

THE IMAGERY OF HOSEA'S FAMILY AND THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

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Throughout the centuries, Hosea chapters 1–2 have astounded, fascinated, intrigued, and impressed both readers and scholars of the Bible alike. From the enigmatic images of Hosea's marriage to questions regarding Israel's history, punishment, restoration, and future, the content of these chapters has caused individuals either to ponder and search out the intended meaning of Hosea's message or to pass over and exclude them from any serious study because of their unusual flavor. These chapters are richly symbolic, and through symbols Hosea helps his readers understand Israel's history relevant to the past, present, and future in order to understand the overall meaning of the book.

Hosea 1–2 uses imagery to describe the Lord's covenant with Israel, relating Israel's covenant to that of the patriarch Abraham; the text unfolds several phases of the covenant relationship between God and his people with past and future generations. While Hosea's message carries with it proclamations of destruction and hardship, it also includes words of hope and reconciliation for Israel and its descendants. In fact,

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as Ehud Ben Zvi, a prominent scholar on the book of Hosea, has written, “It is precisely the element of hope—hope against a background of apparent hopelessness—that has led to the book’s wide use in Jewish liturgy.”¹ When the metaphors in the book of Hosea are viewed beyond their literal application, the word of the Lord through Hosea becomes a vivid description of the scattering and gathering of Israel and offers glimmers of hope of restoration and the fulfillment of covenants with the Lord.

This paper will address a few major issues in Hosea 1–2, including how the imagery of the names of Hosea’s family members are used, what they really mean in context, how the history and condition of Israel is presented, and what clues the text gives us about the nature of Israel’s reconciliation and restoration. I will show how Hosea intersperses teachings on the scattering and gathering of Israel, how he references the Abrahamic covenant to intertwine dispensations, and how he draws upon images of the Creation, the Fall, and the earth receiving its paradisiacal glory. I will show that the family imagery is used to portray Israel’s then-present situation in relation to its near and distant future. This demonstration will contribute to the text’s rich language in defining Israel’s separation from and eventual reconciliation with God.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hosea begins by stating that it contains “the word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel” (Hosea 1:1). We do not know the details of how or where Hosea received this word, and the ordering and numbers of the kings listed in verse 1 has raised many questions concerning the audience and the time in which the oracle was given. Although Judah is referenced in verse 7, Hosea’s message appears to be primarily directed toward the Northern Kingdom of Israel prior to its destruction. The listing of Judahite kings first has led some to believe that Hosea was meant to be read and reread by diverse audiences (including Judah) over the years.² We do not know many details about the historical person of Hosea; based on the content of the book, his prophetic activity is usually dated from near the end of Jeroboam II’s reign (circa 750 BC) to around the fall of Samaria (circa 722 BC).³

The book of Hosea applies to different dispensations and shows us glimpses of the past, present, and future of Israel through a divine lens. Because of the ambiguity of the text and the lack of specific historical detail, readers from various generations have assigned a multifarious range of applications to the book.⁴ Hosea's message was timely not only to ancient Israel and Judah but also to his audiences in future days. Especially in chapters 1–2, Hosea addresses issues pertaining to the scattering and gathering of Israel as well as to the time of millennial peace. Thus the book's content has meaning for our day as we witness the fulfillment of the Lord's words to Hosea over two thousand seven hundred years ago.

HOSEA 1

The most notable question arising from Hosea 1 has centered on the meaning of Hosea's marriage. Hosea 1:2–3 states, "The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son."⁵ These verses have long perplexed readers, and debates have run rampant as to whether or not this marriage was symbolic, literal, or a combination of both. The fact of the matter remains that even if the marriage is indeed historical, we do not possess sufficient information to interpret with any accuracy the details surrounding the circumstances of the marriage. Many accept the marriage as literal, but because no one can verify the speculative details surrounding it, most cautiously make comments such as the following, which concentrates on the image the marriage represents in Hosea's prophecy:

The text is written so as to strongly communicate to its intended readers that its main concern is *not* with the reported sexual sins and marital life of Gomer (or of the unnamed woman in chapter 3 [see . . . the final clause of v. 2]) or even the fate and actions of Hosea, but rather that which they symbolized. These descriptions point on the one hand to the 'harlotry of the land and its inhabitants'—that is, the worship of gods other than YHWH—and on the other, to the construction of a literary and ideological image of a prophetic personage who on the one hand represents YHWH, but with whom

Israel is also supposed to identify. . . . The main intention of the text was not to provide the readers with a kind of (personal life) biography of a particular man, Hosea, nor to elicit thoughts about his supposed prophetic growth through his difficult family or marital experiences. Instead, it was to instill a hope for the future based on the theme of obeying YHWH and following YHWH's lordship and on an explanation of Israel's (hi)stori-cal disasters in terms of a just retribution for Israel's rejection of YHWH.⁶

Though we may wonder whether the marriage is literal or metaphorical, the message is clear: The necessity of fidelity to the Lord and covenants.⁷ I agree with Sidney B. Sperry's conclusion that "the Lord's call to Hosea to take a harlotrous woman to wife represents the prophet's call to the ministry—a ministry to an apostate and covenant-breaking people. The evil children of this apparent union represent the coming of the judgments of the Lord upon Israel, warning of which was to be carried to the people by the prophet. The figure of the harlotrous wife and children would, I believe, be readily understood at the time by the Hebrew people without reflecting on Hosea's own wife, or, if he was unmarried, on himself."⁸

I believe there is ample evidence in the scriptures to demonstrate that Hosea's marriage is a metaphor of his message to the people.⁹ The syntactic and pragmatic features of the command for Hosea to take a wife also seem to support this. "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: *for* the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord" (Hosea 1:2; emphasis added). Here, the word *for* introduces a causal clause¹⁰ (it is because the land—which includes its leaders and its inhabitants—is committing great whoredom and departing from the Lord that Hosea is told to take a wife and children of whoredoms).¹¹ This detail brings our understanding of Israel and all her people into focus and explains that it is she who is going to whore away from following the Lord. The language is metaphorical, and the wife and children Hosea refers to represent the kingdom of Israel and its inhabitants.¹² What seems to bolster this interpretation¹² is that the usual formula "to take for yourself a wife" is not employed here, and referring to Israel as a woman forsaking the Lord is a common motif in Hosea, Jeremiah, and the Old Testament in general.¹³ The symbolism here may be along

the lines of Ezekiel or John eating a book at the beginning of their ministries, which action represents internalizing and proclaiming the bitter and sweet message of the Lord to the people.¹⁴ Similarly, Hosea's message is both bitter and sweet, as will be seen in the names of the children conceived from this union.¹⁵ The image of the marriage thus provides a powerful description of the message Hosea bears in his ministry to Israel.

The name Gomer may have originally meant "perfection" or "complete" but has here become a pejorative "complete," as in "done."¹⁶ Because of disobedience to God's commandments, Israel's political existence was literally almost finished. If the chapter can be situated during the reign of Jeroboam II (circa 788–747 BC), then within a few decades, Israel would be overrun by the Assyrians and cease to be a political entity. The name Gomer is thus appropriate in the Lord's message through Hosea.¹⁷ The name Diblaim is from an unused root, but it probably means something like "two cakes." It is interesting that, using a different but synonymous word, Hosea 7:8 describes Ephraim as "a cake not turned." According to 7:9–10, this term refers to the leaders of Israel entering foreign alliances rather than trusting in the Lord for protection. The image is that Ephraim has not risen to its full potential; it is burning on one side but is spiritually doughy or undeveloped on the other, resulting in the kingdom coming to an end as it forsakes its covenants with the Lord. Though this connection is not certain, it may offer some insight into the symbolic image of the end of the kingdom of Israel.

The names of the children coming from the marriage in chapter 1 represent Hosea's oracles and the various stages of Israel's scattering, gathering, and restoration with the Lord.¹⁸ The first child mentioned (Jezreel—"God will scatter") seems to represent the message Hosea is proclaiming as the word of the Lord: "And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hosea 1:4). Kent P. Jackson summarizes one of the reasons leading up to this pronouncement as follows:

Conveyed in this symbolic name is a forewarning of the Lord's vengeance on Jehu's dynasty and the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. Jehu was the king who had come to power in Israel by overthrowing the previous king in the city of Jezreel, beginning

his massacre of the descendants of King Ahab. Jehu's descendants still ruled Israel in Hosea's day. The use of the name Jezreel is a prophetic pronouncement that the blood shed by Jehu at that place would now be avenged upon his dynasty, whose kings were wicked like their ancestor.¹⁹

At this time the literal scattering of Israel was about to begin, and Hosea forewarns them of this with a prophecy couched in the name of the child Jezreel.

Hosea 1:6 then seems to pass into the next phase or portion of the word of the Lord through Hosea: "And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away." Lo-ruhamah ("not pitied," "not having obtained mercy") comes after the warning that God will scatter Israel. For hundreds of years since the Exodus, God had protected, prolonged, and extended mercy to the people of Israel. Hosea declares through the name of this child that this mercy had run out.²⁰

Hosea 1:9 then describes another son, representing another phase of Hosea's prophetic teaching, who is named Lo-ammi ("not my people"), "for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." The language here is often described in terms of divorce, especially in relation to the following verses. However, it is more of a declaration by the Lord that the people have disqualified themselves from the blessings that come from his mercy through disobedience to the covenant. Rather than a divorce, it is more of a temporary separation, as the Lord clearly wants Israel back, and in a future day this reuniting will happen.²¹

Hosea 1:10 marks a shift in Hosea's prophesying—from Israel's separation from God to their eventual restoration with him. "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." The language of the children being as "the sands of the sea" is a reference back to the covenant between the Lord and Abraham.²² This reference to Abraham signals an important feature of salvation in Hosea's message. Hosea's words point the reader forward to the day when that covenant will continue amongst the house of Israel and when they shall be called "sons of the living God."²³

Verse 11 then describes the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, the reunification of the tribes of Israel, and the coming of the Lord to rule over the house of Israel forever more. "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel." Hosea plays on the name Jezreel, meaning both "God shall scatter" (v. 4; emphasizing the dissemination of Israel) and "God shall sow" (emphasizing the Lord's preservation of Israel and the preparations necessary to disperse, grow, and gather her). That this day was still in the future to Hosea's audience is clear from verse 11. Under Rehoboam, Israel was split into the Northern Kingdom of Israel (ten tribes) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Judah, Simeon, and parts of Benjamin).²⁴ This gathering will ultimately be fulfilled in both religious and political realms when all the tribes are gathered under "one head," or the Messiah.²⁵ Zechariah says of the coming of the Lord in the latter days, "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9), and Nephi states, "And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture" (1 Nephi 22:25; see also Mosiah 5:7–8). That shepherd will be the God of Israel, even Jehovah, who will gather his people and fulfill the promises made to Abraham and the fathers (see Abraham 1:2). As described, the Lord's harvest will be sown and eventually gathered into his protective care through the covenant. Hosea's message here is clear: the gathering will include a fulfillment in the latter days of the promises God made to Abraham.

HOSEA 2

Hosea 2 brings the covenant marriage metaphor between the Lord and Israel into focus. "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts" (vv. 1–2).

The plural command "say ye" speaks to all Israel and all readers in a powerful manner. Thus the "mother" is the nation; her children are the people of Israel.²⁶ Concerning this message, Farres Nyman states:

It also carries the same message as another prophecy of Isaiah (49:3, 6). The people of Israel, as the gathered servant, are to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel (among the Gentiles). As they are gathering the preserved of Israel, they will also give the Gentiles an opportunity to be numbered with Israel and further fulfill the Lord's covenant to Abraham that his seed would bless the nations of the Gentiles (Genesis 12:3). Thus, in the context of Hosea, Ammi and Ruhamah represent the small gathered remnant children who are to plead with the mother of Israel, representing the vast number of the body of Israel.²⁷

It is possible that Ammi and Ruhamah here represent those "gathered" children of Israel who are to plead with their brothers and sisters to return to the covenant with the Lord. When we stay in alignment with the apparent interpretation of the ancient context, the "mother" in a latter-day context may represent religious and political entities that govern scattered Israel throughout the world. Thus the plea is to establish an environment where the gathering of Israel might be facilitated.²⁸ This gathering process may be witnessed in Daniel's visions (see Daniel 2 and 7), which describe the historical circumstances surrounding the establishment of the kingdom of God in the latter days.

It is sometimes argued that the language in Hosea 2:2 ("for she is not my wife") represents a divorce, but the Lord is not trying to divorce Israel, he is trying to reclaim her.²⁹ The designations of Ammi ("my people") and Ruhamah ("pitied" or "receiving mercy") mark a reversal of Hosea's message in chapter 1, verses 6 and 9. Israel is to be shown mercy, be gathered, and become the Lord's people once again.³⁰ In chapter 1, Hosea uses the image of a husband-and-wife relationship to describe judgments or aspects of his teaching that will come to pass. In Hosea 2, the Lord becomes the husband who faithfully endures those prophecies, working to recover unfaithful Israel and encouraging her to return and reestablish her covenant relationship with him.

Hosea then challenges his readers to remember Israel's past, where they have come from, how the Lord has blessed them, and how they have forsaken the Lord in order to comprehend the judgment that is coming upon them for forsaking their covenants.³¹ "Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and

set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink" (Hosea 2:3–5).

Here the Lord's warning against whoredoms and adulteries refers not only to idolatry but also to political alliances not sanctioned by the Lord and to Israel's lack of trust in him. The symbolism in 2:3 takes us back to the birth of Israel during the Exodus, when she struggled for physical and spiritual survival and was literally sustained by the Lord with manna and living water.³² It was a time when Israel had nothing and needed to rely on the Lord or perish. Because Israel would not repent, the Lord would withdraw his mercy, leaving Israel in a state of lack and nothingness. In 722 BC the Assyrians would destroy the kingdom of Israel and begin to fulfill this prophecy.

The images of mother and children in Hosea 2:4–5 seem to parallel the image of Gomer representing Israel as an entity in Hosea 1:3. In verse 5 the mother has played the harlot, going after political alliances that have led all Israel down paths of destruction (see Hosea 5:13, 7:11, 8:4). The children seem to represent the general populace of Israel and parallel the image in 1:2.

Hosea 2:3–13 contains an image in which the prosperous and productive land of Israel sins and is punished, drying up and losing its fertility. We read of the loss of opportunity to participate in sacred acts of worship (v. 11) and Israel's eventual desire to repent and return to her husband. We read of thorns hedging up the way and of Israel's shame and nakedness being uncovered—specifically of items that were given to "cover her nakedness" (vv. 6–9). These items may relate to some of the images of the Fall in the book of Genesis.³³ The creation motif is used later in the chapter, but here the images depict Israel's fall and destruction before she says, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now" (v. 7). In verse 9 the Lord says, "I . . . will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness." Ultimately, Israel had created an environment in which she was destroying herself, and though the Lord had had mercy on her for several hundred years by calling prophets and warning of this destruction, Israel was then *Lo-ruhamah* ("not obtaining

mercy”); the children of Israel had “sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). Israel had essentially undone creation by forsaking the covenant and all the blessings God had desired for her.

Hosea 2:14–16 marks a turning point in restoring Israel from her fallen state. It draws upon images of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, when Moses gathers the Lord’s people and leads them successfully into their land of promise: “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.” Just as in the days of the Exodus, Israel will be led to safety and back into the covenant with the Lord, after which Israel will call the Lord “Ishi” (my husband). The covenant relationship will be restored, preparing for the day referenced in 1:11 when all Israel will be gathered and appoint “one head.” What follows in Hosea 2:18 draws upon the imagery of the Creation and points to the millennial reign of the Lord and the earth’s paradisiacal glory. “And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.” Mark E. Rooker writes, “The reference to the animals from Gen. 1:30 in the restoration passage of Hos. 2:18 is thus a re-creation accomplished by God under the provisions He promised to Israel in the new covenant. The reference to the series of animals in Hos. 2:18, following the creation order, is a return to the harmony that existed in creation as the animal kingdom is to be maintained.”³⁴

The restoration of Israel will precede this millennial reign of peace when the Lord fulfills the marriage described in Hosea: “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord. . . . And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (Hosea 2:19–20, 23). The restoration of the covenant described in the

marriage between the Lord and Israel thus marks a reversal in the meaning of the names of the children described in chapter 1 and highlights the message of the Lord. Israel will be sown with the intent to be gathered, obtain mercy, and become the Lord's people once again through the covenant. Another millennial passage that discusses the gathering of Israel describes this process and the marriage metaphor of the covenant: "For the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. . . . And as I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on even as a bride" (1 Nephi 21:13, 18; compare Isaiah 49:13, 18). The purposes of the Lord will then be fulfilled as the covenant is fulfilled and as he extends mercy by reclaiming his bride.

SUMMARY

The covenant of Abraham referenced in Hosea 1:10 lies at the heart of the promised restoration, and Hosea's message is a multigenerational call to repentance, hope, and responsibility in entering into and keeping covenants with the Lord.³⁵ Hosea 1–2 demonstrates the concept from Amos 3:7 that the Lord always sends prophets to declare his word. Hosea is sent to a kingdom that is nearly finished. As the Lord's representative and prophet, he attempts to nurture its people and bring them back into the covenant. Hosea's prophetic ministry produces oracles of the scattering of Israel, the withdrawal of the Lord's mercy until she repents, and Israel's separation from the Lord (as is depicted in the names of the children Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi). The Lord's covenant relationship with Israel is defined in chapter 2, showing that the Husband is not about to give up on his love. The promises find their fulfillment in a future day—our day—when the gospel has been restored in its fullness and Israel has "come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:14).

The appeal of the book of Hosea for Latter-day Saints is that we live in a day when the Restoration has begun and when latter-day Israel is under solemn obligation and responsibility to carry forth the work of the Restoration and fulfill the Abrahamic covenant.³⁶ Thanks to the words of the Lord given to his prophets, we get a better understanding that "the gathering of Israel following the scattering is thus foretold through

Hosea” and that “this interpretation is strengthened through Paul’s quoting of Hosea 2:23 as a promise to be fulfilled to the Gentiles.”³⁷ Indeed we have an opportunity to participate in the events leading up to the millennial reign of Christ and to participate in the fulfillment of Hosea’s great prophecies of the Restoration when the Lord will say, “Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (Hosea 2:23).

NOTES

1. Ehud Ben Zvi, “Hosea,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 1143. He continues, “Thus Hosea 14.2–10 is read in the afternoon service of Tish’ah be’av (Sephardic and Yemenite traditions; others read Isa. 55.6–56.8) and on Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath between Rosh Ha-Shanah (the New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). Hosea 2.1–22 is read as the haftarah for the parashah of Be-midbar (Num. 1.1–4.20). Hosea 2.21–22 are recited as part of the ritual for donning tefillin (phylacteries).”

2. Ehud Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, vol. 1, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 21A* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 20.

3. Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*, Academia Biblica (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 4. This is not unanimously agreed upon but offers an approximate time for Hosea’s ministry.

4. Ben Zvi writes, “The text requires from the readers only to accept the sequential, internal logic of the narration. But there are no temporal markers beyond that, nor is any social or historical precise background given. This openness is not accidental. This narrative is not presented to its intended readers as one about historical or biographical events, dependent on a particular *Sitz im Leben*, or meaningful only against a precise set of socio-historical circumstances. The readership is asked to go above and beyond these concerns, and particularly so as the narrative turns into a basic meta-narrative: a mythical reconstruction of a terrible past that will be transformed into a great future, and that serves to encapsulate and shape an authoritative understanding of Israel’s understanding of its (own terrible) past as well as its hopes and certitude for the future” (*Hosea*, 56; see also Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 7–8).

5. F. C. Fensham describes “whoredom” here as an “abstract conception which points to an attribute” and says that this verbal form is used figuratively for idolatry and is regarded as Israel’s infidelity to the Lord (“The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea for the Covenant Relationship Between the Lord and His People,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 12 [1984], 72). It does not represent a profession. Elder Bruce R. McConkie remarks, “In a spiritual sense, to emphasize how serious it is, the damning sin of idolatry is called *adultery*. When the Lord’s people forsake him and worship false gods, their infidelity to Jehovah is described as whoredoms and adultery. (Jer. 3:8–9; Hos. 1:2; 3:1.) By forsaking the Lord, his people are unfaithful

to their covenant vows, vows made to him who symbolically is their Husband" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], 25).

6. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 40, 60.

7. I don't think it is safe for us to assume that the people of Israel would have had extensive knowledge about Hosea's wife or children, as we do not possess many details of his life or his origin other than that he came from the Northern Kingdom. Douglas Stuart notes, "The personal details Hosea gives us are so few, and those details are so inextricably linked to the message Yahweh intended—rather than having any useful interest of their own—that any attempt to write Hosea's biography on the basis of such scanty information is doomed to failure. . . . While these questions are not irrelevant to the understanding and appreciation of the book's message, they are definitely peripheral to it. For as the early chapters are structured, no details exist for the satisfaction of our curiosity about the people involved: all details serve the interest of the divine message of wrath and redemption and are inextricably woven into that message" (*Hosea—Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary 31 [Waco, TX: Words Books, 1987], 11).

8. Sidney B. Sperry, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 281. In justifying the cited conclusion, Sperry rejects the literal union of Hosea to a wife of whoredoms because it "would be imputing to God a command inconsistent with His holy character." Brent L. Top cautions against such reasoning, stating, "Rejecting the literal nature of this or any other scriptural episode that we find disturbing, illogical, or at odds with our own finite view of God and his dealings with man opens a Pandora's box of issues surrounding the historicity of the scriptures" ("The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer: A Symbolic Testament of Messianic Love and Mercy," in *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, ed. Richard D. Draper [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 227). I agree with Top.

9. The Targum states that these opening verses represent a prophecy that Hosea was to speak to Israel: "Go (and) speak a prophecy against the inhabitants of the idolatrous city, who continue to sin. For the inhabitants of the land surely go astray from the worship of the Lord. So he went and prophesied concerning them that, if they repented, they would be forgiven; but if not, they would fall" (Tg. Hosea 1:2–3).

10. On this construction, see Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 640.

11. The King James Version translates this portion of the text in the past tense ("for the land hath committed"), but the Hebrew reflects a condition that is certain in regards to the future ("for the land will surely"), and this is why the Lord sent Hosea to call Israel to repentance: to help them avoid what was coming. Francis Andersen and David Freedman interpret "land" as including kings, priests, and the people (*Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980], 169).

12. Kelle sees the wife in chapter 2 as Samaria, the capital and governing city of Israel, thus marking a distinction between the wife and children (*Hosea* 2, 93). Gale A. Yee comments, "Hosea's accusations are targeted primarily at a male audience: the king and his political and cultic élite. The marriage metaphor effectively

feminizes this male ruling hierarchy, by depicting its members collectively in a graphic image of a promiscuous wife” (“She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband’: A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1–2,” *Biblical Interpretation* 9, no. 4 [2001], 368).

13. “Another matter to take into account, despite the high use of sexual metaphors: the text consistently avoids the expected formulas ‘X knew/came to/approached his wife/Y and she conceived and bore . . .’ or some variant of them (e.g., Gen 4:1, 17; 16:4; 30:4–5; 38:18; 1 Sam 1:19–20; Isa 8:3; Ruth 4:13; 1 Chron 7:23). Although an explicit reference to Hosea’s intercourse with Gomer may seem unnecessary in 1:3 (see Exodus 2:1–2), the consistent avoidance of such references is noticeable” (Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 52). For a few examples of Israel or its cities personified as a woman or wife, see Jeremiah 3:8–9, 14, 20; 5:7; Ezekiel 16:30–35; 23:7; Nahum 3:4; Hosea 5:3–4; 6:10; 9:1.

14. See Ezekiel 2:7–3:4 (and comments in Ben Zvi, “Ezekiel,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1049); Revelation 10:9–10; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:507. Contrast 1 Nephi 1:10–15, where Lehi reads a book containing the Lord’s message to his people.

15. What also may be relevant in discussing the metaphors in Hosea’s “marriage” are the parallels we find in 1 Nephi. In 1 Nephi 1:13–15, Lehi describes seeing the destruction of Jerusalem but is able to rejoice and declare God’s mercy. At first glance this seems out of place, but verses 18–19 seem to clarify why Lehi rejoices; he speaks of “the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.” As we read chapters like 1 Nephi 11–15, we see how the Nephites glory in the prospect of a restoration of their people in a future day. Lehi and Hosea may have thus seen similar visions of the destruction and restoration of their people.

16. Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 54.

17. Andersen and Freedman say of Gomer, “The name does not seem to be symbolic; there is no wordplay on it as there is on the names of the children” (*Hosea: New Translation*, 171). However, I see a logical sequence depicted in the names of his wife and children, representing Hosea’s going to a kingdom that is about to end, preaching of its scattering, and so forth.

18. Ben Zvi writes, “Martin Buss once wrote, ‘A paradoxical union of attitudes occurs in Hosea’s naming of Gomer’s children, at divine command. . . . Hosea, by giving them names, accepts them into his family. Yet the names themselves say the opposite’ (Buss, ‘Tragedy and Comedy,’ 75). The above observations show that although, for obvious rhetorical purposes, the names defamiliarize the situation, they in fact do tell the readers of the book that YHWH (as represented by Hosea) has accepted Israel (the children) as his children, for the names carry the seed of their reversal and certainly draw the attention of the [readers] and evoke among them the memory of their reversal” (*Hosea*, 46).

19. Kent P. Jackson, “The Marriage of Hosea and Jehovah’s Covenant with Israel,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets*, ed. Monte Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 61.

20. Jarom 1:3 and Mosiah 1:13 also describe the process of the Lord’s mercy being extended to a people and eventually being withdrawn due to their disobedience. The implication is that the prophets taught their people that mercy would not be

justice and that the word of the Lord would come to pass against them if they did not repent; see also 2 Kings 13:23.

21. See, for example, Hosea 2:19–23; 6:1–3; 14:1. For a discussion on the arguments against the interpretation of divorce, see Kelle, *Hosea* 2, 54. In the Hebrew text, chapter 1 ends with verse 9.

22. Others also recognize the importance of the Abrahamic covenant at this juncture. Mark E. Rooker comments, “The language and the comparison represent a dependency on God’s promise to Abraham in Gen. 15:5 and 22:17. The expression provides a clear example of the borrowing of a prominent phrase drawn from the promise to the nation via the Patriarch which is now applied to the future re-installing of Israel” (“The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Hosea,” *Criswell Theological Review* 7, no. 1 [1993]: 53).

23. Becoming sons and daughters of God denotes entering into covenants with him. For more on this process, see Moses 6:62, 64; 7:1. Genesis 6:2 and Moses 8:13–15, 21 also seem to contain episodes where sons and daughters of God factor importantly into the story. Elder Bruce R. McConkie defines becoming sons of God as follows: “Those who receive the gospel and join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have power given them to become the sons of God (D&C 11:30; 35:2; 39:1–6; 45:8; John 1:12). Sonship does not come from Church membership alone, but admission into the Church opens the door to such high status, if it is followed by continued faith and devotion (Rom. 8:14–18; Gal. 3:26–29; 4:1–7). The sons of God are members of his family and, hence, are joint-heirs with Christ, inheriting with him the fullness of the Father (D&C 93:17–23). . . . Those who become the sons of God in this life (1 John 3:1–3) are the ones who by enduring in continued righteousness will be gods in eternity” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 745).

24. Though attempts have been made to describe how this unification had already taken place during the time of the Persian empire, none have been able to fully justify such claims, and future days still lie in the interpretations. The *Jewish Study Bible*, 1146, states, “The motif of a future reunification of (northern) Israel and Judah appears elsewhere in prophetic literature (cf. Ezekiel 37.15–28), though it was never fulfilled.”

25. Concerning this “head,” Ben Zvi writes, “A similar rhetorical approach led to the choice of ‘one head’ in the same verse, over the alternative ‘king.’ The use of the former allows an allusion to Moses (cf. Num 14:4, where the ‘Anti-Moses’ is referred to as ‘head’), whereas the term ‘king’ would have not. Yet, the readers of this set of prophetic readings know also that this ‘head’ of the ideal future will be like Moses, but also a Davidic king. . . . It goes without saying that in periods later than the Persian era, the image of a future Messiah who will combine features of a David with those of Moses fulfilled important roles and influenced among others the characterization of Jesus” (*Hosea*, 51). President Joseph Fielding Smith gave the following explanation of Isaiah 2:3 and described the future reign of Christ: “Jerusalem of old . . . shall become a holy city where the Lord shall dwell and from whence he shall send forth his word unto all people. Likewise, on this continent, the city of Zion, New Jerusalem, shall be built, and from it the law of God shall also go forth. There will be no conflict, for each city shall be headquarters for the

Redeemer of the world, and from each he shall send forth his proclamations as occasion may require. Jerusalem shall be the gathering place of Judah and his fellows of the house of Israel, and Zion shall be the gathering place of Ephraim and his fellows. . . . These two cities, one in the land of Zion and one in Palestine, are to become capitals for the kingdom of God during the Millennium” (“Zion and Jerusalem,” *Improvement Era*, July 1919, 815–16). This emphasizes the coming together of Israel under “one head.”

26. See *Jewish Study Bible*, 1146. Stuart also makes a distinction “between corporate Israel as the prostituting wife, and at least certain of her children, or citizens” (*Hosea–Jonah*, 47). Kelle discusses the “close relationship between the children and their mother, which produces a sense of urgency for the children” (*Hosea* 2, 231).

27. Farres H. Nyman, in *The Words of the Twelve Prophets: Messages to the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 26–27.

28. See 1 Nephi 21:22–23 and Isaiah 49:22–23, which describe kings and queens nursing Israel in the gathering process. Victor L. Ludlow writes, “Verses 22 and 23 answer Israel’s question as to how she will grow so quickly. Her growth will come from the Gentile nations who will assist both temporally and spiritually to gather Israel. (D&C 77:11; 1 Ne. 22:3). . . . This gathering of Israel through the aid of foreign nations is taking place today” (*Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982], 414).

29. Kelle concludes, “A majority of interpreters now proposes that, while Hos 2:4 does depend upon the image-base of the legal stipulations for marriage and divorce, it is not an actual Israelite divorce formula. This position seems to rest on the most secure evidence. The words, ‘She is not my wife, and I am not her husband’ are not attested anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible as a formula of divorce, and they are essentially dissimilar from those formulas found in Babylonian and Elephantine texts. Also, as Buss observes, 2:4 has no parallel in Jewish texts, and the rest of Hos 2 is dedicated to convincing the wife to return. Verse 4 is more of a ‘negated marriage formula’ that describes the current situation” (*Hosea* 2, 54).

30. For a description of this mercy in relation to the gathering of Israel, see 1 Nephi 13:33–42.

31. Thomas B. Dozeman writes, “The book of Hosea provides a window on election traditions in the northern kingdom during the eighth century BCE. ‘[It] is quite remarkable how thoroughly Israel’s history is embedded in Hosea’s proclamation’” (“Hosea and the Wilderness Wandering Tradition,” in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie, Thomas Römer, and Hans Heinrich Schmid [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000], 55).

32. For a message addressed to Jerusalem along these lines, see Ezekiel 16:4–15.

33. For a brief comment on the “thorns” in Hosea 2:6, see Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea: New Translation*, 237, where they discuss thorns as part of the scenery in Sheol and they note that in Hosea 9:6 “the reversion of farmland to waste is sufficient to explain the reference to thorns.” See also Rooker, “Use of the Old Testament,” 52–53, which makes a possible connection with the Genesis account.

34. Rooker, “Use of the Old Testament,” 52.

35. Rooker comments, "It perhaps should be mentioned that the Hoseanic eschatological texts have as their background covenantal promises made to Israel by the Patriarchs. The promises made to Israel in Israel's covenants were the basis for the confidence of future blessings" ("Use of the Old Testament," 66).

36. President Ezra Taft Benson taught, "The responsibility of the seed of Abraham, which we are, is to be missionaries to 'bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations' (Abr. 2:9)" ("The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants," *Ensign*, May 1987, 85).

37. Nyman and Nyman, "Hosea," 27.