



Research article

THE IMAGERY OF LOVE IN THE BOOK OF HOSEA (HOSEA 3:1-5): A WORD STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The book of Hosea presents sincere devotion and commitment to the Lord. The prophet's message was mostly warnings, but there is a note of hope in the form of sincere repentance and asking for God's forgiveness, followed by a renewed commitment to the Lord. The people of Israel may find forgiveness and restoration to God's favour and blessings. The prophet Hosea was instructed by God to symbolically prophesy to the Israelites about their disobedience to His call, and they would be punished if they did not return to the Lord their God. The prophecy is aptly represented in the marriage of Hosea to an adulterous woman, Gomer. God, represented by Hosea, had a covenant with Israel, but the latter turned him over to other gods. God foretold the punishment that would befall Israel, as well as the mercy that would befall them if they repented and returned to him through Hosea. The prophet's message speaks of God's steadfast love, portrayed through the suffering husband of an unfaithful wife. Hosea's message is also considered a warning to them, and they will turn their backs on God's love. Through the symbolic presentation of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, God's love for the idolatrous nation of Israel is displayed in a rich metaphor. This essay explains how the message of Hosea is relevant in the present context.



Introduction

The dominant theme of the book of Hosea is the infinite love and patient long-suffering of God. God's care for His people is presented in terms of a faithful husband's kind affection for an erring wife, as acted out in the tragic personal narratives of Hosea 1 to 3. In many ways, the book of Hosea is the most beautiful in the Old Testament. It is a love story – the story of unfaithfulness and a broken marriage resulting in pains of separation. Yet, it is also the story of the perseverance of God in fulfilling His promise of redemptive action.

The book of Hosea is considered to be the first of the minor prophetic books, otherwise known as “the book of the twelve.” In an apocryphal book, “The Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach,” we find a reference to the twelve Minor Prophets.

May the bones of the twelve prophets
Receive from where they lie,
For they comforted the people of Jacob and
Delivered them with confident hope.¹ (Sirach. 49:10)

This is an implicit reference that the message of hope and joy is the theme of the minor prophetic books. The book of Hosea uniquely portrays the impressive imagery of God's love which does not let go of God's people. In the book of Hosea, the covenant is important (6:7, 8:1). The task of Hosea was simply to warn the people that Yahweh intended to enforce the terms of His covenant. The people of Israel continually broke the covenant, and Yahweh was, therefore, determined to punish the people by unleashing punishments outlined in the Law. But he also had a plan of blessing to his chosen nation. Accordingly, the book of Hosea, time and again, contains reminders to the faithful that God would one day bring prosperity to Israel. In Hosea 3 the paradigm of marriage is employed to portray a conflict of separation, judgment and re-established partnership within the framework of the special commitment of Yahweh to Israel. The love has the potential to renew Israel and to bring it to a reunion with Yahweh that indicates restoration in the text.

1. Context

In 3:1-5, Hosea speaks directly to Gomer (v.3) for the only time in the book (in 2: 2-3 he speaks to her through the children). These verses show how Yahweh's love works through a humanly

¹ L. James, *Hosea – Micah, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1988, 1.



pessimistic situation – “to love again the prostitute” (v. 1). This action shows the vicarious love of God which demands a deliberate return and obedience to him. “In chapter 1, the emphasis falls more on the children of the marriage, whereas in chapter 3 it falls upon the nature of the marriage itself.”

According to Ben Zvi, chapter 3 is considered to be more didactic; the prophetic reading is devoted to the explanation of the meaning of the text reported as symbolic acts, not to the acts themselves.² It is clear in the passage that:

the meaning of these acts provides hope for the future of the intended and primary readerships and supplies them with an explanation for the fall of the monarchies’ politics and their present situation.

This helps to go ahead with further explanation of understanding the community or communities of the readers and to identify the importance of the socio-political-religious centre in post-monarchic Israel.

Hosea 3 is considered to be a human monologue, but it is presented as being as authoritative as the preceding divine monologue.³ The text explains that the human monologue is itself embedded in Yahweh’s word (that is, the book of Hosea; Hos. 1:1) and in turn it explicitly embeds Yahweh’s words as authoritatively reported by the speaker in the book Hos. 3:1. Now there is a clear distinction between the human monologue and divine monologue.

This chapter addresses the relationship between Yahweh and his people through the marital metaphor. It helps to identify the husband/Yahweh but also the actual situation of the woman, Israel. Verse 3 helps us how to understand the reported speech of the man. The text leads to some points in a different direction:

1. the multiple links between Vv. 3 and 4, and with 5 as well
2. the dependent character of the clause that begins in v. 4 and
3. the absolute lack of any textually inscribed marker pointing to the end of his address to her in v. 3.

Questions that can be raised in this context are how does the speaker characterize the woman, and how does a historical readership accept the speaker as an author. Since the weight of the

² Ehud Ben Zvi, *Hosea FOTL*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005, 78.

³ Abma, R. *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)*, 1999, 120-121.



reading is on how does the man's address to her by the end of the v. 5. The text clearly explains that she is certainly a woman to whom it is explained and who will be able to understand that her situation parallels that of Israel, and above all one who has the hope for a Davidic monarch, a full return to Yahweh and a full restoration in the future. This explains that she is surely not imagined as a common, adulterous woman: she is imagined as Israel.

1.2. The Prophet

Although Hosea is known to have had his home in Israel, almost nothing is known about his family. The search for the personal details of the prophet within the book is disappointing. Hosea offers very little personal information about himself. And the little he mentions is intrinsically connected to the message Yahweh intended.

In general, scholars tend to raise more questions about Hosea's biography (chapters 1 and 3) than about the rest of the book. The attempt to reconstruct Hosea's biography based entirely on such scanty information is bound to be in vain, if not a misrepresentation. The discussions about the identity and profession of the wives (or wife) in chapters 1 and 3 have invited the most attention.

The questions that need to be resolved are: Are the two mentions of a woman the same? Was Gomer a prostitute? If yes, then why and when did Hosea marry her? On the contrary, if she was not a prostitute, did she become unfaithful later? Were any of the children illegitimate? Further, did Hosea divorce Gomer through court proceedings? Many questions such as these can be raised from the book of Hosea, but the above-mentioned questions are important and cannot be side-stepped.

Scholars think that these questions are irrelevant, perhaps peripheral. They would rather appreciate the message outlined in the book. Though the curiosity to understand the early chapters in all their details is not satisfied, the detail in its entirety serves the interest of the divine message of wrath and redemption.

1.3. Historical Background

We know nothing of Hosea, son of Beeri, except what we can glean from the collection of his prophetic speeches. It is an extremely difficult task to reconstruct his personality and make inferences from the details contained in the book. However, some observations do help us in the



process. For example, he spoke his oracle in the last days of the Northern Kingdom. His prophetic activity extended from the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II to the disappearance of Israel from the political scene. All this is reflected in his oracles and, therefore, help us arrive at a probable date of their origin (ca. 750–732).

Although Hosea was of Israel and not Judah, the evil kings like Jeroboam and other names are ignored in the superscription dating the prophet (1:1). However, Jeroboam's death corresponded closely with the accession of King Tiglath-pileser III in Assyria (745–727). The renewed pressure that the Monarch applied to the states of Syria and Palestine revealed the hollowness of Israel's power. The political life of the nation declined into a succession of palace revolutions, assassinations, and dynastic changes. In the twenty years between Jeroboam's death and the end of the kingdom, as many as six kings ruled in Israel.

The historical context of Hosea was during the prosperity period of Jeroboam II. This comes out richly and clearly from the earliest period of Hosea's ministry. However, we need to balance this picture with the portrayal in the book of Amos which is largely a picture of corruption and religious decay. We are informed in the opening verse that Hosea ministered in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, and king of Israel. This would make him a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos, and Micah.

It was a time of spiritual decay within the nation and the people. This helps us to understand the ideas in the book of Hosea. The political context in which the prophet ministered was one of political distrust. Pekah was murdered by Hoshea who for a time paid tribute to Shalmaneser V. Later, Hoshea withheld the tribute to Assyria and sought help from the Egyptians. The situation took a sudden turn, Hoshea was arrested and the city of Samaria was captured. The resultant social and political chaos eventually brought about a collapse of the moral structure of the society.

Along with the corrupt political situation, Hosea pictures in the book that the people followed the Canaanite fertility cult associated with the god Baal. The people of Israel acknowledged Yahweh with Baal and attributed Yahweh's good gifts of land and fertility to Baal. The worship of Baal increasingly attracted the people of Israel, and they started to worship Baal. Hosea's central target is to attack the worship of Baal. During this time, the priests also failed in their duties. They were assigned to instruct the people. But the priests themselves were greedy and corrupt. The book of Hosea captures the situation of total deviation from faithfulness to Yahweh. This helps us to understand the social, historical, religious, and political background of Hosea.



2. Selection of a Text for a Critical Study

The basic theme of the book of Hosea is ‘steadfast love.’ This plays an important role in the life and message of Hosea to the people of Israel in 3:1–5. In Hosea 3:1–5, the prophet represents the person of God and talks about love as the relationship between a husband and his wife. The people of Israel belong to God and they should seek the Lord pictured as Israel’s husband.

2.1. Translation: Hosea 3: 1 – 5

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי עוֹד לְךָ אֶהְיֶה-אִשָּׁה אֲהַבְתָּ
רְעוּמָנָאֶפֶת כִּאֲהַבְתָּ יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהֵם
פְּנִים-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְאֲהִבֵּי אִשִּׁשֵׁי עֲנָבִים: 1 Then Yahweh said to once again, ‘Go again,⁴
love⁵ a woman⁶ who is loved⁷ by a friend,⁸ and
committing adultery,⁹ as Yahweh loves¹⁰ the sons of
Israel,¹¹ although they turn to other gods and love
cakes of raisins.¹²

⁴ The MT translates it as, “and Yahweh said to me, Go again.”

⁵ Other English versions translate it as “give your love to.” The Hebrew word אָהַב has several meanings. In this context the word “love” means for Hosea to use words and acts of love to affirm his marriage with Gomer. Cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 295.

⁶ The MT translates it as “a woman.” The woman probably refers to Gomer. English translations denote that the referent in this case is “your wife.” A similar view is proposed by Garrett in his commentary; cf. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, B and H Publishing Group, 1997, 121.

⁷ The MT pronounces אֲהַבְתָּ as a combining form of the qal, passive participle and carries out רַע as a genitive of effect: “who is loved by רַע.” But LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac versions express אֲהַבְתָּ as an absolute form of the qal, active participle and take רַע as the accusative direct object: “who loves רַע.” English versions prefer to follow the MT. The MT has it in a passive participle form, whereas the Greek text translates it as “loving evil” which is different from the MT translation. The author adopts the active participle interpretation for this research. (Mays, *Hosea*, 54).

⁸ The literal meaning of the term רַע is “companion.” The noun רַע has different meanings in different contexts. רַע is translated as “friend,” “companion,” “another lover,” “lover; paramour,” and “neighbour.” Biblical scholars adopt different meanings but the word רַע here does not refer to another man, instead it clearly indicates Hosea himself, as Gomer’s husband.

⁹ The MT translates it as “committing adultery,” but the literal meaning of the word is “love a woman who is loved of a lover and is an adulteress.”

¹⁰ MT has “Yahweh loves” but it is translated as “like the love of the Lord.” It is because the genitive after the construct functions as a subjective genitive.

¹¹ The MT translates it as “sons of Israel,” but English versions translate it as “children of Israel” and “people of Israel.”

¹² MT has “they are lovers of cakes of raisins.” Some English versions render it as love cakes of raisins literally.



- 2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and half a homer of barley.¹³ ואכרה לי בחמשה עשר כסף וחמר שערים ולתךשערים:
- 3 Then I said to her, “you shall wait for me many days. You shall not commit adultery,¹⁴ nor shall have a man;¹⁵ so I will be also toward you.” וואמר אליה ימים רבים תשבי לי לא תזני ולא תהיי לאיש וגם־אני אליך:
- 4 for the children of Israel¹⁶ will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice, and without an image, and without ephod and teraphim.¹⁷ כי ימים רבים ישבו בני ישראל אין מלך ואין־שר ואין זבח ואין מצבה ואין אפוד ותרפים:
- 5 Then the sons of Israel shall return and shall seek the Lord their God and David their king, and then they shall seek Lord their God and then they will tremble at the Lord and His goodness in the last days.¹⁸ 5 אחר ישבו בני ישראל ובקשו את־יהוה אלהיהם ואת־דוד מלכם ופחדו אל־יהוה ואל־טובו באחרית הימים:

2.3. Text analysis of Hosea 3:1-5

The form of Hosea 3:1–5 is close to that of 1:2–9. Several factors¹⁹ within the text itself have raised doubts about considering this passage as an original unit.

Verse 5 seems to treat the theme which is foreign to the previous verses and therefore, is connected loosely with other verses.

¹³ MT has “*lethech*,” a dry measure. But the LXX translates it as “a homer of barley and a measure of wine.” The LXX meaning of “*lethech*” is adopted by some English versions. *Lethech* is a measure for dry things about “an homer of barley.” The measures are: an homer was about 5 bushels (180 litres) and a *lethech* about 2.5 bushels (90 liters). Cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 300.

¹⁴ The MT indicates that “she” is the topic of “and you will not be for.”

¹⁵ The rendering here is that she will not have a husband. The reference is to a man, as the same word used in Deut, 21:3 makes clear.

¹⁶ The text talks about “sons of Israel,” but English versions indicate “children of Israel.” Most of the translations prefer to use “children of Israel.”

¹⁷ The MT *תרפים* means a standing stone or statue. The word *תרפים* also means “proclaimer,” or ‘interpreter.’ In some cases *תרפים* is translated as “household idols.”

¹⁸ The MT reads, “in the last days.” But other translations and English versions suggest “in the end of the days.” The confusion is because the word *אחר* closes in a simple way. It creates confusion for the reader and the sentence is not clear.

¹⁹ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 57-63.



Verses 4-5 are sharply set off from Vv. 1-3. Chapter 3: 1-3 is concerned exclusively with Yahweh's action as reflected in the actions of the prophets, and Vv. 4-5 relate exclusively to Israel's future.²⁰

However, v. 4 is tied to V 3 for the three accented words (כי ימים רבים) and the beginning of v. 4 echoes the vocabulary of v. 3. This combination of an account with its interpretation belongs to a special genre of accounts of the prophet's symbolic action. The basic literary genre is called the *memorable*.²¹ A memorable 'endeavours to set apart something unique from a common occurrence, which as a whole signifies the meaning of this occurrence.'²²

Verse 1 presents a first-person account by the prophet, and this usage of a first-person account by the prophet seems intentional. It is a reference to the real event.²³ The first person suggests that it must have come from Hosea himself rather than from his disciples. Several doubts have been raised regarding the reality of the prophet's experience.²⁴ It has been supposed to have been a vision²⁵ or an allegory.²⁶ But certain details rule out these possibilities.

The passage belongs, as already mentioned, to the genre of the memorable symbolic action – in a memorable, a historical event is summarised to one central point. When regarded as a part of history, a concern for the bare facts suppresses any underlying intention to narrate the story. Therefore, the passage is presented simply without many autobiographical details.²⁷ Even the precise details, given in Vv. 2 and 3 do not serve to reconstruct Hosea's life; they only help in 'the understanding of a remarkable occurrence into which the individual events merge.' This

²⁰ Macintosh, A. A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea. International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997, 111.

²¹ Quoted in Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermenia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 63. Cf. Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987.

²² Andre Jolles, *Einfache Formen*, Leipzig, 1930; Darmstadt, 1969 unrevised of the fourth edition quoted in Wolff: 1974, 57.

²³ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermenia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 59. Cf. Lewis, 1325

²⁴ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermenia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 59.

²⁵ Calvin, Cr LXX, quoted in Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermenia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 57.

²⁶ P. Humbert, Paris, 1918, H. Gressmann, Gottingen, 1921, H. G. May, *JBL*, 1936.

²⁷ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, Chicago: IL: Moody Press, 1986, 91; H. H. Rowley, *The Marriage of Hosea*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1956, 205-208.



merger takes place in the memorabile – ‘in which the concrete is effected throughout.’²⁸ Wolff concludes that the passage “when viewed in terms of a biographical question, remains an annoying fragment” and as an allegory “it seems overloaded with incomprehensible facts.” Douglas is also in agreement that “the purpose of the passage is not to give a chronology of Hosea’s personal life.”²⁹

The subject of this memorabile is to be taken as a prophet’s symbolic action. The real marriage illustrates the present situation prevailing in the metaphorical marriage between Yahweh and Israel. It represents the prophesied future event as a present event.³⁰ The three main elements³¹ are God’s command (v. 1), report of its execution (v. 2f), and its interpretation (v. 4). The essential part is its completion.

There have been questions about the unity of the chapter because its peculiar style has mostly gone unnoticed. Objections³² such as the following have been raised:

- The three elements are not always similar concerning the content.
- The interpretation (v. 4f) goes much beyond the previous symbolic action.
- The stylistic tool of ‘continuation’ is used instead of the ‘repetitive style.’

At first, only love is commanded (v. 1), but the prophet’s obedience is described without repeating the keyword. The symbolic action ultimately presents love, as harshness (v. 3) while the proclamation goes on to describe love’s healing results (v. 5).

The prophetic account may appear fragmented at certain points (for example, the indefinite command to *love a woman* v. 1 does not prepare for the suffix ‘*I bought her myself*’ v. 2.), the

²⁸ Andre Jolles, ‘*Einfache Formen*,’ Leipzig, 1930, 211; Darmstadt, 1969 reprint of the unrevised fourth edition quoted in Wolff, H.W., *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1974, 58.

²⁹ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 64.

³⁰ Cf. Zimmerli, Walther, *A Commentary on the book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1979, 103f.

³¹ Fohrer, Handlungen, 5 quoted in Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 58. Cf. Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 63.

³² Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 57f.



style is intended 'to witness.'³³ This 'runs contrary to the general rules of interpreting an account of symbolic action.'³⁴ However, this intention is brought into the command.

The literary form of this section is particularly poetic,³⁵ but Wolff suggests that the prophet writes elevated prose.³⁶ Fohrer does not find a regular rhythm and a prosodic arrangement,³⁷ while Harper finds an artistic element both in form and thought.³⁸

The text does not point to the period of Hosea's ministry. The circumstances, which might aid our interpretation, are also not given. Therefore, we are required to find the relationship of chapter 3 to its context.³⁹ In chapter 3, there is 'no evidence of prosperity forthcoming.'⁴⁰ But there is an implication that the North is about to or has already fallen in Vv. 4-5. A date for the marriage, at least as late as the reign of Hoshea (732-722 BC) and possibly as late as 722 when the North fell to 'Assyria' described in this chapter, is mentioned.

The passage can be divided into two parts. Verses 1-3 talk about Yahweh's actions as reflected in the light of the prophet's situation and vv. 4-5 talk about Israel's future destiny. The structure of the passage can be represented as

V. 1 - a command to express love to a harlot - an interpretation of the command: Love for Israel, which is equally wayward, is revealed.

V. 2 - action through which Hosea acquires the woman.

V. 3 - is a command to Hosea to chasten his wife (in future).

V. 4 - is again an action through which Israel is chastened in future.

V. 5 - is again an interpretation of that chastening that should lead to obedience.

³³ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 64.

³⁴ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 58.

³⁵ Harper, William Rainey. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905, 215.

³⁶ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 58.

³⁷ Fohrer, Georg *History of Israelite Religion*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1952, 106.

³⁸ 1. The distribution of the contents into three strophes, 2. The regularity of the rhythm 3. The parallelism. 4. The use of poetic phrases such as *raya habeth*, 5. The use of rare and poetical words 6. The use of first person throughout, 7. The assonance prevailing in the closing lines of each strophe in lines 5 and 6 of strophe 1, of in lines 4-6 of strophe 2, and of *aeien* in lines 3-5 of strophe 3 (Harper, William Rainey. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905, 215).

³⁹ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 59.

⁴⁰ Macintosh, A. A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea. International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997, 111.



3. Text-Critical, Grammatical and Syntactical Notes on Hosea 3:1–5

Hosea 3:1 begins with Yahweh as the speaker. This verse commences with two *qal*, imperatives. He is commanding Hosea to love (BDB 12, KB 17) this verb is used four times in this one verse) again an unfaithful and divorced marriage partner. The second use of “love” is a *qal*, passive, participle construct, which denotes the husband’s (i.e., Hosea as an analogy of Yahweh) ongoing love. There has been much discussion about the identity of this woman. Some believe it is impossible that this refers to Gomer and, therefore, must be another cultic prostitute or an unfaithful, divorced wife.⁴¹ However, here, the symbolism of God’s faithful love for Israel demands that this is Gomer, and the term “again” (BDB 728) lends itself toward this interpretation.⁴² The term “again” (BDB 728) could refer to the Lord speaking to Hosea a second time about Gomer, but the MT marks denote that it was part of Yahweh’s words to Hosea.⁴³ Although the MT’s additions beyond the consonantal text are not inspired, they represent the ancient Jewish tradition about punctuation and pronunciation. The legal divorce in 2:2 seems to have become a reality. Gomer continued to be unfaithful until she was sold as a slave.

The word עוֹד “said again” is adopted by the scholar Rowley⁴⁴ (other scholars also endorse this view such as Robinson, Pfeiffer).⁴⁵ The word עוֹד is an adverb meant to limit “go.” It would follow an imperative. In the Old Testament, there are few cases where the word עוֹד directs an imperative (Cf. Zech. 1.17, 11.15). But these two references are similar to Hosea 3:1, and the adverb there, too, may restrain the preceding “said” and not the following “take,” but W. R. Smith prefers to adopt the expression “love again,”⁴⁶ whereas the preference of MT has been “loved by a paramour.”⁴⁷ The LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate versions have *qal* which is active, participle, feminine, singular, and reads ‘one who is loving’ a friend.⁴⁸ Here the author would

⁴¹ Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, 164; Anderson, G. W. “Hosea and Yahweh: God’s Love Story.” Review and Expositor 72 (Fall 1975): 426-27; Waterman, “Marriage,” 194-95.

⁴² Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, 294.

⁴³ Harper, William Rainey. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 216; Eiselen, *op. cit.*, 53; Cohen, *op. cit.*, 12. Cf. Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, Wellhausen, Nowack, Gunkel, Marti, G. A. Smith, and Cheyne.

⁴⁴ Rowley, H. H., “The Marriage of Hosea,” *BJRL* 39, 200-233, 1956, 57.

⁴⁵ Robinson, H. Wheeler. *Two Hebrew Prophets: Studies in Hosea and Ezekiel*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1948, 17.

⁴⁶ W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel and their Place in History*, New York, AMS Press, 1982, 412.

⁴⁷ Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, 293.

⁴⁸ LXX and Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 70.



prefer the scholar's view "love again" since it portrays God's love for the people of Israel. The word love again talks about God's love despite Israel's rejection and disobedience.⁴⁹ Further, critical emendations of v. 1b read 'I Yahweh love' the children of Israel, thus denoting the personal involvement of Yahweh and his love.

The repeated use of אהב in v. 1 emphasizes the importance of love in the "marital relationship" between Yahweh and Israel. It also serves as motivation for Yahweh's dealings with Israel. Yahweh, Himself pleaded with them not to yield to this temptation (cf. Lev. 19:4; 20:6). Here it means that God is the husband and Israel is His wife. Here the imagery of love in the metaphor of the relationship between husband and wife representing Yahweh's love towards Israel can be clearly understood. Even though God has depicted his love to the people of Israel, they have turned away from God and sought after other gods.⁵⁰ This metaphor has been taken as an example to explain the state of affairs between God and his people.⁵¹ This is the fourth use of the verb love (Qal, perfect), describing how the Israelites embraced Baal worship.⁵² Where evil entered into אהב and creates a breakdown in the relationship between Yahweh and his people. The repetition of אהב denotes a technical covenantal term for a relationship of loyalty. The repetition of various derivatives of the root word אהב is imagery for Israel. Hosea loves a woman – the woman loves another man is parallel to Yahweh loves Israel – Israel loves raisin cakes.⁵³ Here it is used as a pun.

According to Macintosh רע indicates a lover or paramour.⁵⁴ Dearman translates by "a paramour." Stuart, "a woman who loves evil" comments that the text is an active participle. Harper has translated it as "husband." The word "husband" is cited in Jeremiah 3.20 in support of this verse.⁵⁵ LXX reads as "evil." This interpretation is also accepted by Scott.⁵⁶ The word רע can be understood as "other gods." Here it means that God is the husband and Israel as his wife. It is because of God's deep love and cares that words such as husband and wife are used for

⁴⁹ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 64.

⁵⁰ Mays, James Luther., *Hosea: A Commentary*, OTL, Philadelphia, PA, Westminster, 1969, 55.

⁵¹ Macintosh, A. A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*. *International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997, 97.

⁵² Rudolph's observation that Hosea here reflects the understanding of his contemporaries is important within the context of adulterous idolatry. He compares this love with the Canaanite cult practices.

⁵³ Dearman, J.A., *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010, 135.

⁵⁴ Macintosh, A.A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, Edinburgh, T and T Clark, 1997, 94.

⁵⁵ Macintosh, *Hosea*, 94, however, disputes that רע means "husband."

⁵⁶ Scott, *The Message of Hosea*, London, SPCK, 1921, 127.



better understanding.⁵⁷ Even though God has shown his love to the people of Israel, they have turned away from him and sought after other gods. The happenings between Hosea and his wife are very important for us to understand. This metaphor has been taken as an example to explain the state of affairs between God and his people.⁵⁸ The Lord loves the people of Israel even though they have turned to other gods and love cakes of raisins.” ‘*Raisin cakes*’ are employed in the cult, and references to this can be seen in Isa. 16.7, 1Chr. 16.3.⁵⁹ Cakes of raisins were delicacies distributed at times of celebration (2 Sam. 6:19).⁶⁰

Hosea 3:2 the verb ואכרה “bought” (BDB, 500 II, KB 497, qal, imperfect) means “to purchase by trade or money” (cf. Deut. 2:6).⁶¹ However, the LXX, following an Arabic cognate, has “hired.” The word נכר means “purchase in remarriage.” This word is probably derived from a Hebrew verb meaning “to buy,” but its morphology is unusual. This is favoured by Gordon,⁶² but Gray⁶³ supports his theory as “purchased in remarriage.” If the verb in 3:2 means “hire,”⁶⁴ it may indicate the services of a prostitute cf. Isaiah 57:8, where כרה should be read as כרת verse 2 talks about purchasing her in remarriage, it is because the people of Israel went after other gods and it is because of the steadfast love he bought them back again, that is inferred as ‘purchased in remarriage.’⁶⁵ The marriage metaphor is used in the text to understand how much God loves them and Israel is God’s one and only partner.⁶⁶ Here Hosea reports, “So I bought her...in verse 2.”⁶⁷ Several questions can be raised: Was she being sold as a slave? As a prostitute? Who was selling her? But we do not find any answers to these questions; the text is silent about it. But the

⁵⁷ Brown, Sydney Lawrence. *The Book of Hosea: An Introduction and Notes*. Westminster Commentaries. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1932, 27; Robert B. Chisholm, “Hosea,” *In The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* by Dallas Seminary Faculty: Old Testament, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985, 1387.

⁵⁸ David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989, 54; J. H. Johansen, “The Prophet Hosea: His Marriage and Message,” *JETS* 14 (1971): 182-83; James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969, 56.

⁵⁹ Dearman, J.A., *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing co, 2010, 135.

⁶⁰ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 65.

⁶¹ Garrett, Duane A. *Hosea, Joel*. New American Commentary. N.p.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997, 101; Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, translated by Gary Stansell, Hermeneia, Philadelphia: PA, Fortress Press, 1974, 61.

⁶² Gordon H. C, *Ugaritic Manual: Grammar*, Volume 1, Pontificum Institutum, Biblicum, 1955, 296.

⁶³ John Gray, *The Krt Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1955, 37.

⁶⁴ H. S. Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuche. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Klarung des Problems der aittestamentlichen Textkritik* (Uppsala: Almqvist und Wiksells, 1935), 23, cited by Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 299.

⁶⁵ Wolff, *Hosea, Biblical Commentary*, Fortress Press, 1969, 70. Cf. Gill, John. *Gill’s Commentary*. 6 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980, 585.

⁶⁶ G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (NCBC), Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992, 105-109.

⁶⁷ McComiskey T, “Hosea,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary*, 3 vols., edited by Thomas Edward McComiskey, Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1992.



price is mentioned, which is fifteen shekels of silver and some barley. A homer and a half cost about 15 shekels of silver.⁶⁸ The fifteen shekels can be equal to the worth of a slave.⁶⁹ As for the fifteen shekels of silver, the MT reads literally “fifteen of silver.” Since shekel was the standard weight, the word itself could be omitted and the amount readily understood.⁷⁰ Hosea bought back his wife. He paid half in silver and half in produce.

Who did he pay it to? The text is so brief that certainty to whom it was paid is not possible: 1. to one special lover, 2. to her owner, 3. to her as a second bridal gift. According to the scholars the phrase describing her lover refers to Hosea, then 3 points fit the context best, but there is no other example of a second bridal gift in history or the Bible. Hosea was told to go and love Gomer who had been loved (sexually) by others. This woman was not worth much to anyone, as she was a whore who had many sexual lovers, could not stay faithful, and was sold to the highest bidder. The woman whom Hosea is told to love had been loved sexually by others while she was married (an adulteress), as clearly pointed out in Hosea 3:1.⁷¹

Yee notes that scholars speculate why Hosea must ‘buy.’ The buying of the harlot (whore), that had many lovers while she was married and has been unfaithful to her husband,⁷² illustrates that God will purchase back Israel and her children.⁷³ At the time when God will buy and get back spiritual Israel (who does the woman that is being bought in Hosea 3:1–5). “Fifteen shekels,” the life of a slave valued at 30 shekels of silver (cf. Exod. 21:32), thus indicating the relative value of an adulterous wife.

The verse explains that the prophet Hosea obeyed the Lord and sought his wife. He paid fifteen shekels of silver and a homer⁷⁴ and a half of barley⁷⁵ since she had become the property

⁶⁸ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 61.

⁶⁹ It was forbidden in Deut. 24:1-4 for a woman to return to her first husband if she had married again even though her second husband had died. It may be that this law was not enforced at this time. Pusey says that it is exceptional and provides for her support until she is restored to wifehood. Some interpret this purchase to prevent any conflict with her paramour.

⁷⁰ Garrett, Duane A. *Hosea, Joel. New American Commentary*. N.p.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997, 101; Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 61; McComiskey, Thomas. “Hosea.” *In The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary*. 3 vols. Ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, 1:1-237. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992, 51. Generally, the explanation is that Hosea purchased Gomer as a slave.

⁷¹ Gordis, Robert, *Poets, Prophets, and Sages*, 232.

⁷² Yee, “*She is not my wife and I am not her husband*,” *New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2001, 231.

⁷³ Sweeney, Marvin A. *The Twelve Prophets*. 2 vols. Berit Olam. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000, 38-39.

⁷⁴ A homer is equal to ten ephahs or over eleven bushels.



of someone else. In Exodus 21:31, it says that fifteen shekels of silver was half the price of a dead slave and barely was cattle food. A homer and a half cost about fifteen shekels of silver.⁷⁶ As for the fifteen shekels of silver, the MT reads literally “fifteen of silver.” The word “homer” (BDB 330) means “a donkey load.” This equals about five bushels. Therefore, the purchase price includes about 7.5 bushels.

Hosea 3:3 The first phrase **לִי תִשָּׁב** can be translated as “wait for me.” Even the Vulgate prefers the same meaning for this phrase. In the Old Testament, **יָשָׁב לִי** never means “sit in the house.” The Old Testament hardly defends translating the phrase **יָשָׁב [בֵּית]** means “sit in the house.” The Old Testament hardly defends translating the phrase **יָשָׁב לִי** “dwell in my house” to “dwell with” which is expressed by the prepositions **אֶת**, **בְּ**, and **עִיִּם**. The Hebrew word **יָשָׁב** with **לִי** occurs in Jeremiah 3:2; et al. MT proposes “shall remain at home.” **לִי תִשָּׁב** in Genesis 22:5 is literally “sit yourselves down here,” that is waiting here.⁷⁷ Even if the text were correct, the usage is unlike that in Hosea 3:3, for the pronoun in Job 15:28 refers not to a person, but a house. The usage is much closer to the common “sit upon” **לִישָׁב**. LXX, Jerusalem Bible, Harper, and Robinson prefer to use “sit still for me” in Hosea 3:3 **לִי תִשָּׁב**.⁷⁸ Macintosh and Stuart translate by “you shall remain mine,” and Dearman, “like mine.”⁷⁹ But KJV and ASV propose “abide for me.” This is in essence what the line means, but not, particularly what it says. But MT says, “you shall remain at home as mine.” Dearman comments there was a time of purification for the adulteress.⁸⁰ It is analogous to the period of exile for the people of God. The important point in the book is the hope for the restoration of Israel that is the extent of the story of Hosea’s marriage.

Verse 3 describes the relationship between God and his people Israel, described as a sign of a more permanent staying with him; she now belongs to him, she is now under his authority, and she can no longer have any other men.⁸¹ The MT emendations of **לֹא אֲבִיא אֲנִי** qal, imperfect,

⁷⁵ The *letheke* is used only here. According to tradition a *letheke* is a half-homer of grain. So Hosea paid for Gomer part in silver and part in grain. The reason for such payment is unknown. He may not have had the whole amount available in silver. Calvin suggests that the money was a purchase price for her and that the grain was provision for Gomer.

⁷⁶ Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 61

⁷⁷ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 64.

⁷⁸ Ward, James M. *Hosea: A Theological Commentary*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 50.

⁷⁹ Macintosh, A. A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea. International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997, 132.

⁸⁰ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 136.

⁸¹ Keil, Carl Friedrich, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 2 Vols, Translated by James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949, 69-70.



first common singular, implies the personal nature of this relationship. The verse explains the essence of love, the love that can be got through obedience and loving care, as Yahweh did for the people of Israel.⁸² It is because of this that love has been given much importance.

Hosea informs her she will now be staying under his roof, but she will not be cohabiting with him, and she will not be permitted to be with any man. The symbolism here is the sacking of Israel. The marriage of Hosea represents the Lord's present relationship with Israel, they are still wedded, but the wife is unfaithful. In this concubinage, Hosea represents the Lord's imminent change in relationship with Israel, as He is about to bring Assyria up to sack her cut her off from her present idolatry, and end Israel's existence as a nation. She has cheated on her husband (the Lord), and so she will be sold off to another (the Lord turns her over to Assyria) and left without any support (Israel ceases to exist as a nation). But, if the Lord is turning Israel over to Assyria, shouldn't Hosea represent Assyria then and not the Lord? Not really. As verse 5 indicates, the Lord never completely cuts Israel off from the present adultery/idolatry. This is what Hosea is doing.

After Hosea had bought Gomer, he told her that she belongs to him from now on. She is his wife by right of marriage and by right of purchase.⁸³ The text says that she was not to play harlot or to have a lover any longer. Hosea also promised to be faithful. According to Keil, Hosea meant that they would have no intimate relations.⁸⁴ This goes beyond what the text says. Once again the action is symbolic of Israel's coming separation from God before the full provisions promised for a covenant faithful people would be realized. Such began with the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE and the Southern Kingdom in 586 BCE.

Hosea 3:4 There has been much discussion about the meaning of this verse. There are three major theories: 1. These three couplets represent a contrast between Yahwehism and Ba'alism, 2. They relate to aspects of idolatry, which had become the norm for Israel's religious practices (cf. 8:4-5; 10:7-8, 15), 3. They refer to the exilic period when Israel was separated from the Promised Land.

⁸² Garrett, Duane A. *Hosea, Joel*. New American Commentary. N.p.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997, 104.

⁸³ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 64.

⁸⁴ Keil, Carl Friedrich, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 2 Vols, Translated by James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949, 69-70.



The phrase “For... many days,” which also appears in verse 3, connects the concepts of verses 3 and 4. **ישב** in verse 4 means what it does in verse 3, that is “wait.”⁸⁵ Masoretic Text says that it is “remain.” Moffatts⁸⁶ also accepts the word “remain.” Here verse 4 explains Israel’s deprivation, but it is deprivation within the covenant. The form of this relationship here is that it is God who wills it, whereas the essential relationship is absent and will remain absent until Israel can learn to love. The covenantal relationship plays an important role in the lives of the people of Israel because God made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai and wants to keep this covenant with them always, whereas the people of Israel have forgotten their promises and the relationship that they had with Him in the early days when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.

There are six things that the people of Israel will be losing because of their disobedience, such as kings and princes which signify the political realm,⁸⁷ the other two are the cult or may point to different aspects of it. The word ‘king’ in verse 4 refers to the political leader of the nation. There is a question whether this term should be specifically applied to the Davidic dynasty or if it could also include the apostate kings of the Northern Kingdom cannot be determined from general usage alone. According to Nyberg ‘king and prince’ in a wholly religious manner, refer to the god of Melek (or Malik), not to the political leaders.⁸⁸ The word ‘prince’ occurs 381 times in the Old Testament. The core meaning of the word is “leader” or “official,” in a political, military, religious, or other sociological sense.⁸⁹ This refers to ‘king’ elsewhere, but in the context of Hosea, it suggests a political application.

Hosea 3:5 Hosea 3:5 is a conclusion of events set in motion as a result of Yahweh’s command to the prophet to go and love an adulteress woman in verse 1. **“Afterwards:”** This is a common adverb (BDB 29) used in several ways. Here it seems to refer to the time after Yahweh’s period of judgment. A related term (BDB 31), “in the last days,” is used at the end of v. 5. It denotes a future event from the author’s perspective. The exact time frame is ambiguous. For Stuart, Yahweh will judge His people, but after that, following a period, He will restore them.⁹⁰ For Dearman, these future orientations and time markers are a theological way of

⁸⁵ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 64.

⁸⁶ Cf. Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.

⁸⁷ Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuche*, cited by G. A. Buttrick gen. ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952-57), vol. 6 (1956): *The Book of Hosea, Introduction and exegesis* by J. Mauchline, 555-6.

⁸⁸ Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuche*, cited by G. A. Buttrick gen. ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. New York: Abingdon Press, 1952-57, vol. 6, 1956,: *The Book of Hosea, Introduction and Exegesis* by J. Mauchline, 555-6.

⁸⁹ Theological Wordbook, s.v. ‘שב’ by G.G. Cohen.

⁹⁰ Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987, 67.



asserting Yahweh's knowledge of and control over history.⁹¹ Yahweh's judgments must be seen concerning the big picture of His accomplishing His ultimate goal of fellowship with humankind. Even judgments are parental love (cf. Hosea 11).

“Sons of Israel:” This term occurs three times within the chapter as the subject of the prophecy. The book of Hosea uses this phrase three other times: Hosea 1:10, 11, and 4:1. Here are the two pillars of biblical faith; one is negative and one is positive. We must “turn from” that is repentance (i.e., “return” BDB 996, KB 1427, qal, imperfect), and we must “turn to” that is faith (i.e., “seek” BDB 134, KB 152, Piel perfect, cf. 5:6,15; 7:10; Isa. 45:19; 65:1; Zeph.1:6; 2:3). Another element of Israel's change of heart is seen in v. 5 in the words “they will come trembling.”⁹² This term seems to involve a new “awe” and “respect” for God. In Hosea 1:11 it is a clear reference to the Northern Kingdom, whereas the “sons” is understood as “members of a group” rather than as “descendants”⁹³ and “Israel” is understood as the nation of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) as opposed to their forefather Israel. In Hosea 1:9 it is used as God's command to name his third child לֹא עַמִּי “*Lo-Ammi*” since Hosea's previous children were given names prophetic of the Northern Kingdom לֹא רַחֲמָה “*Lo-ruhamah*.” In Hosea 4:1, it is the salutation that heads the list of grievances that the Lord has against “the inhabitants of the land.” This reference appears to be to the Northern Kingdom, as the Lord concludes His list by saying, “Though you, Israel, play the harlot, do not let Judah become guilty...” (Hosea 4:15). To summarize the term “sons of Israel” finds exclusive use elsewhere in Hosea as denoting the Northern Kingdom, composed of the ten tribes which seceded from Judah during the reign of Rehoboam. The use of the “sons of Israel” within Hosea chapter 3 is a more generic reference to all the descendants of Israel which includes Judah and Benjamin.

The Masoretic Text proposes the following expression “and seeks” וּבִקֵּשׁ. The word בִּקֵּשׁ has the same sense of seeking to gain or regain a person or thing. The word “seek” means that the people of Israel have disobeyed and that they will return one day (in the future). This section closes with hope, which also forms the major themes of this section in Hosea's preaching. The prophet pleads with the people of Israel to return to the Lord. When they disobey again, they will be taken back into the bondage as they were earlier, “because they have refused to return to me” says the Lord. The phrases “and David their king” and “in the latter days” have been regarded by

⁹¹ Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, 62.

⁹² Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, 291.

⁹³ Theological Wordbook, s.v. “בֵּן” by E. A. Martens.



many scholars as marks of a later “perhaps exilic” hand.⁹⁴ The meaning of this phrase conveys the reunion of the two kingdoms under one hand, the reversal of Israel’s pattern of dynastic instability, the ejection of the foreign alliances which served as a buffer against their political weakness, the covenantal continuity to David by Yahweh that was violated by Jeroboam I and all his successors, etc. and was condemned by such prophets as Amos and the other great prophets who followed him. Here Hosea connects Yahweh’s future victory to the rebirth of Davidic rule.⁹⁵ So, hope is given to the people of Israel that they will return to their Lord from worshipping other gods. The prophet gives them hope of healing if they turn to the Lord. They can return to the Lord because of His love for them. Hosea has described this love of God to the people of Israel through various metaphors, which are given briefly in the following section.

Hosea 3:5, clearly states that there is to be a king named David in the latter-day kingdom. The king has the first name of David, as stated in Hos. 3:5; Jer. 30:9; Eze. 34: 23-24; and Amos. 9:11.⁹⁶ Those who fulfil the return of the spiritual ten tribes will be the great multitude that returns to God’s kingdom. Then God’s kingdom shall be one kingdom, as it was in the days of King David, this we can see in Ezekiel. 37:15-28. After the punishment imposed upon them, Israel will repent and seek reconciliation with the Lord and political unity with Judah, and subsequently be blessed by the Lord.

Dearman states that the verb פָּחַד means ‘to fear,’ ‘to reverence,’ represents the posture of a repentant people who embrace faithfully.⁹⁷ **“They will come trembling to the Lord”** this verb פָּחַד (BDB 808, KB 922, qal, perfect) is used in a similar way (and same form) by Hosea’s contemporary eighth-century prophet in Judah, Micah (cf. 7:17).⁹⁸ It used in several senses: 1. positives of the faithful, a. respect for God’s word, Ps. 119:16, b. no fear for the faithful, Ps. 78:53; Prov. 3:24; Isa. 12:2; 44:8, c. sense of awesome joy at Yahweh’s deliverance, Isa. 60:5; Jer. 33:9; Hos. 5:2 negative of sinners, Ps. 119:120; Isa. 33:14; 44:11-14. It is Yahweh’s action that creates a new life for the people of Israel. The return to Yahweh here represents God’s love for them.

4. Metaphors Used in These Verses to Describe the Love of God

⁹⁴ Beeby, H. D., *Hosea: International Theological Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, 41.

⁹⁵ Chisholm, Robert B., *Handbook on the Prophets*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 2002, 348, cf. Kaiser, Walter C., *Back Toward the Future*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1989, 198.

⁹⁶ Keil, C. F., *Minor Prophets: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Peabody, Hendrickson, 2001, 48.

⁹⁷ Dearman, J. A., *The Book of Hosea*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010, 141.

⁹⁸ Andersen, F.I and Freedman, D.N., *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, Doubleday, 1980, 291. So HAL 3, 871.



4.1. The Metaphor of Marriage

The marriage metaphor is used in the text for them to understand how much God loves them. Verse 1 'to once again love a woman who is loved by a friend', and the response 'I bought for myself' is a demonstration of 'love in action.' Hosea's response (v. 2) shows how costly love can be. It is love that forbears all that is necessary to accomplish the divine purpose. The prophet's message is very much close to his personal life. The command to marry a woman and the naming of the children sent messages of judgment on Israel. In this context, it is noticed the cycle of repentance, redemption, and restoration is evident in the prophet's prophecy and even in his marriage (3:1-3). The important aspect and familiar aspect of Hosea's prophecy is his use of metaphors. Hosea 3:1-5 presents the metaphor is to illustrate that when God commanded him to go and marry a woman, presents how much God loves Israel as a marital relationship between God and Israel. God as husband and Israel as a wife. Metaphors are important and play a vital role in the life of Hosea.

4.2. Love in Action - Hosea 3

The command 'to once again, love a woman who is loved by a friend', and the response 'I bought for myself' is a demonstration of 'love in action.'⁹⁹ *Words* of love need to be translated as *works* of love.

The main theme of the chapter is, therefore, "love" (inaction). This highlights Yahweh's love as a model for Hosea's love. It stands in contrast to that of the fickle lovers who do not remain true. The overpowering strength of God's true love becomes clear as it is reflected in the prophet's symbolic action. The specific command 'to love' that came to Hosea is certainly annoying even as a personal request. Here, this symbolic action represents Yahweh's love – to bring home someone who has gone into another's possession. God does what is impossible according to the law.

Here, Hosea is a witness not only as a messenger of God's word but also as the one who experienced the consequences of the message he had received. By his obedience, he confirms that the proclaimed love of Yahweh becomes an event that leads Israel through judgment to salvation.

In this passage, we can find three kinds of love that have been used for us to understand: first, the *love of the paramour* is an adulterous, illicit affection. This sort of love is self-centered and

⁹⁹ Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, 296.



destructive because at least one of the parties involved is committed to another by a vow of marriage. Secondly, the people who “*love cakes of raisin*” have placed their affections on other gods. The people of Israel have fallen in love with the cults of their day which promise happiness and success. This also may be considered as a self-centered and destructive sort of love. Thirdly, *love of the Lord* who loves the people of Israel even when they rejected His love. This is a love not motivated by the object and the people who indeed turned to other gods. This kind of love originates in the heart of God, this kind of love keeps on loving no matter what the response is. This is the divine love that provides the foundation for the book of Hosea. It is to this kind of love that the Lord called Hosea when he said, “Go again, love a woman...” and into which God’s people are continually called. If God so loved us, we ought to love one another (1 John 4:11) unconditionally. It is this ‘love in action’ that would truly mirror God’s love, which is the basis.

5. Theology

Theology in a strict sense is related to the image of God. Hosea prefers the divine name ‘Yahweh’ much more than ‘God.’ He knows the God who revealed Himself from the time of Moses (Hos. 12:14), through the proclamation of the Law and through liberating actions (12:10). Israel knows Yahweh as a Liberator. Israel does not know any other God or savior besides Yahweh (13:4b). Hosea indicates a negation of the old covenant formula and, in this respect, similar to the interpretation of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14, he proclaims a new that Yahweh, the ancient God of Israel, is ‘the God’.

As we look closer at the language Hosea employs, it is evident that he is unable to speak of a divine being in a general religious sense. He speaks of Yahweh as one who proved Himself in history to be the God of Israel. He is not only God of the past, as well the God of the present. The prophet’s language itself is striking. He uses new and bold expressions to refer to God. He speaks of Yahweh as ‘the judge of Israel’, and this appears only once (12:15). He mostly uses imageries to announce salvation, but at the same time, the power of God’s saving deeds is explained by the use of metaphors of ‘the dew’ (14:6). The prophet does realize that he stands dangerously close to the imagery of the Canaanite vegetation cult.¹⁰⁰ Hosea’s best-known allegorized metaphor of Yahweh is the loving yet rejected husband. The use of this metaphor has its roots in the recognition of Israel’s specific guilt of ‘whoredom.’

Hosea’s adaptation of the divine husband concept to Yahwism is commendable. It represents Yahweh as the only God and it vividly states the exclusive claims of Yahwism. It directly

¹⁰⁰ Wolff, *Hosea, Biblical Commentary*, Fortress Press, 1969, p. 15.



expresses the genuine profession of faith in Yahweh and carries its opposition to syncretism. Yahweh as a marriage partner is set against certain historical concepts. Yahweh is not just another god or goddess, but rather is understood within the legal categories of the Covenant. He replaces the mythico-cultic fertility concept that is rooted in the '*ierosgamos*' (sacral marriage, cf. 1:19, 2:4). This gradual unfolding of Hosea's theology in polemic dialogue with the existing culture and mythology of Canaan provides us with a fundamental example of faith's dialogue with contemporary ideology.¹⁰¹ Hosea uses the keywords employed in myth and these remain dominant themes all through.

Yahweh is the Lord of Israel's history. Hosea views Israel's present and future together with this history. It is remarkable how Israel's history is thoroughly embedded in his proclamation. Hosea probably looks back at the sequence of events over the decade, when kings were murdered, thrones usurped (7:7), and the crimes of the Jehu dynasty witnessed (1:4). Hosea goes even beyond these to the conquest (2: 10). The encounter with the Baal cult and the subsequent apostasy was probably the determining factor for Israel's present position. The interventions of God in the Exodus from Egypt and in the wilderness are vividly captured. Perhaps the longest leap that Hosea takes back in History is to the Jacob traditions (12:4-5, 7, 13). These traditions serve to lay bare Israel's present deceit against God and the neighbor.

The two keywords in Hosea's theology are *דסה* (*he-sed*) and *מיהלא תעד* (*da'at Elohim*) which may be translated 'faithful love' and 'knowledge of God'. The Hebrew word *דסה* (*he-sed*) denotes loyalty and devotion that may be expected in a relationship of love. Therefore, it is used for God's attitude towards Israel as well as the response He hopes for from Israel for the same. This describes the attitude towards one another within the covenant. Hosea interprets God's judgment upon sin and unfaithfulness not as arbitrary acts, but as a consequence that stems from the nature of sin itself. The disruption of the covenant relation results in the disappearance of *מיהלא תעד* (*da'at Elohim*) the knowledge of God, and all faithful love. Unlike some of the Minor Prophets, Hosea ends his message with a clear word of hope.

5.1. Purpose of Hosea 3

The book of Hosea was written to demonstrate the steadfast or unfailing love of God despite Israel's continued unfaithfulness. Through Hosea's marital experience, the book shows us the heart of a loving and compassionate God who longs to bless His people with the knowledge of Himself and all that the knowledge of God intimately would mean to human beings. In keeping

¹⁰¹ Wolff, *Hosea, Biblical Commentary*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1974, p.16.



with this purpose, the theme of Hosea is a strong testimony against the Northern Kingdom, because it had been unfaithful to its covenant relationship with the Lord, as demonstrated in its widespread corruption in the moral life, both publicly and privately. Thus, the prophet seeks to get his countrymen to repent and return with deeply remorseful hearts to their ever-loving God. This is presented from the standpoint of Yahweh's love to Israel as His dear children and as His covenant wife.

The prophet was commanded to continue to love her and he did take her back but kept her in isolation for a while. It is indicated that the affair graphically represents the Lord's relation to the Israelites (cf. 2:4) who had been disloyal to Him by worshipping the Canaanite gods. Even though the people were taken into exile, still God loved His covenant people and longed to take them back just as Hosea had taken back Gomer. The return is described with imagery recalling the exodus from Egypt and the settlement in Canaan. The intimacy of the covenant relationship between God and Israel is illustrated in the first part of the Book by a husband-wife relationship. The major purpose of this book is to proclaim God's compassion and love.

6. Present Context and Relevance

The powerful message of restoration within the prophet's marriage brings out the idea of judgment to the relationship. The Scriptures have significance both in the Old Testament and modern times, from Creation to the present time. The Word of God addressed through the prophet, is for all. In Hosea 3, it is noted that both the punishments and blessings due to Israel are also relevant for the present context of Israel redeemed by Christ, that is, the Christians of the present time. Though God revealed himself to the people of Israel, the same God is the God of all the nations.

The relevance of the concept of imagery of love in Hosea is very much felt in the present-day world. The doctrine of love is Hosea's greatest contribution to the history of thought.¹⁰² The prophet mentions the relationship of God to man as that of love to his wife. Hosea is the first prophet who recognized and impressed with '*Shema*,' which says that you shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. The prophet Hosea was the first one to recognize this fundamental religious principle. As we read in the Bible, Hosea was ignored in his day, but the principles for which he stood ultimately triumphed and are still prevalent in our context today. Hosea is overcome with love and sorrow for his people, and the prophet's style reflects even in the present-day context.

¹⁰² Scott, *The Relevancy of the Prophets*, MacMillan Company, New York, 1963, 18.



The concept of love that Hosea employed is to describe the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Yahweh's love entails indeed the loyalty and the love that the husband promises to give his wife but it entails both the grace and the condescending mercy of one who has all to give. The prophetic word is very relevant in present-day life; it even warns Christians that they too may become the objects of wrath and condemnation if they persist in the way of pride and ego. Hosea warns us to urgently seek the Lord and establish thoroughly God's kingdom of righteousness, love, and peace in all areas of our lives, and if we live accordingly, we too may enjoy the benefits and live with the vision of the renewal of Zion and God's everlasting presence.

Now, at the end of the 20th century, change seems to have taken place, morality is lost, selfishness and materialism have paved the way for disaster. The relationship between mankind has undergone a lot of change, love and affection have no place; instead, there is hatred and enmity between one group and the other. Even the institution of marriage which was considered holy and pure has undergone a radical change in today's context. In today's context, marriage is convenient and choice. The relationship between husband and wife is only superficial; there is no real love and affection. As a result, there are many divorce cases in the courts. The relationship between parents and children has also undergone radical changes, there is no place for ethical values and principles. Society has also undergone many changes; people are losing their faith in religion and its institutions.

Hosea emphasized the theoretical union of God and man, and this union was a moral relation, a communion of love with an element of holiness. Without hesitation, they denounced the corruption of society. They tried to rectify whatever was necessary, to make changes wherever needed. The prophets of the OT fought to create a society in which the spirit of God dwelt. They were pioneers of a new society. The prophets prophesied what is going to happen in the future. The message of the prophet is relevant indeed in modern society, in which injustice, violence, and anarchy are the ruling forces. Indian sociologists have discovered that what each society needs for its continuance, values and norms can only be given by an extra-scientific system, a kind of religion because there is always an underlying axiom of human dignity and the meaning of human life. Our present societies have lost this common image of humanity.

The prophets ministered in times of tragedy and triumph. They exercised their calling of warning and guidance, of denunciation and encouragement to people and rulers. Their ministry was directed towards the people of God, that is, to the chosen people of Israel. God's redemptive outlook of the world was articulated by the prophets. Prophets like Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah



lashed out at the people's ethnocentrism and charged them with subverting God's actual intentions. The prophets of Israel grew increasingly aware that not only Israel would share in God's acts of redemption, but God would break in to restore His liberating Lordship over the entire world of the nations. The prophets worked very hard to keep this hope alive in Israel.¹⁰³

The prophets spoke to the issues of their day. They frequently reinforced their verbal message with symbolic actions – e.g., Hosea (Hosea 1:2f), Jeremiah (Jer. 13:1f), Isaiah (Isaiah 20:2–4), and Ezekiel (Eze. 4:1–5:4ff). The object was by no means for sensationalism, but rather for the spiritual and moral renewal of the people of God.

Conclusion

We can draw one important major theme from the book of Hosea. It is that God is characterized by faithfulness throughout the history of Israel. It is clear that God was the one who saved the people of Israel and delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, and He gave them status restored them from shame, and maintained a living and loving relationship with them. Hosea describes the relationship between God and his people through the parable of marriage, parenting, and healing and also the historical reference to the covenant. The text brings out the theme or idea that this covenant relationship is not a commitment between two equal partners. For Hosea, God's faithfulness contrasts sharply with the betrayal of commitment on the part of the people of Israel, personified by his wife Gomer.

God, however, aims towards a renewed relationship with the people of Israel who proved to be unfaithful. God is the one who transcends the original covenant relationship; this is done in a sequence of actions that is unidirectional but also incorporates Israel's prior history of unfaithfulness. After their deliverance from slavery, God exhibits the character of faithfulness by restoring their integrity in covenant relationships. When they left God and went to follow someone else, the Israelites lost their identity. The promise is a new kind of integrity grounded in God's compassion for the people of Israel who were in a plight of their own making. The promise here is a radical change that incorporates negative and positive elements of prior perspectives and actions into a more comprehensive understanding of God.

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¹⁰³ George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4, New York: Abingdon Press, 1962, 404.



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