

The Threat of Jezreel (Hosea 1:4-5)

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HOSEA 1:2-9 NARRATES the marriage of Hosea, the births of his three children, and their symbolic naming. Scholars usually reckon with a few late additions to the account, especially in vv 5 and 7, but they view the narrative otherwise as a reliable presentation of the prophet's message.¹ Verse 4 focuses on the first child. Here, Yahweh commands the prophet, "Call his name Jezreel." An interpretation of the name then follows, introduced by the conjunction *kî*. The interpretation consists of two divine threats: (1) "I [Yahweh] will visit (*ûpāqadtî*) the blood of Jezreel (*ʿet-dēmê yizrēʿeʿl*) on the house of Jehu" (v 4ba), and (2) "I will put an end (*wēhišbattî*) to the kingdom/kingship (*mamlēkūt*) of the house of Israel" (v 4bβ).² Both threats are governed by the temporal clause, "yet a short while" (*ʿôd mēʿat*), at the beginning of v 4b.

The saying poses a number of exegetical issues. To what event(s) does the "blood of Jezreel" refer? Is the "blood of Jezreel" the reason for Yahweh's

¹ Besides the standard commentaries, see J. Schreiner, "Hoseas Ehe, ein Zeichen des Gerichts (zu Hos 1,2-2,3, 3,1-5)," *BZ* ns 21 (1977) 163-83; G. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation* (SBLDS 102, Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 55, 127-30. Most scholars attribute the narrative to a disciple of Hosea, who witnessed firsthand what the prophet had said and done.

² Schreiner ("Hoseas Ehe," 172) and J. M. Ward (*Hosea: A Theological Commentary* [New York: Harper & Row, 1966] 5-6) doubt that the second threat belongs to the original narrative. Their arguments, however, are far from conclusive; see F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) 172-75.

punishment of Jehu's dynasty, or is it a shorthand description of the punishment itself? What is the sense of *mamlēkūt* in v 4bβ, and what exactly does the threat here mean? Finally, from when does the preaching on Jezreel in 1:4 date?

Answers to these questions vary significantly from one scholar to the next. This article begins with a review of recent interpretations of Hos 1:4. The survey will illustrate the interdependency of the exegetical issues, the different configurations of possible answers, and some of the underlying arguments. A critique of the interpretations will then follow, and there I will have occasion to make some new suggestions about the meaning, setting, and function of the threat of Jezreel.

I. Recent Interpretations

For H. W. Wolff, the "blood of Jezreel" is a reference to Jehu's massacre of the house of Ahab in the city of Jezreel ca. 845 B.C.E.³ Second Kings 9–10 presents the episode in a favorable light, claiming that the prophets Elisha and Elijah, and other conservative Yahwists, supported the revolution. Hosea, Wolff argues, regards Jehu's actions quite differently. He views the massacre as an instance of grave wrongdoing and cites it as the sin that prompts Yahweh to overthrow the dynasty of Jehu a century later. In v 4bβ, *mamlēkūt* means "kingship." The prophet here threatens the end of the monarchy as an institution and links it to the fall of the dynasty of Jehu. Historically, of course, the two events did not coincide: the Israelite monarchy continued twenty-five years after the murder of Zechariah, the last member of the house of Jehu. Wolff, however, reasons that the "glory" of the monarchy did in fact end with the death of Jeroboam II. The saying in 1:4 dates from the reign of Jeroboam, 747–746 B.C.E. at the latest.

According to A. Caquot, *mamlēkūt bêt yiśrā'el* in v 4bβ means "the reign of the house of Israel" and refers specifically to the house of Jehu.⁴ The two threats in v 4, then, are exactly parallel. Furthermore, the saying continues in v 5: "And on that day I [Yahweh] will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." This third threat complements v 4 by indicating precisely where Jehu's dynasty would come to an end. Caquot argues that Zechariah, the last member of the dynasty, was in fact killed by Shallum in or near Jezreel (2 Kgs 15:10). In light of this coincidence, 1:4-5 appears as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, dating from the time shortly after Zechariah's murder. Hosea supposedly looked back on the event and interpreted it as divine punishment for the "blood of Jezreel," that is, Jehu's violent acts against the house of Ahab.

³ H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 12, 17-19.

⁴ A. Caquot, "Osée et la royauté," *RHPR* 41 (1961) 123-46, esp. 127-30.

Wolff and Caquot, despite their differences, agree on one essential point: that the "blood of Jezreel" refers to Jehu's revolution as "bloodguilt." This view is challenged by Jörg Jeremias, who states that "it would be unique in the entire book of Hosea, insofar as the prophet otherwise never announces God's judgment for guilt lying far (a century) in the past. Rather, Hosea constantly proclaims divine judgment for present wrongdoing. Where he mentions earlier historical events (from 9:10 onward in large number), he does so in order to reveal and clarify present sin."⁵

According to Jeremias, the "blood of Jezreel" does refer to Jehu's massacre of the house of Ahab, but only as a "starting point" or "model" of the regicide that occurred throughout Hosea's time. The prophet views the series of royal murders as sin and predicts the consequence in v 4b β : Yahweh will put an end to kingship (*mamlĕkût*) in Israel altogether. Jeremias assigns the saying to Hosea's late period (731–724 B.C.E.), when the prophet could look back on the assassinations of Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah and see that the monarchy had become a hopelessly perverse institution.⁶

Finally, we turn to the interpretation of F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman.⁷ They argue that the "blood of Jezreel" might include Ahab's murder of Naboth but that it refers primarily to Jehu's extermination of the house of Ahab. Hosea does not cite the massacre as a punishable sin. Rather, he means to say simply: what God did to the house of Ahab by means of Jehu is exactly what God will do to the later members of the dynasty of Jehu—to Jeroboam II and his family. The reason for this punishment is not stated but implied. Unlike his great grandfather, the founder of the dynasty, Jeroboam did not show "zeal for Yahweh" (see 2 Kgs 10:16). Instead, he followed in the footsteps of Ahab by tolerating, if not promoting, the cult of Baal in Israel.

As for the second threat in v 4b β , Andersen and Freedman contend that it also focuses narrowly on the fate of the house of Jehu. *Mamlĕkût* here means "kingly rule," and the reference is specifically to the dynasty's tenure in power. Andersen and Freedman thus translate the line: "I [Yahweh] shall put an end to its [the house of Jehu's] rule over the state of Israel." The saying in 1:4 dates from the last years of Jeroboam II or from the six-month reign of Zechariah.

II. A Critique, with New Suggestions

None of the interpretations above are entirely satisfactory. By way of critique I offer the following observations, criticisms, and suggestions.

⁵ J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* (ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 31–32. This dating depends partly on the comparison of 1:4 with Hosea's other statements about kingship. According to Jeremias, Hos 9:15; Hos 10:3, 7, 15; and Hos 13:9–11 date from the prophet's last years, and the sharp criticism of the monarchy in these passages matches the complaint and threat in 1:4.

⁷ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 142–213, esp. 172–85.

1. The two verbs in v 4b, *ûpāqadî* and *wēhišbattî*, are perfect consecutives. At least on the surface, then, they seem to describe future actions of Yahweh. This sense is confirmed by the preceding temporal clause, *‘ôd mē‘at*, “yet a short while,” or “soon.”

2. There is little reason to doubt that the two threats in 1:4b are genuine predictions. Caquot construes them as prophecy *ex eventu*, but his interpretation rests on several questionable assumptions. The first threat announces the imminent punishment of the dynasty of Jehu but says nothing about where such punishment will occur. Caquot appeals to v 5, which mentions the Valley of Jezreel, but the statement there may not focus on the house of Jehu specifically. As for the claim that Shallum murdered Zechariah in or near Jezreel, the MT of 2 Kgs 15:10 indicates only that the assassination occurred *qābāl-‘ām*, “in public” (thus the *NRSV*). Caquot sites the reading of the LXX^L, “in Ibleam,” but its correctness is not entirely certain.⁸ Even if the reading were preferable, the match with Hos 1:4-5 would still not be as close as Caquot suggests. Ibleam (modern *Khirbet Bel‘ameh*) is not very near to the city of Jezreel (modern *Zer‘in*), and there is some question whether it even lies within the Jezreel Valley.⁹

3. At least the first threat anticipates disaster for the house of Jehu specifically. Accordingly, the birth and symbolic naming of Jezreel, along with the interpretation in v 4b, must date from a time before Shallum’s coup and the fall of the dynasty. Jeremias, we have seen, argues for a later date, primarily because he takes the “blood of Jezreel” as code for the frequent regicide in Israel during the 740s and 730s B.C.E. That interpretation, however, is by no means necessary, and it has the disadvantage of forcing Jeremias to gloss over the future tense of the verb *ûpāqadî*: “yet a short while I [Yahweh] will visit the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.”

4. The expression *pāqad dām ‘al* (“visit blood upon”) occurs only in Hos 1:4. There are, however, a number of comparable idioms elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For example, *pāqad ‘āwōn ‘al* (“visit iniquity upon”) occurs several times in the Pentateuch (Exod 20:5; 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9), as well as in Jer 36:31 and Amos 3:2. *Pāqad peša‘ ‘al* (“visit transgression upon”) appears in Amos 3:14, and *pāqad ḥaṭṭā‘t ‘al* (“visit sin upon”) in Exod 32:34

⁸ Cf. the Targum, the Vg, and the Syriac, which read “before the people” and thus match the MT. The LXX^B also presupposes the MT but renders the Hebrew as a place name, *Keblaam*. The LXX^O appears to conflate two variants: “in Ibleam before the people.” If one follows the LXX^L and assumes that *bybl‘m*, “in Ibleam,” is the original Hebrew reading, it is difficult to imagine the scribal error or reasoning that would have led to the MT’s *qbl ‘m*. Possibly the Greek reading “in Ibleam” was contrived by a translator who, with an eye toward 2 Kgs 9:27, saw poetic justice in the idea that the house of Jehu should rise and fall by acts of regicide in the same location, Ibleam. On the other hand, the MT is suspect because *qābāl* is a late Aramaic word. The phrase *qābāl-‘ām* may be a scribal gloss; cf. 2 Kgs 15:30.

⁹ See Wolff, *Hosea*, 19 n. 124; also Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, 30.

(cf. Hos 8:13; 9:9). Similar expressions include *pāqad yēmē habbē‘ālīm* ‘al (“visit the days of the Baals upon”) in Hos 2:15, and *pāqad dērākīm* ‘al (“visit ways [or] actions upon”) in Hos 4:9. In all of these instances, *pāqad* means essentially “punish,” and the object of the verb—*‘āwōn*, *peša*‘, *ḥaṭṭā’t*, *yēmē habbē‘ālīm*, or *dērākīm*—is the human offense that prompts divine punishment.

This evidence is telling for the meaning of the first threat in Hos 1:4. The prophet does not likely intend the “blood of Jezreel” as a shorthand description of the divine punishment, as Andersen and Freedman propose. Rather, Hosea cites it as a punishable sin, and, thus, as the reason for Yahweh’s actions against the dynasty of Jehu. The “blood of Jezreel” means essentially the “bloodguilt of Jezreel,” and, according to the prophet, Yahweh will punish the house of Jehu for it. (The LXX translators understood Hos 1:4b in this way and so rendered the Hebrew *ūpāqadtī* as *ekdikēsō*, “I will avenge.”)

5. If the analysis so far is correct, the “blood of Jezreel” cannot include Ahab’s murder of Naboth, as Andersen and Freedman suggest. Nor can it include the series of royal murders after the death of Jeroboam II, as Jeremias proposes. The house of Jehu could not be held accountable for these events. The “blood of Jezreel” can only refer to Jehu’s extermination of the house of Ahab in Jezreel. As Wolff correctly sees, Hosea cites this massacre as the reason for Yahweh’s decision to overthrow the dynasty of Jehu in the near future.

6. The negative appraisal of Jehu’s revolution contrasts sharply with the favorable presentation in 2 Kgs 9:1–10:27. As it now stands, the account in Kings legitimates Jehu’s rise to power with the following claims: (a) the prophet Elisha directed one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu as king of Israel, and the accompanying divine oracle sanctioned the revolution (9:1–10); (b) the revolution carried out Yahweh’s punishment of the Omrides for various crimes: Jezebel’s murder of the prophets and other servants of Yahweh (9:7–10a), the “many whoredoms and sorceries” of Jezebel (9:22), and the murder of Naboth and his children (9:25–26); (c) the details of the revolution fulfilled Yahweh’s word by the prophets, especially Elijah (9:26, 36; 10:10, 17); (d) the revolution was supported not only by the prophets but also by other loyal Yahwists like Jehonadab the Rechabite (10:15–16, 23); (e) the revolution wiped out the cult of Baal in Israel (10:18–27; cf. v 28); (f) Jehu’s actions were motivated by his “zeal for Yahweh,” not by his personal ambition (10:16); (g) the revolution restored order, or peace (*šālôm*), in Israel.¹⁰

¹⁰ On *šālôm* as a leitmotif in the narrative, see S. Olyan, “*Hāšālôm*: Some Literary Considerations of 2 Kings 9,” *CBQ* 46 (1984) 652–68, esp. 660–68. Note also how he interprets Jehu’s driving “in madness” (*bēšiggā‘ōn*, 9:20) as symbolic of Jehu’s function in the service of Yahweh.

Whether all of these claims belong to the original story of Jehu is debatable. At least some of them occur in passages which many commentators assign to late editors (e.g., 9:7-10a, 36-37; 10:10-11).¹¹ There should be little doubt, however, that, even apart from the supposed additions, the narrative depicts Jehu as Yahweh's agent of revenge upon the house of Ahab and as the restorer of *šālôm* in the Northern Kingdom. The positive bias of the account is difficult to deny.¹²

If the account goes back to the reign of Jehu and accurately reflects the support he enjoyed from prophets like Elisha, it is hard to see why Hosea views the revolution so negatively. According to some scholars, Hosea disagrees with the ninth-century prophets because he applies a higher moral standard to historical events and, thus, cannot condone the excessive violence of Jehu's actions.¹³ Against this proposal, however, one may observe that the prophet generally does not appear squeamish about the use of violence in carrying out Yahweh's judgment upon sinful human beings. His own proclamations of divine punishment often envision gruesome slaughter (see especially 14:1; also 9:13; 10:14; 11:6).

As an alternative explanation, Wolff suggests that in the threat of Jezreel Hosea simply does not know the traditions of the ninth-century prophets and so gives his own independent judgment of the revolution.¹⁴ This solution may be possible, but there is little to recommend it. Elsewhere, Hosea appears at least vaguely familiar with the traditions of his prophetic predecessors (6:4-6; 12:8-11, 13-15). In 6:5 specifically, he aligns himself with earlier prophets who proclaimed divine judgment, and quite possibly he has in mind Northern figures like Elijah and Elisha.

In light of these remarks, it is worthwhile to consider another approach to the problem. The story in 2 Kings 9-10 may in fact have originated during the period of Jeroboam II.¹⁵ The last years of his reign were a time of extreme trouble for the dynasty of Jehu. External enemies like Rezin of Damascus

¹¹ Scholars disagree widely over the extent of redaction in 2 Kgs 9:1-10:27. Compare, for example, M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988) 117-18, and H.-C. Schmitt, *Elisa: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972) 19-52, 224-30.

¹² See Olyan, "Hāšālôm," 654, 663; B. O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 125; and cf. L. M. Barré, *The Rhetoric of Political Persuasion: The Narrative Artistry and Political Intentions of 2 Kings 9-11* (CBQMS 20; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1988) 42-55, 97-98; F. O. Garcia-Treto, "The Fall of the House: A Carnavalesque Reading of 2 Kings 9 and 10," *JSOT* 46 (1990) 47-65.

¹³ See, for example, W. Rudolph, *Hosea* (KAT 12/1; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1966) 51.

¹⁴ Wolff, *Hosea*, 18.

¹⁵ See J. H. Hayes and P. K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implications for Biblical History and Literature* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988) 41; and cf. J. M. Miller, "The Fall of the House of Ahab," *VT* 17 (1967) 322.

seem to have been encroaching on the peripheral areas of Jeroboam's kingdom (see especially Amos 1:3 and Isa 9:10-11; also Amos 3:11; 4:10; 5:15b; 7:2), and a breakaway movement in Gilead, led by Pekah, may have been underway as well.¹⁶ Internally, there seems to have been widespread public sentiment against Jeroboam, and prophets like Amos and Hosea were calling for the overthrow of the regime (see Amos 7:9, 10b). In this context, the account in Kings would have served to shore up support for the dynasty of Jehu by demonstrating Yahweh's approval of its founder.¹⁷ Hosea's threat of Jezreel, on the other hand, would have tried to counter such propaganda by claiming that Yahweh had always viewed Jehu's rise to power as a punishable sin and so had never approved of the dynasty.¹⁸

7. Verse 4bβ anticipates the end of the *mamlākūt bêt yiśrā'ēl*. The noun *mamlākūt* occurs only eight other times in the Hebrew Bible, always in the singular construct form.¹⁹ Five of these instances are in Joshua 13, and there

¹⁶ See J. H. Hayes, *Amos, the Eighth-Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988) 26-27, 72, 128-29, 147, 167, 201-23, S. A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis* (SBLDS 123, Atlanta: Scholars, 1990) 239-40, H. J. Cook, "Pekah," *VT* 14 (1964) 121-35, Hayes and Hooker, *Chronology*, 54.

¹⁷ If the proposal here is correct, the story might be labeled an "apologetic work" (Miller, "Fall of the House of Ahab," 322) and attributed to scribes in the court of Jeroboam at Samaria. For approximate analogies from the wider Near East, see H. Tadmor's analysis of the apologies of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal ("Autobiographical Apology in Royal Assyrian Literature," *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* [ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983] 36-57). In each apology, the Assyrian monarch reviews his rise to the throne and justifies his kingship with the claim of divine election. According to Tadmor, these texts were composed not at the beginning of the kings' reigns but many years later, in conjunction with the appointment of their successors. The apologies sought to establish the legitimacy of the successors by defending the legitimacy of their fathers. It is a small step from these examples when the successors themselves, or even later descendants, compose the apologies, as I suggest in the case of 2 Kings 9-10.

¹⁸ Miller ("Fall of the House of Ahab," 322) assigns priority to Hos 1:4 and thus interprets 2 Kings 9-10 as an attempt by Jeroboam to counter the prophetic challenge. This view is not impossible, but it fails to explain adequately why Hosea, in the first place, looked back to Jehu's coup as the moral ground for condemning Jeroboam. According to my proposal, the prophet was driven to this strategy by the story in 2 Kings 9-10, which glorified Jehu's coup in order to legitimate the reign of his descendants, specifically Jeroboam. It is uncertain whether Hosea ever explained why Jehu's coup was a punishable sin. The fall of the dynasty in 747 B.C.E. might indicate that few people at the time found the account in Kings persuasive. Most Northerners probably recognized the account for what it was: royal propaganda recently composed by an unpopular and desperate regime. In this case, Hosea may have thought that the brief statement in 1:4 sufficed as a rebuttal.

¹⁹ According to K. Marti (*Das Dodekapropheten* [Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 13, Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1904] 17), the word is a scribal corruption of *mamlēket*, the construct form of the well-attested noun, *mamlākā*. More recently, K. Seybold ("mek," *TWAT*, 4: 942) suggests that *mamlākūt* is a mixed form of *mamlākā* and *malkūt* which

mamlākūt means concretely “kingdom,” that is, the political territorial domain of a king (vv 12,21,27,30,31). In Jer 26:1, the noun occurs in a dating formula and means “reign,” that is, the period of a king’s rule. Finally, in 1 Sam 15:28 and 2 Sam 16:3, the noun *mamlākūt* might again mean “kingdom,” or alternatively “dominion,” that is, the power or authority that a king (in these texts, Saul) exercises.

Which of these meanings, if any of them, applies in Hos 1:4bβ? As noted above, Andersen and Freedman contend that *mamlākūt bêt yiśrāʾēl* means “its [the house of Jehu’s] rule over the state of Israel.” The focus of the judgment, then, is exactly the same as in the preceding threat. As ingenious as this interpretation may be, it depends on a translation that is hardly straightforward. Neither the possessive pronoun “its” nor the preposition “over” is explicit in the Hebrew.

Alternatively, *mamlākūt bêt yiśrāʾēl* might refer to “kingship” in Israel, as an institution.²⁰ This proposal is certainly possible, but there is reason for caution here. For one thing, it is hard to see how political circumstances ca. 750 B.C.E. would have led Hosea to anticipate not only the fall of the dynasty of Jehu but the end of the monarchy altogether. Assyria’s influence in the West was negligible throughout the reign of Ashur-nirari V (754–745 B.C.E.). Only with Tiglath-pileser’s rise to the throne in 745 B.C.E. and his first campaign to the West in 743 B.C.E. did Assyria again become a serious threat to the states of Syria and Palestine. Although Rezin of Damascus was confiscating Israelite territory during the last years of Jeroboam II, it is doubtful that Hosea expected the Syrian king to overrun Israel completely and annex the state.²¹ In any case, the prophet would seem to have miscalculated the course of events badly. The monarchy did not fall in “yet a short while,” as 1:4 predicts. Rather, it continued for another quarter of a century.²² One might wonder,

possibly goes back to a scribal mistake by the masoretes. Neither proposal is compelling. Note that in the four instances of *mamlākūt* outside Joshua 13 the masoretes were careful to protect the form with notes in the marginal and final masora.

²⁰ See, for example, Wolff, *Hosea*, 19; H. Utzschneider, *Hosea, Prophet vor dem Ende: Zum Verhältnis von Geschichte und Institution in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie* (OBO 31; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980) 71, 78–80.

²¹ The kings of Damascus had never ruled Israel directly, even during the ninth century when Hazael and his son Ben-hadad thoroughly dominated the country. They were content to establish Syria’s political and economic hegemony in Palestine without eliminating local monarchies. The policy of Rezin was much the same (see J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 323–26).

²² Commentators must strain to defend the essential accuracy of the prophetic threat. Thus Wolff, as noted earlier, resorts to arguing that the “glory” of the monarchy did in fact end with the death of Jeroboam. It is doubtful that the last five kings of Israel—Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea—can be dismissed so easily as of no consequence.

too, why the prophet, or one of his followers, did not subsequently adjust the prediction so as to make it match the historical outcome more closely.

In light of these criticisms, I would propose another interpretation of 1:4b β , at least as a possibility. *Mamlēkūt bêt yiśrā'el* might mean something like "the extended kingdom" of Israel. During the early or middle years of Jeroboam II, Israel expanded territorially into northern Galilee and Trans-jordan (2 Kgs 14:23-29; 1 Chr 5:11-17; Amos 6:13).²³ Toward the end of his reign, however, the kingdom was again shrinking, particularly as the result of Syria's resurgence under Rezin. Hosea presumably witnessed this change in Israel's fortune and expected events to continue in the same direction (see Amos 6:14). Jeroboam's extended kingdom would come to an end, he predicted, and the house of Israel would consist of little more than the hill country of Samaria.

8. The interpretation of Hos 1:4b β offered above may find support in v 5: "And on that day I [Yahweh] will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel" (*wēhāyā bayyôm hahû' wēšābartî 'et-qešet yiśrā'el bē'ēmeq yiz-rē'e'l*). Although many scholars assign v 5 to a late redactor, their arguments are not conclusive.²⁴ If the threat does derive from Hosea, the prophet explicitly predicts the military defeat of Israelite forces in the Jezreel Valley and thereby implies the reduction of Israel to the hill country farther south. The threat makes sense against the background of Syrian aggression during the last years of Jeroboam II.²⁵

III. Conclusion

In this essay, recent treatments of the threat of Jezreel have been criticized, en route toward the following interpretation. Hos 1:4-5 dates from ca.

²³ See M. F. Unger, *Israel and the Arameans of Damascus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957) 90, Hayes and Hooker, *Chronology*, 53, cf. M. Haran, "The Rise and Decline of the Empire of Jeroboam ben Joash," *VT* 17 (1967) 266-97.

²⁴ According to Rudolph (*Hosea*, 52), Wolff (*Hosea*, 9, 19), and J. L. Mays (*Hosea* [OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969] 29), the saying is genuinely Hoseanic, but its placement in Hosea 1 is secondary. Others, however, go farther and argue that v 5 forms an integral part of the threat in v 4: see especially Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 174-75, 185, also H. Frey, "Der Aufbau der Gedichte Hoseas," *Wort und Dienst* 5 (1957) 16-17. M. Buss (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea: A Morphological Study* [BZAW 111, Berlin: Topelmann, 1969] 7) apparently regards v 5a (*wēhāyā bayyôm hahû'*) as a secondary addition but retains v 5b as an original part of the threat of Jezreel.

²⁵ Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 19, Mays, *Hosea*, 28. According to these scholars also, 1:5 predicts that Israel will lose its territorial holdings in Galilee and the Jezreel Valley, however, they view the verse as an independent saying from the period of the Syro-Ephraimite war and thus as a reflection of Assyrian aggression. The inscriptions of Tiglathpileser III and 2 Kgs 15:29 can be interpreted to suggest that in 733-732 B.C.E. Assyria confiscated Galilee and the Jezreel Valley from Syria, not from Israel (see S. A. Irvine, "The Southern Border of Syria Reconstructed," *CBQ* 56 [1994] 21-41). Syria presumably had seized these areas from Israel years earlier.

750 B.C.E. and anticipates two imminent disasters: the fall of the dynasty of Jehu (v 4b α), and the territorial reduction of Israel to the hill country south of the Jezreel Valley (vv 4b β -5). The threat reflects the political difficulties of the house of Jehu as Syria confiscated much of Jeroboam's kingdom and Israelites increasingly opposed his rule and the dynasty as a whole. Hosea cites Jehu's massacre of the house of Ahab as the specific reason for divine judgment. The prophet resorts to this assertion as a way of countering the recently composed propaganda of Jeroboam's court in 2 Kings 9-10.

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