for Judah makes him ask them not to include Gilgal and Beth-el in the sanctuaries they patronize. Both lie in the south near the border with Judah, and both are places with a history for Israel as a whole going back via Joshua to Jacob and Abraham, so one can imagine Judahites going there. Gilgal was the site of Joshua’s base camp near Jericho where the crossing of the Jordan was commemorated; it was also where the monarchy was inaugurated (if these were two different Gilgals, Hosea’s point would not be affected). Beth-aven (“house of wickedness/trouble”) is a derogatory alternative name for Beth-el (cf. Amos 5:5, which refers to both Gilgal and Beth-aven), devised because Beth-el was (with Dan) one of the Ephraimite sanctuaries where Jeroboam I set up bullock images of Yahweh, though it had those earlier associations with Abraham and Jacob. To turn Beth-el into the house of another god means “a kind of violence being done to both fact and name.”[[226]](#footnote-226) It’s in the highlands so one “goes up” there. Don’t pollute Gilgal and Beth-el with your whorish presence, says Hosea. To make the point even more forcibly, he adds (in the third colon of another tricolon), if you’re going to indulge in your whoring, don’t also take the name of Yahweh on your lips, will you? If you don’t trust in Yahweh but trust in your various other deities, it doesn’t makes sense to swear an oath in Yahweh’s name, which would be one of the acts one undertook in going to a sanctuary. Such swearing needs to be done with truthfulness and faithfulness (Jer. 4:2).

As an alternative to the term “whoring,” Hosea goes on (v. 16) to compare Ephraim’s behavior with a cow running amok and turning aside out of the way the farmer is seeking to direct it. Israel (*yiśrā’ēl*)is running amok (*sαrar*) andturning aside (*sûr*).The cow thinks it’s going to get good pasturage that way. Is the farmer simply going to adapt to it? Rather Yahweh is going to let the “cow” have its way.[[227]](#footnote-227)

Let Ephraim worship the idols it’s drawn to (vv. 17-18a). Hosea likes designating divine images as idols (8:4; 13:2; 14:8 [9]); etymologically “idol” (*‘āṣāb*) likely means something “shaped,” which makes it not so different from the word “image” (*ṣelem*), but the word also resonates suggestively with a verb meaning hurt, pain or grieve. Hosea adds how even when the festival indulgence is over, Ephraim still carries on attending to the other gods. Isaiah will likewise comment on Ephraim’s drinking habit and its fondness for food (Isa. 28:1).

The chapter closes (vv. 18b-19) with a tricolon whose reference to “its shields” (that is, the people who are supposed to be the protectors of the city) begins the transition to the next section with its challenge to the Ephraimite leadership. These shields have behaved as if they are emotionally attached to shame or slighting (cf. v. 7). Such is the implication of their behavior, in that it’s going to take them to that fate. It’s as if they have been bewitched. The whoring spirit that has led the people astray (v. 12), to which he will refer again in 5:4, has bound them up in its wings. Hosea is playing with the fact that *rûaḥ* also denotes the wind, which (as it were) has wings (Pss. 18:10 [11]; 104:3) that enable it to carry someone away. They will carry the shields to the shame that properly issues from their offering sacrifices to these other deities. They will not merely be ashamed but shamed.

## Theological Implications

1. God has an argument with the world which he wants his people to be aware of and to understand. Sometimes, at least, he doesn’t simply implement his decisions in the world. He forewarns his people, perhaps simply to prepare them (e.g., Mk. 13), perhaps so that they can take some action (e.g., Jonah).
2. God’s expectations of the world are not so different from his expectations of his people. He assumes that the world knows the basics about the proper stance towards God that God looks for (cf. Rom. 1—3), which involves truthfulness, commitment, and acknowledgment of God. Truthfulness (*’ĕmet*) denotes a trustworthiness whereby people keep their word. Commitment (*ḥesed*) denotes a faithfulness that goes even further in showing a steadfastness surpassing what anyone has a right to expect and in maintaining such steadfastness even if the other party has forfeited any rights to it. Acknowledgment of God doesn’t denote knowledge of facts about God or an intimate personal knowledge of God like that of children for a father, though the broader context in Hosea presupposes such knowledge.[[228]](#footnote-228) It denotes recognition of God as God, which implies submission to God. Tg appropriately paraphrases “there are none who walk in awe of Yahweh.”
3. God also assumes that the world knows the basics about a proper style of community life, or of the acts that destroy community life. The moral style of community life that God looks for abjures swearing false oaths, lying, stealing, murder, adultery, and other forms of bloodshed. People do not need a special revelation in order to know that these things are wrong. This assumption fits the way most cultures do recognize that these things are wrong.
4. A wise style of community life respects both halves of the Decalogue. It is possible and tempting to focus either on worship and people’s personal relationship with God (and to pay less attention to doing right by other people) or to focus on matters of justice (and to pay less attention to relationships with God). Hosea integrates the two.
5. These assumptions about a wise style of community life such that God looks for recognize that godliness and morality issue in a harmony with nature. Sacralizing nature and commodifying nature are not the only alternatives.[[229]](#footnote-229) Whereas Hosea “is announcing the reversal of creation,”[[230]](#footnote-230) a wise style of community life will mean both that crops will grow and that animate nature will live in harmony with humanity rather than working against it. On the other hand, an immoral style of community life is stupid because it will issue in devastation in nature. It means “creation in Jeopardy,”[[231]](#footnote-231) indeed “creation uncreated.”[[232]](#footnote-232)

The indictment against priests and people in Hosea 4 establishes the connection between knowledge of God and ethical behaviour within the community and presents the failure to maintain this relationship with YHWH in terms of the devastation of the natural world. By means of an appeal to cause and effect, act and consequence, the book's dual presentation of warning and hope suggests to its readers that there is a choice to be made—between the reversal or the restoration of the created order.[[233]](#footnote-233)

1. God may respond to unfaithfulness in several ways. One is by taking deliberate action in “attending” to such unfaithfulness, which may involve giving their deeds back to the people—taking action to ensure that their deeds have their natural effect. Another is by letting people have their way. Another is that God may not directly cause the withering and wasting of nature; this consequence of a stupid community lifestyle can work itself out in a “natural” way that reflects interwovenness within reality as a whole. Compare and contrast Isaiah 24, which first talks about God’s action, then speaks more in Hosea’s terms. If Hosea 4:1-2 includes reference to Ephraim’s waywardness, then 4:3 is a terrifying declaration. The wrongdoing of the people of God can bring disaster on the natural world. If 4:1-2 simply refers to the world’s waywardness, 4:3 is in one sense less terrifying, though the end result is just as chilling.
2. Within the people of God, there is regularly a tension between priests and prophets, and between groups related to each. The former are properly and officially recognized servants of God and of the people of God whose regular life and livelihood center on and depend on their service of God and of the people of God—for instance in leading worship. The latter are people who serve God outside such recognized structures and don’t depend on their work for their livelihood. The former are an important part of the ordered arrangement and secure regularity of the life of the people of God, but that very position makes it hard for them to recognize things that are wrong in the people of God, easy for them to collude with such things, and hard for them to respond positively to critique. These dynamics applied to Israel and they apply to the church, where one has to assume that a priest or pastor or bishop cannot be a prophet. Priests and pastors feed off their sheep rather than feeding them.
3. “My people” is an important designation of Israel and of the church. Further, “in Hosea ‘my people’… is always an expression of God’s mercy or compassion (2:3, 25; 4:8, 12; 6:11b; 11:7; cf. 4:14b).” It is part of a “divine lament.” [[234]](#footnote-234)
4. While the people of God are responsible for their own acknowledgment of God, leaders such as priests and prophets, pastors and teachers, are responsible to urge and facilitate that acknowledgment. Hosea’s warning about creation in jeopardy is thus “a warning to priests,”[[235]](#footnote-235) and teachers pay a price for failing to teach (cf. Ezek. 33). They will no longer be able to exercise their ministry. They may do so in a formal sense (that is, continue acting as priests, pastors, prophets, and teachers), but God may not recognize what they do.
5. The people of God is inclined to be attracted to the same assumptions as other people regarding how to safeguard the future and how to gain insight on the future so as to safeguard its security.
6. The people of God can be inclined to the view that “One is nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth” (Dorothy Frances Gurney) and/or to rejoice in the pleasantness of praying in the open under a shady tree. English churches were often built on the highest point in their village; the church then symbolically reached towards God’s home in the heavens. Augustine implicitly critiques such ideas:

We have heard, and it is manifest; we had gone out of doors, and we are sent inward. Would I could find, thou didst say, some high and lonely mountain! For I think that, because God is on high, He hears me the rather from a high place. Because thou art on a mountain, dost thou imagine thyself near to God, and that He will quickly hear thee, as if calling to Him from the nearest place? He dwells on high, but regards the lowly…. Didst thou seek a mountain, then? Come down, that thou mayest come near Him. But wouldest thou ascend? Ascend, but do not seek a mountain. “The ascents,” it saith, “are in his heart, in the valley of weeping.”The valley is humility. Therefore do all within. Even if perhaps thou seekest some lofty place, some holy place, make thyself a temple for God within time. “For the temple of God is holy, which temple are ye.”[[236]](#footnote-236)

1. The key to being able to have children is prayer to God not recourse to other possible resources.

# Hosea 5:1-7: Listen (A Confrontation about Leadership)

## Translation

1Listen to this, priests;

 pay heed, Yiśrā’ēl’s household.[[237]](#footnote-237)

Royal household, give ear,

 because decision-making concerns you.

Because you’ve been a snare to Miṣpāh,

 and a net spread over Tābôr.

2So wanderers have gone deep in slaughter;[[238]](#footnote-238)

 yes, I am the discipline of them all.

3I myself know about ’Eprayim,

 Israel has not hidden from me.[[239]](#footnote-239)

Because now, you’ve whored, ’Eprayim,

 Israel has become defiled.

4Their deeds don’t allow them

 to turn back to their God.

Because a downright whorish spirit is among them,

 and they haven’t acknowledged Yahweh.

5So now Yiśrā’ēl’s majesty[[240]](#footnote-240) will be humbled[[241]](#footnote-241) before his face,[[242]](#footnote-242)

 and Yiśrā’ēl (that is, ’Eprayim) will collapse[[243]](#footnote-243) through their waywardness

 (Yəhûdāh collapsed with them, too).

6When they go with their flock and with their cattle,

 to seek help from Yahweh, they won’t find.

He pulled away[[244]](#footnote-244) from them,

 7when they broke faith with Yahweh.

Because they’ve fathered alien children;

 now he will consume them at a new month[[245]](#footnote-245) with their shares.

## Interpretation

Hosea again urges people to listen, berates them for their bloodshed and whoring, and warns them of calamity to come, but the reference to Ephraim’s “shields” (4:18) signaled a move to speaking of Ephraim’s leadership, and Hosea now explicitly addresses the royal household. MT (A)’s petuhah after 4:19 fits with the new imperative at 5:1, but MT (C) keeps its petuhah for 5:7, where MT (A) and MT (L) have a setumah.

**Hosea 5:1a.** While the new section begins by calling for the priests’ renewed attention (cf. Amos 3:13; Jer. 29:20), it then thus turns to focus on the royal household. The link between priests and king again recalls Amos 7:10-17 and invites us to assume that Hosea issued his summons at the royal sanctuary at Beth-el. The link brings out a point implicit in Amos 7:10-17. One might think that a priest’s job might include confronting the administration in Yahweh’s name when necessary. But Amaziah was not doing so, and neither are the priests here. It is one reason for the existence of prophets.

There is a neat developing parallelism through v. 1a. An exhortation to the priests to listen leads into a similar exhortation to the household of Israel, using a sharper verb. While it would make sense for Hosea to be urging Israel’s household as a whole to listen to his critique of the administration (as is implicitly the case in Amos 7:10-17), the next colon takes up the word “household” and makes explicit a reference to the royal household, with another sharper word for listening. The complementary colon then provides a barbed and incisive reason why the administration should pay attention. The reason is that the buck stops there. The administration is responsible for government, for decision-making, for the exercise of authority (*mišpāṭ*: see 2:19 [21]). But Hosea’s words are also open to a second understanding: decision-making concerns them in the sense that the decision or judgment that Hosea is about to announce relates to them.

**Hosea 5:1b-4.** Why does the administration need to pay attention? And why is it in danger of having authority exercised against it?

Its responsibility for proper government (vv. 1b-2) would include protecting ordinary people from the snares, nets, and traps that the unscrupulous lay for them (e.g., Pss. 35:7-8; 57:6 [7]; and see the comments on 4:2). Instead, it has set snares, nets, and traps before people, by encouraging and facilitating the whoring that has been prominent in 4:4-19 and will reappear in 5:3-4. Presumably the whoring took place at Mispah and at Tabor, where there were apparently sanctuaries. Mount Tabor is in the northern half of Ephraim, between Jezreel and Kinneret. There is more than one Mispah, but a Mispah in the south of Ephraim, in Benjamin, was a site of sacrifice in 1 Samuel 5. Perhaps they are mentioned just as representative sanctuaries in the north and south, or perhaps there had been treaty-making meetings there with people such as the Arameans or the Ammonites or the Philistines which would involve political and/or religious whoring. The supposed shields (4:18) have thus been deliberately straying from Yahweh’s way. Instead of shielding their people they are going deep into bringing about slaughter among them. The slaughter will be an expression of Yahweh’s discipline (*mûsār*),which can be a severe experience (e.g., Isa. 53:5; Jer. 2:30; 5:3; 30:14); Hosea will take up the related verb (7:12, 15; 10:10). It will mean Yahweh is the one who spreads a net and slaughters.

It will come about because Ephraim’s action does not escape Yahweh’s notice (v. 3). With irony, Hosea again takes up the verb *yāda’* which on either side refers to Ephraim’s not acknowledging Yahweh (4:1, 6; 5:4). Yahweh knows about Ephraim’s whoring, which has brought defilement upon it. Involvement with other deities stains people and makes them taboo, and any form of defilement, stain, or taboo makes it impossible for them to go into Yahweh’s presence until they’ve been cleansed.

But Ephraim won’t seek that cleansing; its deeds won’t let it (v. 4). It’s possessed by the whoring spirit (4:12) that won’t allow it to acknowledge Yahweh. Verses 3-4 thus work ABCB’A’:

Yahweh knows/acknowledges

 Ephraim has whored

 They can’t come back to Yahweh

 They have a whoring spirit

They haven’t acknowledged Yahweh.[[246]](#footnote-246)

**Hosea 5:5-7.** Yahweh goes on to restate the nature of Ephraim’s slaughter and discipline (v. 5). At the moment Ephraim is an impressive nation, able to hold its head high in the context of the nations around. But that stateliness is going to be replaced by insignificance, and Ephraim itself will have to face it. Hosea’s threat will come true when the Assyrians show up, but Hosea doesn’t enunciate a theory about how the humiliation will happen. He just knows it will. Yahweh won’t simply leave the monstrous situation as it is. Hosea doesn’t even make explicit that Yahweh will take action. Waywardness itself brings downfall. The same will apply to Judah; the last colon looks like a retrospective comment by Hosea or a disciple in the context of the later troubles that came to Judah towards the end of the eighth century.

It will be no good Ephraimites then thinking they can come back to Yahweh (vv. 6-7aα), in their unclean state. They may bring their sacrificial animals in the appropriate manner of people wanting to pray for Yahweh’s guidance and help, but they won’t find Yahweh accessible to them; there’ll be no response. Yahweh will have responded to their breaking faith by himself withdrawing from them.

They prayed to other deities for children, and they got them (v. 7aβb), so these are “alien children,” what Yahweh earlier called “whorish children” (1:2). It’s an ad hominem argument; Hosea hardly believed that the nonentities to whom they prayed could answer prayers. The children are like the alien women of Proverbs 5, or the alien man whom a wife prefers to her husband (Ezek. 16:32), who stands for alien gods (Jer. 2:25; 3:13), the gods from whom Ephraimites sought these children. Hosea knows that Yahweh is the one who can consume these children, who are the result of their parents’ breaking of faith. He will consume them along with their parents’ shares, the land once allocated to them by Yahweh (or their shares at the feast?). It will happen at some new month festival, one of those occasions when they gather to seek the gods’ blessing for the month that lies ahead (cf. 2:13 [15]). Such occasions were designed to be means of seeking blessing on the fields. Because of the nature of the worship offered then, they will have the opposite effect.[[247]](#footnote-247) They will be wise never to rejoice in those occasions from now on, because who knows which will be the occasion when the axe falls?

## Theological Implication

1. The people of God can be led astray by an “unfaithful spirit.” There is some mystery in talk about spirits, good and bad. Part of the mystery concerns where a bad spirit comes from. A suspicious husband’s jealous spirit comes simply from inside him (Num. 6). Does Saul’s bad spirit (1 Sam. 16:14) come simply from outside him or also from inside him? Does the spirit that deceives prophets (1 Kings 22) come simply from outside them or also from inside them?
2. There is a related mystery about why it sometimes seems impossible for the people of God to turn back to God. In what sense do their deeds not allow them to come back? While it surely would be quite possible to get cleansed, the problem is that the people of God won’t seek cleansing. Are they attached to their own ways and therefore unable to come back?
3. But apparently God will sometimes not have them back. Perhaps they may seek to come back to God, but not in a way that involves real turning. Does the unfaithful spirit somehow stop them? The puzzling nature of this dynamic also lies behind Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-39.

# Hosea 5:8—6:3: Sound Out (A Warning about Invasion)

## Translation

8Sound a horn at The Hill,

 a bugle at The Height![[248]](#footnote-248)

Shout in Bȇt ’Āwen:

 behind you,[[249]](#footnote-249) Binyāmin!

9’Eprayim, you will become[[250]](#footnote-250) a desolation,

 on the day of reproof.

Among the clans of Yiśrā’ēl

 I make known[[251]](#footnote-251) something truthful.

10 Yəhûdāh’s leaders have become

 veritable[[252]](#footnote-252) boundary-movers.

On them I will pour

 my fury like water,

11With ’Eprayim oppressed, harassed[[253]](#footnote-253) by the making of decisions,

 because it determined to go after[[254]](#footnote-254) emptiness,[[255]](#footnote-255)

12And me like a moth[[256]](#footnote-256) to ’Eprayim

 and like decay to Yəhûdāh’s household.

13’Eprayim has seen its ailment,

 Yəhûdāh its wound.[[257]](#footnote-257)

’Eprayim went to ’Aššûr,

 sent to the great[[258]](#footnote-258) king.

But that man—he won’t be able

 to heal you,

 and the sore will not go away[[259]](#footnote-259) from you.

14Because I’m the one who’ll be like a lion to ’Eprayim,

 like a cougar[[260]](#footnote-260) to Yəhûdāh’s household.

I, yes I, will tear, and I will go;

 I will carry and there will be no rescuer.

15I will go, I will turn back to my place,

 until they make restitution.[[261]](#footnote-261)

They will seek help from my face,

 when in their pressure they look urgently for me:[[262]](#footnote-262)

6:1“Come, let’s turn back to Yahweh,

 because he’s the one who tore, but he can heal us;

 he strikes down,[[263]](#footnote-263) but he can bandage us.

2He’ll bring us to life after a couple of days,

 on the third day he’ll stand us up,

 so we may live before his face 3and acknowledge him.[[264]](#footnote-264)

Let’s pursue acknowledgment of Yahweh,

 whose coming out is as established as dawn.[[265]](#footnote-265)

He will come to us like rain,[[266]](#footnote-266)

 like spring rain that waters[[267]](#footnote-267) the earth.”

## Interpretation

An indirect bidding to pay heed marks the beginning of a new section, which changes the subject. Another indirect bidding to pay heed in 8:1 will also suggest a new beginning and one might then view 5:8—7:16 as one section, but it would be somewhat longer than any other section in the scroll, and there is a disjunction after 6:3, so I make a break there. Once again this section urges the paying of attention, though it does so in an indirect way; it indicts both Ephraim and Judah for their wrongdoing—though here explicitly in the context of politics; it warns of the consequences; and it distinctively lays out the kind of response Ephraim and Judah need to make.

Hosea 5:8—6:3 warns Ephraim of an invasion by Judah which will be an act of Yahweh’s reproof for its unfaithfulness in looking to Assyria for support, the first reference to Assyria in the scroll. The invasion will also be an act for which Yahweh will chastise Judah itself. Yahweh intends therefore to withdraw from both Ephraim and Judah until they look seriously to him. The “sustained” reference to Judah as well as Ephraim[[268]](#footnote-268) with its critique of the “fratricidal war”[[269]](#footnote-269) is a mark of the section. The historical background may be the tensions between Ephraim and Judah in the context of Assyrian attacks on Ephraim in the 730s,[[270]](#footnote-270) but there are a number of possible ways of linking the prophet’s message to this context.[[271]](#footnote-271) We know of Ephraimite recourse to Assyria in the previous century but not in Hosea’s time, which wouldn’t make sense as Ephraim was now resisting Assyria.[[272]](#footnote-272) In the eighth century Assyria reduced first Ephraim then Judah to shadows of their former selves, and Ephraim’s weakness could provide a context for a Judahite invasion. But we don’t have record of one, and the prophecy doesn’t correlate with any sequence of events that we can reconstruct from references in the First Testament or in Assyrian sources. In other words, the section is a prophecy in the sense of a declaration of the kind of thing that Yahweh intends to do, but one cannot link it with a sequence of events in Hosea’s day or with the literal nature of a series of events.[[273]](#footnote-273) It instructs people on the certainty and meaning of events rather than on what one might be about to read in the newspaper. It thus compares with Yahweh’s declarations about (say) the fall of Edom or Babylon. Hosea’s words are poetic, metaphorical, and allusive. His concern is how Ephraim needs to respond to Yahweh in the context of the crisis he speaks of, and indeed it makes little difference which crisis it is.

**Hosea 5:8-9a.** Hosea or Yahweh metaphorically issues people with an indirect exhortation to pay attention that parallels the more literal and direct biddings in 4:1 and 5:1. Tg not inappropriately prefaces the section by urging, “Prophets, lift your voices and….” The people who are literally to give their attention overhear the exhortation and are expected to imagine the sounding of the instruments and to respond to what they imagine.

The sounding (literally, the blasting) of a ram’s horn (v. 8) would be chiefly familiar as a summons to battle or a warning of attack, but the sounding of a silver bugle would evoke the context of worship. When the two instruments appear together elsewhere (1 Chron. 15:28; 2 Chron. 15:14; Ps. 98:6) it is in connection with worship, but the context here suggests war. So the exhortation suggests both a battle summons or warning and a summons to worship. The metaphorical sounding is to happen in Benjamin, in Gibeah, Ramah, and the border town of Beth-el (see on 4:15), which are all near each other on the way from Judah to Ephraim. Benjamin sometimes counted as part of Judah and sometimes as part of Ephraim. Whenever Ephraim was marching south or Judah was marching north, the sound of alarm would be needed in Benjamin and its towns; see e.g., 1 Kings 5:16-22; and closer to Hosea’s time, 2 Kings 14:8-14. “Behind you, Benjamin” might be a warning or an encouragement.

On this occasion (v. 9a) the coming battle is one Ephraim will lose (cf. the promise to Judah in Isa. 7:1-17). Ephraim is going to be desolated: the noun (*šammāh*) can refer both to physical devastation and to the loss of morale that follows. It will not be just a military reversal but a day of reproof. Yahweh is by implication the reprover. He is implementing the threats Hosea has uttered (there is an ironic link with 4:4) and the curses threatened in Deuteronomy 28 (for “desolation,” see Deut. 28:37).

**Hosea 5:9b-13aαβ.** When Hosea goes on to allude to the clans of Israel (5:9b) one would initially assume that “Israel” denotes “Ephraim” as in previous sections, but he will later use “Israel” to denote the entire people of God (see 6:11b—7:1; 9:10; 11:1; 12:13; 14:1, 5). Here the allusion prepares the way for the next verse and the concern with both Ephraim and Judah in this section. “Making known something truthful” applies to Hosea’s declarations about Ephraim but also to his imminent declarations about Judah. All Israel will be wise to take notice of what Yahweh is here reliably declaring. When Yahweh says that something is going to happen, it happens (even if not in the literal way in which the words speak). The metaphorical alarm needs to be heeded in the appropriate literal way, and not merely by shutting the gates of the towns that have been named, and not merely in Benjamin.

On this occasion Judah is appropriating territory (v. 10a). “Boundary-mover” elsewhere refers to someone surreptitiously moving the boundary stone between his family’s land and his neighbor’s (e.g., Deut. 19:14; Prov. 22:28). Hosea applies the idea to a larger-scale appropriation of land by Judah, which Hosea pictures happening in Benjamin and/or in areas within Ephraim itself.

Judah will pay the penalty (v. 10b). No penalty is laid down for someone who undertakes the literal action in the Torah and in Proverbs; perhaps the implication is that it’s not something anyone would think about. In connection with this boundary-moving, the Ephraimite audience will be glad to hear that terrible punishment will be imposed on Judah. Hosea is not some Judahite sympathizer but the messenger of the One who is God of all the clans of Israel.[[274]](#footnote-274) The action will involve fury like an overwhelming flash flood pouring out (the word for fury recalls another verb meaning overflow). Yahweh will personally bring it about.

Hosea goes on to invite people into a different act of imagination (v. 11a) from the one in v. 8. The verbs are participles and there are no verbs in v. 12; the absence of any marker of a change in perspective suggests that Hosea continues to speak of the future. He is projecting himself and his audience into the situation when disaster has happened. They are to picture themselves oppressed: the word describes the repressive and harsh treatment of the powerless by the powerful within the community or by a bigger national power, typically through appropriating their resources (e.g., 1 Sam. 12:3, 4; Isa. 52:4; Mic. 2:2). Ephraim is itself guilty of oppression (Hos. 12:7 [8]; Amos 4:1), so there’s poetic justice in oppression being its fate. If it seems unfair to people within Ephraim who are already oppressed, one might hypothesize that by definition they actually have little to lose, but in speaking of the fate of Ephraim or Judah as a whole, the Prophets do not take this consideration into account. The rarer and more concrete “harassed” or “crushed” or “broken” then underlines the point (it accompanies “oppressed” in 1 Sam. 12:3, 4; Amos 4:1). The two participles come together in Deuteronomy 28:33: Hosea is again portraying an implementation of the kind of curses that appear in the Torah. Yahweh is the unspecified subject of the passive verbs here, but reticence about quite saying so is appropriate; the only passage where Yahweh is explicitly the agent of oppression or harassment is an accusation in Job 10:3. Like “reproof” in v. 9, reference to “the making of decisions,” the exercise of authority or judgment (*mišpāṭ*), reaffirms that Hosea is not talking about a mere military or political reversal but about something Yahweh has brought about as an expression of his governing the world in the right way. Ephraim was supposed to be responsible for the proper exercise of authority in its own life but it has failed (cf. 5:1; 10:4; the promise in 2:19 [21]; and the exhortation in 12:6 [7]); also Amos 5:7; 6:12). Its being the victim of Yahweh’s exercise of authority is a further act of poetic justice (*sic*).

The reason why Ephraim will be in this state (v. 11b) is not that it lacked leadership or decisiveness. It has acted decisively but in the wrong direction. “Emptiness” refers to the usual Ephraimite inclination to go after other gods or (more likely in the present context) seek political alliances: perhaps a present alliance with Aram (cf. Isa. 7), but more likely (v. 13 will suggest) its past recourse to Assyria.

Yahweh goes on to describe his action even more concretely and vividly (v. 12). Moth and decay form a natural pair (cf. Job 13:28). Moth (like locust) is a devastating affliction that totally destroys things. The further reference to Judah reaffirms that its being the agent whereby Yahweh chastises Ephraim doesn’t exempt Judah from punishment for the wrongful act whereby it fulfilled this role.

In the further, more conventional double image (v. 13aαβ) the verbs are qatal, instances of the “prophetic perfect” which “imparts to descriptions of the future a forcible and expressive touch of reality, and reproduces vividly the certainty with which the occurrence of a yet future event is contemplated by the speaker.”[[275]](#footnote-275) “Ailment” and “wound” compare with Isaiah 1:5-6 but they are the kind of thing that issue from failure to keep the pact (Deut. 28:69, 61). While they have seen their lesions, otherwise “a blindness has fallen upon Ephraim and Judah.”[[276]](#footnote-276)

**Hosea 5:13aγδ-15.** How is one to respond to a situation of this kind? In the past Ephraim has sent envoys off to Assyria. Assyrian records relate that Jehu paid tribute to the Assyrian king in the ninth century.[[277]](#footnote-277) Second Kings 15:17-22 relates how one of Jeroboam’s immediate successors did so to gain Assyria’s support.

The hope would be that Assyria would take Ephraim’s side, for a consideration (v. 13aγδ). Judah used the same move against Ephraim (2 Kings 16:5-9). But such hopes depend on forgetting who will be behind Ephraim’s troubles—not a human attacker but a King rather bigger than Assyria’s. He won’t be able to heal Ephraim or make its wound go away. The talk of healing, with the coming declaration that there will be no rescuer, again parallels Deuteronomy (see Deut. 32:39, which also speaks of Yahweh as the one who brings to life: cf. Hos 6:1).

Yahweh reinforces the declaration (v. 14) with yet another image. Yes, trouble is on the way to both households. While an opposing army can wound, so can a fierce animal like a lion or especially a “teenage lion,” not fully-grown but with a big appetite and full of energy, old enough to hunt its prey and be very dangerous to meet. Yahweh declares the intention to behave like such an animal, which will maul and thus kill, then go, and carry the prey off, with no one able to rescue it. Whereas people might think of Assyria or its king as a lion (cf. Nah. 2:11-13 [13-15]), and might even think of themselves that way, Yahweh is the real lion to be afraid of.

In seguing from the simile (v. 15) Yahweh keeps the verb “I will go” and thus implies that his “place” to which he returns is his lair, though Tg nicely has “his holy home in the heavens.” Perhaps this second going “represents a failure of nerve…. No matter how fully he enters into the role of the lion, this does not seem to be what he wants.” While he goes, “he still waits.”[[278]](#footnote-278) And he reverts to speaking about Ephraim’s relationship with him. It will be by going through the savaging that he intends that Ephraim will “make restitution” for their wrongdoing. Having does so, they will be in a position to turn and seek help from him rather than from the political resources that tempt them. It will happen when the distress he puts them through drives them to. Seeking help from “my face” suggests looking to him in the way one looks to a king whose face is key to beneficent provision. If the look from the king is a frown, it can mean denial of a request, or even death, and the Ephraimites’ chastisement means that their majesty is being put down “before his face” (v. 5). But the look from the king can mean life if he smiles and gives the nod to his aides to provide for the suppliant. Being put down need not be the end of the story.

**6:1-3**. Hosea is not explicit that 6:1-3 are the words people will need to speak to Yahweh when they come to look urgently for him, but the verses have no other introduction, and I follow LXX and Tg in inferring that they are such words. MT has no break at this point and vv. 1-3 take up Yahweh’s words from the immediate past lines as well as earlier sections. They are the words Yahweh wants to put on people’s lips.

The language is exquisite, the religious practice thoughtful, the theology apt, the repentance explicit, the recognition of appropriate divine judgment evident, and the quest for knowledge of the Lord in tune with Hosea's most basic concerns. Moreover, creation is related to God and not Baal, there are no signs of apostate worship, and their hope in God is voiced clearly. Indeed, the people do what 3:5 anticipates they will do.[[279]](#footnote-279)

They need to turn back, in a positive sense (v. 1), given that Yahweh has turned back in a bad sense (5:15). The interrelationship between 5:8-15 and vv. 1-3 is further signaled by the fact that seeking help and turning back (5:5 and 6:1) are interrelated motifs (see 2:7 [9]; 3:5; 5:4-6; they will reappear in 7:10). Seeking help from Yahweh rather than from other political or religious resources is basic to Israel’s identity. Therefore when Ephraim has been looking elsewhere, it has to turn back to Yahweh in order to look to him again. It needs to turn back to Yahweh as the one who tore and who can heal as no one else can (cf. 5:13-14). The parallel colon that makes v. 1 a tricolon then expresses the negative and the positive in new terms—Yahweh struck down, Yahweh can bandage.

Yahweh’s prescribed words (v. 2) first restate that positive point, in parallel abb’a’ cola. Two days and a third day resembles the English expression “two or three days” in simply suggesting a short time, though here “after two days” and “on the third day” are parallel expressions referring to the same day. They are not strict arithmetical expressions (cf. Isa. 17:6; Amos 4:8).[[280]](#footnote-280) Metaphorically speaking, the wounded people will soon be revived and helped to stand. Or possibly the two verbs are also parallel: the people who are corpses will be revived and thus lifted up from Sheol (cf. Isa. 26:14, 19). Or perhaps the corpses will first have new life breathed into them, then be stood up so as to be active (cf. Ezek. 37:4-10). In one conceptuality or another, a people that is severely ill or dead will be brought back to life. Once more an unexpected third colon completes a tricolon that first picks up the verb “live” again but importantly adds “before his face,” which takes up the references in 5:5, 15. This seeking help from Yahweh’s face means looking to him as the one who will smile again and will provide. At least as importantly the third colon adds the end that people may acknowledge him. It takes up the importance of that expression in Hosea, not least in association with the reference to Ephraim’s majesty being humbled (5:4; also e.g., 4:6a, 6b). While acknowledging is a key to experiencing Yahweh’s blessing, Yahweh’s blessing also issues in acknowledging.

Restating the point again (v. 3), more forcefully, the people need to pursue, chase, go after the acknowledgment of Yahweh, which on one hand is at the other extreme from ignoring it or rejecting it and on the other hand involves a different object of “pursuit” from the one mentioned earlier (2:7 [9]). The second colon offers a self-reassuring affirmation. Like English, Hebrew speaks of dawn or the sun “coming up,” but it can also speak of the sun “coming out” in the morning (Gen. 19:23), which facilitates the drawing of an analogy with Yahweh “coming out,” from the place to which he has withdrawn (5:15). Rain offers another analogy, arguably a more promising one. While the reliability of rain is less “established,” its life-giving effect is the more noticeable. That principle applies to rain in general; the second colon gives precision to the point by referring to the spring rain that plays a key role in making the crops come to maturity.

## Theological Implications

1. God’s declarations give his people concrete imaginative portraits of what God intends and of its meaning. They are designed to provoke people into hope, trust, and repentance. In inspiring prophets to speak about coming events, God does not generally provide them simply with an advance report. One reason is that they are sometimes designed to mislead (see 1 Kings 22). Another reason is that their fulfillment depends on an interaction with the response of the addressees (see Jer. 18). Another reason is that their fulfillment depends on an interaction with other people involved (see Ezek. 26 and 29). Another reason is that they use imagery and scriptural allusion because their aim is to bring home the meaning of events for their hearers not merely the concrete nature of events. Thus one could not work out in advance from First Testament prophecies what would be the literal nature of the fall of Jerusalem, of its restoration, of its deliverance from Antiochus, or of sort of person Jesus would be (hence John the Baptizer’s puzzlement at what Jesus did), nor from the New Testament can one work out what Jesus’s final appearing or the new heavens and the new earth will be like. But on the basis of God’s declarations one can respond to invitations to repentance before God, trust in God, and hope in God.
2. So God warns his people about coming disaster in order to urge them to turn back to him, and appeals to their imagination to reinforce that urging. God’s warnings are those of someone with power, like those of a teacher or a parent; they need to be treated as trustworthy and reliable, not as questionable or moot.
3. When such disaster comes to the people of God, it is palpably experienced as calamity and as comparable to oppression by a superpower, but it also needs to be understood as reproof or chastisement and as an expression of the proper governmental authority that belongs to God. It is not only punishment imposed for the sake of reasserting the moral and theological order that is affirmed in the community but also discipline designed for the shaping and upbuilding of the people of God itself. Thus the word “reproof” conceals good news, because reproof wants to achieve something in the life of the person reproved. It cannot be said that wrath is always an expression of love designed to bring change, but reproof always has that implication.
4. Honoring people’s right to their land is a principle that applies not only within the nation but between nations. We seek the freedom of others as well as our own freedom.[[281]](#footnote-281)
5. In talking of God as lion and even as consuming disease, “with Hosea,… the prophet of God’s love, the element of dreadfulness in the Nature of God stands out clearly.”[[282]](#footnote-282) Then “‘God’s returning to his place’… is the ‘turning’ to end all turnings.”[[283]](#footnote-283) There is a much loved quote from C. S. Lewis: “‘Aslan is a lion—*the* Lion, the great Lion….’ ‘Is he—quite safe?...’ ‘Safe?’ said Mr. Beaver…. ‘Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He’s the King, I tell you.’”[[284]](#footnote-284) Christians appeal to the quote rather easily, and the first part must not have its teeth pulled.
6. God may use one party within the people of God to bring trouble to another, but the one he uses will then find itself under chastisement even though used by God in this way, if its own aim in the action took was its own advance. The principle that applies outside the people of God (e.g., to one of the great empires) also applies within it.
7. When the people of God are in trouble, their temptation is to look elsewhere for support, but it won’t work. God is more powerful than other tempting resources. There is no one can rescue the people of God from God.
8. When the people of God make no response to his warnings and he imposes his chastisement, he may then simply go away and leave them for a while until he deems the chastisement to be long enough (cf. Isa. 40:1-2). If God doesn’t immediately revive his people, he doesn’t delay that reviving for too long, in case our spirits fail.[[285]](#footnote-285)
9. The time may then come when they come to their senses and recognize that the one who struck them is the one to whom they should have been looking all the time.
10. In his graciousness God provides them with the words to say when they come back. They involve a resolution to turn back and to commit themselves in a serious way to giving God the acknowledgment that they had been denying him as they turned to other resources.
11. More important are the facts about God that they can then lay hold of, which God also reminds them of my giving them these words. The proposed prayer’s theological implications in the narrow sense lie here. God is one who wounds, but then heals. God is one who gives life and stands people up. The shining of God’s light is as reliable as that of the sunrise. The refreshing and enlivening that God can bring is as remarkable as that of the rain. It will be possible thus to live before God, to live in the sphere of his blessing, and to live a life that acknowledges him.
12. It’s okay for Israel to attach to God the hopes that other people would have regarding the Master. “Hosea’s religion, too, is a ‘fertility religion’ in which the blessings of the deity will be manifest in agricultural abundance and fertile wombs.”[[286]](#footnote-286) Yahweh is a weather God, and they have put the weather God out of mind.[[287]](#footnote-287)
13. Possibly Paul’s declaration that Jesus “was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” implies a link with Hosea 6:2. Certainly Tertullian makes links of this kind. In one passage he relates it to the women disciples:

Prophecy does not omit the (pious) office of the women who resorted before day-break to the sepulchre with the spices which they had prepared. For of this incident it is said by Hosea: “To seek my face they will watch till day-light, saying unto me, Come, and let us return to the Lord: for He hath taken away, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up; after two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up.” For who can refuse to believe that these words often revolved in the thought of those women between the sorrow of that desertion with which at present they seemed to themselves to have been smitten by the Lord, and the hope of the resurrection itself, by which they rightly supposed that all would be restored to them?[[288]](#footnote-288)

Elsewhere he relates it to Jesus’s return to heaven:

Why, accordingly, after His resurrection from the dead, which was effected on the third day, did the heavens receive Him back? It was in accordance with a prophecy of Hosea, uttered on this wise: Before daybreak will they arise unto Me, saying, Let us go and return unto the Lord our God, because Himself will draw us out and free us. After a space of two days, on the third day — which is His glorious resurrection— He received [Him] back into the heavens.[[289]](#footnote-289)

Both passages illustrate the fruitfulness of the inspiration of Hosea.[[290]](#footnote-290) Perhaps there was a twinkle in the Holy Spirit’s eye when he inspired Hosea to lay before Israel the possibility of Yahweh’s bringing the people back to life after two or three days, because he knew how this God would raise Jesus after two or three days, and restore him to his place in the heavenly realm, and restore the women who believed in him.

# Hosea 6:4—7:16: Will You Answer (A Puzzling Question about You)

## Translation

4What shall I do about you, ’Eprayim,

 what shall I do about you, Yəhûdāh,

When[[291]](#footnote-291) your commitment is like morning cloud,

 like the dew, going early in the day?[[292]](#footnote-292)

5That’s why I have cut them down[[293]](#footnote-293) with prophets,

 slaughtered them with the words of my mouth.

And decisions about you[[294]](#footnote-294) should go out as light,[[295]](#footnote-295)

 6when I want commitment not sacrifice,

 acknowledging of God rather than burnt offerings?

7But those people—they’ve transgressed a pact as at Adam,[[296]](#footnote-296)

 they broke faith with me there.

8Gil‘ad is a town of evildoers,

 footprinted[[297]](#footnote-297) with blood.

9Like people waiting for[[298]](#footnote-298) someone,

 the company of priests are raiding gangs.

They murder on the road to Šekem;[[299]](#footnote-299)

 indeed they’ve performed a deliberate atrocity.

10In Yiśrā’ēl’s household I saw a horror[[300]](#footnote-300)—

 ’Eprayim’s whoring there.

Yiśrā’ēl defiled itself, 11Yəhûdāh too;[[301]](#footnote-301)

 he has set a harvest for you.[[302]](#footnote-302)

11bWhen I turn back[[303]](#footnote-303) my people’s fortunes,[[304]](#footnote-304)

 7:1as I heal Yiśrā’ēl,

’Eprayim’s waywardness reveals itself,[[305]](#footnote-305)

 Šōmərōn’s bad dealing,

 because they’ve practiced falsehood.

As a thief comes in,

 a raiding band has been marauding outside.[[306]](#footnote-306)

2And they just don’t[[307]](#footnote-307) say to themselves[[308]](#footnote-308)

 that[[309]](#footnote-309) I am mindful of all their bad dealing.

Now their deeds have surrounded them,

 as they’ve been in front of my face.

3Through their bad dealing, they make a king happy,

 and officials, with their deception.

4They’re all of them committing adultery,

 like an oven burning without[[310]](#footnote-310) a baker,

Who stops stirring

 from the kneading of the dough until its leavening.

5On our king’s day they made the officials sick[[311]](#footnote-311)

 with poison from wine.

He joined his hand with mockers

 6when they came near,[[312]](#footnote-312) their mind like an oven, with their trick.

Though their baker[[313]](#footnote-313) slept all night,

 in the morning it was burning,

 as a blazing fire.

7All of them get hot like an oven,

 and consume their governing authorities.

All their kings have fallen,

 though there is no one among them calling to me.[[314]](#footnote-314)

8’Eprayim is among the peoples,[[315]](#footnote-315)

 ’Eprayim mixes,[[316]](#footnote-316)

 he’s become a pita not turned.

9Aliens have consumed his vigor,

 but he himself has not acknowledged it.

Gray hair has tossed over him, too,

 but he himself has not acknowledged it.

10So Yiśrā’ēl’s majesty is humbled[[317]](#footnote-317) before it,

 but they haven’t turned back to Yahweh their God,

 they haven’t sought help from him, with all this.

11’Eprayim has become like a pigeon,

 simple, no sense.

They’ve called Miṣrayim,

 they’ve gone to Aššûr!

12When they go,

 I’ll spread my net over them.

Like a bird of the heavens I’ll bring them down;

 I’ll discipline them in accordance with the report to their meeting.[[318]](#footnote-318)

13Alas for those people, because they’ve fled from me;

 destruction for them, because they’ve rebelled against me!

And I—I could redeem them,

 but they—they’ve spoken lies about me.

14They haven’t cried out to me with their heart,

 when they wail on their beds.

As they rage[[319]](#footnote-319) over wheat and new wine,

 they turn away[[320]](#footnote-320)against me.

15When I myself disciplined, I strengthened their arms,

 but they thought up something that was bad regarding me.

16They turn back, to one who is not on high;[[321]](#footnote-321)

 they’ve been like a bow that lies.[[322]](#footnote-322)

Their officials will fall by the sword,

 because of their tongue’s condemnation,

 that is, their mocking, in the country of Miṣrayim.

## Interpretation

Whereas the English chapter division separating 6:1-3 from 5:8-15 makes a link between 6:1-3 and 6:4-6, and thus suggests that 6:4-6 is Yahweh’s response to 6:1-3, there is no verbal link between 6:4-6 and 6:1-3 and except the word “acknowledgment.” A jump is needed to see 6:4-6 as a response to 6:1-3, which did not refer to “commitment” or sacrifice. Rather, 6:4-6 is the beginning of a new section (so LXX)[[323]](#footnote-323) one of whose effects is to indicate why Yahweh needed to make the kind of undertakings expressed in 2:14-23 [16-25], which also spoke of commitment, acknowledgment, pact, and decision. The protest in 6:4-6 relates not to the unreliability of Israel’s words in 6:1-3 (which in any case Israel hasn’t uttered) but to Israel’s general unreliability, of which 6:4-6 introduces a sequence of instances. The English division between chapters 6 and 7 does correspond to a division in MT (either petuhah or setumah) but the sequence of instances continues in chapter 7, and in chapter 8. But while MT has no break after 7:16, the new summons at 8:1 (paralleling the one in 5:8) suggests a break there.

Luther comments as he moves to chapter 7, “This is also an obscure chapter.”[[324]](#footnote-324) But a sequence of concrete allusions suggests links with events towards the end of Ephraim’s existence as a nation. The section makes sense as a reflection from 734-732, when Assyria several times invaded and cut Ephraim down to size. Hosea challenges Ephraim to recognize that its internal and external policies in that decade lie behind what is happening, and to give Yahweh the commitment and acknowledgment of which 6:4-6 speaks. It would have partially similar implications when taken to Judah in the context of late eighth century politics (or late seventh century politics or the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century). The section aims to get Israel to acknowledge the facts and turn back, so that the disasters that Yahweh has brought may function as discipline rather than mere punishment.

**Hosea 6:4-6**. Hosea continues to concern himself with both Ephraim and Judah. In Ephraim it would again indicate that he is not just anti-Ephraimite, and in Judah it would hinder people from feeling superior. While Yahweh’s words are not a response to vv. 1-3, they could be a response to the kind of prayer Israelites did pray. Both peoples have been coming to Yahweh with their sacrifices and burnt offerings, pleading with Yahweh about being cut down and slaughtered, beseeching Yahweh to act decisively on their behalf to bring light rather than darkness and thus show commitment to them (see e.g., Pss. 25:7; 44:26 [27]), and claiming or promising their acknowledgment of Yahweh and their commitment. The response in vv. 4-6 is then other than the one they hoped for.

Behind Yahweh’s opening question (v. 4) is the unreliability of their commitment (*ḥesed*). Elsewhere the word denotes Yahweh’s commitment to the world and to Israel, or people’s commitment to one another (see 2:19 [21] and the comments; also 4:1). There is no parallel in the Torah or the eighth-century Prophets for understanding commitment to denote an attitude to Yahweh,[[325]](#footnote-325) though the rest of this section will illustrate how Hosea closely associates acknowledgment of Yahweh and faithfulness in the community. While Yahweh may then be referring to morning mist, his point is stronger if he is speaking of the morning cloud in Israel’s highlands that can look as if it promises rain but whose appearance is more often than not deceptive. Dew plays a key role in the dry summer months in bringing crops to fruition, but it soon disappears. Israel’s commitment has been similar to both, as its story from the beginning shows.

Hence Yahweh’s butchering of Israel (v. 5); it’s a vicious word (cf. Isa. 51:9). Yahweh has taken this action by means of his prophets: that is, he has declared what he was intending to do and has thereby implemented it. “Prophetic speech” is “the agent of death.”[[326]](#footnote-326) Yahweh brought judgment on kings and other prophets by means of people such as Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah, though not so much on the people as a whole. Hosea’s words thus make us think rather of prophets such as himself, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, whose words were implemented in the events of the 730s.

Yahweh makes his decision go out like the light (vv. 5b-6). But that applies to people who trust in him (Ps. 37:6), and Israel does not belong to this category, so is there any reason why things should suddenly become different? The reason why Yahweh can hardly issue such positive decisions is the absence of commitment and of acknowledgement of God (cf. 4:1). Sacrifice and burnt offering strictly denote sacrifices shared by Yahweh and the offerers at a fellowship meal, and sacrifices wholly given over to God. The pair of terms constitute a common First Testament summary of the nature of liturgical worship (e.g., Pss. 50:8; 51:16 [18], in contexts like the present one). Usually in Hosea, worship is problematic because it’s offered to the Masters. Here, Hosea refers to worship offered to Yahweh, but still unacceptable as an alternative to commitment and acknowledgment of Yahweh.

**Hosea 6:7-11a.** The resumptive “those people” are Ephraim and Judah (as vv. 10-11 will confirm). What will follow through the rest of the section is the facts behind the conclusion in vv. 4-6.

If Hosea’s audience knew the Eden Garden story, the opening (v. 7) might at first make them think of Adam the man, but the line’s parallelism would make them realize that it refers to Adam the place, a Jordan River crossing (modern Damiyah). The parallelism’s further reference to breaking faith and transgressing a pact might make the audience think then of the Israelites’ crossing of the Jordan to come after resealing their pact or commitment with Yahweh. The crossing at Adam was where the Jordan’s water stopped to facilitate that crossing, further down the river by Jericho (Josh. 3:16). That crossing was soon followed by their transgressing the pact at Trouble Vale (Josh. 7) to which Hosea referred earlier (2:15 [17]) and by their making their way to Shechem (cf. v. 9b) where they reaffirmed the obligations of the pact (Josh. 8:30-35).

Hosea’s reference to Gilead (v. 8) contrasts with the way his expressions are generally too open and indefinite to link with particular events This reference might make his audience also think of a more recent failure of commitment and acknowledgment on the part of Ephraim in particular (see 2 Kings 15:23-25): hence the comparison, “as at Adam.” About 738, the Ephraimite king Pekahiah was killed by an aide, Pekah ben Remalyahu, with the support of fifty men from Gilead (see v. 8). “A *town* of evildoers” may be figurative description of the Gilead *region* (comparable to his saying that “Gilead is a den of robbers”),[[327]](#footnote-327) or it may allude to a town such as Heights-in-Gilead where Jehu’s bloodshedding received its commission (2 Kings 9); there is also some evidence of there being a town actually called Gilead as there was later a region called Samaria as well as a town of that name.[[328]](#footnote-328) The slayers, people whose feet have trodden through blood in doing their dastardly work, were involved in breaking their pact or loyal commitment to their king; and as they took their oath of allegiance in Yahweh’s name, they were also breaking faith with Yahweh. Adam would be a natural place for Gileadites to cross the Jordan on the way to Samaria via Shechem. Closing v. 8 with a reference to blood (*dām*) follows nicely on the way v. 7 almost opened with *’ādām*: the place of crossing became a place of blood.

Apparently the coup had the support of some priests (v. 9), who were thus involved in behaving like a raiding gang laying an ambush, whether or not they wielded the weapons. They were taking part in the scheme and thus in the killing, a “deliberate atrocity,” a *zimmāh*. While etymologically the word simply suggests something upon which you have deliberated, it usually applies to acts of enormity, particularly acts of sexual flagrancy, which fits the present context’s upcoming references to whoring and adultery (6:10; 7:4).

The scheme and its implementation were thus an extraordinary horror (v. 10abα) which Yahweh or Hosea “saw” (in v. 7 “I” was Yahweh, but in v. 11 Yahweh is “he”). “Israel” and “Ephraim” here both refer to the northern kingdom. Starting with “Israel” underlines the horror because that name marks Ephraim as the people of God, while in the parallelism “Ephraim” makes the reference more specific. More striking is the return to talk of Ephraim “whoring,” originally a metaphor for the religious unfaithfulness involved in having recourse to other gods, then for seeking help from human allies and/or for the recognition of other deities involved in making such alliances. It would be suggestive if Hosea has further extended the word’s meaning, to describe internal political violence as another way of having recourse to human political action, to fulfill your hopes, but this understanding requires some reading into his words. More likely the metaphor continues to have the earlier set of references: the irony of the coup in Samaria was that it brought no change in the realm that really mattered (2 Kings 15), since Pekah the assassin continued to follow the ways of his victim Pekahiah, who had learned them from his father Menahem. The more things changed, the more they stayed the same. Ephraim was still involved in horrific whoring.

The nation was still therefore engaged in defiling itself (v. 10bβ-11a): defilement issues from whoring (cf. 5:3; 5:7 also includes reference to breaking faith). “Israel” continues to denote Ephraim, since reference to Judah follows. Hosea has used ingathering as a negative image (4:3), and here “harvest” functions in the same way; being harvested is not much fun for wheat or fruit. The image can apply to other nations (Jer. 51:33; Joel 3:13 [4:13]); Hosea applies it to Ephraim and/or Judah (“you” in v. 11a is singular).

The “long tirade” with its “remarkable profusion” of expressions for wrongdoing (transgress a pact, break faith, evil, footprinted in blood, raiding gang, murder, deliberate atrocity, horror, whoring, defilement) will continue in the next subsection (waywardness, bad dealing, falsehood, theft, raiding band, marauding, bad dealing).[[329]](#footnote-329)

**Hosea 6:11b—7:2.** Yahweh goes on to make a general statement paralleling 6:4-6 regarding the dynamic which 6:7-11a has concretely illustrated. It reads like a further response to Israel’s protests about his treatment of his people.

Actually (6:11b-7:1aα), he is not in the habit of neglecting his people Israel; the parallelism suggests that Israel here denotes the people of God as a whole. “Turning back the fortunes” is a standard term for putting things right for the people, especially after they’ve been cut down by Yahweh. “Healing” provides a parallel image, with which “turn back” has been associated earlier (see 5:13—6:1 and the comments on 6:1).

The problem is on the other foot (v. 1aβγδb). Yahweh’s restoring and healing doesn’t lead to the people’s turning back to Yahweh. It almost seems to stimulate waywardness or bad dealing. It brings them out. Given that “Israel” denoted the people of God as a whole in the previous line, Hosea naturally goes on to speak of Ephraim in particular and of its capital, which as such is the focus of its bad dealing. It is his first explicit reference to Samaria (the Greek version of Šōmərōn), though the town was the actual location of the slaying to which the previous subsection alluded. Hosea walks a careful line in both safeguarding the principle that both Ephraim and Judah comprise Yahweh’s people and in focusing on his own people in accordance with his vocation and location. His allusions to falsehood and to a raiding band does suggest he is referring back to an event such as that slaying, though it also looks like an aphorism: trouble is attacking inside and outside. A coup entails falsehood, going about things as thieves and bandits do, coming in from outside in order to “steal” the throne.

The Ephraimites act as they do (v. 2) without taking into account the possibility that Yahweh may notice. As a result, with poetic justice their wayward deeds have come to surround the “thieves” like besieging enemies (e.g., Ps. 118:10-12), as they themselves had encircled and overwhelmed their victim, because in reality their deeds have been done right before Yahweh’s face.

**Hosea 7:3-7.** Hosea goes on to describe further the behavior of the people involved in a coup (v. 3), which might be the one just referred to, or might be the next one when Pekah was in turn assassinated by Hoshea ben Elah (see 2 Kings 15:30). Through the lying with which they initiate their wrongful action they give a false sense of security to the king and his administration in Samaria.

 In effect they are all adulterers (v. 4). Whereas Hosea has used this metaphor to describe unfaithfulness to Yahweh (2:2 [4] ; 3:1; 4:13-14), here it describes unfaithfulness to committed relationships in the political realm, and/or with the implication noted above that their involvement in political machinations designed to take their future into their own hands implies abandoning trust in Yahweh. With hindsight one might wonder whether this application of the metaphor also came earlier (see 4:2; and e.g., Jer. 9:2 [1]; 23:10). The plotters’ faithlessness makes them as menacing and treacherous as a hot oven. The oven will be cylindrical with the fire in the bottom; in the morning the baker inserts a piece of dough from the top and slaps it on one of the hot sides. The danger of its heat might not be obvious when he stops stirring the fire (or stops stirring the dough or stops stirring himself) and leaves the fire unattended while the dough is rising.

The coup was apparently effected at a dinner (vv. 5-6a): “our king’s day” might be his birthday, or his accession anniversary, or the actual day of his assassination. The slayers first got the officials ill with poisoned wine (or perhaps just with the wine’s heat—that is, they got them drunk). The king himself, having no idea what was going on (cf. v. 3), was prepared to shake hands with the slayers, unaware that behind their gesture of loyalty was mockery. With their trickery their mind was hot and dangerous like an oven when they came near to him: they themselves were like a baker who stokes his fire in the evening but then sleeps through the night knowing that all will be ready when it is needed; the fire can be fanned to a flame and the bread baked. The plotters have made their parallel preparations carefully and can implement them quickly when the moment comes (the image recurs in more straightforward form, without the baker complicating it, in Mic. 2:1).

So (v. 7), when the moment comes, they’re all heated up and ready to take action to consume like fire the governing authorities (the *šōpəṭîm*, the people responsible for *mišpāṭ*: see 2:19 [21]; 5:1, 11; 6:5). Hosea moves once again to speak in general terms. “Regicide has become fashionable; one after another the kings of Ephraim have fallen only to be replaced by their assassins.”[[330]](#footnote-330)After Jeroboam, a sequence of kings fell to coups: Zechariah and Shallum in about 750, then Pekahiah and Pekah in the 730s; the last king, Hoshea, was removed by Assyria but we don’t know how he died. Yet it didn’t make people in Ephraim turn to Yahweh.

**Hosea 7:8-12.** Hosea moves from talking about domestic intrigue to talking about international politics. Ephraim was involved with Assyria, then with Aram and then with Egypt in resisting Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 15—17; Isa. 7).

“Mixes” (*bālal*; v. 8)elsewhere refers to mixing flour and oil to make bread, which fits the context. It might have further resonances for Hosea’s hearers: more or less the only other metaphorical occurrence of the verb in the First Testament describes the mixing up of languages at Babel (Gen. 11:7, 9). It also recalls verbs meaning “be swallowed up” (*bāla‘*) or “wear out” (*bālāh*). But Hosea again takes up the baking metaphor to declare Ephraim a piece of flat bread that’s been cooked on only one side or whose dough was not properly turned over.

The foreigners (v. 9) are people Ephraim has been willing to ally with and seek help and strength from, but who have instead fatally weakened the nation through the tribute they’ve required and/or through the land they’ve appropriated. To put it another way, Ephraim has lost its youthful strength. But it won’t acknowledge the facts, and it continues the same policies.

To put it yet another way (v. 10), as a consequence its impressiveness has disappeared. Ephraim used to be more imposing than little Judah, but no longer (see 2 Kings 15:19-20, 29; 17:3). As Hosea threatened, it’s happened before its own eyes (5:5), but Ephraim still hasn’t returned to Yahweh or sought help from him. Hosea again takes up the verb *‘ānāh* (is humbled) and the linked expressions “turn back” and “seek help” that were used in that connection (5:4-6; cf. 2:7 [9]; 3:5; 5:15—6:1).

Ephraim has as much sense as a pigeon (v. 11); it advertises its presence by its cooing call, so it’s easy to catch. Historically, as far as we know Ephraim’s dealings with Assyria preceded those with Egypt (for which see 2 Kings 17:3-4); maybe Hosea refers to actions unmentioned in 2 Kings or to the policies of different contemporary parties in Ephraim,[[331]](#footnote-331) or speaks in general terms about the regular options open to little powers in the region (cf. 2 Kings 7:6).

Either way, Ephraim’s real catcher is Yahweh (v. 12). He’s like a trapper snaring birds in a net so as to cook them and eat them or trade them. Such is the form that Yahweh’s severe “disciplining” will take (cf. 5:2).Once again, Hosea’s hearers might hear him in two ways, understanding the verb not as the word for discipline (*yāsar*) but as the word for bind (*’āsar*).[[332]](#footnote-332) Either way, it will be in fulfilment of the report (*šēma‘*), the thing the prophet has heard from Yahweh,[[333]](#footnote-333) which Hosea has brought to their assembly.

**Hosea 7:13-16.** Yahweh brings the section to an end with a protest relating to their foreign policies, a protest that may again respond to their prayers, to their own lament. Perhaps they’ve urged Yahweh to redeem them (e.g., Pss. 25:22; 44:26 [27], psalms mentioned above in connection with an appeal to Yahweh’s “commitment”). Perhaps they’ve noted that they’ve been crying out to him (e.g., Ps. 142:1, 5 [2, 6]) and said that they’ve come back to him as he’s urged.

If so, once again Yahweh has a tough reply (v. 13). “Alas” (*’ôy*)can signify sadness or anger; what follows here implies more the latter. Fleeing suggests a continuation of the bird metaphor (cf. Jer. 4:25; 9:9); it may be another aspect of the pigeon’s lack of sense. The parallelism brings a double heightening. “Destruction” makes clear that the “oh” is indeed more anger than sadness, while “rebelling” makes a value judgment on “fleeing.” But pathos returns (v. 13b). Redeeming suggests doing whatever it takes to get people out of bondage, and ironically the verb is especially associated with getting Israel out of the Egypt with whom Ephraim has now got itself into bondage. How grievous that Ephraim tells lies about its redeemer instead of looking him to act that way, and speaks as if he no longer had a hand strong enough to redeem (see the references to redemption in Deut. 7:8; Jer. 31:11; Neh. 1:10).

Thus they haven’t cried out like the Israelites in Egypt (Exod. 2:23) (v. 14). Instead they’ve cried out and wailed like the victims of trouble that’s been brought by Yahweh: the verbs are especially used in parallelism of other nations suffering at Yahweh’s hand (e.g., Isa. 14:31; 15:3; Jer. 47:2). While crying out and wailing is quite appropriate, it doesn’t constitute turning to Yahweh as the one who struck them. Further, the heart and the bed suggest their response in private.[[334]](#footnote-334) In public, (v. 14b) they console themselves with drink, rage at their misfortune, and continue to resist Yahweh.

Yahweh’s further reference to discipline (v. 15) makes more explicit that their snaring and even their destruction (vv. 12-13) were designed towards a positive end. Any discipline is designed to strengthen, but they responded to it by thinking up something bad. That expression would usually suggest devising harm, which is odd when Yahweh is the victim (Nah. 1:11 is the nearest parallel); more likely the idea is that they have been attributing bad intentions or incompetence to Yahweh (cf. v. 13).

If they’re doing any returning (v. 16), it’s not to the One on High but to the Master, who is not on high (‘*al*) despite his name (*ba‘al*). They’ve been like a bow that lets the archer down. The final judgment is that their officers will fall by the sword, because their tongue has rejected and condemned prophets such as Hosea (cf. 6:5).[[335]](#footnote-335) Toing and froing between the regional powers will cost them their life: see 2 Kings 17:3-6 (that passage doesn’t refer to execution, but anyway Hosea will again assume that Yahweh rather than Assyria or Egypt is the real executioner). While the Ephraimites’ mocking might then mean their mocking by the Egyptians for their stupid policies, the parallelism suggests their own mocking of Yahweh and his policy expectations of them (cf. Isa. 5:19-20).

## Theological Implications

1. God is one who has to think through hard questions (“What will I do about you?”); Hosea 11 will take up the self-questioning again. The questions reflect the mystery of the rebelliousness and unreliability of the people of God (cf. Isa. 5:4) and of what can change it (cf. Hos. 8:5). God’s question in the context of what follows implies a recognition that punishing people doesn’t get God anywhere (cf. Gen. 8:21). God’s further hard question is whether to respond to intransigence with blessing instead of punishment, which is his resolve through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34); but it doesn’t seem to work either. God’s grace may succeed only in bringing out wrongdoing, like God’s imperatives. God could redeem us (Hos 7:7), but we may not be open to his redeeming us and there are limits to what he can force upon us. He is “a father who laments his inability to help wayward sons.”[[336]](#footnote-336) One might compare Jesus’s addressing the community in his day as an “unbelieving generation” and asking “How long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you?” (Mark 9:19).
2. Praying is a risky business. When protesting to God about things that have happened, one hopes for sympathy and a positive response. But prayer is an expression of a true relationship in which there can be straight talking by both sides. When we hope for a positive response, we may get a snorting one (cf. Isa. 42:18-25; 43:22-28; Matt. 15:21-28).
3. God’s snorting response may begin with a protest that we’re not committed in a long term way to one another; we don’t keep our word to one another; our feet have trailed in blood. “Faith by itself cannot please God, since it cannot even exist without love to our neighbour.”[[337]](#footnote-337)
4. The leaders of the people of God commonly take the lead in wrongdoing, being convinced that they know what needs to happen and believing that they have responsibility to take the right action. Yet what they do may be a deliberately planned atrocity. The execution of Jesus is the great example.
5. This leadership in wrongdoing particularly expresses itself in internal and external political policies. While sometimes God commissions coups, more often they issue from human initiatives that God is not behind. Likewise, seeking help from other groups or making alliances with them compromises trust in God and constitutes whoring or adultery that brings defilement (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14—7:1). Hosea’s declarations are paralleled by the prophecies about other nations in other prophetic books (e.g., Isa. 13—23) and are designed in part to warn Israel off from alliances with other nations. “Hosea’s political theology is absolutely clear: Allegiance to YHWH involves no allegiance to international powers. Yet such an international policy was utterly impractical.”[[338]](#footnote-338) Tough.
6. God’s response may also be a protest that in failing in our commitment to one another, we don’t acknowledge him; we don’t keep covenant with him; we’ve broken faith with him; our response to his restoring our blessing may be to seize the chance to be more wayward; we may not think seriously about the fact that he’s looking hard at what we’re doing; we don’t call to him; we don’t come back to him; we don’t seek help from him; we’ve fled from him; we’ve rebelled against him; we lie about him; we’ve lamented our situation but we haven’t cried out to him; we go back to resources that are not God. There’s a pattern about the failure of the people of God; one can see the same dynamics recurring over the centuries (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-11).
7. God’s response may also protest our stupidity in ourselves. We don’t face the facts about the results of our actions. Our standing is compromised and/or our pride testifies against us. We are as silly as a pigeon. Thieves, plotters, and other wrongdoers are like stupid people who tell themselves that God is not around (Ps. 14:1). People “imagine that he is, as it were, sleeping in heaven.”[[339]](#footnote-339) We may seek to deceive other people and ourselves and we may succeed but we will not succeed in deceiving God (Hos. 7:13).
8. Our lifestyle therefore brings consequences. God has set a harvest for his people. Our deeds may surround us. God asserts responsibility for what happens to his people: he cuts them down, he slaughters them. He uses agents such as prophets and imperial powers. But he clams responsibility. We get caught by the agencies that we think will be our resources, but the one who really catches us is God (cf. Matt. 21:33-41).
9. But God describes his punishment “not as the ultimate but as the penultimate judgment.”[[340]](#footnote-340) It’s disciplinary (cf. John 15:1-2). And God does restore and heal. This restoring and healing is not a response to people’s turning back to him. It comes first. But it then requires a response. It’s not possible to say, “Let’s continue in sin, so that grace may increase” (Rom. 6:1). Making that suggestion indicates that we haven’t understood at all the object and nature of God’s redeeming activity.
10. Although God’s assessment of his people in different places and times may be similar, he may treat them differently (cf. Rom. 9:6-26, which ends up with quotations from Hosea 1—2). “The difference between Judah and Ephraim… is that of God’s hesitation, his alternative futures.”[[341]](#footnote-341)
11. Hosea’s declaration that God is more interested in commitment to other people and in acknowledgment than in offerings, corresponds to Samuel’s declaration to Saul (1 Sam. 15:22). The principle that Samuel applies to Saul, Hosea applies to the people as a whole. Perhaps it is a well-known saying.[[342]](#footnote-342) For that matter, there is nothing distinctively Israelite about the declaration. The Egyptian “Instruction for King Meri-ka-re” (line 129) asserts, “”More acceptable is the character of one upright of heart than the ox of the evildoer.”[[343]](#footnote-343) Jesus applies Hosea’s words to people committed to living by the Torah (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). The Pharisees would have agreed with the saying; none of us are good at accepting the implications of the principles we recognize. There is something prophetic about the idea in the sense that it is a truth that we may not like and thus need to be reminded of. Yet there is nothing revolutionary about the idea. Nowhere do the Torah or the Prophets give any other impression than the one declared by Hosea; Leviticus (the book that is biggest on offerings) stresses both offerings and commitment, as do the Psalms.
12. In his comments about sacrifice, Hosea is not making a statement of theological principle, either to rule out sacrifice or to declare that sacrifice is fine as long as it’s accompanied by commitment and acknowledgment. To judge from his other sayings, it’s difficult to imagine him thinking about (e.g.) turning to God or seeking help from God without assuming that it would involve sacrifice. But Hosea would no doubt have scathing comments to make to interpreters who focus on the question about whether he is rejecting sacrifice in principle and neglect the point he makes, scathing comments along the lines of “I want commitment not commentaries, acknowledgment of God rather than scholarly articles.”
13. God’s greater interest in commitment than in sacrifice would be good news in contexts where sacrifice was no longer possible,[[344]](#footnote-344) which is the situation for Jews after 70 A.D.[[345]](#footnote-345)
14. While involvement in worship is unacceptable if not accompanied by mutual commitment, conversely, a prophet faced with people who stress the latter rather than the former would need to say, “A concern for justice isn’t enough; worship is also important; both love of neighbor and love of God.”

# Hosea 8:1-14: Horn to Your Mouth (A Confrontation about Political Initiatives)

## Translation

1Horn to your mouth:

 a veritable[[346]](#footnote-346) eagle is over Yahweh’s household![[347]](#footnote-347)

Since they have transgressed my pact,

 rebelled against my instruction,

2though they cry out to me,

 “My God, we acknowledge you, we Yiśrā’ēl.”[[348]](#footnote-348)

3Yiśrā’ēl has rebuffed what is good,

 though an enemy pursues him.[[349]](#footnote-349)

4They—they made a king, but not through me;

 they made officials,[[350]](#footnote-350) but I had not acknowledged them.

Their silver and their gold—

 they’ve made themselves idols.

In order that it may be cut down,[[351]](#footnote-351)

 5he has rebuffed[[352]](#footnote-352) your bullock, Shōmərôn.

My anger has blazed up against them;

 how long will they be incapable of being free of guilt?[[353]](#footnote-353)

6Because it was from Yiśrā’ēl,

 and it—a craftsman made it.

So it’s not a god;

 because Shōmərôn’s bullock will become broken bits.[[354]](#footnote-354)

7Because “they sow wind

 and reap hurricane.”[[355]](#footnote-355)

“Stalk that has no flower:

 just doesn’t[[356]](#footnote-356) produce flour.”

If perhaps it produces, strangers devour it;[[357]](#footnote-357)

 8Yiśrā’ēl has been devoured.

Now they’ve become among the nations

 like a container for which there’s no desire.

9Because they—they went up[[358]](#footnote-358) to Aššûr;

 a wild donkey on its own was ’Eprayim.[[359]](#footnote-359)

“Lovers”[[360]](#footnote-360) made them “give”;[[361]](#footnote-361)

 10yes, they indeed “give” among the nations.

Now I will collect them up, and they will writhe[[362]](#footnote-362) in a little while[[363]](#footnote-363)

 because of the burden[[364]](#footnote-364) of the king of officials.[[365]](#footnote-365)

11Because ’Eprayim has made many altars for doing wrong,

 though he had altars for doing wrong.

12Were I to write[[366]](#footnote-366) for him many things[[367]](#footnote-367) in my instruction,[[368]](#footnote-368)

 they would be thought of as strange.

13Though they offer roasted sacrifices to me,[[369]](#footnote-369)

 though flesh they eat,[[370]](#footnote-370)

Yahweh himself has not accepted them;[[371]](#footnote-371)

 now, he is mindful of their waywardness,

So that he will attend[[372]](#footnote-372) to their wrongdoings;

 they—they will turn back to Egypt.[[373]](#footnote-373)

14Yiśrā’ēl disregarded its maker,

 and built palaces,

While Yəhûdāh made many fortified towns,

 but I will send off fire on its towns and it will consume its strongholds.

## Interpretation

The bidding in 8:1 looks like a new beginning comparable to that in 5:8, though in other respects this section continues from the previous one.[[374]](#footnote-374) “Rebelled” and “cry out” (vv. 1-2) picks up from 7:13-14 (MT had a setumah there), and Hosea continues to report Yahweh’s words to him (except in v. 13aγbα) and to speak about Ephraim in the third person (except in v. 5aα). Yahweh thus warns Ephraim (and Judah) about the coming consequences of the unfaithfulness expressed in conducting its internal and external politics in a way that ignores its relationship with Yahweh and in constructing idols and altars. Ephraimite hearers thus overhear a communication about them between Yahweh and Hosea. A change comes with 9:1, where Hosea reverts to direct address of Ephraim and to speaking of Yahweh in the third person. MT thus has a setumah or petuhah at 9:1.

**Hosea 8:1-4a**. Once again Yahweh commissions the sounding of a horn (v. 1a; cf. 5:8). More precisely the horn is applied to the palate, which is not where a horn goes, but it is key to speech (e.g., Prov. 5:3; 8:7); Yahweh is commissioning Hosea himself to sound out (cf. Tg). The passage’s function is similar to that of a prophet’s account of his call (e.g., Isa. 6, as well as Hos. 1). A regular point about such accounts is that people need to listen in on what Yahweh is saying to Isaiah or Hosea in order to hear what Yahweh is saying about themselves. Once again the sounding of a horn might suggest a summons to worship, and it would not inevitably be cause for alarm. But this commission conveys greater urgency than the previous one; there isn’t even time to include a verb. The horn draws attention to the hovering of an eagle, which is also an ambiguous image. It was on eagle’s wings that Yahweh carried Israel from Egypt (Exod. 19:4; cf. Deut. 32:10-12): is this eagle hovering in protective fashion over Yahweh’s household, the household of Ephraim (cf. 1:6-7)? But the eagle (or vulture) is also an image for a nation swooping on Israel if it is unfaithful to Yahweh (Deut. 28:49; cf. Job 39:27-30; Jer. 48:40). Isaiah 31:4-5 plays with the image’s ambiguity.

Of course this is Hosea, so we know how the surface ambiguity is likely to resolve itself (v. 1b). Actually, the resolution is presupposed and unstated; Yahweh simply gives us the reasons for the obvious, which are themselves also obvious. Here the transgression is specifically of “my” pact (contrast 6:7), the pact between Yahweh and Israel that promises the eagle’s beneficent protection but expects loyalty in return. The parallelism makes the point more explicit. The more relational verb “rebel” (repeating the charge in 7:13) complements the more legal verb “transgress,” and the more concrete noun “my instruction” nuances “my pact,” which requires people to live by the instruction. I assume that the pact is the one that goes back to Sinai and that the instruction is a form of some of the material we have in *“the* Instruction,” the Torah, and my working hypothesis is that Hosea will be referring to some form of the Decalogue (cf. 4:1-3), but we have no critical basis for certainty concerning this question. In any case, there is little in the Torah about a matter such as appointing kings and officials (v. 4), so Yahweh’s account of Ephraim’s rebellion is not simply a kind of legal charge about transgressing the specific terms of their pact. As the development of the Torah itself indicates, the terms of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel change as situations change. It is the remit of people such as prophets to take up Moses’ responsibility for apprising Israel of what Yahweh expects in new situations.

Ephraim has been pleading for Yahweh’s help in a way that ignored its waywardness (v. 2). Yahweh again raises a question about their crying out to him (see 7:14 and the comments), though it’s a different question. They are behaving like the Israelites in Egypt, reminding Yahweh that they are “Israel,” his people, calling him “my God.” In this sense they acknowledge him. They would be doing so on the worship occasions associated with formalizing relationships with other nations. But therein lies the scandal in their prayers, which will be accompaniments to offerings, so that Yahweh’s words recall his challenge in 6:6; compare also 4:1 and 5:4 (with their reference to acknowledgment as here); 4:6 (with its reference to Yahweh’s instruction as here); and 6:3 (the pledge of acknowledgment in the context of the prayer they aren’t praying). They are “a parody of liturgy.”[[375]](#footnote-375)

With irony, Yahweh takes up Ephraim’s self-designation as Israel (v. 3), and notes the mysterious nature of its action, with its double stupidity. It has rebuffed, rejected, spurned, turned away from what is good for it (see 2:7 [9] and3:5, with the comments) by choosing instead what it thought was good (4:13). In the First Testament it is nearly always Yahweh who does any “rebuffing,” but the word is *zānaḥ* which is neatly similar to *zānāh*, “to whore,”one of Hosea’s favorite words. Whoring is thus implicitly linked with rebuffing what is good—or even rebuffing the One who is good. And Ephraim has acted in rebuff even though it is and/or will be under pressure from an enemy. Here too Yahweh leaves open whether the enemy is Assyria or whether it is himself, though the ironic taking up and reversing of the idea of pursuit (6:3) would point to the latter.

“They made a king” (v. 4a) could refer to recent king-makings. Like a Western democracy, Ephraim changes its leadership every few years (see 2 Kings 15—17), but it has less right to do so as the people of God. Yahweh critiques the self-willed nature of its action not the violence of its coups (he has been known to commission violence). But the context with its subsequent references to Ephraim’s bullock idol makes it more likely that Yahweh refers to Ephraim’s first king-making, even though he had himself designated Jeroboam I; as far as Ephraim was concerned, designating him was their own idea.[[376]](#footnote-376) In either case, the entire administration which would be the means of his coming to power and then would share in power with him also came from Ephraim rather than from Yahweh. The “officials” would include members of a king’s staff such as senior priests, secretaries of state, recorder, commander-in-chief, palace administrator, and overseers of the governors and of the conscript labor force (1 Kings 4:1-7). Yahweh’s use of the verb “acknowledge” recalls other passages where that verb means “designate,” virtually “choose,” notably Amos 3:2 (also Gen. 18:19).

**Hosea 8:4b-6.** Yahweh moves to talk more explicitly of Ephraim’s religious practice (v. 4bαβ), taking up his earlier condemnation of their use of the silver and gold he gave them through the flourishing that enabled them to engage in trade (2:8 [10]) and his critique of “idols” (see 4:17 and the comments).

Specifically, he has rejected Ephraim’s bullock image (vv. 4bγ5aα). Whereas there had once been a temple for the Master in Samaria which might have had such an image, it had been destroyed by Jehu (2 Kings 10), and Hosea presumably refers to the relatively-nearby bullock image of Yahweh at Beth-el (see 1 Kings 12:28; 2 Kings 17:16; also Amos 7:13). Its great importance to the people of Samaria (10:5) is a further indication that there was no sanctuary in Samaria. Failure to mention the bullock at Dan might indicate a time when Assyria had already annexed the northern territories (see 2 Kings 15:29) or might simply reflect its location twice as far away from Samaria. As the capital, Samaria will then stand for Ephraim as a whole, as it may elsewhere (7:1; 10:5, 7; 13:16 [14:1]). Bullock images were a common aide to worship in Canaan; they need be only a few inches in size, but they could stand for the forceful strength of a deity. Yahweh’s rebuff of such representation means the bullock must be destroyed. The allusive form of the “in order that” clause with its passive verb leaves open who will do the destroying, as the identity of the enemy was left open earlier. Historically it will be Assyria, though Yahweh will be the agent behind Assyria. There is some irony in the recurrence of the verb “rebuff” (cf. v. 3). If the earlier reference suggested rebuff of Yahweh as the one who is good, Yahweh responds with his own rebuff of something bad. The verse then leaves Ephraim free to decide that it will do the destroying in light of this rebuff.

Yahweh’s further declaration (v. 5aβb) takes the point further, while also hinting that the declaration is another answer to Ephraim’s own protests to Yahweh along the lines of “Why have you rebuffed us? Your anger has blazed against us. How long?” If Ephraim has been protesting thus, Yahweh has responded to the first question in v 5aα; given that his anger has indeed blazed up against them (but not yet totally consumed them), he further asks why they decline to turn from their wrongdoing and thus become free of guilt, able to be acquitted? They need to be able to claim a commitment to Yahweh’s ways in order to pray in a way that can expect an answer (e.g., Ps. 26:6). Why they won’t do so is a mystery even to Yahweh (cf. Isa. 1:5, 16-17). But by implication, the possibility is still open.

The subsection returns to where it started (v. 6)—that is, vv. 4b-6 work aba. The bullock came from Israel itself: why can’t people face the implications? It was made by a craftsman (cf. 13:2). How then can it be a god? In theory the Ephraimites knew it wasn’t a god; it simply stood for Yahweh or provided them with a visual aid that suggested Yahweh’s reality or provided a podium for the invisible Yahweh. But Jeroboam had said “Here is/are your god[s]/God” (1 Kings 12:28). It takes a degree of sophistication to keep remembering that the image is simply a representation or podium and to avoid forgetting how an image gives a misleading impression of true deity. Its shattering will both result from its not being a god and show that it is not a god.

**Hosea 8:7-10.** Yahweh moves to his further preoccupation through Hosea, Ephraim’s involvement with other nations. Vv. 7-10 work aba like vv. 4b-6, with warnings of trouble bracketing an account of the reason for it.

The opening line (v. 7a) looks like a saying related to but more threatening than the aphorism “You reap what you sow.” Ephraim is stirring up trouble for itself.[[377]](#footnote-377) While Hosea’s hearers could simply understand the aphorism as a metaphor with this implication, they might be familiar with the accusation that images are merely *rûaḥ* in the sense of breath (e.g., Isa. 41:29), so they could think in terms of sowing mere breath, which will issue in a terrible harvest. Either way, sowing *rûaḥ* is “unnaturally foolish.”[[378]](#footnote-378) Further, these hearers are possessed by a whoring *rûaḥ*, and Hosea could be inviting them to see how its wings will carry them off (see 4:12, 19).

A second apparent aphorism follows (v. 7bαβ), another observation based on experience and appealing to the way nature works, but in a more down-to-earth aspect. To westerners the second aphorism may not seem as frightening as the first, but it may be even more so. In nature, first there are stalks of wheat, then these stalks sprout ears from which the grain comes, then people harvest it and produce flour, then they have the wherewithal for their staple, bread, for the next year. But if in the spring you see nothing sprouting on the stalks, you receive a horrifying warning that there will be no harvest, no flour, no bread. The paronomasia between stalk (*qāmāh*), sprouting or flower (*ṣemaḥ*), and flour (*qemaḥ*)[[379]](#footnote-379) underlines the point. The three are linked in sound and in nature, but the link in nature can break down and belie the link in sound. The implication in light of what has preceded is that it is evident (to anyone with eyes to see) and inevitable that Ephraim has no future. The way things work in nature is the way they work in life.

Yahweh then takes the aphorism’s application in a different direction (vv. 7bγ-8a)—indeed, in two—as Hosea characteristically reverts from threat to lament.[[380]](#footnote-380) The first colon understands the aphorism more literally. If Ephraim’s harvest is actually good (now or in the future), it won’t do Ephraim any benefit, because invaders will eat it up. It happens literally, when an army invades and appropriates its victims’ food supplies. It happens in a broader sense metaphorically. And it has already happened (see 2 Kings 15:29).

The nations (v. 8b) to whom Ephraim has paid tribute to get their support and protection have thereby eaten up Ephraim’s resources, so in the eyes of such nations Ephraim is like a cardboard box that one discards after removing the contents. The First Testament’s frequent reference to what Yahweh “desires/wants” (e.g., 6:6; Mic. 7:18) might make the hearers also wonder whether he is the one who has no desire for them.

The allusion to Assyria (v. 9a) suggests that this is a passage where “the nations” specifically denotes the imperial power. Hosea 7:11 has already referred to Ephraim “going” to Assyria (see the comments). Second Kings 15—17 doesn’t speak of Ephraim sending delegations there (it does refer to Judah doing so), but it does speak of paying tribute to Assyria, and both the “going” and the “going up” might refer to dealings with the Assyrians during one of their invasions rather than a journey to Assyria itself. In its dealings with Assyria, Ephraim (*’Eprayim*) behaves like a wild donkey (*pere’*), not susceptible to control, going it alone.

Or in thus paying tribute to get protection and support (vv. 9b-10aα), Ephraim is like a man making a “gift” to a prostitute: except that as usual Ephraim is the whore, and her lovers are extracting the payment from her! Hosea again trades on the breadth of meaning of *’āhēb*, which covers both personal relationships (hence “love”) and political relationships (hence “be loyal”).

In response (v. 10aβb), Yahweh will collect them together, and not in a good way (cf. 9:6; contrast e.g., Deut. 30:3-4; Mic. 2:12; 4:6). They will writhe in pain because of the financial burden imposed by the deal with the Assyrian king.

**Hosea 8:11-13.** Yahweh reverts once more to wrongs associated with worship, though the link may be the sacrifices that were offered in connection with making treaties.

The First Testament is ambivalent about multiplicity of altars (v. 11). Abraham built altars in a number of places and 1 and 2 Kings allows for a number of altars, though it does so grudgingly because it knows they easily become places for worship that is too much like that of the Master. Further, in Ephraim’s case, building altars followed from abandoning Jerusalem. So the construction of many altars could be a way of doing wrong both because it linked with abandoning the proper place for altars and because of the questionable nature of the worship offered on them (cf. vv. 4-5). It thus symbolized rebellion against Yahweh. However orthodox, this worship was not an expression of true acknowledgment of Yahweh. The word for doing wrong (*ḥăṭṭō’*) is also the word for an expiatory offering, which (as in 4:8) would make for a nice double entendre. Ephraim thought its altars could help it find expiation, but it already has such altars, so why is it building more? Actually its altars are places where it does wrong, not where it can gain expiation from the effect of its wrongdoing, and the increase in the number of altars means an increase in the wrongdoing. The repetition in the two cola is an expression of incomprehension, as in 6:4; 9:14; 11:8.[[381]](#footnote-381)

Multiplying instructions about worship would not make a difference (v. 12). Yahweh has made his expectations clear enough, and he has already noted (v. 1) that Ephraim has rebelled against his instruction. “Many” things takes up the phrase made “many” altars. I assume that in Hosea’s day Exodus 20:22—23:19; 34:10-26 as well as the Decalogue existed in something like the form we know, though how much was in writing is a different question.[[382]](#footnote-382) Yahweh’s words thus imply an irony, whether or not Hosea knew. Yahweh has already added “many things” to the basics in the Decalogue, and Ephraim ignores a number of them. Subsequently Yahweh will add the further “many things” that will appear in the rest of the Torah, and this will prove the point he makes here. Whereas Ephraim does not treat strangers as foreign (v. 7; cf. 7:9) it treats its own as strange.

Its sacrifices (v. 13abα) included burnt offerings that are wholly gifts to Yahweh and offerings in which the offerers share that are occasions of fellowship among the offerers and between them and Yahweh. But none of this sacrificing works. Yahweh has not wished to have fellowship with them and has not accepted the gifts; he is mindful of the waywardness of their worship and of their life. Hosea’s words make for a chilling contrast and comparison with his self-description as one who carries waywardness and wrongdoing but also attends to wrongdoing (Exod. 34:6-7).[[383]](#footnote-383) Ephraim also sees as strange Yahweh’s assumption that its acknowledgment of him should be expressed in the form of its worship (vv. 4-5), and the rest of its life, as well as in the fact of its worship.

Therefore (v. 13bβγ) Yahweh will attend to the wrongdoings for whose performance they have built their altars, and will cause them to return to Egypt. One irony about this threat is that Egypt is where he rescued them from at the beginning; another is that they have more recently been thinking of Egypt as a potential alternative to Assyria as a resource for protection and support (2 Kings 17:4). In other words, the threat is not merely an (unfulfilled) warning about their geographical destiny but a (fulfilled) warning about their theological destiny.

Once again the subsection is closing with a threat (v. 14), which comes to completion with a recollection of events from long ago. The First Testament does not speak of building projects in the 730s, the period to which the rest of the section has related, which is not surprising in light of the pressures of this period. Such projects would belong to earlier decades (for Judah, see 2 Chron. 29). But the projects implied that the people put their maker out of mind. The reference to Yahweh as their maker takes up a description that they perhaps used in worship (e.g., Ps. 95:6) but it also nicely and ironically takes up his description of them as makers of their bullock (v. 6). The building projects were a different expression of putting Yahweh out of mind from the more recent engagement in alliances with nations such as Aram, Assyria, and Egypt, but they were a parallel expression. No doubt Ephraim and Judah were still hoping that these projects from the past would contribute to their security in the 730s and 720s, but Yahweh will now see to their being devastated, as indeed happened. The eagle landed.

## Theological Implications

1. The relationship between God and his people is one in which God’s grace takes the initiative in setting up a covenant relationship; but on the basis of what he has done for his people he then expects them to live by his instruction. God’s grace towards his people was not conditioned (it was grace) but God lays down conditions on the basis of which a particular generation or congregation continues to be his people.
2. The dealings God has with his people are based both on a personal but hierarchical relationship and on set and hard-and-fast instructions. What is right is right because God says so and because it conforms to something objective about reality. Thus the waywardness of the people of God lies both in rebellion against the relationship with the one who gives the instructions (e.g., Isa. 30:1) and in transgression of the instructions which are themselves right (e.g., 1 John 3:4). The charge that his people have transgressed his pact and rebelled against his instruction is then “the heart of YHWH’s controversy with Israel.”[[384]](#footnote-384)
3. Prayer doesn’t work and sacrificial giving doesn’t please God unless they are associated with acknowledging God in life as well as in words and giving.
4. What God promises his people on the basis of its living by his instruction is good (e.g., Rom. 8:28).
5. The people of God is inclined to think that the solution to its problems is organizational or structural or administrative or political. Whereas God expects to decide who leads his people, it is inclined to make its own appointments even if going through the motions of seeking to know his will.
6. Looking to resources outside the people of God rather than trusting in God is inclined to involve compromise, loss, discrediting, and sorrow. The people of God is challenged to remember that God is not merely the world’s maker but its maker and therefore the one it can and must trust.
7. The people of God is inclined to use the things it has, which may be God’s gifts, to make idols. It then forgets that the things it has made are humanly-made. God is inclined then to get angry with it and reject and destroy the things it constructs. The people of God have a bewildering unwillingness to face the facts about themselves and turn from guilt to freedom (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1-11).
8. What you sow, you reap (e.g., Gal. 6:7). It’s an aspect of the moral fabric of reality. Worse still, sometimes you do something stupid and something ten times as bad ricochets back on you.
9. Sometimes God has other things to say to his people but there’s no point because we haven’t taken notice of what he’s said already (e.g., Heb. 5:11-14).
10. Although some Judahites did end up in Egypt (see Jer. 43—44), Hosea’s threat that the people will go back to Egypt does not require a literal interpretation. We have noted before in Hosea that God’s declarations about the future are often theological rather than literal and are designed to appeal to the imagination and provoke repentance rather than to supply information. This does not mean they are not serious and will not be fulfilled. It makes them more serious and more certain of fulfillment. But you may not be able to know the nature of the fulfillment until it happens.

# Hosea 9:1-9: Don’t Celebrate (A Confrontation about Worship)

## Translation

1Don’t celebrate, Yiśrā’ēl, as regards a rejoicing[[385]](#footnote-385) like the peoples,

 because you’ve whored away from your God.

You’ve loved a “gift,”

 at all the wheat threshing-floors,

2Whereas[[386]](#footnote-386) threshing floor and vat: it[[387]](#footnote-387) won’t pasture them,[[388]](#footnote-388)

 and new wine will deceive it.[[389]](#footnote-389)

3They will not live

 in Yahweh’s country,

but ’Eprayim will turn back[[390]](#footnote-390) to Mișrayim,

 and eat unclean food in ’Aššûr.

4They will not pour out wine for Yahweh,

 and their sacrifices will not be sweet for him.

Like mourners’[[391]](#footnote-391) bread to them,

 all who eat it will be unclean.

Because their bread is for their soul,[[392]](#footnote-392)

 it does not come into Yahweh’s house.

5What will you do for a set day,

 for Yahweh’s festival day?

6Because there—should they have gone from destruction,[[393]](#footnote-393)

 Mișrayim will collect them up.

Moph will bury them[[394]](#footnote-394) with delight at their silver;

 brier will come to possess them, thorn be in their tents.

7The days of attending[[395]](#footnote-395) have come,

 the days of recompense have come.

Yiśrā’ēl will acknowledge:[[396]](#footnote-396) the prophet is stupid,

 the spirit man is driven mad,

Because of the manifold nature of your waywardness,

 and your[[397]](#footnote-397) animosity is manifold.

8A prophet is ’Eprayim’s lookout in relationship with my God,[[398]](#footnote-398)

 when a birdcatcher’s snare is on all its ways.

With animosity in his God’s household

 9they have gone deep in corruption[[399]](#footnote-399) as in the days of The Hill.[[400]](#footnote-400)

He will be mindful of their waywardness;

 he will attend[[401]](#footnote-401) to their wrongdoings.

## Interpretation

The section begins with a bidding (like 4:1; 5:8; 8:1), but a different sort of bidding, and the section is marked more by threat than indictment, the opposite balance to that in 8:1-14. Hosea rather than Yahweh is now the speaker, again in contrast to 8:1-14, and he reverts to explicit talk of whoring, which recurred through chapters 1—6 but has not featured in chapters 7—8. The opening exhortation and the reference to festivals (v. 5) suggest a message delivered at the sanctuary on a festival occasion, and the references to harvest (vv. 1-2) suggest specifically Sukkot. It would not be surprising if an intervention that would spoil the rejoicing of the occasion provoked the kind of response implied by vv. 7-9. The section brings the series of biddings in 4:1—9:9 to a close in solemn fashion (though MT has only a setumah after 9:9).

**Hosea 9:1-4.** While individuals and groups can celebrate (*śāmēaḥ*) (v. 1a) in the context of ordinary life, as can trees and the heavens, Israel commonly celebrates “before Yahweh” (e.g., Deut. 12:12, 18), which suggests a celebration in a sanctuary, and this understanding makes sense here. Hosea thus appropriately addresses the festive company by its theological name Israel rather than its political name Ephraim. “Rejoicing” may imply a particularly enthusiastic celebration with dancing,[[402]](#footnote-402) which would be appropriate to a harvest festival, but it need imply nothing inherently untoward. Whereas the Torah will thus expect Israel to celebrate and rejoice in that context, and choirs will urge people to do so (e.g., Pss. 32:11; 97:12), Hosea extraordinarily gives the opposite bidding. He underlines the scandal by his reference to other peoples, who are elsewhere envisaged as joining in Israel’s celebration (Ps. 97:1). Recognition of Yahweh by other peoples would be a theme of the festival. Hosea half-implies that they may carry on celebrating while Yahweh’s own people are excluded. The logic of the prohibition is explained in the second colon, as Hosea takes up for the last time his characteristic charge of whoring. It also recalls the implication at the beginning of the series of biddings (4:1-19) where a critique of the nations is turned back on Ephraim, whose behavior is arguably worse.

As far as Ephraim is concerned, its whoring has worked (v. 1b). It has given itself to the Master, and he has responded by giving his “gift” (cf. 2:12 [14] with the note and comments; also 8:9-10). While the liturgical harvest celebration may have happened at a sanctuary, it was a liturgical re-representation of a celebration that will naturally have begun at the threshing floor itself (cf. Judg. 21:19-21). When people see the stack of sheaves and watch someone beat them out at the threshing floor so that the ears separate from them, then throw them into the air so that the useless chaff blows away, and they are left with a stack of grain which is their staple for the coming year and also their seed for sowing for the following year’s harvest: how could they not celebrate and express their appreciation to the giver?

The real giver will not tolerate such mis-directed celebration (v. 2), as if the giver is the Master. Yahweh will make sure that the business arrangement between whore and client does not work. Ephraim has loved the “gift” in the past but has misidentified the giver, and Yahweh will now ensure that the gift does not materialize. The harvest will fail, or invaders will consume it (8:7), or these worshipers will not be here to enjoy it (cf. v. 3). Along with grain, grapes are another of the handful of Ephraim’s key crops (e.g., 2:5, 12 [7, 14]), and alongside threshing floor, in the metonymy the vat here represents the other chief crops. A winepress and wine vat were cut into flat rock; they comprised a basin where grapes were piled and trodden with a channel conducting the juice into a smaller lower basin. But threshing floor and vat will be shepherds that don’t succeed in feeding the people (Hosea reverts to speaking about them rather than directly to them). The reference to new wine in the vat complements the reference to grain on the threshing floor; the allusions to product and process come in abb’a’ order. In a further metonymy, the new wine (standing for the Master who promised it) will turn out to have deceived Ephraim.

Letting the harvest fail will not be the end of Yahweh’s response (v. 3). Ephraim’s failure to keep its side of Yahweh’s relationship with it will also mean its losing its place in his country, as he said (Lev. 18:25 makes the point more pungently). Theologically, it will go back to Egypt, which had been a place of bondage rather than freedom, or rather a place of subservience to a foreign ruler rather than service of Yahweh; it is also a place to which Ephraim has recently put itself once more into subservience, and a place where it will be treated as spoil (v. 6) in some contrast to the way it had once stripped the Egyptians (Exod. 12:36). Geographically, Ephraim will go to Assyria, when Assyria responds with its own intolerance to Ephraim’s turning to Egypt (cf. 2 Kings 17:4). In a narrow sense all food eaten in Assyria need not be unclean; in theory at least, Ephraimites could find and eat food that counted as clean (cf. Dan. 1). But the fourth colon in the verse parallels the second colon. Assyria is by definition an unclean country as far as Israelites are concerned because it belongs to and acknowledges an alien god. Ephraim has itself become unclean through the whoring to which v. 1 referred (cf. 5:3; 6:10). So it’s appropriate that it should be eating in a foreign land with its uncleanness (cf. Amos 7:17).

In their unclean state (v. 4) they will not make wine offerings for Yahweh or offer him sweet-smelling or nice-tasting sacrifices. If there’s a hint that Yahweh will thus lose out, in reality he has lost out already. “Exile will put an end to pretence and those who are devoted to other gods (v. 1) will be taken to a place where it is natural to practise their worship.”[[403]](#footnote-403) When someone died in Israel, for a week their death brought uncleanness onto their house, their household, and anything in it such as their food (see e.g., Num. 19:11-22). Ephraimites in exile will be like people living permanently in such a house of death and thus of uncleanness. Their association with foreign gods in Israel and their praying to them about the harvest meant uncleanness attached to the bread they made from the grain they saw as these gods’ gift. Indeed, they have already made Yahweh’s own land unclean (Jer. 2:7). Yes, pretense gets terminated by their living in a land that overtly belongs to other gods. The mourners’ bread doesn’t come into Yahweh’s house along with the meat for a sacrifice, in the usual fashion, because their offerings are made for their dead family members (cf. Deut. 26:14).

**Hosea 9:5-7aαβ.** Hosea reverts to addressing Ephraim (v. 5), so as to ask a question not unrelated to his prohibition in v. 1, though he now uses second person plural to add to the forms of reference that have already multiplied over vv. 1-4. The question is rhetorical. Ephraim can do nothing. “Set day” is a general expression; in the parallelism, “festival day” points more specifically to one of the pilgrimage festivals, occasions of great enjoyment at more than one level. They were both religious services and holidays, and they celebrated both Yahweh’s provision in nature and his activity in bringing Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness to Canaan. At Sukkot, celebration of the harvest and of Israel’s rescue from Egypt come together. Cancelling festivals was like cancelling Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, and Easter. Ephraim is to go “from festival days to punishment days.”[[404]](#footnote-404)

Suppose the Ephraimites should escape the devastation by Assyria (v. 6) that Yahweh has already announced (7:13), or suppose the devastation has happened. As events will show, destruction is not an alternative to exile but its accompaniment. Escape or survival will do them no good, because that is when Egypt will come into play (cf. v. 3). “It will become the grave even of those who expect to be saved by Egypt” (cf. Jer. 41—44).[[405]](#footnote-405) “Collecting up” is again not a friendly image (cf. 8:10). Moph is a Hebrew form (Noph is more usual) of the name of the great Egyptian city of Men-nepher; the Greek form is Memphis. As the site of some of the pyramids and of a giant graveyard, it is an appropriate Egyptian city to specify in this context. Its willingness to bury Ephraimites will issue from its having opportunity to collect valuables from their dead bodies in doing so. Meanwhile the Ephraimites’ land, bereft of its inhabitants who had cared for it and whose homes were there, will be free to grow wild.

Hosea sums up his declaration with a statement in past tense (v. 7aαβ). The declaration is anticipatory, but it is not simply an example of the perfect of certainty, the prophetic certainty—that is, it is not merely saying that the time will certainly come one day. It is saying that it is right here, imminent, at the gates. Both cola begin “have come the days of the…” then close with different nouns. The noun in the second manages to make the first more specific yet still leave the main point unspoken. Yahweh will attend to Ephraim, and he will do so in a way that does recompense, with an action that is appropriate to Ephraim’s; recompense indicates correspondence and appropriateness without indicating whether it is positive or negative. Ephraim can work that out for itself.

**Hosea 9:7aγb-9.** Prophets are not cool, detached deliverers of messages; their proclamation involves passion, fear for their people and for themselves, and anger.

Hosea’s message drives him crazy (v. 7aγbαβ). People were saying he was a fool, and he admits it. “I am compelled to play the fool.”[[406]](#footnote-406) He is a “fool for God.”[[407]](#footnote-407) “Stupid” is a general purposes word; realists might use it of someone irresponsible enough to say that Ephraim should trust in Yahweh for its political future and not accept any responsibility for ensuring that it had a future. More specifically, they would say he talked and behaved like a madman, as they said of Elisha’s servant and will say of Jeremiah (2 Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26). As “stupid” is given more specificity by “driven mad,” “prophet” is nuanced by the unique expression “spirit man” (man of spirit). It recalls the more common term for a prophet, “supernatural man” (man of God), which commonly denotes someone who does extraordinary things; it also recalls other applications of the word “spirit” to prophets (e.g., Mic. 3:8, but especially in Ezekiel). It suggests someone hurled to and fro in unpredictable fashion by Yahweh’s breath/wind. It may be another pejorative expression which Hosea is prepared to take as a compliment. Better to be a man of that spirit than of your spirit (cf. 4:12, 19; 5:4), Hosea might have implied.

His more overt point (v. 7bγδ) is that there is good reason for his craziness. He is almost proud of it. It is a reasonable reaction to the waywardness he confronts in the entire prophecy. It was their many-sided waywardness that was expressed in making many altars (8:11). Their animosity is also manifold. Whereas the parallelism would make one think of animosity to Yahweh, the rare word (*maśṭēmāh*)is used only of human rancor (e.g., Gen. 50:15; Ps. 55:3 [4])—except with irony when Job applies it to God (Job 16:9; 30:21). It fits the context to understand Hosea as driven crazy by people’s animosity to him. He is “the persecuted prophet.”[[408]](#footnote-408) Yet the parallelism hints that Hosea is not preoccupied by this animosity’s effect on him personally. People’s animosity to him is animosity to his message. It is animosity to God. It’s enough to drive someone crazy with frustration and grief for their sake. The day is coming when they will acknowledge the reasonable nature of his craziness.

After all, Hosea’s job as a prophet is to be a lookout (v. 8abα), a classic description of a prophet’s role (e.g., Ezek. 3:17; 33:1-9). A city’s lookout keeps his eye peeled for the approach of an enemy (e.g., 2 Kings 9:16-20). He’s the first person to know about danger threatening the city, and his vital job is to warn people so they can take appropriate action. A prophet is a city’s lookout who tells it when Yahweh threatens to attack it. It was the role presupposed earlier (cf. 5:8; 8:1). In the terms of another familiar image from every life, he has to warn Ephraim that Yahweh is like someone hunting birds. He has set a trap for Ephraim because of its entire pattern of life (for this bold image, cf. Jer. 50:24; also Amos 3:5).

So there is animosity within the household of the prophet’s God (v. 8bβ-9a). As their lookout the prophet is on their side within this household. There is a tension built into his position: he has to warn his own people of the hostility of the one whom he has also called “my God.” Perhaps both expressions indicate that people were dismissing the God in whose name he spoke, as merely “Hosea’s [alleged] God.” It indicates the depth of their “corruption”: see the first three occurrences of this word in Genesis 6:11-12. We don’t know what Hosea refers to by the days at Gibeah (cf. 10:9), but Judges 19—21 makes solemn reading (see also 1 Sam. 10—15).

Hosea closes off this section and closes off the sequence of biddings that comprise Part 2 of the scroll (v. 9b) with familiar words (cf. esp. 8:13).

## Theological Implications

1. There is a time to celebrate and a time to refrain from celebration. There is a time to refrain even on occasions such as weddings if you have abandoned God and worshiped other gods (cf. Exod. 33:4).[[409]](#footnote-409)
2. Canaan is God’s country. This fact is the basis upon which he can give the Canaanites notice when they haven’t kept the implicit terms of their lease. It’s also the basis on which he can give Israel notice when they haven’t kept the explicit terms of their lease.
3. It’s much worse to have to eat what is unclean than just to be hungry: “Nothing more grievous can happen to us than the doing away of all difference between us and the profane despisers of God, even in the outward manner of living.”[[410]](#footnote-410) Calvin speaks especially of forms of worship. In the West, at least, Christians once dressed differently, drank differently, vacationed differently, and made music in church differently from non-Christians. It’s no longer so. There are advantages to this change if the difference is only outward, but there are disadvantages in that outward differences can point to differences of substance.
4. As Hosea speaks of “days of recompense,” so does Jesus (Luke 21:22: the two Greek words are the same in Luke as in the LXX) which are to come “in fulfillment of all that is written.” At the beginning of his ministry as Luke tells the story (Luke 4:14-21), Jesus had taken up Isaiah 61:1-2 and declared that this prophetic testimony was being filled out in him. In his quotation, he includes the reference to “a year of acceptance by Yahweh” but stops before the parallel reference to “a day of redress by our God.” In Isaiah the parallel expressions refer to the same moment, but in the context of Jesus’s ministry it suits him to separate them. His ministry is the time when God is expressing his acceptance of his people. But in his later words with his disciples Jesus indicates that a time of redress is also imminent. His ministry is the time when Israel is invited to respond to the one whom God has sent, but broadly-speaking it has failed to do so, and redress will follow in the form of the fall of Jerusalem to the Gentiles. In Luke 21:22 Jesus thus takes up the substance of that closing phrase from Isaiah 61:1-2, and in referring to fulfilling all that is written (not just one of the two colons in that line) suggests the link, but his actual words in Luke 21:22 come from Hosea 9:7. Hosea presupposes that Ephraim has known a time of acceptance and favor; “the days of recompense” are now to come. Thus the pattern will be repeated in Jesus’s time and in succeeding decades. If Jesus “fulfills” or “fills out” Hosea as well as Isaiah 61, he does so in noting how God’s action in the eighth century fits into a broader pattern of his relationship with his people and that it constitutes one embodiment of the ultimate implementing of that pattern. Conversely, Hosea helps Jesus’s disciples understand how Jesus fits into that pattern of relating to his people which was embodied in his relationship with Ephraim. In terms of the words that Jesus takes up, it transpires that there was something in the back of the Holy Spirit’s mind in inspiring Hosea to speak in the way he does in v. 7.
5. A prophet’s job is to be a lookout, which usually means proclaiming news that people don’t want to hear and telling them that they are mirroring their culture rather than modeling an alternative. But the people of God are inclined to dismiss their prophets and their apostles as fools (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12). If prophets and apostles don’t receive that reaction, they will need to ask whether they are really declaring God’s message.

# Part Three: Hosea 9:10—13:16 [14:1] Unhappy Recollections

The series of biddings in 4:1—9:9 has come to an end. The distinctive feature of 9:10—13:16 [14:1} is a series of recollections from way back in Ephraim’s corporate memory. In recollection after recollection, nostalgia mixes with shock at Israel’s apostasy.[[411]](#footnote-411) In a formal sense, the biddings and the recollections could not be more different. In a rhetorical sense, they are comparable in that each draws attention to what follows. The biddings do so directly by explicitly urging attention. The recollections do so indirectly. None begins with a straightforward sentence.

9:10-17 opens with a comparison

10:1-10 opens with a participial clause

10:11-17 opens with a *waw* and a participial clause

11:1-12:1 [12:2] opens with a *kî*

12:2-11 [3-12] opens with a noun clause

12:12—13:16 [12:13—14:1] opens with a *waw*-consecutive

# Hosea 9:10-17: Unhappy Recollections—The Grapes

## Translation

10Like grapes in the wilderness,

 I found Yiśrā’ēl.[[412]](#footnote-412)

Like the first fruit on a fig tree at its beginning,

 I looked at your ancestors.

They—they came to Ba‘al-pə’ôr

 and dedicated themselves to shame.

So they became a total abomination[[413]](#footnote-413) like the thing they loved;

 11’Eprayim: their splendor was[[414]](#footnote-414) like a bird that flies.

From birth and from the womb and from conception,[[415]](#footnote-415)

 12indeed they will bring up their children.

But I will bereave them of people;

 yes, alas for them when I turn away[[416]](#footnote-416) from them.

13’Eprayim, as I looked, was to be a palm shoot,[[417]](#footnote-417)

 planted in a meadow,

 but ’Eprayim is to take out its children[[418]](#footnote-418) to a slayer.[[419]](#footnote-419)

14Give them, Yahweh: what are you to give?—give them

 a bereaving womb, shriveling breasts.

15All their bad dealing has been at Gilgāl;[[420]](#footnote-420)

 indeed, there I have been hostile to them.[[421]](#footnote-421)

For the bad nature of their deeds

 I will drive them out of my household.

I will not continue my love to them,

 when all their officials are rebellious.[[422]](#footnote-422)

16’Eprayim has been struck down, so that[[423]](#footnote-423) their root will wither,

 they just won’t[[424]](#footnote-424) produce fruit.[[425]](#footnote-425)

Even when they give birth,

 yes, I will put to death the delights[[426]](#footnote-426) of their womb.

17May my God reject them,[[427]](#footnote-427)

 because they haven’t obeyed him,

 so they may be wanderers among the nations.

## Interpretation

There is marked change of subject and change of form at 9:10 as Yahweh recalls events from long ago. We will discover that 9:10-17 is the first instantiation of a new pattern in the scroll, as Yahweh speaks more reflectively than heretofore. His rhetorical strategy thus changes. MT marks off 9:10-17 with setumahs. MT (L) has a further setumah between vv. 16 and 17, which corresponds to the fact that Yahweh’s speaking gives way there to Hosea’s speaking at the close of the chapter (though Hosea also speaks in v. 14). Indirectly, Hosea speaks to Ephraim all the way through. First Yahweh thinks about how sweet things were with Ephraim at the beginning, and how they went sour.

**Hosea 9:10-11a.** So Yahweh himself now looks back (v. 10a) in a remarkable pair of new images (cf. Mic. 7:1). Imagine you’re in the wilderness and you’d love something fresh and sweet, and you find a vine with grapes on it. Or imagine it’s coming towards summer and you’d love something fresh and sweet, and you find the first fruit on a fig tree, the particularly tasty fruit that grows on last year’s shoots (cf. Isa. 28:4). That’s how I felt about Israel, the ancestors of the present generation, Yahweh says. One shouldn’t press or allegorize the notions of finding or seeing, or the location in the wilderness. The analogy is like that of Israel as Yahweh’s bride; the point is the delight of the early relationship.

But the point about the allusion to the wilderness now emerges (v. 10bαβ). Things soon went sour. The “magical moment”[[428]](#footnote-428) soon passed. The section turns out to be a kind of lament. Numbers 25:1-5 relates this incident, at the end of Israel’s stay in the wilderness; Ba‘al-pə’ôr (Master of Pe’or) is there the name of a god worshiped at this place, which is elsewhere called House of Pe’or (e.g., Deut. 3:29) or simply Pe’or (e.g., Num. 23:28). Strictly, there is one deity called Master, but his title can be glossed with a reference to a particular place (a little like “Our Lady of…”). Numbers 25 is the first place where the First Testament speaks of Israel whoring, so this allusion follows on the prominent references to whoring in the scroll so far. In other words, this incident at Pe’or was the beginning of the entire problem that preoccupies Yahweh in Hosea. The tension between vv. 10a and 10b is therefore monumental. Looking back, Yahweh can describe the Israelites’ ancestors as “dedicating themselves” to the Master at Pe’or as some Israelites would specially dedicate themselves to Yahweh: the verb is the one from which the noun Nazirite derives (see Num. 6). “Becoming Nazirites for Baal comprises a complete reversal of normal values.”[[429]](#footnote-429) It was something shameful, of which they should have been ashamed and by which the present generation will be shamed (4:19; 10:6). The shamefulness is placarded elsewhere by replacing of the title *ba‘al* by the word for shame (*bōšet*;e.g., Jer. 3:24, and names such as Mephiboshet). Here “shame” stands in telling parallelism to Ba‘al-pə’ôr and expresses judgment on it.

So the lament was actually an indictment, which now comes to a conclusion (vv. 10bγ-11a) and leads into a preliminary declaration about where things will lead. Abomination (*šiqqûș*) is an even more powerful term for condemning foreign gods to whom Israel might pray. It, too, has likely come to replace *ba‘al* in expressions such as “a desolating abomination” (Dan. 9:27). There may be nothing shameful about Moabites or Ammonites praying to their gods; Yahweh had allocated them to them. Yet these are not the real God and eventually their worshipers will be shamed, and the shameful nature of some aspects of their worship (notably, the sacrifice of children) also makes them abominations. The trouble is that being an abomination, like uncleanness, is contagious. Only here is the term “abomination” applied to the people itself, as opposed to gods or practices. But if you love and are loyal to an abomination, contagion comes to attach to you. You become an abomination, which will inevitably have consequences. And abomination and splendor/honor are incompatible. So becoming an abomination meant the flitting of Ephraim’s splendor. While the flitting is not yet complete (cf. 4:7), in another sense it has happened. “Splendor” could simply denote the impressiveness that attached to Ephraim in Jeroboam’s day but is disappearing, or to its nobility or its wealth or its bullock image (cf. 10:5). But Yahweh himself is Israel’s splendor or glory (e.g., Ps. 3:3 [4]). An audience aware of that usage could understand the expression in this way in light of the “I” in v. 10a and the subsequent references to Yahweh’s turning away (v. 12).

**Hosea 9:11b-14**. Yahweh intends to bring calamity in a new and horrifying way, though one that constitutes poetic justice. People have recourse to alien gods in order to seek the fertility of crops and family. Hosea has spoken of failure in the first connection; here he speaks of it in the second connection.

Yahweh’s threat takes a particularly cruel form (vv. 11b-12). It’s not that they won’t have children or that the children will die in infancy—both being common experiences in a traditional society. The process of having children is first described in the reverse of chronological order, from the birth to the womb out of which the children come and back to the conception itself. Then the description moves forward to parents taking their children to adulthood. Yes, they will flourish. Their prayers will work. The terrible thing is that it will work only in the short term. Yahweh intends to bereave them when their children are adults, because he intends to turn away from them.

Yahweh goes on to make explicit the implications of this turning away (v. 13). The image in v. 13a links with and adds to the ones in v. 10, and the verb “I looked” recurs. But Yahweh speaks now of Ephraim rather than Israel, which suggests a more recent scrutiny of Ephraim in particular rather than that first look at Israel as a whole. A tree planted in a meadow ought to grow well and produce fruit; and Ephraim’s territory is more promising than Judah’s. But Ephraim will not in the end produce fruit. When its children are grown up it will find itself having to send them out to a battle in which they will lose their lives.

Hosea’s response is to pray (v. 14). His question compares with Yahweh’s in 6:4; 11:8.[[430]](#footnote-430) Perhaps his prayer implies that it might be better and more merciful to prevent them from having children at all, to give them wombs that don’t work properly but miscarry, and breasts that can shrivel because they aren’t needed. Standing between Yahweh and the people and identified with both, Hosea looks for a way of honoring God and seeking mercy for the people.[[431]](#footnote-431) Yet rhetorically this terrible prayer also seeks to get home to his Ephraimite listeners.[[432]](#footnote-432)

**Hosea 9:15-17**. Yahweh resumes his declaration; it will eventually emerge that he has not changed the subject.

Gilgal (v. 15a; see 4:15-19 and the comments) is one of the sanctuaries where Ephraim’s worship is so unacceptable. Amos 5:1-6 similarly first mentions Beth-el and Gilgal, like Hosea 4:15-19, then just mentions Beth-el. But mentioning Gilgal on its own recalls 6:8 (see the comments) and the event that occurred there. The concrete expression of Yahweh’s hostility will involve throwing them out of his household. The verb (*gāraš*)is the one he uses in connection with driving the Canaanites out of the country (e.g., Exod. 34:11) for the waywardness (Gen. 15:16) that made it morally and practically possible to let the Israelites in. The same moral consideration that led to expelling the Canaanites leads to expelling the Ephraimites. The language (hostility, drive out, household) is also divorce language (Deut. 24:1-4), which fits the prominence of the marriage image in Hosea.

That imagery continues (v. 15b) when Yahweh goes on to say he will not prolong his love to them (*’ahăbāh*). But the second colon indicates that the political overtones of this language also apply. He will not maintain his loyalty because their leaders are not loyal; rebellion is the opposite of loyalty.

Yahweh goes on to reprise the previous subsection (v. 16). First he takes up the image of the tree. In the context, the opening verb looks like perfect of certainty; the tree’s felling has as good as happened. The result will be its root withering; it will not produce fruit. Roots do not always wither because a tree is felled, a fact that prophets sometimes appeal to (e.g., Isa. 11:1), but in both connections the theology comes first and the images from nature are subordinated to it. Ephraim’s felling means there will be no one to beget children and thus no fruit. Hosea proclaims “the death of the future.”[[433]](#footnote-433) And even if it fruits, giving birth will get it nowhere (cf. vv. 11b-14). In isolation one might infer that Yahweh refers to death in infancy or childhood, but in the context death is battle is more likely the reference. Either way, Yahweh refers to children being their parents’ delight, for both personal and practical reasons, and grown-up children at least as much so. "No parent should have to bury their child" (King Théoden in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*), but these parents will watch their children die.

Hosea’s own conclusion (v. 17) is prosaic like the one at v. 9, and it is a kind of prayer, like the one at v. 14. Not only is Yahweh expelling Ephraim from his country: Hosea wants him to reject them as a people, in a horrifying reversal of his original choice of them (v. 10), because it is not only their leaders who are rebellious and/or because the leaders inevitably involve the people in their fate. So after Yahweh’s further declaration of intent in vv. 15-16, following his prayer in v. 14, Hosea acquiesces. Having been thrown out, they will wander homeless like Cain (Gen. 4:12-16) among the nations—that is, they will wander somewhere in the realm of the superpower but outside the one country that means everything to them. The sequence in vv. 10-17 parallels that in Amos 7:1-9: there at first Amos prays for mercy, but he does not do so after Yahweh’s declaration “No more.”[[434]](#footnote-434) The implication is not that Ephraim may no longer repent. It’s never too late to repent. Giving them this information about his prayer is yet another attempt to get through to them.

## Theological Implications

1. God gained great joy in the beginnings of his relationship with his people, but things soon went wrong. This dynamic characterizes the entire relationship. Jesus wins initial enthusiasm from his people, but later rejection. Paul speaks of his thanksgiving for what God has given the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4-6), but spends most of his letters covering things that trouble him about them. The faithlessness of the people of God goes back to its beginnings. As well as applying to the creation story, it applies to the Noah story, the Abraham story, the story of Israel at Sinai, the story of the priesthood, the story in Joshua, and the story in Acts. The people of God is characterized by its own version of original sin.
2. When God’s servants pray for their people, it may involve their mediating between what people would naturally long for and what God must contemplate doing. Such prayer is then designed to elicit a response from God, but the response may not be the one that the servants hope for. When they tell their people how they are praying for them, it’s designed to elicit a response from them. It’s not designed to push them into being the fulfillment of their own prayers, but it is designed to push them into not making it hard for God to answer his servants’ prayers.
3. One might say that Jesus came to bring Israel’s wanderings to an end. In a literal sense that was unnecessary; the Jewish people now occupied a land as extensive as it was when Israel was most flourishing. But they still needed to be rescued from the hand of their enemies and freed to serve their God without fear as they receive the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins (Luke 1:68-79).
4. The motif of the Ephraimites wandering because of their sin was taken up in the Christian image of the eternally wandering Jew who came to be subject to restriction, ghetto, expulsion, pogrom, and ultimately holocaust.[[435]](#footnote-435) Both because Ephraimites as such had ceased to exist and because God had made it possible for any descendants of Israel to return to the land, there is no basis for seeing Hosea’s wish as open to such fulfillment. The implication is rather that Christians are under obligation to support the Jewish people especially in the context of having been victims of mistaken appeal to Hosea’s wish.

# Hosea 10:1-10: Unhappy Recollections—The Vine

## Translation

1Yiśrā’ēl is a wasting[[436]](#footnote-436) vine,

 whose fruit matches it.[[437]](#footnote-437)

As its fruit was manifold,[[438]](#footnote-438)

 it made it manifold for its altars;[[439]](#footnote-439)

 As its land was good,

 they made its pillars good.

2Their mind[[440]](#footnote-440) was slippery;[[441]](#footnote-441)

 now they are to make restitution.[[442]](#footnote-442)

He—he will break the neck of their altars,

 destroy their pillars.

3Because now they say,

 “We have no king,

Because we’re not in awe of Yahweh;

 the king: what will he do for us?”

4They have spoken words,[[443]](#footnote-443) empty oaths,

 in sealing a pact.

Decion-making[[444]](#footnote-444) flourishes like hemlock

 on the furrows of the field.

5For the great heifer[[445]](#footnote-445) of Bȇt ’Āwen,

 the population of Shōmərôn are in dread.[[446]](#footnote-446)

Indeed they mourn[[447]](#footnote-447) over him,

 his people and his priestlings,

Who used to rejoice[[448]](#footnote-448) over him, over his splendor,

 because it’s gone into exile[[449]](#footnote-449) from him.

6Further, him[[450]](#footnote-450)—he will be brought to ’Aššür,

 as a gift to the great king.[[451]](#footnote-451)

Shame is what ’Eprayim will receive,[[452]](#footnote-452)

 Yiśrā’ēl will be shamed because of its plan.[[453]](#footnote-453)

7Shōmərôn is cut off,

 its king[[454]](#footnote-454) like a twig[[455]](#footnote-455) on the face of water.

8The great shrine of ’Āwen[[456]](#footnote-456) is destroyed,[[457]](#footnote-457)

 Yiśrā’ēl’s wrongdoing.

Nettle and thistle—

 it will grow up[[458]](#footnote-458) on its altars.

People will say to the mountains, “Cover us,”

 to the hills, “Fall on us.”[[459]](#footnote-459)

9Since the days of The Hill[[460]](#footnote-460) you’ve done wrong, Yiśrā’ēl;

 there they took their stand.

War has not[[461]](#footnote-461) overtaken them at the Hill

 against the sons of villainy[[462]](#footnote-462) 10in my wish[[463]](#footnote-463) that I should discipline them.

But peoples will be gathered against them,

 through their being bound[[464]](#footnote-464) to[[465]](#footnote-465) their double waywardness.[[466]](#footnote-466)

## Interpretation

A new recollection begins at 10:1 (MT has a setumah), concerning Israel’s fruitfulness with its positive and negative connotations. The recollection leads into further indictments and threats and another reference to what happened at Gibeah (cf. 9:9). MT has a petuhah or setumah at that point but I rather see the beginning of a new section with the new recollection in v. 11. Regarding this chapter, Luther comments that “the meaning is obscure, although the words are not.”[[467]](#footnote-467) Actually they are, and the time reference of a number of the verbs is problematic—that is, the alternating of qatal and yiqtol verbs can make it hard to see whether they refer to past, present, or future, and decisions about that question have implications for an understanding of subsections as wholes.

**Hosea 10:1-4.** While the talk of a vine (v. 1)recalls the recollection of the grapes in the wilderness in 9:10, the image also recalls Israel’s position as the vine Yahweh planted to flourish and fruit in Canaan (see e.g., Ps. 80). But if Israel once brought Yahweh the pleasure that grapes would provide in the wilderness, it does so no longer; it rather resembles the vine in Isaiah’s vineyard song (Isa. 5:1-7). As in 9:10, Hosea underlines the situation’s sadness by speaking of Israel, the people of God, rather than Ephraim, the political entity. Yet the opening line is allusive: Ephraimites knew what it was like to sit in the shade under a vine, looking forward to the fruit it would produce and the wine that would issue from the fruit, but is this vine wasting away in the sense of failing to produce the fruit Yahweh looks for, or wasting away as Assyria appropriates parts of Ephraim’s land, or failing to produce its fruit (the verb is usually transitive), or spreading wastefully? Any of those meanings could lead into v. 1b. It was in line with the fruit that the vine produced that Ephraim multiplied its altars and erected impressive pillars (see 3:4 and the comments). The implicit critique might presuppose that structures for worship replaced commitment and acknowledgment of Yahweh (see 6:6) and/or that they were structures for wrongful worship (see 8:13).

Either way, Ephraim was deceptive in its thinking (v. 2). The altars and pillars were allegedly erected in honor of Yahweh, but covertly people prayed to the Master there, or prayed to Yahweh understood in such a deeply mistaken way that it was as if they were praying to the Master. The moment has come when they must pay the penalty. Yahweh (who is presumably the “he”) intends to take action against them for their guilt. It will naturally consist in demolishing the altars and pillars. The vivid image for destroying the former suggests both hypallege and synecdoche, if breaking the altars’ necks means breaking their horns (cf. Amos 3:14).

“We have no king” (v. 3) is a fact they will have to face in due course as a consequence of the disaster that Yahweh intends, when their monarchy is terminated. But the wording in v. 3a seems an understated way to express that point, and v. 3b points to a different understanding. The parallelism between the two lines suggests that the king is Yahweh; “we have no king” is then re-expressed as “we are not in awe of Yahweh.” Maybe they weren’t actually saying that they didn’t acknowledge Yahweh as king and weren’t in awe of him; maybe they weren’t even consciously thinking this way. But if so, it is the implication of how they did speak, think, and behave (cf. Isa. 28:14-15; 30:8-11; Mic. 2:6). They are not in awe of Yahweh because as king he doesn’t or can’t do anything for Ephraim. They’re on their own.

Their internal political machinations (v. 4) were another aspect of their slipperiness. The indictment for empty oath-making in sealing a pact reworks the accusations in 6:7-9 with their reference to coups and with the implication that falsity in human pacts mirrors and links with falsity in their pact with Yahweh. It’s not surprising if such falsity in political relationships accompanies a general failure in decision-making or the exercise of authority or government (*mišpāṭ*). Flourishing is what government is supposed to do, as the administration sees that the community is characterized by faithfulness and mutual commitment. But this administration’s exercise of authority resembles poison more than fertilizer on the fields (cf. Amos 5:7; 6:12).

**Hosea 10:5-8.** Here, while some of the qatal verbs may describe events that have happened, some describe events that have happened only in the prophet’s imagination and in Yahweh’s intent (see vv. 7-8a). The subsection as a whole pictures the time when capital and sanctuary will have been devastated, when Assyria has overrun Ephraim. Hosea wants people to face the reality of what he can see coming.

The image at Beth-el (v. 5) is a bullock and it need not have been large (cf. 8:5-6 and the comments), but Hosea here describes it sarcastically as a heifer, and a remarkable one, though he then refers to it as a “he.” Because Beth-el is Samaria’s nearby sanctuary, Samaria is panicked about the heifer’s fate and grieving over what has happened. “Priestlings” (*kəmārîm*)is a pejorative foreign word for priests who should have served Yahweh but serve in an idolatrous way. They used to “rejoice”—Hosea uses the word for enthusiastic celebration that he earlier forbade to Israelites (9:1)—over the “splendor” of the image (see 9:11). But the splendor has gone; the image has been taken into exile away from its honored place in the sanctuary (cf. 1 Sam. 4:21-22). As far as we know, the Assyrians didn’t take the image from Beth-el back to Assyria, which supports the assumption that here Hosea is imagining what the catastrophe will be like rather than describing what it was already like or predicting what it will literally be like.

But Hosea does imagine it being taken to Assyria (v. 6), and with even more humiliation imagines it just becoming a gift to the Assyrian king. Most times in the First Testament “gift” (*minḥāh*)refers to things people offer the deity as an act of worship. So instead of being the recipient of gifts, the bullock is turned into one. But the word also denotes the “gifts” that a subject king gives to the great king (e.g., 2 Kings 17:3-4, in this period). The bullock has been turned into tribute of this kind. It’s all shameful, shameful for Ephraim, which is supposed to be Israel, the people of God, and it has happened because Ephraim did its own political planning.

So the capital and its king are lost (vv. 7-8). They are being carried away like a twig in a stream. And ruin will also overwhelm the great shrine where the great heifer is located. Only here does Hosea use the word “shrine”(*bāmāh*, conventionally “hIgh place”), the term for local sanctuaries, though he has likely had them in mind in some of his references to Ephraim’s whoring (e.g., 2:2-23 [4-25]). But here he is talking about Beth-el, which he regularly calls Beth-aven (see v. 5). Beth-el is as significant For his Samarian hearers as Jerusalem is for Judahites. To call it a shrine, even a great shrine, looks like an insult. Beth-el is just a trumped-up version of one of those shrines that every town had. Yet as far as Yahweh is concerned, it’s the quintessence of Ephraim’s wrongdoing. Hosea’s description of the consequences of the destruction reminds one of the actual natural state of many tells in Israel, historic places covered in wild plants and weeds. It will all be so horrifying and shaming that it would be better to die before it happens (v. 8b).

**Hosea 10:9-10.** On the way to a furtherdeclaration of Ephraim’s coming calamity, Hosea returns (v. 9abα) to what happened at The Hill, Gibeah (see 9:9 and the comments). There they took their stand as wrongdoers and they’ve maintained that stand with consistency. Although it would have been appropriate for war to overwhelm and eradicate them there, it didn’t (vv. 9bβγ10. Although they are villainous people, as usual Yahweh was concerned to chastise and discipline (cf. 7:12), not to annihilate. But imperial forces will gather against them as a result of their being bound like a heifer to their waywardness. Possibly it’s double waywardness because their recent wrongdoing matches the original wrongdoing at Gibeah, or possibly “double” simply means “plenty” (cf. Isa. 40:2).

## Theological Implications

1. The people of God is a vine; it is inclined to waste. Further, manifoldness gets under Hosea’s skin: God-given silver and gold that Ephraim used for the Master (2:8 [10]), priests (4:7), altars (8:11), fortified towns (8:14), forms of waywardness and animosity (9:7), strong men (10:13), lies (12:1 [2]).[[468]](#footnote-468) Does Hosea raise a question about the church’s manifold denominations, structures, orders of ministry, hymn books, web sites, prayer books….? At the very least, he raises the question what the church does with its manifoldness.
2. Ephraim’s theology (v. 3) is like that enunciated by Sennacherib’s lieutenant (Isa. 36:18-20). Formally, Ephraim acknowledged a divine king, but the acknowledgment had little purchase. There are twice-two aspects to God’s being king. He is king of the world and king of Israel, and he is king as authority and king as provider. As king of the world he provides for it, though it doesn’t realize, and as king of the world he looks to the world’s acknowledgment, though that will happen only in the age to come. As king of his people he provides for it, defends it from attackers, and expects that its acknowledgment should be a reality in this age, not only in the age to come. One could say that the demise of Ephraim and in due course the demise of Judah constitute God’s affirmation that they indeed have no king—that is, they do not acknowledge one. The restoration of Judah issues from God’s beginning to reign as king again (Isa. 52:7-10) and God’s later intervention to restore his people has the same implication (Mark 1:15). When Israel’s king is in its midst, it has no reason to fear anything bad (Zeph. 3:15).
3. The exercise of authority flourishes like hemlock (v. 4). There is hardly a nation whose rulers exercise government in a way that embodies faithfulness, commitment, and truth, and encourages faithfulness, commitment, and truth among its people. There is thus a contradiction between what authority is for (Rom. 13:1-7) and how it is used (Rev. 13). The challenge to the people of God (and its authorities) is to resist the temptation to follow the second model, to challenge authorities to govern in a way that reflects the reason they exist, and to manifest “patient endurance and faithfulness” (Rev. 13:10), not least in the context of the way the rest of the world bows down to the faithless authorities.
4. Jesus takes up v. 8 on his way to his execution (Luke 23:30) and John hears all the world speaking in similar terms when the great day of the wrath of God and of the lamb comes (Rev. 6:16). In Hosea the words constitute a challenge to Ephraimites to see where the implementing of God’s threats will take them, and therefore to turn. For the women of Jerusalem, they constitute a frightening warning that people who treat Jesus in the way people are treating him will also be bringing a terrible fate on themselves and thus on their people—as happens when Jerusalem falls. In Revelation, they appear on the lips of kings and generals, rich and powerful people, but also of everyone else both slave and free, but they do so in the context of a promise that a great company from Israel, and a further great company that no one can count, come out of the great tribulation.

# Hosea 10:11-15: Unhappy Recollections—The Heifer

## Translation

11But in that ’Eprayim was a teachable[[469]](#footnote-469) heifer

 that liked threshing,

When I passed by its good neck,[[470]](#footnote-470)

 I have made ’Eprayim to be ridden.[[471]](#footnote-471)

Yəhûdāh would plow,

 Ya‘ăqōb would do its harrowing.[[472]](#footnote-472)

12Do your sowing for faithfulness,

 reap for the sake of commitment,

 do your tilling of the tillable land:

A time[[473]](#footnote-473) for inquiring of Yahweh,

 until he comes and rains[[474]](#footnote-474) faithfulness for you,

13You’ve plowed faithlessness, you’ve reaped villainy,

 you’ve eaten the fruit of deception.

Because you’ve relied[[475]](#footnote-475) on your own way,[[476]](#footnote-476)

 on the number of your strong men.

14A boom will arise among your people,

 and all your fortresses will be destroyed,

As at Shalman’s destruction of Bȇt ’Arbē’l

 on the day of battle,

 when mother was dashed down with children.

15Exactly[[477]](#footnote-477) this he has done to you, Bȇt-’ēl,[[478]](#footnote-478)

 as a result of the depth of your bad dealing;[[479]](#footnote-479)

At dawn he was utterly lost,

 the king of Yiśrā’ēl.

## Interpretation

Yahweh’s talk of binding (10:10) makes for a segue back into another recollection of his taking up Israel in the first place (cf. 10:1), in a picture also parallel to the one of grapes in the wilderness (9:10). So Yahweh again recalls Ephraim’s beginnings, indicts it, warns it about the calamity to come, and incorporates another reference to apparently more recent events.

**Hosea 10:11-12.** In this recollection, Ephraim was a heifer used to threshing (v. 11), happy to stroll around and around over the wheat to break it up, free to eat as it goes (Deut. 25:4; Jer. 50:11). It was teachable and it had the strength of neck to sustain a yoke and pull a cart. So Yahweh set Ephraim to this task. The sudden additional reference to Judah reminds people that Judah is as much part of Israel as Ephraim; they are the service team that works for Yahweh (cf. 1:11 [2:1]). With Judah and Jacob in parallelism, Jacob will refer to the northern kingdom (cf. Mic. 1:5). Plowing is stage one in the preparing of the ground for sowing, the breaking up of the hard earth; harrowing is stage two, the flattening and leveling of the ground (cf. Isa. 28:24). The parallelism implies that Judah and Jacob both plow then harrow, not that the tasks are divided up.

The image stays the same as the rhetoric moves on (v. 12a). Yahweh (or Hosea) was talking about Ephraim and Judah as heifers, each in the third-person singular. Now Yahweh (or Hosea) is addressing the Ephraimites (and the Judahites?) as the farmers, in the second-person plural. Further, the farming process moves on from preparatory plowing and harrowing to sowing and reaping. In 2:19 [21] (see the comments) faithfulness and commitment were two aspects of the marriage gift that Yahweh promised. There faithfulness was *ședeq*, here it is *șədāqāh*; if one can discern a difference between the two, the former refers more often to Yahweh’s faithfulness, the latter to the faithfulness expected of Israel. So here Yahweh is exhorting his people to sow with a view to producing a crop of faithfulness in its life. Likewise commitment was Yahweh’s expectation in 4:1; 6:4, 6, and it is the crop Yahweh looks for here. Then a third colon follows, surprising in content as well as form. Tilling precedes sowing; it doesn’t follow it. Given that tillable land is land that hasn’t yet been cultivated, tilling is not so different from plowing, though it might be harder and more complicated. But if Hosea is talking about new, uncultivated land, he’s not referring to Israel in his own day but continuing to talk about the time back at the beginning, when Yahweh first put the yoke on Ephraim so it could be ridden. In other words, v. 12 continues the recollection in v. 11: it comprises the exhortation that went with the action in v. 11.

After the imperatives, at last (v. 12b) we get a more literal description of what Hosea means. Tilling means inquiring of Yahweh (*dāraš*). Only here does Hosea use this verb; he has previously used the related verb “seek help from” (*biqqēš*; 2:7 [9]; 3:5; 5:6, 15; 7:10), and the less technical term “ask things of” (*šā’al*;4:12). These expressions have more concrete significance than the traditional English expression “seek the Lord”; they denote turning to Yahweh as the one who must give his people both concrete direction and blessing. Failure to treat Yahweh as resource in these connections is what constitutes whoring. If his people do treat Yahweh as resource, then he’ll show that there’ll never be need to ask the skeptical question in 10:3b. In keeping with the imagery running through the passage, he’ll come and rain faithfulness (appropriately, *ședeq*). “Coming” to do so suggests a personal involvement; it recalls the portrayal of God personally irrigating the land and watering the mountains from his penthouse (Pss. 65:9-10 [10-11]; 104:13). He’s not sending; he’s bringing. While rain is necessary to the process from tilling to harvesting, here Hosea is talking about a faithfulness which will be a response to Israel’s having tilled, sown, and produced a harvest of its own faithfulness and commitment. But the promise might prompt a reconsideration of v. 12a: Israel’s sowing and reaping will be with a view to Yahweh showing his faithfulness and commitment.

**Hosea 10:13-15.** Suddenly there’s a switch to critique, confirming the inference that v. 12 was not the exhortation Yahweh is issuing now, which would be surprising in light of everything that has preceded in the Hosea scroll, but the exhortation Yahweh issued way back.

Actually Ephraim has done its plowing (v. 13), and it’s not the kind that the exhortation had in mind. Instead of faithfulness, Ephraim has plowed the opposite (*reša‘*), failure to do the right thing by God or by other people. It has reaped in the community a harvest of villainy or corruption. It has consumed the fruit issuing from the deception that has characterized the nation’s politics (7:3) and that thus has an effect on its moral life. The words sum up the moral and relational failure with regard to God and to one another that Hosea has denounced throughout. The continuation of the denunciation in v. 13b implies that Ephraim’s reliance on its own decision-making and on its human military resources is an expression of the faithlessness, villainy, and deceptiveness of its claim to rely on Yahweh. “They have therefore *harvested the fruit* of iniquity and *eaten fruit that deceives*; that is, they have had weak and blind hope.”[[480]](#footnote-480)

Its policy will lead to disaster (v. 14), as the earlier reference to relying on its own decision-making said (10:6). The boom that will arise will be the sound of an army advancing and/or the sound of the collapsing walls of its fortresses. We can’t identify the event involving Shalman; it might have involved one of the Assyrian kings called Shalmaneser and the town of Arbela in Galilee, or the Moabite king Salamanu and a town across the Jordan (the name of modern Irbid, Jordan’s second city, corresponds to that of Arbela). What we can acknowledge is that such events commonly involve the suffering for ordinary people that the last colon refers to (cf. 13:16 [14:1]).

“He has done” (v. 15) is perfect of certainty, denoting something that has happened in Yahweh’s intent and in Hosea’s vision (cf. LXX’s future verb in v. 15a, though not in v. 15b)—unless v. 15 is a note from after the calamity has happened. As people listened to Hosea they would be wondering about the verb’s subject: who is it who has done it? Is it Yahweh? Is it Beth-el itself, as the cause of the calamity? Is the subject impersonal (“Exactly this they have done to you”—cf. GK 144d)? Eventually the answer emerges when the subject of the entire verse comes at the very end. It is the king of Israel who is responsible. Is this simply the current king? Or does Hosea refer to the first king of Ephraim, Jeroboam, who sealed Beth-el’s ultimate fate and brought on it an end as terrible as that of Bet Arbel, by making Beth-el one of his new kingdom’s national sanctuaries and turning it into a place of deep apostasy? Or does “the king of Israel” refer to the Ephraimite monarchy as a whole? Daybreak is often the moment for commencing battle and the moment when you might therefore hope for Yahweh’s great act of deliverance (Josh. 6:15; Ps. 46:5 [6]). This dawn will be the reverse.

## Theological Implications

1. The image of breaking up your unbroken (fallow) ground (v. 12) was key to Charles G. Finney’s teaching about revival, and specifically to promoting a revival.[[481]](#footnote-481) To break up the fallow ground is to break up your hearts, to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God. It involves self-examination in order to identify where one’s shortcomings lie: for instance, in ingratitude to God, or want of love for God, or neglect of the Bible, or neglect of social duties, or envy, or cheating. The results will be just as certain as they are when a farmer breaks up a fallow field, and fertilizes it, and sows his wheat. Whereas the word for “fallow ground” (as KJV translates it) is actually not land that was cultivated but then abandoned to nature but land that has never been cultivated, Finney’s allegory refers to that first kind of land, which Hosea is indeed concerned about.
2. Paul, in the context of his exposition of the sowing and reaping metaphor, takes up the promise that God will rain faithfulness (v. 12, in the LXX version) to declare that God will increase the harvest of the Corinthians’ righteousness/faithfulness (2 Cor. 9:10). In effect he reaffirms to the church God’s commission and promise to Israel. Taking up both the ideas of teaching and of raining righteousness/faithfulness, Jerome takes it to refer to Jesus, comparing Romans 10:4.[[482]](#footnote-482) He thus looks at the imagery from the perspective of Israel’s having failed to implement its commission failed to produce the fruit. Putting together these two applications of the phrase suggests how the just requirement of the Torah (which Israel didn’t fulfill) is fulfilled in those who live not according to the lower nature but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).

# Hosea 11:1—12:1 [2]: Unhappy Recollections—The Son

## Translation

1When[[483]](#footnote-483) Yiśrā’ēl was a boy, I loved him,[[484]](#footnote-484)

 and from[[485]](#footnote-485) Mișrayim I called[[486]](#footnote-486) to my son.[[487]](#footnote-487)

2They’ve[[488]](#footnote-488) called to them,

 though they’d thus gone from before them—

It’s to the Masters that they sacrifice,

 and to carved sculptures[[489]](#footnote-489) that they burn incense.

3And I was the one who put ’Eprayim on his feet—[[490]](#footnote-490)

 in taking them upon his arms.[[491]](#footnote-491)

But they didn’t acknowledge

 that I healed them.[[492]](#footnote-492)

4With human cords[[493]](#footnote-493) I would draw them,

 with loving ropes.

I became for them

 like people lifting[[494]](#footnote-494) a yoke[[495]](#footnote-495) on their cheeks,

 in order that I might stretch out[[496]](#footnote-496) to him so I might feed him.

5He will not[[497]](#footnote-497) turn back to the country of Mișrayim,

 but ’Aššür will be his king,[[498]](#footnote-498)

 because they refused to turn back.

6A sword will whirl[[499]](#footnote-499) against his towns,

 and finish off his gate-bars.[[500]](#footnote-500)

It will consume [them] because of their plans,

 7since my people are hung up[[501]](#footnote-501) on turning back to me.[[502]](#footnote-502)

Though people call it to One on High,[[503]](#footnote-503)

 altogether it does not lift [him] up.[[504]](#footnote-504)

8How can I give you over, ’Eprayim,

 deliver you up, Yiśrā’ēl?

How can I give you over[[505]](#footnote-505) like Admah,

 make you like Ṣəbō’îm?

My attitude[[506]](#footnote-506) has overturned in[[507]](#footnote-507) me,

 my deep relenting[[508]](#footnote-508) has altogether warmed.

9I will not act on my angry blazing,

 I will not turn back[[509]](#footnote-509) to devastate ’Eprayim.

Because I am God and not a human being,

 among you as the holy one,

 and I will not come against a town.[[510]](#footnote-510)

10They will go after Yahweh

 who roars like a lion, because he is the one who roars.

Children will come trembling from the sea[[511]](#footnote-511)

 11as they come trembling like a sparrow from Mișrayim,

Like a pigeon from the country of ’Aššür,

 and I will let them live in[[512]](#footnote-512) their homes (Yahweh’s proclamation).

12’Eprayim has surrounded me with deceit,

 Yiśrā’ēl’s household with lies—Yəhûdāh, too,[[513]](#footnote-513)

Still[[514]](#footnote-514) drifting[[515]](#footnote-515) in relation to[[516]](#footnote-516) God,

 yes, in relation to the truthful Holy One.[[517]](#footnote-517)

12:1’Eprayim—it’s shepherding[[518]](#footnote-518) a wind

 and pursuing an east wind,

As all day it makes manifold deceit and destruction,

 when they seal[[519]](#footnote-519) a pact with Assyria,

 and oil is carried to Egypt.

## Interpretation

A move from threat to recollection again marks the beginning of a new section. Again someone listening to the entire scroll might not immediately perceive the transition, this time because the section opens with a *kî*, which usually means “because” and thus initially suggests that v. 1 provides the reason for the threat in 10:15. Likewise in v. 11 the phrase “Yahweh’s proclamation” has made the Masoretes think the subsection closes there (they provide a *setumah*). But that phrase doesn’t usually mark the ending. Further, these sections in Hosea characteristically move from recollection to confrontation and threat, before coming to an end and to the next recollection. Thus the English chapter rightly does not end at v. 11, though it does end in the middle of the confrontation and threat verses (11:12—12:1 [12:1-2]); perhaps it does so on the basis of a “positive” understanding of 11:12 (see the notes). As a section Hosea 11:1—12:1 [2] follows the pattern of the other “recollection” sections, in closing in solemn fashion. So it begins by recalling the beginning of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, notes the contrasting way Israel has subsequently behaved, and declares Yahweh’s resolve to attend to its wrongdoing. Amidst these elements, it is distinctive for its account of the tension within Yahweh over whether to punish or forgive (vv. 8-9) and for its vision of people returning to follow Yahweh (vv. 10-11).

**Hosea 11:1-2.** “Boy” (*na‘ar*) (v. 1) is a general term for someone from three months to young adulthood. It can be mildly affectionate; it’s used of Ishmael, Benjamin, and Absalom. It’s also commonly used of a servant (e.g. Gehazi). Only here is it used of Israel. “I loved the boy” is thus a familial expression, though natural for an adoptive parent or for a master as for a natural father. In this connection, not least in Hosea, “love” once again carries the connotations of loyalty and commitment as well as affection. “My son” in the second colon thus sharpens the declaration. It also suggests “kindliness and endearment”[[520]](#footnote-520) on the lips of Eli (1 Sam. 3:6, 16; 4:16), though on other lips in an honorary or ironic way (1 Sam. 24:17; 26:17; 2 Kings 8:9; 16:7; and Proverbs). Again its application is by no means confined to a natural father. It is otherwise used of Israel only in Exodus 4:22-23, which fits with Yahweh’s referring to Egypt here. In Exodus, too, the implication is that Israel is Yahweh’s servant, whom he intends to take so he can serve Yahweh rather than Pharaoh. This significance fits here, given that “calling to” characteristically denotes summoning.[[521]](#footnote-521) It also fits the assumption in preceding recollections that the significance of Ephraim was to be useful, like grapes (9:10) or a vine (10:1) or a heifer (10:11).

As Yahweh continues to speak of Israel and Egypt (v. 2), he moves to speaking of both in the plural. The problem is that in more recent times the Ephraimites have been calling to the Egyptians for help (cf. 7:11), notwithstanding the fact that long ago the Israelites had escaped from the Egyptians! Further, despite the fact that Yahweh summoned them as his servant, they now serve other masters and look to them for blessing.

**Hosea 11:3-4.** Yahweh reverts again from accusation to recollection (v. 3). He had been the one who set Ephraim walking. The strange verbal form comes from a word that nearly always refers to people investigating a country (“spy” is the usual English translation). An allusion to the Israelites investigating Canaan neatly accompanies the reference to Egypt and to Yahweh’s “taking” them (cf. Exod. 6:7; Deut. 4:20, 34). Yahweh then carried them upon his pinions, you could say (Deut. 32:11), or “upon his arms” (cf. Deut. 33:27). But once more the failure of acknowledgment that Hosea traces back to the exodus is the failure he denounces. “Healed” continues the exodus reference (Exod. 15:26) while also being a prominent motif in Hosea (5:13; 6:1; 7:1; 14:4 [5]). People failed to acknowledge Yahweh as the healer then, and they fail to do so now. Both in Exodus and in Hosea 7:1; 14:4 [5], “healing” refers to something broader than the curing of physical maladies; it suggests healing of body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

Yahweh then changes the image to another familiar one (v. 4) whereby he is the farmer and Ephraim is the heifer. At the exodus and subsequently, he was drawing Israel as a farmer draws a heifer, and doing so in a humane way and/or by human means such as prophets.[[522]](#footnote-522) There was no painful fetter chafing the animal’s neck. They were loving or loyal ropes. Yahweh behaved to the Ephraimites like a farmer fixing a yoke onto their cheeks with the implication that farmers do so carefully, or perhaps lifting the yoke that’s already on their cheeks.[[523]](#footnote-523) The motif of care in the talk of human cords and loving ropes finds further expression in the following colon with its reference to feeding

**Hosea 11:5-7**. The obvious action for Yahweh would be to have Ephraim return to Egypt (v. 5), given Ephraim’s refusal to acknowledge Yahweh. He had earlier threatened this action (8:13; 9:3, 6), though there Egypt was perhaps a theological rather than geographical destination. But Ephraim itself wants to go to Egypt for help, as it wanted to return there once in the past (Num. 14:1-3). That morose connection doesn’t apply to Hosea’s time, where the interest issues from a desire to exercise political responsibility. So maybe Yahweh refuses to have Ephraim go geographically to Egypt because it would collude with its own action in going there for help. Ephraim is resistant to Assyria, so Assyria will be its destiny. Ephraim won’t return to Yahweh, so it will not return to Egypt as it wishes.

Actually Yahweh speaks (vv. 6-7a) not of Ephraim’s going to Assyria but of Assyria coming to it. War will rage in its streets, and its gates will not withstand their attackers. War will consume it for interrelated political and religious reasons. It insists on shaping its own political policies by rebelling against Assyria and allying with Egypt. But it thus gives expression to its being bent or hung up on turning back to Yahweh. Yahweh talks about “turning back” in three senses in three lines in vv. 5-7.

People like Hosea may summon Ephraim to call on the One on High (v. 7b), but it does not respond. Lifting Yahweh up is an aspect of serving Yahweh (e.g., Pss. 30:1 [2]; 145:1), as is the entire people lifting Yahweh up altogether (Ps. 34:3 [4]). Ephraim declines to do so.

**Hosea 11:8-9**. The section so far has described the two aspects to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Yahweh made commitments; Israel has not responded. The section has then described Yahweh’s response in relation to that second aspect; Yahweh must surely cast Israel off. Everyone knows how parents should treat a rebellious son (Deut. 21:18-21), even if no one ever took the rule literally. How could parents act thus? And it’s the same for Yahweh.[[524]](#footnote-524)

So now comes a further commitment on Yahweh’s part (v. 8a). It takes the form of a series of rhetorical questions which indicate how impossible it would be for Yahweh to cast Israel off. That response implied that the only question for him was which of its lovers to surrender Ephraim to, whether Egypt (as its behavior more recently indicates it wishes) or Assyria (as its past behavior indicated it wished). Such surrender would be natural and reasonable on the part of spurned lover or spurned parent, even if few acted on it. It would be a natural and reasonable reaction on the part of a spurned ally such as Assyria, who would act on it without hesitation. And Yahweh himself has done it before. Admah and Zebo’im were two of the towns by the Dead Sea that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23; Genesis does not mention them in this connection, though they do appear with Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen. 10:18; 14:2, 8). But the mention of them heightens the force of the rhetorical questions. How could Yahweh treat his son or wife in that way?

So Yahweh has had a change of attitude (v. 8b). The verb is the one used for Yahweh’s overturning of Admah and Zebo’im; instead of overturning Ephraim, Yahweh has overturned himself. The expression “change of attitude” comes only three other times (Exod. 14:5; Ps. 105:25; Lam. 1:20), only here of God, and only here with a positive sense of giving up a threatening stance. To put it another way, Yahweh has “relented.” Hosea uses the rare noun for relenting (*niḥûmîm*), but talk in terms of relenting (*nāḥam* niphal) is the classic First Testament way to speak of Yahweh having a change of mind in the sense of giving up one intention and adopting another. Sometimes the verb refers to giving up an intention to bless, but much more commonly it denotes relenting of an intention to bring calamity. Whereas Ephraim is altogether unwilling to return to Yahweh (v. 6), Yahweh’s deep relenting has altogether become ripe and tender: such is the etymological meaning of the rare verb for “growing warm,” elsewhere used of compassion (Gen. 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26).

This warming thus overcomes the angry blazing (v. 9a)—rather surprisingly, given that warmth is less powerful than such heat. The implicit explanation lies in the renewed statement in the parallel colon. For Yahweh to implement his anger would be to go back on the stance to Israel that Yahweh took from the beginning (vv. 1, 3-4).

The explicit explanation comes in the tricolon that follows (v. 9b) and brings the section to its initial climax. Yahweh is God and not a human person. It’s natural for human beings not only to get justifiably angry at being treated faithlessly by offspring, spouse, or ally, but also to act on that anger. Yahweh is not bound by this logic. To sharpen the point, he is the holy one. “Holy” is intrinsically a metaphysical term not a moral one. It designates God as belonging to a different category of being, as a supernatural being. But other gods could be holy in this sense without their being inclined to faithfulness or mercy. The implication of Yahweh’s asserting his holiness is to introduce a moral or characterological aspect to the definition of holiness, as it applies to Yahweh over against other alleged supernatural or divine beings. It is as the holy one that Yahweh does not allow the necessity of punishment to overwhelm the necessity of being consistent to his own faithfulness in relationship or commitment; *ḥesed* is the word Yahweh could have used in this context. At this moment he does not intend to allow the necessity of punishment to overwhelm the necessity of faithfulness. As the section will go on to make clear, that decision is not final; it is subject to being rescinded if it continues to receive no positive response. Historically it did get rescinded; Yahweh did bring to an end Ephraim’s life as nation. But meanwhile, Yahweh will not come against a town—perhaps any town in Ephraim, but perhaps Samaria in particular.

**Hosea 11:10-11.** So there’s reason to follow Yahweh, but the reason to follow him is not confined to his faithfulness (v. 10abα). Yahweh’s bark is worse than his bite, but it is quite a bark, or rather quite a roar, and it cannot be ignored. The object of his roar is not explicit here: maybe it’s Ephraim, maybe it’s Egypt or Assyria.

Ephraim would be wise to play safe and come back trembling to Samaria (v. 10bβ-11aα). “Trembling” like other words for fear can be an awed response to an entity that one can also trust, or a fearful response to an entity of which one is afraid. It would do no harm if there is a mixture. The fearsomeness of the lions scares the birds, but in a good sense. The tremblers will come from the sea, which in this context implies coming from Egypt; a diplomatic journey to Egypt would be as likely made by sea as by land (Isa. 30:6 hints at the reason). The parallel colon makes explicit that Egypt is where the tremblers come from, and their returning all-a-tremble will be a sign that they have given up their illicit diplomatic venture. Yahweh thus finally achieves his goal of delivering Israel from Egypt.[[525]](#footnote-525)

They will equally give up diplomatic missions to Assyria (v. 11aβb) and come back (implicitly trembling) from there too. There will be a neat reversal of Yahweh’s earlier threats. He had threatened to stop them living in his land and have them live in Egypt and Assyria because that was where they looked to (9:3). Now they will come back tail between their legs from there, and Yahweh will let them live in their own homes. It will also be a fulfillment of the promise in 3:3-5. Whereas Hosea has switched back to speaking for himself for most of this last subsection (as in vv. 3aβ, 7b), he has Yahweh speaking directly again to underscore this last promise. It is further underscored by the closing expression “Yahweh’s proclamation.” In Hosea the phrase places some emphasis on what precedes, though it does not mark the end of a section (see 2:13, 16, 21 [15, 18, 21]). The same usage is characteristic of other Prophets (e.g. Amos 2:11; 3:10, 13; 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11; 6:8, 14; 8:3, 9, 11; 9:7, 8, 12, 13) though there it occasionally appears at the end of a subsection (e.g., Amos 2:16; 3:15; 4:3, 5). Generally, then, it suggests “What I have just said is particularly important, so think about it, but I am not done yet.” Such is the case here.

**Hosea 11:12—12:1 [12:1-2].** It would be encouraging if the section ended at v. 11 but Hosea’s message is generally more ambiguous, so it’s not surprising that it doesn’t end there. Yahweh continues to speak in these final verses, reminding listeners of the background to his promises or declarations of intent in vv. 10-11 by taking up and developing the accusations in the opening of the section and restating accusations from earlier in the scroll. They cannot simply be ignored in light of those promises and declarations.

It is still the case (11:12a [12:1a]) that Yahweh dwells among them (v. 9), so they surround him—with deceit and lies.[[526]](#footnote-526) Hosea has mostly spoken of falsehood as characterizing the nation’s internal life and leading to its coups, but he has also indicated that it characterizes Ephraim’s relationship with Yahweh. Ephraim claims to be committed to Yahweh and reliant on him, but its deception (4:2; 7:3; 10:13) and lying (7:16) includes also making commitments to other deities and relying on alliances with other peoples. And Judah is no better. The scroll again makes clear that its critique of Ephraim by no means implies approval of Judah (see 5:5, 10, 13, 14; 6:4, 11; 8:14; 10:11), which may be strangely comforting to Ephraim; it also makes it impossible for Judah to read the scroll in a way that offers false assurance.

Hosea then offers a distinctive re-expression of his critique (11:12b [12:1b]). Esau the restive and restless wanderer was a drifter, in contrast to Jacob (Gen. 27:40), and Jeremiah reports Judah acknowledging that it has drifted or wandered away from Yahweh (Jer. 2:31). So Ephraim or Judah drifting in their relationship with Yahweh really means drifting away from Yahweh. The parallel colon underlines the scandal. They’ve been drifting in their relationship with the supremely Holy One (Hosea uses the plural of majesty) who is himself the truthful one. An irony here is that holy ones or (semi)-divine beings, and also Yahweh’s own truthfulness, “surround” Yahweh (Ps. 89:7-8 [8-9]). Ephraim and Judah have managed to surround Yahweh with lies and deceit (cf. 7:2) and have also ignored the truthfulness that not only surrounds but characterizes the Holy One. Another irony is that the implicit comparison with Esau foreshadows the focus on Jacob in the next section.

Ephraim is thus behaving in a way that is also effectively aimless (12:1 [2] aαβ), certainly fruitless. Hosea spoke earlier of sowing wind (8:7), in what looked like a familiar aphorism. Perhaps this further line about winds is another aphorism. Trying to shepherd wind is foolish. Chasing the east wind is even more foolish, because it is the fierce and destructive hot wind off the desert. “Ephraim the alliance-seeker was therefore Ephraim the idiot.”[[527]](#footnote-527)

The interpretation of the metaphor (12:1 [2] aγb) closes the section and restates how Ephraim surrounds Yahweh with lies. It is continuously engaged in multiplying deceit. The stupidity of its policy lies in how it is thereby multiplying the dimensions of its own coming devastation (see 7:13; 9:6; 10:14), which will come about because of the deceit involved in its alliances with Assyria and Egypt. It’s making a pact with one while hedging its bets by undertaking simultaneous negotiations with the other. Israel is a major producer of olive oil and Egypt has to import it, so exporting oil there will be part of the negotiation. Further, while the point about deceit and devastation applies on a political level (see 2 Kings 17:4-5), Ephraim’s more profound faithlessness lies in relation to Yahweh. It has no business making a pact or covenant with anyone else.

## Theological Implications

1. Matthew 2:15 declares that Jesus’s being taken to Egypt happened to fill or fill out or fill up what God spoke by means of the prophet in Hosea 11:1. There is no precedent in Jewish interpretation for a messianic understanding of the text. Commentators such as Jerome and Calvin acknowledge the gap between Matthew’s statement and the contextual meaning of Hosea’s declaration, though Theodore omits even to mention Matthew.[[528]](#footnote-528) Jerome justifies Matthew’s application to Jesus on the basis of the typology that is more explicit in Galatians 4.[[529]](#footnote-529) Calvin likewise declares that it is not enough to say that there was simply a comparison between the two sojourns in Egypt.

For it behaves us to consider this, that God, when he formerly redeemed his people from Egypt, only showed by a certain prelude the redemption which he deferred till the coming of Christ. Hence, as the body was then brought forth from Egypt into Judea, so at length the head also came forth from Egypt: and then God fully showed him to be the true deliverer of his people. This then is the meaning. Matthew therefore most fitly accommodates this passage to Christ, that God loved his Son from his first childhood and called him from Egypt.[[530]](#footnote-530)

While there are appeals to typology in Paul here and elsewhere, neither here nor in his other quotations does Matthew indicate that he thinks in these terms. The typological explanation appeals to interpreters who feel the need to defend Hosea on some rational basis because of the attacks of people who dispute his use of the Scriptures (as Jerome acknowledges he needs to) or because they are themselves more comfortable if they can give a rational account of Matthew’s interpretation. But elsewhere the New Testament is more inclined to associate the Holy Spirit with such interpretation, and this is more likely Matthew’s inclination. The Holy Spirit was involved in inspiring Hosea to speak to Ephraim in the way he does, with the significance that Theodore finds in his prophecy. But the Holy Spirit was also involved in inspiring Hosea to speak in words that would be open to being applied to Jesus. This latent second meaning was not available to Hosea or his listeners; it became available only when someone such as Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, spotted the words’ applicability to Jesus. While some such applications to Jesus can be given a typological interpretation, not all of them can, so it is hardly the basic principle involved in Matthew’s interpretation.

1. God’s summons to Israel finds a counterpart in Jesus’s summons of disciples. One could say that Jesus put Peter and Andrew, James and John onto their feet. They are challenged to follow him, as Israel was (v. 10). Their shortcomings as followers were less spectacular than Ephraim’s, but the restoration of a disciple who denies knowing Jesus is for him a fulfillment of the promise that Israel will become a real follower.
2. The relationship between God and his people involves God as adoptive father or master reaching out in love and commission to a potential son or servant, and his people responding with commitment as servant and as son. Thus God’s grace comes first; the relationship does not start with the people seeking a father or servant. But the response of son and servant is integral to the relationship. The relationship is not conditioned, but it does require that response. The relationship between God and his people thus involves loving it, summoning it, setting it on its feet, taking it, carrying it on his arms, healing it in a broad sense. It involves setting it about its task as a farmer does his animals, but in a gentle, considerate, and loving way.
3. The problem is that the people of God characteristically make commitments to other fathers or masters rather than or as well as the true God. They do not acknowledge him. They plan their own way of ensuring their security. Though they are summoned to turn back to the One on High, they decline to exalt him. God’s response is then not to abandon them to the masters they prefer to serve, or to give them another master of his choice, whose stance in relation to them will be much tougher. *“*For the people, Yahweh is the maintainerof the cosmos, who, albeit he has wounded, will also heal.”[[531]](#footnote-531) Yahweh got involved with Israel historically and thus “acknowledged” Israel in a distinctive way, and that on this basis Yahweh insists on being exclusively “acknowledged” by Israel.
4. The parent-child metaphor, even more than the husband-wife metaphor, facilitates a wrestling with the question of what God is to do about his people’s faithlessness and rebellion. Does God simply cast the people off? Does he discipline them? Does he cast them off for a while and then restore them? Does he simply carry on challenging them? As an adoptive parent God is the prodigal father or mother (“the image of God in Hos 11 is parental rather than specifically paternal or maternal”)[[532]](#footnote-532) perplexed and disconcerted by the behavior of their child. The child is not the returning prodigal.
5. Calvin comments:

God, we know, is subject to no passions; and we know that no change takes place in him. What then do these expressions mean, by which he appears to be changeable? Doubtless he accommodates himself to our ignorances whenever he puts on a character foreign to himself…. God does not in vain introduce himself as being uncertain; for we hence learn that he is not carried away too suddenly to inflict punishment, even when men in various ways provoke his vengeance…. But when he says that his *heart was changed,* and that his *repentings were brought back again,* the same mode of speaking after the manner of men is adopted; for we know that these feelings belong not to God; he cannot be touched with repentance, and his heart cannot undergo changes…. But as God was merciful, and embraced his people with paternal affection, he could not forget that he was a Father, but would be willing to grant pardon; as is the case with a father, who, on seeing his son’s wicked disposition, suddenly feels a strong displeasure, and then, being seized with relenting, is inclined to spare him. God then declares that he would thus deal with his people.[[533]](#footnote-533)

In a general sense it cannot be right that God feels no passions; at least, the Scriptures rather consistently attribute to him passions such as delight, compassion, wrath, and sorrow, as well the capacity to have a change of mind.

Hosea 11:1-9 conveys the emotive realm of a funeral. The historical recital, the pain that overwhelms the anger, the mood of hopelessness, and the bitter cries that emanate from the inmost part of the mourner (here, God) are all essential facets of a “dirge.” As a parent grieves for the death of a son, the Hebrew God cries out bitterly with four “how’s”—utterly painful and hopeless. Towards the end of the poem, there is still no sign of “return/repent.”[[534]](#footnote-534)

It is a problem that Calvin declares on a philosophical basis what must be true about God and then evades teaching from the Scriptures that clashes with these philosophical convictions by declaring it to be the result of condescension. But indeed God is not subject to random passions or changes of mind.

1. In general, both relenting of bringing blessing and relenting of bringing calamity issue from God’s rational reconsideration of his intentions based on new factors that now need to be taken into account, such as a change of attitude on the part of the potential victims or beneficiaries of his act (see especially Jer. 18). What is noteworthy in Hosea 11 is that the basis for reconsideration comes from inside God himself. God's "change of heart" is not induced by human pleading, but by a love that renews hope through bestowing undeserved blessing.[[535]](#footnote-535) No Moses urges God to relent (contrast Exod. 32:12; also Ps. 90:13, the only other occurrence of the imperative of *nāḥam* niphal). Is it “strange that Yahweh is still undecided at this late stage”?[[536]](#footnote-536) It’s not so much that God is undecided as that on an ongoing basis God acknowledges two sets of internal obligations, and the section gives expression to both. The background lies in the revelation at Sinai and it’s not unrelated to Moses’ prayer for God to relent. Faithfulness, compassion, and commitment on one hand, and a commitment to attend to wrongdoing on the other, are both aspects of God’s nature, but the former set of qualities is more central to that nature than is blazing anger.
2. In other words, God is the holy one. God’s being the holy one does not mean that love and justice are evenly balanced in God. God’s point here is that holiness doesn’t mean that he has to act in punishing wrongdoing. It means the opposite, that he does not need to act in punishing wrongdoing—at least, not always. To put it another way, saying he is the holy one “among you” is like saying he is “the holy one of Israel.”[[537]](#footnote-537) Being the holy one among you, being the holy one who has a special relationship with Israel, pushes God towards being merciful rather than punitive. Isaiah 40—55 develops this notion that God’s holiness is the foundation of his deliverance of his people, by emphasizing that God’s being “the holy one of Israel” means he will deliver his people. In v. 9b “Hosea combines the transcendence and immanence of God in a single phrase.”[[538]](#footnote-538) Of course Yahweh is the holy one among the rest of humanity, too, with similar implications.
3. It is important to affirm what is right and to avoid giving the impression that wrong does not matter, and sometimes God does punish wrongdoing. But the balance within his holiness means he doesn’t always have to do so. He is always having to decide what to do where there is no single answer. In that situation, his “decisions” are thus always tentative and he can have a change of mind. “Although for rhetorical reasons thesedivine announcements [such as 8:13; 9:3, 6] are crafted in categorical language, they are not to be understood as… reflecting by themselves the full extent of YHWH’s decisions concerning Israel.” They are set in the context of 11:8-11.[[539]](#footnote-539) But the converse is also true, as the English chapter division (linking v. 12 with vv. 1-11) suggests. It is not the case that the section to which vv.1-11 belongs differs from preceding ones in issuing in no new threat or a final rejection of judgment[[540]](#footnote-540) or in being simply a proclamation of salvation.[[541]](#footnote-541) “Contradiction is pervasive in Hosea…; alternative futures are juxtaposed.”[[542]](#footnote-542)
4. “Angry blazing” is a standard First Testament description of God’s wrathful response to his people’s faithlessness (e.g., Exod. 32:12; Deut. 13:17 [18]; Jonah 3:9), though fortunately it comes as often as not in the context of references to God’s not acting on it. But to act on the anger aroused by wrongdoing is not only an expression of natural but regrettable feelings. It is the imposition of a proper chastisement and a proper penalty. It would be wrong to treat such conduct as if it did not matter. Calvin again, comments on “I will not act on my angry blazing,”

by which figurative mode of speaking he sets forth the punishment which was suitable to the sins of men. For it must ever be remembered, that God is exempt from every passion. But if no anger is to be supposed by us to be in God, what does he mean by the fury of his wrath? Even the relation between his nature and our innate or natural sins. But why does Scripture say that God is angry? Even because we imagine him to be so according to the perception of the flesh; for we do not apprehend God’s indignation, except as far as our sins provoke him to anger, and kindle his vengeance against us. Then God, with regard to our perception, calls the fury of his wrath the heavy judgement, which is equal to, or meet for, our sins. [[543]](#footnote-543)

The Scriptures consistently describe God as capable of anger (and “he is never angrier than in Hosea’s prophecies”)[[544]](#footnote-544) and give no indication that they do not mean it.

1. God’s commitment to his people does not stop at declining to act in judgment. If he stopped there, he would again give the impression that right and wrong, faithfulness and faithlessness, do not matter. His original call to Israel was designed to turn it into a people that called on him, and beyond his holding back in mercy there is also a determination that they will fulfill their original vocation. They will give up calling on other lovers and come trembling to him, to claim the promise that he will then let them resettle in Canaan. It’s a promise, but it’s also by implication a challenge. They must come trembling back.
2. When the people of God are subject to God’s rebuke and chastisement, they can rejoice in his promise, but not in such a way as to forget his challenge. Specifically, their covenant with God is an exclusive one, like the marriage covenant. It rules out other covenants or commitments or reliances. They have to be wary of drifting.

# Hosea 12:2-11 [3-12]: Unhappy Recollections—The Heel

## Translation

2Yahweh both had[[545]](#footnote-545) a confrontation with Yəhûdāh,

 and attended[[546]](#footnote-546) to Ya‘ăqōb in accordance with its ways;

 he would give back[[547]](#footnote-547) to him in accordance with his deeds.

3In the womb he grasped the heel of his brother,

 and in his vigor[[548]](#footnote-548) he exerted himself with God.[[549]](#footnote-549)

4He asserted authority[[550]](#footnote-550) in relation to[[551]](#footnote-551) an envoy[[552]](#footnote-552) and won,

 though he[[553]](#footnote-553) cried and asked him for grace.

At Bȇt-‘ēl he[[554]](#footnote-554) would find him;

 there he would speak with us.[[555]](#footnote-555)

5Yes, Yahweh the God of Armies,

 Yahweh is his invocation.

6You: you are to turn back through[[556]](#footnote-556) your God—

 keep commitment in[[557]](#footnote-557) decision-making,

 and hope in your God continually.

7Phoenicia,[[558]](#footnote-558) in whose hand are lying balances,

 likes to defraud.

8’Eprayim has said, I have indeed got rich,

 I’ve found vigor, as far as I’m concerned.

All my labors:[[559]](#footnote-559) people will not find, as far as I’m concerned,

 waywardness[[560]](#footnote-560) that is wrongdoing.

9But I—I am Yahweh your God,

 from the country of Mișrayim.

I will again make you live in tents,

 as in the days of a set meeting.[[561]](#footnote-561)

10I would speak urgently to[[562]](#footnote-562) the prophets,

 when I granted many a vision,

 and by means of the prophets would give pictures.[[563]](#footnote-563)

11If Gil‘ād was evil, indeed they were empty,

 when they sacrificed bulls[[564]](#footnote-564) at Gilgāl,

Also their altars will be[[565]](#footnote-565) like heaps[[566]](#footnote-566)

 alongside the furrows of the field.

## Interpretation

Again Hosea moves from confrontation to recollection, though again the two sections flow into each other syntactically. Here Hosea looks back to the ancestral beginnings of Judah and especially of Jacob the father of Ephraim and Judah, then makes another transition to critique and threat, but also incorporates a promise.

**Hosea 12:2-4 [3-5].** Initially Hosea’s listeners would hear this section as directly continuing the indictment of the two nations of Judah and Jacob, taking Jacob to refer to Ephraim as in 10:11 (see the comments). But they would then discover from v. 3 [4] that Jacob is the eponymous ancestor of the present nation, as presumably then is Judah. The present nations are continuing to live out their ancestors’ destiny, or the ancestors foreshadow the nations, or are types of which the nations are antitypes. “Look at these ancestors and you will see yourselves mirroring them.”

For Yahweh’s argument with Judah (v. 2 [3]), see Genesis 38 and Joshua 7. For Yahweh’s attending to Jacob, see the broader story of his troubled life in Genesis 27—49, which tells of how Jacob’s decisions often recoil on him (e.g., in his relationship with Esau and Laban), though it also indicates that Yahweh nevertheless preserves and blesses him. Here Hosea puts the emphasis the other way around in both respects. He sees Yahweh involved in bringing about the recoil and he ignores the preservation and blessing. We don’t know whether Hosea would have known the Genesis account in something like the form that we have it, but comparing the two nevertheless helps bring out their respective natures.

Hosea first (v. 3 [4]) describes some of those ways and deeds that earned Yahweh’s disciplinary response. Initially there was the fighting with Esau in the womb and the reaching after him as they were born (see Gen. 25:21-26). In Genesis this description of Jacob carries no necessary note of critique; it may even imply he is reaching after the fulfillment of God’s promise. Likewise Tg gives a positive interpretation of this account of Jacob in Hosea. But Hosea’s wording suggests a different reading of the story. “Grasp the heel of” is *‘āqab*, a denominative verb derived from the word for “heel” which suggests attacking someone from behind (see Jer. 9:3); compare and contrast the related adjective in 6:8 (see the note). Hosea’s evaluation corresponds to Esau’s. He made the link between his brother’s name and his acts (Gen. 27:36): Jacob was grabber or heel by name and by nature. The parallel colon takes things much further. When he had reached his adult strength (cf. Jacob’s words in Gen. 49:3), God was the object of his reach. “Two conflicts are decisive for Jacob’s life…: that with his brother and that with God.”[[567]](#footnote-567) “Exerted himself” is *śārāh*: there are two such roots and Sarah’s name comes from the other one meaning “rule,” but it looks the same, and Jacobwas the true descendant of his grandmother. Genesis rather makes a link with Jacob’s new name Israel, which etymologically implies “God exerts himself” but which to Genesis suggests Jacob exerting himself with God (Gen. 32:28 [29]).

Hosea goes on to expand on his reminder of the Jacob story (v. 4a [5a]). In Genesis Jacob is wrestled by “someone” (*’îš*, which one would usually take to denote “a man”) who eventually says that Jacob has exerted himself with God (*’ĕlōhîm*) and with men (*’ănāšîm*) and won (Gen. 32:28 [29])—the same verbs here in vv. 3-4 [4-5]. Genesis is thus ambiguous over whether Jacob wrestles with a human being, or with God, or with something in between; Hosea’s word “envoy” (*mal’āk*, traditionally “angel”), is a nice ambiguous compromise. In Genesis 32:22-32 [23-33] there is no talk of weeping or of grace, though on either side of that passage, Jacob seeks and finds grace from Esau (32:5 [6]; 33:8, 10, 15) and they both weep (33:4). Here, Jacob is crying. and seeking and finding grace from the envoy or from God, which would also be a reasonable way of expressing the implications of the Genesis version.

The continuation of the account (v. 4b [5b] ) carries on keeping the audience on its toes. God finding Jacob would be a good description of what once happened at Beth-el and will happen there again (28:10-22; 35:1-15). It was on that second occasion that Yahweh gave Jacob his new name, as the one with whom God exerts himself and who exerts himself with God. But in Genesis Jacob is the one who does the finding, of grace and also of Esau (32:19 [20]), and finding God would be a good description of what happens on those two occasions at Beth-el. There, too, Jacob speaks with God, but the second colon in v. 4b [5b] more strikingly notes that God speaks with *us*. Yahweh’s dealings with the Jacob of the past also relate to the Jacob of the present.

**Hosea 12:5-6 [6-7].** The declaration about Yahweh (v. 5 [6]) both follows from vv. 2-4 [3-5] and leads into v. 6 [7]. The title “Yahweh God of Armies” and its variants do not appear in the Torah; they become frequent only in Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. They suggest that Yahweh is the lord of all military forces, supernatural and natural, and is not someone to be messed with. One significance of the expression here is that the envoy would have been a member of the heavenly armies or would be associated with them (cf. the juxtaposition in Pss. 103:20-21; 148:2). It is then as Yahweh that this God is invoked or made mention of. The formulations are similar to those in Amos 4:13; 9:5-6, but the declaration that Yahweh is this God’s invocation, the name by which he is to be addressed, parallels Exodus 3:15 (cf. Tg).

The declaration about Yahweh is the implicit backing for what follows (v. 6 [7]). In light of 11:10-11, v. 6a [7a] could be heard as a promise, but then in light of v. 6b it could be heard as an exhortation. Either way, “turn back” (*šûb*) makes another link with Jacob (Gen. 28:15), but the verb here implicitly refers to coming back to Yahweh, more explicitly to coming back by means of Yahweh. It thus also recalls the promise in 3:5, and the many times Hosea has spoken regretfully of turning back or not doing so (2:7 [9]; 5:4; 7:10, 16; 11:5; cf. 6:1). Through Yahweh’s action, Ephraim will come back. There follow two imperative cola, and promises can lead into exhortations to make an appropriate response. But these imperatives spell out the promise’s implications. They are the kind of imperatives that themselves make a pledge.[[568]](#footnote-568) The first reexpresses a promise from 2:19 [21] concerning the future life of the community. Its two terms comprise a hendiadys: the exercise of authority in a way that expresses commitment will form a contrast with the mutual deceit that presently characterizes the leadership. The parallel colon makes a parallel point. Instead of organizing its political affairs on the basis of the assumption that it must take responsibility for its own affairs and put its hope in alliances with Assyria or Egypt, Ephraim will put its hope in Yahweh. He is “your God,” the line repeats. It is the reason why Ephraim can and must hope in him.

**Hosea 12:7-8 [8-9].** As happened in the previous section, Hosea moves from promise to confrontation.

He begins with a metaphor, or a little allegory, or another aphorism (v. 7 [8]). “Lying balances” is a motif in Proverbs (11:1; 20:23; also Amos 8:5); they are to be contrasted there with “authoritative scales” (Prov. 16:11), the kind with which one could exercise proper authority (v. 6). “Someone in whose hand are lying balances likes to defraud” is a statement of the self-evident such as appears in Proverbs (e.g., 12:17; 16:17): the statement of the obvious also constitutes a protest or denunciation. Here, the possible aphorism takes the form of a racial slur. The fraudulent trader is Phoenicia, located on the Mediterranean to the northwest of Ephraim. It’s a trading people; “Phoenician” comes to mean trader. Here Hosea uses the primary noun referring to the people. The slur says, “Beware those Phoenician traders (Ephraim’s neighbors); they’re all dishonest.”

In light of the definition, Hosea puts Ephraim in its place (v. 8 [9]). The rhetoric works in a similar way to that of chapter 4: denounce some people, watch the audience nod in agreement, then turn the argument against them. Like Phoenicia, Ephraim has worked hard and got rich (Hosea doesn’t speak of oppression within Ephraim, as Amos does; his focus continues to lie on religion and the associated realm of politics). Hosea hardly refers to Ephraim’s final decades when it had had to pay the cost of seeking protection from Assyria and Egypt. He refers back to Ephraim’s halcyon days in the time of Jeroboam II, when Ephraim was like Jacob in its “riches” (cf. Jacob’s wives’ words in Gen. 31:16), in its “vigor” (cf. v. 3 [4]) and in its “labors” (cf. Gen. 31:42). The words Hosea puts on Ephraim’s lips transition to speaking more the language of Hosea than of Genesis when it comes to talk about waywardness (4:8; 5:5; 7:1; 8:13; 9:7, 9; 13:12; 14:1-2 [2-3]) and wrongdoing (4:7-8; 8:11, 13; 9:9; 10:8-9; 13:2, 12; but Gen. 31:36). The contrast between the judgment Ephraim is prepared to make on Phoenicia and its delusion about itself hardly needs articulating. “By quoting the defendant, the prophet offers proof of guilt with words from the defendant’s own mouth.”[[569]](#footnote-569)

**Hosea 12:9-11 [10-12].** It is Yahweh himself who implicitly articulates it. Ephraim may not be a fraud and liar in the way Phoenicia is, but its waywardness and wrongdoing do consist in being fraudulent and lying (cf. 11:12 [12:1]) in its own way. It pretends to acknowledge Yahweh, but it doesn’t really do so.

Hence Yahweh’s reminder (v. 9 [10]) of the relationship that has obtained “since Egypt,” when Yahweh began calling to them (11:1). Since then, Yahweh has asserted himself as master (“your God”) and they’ve been his servant; except that they’ve deceived him. So he will discipline them. They can extend the resemblance to Jacob by living in tents (Gen. 31:25; 33:19). Maybe the idea is that their wealth has gone, maybe that their proper houses have been destroyed by invaders, maybe that they have been thrown out of the land and are back in their wilderness style of life, living as refugees. Whichever it is, the parallel colon nuances the point with its reference to the time of one of Israel’s set festivals (cf. 2:11 [13]; 9:5). It would not be surprising if occasions such as Sukkot were when Hosea delivered some of his messages, to everyone’s annoyance at his spoiling the festivity (see 9:1-9 and the comments). At Sukkot people stayed not in tents but in bivouacs (*sukkôt*) as they had lived in the wilderness, but the experience would still provide a plausible context for inviting Ephraim to envisage living wilderness-style on a more permeant basis—not just for a week.

Yahweh goes on to refer to speaking through prophets (v. 10 [11]), extending the recollection of his acting as master giving instructions to his servant. Israel cannot claim not to have known the Master’s revelations. He has given people such as Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, and Amos many visions.

If Ephraim is unpersuaded, it could think about Gilead (v. 11 [12]). The mention of Gilead continues the allusions to the Jacob story (Gen. 31:21-54). Another reason for mentioning Gilead is the events referred to in 6:8, where also Gilead is characterized as *‘ăqubbāh*, “Jacobbed” (see the comments and the note). The Gileadites have already been designated evildoers because of their Machiavellian political activity. Their words were empty (cf. 10:4). The second colon will then refer to the event in which Gilead was leader that also involved events at Gilgal (9:15)—apparently an act of worship in which the plotters sealed their commitment and prayed for Yahweh’s help. Yahweh’s response may have seemed to be positive at the time (the coup succeeded), but that inference would be misleading. While Gilead will be one of the first areas of Ephraim to be invaded, devastated, and annexed by Assyria, the pattern of critique and threat in vv. 9-11 [10-12] suggests that this prospect still lies in the future. Yahweh will act in judgment on the Gileadites’ action through the devastation of their shrines, leaving the altars like the piles of stones by the side of a field when a farmer has cleared them from it. There is a verbal link between Gilead, Gilgal, and heaps of stones (*gallîm*), while the collocation of Gilead and a heap of stones makes for another link with the Jacob story (see Gen. 31:45-52).

## Theological Implications

1. The story of our ancestors from the beginning of our story (Jacob, Rachel, and Leah; Moses, Aaron and Miriam; Elizabeth and Zachariah, Mary and Joseph) is designed to be illuminating for us. It’s not primarily that they give us examples to follow or avoid but that they provide us with a mirror in which to see ourselves and gain insight into the significance of our actions, and an illustration of how God has dealt with people like us.
2. Jacob’s story provides a particularly significant instance because he embodies the ambiguity of what it means to be Israel. We are people who want to assert ourselves over our brother or sister, and in relation to God. We find that God lets us defeat him. Yet we are confused: we also weep and plead for grace.
3. There is more than one way to tell stories that appear in the Scriptures. Doubtless there is more than one way to tell any story, but the importance and profundity of the events related in the Scriptures makes it especially fruitful to reflect on them on the assumption that not everything has been said and that more significance emerges from them when we consider them again in light of the events of our own time.
4. While this fact reflects something of the inherent nature of hermeneutics, it also reflects the fact that in the Scriptures God speaks with *us*. God did not merely speak with Jacob; in doing so he spoke and speaks with us. He had us in mind in his speaking then. We respond to the nature of the Scriptures when we approach them expecting to discover that God speaks to us. Thus Hebrews can quote the Scriptures and speak in terms of what the Holy Spirit *says* (Heb. 3:7).
5. Yahweh is the name by which God is to be invoked. It is odd that the church declines to invoke God by the name he provided for this purpose.
6. We come back to God through God. “On His promise and His support, which He promises you, you can rely, and return to Him.”[[570]](#footnote-570) Both the word and the action are important. The promising word encourages us to come back. The support operates by continuing to remind us of that promise and to dangle before us the advantages that accrue from coming back, and to keep us aware of the disadvantages of persisting in our waywardness.
7. Coming back finds its fruit in the exercise of leadership in a way that embodies commitment, and in trusting God for our destiny rather than thinking we are responsible for it.
8. It can be dangerous and foolish to critique other peoples. The critique is inclined to rebound on us and to discourage us from seeing our own faults. It would be wiser to treat the lifestyle of other peoples in a way related to how we treat the stories of our ancestors. The question they raise is, how does what we see in them help us see something we need to face in ourselves? There is a mechanism whereby we defend ourselves against our own unpleasant traits by declining to face them while noting them to others. As “men do not suspect faults which they do not commit,”[[571]](#footnote-571) they do suspect faults that they do commit.

# Hosea 12:12—13:16 [12:13—14:1]: Unhappy Recollections—The Shepherds

## Translation

12Ya‘ăqōb fled to the fields of ’Ărām;[[572]](#footnote-572)

 Israel served for a wife,

 and for a wife acted as a keeper.

13When by a prophet Yahweh took up

 Yiśrā’ēl from Mișrayim,

 by a prophet it was kept.[[573]](#footnote-573)

14’Eprayim provoked to great bitterness;[[574]](#footnote-574)

 his bloodshed, he will let rest on him,[[575]](#footnote-575)

 his reviling, he will turn back on him—his Lord will.

13:1When ’Eprayim spoke with quivering,

 while he lifted up [his voice][[576]](#footnote-576) in Israel,

He incurred guilt through the Master, and died,

 2but now they continue doing wrong.

They made a cast image for themselves,

 from their silver an idol, in accordance with their insight.[[577]](#footnote-577)

“The work of craftsmen, all of it,”

 they’re saying about them.

People who offer sacrifice—[[578]](#footnote-578)

 they kiss bullocks.

3Therefore, they will be like morning cloud,

 like the dew, going early in the day,

Like chaff that whirls from the threshing floor,

 like smoke from an opening.

4But I am Yahweh your God,

 from the country of Mișrayim.

You’re to acknowledge no God apart from me;

 there’s no deliverer except me.

5I’m the one who acknowledged you[[579]](#footnote-579) in the wilderness,

 in a land of great drought.

6With their pasturing, they were full;

 they were full and their attitude became elated;[[580]](#footnote-580)

 thus they disregarded me.

7So I’ve become like a lion to them,

 like a leopard by the way, I keep watch.[[581]](#footnote-581)

8I’ll meet them like a bear that’s lost its young,

 I’ll rip the casing of their heart.

I’ll consume them there like a panther,

 like a creature of the wild that tears them apart.

9Your devastation,[[582]](#footnote-582) Yiśrā’ēl!—

 because in me[[583]](#footnote-583) is your help.[[584]](#footnote-584)

10Huh,[[585]](#footnote-585) where is your king,

 so he may deliver you in all your towns,

Your decision-makers, of whom you said,

 “Give me a king and officials.”

11I would give you a king in my anger,

 and take him in my fury.[[586]](#footnote-586)

12’Eprayim’s waywardness is bound,

 its wrongdoing hidden away.

13When the pains of a woman giving birth come to him,

 he’ll be a son who’s not smart.

Because at the time he won’t remain standing,

 at the breaking out of children.

14From the hand of Šə’ôl I would redeem them,

 from death I would restore them.[[587]](#footnote-587)

Huh,[[588]](#footnote-588) your terrible plague,[[589]](#footnote-589) death,

 huh, your destruction, Šə’ôl.

Relenting: it’s hidden from my eyes,

 15because he acts like a wild donkey[[590]](#footnote-590) among brothers.[[591]](#footnote-591)

An east wind, a supernatural wind,[[592]](#footnote-592) will come,

 going up from the wilderness,

So his fountain will be shamed,[[593]](#footnote-593)

 his spring will dry up.

It—it will plunder the treasury,

 all the desirable objects.

16Šōmərôn will make restitution,[[594]](#footnote-594)

 because she has defied her God.

By the sword they will fall, their infants will be dashed down,

 its pregnant women will be torn apart.

## Interpretation

The final recollection combines the motifs from the preceding two, Jacob (12:2-11 [3-12]) and the exodus (11:1—12:1 [2]). But the recollection itself is brief; it soon gives way to a final sustained set of confrontations and threats. MT rightly places a petuhah after 13:16 [14:1] and 4QXIIc has a line space at this point[[595]](#footnote-595) (MT also has a setumah after 13:11), whereas printed Hebrew Bibles transition the final chapter at 13:16 (which is thus 14:1). The Haftarah begins at 12:12 and continues to the end of the scroll.

**Hosea 12:12-13 [13-14].** Hosea returns to speaking of Jacob, and of the flight that comes between the two experiences at Beth-el (Gen. 29—31).

Jacob fled (v. 12 [13]; e.g., Gen. 27:43) to the fields (e.g., 29:2) of Aram (e.g., 28:1-7), served there (29:15-30) for a wife (29:21), and kept the flock (30:31) for another wife (29:28). Thus in Aram, Ephraim’s occasional ally in what is now northern Syria, Jacob served Laban for seven years for Rachel, found he’d got Leah, then kept sheep for another seven years for Rachel. Hosea makes no explicit positive or negative comment, but at the beginning of a recollection he would likely again be making a positive point: Jacob served and kept (sheep), and thus got a wife from among his own people rather than from among the Canaanites (Gen. 28:1).[[596]](#footnote-596)

More keeping was involved when Yahweh got Israel out of Egypt (v. 13 [14]); keeping is the last word in each line. The prophet in the first colon is Moses (Deut. 18:15-16), and the last colon likely also refers to him. He isn’t called a keeper in Exodus, but he does shepherd sheep (Exod. 3:1) and implicitly shepherds Israel (Num. 27:16-17). So “the Lord says, ‘acknowledge what you owe to me.’” Jacob was your father, notwithstanding his being just a fugitive and a servant. And you got out of Egypt only because I brought it about.[[597]](#footnote-597)

**Hosea 12:14 [15]—13:3.** Predictably, however, things now go south. Provoking Yahweh to anger (v. 14 [15] is a common characteristic of Israel, especially in Deuteronomy and in 1 and 2 Kings, through worshiping other deities and worshiping Yahweh in inappropriate ways. It issues from making the gold bullock at Sinai (Deut.9:18; cf. 32:21), the analogous actions of Jeroboam I (1 Kings 14:9, 15), events in Ephraim in Hosea’s own time (2 Kings 17:11, 17), and subsequent events in Judah (2 Kings 23:26). “Provocation” can describe the entire period from Moses’ day to the end of Ephraim and afterwards. But only here is bitterness (implicitly) attributed to Yahweh. It’s usually a human emotion, and not a nice one. It indicates the strength of the anger that Ephraim managed to provoke. Further, Ephraim will let its bloodshed rest on itself. The expression suggests a certain recklessness or heedlessness. It has kept indulging in the bloodshed involved in its political violence (4:2) and it has simply not worried. It hasn’t considered how there must be consequences, how blood cries out from the ground. Nor has it considered how its Lord makes things rebound on people. Reviling complements bloodshed as the other aspect to Ephraim’s wrongdoing. Alongside wrongdoing in human relationships is wrongdoing in relationships with God, in courting the Masters rather than its one Lord and Master. “His Lord” is the last word in the line, and in retrospect the audience could ask whether it is the subject of “will let rest” as well as the subject of “will turn back.” Either way, the verbs imply that wrongdoings have natural consequences but also that God is involved in that process.

Hosea spells out the point (13:1-2aα). Like “trembling” (11:10), “quivering” could suggest a positive, awed stance or a negative, frightened one. The parallel with lifting the voice in worship (cf. Isa. 24:14) points to the former. Quivering and lifting up are fine, but when they’re directed towards the Master, not Ephraim’s Lord, they’re suicidal. They carry the death penalty. They did so at Master of Pe’or (9:10), to which Hosea apparently refers in saying that Israel incurred guilt through the Master.[[598]](#footnote-598) The entire nation didn’t die, but 24,000 did, and death will be “the major theme of the chapter.”[[599]](#footnote-599) People haven’t learn the lesson. They’ve continued in the same kind of wrongdoing.

The subsequent talk of making images (v. 2aβγδb) will recall both the activity at Sinai and the innovations of Jeroboam I, which are one in the First Testament’s mind. Both Exodus 32 and 1 Kings 14 talk about cast images, made by melting and shaping metal (see also 2 Kings 17:16, in Hosea’s time). They talk in terms of gold though not of silver, but Hosea has referred to both in this connection (2:8 [10]; 8:4). The way the objects were made carries a double irony. They are made in accordance with people’s (own) insight and/or with their (own) pattern (see the note), which contrast with the divine insight and divine pattern involved in making the wilderness dwelling, but not of the Sinai bullock (Exod. 25:9, 40; 31:3; 35:31; 36:1). The ironic link continues with the reference to “the work of craftsmen,” which also applies to the dwelling (e.g., Exod. 28:11). Ephraimites call their work the work of craftsmen, but really it isn’t. The further sarcastic critique notes that offering sacrifice (which is fine) is associated with kissing the cast images of bullocks (which isn’t); compare the kissing of the Master in 1 Kings 19:18. Normally people kiss other people and sacrifice bullocks; the Ephraimites do it the other way around.[[600]](#footnote-600)

Irony continues in the account of these worshipers’ fate (v. 3). It first recycles words from 6:4, where they describe worshipers whose commitment shouldn’t have these characteristics; here, they describe the same worshipers who will have them, in another sense. The parallel line reexpresses the point in two more images. The chaff from the threshing floor blows clean away (see the comments on 9:1)—good news in its proper context, but not here. The same applies to the escape (through an opening high in the wall) of the smoke made by the fire in the center of a house.

**Hosea 13:4-8.** Yahweh restates the point by reasserting who he is, which is not how 12:14 [15]—13:3 has described their treating him. He is also restating the point from 11:1 and 12:9 [10].

His being Yahweh their God since Egypt (v. 4) means they should acknowledge only him (cf. 2:8, 20 [10, 22]. More concretely, he has always been their deliverer (cf. 1:7). The First Testament often applies the term “deliverance” to Israel’s escape from Egypt; the colon appears in almost the same words in Isaiah 43:11. Part of the point here is Ephraim’s continuing inclination to acknowledge the Master and/or El alongside Yahweh.[[601]](#footnote-601)

Part of the rationale for acknowledging Yahweh is that Yahweh acknowledged them (v. 5). The verb can work both ways in Hosea (2:8, 20 [10, 22]; 5:3-4; 6:3; 8:2; 9:7; 11:3); it appears elsewhere in a sense overlapping with “care for” and “choose,” as here (e.g., Amos 3:2). Ephraim needed Yahweh to acknowledge it in the sense of looking after it on the way through the wilderness, given the conditions there.

And Yahweh did so, quite extravagantly (v. 6), so that they were full (Exod. 16:8, 12). But being full can lead to elation and thus to disregarding God or putting God out of mind (Deut. 8:11-14). It’s what happened (cf. Hos. 2:13 [15]). “Luxurious living is… risky and difficult to manage, and is, as it were, a slippery path to apostasy from God.”[[602]](#footnote-602) Blessing Yahweh safeguards against putting Yahweh out of mind (Deut. 8:10), but Ephraim has not done so. (I assume that Deuteronomy was written after and was influenced by Hosea, so the link between these passages suggests that Deuteronomy is seeking to get people to heed Hosea’s message.)[[603]](#footnote-603)

In a series of frightening similes (vv. 7-8) Yahweh describes the consequences that will follow. The sequence of tenses suggests that Yahweh first describes the change in his stance then goes on to the action that will follow. Though reversals have happened through Ephraim’s history, they’re nothing to what will happen. “Never before in Hosea has Yahweh pictured himself as such a drastic danger to Israel.”[[604]](#footnote-604) They need to see themselves as proceeding along a path that seems safe but where wild animals are in a position to pounce. The images are designed is to push Ephraim towards a change of attitude so that the coiled lion uncoils and stops lurking, Assyria-like (see the note).

**Hosea 13:9-11**. A pair of exclamations sum up pungently where we’ve been and draw attention to an implication.

“Devastation” (v. 9) contrasts with an earlier declaration of intent (11:9); it also carries the connotation of corruption (9:9). The second colon explains what Ephraim ignores, another reason why devastation threatens. Only here does Hosea refer to “help” (*‘ēzer*), a word which especially applies to God’s action and commonly denotes the assistance that effects something you could not do at all on your own (e.g., Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Gen. 2:18, 20!).

Thus help is not so different from deliverance, for which Ephraim looks elsewhere (v. 10). The comment about the towns points to the widespread nature of the coming threat to Ephraim. The authorities or governors (see the comments on 7:7) are perhaps the mayors of the towns; “officials” is an alternative description of them. Ephraim had prayed for these leaders, like Israel in 1 Samuel 8).

Yahweh’s further comment (v. 11) suggests he is talking not about Israel’s original request for a king but about the series of dynastic changes that characterized Ephraim’s story, particularly in Hosea’s time. The fomenters of each coup were seriously concerned about what was right for Ephraim, they met to pray about it, and they asked Yahweh to prosper their action. And Yahweh did so. He gave; he took away (cf. Job 1:21). He was involved in both the accession and the toppling of each king. But his involvement was an expression of his wrath, because the broader framework of their assumptions was that they needed to take responsibility for their destiny and needed Yahweh to work within their framework of thinking

**Hosea 13:12-15a.** That expression of Yahweh’s wrath is not the end of the matter. Eventually (indeed soon) they will pay for their action in a more devastating way.

At the moment the waywardness and wrongdoing are bound (v. 12), like a sealed scroll whose contents will eventually be revealed (Isa. 8:16) or like water in a dam that will eventually burst (Job 26:8) or like a woman inescapably pressed and distressed as she prepares to give birth (Jer. 49:22, 24), or like a town besieged by an enemy (1 Kings 8:37). They are hidden away like someone kept safe from trouble (Ps. 27:5) and like the punishment of the wicked (Job 21:19).

The image of the pressures of childbirth would lead well into what follows (v. 13). The one affected by the pain of childbirth is now the child himself, for whom being born has its trauma. So suppose the baby stupidly declines to be born; the puzzled critique of Ephraim’s non-smartness takes up that in 7:9-11. There’s a moment when a child has to break out from the womb, and he is going to miss it. If that happens to a baby, it dies.

It’s not the first time Ephraim has been this way (v. 14a). The sequence of divine involvements with negative implications (v. 11) has been paralleled by a series of involvements with positive implications. Ephraim could easily have died, but it hasn’t (notwithstanding v. 1). She’ol is the home where dead people “live,” a kind of non-physical equivalent to a family tomb. You don’t have much control over when you go there; She’ol is like a person with a hand that can reach out to you when it chooses. But from that grasp of She’ol or of death Yahweh has been redeeming Ephraim: like English “redeem,” etymologically *pādāh* suggests paying a price for someone’s freedom, but it commonly focuses on the freeing rather than the paying. Likewise, “restoring” (*gā’al*) has associations with the responsibility of someone to take action to put things right for a member of their family who is in a difficult or hopeless position, but often the word focuses on the restoring of things to their right situation rather than on the link with that family obligation. So Yahweh has been the redeemer and restorer in the past.

But now he intends to work with death and She’ol (v. 14bαβ), rather than against them. Although dying and going to She’ol do not terminate human existence, one look at the state of a family member’s body the next time one opens the tomb to admit someone else shows that they do not enhance it. It’s as if the body has been ravaged by a terrible plague. In due course there are only bones left. In effect it has been destroyed.

Yahweh again indicates that his resolve in 11:9 was not his last word (vv. 14bγ-15a). He has turned his eyes away from relenting. It doesn’t come naturally. He has to hide from the idea, to resist the temptation to relent. He must act against Ephraim for the uncontrollable wandering (*pere’*) which means it failed to live up to the good implication of its name (9:16), and instead lives up to the bad implication (see the note). Ephraim is more troublesome than his brothers, the other clans (Ephraim’s only actual brother was Manasseh, but their father’s brothers could be thought of as their brothers); the comment depends on thinking of Ephraim the clan rather than Ephraim the nation.

**Hosea 13:15b-16 [13:15b—14:1].** So for one last time Yahweh declares the intention to chastise. We know about the torrid east wind (v. 15b; see 12:1 [2]) coming from the wilderness to the east: only a fool chases it. It can destroy everything in its path. It will be supernatural in two senses. It will be extraordinary, as if it conveys Yahweh’s force. And it actually will convey Yahweh’s force, because it comes as his agent. It will block up the water sources. But “fountain” is much more commonly a figurative expression for a wellspring of life (e.g., Ps. 36:9 [10]), and “spring” can also have this connotation (e.g., Isa. 12:3). And wind from the eastern desert is an image for the invader whom Yahweh brings, who comes from that direction (e.g., Isa. 21:1) even if approaching Israel from the north. The metaphor then becomes literal reality: Hosea is talking about someone who will come from the east to dry up the nation’s resources.

Samaria will thus make restitution (cf. 5:15; 10:2) for its defiance (13:16 [14:1]). The capital stands for the nation as a whole, but as the seat of the administration it will pay a distinctively awful price (see 2 Kings 17:3-6). The description of the retribution is conventional and familiar (11:6; 10:14; 13:8), but terrible. In effect “Yahweh summons death and Sheol to overtake the covenant people.”[[605]](#footnote-605)

## Theological Implications

1. The people of God is the heir to the achievements of great heroes who were nevertheless lowly, and who served and acted as keepers and were means of God’s delivering them and keeping them. Its challenge is to live a life worthy of its heroes not to fail them.
2. It’s possible for us to let our wrongdoings rest on us like the blood that cries out from the ground, which by a natural process will be our downfall. At another level our waywardness provokes God to anger and he’s actively involved in making our reviling of him rebound on us. But our waywardness and wrongdoing may be bound or hidden way for quite a while, against the possibility that we may repent. Yet eventually they will take their toll, if we do not recognize the day of our visitation (Luke 19:44).
3. Prayer and worship can be heartfelt and vocal yet can imperil our relationship with God. And means of worship that utilize our gifts and insight can be devastatingly misleading.
4. There is a mutuality in God’s relationship with us. He acknowledges us in the sense of recognizing who we are and taking action to see that our needs are met. We acknowledge him in the sense of recognizing who he is and relying on him rather than on other resources.
5. Experiencing God’s provision easily leads to a happiness that issues in putting God out of mind.
6. God’s acting in response to our disregard of him can involve a frightening fierceness. “Hosea 13 reminds us of God’s impenetrability. We cannot fashion God into our own image and put God into a box.”[[606]](#footnote-606)
7. It’s possible for the framework of prayer to be misguided and for God’s granting of a prayer and for God’s gifts thus to be expressions of anger. This pattern can become an ongoing process. We ask, God gives. We regret, God takes away. We ask again, God gives again. We regret, God takes away again. God is involved in both the accession of leaders and in the toppling. We never give up thinking that the next new leader may be the Messiah.
8. Paul quotes v. 14bαβ in connection with the prospect of our final resurrection: “Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

The Apostles do not avowedly at all times adduce passages, which in their whole context apply to the subject they handle; but sometimes they allude to a word only, sometimes they apply a passage to a subject in the way of resemblance, and sometimes they bring forward passages as testimonies. When the Apostles use the testimonies of Scripture, then the genuine and real truth must be sought out; but when they glance only at one word, there is no occasion to make any anxious inquiry; and when they quote any passage of Scripture in the way of resemblance, it is a too scrupulous anxiety to seek out how all the parts agree. But it is quite evident that Paul, in 1 Cor. xv., has not quoted the testimony of the Prophet for the purpose of confirming the doctrine of which he speaks…. The simple object of Paul is, to extol by these striking words that incredible power of God, which is beyond the reach of human understanding.[[607]](#footnote-607)

Hosea declares that God will not overwhelm the power of death; Paul declares that he will do so. Yet it is not the case that the New Testament sees Jesus as thereby answering or going beyond Hosea. In other contexts Hosea makes equivalents to the same affirmation as Paul. And in other contexts the New Testament makes clear that death will have its way with people who turn away from God, as Hosea says. Hosea and Paul say the same thing about God, death, and life. The difference is that Paul knows that it is through Jesus that the promise of life is fulfilled, and that its fulfillment has an effect beyond the She’ol to which all must go unless they happen to be still alive when Jesus comes.

# Hosea 14:1-8 [2-9]: The Final Bidding

## Translation

1Do turn back,[[608]](#footnote-608) Yiśrā’ēl, to[[609]](#footnote-609) Yahweh your God,

 because you’ve collapsed through your waywardness.

2Take words with you,

 and as you turn back to Yahweh, say to him,

“For each person,[[610]](#footnote-610) carry waywardness,

 take[[611]](#footnote-611) something good, so we may render[[612]](#footnote-612) our lips as bulls.[[613]](#footnote-613)

3’Aššür—it will not deliver us;

 on horse we will not ride.

We will no more say ‘Our god’[[614]](#footnote-614)

 to the work of our hands,

 because through you an orphan is shown compassion.”

4I will heal their turning back, I will love them with generosity,

 because my anger has turned back from it.[[615]](#footnote-615)

5I will be like dew to Yiśrā’ēl,

 so it will blossom like a wild flower.[[616]](#footnote-616)

And[[617]](#footnote-617) it will strike its roots like the Ləbānôn,[[618]](#footnote-618)

 6so its tendrils will travel.

And its majesty will become like the olive tree,

 the smell of it like the Ləbānôn.

7People who sit[[619]](#footnote-619) in its[[620]](#footnote-620) shade will come back[[621]](#footnote-621)

 to bringing wheat[[622]](#footnote-622) to life.[[623]](#footnote-623)

They will blossom like the vine,

 its fame[[624]](#footnote-624) like the wine of Ləbānôn.

8Ephrayim:[[625]](#footnote-625) “What more is there for me[[626]](#footnote-626) regarding idols?”—

 I am the one who has averred[[627]](#footnote-627) and kept watch for it.[[628]](#footnote-628)

“I am like a flourishing juniper”—

 through me your fruit has been found.

## Interpretation

The last petuhah in MT came after 13:16 [14:1: that is, the printed Hebrew Bible starts the final chapter there]. The imperative in 14:1 [2] signals the beginning of a section, which constitutes Hosea’s closing exhortation to Ephraim, but this closing section is dominated by promises about how fruitful Ephraim’s life will be as it responds. The section rounds off Hosea’s message by taking up many words and ideas from the entire scroll so far. It takes up not least the promises in 2:14-23 [16-25] and chapters 1—3 more generally, which it “reinterprets, reverses and resolves.”[[629]](#footnote-629) It speaks of the collapse of Ephraim as now past rather than threatened (it appears in synagogue lectionaries for the Ninth of Av, in connection with lamenting the destructions of the temple).[[630]](#footnote-630) It says to Ephraimites who have survived the disaster (perhaps people who have moved to Judah) and to Judahites, “Now will you learn the lesson?” Whereas the rest of the scroll has worked consistently with a tension between threat and promise, here tension disappears. In its visionary world, Ephraim at last turns back and Yahweh heals. But rhetorically, the dynamic stays the same: the design of the previous exhortations, threats, recollections and promises has always been to get Ephraim to turn back so the threats can be cancelled. The design of these promises, too, is to get Ephraim to turn back, so they can be fulfilled.

**Hosea 14:1-3 [2-4].** There is admittedly some ambiguity about the situation this exhortation addresses. While it begins by speaking of collapse as now past, it goes on to urge the listeners to renounce any reliance on Assyria, as if the nation still stands. The relationship of this last section to chapters 1—3 suggests that the fall of Samaria has indeed happened and that the exhortation relates to the nation’s survivors. But for both chapters 1—3 and chapter 14, the message and promise would apply both before the collapse and afterwards.

The bidding to turn back (v. 1 [2]: see the note) might be heard as something like an appeal rather than simply a command, as Yahweh’s last reference to Ephraim’s turning back to Yahweh could be read as a soft exhortation or as a promise (12:6 [7]; see the comments). It addresses the people as “Israel” and urges them to turn to the one who is, after all, “Yahweh your God”: the expansive title expresses both the demands and the potential of the relationship (cf. 12:10 [9]; 13:4). Whereas Hosea has previously spoken about collapse as something threatened (4:5; 5:5), he does now speak of it as something actual, though he might simply mean that it has as good as happened (in 5:5 he spoke of Judah’s collapse as if it had already happened). Either way, addressing “Israel” just after commenting on “Samaria” in 13:16 [14:1] could invite to Judah to learn from Ephraim’s fate,[[631]](#footnote-631) an understanding encouraged by the printed Hebrew Bible’s chapter division.

In connection with turning, there are words that need saying (v. 2 [3]); Hosea again indicates their nature. Presumably Ephraim will utter them in a proper act of worship that contrasts with the false worship Hosea has lambasted, but Hosea does not comment on this question; his focus lies on the new attitude Ephraim needs to articulate. If the collapse has happened, the kind of occasion and the kind of words that are needed will be the kind observed and used after Jerusalem fell (cf. Lamentations). The parallelism in v. 2bβγ indicates that the words are expressive of the return Hosea urges. They will own waywardness, the thing that made collapse inevitable (or otherwise makes it inevitable). Refusing to own it is the one failure that would mean Yahweh will not or cannot “carry” it (see 1:6 and the comments). To take “words” seems trivial, but people are to believe that words are the “good” thing that Yahweh wants to receive, on the assumption that they express a genuine turning. People can thus offer (the words of) their lips as they offer bulls in sacrifice. “Rendering” (*šillēm*) implies that this offering makes whole or restores: it compensates for the words addressed to the Master and the lying words uttered to Yahweh.

The words will need to express a change of attitude to politics and to faith (v. 3 [4]). The confession about Assyria will be a corollary of that required in 13:4, a confession that Assyria and Egypt are “failed saviors.”[[632]](#footnote-632) Egypt was where horses came from (cf. Deut. 17:16; 1 Kings 10:28-29; Isa. 31:1; also 30:16); Hosea’s one previous reference to horses accompanied his first reference to deliverance (1:7). Accompanying the revolutionary change in the relationship between politics and faith is one regarding theology; its contrast lies with 11:2. Ephraim is an orphan because its father has abandoned it: the colon implies a link with the opening of Hosea, which threatened that Yahweh would not show compassion to Ephraim, and then with its promise that Yahweh would show compassion (1:6; 2:21 [23]).

**Hosea 14:4-7 [5-8]**. Hosea knows how Yahweh will respond to Ephraim if it prays that way; sharing the potential response further encourages Ephraim to pray that way. Hosea and Yahweh risk generating the kind of turning back they are not seeking (see 2:7 [9]), but they are prepared to take the risk.

Yahweh has been in the healing business (v. 4 [5]) before and will be so again, as Ephraim has already been invited to pray (11:3; 6:1). Here, reference to healing leads into more recourse to the multivalence of “turning back.” It can allude not only to turning back towards Yahweh but also to the turning back from Yahweh which makes the re-turning necessary, and to the “turning back” of Yahweh’s anger which had been Yahweh’s response to the negative “turning back.” In the verb for “love,” too, one may discern the breadth of its potential significance, which includes emotion, commitment, and loyalty (cf. 11:1). Qualifying that love as generous emphasizes its practical aspect, which goes with commitment and loyalty. Generosity and related words normally apply to Israelites volunteering themselves and their generous (“freewill”) offerings; only here and in Psalms 51:12 [14]; 68:9 [10] do they apply to God. Ephraim may think of the most remarkable human liberality and see this open-handedness as what God offers. Yahweh responds to Ephraim’s offering with an offering of his own.[[633]](#footnote-633)

Yahweh goes on to spell out the generosity (v. 5a [6a]), first in terms of making growth possible. Yahweh restores “dew” from being a negative image (6:4; 13:3), as something that disappears quickly, to its more usual positive significance (e.g., Mic. 5:7 [6]): dew plays a key role in encouraging growth towards maturity during the summer drought. Likewise “blossom” had been a negative image (10:4) but Yahweh turns it back to being a positive one. “Wild flower” suggests flowers such as lilies, but the point is that they are ordinary flowers that grow wild and in profusion (cf. Song 2:1-2).

Thus Yahweh will enable Israel to grow roots and shoots, and be fruitful (vv. 5b-6 [6b-7]). “Strike” takes up another verb with negative connotations (6:1; cf. 9:6) and gives it unaccustomed positive ones. Striking down deep roots like the giant trees in the Lebanon (which includes the forests of northern Galilee, within Ephraim itself) will mean its shoots can spread far and wide. While the olive tree and thus the olive is of key importance to Israel’s life and economy (see 2:5 [7]; 12:1), majesty is a royal attribute (e.g., 1 Chron. 29:25; Psa. 45:3 [4]; Jer. 22:18), and the line suggests another metonymy: from the olive tree comes the oil for anointing a king. But the oil carries the fragrance of the cosmetics that anyone might use, in which the Song of Songs delights and which it compares with the fragrance of the forests in the Lebanon (e.g., Song 1:3; 4:10-11).

The picture of people sitting in the tree’s shade (v. 7aαβ [8aαβ]) slightly oddly distinguishes the Ephraimites from Ephraim, though the figure parallels the distinguishing of mother from children (2:2 [4]). At the moment the people have no place to sit, because the tree has been felled (or is due to be felled). The Assyrian invasion would have a devastating effect on the agricultural dynamics of the country (cf. Isaiah’s words about parallel events in Judah in Isa. 37:30). It would be a fulfillment of Yahweh’s threats about crops such as wheat (2:9 [11]). But coming back to Yahweh will also mean coming back to a life of successful sowing and reaping (cf. 2:22 [24]). Hosea trades further on the range of meaning of the verb *šûb*; he does not use this verb to denote returning from exile, but when a later audience listens to the scroll, it would be natural to hear a promise of such a return (cf. Tg).

People and tree/Ephraim reappear when Hosea promises that “they” will blossom and “it” will enjoy fame (v. 7aγb [8aγb]). The vine blossoms spectacularly, but the parallel colon suggests that Hosea’s focus is on the vine’s fruit, and on what issues from it. The reference completes a sequence of allusions to Israel’s basic crops (olives, wheat, grapes) parallel to that in (e.g.) 2:8 [10]. Lebanon had no great reputation for wine, though Helbon (Ezek. 27:18) is there; Lebanon appears here as a figure of richness in its own right.

MT (L) provides a helpful setumah after v. 7 [8].

**Hosea 14:8 [9].** Hosea brings to a close the proposed dialogue between Ephraim (vv. 2-4 [3-5]) and Yahweh (vv. 5-7 [6-8]) in a brisk further pair of exchanges, recalling ones in the Song of Songs.[[634]](#footnote-634) The first colon puts on Ephraim’s lips a commitment about idols that contrasts with 4:17; 8:4; 13:2. The second colon expresses Yahweh’s claim about his action that would justify that response. He had asserted that he would restore his people, and he will have done so. “Keep watch” (*šûr*) yet again takes up a negative expression (13:7) and turns it around.

In the third colon, presumably Ephraim is the tree, as it has been in vv. 5-7 [6-8]; Israel, its kings, and individuals are elsewhere likened to flourishing trees (e.g., Ps. 52:8 [10]), but Yahweh is not. The fourth colon responds to and explains the flourishing. While the juniper’s berries are of culinary significance, Yahweh’s allusion to Ephraim’s fruitfulness has broader reference. He is again drawing attention to the reversal of a threat (9:16). “Fruit” being *pərî*, this is the last of the many paronomasias involving Ephraim. “The naming of names is the very matter of Hosea’s prophecy” and “all these names contain their own antitheses,” but “the densest wordplay in this prophet involves the name Ephraim” and “salvation seems to come to Ephraim as a result of the ambiguities lodged in that amazing name.”[[635]](#footnote-635)

## Theological Implications

1. The challenge to the people of God is often to turn back to God in repentance, not least in light of his intention to take important action its life. It is the challenge of John the baptizer and of Jesus. It is the challenge of John in Revelation, not least to a church that has “fallen” (Rev. 2:5), with threats of harsh action if it fails to do so (Rev. 2:16, 21-22). The Revised Common Lectionary includes four passages from Hosea over its three years (1:2-10; 2:14-20; 5:15—6:6; 11:1-11) and the synagogue readings from the Prophets include a similar proportion over a year (1:10—2:20 [2:1-22]; 11:7—14:9 [10]). In both, promises predominate over warnings to a greater extent than they do in the scroll.
2. Key to turning back to God is “words.” While sacrifice is proper when the relationship between God and his people is in good order, it has no place when that relationship is out of order (cf. Ps. 51:16-19 [18-21]). Then we must render what LXX calls “the fruit of our lips,” a phrase that apparently caught the imagination of later readers and appears in connection with worship in Hebrews 13:15 (see the note). Instead of offering sacrifices, then, all the people of God can or needs to do is appeal to God to “carry waywardness.” We come to God as orphans, but we thus come to one who has compassion for orphans. The basis of our hope for the cancelling of God’s threat to bring disaster on us or leave us in our devastated condition is God’s willingness to take responsibility for our wrongdoing (even though it was our responsibility) instead of requiring us to carry it forever. His letting Jesus die for us embodies that taking of responsibility. Instead of our dying, he is prepared to die.
3. The content of the words is twofold. They indicate a turning away from reliance on taking responsibility for our own destiny and from reliance on resources apart from God, resources in the world. Such a turning recognizes that we belong to a kingdom that is not based in this world and cannot ally with its empires or turn to it for protection and support. They also indicate a recognition that the religion we make for ourselves, which we may claim to be an expression of the gospel, is simply a religion we make for ourselves.
4. Alongside the words we bring are the words that God brings, which declare the intention to restore us. They speak first of healing, and they thus illustrate how healing can be a broader notion than it sounds. The people of God are both sinners in need of forgiveness and hurt people in need of healing, and these two realities can interact. Because we sin, we do things that hurt us. Because we hurt, we do things that are wrong. God draws attention to the interwovenness of the two realities by speaking of healing our turning away. Jesus’s involvement in bringing both healing and forgiveness (see especially Mark 2:1-12) recognizes the interwovenness. The healing of our turning back means that God does more than forgive it and leave us likely to go wrong again. The very act of forgiveness changes us. “The way of healing is by gratuitous pardon.”[[636]](#footnote-636)
5. Part of the basis for God’s healing is his turning away from anger. That turning away issues from his renewed decision to give expression to the dominant side of his person (showing compassion, grace, commitment, and faithfulness) rather than the shadow side (treating the guilty as guilty and attending to their waywardness) (Exod. 34:6-7).
6. A generous love is the basis, but even more the expression, of both the healing and the turning away from anger. This love expresses itself by transforming us into a wildly colorful flower garden, a massive forest, a sweet-smelling perfume, a fertile wheat field, a spreading vine. God will make the life of his people beautiful, strong, attractive, growing, and proliferating. This portrait of God’s grace makes 14:1-8 [2-9] a highpoint of the Hosea scroll.[[637]](#footnote-637)
7. Yahweh is thus the God of nature, the God of fertility. It is not that Ephraim needs to turn from a god of nature to a God of history. It is that the God of history (whose involvement in Israel’s story has been expounded through 9:10—13:16 [14:1]) is also the God of nature, and the God of politics, and his people need to treat him as all three.[[638]](#footnote-638)
8. The turning and the promises are simply set alongside each other. Turning is not a condition of the fulfilling of the promises. Nor will the promises be fulfilled independently of any turning. The relationship between God and his people is a personal one, and the working and development of a personal relationship is not amenable to tight analyses of that kind. If the people of God turn, they will find the promises fulfilled. It may be the promises that inspire them to turn. God may fulfill the promises and that fulfillment will require them to turn. It may make them turn. The implications about the interrelationship of the turning and the promises are the ones that Paul also assumes in his analysis of the way God relates to us through Jesus in Romans 6.

# Hosea 14:9 [10]: Coda

## Translation

Who is smart, so he will consider[[639]](#footnote-639) these things,

 is understanding, so he will acknowledge them?

Because Yahweh’s ways are upright,

 and faithful people walk in them,

 while rebellious people collapse[[640]](#footnote-640) on them.

## Interpretation

The closing lines in Hosea comprise an invitation to take seriously the scroll as a whole.[[641]](#footnote-641) Two comparable lines appear at the end of Psalm 107, though in reverse order: in both contexts teachers who naturally talk the language of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes urge Israelites to have the sense to pay attention to the material in the respective works. Here, their presupposition is that the prophetic scroll has a significance that is not confined to the prophet’s day. Smartness and understanding will express themselves in pondering and acknowledging. While talk of smartness, considering, and acknowledging is manifestly Proverbs’ language, it is also Hosea’s language. Talk of smartness follows ironically on 13:13 (let no listener follow the old Ephraim’s example). Talk of considering follows ironically on 4:14. Talk of acknowledging follows ironically on 2:8 [10], among many references.[[642]](#footnote-642)

The second line makes more explicit that smartness involves both understanding these things intellectually and recognizing their truth by living in light of them. It also presupposes (like Proverbs) that smartness embraces recognition of Yahweh and recognition of an ethical aspect to smartness (cf. Prov. 1:2-7). Here, uprightness (like understanding) is a Proverbs word and not a Hosean one, though the entire scroll has concerned itself with Yahweh’s ways, both the ways he walks and the ways he expects his people to walk. While Hosea talks about faithfulness, he never uses the adjective faithful (*șaddîq*); the language of rebellion appears in both contexts. Collapsing is more Hosea’s language than Proverbs’. When rebellious people bump into Yahweh’s ways (whether the ways he follows or the ways he expects people to follow), they fall over them (Aq nicely uses the verb *skandalizō*).

The complex relationship between the language of Hosea and the language of Proverbs indicates how this closing exhortation comes from someone who has immersed himself in both,[[643]](#footnote-643) either Hosea or one of his disciples.

## Theological Implications

1. The message of a prophetic scroll is one that will be reflected on and heeded by sensible people way beyond Hosea’s day. The statements in 2 Timothy 3: 15-17 and in 2 Peter 1:19-21 about the Scriptures, and about the prophetic scrolls in particular, restate the point.[[644]](#footnote-644)
2. On the basis of the scroll’s contents it declares that God’s ways are upright. God has been upright in the way he has been dealing with Ephraim, in bringing trouble to it when it has gone wrong rather than ignoring such waywardness; and God will be upright in the way he will restore Ephraim if it turns from that waywardness. Further, the ways of acting that God expects are upright. He looks for faithfulness to him and reliance on him rather than on other religious and political resources, on the basis of the fact that he is God, and is Israel’s God, and is the only one capable of delivering Israel.
3. The closing line in Hosea “conveys a poignant message relevant to matters of theodicy,”[[645]](#footnote-645) though the suffering of the Jewish people over the centuries, not least in the Holocaust, makes us aware that we cannot universalize its statement.[[646]](#footnote-646) The statement implies that we should not be so overwhelmed by the reality of undeserved suffering that we fail to ask about whether we as the people of God deserved our suffering. It also invites us to hold onto the declarations it makes, not least when they seem belied by experience. To say that faithful people walk in these upright ways is a tautology, though Proverbs is not averse to such tautologies, and neither is Hosea (see the comments on 12:7). But the parallel colon points to a less tautological point. Faithful people *can* walk by them; they walk successfully and safely by them. People listening to the Hosea scroll are encouraged to live their lives confidently in the conviction that they can trust its moral account of how life works. Conversely, they are encouraged to accept the corollary warning about the fate of rebellious people which is a prominent emphasis in the scroll. Like declarations in Proverbs, the promise and the warning will not work out 100% of the time, but they will work out enough of the time for the listeners to bet their lives on them.
1. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Chalmers, *The Struggle of Yahweh and El for Hosea’s Israel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Thomas A. Judge, *The Relationship between the Worship of Other Gods*

*and the Worship of Idols within the Old Testament* (Dissertation, Durham U.K., 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See John Day, “Hosea and the Baal Cult,” in Day (ed.), *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel* (London: Clark, 2010), 202-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See the comments on 2:8 [10]. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Gale A. Yee, “The Book of Hosea,” *NIB* 7:263. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. And see John Day, “Does the Old Testament Refer to Sacred Prostitution and Did It Actually Exist in Ancient Israel,” in C. McCarthy and J. F. Healey (eds.), *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays* (Kevin J. Cathcart Festchrift; London: Clark, 2004), 225-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. On the need to abandon such theories, see e.g., Alice A. Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Irene E. Riegner, *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot* (New York: Lang, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fretheim, *Reading Hosea-Micah*, 12; see further Gören Eidevall, *Grapes in the Desert* (Stockholm: Almqvist, 1996); Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, *Imagery in the Prophecy of Hosea* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999); Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 273-97; Haddox, *Metaphor and Masculinity*; Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: OUP, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Walter Brueggemann, “The Recovering God of Hosea,” *HBT* 30 (2008): 5-20 (7). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Wendland, *Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Prophetic Literature*, 172-218 (though I don’t think 6:1-3 is ironic in quite the sense he suggests). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cf. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Theodoret, *Twelve Prophets*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Ben Zvi’s comments, *Hosea,* e.g., 121-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. It overlaps with that of Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament* (reprinted Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 385-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Daniels, *Hosea and Salvation History*, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Davies, *Hosea*, 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Cf. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea*, 111-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mays, *Hosea*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 146-47. In this first reference to the monumental Andersen/Freedman commentaries on Hosea, Amos, and Micah, I am especially glad to acknowledge Francis Andersen, who after his retirement from New College, Berkeley, but still in the midst of writing for the Anchor Bible, kept the David Allan Hubbard chair at Fuller Seminary warm for me before I arrived in Pasadena, and hosted a marvelous welcome barbecue for our family in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains before he left to get back to Australia, where at the time of writing he still lives in his nineties. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. JPSV has “When the LORD first spoke,” taking v. 2a as an adverbial phrase directly introducing v. 2. But the lack of a preposition makes it a less natural understanding, and MT has a section division after v. 2a, suggesting that it is a phrase that stands alone. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cf. GK 52o; 130d; Aq “the beginning which he spoke.” LXX *logou*, Vg *loquendi* imply different vocalizations (cf. BHQ). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “To” for *bə* (JPSV) is hard to parallel, and *‘al* is used for “to” in v. 2b. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Landy, *Hosea*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. More literally “a woman/children of whoredoms”: the latter noun is an intensive plural. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The emphatic Hebrew idiom involves an infinitive followed by a finite verb—“[in] whoring it whores.” The verb is feminine because “country” (*’ereș*) is feminine, enhancing the metaphor’s effectiveness. JPSV translates the yiqtol as future, but it is unlikely that there was any point in Hosea’s day when Yahweh saw Ephraim as faithful to him. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Neither name is interpreted and their meaning is not obvious; Rudolph (*Hosea*, 50) nicely suggests that “Gomer” is an example of a name having a judgment passed on it by the replacing of its vowels by the vowels of the word for “shame,” *bōšet*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Vg lacks “for him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. LXX renders *pāqad* “avenge,” but the verb itself is neutral; cf. Aq “attend to,”Vg “visit.” It is the context that determines whether the visit or attention is pleasant or unpleasant. While Hosea could have envisaged Yahweh “appointing” Jezreel-type bloodshed for Ephraim (cf. Thomas E. McComiskey, “Prophetic Irony in Hosea 1.4,” *JSOT* 58 [1993]: 93-101), “appoint” is a much rarer meaning for *pāqad*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The plural of the word for “blood” means “bloodshed.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Some LXX mss have Judah for Jehu, which could make sense in the context of Judahite elaboration of Hosea’s message. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. “Bring [to a stop] its reign over” would give easier sense in the context (Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 183-84), but it involves understanding both a pronominal suffix and a preposition. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. This occurrence of terms such as “Israel’s household” is one of a number that seem to denote “Israel’s royal household,” the administration and/or the dynasty. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. LXX translates with a participle, but the form is qatal; for names comprising sentences, cf. e.g., Isa. 7:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Hosea again uses the emphatic construction involving an infinitive as well as a finite verb. MT’s verse division might invite a threatening understanding of these words, if the preceding negative also applies to this verb: “I will in no way carry….” Yet this requires some inference, especially given the intervening *kî* (Macintosh, *Hosea*, 22). LXX “oppose” may be taking *nāśā’* negatively to mean “carry away” or may imply a form of *śānē’* rather than *nāśā’* (metathesis) or may imply a form of *nāšā’* I for *nāśā’* (Wolff, *Hosea*, 8), as Vg “forget” implies *nāšā’* II. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The verb *hôša‘* which underlies Hosea’s name: he will “hosea” them. JPSV’s “give victory” risks obscuring the verb’s key religious and theological significance: God and not human beings is its regular subject (see J. F. Sawyer, *TDOT* 6:444, 445). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. LXX and Vg’s understanding of Hosea’s distinctive final formulation, “I will not be yours,” sharpens the marriage analogy and makes the statement a declaration of divorce. MT hyphenates “not” and “I am” and thus suggests “I am ‘Not-I-am’ to you.” Presumably appalled by the statement, Tg omits it. Some LXX mss read “I am not your God” (see BHQ, 55\*), translating loosely and/or assimilating to the usual formula; but see Carl S. Ehrlich, “The Text of Hosea 1:9,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 13-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. For this meaning of *māqôm* “place,” see e.g., Gen. 12:6; 28:10-22; Exod. 20:24 (cf. BDB, which notes other occurrences followed by *’ăsher*, as here). In later Hebrew the expression could mean “instead” but this meaning Is not instanced in Classical Hebrew [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Tg adds “from David’s household,” but the idea that Judahites and Ephraimites might appoint such a head for themselves is in tension with 8:4 and with the precedent of 1 Sam. 8:4 where the verb appears on the people’s lips is hardly promising, and “head” is hardly a word for a king. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Tg takes *’ereș* to mean “the earth,” but there has been no reference to exile and this is not a usual way to refer to return from exile (people return *to* the *’ereș*, not *from* it). The phrase could denote coming back from the world below, from death (William L. Holladay, “’Ereṣ--‘Underworld,’” *VT* 19 [1969]: 123-24), but it is an allusive way to make the point. The preposition makes the translation “take possession of the land” (NRSV) implausible (Macintosh, *Hosea*, 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Tg takes the command to address particularly prophets. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. TNIV has “of,” but the preposition *lə* meant “to” in 1:10 and the content of what is said is the same as there. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Both nouns are plural in MT, though the difference from singular lies only in the pointing and in a vowel letter: on the second, see GK 96 (p. 284). LXX has singular for both nouns, Vg plural for the first and singular for the second, inviting us to imagine the addressees speaking to Hosea and Gomer’s sons and daughter about the people they represent. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cf. Glenny, *Hosea*, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibn Ezra, *Hosea*, 19-21; Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:43-45; contrast Theodoret, *Twelve Prophets*, 39-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *In Osee prophetam* on 1:2 (PL 25, column 823a). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Cf. Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 40-53; Joshua Moon, “Honor and Shame in Hosea’s Marriages,” *JSOT* 39 (2015): 335-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See R. D. Nelson “Priestly Purity and Prophetic Lunacy,” in L. L. Grabbe and A. O. Bellis (ed.), *The Priests in the Prophets* (London: Clark, 2005), 115-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Cf. Theodore, *Twelve Prophets*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:39; Cyril gives eight pages in the English translation to his concern about the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Landy, *Hosea*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For this understanding see Teresa J. Hornsby, “‘Israel Has Become a Worthless Thing,’” *JSOT* 82 (1999): 115-28); Douglas K. Stuart, “’Marry a Promiscuous Woman’ (Hos. 1:2) and ‘Your Wife Again’ (Hos. 3:1),” *Bibliotheca sacra* 171 (2014): 131-147. Thomas Hentrich considers Gomer’s role in light of that of a Babylonian priestess who functioned as a midwife (“Qui était Gomer?” *Science et Esprit* 55 [2003]: 5-22). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. On the possibility that this might involve sexual rites, see the Introduction to Hosea above, on “The Issues.” [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Wolff, *Hosea*,15. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Wolff, *Hosea*,14. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Dearman, *Hosea*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Lim/Castelo, *Hosea*, 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See further Shawn Zelig Aster, “The Function of the City of Jezreel and the Symbolism of Jezreel in Hosea 1–2,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71 (2012): 31-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:62. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Landy, *Hosea*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Cf. Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea,* 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, “Der grosse Jesreeltag,” *Evangelische Theologie* 12 (1952-53): 78-104 (95). Unfortunately he abandoned that view in *Hose*a, 24, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ehud Ben Zvi, “Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in its Ancient Israelite Context,” *JSOT* 28 (2003-4): 363-84 (370). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See Gillian Cooper and John Goldingay, “Hosea and Gomer Visit the Marriage Counsellor,” in *First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography* (ed. Philip R. Davies; London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 119-36; also John Goldingay, “Hosea 1—3, Genesis 1—4, and Masculist Interpretation,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 161-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. But Peggy L. Day argues that the background rather lies in what men do to women in war (“Yahweh’s Broken Marriages as Metaphoric Vehicle in the Hebrew Bible Prophets,” in Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro (eds.), *Sacred Marriages* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 219-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Cf. Willem Boshoff**, “**Sexual Encounters of a Different Kind,” *Religion and Theology* 1 (1994): 329-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ben Zvi, *Hosea,* 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Tg has “that” (the *kî* introducing direct speech); but one would expect an intervening word for “say” (*DCH* 7:478). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. LXX has “I will put away… from my face,” making v. 2 [4] follow nicely on the promissory and familial address of v. 1 [3], but then in v. 3 [5] it oddly omits the “don’t.” MT has a “defamiliarizing" effect after v. 1 [3] (Ben Zvi, *Hosea,* 63). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. The piel participle, presumably intensive, is used only of illicit love. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. LXX provides the expected “her way.” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. The pronominal suffix has quasi-dative meaning (Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 44; cf. DG 2a), or pregnant significance (GK 135m ). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Piel of *rādap,* again intensive. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Tg has more explicitly “my first lord” (*ribbônî*). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Rather than “made into the Master”; cf. Exod. 38:24; 1 Sam. 8:16; 2 Chron. 24:7. The colon involves an unmarked relative clause (cf. Vg, Tg); LXX “silver and gold they made for the Master” makes explicit the point implicit in the parallelism that the silver was also used for the Master. The parallelism suggests further that the first colon also involves an unmarked relative clause. LXX cannily provides a feminine article for *ba‘al*, which might suggest “the Mistress,” a goddess, rather than “the Master,” or might hint at the replacing of *ba‘al* by the Greek word *aischunē*, Hebrew *bōšet*, “shame” (cf. 9:10) as has happened in names such as Ish-boshet (so Macintosh, *Hosea*, 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Literally “return and take” (cf. Tg). *Waw*-consecutive following adverbial use of *šûb* is unusual (JM 177b; GK 120e) but it makes for a tighter link with the wife saying “I will go and turn back” (v. 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Andersen/Freedman (*Hosea*, 215, 246) take the piel as privative, “to uncover.” Less implausibly, Brad E. Kelle (“A Reconsideration of *lekassôt* in Hosea 2, 11 [MT],” *ZAW* 102 [2004]: 334-47) renders “to calculate [from *kāsas* not *kāsāh*] her indecency [as in Deut. 24:1].” But see Matthew W. Mitchell, “Finding the Naked Woman in Hosea ii 11,” *VT* 57 (2007): 114-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Taking the *waw* as epexegetical, since the previous colon covers all the set occasions. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *’Etnāh*, a variant on *’etnan* to denote a “gift” to a prostitute, comes only here; it generates a paronomasia with *tə’ēnātāh* (her fig), and also with *nātənû* (they have given). Whatever the word’s etymology, it makes for a nice euphemism. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. LXX “witness” implies *‘ēd* for *ya‘ar*. Hebrew d and r are similar; the reading is plausible and suggestive (cf. Gen. 31:44-52). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See the note on 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Cf. Vg; LXX has “on which [days] she burns incense for them” (cf. DG 124a). JM118n takes as past yiqtol, which fits with the next line, but the context doesn’t imply she’s stopped, and the more regular present tense translation fits. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. For *pātāh*, LXX has “deceive.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Midbār* *wədibbartî*, both from a root *dbr*: “The desert is a place of absence, but there are words in it…. In the settled land the word itself may be forgotten” (Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, 143). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Anatomically, the heart, but “speak to her heart” could give a misleading impression; in Hebrew the heart is not especially the locus of the emotions. If anything, it refers to what we would call the mind (cf. 7:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. JPSV’s “plowland” derives *petaḥ* from *pātaḥ* II which means “engrave.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *‘*Ā*nāh* (here and vv. 21-22 [23-24]) most often means “answer,” but it can mean respond or testify in a formal sense; hence “aver.” There are several homonyms *‘ānāh*: LXX “be made low” (cf. Sym) takes it as BDB’s *‘ānāh* III, Vg “sing” as BDB’s *‘ānāh* IV (cf. Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics,*  176-77); Tg gives a different meaning each time it occurs—rightly, A. Guillaume thinks (“A Note on Hosea ii. 23, 24 [*JTS* 15 (1964): 57-58]). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. LXX, Vg have third-person verbs in this verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. That is, by being mentioned in worship (cf. Exod. 23:13). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. The “she” of v. 17 has become a “they.” [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Presumably the Ephraimites, the “them” of v. 18a. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Cf. Vg, LXX; *bāṭaḥ* denotes “trust” and *beṭaḥ* refers to a sense of security not directly to actual security (though that would also apply here). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Perhaps *b* indicating price (cf. GK 119p). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Vg has “acknowledge that I am the Lord,” reflecting the language of Ezekiel and Isaiah 40—55. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Tg “the exiles of my people” presupposes a negative understanding of *zāra‘*, “scatter” (see the comments on 1:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Vg fills the colon out as “You’re my Lord,” LXX as “You’re the Lord my God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. On marriage and divorce in the ancient Middle East, see Paul A. Kruger, “The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 2:4-17,” *OTE* 5 (1992): 7-25; Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2* (Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 47-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. See Paul Kruger’s comments on v. 6 [8] in particular, "I will hedge her way with thornbushes" (Hosea 2,8),” *BZ* 43 (1999): 92-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Mary Joan Winn Leith, “Verse and Reverse,” in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 95-108 (98). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 98-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Cf. Haddox, *Metaphor and Masculinity.* [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. So Renita J. Weems, “Gomer,” *Semeia* 47 (1989): 87-104 (95). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Fishbane, *Haftorot*, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. See William D. Whitt, “The Divorce of Yahweh and Asherah in Hos 2,4-7.12ff,” *SJOT* 6 (1992): 31-67; and further Mari-Therese Wacker, “”traces of the Goddess in the Book of Hosea,” in Athalya Brenner [ed.], *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 219-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See e.g., John J. Schmitt, “The Gender of Ancient Israel,” *JSOT* 26 (1983): 115-25; “The Wife of God in Hosea 2,” *Biblical Research* 34 (1989): 5-18; “Yahweh’s Divorce in Hosea 2,” *SJOT* 9 (1995): 119-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Cf. Mark Smith, *The Early History of God* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. So Kelle’s systematic interpretation of the section in his monograph *Hosea 2*. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, esp. 122-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Landy, *Hosea*, 36; he continues with more comparisons and contrasts. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Cf. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 84; further Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, 197-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. See further Saul M. Olyan,”‘In the Sight of Her Lovers’: On the Interpretation of nablût in Hos 2,12,” BZ 36 (1992): 255-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 249-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. See Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Cf. Landy, *Hosea*, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Cf. Kruger, “The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 2:4-17,” 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:99. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See David J. A. Clines, “Hosea 2,” in *On the Way* *to the Postmodern* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1:293-313 (297-98). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Cf. Erasmus Gass, “Hosea zwischen Tradition und Innovation am Beispiel von Hos 2,16 f,” *ZAW* 122 (2010): 169-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. So Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 207-14. Matthew W. Mitchell comments, “This book deconstructs itself in terms of everything from its imagery to its logic” (“Hosea 1—2 and the Search for Unity,” *JSOT* 29 [2004] 115-27 [127]). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. The first time, if one follows LXX in v. 6 (cf. Clines, “Hosea 2,” 302). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Cf. Mordechai A. Friedman, “Israel’s Response in Hosea 2:17b,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 199-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Cf. Richtsje Abma, *Bonds of Love* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:110. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. So perhaps “wed” is better than “betroth” (Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 277-78). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Allan Rosengren, “Knowledge of God according to Hosea the Ripper,” *SJOT* 23 (2009):122-126 (122). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Cf. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:112-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Cf. Landy, *Hosea*, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Lim/Castelo, *Hosea*, 22-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Theodore, *Twelve Prophets*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Barth, *CD* IV, 2:762. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Landy, *Hosea*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Weems, “Gomer,” 101, quoting from Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Theodoret, *Twelve Prophets*, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Weems, “Gomer,” 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. See Weems, “Gomer,” 101; cf. Weems, *Battered Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*; Rut Törnkvist, *The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery in the Book of Hosea* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Cf. Helgard Balz-Cochois, “Gomer oder die Macht der Astarte, *Evangelische Theologie* 42 (1982): 37-65 (60-63). See further Balz-Cochois, *Gomer* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:118. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Richard Whitekettle, “Freedom from Fear and Bloodshed,” *JSOT* 37 (2012): 219-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (Dallas: Word, 1988) 2:575; cf. Steve Moyise, “The Minor Prophets in Paul,” in Menken and Moyise (eds.), *Minor Prophets*, 97-114 (106). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. From the greater to the lesser. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Barth, *CD* II, 2:231. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Taking *‘ôd* with the word it follows, in keeping with the Masoretic accents and with usual practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. LXX “loving” may imply *’ōhebet* for MT *’ăhubat* but may simply presuppose the passive participle’s capacity for an active meaning (cf. English expressions such as “I am minded”). [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. For MT *rēa‘*.LXX implies *ra‘* “what is bad.” Tg understands the neighbor to be “her husband,” which implies that she is already Hosea’s wife who has then committed adultery. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. The *waw*-clause with a pronominal subject is concessive (cf. *TTH* 160). [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. LXX understands these as raison blocks, Rashi (in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage) as goblets of wine. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Vg derives *’ekkərehā* from *kārāh* I “dig,” Ibn Ezra (*Hosea*, 39) from *nākar* “recognize [as mine]” and thus “acquire,” LXX from *kārāh* II “hire/buy” with an implication of barter (Job 6:27; 40:30; cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 61), which fits with the reference to what Hosea pays. Tg “them” reads the interpretation into the allegory itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. LXX has “a skin of wine,” which avoids the repetition of barley. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. LXX “with/by me” involves a unique understanding of the preposition *lə*. Vg “wait for me” and JPSV “remain for me” are semantically possible but don’t fit the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. There seems no reason to infer that that the “not” carries over so that the colon refers to abstaining from sex (JPSV); for *’el* used without a verb to mean “toward” in a positive sense, cf. 2 Kings 6:11; Ezek. 36:9 (Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:506). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. LXX, Vg “altar” suggests *mizbēaḥ* for *maṣṣēbāh*, possibly on the assumption that Hosea refers to the worship in Jerusalem where a pillar would be illegitimate. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. *Tərāpîm*. LXX has *dēlōn*, “clear things,”means of discovering God’s will (cf. Glenny, *Hosea*, 86); Tg has *məḥawȇ* “oracles” or “seers.” [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. In the context, *yāšubû* has this regular meaning rather than instancing *šûb* qualifying another verb and meaning “again.” *Yāšubû* completes a triple paronomasia in vv. 3-5 with *tēšəbî* (you will live) and *yēšəbû* (they will live). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. *Pāḥad*, a rarer and thus more emphatic synonym for *yārē’* (conventionally “fear”). Each can suggest either a negative or a positive fear or awe; the context decides the connotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. So Wolff, *Hosea*, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Cf. Tg; Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:123. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. See J. Schreiner, *TDOT* 11:582, 583. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Cf. Rainer Kessler, “Hosea 3,” *ZAW* 120 (2008): 563-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. See Susanne Rudnig-Zelt, “Vom Propheten und seiner Frau, einem Ephod und einem Teraphim,” *VT* 60 (2010): 373-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Paul A. Kruger, “The Face of Disorder,” *ZAW* 124 (2012): 249-254 (253). [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ben Zvi*, Hosea*, 89; further, Alexander Rofé, “David Their King,” in David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon (eds.), *Leshon Limmudim* (A. A. Macintosh Festschrift; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 130-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Peter Machinist, “Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel,” in *Constituting the Community* (S. Dean McBride, Jr., Festschrift, eds. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 153-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. David Jobling. “A Deconstructive Reading of Hosea 1—3,” in Carleen Mandalfo and Timothy J. Sandoval (eds.), *Relating to the Text* (Martin J. Buss Festschrift; London: Clark, 2003), 206-15 (208). [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Cf. George L. Klein, “Hos 3:1-3—Background to 1 Cor 6:19b-20?” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 373-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Cf. Joshua Moon, “Honor and Shame in Hosea’s Marriages,” *JSOT* 39 (2015): 335-51 (347-51). [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 33; cf. Landy, *Hosea*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. So Theodore, *Twelve Prophets*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Not “the land,” in the context: see the comments. “Against you who live in the land” (TNIV) and “against the inhabitants of this land” (JPSV) read an interpretation into the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Tg apparently takes the five infinitives as substitutes for finite verbs (cf. GK 113ff). They might also be taken as gerundives (“in taking oaths, deceiving…”), with “the people who live in the earth” still the subject of the finite verb (cf. *DCH*). LXX, Vg take the infinitives as gerunds and as the subjects of the main verb, which makes for parallelism with the third colon: to put it another way, the third colon clarifies the syntax of the preceding cola. At the end LXX adds “in the earth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. In the context, *HALOT*’s *’ābal* II not *’ābal* I “mourn.” The verbs in v. 3 are yiqtol and *waw*-consecutive, suggesting future reference (cf. LXX, Vg). [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Vg has “everyone”; but *’umlal* usually has an impersonal subject, and this fits the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. LXX adds “the things that crawl on the ground” from 2:18 [20]. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. It requires even more inference to take Hosea as speaking to the king (so Jack R. Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013], 224). [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Not simply “like ones who”; see the note on 5:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. LXX has “my people is like a priest who is confronted.” Tg has “your people confront their teachers.” Vg reads as MT. Scholars have suggested various emendations but none has carried conviction. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Cf. Vg. It is doubtful whether *hayyôm* ever means “by day” (LXX); Neh. 4:16 is the only possible other example (see *DCH*). Tg significantly adds the preposition *b.* [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. LXX, Vg link “by night” with the next colon, ignoring the “and.” [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Here and in the next colon LXX derives *dāmîtî* from *dāmāh* I “resemble” not *dāmāh* II “cut off.” Aq, Sym, Theod, Vg derive it from *dāmam* “be silent.” [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Tg takes “mother” as a figure for the people as a whole (cf. 2:2 [4] and the next line). [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Taking *rubbām* as a form of the noun *rōb*, with LXX and Vg, rather than infinitive from *rābab*, “as many as they were.” [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Tg implies *hēmîrû* “they’ve changed” for MT *’āmîr*; “their honor” (*kəbôdām*)might then denote Yahweh as “the honorable/glorious one” (cf. Ps. 106:20, to which Tg assimilates this line). Seethe discussion in Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1981), 97-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. I add “each” on the assumption that Hosea abbreviates the distributive construction (cf. Andersen/ Freedman, *Hosea*, 359). [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. The subsequent cola indicate the implication “people will suffer like priest” as opposed to “priest will suffer like people.” [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. The object comes first and thus with emphasis. The third-person reference to Yahweh in a statement by Yahweh again reflects the ambiguity of the prophet’s position as mouthpiece or messenger. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. MT’s verse division implies “they have abandoned observing Yahweh,” but the formulation is odd. Tg reads the *l* on the verb as a negative, to make more sense of MT’s verse division (Cathcart/Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 37); cf. Vg. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. With LXX (cf. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:113) I see “whoring” as the object of “observe.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. The singular verb treats “wine and new wine” as one thing (JM150p). [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. LXX “the mind of my people” takes *lēb* with what follows. On *lēb*, see the note on 2:14 [16]. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. The subject comes in emphatic position before the verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Taking *bə* in the first colon as applying also in the second; what follows is then an unmarked relative clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. The verb is masculine, though the subject (which precedes it) is feminine. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Tg assumes that this line refers to marrying foreign girls (cf. 5:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Not “understand” (e.g., NRSV): the point is that they need to put in the effort. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Whether or not the repeated verb *sārar* is a byform of *sûr* “turn aside,” in the context it will evoke the implications of *sûr* (*DCH* notes the juxtaposition of the verbs in Jer. 4:23; 5:28). [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. At first sight v. 16b looks like a statement and a promise, which ill fits the context. It can be understood as a threat if it’s unnatural for a cow to be in a meadow (cf. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt*, on the passage), but it’s easier to infer that the line is an unmarked question (GK 150a). [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. *Sûr* is unusual in this connection (though see Isa. 11:13) but it makes for a paronomasia with *sārar* (with the connotations of *sûr*) in v. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Literally, “[in] whoring they have whored.” [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. *Māginneyhā*; cf. Vg “protectors.” LXX “through their insolence” implies a reading such as *miggə’ōnām*. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. *DCH* takes *hēbû* as a noun for “love” from the root *’āhēb*,used adverbially; or one might take *’āhăbû* *hēbû* as an artificial pe‘al‘al form (JM 59d; cf. Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:515). [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. *Ṣārar* generates another paronomasia with *sārar* and *sûr* in vv. 16, 18. The feminine singular suffixes in vv. 18-19 are odd, but one can hardly read in a reference to an unnamed goddess (so e.g., Frédéric Gangloff and Jean-Claude Haelewyck, “Osée 4,17-19,” *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 71 [1995]: 370-382). [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. LXX, Tg imply *mimmizbəḥôtām* ‘by their altars” for MT *mizzibḥôtām*. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Wolff, *Hosea*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Cf. Cathcart/Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Walter Brueggemann, “The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3,” in Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from This Place* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 1:231-49 (241). [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Cf. Robert Gordis, “Quotations in Biblical, Oriental, and Rabbinic Literature,” in *Poets, Prophets, and Sages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 104-59 (113); Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 345. I extend the quotation through v. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. See the comments on Hosea 9:7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Landy, *Hosea*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Dearman, *Hosea*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Cf. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Jutta Krispenz, “Idolatry, Apostasy, Prostitution,” in Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (ed.), *Priests and Cults in the Book of the Twelve* (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 9-30 (16). [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Cf. Landy, *Hosea*, 62; he notes many other instances of paronomasia in the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Cf. Karin Adams, “Metaphor and Dissonance,” *JBL 127* (2008): 291-305; she thinks in terms of unfaithful worship more generally. James E. Miller’s critique (“A Critical Response to Karin Adams's Reinterpretation of Hosea 4:13-14,” *JBL* 128 [2009]: 503-6) does not affect the central point. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Jack R. Lundbom (*Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013], 232-39) particularly ties together this colon and v. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Cf. Landy, *Hosea*, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:119. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. See Pierre J. P. van Hecke, “Conceptual Blending,” in van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 215-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. See Thomas C. Parker, *The Knowledge of God in Hosea* (Diss., Sheffield, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. See Gunther H. Wittenberg, “Knowledge of God,” *OTE* 22 (2009): 488-509. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Michael DeRoche, “The Reversal of Creation in Hosea,” *VT* 31 (1981): 400-9 (403). [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Carl J. Bosma, “Creation in Jeopardy,” *CTJ* 34 (1999): 64-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Melissa Tubbs Loya, “‘Therefore the Earth Mourns,’” in Habel and Trudiger (eds.), *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, 53-62 (59). [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics*, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Wolff, *Hosea*, 79, 80. The English equivalents of the first two references are 2:1 and 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Bosma, “Creation in Jeopardy,” 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Augustine, *Homilies on John,* 15:25 (NPNF I, 7:105-6) [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. See the note on “Israel’s household” in 1:4; it makes sense in light of the next line if the phrase here refers specifically to the administration. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. The line begins with the paronomasia *wəšaḥăṭāh śēṭîm*: the first word is an alternative spelling for *šaḥătāh* (“slaughter”), the second is *śēṭ* from *śûṭ*, a variant for *śāṭāh* (see BDB). On NRSV’s emendation, see Macintosh, *Hosea*, 178-82. See further Gert Kwakkel, “Paronomasia, Ambiguities and Shifts in Hos 5:1-2,” *VT* 61 (2011): 603-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. The line thus takes neat abcc’b’a’ form. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. LXX, Aq, Sym, Theod, Vg have terms such as “pride,” but *gā’ôn* is not an inherently pejorative word; hence Tg *yəqar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. The parallelism suggests deriving the verb from *‘ānāh* III (LXX, Tg) rather than *‘ānāh* I “answer, aver” (Vg). [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Or “before/against its own face” if the verb is *‘ānāh* I. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. More literally, “Israel and Ephraim will collapse,” the verb being plural. Were Israel and Ephraim in some way separate entities (see e.g., Dearman, *Hosea*, 23-24, 175-76*)*? I rather take *wə’eprayim* as defining *yiśrā’ēl*, perhaps as an explanatory addition in light of the (added?) reference to Judah in the next colon. Hosea can switch between treating Israel as singular or plural (see 4:15—5:4) so the plural can be original. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. The verb *ḥālaṣ* usually denotes pulling off or pulling out (in the niphal and piel), often in the sense of rescuing—so the usage here conveys some irony. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. The more straightforward translation “a new month will consume them” makes poor sense; LXX implies *ḥāsîl* (locust) for *ḥōdeš*, an easier reading. For *ḥōdeš* as adverbial expression of time, cf. Tg (and GK 118i). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Cf. Jeremias, *Hosea*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Cf. Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:521. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. *Gib*‘*āh* and *rāmāh* (Gibeah and Ramah) both have the article. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. LXX “Benjamin is astonished” suggests a form of the verb *ḥārad* for MT *’aḥărēkā*. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. LXX, Vg take *tihyeh* as third person feminine, but Ephraim is elsewhere treated as masculine (e.g., 4:17; 5:3, 11) and direct address to Ephraim (cf. Deut. 28:37) fits following v. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. The qatal is instantaneous or performative (see JM 112f). [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Not just “like” (unless in the colloquial sense): see GK 118x; *IBHS* 11.2.9b. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. On LXX’s active verbs, see Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence*, 78-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. *Hālak* follows asyndetically from *hô’îl* (cf. GK 120g). [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Taking *ṣāw* as a byform of *šāw’* (cf. LXX) not of *ṣō’ā* “filth” (Vg*;* cf. Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:523-24). [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Or pus (see *HALOT*), which would lead well into v. 13; either way, *‘āš* is similar to *‘āšûq* (oppressed). [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Judah’s seeing Ephraim’s wound would suggest the seriousness of Ephraim’s affliction, but v. 14 suggests that more likely Judah is seeing its own wound. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. *Yārēb*, from abyform of *rābab* (see *HALOT*), though it can alternatively be taken as jussive from *rîb* (cf. Aq, Vg, Tg), implying “he should contend.” [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. *Māzôr* is thus the subject of an intransitive verb (LXX) not the object of a transitive one (Vg), which would need to be hiphil (cf. *DCH* on *yāgāh*). [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Strictly (according to BDB) a lion that is not an adult but older than a whelp. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Tg has “acknowledge that they have sinned,” but it is questionable whether *’āšam* can bear this meaning (cf. Davies, *Hosea*, 158). But *’āšam* conveniently resembles *šāmëm* “be desolate” (cf. LXX, Vg; and 5:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. The asyndetic clause with the verb at the end is circumstantial. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Taking the verb as jussive used with yiqtol meaning (GK 109k; cf. LXX, Vg) rather than *waw-*consecutive without the *waw* (*TTH* 84β). [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. The suffix carries over from the previous word. I take the verb as linking with v. 2 and then picked up in the next line, rather than as being repeated within the same line (cf. Isa. 26:3). For simple *waw* plus cohortative of *yāda‘* in a purpose clause, cf. Isa. 41:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. *Šaḥar* makes for another link with 5:15 via the denominative verb “look urgently” (*šāḥar*). [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. LXX has “first rain,” the rain that softens the earth and makes sewing possible, but the Hebrew works by using a general word and then a more specific one. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. In the context *yôreh* should be a verbal form, which would usually be taken as qal yiqtol (or hiphil participle) from *yārāh* meaning “throw,” but in the context *yārāh* might be understood as a byform of *rāwāh*, whose hiphil here would meaning “saturate”—an understanding which would be encouraged by the fact that *yôreh* itself can also be a noun for autumn rain. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Davies, *Hosea*, 145-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten* 1:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. See especially Albrecht Alt, “Hosea 5, 8-9—6, 6,” in Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (2nd ed.; München:: Beck, 1959) 2:163-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. See e.g., Dearman, *Hosea*, 179, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 1:60-61; Sweeney proposes an earlier political situation in Hosea’s day. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. See e.g., Helmut Utzschneider, “Situation und Szene,” *ZAW* 114 (2002): 80-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. *TTH* 14(8) (though not giving this as an example). [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Mays, *Hosea*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. See *ANET*, 280, 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Landy, *Hosea*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Fretheim, *Reading Hosea-Micah*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Cf. DG 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Cf. Gunther H. Wittenberg, “Prophecy for a Time of Global Crisis,*” Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 146 (2013): 139-169. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 138 (cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (reprinted New York: HarperCollins [2005]), 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:217. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Alice A. Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Sebastian Grätz, “Die vergebliche Suche nach Gott,” *VT* 50 (2000): 200-217. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. *Against Marcion* !V, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. *Against the Jews* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. See the comments on the theological implications of 1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. On the circumstantial clause, see *TTH* 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Two asyndetic participles, the first functioning adverbially: “that is, in being early, going” (cf. GK 120g). [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. I infer the object from the parallel colon (cf. Vg, Tg); LXX “cut down the prophets” ignores the parallel *b* expressions. TNIV “you” assimilates to the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Literally “your decisions”; LXX, Tg “my decision” suggests *mišpāṭî kə’ôr* for *mišpāṭeykā ’ôr*. In v. 4a Yahweh spoke to Ephraim in the second person singular, in v. 4b in second plural, in v. 5a he speaks about them in the third plural, and in MT he here reverts to direct address in second singular. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Initially v. 5b looks like a simple declaration, but while “decision[s]” can be positive or negative, “light” is a positive image (a threat would require reference to darkness: cf. Amos 5:18, 20) and in this context a positive promise would be odd. So I take v. 5b as the beginning of an unmarked question (cf. GK 150a). [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. LXX takes *’ādām* to denote a human being, Vg to denote Adam, but “there” in the next colon clarifies the reference. For *kə* meaning “as in/at,” see GK 118t. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Tg neatly includes a reference to cunning, making a link with that significance of words such as *‘āqēb* and the Jacob story (cf. Cathcart/Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 42). The related verb will come with such implications in 12:3 [4]. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Taking *ḥakkȇ* as a mixed reading, combining piel participle (which would require an initial *m*) and piel infinitive construct (which would require a final *h*). GK75aa takes it as simply an odd (Ephraimite?) spelling of the latter. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Šekem can mean shoulder, but Tg “with one consent” (lit. “with one shoulder”) would require “one” to be expressed, as in Zeph. 3:9 (*TTH* 190). [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. *Ša‘ărûriyyāh* Q*, ša‘ărîrît* K, two of the three forms from this root, both occurring only here, both reduplicated forms that underline the horrifying nature of the horror. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. If some references to Judah come from Hosea’s later inspiration or from that of his disciples, “Judah too” could be an example; the colon works without it. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. MT’s verse division implies that harvest is a positive image, a first way of describing the restoration of fortunes for Judah (cf. Vg, and Jeremias, *Hosea*, 94). LXX also associates this colon with what follows. But MT’s petuhah after v. 11 associates v. 11 as a whole with what precedes and implies that harvest is a negative image (cf. Tg). Dividing v. 11 between the subsections works well for the prosody, the parallelism in 6:11b—7:1a, and the sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. The tense reference is determined by the *waw-*consecutive plus qatal in 7:1aβ (contrast Vg’s future and subjunctive, “when I will restore… when I wish to heal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. LXX, Vg, Tg derive the noun *šəbût* from *šābāh* and thus take the phrase to denote return from exile, but this meaning doesn’t fit all the phrase’s occurrences; more likely the noun derives from *šûb* and the phrase literalistically means “restore the restoring” (see *HALOT*). [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Taking the *waw-*consecutive plus qatal to signify present reference (see GK 112m). [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. On the alternating of yiqtol and qatal, see *TTH* 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. The unusual poetic negative *bal* (cf. 9:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Literally, “to their heart/mind.” [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. The object clause is dependent on “say” (GK 157a). [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. For *min* LXX, Vg have “by,” but this is difficult after the active participle “burning.” As well as the oddness of the preposition there is the oddness that the participle is feminine, which prompts a redividing and repointing of the words such as *tannûr bō’ēr hēm ’ōpeh*, “they are a burning oven./ A baker stops…” (e.g., Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 455-56). But in MT “without a baker” (*mē’ōpeh*)makes for paronomasia with “adulterers” (*mənā’ăpîm*)in the same position in the parallel colon (the two expressions might also remind people of the noun *’ap* “anger” and the verb *’ānap* “burn with anger”). [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. LXX, Vg, Tg derive the verb from *ḥālal* “begin,” but it looks more like a form from *ḥālāh;* I take it as having regular hiphil meaning rather than being the only example of the verb’s internal hiphil (“the officials made themselves sick”). [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. It’s not clear why *qērəbû* is piel rather than qal (see Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, p. 459). Grammatically, “their mind” should be its object, but that makes poor sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Tg “their anger” (cf. TNIV “their passion”) implies *’appēhem* for *’ōpēhem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. V. 7 combines yiqtol and qatal, like v. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Taking the first three words of v. 8 as a regular noun clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Against MT, I take the second ’Eprayim as the subject of the verb it follows (in accordance with the usual rule) not of the succeeding one. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Does *‘ānāh* denote averring or being humbled? In 5:5, “collapse” in v. 5b resolved the ambiguity. Here both ideas are appropriate (cf. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:260). [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Tg “because they listened to their counsel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. LXX “gash themselves” implies a form of the verb *gādad* (cf. 1 Kings 18:28); some mss have *yitgôdādû* for *yitgôrārû* from *gûr* (see BDB). Tg derives from *’āgar* “gather” (Cathcart/Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 45). [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. MT’s *yāsûrû* is pointed as from *sûr* (cf. Sym, Vg) though the preposition *bə* implies *sārar* “run amok/rebel” (cf. Tg). LXX conflates with the form from *yāsar* “discipline” in the next line; the similarity between the words makes vv. 14b-15 the more poignant. Cf. 4:16 and the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Or “not [to the one] on high”; *lō’ ‘āl* (“[to one] not on high”) is enigmatic. Sym, Vg suggestively have “yoke” (*‘ōl*): “they turn back, not to a yoke.” [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. A triple paronomasia: there are three verbs *rāmāh*, meaning “shoot an arrow,” deceive,” and “be slack.” [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Cf. Glenny, *Hosea*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:35. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Jer. 2:2 is the only clear example in the First Testament; plural “acts of commitment [to God]” appears in 2 Chron. 32:32; 35:26; Neh. 13:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Landy, *Hosea*, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:237. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. See Macintosh, *Hosea*, 239-41; Davies, *Hosea*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. See Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 434-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Shalom Paul, “The Image of the Oven and the Cake in Hosea vii 4-10,” *VT* 18 (1968): 114-120 (117). [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Cf. Macintosh, *Hosea*, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:265. See further Paul A. Kruger, “The Divine Net in Hosea 7,12,” *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 68 (1992):132-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Cf. the use of *šēma‘* of a word that comes to a prophet in Hab. 3:2; and Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:39. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Michael L. Barré, “Hearts, Beds, and Repentance,” *Biblica* 76 (1995): 53-62 (57). [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:231. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Lim/Castelo, *Hosea*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:244. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Wolff, *Hosea*,129. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Landy, *Hosea*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. See Dearman, *Hosea*, 196-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. *ANET*, 417; cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. See Eberhard Bons, “Osée 6:6 dans le Texte Massorétique,” in Bons (ed.), *“Car c’est l’amour qui me plaît, non le sacrifice…”* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 9-24, and other papers in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. See Eric Ottenheijm, “The Shared Meal,” *Novum Testamentum* 53 (2011): 1-21(16-17). [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Not merely “like”: see the note on 5:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. While *bȇt yhwh* usually refers to the Jerusalem temple (cf. Tg), that understanding makes poor sense here. If there was a temple in Samaria, Ephraimites would no doubt refer to it as *bȇt yhwh*, but we do not know of one, and Hosea would be unlikely to do so without qualification or irony. In fact *bȇt* always denotes “household” in Hosea (see especially 9:4, 8, 15 and the comments). [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. LXX has simply “God, we acknowledge you,” an easier reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. The lack of *wə* and the subject’s position before the verb suggests a concessive or circumstantial clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. *Hēśîrû* is the only hiphil occurrence of the denominative *śārar* from *śîr*, though it might also be taken as an alternative spelling of a form from *sûr* which would mean “they removed [a king]” (so e.g., Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage), suggesting a paronomasia: they have appoint/removed officials. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. The move to third person singular for v. 4bγ-5aα (the lines on either side being third plural) suggests that these two cola form a bicolon, like the rest of vv. 4-6. Placing the purpose clause first with the subject explicit only in the second colon makes the line elliptical, but not as elliptical as they are in MT’s verse division. A similar structure recurs in v. 6. “Cut down” may imply that the silver and gold were plating over a wooden figure (cf. v. 6b); cf. the hiphil in Mic. 5:13 [12], or may imply a metonymy: the bullock will be “cut down” like an Asherah column. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. LXX implies imperative *zənaḥ* for *zānaḥ*, avoiding the change from Yahweh’s speaking toHosea’s speaking about Yahweh. But Hosea often makes such transitions (see 1:2b and the comments); he moves back in the next line. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. BDB takes the noun to denote being free of punishment. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Linking *šəbābîm* with BDB’s *šābab* I rather than *šābab* II. LXX links it with *šûb*, inferring the meaning “things that turn people away [from Yahweh].” [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Nicely in light of the word’s adoption into English, LXX has *katastrophē*; but see T. J. Meadowcroft, “καταστροφή: A Puzzling LXX Translation Choice in Hosea viii 7a,” *VT* 46 (1996): 539-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. The unusual poetic negative *bəlî* (cf. 9:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. MT’s verse division invites us to take this colon as itself a 2-2 bicolon, but the verbal link with v. 8a suggests taking vv. 7bγ-8a as a 4-2 bicolon; v. 8b is then a 3-3 bicolon. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. One would not “go up” from Israel to Assyria; perhaps *‘ālāh* can mean “go up country” (as we put it), “go north” (see G. R. Driver, “On *‘lh* ‘went up country’ and *yrd* ‘went down country,’ *ZAW* 69 [1957]: 74-77; taken up by Rudolph, *Hosea*, 159). [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. MT links *’Eprayim* with the next line, but the singular noun reads better here and the paronomasia with *pere’* is tighter. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Literally, “loves.” [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. See the note on “gift” at 2:12 [14]. *Tānāh* is hiphil, in the next colon qal, with the regular difference between hiphil (what the nations made Ephraim do) and qal (what Ephraim therefore did). [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Taking the verb as from *ḥîl* or perhaps rather from a byform *ḥālal*. BDB’s *ḥālal* III usually means “begin,” which is possible if we take *mə‘aṭ* as an infinitive; but “begin to become small” does not follow “collect up” as naturally. LXX “cease,” Vg “be quiet” might suggest *ḥālāh* I “be weak” or *ḥādal* “cease.” Aq “entreat” suggests *ḥālāh* II “entreat the favor of.” Sym “remain” suggests *yāḥal* “wait.” For the *wayyiqtol* with future reference following a yiqtol, cf. Ps. 49:14 [15] (GK111w); one could understand it as equivalent to a perfect of certainty (prophetic perfect). [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. For this meaning of *mə‘aṭ* cf. 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. For *mimmaśśā’* LXX implies *mimməšōaḥ* “because of the anointing.” [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. *Melek šārîm* recalls the Assyrian titles *šar šarrâni* and *šar malkē*, designating the emperor as supreme over the rulers of the countries within the empire (cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 144). *Melek məlākîm* is the usual Hebrew equivalent; Hosea’s alternative expression seems to have the same significance. LXX, Vg, Tg, make the reading easier by reading “king and officials.” [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Tg has “I wrote,” but the verb is yiqtol. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. So Q *rubbȇ*; K implies *ribbô* “a myriad.” [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. The plural of a construct can carry over to the absolute noun, and LXX and Vg have plural, but more likely the much more common singular meaning applies, as in v. 1 (and cf. 4:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Literally “sacrifices of my roasted things”—in other words, burnt offerings. The hapax *habəhābay* recalls both *’āhēb* (love, be loyal: cf. LXX) and *yāhab* (give: cf. Aq), but Rashi (in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage) makes a link with Aramaic *habhēb* “roast” (cf. *HALOT*; Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:556-57). [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. The object is extrapolated (casus pendens) and followed by resumptive *waw*: cf. Andersen/ Freedman, *Hosea*, p. 510; JM 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Yet again Hosea moves from speaking as Yahweh to speaking about Yahweh (see the note on v. 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. See the note on 1:4. I take the simple *waw* plus yiqtol as indicating purpose. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. LXX adds “and will eat unclean things in Assyria,” from 9:3 where it parallels reference to Ephraim going back to Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Cf. Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, “The Role of Images in the Literary Structure of Hosea vii 8—viii 14,” *VT* 54 (2014): 216-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Landy, *Hosea*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. So e.g., Jerome, *In Osee prophetam* on 8:4 (PL 25, column 883d). [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Cf. Dearman, *Hosea*, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. The flower-flour translation comes from Landy, *Hosea*, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Cf, Landy, *Hosea,* 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. See the discussion in Hamborg, *Still Selling the Righteous*, 131-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Cf. Dearman, *Hosea*, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:84; cf. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten* 1:53. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. LXX, Vg, Tg suggest *’al tāgēl* “don’t rejoice” for the unusual expression *’el-gîl* (with which compare Job 3:22). [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. The asyndesis with the subject preceding the verb suggests this is a subordinate clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. That is, the gift (v. 1). It seems less likely that the two nouns are treated as one idea and thus govern a singular verb (against JM 150p); contrast 4:11; 10:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. The use of *rā‘āh* is idiosyncratic and/or involves a metonymy; more directly, the giver will (not) pasture them. “Befriend” (Wolff, *Hosea*, 149; BDB’s *rā‘āh* II) and “attend to” (cf. Macintosh, *Hosea*,339-40; BDB’s *rā‘āh* III) both require unique usages of *rā‘āh* and are also allusive.LXX may imply a form from *yāda‘*, but in view of the importance of know/acknowledge in MT and in LXX (cf. Glenny, *Hosea*, 134), it may be translating loosely. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Ephraim was second singular masculine in v. 1, became third masculine plural in v. 2a (cf. vv. 3a and 4) is here third feminine singular, as the “woman” whoring, and in v. 3b will be third masculine singular. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. “They will… live” was *yēšəbû*; “but it will go back” is *wəšāb*. The “elegant” paronomasia (Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:313) draws attention to the difference between the verbs’ meaning. LXX repeats *yēšəbû*. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Or “mourning” (*HALOT*). One would expect the spelling *’ōnîm* not *’ônîm*, which looks like the plural of *’āwen* “wickedness” (see 4:15 and the comments); aurally, too, people might be invited to hear its resonance. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. That is, it is given for dead people: see Matthew J. Suriano, “Breaking Bread with the Dead,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 385-405. NRSV “for their hunger only” takes *nepeš* to refer to appetite (cf. 4:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. A conditional clause introduced by *hinnēh* (DG 123 remark 2). NRSV “to Assyria” presupposes emending *miššōd* to *’aššûr*. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. “Will collect them” is *təqabbəșām*, “will bury them” *təqabbərām*: whereas the first piel is common, the second is unusual, but the similarity in the words suggests the relationship of the actions (cf. Davies, *Hosea*, 219). [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. See the note on 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. MT associates “Israel will acknowledge” with the previous two cola, but this leaves the expression isolated. D. Qimchi (in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt*, on the passage) rather associates the phrase with what follows, though he refers it to recognizing that the false prophet is a fool; Ibn Ezra (*Hosea*, 87) assumes that it refers to calling the true prophet a fool. Rather the object of the acknowledgment is that his madness is a (quite reasonable) reaction to their waywardness and animosity. While *yāda‘* is occasionally used with an object clause (see Job 32:22) like the English word, I have assumed an asyndesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. The suffix carries over from the parallel colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Cf. the use of *‘im* in 11:12 [12:1]. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Literally, “they have gone deep, they have become corrupt”: see e.g., GK 120gh. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. *Haggib‘āh*, The Gibeah. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. See the note on 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. So e.g., Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:559; but see C. Barth, *TDOT* 2:469-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Davies, *Hosea*, 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Wolff, *Hosea*, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:49. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Mays, *Hosea*,128. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten* 1:58. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. D. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt*, on 9:1; Rashi speaks similarly there on the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:313. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Hubbard, *Hosea*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Tg reads the line as “Like grapes, in the wilderness I found Israel,” whereas MT’s accent connects “Like grapes” with “in the wilderness.” Tg’s understanding also doesn’t match the prosody if the line is 2-2, though it makes for an interesting link with the idea that Yahweh initiated the relationship in the wilderness (cf. Deut. 32:10; Jer. 2:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Intensive plural (cf. GK 124e). [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. The past time reference of the noun clause (cf. LXX, Vg, Tg) is suggested by the parallelism. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. NRSV’s “no birth, no pregnancy, no conception” is a way of making sense of the colon on the basis of MT’s division of verses, but associating v. 11b with v. 12aα makes better sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. *Śûr*, an alternative spelling of *sûr* (which appears elsewhere in Hosea); it comes only here. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. See Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:568-69; *DCH*. *Ṣôr* usually denotes Tyre (Vg, Tg; though the more common spelling is *șōr*); Aq, Th, Sym imply *șûr* “rock”; LXX implies *șayid* “prey”; none fits well. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. “Meadow,” the last word in v. 13a, is *bənāweh*; “its children,” the last word in v. 13b, is *bānāyw*, which underlines the link between the metaphor and the referent and thus underlines the horrifying intervening reference to the slayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Tg interestingly takes this colon to refer to the sacrifice of children. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. In the order of sections in the scroll, mentioning Gilgal makes a link with the ban on “rejoicing” (*gîl*) in 9:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Although *śānē’* is stative (and v. 15a is a noun clause), I follow LXX, Vg in translating the line as having past reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. *Śārȇhem* *sōrərîm*: the paronomasia draws attention to a reality that belies what should be the case. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. The asyndesis with noun preceding verb suggests that the clause depends on the preceding one. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Either *bəlî* (K) or *bal* (Q) is an unusual poetic negative (cf. 7:2; 8:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. It will have no *pərî*: Ephraim will belie its name. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Here, in the order of sections in the scroll, Yahweh picks up with irony the unusual word *maḥmad* from v. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. While in isolation the words might signify “My God will reject them” or “My God must reject them” or “My God rejects them,” v. 17 parallels v. 14 as words of Hosea that follow on Yahweh’s words, so a quasi-prayer is more likely (cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 162). [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Macintosh, *Hosea*, 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Landy, *Hosea*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Cf. Landy, *Hosea*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Cf. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:*3*42. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Dearman, *Hosea*, 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:102; cf. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:51, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Cf. Tg, and BDB’s *bāqaq* II, *HALOT*’s *bāqaq* I. LXX, Vg have words suggesting “flourishing”; cf. BDB’s *bāqaq* I and *HALOT*’s *bāqaq* II (the sole occurrence), but the argument for its existence is thin. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Present tense translation is more likely than past for an opening line that combines a participle and a yiqtol verb. I take this verb as BDB’s *šāwāh* I not as a unique example of *šāwāh* II meaning “produce.” [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Literally, “in accordance with its fruit being manifold”—Infinitive construct; so also v. 1bγ “in accordance with its land being good.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Hardly a use of *lə* as object marker (BDB, cf. TNIV); rather cf. 8:11 for the construction. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. *Lēb*; see 2:14 [16] and the comments; 4:11; 7:6, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. *Ḥālaq* II; LXX, Vg, Tg assume *ḥālaq* I “divide,” which requires repointing the word. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. As at 5:15 (see the note), LXX, Vg understand the verb as from *šāmēm* “be desolate,” and the similarity between the verbs in this context is fortuitous. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Hebrew lacks a word for “promise” and “word” can have this implication. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. *Mišpāṭ:* a convenient example showing that it is an action word more than a word denoting “justice.” [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Honorific or intensive plural (cf. GK 124). [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. *Gûr* III; LXX derives the verb from the more common *gûr* I “sojourn,” which does not fit the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Taking the qatal as stative (see e.g., JM 111h) in light of the yiqtol with present reference in v. 5a. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Taking the yiqtol as past imperfect; giving *yāgîlû* present references doesn’t make sense in the context (thus NRSV emends to *yālîlû* “wail”). [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Rejoicing (*gîl*) is replaced by exile (*gālāh*). [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. The object marker with a suffix appears as if the verb were active (see GK 121b). [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Cf. 5:13; see the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Vg has “shame will take Ephraim”; but for the construction, cf. Ezek. 36:30; Prov. 9:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. NRSV emends *mē‘ășātô* to *mē‘ășābô* “its idol.” [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. MT links “its king” with the first colon, suggesting “Shōmərôn, its king is cut off” (the participle is masculine), an indirect way of saying “Shōmərôn’s king is cut off.” [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Vg “froth” (cf. Aq, Sym) perhaps derives *qeșep* from the more familiar *qāșap* I “be angry.” [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. “The great shrine of ’Āwen” denotes Bȇt ’Āwen, that is Beth-el (cf. Tg); It would be odd to speak of a multiplicity of shrines there, but honorific or intensive plural follows nicely on the one in v. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Even a non-numerical plural can govern a plural verb (e.g. Exod. 33:14-15, 23); cf. the plural suffix on “its altars.” [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Thorn and thistle are treated as one thing governing a singular verb (see the note on 4:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Cornelis van Leeuwen sees vv. 1-8 as a chiasm (“Meaning and Structure of Hosea x 1-8,” *VT* 53 [2003]: 367-378). [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. *Haggib‘āh*, The Gibeah. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Taking the yiqtol verb as referring to the past; NRSV, TNIV understand v. 9b as a question, but there’s no indication in that direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. *‘Alwāh*, an alternative spelling of *‘awlāh* (v. 13). [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. LXX “I have come” implies *bā’tî* for MT *bə’awwātî*. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. Following *’essŏrēm* from *yāsar* (“I should discipline them”) with *’osrām* from *’āsar* (“their being bound”) generates a paronomasia: Yahweh’s disciplining responds to the peoples’ being bound. The effect is further enhanced by the interposition of *’essəpû* “are gathered.” LXX, Vg, parse *’osrām* as another form from *yāsar.* [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Vg implies “for.” [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. So Q, *‘ônōtām*; K has *‘yntm*. “their eyes,” which Tg takes to denote the heifer’s eyes or the “eyes” (i.e., rings) of the yoke (cf. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage; and Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:580-81). [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:53. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. While niphal participles are more commonly gerundive, pual can be used thus (GK 116e). Gerundive is needed here and pual is used because niphal would mean “learnable.” The time reference of v. 11aαβ is established by that of the circumstantial clause in v. 11aγ (cf. Holt, *Prophesying* *the* *Past*, 79-80). [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Literally, “the goodness of its neck.” [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. The parallelism suggests that the yiqtol verb has past reference (Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 166). Literally, “I have made ’Eprayim ride”: the verb involve involves a hypallege or transferred epithet as it’s literally the rider who rides, not the heifer. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Literally, “harrow for himself,” and in the next verse, “sow/till for yourselves.” [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. For “a time” (*wə‘ēt*) LXX, Tg imply *da‘at* “acknowledgment”; the reading follows understanding *nîr* In the previous colon to denote a lamp (from the root *nûr*) and develops Hosea’s emphasis on acknowledgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Vg has “teaches” (Tg’s extensive elaboration also implies it), the more usual meaning of *yōreh* (BDB assumes there is one root *yārāh*; *HALOT* has three). Hosea’s audience might pick up this second possible meaning. With *yōreh ședeq* compare *mōreh hașședeq* or *mōreh ședeq* (conventionally “teacher of righteousness”) in Qumran writings such as the Habakkuk Pesher (e.g., 1QpHab 1:13). [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. Hosea reverts to second-person singular; within v. 9 he had moved from singular to plural. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. For *bədarkəkā*, LXX implies *bərikbəkā* “on your chariotry.” [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Not merely “like”: see the note on 5:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Tg takes Bȇt-’ēl as the verb’s subject, but it’s hard to parallel a place being the subject of such a verb, and hard to see how Beth-el can be distinguished from “you” as the agents of bad dealing. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. More literally “your bad dealing of bad dealing,” a way of expressing the superlative (GK 113i). [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:205. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. See *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (2nd ed. New York: Leavitt, 1835), 33-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. *In Osee prophetam*, on 10:12 (PL 25, column 911a). [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. LXX, Vg “because” suggests that the catastrophe (10:15b) happens because Israel was only a child (see Glenny, *Hosea*, 152-53); Mark S. Gignilliat thinks they may be right (“For Israel Was a Child,” *ZAW* [2009]: 277-80). [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. The *waw*-consecutive picks up from the *kî-*clause (*TTH* 127β). LXX, Vg (see previous note) are able to take the *waw*-consecutive more straightforwardly. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Yahweh called *to* them (not simply called them; see next note), and “from” has the temporal sense, “since” (so Tg): cf. 12:9 [10]; 13:4; 1 Sam 12:2; Ps. 22:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. To judge from the word order, the parallelism, and the use of the preposition *lə*, Yahweh is not saying “I called my son out of Egypt”; likewise “call to” is not a normal way to refer to naming (see *DCH*). LXX has “recalled,” interestingly connecting this call in v. 1 with the return in vv. 10-11 and with its linking of v. 1 to 10:15b—the catastrophe happened because Israel was a child, but he then recalls Israel from Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Vg has “sons,” assimilating to v. 2 and the more common way of describing Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Tg refers “they” to prophets. LXX has “I called” (and in the next colon “from before me”), simplifying the allusiveness by assimilating to v. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. I.e. divine images like the heifer image at Beth-el (cf. Rudolph, *Hosea*, 215)*.* But etymologically they’re simply carved objects; the term implies a slur. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. *Tirgaltî* is conventionally parsed as an instance of the very rare tiphel, an alternative to hiphil (GK 55h), from a denominative verb derived from *regel* “foot”; but see Jeremy M. Hutton and Safwat Marzouk, “The Morphology of the tG Stem in Hebrew and Tirgaltî in Hos 11:3,” *JHS* 12/9 (2012). LXX has “bound his feet together”—apparently to restrain (see Glenny, *Hosea*, 154). Sym has “educate.” [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. MT makes one of its common switches from first person to third person, in speaking of God; LXX, Vg, have “my arm[s],” which is easier after “taking them” and before “I healed” in the next line. The expression “upon” someone’s arms comes only here, except with more literal reference to something such as a rope or a bracelet. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. *’Eprayim* did not acknowledge that *rəpātîm*: Ephraim’s very name hints that it should have done so. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. LXX “ruin” takes the word as *ḥebel* II rather than *ḥebel* I. In 13:13 *ḥeblȇ* denotes labor pains, and the context here might also recall that connotation (Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 1:114). [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Sym assumes he is lifting on; Aq that he is lifting off (cf. Tg). [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. NRSV, TNIV emend *‘ōl* to *‘ûl* “infant.” [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. *Wə’aṭ*,simple *waw* followed by apocopated first-person singular hiphil yiqtol from *nāṭāh*, here uniquely intransitive (inwardly transitive: GK 53d) or involving the ellipse of a noun such as “hand” (cf. JM 55e). [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. LXX lacks *lō’* (the first word in the verse) and implies *lô* at the end of v. 4; it also has “live” for “turn back” and it adds “Ephraim,” in all three ways assimilating its version to 9:3 (as it rendered it): Ephraim will turn back to Egypt and Assyria will be his king. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. There is no indication that the two cola are a question (TNIV, which also has the “not” carrying over into the second colon). [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. *Ḥālāh* from *ḥûl* I. LXX derives from *ḥālāh* “be sick,” thus “make sick”; Sym from *ḥālal* I “pierce”; Vg from *ḥālal* III “begin.” [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. *Baddîm* most commonly denotes carrying poles, but gate bars in Job 17:16 (see BDB). Derived from *bdd* II it can denote “oracle priests” (NRSV), but this rare usage fits the parallelism less well. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. The passive participle of *tālā’*, a byform of *tālāh*, “hang.” [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. The suffix hardly has either of the two regular significances, subjective (“my turning back”) or objective (“turning me back”), which is not the question here. Rather it has the “pregnant” significance (GK 135m), “turning back in respect of me”; cf. 2:6 [8]. “Back to me” (cf. Tg) then fits the context better than “back from me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. Taking *‘al* as a title for Yahweh, comparable to *‘elyôn* (cf. D. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt*, on the passage). In other contexts, *’ēl ‘al* might be a compound comparable to *’ēl ‘elyôn*, but MT’s reading *’el*, the preposition, fits with the verb *qārā’* (see the note on v. 1). Vg, Aq, Theod, Sym imply *‘ōl* “yoke.” [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. LXX refers the colon to God not lifting up Ephraim, but “altogether” is then difficult to make sense of. [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. In other contexts, one would translate “How can I make you,” but the verb form is identical to that in the first colon. Perhaps hearers might first sense the same meaning (cf. Vg), though the more usual one in light of the subsequent parallel colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Anatomically, “my heart,” suggesting the inner self, commonly the mind; see the note on 2:14 [16]. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Literally, “upon me”: see the use of ‘*al* in Ps. 42:5, 7 6, 8]; 142:3 [4]. It is as if something is acting upon the self from outside (see BDB, 753b). [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. *Niḥûmāy*, intensive plural. NRSV, TNIV “compassion” (cf. Aq, Sym, Theod) translates loosely (or presupposes *raḥămāy*). [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. *Šûb* followed by another verb can denote repeating an action (cf. GK 114n, note 2; NRSV, TNIV), “but destroy (*šiḥēt*) is such a strong word… that repetition seems inconceivable” (Davies, *Hosea*, 263). [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. NRSV emends *bə‘îr* to a form of the verb *bā‘ar* “consume.” [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Tg refers these lines to bringing Ephraim back from exile, but the language is not elsewhere used of return from exile, and the references to Egypt and Assyria suggest the context of Ephraim’s present relationship with these powers. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. For *hôšabtîm*, LXX, Tg suggest *hăšîbôtām* “I will take them back,” which fits better with the preposition *‘al*. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. I follow LXX in linking “Judah too” with v. 12a. It is then grammatically ambiguous whether the subject of v. 2b is Judah (as in MT) or Ephraim (as I think). If the Hosea scroll includes glosses noting its application to Judah, then this could be an example. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. For *‘ōd* Vg implies *‘ēd* “witness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. For *rād* from the verb *rûd* Aq implies a second root *rûd*, a byform of *rādāh* “rule,” but this make poor sense in the context. Vg has “he went down” implying *yārad* (cf. Tg). For *‘ōd rād* *‘im* LXX implies a form such as *yədā‘ām* “[God] knew them,” once again developing Hosea’s stress on knowing/acknowledging. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. For the negative or hostile sense of *‘im*, see BDB, 767b. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. “Truthful with the holy ones” (cf. Vg) is an easier translation but hard to fit into the context. Rather *qədôšîm* is plural of majesty (see GK 124h). JPSV thus has “faithful to the Holy One,” but this is also implausible in the context. Rather I take *qədôšîm* to be qualified by a singular participle (see GK 132h). LXX, Tg imply ‘*am* for *‘im*: “the people of the holy ones is faithful.” [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. See the note on 9:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Literally, “cut”: see Gen. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. BDB, 120a. [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. See *DCH*, 289b. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. Cf. Dearman, *Hosea*, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. See Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1964)2:99-100 (cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 199-200). [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 1:115. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. Wolff, *Hosea*, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Macintosh, *Hosea*, 475. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. *Twelve Prophets*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. *In Osee prophetam*, on 10:12 (PL 25, columns 915b-916a). [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. *Minor Prophets* 1:387. Cf. G. K. Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15,” *JETS* 55 (2012): 697-715. [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. Holt, *Prophesying the Past*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. Joy Philip Kakkanattu, *God’s Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2006), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:401-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. Barbara M. Leung Lai, “Hearing God’s Bitter Cries (Hosea 11:1-9),” *HBT* 26 (2004): 24-49 (48-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. Fishbane, *Haftarot*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Andersen/Freedman, *Hosea*, 588. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. Davies, *Hosea*, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. Kakkanattu, *God’s Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea*, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Ben Zvi, *Hosea,* 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. As Wolff says about vv. 1-11 (*Hosea*, 203). [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. As Jeremias says about vv. 1-11 (*Hosea*, 139). [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. Landy, *Hosea*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:402. [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. The link with what follows indicates that the noun clause has past reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. The infinitive can function like a finite verb even following a noun clause (JM 124p). On the verb, see the note on 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. The yiqtol verb has past imperfect significance, referring to the more-than-one occasion when these meetings happened; so also several other yiqtols in this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. LXX derives *’ônô* from *’āwen* “evil, trouble” (cf. v. 11 [12] and the note on v. 8 [9]). [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. Aq, Vg render *’ĕlōhîm* “an angel” (Vg then uses the same word in the next line). [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. LXX repeats “he exerted himself,” but *wayyāśar* is from *śārār* not *śārāh* (cf. Vg, Sym). [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. The preposition *’el* is odd, but it generates a paronomasia between *wayyāśar ’el* and the name *yiśrā’ēl* (Dearman, *Hosea*, 305). [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. Here Aq, Theod have “God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. JPSV makes the envoy the subject, but the continuation from the previous colon, the links with the Genesis story, and the reference to God in the previous line suggest that Jacob is the subject. Ben Zvi (*Hosea*, 249-51) surveys various ways of understanding the third-person references in vv. 4-6 [5-7]. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. Again the continuation from v. 4a [5a] suggests that “he” is Jacob. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. *‘Immānû* is the regular first-person plural form (cf. Tg), though it could possibly be understood as third-person (see William D. Whitt, “The Jacob Traditions in Hosea and their Relation to Genesis,” *ZAW* 103 [1991]: 18-43 [46]; cf. *DCH*; also GK 103i on *min*; and LXX, though it is likely assimilating to the context). [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. *Bə*, thus not “to” (Vg). [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
557. Literally, “and.” [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
558. *Kəna‘an* no longer refers to Canaan but to the people and area northwest of Ephraim, as in Isa. 23:11; Obad. 20. Aq, Tg have “trader[s],” which *kəna‘ănî* can mean, but here Phoenicia is being contrasted with Ephraim. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. Cf. LXX, Vg; Tg has “wealth,” which *yəgîa‘* can mean, but the context and the link with Gen. 31:42 suggest labor itself rather than the result of labor. LXX has third person through v. 8b [9b]. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. *Yimșə’û lî ‘āwōn* “people will not find as far as I’m concerned waywardness” is thus similar to *māșā’tî ’ôn lî* “I have found vigor as far I’m concerned.” Ephraim claims vigor but not waywardness, but the two words are similar (Vg, Aq derive *’ôn* from *’āwen* “evil”: see the note on v. 3 [4]) which raises a question about Ephraim’s claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. Tg “of old” implies *mē‘ād* for *mô‘ēd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. “Urgently to” translates the unusual *‘al* rather than *lə* (Wolff, *Hosea*, 215). [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. NRSV understands *’ădammāh* as the only piel occurrence of *dāmāh* II “destroy” and renders it as future, which seems not to follow as well on v. 10a [11a]. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. Vg has “to bulls.” The pointing of *šəwārîm* invites LXX nicely to read the word as *śārîm* (officials). [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. I infer the time reference of the noun clause from the context (see the comments). [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. Jerome interprets LXX’s *chelōnai* to signify “tortoises” (*In Osee prophetam*, columns 928d-929a; cf. *DTT*, 243), but alas the Greek word is probably as prosaic in meaning as Hosea’s (cf. Glenny, *Hosea*, 167-68; and the version in Albert Piersma and Benjamin G. Wright [eds.], *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* [New York/Oxford: OUP, 2007]). [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
567. Landy, *Hosea*, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
568. See GK110c [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
569. Wolff, *Hosea*, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
570. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on v. 6 [7], as translated in Rosenberg, *Twelve Prophets* 1:75. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
571. Samuel Johnson, as quoted in James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel* *Johnson* (reprinted London: Sands, 1900), 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-571)
572. The expression equivalent to Paddan-aram (Gen. 28), though the Akkadian word doesn’t seem actually to mean “field” (see *HALOT*). [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
573. TNIV has “he cared for him,” but the verb is niphal. [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
574. *Tamrûrîm*, intensive plural. [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
575. LXX, Vg, Tg suggest “his bloodshed comes to rest,” but there are no other instances of *nātaš* intransitive. [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
576. For the absolute use of *nāśā’* to signify lifted up his voice, cf. Isa. 3:7; 42:2, 11 (BDB, 670b). For “was exalted” (TNIV) one would expect a niphal verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
577. For *təbûnām* LXX, Vg, Tgmay suggest *tabnît* “pattern” or may indicate that the unique *tābûn* is a variant form for *tabnît*; on the phrase, see Stuart A. Irvine, “Idols *ktbwnym*,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 509-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
578. Taking *zibḥȇ ’ādām* as subjective genitive, not objective genitive (people who sacrifice a human being); Hosea does not elsewhere refer to human sacrifice, and when the First Testament refers to human sacrifice, this is not an expression it uses. LXX, Vg imply Imperative *zibḥû* “sacrifice a human being.” [↑](#footnote-ref-578)
579. LXX “tended you” may imply *rə‘îtîkā* for MT *yəda‘tîkā*. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
580. TNIV has “proud,” but see BDB, 926b. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. *’Āšûr;* Assyria is *’aššûr* (so LXX, Vg here). [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. Taking *šiḥēt* as a noun, with LXX, Vg (cf. Macintosh, *Hosea*, 535-36). As a verb, *šiḥetkā* would mean “he has destroyed you,” or “one has destroyed you,” i.e., “you’ve been destroyed,” but these understandings are hard in the context.. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. LXX implies *mî* “who?” for MT *kî-bî*. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. *Bə* of identity (*beth essentiae*) (*IBHS* 11.2.5e). [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
585. Taking *’ehî*, which comes only here and in v. 14, as “an interjection of derision” (Macintosh, *Hosea*, 537). LXX, Vg, Tg have “where,” but a regular word for “where” comes later in the line. [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
586. The yiqtols refer to a series of events (cf. *TTH*, p. xvi). [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
587. NRSV takes v. 14a as questions, but there’s no interrogative. LXX, Vg, Tg, translate as future, but the last colon in the verse works against this. The eventual implications of interrogative or past imperfect statement are similar; Ben Zvi (*Hosea*, 274-75) makes the same point about nine possible ways of understanding the line. [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
588. LXX again has “where,” Aq, Vg have “I will be.” [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. Taking the plural (which comes only here) as intensive. [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
590. BDB treats *yaprî’* as a unique alternative spelling for *yaprîh* “be fruitful” (see 9:16 and the comments) but this gives poor sense. More likely it is a denominative from *pere’* (see 8:9 and the comments); cf. *DCH*. But it would be typical of Hosea to make “an allusion to and a parody of” *pārāh* (Macintosh, *Hosea*, 551). [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
591. NRSV “reeds” derives *’aḥîm* from *’āḥû* rather than *’aḥ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
592. Taking the expression “a wind of Yahweh” as intensive. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. *Yēbôš*; “wither” would be *yîbaš*, and since it is withering that will shame the fountain, the audience might also sense that idea (cf. Vg) even before they hear the next colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. LXX, Vg take the verb as *šāmēm* (cf. 5:15; 10:2; and the notes); contrast Theod. [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
595. Fuller, “The Twelve,” 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
596. Theodore, *Twelve Prophets*, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:445. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. Cf. Rudolph, *Hosea*, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
599. Landy, *Hosea*, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
600. Cf. Ibn Ezra, *Hosea*, 123, assuming that v. 2 refers to human sacrifice. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. See Chalmers, *The Struggle of Yahweh and El for Hosea’s Israel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:241. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
603. See e.g., Davies, *Hosea*, 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
604. Wolff, *Hosea*, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
605. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
606. Gale A. Yee, “The Book of Hosea,” *NIB* 7:293. [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
607. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:478-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
608. The form of the imperative with the longer –*ah* ending may convey emphasis and/or suggest the personal involvement of the speaker (see JM 48d; DG 66 remark 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. *’Ad* not *’el*, with a hint of “right to” not merely “toward” (DG 118 remark 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. Singular reference to each person follows on the move from addressing Israel corporately (v. 1) to addressing people in the plural (v. 2a). But the construct before the verb is odd (see Macintosh, *Hosea*, 561) and makes unlikely the translation “all waywardness” (Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:621). Tg omits “all,” perhaps in the conviction that not all sins can be forgiven (Cathcart/Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 60). LXX implies *bal* (“[you will] not)” for *kol*. [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. I.e., “accept”; LXX has plural, assimilating to the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
612. The piel verb *šillēm* expects an object and the two nouns that follow look as if they provide one. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. Literally, “render bulls our lips.” LXX “the fruit of lips” suggests a form of *pərî* for *pārîm*. 1QH IX:28 (*DSS* 1:160) has the phrase *pry šptym* in a different connection, while Psalms of Solomon 15:3 has LXX’s phrase in connection with worship, to which Heb. 13:15 is thus close (cf. Radu Gheorghita, “The Minor Prophets in Hebrews,” in Menken and Moyise [eds.], *Minor Prophets*, 115-33 (132). [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. LXX translates “Our gods.” [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. LXX, Tg have “them,” assimilating to the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. On *šôšannāh* see *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
617. The simple *waw* construction continues the purpose clause construction; the same applies to v. 6aβ. [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
618. Metonymy for the trees in Lebanon (Macintosh, *Hosea*, 570). [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. LXX, Tg imply *yēšəbû* “they will sit” for MT *yōšəbȇ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. NRSV emends to “my.” [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. Hosea uses the idiom referred to in the note on 11:9; my translation here reflects the unusual separation of the second verb from the first. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
622. NRSV “as a garden” presupposes *kaggān* for *dāgān*. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
623. LXX, Vg, Tg imply *yiḥyû* “will live” for *yəḥayyû*. [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
624. “Fragrance” (e.g., NRSV) is a “mistranslation” and “mistake” (Davies, *Hosea*, 307); dictionaries do not register this possible meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
625. NRSV, TNIV take “Ephraim” as vocative, but the “more” is then a problem (NRSV omits it); Yahweh never had anything to do with idols. Rather cf. Tg, which sees Ephraim as the speaker and suggests a plausible implicit interpretation of the verse as an abab conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
626. LXX implies *lô* “for him” for *lî*. [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
627. See 2:15 [17] and the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
628. The verbs are qatal and *wayyiqtol*, which makes present tense translation (NRSV) implausible, though perfect of certainty (TNIV) would correspond to Yahweh’s speaking of something he will have done. LXX derives the second verb from *śārāh* (see the comments on 12:3 [4]), Vg from *’āšar* (cf. BHQ). [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
629. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
630. Cf. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
631. So Rashi, in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
632. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
633. Cf. Dearman, *Hosea*, 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
634. Cf. Macintosh, *Hosea*, 579. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
635. Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, 144, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
636. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 1:494. [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
637. See Hubert Irsigler, “‘An mir findest du reiche Frucht,’” *BZ* 59 (2015): 257-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
638. Cf. Alice A. Keefe, “Hosea’s (In)Fertility God,” *HBT* 30 (2008): 21-41. Perhaps this includes polemic against and appropriation of goddess motifs: see e.g., Judith M. Hadley, “Goddesses, Trees, and the Interpretation of Hosea 14:8(9),” in David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon (eds.), *Leshon Limmudim* (A. A. Macintosh Festschrift; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 136-48, and her references. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. Not “understand” (see the note on 4:14), as in the parallel colon. Simple *waw* plus jussive in a purpose clause (cf. DG 129; 87d); LXX, Vg take the *wə* simply to mean “and,” and the line could then express humbleness or puzzlement; but this leads less well into v. 9b and makes for a lame ending for the scroll. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
640. That is, fall into Hell, Tg understands. [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
641. And in its own right and not merely as one unit within the Twelve: cf. Roman Vielhauer, “Hosea in the Book of the Twelve,” in Albertz and others (eds.), *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, 55-75 (70-71). [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
642. See Gerald Γ. Sheppard, “The Last Words of Hosea,” *Review and Expositor* 90 (1993): 191-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
643. Cf. A. A. Macintosh, “Hosea and the Wisdom Tradition,” in John Day and others (eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel* (J. A. Emerton Festschrift; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 124-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
644. Kåre Berge makes v. 9 [10] the starting point for considering “Divine and Human Wisdom in Hosea,” in Ehud Ben Zvi and others (eds.), *Poets, Prophets, and Texts in Play* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 19-36. See also Ehud Ben Zvi, “Remembering Hosea,” in the same volume, 37-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
645. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
646. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:141. [↑](#footnote-ref-646)