

Notes on Hosea

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Introduction

TITLE AND WRITER

The prophet's name is the title of the book. The book claims to be "the word of the LORD" that "Hosea" received (1:1). Thus he appears to have been the writer.

UNITY

Historically almost all Jewish and Christian scholars have regarded the whole book as the product of Hosea. Some critics, however, believe later editors (redactors) added the prophecies concerning Judah (e.g., 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12-14; 6:4, 11; et al.), since most of the book contains prophecies against Israel, the Northern Kingdom.¹ Yet there is no good reason to deny Hosea the Judean prophecies.² All the other eighth-century B.C. prophets also spoke about Judah, including Amos, who ministered to the Northern Kingdom at this time. Some critics say the salvation passages in Hosea (e.g., 11:8-11; 14:2-9) are so different from the judgment passages that someone else must have written them. However, the mixing of judgment and salvation messages is very common in all the prophets.

DATE

Hosea's ministry spanned the reigns of four Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; cf. Isa. 1:1) and one Israelite king (Jeroboam II; 1:1). King Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah began reigning in 792 B.C., and King Hezekiah of Judah stopped reigning in 686 B.C., spanning a period of 107 years. Probably Hosea's ministry began near the end of Jeroboam II's (793-753 B.C.) and Uzziah's (792-740 B.C.) reigns, and ended in the early years of Hezekiah's sole reign (715-686 B.C.). Hezekiah evidently reigned for 14 years as co-regent with his father Ahaz (729-715 B.C.; cf. 2 Kings 18:1). This would mean that the prophet's ministry lasted perhaps 45 years (ca. 760-715 B.C.). It also means that Hosea's ministry extended beyond the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., since Hezekiah began ruling in 715 B.C. Hosea did not date any of his prophecies. Other possible dates

¹E.g., W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, pp. clix-clxii; H. W. Wolff, *Hosea*, pp. xxix-xxxii.

²For discussion of the Judean passages, see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 868-70; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 280.

are between 760 and 753 to 715 B.C. (38 to 45 years),³ 760 to 720 B.C. (38 years),⁴ 760 to sometime during Hezekiah's reign (715-686 B.C., about 45 years,⁵ over half a century,⁶ and about 60 or 65 years.⁷

There were six other kings of Israel who followed Jeroboam II that Hosea did not mention in 1:1 that ruled during the reigns of the four Judean kings he named. They were Zechariah (753 B.C.), Shallum (752 B.C.), Menahem (752-742 B.C.), Pekah (752-732 B.C.), Pekahiah (742-740 B.C.), and Hoshea (732-723 B.C.). Hosea evidently prophesied during the reigns of more kings of Israel and Judah than any other prophet, probably eleven. It seems unusual that Hosea would mention four Judean kings and only one Israelite king, especially since he ministered primarily to the Northern Kingdom. He may have done this because the six Israelite kings named above were less significant in Israel's history than the other kings Hosea did mention. Another possibility is that Hosea did this because he regarded the Judean kings as Israel's legitimate kings in contrast to those of the North. He may have mentioned Jeroboam II because he was the primary king of the Northern Kingdom during his ministry, or because he was the strongest king of that kingdom during that period.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hosea began ministering near the end of an era of great material prosperity and military success for both Israel and Judah (cf. 2 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chron. 26:2, 6-15). In the first half of the eighth-century B.C., Assyrian influence in the west had declined temporarily, allowing both Jeroboam II and Uzziah to flourish. However, under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.), Assyria began to grow stronger and to expand westward again. In 734 B.C. the Northern Kingdom became a puppet nation within the Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 15:29). After Israel tried to revolt, Assyria defeated Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, in 722 B.C., and deported the people of Israel into captivity (2 Kings 17:1-6; 18:10-12). Judah also became a vassal state in the Assyrian Empire during Hosea's ministry (2 Kings 16:5-10).

Hosea's prophecy reflects conditions of economic prosperity, religious formalism and apostasy, and political stability that marked Jeroboam II's reign. The historical background of the Book of Amos is almost identical.

PLACE OF COMPOSITION

Besides the fact that Hosea ministered to the Northern Kingdom, his reference to the king of Samaria as "our king" (7:5) seems to make his residence in Israel certain. The book never states the location of any of his preaching, however.

³Leon Wood, "Hosea," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 163, and idem, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 276.

⁴Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p. xliii.

⁵Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p. 175.

⁶Charles Lee Feinberg, *Hosea*, p. 10.

⁷C. F. Keil, "Hosea," in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 1:15.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Hosea, like Amos, addressed the Northern Kingdom of Israel primarily. Their contemporaries, who were Isaiah and Micah, ministered primarily to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Some scholars believe that Amos preceded Hosea slightly.⁸ But this seems impossible to prove conclusively since we have so little information about exactly when these prophets wrote. Hosea's purpose was to announce that because the nation had broken Yahweh's covenant (the Mosaic Covenant), judgment was coming (cf. Deut. 28:15-68). His purpose was, therefore, similar to Jeremiah's in that both prophets announced and witnessed the downfall of their respective nations. One writer referred to Hosea as the Jeremiah of Israel.⁹ The people needed to repent and return to the Lord and His covenant. If they did, they might avoid His judgment. However, the prophet announced that the nation as a whole would not repent, though individuals could, so judgment was coming. Hosea also reaffirmed God's promise to bless His people Israel eventually, in the distant future (cf. Deut. 30:1-10).

"Understanding the message of the book of Hosea depends upon understanding the Sinai covenant. The book contains a series of blessings and curses announced for Israel by God through Hosea. Each blessing or curse is based upon a corresponding type in the Mosaic law."¹⁰

THEOLOGY

The major biblical doctrines that Hosea stressed were sin, judgment, salvation, and the loyal love of God.

Regarding sin, the prophet stressed the idolatry of the Israelites, which he compared to spiritual adultery. Israel had turned from Yahweh to worship Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. The Lord told Hosea to marry a woman who would prove to be unfaithful to him, so he could appreciate and communicate how the Lord felt about His wife's (Israel's) unfaithfulness to Him. Hosea also pointed out other sins that the Israelites needed to forsake: violent crimes (4:2; 6:9; 12:1), political revolt (7:3-7), foreign alliances (7:11; 8:9), spiritual ingratitude (7:15), social injustice (12:7), and selfish arrogance (13:6).

Hosea called for repentance, but he was not hopeful of a positive response because most of the people did not want to change. God's judgment would, therefore, descend in the form of infertility, military invasion, and exile. Hosea stressed the fact that God was just in sending judgment on the Israelites. He would do it by making their punishments match their crimes.

The prophet assured the Israelites that God would not abandon them completely. After judgment would come salvation. Eventually the people would return to Yahweh, as Hosea's wayward wife would return to him. In Hosea, passages on salvation follow sections announcing judgment, though there are more predictions of punishment than promises of deliverance.

⁸E.g., Wood, "Hosea," pp. 162, 163; Stuart, p. xliii; and H. L. Ellison, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 95.

⁹Freeman, p. 177. Cf. Wood, *The Prophets . . .*, p. 282.

¹⁰Stuart, pp. 6-7.

Judgment	Restoration
1:2-9	1:10—2:1
2:2-13	2:14—3:5
4:1—5:14	5:15—6:3
6:4—11:7	11:8-11
11:12—13:16	ch. 14

The outstanding revelation concerning God that this book contributes is the loyal love of Yahweh for His own.

"In no prophet is the love of God more clearly demarcated and illustrated than in Hosea."¹¹

"Nowhere in the whole range of God's revelation do we find more beautiful words of love than in Hosea 2:14-16; 6:1-4; 11:1-4, 8, 9; 14:4-8."¹²

"Every page of the prophecy keeps declaring God's love for Israel."¹³

The great illustration of how committed God is to His people is how He instructed Hosea to relate to his unfaithful wife. The Lord will not forsake those with whom He has joined in covenant commitment, even if they become unfaithful to Him repeatedly. He will be patient with them and will eventually save them (cf. 11:1-4; 14).

"The Lord's covenantal relationship with His people Israel is central to the messages of the eighth-century prophets Hosea, Amos, and Micah. Each of these prophets accused God's people of violating the obligations of the Mosaic Covenant and warned that judgment was impending. Despite painting such a bleak picture of the immediate future, these prophets also saw a bright light at the end of the dark tunnel of punishment and exile. Each anticipated a time when the Lord, on the basis of His eternal covenantal promises to Abraham and David, would restore Israel to a position of favor and blessing. In fact, the coming judgment would purify God's people and thus prepare the way for a glorious new era in Israel's history."¹⁴

THEMES

"The major truths of the book are: (1) God suffers when His people are unfaithful to Him; (2) God cannot condone sin; and (3) God will never cease to love His own and, consequently, He seeks to win back those who have forsaken Him."¹⁵

¹¹Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward and Old Testament Theology*, p. 197.

¹²Feinberg, pp. 10-11.

¹³Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 398.

¹⁵*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 919.

Wood identified five basic themes that recur throughout the book. Israel continued to break the covenant that God had made with her. The broken marriage covenant of Hosea and Gomer illustrated Israel's sin. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness, God remained faithful to her. The Israelites could expect severe punishment for breaking the covenant. And yet Israel would again enjoy gracious benefits from God, including future restoration.¹⁶

GENRE AND LITERARY FORMS

Hosea consists of prophetic oracles, most of which are in poetic form.¹⁷ Silva regarded Hosea as essentially a covenant enforcement document. He identified the following subgenres or literary forms in Hosea: the prophetic judgment speech, the covenant lawsuit speech (or *rib* oracle), the oracle of salvation, the prophetic call or commission, the symbolic action, proverbs and wisdom sayings, calls to alarm or battle warnings, the woe oracle, rhetorical questions, a penitential song, a divine lament, an admonition or exhortation to repent, and a love song.¹⁸

"Hosea was a master literary craftsman. His work is so elevated in style that it is often difficult to distinguish between his use of poetry and prose."¹⁹

"The single most striking feature of the poetic/literary nature of the book is its use of metaphor and simile."²⁰

TEXT

Hosea contains the highest proportion (not number) of textual problems of any Old Testament book except possibly Job.²¹

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1
- II. The first series of messages of judgment and restoration: Hosea's family 1:2—2:1
 - A. Signs of coming judgment 1:2-9
 - B. A promise of restoration 1:10—2:1
- III. The second series of messages of judgment and restoration: marital unfaithfulness 2:2—3:5

¹⁶Wood, *The Prophets* . . . , pp. 282-83.

¹⁷Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 403.

¹⁸Charles H. Silva, "Literary Features in the Book of Hosea," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:653 (January-March 2007):34-48.

¹⁹Richard D. Patterson, "Portraits from a Prophet's Portfolio: Hosea 4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):294-308.

²⁰Longman and Dillard, p. 405.

²¹F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, p. 66.

- A. Oracles of judgment 2:2-13
 - 1. Judgment on Gomer as a figure of Israel 2:2-7
 - 2. Judgment on Israel 2:8-13
- B. Promises of restoration 2:14—3:5
 - 1. Renewed love and restored marriage 2:14-20
 - 2. Renewed fertility and restored favor 2:21-23
 - 3. The restoration of Hosea's and Yahweh's wives ch. 3
- IV. The third series of messages on judgment and restoration: widespread guilt 4:1—6:3
 - A. The judgment oracles chs. 4—5
 - 1. Yahweh's case against Israel ch. 4
 - 2. The guilt of both Israel and Judah ch. 5
 - B. The restoration promises 6:1-3
- V. The fourth series of messages on judgment and restoration: Israel's ingratitude 6:4—11:11
 - A. More messages on coming judgment 6:4—11:7
 - 1. Israel's ingratitude and rebellion 6:4—8:14
 - 2. Israel's inevitable judgment 9:1—11:7
 - B. Another assurance of restoration 11:8-11
- VI. The fifth series of messages on judgment and restoration: historical unfaithfulness 11:12—14:8
 - A. Judgment for unfaithfulness 11:12—13:16
 - 1. The deceitfulness of Israel 11:12—12:14
 - 2. Israel's impending doom ch. 13
 - B. Restoration in spite of unfaithfulness 14:1-8
 - 1. An appeal for repentance 14:1-3
 - 2. A promise of restoration 14:4-8
- VII. Conclusion 14:9

MESSAGE

The Book of Hosea is an unusually powerful book, because the prophet ministered out of his deep personal emotions. His intellectual appeals to the Israelites in his day, and to us in ours, arose out of great personal tragedy in his own life. We might say that he cried out as he bled. Hosea appreciated the pain that God felt over His people's apostasy, as no other prophet did, because he felt the intense pain of his wife's unfaithfulness. Hosea could speak of the deepest things in the economy of God because he entered into fellowship with God in God's sufferings (cf. Phil. 3:10). That is one reason this book is so appealing and so powerful.

The permanent values of this book are its revelations of sin, judgment, and love. Hosea reveals what sin is at its worst. It also reveals the nature of judgment. Third, it reveals the unconquerable force of true love.

With regard to sin, Hosea reveals the very nature of sin, what makes it so appalling, not just the various forms of sin. Hosea was able to penetrate to the very heart of sin. What made the sin of the Israelites so great was the fact that they had sinned against light and love.

The more light (revelation from God) that people have, the greater is their responsibility (cf. Amos; Rom. 1—3). What made the Israelites' sin so bad was that they were the Chosen People of God, the people of all peoples on earth who enjoyed the most revelation of the gracious person and the loving plans of Yahweh for their blessing. They had the Law, they had God's presence among them, and they had God's covenant promises (cf. Rom. 9). Yet they rebelled against Him and chose to walk in darkness rather than light.

Furthermore, they had sinned against God's love. They had experienced Yahweh's election, His provisions, His protection, and more of His blessings than any other people on the earth, but they had walked away from Him and spent His gifts to them to satisfy their lewd desires. They had not only committed spiritual adultery, but they had become spiritual prostitutes. They had sinned against His love as well as against His light.

In one respect, all sins are equally bad in that they are all offenses against God. But in another sense, some sins are worse than others, because people who have experienced much of God's light and love have greater responsibility to respond to that light and love, than people who have fewer of these blessings. In Romans 2, Paul explained that God will judge people according to the light that they had (cf. James 3:1). The Israelites had much light, and they had experienced much love. This made their sin especially heinous.

Hosea declared that the human marriage relationship symbolized the relationship that existed between Yahweh and His people. Israel had become unfaithful to God. God taught Hosea the seriousness of this unfaithfulness and how He felt about it through the prophet's own marriage relationship. Hosea experienced the tragedy and heartbreak of an unfaithful wife, not just an adulteress, which is bad enough, but an adulteress turned prostitute—which enabled him to enter into the fellowship of God's sufferings over the behavior of His "wife," Israel. Hosea's heart was broken, and he felt the most unutterable sorrow that a man can feel, when he feels his wife abandon him. He learned how God felt, and he denounced kings, priests, and people out of that broken heart that mirrored the broken heart of God. Hosea, then, revealed the deepest nature of sin, namely: infidelity to the elective grace of God. The worst thing in the realm of sin is apathy to the love of God. The opposite of love is not hate but apathy.

Hosea also revealed the nature of judgment. In view of the essential nature of sin, namely: violation of covenant love, judgment will inevitably fall, unless there is genuine repentance. In view of their sin, the Israelites had no basis for hoping that God would pardon them. Hosea referred to the past love of God for Israel, His present love, and His

future love for His Chosen People. Interspersed between these reminders of God's love through the book we have Hosea's tracing of Israel's history downward to the place where judgment was inevitable. Such great sinners against God's light and love had no reason to expect divine mercy. No one can see this as clearly, or feel it so intensely, as the person who has been sinned against as long and persistently as Hosea had been. Hosea felt the divine justice in God's action, so he could announce it in the clearest and most forceful terms, as this book shows.

Nevertheless, in spite of the great revelations of sin and judgment that this book contains, its greatest revelation is that of love, divine love. In the midst of Hosea's personal overwhelming sorrow, because of Gomer's infidelity, God told him to seek out his sinning wife, to go after her and bring her back, first into a wilderness seclusion for a while, but then back into a place of love and privilege at his own side. Through his wife's unfaithfulness Hosea learned the awfulness of sin, and in obedience to God's command to seek out and accept his traitorous wife, he learned God's love in spite of sin.

These three great revelations—sin, judgment, and love—constitute the living message of the Book of Hosea. These are the great lessons that we as Christians must apply to ourselves and to those to whom we minister. We need a constant re-emphasis of each of these truths, because we tend to get away from them, both individually, and corporately as the church. We fail to appreciate the love of God, because we fail to appreciate the essential nature of our sin, and that it makes judgment inevitable. Jesus said that the person who is most impressed with his or her own sin is the person who is most impressed with God's love for him or her (Luke 7:47).

Hosea teaches that the most heinous and damnable sin of which people are capable is infidelity to love. This is the sin that damns unbelievers; they fail to respond to the love of God that reaches out to them. It is also the sin that will bring judgment on believers who are apathetic to the love of their Savior. Apathy toward divine love, if unchecked, will inevitably lead to spiritual adultery. Compared to this, the animalism and violence of the heathen are as nothing. It would be better not to have the light, or to have known divine love, than to have them and then to be unfaithful to them (cf. 2 Pet. 2:21).

Hosea also teaches that divine judgment is the fruit of sin. Infidelity to love can lead only to degradation. Israel thought she was repenting, but this prophet pointed out that her repentance was only superficial (6:4; 13:3). Just as faithfulness to the covenant brought blessing, so unfaithfulness brought discipline, and discipline in proportion to the light and love violated.

Hosea teaches, too, that true love will triumph over unfaithfulness. Though unfaithfulness inevitably results in chastening, and unfaithfulness to divine light and love leads unquestionably to the worst kind of misery, true love does not forsake the one loved. In fact, true love bears the judgment, the heartache, and the suffering that the unfaithful lover causes. It takes this judgment on itself so that final restoration can be possible. This book closes with the Lord saying at last, "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely" (14:4). God will not cast off those who sin against Him, even those who sinned in the most heinous way. He will discipline them, but He will not cast them away from His

presence. He will give them a new heart of faithfulness to Himself eventually (Jer. 32:39). This revelation supports the doctrine of eternal security.

The application of the message of Hosea to our generation touches both the church and the individual Christian. It is a message to God's people, not to unbelievers, primarily. It is a message to those who walk in great light and enjoy great love: to all those who are "married" to God.

Like Israel of old, the modern church has become apathetic to the love of God and has wandered away from Him, has become unfaithful to Him, and has even prostituted herself to the world to find satisfaction and approval. The evidence of spiritual adultery in our time is worldliness: the paganism of our day that is part of church life. The church is going after the things that the world values at the expense of faithfulness to the Word and will of God. This is due, ultimately, to our dissatisfaction with God's love. We take the resources that God has given us and spend them to satisfy unworthy ambitions and pleasures. We are enflaming ourselves with carnality under every "green tree," as Israel did. Consequently, we are failing to bear the testimony to the light and love of God that we as the church should be proclaiming, and unbelievers are not taking God seriously. One of the greatest hindrances to evangelism today is the behavior of Christians.

Hosea spoke of God's judgment coming on His people in three figures.

He said God would weaken His people's strength, as a moth and rotteness weaken clothing (5:12). That judgment is evident in the church today. We see it in the church's lack of influence in the world, the lack of conversions as the gospel is preached, and the world's indifference to the church's testimony, for example. This is because the church has turned to other sources of strength beside the Lord, as Israel turned to Egypt and Assyria, and like Gomer turned to her lovers. The church, like Israel, has only repented superficially. This judgment is already taking effect.

Second, Hosea said judgment would come like a young lion and a bear (11:10; 13:7-8). This is a manifestation of the fiercer anger of the Lord. This form of judgment is also evident in some churches. They have lost their testimony completely. They have no spiritual impact, because they have abandoned the Lord. They have rejected His Word and His will to pursue other interests, like a prostitute.

The third form of judgment is God's withdrawal from His own people (5:6). When they call on Him, He does not answer them because they have refused to listen to Him for so long (cf. Jer. 7:13-15; 14:11-12). His presence and blessing have departed from them, and there is no more indication that they even belong to Him. Of course, God will not fully abandon His own, but He will remove His presence from them to such an extent that they are without His help. God did this to Israel when He allowed them to go into captivity.

Nevertheless, after all the failure, heartbreak, and desolation caused by the unfaithfulness of God's people, He will gather them to Himself. As He promised to restore and revive Israel's love for Himself, so He has promised to take the church to abide forever with Himself one day (John 14:3). What God will do for Israel at the Second Coming, He will do for the church at the Rapture. These restorations are in spite of, not because of, His

people's responses to His light and love. They are due to the love of God, a love that remains committed to those whom He has chosen, regardless of their commitment to Him. May His love for us move us to remain faithful to Him, and to practice that kind of love toward those who have been unfaithful to us as well. God's unconditional love should be our model in our relationship with those in covenant relationship with us (e.g., our spouses).²²

THE MINOR PROPHETS

Hosea is the first of the so-called "Minor Prophets." The Minor Prophets are called Minor Prophets because they are shorter than the Major Prophets. Hosea and Zechariah, which may appear longer than Daniel, because they have 14 chapters each, compared with Daniel's 12, are really shorter than Daniel. Hosea has 197 verses, and Zechariah has 211, whereas Daniel has 357.

There are 12 Minor Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and they are called "The Twelve." These books were originally copied on one scroll, whereas the Major Prophets required a whole scroll for each book. The Twelve include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The 12 "Minor Prophets" in our English Old Testaments are exactly the same as "The Twelve," the shorter prophets in the Hebrew Bible.

Lamentations and Daniel were put in the Hagiographa—or Writings—section of the Hebrew Bible, not the Prophets section. Lamentations was placed there because it is a book of poetry, and Daniel was placed there because it is a book of history primarily, though it contains prophecy. In the Hebrew Bible, there are only three Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Also, Daniel was not officially a prophet.

²²Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:165-79.

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1

This verse introduces the whole book. The word of Yahweh came to Hosea, the son (possibly descendant) of Beeri, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (cf. Isa. 1:1). It also came to him during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (cf. Amos 1:1). As explained above under "Date," Hosea's ministry probably extended from about 760 to 715 B.C. Hosea's name means "He [Yahweh] has saved" and is a variation of "Joshua" (cf. Num. 13:8, 16; Gr. Jesus). We know nothing else about Beeri ("my wellspring"), or any of Hosea's other ancestors, or his hometown.

II. THE FIRST SERIES OF MESSAGES OF JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION: HOSEA'S FAMILY 1:2—2:1

Though we know nothing of Hosea's personal life before he began prophesying, we do know about a crisis that arose in his family while he ministered. This personal tragedy and its happy ending proved to be a lesson to the people of Israel. This lesson corresponds to and illustrated the other messages of judgment and restoration that follow. Other prophets also experienced personal problems that the Lord used to teach His people (e.g., Isa. 20:1-4; Ezek. 4:1—5:4).

The major themes of the book come into view in this opening section: Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh, His judgment of her, and His later restoration of her.

A. SIGNS OF COMING JUDGMENT 1:2-9

The Lord used Hosea's family members as signs to communicate His message of coming judgment on Israel.

1:2 At the beginning of Hosea's ministry, Yahweh commanded him to take "a wife of harlotry" and to have "children of harlotry." The reason the Lord gave for this unusual command was that the land of Israel (i.e., the people of the Northern Kingdom, cf. 4:1) were committing flagrant harlotry in the sense that they had departed from the Lord to pursue other loves. The Lord used personification to picture the land (i.e., the people of the land) as a woman acting like a prostitute.

Students of this book have understood the phrase "a wife of harlotry" (Heb. *'esheth zenunim*) to mean one of four things. These major views fall into two groups: non-literal and literal interpretations.

First, some believe the text means that God gave Hosea a vision or that He told him an allegory in which his wife was or would become a harlot.²³ This view avoids the moral problem of God commanding His prophet to marry a woman who was already or would become a harlot. However,

²³E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 245-46.

there is no indication in the text that this was a visionary experience or an allegorical tale, and there are many details that point to it being a real experience. For example, Hosea recorded the name of his wife and her father's name (1:3). He also named the exact amount that he paid for her (3:2).

Second, some interpreters believe that Hosea's wife became "a wife of harlotry" because she was already or became a worshipper of a false god; her harlotry was spiritual rather than physical. A related view is that she was a spiritual harlot merely by being an Israelite since the Israelites had been unfaithful to Yahweh.²⁴ Again the details of the story as it unfolds argue for literal sexual unfaithfulness.

Third, it is possible that Hosea's wife was sexually promiscuous before he married her.²⁵ Some have even suggested that she may have been a temple prostitute. One writer suggested that she had participated in a Canaanite rite of sexual initiation in preparation for marriage, but this would not likely have made her a harlot.²⁶ If the Lord meant that Hosea was to marry a harlot, it would have been more natural for Him to say "take to yourself a harlot" (Heb. *zonah*) or "prostitute." The biggest problem with this view is ethical. It seems very unlikely that God would command His prophet to marry a woman who was already a harlot.

Fourth, the preferred view seems to be that Hosea's wife became unfaithful to him after they got married, and that Yahweh told him that she would do this before they got married.²⁷ Similarly, God told Moses that Pharaoh would harden his heart and not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt before Moses first went into Pharaoh's presence (Exod. 3:19). This view posits a situation that was most similar to the relationship that existed between Yahweh and Israel, which Hosea's marital relations illustrated (cf. 2:2, 4; 4:12; 5:4). Israel became unfaithful to Yahweh after previous faithfulness; Israel was not unfaithful when Yahweh married her (at Sinai). She was a brand new bride freshly redeemed out of Egyptian slavery (cf. Jer. 2:2-3). This parallelism suggests that the woman whom Hosea loved again (ch. 3) was Gomer, his original wife. Another view is that two wives are involved, one in chapter 1 and a different one in chapter 3. Discussion of this issue follows under chapter 3.

Another difficulty is the meaning of "children of harlotry." Were these children that Gomer already had?²⁸ Were they children that Hosea would

²⁴Stuart, pp. 26-27.

²⁵Keil, 1:29, 37; T. E. McComiskey, "Hosea," in *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 11-17; J. L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, p. 26; Longman and Dillard, p. 402; and Warren W. Wiersbe, "Hosea," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Prophets*, p. 316.

²⁶Wolff, pp. 14-15.

²⁷Andersen and Freedman, p. 162; Harper, p. 207; Wood, "Hosea," p. 166; idem, *The Prophets . . .*, p. 279; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 337; Freeman, pp. 181-82; and Kaiser, p. 197.

²⁸Keil, 1:29.

have by Gomer that would prove unfaithful like their mother?²⁹ Or were they born to Hosea and Gomer after she became unfaithful?³⁰ Probably the phrase means "children of a wife who is marked by harlotry."³¹ It seems to me that the children in view were the children born to Hosea and Gomer, and they became known as "children of harlotry" when their mother became a harlot.

"In ancient Israelite society harlots were chiefly foreigners."³²

1:3-4 Hosea obediently married Gomer (probably meaning "completion"), the daughter of Diblaim ("fig cakes"). She bore Hosea a son whom the Lord told the prophet to name "Jezreel." The Lord also prescribed the names of Isaiah's sons (Isa. 7:3; 8:3-4), Messiah (Isa. 7:14; 9:6), and many other individuals. He also assigned the symbolic names "Oholah" and "Oholibah" to Samaria and Jerusalem (Ezek. 23). The name "Jezreel" means "God sows" (by scattering seed), but it was not just the meaning of the name that was significant in this case, but also the associations with the town in Israel that bore that name.

Each section on Hosea's children (vv. 3-5, 6-7, 8-9) contains a birth notice, a word of instruction from the Lord about the child's name, and an explanation of the meaning of the name. The names of Hosea's children all reminded everyone who heard them of the broken relationship that existed between Yahweh and Israel, and each one anticipated judgment.

It was at Jezreel that King Jehu of Israel (841-814 B.C.) had massacred many enemies of Israel, including King Ahab and Queen Jezebel of Israel, King Jehoram of Israel, and many prophets of Baal, which was good (cf. 2 Kings 9:6-10, 24; 10:18-28, 30). But he also killed King Ahaziah of Judah and 42 of his relatives, which was bad (2 Kings 9:27-28; 10:12-14). Ahaziah and his relatives did not die in Jezreel, but their deaths were part of Jehu's wholesale slaughter at Jezreel. Jehu went too far and thereby demonstrated disrespect for the Lord's commands (cf. 2 Kings 10:29-31).

Because of Jehu's atrocities that overstepped his authority to judge Israel's enemies, God promised to punish his house (dynasty).³³ The fulfillment came when Shallum assassinated King Zechariah, Jeroboam II's son and the fourth king of Jehu's dynasty, in 753-752 B.C. This death ended Jehu's kingdom (dynasty) forever (2 Kings 15:10). Another view is that the reference to putting an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel refers to the demise of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.³⁴ It is very difficult to

²⁹Wood, "Hosea," p. 171.

³⁰McComiskey, pp. 15-16.

³¹Andersen and Freedman, p. 168; and Kaiser, p. 197.

³²McComiskey, p. 19.

³³Ibid., p. 20.

³⁴Wood, "Hosea," p. 171.

determine if the word rendered "kingdom" should be translated "kingdom" (Heb. *mamlekat*) or "kingship" (*mamlekut*). When Hosea wrote, the Hebrew alphabet only had consonants, no vowels.

- 1:5 This name of Hosea's first son would also point to a future judgment that would also take place in the valley near Jezreel. It would happen on "that day," namely, a future unspecified day. Yahweh promised to break Israel's military strength, symbolized by an archer's "bow," there and then. The Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III fulfilled this prophecy when he invaded and defeated Israel there in 733 B.C. (2 Kings 15:29; cf. 2 Kings 17:3-5). Gideon had defeated the Midianites in this valley (Judg. 6:33; 7), the Philistines had defeated the Israelites under Saul's leadership there (1 Sam. 29:1, 11; 31), and Pharaoh Neco II defeated Josiah there after the Assyrians attacked (2 Kings 23:29-30).
- 1:6 After some time, Gomer bore Hosea a daughter. Some scholars believed that Hosea fathered only the first child and that Gomer's other children were born of fornication.³⁵ The Lord told Hosea to name this girl "Loruhamah," meaning, "Not Loved," because He would not have compassion on Israel to forgive her for her sins. This was an outrageous name for a daughter. Yahweh had been very compassionate toward Israel in the past, but her persistent unfaithfulness to Him and His covenant with her made continuing compassion impossible.
- 1:7 In contrast, the Lord would have compassion on the Southern Kingdom of Judah and deliver her from such a fate. He said He would do this by Yahweh their God, perhaps using His own name this way to impress on the Israelites who their true God was. He said He would not do this in battle, however. The Israelites relied on human arms and alliances, but the Judahites trusted in the Lord, generally speaking, so He delivered the Judahites supernaturally. He did it in 701 B.C. by killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night while they slept encamped around Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:32-36; Isa. 37). Jerusalem was the only great city that did not fall to the Assyrians during this invasion of Syria-Palestine. Judah's sins were not as great as Israel's at this time. Judah enjoyed a succession of four "good" kings (Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham), and Hosea may have received this prophecy when Uzziah or Jotham was reigning.

"The northern kingdom had arrogated the name of Israel to itself. It clung obstinately to the belief that its greater riches, area and strength showed that it was the true representative of God's people. The mention of Judah underlines the vital truth that the rejection of the North in no way involved God's complete repudiation of Israel's sonship."³⁶

³⁵E.g., Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 725; and F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 184-85.

³⁶Ellison, p. 105.

1:8-9 Two or three years later, after Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah (cf. 1 Sam. 1:23; 2 Macc. 7:27), she bore Hosea another son. The reference to weaning is a detail that would seem superfluous if this were an allegory or vision. This time the Lord told Hosea to name the boy "Lo-ammi," meaning "Not My People." The Lord no longer regarded the kingdom of Israel as His people or Himself as their God. He did not mean, of course, that He would break His unconditional promises to His people (e.g., Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 26:17-18), but that the relationship that they had enjoyed so far would come to an end. The last phrase of verse 9 literally is "I [am] not I AM [*'ehyeh*] to you" (cf. Exod. 3:14). The Lord would withdraw the covenant He had so dramatically made with the revelation of this same name. He would remove protection that He had formerly provided and allow another nation to invade and discipline His people.

This passage contains four symbolic names: the names of Hosea's three children and Yahweh's new name, "not your I AM," indicating His rejection of Israel. Positive names were the rule in the ancient Near East, yet the last three of these names are bluntly negative. The collective impact of these four names is the message of this pericope: Israel's unfaithfulness had become so obnoxious to Yahweh that He would not tolerate her any longer.

HOSEA'S CHILDREN		
Name	Meaning	Purpose
Jezreel	God plants (scatters)	God would scatter His people.
Lo-Ruhamah	No compassion	God would no longer show compassion by rescuing Israel from destruction.
Lo-Ammi	Not my people	God would sever His relationship because of Israel's disobedience.

"Hos 1:2-9 functions as a summarizing preface to the entire book. It presents an overview, in stark and moving terms, of the prophet's proportionately dominant message: God has given up his people. The theme of restoration after this judgment then follows immediately in 2:1-3 [in the Hebrew Bible, 1:10—2:1 in the English versions]."³⁷

B. A PROMISE OF RESTORATION 1:10—2:1

A wonderful promise of future restoration immediately follows this gloomy revelation of judgment. It provided encouragement to Hosea's audience by assuring a glorious and secure future for Israel eventually.

³⁷Stuart, p. 35.

1:10 This verse begins chapter 2 in the Hebrew Bible. Despite the judgment promised, Yahweh revealed that the number of the Israelites would be as the "sand" grains of the sea (i.e., innumerable, cf. Gen. 22:17; 32:12). He also said that in the same place where they heard His word of rejection (v. 9) they would hear His word of acceptance, namely, in the land of Israel. They would again be sons of the living God. This family terminology points to the restoration of intimate covenant relationship and privilege. The "living God" title recalls Joshua 3:10, where Joshua told the Israelites that they would know that the living God was among them when they saw Him defeat their enemies in the Promised Land. In this future day the Israelites would again see that Yahweh was the only living God (true God), when He defeated their enemies and led them in victory.

"Hosea's words here are crucial to an understanding of his theology of hope. His prophetic oracles appear to presage absolute judgment, but that was so only for his unbelieving generation. The nation's unfaithfulness to God and their trust in Assyria would be their downfall, but God would preserve a people, and out of them would spring an innumerable multitude."³⁸

1:11 The Northern and Southern Kingdoms would reunite, and they would have only one king instead of two (cf. 3:5; 2 Sam. 7:11-16; Isa. 9:6-7; Ezek. 37:22; Amos 9:11; Mic. 5:2). They would also go up from the land, probably in the sense of growing strong in the land, as a plant.³⁹ When this happens, it will be a great day for Jezreel. As Jezreel was a place of former victory for Israel (Judg. 7), so it would be again in the future (cf. Isa. 9:4-7; 41:8-16; Joel 3:9-17; Amos 9:11-12; Rev. 19:11-21). The leader in view is probably Jesus Christ (cf. 3:5; Jer. 30:21), so this is probably a messianic prophecy.

2:1 The Lord instructed future representatives of the restored nation to announce to their fellow Israelites—then—that they were again "My (God's) people," and that they were again Yahweh's "loved one" (cf. Deut. 30:1-9; Rom. 11:25-32).

"Just as no other prophet pronounces doom alone upon Israel without a promise of future blessing, so Hosea follows his dark predictions with words of great comfort. In verses 1:10 through 2:1 the prophet promises five great blessings to Israel: (1) *national increase* (1:10a); (2) *national conversion* (1:10b); (3) *national reunion* (1:11a); (4) *national leadership* (1:11b); (5) *national restoration* (2:1)."⁴⁰

³⁸McComiskey, p. 29.

³⁹See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Hosea," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 1381-82.

⁴⁰Feinberg, p. 20.

The fulfillment of this prophecy has not come yet, so we look forward to the regathering of Israel, rule by David's descendant, and Israel flourishing in her land in the future. Amillennial interpreters believe the church replaces Israel in the promises of God and that Jesus began the day of Jezreel at His first advent.⁴¹

III. THE SECOND SERIES OF MESSAGES OF JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION: MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS 2:2—3:5

These messages develop more fully the comparison between Hosea's relationship with his adulterous wife and Yahweh's relationship with unfaithful Israel. In both relationships, restoration follows judgment.

A. ORACLES OF JUDGMENT 2:2-13

Two judgment oracles follow. In the first one, Hosea and Gomer's relationship is primarily in view, but the parallels with Yahweh and Israel's relationship are obvious. In the second one, it is almost entirely Yahweh and Israel's relationship that is in view. In both parts the general form of the messages is that of the lawsuit or legal accusation (Heb. *rib*) based on (Mosaic) covenant violation.

1. Judgment on Gomer as a figure of Israel 2:2-7

In this message, the Lord described Israel's unfaithfulness to Him in terms similar to those that a husband would use to describe his wife's unfaithfulness to him. The whole message appears to be one that Hosea delivered to his children, but it really describes Israel as the unfaithful "wife" of Yahweh. As explained above (cf. 1:2), the evidence suggests that Hosea's wife really was unfaithful to him; this is not just an allegory in which God projected His relationship with Israel onto Hosea and his wife for illustrative purposes.

2:2 Hosea called on his children to act as witnesses against the conduct of their mother. She was not acting like a true wife, so he could not be a true husband to her. Perhaps they had separated. She needed to stop practicing harlotry and adultery.

In the figure Yahweh used, He called on the Israelites to contend with their mother, a figure for the nation as a whole.

"Israel's one hope is that her own sons should stand up in accusation against her, as Ezekiel was later to do with Judah (cf. chs. 16, 20, 23), rebuking her not for her faults but for her fundamental unfaithfulness."⁴²

"Contend" (Heb. *rib*) often refers to a legal accusation. Yahweh was bringing legal charges against Israel that could stand up in court. The legal

⁴¹E.g., Stuart, p. 41.

⁴²Ellison, p. 106.

charge was not a formal declaration of divorce, however, because He wanted to heal the relationship, not terminate it (cf. vv. 6-7, 14-23). The relationship between Yahweh and Israel was not what it should have been because Israel had become a spiritual harlot.⁴³ She had stopped worshipping and serving Yahweh exclusively and had worshipped and served other gods. This was spiritual adultery. Under the Mosaic Law, a husband could have his wife stoned for being unfaithful (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22), but this was not God's intention for Israel.

"Marriage is one of many figures used in Scripture to emphasize the relationship of God to men. This illustration is used in both O.T. and N.T. to picture love, intimacy, privilege, and responsibility. In the O.T., as here in vv. 16-23, Israel is described as the wife of the LORD, though now disowned because of disobedience. Nevertheless eventually, upon repentance, Israel will be restored. This relationship is not to be confounded with that of the Church to Christ (Jn. 3:29). In the mystery of the divine Trinity both are true. The N.T. speaks of the Church as a virgin espoused to one husband (2 Cor. 11:1-2), which could never be said of an adulterous wife restored in grace. Israel is, then, to be the restored and forgiven wife of the LORD; the Church is the virgin wife of the Lamb (Jn. 3:29; Rev. 19:6-8). Israel will be the LORD's earthly wife (ch. 2:23); the Church, the Lamb's heavenly bride (Rev. 19:7)."⁴⁴

2:3 If she did not respond appropriately, Hosea threatened to strip her as naked as when she was born, to expose her to shame and helplessness. Stripping naked like a prostitute was a metaphor used to describe the punishment due a covenant breaker in the ancient Near East.⁴⁵ Gomer had exposed herself to her lovers (v. 2), and now her husband would expose her for all to see. He would also make her like a desert wilderness in that she would become sterile and incapable of bearing other children. Her insistence on having sexual relations with many men would result in her not being able to bear the fruit of sexual relations, children. Even though she thirsted for children, she would bear no more.

The threat to Israel involved, first, making the nation an object of shame and ridicule in the world (cf. v. 10; Ezek. 16:35-43). Second, Yahweh would remove all her powers of fertility. Her flocks and herds would not flourish, her fields would become unproductive, and her women would be unfruitful.

⁴³Cf. D. Kidner, *Love to the Loveless: The Message of Hosea*, p. 27.

⁴⁴*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 920.

⁴⁵D. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, pp. 58-59.

2:4 Furthermore, Hosea threatened to have no compassion on the children that Gomer had given birth to in her harlotry, children of other fathers. These appear to be children in addition to the three named earlier, but they could refer to the last two named.

For Israel, this signified that Yahweh would not recognize as His own, and love as His own, the descendants that the Israelites bore. He would regard them as the offspring of others, not Himself.

Rather than slaying the guilty, steps would follow to restore the fallen to their former state.

2:5 The reason for Hosea's lack of compassion for these children was that Gomer had shamelessly played the harlot and had conceived them in adultery. She had brazenly sought out lovers who promised to provide money adequate to take care of her needs and wants.

Israel pursued other gods (Baals) because she believed they could take care of her better than Yahweh. Trade agreements required acknowledging foreign gods.⁴⁶

2:6 Hosea said he would oppose Gomer as though he put a hedge of thorns or a wall across her path so she would turn aside from her ways.

Yahweh would make it perilously difficult for Israel to pursue idols.

2:7 Consequently, Gomer would pursue her lovers but not be able to catch up with them. She would seek them but not find them. Out of frustration she would give up pursuing them and return to her husband. She would conclude that she was better off with him than with them.

Out of frustration Israel would turn back to Yahweh.

2. Judgment on Israel 2:8-13

In the section that follows, the relationship between Israel and Yahweh becomes even clearer. The mention of Baals and Israel's feasts makes this obvious. Hosea's relationship with Gomer recedes into the background.

2:8 Israel failed to acknowledge that it was Yahweh who had provided for her and had given her all she needed when she was pursuing pagan gods (cf. Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 26:10). The Israelites used the silver and gold that the Lord had bestowed on them to make idols of Baal, which they credited with their agricultural blessings.

Hosea spoke frequently of knowledge. He traced Israel's declension back to her lack of knowledge about Yahweh's bounty in this verse. In the

⁴⁶Wood, "Hosea," p. 176.

future the Israelites would know the Lord (v. 20). The prophet bemoaned the lack of knowledge of God that presently existed in the land (4:1). The Israelites' destruction was due to this lack of knowledge (4:6). The fact that they had not known the Lord stood in the way of their return to Him (5:4). But when repentance came, they would know and follow on to know the Lord (6:3). They would learn that knowledge of the Lord is more important to Him than burnt offerings (6:6). The last verse in the book calls on the wise to know these things (14:9).⁴⁷

- 2:9 Therefore the Lord would withdraw the blessings of fertility that He had formerly provided for Israel. Covenant curses would take their place (cf. Lev. 26:3-39; Deut. 28).
- 2:10 He would also expose Israel to shame (Heb. *nabluth*, a withered state) in the sight of those with whom she had committed adultery. No one would be able or willing to save her from this punishment.
- 2:11 Yahweh would also put an end to all of Israel's happy yearly, monthly, and weekly celebrations. In the time of Jeroboam II, the Sabbath was apparently a feast day (cf. Amos 8:5). Idolatry had so corrupted Israel's sacred feasts that Yahweh no longer wanted His people to observe them.
- 2:12 The Lord would also destroy the vines and fig trees, the sources of Israel's finest products. Israel regarded these trees as pay from her lovers, but Yahweh would turn these groves of fruit trees into wild forests, and wild beasts would destroy the trees and their fruit. This suggests that there would no longer be Israelites in the land to care for these crops (cf. Isa. 5:5-6; 7:23-25; 17:9; 32:9-14; Mic. 3:12).
- 2:13 Yahweh would also punish Israel for observing sacred days in honor of the Baals and offering sacrifices to them. "Baal" means "lord." The Canaanites considered that there were many local representations (Baals) of the one deity (Baal). The Israelites had worshipped at many different shrines to Baal—they had pursued the Baals—as a harlot pursues many lovers. Israel had gotten dressed up to impress her idols and to celebrate these occasions, but she had forgotten Yahweh, in the sense that she had refused to acknowledge Him (cf. Deut. 4:9; 8:11; Judg. 3:7; 1 Sam. 12:9-10; Ps. 78:9-11; Jer. 23:27).

B. PROMISES OF RESTORATION 2:14—3:5

Three messages of restoration follow the preceding two on coming judgment. They assured Israel that Yahweh would remain faithful to His promises to His people—even though they were unfaithful to Him and incurred His punishment (cf. 1:10—2:1; 2 Tim. 2:13).

⁴⁷Harold P. Barker, *Christ in the Minor Prophets*, pp. 10-11.

1. Renewed love and restored marriage 2:14-20

The emphasis in this message is on the fact that God would renew His love for Israel and would restore their "marriage" relationship.

2:14 Following Israel's decision to return to Yahweh after her punishment (v. 7), the Lord promised to woo her back to Himself. He would appeal to her with tender and attractive words, lead her into a place where there would be few distractions (cf. 13:5; Jer. 2:2-3), and speak kindly to her heart. This verse presents the Lord as wooing Israel back to Himself.⁴⁸

"As . . . God persuaded Israel to leave Egypt, go out into the desert, and move on finally to the Promised Land; so in the final day he will persuade her to leave the Egypt of spiritual declension, go out into the wilderness of fellowship alone with God, and move on to the Promised Land of blessed rest."⁴⁹

2:15 The Lord promised that He would restore the blessings of "vineyards" to the Israelites. He would turn "the valley of Achor" (lit. Trouble, the site of Achan's sin, Josh. 7:24-26) into "a door of hope" (cf. 1:11). This memorial site would no longer remind the Israelites of past sins but would appear to them as the gateway to a new and better future in the land. She would sing again, as the Israelites did when they had crossed the Red Sea (Exod. 15). It is as though Israel would start over as a nation, as she did when she came out of Egypt and the wilderness into the Promised Land.

2:16-17 In that coming day of restoration, the Israelites would call Yahweh *Ishi*, "my Husband," and would no longer refer to Him as *Baali*, "My Lord" or "My Master." "Baali" would recall the Baals of Israel's past, which the Lord would remove from her heart and mouth. They would not even mention the name of Baal by referring to Yahweh as their Baali.

2:18 "In that day," the Lord promised, He would also make the animals in the Promised Land safe and secure (cf. v. 12; Lev. 26:5-6, 22). He would make it safe for the animals to live there by removing war from the land. This is a way of saying that the Israelites, and even the animals in Israel, would dwell in peace and security. Attacks from wild animals and destruction from war were prominent motifs employed in the curses threatened in ancient Near Eastern treaties.⁵⁰

2:19-20 It would be as though Yahweh and Israel began life anew as husband and wife.⁵¹ They would return to the courtship days and start again as an engaged couple. In the ancient Near East, a man paid a price to seal the agreement when he became engaged (cf. 2 Sam. 3:14), and people

⁴⁸See Mays, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁹Wood, "Hosea," p. 179.

⁵⁰Hillers, pp. 54-56.

⁵¹Cf. Kidner, p. 34.

regarded the couple as good as married in the eyes of the law. What the Lord vowed to give Israel to seal this nuptial agreement was: righteousness (what was right), justice (fair treatment), loyal love (unswerving commitment), compassion (tender affection), and faithfulness (dependability). This was God's marriage vow for Israel. In response, Israel would recognize her special relationship to Him and show this by faithfully obeying Him (cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

2. Renewed fertility and restored favor 2:21-23

This message stresses the renewed fertility and restored favor that Israel could anticipate because Yahweh would reach out and save her in the future.

2:21-22 In that coming day of blessing, the Lord would restore agricultural productivity to the land. He would respond to the heavens, personified as crying to Him to send rain. The cry of the heavens would be in response to an appeal that the earth made to it to send rain. The earth would ask for rain because the grain, new wine, and oil had told the earth they needed rain. These crops would appeal to the earth because Jezreel had appealed to the earth, too. Jezreel ("God Plants" or "God Sows") here personifies the nation of Israel as a whole, though its area was also the traditional "breadbasket" of the Northern Kingdom. Israel in the past had cried to Baal, the Canaanite god of rain and fertility, but he had not helped. Having returned to the Lord, the Israelites would now appeal to Him as the true God of fertility, and He would respond by sending rain.

2:23 The Lord would also plant Israel in the Promised Land; He would plant her there securely where she would grow under His care and blessing. He would show compassion to the people whom He formerly said were "not loved," and He would reclaim as His own the people whom He formerly called "not my people" (cf. 1:6, 9). They would then acknowledge Yahweh as their God, not Baal. The names of all three of Hosea's children come together again in verses 22-23.

"Hosea 2:23, along with 1:10, is quoted in Romans 9:25-26 and 1 Peter 2:10. Paul quoted those Hosea passages to say that both Jews and Gentiles will be converted during the Church Age (cf. Rom. 9:24). This does *not* mean, however, that he equated the Gentiles with Israel and regarded the conversion of Gentiles as a direct fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy. Paul clearly taught that national Israel would be saved as well (Rom. 11). Rather, Paul extracted from Hosea's prophecy a principle concerning God's gracious activity . . ."⁵²

⁵²Chisholm, "Hosea," p. 1387.

3. The restoration of Hosea's and Yahweh's wives ch. 3

Like the first section in this series of messages that develop the figure of marital unfaithfulness (2:2-8), this last section also blends the prophet's personal experience with that of Yahweh. This is the strongest affirmation of Gomer's and Israel's restorations. Chapter 3 is probably a separate cycle of judgment and restoration speeches from 2:2-23.⁵³

The restoration of Hosea's wife 3:1-3

3:1 Yahweh told Hosea to seek out in love the woman whom he formerly loved, Gomer, even though she was an adulteress. Stuart held that this second woman was not Gomer but an adulteress, probably a prostitute, with whom Hosea never consummated his (second) marriage.⁵⁴ He believed there is no evidence that Gomer was ever unfaithful to Hosea. Most scholars regard the wife in chapter 1, Gomer, as the same wife in chapter 3, and I agree. The basis for this is that both women were unfaithful to Hosea.

Hosea's action would be similar to that of the Lord Himself, who loved the Israelites even though they had become spiritually unfaithful to Him. They had turned from following Him to worship other gods, and they loved the raisin cakes that were evidently part of their worship (cf. Jer. 7:18; 44:19).

3:2 Hosea obeyed the Lord and sought out his wife. He had to pay 15 shekels of silver and an homer and a half of barley (about 9 bushels), since she had apparently become the property of someone else. Fifteen shekels of silver was half the price of a dead slave (Exod. 21:32), and barley was cattle food. An homer and a half cost about 15 shekels of silver.⁵⁵ So Hosea evidently paid the price of a dead slave for his wife.

3:3 After Hosea had brought Gomer home, he told her to stay with him from then on. She was his by right of marriage and by right of purchase. She was not to play the harlot or to have a lover any longer. He also promised to be faithful to her. Keil argued that Hosea meant that they would have no intimate relations.⁵⁶ But this goes beyond what the text says.

The restoration of Yahweh's wife 3:4-5

3:4 The Lord explained that the Israelites would remain for a long time separated from their idolatrous practices. During this time they would not have a king or leader (i.e., enjoy national sovereignty), sacrifices or sacred

⁵³Charles H. Silva, "The Literary Structure of Hosea 1—3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):181-97.

⁵⁴Stuart, pp. 64-68.

⁵⁵Wolff, p. 61.

⁵⁶Keil, 1:69-70.

pillar (or stone, i.e., engage in formal religious activity), ephod or household idols (Heb. *teraphim*, i.e., use methods of divination, cf. Judg. 18:27-31). Large stone pillars often stood at Canaanite shrines and were probably symbolic of deity. The Mosaic Law banned these standing stones (Deut. 16:22), but the Israelites ignored the prohibition. They would have none of the things that marked them as God's people or that they had used to worship idols.

3:5 After this period of cleansing, the Israelites would return to the Lord. They would seek Him as their God and a Davidic king as their ruler (cf. 2:7; 5:15; Deut. 4:29). They would approach the Lord with a healthy sense of fear because of His rich blessings. This would happen "in the last days," namely, the days of Israel's national restoration (i.e., the Millennium; cf. Deut. 4:30; Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1).

"The reference to 'David their king' should not be understood in an overly literalistic manner. The prophets view the ideal Davidic ruler of the future as the second coming of David (see Isa. 11:1-10; Mic. 5:2) and even call him 'David' on occasion (see Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). This 'David' carries out royal functions that cannot be distinguished from those assigned to the messianic king. Other texts make it clear that this 'David' is actually a descendant of David (see Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16) who comes in his ancestor's spirit and power, much like John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah and thus fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 (see Matt. 11:10-14; 17:11-12; Mark 1:2-4; Luke 1:17, 76; 7:27)."⁵⁷

This appears to be another messianic prophecy (cf. 1:11).

"Chapter 3 is one of the classic O.T. passages describing Israel's past, present, and future. Her idolatrous past is illustrated by Gomer's unfaithfulness to Hosea (vv. 1-2), despite which Hosea is commanded to love her and buy her back 'according to the love of the LORD toward . . . Israel,' a love which led Him to pay the purchase price of the blood of the cross to redeem Israel, the basis of her restoration. The present condition of Israel is illustrated and plainly prophesied in vv. 3-4. Her future is declared in v. 5, showing her repentance toward God who, in His faithfulness, will restore her."⁵⁸

"To summarize [chapters 1—3]:

⁵⁷Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 348. Cf. Kaiser, p. 198.

⁵⁸*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 921.

"God is gracious, and no matter what 'name' our birth has given to us, He can change it and give us a new beginning. Even the 'valley of trouble' can become a 'door of hope.'

"God is holy and He must deal with sin. The essence of idolatry is enjoying the gifts but not honoring the Giver. To live for the world is to break God's heart and commit 'spiritual adultery.'

"God is love and promises to forgive and restore all who repent and return to Him. He promises to bless all who trust him [*sic* Him]."⁵⁹

IV. THE THIRD SERIES OF MESSAGES ON JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION: WIDESPREAD GUILT 4:1—6:3

The remaining messages that Hosea recorded in this book continue to expound the themes introduced in the first two series (chs. 1—3). All five series of messages major on Israel's guilt and coming judgment, but all conclude on a positive note promising restoration in the future.⁶⁰

"At this point we leave the account of Hosea's marriage and begin a new section, which extends to the end of the book and contains oracles of doom and hope. Even in this section, however, we are never far from Hosea's marriage, for it is always in the background and is the catalyst for his message to his people. We see it in the references to the nation as mother and children, as well as in the numerous allusions to spiritual harlotry and adultery."⁶¹

Chapters 4—14 contain speeches that Hosea probably gave at various times in his long prophetic career.

A. THE JUDGMENT ORACLES CHS. 4—5

Chapters 4 and 5 contain more messages of judgment. Chapter 4 focuses on the sins of the Northern Kingdom. Chapter 5 describes the guilt of all the Israelites in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms and announces judgment on both groups.

1. Yahweh's case against Israel ch. 4

This chapter exposes Israel's sins more particularly than we have seen so far. The Northern Kingdom had broken covenant with Yahweh. Her priests (religious leaders) were especially guilty, but the idolatrous citizens also deserved divine judgment, and they would receive it.

⁵⁹Wiersbe, p. 320.

⁶⁰See Charles H. Silva, "The Literary Structure of Hosea 4—8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):291-306.

⁶¹McComiskey, p. 56.

Israel's breach of covenant 4:1-3

The Lord brought a legal charge against the Israelites for breaking the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Isa. 1). Again the literary form of this section is a legal confrontation (Heb. *rib*, cf. 2:2). Scholars therefore often refer to these courtroom type charges as "*rib* oracles," pronounced "reeve." Waltke called these messages oracles of reproach in the form of a lawsuit.⁶² The Lord stated His charges against Israel in 4:1-3 and then developed these charges in reverse order.

God's Lawsuit against Israel		
The charges	Stated	Developed
No faithfulness (trustworthiness)	4:1	11:12—13:16
No love (kindness)	4:1	6:1—11:11
No acknowledgment of God	4:1	4:4—5:15

- 4:1 Hosea called on the Israelites to listen to a message from Yahweh because He was charging them with serious crimes (cf. Isa. 1:2). Yahweh was taking the Israelites to court. The basic accusation is that there was no faithfulness (truth, trustworthiness), kindness (loyalty, Heb. *hesed*), or (evidence of) knowledge of God in the land. The Israelites failed to acknowledge Yahweh as their God (cf. 2:20). These were all things that God had ordered His people to pursue when He covenanted with them at Sinai.
- 4:2 Instead of these virtues, He observed swearing (cursing others by misusing oaths and imprecations), deception, murder, stealing, adultery, violence, and continual bloodshed. An imprecation is a formal curse made in the name of some deity in which one person calls down calamity on another (cf. Job 31:29-30). These were things He had forbidden in His covenant. He identified violations of at least five of the Ten Commandments (numbers 3, 9, 6, 8, and 7). Violent crimes were so common that they seemed to follow one another without interruption.
- 4:3 Therefore God was not blessing Israel, but instead was bringing curses on the land, so that every part of the Northern Kingdom suffered—every living thing. Drought seems to be the primary form of chastisement in view (cf. Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:23-24).

The guilt of Israel's priests 4:4-10

In this pericope, God addressed the Israelites as a whole, but identified sins of their priests in particular.

⁶²Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 836.

- 4:4 Israel's guilt was so clear that the Lord forbade the people from denying His charge against them. As judge, He silenced them in His court. In defying Him, they were like witnesses who brazenly defied their authority on earth: "the priest."
- 4:5 Because of this rebellion, the people would have great difficulty and would stumble as they walked through life. Their false prophets would also err. Both types of spiritual leaders, priests and (false) prophets, were guilty before God. The Lord also promised to destroy the "mother" of the Israelites, probably another reference to the nation as a whole (cf. 2:2).
- 4:6 God would destroy the Israelites because of their lack of knowledge of Himself. That is, they failed to acknowledge Him as their God (cf. v. 1). God would reject them as His priests on the earth, whose task it was to mediate the knowledge of God to the nations (Exod. 19:6), because they rejected the knowledge that He gave them in His law. He would abandon (forget) their children because they had abandoned (forgotten) His law.
- "To the modern Western mind, it might seem unfair that the priests' mothers and children should be punished for their sins. But the concept of corporate guilt and punishment was common in ancient Israel and is frequently reflected in the Hebrew Bible."⁶³
- 4:7 God had blessed the Israelites by increasing their numbers, but their response to this blessing had been to increase their sinning against Him. Consequently He would change their glory, a large population (or perhaps Yahweh Himself), into shame; He would reduce their numbers (and withdraw from them).
- 4:8 Israel's priests were feeding on the sin offerings that the people brought to their pagan shrines. Yet since these offerings were *also offered* to idols, it was as though the priests actually fed on the people's sins. The priests desired these offerings, which meant they wanted the people to practice idolatry so they would bring more sacrifices. King Jeroboam I had appointed as priests people from any tribe and all walks of life in Israel (1 Kings 12:31; 13:33).
- 4:9 God would, therefore, punish the unfaithful priests of Israel as He would punish the unfaithful people of Israel. Both groups were sinning, so God promised to punish them for their sinful ways and to repay them for their idolatrous works.
- 4:10 They would eat, "but not have enough," because the Lord would send drought and scarcity of food as punishment (cf. v. 3). They would act like harlots by committing fornication with pagan temple prostitutes, but their

⁶³Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 349.

numbers would not increase because Yahweh would reduce their fertility. He would do this because they had stopped listening to and obeying Him by observing His law.

The guilt of Israel's idolatrous citizens 4:11-14

The following section is a general indictment of the people of Israel for their idolatry.

4:11 The practice of idolatry (spiritual harlotry), with its emphasis on drinking wine, had turned the hearts of the Israelites from Yahweh. Along with their heart for God went their realistic understanding of what was best for them, which He had revealed.

4:12 God's people consulted wooden idols and sought revelations using a diviner's rod. Their spirit of harlotry led them astray from the true God and His Word. They behaved like harlots departing from the authority of their true husband, Yahweh.

4:13 They worshipped their idols on the tops of hills and under trees because they enjoyed worshipping at their convenience (cf. 2 Kings 17:10-11). This was as bad as the daughters of the Israelites practicing harlotry and adultery with male cult prostitutes (cf. Deut. 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24).

"Faithlessness toward God always results in faithlessness to the most sacred ties of earth."⁶⁴

4:14 However, Yahweh would not punish only the females in Israel, because the males were just as guilty. The females were unfaithful to their husbands, but their husbands were also engaging in immoral acts with pagan temple prostitutes. Stuart believed that homosexual prostitution was also involved.

"For homosexuals, homosexual prostitutes were provided (1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7)."⁶⁵

Thus, this people marked by lack of understanding, would come to ruin when God humbled them with punishment.

Judgment on the idolatrous worship 4:15-19

4:15 The Lord warned the Israelites not to pollute their brethren in the Southern Kingdom with their unfaithfulness. He also warned them not to go to the pagan shrines and take an oath in His name since they did not really worship Him. This was pure hypocrisy. Gilgal and Beth-aven were representative pagan cultic sites (cf. 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4). The prophet

⁶⁴Feinberg, p. 39.

⁶⁵Stuart, p. 83.

had come to refer to "Bethel" ("House of God") by the name "Beth-aven" ("House of Wickedness"), because it had become one of the main centers of idolatry in Israel since the time of Jeroboam I (cf. 10:5; Amos 5:5). The use of one site's name to represent a different though similar place is a figure of speech called *atbash*. Another view is that Beth-aven was a town east of Bethel.⁶⁶

"The site served as a boundary mark for Benjamin's allotment (Jos. xviii. 12). In Hosea (iv. 15, v. 8, x. 5) the name may be a derogatory synonym for Bethel, 'House of the false (god)'. "⁶⁷

4:16 The Lord asked, rhetorically, if He could continue to guide Israel as its Shepherd, since it was not behaving like a compliant heifer or lamb, but had become stubborn and obstinate. No, He could not.

4:17 Since Ephraim (lit. fruitful), the largest tribe in the Northern Kingdom that stood for the whole nation, had abandoned his Shepherd for idols, He called for others to leave him alone also. He would abandon him to the judgment that would come inevitably from pursuing sin (cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Ephraim had become incorrigible.

"By referring to the North as Ephraim Hosea reminds Israel that, as we saw in the story of Jeroboam I, it owed its very existence to Ephraim's jealousy of Judah with its God-given institutions of the Jerusalem temple and the Davidic monarchy."⁶⁸

4:18 Even when the Israelites were not under the influence of liquor (cf. v. 11), they still played the harlot continually. The rulers of the people, who were to be as shields protecting the general populace, also loved the sins that brought shame on the nation.

4:19 God would blow Israel away in judgment as though "the wind" wrapped the nation in "its wings." When judgment came, the Israelites would finally feel shame for sacrificing to idols.

"God's covenant people are called to court, found to be in violation of the stipulations of his covenant, and sentenced to destruction.

"The passage details a long series of crimes against the divine law, all related to the catalog of blessings and curses found in Deut 28—33. The sins of omission and commission pictured so relentlessly throughout the

⁶⁶Feinberg, p. 40.

⁶⁷*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Beth-aven," by R. J. Way.

⁶⁸Ellison, p. 115.

chapter make up a remarkably complete picture of the depths of Israel's apostasy."⁶⁹

2. The guilt of both Israel and Judah ch. 5

The general pattern of accusation of guilt followed by announcement of judgment, that marked the messages in chapter 4, is also evident in chapter 5. One significant difference, however, is that in chapter 5 Judah falls under the prophet's condemnation, though the primary object of the prophet's criticism continues to be Israel.

A warning to the priests, people, and royal family of Israel 5:1-7

The target audience of this warning passage was originally the leaders as well as the ordinary citizens of Israel.

- 5:1 Hosea called on the Israelite priests, the whole population of Israel, and the royal household to hear this message from Yahweh (cf. 4:1). The following word of judgment applied to all of them because they had been as a bird "snare" to people in the Northern Kingdom. Their policies and practices had trapped many people in idolatry and its consequent bondage and destruction. There was an Israelite Mizpah in Gilead (Judg. 10:17; 11:29) and one in the territory of Benjamin (1 Sam. 7:5; 10:1). It is probably the one in Gilead that is in view here. Mt. Tabor stood in the Jezreel Valley in northern Israel. Probably these hunting sites represent the whole nation (by merism), from north to south or east to west. These may also have been the locations of important worship sites in the north.⁷⁰ The point is that the leadership was corrupting the people everywhere.
- 5:2 Those who had revolted against Yahweh's covenant had gone deep into depravity, as though they waded through much carnage, to continue the hunting imagery. Yet the Lord promised to chasten all of them so they would return to Him.
- 5:3 Yahweh knew Israel well; He had not been deceived and fallen into a trap, as the Israelites had. Ephraim had played the harlot against her husband, the Lord, and had defiled herself by doing so (cf. Lev. 18:20, 24; Num. 5:20, 27-28). Ephraim was the largest tribe in Israel and so, frequently, was a synonym for the Northern Kingdom (e.g., 4:17). Hosea may have referred to it here because this tribe was foremost in idolatry.⁷¹ It was part of the priests' responsibility to distinguish between clean and unclean (Lev. 10:10), but they had not done their job, so Israel had defiled herself.
- 5:4 The cultic practices of the Israelite idolaters had ensnared them so they could not return to their real God. The spirit of a harlot had taken them

⁶⁹Stuart, p. 86.

⁷⁰Ellison, p 116.

⁷¹Wood, "Hosea," p. 190.

over; they had become sin addicts. Consequently they did not acknowledge (know) Yahweh.

- 5:5 The self-exalting arrogance of the Israelites gave evidence of their guilt and caused them to stumble as they pursued iniquity (cf. Prov. 16:18). With their proud noses high in the air, they frequently stumbled as they walked. Judah had also stumbled in some of the same sins.
- 5:6 The guilty might seek the Lord, bringing their animal sacrifices to Him, but they would not find Him because He had withdrawn from them. Whereas holiness makes fellowship with God possible, sin and hypocrisy rule it out. He would withdraw His help and blessing from them.
- 5:7 They had dealt treacherously against the Lord by being unfaithful to their natural and contractual (covenant) responsibilities to Him. In this they were like an unfaithful wife who had given birth to illegitimate children, the natural result of unfaithfulness. Probably many illegitimate children who were the products of Israelites and temple prostitutes populated the Northern Kingdom. Participation in apostate religious festivals would only hasten their destruction, not avert it. Perhaps sexually transmitted diseases were taking their toll on the Israelites. Their lands would also experience destruction when enemy invaders overran Israel.

A warning to Ephraim and Judah 5:8-15

This warning confronted the tribe of Ephraim, or perhaps the whole Northern Kingdom, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

- 5:8 Blowing trumpets in cities announced the coming of an invader. Throughout Israel's towns the sentries would blow alarms: in Gibeah and Ramah in northern Judah and in Beth-aven (Bethel) in southern Israel. Throughout the territory of Benjamin, which was home to all these towns at one time or another, news of war would come. Rather than leading Ephraim into battle, as the tribe of Benjamin did in Deborah's day (Judg. 5:14), the invader would pursue Benjamin as it did Ephraim. Benjamin should have been particularly watchful because of its close geographical proximity to Israel.

"This verse describes an invasion of the territory of Benjamin from the south, i.e., from Judah. The enemy is portrayed as advancing along the main mountain road from Jerusalem through Bethel and thereafter into the heart of Ephraim. Gibeah, only three miles north of Jerusalem, is the first to be attacked; then Ramah, five miles north of Jerusalem; and finally Bethel, eleven miles north of Jerusalem, on the northern border of Benjamin."⁷²

⁷²Stuart, p. 102

- 5:9 When the Lord rebuked Ephraim for his sins, he would become desolate throughout his tribal territories. The Lord promised that this would surely happen (cf. Lev. 26:32-35).
- 5:10 The leaders of Judah had also broken covenant with the Lord (cf. Isa. 5:8; Mic. 2:1-2), as those who move boundary markers. Judah had re-annexed Benjaminite territory, thus violating the terms of the Mosaic Covenant regarding tribal allotments (cf. Deut. 19:14; 27:17).⁷³ Consequently God's wrath would rain down on them. The boundaries that the leaders of Judah had moved were not just physical but also spiritual. They had moved the boundaries between right and wrong, true and false religion, and the true God and idols.
- 5:11 Ephraim would experience crushing judgment by an enemy invader because he determined to follow false gods rather than divine commands (cf. Deut. 4:3; 6:14; 8:19; 28:14; Jer. 2:5). The human command in view is probably Jeroboam I's institution of calf worship at altars in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:27-30).
- 5:12 Yahweh would consume the Northern Kingdom as a moth eats cloth or as rot causes bones to decay. He was behind the enemy invasion.
- 5:13 Both Israel and Judah appealed to the king of Assyria for help, but he was unable to save them. King Ahaz of Judah did this (2 Kings 16:5-9), and so did King Menahem of Israel (2 Kings 15:19-20) and King Hoshea of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 17:3). Rather than assisting, the Assyrians attacked both nations. King Jareb ("The Avenging" or "The Great") probably refers to Tiglath-Pileser III, with whom both Israel and Judah made alliances.
- 5:14 However, it would be Yahweh, not the Assyrians, who was ultimately responsible for the discipline of these kingdoms (cf. v. 12). As a lion, He would tear them to pieces and carry them away in judgment, and there would be no one who could deliver them. Israel fell to the Assyrians, in 722 B.C., after two previous Assyrian invasions (in 743 and 734-32 B.C.). Judah escaped Assyria in 701 B.C., due to King Hezekiah's trust in the Lord, but Babylonia finally fulfilled this prophecy to her in 586 B.C.
- 5:15 As a lion returning to its lair, Yahweh would go away and leave His people until they bore their punishment and sought His forgiveness. When they felt their affliction, moved by His Spirit, they would seek Him earnestly (cf. v. 6; Deut. 4:29).

"The language would appear to reach into the Millennium, when the Israelites will indeed repent before God and seek his face (cf. 1:10-11; 2:14-23)."⁷⁴

⁷³Ibid., p. 104.

⁷⁴Wood, "Hosea," p. 192.

"Taken with Mt. 23:37-39, this passage gives in broad outline the course of Israel's future restoration to God."⁷⁵

The last statement of this verse provides a transition from the messages of judgment in chapters 4 and 5 to the promises of restoration in 6:1-3.

B. THE RESTORATION PROMISES 6:1-3

This first part of chapter 6 envisions Israel's repentance. The prophet predicted the words that the penitent generation of Israelites would say when they sought the Lord (5:15). The message contains two cycles, each containing an exhortation (vv. 1a, 3a) and a motivating promise (vv. 1b-2, 3b).⁷⁶

"Some of the most gracious calls to repentance in all Scripture are found in 6:1-3 and 14:1-3."⁷⁷

- 6:1 The repentant Israelites would encourage each other to return to Yahweh because they believed He would heal them (as a shepherd, cf. 5:13) even though He had torn and wounded them (as a lion, cf. 5:14). They would recognize that their punishment had come from Him, not just from a foreign enemy (cf. Deut. 32:39).
- 6:2 He would revive them after a relatively brief period of judgment (two days; cf. Job 5:19; Prov. 6:16; 30:15, 18; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, et al.) and restore them to life and usefulness. He would do this so they might enjoy His fellowship and serve Him. The fact that Jesus Christ was in the tomb two days and arose on the third day is only a coincidental parallel. It is, however, one of many similarities between Christ and Israel.
- 6:3 Such a hope would motivate this revived generation of Israelites to encourage themselves to pursue intensely knowing (acknowledging) Yahweh as the true God and as their God (cf. 4:1, 6; 5:4). They would be confident of His restoration because of His character, His faithfulness to His promises (e.g., 5:15), and His power. His return to bless them would be as certain and as life-giving as the sunrise. He would bring refreshment and fertility back to the nation (cf. Deut. 11:13-15). No more would they look to Baal for these blessings.

Corporate Israel has never prayed like this. The fulfillment must still be future, at the beginning of Christ's millennial reign.

⁷⁵*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 922.

⁷⁶Chisholm, "Hosea," p. 1393.

⁷⁷Kaiser, 197.

V. THE FOURTH SERIES OF MESSAGES ON JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION: ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE 6:4—11:11

This section of the book contains another series of messages that deal, first, with the judgment coming on Israel and, second, the restoration that will follow. There are three major addresses in this section, each introduced by a direct address (6:4; 9:1; 11:8).

A. MORE MESSAGES ON COMING JUDGMENT 6:4—11:7

The subject of Israel's ingratitude is particularly prominent in these messages. Each of the two major messages of judgment ends with a reference to Israel returning *to* Egypt (8:13; 11:5). The message on restoration that follows these two (11:8-11) refers to the Israelites returning *from* Egypt (11:11).

1. Israel's ingratitude and rebellion 6:4—8:14

Two oracles of judgment compose this section. Each one begins by referring to Israel's breach of covenant (6:7; 8:1), and each one contains a reference to Egypt near the end (7:16; 8:13).

Accusations involving ingratitude 6:4—7:16

The Lord accused the Israelites of being ungrateful for His many blessings in the past and therefore being disloyal to Him and His covenant with them. The section primarily enumerates and illustrates these accusations, but it closes with an announcement of coming judgment (7:12-13, 16).

Lack of loyalty 6:4-11

This section stresses Israel's covenant disloyalty to Yahweh.

- 6:4 The Lord twice asked rhetorically what He should do with Ephraim and Judah. The questions express frustration, helplessness, and despair more than inquiry. The loyal love (Heb. *hesed*, cf. 2:19; 4:1) of these elect nations, expressed in their obedience to Yahweh's covenant, was as short-lived as the morning fog or as dew. Both disappear quickly, especially in the hot Palestinian sun.
- 6:5 Therefore the Lord had sent messages of condemnation through His prophets that had the effect of mowing His people down. These messages had been as destructive as lightning bolts (cf. Amos 4:6-11).
- 6:6 God's preference is that His people love Him faithfully more than that they offer Him other types of sacrifices. He wanted the Israelites to acknowledge (know) Him rather than bringing burnt offerings to their altars (cf. 2:20; 4:1, 6). Sacrifices were meaningless, even offensive, unless offered out of a heart of love that demonstrated obedience to God's Word (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8; Matt. 9:13; 12:7).

- 6:7 Like Adam, the first and typical man in an endless stream of human beings, the Israelites had violated God's loving directions even though His blessings had been abundant. The AV translation "like men" (Heb. *'adam*) highlights Adam's typical significance. The covenant that Adam transgressed was not the Mosaic Covenant, which the Israelites and Judahites had violated. It was the arrangement with Adam that God had specified for life within the Garden of Eden, the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 2:16-17). Ever since Adam, all people, including God's people, dealt treacherously with Him by trying to seize the sovereignty from God—because they doubted His love for them.
- 6:8 The Lord viewed Gilead, a region of Israel east of the Jordan River, as a city. Perhaps He meant that the whole area was similar to a city in which violence and murder were so widespread that one could see bloody footprints in the streets. He may have been referring to a particular city named Gilead (Ramoath-Gilead?) in the region of Gilead where those conditions prevailed (cf. Gen. 31:47-48; Judg. 10:17). In any case, the point is clear. Evidence of gross violence against one's neighbors demonstrated lack of love for Yahweh and lack of respect for His covenant.
- 6:9 Whether priests were really murdering travelers as they approached the Israelite town of Shechem is uncertain. Perhaps they were. Shechem was a major religious and political center in Israel. On the other hand, this may simply be another (hyperbolic) way of describing the perverse behavior of even those who should have been closest to God. Shechem and Ramoth-Gilead were cities of refuge where people could supposedly flee for safety (cf. Josh. 20:1-2, 7-8), but they had been contaminated by blood.. Shechem stood on the route between Samaria and Bethel, so many pilgrims traveled through Shechem. The Hebrew word translated "crime," (*zimmah*) refers to the vilest sexual sins elsewhere (e.g., Lev. 18:17; 19:29; Judg. 20:5-6; Job 31:9-11). Such behavior by priests, who should have been serving the people by leading them to Yahweh, was vile to God.
- 6:10 The Lord had observed a horrible thing. The Israelites as a whole had practiced harlotry by going after pagan gods and had thus made themselves unclean. Religious apostasy involved sexual immorality, so both forms of harlotry are doubtless in view.
- 6:11 Judah also had sinned horribly and could anticipate a harvest of judgment. This would come when the Lord paid back His people for their sins. Yet the hope of eventual restoration was clear. This would be another type of harvest, a harvest marked by blessing and restoration, and that is the one primarily in view here. Reference to restoration concludes this brief message as it does the major series of messages on judgment.

The mention of Judah at the beginning and at the end of this message proves again that both kingdoms were guilty of disloyalty to God, though Israel was the worse offender.

Internal corruption 7:1-7

This section focuses on Israel's domestic sins.

- 7:1 The Lord longed to heal Israel, but when He thought about doing so, new evidences of her sins presented themselves. The prophets He sent to them were mainly ineffective in stemming the tide of rebellion. Most people's reaction to their messages was rejection and further heart-hardening. The people lied to one another and stole from each other. These two crimes are a synecdoche for civil and social injustices in general.
- 7:2 The Israelites apparently hoped that the Lord would not hold some of their sins against them, but He remembered all their wickedness. Their evil deeds surrounded them like a wall, so they were constantly before His eyes. They reminded Him of their sins whenever He looked in their direction.
- 7:3 Their political leaders rejoiced in the wickedness of the people because that made it easier for them to get away with sinning. These leaders, of course, should have opposed all forms of ungodliness since they were Yahweh's representatives on earth.
- 7:4 The Israelites as a whole were all adulterers, both physically and spiritually. Their passion for wickedness was like the fire in a baker's oven: very hot and constantly burning.
- "The oven was so hot that a baker could cease tending the fire during an entire night—while the dough he had mixed was rising—and then, with a fresh tending of the fire in the morning, have sufficient heat for baking at that time."⁷⁸
- 7:5 Verses 5-7 describe the assassination of one or more of Israel's kings, an example of the passion for wickedness just illustrated. The political leaders became drunk on a particular festive occasion that honored the king. The king himself joined in scoffing at what was holy.
- 7:6 The princes eagerly plotted to overthrow the king. Their anger with him smoldered for a long time and was not obvious to him, like a fire hidden in an oven (v. 4), but at the proper time it flared up and consumed him and his supporters. Hosea saw this happen four times. Shallum assassinated Zechariah, Menahem assassinated Shallum, Pekah assassinated Pekahiah, and Hoshea assassinated Pekah (2 Kings 15:10, 14, 25, 30).
- 7:7 All of Israel's past kings had fallen. All the Israelite kings who followed Jeroboam II suffered assassination except Menahem and Hoshea (cf. 2 Kings 17:3-6). The Israelites murdered their leaders, leaving themselves

⁷⁸Wood, "Hosea," pp. 196-97. See Stuart, p. 119, for a fuller description of the bread-baking process.

like a ship without a rudder. A continuing dynasty, as existed in Judah, never succeeded in the North. The reason was that none of the Israelites sought the Lord. Since this prophecy is undated we do not know when Hosea gave it, but it must have been during the tumultuous times when Israel's final kings reigned (ca. 752-722 B.C.).

"So blinded had the people become that they did not realize that even though their kings had been of their own making, in destroying them they were destroying God's order (Rom. 13:1)."⁷⁹

"Like every revolutionary state that has no faith in anything beyond itself, Israel was burning up in its own anger."⁸⁰

Reliance on foreigners 7:8-16

This pericope condemns Israel's foreign policy.

7:8 Ephraim had mixed itself with the pagan nations like unleavened dough mixed with leaven. She had done this by making alliances with neighbor nations, as well as by importing heathen customs and pagan gods into Israel.

"Hoshea's lurching foreign policy is illustrative. In 732 B.C., Hoshea, after killing Pekah, suddenly shifted from alliance with Egypt, Philistia, and Aram-Damascus to alliance with Assyria. A few years later he broke that alliance, and coming virtually full circle, again sought alliance with Egypt. These confused policies are caricatured in the figurative sense of 'mixed up.'"⁸¹

Ephraim had become like all the other nations rather than distinctive, as Yahweh intended (Exod. 19:6). To use another figure, Ephraim was similar to a pancake that the cook had not turned over, all burnt and black on one side and soggy and runny on the other. In other words, she was only half-baked, worthless, not what God intended or what could nourish others. She was crusty toward Yahweh but soft toward other nations.

"It is so easy for us all to become a cake unturned. We may have much of doctrine and little of deed, much of creed and little of conduct, much of belief and little of behavior, much of principle and little of practice, much of orthodoxy and little of orthopraxy."⁸²

⁷⁹Ellison, p. 124.

⁸⁰Mays, pp. 106-7.

⁸¹Stuart, p. 121.

⁸²Feinberg, p. 57.

7:9 Foreign alliances had sapped Ephraim's strength rather than adding to it, but the Israelites were ignorant of this. They thought they were as strong as ever. Tribute payments to allies constantly drained the nation's wealth and weakened its economy (cf. 2 Kings 15:19-20; 17:3). Israel was unaware of its real condition, as when a person's hair becomes gray but he does not notice it. Others can sense the approach of death, but he does not. Israel was dying in the late 730s and early 720s, but its own people did not know it.

"Are there gray hairs here and there in your spiritual life and you know it not? Prayerlessness, lack of fervor, no passion for the lost, distaste for the worship of God's house, no delight in the study of the word, no desire for fellowship with the Lord, and no interest in God's missionary plan which burns in the heart of the Lord Jesus for Jew and Gentile as a never-dying flame?"⁸³

7:10 Despite Israel's weakness, the nation was too proud to return to Yahweh and seek His help. Israel seems to have been living in the past glory days rather than in the present. The years following the reign of King Jeroboam II saw the weakening of Israel that this whole section of the book pictures.

7:11 Ephraim was behaving like a dove, a bird known for its silliness and naiveté (cf. Matt. 10:16). Expediency and human wisdom, marked by vacillation, had guided Israel's foreign policy for years—rather than the will of God. This was "bird-brained" diplomacy. Emissaries had fluttered off to Egypt (2 Kings 17:3-4) and Assyria (2 Kings 15:29), seeking aid without realizing the danger that these nations posed (cf. 11:11). Finally, because Israel turned from Assyria to Egypt for help against Assyria, Assyria captured and destroyed the Northern Kingdom.

7:12 Yahweh promised to bring Israel under His control and to subdue it, as when a hunter throws a net over birds. He would chasten His people in harmony with what He had earlier proclaimed to them when He gave them the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Lev. 26:28).

"Vv 8-12 would appear to refer to Hoshea's desperate, inconsistent attempts at foreign alliances. He came to power submitting to Assyrian hegemony, paying tribute, and thus preserving the central-southern portions of the nation not yet controlled by Assyria. Within a few years (i.e., sometime in the mid-720s) he stopped tribute payments to Assyria and appealed for support to a temporarily resurgent Egypt (1 [*sic* 2] Kgs 17:2-4). This was the 'mixed up' foreign policy 'among the nations' (v 8) of a dying people (v 9)."⁸⁴

⁸³Ibid., p. 58.

⁸⁴Stuart, p. 117.

7:13 The Lord pronounced doom on the Israelites because He would judge them for straying from Him like sheep from their Shepherd. Destruction would be their punishment because they rebelled against Him. His desire was to redeem them from destruction, but they only spoke lies about His desire and ability to redeem them. That is why they made foreign treaties: to defend themselves since they thought Yahweh would or could not.

"The God of the Exodus is unchanged in His will, but because of Israel's lies there will be no 'exodus' from the Assyrian danger."⁸⁵

7:14 When the people cried out, it was not in prayer to God but out of self-pity over their miserable condition. These tears did not impress Him. They assembled (or gashed themselves, maybe both) to obtain food and drink from their idols. Crying out, wailing, and slashing oneself were all aspects of the self-destructive Canaanite worship style that the Israelites adopted (cf. 1 Kings 18:28). They turned away from Yahweh, the only One who could provide their needs, like stubborn children.

"According to Canaanite religious beliefs, prolonged drought was a signal that the storm god Baal had been temporarily defeated by the god of death and was imprisoned in the underworld. Baal's worshipers would mourn his death in hopes that their tears might facilitate his resurrection and the restoration of crops."⁸⁶

7:15 It was Yahweh who had taught His people how to be strong. He had also made them strong militarily (cf. Ezek. 30:24-25), for example, during Jeroboam II's reign (cf. 2 Kings 14:25-28). Yet they had used what He had given them to sin against Him (cf. Gen. 50:20). They treated Him as their enemy. This was further evidence of their ingratitude.

7:16 They had looked around to other nations for help, but they had not turned their hearts and eyes to heaven to seek the Lord's help. They had become like a warped bow in Yahweh's hands. Rather than shooting His enemies, they shot their own leaders and slew them (e.g., Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah). In the days of Jeroboam II, the Israelites had even boasted insolently to the Egyptians about not needing Yahweh. But the Egyptians, their treaty partner on several occasions, would deride them for their weakness.

"As we review these images, we might take inventory of our own devotion to the Lord. How lasting is it? How deep is it? How strong is it? How serious is it? How dependable is it?"⁸⁷

⁸⁵Mays, p. 111.

⁸⁶*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1455.

⁸⁷Wiersbe, p. 324.

Accusations involving rebellion ch. 8

Judgment would also come on Israel because God's people had rebelled against Yahweh. In the previous section (6:4—7:16), accusations were more common than promises of judgment. In this one judgment becomes more prominent, though accusations continue.

Making idols 8:1-7

8:1 The Lord commanded Hosea to announce coming judgment by telling him to put a trumpet to his lips. The blowing of the shophar announced that an invader was coming (cf. 5:8). Israel's enemy would swoop down on the nation as an eagle attacking its prey (cf. 5:14; Deut. 28:49). The "house of the LORD" refers to the people of Israel, His household. The reason for this judgment was Israel's transgression (overstepping) of Yahweh's covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) and the nation's rebellion against His Law (the Mosaic Law; cf. 7:13).

8:2 The Israelites claimed that they acknowledged (knew) the authority of their God, but their transgressions and rebellion proved that they did not (cf. 4:1, 6; 5:4). Their knowledge of Him was only historical and traditional (cf. John 8:33).

8:3 Because Israel had rejected the good (i.e., the Lord's moral and ethical requirements), an enemy would pursue him (cf. Deut. 28:45).

8:4 One example of Israel's rebellion was the setting up of kings and other leaders without consulting Yahweh.

"Yahweh *alone* determines who can be king either by charismatic gifts or by direct revelation through a prophet. He *gives* kings to the nations (e.g., 1 Kgs 19:15-16); they do not decide who their kings will be. . . . The king was Yahweh's representative or regent, not the people's choice."⁸⁸

The making of idols was another example of rebellion. The result of this rebellion was that God would cut Israel off (separate Israel from its land and people).

8:5 The Lord rejected the calf idol, that had come to represent Israelite worship, ever since Jeroboam I first set up images of calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-30). "He" refers to Yahweh (cf. 1:7; 2:23; 4:6, 10, 12; 8:13), and "Samaria" again represents the whole Northern Kingdom, by metonymy. Hosea spoke to the people about Yahweh in the third person here. The Lord also said His anger burned against the Israelites because of this idolatry. He lamented that they persisted in uncleanness, asking them rhetorically how long they would be incapable of "innocence" (purity).

⁸⁸Stuart, p. 131.

- 8:6 From Israel, of all people, had come the pagan idol. A human craftsman had fashioned it, so the idol was not the true God (cf. Isa. 40:18-20; 44:9-20). When Jeroboam I originally presented these idols to the people of Israel, he said, "Behold your gods, O Israel" (1 Kings 12:28; cf. Exod. 32:4). These idols, represented here as the calf of Samaria, would be broken to pieces, demonstrating the impotence of the gods.
- 8:7 Normally farmers sowed seed and reaped grain, but Israel had sowed "the wind," something foolish and worthless (cf. Job 7:7; Prov. 11:29; Eccles. 1:14, 17), namely: idolatry. Consequently, instead of reaping something beneficial and nourishing, he would reap a "whirlwind," something equally vain but also destructive. "Sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind" may have been a proverb in Israel.⁸⁹ The literal seed the Israelites sowed would grow up but not produce any grain, only bare stalks without heads. If the land *did* yield some grain, strangers would confiscate it and the Israelites would not benefit from it.

Making treaties 8:8-10

- 8:8 The prophet looked ahead to the time of Israel's judgment. The nation would be swallowed up, as when someone eats grain (v. 7). Israel would become a part of the nations, having gone into captivity and lost its own sovereignty—and even its identity. It would be like an earthenware pot that no one wanted because it was broken (cf. Jer. 22:28; 48:38).
- 8:9 Ephraim (Israel) had made treaties with Assyria to help protect her from her enemies (cf. 7:11), but the Assyrians would turn and devour Israel. Wild donkeys were notorious for their willfulness and being difficult to control (cf. Jer. 2:24), and so was Israel. Ephraim was also like a harlot, *but even worse* in that he paid others to love him, rather than receiving pay from them (cf. 2:5; Jer. 2:23-25). Yahweh had promised to care for the nation because He loved it.
- 8:10 Hiring allies among the pagan nations by making treaties with them would not work. Yahweh Himself would gather them up to judge them. He would use as His instrument of judgment "the king of princes," namely, the king of the Assyrian Empire, the very king to whom the Israelites appealed for protection (cf. 10:6; Isa. 10:8). The result would be the diminution of the nation of Israel.

Making altars, palaces, and fortified cities 8:11-14

- 8:11 In rebellion against Yahweh's covenant, the Israelites had also built many altars (Deut. 12). They built them to offer many sin offerings, but since God had not authorized these altars they became places for sinning rather than places for worshipping. More altars simply meant more sinning.

⁸⁹Dyer, p. 732.

- 8:12 Yahweh had been very specific about His demands in the Mosaic Covenant, but the Israelites treated them as something foreign to their lives. Ironically, they had treated God's laws as foreign, but they had imported foreign idols and practices and followed them. "Ten thousand precepts" looks at the abundant detail that God had provided His people so they would know just what to do, not at the literal number of His commands.
- 8:13 They offered the sacrifices prescribed in the Law, but the Lord looked at them as *only* meat; they had no sacrificial value to Him. The Hebrew word *basar*, translated "meat," is in the emphatic position before the verb. God regarded the sacrifices as nothing more than meat. He took no delight in these sacrifices because the people mixed them with rebellion. Consequently He would call them into judgment for their sins and punish them. He would send them back "to Egypt," where they used to live as slaves before He redeemed them in the Exodus (cf. 9:3). Josephus wrote that the Roman general, Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, sent many of the Jews as prisoners to the Egyptian mines.⁹⁰ Perhaps the Lord also meant that He would send them to an *Egypt-like place*, which Assyria proved to be (cf. 11:5; Deut. 28:68).⁹¹

"In the deliverance from Egyptian bondage Israel had experienced God's grace. Having spurned that grace, she would return to slavery."⁹²

- 8:14 Both Israel and Judah had forgotten (turned away from) their Creator. Instead of continuing to trust and obey Him, the people had put their confidence in their own ability to provide for themselves. This attitude of self-reliance manifested itself in building palaces and fortified cities as places of prominence and protection. Palaces and fortified cities are not wrong in themselves, but in this context, set against remembering Yahweh, they were expressions of self-trust. In judgment, the Lord would burn down their palaces and fortified cities. He would remove the objects of their confidence and teach the people their personal inadequacy. Tiglath-Pileser III did this when he destroyed Samaria and the other Israelites cities, and Sennacherib did it when he attacked all the fortified cities of Judah (2 Kings 17:6; 18:13).

To summarize, five types of sin stand out in this section as reasons for Israel's punishment: Israel had usurped Yahweh's sovereign authority to lead the nation (v. 4), and had worshipped idols (vv. 4-6). Israel depended on foreign treaties rather than God (vv. 9-10), and had adopted and perpetuated a corrupt cult (system of worship, vv. 5, 6, 11, 13). And Israel arrogantly disregarded Yahweh's Law (vv. 1-3, 5, 12, 14).

⁹⁰Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:9:2.

⁹¹See McComiskey, p. 117.

⁹²Chisholm, "Hosea," p. 1397.

2. Israel's inevitable judgment 9:1—11:7

This section of prophecies continues to record accusations against Israel, but the emphasis on the inevitability of coming judgment increases. Also in contrast to chapter 8, this section is not a speech by Yahweh but one that Hosea delivered about Him.⁹³

Israel's sorrow 9:1-9

Israel would sorrow greatly because of her sins. Description of her sorrow precedes the explanation for it.

The result: termination of festivals 9:1-6

9:1-2 The Lord told Israel not to rejoice like other nations at the prospect of an abundant harvest; that would not be her privilege. He promised to remove her grain and wine. These were threatened curses for covenant unfaithfulness (cf. Deut. 28:30, 38-42, 51). Her unfaithfulness to Him had precluded further blessing. She had credited Baal with providing the blessings that she enjoyed rather than Yahweh. The prophet envisioned Israel as a harlot committing adultery on a threshing floor by worshipping idols there. Threshing floors and winepresses were common places where ritual prostitution took place. It was through these rites that the worshippers sought to stimulate the gods to engage in sex and so bestow fruitfulness on them and their land.

9:3 Israel would not remain in the Promised Land but would go into captivity (cf. Deut. 11:8-21). Assyria, likened here to Egypt (cf. 7:16; 8:13; 11:5), would be the place the Israelites would eat unclean food (i.e., no longer be independent; 2 Kings 17:6; Ezek. 4:13; Amos 7:17). She would eat defiled food in a defiled land because she had defiled herself with sin.

"The place of their captivity was first called 'Egypt' (cf. 8:13) in order to show its general character; then Assyria was named as the actual place the people would be taken to (cf. 11:5)."⁹⁴

"Egypt" is a metonymy for exile because it was the original place of Israel's captivity (cf. Deut. 28:68).

9:4 Opportunities for legitimate worship would end in exile since Israel had corrupted legitimate worship in the land. Drink offerings of wine, which accompanied certain sacrifices, would cease (cf. Num. 15:1-12), and sacrifices offered there would be unacceptable to Yahweh. They would be similar to the bread that mourners ate, namely, ceremonially unclean because of contact with dead bodies (cf. Num. 19:14-15, 22). Such bread

⁹³See Charles H. Silva, "The Literary Structure of Hosea 9—14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:656 (October-December 2007):435-53, for a literary analysis of this section of Hosea.

⁹⁴Wood, "Hosea," p. 204.

might be suitable for human consumption, but it was unacceptable as an offering to God. Cultic celebration would give way to disease and death.

- 9:5 Consequently the Israelites would have nothing to offer the Lord when their annual feasts rolled around. These feasts centered on offerings to the Lord, but those offerings would be unacceptable in exile.
- 9:6 The Israelites would leave their land because of the destruction Yahweh would send. Egypt and Memphis, as two undertakers, would bury the exiles. Memphis (near modern Cairo) was an Egyptian city famous as a burial site because of the pyramid tombs there. Back in the land weeds would overgrow the Israelites' abandoned treasures, and thorns would take over their houses (cf. Deut. 28:36-46).

The cause: opposition to prophets 9:7-9

- 9:7 Israel was to know that the days of her punishment and retribution were imminent because the nation's iniquity was fat and its hostility to the Lord was great. Another reason for her judgment was that the Israelites had regarded the prophets whom the Lord had sent to them as demented fools (cf. 2 Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26-27). This probably included Hosea.

"The prophet represents Yahweh as saying that the captivity was a payment for the sin of the nation. One of the primary themes of this prophecy is the stark truth that sin demands requital, and Israel was soon to know that by experience. The present respite from national calamity was not to last forever."⁹⁵

- 9:8 Ephraim tried to function as a prophet of God warning others of approaching danger. But Ephraim had tried to entangle the prophets God had sent the people, like a hunter catches birds in a net. Thus there was nothing but hostility in the land of Israel between the Ephraimites and the true prophets of Yahweh. Ephraim saw nothing as a prophet and criticized the prophets for preaching what they saw, namely: coming judgment.
- 9:9 The Israelites had delved deep into depravity, as when the men of Gibeah raped and murdered the visiting Levite's concubine (Judg. 19). This was another occasion in which the Israelites punished one of their own rather than protecting her. The Lord would remember their iniquities and punish their sins. This sin had resulted in war in Israel and almost the obliteration of the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 20). War would come again, and God would almost entirely obliterate all the Israelites for their sins.

Israel's humiliation 9:10-17

This section is one in a series that looks back on Israel's previous history, and its reflective mood colors its prophecies (cf. 10:1-8, 9-15; 11:1-7).

⁹⁵McComiskey, p. 144.

"Divine speech and prophetic speech combine in this passage to pronounce upon the disobedient Israelites the fulfillment of the curses for disobedience contained in the Mosaic covenant. Here for the first time Hosea himself calls down the wrath of God upon his own compatriots (vv 14, 17). He is thus both announcer and imprecator of punishment."⁹⁶

Diminished fruitfulness 9:10-14

"The gloomy, foreboding atmosphere of verses 1-9 changes now to one of pathos. The words here are at once tender and loving."⁹⁷

- 9:10 In the early days of Israel's history in the wilderness, the Lord took great delight in His people, as one rejoices to find grapes in a desert or the first figs of the season. However, when they came to Baal-Peor, where they worshipped Baal and committed ritual sex with the Moabite and Midianite women (Num. 25), they became as detestable to Yahweh as the idols they loved. This first instance of Baal worship set the pattern of Israel's idolatry that followed in the land and resulted in her present judgment.
- 9:11 The glory of the Ephraimites, their numerous children, would fly away like a bird, quickly and irretrievably. There would be few births, or even pregnancies, or even conceptions. There is a play on the name "Ephraim" here, which sounds somewhat like the Hebrew word meaning "twice fruitful." The Ephraimites had looked to Baal for the blessing of human fertility, but Yahweh would withhold it in judgment. Ephraim, the doubly fruitful, would become Ephraim, the completely fruitless.
- 9:12 Most of the children born would die prematurely, and few of them would remain, probably because of the coming invasion (cf. Deut. 32:25). When Yahweh withdrew His protection from His people, their doom would be great. He would no longer multiply the nation.
- 9:13 Yahweh saw that Ephraim had been fertile in the past, comparable to the prosperity of Tyre. Yet in the future, Ephraim's sons were destined to become prey to the enemy. Ephraim's punishment would be similar to Tyre's.
- 9:14 Hosea called on Yahweh, after reflecting on her punishments, to disappoint Ephraim's hopes concerning descendants and the inability to sustain their children. The combination of "womb" and "breasts" is a pairing that describes human fruitfulness (cf. Gen. 49:25).

Expulsion from the land 9:15-17

"The previous section (vv. 10-14) began with a tender expression of Yahweh's love. This section (vv. 15-17) begins with an affirmation of his hatred. The previous section looked back to the wilderness; this section

⁹⁶Stuart, p. 155.

⁹⁷McComiskey, p. 148.

looks back to Gilgal. Hosea views God as acting in history; thus historical events and the geographical sites where they occurred become vehicles of divine truth. The events of the exodus from Egypt spoke volumes about God, as did the events that took place in the wilderness and at Gilgal. To Hosea God's response to the people at those places forever remains as crystallized truth about the nature of God."⁹⁸

9:15 What the Israelites did at Gilgal caused the Lord to hate them. This is covenant terminology meaning He opposed them; personal emotion is not the main point. At Gilgal the Israelites practiced the pagan fertility cult (cf. 4:15; 12:11). Gilgal epitomized the syncretistic worship of Hosea's day. Yahweh would drive His people out of the land, as He had expelled Adam and Eve and the Canaanites, because they had sinned and had adopted the ways of sinners. He would love (choose to bless) them no more, as He had in the past, because all their leaders rebelled against Him.

Even though God loves (chooses) all the elect (Eph. 1:4), He has a special affection for those who comply with His will (cf. John 15:14). The Israelites had stopped being compliant and had been rebellious.

9:16 The Lord had struck the very roots of the nation so that it would dry up and bear no fruit (cf. Mal. 4:1). This probably refers to human barrenness, agricultural unfruitfulness, and animal infertility. Even though the people bore children that were precious to them, the Lord would slay them.

9:17 Hosea's God would cast the Ephraimites out of the land because they proved unresponsive to Him (cf. Deut. 28:62-64). They would end up wandering among the other nations of the world. Because they had wandered from the Lord, they would wander in the earth, like Cain whom the Lord also cursed (cf. Gen. 4:12).

Israel's vulnerability 10:1-8

The allusion that opens this series of messages is similar to the ones in 9:10, 10:9, and 11:1, in that it refers to Israel's early history. A mood of loss of confidence and protection marks this section. As so often occurs in Hosea, evidences of covenant unfaithfulness begin the section followed by announcements of punishment for unfaithfulness. In this one: announcement of the fate of the nation's cultic symbols (altars, idols, sacred standing stones, and high places) gives way to announcement of judgment on Israel's political symbol (the king).

Judgment on Israel's cultic symbols 10:1-2

10:1 Hosea compared Israel to a luxuriant (degenerate) vine; the people enjoyed great economic prosperity. The grapevine was a common figure for Israel. Yahweh had planted Israel in Canaan as a vine and had blessed

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 154.

it with fruitful prosperity (cf. Ps. 80:8-10; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10-11). Yet the more the Lord blessed Israel, the more the Israelites multiplied altars and sacred pillars to honor idols. They worshipped pagan gods in response to Yahweh's blessing.

- 10:2 Such behavior indicated an unfaithful (Heb. *halaq*, flattering, hypocritical, lit. slippery) heart that rendered the Israelites guilty before God. He would do away with the altars and pillars that they had erected.

Judgment on Israel's political symbol 10:3-8

- 10:3 When the Lord brought destruction, the people would realize that their self-appointed king had failed them and that they did not respect the Lord. They would acknowledge that no human king could help them. Hoshea would prove to be Israel's last king, and perhaps he was already on the throne when Hosea gave this prophecy.
- 10:4 The people had not been true to their word. They had broken covenants they made with one another. Consequently, God's judgment was as inevitable as poisonous weeds growing in the furrows of their fields and choking out the crops. His judgment would slay the people just as surely as poisonous hemlock weeds kill those who eat them. God's judgments would replace His blessings. Another view is that the weeds represent perverted justice, and true justice would have been as wheat.⁹⁹
- 10:5 When God destroyed Israel's altars (v. 2), specifically the golden calf at Beth-aven (i.e., Bethel, cf. v. 8; 4:15; 5:8), the Israelites who lived in Samaria, Israel's capital, would fear. "Beth-aven" may stand not merely for Bethel, but also for the entire official, semi-pagan religious set-up in Israel.¹⁰⁰ The people would mourn, and the idolatrous priests (Heb. *kemarim*; cf. 2 Kings 23:5; Zeph. 1:4) who served there would bewail the demise of this altar, since its glory had departed from the land.
- 10:6 The Assyrians would carry the golden calf to their land in honor of their king (cf. 8:10). Israel would then feel great shame because the Israelites had decided to trust in a foreign alliance with the Assyrians for their security (cf. 5:13; 7:8-9, 11; 8:9-10).

"For us alliances between nations are such a commonplace of life that we can hardly imagine a nation standing alone . . .

"It should have been fundamental, however, for Israel that no foreign alliances were possible. The reason was quite simply that in those days the secular state did not exist, and so in practice it was impossible to distinguish between a

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁰⁰Ellison, p. 128.

state and its gods. In an extant treaty of peace between Rameses II of Egypt and Hattusilis the Hittite king it is a thousand of their gods on either side who are the witnesses to and guarantors of it.¹⁰¹ So even a treaty on equal terms with a neighbouring country would have involved for Israel a recognition of the other country's deities as having reality and equality with Jehovah. To turn to Assyria or Egypt for help implied of necessity that their gods were more effective than the God of Israel."¹⁰²

10:7 The Assyrians would also remove the Israelites (Samaria) along with their king. They would be swept away like a twig floating on the surface of a fast-moving stream. They would be helpless, totally at the mercy of the Assyrians.

"The three centers of authority in the North were king, cult, and capital city. The final two verses of the passage announce the fulfillment of covenant sanctions against each of these, beginning in v 7a with the capital."¹⁰³

10:8 The Assyrians would also destroy the sites of the idolatrous shrines at "Aven" (wickedness, i.e., Bethel [or Beth-aven, cf. v. 5]), where the Israelites had sinned. Ironically, when the Israelites had entered the Promised Land, the Lord had commanded them to destroy such places (Num. 33:52; Deut. 12:2-3). Since they had not obeyed, the Lord would use the Assyrians to fulfill His command. The pagan altars there would become overgrown with wild thorns and thistles. The Israelites would then express their terror over this judgment by calling on the mountains and hills to cover them (cf. Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:16). They would prefer death to life (cf. Jer. 8:3; Rev. 9:6).

Israel's coming war 10:9-15

This section also opens with a reference to an event in Israel's past history (cf. 9:10; 10:1; 11:1). Announcements of war punishment (vv. 9-10, 14-15) bracket Yahweh's indictment of His people for their sins (vv. 11-13).

An initial announcement of war 10:9-10

10:9 The Israelites had sinned consistently since the days of the atrocity at Gibeah (Judg. 19—20; cf. 9:9; Isa. 1:10). The prophet depicted them as warriors standing at Gibeah. He asked rhetorically if the Lord's battle against them would not be victorious at this site of their early sinning. He would indeed defeat these people so long associated with iniquity.

¹⁰¹Footnote 1: James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁰²Ellison, p. 131.

¹⁰³Stuart, p. 162.

- 10:10 At the Lord's chosen time, He would chasten (punish, discipline, cf. 5:2) His people by binding them as prisoners, harnessing them to their sins (cf. v. 11). Other peoples would oppose them in battle when the Lord had bound them up for being twice guilty. The double guilt in view is probably their original guilt because of their sin at Gibeah and their present guilt because of their sin at Bethel.¹⁰⁴ Another view is that it refers to the sin of forsaking God and the sin of forsaking His appointed Davidic kings.¹⁰⁵

A confirming announcement of war 10:11-15

- 10:11 Hosea compared Ephraim to a heifer that enjoyed threshing.

"Threshing was a comparatively light task, made pleasant by the fact that the creature was unmuzzled and free to eat . . . as it pulled the threshing sledge over the gathered corn."¹⁰⁶

Ephraim had abandoned this comparatively light service in preference for becoming yoked to sin (v. 10). As punishment, Yahweh would yoke the people of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms to an enemy who would greatly restrict their movements and force them to do hard work. "Judah" refers to the Southern Kingdom and "Jacob" to the Northern, using the name of the patriarch that stresses this ancestor's rebelliousness. Or possibly "Jacob" refers to all 12 tribes.¹⁰⁷

- 10:12 The prophet appealed to the Israelites to repent. They should cultivate righteousness with a view to reaping the Lord's kindness (Heb. *hesed*). Breaking up fallow ground is what a farmer does when he plows land that has remained untouched for a long time, even forever (cf. Jer. 4:3). This is a figure for confessing sins and exposing them to God when they have remained unconfessed under the surface of life for a long time. It was time for the people to seek Yahweh, whom they had failed to seek in repentance for so long. They should confess and repent until the Lord sent the blessings of righteousness (deliverance, cf. 2:19) on them like rain (cf. 6:3).

This well-known verse is a good summary of what all Israel's prophets appealed to God's people to do throughout their history (cf. 2 Cor. 6:2).

- 10:13 Instead of plowing righteousness and reaping loyal love (v. 12), the Israelites had plowed wickedness and reaped injustice. Instead of eating the fruit of righteousness, they had eaten the fruit of lies. They had done this because they trusted in themselves and in their own military might.

¹⁰⁴Wolff, p. 184.

¹⁰⁵Keil, 1:133.

¹⁰⁶Kidner, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁷Wood, "Hosea," p. 211.

10:14 Because the Israelites trusted in their own army, turmoil rather than tranquility would mark their life. Their fortresses would suffer destruction, rather than protecting the Israelites from destruction. Hosea compared this future loss to one in Israel's past, but what past event is uncertain.

"Shalman" may refer to King Shalmaneser III, an Assyrian who conducted campaigns in the West in the ninth century B.C. Another identification of "Shalman" is King Salamanu, a Moabite ruler who was a contemporary of King Hoshea of Israel, whose name appears in a list of kings who paid tribute to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III.¹⁰⁸ A third possibility is the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, who prepared the way for Israel's captivity by invading the land (cf. 2 Kings 17:3-6).¹⁰⁹ "Beth-arbel" could refer to the town of Arbela about 18 miles southeast of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee), or to Mt. Arbel two miles west of that sea. In any case, the battle had been a bloody one that the Israelites of Hosea's day remembered vividly. The enemy had slaughtered mothers and their children without mercy.

10:15 The Israelites would suffer a similar slaughter at Bethel because of their great wickedness. "Bethel" here may refer to the town or to the whole nation of Israel (by metonymy, cf. v. 7).

"Since her destruction would occur 'when that day dawns' (meaning the very beginning of the day of battle), it is noteworthy that Israel's final king, Hoshea, was taken captive by the Assyrian conqueror Shalmaneser V before the actual siege of Samaria began."¹¹⁰

Israel's rebelliousness 11:1-7

Again this section, which is all divine speech, begins with a reference to something in Israel's history to contrast the past with the present (cf. 9:10; 10:1, 9).

"The passage at its outset has similarities to the form of the legal complaint made by parents against a rebellious child (Deut 21:18-21; cf. Isa 1:2-20 where hope is held out that the child [Israel] may yet repent and receive compassion rather than death)."¹¹¹

Proof of rebelliousness 11:1-4

11:1 The Lord reminded His people that when Israel was in its early days as a nation, like a youth, He loved the nation (cf. Exod. 4:22-23). As often is the case, loving refers to choosing (cf. Gen. 12:2-3). God chose Israel for

¹⁰⁸Ellison, pp. 140-41.

¹⁰⁹See Harper, p. 358.

¹¹⁰Wood, "Hosea," p. 211.

¹¹¹Stuart, p. 175

special blessing among the world's nations and in this sense loved him. He called and led His "son" Israel out of bondage in Egypt (cf. Deut. 14:1; 32:6; Isa. 1:2-20; Jer. 3:19, 22; 4:22; 31:9, 20).

"We need not find the slightest difficulty in Israel's being called Jehovah's son and not His wife. In a book of so many brief and normally unconnected oracles, with their wealth of metaphors and pictorial imagery, it is worse than pedantic to see a contradiction."¹¹²

Matthew wrote that Jesus Christ fulfilled this verse (Matt. 2:15). Jesus did so in that, as the Son of God in another sense, God the Father called and led Him out of Egypt when He was a child. Matthew did not mean that Hosea had Jesus Christ in mind or was predicting His exodus from Egypt when he wrote, but that Jesus' experience corresponded to what Hosea had written about Israel. He saw the experience of Jesus as analogous to that of Israel. Jesus' experience completed the full meaning of Hosea's statement and in this sense fulfilled it.¹¹³

"This is a reference not only to the exodus of Israel from Egypt but also to the fact that all of God's dealings with Israel were based upon the love that He would show in calling His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, back from the comparative safety of Egypt in order that He might suffer and die to accomplish His great redemptive work."¹¹⁴

- 11:2 God continued to call the Israelites after they left Egypt. He did so through His prophets. But the more the prophets appealed to the people to follow the Lord, the more the people turned aside from following Him. They kept sacrificing to Baal and kept burning incense to idols (cf. Judg. 2:11-13).
- 11:3 Israel demonstrated this ungrateful apostasy even though it was Yahweh who taught His son Israel to walk (behave, cf. Deut. 1:31; Isa. 1:2), provided tender loving care, and healed him when he needed restoration.
- 11:4 The restraints that the Lord had placed on Israel in its youth were cords of love, designed to protect and preserve the people, rather than robbing them of freedom. The Lord freed them from oppressive bondage and made special provision to feed them. The image of a loving herdsman taking care of his animal is in view here. Often a cattleman would lift the yoke from an ox's shoulders, so that when it bent over to eat, the yoke would not slide down over its face and impede its feeding.¹¹⁵

¹¹²Ellison, p. 143.

¹¹³See Dyer, pp. 733-34, for several comparisons and contrasts between the history of Israel and the history of Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁴*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 925.

¹¹⁵Wood, "Hosea," pp. 212-13.

Punishment for rebelliousness 11:5-7

- 11:5 Because Israel refused to "return" (Heb. *shub*) to Yahweh after so many appeals by His prophets (v. 2), He would "return" (Heb. *shub*) the nation to captivity. Yet the place of exile would not be Egypt but Assyria. In other messages, Hosea identified Egypt as the place of Israel's future exile (cf. 8:13; 9:3, 6), but here it becomes clear that he was only using "Egypt" as a metaphor for a *place of captivity*. Assyria would be the geographical location of Israel's exile. Thus "Egypt" is an *atbash* for Assyria (cf. 4:15).
- 11:6 Enemy soldiers would swarm around Israel's cities and break down the gate bars that secured them against foreign attack. They would consume the Israelites because of the decisions the Israelites had made to depart from the Lord (cf. Mic. 6:16). These were the result, in part, of false prophets' advice. Yahweh had fed His people (v. 4), but now the sword would feed on them (cf. Isa. 1:19-20).
- 11:7 The Israelites' resolve to abandon Yahweh was firm. In spite of the prophets' appeals to return to Him, none of them exalted the Lord by doing so. The Hebrew text of the last part of verse 7 is very difficult to understand. The NIV translators thought it meant God refused to hear the desperate cry of His people.

B. ANOTHER ASSURANCE OF RESTORATION 11:8-11

As previously, a series of messages assuring Israel's judgment (6:4—11:7) ends with assurance of future restoration. God would definitely bring devastating judgment on Israel, but His compassion for the nation and His promises to the patriarchs required final blessing after the discipline (cf. Deut. 4:25-31).

"These verses are like a window into the heart of God. They show that his love for his people is a love that will never let them go."¹¹⁶

- 11:8 The Lord asked four rhetorical questions that reveal how hard it was for Him to turn Israel over to an enemy for punishment. They are strong expressions of divine emotion, specifically, *love*, for His chosen people. "Admah" and "Zeboiim" were cities that God annihilated along with Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 10:19; 14:2,8; Deut. 29:23). God could not bring Himself to deal with the cities of Israel as He had with those towns. He would not totally destroy them. His heart of judgment was turned upside down into a heart of compassion. All His compassion flamed up in Him as judgment emotions had done before.

"Israel will not be completely 'overturned' as the cities mentioned here; rather, there will be an 'overturning,' that is, a change, in Yahweh's heart."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 214.

¹¹⁷Wolff, p. 201.

11:9 God did not change His mind about bringing judgment on Israel, but He promised not to apply the full measure of His wrath or to destroy Ephraim again in the future. He would show restraint because He is God, not a man who forgets his promises, is arbitrary in his passions, and might be vindictive in his anger (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29). He was the Holy One in the midst of the Israelites, so He would be completely fair with His people. He would not descend on them with unbridled wrath.

"Some theologians argue that God does not possess emotions. Of course, to make such an assertion they must dismiss as anthropopathic the many biblical texts that attribute emotions to God. Hosea 11:9 demonstrates that this view of God's nature is erroneous and unbiblical. God, like human beings whom he made in his image, is capable of a wide range of emotions, but God, unlike human beings, expresses his emotions in perfect balance. The distinction between God and human beings does not lie in some supposed absence of divine emotion, but in God's ability to control his emotions and express them appropriately."¹¹⁸

11:10 In the future, the Israelites would follow the Lord (cf. vv. 2, 5). He would again announce His intentions like a roaring lion (cf. 5:14; 13:7; Amos 1:2; 3:8). However, this time it would not be as a lion about to devour its prey, but as a lion leading its cubs to safety. The Israelites would follow Him, "trembling from the west" (cf. 3:5; Exod. 19:16).

Since Assyria lay to Israel's east, it seems that this reference to regathering from the west does not refer to return from Assyrian captivity. Apparently it refers to return from another worldwide dispersion. Presently the Israelites live dispersed all over the world. This verse then probably alludes to a still future restoration from our perspective in history. It may refer to the restoration that Antichrist will encourage (Dan. 9:27), but it probably refers to the streaming of Israel back into the land following Jesus Christ's return to the earth (cf. Isa. 11:11-12).

11:11 The idea of a universal return finds support in the references here to return from both Egypt (the symbolic place of exile) and Assyria (the literal place; cf. Zech. 10:10-11). Yahweh promised to settle the Israelites in their houses, namely, in the places that they formerly left, in the land of Israel. The Israelites had been as silly as doves seeking foreign alliances (7:11), but now they would return as vulnerable and as swift as doves to the land (cf. Ps. 55:6-7; Isa. 60:8).

¹¹⁸Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 362.

VI. THE FIFTH SERIES OF MESSAGES ON JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION: HISTORICAL UNFAITHFULNESS 11:12—14:8

A tone of exhortation and instruction marks this fifth and last collection of messages.

A. JUDGMENT FOR UNFAITHFULNESS 11:12—13:16

Hosea again established Israel's guilt and predicted her punishment. Israel's unfaithfulness to God receives special emphasis (cf. ch. 3).

1. The deceitfulness of Israel 11:12—12:14

Several comparisons of Israel and the patriarch Jacob point out the deceitfulness of the Northern Kingdom in this apparent mosaic of messages. Israel had cheated on its covenant with Yahweh. The form of the passage is again that of a lawsuit in which the Lord brought charges against Israel (the *rib* oracle) and concluded by announcing its doom.

An introductory accusation and announcement of judgment 11:12—12:2

- 11:12 This is verse 1 of chapter 12 in the Hebrew Bible. The Lord complained that Ephraim (Israel) had consistently lied and tried to deceive Him. He described Himself as surrounded and under attack by His own people. Wherever He looked, all He saw was cheaters. Deception (Heb. *mirmah*, unfaithfulness) had also marked Israel's ancestor, Jacob (cf. 12:3-4, 12; Gen. 27:35). But the kingdom of Judah had also been unruly (Heb. *rud*, wayward) in its relationship with "the Holy One (cf. v. 9) who is faithful." Yahweh was always faithful to His covenant promises, even though these groups of His people had wandered from Him and sought out Baals and foreign allies. Both kingdoms had been unfaithful to the covenant the Lord had made with them.
- 12:1 Describing Ephraim feeding on wind pictures the nation pursuing vain efforts that do not satisfy (cf. 8:7; 13:15). Reference to the "east wind" suggests the hot desert wind that no one in his right mind would pursue. Ephraim also multiplied "lies and violence," evidences of internal social injustice (cf. 4:2; 7:1). She made covenants (treaties) with Assyria and Egypt rather than trusting in God (cf. 5:13; 7:8, 11; 8:8-9; 2 Kings 17:3-4; 18:21; Isa. 30:7). Carrying "oil to Egypt" probably pictures Ephraim fulfilling a covenant obligation to her treaty partner.
- 12:2 The Lord also had a charge (Heb. *rib*, cf. 2:2) to bring against Judah, and promised to punish Jacob in harmony with his sins. "Jacob" may represent the Northern Kingdom here in contrast to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, or "Jacob" may represent both kingdoms since both descended from him (cf. 10:11).

"Israel is not a 'chip off the old block' but a nation *unlike* its eponymous ancestor, in that it refuses to acknowledge Yahweh as its sole God."¹¹⁹

A lesson from Jacob's life 12:3-6

The Lord proceeded to teach His people the need to repent by reminding them of the experience of their forefather Jacob.

12:3 The Lord described the ancestor of these kingdoms further. Jacob grasped his brother's heel while he was still in the womb of his mother Rebekah (Gen. 25:26). This was a preview of the grasping character that marked him all his life (cf. Gen. 27:35-36). In later life he also continued to contend with God. These references to the early and later life of Jacob picture him as being a contentious person all his life.¹²⁰ Other interpreters thought Hosea used this characteristic of Jacob as a positive example for his hearers and readers.¹²¹ They took it as an indication of Jacob's desire to obtain the promised blessings.

12:4 One important instance of Jacob contending with God was when he wrestled with the angel at Peniel and prevailed over him by weeping and pleading with him to bless him (Gen. 32:22-32). This event was a turning point in Jacob's life because he finally realized that he could not succeed simply by manipulation and trickery. He recognized his need for God's help and turned to Him in desperation. It was the occasion of Jacob's repentance. God had prepared Jacob for this event by allowing him to experience several years of conflict with his uncle Laban (cf. Gen. 31:42).

"Making no mention of an angel, the Genesis account refers to Jacob's foe as 'a Man' (Gen. 32:24 reflects Jacob's initial perspective), but then indicates that Jacob wrestled with God Himself (see Gen. 32:28, 30). Since vv. 4, 5 seem to place *God* and the Angel in parallel, some understand the Angel of the Lord to be in view here. This angel is sometimes equated with God in the Old Testament (see Gen. 16:9-13; Judg. 6:11-14; 13:20-22)."¹²²

Another significant event in Jacob's life was when he returned to Bethel, where God had appeared to him in a dream years earlier (Gen. 28:10-22). This return to Bethel, and the act of worship Jacob performed there, were in obedience to God's instruction to him to go there and fulfill his former vow (Gen. 35:1-14). This, too, was an act of submissive obedience and

¹¹⁹Stuart, p. 190.

¹²⁰See Harper, p. 379; and Chisholm, "Hosea," p. 1404.

¹²¹Keil, 1:146; Stuart, p. 197; and Wood, "Hosea," p. 216.

¹²²*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1460.

resulted in God changing Jacob's name to Israel (prince with God), blessing him yet again, and renewing the Abrahamic Covenant with him.

It is ironic that the place where Jacob got right with God was Bethel, since *Bethel* was the place where the Israelites had gotten wrong with Him by worshipping idols. Jacob's return to God at Bethel provided a good example for the Israelites to get right with Him, there, too.

12:5 Yahweh, the Almighty God of armies, even Yahweh, spoke to all the Israelites when He spoke to Jacob at Bethel. He did this in that He intended the Israelites to learn from the experience of the patriarch.

12:6 The lesson was that, like Jacob, the Israelites should return to their covenant God. They should practice loyal love and justice in dealing with one another, rather than being like the old Jacob. And they should commit to waiting in faith for God to act for them, rather than seizing control of the situation, as Jacob so often had done.

The pride of Israel that needed humbling 12:7-11

12:7-8 A merchant who used dishonest scales loved to oppress his customers. Similarly, Israel's oppression of others was traceable to pride in her riches. Much of Israel's dealings with the nations involved trading contaminated by deceit. The Israelites considered their wealth a blessing from God that they interpreted as due to their cleverness and His approval of their lifestyle. Instead, it was due to His grace, and in spite of their sins.

"The word *Canaanite* also means 'merchant.' Here the word may allude to Israel's dishonest economic activities."¹²³

12:9 Yahweh reminded His people that He had been their God since before the Exodus. He was able to make them revert to a humble wilderness lifestyle again, which their yearly Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) reminded them about (cf. Lev. 23:33-43). This is clearly an allusion to the coming captivity of Israel.

12:10 The Lord also reminded them that He had spoken to them through prophets many times (cf. 9:7; 11:2). He had given the prophets visions, and they had taught their lessons to the Israelites. Nevertheless, in spite of so many exhortations to return to the Lord, the people had not responded.

12:11 What was going on in Gilead was an example of Israel's depravity (cf. 6:8-9). In Gilgal, too, worthless Israelites were sacrificing bulls, expensive offerings, on numerous altars that they had built there. The use of Gilead, on the west side of the Jordan, and Gilgal, on the east side, did not just represent the whole nation. It also provided a rhetorical parallelism since the two names sound similar (assonance). The number of the pagan altars

¹²³Ibid.

at Gilgal was as great as the piles of stones that the farmers gathered beside their furrows. These altars would become simply piles of stones. There is a play on the name "Gilgal," which sounds like the Hebrew word *gallim*, meaning "pile of stones."

The land that Israel occupied had very stony ground, and when farmers plowed they often hit stones that they had to remove from the fields. Evidently they would pile these stones beside their furrows.

Another lesson from Israel's history 12:12-14

- 12:12 The Lord reminded the Israelites again of their humble origins. Jacob was a refugee who migrated to the land of Aram. There he had to work to pay for a wife, and he did so by tending sheep, a very humble occupation (cf. Deut. 26:5).
- 12:13 Later the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt and kept them alive during their wilderness wanderings by using a prophet—Moses (cf. Deut. 18:18). The Israelites, as well as Jacob, had experienced hardship while in a foreign land. By implication they should not, therefore, have despised the prophets that Yahweh had sent them since Moses (cf. v.10). Furthermore, they should remember that they could return to these conditions if they were not careful.
- 12:14 In spite of these mercies, the Israelites had provoked the Lord to bitter anger with their idolatry (cf. Deut. 4:25; 9:18; 31:29; 32:16, 21; Judg. 2:12; 1 Kings 14:9, 15). Consequently, He would not remove the guilt of their sins by forgiving them, but would pay them back with punishment and shame. This was the sentence of their divine Judge.

2. Israel's impending doom ch. 13

Again Hosea charged Israel with covenant unfaithfulness that called for destruction. Here he graphically portrayed the impending doom of the nation.

"In this passage Hosea brings to a close via climactic crescendo the predictions and warnings that comprise the bulk of the book."¹²⁴

Israel's sin against privilege 13:1-3

- 13:1 When members of the tribe of Ephraim spoke, the other Israelites trembled because they looked to Ephraim for leadership (cf. Judg. 8:1-3; 12:1-6). Jacob had prophesied that Ephraim would lead (Gen. 48:13-20), and the first king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam I, had come from the tribe of Ephraim (1 Kings 11:26; 12:25). The Ephraimites "exalted" (strengthened) themselves in the north as well. Yet they were also the

¹²⁴Stuart, p. 200.

leaders in Baal worship. Therefore they were as good as dead since God would judge idolaters.

- 13:2 The Ephraimites, and the other Israelites, had continued to sin more and more by making molten images and carved idols of silver (cf. Exod. 20:4-5; 34:17; Deut. 5:8-9). They took great pains to make beautiful idols by employing skilled craftsmen for their construction. They also required that those who made sacrifices to them profess their devotion and homage by kissing the images. The NIV translation "they offer human sacrifice" is literally "sacrificers of men kiss calves." Human sacrifice is probably not in view here. There is no other indication that the Israelites practiced human sacrifice at Bethel or Dan at this time. (They evidently *did* practice human sacrifice later, during the reign of Israel's last king, Hoshea [cf. 2 Kings 17:16-17].) The idea is that those among the people (men) who sacrificed to idols kissed the images. How doubly ironical it was that they should worship things that they had created and that they should kiss images of animals!
- 13:3 Because they did this, the Ephraimites would soon vanish from their land. They would disappear like fog or dew in the morning, and like chaff from a threshing floor or smoke from a chimney, that the wind blew away. Judgment would come swiftly and surely.

The perversity of Israel's idolatry 13:4-8

- 13:4 Yahweh had been Israel's God since the Israelites had lived in Egypt. Israel first became a nation in Egypt. Before that, the Israelites were just a large family (Gen. 46:3). He had commanded the Israelites not to acknowledge any other gods besides Himself, because He was the only God who could save them (cf. Deut. 11:28; 32:17; Jer. 9:2; 31:34). For them to become idolaters would only be frustrating and futile. To abandon the only Savior is to doom oneself to no salvation.
- 13:5 The Lord also was the One who cared for the Israelites in the wilderness, and who kept them alive in that barren wasteland. His provisions of manna and water are only two examples.
- 13:6 When they entered the Promised Land and began to enjoy rich pastures, they soon became self-satisfied, proud, and forgot their God. Prosperity is often a greater temptation to depart from conscious dependence on God than adversity is, and Israel fell into that trap.
- 13:7-8 In view of Israel's behavior, the Lord promised to become as an enemy of His people, like a lion or leopard that laid in wait to attack a sheep grazing in rich pasture (v. 6). He would confront them as a mother bear crazed by the loss of her cubs (cf. 2 Sam. 17:8; Prov. 17:12). He would tear them open like a bear and consume them like a lioness. The lion, leopard, and bear were all wild animals native to Canaan that were notorious for their relentless manner of killing prey.

Israel's misplaced confidence 13:9-11

- 13:9 By turning against the Lord who only desired to help them (cf. v. 4), the Israelites had done something that would result in their own destruction. How ironic it was that Israel's helper would become her destroyer!
- 13:10 The people had formerly asked their leaders to give them a king like all the other nations. They hoped that their king and his princes would provide deliverance for them. God had given them kings: first Saul (1 Sam. 8:4-9; 12:12), and more recently the kings of Israel that were not of David's line but were kings of the people's own choosing (1 Kings 12:16-20). Yet all these kings had proved ineffective in saving the Israelites. Only Yahweh was their Savior (v. 4).
- 13:11 God conceded to His people's request for a king (Saul and or Jeroboam I), but it made Him angry because it expressed their reluctance to trust and obey Him. When these kings proved ineffective, since they did not trust in Yahweh, the Lord removed them, which also made Him angry. King Hoshea was the last of the Northern Kingdom kings. The Lord had removed the Ephraimite kings because they followed the pattern of Saul, and He would continue to do so until none were left. The sins and bad times, that all these Northern Kingdom kings' reigns brought on Israel, were unnecessary and displeasing to the Lord—who wanted His people to enjoy peace and prosperity.

Israel's stubbornness and its consequences 13:12-14

- 13:12 God would not forget Israel's sins. Its iniquities were rolled up (Heb. *sarar*) in a bundle, like a scroll, and stored up (Heb. *sapan*) like a treasure. They stood as hard evidence that condemned the nation.
- 13:13 Israel was like a baby that refused to come out of its mother's womb, in the sense that it refused to leave its comfortable sin. Despite the mother's (God's) strenuous efforts to bring the child into freedom, Israel refused to repent. This was evidence that Israel was a foolish child. She would sooner die, rather than leave her sins, apparently feeling that the proper time for repenting was not yet.
- 13:14 The Lord asked, rhetorically, if He would buy the Israelites back out of Death's hand. Would He pay a price for their redemption? No, compassion would be hidden from His sight; He would have no pity on them. He appealed for Death (like a thornbush) to torment the Israelites, like thorns tearing their flesh. He called on the Grave (as a hornet) to sting them fatally.

Later in history, God did provide a ransom for His people from the power of the grave, and He redeemed them from death. He did this when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again. God's future redemptive work for

His people meant that death would not be the end for Israel, even though judgment in the near future was inevitable.

The Apostle Paul quoted the famous couplet in this verse in 1 Corinthians 15:55, and applied it to the resulting effect of Christ's redemption on all of God's people. Death and the grave are not the final judgment and home of the believer, because God *did* provide a ransom and redeemed His people. God has a glorious future beyond His punishment for sin—for His own people—both for national Israel and for Christians. Paul's use of this passage does not support the view that the church fulfills God's promises concerning Israel. Here in Hosea, the promise is that Israel would indeed suffer death and the grave, not that she would escape it. Paul turned the passage around and showed that Jesus Christ's resurrection overcame the judgment and death that are inevitable for sinners.¹²⁵

Covenant unfaithfulness punished 13:15-16

- 13:15 With the removal of God's compassion (v. 14), Israel's prosperity would end. Hosea described that change as a hot eastern desert wind sweeping over Israel and drying up all its water sources. Israel had flourished among its neighbors, as a plant does when it grows in shallow water among reeds. Like a sirocco, Assyria would sweep over Israel from the east and cause the nation of Israel to wither. The Assyrians would plunder everything valuable in the land.
- 13:16 This verse begins chapter 14 in the Hebrew Bible, but its connection is clearly with the preceding verse rather than with those that follow. Yahweh would hold Samaria, a metonymy for Israel, guilty for rebelling against Him: her *covenant lord* and God (cf. 7:13; 8:1). Israel's soldiers would die in battle (cf. Lev. 26:25), her children would suffer unmerciful executions (cf. Deut. 28:52-57; 32:25), and the Assyrians would even cut open her pregnant women with their swords (cf. 2 Kings 15:16; Amos 1:13). This gruesome form of execution killed both the mother and the unborn child, making it impossible for the coming generation to rise up eventually and rebel against the conqueror. These were curses that the Lord warned would follow rebellion against the terms of His covenant (cf. Lev. 26:25; Deut. 28:21; 32:24-25; Amos 4:10).

B. RESTORATION IN SPITE OF UNFAITHFULNESS 14:1-8

As usual in the major sections of Hosea, promises of restoration follow announcements of judgment. This final section of restoration promises begins with an appeal for repentance and closes with the prospect of full and complete restoration.

"In beauty of expression these final words of Hosea rank with the memorable chapters of the OT. Like the rainbow after a storm, they

¹²⁵See Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 366.

promise Israel's final restoration. Here is the full flowering of God's unfailing love for his faithless people, the triumph of his grace, the assurance of his healing—all described in imagery that reveals the loving heart of God."¹²⁶

"In many ways the last chapter of Hosea is the most beautiful in the entire prophecy and forms a fitting close to the series of prophetic discourses."¹²⁷

1. An appeal for repentance 14:1-3

"As we move toward the conclusion of Hosea's prophecy, the thundering voice of the prophet becomes a tender whisper as he pleads lovingly with Israel."¹²⁸

- 14:1 Hosea appealed to Israel to return to Yahweh her God because her iniquities had caused her to stumble in her history as a nation. We know from Israel's history that Hosea's generation of Israelites did not repent, but nevertheless, God's invitation was open and genuine.
- 14:2 The prophet counseled the people to return to the Lord with "words" (not animal sacrifices) that expressed their repentance. They should acknowledge their sins and ask Him to remove their iniquity (cf. 1 John 1:9). They should also ask Him to receive them graciously, with a view to their praising Him with their "lips" (not offerings).
- 14:3 They should renounce confidence in "Assyria" (a synecdoche for political alliances) and war "horses" (military might) for their security and victory. They should also promise not to call their hand-made idols their gods (heterodox worship). And they should acknowledge that only from Him could vulnerable, dependent orphans such as themselves find mercy. They were orphans in that they had no other means of deliverance and support.

"If their hearts were broken, their relationship to God would be mended."¹²⁹

2. A promise of restoration 14:4-8

- 14:4 When Israel repented, the Lord promised to heal the apostasy of the Israelites that had become a fatal sickness for them (cf. 6:1). He also promised to bestow His love on them generously, because then He would no longer be angry with them.

"When a person collapses with sickness, it's usually the result of a process that's been working in the body for

¹²⁶Wood, "Hosea," p. 223.

¹²⁷Feinberg, p. 111.

¹²⁸McComiskey, p. 229.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 237.

weeks or months. First an infection gets into the system and begins to grow. The person experiences weariness and loss of appetite, then weakness, and then the collapse occurs. When sin gets into the inner person and isn't dealt with, it acts like an insidious infection: it grows quietly; it brings loss of spiritual appetite; it creates weariness and weakness; then comes the collapse."¹³⁰

- 14:5 The Lord would descend on Israel with blessing "like the dew." Instead of being dry and withered (13:15), Israel would "blossom like the" prolific spring "lily" (or crocus, cf. Song of Sol. 2:2). The Israelites would become as "beautiful" as an "olive tree" (v. 6), that is not only attractive but the source of beneficial products (cf. Ps. 52:8; Jer. 11:16). Israel would "take root" and grow strong, like a cedar of "Lebanon" (cf. Song of Sol. 4:11).
- 14:6 Israel would become productive and attractive to the eye and nose, namely: totally appealing. "Shoots" imply *stability*, "beauty" suggests *visibility*, and "fragrance" connotes *desirability*.
- 14:7 Other nations would also flourish as they benefited from Israel's good influence. The Israelites would again grow grain, a sign of covenant blessing (cf. 2:21-23; Deut. 28:4, 8, 11; 30:9; Amos 9:13-15). The nation would be like a fruitful vine that produced the best wine, no longer like a scraggly vine in the wilderness (10:1).
- 14:8 Ephraim would repudiate her dealings with idols (cf. 2:8; 4:17; 8:4-6), and the Lord would respond with a commitment to care for her. Formerly He lay in wait (Heb. *shur*) for Israel like a leopard ready to pounce on her in judgment (13:7), but now He would care (Heb. *shur*) for her. He would be the source of her fruit, like a cypress or pine tree that bears cones.

"Hosea closes his book with the heartening word of forgiveness. When Israel responds to the LORD's loving plea to return to Him (vv. 1-3), then will follow the gracious healing of their backsliding, the free bestowal of His love, the turning away of His anger, the future blessing of their restoration, and their final repudiation of idolatry (vv. 4-8)."¹³¹

The Israelites have not yet met these conditions for restoration, and restoration has not yet come to them. Fulfillment awaits the return of Christ to the earth and His millennial reign that will follow. Then Israel will be blessed and will become a source of blessing for all the other nations of the world, as the prophet predicted.

¹³⁰Wiersbe, pp. 329-30.

¹³¹*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 927.

PARALLELS BETWEEN HOSEA AND GOMER, AND YAHWEH AND ISRAEL¹³²	
Hosea and Gomer	Yahweh and Israel
Hosea marries Gomer (1:3).	Yahweh is betrothed to Israel (2:19).
Hosea is a faithful husband (3:3).	Yahweh is a faithful "husband" (1:7).
Hosea's love is unrequited (3:1).	Yahweh's love is unrequited (3:1).
The relationship disintegrates (3:1).	The relationship disintegrates (2:2).
Gomer pursues other men (3:1).	Israel pursues other gods (4:1).
Gomer is indifferent to Hosea's feelings (3:1).	Israel is indifferent to Yahweh's feelings (11:1).
Hosea has a daughter whose name Lo-Ruhama means "Not Loved" (1:6).	Yahweh will not have pity on His wayward children in Israel (5:6).
Hosea has a son whose name Lo-Ammi means "Not My People" (1:9).	Yahweh declares that the Israelites are not His people (1:9).
Hosea redeems and restores the adulterous Gomer (3:2).	Yahweh redeems and restores the unfaithful nation, Israel (14:4-8).

VII. CONCLUSION 14:9

Hosea added a conclusion to his prophecies that is a word of wisdom for the discerning reader. One should learn three things from this book. First, the Lord's "ways" (covenant commands) are the "right" (correct and therefore, best) ways. Second, righteous people will choose to walk in the Lord's ways and to keep His covenant commands because that results in blessing. Third, transgressors (rebels) will stumble over His ways and bring destruction on themselves for their disobedience. Their downfall results from their failure to obey His commands, to walk in His ways.

This is an unusual closing verse in a Bible book, in that it applies the teaching of the whole Book of Hosea to the reader.

¹³²Adapted from *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1450.

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