

# THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF HOSEA 1–3

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**T**HE BOOK OF HOSEA may be outlined as follows, with a major twofold division (chaps. 1–3 and 4–14) that is supported by the majority of Hosea scholars, past and present.<sup>1</sup>

Prologue: Superscription (1:1)

I. Hosea's Marriage and Family (1:2–3:5)

Cycle A (1:2–2:1)

Cycle B (2:2–23)

Cycle C (3:1–5)

II. Hosea's Prophetic Oracles (4:1–14:8)

Cycle D (4:1–6:3)

Cycle E (6:4–11:11)

Cycle F (11:12–14:8)

Epilogue: Wisdom Saying (14:9)

The book records the Lord's message of judgment against Israel for egregious covenant violation. Each of the book's cycles begins with a prophetic judgment speech (accusations and judgment) and concludes with the Lord's gracious promise to provide future restoration. The first section recounts Hosea's obedience to the

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1 While most commentators subscribe to this twofold division, a small and yet highly respected group of scholars propose a threefold division of the book (chaps. 1–3, chaps. 4–11, chaps. 12–14). These include Wilhelm Rudolph, *Hosea*, *Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966); Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, *Das Alte Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983); James L. Mays, *Hosea*, *Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), and Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

Lord's command to take "a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry" (1:2). Hosea's individual prophetic oracles of judgment (accusations of sin and announcements of judgment), composed of several large collections,<sup>2</sup> form the second major unit of the book.

The prophetic speech forms of judgment and restoration alternate cyclically<sup>3</sup> through each subsection: 1:2-2:1; 2:2-23; 3:1-5; and 4:1-6:3; 6:4-11:11; 11:12-14:8. Scholars have noted that this repetitive interaction between the themes of judgment and restoration uses a paneling technique that exhibits an AB // AB structure throughout the book.<sup>4</sup> Alternating cycles of *judgment* and *restoration* control the structural development of the six cycles<sup>5</sup> of Hosea as the following chart indicates.

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<sup>2</sup> The prophetic books are considered "collections" because they contain numerous distinct prophetic messages that the prophets spoke at various times and places throughout the course of their ministries, rather than at one time (Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 176). Many scholars view these individual prophetic oracles as "sayings originally prepared for oral delivery to an audience" (Mays, *Hosea*, 5). Wolff describes these individual prophetic speech units as "memorable" (*Hosea*, 10, 57). He defines "memorable" as a basic literary genre or form that stresses and laces independent facts, often derived from prior prophetic oracles, into a connected reality so that historical details are arranged in such a way that they bring the true significance of an event into prominence (*ibid.*). Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman seem correct in saying that Hosea appears to have used numerous forms of prophetic speech combined with numerous rhetorical devices to knit the material in chapters 4-14 together (*Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980], 316). They also maintain that the larger sections of material in chapters 4-14 are arranged primarily according to thematic matter, and that prophetic oracles and sections are often linked by key themes and terms (*ibid.*, 316-26).

<sup>3</sup> Wolff attributes the rhythmic cadence of many of Hosea's prophetic sayings to the prophet's implementation of poetic forms. Wolff calls this cadence "the thought-rhythm of *parallelismus membrorum*" (*Hosea*, xxiv). Mays suggests that the material in Hosea 1-3 is arranged so that "messages of punishment and salvation alternate (1:2-9 and 1:10-2:1; 2:2-15 and 2:16-23)" and then judgment and restoration combine in the autobiographical chapter 3 (*Hosea*, 15). Mays also suggests that the alternation of punishment and salvation so evident in chapters 1-3 seems to have also played a significant role in shaping the material in chapters 4-14 (*ibid.*, 16).

<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 15. In his more recent work Chisholm rejects his earlier approach. He writes, "The Book of Hosea does not display a sophisticated macrostructure; it appears [instead] to be a loose anthology of speeches rather than a tightly structured collection" (*Handbook on the Prophets* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 336).

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this study the term "cycle" will be used to refer to the six subunits in the book. The idea for subdividing the collections of Hosea's prophetic judgment/restoration oracles into cycles is not unique with this writer. Martin J. Buss employed a similar strategy in his study of Hosea (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea: A Morphological Study*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1969], 31-33).

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Judgment</i>	<i>Restoration</i>
A.	1:2-9	1:10-2:1
B.	2:2-13	2:14-23
C.	3:1-4	3:5
D.	4:1-5:15a	5:15b-6:3
E.	6:4-11:7	11:8-11
F.	11:12-14:3	14:4-8

In this article and the remaining two in this series Hosea's prophetic speech types will be noted and these will help identify and demarcate the literary boundaries of each cycle.<sup>6</sup> Then a discussion of the contents of each cycle will follow.

### HOSEA'S MARRIAGE AND FAMILY (CHAPS. 1-3)

The first three chapters of Hosea form a highly structured and well defined literary unit<sup>7</sup> that focuses on a most peculiar marriage, instituted by God Himself.<sup>8</sup> The story of Hosea's marriage to faithless Gomer pictures the Lord's relationship with His faithless "wife," the people of Israel.<sup>9</sup> These first three chapters are structured cy-

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<sup>6</sup> The individual literary units will be discussed according to their prophetic speech types (literary forms), and various structuring devices that signal the opening and closing of the individual prophetic units. As James Muilenburg noted, the rhetorical critic's first responsibility is to delimit the literary boundaries of the unit to be studied—identifying a text's beginning and ending, and any other stylistic literary devices employed ("Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 [1969]: 8-10).

<sup>7</sup> Seeing chapters 1-3 as a distinct literary unit is based on both thematic and form-critical criteria. The metaphorical analogy between Hosea and his family with the historical relationship of the Lord and His people Israel has no parallel in the second portion of the book (chaps. 4-14). Chapters 1 and 3 are both introduced by the words "Then the LORD said to Hosea/me" (1:2b and 3:1a). An inclusio brackets the material presented in chapters 1-3—whereas Israel's harlotry caused them to forsake the Lord (1:2b), judgment will result in Israel's returning to the Lord (3:4-5). The central chapter of this initial unit (2:2-23) introduces the Lord's *רִיב* oracle (v. 2), in which He condemns faithless Israel to judgment, but concludes with His eschatological promise to restore Israel (vv. 14-23).

<sup>8</sup> Benson represents several scholars who contend that the first three chapters serve as an abridgment to the entire book. "They set forth God's relationship to His people and reveal His tender love despite their rebellion and infidelity [to His covenant mandates]" (Clarence H. Benson, *Old Testament Survey: Poetry and Prophecy* [Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Teacher Training Association, 1963], 67). See also Douglas K. Stuart, "Hosea," in *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Gomer's harlotry and the children's names depict Israel's guilt and God's approaching judgment. Hosea's purchase of Gomer and his changing the children's

clically around the themes of the Lord's accusations against Israel's sins (idolatry and harlotry), announcements of judgment, and predictions (promises) of future restoration.<sup>10</sup> Each cycle concludes with a dramatic reversal of judgment, as the Lord in His redeeming love promised to restore faithless Israel.

Hosea wrote 1:2–2:1 as a third-person biographical account and chapter 3 as a first-person autobiographical account. The central panel of this introductory triptych (2:2–23; Heb., vv. 4–25) presents an extended covenant lawsuit or *רִיב* judgment oracle in which the Lord initiated “divorce proceedings” against His adulterous wife Israel. This central panel concludes with an extended passage (vv. 14–23) detailing the Lord's eschatological promise to reverse Israel's judgment by restoring them to covenant blessings. God's command for Hosea to be reconciled to his wayward wife (presumably Gomer) in 3:1–3 exemplifies God's eschatological promise to restore His own wayward wife, the nation of Israel, to Himself (vv. 4–5).

SUPERSSCRIPTION: TITLE, AUTHOR, AND DATE (1:1)

*Demarcation of the superscription.* The superscription in 1:1 constitutes the first major structural element in the book.<sup>11</sup>

*Function and content of the superscription.* Superscriptions function as the title and general introduction to an entire book. As such, they stand apart from the material they introduce, as here in cycle A of Hosea (1:2–2:1). Superscriptions typically provide information about the author (the prophet), the prophet's patronymic, a reference to his call, and the date of his ministry.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly the superscription announces that the book in its entirety is

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names speak symbolically of the Lord's promise to restore His people following His judgment on them (1:10–2:1; 2:19–23; 3:5).

<sup>10</sup> Mays is probably correct in his assertion that Hosea's cyclical arrangement of judgment oracles may have served as a rhetorical device employed by the prophet to attack the Baal cults' annual fertility cycle—with its cyclically based hopes of annual renewal of the land's fertility, crops, flocks, and children (*Hosea*, 11). The prophet Hosea denounced and condemned the people's perverted devotion to Baal, the Canaanite storm and fertility god, and attributed Israel's provisions and blessings to the Lord alone.

<sup>11</sup> Some writers wrongly suggest that the superscription points to an anonymous exilic or postexilic editor (e.g., Gene M. Tucker, “Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of the Canon,” in *Canon and Authority*, ed. George W. Coats and B. O. Long [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 56–70; Mays, *Hosea*, 15–17, 20–21; and Wolff, *Hosea*, 3–6, 11–12).

<sup>12</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 143–44. They list eight features in the prefatory remarks of the prophets, noting that no one book has all of them (*ibid.*).

to be understood as “the word of the LORD which came to” a prophet, in this case, Hosea.<sup>13</sup>

*Summary of the superscription.* The first words of the title, “The word of the LORD [יְהוָה דְּבַר],” serve to authenticate the book as a whole as the Lord’s word or message. In its broadest sense the title validates all the prophet’s words as the inspired message of the Lord to His people Israel.<sup>14</sup> Only here and in the next verse did Hosea state that he was both the recipient and author of the revelations of the Lord. Apart from the naming of his father and the reigns through which Hosea’s prophetic ministry extended, no other biographical information is recorded.<sup>15</sup> The list of kings of both Judah and Israel indicates that Hosea’s ministry extended from the closing days of Jeroboam II’s reign in Israel (793–753 B.C.) to the opening days of Hezekiah’s reign in Judah (716–687 B.C.). Thus Hosea’s prophetic ministry extended between thirty and forty years (753–716 B.C.).

**CYCLE A: HOSEA’S WIFE AND CHILDREN AS SYMBOLS OF ISRAEL’S SIN, JUDGMENT, AND RESTORATION (1:2–2:1)**

*Demarcation of cycle A.* The demarcation of the book’s first cycle is based on three criteria. First, the introductory address formula (“When the LORD first spoke through Hosea”) in 1:2 signals the opening of this narrative unit.<sup>16</sup> Second, the Lord’s eschatological promise to restore and reunite Judah and Israel, who will be ruled by one leader (1:10–2:1), marks the cycle’s conclusion. The reversal of the children’s negative names reflects the Lord’s gracious promise to restore Judah and Israel. Third, the covenant lawsuit form

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<sup>13</sup> Similar superscriptions are found in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Wolff points out that the formal elements contained in the superscription (i.e., the prophet’s name, patronymic, reference to his call, and date of his ministry) are grammatically subordinate to “the word of the LORD,” which serves as the proper title of the book (*Hosea*, 3).

<sup>14</sup> When referring to his God, Hosea used the more personal covenant-name Yahweh (יְהוָה) twice as often (forty-five occurrences) as he used other designations for God—אלהים occurs twenty-six times and אלה four times (*ibid.*, xxv).

<sup>15</sup> Andersen and Freedman contend that no other information is required, since the prophet was completely subservient to the Lord’s word, which he was commissioned to deliver (*Hosea*, 150).

<sup>16</sup> Stuart contends that the “beginning” words of the Lord to Hosea serve not simply as an introduction to verse 2, but as a title or introduction to the entire pericope of verses 2–9 (*Hosea*, 26). See also Thomas E. McComiskey, “Hosea,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1:11; and Wolff, *Hosea*, 12–13.

(יִכּ oracle) in 2:2 signals the beginning of the next cycle of judgment and restoration.<sup>17</sup>

Mays represents scholars who believe that this "salvation oracle" (1:10-2:1) was deliberately placed in this position to dramatically reverse the theme of Israel's judgment—it serves to "alternate the themes of judgment and salvation."<sup>18</sup> Chapters 2 and 3 in this initial section are structured in a similar way. That is, the Lord reversed His announcement of Israel's judgment by promising ultimately to restore a future generation of Israelites.

*Contents of cycle A.* As Wolff argues, this opening cycle is composed of two distinct literary units (1:2-9 and 1:10-2:1).<sup>19</sup> The first subunit contains four commands that the Lord communicated to Hosea over the course of his first five or six years of prophetic ministry.<sup>20</sup>

These commands and Hosea's response have a consecutive rhetorical pattern that serves to integrate the entire unit (1:2-3, 4-5, 6, 8-9). Each command is issued in the form of an imperative introduced by the divine address formula "The LORD said," followed by a כִּי ("for") clause that explains the meaning associated with the Lord's command.

This initial biographical narrative tells how the Lord called Hosea to his prophetic office and commanded him to marry "a harlotrous woman"<sup>21</sup> and have children of harlotry (vv. 2-9). For the

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that in a few instances the verse divisions of the English Bible differ from those of the Hebrew text. English 1:10-2:23 = Hebrew 2:1-25; English 11:12-12:14 = Hebrew 12:1-15; and English 13:16-14:1-9 = Hebrew 14:1-10.

<sup>18</sup> Mays, *Hosea*, 31. See also Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 199-202. Smith suggests that Hosea intentionally placed oracles of judgment and oracles of salvation side by side without transitional phrases in order to highlight the miraculous power and love of God, who alone can bring grace to such a vile and sinful people (Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 49).

<sup>19</sup> Wolff, *Hosea*, 9-11, 24-25. See also Stuart, *Hosea*, 23-41.

<sup>20</sup> The marrying of Gomer, the births of Hosea's first two children, and Gomer's weaning Lo-Ruhamah (weaning took place at about three years of age) prior to her conceiving and giving birth to her third child would require approximately five to six years.

<sup>21</sup> For a survey of views on Hosea's marriage to Gomer see H. H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea," in *Men of God* (London: Nelson, 1963), 66-97. Many scholars hold to the proleptic view, namely, that Gomer was chaste at the time of her marriage to Hosea and later became unfaithful (e.g., Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 279). It is better, however, to understand that Gomer was sexually promiscuous before and after her marriage to Hosea. This view provides an exegetically cogent interpretation that supports all other aspects of Hosea's prophecy (see Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 28; and McComiskey, "Hosea," 12).

prophet to take a “woman of harlotry” (זְנוּנִים)<sup>22</sup> as his wife is a symbolic<sup>23</sup> metaphor that represents the situation of the Lord and Israel, who had committed “flagrant harlotry,”<sup>24</sup> forsaking the LORD<sup>25</sup> to pursue Canaan’s fertility gods Baal and Asherah.

The three remaining divine commands concerning the births and naming of Hosea’s three children are recorded in verses 4–9. In each instance the Lord’s brief command for Hosea to name the child is followed by an explanatory כִּי (“for”) clause stating the symbolic meaning of the child’s name. The judgment associated with the children’s names must be interpreted in light of the Lord’s initial accusation in verse 2. The judgment unit (vv. 2–9) concludes with the Lord’s frightening termination of the covenant relation-

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<sup>22</sup> This abstract plural noun is derived from the Hebrew verb זָנָה, “to commit fornication, to be a harlot.” The verb is used both literally and figuratively. Figuratively it is used of Israel’s “fornication” with foreign nations and of her worship of the Canaanite deities Baal and Asherah. Literally it refers to a promiscuous woman, one who engages in illicit sexual activity (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, trans. Edward Robinson [Oxford: Clarendon, 1959; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979], 275–76). McComiskey argues that “characteristic genitives [as used here] . . . always describe the present state of the *nomen regens*. . . . In other cases where a verb occurs with *ʾēset* and a *nomen rectum* (2 Sam. 12:10; Prov. 5:18; 31:10) the construct relationship always describes the state of the woman at the time of the verbal action” (“Hosea,” 13). This supports the view that Gomer was a promiscuous woman before Hosea took her as his wife.

<sup>23</sup> Symbolic actions are a common feature of prophetic activity undertaken in order to explain the Lord’s message (e.g., Isa. 8:1–4; 20:1–6; Jer. 13:1–11; 27:1–15; Ezek. 4:1–5:17; 12:1–28). Buss suggests that the names assigned to Hosea’s three children “may be called one-word or one-phrase oracles,” or “embryonic oracles,” which in this case speak of Israel’s impending judgment (*Prophetic Word of Hosea*, 29). See also J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962; reprint, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 165–73.

<sup>24</sup> The terms “harlotry,” “adultery,” and their derivatives are widely used in Hosea. This motif dramatizes the shocking nature of Israel’s covenant infidelity. It functions as a link word in chapters 1–9, thereby providing continuity between individual prophetic oracles, and even the two major sections of the book. “The [harlotry] metaphor in 1:2 is the foundation of all the prophet has to say not only in the first three chapters, but in the entire book. It is the key image that boosts the internal progression of Hosea’s prophecy” (Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, *Imagery in the Prophecy of Hosea*, Ägypten und Altes Testament [Munich: Harrassowitz, 1999], 57).

<sup>25</sup> This initial accusation against Israel for committing “flagrant harlotry,” which resulted in their “forsaking the LORD” (1:2), serves as the dominant motif in Hosea’s oracles against the religious situation in Israel. Just as Gomer’s harlotry violated her marriage vows to Hosea, so Israel’s spiritual harlotry with Baal violated her covenantal relations with her divine Husband, the Lord (see 2:2; 4:12; 5:4). The Lord had informed Moses of Israel’s future sins and consequent judgment (Deut. 29:22–28; 31:16–29; cf. Josh. 23:6, 11–13, 15–16; and 24:20, “If you forsake the LORD . . . then He will turn and do you harm”).

ship established at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19–24).<sup>26</sup> In forsaking the Lord Israel was guilty of gross spiritual prostitution. His final word of judgment is “Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I am not your God” (v. 9).<sup>27</sup>

The first child, a son named Jezreel (יִזְרְעֵאל), means “God sows” (1:4–5).<sup>28</sup> Jezreel is used of a geographical area (“the Valley of Jezreel”) and two cities in Israel.<sup>29</sup> It represents the Lord’s “sowing” of Israel in the land and the Lord’s “scattering” Israel in judgment (putting “an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel,” v. 4, and breaking “the bow of Israel,” v. 5). It also refers to the Lord’s eschatological promise to “sow” or restore Israel in the land.<sup>30</sup>

Lo-Ruhamah (לֹא רַחֲמָה) was the second child, a girl whose name means “unpitied/shown no compassion”<sup>31</sup> (v. 6). The name of the third child, Lo-Ammi (לֹא עַמִּי), means “not My people” (v. 9). The three names symbolized God’s progressive rejection of His idolatrous and harlotrous people, the northern kingdom of Israel. The children’s negative names, coupled with their mother’s (Gomer’s) “harlotries,” embody the message that the Lord commissioned Ho-

<sup>26</sup> The Lord’s threatened judgments failed to turn Israel from her course of idolatrous rejection of their true God. As a consequence the Lord announced His intent to cancel out the Mosaic Covenant—a relationship hundreds of years old was about to be dissolved (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 198). For a discussion that seeks to reconcile the termination of this covenant relationship between Israel and God in light of the Lord’s election of the nation, see Wolff, *Hosea*, 21–22.

<sup>27</sup> The traditional reading לֹא אֶתְּךָ לְךָ (“I will not be yours”) in the Masoretic text may be based on an allusion to the “I Am” of Exodus 3:14. This displays a typical assertion in Hosea that states not what the reader expects but what, on careful reflection, includes the potential ambiguity of the new divine name revealed in verse 9. The Lord was saying in effect, “I will no longer be your ‘I Am.’” Wolff proposes that “the promise that the Lord would be efficaciously present for Israel is here forcefully negated” (*Hosea*, 21–22).

<sup>28</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 281.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 283. The place Jezreel was notorious for bloodshed and wickedness, and in this context it recalls Jehu’s atrocities, for which the Lord was about to put an end to the Northern Kingdom. For a more detailed discussion of the reasons behind the Lord’s announced punishment of Jehu’s dynasty see Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Also a phonetic wordplay is in the proper name יִזְרְעֵאל (Jezreel, “God sows”) which sounds like יִשְׂרָאֵל (Israel). The pronouncement that Israel was about to be punished for Jehu’s sins at Jezreel reinforces God’s poetic justice. It is also ironic that the Israelite dynasty that had been nurtured on idolatry and harlotry was about to be destroyed for the same sins.

<sup>31</sup> Another wordplay is in the name לֹא רַחֲמָה (“no pity” or “no compassion”) and the Lord’s announcement that the nation Israel would no longer be shown compassion or pity (רַחֲמָה).



sea to deliver. Israel's apostasy had become so rife that He had no choice but to release on them the curses of the covenant. "He had to abandon them, divorce them."<sup>32</sup>

By way of contrast, verse 7 records a peculiar promise from the Lord that He would give Judah supernatural deliverance from military attack.<sup>33</sup> Although some scholars exclude this promise of Judah's deliverance on the grounds that it is a later insertion by an exilic or postexilic Judaic redactor,<sup>34</sup> it actually provides information that is neither irrelevant nor disruptive. The promise from the Lord cannot be excised from the context, for it stands in direct antithesis to Israel's prophesied doom in verse 6. It may be that Israel, being more corrupted than Judah at this stage in her history, was about to be judged. Judah was promised the Lord's divine protection for the immediate future, although nothing is implied about her distant future.<sup>35</sup>

The second subunit in this initial cycle (1:10–2:1), while initially appearing to be an entirely independent unit, forms an inseparable component with 1:2–9.<sup>36</sup> The first phrase in 1:10, "Yet the number of the sons of Israel," connects this subunit with the Lord's four speeches to Hosea in the preceding verses (vv. 2–9). Having predicted that Israel must presently be judged for violation of the Mosaic Covenant, the Lord then made it clear that He would not abandon His people forever.<sup>37</sup> This is the first of God's es-

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<sup>32</sup> Stuart, *Hosea*, 34. For a detailed study on God's rejection of Israel see Monica J. Melanchthon, *Rejection by God: The History and Significance of the Rejection Motif in the Hebrew Bible*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Lang, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Chisholm proposes that "a vivid example of the fulfillment of this prophecy came in 701 B.C., when the Lord decimated the Assyrian army in one night and preserved Jerusalem from destruction (2 Kgs 19:32–36)" (*Handbook on the Prophets*, 25).

<sup>34</sup> Graham I. Davies, *Hosea*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 47; Wolff, *Hosea*, 20–21; and Mays, *Hosea*, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart, *Hosea*, 24. Judah continued in sin until they too were finally judged by the Lord through the Babylonians in three successive conquests and deportations (605, 597, and 586 B.C.).

<sup>36</sup> Wolff, for example, writes that this unit (1:10–2:1) "does not continue the narrative of the Lord's addresses to Hosea concerning his family" but "sets it off as a new unit" (*Hosea*, 9–10, 24). Also Umberto Cassuto argues that this independent unit is properly placed at the head of chapter 2 in the Hebrew Scriptures ("The Second Chapter of the Book of Hosea," in *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, trans. Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973], 1:101–4). The abrupt change of mood and content between 1:9 and 1:10–2:1 has caused some commentators either to remove this salvation oracle (1:10–2:1), claiming it to be the product of a later editor or redactor, or else to move it to another location in the book. Andersen and Freedman rightly argue for retaining the text in its present position (*Hosea*, 199).

<sup>37</sup> Some writers say this restoration passage is addressed to the Northern Kingdom, which Hosea was addressing (Wolff, *Hosea*, 28), whereas others say it ad-

chatological promises to regather and restore Judah and Israel both numerically and spiritually (1:10–2:1; 2:14–23; 3:4–5; 11:8–11; 14:4–8).<sup>38</sup>

Through the use of wordplay involving the names of Hosea's children, the Lord promised to reverse Israel's judgment by providing a future restoration (2:1).<sup>39</sup> Whereas Israel was called Lo-Ruhamah (לֹא רַחֲמָה, "no compassion") and Lo-Ammi (לֹא עַמִּי, "not My people") in connection with her judgment, in the future day of her restoration she will be spoken of as Ruhamah ("loved") and Ammi ("My people").<sup>40</sup> Whereas the name Jezreel in 1:5 spoke etymologically of the Lord's "scattering" Israel in judgment (see Lev. 26:33; Deut. 4:27; 28:64; 29:28), here it concludes this unit with the more common meaning of "God sowing."<sup>41</sup> The Lord promised to "sow" a redeemed and reunified Israel and Judah back in the land, under the reigning authority of a new Davidic King (1:11; cf. 3:5; Deut. 4:30; Ezek. 43:2–12).

*Summary of cycle A.* The pattern of accusation for sin, announcement of judgment, and prediction of future restoration delivered against Israel in this opening cycle becomes the major structuring pattern for the two remaining cycles in this first section of the book, and it also controls each of the three cycles of the second major section of the book (chaps. 4–14).

#### CYCLE B: YAHWEH'S INDICTMENT OF FAITHLESS ISRAEL AND PROMISE OF FUTURE RESTORATION AND BLESSINGS (2:2–23)

*Demarcation of cycle B.* This cycle has the characteristic opening and closing devices. The unit opens in verse 2 with an announce-

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dresses the people of Judah or the postexilic Judean community (Marvin A. Sweeney, "A Form-Critical Reading of Hosea" [paper presented at the Pacific Coast Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Claremont, CA, March 15–17, 1998], 4). According to Old Testament usage this passage is best seen as addressing the eschatological remnant of the redeemed righteous to whom the promise ultimately refers. For a survey of the various options see Davies, *Hosea*, 63–64.

<sup>38</sup> This initial promise of Israel's ultimate restoration articulates the promises God made to Abraham that his descendants would one day become as numerous "as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17; cf. "dust of the earth," 13:16; 28:14). Hosea was particularly adept at incorporating Israel's earlier traditions to reinforce his prophetic oracles.

<sup>39</sup> Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> The plural references to "brothers" and "sisters" refers to the individual Israelites to whom the Lord will show compassion in the eschatological day of renewal (Mays, *Hosea*, 34).

<sup>41</sup> The word זָרַעַל ("Jezreel") takes on its typical meaning here, "God sows" (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 281).

ment of the Lord's judgment speech (יְיָ oracle).<sup>42</sup> Like the initial cycle this unit closes with an extended section (subunit) detailing the Lord's eschatological promise to restore Israel (2:14–23). A new cycle is clearly introduced in 3:1 by the introductory address formula "Then the LORD said to me [Hosea]."

*Contents of cycle B.* This second cycle is a relatively unified though complex collection of oracles.<sup>43</sup> Two subunits make up the cycle (vv. 2–13 and vv. 14–23).<sup>44</sup> The first subunit presents the Lord's judicial case (יְיָ) against His adulterous wife, Israel.<sup>45</sup> The unit opens with God's יְיָ oracle (v. 2) and closes with the oracular formula "declares the LORD" (v. 13).<sup>46</sup>

Summoning Israel before His judgment court, God announced the nation's guilt by a series of alternating accusations of sin and announcements of judgment (vv. 2–4, 5–8, 9–13). The second subunit (vv. 14–23) introduces a series of salvation oracles in which the Lord promised Israel's future restoration (vv. 14–15, 16–17, 18–20, 21–23). As in 1:10–2:1, God again based His promise to provide for Israel's eschatological restoration on wordplays that reverse the negative meanings of Hosea's children's names in order to reflect positive meanings. The Lord promised to "sow" (זָרַע)

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<sup>42</sup> Hosea's predominant use of the divine "I" reflects the Lord's first-person confrontations with His sinful people Israel (Buss, *Prophetic Word of Hosea*, 60). On the other hand passages that refer to the Lord in the third person presumably point to Hosea as the speaker. At times it is difficult to determine whether the speaker is the Lord or Hosea (*ibid.*).

<sup>43</sup> Wolff suggests that these verses are a loosely knit collection of prophetic sayings (what he terms a "kerygmatic unit") that have been assembled according to their genre, setting, and content (*Hosea*, 32). Buss proposes that each of these first three chapters evidences "a complicated, and evidently largely oral, history" (*Prophetic Word of Hosea*, 33).

<sup>44</sup> Some writers suggest a different division. Wolff, for example, suggests that verses 2–15 focus on accusation/judgment and verses 16–23 focus on restoration. He bases this on the Lord's court case against Israel in which there is a repeated circular movement from Israel's sin to the Lord's proposed action conveyed by the three occurrences of "therefore" (לָכֵן) in verses 6, 9, and 14, which follow the proof of guilt presented in each of the preceding verses (5, 7, 13) (*Hosea*, 32).

<sup>45</sup> Stuart represents the majority of commentators in proposing that these verses portray the Lord, the wronged husband, as a prosecutor undertaking a court case against His faithless wife, the nation Israel (*Hosea*, 45–48). See also Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 25; Mays, *Hosea*, 35–37; and Wolff, *Hosea*, 31–34. Andersen and Freedman add that while the Lord's יְיָ judgment oracle and legal divorce proceedings were made metaphorically against Israel, they probably mirrored Hosea's literal experience with his adulterous wife Gomer (*Hosea*, 220–21).

<sup>46</sup> In Hosea the statement "declares the LORD" does not always conclude a rhetorical unit. It is used in 2:16 to introduce a salvation oracle, in 2:21 it appears in the middle of the saying, and in 11:11 it concludes a unit.

Israel back in the land, to restore agricultural blessings, to show them "love" and "compassion" (רַחֲמִים), and to once again call them "My people" (עַמִּי; 2:22-23).

Hosea 2:2-13 opens with a covenant lawsuit or formal summons to trial, introduced by the הָיָה oracle.<sup>47</sup> Comparing Himself metaphorically to an offended husband, the Lord summoned His unfaithful wife, Israel, to appear before His judgment court to answer charges of marital infidelity. The trial language employed here is commensurate with the form employed in a Jewish divorce proceeding: "For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (v. 2; cf. Isa. 50:1 and Jer. 3:8).<sup>48</sup> As the offended husband, the Lord spoke about His wife, Israel, as if to a third party, and never directly to her, as was common in the legal court proceedings.<sup>49</sup> Israel must abandon her adulterous pursuits (Hos. 2:2) or she would face devastating judgment in the form of shameful exposure and deprivation (v. 3).<sup>50</sup> He also threatened to disown her children (v. 4), showing individual Israelites no compassion (רַחֲמִים).

Having stated His case in verses 2-4, the Lord validated His case by introducing two sections of accusations and judgment against Israel in verses 5-7 and 8-13.<sup>51</sup> Forsaking her "first husband," the Lord, Israel committed shameless harlotry with the Baals (vv. 8, 13, 17).<sup>52</sup> Also the Israelites attributed all the Lord's

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<sup>47</sup> Other covenant lawsuit or הָיָה oracles are in Hosea 4:1, 4 and 12:2.

<sup>48</sup> For a full discussion of the "divorce form" in this opening unit (2:2-13) see Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rtb-Pattern)*, trans. Frederick Cryer, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 34-35. See also Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (December 1997): 529-50.

<sup>49</sup> Mays, *Hosea*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> The threat to "strip" Israel "naked" (Hos. 2:3) further supports the imagery of a divorce proceeding. A wife guilty of adultery was publicly shamed (Ezek. 16:35-42), and death could also result (Lev. 20:10). See Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, *Biblica et Orientalia* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964), 58-60. Hosea then introduced two metaphors to depict Israel's ultimate judgment: He said He would "make her like a wilderness [and] make her like desert land." By threatening to turn Israel's prosperous land into a desert wasteland, God was showing that Israel's prosperity was not to be attributed to her involvement in the Baal fertility cult (Wolff, *Hosea*, 34).

<sup>51</sup> Mays noted that this unit has a repeated circular movement from announcements detailing Israel's sin to the Lord's proposed action of judgment (*Hosea*, 36).

<sup>52</sup> "At this point reality pushes aside metaphor, as the Lord accuses Israel of ingratitude and idolatry. Israel did not acknowledge the Lord as the source of her blessings, which included the staples of life, as well as great wealth. Instead, she insisted on worshiping Baal, the Canaanite storm and fertility god, for she thought he was the source of her prosperity" (Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 343).

covenant blessings of produce and productivity to the fertility gods of Canaan (vv. 5, 8). As a consequence of Israel's sin of deserting the Lord and attributing all His provisions to Baal, the Lord announced that He would restrain Israel from prostituting herself with her illicit Canaanite lovers (vv. 6-7).

The Lord resumed His accusations against Israel in verses 8-13. This second series of condemnation and judgment oracles is marked by an inclusio. The opening words "For she does not know [acknowledge] that it was I who gave her" are echoed in the climactic closing words of the Lord in verse 13, "but she forgot Me."<sup>53</sup>

The Lord threatened to take away all the agricultural bounty that Israel had erroneously attributed to her lovers, the Baals, and to remove His life-giving rain, which produced Israel's grain, and wine, wool, and flax, as a scathing polemic against Israel's false worship of Baal (vv. 8-9, 12).<sup>54</sup> He said He would throw down Baal, showing him to be a worthless and impotent god who could not be trusted. What is more, the Lord's wrath would expose His wife's (Israel's) lewdness for all to see, and no one would be able to deliver her from His fierce judgment (vv. 9-10).<sup>55</sup> The gaiety associated with Israel's feasts, new moons, sabbaths, and festal assemblies would be brought to an end. These feasts were particularly deplorable to the Lord because in them Israel engaged in sexual immorality with the temple prostitutes of the Baal fertility cult (vv. 2, 13). The agricultural rewards of "vines and fig trees" that Israel attributed to her Canaanite lovers would be destroyed (v. 12). The Lord concluded that His wayward wife would be punished for her long history of devotion to the Baals, a false worship that had resulted in her forgetting Him (v. 13).

The second subunit (vv. 14-23)<sup>56</sup> opens with yet another "therefore" (לָכֵן). But instead of the anticipated continuation on the

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<sup>53</sup> Mays, *Hosea*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> Stuart points out that the words "grain, wine, and olive oil" serve as a synecdoche for the full range of covenantal or agricultural blessings given to Israel by the Lord (*Hosea*, 50).

<sup>55</sup> The irony here is obvious. The people of Israel were practicing shameless nakedness in the worship of the Baal fertility cult in order to ensure abundant rain for crops and riches. The Lord, Israel's true source of blessing, would withhold Israel's rain and fertility, and thereby "strip the land" of agricultural productivity and expose the people's nakedness. The penalty of publicly stripping an accused adulteress is mentioned in Jeremiah 13:22-27 and Ezekiel 16:35-42. See C. H. Gordon, "Hos 2:4-5 in Light of New Semitic Inscriptions," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 54 (1936): 277-80.

<sup>56</sup> As noted earlier, this second subunit introduces a series of four salvation oracles promising future restoration for Israel (2:14-15, 16-17, 18-20, 21-23).

theme of Israel's judgment introduced by the two previous uses of "therefore" in verses 6 and 9, the Lord now prophesied Israel's future restoration. Garrett observes that this unit presents a parallel structure framed within an inclusio.<sup>57</sup>

- A. Reversal: Wooing in the wilderness (vv. 14–15)
- B. A new marriage covenant (vv. 16–17)
- C. Return to Eden (v. 18)
- B'. A new marriage covenant (vv. 19–20)
- C'. Return to Eden (vv. 21–23a)
- A'. Reversal: The names of Hosea's children are changed (v. 23bc)

Following the judgment described in the previous verses, the Lord actively pursued His wayward wife in order to restore her to Himself and to their land (vv. 14–15). Israel's future restoration will take place, He said, in the wilderness,<sup>58</sup> the very place to which the Lord had cast them out in judgment. The Lord promised to pursue and win back His wayward wife,<sup>59</sup> and to restore her vineyards and well-being as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt (vv. 14–15).<sup>60</sup>

The remainder of this restoration complex is framed around the threefold occurrence of the phrase "in that day" (vv. 16, 18, 21). This entire unit exhibits a marvelous progression of God's promises to take Israel back as His covenant partner and wife. In verses 17–23 the words "I will" occur twelve times!

In that future day she will enjoy a new marriage covenant, betrothed to the Lord forever (vv. 19–20; cf. Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–29). The people of Israel will call the Lord "Ishi" (אִשִּׁי), which means "my husband," no longer calling Him "Baali" (בָּעָלִי), which

<sup>57</sup> Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Chisholm maintains that this reference to the wilderness may refer to Israelite traditions that tended to "sometimes idealize it as a pristine time in the nation's history, when Israel, like a new bride, expressed her love for the Lord and in turn experienced his protection" (*Handbook on the Prophets*, 343). Wolff points to Ezekiel's adaptation of this theme (Ezek. 20:33–44) in which he spoke of Israel's future when the Lord will gather them out of the wilderness of the nations (*Hosea*, 41).

<sup>59</sup> The verb פָּתָה translated "allure" ("entice, persuade, seduce") is used in Exodus 22:16 (Heb., v. 15) for the seduction of a virgin. The phrase "speak kindly to her" (וְדַבַּרְתָּ עִלְלָהּ) likewise implies a romantic connotation.

<sup>60</sup> Another wordplay involves the name Achor, meaning "trouble." Whereas the Valley of Achor was the "valley of trouble," following Achan's sin at the time of the Israelite conquest (Josh. 7:24–26), it will be a "door of hope" and renewed blessings when the Lord restores Israel to Himself and to their land (Hos. 2:15).

means “my master” or “my owner” (Hos. 2:16).<sup>61</sup> Also in that day the Lord will restore the land to Eden-like conditions (vv. 18, 21–23; cf. Isa. 11:6–9; 65:17–25; Mic. 4:1–8). Like the first cycle, this unit concludes with the Lord’s reversing the names of Hosea’s children to reflect restoration (Hos. 2:23). The Lord promised to “sow” (זָרַעַל) His people back in a fertile land. He will have “pity” or “compassion” (רַחֲמִים) on those who had “no pity” (לֹא רַחֲמִים), and He “will say to those who were ‘not My people’ [לֹא עַמִּי], ‘You are My people [עַמִּי]!’ And they will say, ‘You are my God!’”

*Summary of cycle B.* The first subunit (vv. 2–13) in this second cycle introduces the alternating themes of accusation and judgment based on the extended covenant lawsuit genre or רִיב oracle introduced in verse 2. The introductory accusation is recorded in the form of a רִיב judgment oracle, a form derived from legal court procedures carried out in ancient Israel.<sup>62</sup> Following the formal summons for Israel to appear before God’s tribunal for the divorce proceedings, He threatened devastating judgment unless she put away her adulterous practices (vv. 3–4). This first list of accusations of sin and announced judgment (vv. 2–4) is followed by a second and third listing of accusations of sin and announced judgment (vv. 5–7 and 8–13), both of which are introduced by “therefore” (לְכֵן).

A third “therefore” (לְכֵן) dramatically introduces the second subunit (vv. 14–23). This reversal from judgment to restoration must have shocked Hosea’s audience. Instead of the anticipated judgment developed by the previous two “therefores,” Hosea delivered God’s promise to renew and restore His relationship as Israel’s faithful and loving husband. Following an initial promise of Israel’s ultimate restoration, a restoration that would share many affinities to the days of her youth when the Lord brought her up from Egypt, three additional promises highlight Israel’s future restoration. Each of these three promises is introduced by the phrase “in that day” (vv. 16, 18, and 21) and serves to detail various elements of the Lord’s gracious restoration and blessings on a future remnant of repentant Israelites.

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<sup>61</sup> These two words are another subtle wordplay because both can mean husband. However, אִשָּׁה is a more intimate term for a loving and affectionate husband (Gen. 2:23; 3:6, 16), and אָדָם emphasizes a husband’s legal rights over his wife (Exod. 21:3; Deut. 22:22; 24:4). Mays is probably correct in his assumption that “this saying clearly presupposes that Israel must have commonly referred to the Lord as her Baal” (*Hosea*, 48).

<sup>62</sup> See René López, “Israelite Covenants in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Covenants, Part 1 of 2,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (fall 2003): 92–111.

## CYCLE C: HOSEA'S AND YAHWEH'S REDEMPTION AND RESTORATION OF THEIR UNFAITHFUL WIVES (CHAP. 3)

*Demarcation of cycle C.* Three features facilitate the demarcation of this third cycle. First, the introductory address formula, "Then the LORD said to me," in 3:1 opens this unit. Second, Israel's prophesied return (repentance) to seek the Lord their God and David their king (v. 5) marks the cycle's conclusion. Third, the covenant lawsuit form (the *רִיב* oracle) signals the start of the next cycle of judgment and restoration in 4:1.

*Contents of cycle C.* In this third cycle Hosea's first-person account relates how the Lord had commanded him to go and love his wayward wife Gomer,<sup>63</sup> even though she was "loved by another" (3:1).<sup>64</sup> As in chapter 1, Hosea's marital relationship once again symbolically portrays the Lord's love for Israel, who had forsaken Him to give her love to other gods (3:1). Hosea's procurement (v. 2) and isolation of his wife Gomer (v. 3) likewise symbolized the Lord's future treatment of His wife, Israel (v. 4). Verse 5 records the Lord's eschatological promise in which He guaranteed Israel's redemption and restoration "in the last days" (v. 5).

This third cycle in the first major division of the Book of Hosea brings the section to an impressive conclusion. Once again the Lord commanded Hosea to portray symbolically, through his love-tested relationship with his adulterous and estranged wife, Gomer, the relationship the Lord sustained with Israel. Chapter 3 seems to imply that Hosea and Gomer's relationship had been severed, most

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<sup>63</sup> The interpretation of this passage is much debated. The fact that Gomer is not specifically named (the Lord simply said, "Go again, love a woman") has caused some scholars to argue that Gomer is not the woman in this passage (William R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: Clark, 1905], 216–17; and Stuart, *Hosea*, 64). Two major questions may be raised. First, is the immoral woman spoken of here Gomer or another woman? Second, is the account recorded in chapter 3 merely a duplicate of the events recorded in chapter 1? That is, do chapters 1 and 3 merely record parallel accounts of the same event possibly taken from different sources? Most modern-day commentators hold that the unnamed immoral woman in 3:1–3 is Gomer, and they view chapters 1 and 3 as recording two different events. Anderson and Freedman propose that the parallel symbolism between Hosea and the Lord and between Gomer and Israel, demands that this unnamed immoral woman be Hosea's former wife, Gomer (*Hosea*, 295–96). Mays also argues that in light of the symbolism the woman must be Gomer (*Hosea*, 55; see also Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 73; and Wolff, *Hosea*, 59–60). For an extensive discussion of the various proposals see Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 44–50; and Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea," 66–97.

<sup>64</sup> The phrase *אִשָּׁה אֲהַבָהּ אֲחֵרָה* is translated in several different ways: "a woman beloved of her friend" (KJV); "a woman who is loved by her husband" (NASB); "a woman who is beloved of a paramour" (RSV); "a woman who is committing adultery with a lover" (TEV). The NET Bible, with the Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate, takes the participle as active rather than passive: "your wife . . . [who] loves another man."



likely by the legal divorce proceeding recorded in 2:2-4. The fact that Hosea had to purchase Gomer would indicate that they were legally divorced (3:1; cf. 1:2). This interpretation is consistent with the symbolism between the Lord and Israel, who like Gomer had forsaken her divine husband, the Lord, in order to pursue her illicit lover, Baal, the god of Canaan.

The word "for" in 3:4 introduces the interpretation of Hosea's symbolic action in relation to the Lord's dealings with Israel and points to the intrinsic meaning behind Hosea's prophetic actions. The Lord's judgment of Israel is stated in strict parallelism with Hosea's treatment of his own wife in verse 3. Hosea said to Gomer, "You shall stay with me for many days" (v. 3), and the clause in verse 4 is nearly identical, "For the sons of Israel will remain many days." This is also followed by a series of negations in verses 4-5, which state six blessings of which Israel would be deprived. These items are listed in related pairs. Israel would remain many days "without king or prince" (devoid of national independence), "without sacrifice or sacred pillar" (unable to offer sacrifices or have an authorized worship center), and "without ephod or household idols" (separated from devotion to the Baals and other implements employed in their idolatrous worship). The cycle closes with the Lord's promise of eschatological restoration. After Israel has experienced His discipline, a remnant "in the last days" will return to Him and to David their king, and Israel will again experience the Lord's goodness and blessings (v. 5).

*Summary of cycle C.* The Lord's command for Hosea to purchase back his wayward wife Gomer from indentured prostitution illustrates the Lord's love for Israel, who had forsaken Him for the gods of Canaan (3:1-3). Israel, like Gomer, would experience forced isolation, and as a result of exile, would be deprived of political independence and worship (v. 4). Afterwards a remnant will return to the Lord their God and David their king (v. 5).

The third article in this series will discuss the literary structure of Hosea 4-8.



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