

Hosea and Yahweh: God's Love Story

(Hosea 1-3)

G. W. Anderson

The parable of the Prodigal Son has been described as a drama in three acts: "sick of home; homesick; home." It is an outstanding example of the way in which in Scripture the dominant experiences and relationships of home and family are used to express the relationship between God and his people and God and the individual. Another such example is the Book of Hosea, in which the thought moves from the broken relationship between husband and wife and its restoration (chapters 1-3) to the broken relationship between father and son and the averting of the grim consequences (chapter 11).

It is with the former of these that the present study is concerned. Put in its simplest terms, the theme of the chapters 1-3 is the story of a wife's unfaithfulness and of the enduring strength of her husband's love; and in these there are mirrored the apostasy of Israel and the goodness of Yahweh. This, however, is a sweeping oversimplification, concealing complex problems of interpretation, the solution of which is in part dependent on the attitude adopted to questions of literary structure. One further difficulty may beset the expositor. The human appeal of the tragic domestic situation delineated in chapters 1 and 3 may easily tempt him to try to reconstruct more of Hosea's domestic situation than the available evidence warrants. To succumb to this temptation is to misconstrue the prophet's aim. That aim is not to give a complete account of his domestic tragedy and its outcome, but to speak to his people the word of Yahweh. His own experience is recorded, not for its own sake (and therefore not necessarily completely), but in order to express the enormity of Israel's apostasy, the reality of divine judgment, and the possibility of restoration.

The incomplete and problematic nature of the evidence about the prophet's domestic experience has given rise to a bewildering variety of interpretations of the chapters with which we are concerned. For that reason it is well to acknowledge the extent of our ignorance by stating the facts as they are recorded, difficult as it is to do so without the intrusion of an element of interpretation. In the first chapter (which is written in the third person) we are told that Hosea was commanded by Yahweh to take in marriage a harlotrous wife and get children of harlotry (whatever these expressions may mean), and that he married a woman named Gomer, who

bore three children to whom he gave the symbolic names Jezreel (God will sow), Lo-ruhamah (Not pitied), and Lo-ammi (Not my people). In the third chapter (which is written in the first person, as by the prophet himself) it is narrated that Hosea was commanded by Yahweh to love an unnamed woman, an adulteress beloved of her paramour, and that he bought her (from what or from whom is not stated) for silver and barley and kept her under control at home, an action symbolic of the relations between Yahweh and Israel.

Problems of Interpretation

The following are the principal questions of interpretation which are raised by these statements: (1) Is the record a literal account of what happened, or is it a purely imaginative allegory? (2) Do chapters 1 and 3 present successive acts in the drama, or are they distinct accounts of the same event? (3) Is the unnamed woman in chapter 3 to be identified with Gomer, or is she a different woman? (4) What was the nature of Gomer's immoral conduct, and when did it become evident?

(1) It has seemed to some to be highly improbable, if not impossible, that a prophet who so passionately attacked sexual immorality in society and worship should have acted as Hosea is said to have done, and quite impossible that God should have commanded him to do so. The story must therefore be a piece of allegorical fiction designed to convey Yahweh's word to his unfaithful people. There is nothing to be said for this view; and important considerations tell against it. In an allegory there is a detailed correspondence between what is related or described and the spiritual or moral truth which it represents; but here there are features which carry no recognizable allegorical meaning (e.g., the name Gomer, the sex of the three children, and the redemption price mentioned in 3:2). If Yahweh's command and the prophet's action are thought to be inconsistent with the moral purity which is inherent in the divine nature and appropriate to the prophetic office, then it is equally repugnant to recount them in an illustrative fictitious narrative. Moreover, not only is no hint given in the text that it is allegorical, but the sense of inward suffering which it conveys is best understood as an expression of the prophet's actual experience.

(2) Both the sequence of passages in the book as we now have it and the presence in 3:1 of the Hebrew word *ʿod* (KJV, RV, 'yet'; RSV, NEB, 'again') suggest that chapter 3 is the sequel to chapter 1. The natural assumption then is that, after Gomer had left Hosea, or had been driven away by him, he bought her back, presumably from some kind of bondage. But it is a commonplace of modern critical study of the prophetic literature that the text is not arranged in strict chronological order (even a cursory examination of the opening verses of each chapter in Jer. 24-29 will show this); and therefore it does not follow that chapter 3 is the chronological sequel to chapter 1. It is another commonplace of modern critical study of the prophetic books that they are compiled from three kinds of material: oracles, biographical narratives, and autobiographical

narratives. As we have seen, chapter 1 is biographical and chapter 3 autobiographical. They may, therefore, come from different sources or collections of material relating to Hosea, and may owe their present relative positions in the book to editorial arrangement and not to the chronological order of the events which they narrate. It has been suggested that chapter 3 does not describe the sequel to chapter 1, but is Hosea's own account of how he came to marry Gomer, recording what led up to the marriage rather than, as in chapter 1, the events which followed. The word *ʿod* in 3:1 (which suggests that what follows is a sequel to chapter 1) is not a serious difficulty. Some scholars have adopted the rather cavalier device of deleting it as an editorial addition. If it is left in the text, the sense may be not 'Go again and love . . .', but 'The Lord said again, "Go and love . . ."' ; or the 'again' might refer back to part of the autobiographical account which has not been preserved. It is, however, most unlikely that chapter 3 records an earlier stage in Hosea's relations with Gomer, since 3:1 would then presuppose her infidelity to a previous husband, and if (as would seem inevitable on this view) he is the 'first husband' of 2:7 (Heb. 2:9), then the direct parallel between Hosea-Gomer and Yahweh-Israel is shattered. If, however, chapter 3 is a parallel to chapter 1, then it is difficult to understand why it contains no reference to the birth of the three children, or how the period of seclusion and discipline can be fitted into the sequence of events narrated in chapter 1; and the reference to adultery in v. 1 must be taken as anticipating Gomer's subsequent infidelity.

(3) Thus far it has been assumed that the unnamed woman in chapter 3 is Gomer. Some have held that the identification is unjustified and that we have here the story of the marriage of Hosea to another woman. This is a forced and artificial view. Hosea's unfaithful wife exemplifies Israel, and the supposed reference to a second wife, also symbolizing Israel, would be a bewildering complication in the prophet's message. To assume that the woman is Gomer is the natural interpretation of the passage and one which raises no real difficulties.

(4) The startling statement that Yahweh commanded Hosea to marry an immoral woman has been understood in a variety of ways. We have already rejected as groundless the view that it should be understood in a purely allegorical sense. Almost equally indefensible is the claim that she is described as a harlotrous wife, and her children as harlotrous children, not because of her actions and character, but because she belonged to Israel which by its apostasy had been untrue to Yahweh. It is a commonplace that the prophets often use the language of sexual infidelity to describe the corruption of Israel's religious life. But if no more than this were conveyed by chapters 1-3, then the drama and the anguish of these chapters would be incomprehensible. The story as told virtually demands a realistic interpretation of Gomer's immorality. If that is granted, two further questions arise: a. What was the nature of Gomer's immorality? b. When did Hosea become aware of her character?

a. It has been suggested that Gomer was not an adulteress in the

normal sense, but that she was a temple prostitute. If this were so, her status would undoubtedly have a striking appropriateness to one of the main themes in Hosea's message: his denunciation of Israel's apostasy as adultery or harlotry. Fertility was a dominant motif in the Canaanite cult by which Israelite worship had been corrupted. One expression of the concern for fertility was the presence at the sanctuaries of women who made themselves available as cultic prostitutes. It has been argued that if Hosea married one of these women, not only would there be a special appropriateness in the description of her as a harlotrous wife and her children as children of harlotry (the term 'harlotry', *zenunim*, being from the same root as words used to describe Israel's 'harlotrous' infidelity to Yahweh), but in marrying her Hosea would be depicting in act Yahweh's union with his harlotrous bride, Israel. But the appropriateness is marred in one important respect. It is clear that Hosea, like Jeremiah, held that the time when the covenant bond was established between Yahweh and Israel was a time of mutual love and loyalty (Hos. 2:14f. (Heb. 16f.); cf. Jer. 2:2), and that the apostasy belonged to a later period. The Israel whom Yahweh chose as his bride was not already harlotrous. This objection does not apply to the view that in the period after the marriage and the birth of the three children, when Gomer left Hosea or was expelled by him, she became a temple prostitute and had to be bought back by him (3:2) before he could take her into his home again. This is a plausible view; but there is no specific evidence that Gomer was at any time a cultic prostitute, nor any indication to whom the price was paid.

The price was fifteen shekels of silver, and a homer of barley, and a lethech of barley. The word 'lethech' occurs only here. Its meaning is uncertain, but it has been generally assumed to be half a homer. A homer and a half amounts to forty-five seahs. In 2 Kings 7:1, 16 it is stated that immediately after the siege of Samaria a shekel would buy two seahs. If in normal times the price was somewhat lower, say a third of a shekel for a seah, then a homer and a lethech would be valued at fifteen shekels, and the total price paid for Gomer would be thirty shekels, which was the value of a female slave according to Ex. 21:32 (cf. Lev. 27:4). If the above admittedly conjectural calculation is correct, the question remains open whether the redemption money was paid to an individual or an institution.

b. The story seems to state quite clearly that Yahweh commanded Hosea to marry an immoral woman. The implication of this would be that Hosea knew her character before he married her. As we have already seen, the idea that Yahweh should have given such a command and that Hosea should have contracted such a marriage has been regarded as so offensive as to require us to adopt an allegorical interpretation of Hosea's marriage. Such a view of chapters 1-3 seems to me to be impossible, for the reason which I have indicated above. These chapters have a symbolic *application*; but they are not purely allegorical or symbolic. They include narrations of actual events in Hosea's life. These events may be interpreted as an instance of prophetic symbolism, by which there was

presented in action and in life the message which the prophet had to convey. The prophet's marriage with a woman known to be immoral expresses the appalling character of Israel's religious infidelity and corruption.

This is undoubtedly a possible interpretation; and it is one which is widely held. But there is another view, also widely held, which seems to me to have the balance of probability in its favor, that Hosea married Gomer believing her to be chaste and that her immorality became evident only at a later stage, possibly after the birth of the first child. The principal objection to this view is the statement that Yahweh commanded Hosea to marry a harlotrous wife and that the prophet acted on the divine command. But it is possible that, just as Jeremiah realized *after* his cousin had asked him to redeem part of the family estate, that this was Yahweh's word, promising the restoration of the land of Israel (Jer. 32:6-16), so Hosea came to believe *after* he realized that his wife had been unfaithful to him, that it had been by the divine direction that he had been led to marry Gomer. Only when he entered into an experience which seemed to empty his marriage to Gomer of meaning did he realize its meaning in Yahweh's purpose. On this view, the description of Gomer as a harlotrous woman is proleptic.

The principal positive argument for this understanding of the sequence of events is that it accords best with the application which the prophet gives to these events. Israel became the bride of Yahweh at the time of the Exodus, a time when she was responsive and loyal (2:15b (Heb. 17b)), but later she became unfaithful, resorting to the Canaanite Baal cult, and only after a period of separation and discipline will she return to Yahweh and experience again the blessings which flow from her reunion with Yahweh in loyal love. Further support for this view may be derived from the names of the children and the way in which their births are recorded. As will be seen more fully below, the name of the first child, Jezreel, "God will sow," speaks simply of Yahweh's punitive judgment. The name of the third, Lo-ammi, "Not my people," may well suggest that the child is not Hosea's; and there may be a similar suggestion in Lo-ruhamah, "Not pitied," the name given to the second, for the name probably implies that the child is deprived of the affection and care which should be natural and normal within the family. Again, it may be significant that when the birth of Jezreel is recorded we are told that Gomer bore *him* (Hosea) a son (1:3), whereas there is no indication of the paternity of Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi. Too much stress should not be laid on this, but it *may* be an indication that, between the births of the first and second children, Gomer's infidelity to Hosea became evident.

Allowing, then, for the incompleteness and complexity of the evidence and for the variety of views which are possible, I conclude that the following is the most probable reconstruction of Hosea's domestic tragedy. He married Gomer, believing her to be chaste. Some time after the birth of his son Jezreel, he became aware that Gomer had been unfaithful to him and this was expressed in the names of the second and

third children. Gomer then left the home, either because Hosea expelled or divorced her or because she abandoned herself to a life of sexual immorality, and came to be in some kind of bondage, either to an individual or to a sanctuary. Hosea, who had come to believe that the devastating experience through which he had passed was the result of Yahweh's leading, now felt himself to be directed by God to restore Gomer to the position of a loved wife, but only after a period of discipline and seclusion. That is the story which provides the framework of Yahweh's word to Israel through Hosea and illuminates the nature of Yahweh's love for his people as set forth in chapters 1-3.

**Exposition: The Goodness and
the Severity of Yahweh's Love**

Probably no subject in Israelite religion has been more extensively and intensively discussed during the past quarter of a century than the idea (or ideas) of covenant. Important though I believe the covenant theme to be for the understanding of Hosea 1-3, practical considerations make it necessary for me to bypass the details of that discussion. I merely state, with the utmost brevity and without supporting arguments, my own views, which form the basis of much of the exposition which follows.

I hold that the idea of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel is an ancient element in Israelite religion, inherent in the traditions of the Exodus and Sinai, and that, while the covenant includes an important element of obligation, it is not solely contractual but conveys also the idea of a personal union between the covenant parties. Thus marriage, with its blend of obligation and affection, exemplifies admirably the covenant relationship; and in using his own marriage as a counterpart of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, Hosea is both recalling the ideal relationship now lost and driving home the enormity of Israel's unfaithfulness. Israel's apostasy is like a disastrous breach in the marriage relationship, both because it involves a breach of covenant and also because her unfaithfulness takes the form of indulgence in the Canaanite fertility cult and the sexual practices which expressed its central ideas. Israel, like Gomer, was a harlotrous wife who had disowned her obligations and thus disrupted the covenant bond.

The names of Gomer's three children are all prophecies of divine judgment, yet not identical in what they express. In its context, the name Jezreel has been transformed from a name of blessing to one of punishment. "God will sow" would normally be a promise of fertility guaranteed by the relationship between the deity and the land. Growth was in his gift, and if he sowed, then the harvest would be plentiful. That being so, one might expect that when "Jezreel" is used as a threat and not as a promise it would be linked with condemnation of the fertility cult and predict blight and barrenness instead of plenty. Instead, its application in 1:3-5 is to history, politics, and war, and not to the natural order. Jezreel was the name of a town which was associated with Jehu's usurpation of power and ruthless slaughter of the members of the house of Omri. It was near

Jezreel that King Joram was shot (2 Kgs. 9:21-24), in Jezreel that Jezebel was assassinated (2 Kgs. 9:30-37), and to Jezreel that there were sent the heads of seventy sons of Ahab who had been slaughtered by Jehu's order (2 Kgs. 10:1-11). In 2 Kings, Jehu's revolt is presented as an assault in the name of Yahweh on the Baal cult which had flourished under the house of Omri. In Hosea's prophecy it is regarded as an outburst of ruthless violence because of which Yahweh's punitive judgment will now come on Jehu's house, the monarchy as such, the northern Israelite kingdom (1:4f.). This indeed came about soon afterwards: Jehu's dynasty was ended in 745 when Shallum assassinated Zechariah (2 Kgs. 15:8-12); little more than a decade later, the victorious Assyrians added to their empire a large part of the territory of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs. 15:29); and that kingdom was finally destroyed in 721 when Samaria fell to the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 17:4-6). The giving of the prophetic name Jezreel thus provides a striking parallel to the naming of Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "Speed-spoil-haste-plunder" (Isa. 8:1-4), which was a prediction of the Assyrian overthrow of Syria and Israel in 733-2.

Thus "Jezreel" speaks of crushing military reverses which are Yahweh's retribution for a political outrage, rather than for a cultic corruption: but it should be noted that when the positive meaning of the name is used in a prophecy of restoration, as will be seen later, its associations with growth and fertility reappear (2:22f. (Heb. 24f.)). But the most striking feature about the prophetic content of the name is that it reverses the estimate of Jehu's coup d'état which is found in the books of Kings. There the revolt is represented as receiving its inspiration in prophetic circles which were uncompromisingly loyal to Yahweh (1 Kgs. 19:15-18; 2 Kgs. 9:1-13) and as being not only a political rising but a religious reformation (2 Kgs. 9:22, 10:18-28). Here the cruelty with which it was carried out is condemned in the name of Yahweh whose cause it claimed to further. Here, within Scripture itself, we find a reinterpretation of events which surely has consequences for our own interpretation of Scripture.

The names of the second and third children are also prophecies of divine judgment; but neither of them is coupled with any allusion to a specific national sin. Gomer's daughter is called Lo-ruhamah, "Not pitied," or, "She has not been pitied." The Hebrew verb translated 'pity', expresses the compassion of the strong for the weak, also the tender emotion of family love (cf. Ps. 103-13). Indeed, the name may be translated "Not loved" (so NEB, note). George Adam Smith rendered it "she-that-never-knew-a-father's-love" and took it to mean that Hosea acknowledged that the child was not his. In its prophetic application to Israel it denotes the withdrawal of the compassionate affection which is inherent in the covenant relationship. If this were Yahweh's final word, then there would indeed be no future for Israel, no life worth living.

Hosea 1:7, with its promise of divine compassion for Judah, is generally agreed not to be an authentic word of Hosea but a later addition, pointing the contrast between the fate of the Northern Kingdom and that

of Judah, and possibly reflecting the deliverance of Judah from Sennacherib's army in 701.

The name Lo-ammi, 'Not my people', probably has a double reference, to the child who bore it as well as the people whom the prophet addressed. *'am* carries the sense of kinship, denoting a people united by ties of blood rather than a nation organized and administered by political means. Thus Hosea calls the child "Not my kin," recognizing and declaring Gomer's infidelity; and Yahweh says to Israel, "You are not my people," reversing the fundamental formula of the Sinaitic covenant, "I will take you as my people and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). But the reversal displays a significant variation; "You are not my people and I will not be yours," or, perhaps, "and I am not EHYEH to you" (1:8). The Hebrew *'ehyeh*, "I am" or "I will be" is the name by which the divine self-disclosure was made to Moses (Ex. 3; 13f.), and to which "Yahweh," the personal name of the God of Israel, is related. This prophetic name, then, betokens a withdrawal, not simply of blessings but of the covenant relationship itself.

When a story is succinctly told, it is easy to forget the duration of time which is involved; but the characters in the story had to live through time as we do. The lapidary conciseness of the account of the birth of the three children should not cause us to overlook the fact that these few verses probably cover a period of some six years, a period during which Hosea not only became aware of his wife's unfaithfulness but bore with it. The separation which appears to be presupposed both by the framework of the drama and by its application to Israel presumably did not occur till some time (how long we do not know) after the birth of Lo-ammi. During that period the oracles thus far recorded are as radical as anything in Amos and strike at the very foundation of the nation's life—the covenant with Yahweh.

The oracles in chapter 2 elaborate the theme of the relations between Israel and Yahweh in terms of those between Gomer and Hosea in the entire drama as it has been reconstructed from chapters 1 and 3. We have noted that it is a commonplace of modern critical study of the prophetic literature that the sequence of passages does not always correspond to their chronological order; it is also a generally accepted fact that the prophetic oracles have been collected and arranged in a way that does not always correspond to logical order. Normally it is difficult, and often impossible, to subject a section in a prophetic book to the kind of sustained exposition which is appropriate in a Pauline epistle. I propose, therefore, to draw out the main themes which are elaborated in chapter 2 and attempt to show their content and interrelationships, rather than to offer a verse by verse exposition of the chapter. The development of the message is made somewhat less explicit by the way in which the thought moves from the home to the law court, from the interrelations of the husband, the wife, and her lovers, to those of Yahweh, the apostate people, the Baals, and the land.

The law court is alluded to in 2:2 (Heb. 2:4), where the children are

urged to support the case against their mother. There is disagreement whether the phraseology used ("she is not my wife, and I am not her husband") and the action described ("I will strip her naked") expresses the idea of divorce or that of the withdrawal by a wronged husband of the protection and maintenance which he would normally be bound to provide. The evidence from the Old Testament for divorce procedure is too scanty to justify a confident assertion that that is presupposed here. Moreover, there are indications at various points in the chapter that the aim is to discipline and win back the unfaithful wife; and these suggest that it is not divorce that is here contemplated.

The wife who is to be deprived of support and stripped of clothing (punishment appropriate to a harlot) is also to be made like the parched wilderness (v. 3 (Heb. 5.)). Here the thought has moved to the land and its fertility, which was dependent on the adequate supply of rain at the appropriate seasons. The lovers of the erring wife are equated (implicitly here, explicitly in vv. 8, 13 (Heb. 10, 15)) with the Baals. The lovers' gifts are the corn, the wine, and the oil, which are the prized produce of the land. In turning to Baal worship, Israel has assumed that it is from that source, and not from Yahweh that the products of the land have come (v. 8, Heb. 10). The emphatic claim that the products of the land are the gifts of Yahweh shows that Hosea's polemic against the Canaanite fertility cult is not that of an unyielding conservatism. He might, like the Rechabites, have taken the line that Yahwism belonged to the wilderness environment and had no connection with the cultivated land and its products. But his plea is not that Israel is at fault in enjoying the products of the land, but rather that, in regarding them as the gifts of the fertility deity, to be earned by participation in the fertility cult, Israel is being untrue to Yahweh. The positive aspect of this is that the natural order, and in particular the processes of growth and reproduction, are asserted to belong to Yahweh, to lie within his domain and under his suzerainty. Israel's experience in Canaan held the possibility of corruption, and of the destruction of Yahwism; but the Canaanite experience also held material for the enrichment of Israel's faith. In Hosea's message that material is appropriated. Indeed, in his passionate polemic against the fertility cult Hosea exploits to the full the figure of the marriage bond which, in the form of the sacred marriage, was one of the central concepts of that cult, but which, in a line of development which continues from Hosea into Judaism and Christianity, was to become a noble and expressive symbol of the bond between God and his people, Christ and the Church, Christ and the believer.

A subtler form of Canaanite influence is reflected when it is said (v. 16, (Heb. 18)) that Israel will no longer call Yahweh "my Baal," but "my 'ish." The words "Baal" ("owner," "possessor," "lord") and 'ish ("man") can both mean "husband"; but "Baal" is to be rejected because of its associations with the fertility cult. What is implicitly criticized here is not the outright rejection of Yahwism, but the use of a terminology which obscures or distorts the true character of Israel's God. Yahweh is the

giver, but he does not give as a Baal is held to do. He is the husband, but is not like the Baal-husband of the fertility cult.

It was said above that the ultimate aim of the plea against the unfaithful wife was not her final rejection but rather her restoration to fidelity and to full marital rights. The way in which this will be done is memorably expressed in two passages, one of which takes up the traditions of the historical deliverance of Israel from Egypt (2:14f. (Heb. 16f.)), whereas the other relates the theme of covenant and marriage to the renewal of the natural order and of the community (2:16-23, (Heb. 18-25)).

The deliverance envisaged is one which presupposes discipline and punishment. The certainty of punishment has been made abundantly clear by the prophecies embodied in the names of Gomer's children, and the prospect of discipline and deprivation appears in two passages, each introduced by "therefore" (vv. 6-8 (Heb. 8-10), 9-13, (Heb. 11-15)) which, in the present arrangement of the material, lead up to the verses which we are about to consider. The harlot will be prevented from consorting with her lovers; and those good things which she regarded as their gifts to her will be withdrawn. Now comes a climax (2:14f. (Heb. 16f.)), also introduced by "therefore," in which the severity of God finds its true fulfillment in the expression of his love.

Nearly a century and a half later, Jeremiah was to speak in bitter anguish of how Yahweh had enticed him to undertake the prophetic task and then exposed him to failure and consequent ridicule and persecution (Jer. 20:7-10). Using the same verb, Hosea here speaks of how Yahweh will entice Israel out of the fruitful land into the wilderness, a place of deprivation and hardship, but also the place where the covenant bond was established and Israel became Yahweh's bride. Discipline and deprivation will lead to a renewed relationship of love and trust. Yahweh will speak wooing words to her and will restore the gifts which she has temporarily lost. By another expressive allusion to the ancient traditions, the reality of Israel's sin, of Yahweh's discipline, and of ultimate renewal is clearly proclaimed. Even when the covenant had been established and the wilderness wanderings were over, Israel nearly forfeited the Promised Land because of the sin of Achan (Jos. 7). The valley of Achor (interpreted to mean "trouble"), reminiscent of that sin and its punishment, was at once a natural approach to the heart of the country and a point at which Israel's entry was in danger of being barred because of sin. The prophet uses it with the double association of sin and forgiveness. At the point where Israel has sinned she will encounter not only Yahweh's discipline but his forgiveness. The valley of Achor will again be a door of hope, and Israel will be enabled to respond in gratitude as she did when she was freed from Egyptian bondage.

Thus, by an interweaving of his own experience with the ancient traditions of his people, Hosea presents God's love as inexorable, making no compromise with sin and ready to impose painful discipline on the sinner. But the love which will not compromise with sin is also the love which is not broken or extinguished by it. When it seems that breach of

the covenant on one side has provided every justification for the renunciation of the covenant and a final separation, love (Hosea's for Gomer and Yahweh's for Israel) remains strong and undefeated, using discipline as an instrument of grace to achieve restoration and renewal.

In the second passage (2:16-23 (Heb. 18-25)) the restoration is celebrated in the exultant language of divine promise. Israel will recognize Yahweh as her true husband, and there will be a new betrothal in which the affliction and deprivation which had been prophesied will be removed. "The bow, the sword, and war" which were predicted in the prophecy of Jezreel will be at an end. The renewed covenant will bring a renewal of the natural order. At his command the heavens will bestow the rain, which will enable the land to produce the corn and wine and oil, and these will be seen as the gifts of Yahweh and not as the results of participation in the fertility cult. But central to the renewed covenant are those personal and moral factors which were from the first inherent in Yahweh's union with his bride, the betrothal or bridal gifts which he will again bestow. The terms used for them cannot be adequately rendered by any word-for-word English translation. Only an approximation is possible. "Righteousness" (*sedek*) probably means Yahweh's saving act in restoring his people, "justice" (*mishpāt*) the acknowledgement and securing of the rights to which one is entitled, "steadfast love" (*hesed*) the devotion or dutiful affection which is appropriate within the covenant bond, "mercy" (*rahamim*) the tender compassion of the strong for the weak, especially within the ties of kinship, and "faithfulness" (*'munah*) is unswerving dependability. The climax and consummation of all this is that Israel will "know" Yahweh, with the knowledge which is essentially personal communion and which issues in obedience to the divine will (contrast 4:1f.)

The prophecies of doom are reversed. "Jezreel" again becomes a promise of plenty. "Not pitied" becomes "Pitied," "Not my people" becomes "My people," and Israel is enabled to say with full meaning "My God." Thus Hosea's acutely personal experience is used to illumine a conception of Yahweh's forgiveness as not merely restoring the individual sinner but reconstituting the people of God, and a conception of his purpose as related not merely to men and women but to the natural order and, in principle, to the whole cosmos.

Bibliographical Note

Footnotes have been deliberately excluded from the above article. Anything approaching adequate documentation would have been cumbersome, and selection would have been invidious. I have therefore concentrated on the attempt to present clearly the essentials of the argument and exposition in relation to the text of Hosea 1-3. In place of detailed documentation I now append a short list of those works in English to which I should myself turn in the first instance.

Those who want detailed documentation will find all that they could desire (and more) in the late Professor H. H. Rowley's study, "The

Marriage of Hosea," which is included in his volume of essays, *Men of God* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1963), pp. 66-97. This is a clearly and closely argued discussion of the main problems in chapters 1-3, with full references to the relevant literature.

The most useful recent commentary in English is that by James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, "The Old Testament Library" (London: S. C. M. Press, 1969), which contains some references to literature more recent than that cited by Rowley, including some important new works in German.

For detailed study of the Hebrew text there is still much to be gained from William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, "The International Critical Commentary" (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1905 and subsequent impressions). On pp. 208-210 there is a succinct survey of all the main interpretations of Hosea's marriage which had been advanced up to the beginning of the present century.

In my view the best of the general studies of Hosea's marriage is still H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Cross of Hosea," in *Two Hebrew Prophets: Studies in Hosea and Ezekiel* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948 and subsequent impressions), pp. 11-61. Here Wheeler Robinson's profound Old Testament scholarship, religious sensitivity, and broad theological concern combine to produce an exposition in which the prophet's teaching and experience are related to the Christian Gospel.

Two classics of criticism and exposition from nearly a century ago should not be overlooked. The first is the chapter on Hosea in W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel* (2nd ed., with introduction and additional notes by T. K. Cheyne, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895 and subsequent impressions), pp. 144-190. The second is the treatment of Hosea in George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, "The Expositor's Bible" (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896, and many subsequent impressions), I, pp. 211-354.

This may seem a meager list, with too strong an emphasis on older books; but whoever masters these works will have a sound grasp of the text of Hosea 1-3 and of how it has been interpreted.

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