

THE TEXT OF HOSEA 1:9

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Hos 1:9 is the second verse of a unit that recounts the birth of Hosea and Gomer's third child, Lo-Ammi/Not-My-People. The literary structure of Hosea 1:8-9 parallels that of the births of the two older children, Jezreel (1:3b-5) and Lo-Ruhamah/Not-Pitied (1:6[-7]). In each case the narrative of Gomer's bearing of the child is followed by a divine oracle explaining the significance of the name that the prophet is to give to the child. Thus Hos 1:8 recounts the birth of the as yet unnamed third child after the weaning of Lo-Ruhamah,¹ and in v 9 YHWH names the child Lo-Ammi and gives an exposition of that name. It is this exposition that has given rise to intense debate concerning its *Urtext* and correct translation.

In the MT the verse reads as follows:

wayyô' mer qērā' šēmô lō' 'ammî
kî 'attem lō' 'ammî
wē'ānōkî lō' -ehyeh lākem

There are three ways in which v 9 has been translated: the first two base themselves on the MT and diverge only in their understanding of its syntax; the third resorts to emendation of the Hebrew consonantal text. The following three translations of the verse represent each of these solutions:²

- (A) And he said: "Call his name Lo-ammi;
 for ye are not my people,
 and I will not be yours." (JV)

¹ Many scholars (e.g., F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980] 197; J. L. Mays, *Hosea* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969] 29) take this information literally and calculate that there was a longer interval between the births of Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi (about two to three years) than there had been between Jezreel and Lo-Ruhamah. H. W. Wolff views as theologically significant the fact that God waited such a long time before issuing his last threat, thus giving the people a fair opportunity to repent (*Hosea* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974] 21). Yet as Mays points out, this allusion to weaning could simply be "a touch of the human story behind the account." Another possibility is to view the mention of weaning as a literary device to indicate the passing of time in a manner that would not be a mere repetition of the phrases used in Hos 1:3 or 1:6.

² The tripartite division into lines is mine, done in order to facilitate discussion.

- (B) He said, "Call his name Lo-Ammi,
for you are not my people.
And I am not Ehyeh to you." (Andersen-Freedman)
- (C) And the Lord³ said, "Call his name Not my people,
for you are not my people
and I am not your God." (RSV)

Before evaluating the various arguments put forward in favor of and against these interpretations, evidence from the versions should be presented. Although there is a fragment of Hosea from Qumran that includes part of Hos 1:9 (4QXII^d),⁴ what it preserves is of no use in solving the problem.⁵ The LXX evidence, except for a few late manuscripts, supports the reading of the MT.⁶ In Greek the last phrase of the verse reads: *kai egō ouk eimi hymōn*. Whether one chooses to translate this as "and I am not your I-am" or as "and I am not yours," in either case somewhat inelegant Greek, it clearly reflects a *Vorlage* identical to the MT.⁷ The targumic *mymry l' hwh bs'dkwn*,⁸ "my word is not on your behalf," also appears to be a reflection of the reading of the MT.⁹ Thus

³ The RSV has here inserted the word *kyrios*, "Lord," on the basis of certain Greek traditions. Neither Ziegler nor Rahlfs (*ad loc.*) views *kyrios* as primary, and it is not reflected in most other translations (the KJV has "God" in italics). Internal literary considerations also argue against its inclusion. In the narrative of Hosea 1 there is a clear progression in the form of the introductory formula to divine speech. In order to avoid redundancy, there is a steady diminution in the formula. The full form is found only in v 2: "And YHWH said to Hosea." The following three times that the formula is used, it is gradually reduced, the identity of both the subject and the object remaining clear from the foregoing. Thus in v 4 the object has become grammatically indefinite, although understood by the reader/listener: "And YHWH said to him (*'ēlāyw*)." In the third occurrence, in v 6, the subject has also become indefinite, and a shorter form of the indefinite objective form is used: "And he said to him (*lō*)." Finally, in v 9, only the verb is left: "And he said." Yet the identity of neither subject nor object is in doubt.

⁴ This small fragment includes just the right-hand margin of a column and contains parts of Hos 1:7–2:5. A photograph of it was published on p. v of Wolff's commentary. Recently it has been discussed by L. A. Sinclair, "A Qumran Biblical Fragment: Hosea 4QXII^d (Hosea 1:7–2:5)" BASOR 239 (1980) 61–65.

⁵ 4QXII^d4 reads *šmw l' 'my k' [y, "his name Lo-Ammi f[or]*. In his restoration of the line, Sinclair follows the MT verbatim (p. 63).

⁶ J. Ziegler, *Duodecim prophetarum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 148. The manuscripts Cyr.^{For} Q^{lat} VII 181 Lo. add *theos* after *hymōn*. Symmachus is more literal in his translation of the imperfect *'ehyeh* by the future *esomai*, and his rendering of *lākem* by the dative *hymin*; however, this does not affect the reconstruction of the *Vorlage*, which must have been a text identical to the MT.

⁷ Ziegler clearly leans toward the former translation, as his capitalization of *eimi* indicates (*Duodecim*, 148).

⁸ A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 387.

⁹ The word *mēmar* is used in the targum to avoid anthropomorphism. Hence the term "the Word" is a euphemism for "the Lord" (M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York: Pardes, 1950] 2. 775). Thus in our case, the *mymry* "My Word" is probably a reflection of the

evidence from the versions offers no real variants and would seem to support the Masoretic reading. Yet the question remains in what manner the MT is to be understood.

(A). Translation (A) offered above is one that has found relatively few adherents, in spite of the fact that it is the most literal translation of the Hebrew of Hos 1:9. The old *JV* and the Luther Bible ("so will ich auch nicht der Eure sein") find that a literal translation makes sense in both idiomatic English and German. Among the moderns only W. Rudolph understands the verse in this manner ("und ich bin nicht für euch da").¹⁰ Although A. Weiser translates the MT in like manner, he feels that this reading is not the original one.¹¹ Both W. R. Harper and J. L. Mays also mention it as a possible translation of the Hebrew text as it stands.¹²

Those who translate "I will not be yours" are clearly in the minority, and rightly so. There are two major arguments that can be brought against (A). One is literary, the other syntactical. All commentators are in agreement that in the exposition of the name Lo-Ammi we are dealing with a negation of a covenant formula.¹³ One of the major literary devices in Biblical Hebrew is the use of parallelism. A strict parallel between lines 2 and 3 of v 9 is maintained only if we translate as either (B) or (C) do above. This twofold sequence of pronoun-negative participle-predicate noun-possessive is destroyed if the second phrase is translated "I will not be yours," which would then have the structure of pronoun-negative participle-*verb*-possessive. While retaining most of the elements of the parallelism, it becomes less elegant, which would not ring very convincingly as the culmination of a prophetic oracle.

However, the syntax of the phrase is also suspect. As early as the twelfth century, the Jewish exegete Ibn Ezra (*ad loc.*) perceived the dangling nature of the Hebrew phrase "I will not be to/for you," and he felt compelled to complete it by suffixing the word *l'lhym*, "as God." His observation was correct. Although the idiom *hāyâ lě-* does indicate possession in Hebrew, when defining a personal relationship it must be modified by a predicate noun, most often introduced by *lě-*, "as/to/for," which determines the relationship of subject and (indirect) object. In no instance does it imply human or divine possession in its narrow sense.

first-person divine name *'ehyeh*. See also G. H. Dalman, *Aramäisch-Hebräisches Handwörterbuch* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967) 234.

¹⁰ W. Rudolph, *Hosea* (KAT 13/1; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1966) 37.

¹¹ A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten* (ATD 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974) 1. 20.

¹² W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1905) 213; Mays, *Hosea*, 22.

¹³ For the seminal treatment of the covenant formula upon which Hos 1:9 is based, see R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel* (Theologische Studien 68; Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1963).

Rather in such instances it circumscribes the parameters of the relationship, and this must be followed by a modifier. The first-person form of this idiom, in both perfect and imperfect, both converted and not, appears an additional forty-three times in the Bible. Of these occurrences, the majority (twenty-eight) follow the sequence verb-object-predicate noun¹⁴ indicated by *lě-* (Gen 17:8; Exod 6:7; 29:45; Lev 26:12; Judg 11:9; 18:4; 1 Sam 23:17; 2 Sam 7:14; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22, 25; 31:8, 32; 32:38; Ezek 11:16, 20; 14:11; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech 8:8; Ps 69:12; Job 30:9; 2 Chr 17:13; 28:6). In four instances the nominal modifier is preceded by *kě-*, "as/like." All of these are poetic passages, three of them in Hosea (Hos 11:4; 13:7, in which the *kě-* is replaced by the longer synonym *kěmô*; 14:6; Ps 71:7). In eight cases the predicate noun does not follow a preposition (1 Sam 18:18; Jer 2:31; Zech 2:9; Ps 109:25; Prov 4:3; Job 12:4; 30:29; Lam 3:14). In two instances the modifier is a participle (Ps 69:9; Neh 1:11). And once the verb is modified by an adjective and is included here only for the sake of completeness, since it defines the quality of the relationship rather than its terms (2 Sam 22:24). However, in not one of these instances is the verb not modified. Thus a translation as "I will (not) be yours," although idiomatically correct in English and German, is not based on a correct understanding of Hebrew syntax.

(B). An ingenious solution to the problem, one which involves no changes in the text, was first proposed in 1899 by A. B. Ehrlich.¹⁵ This solution, which views the *lō'-ehyeh* as a predicate noun, is reflected in translation (B) above. It is this theory that seems to have gained the widest acceptance among most recent scholarship. Wolff, Mays, C. D. Isbell, Andersen and Freedman all advance it.¹⁶ In the words of Wolff, the theory runs as follows:

The last four words are comprehensible only when thus interpreted: "I am not" (לֹא־אֶהְיֶה); note the *maqeph* functions as a predicate noun, thus standing parallel to "not my people" (לֹא עַמִּי). This makes sense, however, only if אֶהְיֶה is used as in Ex 3:14 and replaces the name of Yahweh. Thus "for you" (לְכֶם) replaces the corresponding nominal suffix in לֹא עַמִּי.¹⁷

¹⁴ Because of the fluidity of Hebrew sentence structure, this order must not be viewed as rigid and unchanging.

¹⁵ A. B. Ehrlich *Mikrâ Ki—Pheshutô* (reprinted with an introduction by H. M. Orlinsky; New York: Ktav, 1969) 1. 138. Ehrlich later changed his view, about which see below n. 30.

¹⁶ Wolff, *Hosea*, 9, 21f.; Mays, *Hosea*, 22, 29f.; C. D. Isbell, "The Divine Name אֶהְיֶה as a Symbol of Presence in Israelite Tradition," *Hebrew Annual Review* 2 (1978) 101–18. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 4, 197–99.

¹⁷ Wolff, *Hosea*, 21. It is interesting to note that in a seminar held at the Harvard Semitic Museum on 9 October 1980 Wolff translated the passage in question as "I am not your God."

Wolff goes on to say that the use of *'ehyeh* "makes the meaning of the Tetragrammaton more easily heard than 'Yahweh.'"¹⁸ Isbell expands on that idea by asserting that "at that one moment, if never again, Hosea employed יהוה in a chilling way to assert that God had abandoned Israel."¹⁹ Thus it is felt that a significant theological statement is being made by the use of *'ehyeh*.

The textual evidence in favor of such an interpretation is formidable. The *maqṣep* binding the *lō'* and the *'ehyeh* to each other serves to indicate that even the Masoretes understood the phrase in a nominal sense, probably drawing on their familiarity with Exod 3:14. The LXX evidence also points in this direction. The *hymōn*, "your," is in the genitive, rather than in the more literal dative *hymīn*, "to/for you," as it is in the version of Symmachus. As indicated above in n. 9, the Aramaic *mymry* reflects an understanding of *'ehyeh* as a divine name.

Yet despite the foregoing, there are weaknesses with this theory. First of all, the last two phrases of Hos 1:9 are not as "strictly parallel" as Wolff would have us believe.²⁰ Although *lō' 'ammî* and *lō'-'ehyeh lākem* both function as predicate nouns, according to this theory *'ehyeh* would be a proper noun, whereas *'am* is a generic one.²¹ Second, when in Hos 2:25b there is a reaffirmation of the relationship that is negated in 1:9 (*wē'āmartî lēlō' 'ammî 'ammî attâ wēhû' yō'mar 'ēlōhāy*, "and I shall say to Not-My-People, 'you are My-People,' and he will say, 'My-God'"), the term used for the divinity is "God," and not some form of the Tetragrammaton.²² Such a change would appear to damage the internal unity of Hosea 1–3. Although most commentators see in Hos 1:9 a negation of the *Bundesformel*,²³ it is difficult to see how the change from *'ēlōhîm* to *'ehyeh* would heighten the shock effect of the oracle. Rather, by removing itself from the accustomed ancient vocabulary of the covenant formula this phrasing would have a

¹⁸ Wolff, *Hosea*, 22.

¹⁹ Isbell, "Divine Name," 110. In his article, Isbell seeks to show that, "whenever יהוה appears in a context of divine action or promise, its theological significance as a *symbol of divine presence* far exceeds its simple syntactic function as a first person verbal form" (p. 101). Although he tempers the "whenever" in the course of the article, his argument suffers from his lack of consideration of synonymous phrases in the perfect mood. I also take issue with his basic assumption that one of Israel's major fears was that God might abandon it. The prophets' continual harping on the subject was not an exploitation of widespread fears among the Israelites; rather it was an effort to shake the moral complacency of a populace which believed that it had God's unconditional protection.

²⁰ Wolff, *Hosea*, 21.

²¹ If the negation of the name "I-am" that expresses the relationship of God to Israel does indeed heighten "the radical character of the declaration" (Mays, *Hosea*, 29), why does Hosea not also negate the proper name that expresses the relationship of Israel to God, namely, Israel "God-wrestler" itself?

²² Conceivably some phrase such as *yhwḥ lî*, "My-YHWH," could have been employed in order to emphasize the personal aspect of the divine presence.

²³ For example, Isbell, "Divine Name," 110ff.; Wolff, *Hosea*, 21. Mays, *Hosea*, 29.

mollifying effect on the broad masses, who may have missed the subtlety. Finally, Isbell claims that "what Hosea had said negatively (אֲנִי לֹא אֱלֹהִים לָכֶם), Jeremiah and Ezekiel wished to say positively (אֲנִי אֱלֹהִים לָכֶם)."²⁴ Nowhere does Isbell explain either why the final element (God) is missing in Hosea nor why there is no positive formulation without the *lē'lōhîm*, "as/for a God."

(C). Translation (C), "you are not my people, and I am not your God," offers solutions to both the syntactical problems and to those of the inner dynamics of the biblical text. In order to arrive at such a translation, however, adherents of this solution must change the Hebrew consonantal text from *'hyh lkm*, "I am to you," to *'lhykm*, "your God." Syntactically this would restore the absolutely strict parallelism between the phrases "you are not my people" and "I am not your God" (pronoun-negative-participle-predicate generic noun with suffixed possessive pronoun). As scholars from Wellhausen to Smend have pointed out, the phrasing of this emendation is an exact negation of the ancient covenant formula "you/they are my people, and I am your/their God."²⁵ The use of "God" in Hos 1:9 is reflected also in the reaffirmation of the covenant in 2:25b, the full import of which is lost in either of the two other translations.²⁶ As Smend has indicated, there is a great emphasis in Hosea on this theme of a personal relationship with God.²⁷

Once one has assumed the plausibility of an original reading *'ēlōhêkem*, one must posit a motivation for the change. Given the monolithic evidence from the versions, it is likely that the text had been changed by the third century B.C.E. There exists no text-critical criterion to explain the unintentional rearrangement of the consonants of *'ēlōhêkem* into *'ehyeh lākem*, although an unconscious transposition of consonants (granting the extra *h*) cannot be ruled out. It is, however, more likely that the text was deliberately changed for theological reasons. As Weiser, followed by Smend, has stated: "Dieses das Fundament der alttestamentlichen Religion stürzende Urteil klang den Späteren unerträglich und wurde—vielleicht mit Bezug auf das *'ehje* 2. Mose 3.14—abgeschwächt."²⁸

This is the translation that has found the most adherents, both among the English versions—from the *KJV* to the *NJV*²⁹—and in modern

²⁴ Isbell, "Divine Name," 114.

²⁵ J. Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1892) 5. 12, 97; Smend, *Bundesformel*, 24f., 38. For a listing of biblical references, see Smend, *Bundesformel*, 5.

²⁶ Contra Isbell ("Divine Name," 110), Mays (*Hosea*, 29), and Wolff (*Hosea*, 21f.).

²⁷ Smend, *Bundesformel*, 24.

²⁸ Weiser, *Propheten*, 20; Smend, *Bundesformel*, 38 n. 73.

²⁹ Other translations in similar vein include the *RSV*, *JB*, and *NEB*, the Moffatt, and even the *Good News Bibles*.

scholarship.³⁰ However, as the discussion of (B) above has shown, in recent years this theory has lost adherents, since it has no textual support. Scholars have become more cautious since Harper claimed that "this translation involves a slight [*sic*] change of text."³¹ Thus, a translation that bases itself on the received text and has versional support, as (B) does, is today the preferred one, in spite of its literary weaknesses. Yet these weaknesses can be resolved if one turns to solution (C).

Of the three possible resolutions to the crux of Hos 1:9 reviewed here, (A) is to be rejected outright on the basis of both literary and syntactical considerations. This is more difficult to do in the case of (B), which is supported by text-critical criteria and which scholars want to preserve as the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet in order to have an inner biblical parallel to the nominal use of 'ehyeh in Exod 3:14. However, this interpretation appears unlikely when viewed in the context of the *Bundesformel* in the Hebrew Bible as a whole and specifically in its negation and reaffirmation by Hosea. As for the strength of the textual argument advanced in favor of (B), the agreement of the MT and the LXX can tell us no more than that at some point of time, no earlier than the third century B.C.E., a full half millennium after the time of Hosea, there existed an understanding of this text as reflecting the nominal use of 'ehyeh in Exod 3:14. Text-critical criteria alone cannot project farther into the past with certainty.³² Thus, other critical methods must also be turned to in the search for an *Urtext*. And, in this case, the literary criteria are much stronger on the side of those who would emend the text to 'lhykm, "your God." This third solution to the problems of the text resolves the difficulties of syntax, restores the strict parallelism between the last two phrases of v 9, and brings the verse solidly into the realm of the *Bundesformel*, which played such an important role in Hosea's understanding of the covenant between God and his people.

³⁰ Besides Wellhausen and Smend, scholars who adhere to this view include Ginsberg ("Hosea," *EncJud*, 8. 1011), Harper (*Amos and Hosea*, 206, 213), W. Nowack (*Die kleinen Propheten* [HAT 3/4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922] 15), Robinson (T. H. Robinson and F. Horst, *Die zwölf kleinen Propheten* [HAT 14; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1964] 7f.), and Weiser (*Propheten*, 15, 20). Both *BHK* and *BHS* suggest this emendation in their critical notes. In a complete reversal of his previous view (see above n. 15), Ehrlich claimed in his *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908–14) 5. 165 that "für לא אהיה לכם, dem nur durch Künstelei ein kümmerlicher Sinn abgewonnen werden kann, ist mit andern לא אלהיכם zu lesen."

³¹ Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, 213. The "slight change" involves the rearranging of the Hebrew consonants and the deletion of one of the *h*'s.

³² Cf. the views of Moshe Greenberg ("The Use of the Ancient Versions for Interpreting the Hebrew Text" in *Congress Volume: Göttingen, 1977* [VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1977] 131–48). Although he does not advocate emendation, Greenberg's caution in evaluating text-critical evidence has some bearing on the argument.

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