

A FORM-CRITICAL REREADING OF HOSEA

by

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I

- 1.1.** Scholars hold that the overall structure of the book of Hosea comprises three basic textual blocks: Hosea 1-3, which presents Hosea's marriage to Gomer as a paradigm for YHWH's relationship with Israel; Hosea 4-11, which articulates Hosea's message of judgment against Israel and concludes with YHWH's passionate outcry that denies the Deity's capacity to give up Israel or allow it to be destroyed; and Hosea 12-14, which reiterates the history of YHWH's relationship with Israel by employing elements of tradition that rehearse the grounds for Israel's punishment and call for Israel's return to YHWH.¹ Each of the three blocks begins with material concerning Israel's judgment and ends with material pertaining to restoration. This structure both presupposes and facilitates redaction-critical views that posit an original core of judgmental material from the prophet that has been softened or modified by the addition of material by later hands. Such additions are designed to transform Hosea's message of judgment into one more favorably disposed to Israel.
- 1.2.** Nevertheless, this view of the structure of Hosea is problematic in that it is not based entirely on an assessment of the literary features of the book in its present form that identify the speaker and addressee of a particular pericope, but on redaction critical criteria that allow views concerning the book's compositional history unduly to influence scholarly assessments of its literary structure. This is evident in Hosea 1-3, for example, which is grouped together on the basis of the narrative literary form in chapters 1 and 3 and by the overall thematic concern with Hosea's marriage or marriages. But such a view tends to suppress important literary features, particularly the narrative voice of the text. The narrative in Hosea 3 is autobiographical, whereas the narrative in Hosea 1 is written about Hosea in an objective form. Furthermore, the poetic material beginning in Hos 2:4 is likewise styled as an address by the prophet

directed to the people of Israel. Hos 2:1-3, on the other hand, is formulated in the objective style of chapter 1. This suggests that Hosea 1-3 do not comprise a single block, but perhaps two distinctly formulated textual blocks addressed by different parties to different audiences, viz., Hos 1:1-2:3, which is addressed by the narrator of the book to the reader, and Hos 2:4-3:5, which is addressed by the prophet alternatively to the people of Israel in Hos 2:4-25 and to the reader in Hos 3:1-5. Similar problems emerge in Hosea 4-11, which contain introductory address formulae, analogous to that of Hos 2:4, that are directed to specific audiences among the people of Israel. Such addressees include the people of Israel in Hos 4:1; the priests, house of Israel, and kings in Hos 5:1; unspecified audiences that are commanded to sound horns in Hos 5:8 and 8:1; and Israel in Hos 9:1. These addresses are intermixed with descriptive material about Israel, generally presented as the words of YHWH or the prophet to an unspecified audience, throughout these chapters. The same phenomenon appears in Hosea 12-14, in which Hos 14:2 contains an address formula directed to Israel in the midst of material that is either descriptive of Israel or addressed specifically to the people. Finally, discussion of the form and contents of Hosea is complicated by numerous references to Judah, which suggest that the prophet's oracles may have been addressed to Judah as well as to Israel or that they have been expanded by later redactors who attempted to relate Hosea to the concerns of the southern kingdom.²

- 1.3.** These considerations point to the need for a reassessment of the structure and generic character of the book of Hosea. Clearly, Hosea is not simply a three-part collection of the prophet's oracles to Israel. The book appears to have a much more complex structure, and it is formulated both to convey the prophet's oracles to Israel and to address an unspecified audience. In order to specify the book's structure, it is necessary to pay close attention to the formal literary features of the text that indicate its speakers and addressees and that convey its contents. By this means, the foundation will be laid for establishing the overall message and perspective of the book together with the settings in which it developed and was read.

II

- 2.1.** In order to establish the structure of Hosea, several initial observations concerning the form of the book are necessary. Hosea begins with a superscription in Hos 1:1 which must necessarily stand apart from the

following material in that it serves as an introduction to the balance of the book that identifies its contents, author, and the historical setting in which it is to be read.³ In contrast to the contents of the book, which are attributed to Hosea as the word of YHWH to the prophet, the superscription cannot be attributed to Hosea, but to an anonymous narrator who presents the book to the reader. Interestingly, the work of an anonymous narrator appears again at two key points in the book. The first is the report of YHWH's speaking to Hosea in Hos 1:2-2:3. The work of the anonymous narrator is evident in the initial statement of this pericope in Hos 1:2a, "the beginning of YHWH's speaking with Hosea," and in the narrative indicators of YHWH's speeches to the prophet and the prophet's subsequent actions throughout the balance of the pericope in Hos 1:2b α ¹, "and YHWH said to Hosea"; 1:3-4a α , "and he went and he took Gomer bat Diblaim and she conceived and she bore a son to him, and YHWH said to him"; Hos 1:6a $\alpha\beta$, "and she conceived again and she bore a daughter, and he said to him"; and Hos 1:8-9a α , "and she weaned Lo Ruhamah and she conceived and she bore a son, and he said . . ." Hos 2:1-3 is clearly included as a component of Hos 1:2-9 in that the introductory formula of Hos 2:1, w h yâ mispar b nê yi r ' l k hôl hayy m, "and the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea. . ." establishes syntactical continuity with the report of YHWH's speech to Hosea in Hos 1:9a β -b. Hos 2:1-3 thereby constitutes a component of YHWH's speech to the prophet in Hos 1:9a β -2:3. A new pericope begins in Hos 2:4, which clearly depicts the prophet's address to the children born in Hos 1:2-2:3, rather than the narrative report of YHWH's address to the prophet. The balance of the book comprises the prophet's addresses to Israel or to an unspecified audience until Hos 14:10, in which an anonymous narrator again addresses the reader, "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things, whoever is discerning, let him know them, for straight are the ways of YHWH, and the righteous shall walk in them but the rebellious shall stumble."

- 2.2.** Overall, these observations indicate that the anonymous narrator plays a determinative role in constituting the structure of the book of Hosea. The book thereby comprises three primary structural elements, each of which is formulated by the anonymous narrator. The superscription in Hos 1:1 constitutes the first major structural element of the book in that it identifies the contents of the book as "The word of YHWH which was to Hosea ben Beerî in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of

Jeroboam ben Joash, king of Israel." Hos 1:2-14:9 then constitutes the main body of the book, which is formulated as the narrator's report of YHWH's speaking to Hosea in Hos 1:2-2:3 and the report of Hosea's subsequent speeches based on that experience in Hos 2:4-14:9. Finally, Hos 14:10 constitutes the postscript of the book that calls upon the reader to understand the book properly and thereby to walk uprightly in the path of YHWH.⁴

- 2.3.** This last point is particularly important in the overall interpretation of the book in that it indicates that the book of Hosea is presented not simply as a transcript or report of the prophet's career and message, but that the book is presented for didactic or persuasive purposes, i.e., the reader is intended to learn something from this book and to apply what is learned as a means to choose a preferred course of action over one that is considered to be undesirable. This observation indicates that the generic character of the book is didactic and parenetic in that it is designed to persuade the reader to adopt a course of action based upon the lessons learned from a proper understanding of the book. The major questions of course are to whom is the book of Hosea addressed and what does it call upon the reader to do?
- 2.4.** Consideration of the structure and generic character of the body of the book in Hos 1:2-14:9 may be useful in answering these questions. Modern exegesis of Hosea has generally proceeded on the basis of the contention that the book of Hosea is addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel.⁵ This is a natural conclusion to draw given that Hosea is a northern prophet and that his message essentially focuses on the projected punishment of the northern kingdom. The calls for Israel's repentance likewise feed into this view. But the formal features of Hos 1:2-14:9 call for a critical reevaluation of this contention. As noted above, the basic layout of this text includes two major components: the report by the anonymous narrator of YHWH's speaking to Hosea in Hos 1:2-2:3 and the report of Hosea's speeches in Hos 2:4-14:9. The presence of the anonymous narrator is explicitly evident only in Hos 1:2-2:3, and it conveys in the form of YHWH's words to Hosea some basic elements of the message of the book. The report of Hosea's compliance with YHWH's commands to take a wife of harlotry and to have children of harlotry certainly articulates an important element of judgment against Israel in the overall message of the book. It is clear from the report of YHWH's statements that this judgment is directed against the people in large measure because of the actions of the house of Jehu which came to power through bloodshed in a coup against the

previously ruling house of Omri.⁶ Nevertheless, the present form of the narrative does not focus exclusively on a message of judgment. The present form of Hos 1:6-7, for example, indicates that YHWH will show no mercy to Israel, but that YHWH will pardon Israel, and that YHWH will show mercy to and deliver the house of Judah, although not by military means. Furthermore, Hos 2:1-3 articulates the patriarchal promise to Israel to become as numerous as the sands of the sea.⁷ It thereby points to YHWH's intention not to destroy Israel entirely, and it makes this clear by its statements that the people will ultimately be considered "my people" and "pitied" in contrast to the names "not my people" and "not pitied" given to Israel previously in the first part of the narrative. This text indicates that as part of this process of restitution, the people of Israel and Judah will be reunited again under the rule of one king. At the end of the speech report, YHWH gives an instruction to speak this message of restoration to the people, "Say to your brothers, 'my people,' and to your sisters, 'pitied.'" Although this statement is part of YHWH's speech to the prophet, the imperative plural form of 'say' (*'imrû*) indicates that this instruction is not directed to the prophet alone, but to a larger group of people. This statement clearly does not address the people of Israel, for they are the objects, not the addressees of this instruction. Rather, it is addressed to the people of Judah, who are called upon to accept the people of Israel as YHWH's people and as pitied at a time when Israel and Judah will be reunited under the rule of a single king. This statement suggests that the present form of the book as a whole is addressed not to the people of Israel, but to the people of Judah.⁸

- 2.5.** This conclusion is supported by the formal features of the prophet's words that appear in Hosea 2:4-14:9. Although a great deal of this material is addressed explicitly to the people and leaders of the northern kingdom of Israel, as indicated by the introductory formulae in Hos 2:4; 4:1; 5:1; and 14:2 as well as by other features of this material, there is a great deal of material that does not represent direct speech by the prophet or YHWH to northern Israel, but that constitutes the prophet's or YHWH's speeches about Israel that is addressed to an anonymous audience. This is evident in Hos 2:4-3:5, for example, in which Hos 2:4-25 is addressed to the children or to the wife of 1:2-2:3, but Hos 3:1-5 is addressed to an anonymous audience and speaks objectively about the people of Israel. It is likewise evident in Hos 4:1-19, which includes material explicitly addressed to the people of Israel in vv. 1-6, 13b-16, but the pericope speaks

objectively about Israel to an unspecified audience in vv. 7-13a and 17-19. Similar features appear throughout Hos 5:1-14:9. Such an alternation of addressee could well be a rhetorical device employed by the prophet in a situation of oral address to an Israelite audience, in which he alternatively addresses his audience directly and then turns for an aside that describes the people's wrongdoing to no one in particular. But in the context of a written book that is removed from the setting of oral speech, such addresses are directed to the reader. Insofar as the written form of the book is formulated to presuppose a Judean reading audience, that addressee becomes the Judean reader.

- 2.6.** This has a bearing on the means by which Hos 2:4-14:9 is read. Although these chapters contain a great deal of material that is directed explicitly to a northern Israelite audience, it is ultimately directed to a Judean reading audience and it is designed to lead that audience to a certain set of conclusions concerning YHWH's actions in relation to the northern kingdom of Israel as articulated by Hosea. Overall, the formulaic addresses to the people and leaders of northern Israel still provide the criteria for determining the basic structure of the text, but it is evident that those addresses are embedded in material that is directed to the anonymous audience of the book, identified above as a Judean audience. In this respect, the book employs the addresses to northern Israel as a means to articulate a series of contentions that are designed to enable the Judean reader to conclude that YHWH has brought about punishment against the people and leaders of northern Israel for acting in a manner that is considered to be abandonment of YHWH. The kings and priests of northern Israel take special blame for this situation, and the material of the book continually returns to the themes of Israel's unwarranted kingship, cultic apostasy, and its alliance with Assyria as the basis for the charge of abandoning YHWH. The series holds out the possibility of Israel's return to YHWH, however, and calls explicitly for this return in the concluding segment of Hos 14:2-9.
- 2.7.** The sequence of the structure and argumentation of the book may be represented as follows. The first major structural segment of Hos 2:4-14:9 appears in Hos 2:4-3:5. This text is demarcated initially by its shift in form from the report of YHWH's speech to the prophet in Hos 1:2-2:3 to the prophet's speech throughout Hos 2:4-3:5. It is initially directed to the children, who were reported to be born in the preceding section and it calls upon them to contend with their mother so that she might return to her

husband.⁹ Although the text is initially formulated as Hosea's appeal to his children, it shifts in 2:18-22 to a report of YHWH's address to Israel as his wife, calling upon her to return. It shifts again to a report of YHWH's statements concerning the people in Hos 2:23-25 that articulates the projected restoration of the people who will be called "my people" instead of the initial "not my people" of Hos 1:2-2:3. The prophet's autobiographical report in Hos 3:1-5 of YHWH's command again to love an adulterous woman is tied syntactically to Hos 2:4-25. It thereby returns the reader to the initial rhetorical situation of Hos 2:4 in which the prophet is clearly speaking about the restoration of his marriage relationship.

- 2.8.** Hos 2:4-3:5 thereby constitutes the initial premise of the prophet's message following YHWH's instructions to him. It presupposes the prophet's marriage to Gomer and the birth of the children, and builds these images into an allegorical portrayal of the relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel. It articulates both the disruption of the relationship, portrayed as Israel's "harlotry" in relation to other gods, and its restoration as YHWH takes back the estranged Israel just as Hosea will take back Gomer. The addressee of this particular pericope is anonymous, but the statements that Israel will lose its king and religious leadership and that Israel will ultimately seek YHWH as G-d and David as king once again suggest that the anonymous reading audience is Judean. Certainly, the portrayal of Israel's restoration corresponds to an ideal Judean view of the situation.
- 2.9.** The next major section of Hos 2:4-14:9 appears in Hos 4:1-19. This sub-unit is demarcated initially by the call to attention formula in Hos 4:1, "Hear the word of YHWH, People of Israel," which introduces the prophet's proclamation of YHWH's lawsuit with the inhabitants of the land.¹⁰ An analogous formula in Hos 5:1 introduces the following unit. Overall, Hos 4:1-19 develops the theme of harlotry from Hos 1:2-2:3 by portraying Israel's lack of knowledge concerning G-d as the basis of its abandonment of YHWH. It is formulated as a prophetic judgment speech, although it alternatively addresses the people directly (vv. 1-6, 13b-16) and speaks objectively about the people to an unspecified audience (vv. 7-13a, 17-19). It builds upon the earlier themes of the mother and the children by arguing that because the people have abandoned YHWH, YHWH will destroy the mother of the people (v. 5) and abandon their children (v. 6). Although the passage is addressed to the people at large, it focuses especially on the leaders of the people, including the priest and prophet who are responsible for seeing to the people's proper understanding of G-d. In this

respect, it begins to focus more specifically on the metaphor of harlotry among the people introduced previously and the cause of that harlotry in the religious leadership of the northern kingdom. The passage thereby condemns the cultic establishment and leadership of the northern kingdom of Israel.

2.10. Following the presentation of Israel as a faithless wife called to return to her husband in Hos 2:4-3:5 and the condemnation of Israel's religious leaders in Hos 4:1-19, the core of the book then follows in Hos 5:1-14:9. Whereas the previous two sections outline the general themes of the book, including Israel's abandonment of YHWH and YHWH's appeal for Israel's return, Hos 5:1-14:9 engages in a detailed examination of the issues involved in YHWH's/Hosea's complaint against Israel which of course aids in defining the conditions for Israel's repentance or return to YHWH. Fundamentally, this unit identifies an alliance between Israel and Assyria as the basic cause for Israel's abandonment of YHWH and the corruption of its royal and cultic establishment. It concludes with a call for Israel's return to YHWH. Again, these chapters constitute of mixture of materials directly addressed to Israel and those that speak about Israel but are addressed to an unnamed audience. The direct address forms in Hos 5:1; 5:8; 8:1; 9:1; and 14:2 appear to be constitutive in defining the overall structure of the text in that the material conveyed directly to Israel serves as the basis for the prophet's comments to the reading/listening audience.¹¹

III

3.1. This analysis of the structure and generic character of the book of Hosea provides the basis for several observations. First, the organization and presentation of the full form of the book indicates an interest to employ the Hosean material for didactic or parenetic purposes, i.e., the book of Hosea is clearly intended to instruct its readers and to persuade them to undertake a course of action. This is evident from the concluding instruction to the reader in Hos 14:10, who is to learn something from the material presented in Hosea and to apply that knowledge by acting in a manner that is consistent with the "straight paths of YHWH" in which the righteous walk. It is also evident in the retrospective introduction to the book, both in the superscription in Hos 1:1 and in the narrative report of YHWH's instructions to Hosea in Hos 1:2-2:3, which are clearly formulated to present the reader with background information on Hosea and his interaction with YHWH (and Gomer) as a basis for understanding the words of Hosea in Hos 2:4-14:9.

- 3.2.** Second, the contents of the body of the book in Hos 1:2-14:9 are clearly organized to appeal for Israel's return to YHWH. This is clear from the introductory reports of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, which sets the basic paradigm for the portrayal of Israel as an adulterous wife whose husband seeks her return. Following the initial presentation of this paradigm, the book provides an extended analysis of northern Israel's behavior that indicates its abandonment of YHWH together with repeated statements by YHWH and the prophet that Israel will be punished but that YHWH will also seek Israel's return. The concluding appeal for Israel's return in Hos 14:2-9 is particularly important in that it points to the return of Israel as one of the primary goals of the work. But it also points to an interest in explaining and justifying the suffering of Israel as a punishment brought about by YHWH that will eventually result in Israel's return and the restoration of the relationship.
- 3.3.** Third, the book of Hosea speaks generally of Israel's abandonment of YHWH based on the paradigm of Gomer's adultery in relation to Hosea as the basic problem in the relationship between Israel and YHWH.¹² Religious apostasy therefore constitutes an important theme of the book as indicated by the addresses to the priests and prophets condemning them for their failure to instill proper "knowledge of G-d" in the people and by the frequent references to Israel's cultic sites, e.g., Beth-Aven (Beth-El), Mizpah, Gilgal, Shechem, etc., as places for illicit worship of pagan deities. But religious apostasy is not the only problem highlighted in the book. Hosea points especially to the kings of Israel as one of the fundamental causes for Israel's problems in that YHWH did not desire kingship for Israel in the first place and because the northern kings are so closely associated with the idolatry and violence that Hosea perceives throughout the land (see esp. Hos 8:1-6). One particular aspect of Israel's abandonment of YHWH appears again and again throughout the book, i.e., Israel's alliance with Assyria and perhaps Egypt. This theme appears in the detailed discussion of Israel's "harlotry" in Hos 5:13-14; 7:8-16; 8:7-14; 12:2 together with references to Israel's exile to Assyria and Egypt in Hos 9:1-3; 10:6; 11:5, 10-11, and in the final appeal for Israel to return to YHWH in Hos 14:3, where Assyria is presented as unable to deliver the nation. Such an alliance would be undertaken by the kings of Israel, and is portrayed as an action designed to protect the nation and to facilitate its role in trade between Assyria and Egypt.¹³ In this respect, the king's alliance with Assyria is presented as the people's rejection of YHWH.

- 3.4.** Obviously, this suggests that one means to repair the relationship between Israel and YHWH is to abandon the alliance with Assyria and to eliminate the various manifestations of pagan worship or contact that such an alliance might entail or encourage. It is noteworthy that a great deal of the material in the book is directed to the northern kingdom of Israel in order to call for its return to YHWH. But the analysis of the structure and generic character of the book indicates that although much material constitutes the prophet's direct address to the northern kingdom, a great deal of the material speaks objectively about Israel to another party, viz., the anonymous audience of the book. Although the prophet may well have composed this material with a northern Israelite audience in mind, various features of the book point to the identification of this anonymous audience as a Judean audience in the final form of the book.
- 3.5.** First, there are numerous references to Judah's guilt and punishment alongside Israel. These references have been investigated as potential redactional additions designed to adjust the message of the book for a Judean audience, but most seem to have been a part of the original composition rather than later additions to the text.¹⁴ Nevertheless, they point to an interest in addressing Judah as well as Israel. Second, this interest in Judah appears to express the fact that Judah will be punished alongside Israel, but that Judah will find itself in a much better position than Israel in relation to YHWH. The narrative in Hos 1:6-7 concerning the naming of Lo Ruhamah indicates that YHWH will ultimately forgive Israel, but that YHWH will have mercy on Judah and deliver Judah militarily, an option that is not open to Israel. Likewise, Hos 12:1 indicates that Judah's relationship with YHWH is still secure.
- 3.6.** This interest in Judah is particularly noteworthy in relation to the condemnation of the northern Israelite kings throughout the book. Hos 10:15, for example, indicates that the northern Israelite king will be destroyed. Statements concerning the future political constitution of the people are enlightening in that they point to Judean interest. Hos 2:1-3, for example reiterates the patriarchal promise that the people of Israel will become as numerous as the sands of the sea, but it continues with a statement that the people of Israel and the people of Judah will be reunited and will appoint for themselves one king as a result of the day of Jezreel, which clearly condemns the northern dynasty of Jehu. Furthermore, Hos 3:1-5 presents an autobiographical statement by the prophet concerning his (re)marriage which concludes with statements that the people of Israel will dwell for many years without a king until the return to YHWH and David

their king in the latter days. These last statements concerning a reunified people ruled by a Davidic monarch clearly speak to Judean interests.

- 3.7.** These considerations establish the Judean identity of the anonymous reading audience of the book of Hosea. The objective descriptions of northern Israel's abandonment of YHWH throughout the book and the appeal to Israel to return to YHWH (and to David) clearly have Judean interests in mind. This indicates that the book of Hosea may be initially addressed to Israel, but it addresses Judah as well, and it does so in a manner that defines the return of Israel to YHWH as a return of Israel to Judah and the house of David. In such a context, the critique of Israel's cultic apostasy would have to be taken as a call for Israel's return to the Jerusalem Temple.
- 3.8.** This analysis obviously raises questions concerning the setting of the book. Although many scholars see the final form of the book as the product of post-exilic redaction, there appears to be little basis for the conclusion that any redaction of Hosea must be set in the post-exilic period.¹⁵ Nothing in the book speaks explicitly of the problems generated by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the Babylonian exile, or the potential return of the Babylonian exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple. The themes of the book focus entirely on the punishment and exile of the northern kingdom of Israel during the Assyrian period. In cases where Judean suffering is addressed, it is only in the context of the Assyrian threat against Israel. Certainly, such themes could have been read in the context of the Babylonian exile as a model for understanding Judah's experience, but the composition of the book appears to have taken place prior to the Babylonian threat against Jerusalem and Judah.
- 3.9.** The interest in calling for Israel's return to YHWH and in the reunification of Israel and Judah under a single Davidic monarch is the key factor in establishing the setting for the composition of the book of Hosea. Given such an interest, it would appear that the period of Hosea's composition could extend any time from the lifetime of the prophet in the mid-eighth century B.C.E. through the reign of King Josiah in the late-seventh century. Certainly, the reunification of Israel and Judah under a Davidic monarch is central to Josiah's concerns, but the concern to show mercy to Judah and the interest in reuniting Israel and Judah under one king is hardly exclusive to the period of King Josiah. As indicated elsewhere, there is extensive interest in such issues during the time of King Hezekiah and perhaps before that time as well.¹⁶

Nevertheless, such considerations point to the fact that the book of Hosea would have been read in the late-seventh century B.C.E. as a prophetic justification for the reform program of King Josiah.¹⁷ In such a scenario, Hosea's critique of the northern kingdom, including its faithlessness, the failure of its religious leaders and kings, and its alliance with Assyria, would all be read as fulfilled prophecy in the time of Josiah. Only the last element of the prophet's message would need to be realized at such a time, viz., the reunification of the people of Israel with Judah and the return of Israel to YHWH and to the house of David.¹⁸

STRUCTURE DIAGRAM OF HOSEA

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| Prophetic Instruction: Parenetic Appeal for Israel's Return to YHWH | Hosea 1-14 |
| I. Superscription | 1:1 |
| II. Parenetic Appeal for Israel's Return | 1:2-14:9 |
| A. Report of YHWH's speaking to Hosea: marriage and birth of children | 1:2-2:3 |
| B. Report of Hosea's speech concerning appeal for Israel's return | 2:4-14:9 |
| 1. report of Hosea's appeal to children for mother's return: restoration of united people under Davidic monarch | 2:4-3:5 |
| 2. report of YHWH's controversy against Israel | 4:1-19 |
| 3. detailed report of YHWH's call for Israel's return | 5:1-14:9 |
| a. initial statement of issues: Israel's harlotry/alien children | 5:1-7 |
| b. concerning Israel's alliance with Assyria/Egypt | 5:8-7:16 |
| c. concerning Israel's kings and cultic apostasy | 8:1-14 |
| d. concerning Israel's pagan cultic practice/rejection of YHWH | 9:1-14:1 |
| 1) announcement of punishment | 9:1-9 |
| 2) Israel as grapes found in wilderness/rebellion at Baal Peor | 9:10-17 |
| 3) Israel as luxuriant vine that will be grown over | 10:1-8 |
| 4) Israel as trained heifer that must repent/return | 10:9-11:11 |

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| 5) Ephraim's need for exile and return like Jacob | 12:1-15 |
| 6) Ephraim's exalted status turned to punishment and death | 13:1-14:1 |
| 4. Appeal for Israel to return to YHWH/abandon alliance with Assyria | 14:2-9 |
| III. Postscript: Instruction for wise to understand (Hosea) and to act properly | 14:10 |

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a form-critical rereading of Hosea based upon synchronic literary criteria. Past scholarship generally argues that the book of Hosea articulates a message of judgment against Israel in three basic parts, Hosea 1-3; Hosea 4-11; and Hosea 12-14. Each component begins with material pertaining to Israel's judgment, but concludes with material pertaining to restoration. This view is based upon redactional-critical criteria, and posits an original core of judgmental material against Israel that has been supplement and "softened" by later texts concerned Israel's restoration. A rereading of the book in relation to its formal syntactical and semantic features indicates a very different structure in which an anonymous narrator presents Hosea's prophecy are parenetic appeal to Israel to return to YHWH by abandoning its alliances with foreign powers, specifically Assyria and Egypt. Although Hosea's oracles were originally delivered in the north, the present form of the book is directed to a Judean audience, and may be read in relation to the reigns of either Hezekiah or Josiah.

1. See Hans Walter Wolff, Hosea (Hermeneia; Translated by Gary Stansell; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) xxix-xxxii; Gale A. Yee, Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction-Critical Investigation (SBLDS 102; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 51-52; G. I. Davies, Hosea (OT Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 102-107. Additional studies on Hosea that are primarily concerned with the literary structure and composition of the book include, Edwin M. Good, "The Composition of Hosea," SEÅ 31 (1966) 21-31 and Martin Buss, The Prophetic Word of Hosea: A Morphological Study (BZAW 111; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1969).

2. See esp. Grace I. Emmerson, Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective (JSOTSup 28; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), for discussion of the references to Judah in the book of Hosea. Other studies concerned with the role of inner-biblical exegesis and the literary growth of Hosea include, Ina Willi-Plein, Vorformen der Schriftexegese

innerhalb des Alten Testaments. Untersuchungen zum literarischen Werden der auf Amos, Hosea und Micha zuruckgehenden Bücher im hebräischen Zwölfprophetenbuch (BZAW 123; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971) 115-253; Thomas Naumann, Hoseas Erben. Strukturen der Nachinterpretation im Buch Hosea (BWANT 131; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991); Martti Nissinen, Prophetie, Redaktion und Fortschreibung im Hoseabuch. Studien zum Werdegang eines Prophetenbuches im Lichte von Hos 4 und 11 (AOAT 231; Kevelaer: Butzon & Berker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991).

3. Gene M. Tucker, "Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of the Canon," Canon and Authority (eds., G. W. Coats and B. O. Long; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 56-70.

4. Cf. C. L. Seow, "Hosea 14:10 and the Foolish People Motif," CBQ 44 (1982) 212-224, who points out the interrelationship between Hos 14:10 and various pericopes throughout the book in order to demonstrate that the verse functions as the conclusion for the book of Hosea.

5. So C. L. Seow, "Hosea, Book of," ABD III 293.

6. See 2 Kings 9-12 for the biblical accounts of Jehu's revolt against the house of Omri.

7. Cf. Gen 22:17.

8. Wilhelm Rudolph, Hosea (KAT XIII/1; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966) 58-59. Cf. Wolff, Hosea 28, who understands this verse as an address to the people of the northern kingdom, but it is precisely the people of the northern kingdom who are the objects, not the addressees, of this command. Others understand it as an address to the post-exilic Judean community, e.g., J. Jeremias, Der Prophet Hosea (ATD 24,1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 36. For a survey of the options, see G. I. Davies, Hosea (NCeB; Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1992) 63-64, who identifies the addressee simply as "the community as a whole" (p. 63). F. I. Andersen and D. I.

Freedman likewise attempt to escape the problem by identifying Hosea's son Jezreel as the addressee, arguing unjustifiably that the oldest son should be addressed with a plural form (Hosea [AB 24; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980] 212).

9.Cf. Wolff, Hosea 33, who identifies the children as the addressees of this passage, arguing that they represent the people of Israel to contend against the land of Israel. Rudolph, Hosea 64, likewise identifies the children as the addressees.

10.For discussion of the "call to attention" and the "lawsuit" forms in this text, see esp. Wolff, Hosea ad loc; Marvin A. Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, U.K.: William Eerdmans, 1996) 544, 541-2..

11.Cf. Wolff, Hosea xxx, who points to similar criteria in the identification of textual sub-units.

12.For discussion of the marriage motif in Hosea and its role as metaphor for the relationship between YHWH and Israel, see esp., H. H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea," Men of G-d: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963) 66-97; Davies, Hosea 79-92; Francis Landy, Hosea (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Yvonne Sherwood, The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective (GCT 2; JSOTSup 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

13.For discussion of Assyria's interest in expanding its trade relations in the western Asia and Egypt during the eighth century B.C.E., see Moshe Elat, "The Economic Relations of the Neo-Assyrian Empire with Egypt," JAOS 98 (1978) 20-34. Such interests would have motivated Assyria to maintain its treaties with Israel throughout the rule of the Jehu dynasty.

14. See Emerson, Hosea.

15. Cf. Brevard Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 377-380, who likewise warns against attempts to place the redaction of Hosea in the post-exilic period.

16. See my study, "A Philological and Form-Critical Reevaluation of Isaiah 8:16-9:6," HAR 14 (1994) 215-231; Baruch Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century B.C.E.: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel (JSOTSup 124; eds., B. Halpern and D. W. Hobson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 11-107.

17. For discussion of the ideology of Josiah's reform, see Duane Christensen, "Zephaniah 2:4-15: A Theological Basis for Josiah's Program of Political Expansion," CBO 46 (1984) 669-682; Marvin A. Sweeney, "A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah," CBO 53 (1991) 388-408; Naomi Steinberg, "The Deuteronomic Law Code and the Politics of State Centralization," The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis (Fs. Norman Gottwald; eds., D. Jobling, P. Day, and G. T. Sheppard; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991) 161-170, 336-339; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Jeremiah 30-31 and King Josiah's Program of National Restoration and Religious Reform," ZAW 108 (1996) 569-583. Critics correctly point to the absence of hard evidence that Josiah could ever have realized a program of political expansion (e.g., Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," TA 18 [1991] 3-71; Ehud Ben Zvi, "History and Prophetic Texts," History and Interpretation [Fs. John H. Hayes; eds., M. P. Graham, W. P. Brown, and J. K. Kuan; JSOTSup 173; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993] 106-120), but this does not negate Josiah's aspirations to carry out such a program in the aftermath of Assyria's collapse. Josiah's plans were thwarted by the Egyptians, who ultimately took control of Judah in the late-seventh century (see J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, A History of Ancient Israel and Judah [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 381-402).

18. This is a revised version of a paper read at the Society of Biblical Literature Pacific Coast Regional Meeting, Claremont, CA, March 15-17, 1998.