

Hosea and Joel

Ep 178: CFM Hosea 1-6; 10-14; Joel

Hosea

Overview¹

Hosea lived during one of the most prosperous eras of ancient Israel's history and was a contemporary of the prophet Amos. But as his book reveals, his society was deeply marred by depravity and evil. His written record exhibits an extraordinary measure of tenderness and compassion which is combined with a stern resolve against wickedness and, particularly, corruption in high places.

Hosea was called by Yahweh to prophesy the destruction and exile of Israel at a time when Israel was at the height of its prosperity. In the latter years of the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 B.C.), probably not much earlier than 760 B.C., Hosea began his ministry through the enactment prophecy of marrying a “prostituting” Israelite and starting a family of “prostituting” Israelites, only a few years before Tiglath-Pileser III (745–728 B.C.) of Assyria changed Israel’s attitudes from complacency to desperation.

The Jehu dynasty, begun in 842 B.C., came to an end with the death of Jeroboam II in 753. It was Israel’s longest dynasty. Thereafter, beginning with the accession of Zechariah to the throne in Samaria in 753, attempts at dynasty proved futile. The order of the day was usurpation by assassination. **Hosea eventually prophesied during the reigns of more kings than any other OT prophet.** Six kings governed the north during the remaining thirty years until its fall, none of them notable for his administrative or diplomatic skills. Life in Israel became increasingly precarious; the nation’s fortunes waned progressively. These developments are reflected in the book of Hosea, which appears to proceed more or less chronologically from the 750s to the 720s in the ordering of Hosea’s oracles. The complacency of the early days (2:7, 10, 15 [2:5, 8, 13]) gives way to a desperation in foreign (7:8–12; 12:1) and domestic (7:3–7; 13:10–11) affairs, evidenced in the latter chapters. The SyroEphraimite war of 734 B.C., which ended with the capitulation of the north to Assyria after Israel was reduced to a rump state by the Assyrian conquest and by a Judean invasion (5:8–10), represented the beginning of the end for Hosea’s native country.

We have no way of answering with certainty a number of key questions about the setting of Hosea’s prophetic ministry. The book never states the location of any of his preaching. We may guess that he delivered oracles frequently at Samaria, and—at least prior to 734 when Bethel probably reverted to Judean control—at Bethel, as did Amos. But we have no hard evidence. None of the oracles is dated. While we may be fairly confident of the dating of some (e.g., 1:2–9; 5:5–10), and of the approximate chronological ordering of most, our analysis of

¹ Much of this overview is provided by S. Kent Brown, [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi](#), Deseret Book, (ed. Kent Jackson), 2004.

setting remains ultimately speculative in any given instance. Might Hosea have had contact with Amos, his somewhat older contemporary in the north, or with any of the somewhat younger contemporary orthodox Judean prophets? We have no way of knowing.

With regard to his audience, Hosea may have enjoyed some faithful reception of his oracles among the small percentage of northerners yet concerned to keep the Mosaic covenant, but he makes no mention of this, nor do his words even hint at it. And his words surely met with both resentment and ridicule, when not utterly ignored, by the vast majority of those who heard them.²

Hosea's name means "deliverance" or "salvation" and, at its root, is connected with the names *Joshua* and *Jesus*. Of his parents and birth we know nothing except the name of his father, Beerai (Hosea 1.1). His prophetic work began before the death of Jeroboam II (746 B.C.) and may well have continued until the eve of the loss of the Northern Kingdom, Israel (721 B.C.), a span of approximately twenty-five years.³

The Hebrew text of Hosea's book, unfortunately, is very corrupted, making some passages difficult to grasp.⁴ Even so, it is certain that the key for comprehending all of Hosea's words lies in chapters 1 through 3, the report of his marriage to a harlot.

A brief outline of the content of the book of Hosea is as follows:

- I. Hosea's experience in marriage and the Lord's experience with Israel (1:1-3:5)
- II. The Lord's denunciations of Israel (4:1-9:9)

² Douglas Stuart, [Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 31, Hosea-Jonah](#), Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987, p. 68 electronic version.

³ The length of Hosea's ministry is a matter of discussion. For instance, Bernard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed., Prentice-Hall, 1986, p. 304, holds to a view of a ten-year ministry. Others accept a longer period. See Sidney B. Sperry, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets*, Deseret Book, 1965, p. 274; and Roland K. Harrison, [Introduction to the Old Testament](#), Eerdmans, 1969, p. 860.

⁴ Douglas Stuart (p. 75) writes, "With the possible exception of the book of Job, no other OT book contains as high a proportion of textual problems as does Hosea. One can only speculate about the reasons for the poor state of the text. Its northern provenance was probably a factor. Like Job, some psalms, and some poems in the Pentateuch and former prophets, Hosea reflects the Israelite rather than the Judean dialect, and in its original form must have reflected typical Israelite orthographic practices as well. Judean copyists, into whose possession the text surely came after the fall of Samaria in 722, may have found the manuscript(s) of the book harder to deal with, or may even have given it less careful attention, than they would have with the corresponding works of a Judean prophet. Fortunately the Septuagint of Hosea is a quite literal, nonexpansionistic rendering of the unpointed Hebrew. This allows for helpful reconstruction of the original consonantal texts at many points, even when the Septuagint translation has failed to interpret its consonantal Hebrew *Vorlage* sensibly. The single most textually problematic part of the book is perhaps 4:18-19. There, the Hebrew is exceedingly difficult to understand, and the versions appear to offer little help." Douglas Stuart, [Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 31, Hosea-Jonah](#), Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987, p. 75 electronic version.

III. The history of divine grace and Israel's apostasy (9:10-13:16)

IV. Future hope for Israel (14:1-9)

Hosea's Marriage to Gomer (Hosea 1-3)

The stunning sketch of the prophet's marriage consists of three parts: (1) an account in chapter 1 written in the third person, (2) words of the Lord in chapter 2 that draw an analogy between Israel's unfaithful conduct toward him and the infidelity of Hosea's wife, and (3) a second report of Hosea's union in chapter 3 written by the prophet himself, that is, in the first person.

Differences among the views of interpreters have focused on how one is properly to understand the connection between the biographical narrative in chapter 1 and the autobiographical sketch in chapter 3. The narrative in chapter 1 reports the Lord's command to Hosea to marry a "wife of whoredoms" to whom were later born three children, whose names symbolized facets of the Lord's ruptured relationship with his people. The narrative in chapter 3 recounts the divine charge to Hosea that he love an adulteress, purchasing her and then confining her to his home, a virtual house arrest (Hosea 3:1-3).

Solutions proposed to explain the ties between the two reports include the hypothesis that Hosea unknowingly married a harlot and, later, retrospectively applied his resulting marital situation to that of the Lord and traitorous Israel. It is clear from the text, however, that the prophet knew beforehand that the woman was a harlot (Hosea 1:2; 3:1). Another interpretation has held that chapters 1 and 3 were to be understood as allegory. On this view, Hosea simply told a story to illustrate a point. But the accounts incorporate details that, if this were the case, remain in the story without function or comment, an unusual feature of allegory. For instance, the name of Hosea's wife, Gomer, does not have special significance for the story or its meaning. In addition, the second child was female and her weaning was specifically noted (Hosea 1:6, 8), but neither detail received further notice. Similarly, in Hosea 3:2 there was no allegorical interest in the price paid for the woman. Moreover, according to both Hosea 1:2 and 3:1, the word of the Lord was directing Hosea's actions.

The explanation that leaves fewer questions unresolved is the view that the two accounts (Hosea 1 and 3) are historical and the events in chapter 1 preceded those of chapter 3.⁵ Accordingly, the sequence of events is to be understood as follows. The Lord commanded Hosea to marry a woman with an evil past. The first child born to their union was Hosea's (Hosea 1:3); the other two apparently were not (Hosea 1:6, 8). Even so, at the Lord's behest, all three were given symbolic names. After later abandoning Hosea, Gomer recognized her mistakes and wanted to return; but by then—one must infer—she had become a slave. The Lord directed Hosea to buy her back, a course which he pursued willingly, for he still loved her

⁵ A review of the various proposals for understanding Hosea 1 and 3 is to be found in Harold H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea," in *Men of God* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963), pp. 66-97. See also Kent P. Jackson, "The Marriage of Hosea and Jehovah's Covenant with Israel," in *Isaiah and the Prophets*, ed. M. S. Nyman (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), pp. 58-60.

despite all. The prophet next disciplined Gomer by severely restricting her movements and associations with others before restoring her fully to her former status. On such a view, this sorrowful episode deepened Hosea's appreciation for the Lord's frustration at Israel's infidelity and apostasy, thus fashioning the prophet into an apt spokesman for the messages of divine disappointment and stern warning. In addition, this representation of Hosea's marital troubles fits a wider pattern perceptible in the Lord's dealings with his agents: he leads them through experiences that make them effective messengers for their time and place.⁶

The Lord's Anger and its Reasons (Hosea 4-10; 12-13)

The ingredients of the prophet's message were tightly fused with his marriage situation and are to be found at the formal beginning of his prophetic remarks: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is *no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God* in the land" (Hosea 4:1; emphasis added).

The charge that "no truth" existed in the land was a broad incrimination, for it referred not only to the functioning of society on the basis of falsehood but also to the general lack of fidelity and personal integrity. The most serious display of infidelity, of course, consisted of idolatry, which was the rejection of Israel's God. "My people ask counsel at their stocks [of wood] . . . they sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms. . . . Ephraim is joined to idols" (Hosea 4:12-13, 17). The spreading blanket of deceit had enveloped even the highest echelons of Israelite society: "They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies" (Hosea 7:3). Moreover, the priesthood had grown seriously corrupt: "And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness" (Hosea 6:9). Further, society had been convulsed by assassinations in high places (see 2 Kgs. 15:8-31): "They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen" (Hosea 7:7); "they have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not" (Hosea 8:4); and "all their princes are revolters" (Hosea 9:15).⁷

The clear evidence of treachery, of course, was linked closely with the second problem identified by Hosea, the lack of "mercy" or steadfast love.⁸ For without fidelity or esteem for

⁶ See the observations of Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), pp. 55-56.

⁷ The years following the death of Jeroboam II in 746 B.C. were chaotic. Disaster first struck Jeroboam's son, Zechariah, who reigned six months and was then murdered by Shallum, who himself held the throne for one month. Menahem (745-737 B.C.) murdered Shallum and held onto power by brutally repressing those who opposed him. Although Menahem died in his bed, his son and successor, Pekahiah, after ruling two years, was assassinated by his army commander Pekah, who in turn held the throne for about five years (736-732 B.C.). Pekah's reign was cut short by assassination. Hoshea, Pekah's successor and murderer, ruled during Israel's last few years before dying in Assyrian custody.

⁸ The Hebrew term is *hesed*. It is translated variously as "covenant love," that is, love based in a covenant relationship. Henry J. Flanders, Crapps, and Smith, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 3d ed. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 313, 315; see also "Love in the OT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. G. A. Buttrick, et al., Abingdon, 1962, 3:165, 167, and as "loving kindness" or "steadfast love."

truth, natural human interactions would be compromised, calculating mistrust would replace trust, and crime supplant respect. "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice," declared the Lord (Hosea 6:6). "There is [false] swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder" (Hosea 4:2, RSV).⁹ In fact, the situation had deteriorated so severely that all of creation was to be sickened: "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away" (Hosea 4:3). To counter this threatened circumstance, the Lord appealed for a return to honorable affections and relationships by saying, "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of steadfast love" (Hosea 10:12, RSV) and "turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually" (Hosea 12:6).

The Lord's third accusation, the deficiency of "knowing" God, was also linked to Hosea's marital ordeal. The Lord observed, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee" (Hosea 4:6). Moreover, "I desired . . . the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). The link between knowing God and the prophet's matrimonial predicament is made in Hosea 5:4: "for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord." Importantly, Hosea was the first of the Old Testament prophets to correlate the covenant of marriage and the Lord's covenant with Israel, a characteristic whose implications have been spelled out by Abraham Heschel.¹⁰ Harlotry, for the Lord, expressed the antithesis of his covenant. In his anger, he asserted that "the spirit of whoredoms hath caused [Israel] to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God. . . . Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery" (Hosea 4:12-13). While the imagery is not enticing, the point is abundantly clear: straying from the covenant of the Lord is tantamount to abandoning one's marriage covenant, deserting one's spouse for a harlot. One additional component is formed by the concept that coming to "know the Lord" is analogous to coming to know one's spouse in a union that is born in a covenant and proven over time with fidelity, love, and mutual trust. Once again, harlotry constituted the opposite.¹¹

Because of the seriousness of Israel's crimes, the Lord declared that "their deeds do not permit them to return to their God" (Hosea 5:4, RSV). Clearly, they were doomed. Because they had rejected the word of the prophets, they were as good as sepulchers: "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth" (Hosea 6:5). Even so, there was hope, but not for Hosea's generation.

The Triumph of Divine Love and Mercy (Hosea 11; 14)

⁹ Revised Standard Version.

¹⁰ Heschel, pp. 50-51.

¹¹ See Jackson, p. 60.

In a most notable passage in scripture, Hosea described the Lord's mixed feelings about his now recalcitrant people. Because Israel was "bent to backsliding from me," the Lord warned that "the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches" (Hosea 11:6-7). On the other hand, long ago the Lord had brought an enslaved people out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1), and like a father with a toddler, he had taught Ephraim to walk (Hosea 11:3). His original feelings of parental love still persisted and, although he must punish his people, he vowed that he would check his anger: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" (Hosea 11:8). Moreover, he resolved to restore their descendants to their ancestral home: "They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the Lord" (Hosea 11:11).

In his last effort to offer counsel and comfort, even in light of the certain punishment that Israel would experience, the prophet intoned: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; . . . turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all [our] iniquity, and receive us graciously" (Hosea 14:1-2). Even though Israel would suffer consequences for wickedness, the Lord promised a blessed future: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. . . . His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree. . . . They that dwell under his shadow shall return" (Hosea 14:4, 6-7). Thus would the stage be set for the fulfillment of the Lord's promise of the full flowering of his covenant with his people: "And I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord" (Hosea 2:19-20).

This final set of observations leads to a related issue, the emotions or feelings of God. Traditional Christian theology has held that God is not subject to passions or emotions. Although this idea has been challenged by some Christian theologians, it remains a strong tenet of Christian belief.¹² Squarely against this view of God's unemotional character stands Hosea's work. While the Lord threatens chastisement of his people through Hosea's message, he also expresses how he feels about carrying out such threats, using language laden with deep feeling: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . My heart is turned toward thee, and my mercies are extended to gather thee. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee" (JST Hosea 11:8-9).

From this passage one readily concludes that it pained the Lord to punish his children, even though they plainly deserved it. One finds similar divine expressions of grief in the prophecies of Jeremiah, spoken more than a century later to the inhabitants of Judah: "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no

¹² See the summary article "Impassibility of God," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed., ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University, 1974), p. 694. The notion of God being "free from passions" derived from strands of Middle Platonic thought; see "God" and "Middle Platonism" in the *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, 2 vols., ed. A. Di Berardino (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 1:355; 1:557-58.

balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" (Jer. 8:21-22; cf. 4:19-21; 10:19-21). As in the case of Hosea, one fundamental reason for God's threatened punishment in Jeremiah's day was the lack of knowing God: "They know not me, saith the Lord" (Jer. 9:3), and "My people is foolish, they have not known me" (Jer. 4:22). It is in latter-day scripture that the most graphic and memorable scene of God's sorrow over sin is depicted. Enoch described the following in a vision of the heavens: "The God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it" (Moses 7:28).

In each of these instances, God sorrowed for the wickedness of his children — wickedness which required a tough response on his part. Even so, it is clear from these sources that God has been pained at the prospect of punishing them. Consistently, he has been a God of love and compassion. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. . . . It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love" (Hosea 11:1, 3-4, RSV).

God's Love and Attentiveness

[How can God attend] to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment? Notice...that the whole sting of it comes in the words *at the same moment*. Most of us can imagine God attending to any number of applicants if only they came one by one and He had an endless time to do it in. So what is really at the back of this difficulty is the idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time...Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along: and there is room for very little in each. That is what Time is like...You and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series...is not simply the way life comes to us but the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from past to future just as we do. But...God is not in Time. His life does not consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He need not listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call ten-thirty. Ten-thirty—and every other moment from the beginning of the world—is always the Present for Him...He has all eternity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames...God is not hurried along in the time-stream of this universe...He has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created.¹³

Hosea 1-2

Did Hosea really marry a prostitute?

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Ch. 3, Para. 2-7, p. 145-147.

Hosea was commanded to “*take thee a wife of whoredoms... for the land hath committed a great whoredom, departing from the Lord*” (Hosea 1:2). This all means that Israel’s waywardness and infidelity constitute a national prostitution.

The phrase “for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord” means that the whole of Israel is engaged in idolatry. It is a national sin and their very way of life. Each person in that nation, male or female, married or single, young or old are engaged in a lifestyle that has nothing to do with God and His word, but everything to do with worshipping other gods, idolatry and the occult. So Gomer, as a citizen of that thoroughly wayward nation is described, just as any Israelite woman could be, as ‘a wife of whoredom’, precisely because she is a typical Israelite, and this is an indictment in itself. God has commanded Hosea to marry a woman who by reason of being involved in the endemic Israelite national unfaithfulness is ‘prostituting’. **To marry any Israelite woman was to marry a ‘prostituting woman’, so rife was the religious promiscuity of Hosea’s day.**¹⁴

I suggest that it is uncertain if Gomer was a prostitute prior to this marriage, or if she was a typical Israelite, one who followed after false gods of the day, hence one who “whored after false gods” (see Deuteronomy 31:16). The comparison between Gomer’s behavior and the Israelites seems to be what is at issue in this text.¹⁵

Hosea married Gomer as commanded and she bore a son, named **Jezreel** (Hosea 1:4), which means, “God scatters.” This naming of the children is similar to what we read in Isaiah where Isaiah’s children have prophetic names. God is shortly going to scatter Israel, and therefore this naming of the child is a message to the House of Israel – to continue to whore after false gods will bring a scattering.

Gomer bore another child, a girl, whom the Lord commanded to be named **Lo-ruhamah**, meaning “*not having obtained mercy.*” Lo-ruhamah’s name was a prophetic statement of God’s displeasure with the house of Israel and a warning that He would destroy them but spare the House of Judah (Hosea 1:6-7).

¹⁴ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, World Biblical Commentary, Zondervan, p. 26-27.

¹⁵ This is Stuart’s assertion as well, for he says, “At a glance it is evident that the data furnished in chaps. 1 and 3 are inadequate for the purposes to which they have often been put, i.e., the writing of a biography of Hosea in his marriage to Gomer. There are no data in chapter 3 to prove that Gomer is to be identified with the promiscuous wife, as has so often been suggested. Nothing is ever actually stated about Gomer’s profession or fidelity. And the intriguing notion that Hosea married a prostitute at God’s command is blunted by the fact that the marriage remained unconsummated. Since it cannot be proved that Gomer is the same wife described in chap. 3, nothing about Gomer’s marital fidelity can be learned. That she is called metaphorically an אשת זונים “prostituting woman” in Joel 1.2 cannot be taken as a literal statement of her profession or practice. She is merely an Israelite—all of whom are “prostitutes” as the verse implies, that is, all of whom have broken Yahweh’s covenant. Douglas, p. 72 electronic version..

Thus the frequent attempts of scholars to reconstruct the quality and/or character of Hosea’s personal life are inevitably doomed. We are told only such details as happen to serve metaphorical/typological purposes. The focus of the early chapters is not on Hosea and his family but on God and Israel.

Gomer then has another child which the Lord told Hosea should be named **Lo-ammi**, meaning “*not my people*.” For God told Israel that “*ye are not my people, and I will not be your God*” (Hosea 1:9). Even though the House of Israel would be scattered, the Lord tells Hosea that in the very same place that He says “Ye are not my people” it shall be said unto them, “Ye are the sons of the living God.” (Hosea 1:10). This is a powerful message of redemption.

Hosea 3: The Prophet is told to marry an adulteress

This is another passage dealing with a marriage metaphor (Hosea 3.1-3). An alternative translation of Hosea 3.1 would be:

"Go again, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress. [This is just] as the love of Lord for the Children of Israel, who turn to other gods." Scholars disagree on whether it refers to Gomer (1 .3) or to another woman. The text leaves her unnamed and by doing so leaves both options open. Clearly, though, Hosea's relationship to this woman symbolizes again God's relationship to Israel.¹⁶

Hosea 3.3 reads **אָנִי אֶלְיָךְ** וְאַמַּר אֵלַיָּהּ יָמִים רַבִּים תִּשְׁבִּי לִי לֹא תִזְנִי וְלֹא תִהְיִי לְאִישׁ אֲנִי וְאַמַּר אֵלַיָּהּ יָמִים רַבִּים תִּשְׁבִּי לִי לֹא תִזְנִי וְלֹא תִהְיִי לְאִישׁ אֲנִי וְאַמַּר אֵלַיָּהּ יָמִים רַבִּים תִּשְׁבִּי לִי לֹא תִזְנִי וְלֹא תִהְיִי לְאִישׁ אֲנִי and can be translated “And I said to her, you will dwell with me many days, you are not to commit fornication, and you are not to be for man (to be intimate with man), and also **I will be like this to you**” (my translation).

I see this verse as implying that this marriage will not have intimacy, but is rather a symbolic marriage.¹⁷

¹⁶ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1148. Douglas Stuart takes this position: After Hosea chapter 1, we heard nothing more of Gomer. She was not mentioned in Hosea 2.4, for that “woman” was a “wife” and “mother” only allegorically. The present passage probably speaks of another woman. Hosea married her, too, at God’s command. She was an adulteress, and conceivably even a prostitute... *We suggest therefore a date at least as late as the reign of Hoshea (732–722 B.C.), and possibly as late as 722, when the North fell to Assyria, for the marriage described in this chapter.* There can be no objection that Hosea married this late either on the ground that he was too old or that the times were too insecure for marriage. **This is not a normal but a symbolic marriage.** Hosea will have no sex with this wife, *the marriage remaining unconsummated* (v 3). *Prophets were, of course, on other occasions called upon to engage in dealings that the times made to seem inappropriate* (e.g., Jeremiah; Jer 32:6–15). Douglas Stuart, p. 156 electronic version, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Stuart (p. 159) states: Hosea gave four instructions to his new wife, each more restrictive than the preceding one. First, she must live/stay/remain (ישב) with him for a long time (יָמִים רַבִּים “many days”). This otherwise reasonable restriction must have seemed to a professional prostitute unexpected. A prostitute might expect to be resold eventually, or shared with other men, or soon abandoned. But Hosea tells her she will stay with him at length. The second instruction precludes her practicing prostitution (her prior profession?). She has been bought; her sinful life is now over. The third instruction makes clear that she will not have relations with anybody else. Hosea has bought her and she had no choice in the matter. The fourth instruction may well have been a complete surprise. She is told that even her husband has no intention of having sex with her. This is clearly the sense of the instruction, textual problems notwithstanding. She has been brought from adultery and prostitution to chastity in a sexless marriage, taken from one extreme and made to conform to another. The reader/hearer is already beginning to see what is in store for Israel. A different kind of life is ahead. We must keep in mind that these restrictions fulfill the command to “show love.” They are not so much intended to harm, as to protect. As Yahweh

Hosea 3.4 – Israel is without a king, a prince, a sacrifice, an image, or an ephod. This can refer to her loss of the temple and the things associated with this blessing.¹⁸

Hosea 4: Israel is without truth, mercy, or knowledge of God

Hosea 4.5 Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother.

Hosea 4.5 ends with "I will destroy your mother," which may refer to the mother of the priest (possibly all priests?), and the land (Gomer) as the mother of Israel.¹⁹

Hosea 4.5 also takes a negative view of the prophets. The mention of "prophet" here has troubled some commentators since elsewhere, it is alleged, Hosea speaks only in glowing terms of the prophets (6:5; 9:7–9; 12:10, 13). This view, however, probably misunderstands Hosea 9.7–9 and ignores the fact that at the Jerusalem temple prophets served the cult along with the priests (Isa 28:7; Jer 2:8; 4:9; 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 14:18; 18:18; 23:11; Mic 3:11). It is unlikely that the well-attested southern practice of priest-prophet cooperation was unknown in the north.²⁰

Hosea 5: Denouncing the kings of Israel and Judah

Snare on Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor (Hosea 5.1).

Tabor is the well-known mountain of the name in Galilee (see Jdg 4:6), and may be taken as the representative of the region on the west of the Jordan (as Psalm 89:12); Mizpah מִצְפָּה ("place of watch" or "watchtower") is most probably Mizpah in Gilead (Jdg 10:17; Jdg 11:11; Jdg 11:29), also called Ramoth-Gilead (Joshua 20:8; Joshua 21:36; 2 Kings 9:1; 2 Kings 9:4; 2 Kings 9:14),

is a "jealous" God, and as he wishes to prohibit Israel from sinning further for her own good, so Hosea acts restrictively toward the new wife. He has bought her not for his own pleasure, but in order to reform her.

¹⁸ The ephod was a garment worn by a priest in the practice of divination (mechanistic discernment of the divine will). It contained a pocket in which the Urim and Thummim (alternately light and dark-sided stones thrown for combinations that would reveal "yes" and "no" answers) were kept (Exod. 28:30). Teraphim, household idols, could also be consulted (Ezek 21:26; Zech 10:2) in pagan divination. The sacrificial system and the ephod were orthodox. The pillar and the teraphim were abominably pagan (At least in some accounts. Jacob sets up a מִצְבָּה – a pillar in Gen. 28.18 that the author deems as appropriate. God acknowledges the pillar in Gen. 31.13 when speaking to Jacob in a dream. Moses builds a מִצְבָּה in Ex. 24.2, "And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an מִזְבֵּחַ altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." The word altar מִזְבֵּחַ and pillar מִצְבָּה are related can mean pillar, altar, stump, monument or memorial. They are condemned in the Deuteronomic code, yet allowed in the story of the early Patriarchs. See: *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2020, p. 663). Israel, in its syncretism, had mixed the holy with the forbidden—had adulterated its religion. So, orthodox and heterodox features alike would now be taken away. Neither leadership, nor worship, nor divination would any longer be available to Israel's citizens. Stuart, p. 159.

¹⁹ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1149. Robert Alter gives this explanation: "The probable reference is to the priest, matched by the mention of the prophet in the next verset. Both have betrayed their calling of providing moral instruction to the people." Alter, p. 1212-1213.

²⁰ Stuart, p. 177.

and consecrated by Jacob (Genesis 31:45-54). These places are probably mentioned because the idolatrous worship was most dangerously seductive there.

The princes of Judah were “like them that remove the bound” (Hosea 5.10).

Moving the boundary marker of a field, which was equivalent to stealing property, was a severe violation of proper behavior (see Deut. 19.14, 27.17; Prov. 22.28). Admonitions against moving boundary markers occur elsewhere in the ancient Near East.²¹

Then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you (Hosea 5.13).

Robert Alter says that the term “King Jareb” is obscure, but that it may be a proper name, or it might be a peculiar formation from the verbal stem that means “to quarrel” or “to contest.” The context, however, suggests turning to a person in power for help.²² Douglas Stuart puts this verse into a historical setting: “Ignoring the possibility that their miseries were the result of Yahweh’s disfavor, Israel and Judah sought relief of their symptoms instead of a real cure. Judah had appealed to Assyria after the Syro-Ephraimite coalition attacked in 734 B.C. Now in 732 the young king Hoshea, presiding over a nation that had already lost the coastal plain, Galilee, and the Transjordan to Assyria, sued for peace to Tiglath-Pileser III following the precedent of Menahem in 738 (*ANET*, 283a). The direct address of v 13b seems to include both Israel and Judah. Neither Samaria nor Judah will be helped by appeal to Assyria. Assyria’s ultimate policy toward Israel, either north or south, was unpredictable, and trusting it to help was folly (cf. 2 Chr 28:16–21). The plural suffixes in v 13b (אַתָּה- “you”) probably refer to both Israel and Judah. Eventually, both will suffer at the hands of the Assyrians as verses 14 and 15 make evident.”²³

Hosea 6: The Lord pleads with the House of Israel

Hosea 6.1-3 The prophet urges them to return to the Lord

“On the third day he will raise us up, in two days he will make us whole again” (Hosea 6.2).

Hosea 6.4-11 The Lord responds to the call and explains his desires²⁴

“I desired *ṭon hesed*/mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6.6).

Hesed is often linked together with the Hebrew word for “covenant”-*berit*. This occurs so often that *hesed* can be a synonym for covenant. Notice the connection between *hesed* and

²¹ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1151.

²² Alter, p. 1217.

²³ Douglas Stuart, p. 227 electronic version.

²⁴ The text here presents a divine response to the earlier speech in Hosea 6.1-3. Here in these verses the images of daybreak and rain are turned on their head as they apply to monarchic Israel. The Lord is probably presented here in the image of a father who laments his inability to help a wayward son: what can I do for you? Or, as others read, “what can I do with you?” *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1152.

covenant in the following verse: “He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy (*hesed*) for a thousand generations” (Deuteronomy. 7:9, 12). *Hesed* “applies primarily to God’s particular love for His chosen and covenanted people. **The entire history of Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with Israel can be summarized in terms of *hesed*...** the association of *hesed* with “covenant” keeps it from being misunderstood as mere providence or love for all creatures; it applies primarily to God’s particular love for His chosen and covenanted people. ‘Covenant’ also stresses the reciprocity of the relationship; but since God’s *hesed* is ultimately beyond the covenant, it will not ultimately be abandoned, even when the human partner is unfaithful and must be disciplined.²⁵

Hosea 9: The people are taken into captivity, Ephraim is smitten

Hosea 9.7-9: The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come; Israel shall know it: **the prophet is a fool**, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred. The **watchman of Ephraim** was with my God: but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves, **as in the days of Gibeah**: therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins.

The prophet is a fool: The prophet is said to be “stupid, a fool,” one whose words cannot be taken seriously (cf. Prov 10:8, 10). In the parallel line of the same couplet, the prophet is called a “man of the spirit” (איש הרוח), a term otherwise unknown in the OT, and possibly a derogatory coinage of the people, perhaps built on the pattern of איש אלהים “man of God”; cf. 1 Sam 10:6; 1 Kgs 18:12; 22:21–22; 2 Kgs 2:9, 16. The word משגה “crazy” connotes especially nonsensical babbling (cf. Jer 29:26). Implicit in the people’s language is that Hosea himself is not to be believed; his message is of no merit; the woe he predicts is insane nonsense. They do not wish to let it interrupt their enjoyment of the harvest festivities.

An alternate translation of Hosea 3.8 reads, “Is Ephraim a watchman? Is God’s people a prophet? A fowler’s snare is on all of his paths, hostility is in the house of his God”

Is Ephraim a watchman? Hosea turns the tables on the people’s cynical derision of prophets. Their mockery assumes that they know more than the inspired prophet(s), so Hosea asks ironically, “Is Ephraim a watchman? Is God’s people a prophet?” The answer, obviously, is “No!” “Watchman” (צֹפֵה), a lookout from an early-warning outpost, is applied metaphorically to prophets several times in the OT (Isa 56:10; Jer 6:17; Ezek 3:17; 33:2, 6, 7), emphasizing their role in warning of approaching danger (cf. Ezek 33:7–20). In the synonymous parallelism of the first couplet of v 8 it is thus paired with “prophet.” So Hosea, in effect, mocks the people who mocked him. If Ephraim really is a watchman, a prophet, he ought to be able to see the severity of his plight: snares everywhere he turns, hostility in his own country.²⁶

²⁵ [Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary](#), Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996, p. 143.

²⁶ Douglas, p. 292.

As in the days of Gibeah: At Gibeah (Judges 19), the local Benjaminites gang-raped a woman to death, fulfilling what Sodom only sought to do, as the elaborate allusions to the Sodom story there remind us. Gibeah thus becomes the paradigm of a wholly depraved society.²⁷

Hosea 9.15 All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers.

Gilgal was where the people demanded of Samuel that he put a king over them (1 Samuel 12). Unless Hosea has some different association with Gilgal in mind, he seems to be saying that the establishment of the monarchy was in itself a rejection of God's kingship.²⁸

Hosea 10: The call to return to the Lord

The calves of Bethaven - עֲגֻלֹת בֵּית אֵן (Hosea 10.5) refers to Bethel, and is a derogatory name for this location.²⁹

It shall be carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb (Hosea 10.6).³⁰ The "it" in this verse is the bull of Bethaven. This shrine is predicted to be taken as booty by the Assyrians when they sack the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BCE.

The "high places of Aven" בָּמוֹת אֵן shall be destroyed (Hosea 10.8). This refers to the shrine at Bethel.

Hosea 10.14: Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, **as Shalman** שְׁלֹמַן **spoiled Betharbel in the day of battle:** the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.

Shalman שְׁלֹמַן spoiled Betharbel in the day of battle seems to refer to "Shalmaneser," the Assyrian emperor.³¹ Nothing seems to be known of the place labeled Betharbel or the fighting that took place here.

²⁷ Alter, p. 1226.

²⁸ Alter, p. 1227.

²⁹ Stuart, p. 317. See also *The Jewish Study Bible*, where it says (p. 1150): Belh-aven (namely, בֵּית אֵן "House of Iniquity" or "Delusion" is a sarcastic way of referring to Bethel.

³⁰ The term "King Jareb" is obscure, but that it may be a proper name, or it might be a peculiar formation from the verbal stem that means "to quarrel" or "to contest." The context, however, suggests turning to a person in power for help. Alter, p. 1217. Stuart Douglas translates this verse as "It too, shall be taken to Assyria, as a gift for the great king." Stuart, p. 312.

³¹ Other scholars speculate that this individual is שְׁלֹמַן Shallum, a king in Israel who assassinated his rival, ending the Jehu dynasty. 2 Kings 15.10 reports that Shallum smote Azariah the king of Judah: "And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead." Shallum reigns in Israel for one month (2 Kings 15.13) before Menahem assassinated him and reigned in his stead (2 Kings 15.14). *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1160. Stuart an explanation of this difficult passage: Hosea 10.14 likens the destruction of the North to the destruction of Beth-Arbel. Evidently this event was universally known in Israel, and notorious for its brutality, but no other reference to it or to "Shalman" is known. Some scholars have proposed emending the text to read "As Shallum destroyed the house of Jeroboam" (כַּשְׁד שְׁלֹמַן בֵּית יִרְבְּעָם), yet no violent

Hosea 11: Israel, God's son, was called out of Egypt

Hosea 11.1: When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

The paternal metaphor was commonly used in the ancient Near East to express the relation between ruler and ruled, sovereign and subject. It is not incongruous for prophets to mix metaphors, such as Israel as God's wife and as God's child.³²

Matthew 2:13-15 provides further understanding in the typological use of this passage of scripture: "Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

Matthew uses Hosea's statement to show that the coming of the Messiah is an extension of the Lord's love to His people. Matthew does not say that Hosea had Jesus in mind when Hosea 11.1 was originally written. Instead, Matthew says that the experience of Jesus matched what Hosea had written about Israel. This is a way that later New Testament authors would recontextualize Old Testament passages to teach about Jesus. In many ways, the Old Testament authors did the same thing. They would repackage stories and legends from their day and make create new scripture that taught about their experiences with God in terms that they could understand.³³

Hosea 11.8: How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

battle is mentioned in connection with that usurpation (2 Kgs 15:10). Others, notably Astour (*JAOS* 91 [1971] 383–89), suggest reading "Shalmaneser" (I) whose invasion of Israel in the first years of the Jehu dynasty may have provided a fitting symbol of judgment, as that dynasty had since fallen and the nation itself was now in danger of collapse. Yet others suggest reading "Shalmaneser" (V), 727–722 B.C., who perhaps destroyed a "Beth-Arbel" (usually thought to be the site of *Irbid* in Gilead) on his way to destroy Samaria. This identification is possible only if the passage is to be dated in 722, just before the fall of Samaria. Another candidate for "Shalman" is Salmanu (Assyrian "Salamani"), a Moabite king mentioned in a tribute list of Tiglath-Pileser III (Oppenheim, *ANET*, 282; cf. Amos 1:11–2:3), the bashing of mothers and children at Beth-Arbel being something a Moabite king would be remembered for. **The point of the statement is at any rate clear: in the manner of battles fought to exterminate a population** (2 Kgs 8:12; Isa 13:16; Nah 3:10; Ps 137:9; cf. Hos 13:16), **Israel itself would experience numbing brutality**. Thus would be fulfilled in part the predictions in the covenant itself of the horrors of the war Yahweh would use to punish his rebellious people (see especially Deut 32:25; 28:34, 53–57; Lev 26:37). Stuart, p. 337.

³² *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1160.

³³ See: Day, [Egyptian Stories Recontextualized in Scripture](#). See also: [The Jewish Redaction Theory](#). Also: The [Moses Birth Story and the Sargon Birth Narrative](#).

Admah and Zeboiim are examples of cities that were utterly destroyed by the Lord in his anger as recorded by the authors of Deuteronomy (see, among others, Deut. 29.23).³⁴

Hosea 12.11 ***Iniquity in Gilead*** – This verse appears to be an accusation, presenting evidence to the divine court, giving two “counts” of covenant crimes. The more general mention of Gilead’s “evil” (עוֹן) and “worthlessness” (רֵשָׁע), if the text is correct, was apparently enough to remind Hosea’s audience of the city’s bloody reputation (see Hosea 6.8). The cult center Gilgal is cited for its multiple altars, every one illegal according to the covenant (cf. Hosea 2.8, 9; 4:19; 8:13; 9:6; 10:8). Gilgal also enjoyed a reputation for iniquity, openly excoriated in Hosea 9.15 and presumed in 4.15.

It is possible that Hosea lists these two cities for the special kind of cult associated or cult-condoned criminality which they represented in his day. Gilead was apparently known for some sort of murder, literal or figurative, in which its priests had a part (6:8–9). Gilgal was a place where virtually any sort of cultic worship might be engaged in—except perhaps orthodox worship—depending on one’s preference. The fact that the names of both cities began with the same sound also fit the prophetic sense of assonance (cf. Amos 5:5) as Hosea strove to frame Yahweh’s word in ways memorable to his audience. It is also possible that Gilead was already destroyed by the armies of Tiglath-Pileser III (thus it had become “worthlessness”) and that Hosea wished to imply the same fate for Gilgal. The text as we have translated it, however, would not support the latter interpretation.

Hosea 13: Ephraim’s Sin Provoked the Lord

Hosea 13.1: When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.

This can also be read as “When Ephraim spoke piously, he was exalted in Israel, and when he trespassed in *his offense with* Baal, he died.”³⁵

They kiss the calves (Hosea 13.2). The prophet’s outrage at the folly of idol worship is expressed by two illustrations of practices common in the northern cult. First, the people sacrificed animals to things that craftsmen had made, i.e. the golden bulls. Second, they kissed the golden bulls as part of their evidence of devotion to them (cf. 1 Kgs 19:18). This Hosea

³⁴ Admah is discussed in the narrative of Genesis 14. Admah, Sodom, Gomorrah, Bela, and Zeboiim were locations described in Genesis 14.2 as part of the coalition of cities that were aligned in their fight against outside forces from the north. It seems that these cities were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah, as expressed in Genesis 19.24-29, although these cities are not mentioned as part of the destruction. It does say, however, that “The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. **And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain**, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground” (Gen. 19.24-25). This would leave open the possibility that the cities that were in the coalition in Genesis 14 were also destroyed in the fire of Sodom.

³⁵ I took “he trespassed in Baal” וַיִּאָשֶׁם בַּבַּעַל to render this idea.

mocks via the ambiguity of the poetic phraseology. The words יִקְשׁוּ אֲדָמָה לְגֵלְלִים can mean “the people kiss the bulls” but also humans kiss bulls!” with the sense “How ridiculous!” implied.³⁶

Joel

Overview³⁷

The words preserved in the book of Joel give us no information about when the book was written. Its opening verses lack the customary reference to the ruling monarch, and its content provides no information about Joel's time. Given these difficulties, commentators have dated the book anywhere from the ninth to the fifth centuries B.C.³⁸ Recently, some scholars have turned to linguistic clues to establish the book's date. Over time, language undergo change, as readers of the King James Version are aware. Some studies suggest that the dialect of Hebrew preserved in Joel is consistent with that of other documents from early in the post-Exilic period: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.³⁹ If this is the case, Joel can then be dated to around 500 B.C., making it one of the latest of the prophetic books.⁴⁰ That is the conclusion accepted in this study.

The book of Joel seems to be completely removed from the context of the time and place in which it was written. This absence of contemporary references certainly seems to be deliberate; it is as though Joel wanted us to leave behind all thoughts of the here and now and join him in his visions of the future. And the future is clearly the book's focus. I believe that aside from the names of Joel and his father in Joel 1.1, every word in the book refers to the latter days—from the time of the Prophet Joseph Smith into the Millennium. **Joel's apocalyptic style makes his fundamental message very clear: in a dramatic way, God will bring judgment upon the world, destroying evil and blessing the righteous with millennial peace and happiness.**⁴¹

³⁶ Stuart, p. 388. Some translate Hosea 13.2 as “yet for these they appoint men to sacrifice, they are wont to kiss calves!” Hosea 13.2, [Sefaria](#). Another translation reads “People say of them, “Let the men who offer human sacrifice kiss the calves!” (Berean Study Bible translation).

³⁷ This overview is provided by Kent Jackson, [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi](#), Deseret Book, (ed. Kent Jackson), 2004.

³⁸ For a good summary of the arguments, see Douglas Stuart, [Hosea-Jonah, Word Biblical Commentary](#), vol. 31, Waco, Texas: Word, 1987, pp. 224-26. See his bibliography, pp. 222-24. Ehud Ben Zvi dates Joel at the Persian period (539-332 BCE), with the date most likely to be around 400-350. The reference to Ionians (Greek inhabitants from Ionia, a region in western Asia Minor, today's Turkey) in Joel 4.6 is often mentioned among the grounds for this dating. The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1166.

³⁹ See Andrew E. Hill, *The Book of Malachi: Its Place in Post-Exilic Chronology Linguistically Reconsidered*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan, 1981.

⁴⁰ Linguists are certainly aware of factors that could confuse the dating process, such as the deliberate use of older language (as with the use of “thee” and “thou” in Latter-day Saint prayers) and the possibility that Joel could have been written centuries earlier and then “translated” into a more modern dialect of Hebrew at a later date.

⁴¹ There are several sections of the scriptures in which visions are presented in a highly symbolic revelatory style called “apocalyptic.” Because definitions of apocalyptic literature vary, no universally accepted list exists. D. S. Russell includes only the book of Daniel from the Old Testament in his list of fully developed apocalyptic literature;

see *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 36-39. He includes Ezek. 38-39, Zech., Joel 3, and Isa. 24-27 in a transitional category that later developed into full apocalyptic. Ehud Ben Zvi labels Joel as representing "some form of transitional or hybrid work that stands between prophetic and apocalyptic texts." *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1166. The notion that there is a class of writings that may be labeled "apocalyptic" has been generally accepted since Friedrich Lücke published the first comprehensive study of the subject in 1832 (F. Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung Johannis und in die gesamte apokalyptische Literatur* (Bonn: Weber, 1832). Lücke's synthesis was prompted in part by the recent edition of *1 Enoch* by Richard Laurence (who also edited the *Ascension of Isaiah*, which Lücke discussed as a Christian apocalypse). The list of Jewish apocalyptic works included Daniel, *1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra*, and the *Sibylline Oracles*, and he adduced this literature as background for the book of Revelation. Subsequent discoveries have enlarged the corpus and modified the profile of the genre: *2 and 3 Baruch*, *2 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Testament of Abraham* were all published in the later part of the nineteenth century. While there has been inevitable scholarly dispute about the precise relation of this or that work to the genre, there has been general agreement on the corpus of literature that is relevant to the discussion and can be called "apocalyptic" at least in an extended sense. See: John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed., Eerdmans, 1998, p. 2-3.

Apocalyptic vision is the mode of revelation in which the observer is withdrawn from the earthly sphere with its normal circumstances of time and space and is moved, as it were, into the realm of the divine. In this realm he sees things no longer from an earthly perspective but from the perspective of the visionary sphere. Most often what he sees there cannot be described in earthly terms and can only be characterized with the use of vivid, dramatic symbols, most of which transcend our understanding of "normal" space, logic, time, and the rules of science as we understand them.

Apocalyptic vision is characterized by what is called "dualism"—the idea of the universal struggle between the forces of evil and good. In the here-and-now the forces of evil usually prevail. But there will be an end-of-the-world time in which the forces of good, God and his chosen Saints, will triumph over the forces of evil, Satan and his hosts. The victory of right over wrong will not take place as a result of the natural flow of history. Instead, there will be a dramatic break with the past, as God and his forces will stop the course of history to defeat the powers of darkness and bring the world into the final age of peace and glory. God's ultimate victory is sure; it is predetermined.

This kind of revelation is **highly typological**—it abounds in vivid symbols, or "types." The types frequently are patterns that represent more than one specific thing; often they represent whole categories. Apocalyptic prophecies are "fulfilled" whenever the categories that are depicted exist. In other words, they can be "fulfilled" more than once and with different individuals or nations involved. At the same time, however, they point to a grand and ultimate fulfillment, on a universal scale, in a last-days setting.

The symbolism in apocalyptic vision is thus much different from metaphor, the literary imagery that is used so abundantly throughout the Old Testament. Metaphor is meant to be understood. For the most part it is easily comprehended by those who are familiar with the culture, history, language, geography, and social circumstances in which the scripture arose. **Apocalyptic vision, in striking contrast, is meant to be understood fully only with the help of other revelation.** The vision usually requires an angelic interpreter or a companion revelation to unlock its meaning (see D&C 77, where the Lord unlocks portions of John's Apocalypse). Joseph Smith taught this principle:

When the prophets speak of seeing beasts in their visions, they saw the images—types to represent certain things. And at the same time they received the interpretation as to what those images or types were designed to represent. I make this broad declaration, that where God ever gives a vision of an image, or beast, or figure of any kind, he always holds himself responsible to give a revelation or interpretation of the meaning thereof, otherwise we are not responsible or accountable for our belief in it. Don't be afraid of being damned for not knowing the

A Day of Darkness and Gloominess (Joel 1:1-2:27)

As is typical in apocalyptic prophecy, vivid symbolic images are used to convey the Lord's message of great future events. Joel is best known for his image of a destructive army of insects that would invade the land. The waves of destroyers would leave nothing in their path: "That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten" (Joel 1:4). While the precise meaning of the obscure insect vocabulary is not known, the message is nonetheless quite clear: "If one doesn't get you, the next one will." As Joel's metaphor continues, the plague of insects becomes "a nation, . . . strong, and without number," with "the cheek teeth of a great lion" (Joel 1:6). They strip the bark off trees, dry up the vines, and wither "all the trees of the field" (Joel 1:7, 12). Seeds rot, grain withers, herds and flocks are decimated, and the rivers are dried up (Joel 1:17-20). In the destructive march of this unprecedented horde, fire devours all that it touches. Though the land was "as the garden of Eden before them," behind them it is "a desolate wilderness" (Joel 2:2-3). They look like horses, gallop like horse-warriors, sound like crackling fire, climb walls like men, never break ranks, and are immune to the weapons of those whom they attack. At their approach, the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon become dark, and the stars cease to shine (Joel 2:4-10). Indeed, when they come, it is "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness" (Joel 2:2).

"Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come" (Joel 1:15). "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1). "The Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11).

It should be clear by this point that Joel was describing neither bugs nor people with lion teeth. His words were meant to convey the awesome power, terror, and despair that will accompany the day of the Lord, that day in which the Lord will return to earth to bring judgment upon the wicked and peace to the righteous. The vivid images seem to represent the destruction that the Lord will unleash to cleanse the world. The tone of fear and doom suggests that the message was addressed primarily to those who need to change their lives.

meaning of a vision or figure where God had not given a revelation or interpretation on the subject ([Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith](#), p. 185).

Nephi was accompanied through the symbolic world of the vision of the tree of life by a heavenly messenger, who translated its symbols for him (1 Ne. 8-14). Modern readers can understand its meaning because of the interpretation the messenger provided. In several other apocalyptic visions, however, the Lord has not yet seen fit to provide an interpretation in the scriptures. Thus we must read them with caution and recognize that we will not fully understand them until the Lord makes their meaning known. Kent Jackson, *The Lord is There*, [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4](#).

As is typical in Old Testament prophecy, ***the words of despair are followed by words of hope, in this case an invitation to repent***: "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and repent, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and he will turn away the evil from you" (JST Joel 2:12-13). In due time, the house of Israel will indeed accept the Lord's invitation and come unto Christ. Then he will have compassion on them and restore their fortunes: those who oppress them will be removed, the fertility of the land will be restored, the storehouses will overflow with plenty, and the devastation of the locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar, and the palmerworm will be undone. The Lord's covenant people will praise his name, "and ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed" (Joel 2:15-27).

Wonders in Heaven and Earth (Joel 2:28-32)

When Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith during the night of 21-22 September 1823, he introduced the young Prophet to his mission by teaching him from the scriptures.⁴² Among the passages that Moroni quoted was Joel 2:28-32, which begins with the following revelation: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:28-29). Moroni told Joseph Smith that this revelation "was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be" (JS-H 1.41). The Millennium will be the greatest era of fulfillment, since it will be the day in which "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). But spiritual experiences are had among the Lord's Saints today, and it may be that the time of outpouring, which Moroni said "was soon to be," has now arrived. Perhaps it began on that same night, as the heavens were opened and the systematic restoration of sacred things commenced. Since that time, even greater things have been revealed.

What are the spiritual blessings of which Joel prophesied? Most often when we think of such things, we envision such miraculous events as visions, healings, and speaking in tongues. Though these are tremendous manifestations, the blessings of which Joel spoke are not restricted to these. Perhaps the greatest fulfillment of these words is in the quiet witness that faithful Saints receive in answer to their humble prayers concerning the truthfulness of the gospel and the divine mission of the Church. The most powerful manifestation of the Spirit today is the personal revelation that we call a testimony, which is granted freely by the Lord to the sons, daughters, old and young, servants and handmaids of the Church. God's Spirit is at work among the Latter-day Saints as they quietly "prophesy"—enjoy personal revelation in

⁴² For a discussion of Moroni's appearance and the scriptures he quoted, see Kent P. Jackson, "The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Two: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), pp. 339-66. See also Kent P. Jackson, "Moroni's Message to Joseph Smith," *Ensign*, Aug. 1990, pp. 13-16.

their lives—"dream dreams," "see visions," and otherwise enjoy the blessings of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Moroni also quoted the rest of chapter 2, which foretells a time in which will be seen "blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:30-31). The scriptures testify that we will witness terrifying things as the earth is being cleansed for the coming of Christ (see also Matt. 24:29; D&C 29:14-21; 45:40-42; 88:88-91; JS-M 1:33). While the precise nature of these cosmic calamities is unclear, it seems safe to say that they have not yet happened, but that we will recognize them when they do. In any case, as Joel reminded us, those who "call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" and will find safety among the Lord's Saints in Zion (Joel 2:32).

In the Valley of Judgment and Decision (Joel 3:1-16)

Joel foretold, in dramatic words, the Lord's day of reckoning against the nations of the world. He would gather them together and enter into judgment against them, contending with the oppressors on behalf of his covenant people (Joel 3:1-2).⁴³ The offenders would receive according to the evil that they had done, for the Lord would "return your recompence upon your own head," he warned them (Joel 3:3-8). In this symbolic scene, the nations would be roused to action. They would be called to convert their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears (Joel 3:10), in striking contrast to millennial circumstances (Isa. 2:4). They would be brought to one place, and the Lord would judge them all together (Joel 3:12).

In Joel's apocalyptic description, the place of God's reckoning is called "the valley of Jehoshaphat," a symbolic name meaning "the Lord judges" (Joel 3:2). Later, the site is called "the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). The names have no geographical significance but punctuate the imagery by emphasizing the nature of the event.⁴⁴ Medieval tradition equates this scene with the final judgment, but it is clearly meant to be understood in a different context. Jehovah's great act of judgment against the world will be at the time of his second coming, when the earth will be cleansed of all that is corrupt in it. It appears that this cleansing will result from upheaval in the forces of nature, from manmade calamities, particularly warfare, and from the burning of the earth that will attend the Lord's coming in his glory. In Joel's visionary scene, the nations are gathered together for war, but it does not appear that they fight—either against each other or against the Lord's Saints, who are not mentioned. Instead, it is the Lord alone who contends against the world. "Put ye in the sickle," Joel wrote, "for the

⁴³ The KJV translation "plead with them" seems too weak a rendering of the Hebrew *spt*, in this particular construction. Some other translations have "enter into judgment" (New International Version; New Revised Standard Version) and "bring to judgement" (Revised English Bible).

⁴⁴ A belief from the Middle Ages, without the support of scripture, sees Jerusalem's Kidron Valley as the Valley of Jehoshaphat and anticipates that the resurrection will begin there. Thus for centuries it has served as a favorite burial ground for Jews, Muslims, and Christians. See Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 17 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), 9:1327-28.

harvest is ripe." He invites them to trample down the grapes in the overflowing winepress, "for their wickedness is great" (Joel 3:13). As was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, when Christ returns he will be "red in his apparel, and his garments like him that treadeth in the wine-vat. . . . And his voice shall be heard: I have trodden the wine-press alone, and have brought judgment upon all people; and none were with me; and I have trampled them in my fury, and I did tread upon them in mine anger, and their blood have I sprinkled upon my garments, and stained all my raiment; for this was the day of vengeance which was in my heart" (D&C 133.48, 50-51).

The Lord Dwelleth in Zion (Joel 3:17-21)

As in all circumstances in which the nations rage against God's work, the Lord is the hope and the strength of his covenant people (Joel 3.16). Joel ends, like most of the prophetic books, with a lovely promise of millennial hope and blessing. In that day, Jerusalem will again be a "holy city"; none but the sanctified will be found there. The earth will be renewed to a level of fertility not experienced since the Fall (see A of F 10), which Joel describes poetically as the mountains dripping with new wine, the hills flowing with milk, and water coming forth from the house of the Lord to nourish the earth both physically and spiritually (Joel 3.18). When Christ reigns as king, all the world will be his domain. The nations will cease to be, and the Lord's covenant Saints will dwell in his presence (Joel 3.19-21).

Joel 2 War and Desolation

Military imagery is pervasive in this section; in this context, the army is a personification of the locusts (see Prov. 6.6-7); this is made explicit in Joel 2.25.⁴⁵ The prophet urges the people to repent and to gather elders, to "let the priests and the ministers of the Lord weep between the porch and the altar" (Joel 2.16-17).

Two Aspects of the Broken Covenant

These are two aspects of the broken covenant: attack from enemies and failure of the world of nature. We think of the disasters of war and the disasters of famine in separate categories, but the prophet saw both as aspects of the broken covenant. The oracles were delivered in the hot summer months of drought, the period before the autumn festival when Israel usually celebrated both the harvest and the triumph of her God and king over her enemies. But that year there was no triumph, and no harvest. Joel described the mourning and repentance for the broken covenant. We find the familiar words: 'Rend your hearts and not your garments' (Joel

⁴⁵ Plagues of locusts, an instance of which figures in the Ten Plagues, were known catastrophic events in the Near East. Vast swarms of the voracious insects would eat everything in their path, leaving the fields bare of produce. Joel uses four different Hebrew synonyms for "locust," and all the English versions, including the present translation, flounder to find or invent four equivalents. Some scholars think these four terms indicate four stages in the metamorphosis of the insect, but that is uncertain. Three of the four Hebrew words show a transparent etymology: *gazam* (the word rendered here as "locust"), "to cut back"; *'arbeh*, "multitude"; and *haq sil*, "to finish off or destroy." The last, *yeleq*, might conceivably be linked with *laqaq*, "lick." Robert Alter, [*The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*](#), W.W. Norton & Co., 2019, p. 1241.

2.13). We find the promise that all would be restored in words that are equally familiar: 'I will pour out my spirit on all flesh' (Joel 2.28). The great covenant was to be restored; the earth was to regain its fertility, and the people of God were to be saved from their enemies, from the evil forces which had broken the cosmic covenant. It was this passage in Joel which inspired Peter's great Pentecost sermon (Acts 2.14-36). This shows us that the giving of the Spirit and the birth of the Church were closely bound up with Joel's vision of a renewal of the cosmic covenant, the restoration of all creation. Perhaps we should hear more about this in our Whitsun sermons. Our poets and artists are still describing the broken covenant; Yeats saw all too clearly the dissolution of the created order in 'The Second Coming':

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

The apocalyptic tradition, which was the mother of Christianity, preserved the idea of the cosmic covenant, the judgement, and the great renewal. But it always had a vision beyond the end; we call it life after death.

The main figure in the eternal covenant was the king, the earthly agent of the Lord. He it was who kept the forces of evil at bay. We have already mentioned Psalm 89, which shows the king in this role; to this must be added Psalm 2, where the rulers of the earth plot against the Lord and his anointed to break out of their bonds; Psalm 72, which links the king's justice to the fertility of the land; and Isaiah 11, which depicts the messianic king who will bring justice and judgement, followed by harmony in the creation. The passage ends, significantly, 'They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain' (Isa. 11.9). As above, so below.⁴⁶

Temple Images in Joel

The people are gathered at the temple. We see this in Joel 2.15-17, where the horn is blown for a communal fast and lament, where the priests are at the porch and the altar (Joel 2.17). The bridegroom comes out of his chamber (Joel 2.16), and the bride comes out from her wedding canopy, or *hupâ* הַפָּתִיחַ – this has images of the divine marriage, whether of an actual ceremony, where a bride and groom are told to leave their celebrations and come to the fast or to the divine marriage between Jehovah and his people embodied in the First Israelite Temple Festival. In this temple setting "the floors shall be full of wheat" (Joel 2.24), an image that could simply mean that Israel will be fruitful or that the Saints are at the threshingfloor, the stone at the base of the Holy of Holies, where they as the "seeds" are liturgically brought into the presence of God the Father. After they are brought to the "floor," they "shall eat in plenty," and

⁴⁶ Margaret Barker, [*The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity*](#), Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005, p. 85-86.

this in turn is the feast we see represented in Exodus 24, D&C 27 and Revelation 19, where the Saints, once they come into the presence of God are allowed to feast in his presence in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.⁴⁷ These Saints (both men and women – Joel 2.28) made perfect will have the Lord in their midst (Joel 2.27), not be ashamed (Joel 2.26), have visions and prophesy open unto them (Joel 2.28), and be delivered “in Mount Zion” (Joel 2.32). The enemies of Israel will be put down (Joel 3.4-8, 19), and dwelling in God’s presence, the Saints will be cleansed from the sins and blood of this world (Joel 3.21).⁴⁸ Clearly this is a temple vision and prophecy of the Saints that have come unto the Lord through covenant. With all of the images laid out in this chapter, when read in connection with the work that LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks have published on the subject,⁴⁹ seeing this in a First Israelite Temple setting comes into clearer focus.

⁴⁷ Revelation 19.9 in part reads: Μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι “In the state of the Gods (blessed) are they which have been called into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.”

⁴⁸ This is reminiscent of Moroni’s promise that the Saints will be cleansed: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10.32-33).

⁴⁹ LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks, [*Who Shall Ascend Into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israels Temple Worship In the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon?*](#), Eborn Books, 2010.