

A Biblical Theology of Repentance in Hosea: In the Light of God's חַסֵּד

By

Lukas Kind

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Supervisor: Dr Bill Domeris

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Background

The prophet Hosea reveals the love of God towards a disobedient people in a fascinating way. Repentance is an important theme not only throughout the Prophetic Books but has a central place in the Book of Hosea (Dempsey 2006, 50; Fretheim 2013, 71). Egelkraut (2017, 1055) argues that while the composition of Hosea is somewhat complex, it is the call to repentance that pervades the book. Boda (2015, 95) confirms this view by emphasising the regular appearance of the characteristic term **שׁוּב** (“turn, return”) in various chapters of the Prophetic book (22x), further supplemented by the use of the derived noun **קְלוּבָה** (“apostasy”; 2x; 11:7; 14:5). According to Holladay (in Gruber 2017, 565), ten of the appearances of **שׁוּב** connote a “covenantal usage” (3:5; 5:4; 6:1; 7:10; 11:5 (2x), 7; 14:2, 3, 5) and describe Israel’s return to covenantal relationship with YHWH in repentance.

Different tensions regarding the theme of repentance come to the fore as one studies the Book of Hosea and its referring theological literature. Firstly, there is a tension between the infidelity of people and the faithful **חַסֵּד** love of God. This dynamic is visible in the structure of the book as oracles of indictment and judgement transition to promises of restoration (Ben Zvi 2005, 8; Fretheim 2013, 7; Lim 2015, 19). Sections like Hosea 1–3 or Hosea 11 are good examples of the way that accusations of grave sin, announcements of judgement and promises for the future are deeply intertwined with the continuing call towards repentance (Egelkraut 2017, 1055; Jacobs 2010, 20; Yate 2016, 249–250). The darkness of Israel’s sin (e.g., 4:1–2) is contrasted with YHWH’s gracious character and acts of restoration (e.g., 14:5–9).

A second tension is found between Israel’s self-determination and the sovereignty of God to lead his people into a process of repentance. Passages of imperative nature that call for a return emphasise the responsibility of Israel to repent in order to prevent separation from God (2:4; Hwang 2021, 101–103) and to prove their renewed faithfulness by their deeds (10:12; 12:6; Smothers 1993, 241; Nogalski 2011, 169).

Conversely, other passages have been understood to demonstrate the sovereignty of God as the key to genuine repentance. Scholars like Fretheim (2013, 16–17), Kessler (2008, 579), and Ramirez (2018) have interpreted the pericope of 3:1–5 to illuminate Israel’s complete dependence on divine grace to return to their God. Similarly, Hosea 5:3–7 (“Their deeds do not permit them to return them to God”¹ [v. 4]) has been understood to emphasise Israel’s inability to repent due to inner corruption (Dearman 2010, 102; Fretheim 2013, 43; Gisin 2014, 244). For scholars like Gisin (p. 464) or Moon (2018, 185–186), Hosea 11 displays the sovereignty of God in the way he withholds judgement despite repentance being missing (vv. 8–9) and instead calls his people back to him (vv. 10–11). Lim (2015, 110) has advocated a mediating position in the interpretation of Hosea 11 by introducing a relationship between Israel and God that is dialectical in the sense that both divine and human actions are entirely crucial for its maintenance.

Thirdly, the Book of Hosea displays a tension between sincere and superficial repentance, as some statements of repentance in Hosea raise questions about possible hypocrisy. Hosea 2:7 (“I will go and return to my first husband”) is understood by some as an indication of a sincere, yet future return of Israel to their God (Fretheim 2013, 30; Gruber 2017, 125). Others like Nogalski (2011, 53) do not support this view, asserting that “[s]he returns to YHWH not because of a renewed sense of commitment but because she recognizes she was better off with her `first husband” (cf. Gisin 2014, 122; Hwang 2021, 106). Similarly, Hosea 6:1–3 can be understood either as an expression of earnest repentance (Dempsey 2006, 51; Ramirez 2017; Vasholz 2008, 1757) or a hypocritical penitential prayer, seeking a swift redemption from judgement (Caroll 2008, pos. 2687–2693; Gisin 2014:69Hwang 2021, 189). Contrary to the other two passages mentioned above, the penitential prayer of 14:2–4 is generally understood by scholarship as being earnest and acceptable to God (e.g., Caroll 2008, pos. 3992–3997; Gruber 2017, 591; Smothers 1993, 242).

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations derive from the Lexham English Bible (LEB). Passages analysed and discussed in the exegetical section will be an exception to this rule and will be quoted from my working translation presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

The depiction of the different tensions connected to repentance underlines the complexity of the topic in the Book of Hosea. To analyse, discuss and resolve some of these dynamics is the objective of this assignment.

2. Problem

2.1 Main Research Question

What does the Book of Hosea teach about the topic of repentance in the light of God's אֱהֵב love?

2.2 Subsidiary Research Questions

2.2.1 What is the general, historical, and literary context of the Book of Hosea, including its theological themes?

2.2.2 What would an exegetical analysis of key pericopes of Hosea (2:4–9; 2:16–22; 3:1–5; 5:3–7; 5:15–6:3; 6:4–7:2; 10:11–13a; 11:1–11; 14:2–9 and 14:10) reveal about repentance in relation to divine אֱהֵב ?

2.2.3 How are the exegetical insights of the individual pericopes to be synthesized into an integrated theology of repentance in the Book of Hosea?

2.2.4 What are the doctrinal and practical implications of Hosea's teaching about repentance, especially for the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig located in Eastern Germany?

2.3 Delimitations

Due to the nature of the main research question, the research will limit itself to the Book of Hosea. Here, the canonical form is the object of study, i.e., the Masoretic Text (MT) (cf. Boda 2012a, 132; Osborne 2006, 370). The issues of authorship and the origin of the text will be discussed in step 1 of the research (context). Other than that, the focus of the study will be to determine the teaching of the final canonical text of

Hosea, and will therefore abstain from further speculations regarding the formation of the text.

In terms of topic, I have chosen to limit my study to the theme of repentance. The passages are selected based on an understanding of repentance as the “return to faithful relationship” in the context of past or present sinful behaviour and apostasy (Boda 2015, 31). The semantic domain of repentance includes the vocabulary of “returning to” (שוב) or “seeking” (דרש, שחר, בקש) the Lord. Pericopes may discuss either successful or failed repentance. Based on these criteria, the following passages will be studied: 2:4–9; 2:16–22; 3:1–5; 5:3–7; 5:15–6:3; 6:4–7:2; 10:11–13a; 11:1–11; 14:2–9 and 14:10.

Regarding the application of the research, I have decided to limit the field of application to my personal local church: TOS Gemeinde in Leipzig, Germany. In terms of denomination, the TOS Gemeinde is to be seen as an evangelical, charismatic free church and is located in Leipzig, Eastern Germany. I will touch on common questions or concepts in the evangelical and charismatic regarding repentance; however, always with a focus on practical implications for my local church.

2.4 Definitions

2.4.1 רַחֻם

Scholars have struggled to find a unified translation for the 250 appearances of the term רַחֻם in the Hebrew Bible (Simpson 2016, n.p.). The various preferences of translations illuminate the depth and different facets of the term רַחֻם: "mercy" (KJV1900); "love" or "kindness" (NIV); "faithful love" (CSB); "steadfast love" (ESV); "loyal love" (LEB). In its most basic meaning, רַחֻם describes the "loyalty within a relationship" (Nettelhorst 2014). Speaking on a human level, רַחֻם can describe the loyalty within families, towards a covenant or treaty and even towards moral values (Baer and Gordon 1997, 2:212–213). When referring to God's רַחֻם, the term describes "Yahweh's faithfulness and love to his people within the context of covenant" (Nettelhorst 2014). It means the enduring love and commitment towards his people and therefore presents 'the essence' of the covenantal relationship" (Baer and Gordon, 2:211).

2.4.2 Repentance

As used in this thesis, “repentance” describes the “human experience of turning away from attitudes and activities opposed to God and his ways and turning to God and his ways” (Boda 2012b). This means a person’s internal reorientation as well as a change in outward behaviour in a renewed commitment to the covenantal relationship with YHWH (DiFransico 2014).

3. Value of the study

3.1 Purpose

Arising from having an interest in living and teaching repentance in a way that is faithful to the Word of God, this research seeks to uncover insights regarding this topic from the Book of Hosea. In my view, repentance is an interesting topic for several reasons. Repentance unites both the central themes of human sin and divine forgiveness. Therefore, it touches on crucial questions regarding human nature and the process of the return to a relationship with God. In the same way, in describing the “turning [of] one’s orientation toward God” it has high practical value for every human being, both in terms of salvation and sanctification (Kennedy 2016). Repentance in the Book of Hosea is particularly interesting due to the sharp contrast between the prophet’s depictions of the idolatry and sin of the people and descriptions of God’s continuous affection towards them (Kruger 1997, 4:713).

3.2. Theological Significance

From an academic perspective, the need for such a study is visible in the fact that—to my current knowledge—extensive research in this precise area has not yet been undertaken. Smother’s (1993) article “Preaching and Praying Repentance in Hosea” comes close to my research topic in terms of content. However, both due to its date (1993) and scope (8 pages), there seems to be a need for current and in-depth research.

With my study, I hope to contribute to the current state of research with a detailed survey of the theme of repentance in Hosea. As such, I hope that the study will also contribute to the general Biblical- and Systematic-theological discourse regarding the

theme of repentance, and give insight into the interplay of God’s divine loyal love and human response in sincere repentance.

3.3 Practical Significance

In my view, there is also an ecclesiological need for this study. In his book “Atonement for a Sinless Society,” Mann (2015,14) argues that “[o]ne of the problems facing the church ... is that the word “sin” itself has become just as tainted, polluted, and defiled as the word itself indicates.” This development has a great influence on the church’s understanding of repentance. It seems that a “Hyper-Grace Theology” has growing influence on Western Christianity (Brown 2014). A sound theology of repentance presents a key teaching for a biblical response to these theological movements. Additionally, it seems that the church currently has a growing interest in repentance. According to a recent poll by the Joshua Fund (Rosenberg 2020), 39 percent of interviewed Americans perceived the coronavirus pandemic as a “wake-up call for us to turn back to faith in God.” A biblical theology of repentance is not only theologically relevant but also significant for the contemporary church of Christ.

4. Research Approach

4.1 Research Design

In order to answer the main research question and subsidiary questions, a study is conducted in Biblical Research. In doing so, the research follows the pattern of Biblical Theology, which is defined by Osborne (2006, 347) as the collection and arrangement of "themes that unite the passages and can be traced through a book or author as a whole." As introduced by Smith (2013, 137) and Boda (2012, 123), Biblical Theology encompasses two primary tasks. Firstly, by the use of Biblical Exegesis individual passages are studied in their context. The second step is to determine the links between individual exegetical results “beyond the pericope level“ (Smith 2013, 137) and identify “macro level connections” (Boda 2012a, 123). Drawing from relevant key pericopes, it is possible to analyse and discuss what the Book of Hosea communicates about the topic of repentance.

This thesis will largely be based on an understanding of Biblical Theology that is labelled by Klink III and Lockett (2012) as the “canonical approach.” This means that the primary role of the canonical text over biblical history is acknowledged (p. 125). In the same way, this approach affirms both the descriptive and prescriptive (or theological) nature of the biblical text and advocates both elements as compulsory in Biblical Theology (p. 128; cf. Mead 2007, 7–9).

4.2 Research Methodology

Since Biblical Theology makes significant use of exegetical research, it seems appropriate to apply a somewhat modified exegetical methodology for this study (cf. Osborne 2006, 350). For exegetical studies, Smith (2008, 171–177) suggests the following key elements: (1) context, (2) meaning, and (3) significance. For my endeavour in Biblical Theology, I will divide the second step of “meaning” into two separate steps of “exegesis of key passages” and “synthesis.” This results in the following methodology for my research: (1) context, (2) exegesis of key passages, (3) synthesis, and (4) application. This is congruent with the approach of Stuart (2009:31), who suggests that for a “topical format” of Old Testament studies, one may combine various exegetical steps (including contextual, historical, textual, and literary analysis) in the way they best fit the content and presentation of the exegetical study.

4.2.1 Step 1: The Context of Hosea

In the first step, I will examine the context of the Book of Hosea. Therefore, I will discuss (1) the general background of the book such as its authorship, date and audience, (2) its historical context, i.e., the historical background of Hosea’s prophetic message, (3) the literary structure of the book, and (4) its theological themes and motifs.

4.2.2 Step 2: Exegesis of Key Passages

The second step will present the main section of the research where I will examine various key pericopes on the topic of repentance from Hosea (cf. §2.3 Delimitations). I will examine each pericope in the following exegetical manner: (1) preliminary analysis, such as the presentation of my working translation from the Hebrew text as well as the discussion of potential textual variants, (2) a contextual analysis of the literary context, (3) a verse analysis in terms of lexical, grammatical, and literary study,

and (4) an exegetical synthesis of studied pericope to determine the author's intended meaning of the text.

4.2.3 Step 3: Synthesis

In the third step of the research, the exegetical findings of the individual pericopes in the previous step will be synthesized into a Biblical Theology of repentance in the Book of Hosea. In this I will follow Smith's (2013, 137) definition of Biblical Theology in the way it "interprets the original teaching of blocks of scripture beyond the pericope level" and seeks to "understand the beliefs of the biblical writers on their own terms." Firstly, I will seek to synthesize the different teachings of the passages into one coherent presentation of what Hosea teaches about repentance. The purpose will be to identify and discuss unifying themes or lines of thought across the different pericopes. Secondly, the presented exegetical synthesis will be compared with the propositions of other theological literature on the Old Testament picture of repentance.

4.2.4 Step 4: Application

In the fourth step, the study will move towards application. As introduced by Mead (2007, 9), Biblical Theology should include the "search for normative applications." The field of application will be my local church, the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig. In terms of denomination, the TOS Gemeinde is to be seen as an evangelical, charismatic, free church located in Leipzig, Eastern Germany. In this step, I will discuss the implications of Hosea's teaching regarding repentance for the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig in areas of, e.g., preaching, discipleship or events of church life.

4.3 Presuppositions

Regarding my personal theological stance, four general directions might help to identify the presuppositions with which I approach the research of "A Biblical Theology of Repentance in Hosea." Firstly, I consider myself to be *evangelical*. This means that I trust the whole Bible, in its final canonical form, to be the inerrant Word of God, "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16 ESV). Furthermore, I affirm the central evangelical doctrines of the trinity, salvation from sin only through faith in Jesus Christ, the importance of missionary activity, and the Bible's call to holy living (Domeris 2014, 153–158).

Secondly, while I refuse to acknowledge the need for too extreme positions on the issue of predestination, I generally have a *tendency towards Arminianism* in contrast to Calvinism. Thirdly, as I have argued elsewhere, I *reject supersessionist tendencies* in the interpretation of scripture (Kind 2019). This means that I affirm the ongoing covenant of God with the Jewish people, also after the Christ event, with an expectancy of eschatological renewal of ethnic Israel including the physical nation. In this way, for the interpretation of Old Testament Prophetic texts like Hosea, I advocate a primary application of eschatological aspects to ethnic Israel and only secondarily to the “grafted in” Gentile church (Rom 11:17). Fourthly, I consider myself to be *charismatic*. This means that I explicitly endorse that the Holy Spirit works today and—among many different appearances—may manifest himself through prophecy, healing, or supernatural conviction (1 Cor 12:4–11; John 16:8–11).

5. Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I have presented the need for a study on a “Biblical Theology of Repentance in Hosea” and have sketched out the methodological approach of the thesis. Having laid this foundation, I will continue to illuminate the greater frame of Hosea’s teaching on repentance, i.e., the context of the Book of Hosea.

Chapter 2: Context

1. Introduction

In order to develop a “Biblical Theology of Repentance in Hosea” from the insights of specific passages, we must begin by examining the overall context of the Book of Hosea. In this Chapter, I will present a general introduction to the Book of Hosea, followed by a discussion of the political and religious backdrop from which the book was written. Furthermore, the literary characteristics and structure of Hosea will be examined. Finally, an overview of the book's primary theological themes will be given.

2. The Book of Hosea

2.1 The Prophet

Apart from the name of his father "Beeri" (1:1), we do not receive much information from the Book of Hosea about the prophet's history. We do not know about his occupation or social standing, and neither can we reconstruct the process of his calling (Egelkraut 2017, 1048). Due to the primary focus on the Kingdom of Israel in his prophecies, it seems probable that Hosea lived and ministered in the Northern Kingdom. Apart from Amos, who came from Judah and ministered in the Kingdom of Israel for only a limited time (Amos 1:1; 7:12–13), this would make Hosea the only prophet writing in the Northern Kingdom (Kruger 1997, 4:708).

With little information on the background of the prophet, we still have some knowledge about the personal life of Hosea. Chapters 1–3 reveal his marriage with Gomer, the אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים (“wife of whoredom,” 1:2 ESV), their three children (1:4–8), and their familial disputes (2:4–7), all serving as prophetic imagery for the relationship of God and Israel (Butler 2016, n.p.). Paradoxically, therefore, we gain intimate insights into the family life of the prophet, without knowing much about his circumstances or living condition.

2.2 Date

The superscription of the Book of Hosea introduces that Hosea's ministry took place during the reigns of the Judean kings "Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah" as well as the Israelite ruler "Jeroboam the son of Joash" (1:1). Since Jeroboam's lifetime overlaps only with that of Uzziah (2 Kgs 14:23), we can conclude that Hosea's ministry also involved the reigns of the Kings of Israel, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea. While it is difficult to establish exact dates, most scholars assume that the preaching of the prophet began at some point at the end of Jeroboam's reign in the 750s BC (e.g., Kruger 1997, 4:709; Carroll 2008, pos. 1469; Keefe 2016, 823; Moon 2018, 2). Certain oracles can be understood to allude to the end of the Kingdom of Israel (Hos 1:4–5; 8:5–1; 11:5–7; 13:6); however, nothing in the book explicitly refers to the dramatic fall of Samaria (722/721 BC; McConville 2012, n.p.). It therefore seems most probable that Hosea's preaching ended shortly before the fall of Samaria sometime in the late 720s (Macintosh 1997, lxxxiii; Egelkraut 2017, 1051; Routledge 2020, 31).

2.3 Audience

Biblical scholarship generally agrees that the primary audience of Hosea's messages was the Northern Kingdom of Israel (e.g., Dearman 2010, 21; Fretheim 2013, 8; Goldingay 2021, n.p.). Hosea in his prophetic speeches addresses the people of Israel (e.g., 4:1; 14:1), their capital Samaria (e.g., 8:5) and their place of cult Bethel (e.g., 10:15; Routledge 2020, 29). The Book of Hosea also includes some references to the Southern Kingdom of Judah (e.g., 1:7; 5:12), which have been understood by some as later Judean redactions (e.g., Macintosh 1997, lxx; Dearman 2010, 20–21). Since, however, Israel and Judah have been deeply connected politically, socially, and geographically, there are good reasons for the prophet to address the Kingdom of Judah (Carroll 2008, 1516–1517; Moon 2018, 13–14; Goldingay 2021, n.p.). While his focus was on the Northern Kingdom, Hosea had a message from the Lord for the people of God including both Israel and Judah² (cf. 1:11; Goldingay 2021, n.p.).

² Since it does not seem central for its teaching on repentance, I will not seek to distinguish or contrast statements on the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Book of Hosea in the remainder of this paper.

2.4 Authorship and composition

Since the exact editorial history of the Book of Hosea is not the focus of this thesis, questions about authorship and compositions will be discussed only briefly. Three main reasons have led scholars to assume that the original material has been collected and edited to some degree: (1) the omission of six subsequent Northern kings in the superscription in comparison to the four named Judean kings (1:1), (2) different persons speaking in Hosea 1 and 3, and (3) the fundamentally different literary character of Hosea 1–3 and 4–14 (McConville 2012, n.p.; Butler 2016, n.p.). Furthermore, scholarly opinions regarding the editorial process can be structured in three groups, according to the extent of their assumed alteration of the original text. The first group of scholars assumes that the Book of Hosea was composed essentially by the prophet himself and has been preserved as such by his disciples and/or the scribes of Hezekiah in Judah after the fall of Samaria (Gisin 2014, 52–53; Hwang 2021, 49). The second group of scholars assumes a similar transmission to Judah, with, however, stronger additions made to the text (e.g., an introductory chapter; McConville 2012, n.p.; Egelkraut 2017, 1056; Goldingay 2021, 21). The third scholarly camp advocates meaningful redaction centuries later during the Babylonian exile, putting it in a "postmonarchic setting" (Ben Zvi 2005, 14–16; cf. Keefe 2016, 823). This thesis adopts the first view and assumes that the book "is most naturally attributed to a single mind and a single author" (Macintosh 1997, lxx) and "could have come substantially from the prophet Hosea" (Carroll 2008, pos. 1508–1509).

3. Historical Context

3.1 Political Context

The time of Hosea's ministry was arguably the most troubled time of the Kingdom of Israel, leading to the final downfall of the nation (Moon 2018, 1). Experiencing the reigns of seven rulers of the Kingdom of Israel, Hosea witnessed more changes in kingship than any other biblical writing prophet (Butler 2016, n.p.). Interestingly, this negative development does not seem to be predictable at the beginning of Hosea's

ministry. Under Jeroboam II (793–753),³ Israel experienced a flourishing period in both military and economic aspects (Egelkraut 2017, 491; Dearman 2010, 21). Jeroboam II successfully expanded the Kingdom of Israel and “restored the boundary of Israel from Lebo-Hamath up to the sea of the Arabah” (2 Kgs 14:25; Finkelstein 2013, 129). Furthermore, archaeological findings indicate thriving trading relationships and the economic well-being of the Israelite kingdom (Finkelstein 2013, 131–138; Moon 2018, 2). As demonstrated by the book of Amos (e.g., 2:6–8), this success went hand in hand with economic injustice in terms of exploitation of the poorer farmers by the landowners (Gisin 2014, 29; Butler 2016, n.p.).

Jeroboam II was succeeded by his son Zechariah (753) who ruled for six months until he was murdered by Shallum (2 Kgs 15:8–10). It seems evident that Hosea’s prophetic announcement of the downfall of the house of Jehu was fulfilled rather soon (Hos 1:4; Egelkraut 2017, 495; Dearman 2010, 21). Shallum ruled for only one month until he was in turn overthrown by Menahem (2 Kgs 15:13–14). It seems probable that Hosea refers to these “royal assassinations” (McConville 2012, n.p.) and understood them as indications of the moral decay of the Kingdom of Israel (7:6–7; 8:4.; Egelkraut 2017, 1052).

The new ruler Menahem (751–742) continued the line of brutality and began his reign with harsh violence against his hometown Tirzah that apparently did not accept his kingship (2 Kgs 15:14–16; Gisin 2014, 24). In the time of Menahem, the political environment of the Ancient Near East significantly changed due to the ascension of Tiglath-Pileser III to the Assyrian throne (745; Moon 2018, 1–2). The Assyrian king soon focused on territorial expansion especially westward of his kingdom and became an overshadowing threat for the smaller nations of Israel, Judah and Aram (Egelkraut 2017, 495). But territorial gain was not the only objective of the Assyrian imperialistic efforts. The politics of Assur incorporated religious goals in terms of establishing syncretistic worship in subjected countries in which the god of Assur should reign over the pantheons of all other local gods (Egelkraut p. 493).

³ The dates in this section have been adopted by Patterson and Austel (2009, 629).

The Kingdom of Israel soon was under pressure from the Assyrian power as Tiglath-Pileser III “came against the land” either through a full military invasion or expressions of threat (2 Kgs 15:19; Dearman 2010, 22). To defend his reign, Menahem paid a costly tribute to Tiglath-Pileser “so that his hand would be with him to strengthen his hold on the kingdom” (v. 20; Gisin 2014, 23; Moon 2018, 2). It seems likely that Israel became Assur’s vassal state at this time (McConville 2012, n.p.). After reigning for ten years, Menahem passed the power to his son Pekahiah (741–742) who ruled for two years before being murdered by Pekah (2 Kgs 15:23).

Pekah (740–732) in his coup was probably supported by an anti-Assyrian group from the upper class and he rebelled against the domination of Tiglath-Pileser after his takeover (Dearman 2010, 22; Routledge 2020, 30). Together with Rezin of Syria, he formed an anti-Assyrian coalition and unsuccessfully tried to convince Ahaz of Judah to join them (Butler 2016, n.p.; Carroll 2008, pos. 1478). In the Syro-Ephraimite War (734), Israel and Syria besieged Jerusalem with the goal of appointing “the son of Tabeel” as the new Judean king (Isa 7:6; 2 Kgs 15:37; Gisin 2014, 25). The military pressure on Judah proved to be a disaster for Pekah as king Ahaz sought help from the Assyrian empire that invaded both the Kingdom of Israel and Syria (2 Kgs 16:7–9; Moon 2018, 3). Israel lost significant parts of its Northern territory and their inhabitants were deported to Assyria (2 Kgs 15:29). This could be the reason for Hosea to primarily refer to “Ephraim” instead of “Israel” as only the region of Ephraim with the capital Samaria remained for the Kingdom of Israel (Gisin 2014, 26).

Hoshea (731–722) continued the line of royal assassinations, murdered Pekah (2 Kgs 15:30), and became the last king in the history of the Kingdom of Israel. He was a vassal of Shalmaneser V until he betrayed Assyria and sought an alliance with Egypt (2 Kgs 17:3–4). Hosea might refer to this treatise with Egypt in 7:11–13 and 9:3 (Egelkraut 2017, 1053). Shalmaneser reacted to this treachery and invaded the nation. After three years of siege, Samaria fell, and all remaining inhabitants were sent into exile (722; 2 Kgs 17:5–6). Several of Hosea’s prophecies point towards the end of the Kingdom of Israel (1:4–5; 8:8–14; 11:5–7) and the fall of Samaria (14:1; McConville 2012, n.p.; Gisin 2014, 27). Since, however, the prophet never explicitly refers to such as a historical event, it remains unclear whether the prophet’s ministry included this time or ended prior to it (Kruger 1997, 4:709).

3.2 Religious Context

3.2.1 Idolatry and Cult

The religious situation of the Kingdom of Israel at the time of Hosea is difficult to reconstruct with certainty. It is helpful to examine the cult established by Jeroboam I, especially as the Book of 2 Kings declares that the following kings "went after the sins of Jeroboam" (1 Kgs 16:31; cf. 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:29; 13:2). Central to this cult were the golden calves that were erected by Jeroboam and that remained important places of worship up to the time of Hosea (1 Kgs 12:28–30; Hos 8:5–6; 10:5–6; 13:2). These calves probably served as YHWH's alleged place of residence and were intended to provide an alternative to the worship of Jerusalem (Bowling 2017, 530). Some have argued that the calves of Jeroboam were erected to represent Baal-Hadad (Gisin 2014, 33; Smith 2016, s.v. Jeroboam, King of Israel), but this appears unlikely in the light of 2 Kings 20:28–29 (Day 2010, 215).

Other significant places of the contemporary cult were the "high places" (בְּמוֹת), the use of which was strongly criticised by the prophet Hosea (4:12–13; 10:8) and which were expressions of Israel's disobedience to the Mosaic Law (Num 33:52). As demonstrated by 2 Kings 17:10 (cf. 16:4), these high places were often filled with "stone pillars," "poles of Asherah," and other idolatrous imagery (cf. Hos 4:12). While the worship and sacrifices on these בְּמוֹת may have included syncretistic worship of YHWH, it seems probable that primarily Canaanite images were worshipped there (Gisin 2014, 29; Selman 1997, 1:670). Other references in Hosea describe the practice of divination (4:12) and the celebration of festivals (2:15).

3.2.3 Cultic Prostitution?

An open debate among academics exists as to what extent sexuality was a part of the cultic practices at the time of Hosea, especially in fertility rituals. Some argue for "some sort of sexual activity" (Caroll 2008, pos. 1636–1637), while others assume structured cultic prostitution (Day 2010, 214–215, Routledge 2020, 34). Regarding the Book of Hosea, these scholars primarily base their argument on 4:14, where the nouns זָנָה ("whore") and שְׂדֵדָה are used in a parallel structure (similar to Gen 38:15, 21–22 or Deut 23:17–18; Day 2010, 214–215; Moon 2018, 88; Routledge 2020, 34). Others, like Gruber (2017, 217–226) or Goldingay (2021, n.p.) have doubted the presence of cultic

prostitution in Hosea's time. Apart from thin historical evidence (pp. 217–219), Gruber states that neither semantics nor the context of the above-mentioned passages justifies a translation of שְׂדֵימָה as "temple prostitute" instead of the plain "prostitute" (pp. 220–226). Arguing in a similar direction, Goldingay (2021, n.p.) suggests that the term שְׂדֵימָה ("prostitute") in 4:14 could be understood as a defamatory term for the religious personnel without suggesting organized temple prostitution. In my view, it is possible that there was cultic prostitution in Ancient Israel; however, the evidence is not sufficiently convincing for this. Still, while Hosea 4:14 is no proof of organised temple prostitution, it seems hard to deny any allusion to sexual behaviour in the heavily sexualised language of the prophet (Hwang 2021, 27).

3.2.3 Baal

The terms Baal or Baalim appear seven times in the Book of Hosea and remain the only possible explicit reference to a Canaanite deity by the prophet (2:13; 17; McConville 2012, n.p.; Day 2010, 204). The use of "Baal" in Hosea remains somewhat ambiguous. The Hebrew בַּעַל literally means "husband" or "owner," but it is used in the ANE and the OT to refer to certain deities (Gesenius 2013, 162; Barrett 2012, s.v. Idols, Idolatry, Gods). The archaeological evidence of the Samarian Ostraca demonstrates that personal names that include the name of Baal were widespread among Israelites at the time of Hosea (Hubler 2020, 612; Day 2010, 207).

In the interpretation of Hosea, there are three general proposals regarding the understanding of references to "Baal". Firstly, the term has been ascribed to Baal-Hadad, the Canaanite storm god that is introduced by the Ugarit (Day 2010, 205; Gisin 2014, 31). This is the "Baal" whose worship was established by Ahab (1 Kgs 16:31), "wiped out" by Jehu (2 Kgs 10:28), and might have come again later (Hadley 1997, 4:424). It seems that some of the characteristics of Baal-Hadad are like Hosea's references. As the supposed lord over rain and weather, Baal-Hadad is understood to be a fertility god, which made his worship particularly attractive in the agricultural environment (Hadley 1997, 4:422; Butler 2016, n.p.). The Baal of Hosea Chapter 2 therefore "agrees perfectly with what we know about Baal from the Ugaritic texts" as the source of agricultural things (Hos 2:5, 8; Day 2010, 205). Additionally, Hosea 7:14 seems to refer to a "Baalistic mourning rite" including self-harm that is evident both in the Ugarit and ascribed to the cult of Baal in 1 Kings 18:28 (Day 2010, 206).

A problem for this interpretation seems to be the plural forms "Baalim" in Hosea (2:13, 17; 11:2). Day (2010, 206) argues for "different local manifestations of the one god Baal." Others, representing the second interpretation, have taken these plurals as references to different deities under the epithet "Baalim" (e.g., Hwang 2021, 25–26; McConville 2012, n.p.). Rather than presenting a personal name, this would make "Baalim" somehow synonymous with Hosea's use of עֲצָבִים (idols) as an umbrella term for different Canaanite deities (e.g., 4:17, 8:4; Hadley 1997, 4:425). Most advocates of this interpretation see proof of syncretistic worship of YHWH in Hosea as "one ba'al among others," especially in the light of 2:18 (McConville 2012, n.p.; cf. Routledge 2020, 34; Hubler 2020; Fretheim 2013, 11). A third interpretation is the understanding of the Baalim as "political overlords," which seems to be supported by the equating of "lovers" with political partners in 8:9–10 (Lim 2015, 50).

Hosea's use of "Baal" does not seem to allow absolute clarity in interpretation, especially as it is part of a large framework of debates over the precise nature of worship and idolatry in Ancient Israel. Since, however, many references to Baal are part of the pericopes studied in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis (2:10; 2:16; 11:2), it seems helpful to state my understanding of the term. In my view, it is best to acknowledge the complexity of the religious context of Hosea by assuming that the proposed interpretations are not mutually exclusive (Caroll 2008, pos. 1619–1624). As suggested by several allusions in the Book of Hosea, it seems likely that Baal-Hadad was a central deity in the Israelite cult of the time (although not the only one). Hosea might have deliberately chosen to use the term "Baal" to provoke association with Baal-Hadad; however, in some places he might have referred more generally to idolatrous practices. It also seems likely that these idol worshipers included YHWH in their "syncretistic tapestry" (Fretheim 2013, 29). Furthermore, there is a possibility that Hosea referred to the religious implications of political alliances with his use of the term "Baal" (e.g., 2:13). However, there does not seem to be enough evidence that he denoted political rulers as "Baalim," since his primary use of the term remains in the context of idolatry and worship.

4. Literary Context

4.1 *Literary characteristics*

In the history of biblical interpretation, the Hebrew text of the Book of Hosea has often been considered one of the most difficult in the Old Testament (Dearman 2010, 14; Macintosh 1997, liii; Routledge 2020, 42). One indicator of these difficulties in interpretation is the high number of discrepancies between the MT and the LXX versions of Hosea. It seems probable that the translators of the LXX were challenged with the language and style of the prophet which resulted in somewhat imprecise renderings in some places (Hwang 2021, 48; Macintosh 1997, lxxvii).

The challenges of the Book of Hosea are numerous. Hosea is the only OT Prophet that is written in a northern Hebrew dialect (Hwang 2021, 46). He makes use of rare vocabulary and about 31 *hapax legomena* can be counted in the MT (Moon 2018, 19). The text regularly features an elliptical style, unusual syntax, and alternative grammatical forms (Caroll 2008, pos. 1541–1544; Butler 2016, n.p.). In terms of literary characteristics, the Book of Hosea also stands out in the Tanach due to its poetic nature. According to Goldingay (2021, 23), Hosea is one of the "three premier poets of the First Testament" along with the authors of Job and the Song of Songs. The main reason for this is Hosea's extensive use of metaphors and similes. With a greater frequency than any other prophet of the Old Testament, Hosea presents a plethora of metaphors that illustrate God, Israel, and the relationship between the two (Dearman 2010, 14). According to Willis (2019, 167), four metaphors occupy a central position in the Book of Hosea to describe YHWH and Israel: (1) husband and wife (1:2–3:5), (2) father and children (11:1), (3) vinedresser and vineyard (10:1), and (4) doctor and patient (7:1; 11:3). Other metaphors and similes include imagery from the realm of animals (moth and dry rot—5:12; lion—5:14; 13:7) and natural phenomena (rain—6:3; dew—14:6; Ben Zvi 2008, 51; Goldingay 2021, 24). The metaphoric language is meant to shock the audience about the reality of sin and judgement as well as to encourage them to repent in the light of God's gracious character (Caroll 2008, pos. 1567–1569).

Various other stylistic devices further shape the poetic character of the Book of Hosea. Wordplays are found throughout the book such as with the word שׁוּב (“return”). The term is primarily used to describe human repentance and a return to God (e.g., 3:5; 5:4). In some places, however, Hosea uses the term to describe God’s likely action in the case of genuine repentance (e.g., “my anger has turned back from them” —14:5) or lack of repentance (e.g., “I will take again my grain” —2:11; Routledge 2020, 43–44).

As another literary feature, unpredictable changes of grammatical persons are used to separate portions of the text and to emphasise "a chasm growing between God and his people" (e.g., 5:1–6; Hwang 2021, 54). Finally, Hosea has a high proportion of allusions to prior history that serve to illuminate aspects of the present or likely future status of Israel (Dearman 2010, 14–16). These allusions include references to Jacob and Esau (12:4–5) or Israel in Egypt and the wilderness (e.g., 9:10; 11:1).

4.2 The structure of Hosea

Before turning to my proposed outline of the book, a few remarks on the structure of Hosea must be made. Except for the division between Hosea 1–3 and 4–14, it is difficult to establish certainty about subdivisions or a literary structure for Hosea. Only seldom are words or phrases found that indicate a transition to or the introduction of a new oracle (Hwang 2021, 57; Routledge 2020, 43). Often it seems that one theme flows into another with frequent shifts between the two (Dearman 2010, 18; Goldingay 2021, 28). Against this background, my suggestions on structure are to be understood as tentative. Unless a decision on structural questions is critical for the understanding of a passage regarding repentance (e.g., 5:15–6:6), I will not attach too much importance to the divisions of sections in exegetical discussions.

Biblical scholars generally agree on a twofold division of the book due to the biographical nature of Hosea 1–3 and the different character of Hosea 4–14 (e.g., Butler 2016, n.p.; Gruber 2017, 7; Hwang 2021, 61–66; Kruger 1997, 4:710). Many theologians agree on further dividing the second part (Hos 4–14) into two subsections 4:1–11:11 and 11:12–14:9 due to the recurring cycles of judgement and restoration (Ben Zvi 2005, 4; Egelkraut 2017, 1055; Gisin

2014, 56–57; Lim 2015, 19). Other than that, proposed structures by scholars often differ fundamentally due to the above-mentioned interpretative difficulties.

The following outline has been influenced by Ben Zvi (2005, 4), Carroll (2008, pos. 1707–1753), Hwang (2021, 61–66) and Dearman (2010, 18–19):

The Structure of Hosea

1:1 Superscription

1:2–3:5 Hosea's Marriage: A Picture for YHWH's Covenant with Israel

1:2–2:3 Marriage and Children

1:2–1:9 Judgement

2:1–3 Reversal of Judgement

2:4–2:25 Adultery, Idolatry, and a New Betrothal

2:4–7 The Reason for Judgement: Infidelity

2:8–10 Barring the way

2:11–15 Taking away prosperity and celebrations

2:16–25 Cleansing, courtship, and a new betrothal

3:1–5 Reestablishment of Marriage and Restoration of Israel

4:1–11:11 Judgement Oracles with an Outlook on Restoration I

4:1–7:16 Israel's corrupted condition

4:1–4:3 Introductory accusations

4:4–11 Against the priests

4:12–19 Harlotry and Idolatry

5:1–7 A shallow return is insufficient

5:8–6:3 From false sources of help to trust in YHWH

6:4–7:2 Covenant faithfulness versus infidelity

7:3–16 The Pitfalls of wrong Political Alliances

8:1–9:9 Israel's sin and exile

8:1–14 Israel has forgotten YHWH

9:1–9 Do not rejoice in the face of impending judgement

9:10–11:11 Metaphors of Election and Rebellion

9:10–17 Grapes in the wilderness

10:1–8 The luxuriant vine

10:9–15 Agricultural imagery and the call to righteousness

11:1–11 God's love for a wayward son

12:1–14:9 Judgement Oracles with an Outlook on Restoration II**12:1–14:1 Israel's Disobedience reflected in Salvation History**

12:1–9 Israel: Descendant of Jacob

12:10–15 God of the Exodus

13:1–6 Israel's idolatry in the time of the Exodus

13:7–14:1 Destruction as God's answer to Israel's idolatry

14:2–14:9 Repentance and Restoration

14:10 Conclusion of the Book

5. Theological Context*5.1 Covenant and **קָוָה***

Although mentioned explicitly only in 6:7 and 8:1 (בְּרִית), it is clear that the concept of covenant is central to the Book of Hosea (Caroll 2008, pos. 1600–1602). The message of the prophet can only be understood against the background of the covenantal relationship between the Lord and his people (McConville 2012, n.p.). The covenantal relationship between God and Israel is one of mutual obligations, expressed especially through the concept of **קָוָה** (McConville 2012, n.p.; Moon 2018, 21;). The Hebrew term

אֱמֻנָה is used more frequently in Hosea than in any other Prophetic Book (e.g., 4:1; 6:6; 10:12; Routledge 2020, 48). אֱמֻנָה is closely related to the concepts of kindness and mercy, by which one approaches a person with benevolence (Routledge 2009, 19). This is the reason some translations render the term primarily by "kindness" (NIV) or "mercy" (KJV1900). While this is an important aspect, אֱמֻנָה essentially describes a person's enduring loyalty to a relationship or covenant (Baer and Gordon 1997, 2:213; Nettelhorst 2014). It is this commitment to faithfulness that is then reflected in concrete acts of love or compassion towards the other (Routledge p. 19). אֱמֻנָה therefore is a key aspect of the covenantal relationship and is expected from both parties (Baer and Gordon 1997, 2:213).

The prophet Hosea presents a dramatic contrast in the theme of אֱמֻנָה. While God remains faithful to his promises, the people of Israel fail to live up to the covenantal obligations in their infidelity (Nogalski 2011, 29). אֱמֻנָה is most explicitly ascribed to the Lord in Hosea 2:21. More often, however, the אֱמֻנָה of God is demonstrated implicitly in metaphors or historical allusions. Hosea recounts the "covenant faithfulness" of YHWH in (1) the time of the patriarchs (12:4–6), (2) Israel's deliverance from Egypt (11:1–2; 12:10), (3) the wandering through the desert (9:10; 13:4–5), and (4) divine grace even in the face of Israel's idolatry (11:2; House 2012, 352; Hwang 2021, 35–36). In the same way, אֱמֻנָה is deeply reflected in the prophetic metaphor of marriage, to which we will now turn.

5.2 Marriage Metaphor

5.2.1 Meaning of the Metaphor

The marriage of Hosea is the dominant theme in the first three chapters of Hosea and remains in the background for the rest of the book. Although the marriage picture appears also in other parts of the Old Testament (Jer 2; Ezek 16), it is particularly prominent in the Book of Hosea (Hwang 2021, 53). Moreover, Hosea was presumably the first in chronological terms to present such an explicit connection between human marriage and God's covenant with Israel (Dearman 2010, 36).

The prophet's obedience to the divine call to marry a "wife of whoredom" is denoted as the beginning of his ministry (1:2–3). The interpretation of this prophetic sign-act is

made clear upfront: "because the land commits great whoredom forsaking Yahweh" (v. 2). The marriage of Hosea is the "metaphorical vehicle" to illuminate the covenant relationship of YHWH with his people (Dearman 2010, 14; cf. Kruger 1997, 4:712). The ideal union between husband and wife in marriage is one of mutual devotion, esteem, and loyalty, and these are the qualities that the Lord expects in his relationship with his chosen people (Barrett 2011, 5). In the way a wife betrays her husband and their marriage covenant with acts of whoredom, so have the people of Israel failed the Lord by their idolatry and sin.

The metaphor of infidelity within marriage conveys two levels of meaning. Firstly, there is an emotional attachment in the metaphor. Hosea was to "love a woman who has a lover" (3:1; italics added). The prophet had to be emotionally involved in a marriage with a woman with whom he built a household of at least three children (Butler 2016, n.p.). The tragedy and disappointment that came with the breach of trust in Hosea's marriage reflected the tender pain that the Lord felt over the rebellion of his people (Hwang 2021, 45). The second dimension of the metaphor is one of hierarchal relationships and "gender roles" which is potentially even more prominent in the ancient mind (Ben Zvi 2008, 47). In a marriage, the husband was to be the source of authority, protection and provision and it was the wife's purpose to submit to this role (Goldingay 2021, 26). Israel's failure to give God this exclusive position therefore is a disregard of their covenantal vocation and a dishonour to their husband YHWH (2:7).

Like their mother, the children of Hosea become part of his message in his confrontation of Israel's sin ("children of whoredom," 2:6). Their names are connected to the announcement of divine judgement: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhama ("No more mercy") and Lo-Ammi ("not my people"; 1:4–9; Egelkraut 2017, 1061). But the household of the prophet does not remain an image only for Israel's apostasy and YHWH's judgement but turns into a prophetic picture of divine restoration (House 2012, 350). The renewed names of the children represent God's withdrawal from judgement: Ammi ("my people") and Ruhama ("mercy"; 2:3). In the same way, the Lord announces the restoration of his bride Israel (ch. 2). After a time of chastisement (2:8–15), he will bring her back to himself (vv. 16–25), including courtship (v. 16), cleansing (v. 17), and a new betrothal (vv. 21–22.; Kruger 1997, 4:713). As will be discussed in the next chapter, it seems likely that Hosea was to restore his wife Gomer to himself and

thereby represent the promises of divine restoration (3:1). The marriage metaphor presents God's דָּוָה love and faithfulness deeply and intimately, and reveals the Lord's voluntary vulnerability towards his people (Fretheim 2013, 13). Despite the pain of a betrayed husband, his covenant faithfulness is expressed in deeds of compassion and restoration (Butler 2016, n.p.).

5.2.2 Problem: The "wife of whoredom"

The scholarly discourse on the marriage imagery of Hosea 1–3 traditionally has been accompanied by debates, and a central discussion has evolved around the exact meaning of Gomer being a "wife of whoredom" (1:2). One group of scholars understands the phrase as an indication that Gomer has been involved in explicit adulterous behaviour *before* marriage, possibly even in the context of organised prostitution (Caroll 2008, pos. 1880–1890; Egelkraut 2017, 2059; Gisin 2014, 82–83). Wolff (in Ben Zvi 2005, 58) argues that Gomer participated in a rather widespread Canaanite fertility rite including defloration, while House (2012, 350) understands her as a temple prostitute for Baal. The second major group of scholars holds the proleptic view, which emphasises that Hosea was to foresee the "whoredom" of his wife (Barrett 2011, 6–8; Macintosh 1997, 8; Routledge 2020, 46). They advocate that Gomer might have had adulterous characteristics before, but put these tendencies into practice only *after* her wedding with Hosea. A third reading of the phrase is represented by Stuart (1987, 11–12) who interprets the "whoredom" of Gomer as metaphorical, since she is part of the spiritually adulterous people of Israel.

In my opinion, there are no substantial reasons to neglect the straightforward reading of the text (first view); therefore I assume the promiscuity of Hosea's wife before their marriage. As Egelkraut (2017, 1058) argues, there is no need to "protect" God or Hosea in reducing the scandal in the text.

5.3 Infidelity and Sin

As demonstrated by the marriage imagery in Hosea, the grave sin of Israel is her failure to affirm and act according to her relationship and covenant with YHWH (Kruger 1997, 4:712; McConville 2012, n.p.). Israel has "forgotten" (שָׁכַח) the Lord (2:15; 4:6; 8:4; 13:6), "rebelled" (מָרָה) against him (7:13; 8:1), "went after" (הֵלֵךְ אַחֲרָי) other lovers (2:7;

2:15), and “dealt faithlessly” (בגד) with YHWH (5:7; 6:7). Whereas Amos primarily addresses the social sins of the people, Hosea focuses on their spiritual failure (Egelkraut 2017, 1064). According to him, “There is no knowledge of God (דַעַת אֱלֹהִים) in the land” (4:2), sin (חַטָּאת; 4:8, 8:11) and “corruption” (עָוֹן; 7:1) are increasing and the people have lost their senses (לֵב [lit. heart]; 4:11, 7:11). Generally, the prophet addresses the sins of the community in contrast to individual sins (Castelo 2015, 21). In some places, however, the political and religious leaders are the focus of Hosea’s prophetic critique when they are held accountable for the condition of their nation (e.g., 5:1). The priests are explicitly admonished for their rejection of the Torah and the subsequent spiritual decay (4:4–6; Carroll 2008, pos. 1603); the political leadership is criticized for their godlessness and self-appointed rule (5:10; 7:7; 8:4; McConville 2012, n.p.).

Regarding the infidelity of Israel to her covenantal relationship with YHWH, Hosea emphasises two main interrelated aspects: idolatry and political alliances (Egelkraut 2017, 1063; Moon 2018, 4). It seems right to assume that the root זָנָה (“whoring”), the key term for infidelity in Hosea (22x times in the book), primarily addresses idolatrous practices as it does explicitly in other places of the Old Testament (Exod 13:15–16; Judg 2:17; 8:33; Fretheim 2013, 26; Kruger 1997, 4:711–712). As already presented above, Israel’s cult involved the worship of Baal-Hadad and other gods, sacrifices on the high places (4:12–13; 10:8), worship of calves (8:5–6; 10:5–6; 13:2), divination (4:12) and the celebration of certain festivals (4:13). As introduced by House (2012, 354), “idolatry is the fundamental sin that poisons the covenant relationship” as it denies “Yahweh’s sovereignty in all life’s issues.” Hosea (2:10) identifies the missing thankfulness towards YHWH as the root of idol worship (Egelkraut 2017, 1067–1068).

The second aspect of Israel’s infidelity to YHWH presented in Hosea is Israel’s alliances with Assyria or Egypt (5:13; 7:11; 8:8–9; 10:5–6; 12:1). Firstly, these alliances were an expression of independence from God and demonstrated their trust in human rather than divine protection (5:13; cf. 14:3; Butler 2016, n.p.; Hwang 2021, 28; Nogalski 2011, 30). Secondly, political subjection included religious commitment and further opened the door to idolatrous worship. As Judean king Ahaz’s adoption of Assyrian worship demonstrates (2 Kgs 16:10–16), one may not distinguish too strongly between the political and religious spheres in an Ancient Near Eastern setting since

they are deeply interrelated (McConville 2012, n.p.; Moon 2018, 4). Israel's subjection to Assyria equalled an affirmation of "the Assyrian claim that Assur, the patron god of the Assyrian Empire, and not YHWH, was the most powerful deity in the ancient Near East" (Hwang 2021, 29). Israel's covenant betrayal on the religious and political level not only meant disobedience to the Torah of God (e.g., Exod 20:3; Lev 26:1) but represented shame for the husband YHWH (Fretheim 2013, 26).

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we saw that the Book of Hosea originated in a turbulent time for Ancient Israel. Politically, the Kingdom of Israel was made unstable by its corrupt leadership and the looming threat of the Assyrian empire. Spiritually, the Israelites demonstrated their apostasy from YHWH with impertinent idolatry and worship of Baal. The Book of Hosea is unique in the OT in the way the prophet embodies the message of covenant and infidelity with his marriage and family life (Hosea 1–3). Furthermore, the prophet confronts the sins of the people and calls them to sincere repentance (Hosea 4–14).

In the next two chapters, I will turn to the detailed examination of specific passages referring to repentance. Due to the different characters of the two sections of the book (Hosea 1–3 and 4–14), this discussion is presented in two separate chapters.

Chapter 3: Exegetical Analysis of Chapters 1–3

1. Introduction

The first three chapters of the Book of Hosea are connected by the marriage imagery and therefore are commonly perceived as a structural unit (e.g., Butler 2016, n.p.; Gruber 2017, 7; Hwang 2021, 61–66; Kruger 1997, 4:710). In this chapter, the three most significant pericopes on the theme of repentance will be studied: 2:4–9, 2:16–22 and 3:1–5, and I will make use of the following methodology: (1) preliminary analysis including the presentation of a working translation along with textual discussions, (2) contextual analysis, (3) the analysis of related verse groups, and (4) synthesis of the exegetical findings. The focus of this exegetical study will be on the influencing factors and the nature of Israel’s repentance as presented by Hosea 1–3.

2. Hosea 2:4–9

2.1 Preliminary Analysis

2.1.1 Translation of the text

4 *Contend with your mother, contend—Is she not my wife and I am not her husband?^a—so that she might remove her whoring from her face and her adultery from between her breasts,*
 5 *lest I strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born, make her like the desert, set her like dry land and I let her die of thirst.*
 6 *I will have no compassion on her children because they are children of whoredom.*
 7 *For their mother has whored and she who conceived has acted shamefully because she said: “I will go after my lovers who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”*
 8 *Therefore, look, I will block her way with thornbushes, and I will build a stone wall against her and she will not find her paths.*
 9 *Then she will pursue her lovers and not catch up to them, she will seek and not*

find them. She will say “I will go and return to my first husband because I was better off than I am now.”

1.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (v. 4) *לֹא אִישָׁהּ לֹא אִשְׁתִּי וְאֶנְכִי לֹא אִישָׁהּ* is translated by all major translations as “she is not my wife and I am not her husband” (ESV, cf. NASB, NIV, CSB, LEB). However, as Liang (2009) argues, it seems better to understand this formulation as a rhetoric question. Firstly, Hebrew grammar allows the formulation of a question without the interrogative pronoun *מָה* (Liang p. 6; Hebrew Reference Grammar 2017, 42.2.2.; e.g., 2 Sam 18:29). Such may even be an expression of Hosea’s unique northern style, since the prophet at no other place makes use of the interrogative marker in his work (LHB 2012). Secondly, the context seems to be in favour of a rhetoric question, making the phrase part of the reasoning why the wife should put an end to her infidelity.

b. (v. 4) The *waw*+jussive clause *וְיָתַר* is subordinated to the preceding imperative *יָבֹן* (“contend”) and therefore best translated: “so that she might remove” (NET Bible notes, 2:4).

2.2 Contextual Analysis

Verses 4–9 are part of the pericope of Hosea 2:4–25 (e.g., Ben Zvi 2005, 61–62; Hwang 2021, 95). This section builds on the foundation of 1:2–2:3 (Marriage and Children) and resembles its twofold structure of judgement (1:2–9; 2:4–15) and restoration (2:1–3; 2:16–25; Dearman 2010, 67; Lim 2015, 48; Routledge 2020, 52; Gisin 2014, 109). The pericope of 2:4–25 continuously changes the focus between the actions of God and the (expected) actions of “Lady Israel.” In this sequence, different conjunctions (“Lest” (*פֶּן*); “because” (*כִּי*); “therefore” (*לְכֵן*)) mark the change of perspective and frame the actions of God as a comprehensible and logical reaction to Israel’s rebellion (Goldingay 2021, n.p.; Hwang 2021, 105–106; Nogalski 2011, 49–50):

2:4–15 Judgement

<u>Lady Israel</u>	<u>Husband YHWH</u>
v. 4 YHWH calling Lady Israel to action (repentance)	v. 5 "Lest" (פֶּן): Divine judgement
vv. 6–7 3x "because" (כִּי): Reason for judgement (woman pursuing lovers for provision)	v. 8 "therefore" (לָכֵן): Divine judgement on woman's pursuit
v. 9 Reaction: Return	
v. 10 (Repetition): Woman's twisted understanding of provision	vv. 11–15 "therefore" (לָכֵן): Divine judgement on provision

2:16–25 Restoration

	vv. 16–17a "therefore" (לָכֵן): Divine action (courtship)
vv. 17b–18 Response in repentance	v. 19 Cleansing vv. 20–25 Restoration

In the following, I will examine the first of these two sections revolving around judgement. Since verses 11–15 do not refer to the topic of repentance, they are omitted in the following in-depth analysis.

2.3 Verse Analysis

4 Contend with your mother, contend—Is she not my wife and I am not her husband?—so that she might remove her whoring from her face and her adultery from between her breasts,

The passage is introduced with an imperative address to the children to "contend" (רִיבוּ) with their mother. Scholars like Nogalski (2011, 51) have highlighted the legal undertone of the passage (cf. use of רִיב in Judg 21:22; 1 Sam 24:15); however, this

may not be overemphasised in the light of its primary family setting (Hwang 2021, 101). The commanded quarrel of the children with their mother has one objective: "so that she might remove her whoring ... and her adultery." The combination of the imperative (רִיבוּ; "contend") and the subordinate jussive clause (כִּי־תִסְרֶה; "so that she might remove") emphasises the sense of urgency in this call to renewal: "Lady Israel" must change (NET Bible notes, 2:4). Where does this urgency stem from? The answer is found in the interpolated rhetorical question and the implicit answer: "she is my wife, and I am her husband." Covenant faithfulness presents the foundation of YHWH's demand for Israel's repentance and change.

Possibly, the woman's "whoring from her face" may allude to a certain veil worn by a prostitute to cover her face, and the "adultery from between her breasts" could refer to ornaments resembling the fertility goddess Asherah (Gisin 2014, 115). Whatever the potential real-world allusions, it can be said with certainty that the metaphorical meaning of "whoring" (זְנוּנוּיָהָ) and "adultery" (נִאֲפוּפָיָהָ) stands for idolatrous worship as it does in the rest of Hosea (Fretheim 2013, 28; Gruber 2017, 112; Routledge 2020, 65). The plural forms of both words are best understood as references to habitual behaviour (Gruber p. 211; Macintosh 1997, 39; cf. Hos 1:2). Israel has not merely betrayed her husband YHWH once but has developed a lifestyle of infidelity—a lifestyle from which the people are to repent with urgency. As the verb סָרַח ("remove") suggests, part of this renewal must be the practical removal of the physical expressions of idolatry (i.e., figurines, and so on).

5 lest I strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born, make her like the desert, set her like dry land and I let her die of thirst. 6. I will have no compassion on her children because they are children of whoredom.

Connected by a כִּי־לֹא ("lest") clause to the previous verse, the pronounced judgement is presented as avoidable through a return to YHWH (Dearman 2010, 69). Therefore, this judgement on the people and the land remains an "undesirable alternative" to Israel's repentance (Hwang 2021, 103). The pronouncements of judgement include public humiliation ("strip her naked"; "expose"), deprivation of provision ("die of thirst") and consequences for the physical land ("desert"; "dry land"; Moon 2018, 53; Routledge

2020, 65). It seems reasonable to perceive these statements as references to exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria (Dearman p. 69; Nogalski 2011, 52).

7 For their mother has whored and she who conceived has acted shamefully because she said: "I will go after my lovers who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink."

The honour-shame dynamic continues in verse 7: the woman has "whored" (זונה) and "acted shamefully" (בוש) towards her husband. The infidelity of "Lady Israel" not only violates the marriage covenant with her husband but also violates his honour (Goldingay 2021, 2:7). In an ANE marriage, the man had the central task of providing for his wife and family (Lim 2015, 49). Taking this role away from him was not only an expression of distrust but also a disgrace for the man. Instead of following YHWH, Israel has searched for provision among other partners. Who then are the metaphoric "lovers" (מְאַהֲבָי) of Israel? As has been discussed in the last chapter (2.5.3), both idolatry and political alliances are expressions of infidelity in the Book of Hosea. While political overlords present an option for the meaning of "lovers" in this verse (Lim 2015, 50), the list of agricultural things seems to speak for a reference to Canaanite deities who promised fertility (Routledge 2020, 66; Carroll 2008, pos. 2104–2105; Nogalski 2011, 53). In worshipping these idols, Israel expected sustenance and provision and betrayed their faithful provider YHWH (Gisin 2014, 120).

8 Therefore, look, I will block her way with thornbushes, and I will build a stone wall against her and she will not find her paths. 9 Then she will pursue her lovers and not catch up to them, she will seek and not find them. She will say "I will go and return to my first husband because I was better off than I am now."

Israel's infidelity leads YHWH to take action ("therefore," לָכֵן) against her and he begins to confine her movements. The paths she had taken before—probably symbolising moral decisions and the practical paths to her cultic places—can no longer be continued (Goldingay 2021, 2:8; Macintosh 1997, 51). Disorientation and despair are the results. The "thornbushes" and the "stone wall" indicate times of restraint for Israel and could even be an allusion to the siege of Samaria (Dearman 2010, 70; Lim 2015, 50).

It becomes evident that the Lord knows exactly what will follow this form of judgement. "Then" (waw consecutivum) Israel will seek its lovers (= idols, places of idolatry), but their search will be impeded. The Pi'el form of פָּרַד ("pursue") and בָּקַשׁ ("seek", always in the Pi'el) emphasise the fervency of the pursuit, a pursuit that ends in frustration (Macintosh 1997, 52). As the futility of idolatry will have become apparent, Israel will realize the way she was "better off" with her first husband YHWH (probably an allusion to the wilderness period, cf. 11:1–3) and her need to come back to him (p. 53). This "return" (שׁוּב) is the objective of YHWH's chastisement of his people (Caroll 2008, pos. 2113–2114; Hwang 2021, 106). The use of the phrase "seek (בָּקַשׁ) and not find (מָצָא) them" presents an interesting parallel to Deuteronomy 4:28–29 (Gisin 2014, 122). Referring to repentance as a reaction to discipline and exile due to idolatry, the Lord declares: "there you shall seek (בָּקַשׁ) Yahweh your God and will find (מָצָא) him" (v. 29; Boda 2015, 149).

Regarding the sincerity of the woman's return, theological scholarship seems divided. While some recognise serious repentance in her return at least in part (Caroll 2008, pos. 2113–2116; Gruber 2018, 125; Routledge 2020, 67), most are convinced that her alleged return is not authentic (e.g., Ben Zvi 2005, 62; Goldingay 2021; Lim 2015, 50; Nogalski 2011, 53). Advocates of this second approach base their interpretation on two main arguments. Firstly, many see verse 10 as the chronological next event after verse 9 and therefore the following statement ["And she did not recognise"] as evidence of a superficial, insufficient repentance without divine revelation (Ben Zvi 2005, 62; Gisin 2014, 123–124; Lim 2015, 50). Secondly, they argue that the woman (= Israel) repents only for selfish motives ("because I was better off than I am now") rather than a genuine change of heart (Hwang 2021, 106; Lim 2015, 50; Nogalski 2011, 53).

Even though this is the less popular view, I think it is better to understand verse 9 as some form of genuine repentance, or at least as a view on it (Routledge 2020, 67). This is for the following reasons. Firstly, it seems better to see the sections of verses 8–9 and 10–15 as interdependent but distinct in meaning. As already stated, לְכֵן, "therefore") appears as the structuring element in Hosea 2 (Lim 2015, 51). Verse 7 here explains the basic problem and reason for judgment: the woman follows her lovers (= idols) for provision. While verses 8–9 emphasise judgement on the first

aspect (restriction of pursuit), verses 10–15 emphasise the second aspect (judgement on provision). Verse 10 here serves as a reiteration of the second aspect and verses 11–15 as God's response (לְיָי) in the form of judgment. Rather than being chronological, it seems better to consider 8–9 and 10–15 as being parallel.

Secondly, the theme of restriction is repeated in 3:1–5 (v. 4: “without a king and without a prince”) where it is followed by sincere repentance (3:5; Fretheim 2013, 36; Carroll 2008, pos. 2282–2289). Through his acts of judgement, YHWH leads Israel “to the point she is amenable to reason” (Macintosh 1997, 70). In this position, he can woo her back and restore her as his bride (vv. 16–25). Thirdly, the “selfish” notion of verse 9 does make repentance impossible. In Jesus's parable of the prodigal son, the same motivation for returning is mentioned (Luke 15:17) and remains uncorrected. As will be seen in the rest of the book, the words “because I was better off than I am now” certainly do not depict the entire process of repentance. In my view, however, it seems reasonable to assume that this verse depicts a potential initiation of this process and thereby provides a first glimpse into “the possibility of a restored relationship” (Routledge 2020, 67 on the use of שׁוּב in this verse). Whereas other passages in the Book of Hosea further illuminate the process of pious repentance, 2:8–9 emphasises the provoking of repentance through judgement.

2.4. Exegetical Synthesis

The section consisting of 2:4–9 presents interesting insights on the topic of repentance. It is important to note that the entire pericope (2:4–25) is introduced with a call to “remove” idolatry and to return to YHWH (v. 4). This demonstrates that God's primary goal is not to punish his people but to lead them to repentance (Moon 2018, 59). This call to return is an expression of his רַחֲמֵי grace to avert his judgment (Hwang 2021, 103). YHWH calls Israel back to purity and the full embrace of their covenant relationship (“Is she not my wife and am I not her husband?”). It is only the resistance to this repentance that necessitates further drastic chastisement (vv. 5–15; Moon p. 60).

This is for one reason only: some distress can lead to repentance. Against the more prevalent interpretation of this passage, I have argued that verses 8–9 illuminate the cause-and-effect relationship of judgement and repentance. In this context, I am not

claiming that verse 9 depicts the complete process of repentance, but rather its potential beginning. Apparently, humans in their sinful nature sometimes need a revelation and confession of their distress ("I was better off than I am now") before they can genuinely enter the process of repentance. Even though this can be understood as a base motive, it seems that full repentance can flow from this realization of forfeited blessing (cf. Luke 15:17–25). With his acts of chastisement and restrictions, the Lord can lead people to recognise their dependence on him, which then can be followed up with a loving call to repentance (vv. 16–17; Gruber 2017, 125; Macintosh 1997, 70).

3. Hosea 2:16–22

3.1 Preliminary Analysis

3.1.1 Translation of the text

16 Therefore, look, I will allure her and lead her into the desert, and I will speak tenderly to her.

17 I will give her her vineyards from there and make^a the “valley of trouble”^b a “gateway of hope.” There she will respond^c as [she did] in the days of her youth and as in the day she came up from the land of Egypt.

18 It will be on that day—a declaration of YHWH—you will call me “My husband” and no longer call me “My Baal.”

19 I will remove the names of the Baalim from her mouth, and no longer will their names be invoked.

20 I will make a covenant with them on that day with the animals of the field, with the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. I will abolish from the land the bow, the sword and war, and I will make you lie down in safety.

21 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness, justice, loyal love and mercy.

22 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you will know YHWH.

3.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (v. 17) In the combination with an accusative $\text{נָתַן} + \text{לְ}$, is best translated as “make” (Grisanti 1997, 3:209; cf. Gruber 2017, 142).

b. (v. 17) “valley of trouble”: Achor (= trouble) is a reference to the valley near Jericho which received its name after incidents around the sin and judgement of Achan (Josh 7; LBD, Achor), but at the same time presents a wordplay in contrasting “trouble” and “hope” (Nogalski 2011, 56). To make this wordplay understandable to the English reader, the proper name is translated here (cf. NET Bible Notes, 2:17).

c. (v. 17) Some have understood עָנָה as the same lexeme (“singing”) as in Exodus 15:21 or Numbers 21:17 (SLT, NET, Gruber 2017, 147). However, it seems better to assume the meaning of the much more frequent lexeme עָנָה (“answer” or “respond”) for the word in this context (Beck 1997, 3:453; e.g., NIV, ESV, LEB). Since עָנָה in the following verses (23–24) appears five times rather unambiguously in the lexeme “answer,” it seems likely that עָנָה in verse 17 has the same meaning (Gisin 2014, 146–147; Macintosh 1997, 73).

3.2 Contextual Analysis

The structure of 2:4–25 has already been discussed in the previous section. The segmentation of 2:16–25 into a subsection of 2:4–25 is grounded in the thematic change and the use of the phrase נְאֻם־יְהוָה "declaration of Yahweh" (v. 15; Ben Zvi 2005, 64). The metaphor of marriage is continued but takes another direction. The third לִכְן (v. 16) introduces YHWH's courtship of Israel, verses 17b–18 Israel's answer to such and verse 19 the related cleansing. Whereas verses 20–22 seem to include important aspects of restoration regarding repentance, verses 23–25 appear less important for this topic and are therefore omitted in this analysis.

3.3 Verse Analysis

16 Therefore, look, I will allure her and lead her into the desert, and I will speak tenderly to her.

As already explained, the word לִכְן ("therefore") normally introduces an announcement of judgment (Macintosh 1997, 50). In this instance, however, the use of the term is to be understood as slightly ironic (Gruber 2017, 141). לִכְן again initiates God's action, but this time to undo the effects of judgment and to heal the destroyed relationship with his people (Hwang 2021, 111). In doing so, YHWH makes five promises of what

he will do in the "immediate or near future" (NET Bible Notes; 2:16): (1) he will court Israel, (2) lead her into the wilderness, (3) speak to her heart, (4) restore her vineyards, and (5) renew the "valley of trouble" (Nogalski 2011, 56; Routledge 2020, 69–70). Whereas the first three actions aim to reach the hearts of his people by communication, the following two are expressions of restoration.

The word הִנֵּה ("look!") emphasises the change in perspective and focuses on God as the agent of these events (Gisin 2014, 142; Routledge 2020, 70). The use of פָּתָה ("allure") in this passage is intriguing. The term denotes the seducing or persuasion of a person and tends to have a negative connotation (e.g., Deut 11:16; 2 Sam 3:25; 1 Kgs 22:20; Gesenius 2013, 1090; Pan 1997, 3:715). Sometimes, פָּתָה describes the interaction between man and woman (Exod 22:15; Judg 14:15; 16:15) and this is how the term should be understood here with a more positive notion (Lim 2015, 51; Macintosh 1997, 69). The use of פָּתָה underlines the intensity of YHWH's courtship of his wife, and his "commitment to doing whatever is needed to restore his relationship with Israel" (Routledge 2020, 71; cf. Gisin 2014, 144).

YHWH chooses the desert (מִדְבָּר) as the place for his renewal of relationship (Routledge 2020,71). As he once led his people into covenant and encounter with him there, so the desert represents the rebirth of this relationship (Gisin 2014, 143–144). The desert is a place of total dependence on God, where the Israelites were to learn to follow God in the pillar of fire and cloud (Exod 13:21–22) and to receive any provision directly from him (Exod 16; Moon 2018, 62). At the same time, the desert represents a place of intimacy and love relationships (Song 3:6; 8:5; Macintosh 1997, 70). Released from slavery, all of Israel's "devotion (הֶקְדָּד) of [her] youth" and "her love as a bride" belonged to the Lord (Jer 2:2 ESV). With a sense of moral and spiritual purity, the idealized time in the wilderness becomes the first honeymoon and therefore the role model for the second (Gruber 2017, 141; Moon 2018, 63). Without political or cultic distractions, separated from her lovers, Israel may once again give all her attention to the voice of her husband (Fretheim 2013, 31; Macintosh 1997, 75).

In the drought of the desert, God makes Israel alive through his word (cf. Deut 8:3). This is emphasised by the play on words as in the wilderness (מִדְבָּר) the Lord will

speak (דִּבֶּר) to Israel (Hwang 2021, 111). The phrase וְדִבַּרְתִּי עַל-לִבָּהּ literally means "I will speak to her heart" and describes "jemandem freundlich, tröstend, liebevoll zureden" (talk to someone kindly, comfortingly, lovingly; Gesenius 2013, 591). Like פתה, the phrase is often used to denote the communication between a man and a woman (e.g., Gen 34:3; Ruth 2:13; Macintosh 1997, 69). For Hosea 2:16, it seems that the appearance of the phrase in Judges 19:3 is especially interesting as a husband seeks to bring back (שׁוּב) his wife from her unfaithfulness (זְנוּה). The phrase "speaking to one's heart" conveys two main aspects: "consolation" and "gentle persuasion" (Luc 1997, 3:752; cf. Goldingay 2021, 2:16). On these two levels, encouragement and correction, the Lord seeks to change the hearts of his people and bring forth a sincere response (Deut 30:6; Gisin 2014, 144). In Hebrew thought, the heart (לֵב) describes the "centre of human psychical and spiritual life" (Luc 1997, 3:749). In an atmosphere of intimacy and trust, YHWH appeals to Israel's heart in order to encourage a voluntary repentance and dedication (i.e., תְּשׁוּבָה) towards him (Fretheim 2013, 31; Routledge 2020, 71).

17 I will give her her vineyards from there and make the "valley of trouble" a "gateway of hope." There she will respond as [she did] in the days of her youth and as in the day she came up from the land of Egypt.

YHWH announces that he will continue his wooing procedure with gifts in the form of restoration. Vineyards had been part of the Promised Land (Deut 6:11) and their loss was a consequence of disobedience (Hos 2:14, Deut 28:30, 39; Dearman 2010, 75). The latter is also true for the naming of the "valley of Achor (trouble)." As introduced by Joshua 7, Achan brought a curse on the Israelites by his sin (taking the devoted things). He had to be stoned in the valley which lies at the entrance of the Promised Land (Routledge 2020, 71–72). Therefore, the "valley of Achor" in this verse is used as a metaphor for the people's rebellion which entailed "trouble" as they entered the land (Caroll 2008, pos. 2148–2152). With the gifts of the vineyards and the transformation of the valley to a "gateway of hope" into the Promised Land, YHWH announces the reversal of the repercussions of his judgements. Subsequently, YHWH's objective is finally achieved: Israel responds (עָנָה) to the courtship of God. The verb in this context is best understood as "accepting an invitation" and is additionally emphasised with the fourfold repetition of the term in the following verses

23–25 (Dearman 2010, 76; Lim 2015, 53). Hwang (2021, 111) even argues for a second marriage proposal, which the woman accepts at this point. "There" (i.e., the wilderness) in the place of separation, intimacy and dependence, Israel will give a heartfelt response to her husband YHWH, which must be understood as a form of Israel's repentance (Ben Zvi 2005, 291). There is again a reference to the Exodus and YHWH's special relationship with his people. In particular, the night of the Exodus ("the day she came up from the land of Egypt") is identified as a time of trusting and being set apart for the Lord (cf. Jer 2:2–3; Moon 2018, 63). Just as Israel responded to the voice of God and marched out of Egypt, they will respond to the voice of God with renewed trust and dependence on him.

18 It will be on that day—a declaration of YHWH—you will call me “My husband” and no longer call me “My Baal.” 19 I will remove the names of the Baalim from her mouth, and no longer will their names be invoked.

Verse 18 presents the implication of Israel's answer (ענה, v. 17; Goldingay 2021, 2:18). As an expression of repentance, Israel will abandon the title "My Baal" (בַּעַלִי) and again will call YHWH "My husband" (אִישִׁי). Both terms seem to be rather interchangeable to describe a husband in Ancient Hebrew (2 Sam 11:26; Carroll R. 2008, 239; Gruber 2017, 126). Still, two messages may be deduced from this statement. Firstly, it means the rejection of any form of "Religionsvermischung" (religious syncretism; Gisin 2014, 147). The phrase includes a wordplay in the sense that בַּעַל was also used to refer to pagan gods. I have presented my view before (2.2, 2.3) that the term "Baalim" is used in the Book of Hosea to summarize different Canaanite deities. Verse 18 suggests that the focus in this pericope is on the syncretistic aspect of these practices, that is the inclusion of YHWH in idolatrous worship ("call me `My Baal"; Dearman 2010, 76; Fretheim 2013, 2013; Moon 2018, 64). The religious meaning is also supported by the term "calling" (קרא) which is also used for invoking Baal-Hadad (1 Kgs 28:26) or the God of Israel (Deut 4:7; Moon 2018, 64). In the eschatological time, YHWH will no longer be invoked as one among the Canaanite deities. Israel will once again embrace the exclusive worship of YHWH according to his will (Hubler 2020, 611; Hwang 2021, 112).

The second level of interpretation regards the nuances of אִישׁ and בַּעַל in describing a husband. בַּעַל derives from the verb בעל ("rule over" or "marry") and carries an overtone of possession and power (Lim 2015, 51; Koopmans 1997, 1:682). A man can become the בַּעַל of both a woman (Exod 21:22) and cattle (Exod 21:28). The term אִישׁ seems to be rather neutral and focuses more on relational aspects than possession (e.g., Gen 3:6; 16:3). The contrast of אִישׁ and בַּעַל emphasises Israel's renewed covenant relationship with YHWH (Hamilton 1997, 1:389; Hwang 2021, 113). Instead of the subjugation of a master-slave concept evidenced in Canaanite religion, Israel will enjoy her marriage relationship with her husband (Dearman 2010, 76; Fretheim 2013, 31). For Gisin (2014, 148), verse 18 presents the situation of remarriage.

In verse 19, YHWH again appears as the active person: "I will remove the names." After Israel has begun to change her perception of YHWH, he will fully "remove" (סור) any evidence of idolatry (Gisin 2014, 148–149; Macintosh 1997, 81). Although the Lord called on Israel to סור ("remove") her idolatry at the beginning of the section (2:4), he himself will now consummate the process of cleansing.

20 I will make a covenant with them on that day with the animals of the field, with the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. I will abolish from the land the bow, the sword and the war, and I will make you lie down in safety.

The wording of this verse brings to mind not only the account of creation (Gen 1:20–25) but also the Noachic covenant (Gen 9:9–11; Nogalski 2011, 57). The land and its inhabitants will be included in the restoration process; people and animals will experience the peace of God in his covenant with creation (Hwang 2021, 112–113). As in the days of Noah, creation will be spared from judgement.

21 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness, justice, loyal love and mercy. 22 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you will know YHWH.

The promises of restoration and metaphorical remarriage culminate in these verses as the Lord announces a new betrothal with the woman that has been a shame for his household. In its OT use, the Hebrew term אָרַשׁ (betroth) is closely associated with the

price a man must pay for his future wife, usually to her father (e.g., Exod 22:15; Wakely 1997a, 1:527; Dearman 2010, 78). The metaphor does not seem to be focused on the potential recipient of this price but emphasises the immense investment that YHWH is willing to make to purchase his bride. As a bride price, he gives righteousness (צְדָקָה), justice (מִשְׁפָּט), loyal love (דְּוָה), mercy (רַחֲמִים), and faithfulness (אֱמוּנָה), all of which are attributes of his own character (e.g., Exod 34, 6; Ben Zvi 2005, 67; Dearman 2010, 78). Through sin and infidelity, Israel has forfeited these values and needs to regain them (Hos 4:1; 10:12–13; Lim 2015, 53). In restoring these attributes in his people, YHWH will provide everything that is demanded for covenantal relationship and intimacy with him (Hwang 2021, 114; Moon 2018, 65; Wakely 1997a, 1:528–529). Therefore, the restoration of attributes will lead to one final purpose: the knowledge of YHWH (Dearman 2010, 78). In a covenantal relationship with him, Israel will “imitate God” and “mirror God’s attitudes and actions” (Lim 2015, 51).

3.4 Exegetical synthesis

After the call to repentance (2:4) and announcements of judgment with initial signs of repentance (2:4–15), the section 2:16–25 demonstrates the interplay of God's wooing, Israel's repentance and divine restoration. After the strong words of judgement, the subsequent loving way God deals with his people may seem surprising to the reader. Nevertheless, this again emphasises that God's judgement is not an expression of mean vengeance, but of his covenant faithfulness (דְּוָה) seeking to restore the relationship (Caroll 2008, pos. 2142–2143).

As discussed in the last section, 2:9 seems to hint at the beginning of repentance but remains incomplete (Routledge 2020, 70). The completion of this process and renewal of the relationship is introduced with YHWH's wooing in the wilderness (v. 16). The call to repentance requires not only shaking off complacency through judgement but also the spoken Word of God that penetrates the hearts of the people. A central element of repentance is the transformation of the human heart through the divine word that leads to a response (עֲנָה). The hallmark of Israel's answer is a return to her first love and trust, as well as a cleansing of all idols that have been falsely placed on a par with YHWH (vv. 17–19).

When considering this passage, a crucial question arises: Is this a voluntary repentance on Israel's part? Or is reconciliation imposed by YHWH? Fretheim (2013) argues for the latter view: "Remarkably, no repentance or vows on Israel's part are called for or needed" (p. 32), and "God will make this move quite apart from anything Israel says or does" (p. 30). This view is supported by the fact that God is the first agent in the process of wooing Israel (v. 16). It seems that only through this act does YHWH open the door for his people to return to him (Lim 2015, 53; Routledge 2020, 70). At the same time, however, some aspects emphasise Israel's free will in this process of conversion. Firstly, we again encounter the marriage metaphor. The associated themes of fidelity and infidelity demand a degree of voluntary surrender on the part of both partners (Nogalski 2011, 29). Secondly, the notion of an action being voluntary is echoed by the vocabulary of coaxing ("allure," "speak to heart"), aiming to get a freewill "answer" from Lady Israel (Routledge 2020, 71). Thirdly, there is a synergy between Israel's steps of repentance and God's involvement in terms of cleansing (vv. 18–19). Israel itself begins to change its image and worship of YHWH ("you will call me 'My husband,'" v. 18), whereupon YHWH also becomes active ("I will remove," v. 19; Gisin 2014, 148). Even though it was initially Israel's task to remove all idols (2:4; סור), in the end it is YHWH himself who completely removes the Baalim in response to Israel's change of heart (2:19; סור). Furthermore, he restores the covenant with his people and provides the necessary spiritual qualities (vv. 21–22).

Thus, YHWH's action is at the beginning and the end of such repentance. Nevertheless, Israel's step in this process must not be ignored. Though only enabled by God's wooing, Israel must respond from the heart to experience the full restoration of the covenant and be united in new marriage to her husband (cf. Jer 31:31–33; Goldingay 2021, 2:19; Hwang 2021, 111; Routledge 2020, 71). The following discussion on 3:1–5 will shed further light on the interplay of judgement and repentance.

4. Hosea 3:1–5

4.1 Preliminary analysis

4.1.1 Translation of the text

1 *The Lord said to me: "Go again^a, love a woman who has a lover^b and is an adulteress just as the Lord loves the children of Israel but they turn towards other gods and love raisin cakes.*

2 *So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a letech of barley.*

3 *I said to her: "Many days^c you are to dwell as mine. You must not whore and not be another man's and so I will also treat you."^d*

4 *For the children of Israel will dwell many days without a king, without a prince, without sacrifice, without a stone pillar, without ephod and teraphim.*

5 *Afterward, the children of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king^e and they will come trembling^f to YHWH and His goodness at the end of days.*

4.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (v. 1) The grammatical affiliation of עוֹד ("again") is ambiguous and can either be applied to וַיֹּאמֶר ("and he said again"; cf. LEB; NRSV; Hwang 2021) or לָךְ ("go again"; cf. ESV; NIV; NET; CSB). I favour the latter version and thereby understand the phrase as a reference to the לָךְ in Hosea 1:2

b. (v.1) אִשָּׁה בְּרֵעֵהָ, literally: "who is loved by a friend." Here the LEB rendering has been adopted: "who has a lover."

c. (v. 3) וְגַם־אֲנִי אֶלְיָךְ: a nominal sentence that is literally translated as: "so I also towards you." Kessler (2008, 563–571) argues for both a different understanding of גַּם (as a marker of contrast between "another man" and "I") and translates the nominal sentence to "Ich jedoch wende mich dir zu" (I, however, will turn to you). He argues for a time of reunion with the husband parallel to the separation from other lovers. Similar approaches have been taken by Hwang (2021, 123), NIV 1984 and LEB. I have decided to translate the phrase with the more traditional understanding "and so I will also treat you" for two main reasons. This understanding of the phrase seems to

correlate better with the events of the parallel verses 4–5. Here, firstly, a time of chastisement is announced for the Israelites (v. 4) and only afterwards (אַחַר) a time of reconciliation with YHWH (v. 5). Therefore, “the negative particle from the previous clauses ought to carry over to the last phrase” in the assumption that Hosea refrains from sexual activity with the woman (Lim 2015, 56; cf. Gruber 2017, 179; Routledge 2020, 78).

d. (v.5) The BHS (5th ed.), Macintosh (1997, 110–111) and Ramirez (2018, 18–19) argue for a post-editorial addition of the phrases וְאֵת דָּוִד מִלְכָּם and בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים by Judean redactors. However, such assumptions are neither supported by textual evidence, demanded by grammar nor justifiable by the northern origin of the prophet (Dearman 2010, 84; Moon 2018, 69).

e. (v. 5) וַיִּפְתְּחוּ אֶל־יְהוָה, literally: “and they will tremble towards the Lord”.

4.2 Contextual Analysis

The pericope of 3:1–5 is closely linked to Hosea 1 and 2 in terms of content and language (Ben Zvi 2005, 80; Goldingay 2021, n.p.). This relationship is evident in the parallel structure of 1:2–3 (“Go, take a woman”) and 3:1 (“Go, love a woman”; Moon 2018, 69). Additionally, the “again” in 3:1 emphasises this connection between the two passages (Ben Zvi 2005, 78).⁴ But 3:1–5 also shows some differences from Hosea 1. For the first time in the book, the prophet switches to the first person, further emphasising the personal nature of his ministry (Macintosh 1997, 96; Moon 2018, 69). At the same time, the explanation and the sign-act are more closely interwoven than in Hosea 1, and the prophet seamlessly shifts between the two (Hwang 2021, 124).

The pericope of Hosea 3:1–5 also evidences close parallels with Hosea 2:4–25. Some scholars even see the second chapter as “a model for what Hosea is to do with his wife” in the third (Caroll 2008, pos. 2251; cf. Routledge 2020, 77). 3:1–5 revisits the

⁴ As explained in the previous section (a), grammar allows both translations of “He said again to me” or “Go again.” In this way, both versions would allude to the introduction of 1:2–3.

topics of 2:4–25 and gives them an additional perspective: infidelity within marriage (2:4–7 and 3:1), constraint and isolation (2:8–16a and 3:3–4), return and reconciliation (2:16b–25 and 3:5; Ben Zvi 2005, 80; Ramirez 2018, 31). In the same way, 3:4 presents a transition from Hosea 1–3 to Hosea 4–10 regarding the announcement of judgement on political and religious institutions (e.g., 4:6, 5:1, 10:2; Hwang 2021, 121).

Structure of 3:1–5:⁵

3:1a Command

3:1b Explanation

3:2–3 Obedience

3:4 Explanation

3:5 Outcome

Regarding the interrelationship of the first three chapters of Hosea, probably the greatest debate among interpreters has been about the identity of the unnamed woman in Hosea 3:1–5. Is she Gomer and therefore Hosea's wife? Or has Hosea divorced from Gomer (cf. 2:4) and is commanded to "love" another new woman (3:1)? Although the traditional view has been the interpretation of the same woman in Hosea 1–3 (cf. Day 2010, 209), some scholars proposed a second woman in 3:1–5 (e.g., Gisin 2014, 162; Moon 2018, 79; Nogalski 2011, 66; Sweeney 2000, 39). Proponents of this view argue that the author would have mentioned Gomer instead of the cryptical phrase "a woman" if he intended to refer to her (Gisin 2014, 162; Moon 2018, 70). Gisin (2014, 165–166) advocates a parallelism to the transition of generations in the desert after the Exodus (Num 14:22–23). He argues that in the way Hosea will love a new woman, God will make a "Neuanfang" (new start) with a new generation of Israel after the time of judgement is over.

The opinion suggesting a reappearance of Gomer in 3:1–5 is more popular among scholars and has been the traditional view (Day 2010, 209–210; Dearman 2010, 81; Fretheim 2013, 33; Hwang 2021, 125; McConville 2012, n.p.; NET Bible Notes, 3:1;

⁵ This proposal is influenced by Kessler (2008, 566) and Ramirez (2018, 19–20)

Routledge 2020, 76). In their view, the description of the woman in 3:1 suggests an obvious association with Gomer (Caroll 2008, pos. 2256–2257). The command to "love" the woman instead of marrying has been taken as an indication that this woman may already be his wife which is supported by the use of אָנַן suggesting infidelity in an already existing marriage (Hwang 2021, 125; McConville 2012, n.p.). Finally, it is argued that a second woman would contradict the message of Hosea 2 (Day 2010, 209; Hwang 2021, 124; Routledge 2020, 46). If God restores his unfaithful Israel to him as his wife (2:20–22), why would he command Hosea to look for a new woman? It is important to recognize that the text does not give clarity on the identity of the woman in Hosea 1. In my view, however, the arguments that this woman is Gomer are more convincing, especially in the passage's relation to Hosea 2. As Fretheim (2013, 33) states: a woman not Gomer "would break down the imagery" of the previous chapters.

4.3 Verse Analysis

1 The Lord said to me: "Go again, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress just as the Lord loves the children of Israel but they turn towards other gods and love raisin cakes.

As explained in the last section, it seems probable that the sign-act of 3:1 is a continuation of Hosea's story with Gomer. YHWH commands him to "love a woman" which in this context is best understood as a renewal of commitment to his wife including aspects of forgiveness (Macintosh 1997, 97; Routledge 2020, 78). The command becomes challenging in light of the woman's affair with her "lover" (אָנַן, lit.: "friend"). The verb אָנַן describes sexual intimacy with someone other than the marriage partner and is used for the first time here in Hosea (Gesenius 2013, 769; Gruber 2017, 166–167). While the account does not allow certainty on Hosea's biography, it seems justifiable to assume that Gomer moved from general promiscuity outside marriage (הַזְנוּהוּ, 1:2) to adultery (אָנַן) in the marriage with Hosea (Hwang 2021, 125).

The prophet's sign-act quickly moves to explanation. The love that Hosea is to show his wife is meant to reflect the love that the Lord has for his people (Routledge 2020, 77–78). Like Hosea's devotion to his wife, YHWH's love for his people is entirely

unmerited and unreturned. Once again, the woman's infidelity with her lovers stands as an allegory for Israel's love for idols ("other gods"). Instead of YHWH, the people love "raisin cakes," which are to be understood as ironic representations of Israel's cultic practices (Ramirez 2018, 22; Weingart 2016, 348). Again, the sign-act and the explanation touch on the honour-shame theme of Hosea 1–3 (Moon 2018, 73). The unfaithfulness of the wife brings dishonour to the husband, and the idolatry of the chosen people presents infamy to their God. As Canaanite deities would reject loving or even pursuing those disobedient to them, YHWH's דָּוָק is revealed as "deeply countercultural for seeking his unlovable people despite the disgrace that this brings to his reputation (Hwang 2021, 134)."

2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lettech of barley. 3 I said to her: "Many days you are to dwell as mine. You must not whore and not be another man's and so I will also treat you.

In his obedience to the Lord's command to love the woman, the prophet has to pay a price for her. Since the text is silent about the circumstances, the recipient of and the reason for the payment remain in the realm of speculation. Some have proposed that Hosea had to redeem her from slavery or even temple prostitution (Gisin 2014, 163; Ramirez 2018, 23), others advocate the clearance of debts (e.g., Dearman 2010, 82). Probably the best argument can be made for a form of bride price for a potential remarriage somewhat parallel to 2:10 and 2:21–22 (Hwang 2021, 126–127; Moon 2018, 71). Since in ancient times it was a cultural norm to pay a price for women they wanted to marry (often to the father), the readership of Hosea would have primary associations with the bride price (Ben Zvi 2005, 91).

After the acquisition for a price, the prophet introduces a time of separation for her: "Many days you are to dwell as mine." Deuteronomy 21:13 appears helpful for understanding the phrase "dwell as mine." Here a captured woman is to dwell (יָשָׁב) in a man's house for a month to mourn her family until the man "may go in to her and be her husband" (ESV), i.e., the full consummation of marriage including sexuality. It seems that Hosea 3:3 should be understood similarly. The prophet has acquired the woman for a price and leads her into his home yet does not sleep with

her. Rather he puts her in some form of isolation, for a long, but fixed amount of time ("many days"; Routledge 2020, 79; Weingart 2016, 346).

Given the assumption that the woman is Hosea's wife Gomer, it seems somewhat unnecessary to prohibit her from whoring (לֹא תִזְנֶי) and infidelity (וְלֹא תִהְיֶי לְאִישׁ). Yet, her adulterous lifestyle (3:1) seems to demand that she is not only reminded anew of the "simple demands of married life" (i.e., covenant fidelity) but is forced to submit to such (Moon 2018, 71). Similar to the "thornbushes" and the "stone wall" in 2:8–9 or the "desert" in 2:16, it seems that Hosea is banning sources of temptation from his wife and does so to give her time to "fall in love again" with him (Fretheim 2013, 35; cf. Macintosh 1997, 104; Carroll 2008, 2270–227). One might think it is paradoxical that in this timeframe the prophet also abstains from sexuality with his wife: "so I will also treat you" (Gruber 2017, 173; Weingart 2016, 344–345; for issues of translations cf. 3.1.2c). However, in this process of marriage restoration, it seems natural that the two stages of cohabitation ("dwell as mine") and sexual union follow one another, the latter being dependent on the woman's inward change.

4 For the children of Israel will dwell many days without a king, without a prince, without sacrifice, without a stone pillar, without ephod and teraphim.

The woman's isolation from her lovers is paralleled by Israel's deprivation of political and religious institutions (Ben Zvi 2005, 82). The repetition of אֵין ("without") emphasises the extent of the divine constraint (Gruber 2017, 176). The list of persons and objects can be divided into three sections (Hwang 2021, 130): (1) political leadership ("king," "prince"), (2) cultic practices and worship ("sacrifice," "stone pillar"), and (3) sources of divination and guidance ("ephod and teraphim").⁶ Both the political institutions and religious tools may not have been inherently detestable to YHWH (e.g., מִצְבֵּה in Gen 28, 18 or זָבֵחַ in the Pentateuch). Since, however, the royal

⁶ The אֶפֶד has been given by God for guidance (Exod 25:7; 1 Sam 25:23), but also appears in the context of idolatry (Judg 8:27) in the OT. The תְּרָפִים, idol figurines, also had functions of divination (Ezek 21:26; Hwang 2021, 131). As both terms appear together without a disjunctive אֵין, it is best to perceive them with an emphasis on divination (cf. Judg 17:5; Dearman 2010, 84).

leadership had become corrupted and cultic practices had been perverted for idolatry, they were closely associated with the apostasy from the God of Israel (cf. Deut 7:5; Dearman 2010, 83; Macintosh 1997, 106; Routledge 2020, 79). This is also the reason these are repeatedly condemned by the prophet in the following chapters of Hosea 4–11⁷ (Kessler 2008, 573). The repudiation of these corrupted institutions for “many days” will be a time of purification for Israel (Moon 2018, 71; Ramirez 2018, 25).

5 Afterward, the children of Israel will return and seek YHWH their God and David their king and they will come trembling to YHWH and his goodness at the end of days.

The passage (3:1–5) reaches its climax in verse 5, where Israel's purification will transition to a new time of reconciliation with YHWH (אַחֲרַיִם, "Afterward"; Ramirez 2018, 25). The absence of the aforementioned items leads them to long for YHWH and return to him (Gisin 2014, 171). The phrase “end of days” can be understood as a reference to an eschatological time (cf. Gisin 2014, 173), but such an interpretation is not compulsory. While the phrase seems to point to some “future age of salvation” in some of it uses in the OT (e.g., Isa 2:2. Mic 4:1), in other passages it simply denotes an undefined distant time (e.g., Gen 49:1, Deut 31:29; Routledge 2020, 80; cf. Goldingay 2021, 3:5; Hwang 2021, 133). Therefore, as often in prophetic literature, it is hard to determine the time at which Hosea expects Israel's return. What can be determined, however, is the nature of Israel's return as it is described by the three verbs שׁוּב (“return”), בִּקֵּשׁ (“seek”) and פָּחַד (“tremble”), which will be examined in more detail.

After the time of stagnant “dwelling” (יִשֵּׁב) in divine quarantine, the people of Israel will get into motion again in their return (שׁוּב; intended wordplay; Hwang 2021, 132). Although שׁוּב might describe a physical return in this context (e.g., from exile; Lim 2015, 56), it seems best to understand it primarily as a spiritual return towards YHWH (Gisin 2014, 171). Firstly, although we may find allusions to exile in verse 4,

⁷ Criticism of political leadership (5:1; 7:3; 7:16; 8:4, 10; 9:15; 10:15), sacrifices (4:13–14; 4:19; 6:6; 8:13; 9:4) and stone pillars (10:2; Lim 2015, 56).

the theme of dispersion is not explicitly referred to (Ramirez 2018, 27). Secondly, verse 5 does not present a destination, making a metaphorical return more probable (Hwang 2021, 132). Thirdly, the combination of **בִּקֵּשׁ** and **פָּהָד** points to a return in repentance towards YHWH (Fretheim 2013, 36; Routledge 2020, 80). Whereas the people of Israel had turned (**פָּנָה**) towards other gods in 3:1, they will return with their hearts to the Lord as their God (Ramirez pp. 26–27).

This aspect of repentance is further emphasised by the use of **בִּקֵּשׁ** (“seek”). With “YHWH their God” as the object of their search, **בִּקֵּשׁ** again needs to be understood in a spiritual sense (Ramirez 2018, 19). The focus of the term in this context probably is on the aspect of the search for orientation and guidance: “zur Befragung aufsuchen, befragen, suchen” (to consult for inquiry, seek; Gesenius 2013, 171). With the removal of the “ephod and teraphim” (v. 4), the communication between the Lord and his people will be restored and they will seek anew his presence and counsel (Ramirez 2018, 29). The second object of **בִּקֵּשׁ**, “and David their king” further illuminates Israel’s repentance on two levels. Firstly, the time of reconciliation with YHWH will also be a time of reunion under kingship for Israel and Judah after its division (1 Kgs 12; Fretheim 2013, 36; Moon 2018, 72). Secondly, in its parallel construction with “YHWH their God,” it seems reasonable to understand the phrase as a messianic promise (cf. Jer 30:9; Egelkraut 2017, 893–894; Hwang 2021, 132). In the eschatological expectation of Hosea, Israel will be subject to their Davidic king (Ezek 37:24–25).

The meaning of the third verb **פָּהָד** (“come trembling”) essentially describes emotions of fear and affright and is often associated with the physical movements of trembling and shaking (Gesenius 2013, 1046; Gruber 2017, 181). In the OT, it can describe the fear of YHWH’s judgement (e.g., Isa 19:16–17; 33:14; Jer 33:16) or a rather positive astonishment at his acts of mercy (Isa 60:5; Jer 33:9; Routledge 2020, 80). The use of **פָּהָד** in 3:5 is unique to the OT in describing a movement with a direction (in conjunction with the preposition **אֶל**; Ben Zvi 2005, 85). In this context, the verb describes the internal attitude of the repentant people, “cautiously” moving back towards YHWH (Dearman 2010, 85; Ramirez 2018, 30). In contrast to their prideful, indifferent stance (e.g., 2:5; 4:1–2), Israel is now shocked by God’s judgement in view of their disobedience, his holiness in view of their sin, and his goodness (**טוֹב**) in view

of their corruption (Gisin 2014, 171–172). פָּחַד is also constructed with two objects: “to YHWH and his goodness.” The goodness (טוֹב) of YHWH may refer to his glory and abundance of mercy with which Israel is restored in blessing (cf. Isa 63:7; Zec 9:17; Gisin 2014, 172; Routledge 2020, 81). At the same time, the term illuminates the Lord’s character as being gracious and faithful, i.e., full of רַחֲמִים (terms parallel in Psa 25:7; cf. Exod 33:19; Ramirez 2018, 31). YHWH’s “goodness” provides the foundation for the people to return to him. Their repentant reaction is a response to his divine love that he has demonstrated to them. Although shaking out of divine reverence, the people are moving towards the Lord, attracted by his gracious nature (cf. Jer 33:9).

4.4 Exegetical Synthesis

It seems reasonable to understand the woman of 3:1 as Hosea’s second approach to Gomer and therefore as a metaphorical picture of YHWH’s dealing with Israel. In loving a nation that is entangled with false idols (3:1), the Lord overcomes the honour-shame dynamic of Hosea’s time (Moon 2018, 73). This aspect of divine love and רַחֲמִים (3:1–2) is presented in tension with divine holiness and authority (3:3–4). The love of YHWH for his people (and of the prophet for his wife) goes hand in hand with drastic measures of constraint. The Lord intervenes strongly in Israel’s corrupted political and religious life, removing much of what determined the daily lives of the Israelites (Gruber 2017, 176; Routledge 2020, 79). As introduced by Ramirez (2018, 25–26), Israel is “to be transformed not with the magic wand of apocalyptic eschatology but with the hard lesson of history.” The goal of YHWH’s chastisement is Israel’s inward change and therefore the restoration of relationship (cf. 2:8–9; 16; Macintosh 1997, 109; Routledge p. 81; Weingart 2016, 345). The vacuum created by the removal elicits Israel’s renewed embrace of YHWH and the loving response of Israel is the final stage of reconciliation (Gisin 2014, 171; Ramirez 2018, 26).

The return in 3:5 as the culmination of the passage of 3:1–5 (and Hosea 1–3) has usually been regarded as genuine repentance by scholarship and in my view, rightly so (e.g., Dearman 2010, 85; Fretheim 2013, 36; Hwang 2021, 132; Ramirez 2018, 25–26; Carroll 2008, 2285–2289). YHWH’s process of chastisement and restoration leads Israel not to a shallow return, but to a repentance of transformation, demonstrated by

the three verbs שׁוּב, בִּקֵּשׁ and פָּחַד (Hwang 2021, 132). Israel will turn away (שׁוּב) from the false worship which has been restricted in 3:4 and turn towards YHWH. The term בִּקֵּשׁ emphasises Israel's renewed desire for closeness with the Lord. It shows an active search for orientation and demonstrates a willingness to be obedient to the law of YHWH (cf. 2 Chr 11:16; Ramirez 2018, 29). בִּקֵּשׁ will have a key role in later exegetical discussions of other passages (5:6; 5:15). The third term פָּחַד ("tremble towards") illuminates Israel's inner stance in her repentance as being one of sincere awe and demonstrates her renewed sense for divine authority. Submission to and acceptance of YHWH's lordship therefore are central components of authentic repentance according to Hosea 3:5 (Moon 2018, 73).⁸ As in 3:1–4, 3:5 reveals the tension between Israel's reverence and the revelation of God's gracious character (טוֹבוֹ, "his goodness") in the process of repentance.

5. Conclusion

The section of Hosea 1–3 presents the theme of sin and repentance through or in relation to the marriage imagery. In doing so, these chapters particularly emphasise two aspects of Israel's return, i.e., repentance in the context of the honour-shame dynamic, and God's judgement in the form of constraint. Firstly, the Book of Hosea and particularly Hosea 1–3 present infidelity as the primary and fundamental sin of the Israelites (1:2; 2:4; 3:1). The "whoring" (זְנוּהָ) of Lady Israel means blatant shame for the man (2:4; 7), and the search for her lovers questions the husband's ability to provide (2:7–10). The studied passages have demonstrated that in his process of judgement and restoration, YHWH overcomes this honour-shame dynamic. He woos anew his bride Israel (2:16–17), receives her back with a new betrothal (2:21–22) and loves her (3:1–2). This form of אֶהְיֶה לָהּ – love crosses ordinary notions of honour and shame and therefore allows Israel to return to YHWH instead of remaining in the realm of condemnation.

⁸ As introduced by Moon (2018, 73), Hosea does not "confuse restoration with any form of antinomianism."

The second important aspect in the studied passages has been the influencing factor of judgement on Israel's repentance. As introduced in 2:4–5, judgement is avoidable by steps of repentance ("so that she might remove her whoring," v. 4). As Israel remains in its infidelity, however, such consequences appear to remain necessary. In the section Hosea 1–3, the primary expression of judgement is one of constraint. YHWH isolates Israel from her metaphorical lovers (2:8–9; 3:3–4) and leads her into the remoteness of the wilderness for her to hear his voice (2:16). As the studied passages have demonstrated, these restrictive actions are designed to shake the complacency of his chosen people. In his $\tau\upsilon\eta$, YHWH puts Israel in a state of temporary judgement to provoke the pivotal step for their restoration, i.e., sincere repentance (2:9, 17; 3:5).

Having studied the theme of repentance in the marriage imagery of Hosea 1–3, I will now turn my attention to the second section of the Book of Hosea. While having a somewhat different character in style, the section of Hosea 4–14 presents the theme of repentance in a variety of contexts and propositions.

Chapter 4: Exegetical Analysis of Chapters 4–14

1. Introduction

Chapters 4–14 present several messages of the prophet's proclamation that are interwoven and in places even hard to distinguish (Egelkraut 2017, 1063). These sermons address different sins of Israel on the religious, moral and political level, often connected with an implicit or explicit call to repentance (Butler 2016, n.p.). As a continuation of the Exegetical discussion of the previous chapter, this chapter will study the theme of repentance in Hosea 4–14, specifically the sections 5:3–7; 5:15–6:3; 6:4–7:2; 10:11–13a; 11:1–11; 14:2–9. The focus of this analysis will be on the nature of pious repentance and aspects that provoke or hinder the penitential process. For this exegetical study, the structure of the last chapter will be continued, i.e., (1) Preliminary Analysis, (2) Contextual Analysis, (3) Verse Analysis, and (4) Exegetical Synthesis.

2. Hosea 5:3–7

2.1 Preliminary Analysis

2.1.1 Translation of the text

3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; because now you have whored O Ephraim, Israel has defiled itself.^a

4 Their deeds do not allow them to return to their God, because a spirit of whoredom is within them^b, and they do not know YHWH.

5 The pride of Israel testifies^c against him; Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity, also Judah will stumble with them.

6 With their flocks and herds they will go to seek YHWH, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them.

7 They have dealt faithlessly with YHWH because they have borne illegitimate children; now the new month will devour them along with their portions.

2.1.2 Notes on Translation

a (v. 3) Many translations favour a resultative understanding of the Nif'al נִטְמָא: "Israel is defiled" (LEB; ESV; NIV; CSB; NKJV). In my view, it is better to emphasise the reflexive notion of the Nif'al: "Israel has defiled itself" (cf. NASB; NET).

b (v. 4) The phrase בְּקִרְבָּם has been translated by some as "in their midst" (LEB, Dearman 2010, 102; Hwang 2021, 141) or "among them" (CSB) as an expression of a general presence of whoredom among the people. Such a translation has the advantage of emphasising the contrast between the manifestation of the whoring spirit and YHWH's promised presence among his people (e.g., Deut 7:21). However, in the light of the other combinations of רִיחַ and בְּקִרְבָּם in the Hebrew Bible (Psa 51:10; Isa 19:14; 26:9; Ezek 36:26–27), it seems better to understand the "spirit of whoredom" as one working "within" the hearts of the people other than being a force around them.

c (V. 5) The translation of עָנָה has been an issue of debate since the two homonyms עָנָה I ("answer/testify") and עָנָה II ("bowed down/humble") seem possible in the context (Gesenius 2013, 988). Most English (e.g., CSB, ESV, LEB, NET, NIV) and German translations (ELB, LUT17, SLT) favour the first homonym of עָנָה and therefore the translation: "testifies to his face" (ESV). However, along with the LXX (ταπεινώω), Gruber (2017, 251) and the NJPS have favoured the second meaning, i.e., the humiliation of Israel's pride "before his eyes." Since other links of עָנָה with פָּנָה in the OT are quite unambiguous in favour of עָנָה I (Deut 31:21; Job 16:8) and there are no linked appearances of עָנָה II and פָּנָה in the Masoretic Text (LHB 2012), I have favoured the first semantic meaning over the second (Keil 1888, Hos 5:5).

2.2 Contextual Analysis

As discussed before, the section of Hosea 4–14 is hard to structure and so is the case with 5:1–7. However, along with Carroll (2008, pos. 1704–1728) I have decided to ascribe 5:1–7 to the larger section of 4:1–7:16. Several connections can be made to this larger framework of oracles, e.g., the references to leadership (4:4–11; 5:1–2; 6:9; 7:3), the metaphorical picture of whoredom (4:10–18; 5:3–7; 6:10), the knowledge of God (4:1; 5:4; 6:3, 6), Israel's arrogance (5:5; 7:10), and YHWH's withdrawal (5:6;

5:15). The imperative markers in 5:1 and 5:8 each introduce a new subsection and therefore clarify the boundaries of 5:1–7 (Gisin 2014, 232). Whereas 5:1–2 specifically addresses the leadership, 5:3–7 speaks to the overall people of Israel (Fretheim 2013, 42; Hwang 2021, 140–141; Sweeney 2000, n.p.). It therefore seems appropriate to disregard 5:1–2 in the following analysis, since it has no decisive reference to repentance.

2.3 Verse Analysis

3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; because now you have whored O Ephraim, Israel has defiled itself. 4 Their deeds do not allow them to return to their God, because a spirit of whoredom is within them, and they do not know YHWH.

In a somewhat ironic way, verses 3 and 4 are framed by the contrast between YHWH's knowledge of Israel ("I know Ephraim") and Israel's ignorance of him ("they do not know YHWH"; Carroll 2008, pos. 2530–2531; Routledge 2020, 91). The context suggests that YHWH's knowledge of Israel, expressed in the chiasmic "I know Ephraim and Israel is not hidden from me," primarily refers to the sins of Israel (Macintosh 1997, 183). It seems that the people have tried to hide their deeds from God, or erroneously assumed that they would not be held accountable for them (Gisin 2014, 243). But YHWH, in his power and holiness, emphasises that all their lives are disclosed before him, including their whoring (זִנָּה).

The people's apostasy resulted in their defilement (טָמֵא), a term primarily known from the context of purity laws, especially in Leviticus (85x; LHB 2012). Sweeney (2000, n.p.) argues that the passage should be seen in the legal context of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. After having become "defiled" (טָמֵא; v. 4) with another spouse, a woman is forbidden to remarry her first husband. Although some allusion to Deuteronomy 24:1–4 in Hosea 5:3–4 is possible ("*Their deeds do not allow them to return*"), such a potential connection should not be overemphasised. The context of טָמֵא in Deuteronomy 24:4 appears unique and does not correspond to the usual use of the term (i.e., defilement towards YHWH, not man; Averbek 1997, 2:372). More likely, Hosea 5:3 parallels passages introducing the practices of idolatry as religious defilement, a common picture in the Old Testament (e.g., Lev 19:31; 20:1–8; Psa 106:39; Jer 2:23; Ezek 20:17). Due to their spiritual impurity, Israel is unable to enter

the presence of God and is in desperate need of divine cleansing (Goldingay 2021, 5:3; Macintosh 1997, 183; Carroll 2008, 2532).

Verse 4 is central for the discussion on repentance in Hosea, especially the statement: "Their deeds do not allow them to return." Due to the use of the term in the rest of Hosea (4:10; 7:2; 9:15), the deeds (מַעַלְלֵי, v. 4) of Israel are best understood as evil deeds contrary to the law of YHWH (Gruber 2017, 251; Macintosh 1997, 184). The phrase "spirit of whoredom" also demands some explanation (cf. 4:12). The primary meanings of the term רוּחַ are "wind" or "spirit" or the human's essential of life called "breath" (Van Pelt, Kaiser and Block 1997, 3:1074). The semantic field of "spirit" at times includes "a person's or group's disposition, attitude, mood, inclination" (pp. 1074–1075). In passages like Hosea 5:4 or Numbers 5:14, Gesenius (2013, 1226) understands רוּחַ as a dominating force over the life of a human. The theme of "whoredom" (זְנוּנוּת) is a resumption of earlier references (e.g., 4:10–19), and primarily refers to idolatry.

The central question in verse 4 is: "Why is a return (שׁוּב) of the people impossible?". Scholars like Moon (2018, 101–102) see the reason for this in YHWH's decision. Along with Sweeney's (2000) argument based on Deuteronomy 24:4, he states that due to the people's infidelity ("spirit of whoredom"), they are determined to stay separated from YHWH (at least for some time). For him, Israel's return to their sin would be "an unthinkable social act" for their time (p. 102). Most scholars, however, point to the corrupted nature of Israel, described by the "spirit of whoredom" and their missing knowledge of YHWH (Dearman 2010, 102; Fretheim 2013, 43; House 2012, 354; Hwang 2021, 166; Nogalski 2011, 87; Routledge 202, 92). According to this view, their sin and idolatry have affected their condition to the point where they are unable to repent: "their spirit has been so captured by adulterousness that this is who they are" (Fretheim 2013:43).

I have already argued why a reference to the marriage law of Deuteronomy 24:4 should not be overemphasised, and therefore I see the first position as unconvincing. At the same time, the second approach of the emphasis on Israel's inability due to corruption in my view is also not entirely satisfactory. While this interpretation has the strength of paying great attention to the following statements of verse 4 ("spirit of

whoredom”; “do not know YHWH”), it focuses less on the surrounding context of verses 3–7. In my view, it seems best to understand verse 4 in a way that a return would not be impossible for the people per se, unless they were willing to repent from their *evil deeds* (מַעֲלָלִים; Gisin 2014, 244). It seems that the people have tried to superficially return to YHWH without neglecting their sinful practices. This interpretation explains why YHWH emphasises his knowledge of Israel’s sin and defilement (v. 3) and their stubborn pride (v. 5), both making it impossible for them to enter the presence of God (v. 6). It then seems best to understand the “spirit of whoredom” in its connection to the sinful deeds of Israel. By adopting idolatrous practices, the people of Israel have opened their hearts to this spiritual influence (4:12) that diametrically stands against the knowledge of YHWH (עֵדֶי; Dearman 2010, 102). Although some impact of the “spirit of whoredom” seems inevitable, it seems that such negative influence would decline if Israel would be willing to separate from sinful practices.

5 The pride of Israel testifies against him; Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity, also Judah will stumble with them.

As in 2:4, the use of עֲנֶה I (“answer, testify”) seems to introduce a legal setting, as Israel is accused by its אֲוֹנָה (Lim 2015, 80; Nogalski 2011, 88; on the potential use of עֲנֶה I cf. 2.1.2c). The intended meaning behind אֲוֹנָה has been an issue of debate. The root of the term refers to something being “high” or “exalted,” which may have implications when referring to the glory of God (Exod 15:1; Psa 68:34) or negative connotations when speaking of human pride (e.g., Job 40:11; Prov 16:19; Smith and Hamilton 1997, 1:786). For scholars like Keil (1888, 62), Gisin (2014, 245) or Gruber (2017, 252), the formulation אֲוֹנָה יִשְׂרָאֵל refers to the first of the two meanings, speaking of YHWH’s accusation of his people. While this is a possible interpretation of this verse, I favour the more traditional second understanding along with the LXX (ὑβρις) and most scholars (Dearman 2010, 103; Macintosh 1997, 186; Moon 2018, 102; Routledge 2020, 93). In the light of Israel’s overall unrepentant stance (vv. 4 and 6) and the judgement in the form of “stumbling” (cf. Prov 16:18), a reference to their “fundamental attitude of self-sufficiency” seems fitting in this context (Smith and Hamilton 1997, 1:788).

גִּזְיוֹן (pride) describes the key attitude of the people that are unwilling to change their sinful behaviour. This is further illuminated by Hosea 7:10⁹: “The pride (גִּזְיוֹן) of Israel testifies against him—they do not return (שׁוּב) to Yahweh their God; they do not seek him for all of this” (LEB). As demonstrated by this passage, the people’s arrogance (גִּזְיוֹן) becomes a central obstacle to their sincere repentance to YHWH (Macintosh 1997, 273).

6 With their flocks and herds they will go to seek YHWH, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them. 7 They have dealt faithlessly with YHWH because they have borne illegitimate children; now the new month will devour them along with their portions.

The animals mentioned in this verse (“flocks and herds”) could be used for peace or sin offerings (Lev 3:1–4:21; Gisin 2014, 247). Often these sacrifices have been made to seek divine blessing, guidance, or protection (cf. 1 Sam 13:5–12) and may include aspects of repentance (3:5; Isa 55:5–6; Hwang 2021, 167; Routledge 2020, 93). In this passage, however, the prophet is demonstrating that rituals without the right heart are of no value before YHWH (Caroll 2008, pos. 2537–2538). It seems evident that the people have falsely trusted in their sacrifices as an “automatic entry into the beneficence of God,” which reveals their blatant arrogance (גִּזְיוֹן, v. 5; Fretheim 2013, 43; Macintosh 1997, 188). But God does not respond to their religious practices as long as they are not accompanied by sincere repentance and obedience: “He has withdrawn from them.” With his withdrawal, YHWH demonstrates that he is not under constraint to hear the prayer of his people (cf. Zech 7:13), and his presence is accessible only to those who are willing to cleanse themselves (Psa 24:3–4; Goldingay 2021, 5:6).

The reason for God’s withdrawal is again emphasised in verse 7: their infidelity and faithless dealing (בגד) with the God of Israel (Gruber 2017, 255). The dedication of the following generation to pagan deities (“illegitimate children”) reveals their apostasy towards YHWH (Routledge 2020, 93). As discussed before (2.2.2.3), the idolatry in

⁹ Due to issues of brevity, Hosea 7:10 will not be studied separately in this thesis.

Hosea's time often included economic aspects; for example, the fertility cult around Baal-Hadad (Day 2010, 205). The people prayed to deities for blessings on their fields and property ("portions"). However, their cultic practices lead to the opposite: "the new month will devour them along with their portions." In their infidelity and the dedication of their descendants to idols, the Israelites have brought curses on their heritage that would be obtained by the following generations ("portions"; (Goldingay 2021, 5:7).

2.4 Exegetical Synthesis

It has been demonstrated that Hosea 5:3–7 refers to the topic of superficial and insincere repentance. Although the people try to return (שׁוּב; v.4) and seek (בְּקִשׁ; v.6) YHWH, these attempts are to no avail. It appears that the problem lies in the people's unwillingness to sincerely turn from their sin, which is exposed as defilement before God (v. 3; Goldingay 2021, n.p.). YHWH cannot ignore their deeds (מַעַלְלֵי) or their faithless dealing (בְּגֵד) and will not allow vessels for idolatrous "whoredom" in his presence (v. 5; 7). Their pride (גִּזְאוֹן) constitutes the core problematic attitude of the people, testifying (עֲנֵה) that their prayers and offerings of penitence are insincere and do not stem from honest regret (vv. 5–6; Routledge 2020, 93). As long as Israel will not really repent from their apostasy and sin, God will withdraw from them and not respond to their prayers (Moon 2018, 104–105). However, as demonstrated repeatedly in the Book of Hosea, such judgement is temporary and has a prospect of future repentance and restoration (e.g., 2:9, 22; 3:5; 10:10–11; 14:1–8; Routledge 2020, 95).

3. Hosea 5:15–6:3

3.1 Preliminary Analysis

3.1.1 Translation of the text

15 I will go and return to my place until they bear their guilt^a and seek my face; in their distress they will earnestly seek me.

6:1 Come, let us return to YHWH, because he has torn and he will heal us, he has struck us down and will bind us up.

2 He will revive us after two days, on the third day he will raise us up so that we may live before him.

3 Let us know, let us pursue to know YHWH; His going out is sure like the dawn; He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain waters the earth.

3.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (5:15) The root meaning of the verb אָשָׁם is to "become guilty, incur guilt" and is used mostly in this sense in the Old Testament (e.g., 10x in Lev 4–5; Carpenter and Grisanti 1997a, 1:553–554). In a second derivative semantic meaning, אָשָׁם can express the consequence of such guilt, i.e., the imposition of punishment (e.g., Isa. 24:6; Jer. 2:3; Zech. 11:5; Psa 34:22–23; Gesenius 2013, 108; Ramirez 2017, 108). Some scholars have proposed that a wider sense of אָשָׁם includes the acknowledgement of guilt (Gruber 2017, 279; Köhler, Baumgartner and Stamm 2004, 92) and this is how most English (e.g., CSB, ESV, NRSV, LEB, NKJV) and German translations (ELB, LU17, SLT) put the term in Hosea 5:15. However, such use of אָשָׁם to describe feelings of guilt is highly debated and is seen as an overextension of its semantic field by others (Carpenter and Grisanti, 1997, 1:554; Gesenius 2013, 108; Botterwerk 1973, s.v. אָשָׁם). Although it might be tempting to interpret and add penitential actions into the use of אָשָׁם, I do not see sufficient linguistic evidence and therefore have decided to adopt the meaning of bearing guilt (cf. NET, NIV, Macintosh 1997, 214). This understanding is supported by both the Hosean use of the term (10:2, 14:1) and its parallel positioning to צָרָר ("distress"; Ramirez 2017, 108).

3.2 Contextual Analysis

As argued before, I have decided to consider 4:1–7:16 as a larger framework of different pericopes. The imperative in 5:8 seems to introduce a new subsection that I understand as spanning to 6:3. The part from 5:8–5:15 presents announcements of judgment to Ephraim and Judah. Due to their disobedience and sin (vv. 8–11), YHWH will bring judgement on them. He himself will become like "a maggot" and "rottenness" to them (v. 12), which leads the people to seek help from Assyria (v. 13). This reaction from Israel to his subtler measures (sickness) moves YHWH to intensify his chastisement and become like a lion to them: "I myself will tear and I will go; I will carry off, and there is no one who delivers" (v. 14; Hwang 2021, 187–188). The judgement

speech culminates in 5:15, which also presents the transition to 6:1–3, which in turn takes up the themes of sickness, injury, and healing (Ramirez 2017, 102). As will be argued later, I perceive 6:4–6 as the introduction to a new subsection spanning to 7:2 although being linked to 6:1–3 by metaphoric parallels.

3.3 Verse Analysis

15 I will go and return to my place until they bear their guilt and seek my face; in their distress they will earnestly seek me.

The threat by God to return to his place can be understood as a continuation of the lion metaphor: just as a lion retreats to its den, YHWH waits for a response from his people (Gisin 2014, 270). It seems unlikely that מְקוֹם denotes a physical place (such as the temple), but is rather an expression of God's temporary inaccessibility, similar to 5:6 (Gruber 2017, 280; Ramirez 2017, 109; contra Dearman 2010, 110). Still, YHWH promises an end to this withdrawal: "until they bear their guilt and seek my face." YHWH's judgment always has the goal of Israel's return back to him (Hos 2:8, 17; 3:4–5; Deut 4:29–30 [cf. צָרָר; בִּקֵּשׁ]; Carroll 2008, pos. 2618–2621; Moon 2018, 112). As explained earlier, both אָשָׁם and צָרָר refer to the effect of the judgment leading Israel to seek YHWH (Ramirez 2017, 110). Although אָשָׁם should not be translated as "acknowledge guilt" in my view (cf. 2.1.2a), the connection between carrying the consequences of sin and seeking (שָׁחַר) YHWH still implies some sense of recognition of sin. The use of שָׁחַר ("earnestly seek") in this context is particularly interesting. More than the parallel בִּקֵּשׁ or the alternative term דָּרַשׁ, שָׁחַר expresses a state of desperation, supported by its Pi'el form. It thus describes a search for God out of deep personal consternation, passion or trouble (cf. Psa 63:2; Isa 26:9; Merrill 2014, s.v. Seeking; Ramirez 2017, 111). Having previously sought help in vain from idols (v. 11) and Assyria (v. 13), utter distress will lead Israel to truly seek its salvation in YHWH.

6:1 Come, let us return to YHWH, because he has torn and he will heal us, he has struck us down and will bind us up. 2 He will revive us after two days, on the third day he will raise us up so that we may live before him. 3 Let us know, let us pursue to know YHWH; His going out is sure like the dawn; He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain waters the earth.

In the section 6:1–3, the speaker shifts to the first person and presents a well-structured and rounded poem (Olson 2017, 163; Ramirez 2017, 162). The exact identity of the speaker is not disclosed, but it suggests that this is the quotation of the seeking Israelites from 5:15¹⁰ (Goldingay 2021, n.p.; Carroll 2008, pos. 2661–2662; Olson 2017, 162), potentially led by the words of the prophet (Moon 2018, 114). The first-person speaker calls Israel to repentance: "Come, let us return to Yahweh." Once again, שׁוּב is clearly applied in a religious context: Israel must acknowledge its need to turn from its false search for help back to YHWH (Mead 2008, 200; Gruber 2017, 282). Israel is to expect deliverance and healing (חֲבֵשׁ, רִפְאָה) from their God in a new way. Their certainty of future restoration is expressed in the verb's tenses: "He has torn," "He has struck" (perfect tense: past), "He will heal" "He will bind us up" (wayiqtol: future; Ramirez 2017, 114). The reference to healing (רִפְאָה) and binding (חֲבֵשׁ) is a continuation of the theme of illness and injury of 5:12–15 and therefore describes the reversal of judgement (Routledge 2020, 100). The same is true for the references to resurrection¹¹ in verse 2: "He will revive us after two days, on the third day he will raise us up."

Before the song continues to praise the faithfulness of God (v. 3b), it emphasises the people's renewed commitment to him. From their resurrection and healing, they promise to "live before him" (lit. "before his face"), which denotes renewed faithfulness in lifestyle and worship towards him (Nogalski 2011, 96; Ramirez 2017, 117). Furthermore, the speaker summons the people to "pursue to know YHWH" (v. 3). This means the knowledge of and obedience to the divine law and is contrary to Israel's spiritual decay (4:1–2; Egelkraut 2017, 1064–1065; Gisin 2014, 274). The knowledge of God describes the "intimate relationship ... with the divine law-giver" and reflects deep communion with him (Gruber 2017, 286).

The prayer concludes with statements of confidence in YHWH's "going out," which means the reversal of his withdrawal (5:15) and the renewal of his availability for the

¹⁰ The LXX adds the word λέγοντες ("saying") at the end of 5:15 (6:1 in the LXX) and therefore explicitly makes 6:1–3 a quotation of 5:15.

¹¹ The combination of קוּם and חַיָּה always seems to signify resurrection from death in the Old Testament (Isa 26:14, 19; cf. 2 Kgs 13:21; Job 14:12, 14; Routledge 2020, 101).

prayers and petitions of his people (Ramirez 2017, 120). The meteorological imagery (“dawn,” “rain,” “spring rain”) conveys both the aspects of hope in a new start and the certainty of this coming (Routledge 2020, 100–101). The song of 6:1–3 confesses and praises the restoring faithfulness of God, i.e., his רַחֲמֵי love (Ramirez 2017, 120).

The central theological question regarding the section of Hosea 6:1–3 is: should we understand the song as an authentic prayer of repentance? Or should we assume some sort of insincerity, especially in the light of God’s potential response in 6:4–6? Regarding this much-debated topic among biblical scholars, two main interpretative approaches have emerged: Hosea 6:1–3 as (1) an insincere prayer of the people that hastily tries to obtain salvation through superficial words (Gisin 2014, 277; Hwang 2021, 189; McConville 2012, n.p.; Olson 2017, 168; Carroll 2008, pos. 2668–2673) or (2) an ideal response to judgement provided by YHWH or the prophet that may be realized in the future (Goldingay 2021, n.p.; Nogalski 2011, 95, Ramirez 2017, 110; Routledge 2020, 100).

The first interpretative approach holds the view that the prayer of 6:1–3 has been articulated by the people in the time of Hosea but was not done with a sincere attitude. The first characteristic that scholars identify is the unwillingness to turn away from sin (Gisin 2014, 277; Olson 2017, 168). Although the speaker zealously calls for repentance (v. 1), the plea for the forgiveness of sin and the articulated renunciation of idolatry and political alliances are absent. This is particularly evident in direct comparison with the penitential prayer of 14:2–4, which includes all of these aspects. Hwang (2021, 190) even considers the prayer of 6:1–3 as syncretistic in itself and sees evidence in the imagery of 6:3 for references to the Canaanite deity Baal-Hadad.

The second major argument of this approach focuses on the declarations of certain and swift restoration (vv. 2–3), which are seen as expressions of pride: “Israel takes for granted that its darkness will turn into light” (Carroll 2008, 2687–2690; cf. Hwang 2021, 189). For Olson (2017, 162–163), the smooth form of the poem is an expression of its superficiality and Israel’s arrogant approach to YHWH. Lastly, the third and probably most important argument of this group lies in the following verses of Hosea 6:4–6. Those who see verses 1–3 as superficial understand verses 4–6 as God’s answer to this spoken prayer and therefore a critique of their superficial repentance (Gruber 2017, 287; Hwang 2021, 189; McConville 2012, n.p.; Olson 2017,

167). These scholars consider the linguistical connections (going out [יֵצֵא], knowledge [דַּעַת; דַּעַה] Canaanite of YHWH) and metaphorical parallels (rain, spring rain, sun and morning cloud, dew, light) as markers of the connection between these verses.

The opposing position perceives the prayer of 6:1–3 as an ideal prayer of repentance, suggested by YHWH (through the prophet). Firstly, the commentators refer to the short-term nature of God's withdrawal in 5:15, which lasts only until (עַד) Israel turns back to him. For them, it appears coherent in this future prospect that YHWH would also put a prayer in the people's mouths and thus predict Israel's explicit repentance, similar to other passages (e.g., 3:5; Goldingay 2021, n.p.; Nogalski 2011, 96; Routledge 2020, 100). Secondly, advocates of this approach see no evidence within the prayer that would indicate hypocrisy or superficiality (Routledge 2020, 100; Fretheim 2013, 46). For them, the song of Hosea 6:1–3 is an expression of earnest repentance and sincere seeking for God. Especially the key terms שׁוּב and דַּעַה are understood as indicators of this earnestness (Goldingay 2021, n.p.; Carroll 2008, 2667–2669). Thirdly, scholars emphasise that the focus of the prayer in 6:1–3 is not primarily the confession of sin, but the turning away from false sources of help (Lambert 2016, n.p.). This turning includes the acknowledgement of YHWH's sovereignty in judgement and the turning to God as the exclusive source of salvation (Nogalski 2011, 96). Taking into account the theme of 5:12–15, they consider the passage to be an honest "eulogy to God's steadfast love" (Ramirez 2017, 120).

It seems that this notion of newly directed trust is also supported by a presumed literary background of this passage from the Song of Moses (Deut 32; Dearman 2010, 109; Gisin 2014, 258–259). Particularly Deuteronomy 32:39 should be understood as an interpretative key for Hosea 5:14–6:3:

*See, now, that I, even I am he,
and there is not a god besides me;
I put to death and I give life;
I wound and I heal;
there is not one who delivers from my hand!*

The lexical and thematic connections to 5:14–6:3 seem undeniable: death and life (6:2); wounding and healing (5:14; 6:1); no deliverance from judgement (5:14; Gisin 2014, 259). The context of Deuteronomy 32:39 makes it clear that the verse refers to the sovereignty of God in contrast to idolatry (Barker 2008, 426). Unlike the powerless deities (vv. 37–38), YHWH is the only one who has the authority and power to strike Israel with judgment and is therefore the only one who can heal them (v. 39). In the text of Hosea, we encounter the same theme: YHWH brings judgement on Israel (5:8–12), whereupon Israel seeks help from Assyria (v. 13), which in turn brings even stronger judgement (v. 14). After their tribulation (v. 15), Israel is again to recognise YHWH as the sovereign God who has both judgement and restoration in his hand (6:1–3). This also explains why the statements of certain and quick salvation and restoration are not to be understood as expressions of arrogance, but of trust in YHWH (and not Assyria) according to the model of Deuteronomy 32:39 (Ramirez 2017, 120).

At this point, it is again important to mention that absolute clarity in the interpretation of this passage is not possible. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the second approach appears to be the more convincing one. This interpretation allows a harmonisation with the preceding verse 15, i.e., the announcement of Israel's serious search that will bring God's withdrawal to an end. The assumption that the prayer is dishonest leaves open the question of why God should predict such a prayer or attach to it the condition of his renewed availability. The apparent weakness of the second approach that is found in the lack of articulated renunciation of sin in the prayer of 6:1–3 (esp. in comparison to 14:2–4) must be noticed, but can, however, be explained (Gisin 2014, 277). Taking into consideration the potential interpretative key of Deuteronomy 32:39, it appears conclusive that the idealized prayer of 6:1–3 has its focus on the reaffirmation of faith in the sovereignty and דְּבָרָא of YHWH. Whereas other passages introduce the importance of turning away from sin (e.g., 5:3–7; 14:2–3), the prayer of 6:1–3 emphasises exclusive trust in YHWH after the experience of judgement from 5:14–15.

How then should we deal with the following verses, 6:4–6? As already mentioned, the connections between verses 1–3 and 4–6 are visible through the metaphorical imagery. Nevertheless, there is no clear indication that verses 4–6 need to be understood as a response to verses 1–3. Like the scribe who authored the 4QXIlg and

left an interval after 6:3, we might understand 6:4 as the introduction to a new subsection (Ben Zvi 2005, 123). It seems reasonable to perceive the similarity in metaphor as an emphasis on the contrast between God's reliable *דִּקְדֻקָּה*-love ("like the rain," v. 3) and Israel's evaporating *דִּקְדֻקָּה*-love ("like a morning cloud" v. 4; Ramirez 2017, 126). After the prophetic outlook of 5:14–6:3, it seems best to read 6:4–6 as again focused on Hosea's present time and the current state of unfaithfulness of the people (Nogalski 2011, 97). This approach seems to harmonise well with the subsequent 6:7 and the discourse of the following verses (until 7:2).

3.4 Exegetical Synthesis

The pericope of 5:15–6:3 again demonstrates how divine judgement has as its goal Israel's return. The experience of suffering is designed to lead Israel to seek (שָׁחַר) YHWH anew (5:15). The idealised repentance therefore is expressed primarily in the acknowledgement of YHWH's sovereignty in judgement and the reorientation of trust in his ability and will for restoration (6:1–3). It has been stated that several scholars perceive the prayer of 6:1–3 as insincere and understand 6:4–6 as the admonishing response to such. However, in consideration of Deuteronomy 32:39, it seems better to understand the prayer of 6:1–3 as an idealised "eulogy to God's steadfast love," i.e., a reaffirmation of trust in his *דִּקְדֻקָּה* (Ramirez 2017, 120). In repentance, Israel will seek healing and renewal from their God who has the power to discipline his people through judgement and to restore them with his reliable demonstrations of compassion and love.

4. Hosea 6:4–7:2

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

4.1.1 Translation of the text

4 What shall I do with you Ephraim? What shall I do with you Judah? Your loyal love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.

5 Therefore I struck them down with the prophets, I killed them with the word of my mouth and my judgements will go forth like light^a,

6 for I desire loyal love and not sacrifice and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

7 But like Adam,^b they transgressed the covenant, there they have dealt faithlessly with me.

8 Gilead is a city of those who do evil, tracked with blood.

9 Like bandits who wait in ambush for man, so are the priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, because they carry out their evil plan.

10 In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing, there Ephraim whores, Israel is defiled.

11 Also to you Judah a harvest is appointed. When I would restore the fortunes of my people,

7:1 when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim was revealed and the evil deeds of Samaria. For they practise deception, the thief breaks in, bandits raid the streets.

7:2 And they do not consider in their heart that I remember all their evil. Now their deeds surround them, they are before my face.

4.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (6:5) The text of the MT literally reads: “your judgements go forth ... light.” For reasons of context and syntactical coherence, most translations (e.g., CSB, ESV, LEB, NIV, NRSV) have followed the LXX by emending the plural form of מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ to the singular and changing its possessive endings from second to first person (my judgement). Clarity on the reading of 6:5 seems impossible, so I have decided to adopt this reading of the LXX.

b. (6:7) The oddity of the parallelism of אֵת and שָׁם (“there”), has led several scholars (Dearman 2010, 155; Nogalski 2011, 98) and translations (NIV, NRSV, LU17) to translate the particle אֵת as a local preposition (“at”). Adam could refer to a city on the east bank of the Jordan river (Dearman 2010, 155). Since, however, the place does not evidence any specific significance for a covenant, I have decided to remain with the literal translation of the phrase (“like Adam”) and to accept the syntactical tension.

4.2 Contextual Analysis

I have argued in Chapter 3 for a division between 5:8–6:3 and 6:4–7:2 into interdependent yet separate sub-sections of the larger 4:1–7:16. The parallel

metaphors are best understood as a deliberate contrast between the faithfulness of YHWH in 6:1–3 and the failure of the people to remain faithful to his covenant. In my view, the pericope of 6:4–7:2 is best structured in three sections:

6:4–6 The search for אֱמוּנָה

6:7–9 The outcomes of faithless living

6:10–7:2 Evil deeds cannot be hidden

With its language and content, the pericope evidences parallels especially with the introductory section 4:1–2 as well as 5:1–7.

4.3 Verse Analysis

4 What shall I do with you Ephraim? What shall I do with you Judah? Your loyal love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. 5 Therefore I struck them down with the prophets, I killed them with the word of my mouth and my judgements will go forth like light, 6 for I desire loyal love and not sacrifice and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

The introductory questions (“What shall I do with you?”) expresses YHWH’s frustration with his people (Caroll 2008, pos. 2691). It resembles the cry of a desperate father over the rebellion of his children (Nogalski 2011, 97). The key theme of this section is the one of אֱמוּנָה (“loyal love”, vv. 4, 6). In Chapter 2, I have argued that the Hebrew term אֱמוּנָה “in essence describes a person’s enduring loyalty to a relationship or covenant” and is “reflected in concrete acts of love or compassion.” אֱמוּנָה therefore represents the essence of the covenantal relationship between Israel and YHWH (De Andrado 2016, 55–56). Whereas the אֱמוּנָה of YHWH towards his people is constant and reliable (vv. 1–3), the אֱמוּנָה of Israel is short-lived and evanescent. Beginnings of devotion to the God of Israel, which probably include sacrifices (5:6; 6:6) dissolve in their disobedience to his Torah laws (De Andrado 2016, 56).

The consequences of the deprived state of God’s people are linked to the ministry of the prophets and their proclamation of judgement (v. 5). Israel has had many opportunities to respond to the words of anointed prophets and return to YHWH. Their

refusal to do so means that God must take a stance of judgement towards them (Fretheim 2013, 47). The reference to light seems to be an ironic allusion to the dawn of 6:3 (Caroll 2008, 2695). Whereas the people enjoy YHWH's salvation as they fully devote themselves to him (6:1–3), they experience judgement coming forth "like light" if they persist in their disobedience.

Verse 6 of this section is specifically known by Christians due to Jesus's quotations in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 9:13, 12:7). In the context of Hosea, they again underline the prophet's emphasis on *דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים* and *הַסֵּד* (knowledge of God): the forces opposing moral and spiritual decay (Egelkraut 2017, 1064–1065; Caroll 2008, 2072–2705). However, one should not understand Hosea speaking against the sacrificial system in general, as this contradicts other prophetic texts (Jer 33:18; Ezek 40:38–46; Mal 1:11; Routledge 2020, 103). Rather, the prophet points out that in the people's condition portrayed in 4:1–2 or the subsequent 6:7–9, no form of sacrifice can be pleasing to YHWH (Ben Zvi 2005, 102; De Andrado 2016, 56). First and foremost, God is interested in the heart of those who want to seek him (Nogalski 2011, 98).

7 But like Adam, they transgressed the covenant, there they have dealt faithlessly with me. 8 Gilead is a city of those who do evil, tracked with blood. 9 Like bandits who wait in ambush for man, so are the priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, because they carry out their evil plan.

Verse 7 describes Israel's grave spiritual failure in the transgression of the covenant (*בְּרִית עֲבָר*) and faithless dealing with YHWH (*בַּגְד*; cf. 5:7). These terms stand in contrast specifically to the demanded *דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים* and *הַסֵּד* of 6:4–6, i.e., the covenant faithfulness. The rather general accusations of v.7 are then specified by the following verses 8–9: blood guiltiness, banditry, murder and evil (Caroll 2008, 2787). Here, as in 4:4–11, the sins of the priests are the focus of Hosea's accusation. This demonstrates not only the fundamental responsibility they carry for the condition of the nation, but also how far they have fallen from rightly fulfilling this role (Kruger 1997, 4:712).

10 In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing, there Ephraim whores, Israel is defiled. 11 Also to you Judah a harvest is appointed. When I would restore the fortunes of my people, 1 when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim was revealed and the

evil deeds of Samaria. For they practise deception, the thief breaks in, bandits raid the streets. 2 And they do not consider in their heart that I remember all their evil. Now their deeds surround them, they are before my face.

Verses 10 summarizes the people's iniquity in metaphorical terms: "horrible thing" (שַׁעֲרֵי־רָי), whoring (זְנוּת), defilement (טִמְאָה; Routledge 2020, 105). The prophet again includes both Israel and Judah in the accusation and pronouncement of judgement ("harvest").¹² The section of 6:10–7:2 evidences parallels to 5:3–7 both in language (טִמְאָה, זְנוּת) and content (Gisin 2014, 209–291). Both passages emphasise YHWH's knowledge of Israel's depravity and sinful deeds ("know," "not hidden" [5:3]; "I have seen" [6:10]; "will be revealed" [7:1]; "I remember," "they are before my face" [7:2]). Whereas 5:3–7 illuminates the perspective of YHWH's rejection of Israel's approaches to seek him, 6:10–7:2 presents the topic in relation to God's restoration activity.

Building upon the foundation of Hosea 1–3, the passage again emphasises God's desire to restore his people (6:11b–7:1; Fretheim 2013, 49, Routledge 2020, 105). God wants to extend grace to Israel, their "restoration" (שׁוּב) and "healing" (רִפּוּא) are his ultimate goal. The phrase "restoring the fortunes" has its first appearance in Deuteronomy 30:3 where it specifically describes the return from exile and is used repeatedly in this sense in the Prophetic Books (e.g., Jer 29:14; Amos 9:14, Zeph 3:20; Gisin 2014, 294). Though not entirely limited to this meaning,¹³ it seems adequate to primarily understand both this phrase and the parallel רִפּוּא in this sense of "national restoration" (Brown 1995, 188; Lim 2015, 87). The metaphorical picture of YHWH as a healer or physician (רִפּוּא) is particularly interesting. It connects the passage to the pronouncement of judgement from 5:12–15 in the form of sickness and wounding as well as the expectation of healing in 6:1. YHWH again emphasises that he is the source of spiritual and physical recovery (Hwang 2021, 195).

¹² A positive meaning of "harvest" (קִצִּיר) seems unlikely but should be perceived as harvest in the form of judgement (Isa 17:5; Jer 51:33; Hwang 2021, 195; Routledge 2020, 105).

¹³ The characteristic שׁוּב seems to imply some allusion to the theme of repentance (Routledge 2020, 105).

What, then, prevents Israel's healing? The crux is the presence of sinful behaviour and attitudes in the lives of the Israelites, especially its leadership (Fretheim 2013, 49; Hwang 2021, 195). The people seem to assume that God does not perceive or take seriously their sin (7:2; Carroll 2008, 2811–2812). Yet their deeds are obviously of evil and depraved character: deception, theft, banditry (v. 1). Any attempt to keep their sin hidden is useless, YHWH sees and remembers their wicked behaviour (v. 2). If healing is to happen, sin will be exposed. This is also evident in the verb גלה ("reveal"), which in its Nif'al form takes on a passive appeal (Hwang 2021, 195–196). If God wants to heal Israel, Israel's iniquity comes to light automatically.

4.4 Exegetical Synthesis

The section 6:4–7:2 highlights two key issues on the topic of repentance. Firstly, verse 6:6 presents the core values on which authentic repentance should focus חֶסֶד ("loyal love") and אֵלֹהִים יָדַעַת ("knowledge of God"; Moon 2018, 127). חֶסֶד here emphasises the aspects of love, devotion and loyalty, at first to God (6:4), and then also to men (Matt 9:13, 12:7; Ramirez 2017, 126). It becomes clear that חֶסֶד must prove itself in the long term (6:4; Carroll 2008, pos. 2702–2705). Authentic repentance must include a sense of constancy expressed in the change of behaviour. YHWH himself exemplifies this kind of devotion to the mutual covenant (e.g., 6:1–3) and calls Israel to follow his example (6:6; Mead 2008, 201). As the Israelites conform to this covenantal relationship, the "knowledge of God" will come forth in their hearts, which, in contrast to syncretistic ideas, describes a genuine revelation of YHWH and his commandments (Hwang 2021, 192–193).

The second subject of the passage concerning repentance is the confession of guilt in connection to restoration (6:11b–7:2). In 5:3–7, it already became clear that the people cannot expect to have access to the presence of God as long as they remain deeply entangled in their sin. Developing this idea further, 6:10–7:2 demonstrates that God cannot bring them out of the state of destruction after judgment should they not be willing to sincerely repent from sin. Just as a wound can only be healed if it has first been cleansed, so God cannot truly restore Israel as a nation until there is a cleansing from the "defilement" of sin and infidelity (6:10; Fretheim 2013, 49). The key to this healing process is the voluntary disclosure of sin, i.e., its verbal confession by the

people (Lim 2015, 87). In the knowledge that the almighty God is already fully aware of all their “evil deeds” (7:1), Israel can open the door for their restoration by confessing their sin, rejecting the practice of it and remaining faithful to this decision (6:4; cf. 14:2–9; Routledge 2020, 106).

5. Hosea 10:11–13a

5.1 Preliminary Analysis

5.1.1 Translation of the text

11 Ephraim was a trained heifer, who loved to thresh and I passed by^a her good neck. I will harness Ephraim, Juda will plough, Jacob will harrow.

12 Sow for yourself according to righteousness, reap according to loyal love. Break up for yourself fallow ground for it is time to seek YHWH until he comes and rains righteousness upon you.

13a But you have ploughed evil, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of deception.

5.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (v. 11) The oddity of the verb עָבַר (Qal: "pass through or over," Harman 1997, 3:314) in this context has yielded different interpretational approaches. Some interpreters and translations have emended the Qal form of the verb (as found in the MT) to Pi'el, allowing a translation of "to lay upon" (Ramirez 2014, 102; Hwang 2021, 258; CSB; NET; NIV). In the same way, they read the עַל ("upon") of the MT as עֹל ("yoke"), resulting in the translation: "I will place a yoke on her fine neck" (CSB). Another approach stays with the text of the MT and understands עָבַר as the expression of "sparing" the neck of heifer Israel (ESV, LEB, NRSV). In my opinion, a third approach is preferable. As Macintosh (1997, 418) or Gruber (2017, 343) have argued, it seems best to remain with the literal reading of the MT עָבַר ("pass") and understand it as "taking note of Israel's early potential" (Routledge 2020, 135; cf. NASB 2020).

5.2 Contextual Analysis

I understand the unit 9:9–11:11 as a larger framework of “metaphors of Election and Rebellion” (cf. Ben Zvi 2005, 210). These include the grapes in the wilderness (9:10–17), the luxuriant vine (10:1–8), this section of agricultural imagery (10:9–15) and the unit is concluded by the metaphor of God’s love for a wayward son (11:1–11). Whereas the previous section (10:1–8), focuses on apostasy through idolatry, 10:9–15 seems to address the immoral deeds of the people¹⁴ in conjunction with impending judgement through war (vv. 9–10; 13b–15), punctuated by a call to repentance (vv. 12; Lim 2015, 103; Ramirez 2014, 103; Smothers 1993, 241).

5.3 Verse Analysis

11 Ephraim was a trained heifer, who loved to thresh and I passed by her good neck. I will harness Ephraim, Juda will plough, Jacob will harrow.

The metaphor of Israel as a heifer seems to have been already introduced in the previous verse with a wordplay on the Hebrew verb אָסַר (“bound up,” ESV), which semantic field includes both the binding for captivity or the binding of animals (Hwang 2021, 257). The metaphor of the “trained heifer” has been viewed by some as carrying a negative connotation (Gruber 2017, 431; Hwang 2021, 257; Nogalski 2011, 149). It has been argued that the imagery presents an ironic allusion to Israel’s calf worship, regularly criticized by the prophet (cf. 8:5–6; 10:5; 13:2; Gisin 2014, 431; Hwang 2021, 257). Scholars have also understood Ephraim’s love for threshing as boisterous (Nogalski 2011, 149) or a self-serving activity¹⁵ (Gruber 2017, 431).

In my view, it seems better to perceive the metaphor of Israel as a “trained heifer” as essentially positive imagery that serves as a contrast to the accusation of a “stubborn heifer” in 4:16 (Lim 2015, 103). Similar to the metaphors of the bride in the desert (2:10), the luxuriant vine (9:10) or the son in Egypt (11:1), the prophet addresses the

¹⁴ It seems likely that the reference to Gibeah in 10:9 presents an allusion to the disastrous events recorded in Judges 19–21 and therefore refers to the Israel’s history of sin (Carroll R. 2008, pos. 3427–3428).

¹⁵ Oxen were allowed to eat during their work of threshing (Deut 25:4), making the task more pleasant for the animal.

beginning of the relationship between YHWH and his people (Dearman 2010, 152; Fretheim 2013, 62; Routledge 2020, 134). He emphasises the uniqueness of Israel's calling as well as the initial obedience with which they responded to this (e.g., on the night of the Exodus). Although not as challenging as the other agricultural tasks, carrying out the job of threshing (שׁוֹרֵף) evidenced some level of obedience to the owner and therefore should be taken as a negative description (Dearman 2010, 152). The positive imagery is continued by YHWH's assertion that he "passed her good neck," which metaphorically describes his observation of Israel's capability to receive and conform to God's Torah law (Macintosh 1997, 420).

Due to this observation of potential, farmer YHWH continued to increase their responsibility and entrusted them with more challenging duties: "I will harness Ephraim, Juda will plough, Jacob will harrow." In contrast to threshing, these tasks had to do specifically with the cultivation of the ground, which may be a reference to Israel's life in the Promised Land¹⁶ (Routledge 2020, 135;). As Gisin (2014, 435) argues, one might even relate the tasks of ploughing and harrowing to Israel's conquest of the land under Joshua. God commanded his people not only to expel the local tribes from Canaan (e.g., Deut 20:17) but also to cleanse the land of their idolatrous pillars and places of worship (e.g., Exod 23:24). Furthermore, the tasks under the yoke of the farmer implied an increased level of submission and guidance (Dearman 2010, 152; Nogalski 2011, 152).

12 Sow for yourself according to righteousness, reap according to loyal love. Break up for yourself fallow ground for it is time to seek YHWH until he comes and rains righteousness upon you.

While verse 12 remains in the agricultural realm, both the addressee (from 3rd person heifer to 2nd person plural) and Israel's role in the metaphor (from animal to the farmer) change from verse 11 (Fretheim 2013, 62; Ramirez 2014, 105). In the same way, ethical implications are now expressed more clearly and pointed towards an

¹⁶ Note that the two primary terms for the Promised Land אֶרֶץ וְיָדָה and אֶרֶץ מְנוּחָה are also used in the OT to describe physical ground, similar to the English "land" or German "Land" (McGuire-Moushon 2014, "Promised Land").

unequivocal summon to repentance (Lim 2015, 103; Macintosh 1997, 422; Smothers 1993, 241). In the OT, the imagery of sowing (זרע) and reaping (קצר) is regularly employed to describe “the connection between an act and its consequences” (Hamilton 1997, 1:1152; e.g., Job 4:8; Prov 22:8). It seems appropriate to understand Hosea 8:7 in this way: “Because they sow the wind, they will reap the whirlwind.” However, the use of זרע and קצר in 10:12 seems to be different in the way that the seed does determine the harvest. Due to the accompanying prepositions ל and לְפִי, the objects (צִדְקָה, חֶסֶד) probably have a “normative relationship” to the verbs (קצר, זרע; Hebrew Reference Grammar 2017, 257; cf. Gesenius 2013, 1041; Ramirez 2014, 106). Therefore, צִדְקָה (“righteousness”) and חֶסֶד (“loyal love”) become the standards according to which Israel is to sow and reap, i.e., how they are to *give* and *receive* in every aspect of their lives. One could summarize the prophet’s message: “Start to live in the way that righteousness and loyal love prescribe to you!”

While not entirely distinguishable, the female צִדְקָה in comparison to the masculine צְדָקָה (v. 12d) more strongly emphasises practical acts of righteousness (Matheus 2015, 274). These may encompass compassion for the needy (Deut 24:12–13) or the care of widows and orphans (vv. 17–21; Gisin 2014, 436). Due to the choice of terms and their normative grammatical relationship, it seems to suggest that these are primarily addressing ethical aspects (Carroll 2008, pos. 3434–3436; Macintosh 1997, 423). The virtues of צִדְקָה and חֶסֶד are centrally linked to the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel and are qualities of their marital bond (2:21; Dearman 2010, 153; Macintosh 1997, 422).

Interestingly, the prophet continues to exhort his people to “[b]reak up for yourself fallow ground,” a process that one would expect prior to the act of sowing (and reaping). Although the order of agricultural tasks may seem reversed, the message conveyed through these metaphors build on each other. After setting the standards of צִדְקָה and חֶסֶד, Hosea calls the people to repent from their ungodly conduct in order to conform to these norms (Lim 2015, 103). As introduced by Futato (1997, 3:100), this is the central metaphoric meaning of the lexeme נִיר (“break up fallow ground”) as it describes “deep repentance” (similar use in Jer 4:3). Two aspects can be drawn from this imagery for the process of returning to YHWH. Firstly, the preparation of *fallow*

ground points toward the new that repentance should bring forth in the life of the Israelites. In the same way a farmer approaches unused ground, the people should adopt hitherto unknown or neglected behaviour and attitudes in their repentance. Secondly, just as the ground had to be broken to receive the seeds and the rain, the hardness of hearts had to be broken to become fruitful for the covenant relationship with their God (Futato 1997, 3:100; Gisin 2014, 437; Padilla 2005, 16).

The call to repentance intensifies and takes on a sense of urgency: “for it is time to seek YHWH.” The agricultural society of Hosea’s time was aware of the significance of carrying out the right tasks in the right season. A farmer had to make use of the dry season (April–September) to prepare the ground and sow seeds before the wet season begins (October–March; Babcock 2014, s.v. Calendar). In the same way, Israel was to “seek (דַּרַשׁ) YHWH” *before* his appearance with rain. The term דַּרַשׁ here appears to be associated with the theme of repentance (c.f. Amos 5:4–7; Isa 1:17; 55:6), somewhat similar to the use of the closely-related בִּקַּשׁ in the Book of Hosea (2:9; 3:5; 5:6, 15; Denninger 1997, 1:995; Ramirez 2014, 107). Israel was to turn to YHWH (and not to idols) and seek his face in an “attitude of prayerful trust in him” (Macintosh 1997, 423).

Hwang (2021, 60) argues that the announced rain of “righteousness” (צִדְקָה) would be one of judgement, raining down “in the manner of projectiles.” However, this approach seems unconvincing for two primary reasons. Firstly, the metaphorical context of agriculture strongly suggests that the rain that accompanies YHWH’s coming is essentially positive and an expression of blessing (Ben Zvi 2005, 221). Secondly, a similar phrase found in 6:6 (יִרְהַב, בּוֹא) unambiguously speaks of restoration, and therefore should be understood in a similar way here (Routledge 2020, 101; cf. 14:6 or Isa 45:8 for similar imagery). YHWH’s pronouncement of raining righteousness upon his people is a promise that is “basically equivalent to salvation” (Fretheim 2013, 62). In the Prophetic Books, the righteousness (צִדְקָה) of God is revealed in the redemption of his people from captivity (Isa 46:13; 51:5–6) and their national restoration (Isa 45:8; Jer 23:6, 31:23; 33:16; Anderson 2014). If the people respond to God’s call to repentance, conform their life to ethical standards and seek him in prayer, he promises to answer with the rain of redemption and restoration (Routledge 2020,

136). Therefore, Israel is to prepare its fallow ground through repentance but is dependent on YHWH's rain of blessing in order to bear fruit (Gruber 2017, 437).

13a But you have ploughed evil, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of deception.

Remaining with the language of verses 11–12, verse 13a serves to demonstrate the deep gap between YHWH's expectations and the current reality of Israel (Caroll 2008, 3228; Hwang 2021, 260; Nogalski 2011, 150). In contrast to the ethical virtues of צדקה and חסד (v. 12), Israel's conduct in Hosea's time was characterised by injustice (רשע) and evil (עוֹלָה). Their harvest, "the fruit of deception," is not only a reference to the sin of falsehood among the Israelites (4:1; 5:3; 7:13; 12:1–9) but appears as an allusion to the Fall of man in Genesis 3 (Gisin 2014, 438; Macintosh 1997, 425). Verse 13a serves as a transition to verses 13b–15 which continue to announce judgement in the light of Israel's apostasy (Moon 2018, 176).

5.4 Exegetical Synthesis

The section of Hosea 10:11–13a connects the appeal to return with agricultural imagery (Lim 2015, 103). The explicit call to repentance (v. 12) is presented against the backdrop of Israel's vocation (v. 11). Similar to other sections (2:17; 9:10; 10:1: 11:1), it seems correct to understand these metaphors as allusions to the time of Israel's Exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land (Dearman 2010, 152). The assertion of Israel's "good neck" seems to imply a lesson for the subsequent exhortation towards repentance: the people are capable of carrying YHWH's yoke and living according to his commandments (Macintosh 1997, 420). Albeit only in the interplay with God's חסד, Israel's return to obedience towards him is possible. It takes some effort and determination in view of their present spiritual condition (v. 13b), but they can conform their lives to God's ideas of צדקה and חסד (v. 12). Just as a new field is prepared by a farmer, the people need to allow their hearts to be broken and "renewed" (Padilla 2005, 16). If they seek God through repentance and prayer, he will come with his blessing and restoration through "righteousness."

6. Hosea 11:1–11

6.1 Preliminary Analysis

6.1.1 Translation of the text

1 *When Israel was a boy, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son.*

2 *The more they were called, the more they walked away [from those who called them]^a; they sacrificed to the Baalim and offered incense to the idols.*

3 *It was I who taught Ephraim how to walk, taking them by the arms^b; but they did not recognise that I healed them.*

4 *With human ropes I drew them, with bands of love, but to them, I was like one who lifts a yoke^c to their jaws, although I bent down to feed them.*

5 *Shall they not return to the land of Egypt?^d And Assyria—he will be his king, because they refused to repent.*

6 *A sword will swirl in his cities, it will consume its false prophets, and will devour them because of their schemes.*

7 *My people are caught up in their apostasy. When called upward, he [Ephraim] does not rise at all.^e*

8 *How can I give you over O Ephraim, hand you over O Israel? How can I give you over like Adamah, do to you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned within me, all my compassion is aroused.*

9 *I will not execute the burning of my anger, I will not turn back to destroy Ephraim, because I am God and not man—the Holy One in your midst—and I will not come in wrath^f.*

10 *They will go after YHWH, he will roar like a lion; when he roars, sons will come trembling from the west.*

11 *They will tremble like birds from Egypt and like doves from the land of Assur and I will let them dwell in their houses declares YHWH.*

6.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (v. 2) The MT literally reads: “They called them and so they went away from their faces.” In the assumption that Biblical Hebrew at times makes use of an active voice to describe a passive act, it seems adequate to understand קָרָאוּ as the passive “they were called” and to leave open the object of מִפְּנֵיהֶם (ESV, NIV, Gruber 2017, 460;

cf. SLT: “Aber sobald man sie rief, wandten sie sich vom Angesicht [der Rufenden] ab“). Other options include (1) the reading of the third person plural as a description of the prophets calling Israel to repentance (Rashi in Gruber 2017, 460; Carroll 2008, 155), or (2) Israel’s call on Egypt, after which they went to Assyria (CSB; Fretheim 2013, 64; Lim 2015, 106; Macintosh 1997, 439–440; cf. 7:11 for the same word pair), (3) In following the text of the LXX and the Syriac, others have accepted an emendation of the MT from the third person plural to first person singular of both קרא (“I called”) and פָּנָה (“from my face”; ELB, NET, NRSV; Dearman 2010, 154; Moon 2018, 181; Routledge 2020, 139). In my view, it is better not to unnecessarily emend the MT at two instances at the same time (contra (3)), or to base one’s interpretation too heavily on ambiguous formulations, especially as these constructions appear debatable in the immediate context of the verse (contra [1] and [2]).

b. (v. 3) Adopting the LXX, others render the phrase in the sense of “taking them *upon my arms*” (cf. Deut 1:31; LEB, SLT; Dearman 2010, 155; Gruber 2017, 465). In my view, it is better to stay closer to the MT and understand the phrase as an explanation of the training of how to walk (cf. ESV, NIV, CSB).

c. (v. 4) Based on the understanding that verse 3 has to refer to familial metaphorical imagery, some scholars have emended the MT’s עֶל (yoke) to עוֹל/עַל (infant) and translated the phrase in the sense of “I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks” (Fretheim 2013, 64; cf. Lim 2015, 107; NIV, NRSV). As I will argue in the exegetical discussion of the verse, such an emendation is unnecessary.

d. (v. 5) The straightforward translation of the MT is: “He will not return to the land of Egypt” (cf. ESV, CSB, Dearman 2010, 155; Hwang 2021, 243), which, however, seems to contradict other statements in Book of Hosea (7:11, 9:3; 11:11; 12:2; Ben Zvi 2005, 231). Some have tried to solve this tension by taking לוֹ instead of the MT’s לָא and reading it as the end of verse 4 (“bent down to them,” NRSV). In my opinion, it seems best to assume a rhetorical question here (cf. NIV; Moon 2018, 179; Routledge 2020, 141).

e. (v. 7). Many interpreters understand אֱלֹ-עֵל as an emended form of אֱלֹ-עֵלִיֹן (4x in Gen 14:18–22) and therefore translate it with “the Most High” as a reference to YHWH:

“To the Most High they call, he does not raise them at all” (LEB; cf. ESV; NIV; NRSV; Carroll 2008, pos. 3554–3555; Moon 2018, 180). Some have adopted a more generic translation (“to one above” Hwang 2021, 242; cf. CSB), that allows a reference to gods of the “Canaanite pantheon” (Nogalski 2011, 159) or even the king of Assyria (Fretheim 2013, 65). In my view it seems adequate to understand the 3rd person Plural of קרא as an impersonal passive expression (“When called,” cf. v. 2) and see אֶל-עַל as a moral or spiritual destination (“upward” or “to higher things”, Macintosh 1997, 455; cf. SLT, Gisin 2014, 450; Gruber 2017, 475). This translation seems to correspond best with the preceding theme of repentance (v. 7a) and the subsequent demonstration of YHWH’s continuous affection towards Israel (Gisin 2014, 450).

f. (v. 9) Some read עִיר as “city” (LXX, NIV, Macintosh 1997, 463), but the context seems to suggest the reading of עִיר II as “wrath” (cf. Jer 15:8; ESV; LEB; Moon 2018, 180).

6.2 Contextual Analysis

The section 11:1–11 continues the theme of vocation and apostasy that is presented in the larger framework of 9:9–11:11 (Hwang 2021, 263, Lim 2015, 106). While it is possible to understand Hosea 11 as forming one unit with the previous Hosea 10 (Ben Zvi 2005, 227; Moon 2018, 180), it seems better to take the theme of fatherhood as an indication of a new and independent section (Dearman 2010, 254). After the marriage metaphor presented in Hosea 1–3, the introduction of God as the father of Israel presents the second familial imagery in the Book of Hosea. The paternal metaphor presents the central topic of 11:1–11 (Gruber 2017, 457; Lim 2015, 106). The section seems to include the following four parts (Ben Zvi 2005:226; Moon 2018:183):

1–4 Divine fatherhood

5–7 Judgement

8–9 The mercy of God

10–11 Israel’s Return

6.3 Verse Analysis

1 When Israel was a boy, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son. 2 The more they were called, the more they walked away [from those who called them]; they sacrificed to the Baalim and offered incense to the idols.

Hosea 11:1–4 reveals the fatherly love of YHWH for his people. The section presents one of the most detailed presentations of God’s fatherhood toward Israel in the Old Testament (Medved 2016, 210; Nogalski 2011, 156; cf. Exod 4:22–23; Deut 1:31, 8:5; Isa 43:6, 63:8). In contrast to the husband-wife metaphor (Hosea 1–3) or other imagery for Israel in Hosea (9:10; 10:11), the father-son metaphor emphasises that Israel had nothing to give to YHWH (Fretheim 2013, 64). It was only the love (אהב) of God that led him to adopt the immature child (נער) Israel and make him his son (בן, v.1; Hwang 2021, 263). As presented in Deuteronomy 4:37 and 7:7–8, YHWH’s love (אהב) for Israel and their “unmerited election” (בחר) are deeply connected,¹⁷ with the Exodus as the ultimate evidence of his divine fatherhood (“out of Egypt I called my son”; Lim 2015, 106; Els 1997, 1:281).

Tragically, child Israel demonstrates his potential for rebellion and is unwilling to respond to the voice of the father¹⁸ (v. 2; Nogalski 2011, 155–157). Instead of following, they “walked away,” which describes their deliberate move away from the presence of God (Dearman 2010, 157). Again, the apostasy of the Israelites is directly linked to their devotion to false gods (cf. 1:2; 3:1). Their idolatry underlines the perversion of their thankfulness as it is directed towards those who have not given them anything at all (cf. 2:10; Fretheim 2013, 64).

3 It was I who taught Ephraim how to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not recognise that I healed them. 4 With human ropes I drew them, with bands of love, but to them, I was like one who lifts a yoke to their jaws, although I bent down to feed them.

¹⁷ Note that *קָדַד* is also regularly associated with *אהב* (e.g., Deut 7:9; Els 1997, 281).

¹⁸ Although the MT is somewhat vague about the subject of calling (cf. 5.1.2a), in my view it suggests itself to assume the voice of the divine father from the previous verse.

YHWH is Israel's father, not only in the sense that he is the author of their being, but also the One who lovingly fostered them by teaching them "how to walk" (v. 3; Macintosh 1997, 438). This fatherly training expresses guidance and probably implies a reference to the Torah law given to the Israelites for instruction (Moon 2018, 184; Routledge 2020, 140). By "taking them by the arms," YHWH provided stability and protection for his people and guided them alongside his example. In the time of the Exodus, the Israelites learned to rely on the Lord's "outstretched arm," with which he redeemed them from Egypt (Exod 6:6; 15:6; Deut 11:2; 26:8; Hwang 2021, 265).

The explanation of YHWH's education also includes an ironic statement: he taught his people to walk (v. 3), but they used this skill to walk away from him (v. 2). Furthermore, the people have demonstrated their ignorance by disregarding his healing in their life (2:10). In my view, it seems best to follow Brown's interpretation¹⁹ (1995, 189–190) by understanding *רפא* not in the sense of physical healing, but as bringing Israel "from weakness and immaturity to strength and maturity" (cf. the healing theme in Ezek 16:1:7–8). YHWH nurtured his son Israel in a wholesome fashion, which is why Israel has the responsibility of remembering and honouring his parent for this (Exod 20:12; Gruber 2017, 465).

Verse 4 continues to illuminate the relationship between YHWH and Israel. There is a great debate among scholars on whether the imagery remains in the parent metaphor (Fretheim 2013, 64; Nogalski 2011, 157–158; Routledge 2020, 140) or moves towards the realm of agriculture (cf. 10:11 Dearman 2010, 158; Gisin 2014, 457; Macintosh 1997, 445–449; Moon 2018:184). In my view, one does best not to exclude the imageries from each other but to allow the themes side by side. It seems best to understand YHWH as the caring parent and Israel as misunderstanding such care as a constraint. As the Jewish scholar Gruber (2017, 467–468) puts it: "God was the quintessential Jewish mother, as it were, who only meant well. Her attempts to draw the erstwhile child close to her were interpreted as attempts to enslave the erstwhile child." The "human ropes" and "bands

¹⁹ Other interpretations include the healing of a child's injuries in its process of learning how to walk (Routledge 2020, 140) or a reference to the healing in the desert at Mara (Exod 15:23–26; Gisin 2014, 457.)

of love,” positioned to draw Israel into fellowship with YHWH were understood as subjugation; his efforts to feed Israel as putting “a yoke to their jaws.” This seems to be the reason why “The more they were called, the more they walked away” (v. 2). Ensnared in their rebellion, the people rejected their God who reached out to his people in tender love.

5 Shall they not return to the land of Egypt? And Assyria—he will be his king, because they refused to repent. 6 A sword will swirl in his cities, it will consume its false prophets, and will devour them because of their schemes. 7 My people are caught up in their apostasy. When called upward, he [Ephraim] does not rise at all.

Verses 5–7 illuminate the consequences of Israel’s rebellion and give an outlook on the end of Israel’s kingdom. In this oracle, the pronouncements of judgement are directly linked with Israel’s refusal of repentance (v. 5; Lim 2015, 259). Because they have rejected the sovereignty of YHWH in their lives, he will dethrone their king (10:15) and put the Israelites under Assyrian kingship²⁰ (Ben Zvi 2005, 231). Because Israel has neglected to return to YHWH (שוב, spiritual sense), they will have to return to Egypt (שוב, physical sense), i.e., a reversal of the Exodus of 11:1 (LeCureux in Lim 2015:49; Moon 2018, 184). In verse 6, the prophet explicates these threats of judgement in demonstrating the dimension of violence that comes with exile (Routledge 2020, 141). The destruction is described in vivid language: “swirl” (חורל), “consume” (כלה), and “devour” (אכל).

Due to textual difficulties, verse 7 has to be approached with care (Dearman 2010, 160; Kakkanattu 2006, 71). In my view, verse 7 is best understood as a reference to the people’s ongoing apostasy. The term מְשׁוּבָה in the OT always seems to describe the turning away from God and is therefore fixed on the negative aspect of its root word שׁוּב (“to turn”). The accompanying verb תלא in its basic sense means “hängen, aufhängen” (to hang; Matheus 2015, תלא) and here seems to describe the attachment of the people to their apostate nature (Routledge 2020, 142). Verse 7a could be

²⁰ This threat of Assyrian dominion could have become reality in the vassalage under Tiglath-Pileser III in the time of Menahem or the invasion by Shalmaneser V in the time of Hoshea.

understood as similar to 5:4 (“a spirit of whoredom is within them”) in the sense that it describes Israel’s tendencies towards infidelity (Kakkanattu 2006, 74). There is a “deep-seated intransigence” among the Israelites: even in the face of severe judgement, they find it difficult to return to their God (Hwang 2021, 268). Tragically, not even the call to repentance reaches their hearts: “When called upward, he [Ephraim] does not rise at all.” The Israelites have received spiritual and moral direction (לָעֲלֹה, “upward”) from prophets like Hosea or Elijah (Macintosh 1997, 557). With urgency, they have been called to reconcile with YHWH and therefore receive his redemption from judgement (Deut 30:2–3). Still, the Israelites have neglected to respond to this call and do not “rise at all” to align with YHWH’s rule.

8 How can I give you over O Ephraim, hand you over O Israel? How can I give you over like Adamah, do to you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned within me, all my compassion is aroused. 9 I will not execute the burning of my anger, I will not turn back to destroy Ephraim, because I am God and not man—the Holy One in your midst—and I will not come in wrath.

Verses 8 and 9 give the reader an intimate insight into the heart of God and his fatherly emotions towards his people. The four introductory questions should not be understood as actual questions but as statements of “self-caution” (cf. Gen 39:9; Gruber 2017, 476). The parallel expressions of נתן and מגן here both express the ideas of abandoning or handing someone over, i.e., to destruction (Gesenius 2013, 628, 862). In this, the prophet draws parallels to Adamah and Zeboiim, cities that were destroyed like Sodom or Gomorrah²¹ in the course of judgement (Deut 29:23). It appears best to apply this verse in the context of impending exile (vv. 5–7). Therefore, although exile will be realized, it will be only temporary and not lead to Israel’s complete end (Routledge 2020, 143). The grave sin of the Israelites means that they would deserve drastic punishment in terms of destruction (Moon 2018, 185). However, YHWH will not “turn back to destroying” Israel (v. 9), which means that he will not proceed with judgement until their complete end but will sustain them before him (v.

²¹ Probably the prophet referred to Adamah and Zeboiim (and not the more popular Sodom and Gomorrah) for literary reasons, i.e., alliteration with the letter נ in this verse (Ben Zvi 2005, 229).

9; Fretheim 2013, 66). This also means that YHWH differentiates between them and other nations: both deserve judgement, but due to his covenant with his people, Israel will not be given over to elimination (Hwang 2021, 269).

YHWH's decision not to destroy Israel comes from deep fatherly mercy (v. 9; Gisin 2014, 463; Nogalski 2011, 160). He goes so far as to say that his own "heart is turned" (הִפָּךְ)²² and his "compassion (רַחֲמִים) is aroused." The root verb נָחַם of רַחֲמִים is associated with either "comfort or console" or "repent, change one's mind" (Butterworth 1997, 3:81–82). When YHWH is the subject of נָחַם, the term usually describes him being moved to change his course in dealing with humans, particularly as a response to repentance (e.g., Jer 18:8; 26:3). The warmth of his compassionate affection leads the God of Israel to spare his people from destruction and therefore to "execute the burning of [his] anger" (v. 9). As Moon (2018, 190) states, we should not understand אֲפִי אֶרְרֹן ("burning of my anger") as an outbreak of emotions but rather as God's "stance" taken towards wickedness and sin. In his perfection, YHWH opposes the evil of human depravity. This has been previously emphasised in the Book of Hosea through various metaphors (e.g., maggot, rottenness (5:12), fierce lion (5:14), bird catcher (7:12)) that are contrasted with imagery of the gracious father of Hosea 11 (Brueggemann 2008, 9). Two stances arise in the heart of God as he looks at Israel: one against sin and the other for his chosen covenant people (Moon 2018, 190). Therefore, this passage should not be understood as God changing his mind, as some have proposed (Dearman 2010, 161; Nogalski 2011, 161). Rather, YHWH makes the decision not to "execute" (עָשָׂה) the full force of his hatred of sin, but to act according to his mercy for Israel (Hwang 2021, 270; Routledge 2020, 143).

How can YHWH do such thing? "[B]ecause I am God and not man—the Holy One in your midst." God's nature and character go far beyond human possibilities. Whereas man is unstable in his decisions, YHWH holds fast to his commitment to Israel (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29). The father image of Hosea 11 illuminates vital aspects of God's character and relationship with his people but therefore remains limited in application

²² The use of הִפָּךְ includes a wordplay as it also denotes the overturning of the above-mentioned cities (Gen 19:25; Deut 29:23; Brueggemann 2008, 17).

(Hwang 2021, 270; Routledge 2020, 144). As the “Holy One”, YHWH is set apart from humans. Yet, this does not mean permanent judgement or final separation, as he announces that he is in the midst of his people (בְּקִרְבָּךְ; Dearman 2010, 162). Furthermore, it is his holiness that becomes not only the source of their judgement (Isa 5:16) but also of their salvation (Isa 10:20, 48:17; Routledge 2020, 144). In his holiness and purity lie the perfected qualities of compassion (גְּהֻמִים) and הַסֵּד that persist throughout blatant apostasy and sin and finally become the basis for Israel’s final restoration (Kakkanattu 2006, 100; Macintosh 1997, 465).

10 They will go after YHWH, he will roar like a lion; when he roars, sons will come trembling from the west. 11 They will tremble like birds from Egypt and like doves from the land of Assur and I will let them dwell in their houses, declares YHWH.

Once again, YHWH is presented as a lion. But unlike in 5:14 or 13:8, this does not imply punitive actions against the Israelites, though the imagery remains one of fear and respect (Nogalski 2011, 161). The roar with which he calls his people back to him connotes authority and majesty and therefore, the people “tremble” (הָרַד) before him (Gisin 2014, 466; cf. Am 3:8). Whereas the physical return is an important theme in this subsection, it seems that the primary emphasis is on the spiritual return of the people (Hwang 2021, 272). The use of הָלַךְ in both verse 2 and verse 10 signifies that these should be understood as deliberate contrasting statements, framing the section (Ben Zvi 2005, 227; Routledge 2020, 144). Whereas the people had gone away in apostasy (מִפְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, v. 2) as they were called, they will now go after YHWH (אַחֲרָי, v. 10), which is a statement of “covenant fidelity” (Kakkanattu 2006, 94). A second signifier for the topic of repentance is the reference to the people’s trembling (הָרַד). Fretheim (2013, 67) argues that the people’s trembling would be an expression of “joy at the prospect of soon returning home.” However, there is little evidence for this view (Gesenius 2013, 394; Matheus 2015, 107). Rather, הָרַד describes the trembling of renewed reverence towards YHWH, similar to the people’s reaction to divine glory in Exodus 19:16 (Gisin 2014, 466).

The spiritual return of the Israelites is presented as interdependent with their physical return (Jacobs 2010, 23). It seems adequate to understand verses 10–11 in the context of future exile (Gruber 2017, 485; Kakkanattu 2006, 93). Since Israel has

sought help from the nations of Egypt and Assyria (7:11; note the term “dove”), they will be sent into exile there (11:5–6), which will finally be reversed (vv. 10–11; Macintosh 1997, 470). Whereas verses 10–11 have clear parallels to 3:4–5 (exile, repentance, trembling), the regathering in the land presents a new aspect in the restoration of Israel (“I will let them dwell in their houses”; Hwang 2021, 272). Faithful to his word (e.g., Gen 13:14–17), YHWH will restore the nation to the Israelites in the course of their repentance.

Concerning Israel's spiritual return, Jacobs (2010, 23) argues that verses 10–11 may well be “perceived as a decision to restore Israel to a relationship that Israel may not want.” For her, the call to repentance in 11:1–11 is both an “invitation” and a “threat” towards Israel and she argues that “It is understandable that Israel resists a relationship defined by control and exclusivity.” (p. 32). In my opinion, this view presents a misunderstanding of the section 11:1–11. Firstly, Jacob’s statements of divine selfishness seem hard to reconcile with the imagery of a father who loves (v. 1) and nurtures his son (vv. 3–4). In the way a child has not much to offer to his father, YHWH chose Israel not for any personal gain (Deut 7:7–8; Fretheim 2013, 64). Secondly, the semantic realm for the call to repentance (קרא; vv. 2; 7) or bands of love (עֲבֹתוֹת אֶהְבֶּה; v. 3) conveys divine tenderness as well as Israel’s freewill—a freewill that the Israelites could use to resist YHWH (vv. 2; 5; 7; Carroll 2008, pos. 3544). Thirdly, Jacob’s reading of 11:8–9 as “inability of the deity to let go of perceived control” is hardly supported by the biblical text but rather appears as eisegesis (p. 21). The unambiguous references to God’s affection (“my heart is turned within me”) and compassion (נְחָמִים) stand contrary to an alleged egoistic aspiration of control.

In its context, therefore, verses 10–11 should not be understood as repentance that is enforced by manipulative methods but as a response to divine אֱהָבָה-love. This does not nullify the above-mentioned aspects of reverence and fear (הָרַד; “tremble”; Nogalski 2011, 161). YHWH’s demonstration of power allows (rather than forces) the Israelites to return as his holy roar (cf. v. 9) “rouses them from the moral torpor” (Macintosh 1997, 470). The fear that is produced in the Israelites is only rightly understood in the framework of God’s gracious character and is directed towards the renewal of relationship and the restoration of the nation (Hwang 2021, 272).

6.4 Exegetical Synthesis

The section 11:1–11 introduces God as a loving and compassionate father who raised and nurtured his son Israel from the time of the Exodus (vv. 1–4). This tender imagery demonstrates the רַחֻּם -character of YHWH and thereby points to the gracious covenant partner to whom the Israelites are to repent (Ben Zvi 2005, 239). The revelation of his troubled thoughts (vv. 8–9) gives a deep, even vulnerable insight into the heart of God (Fretheim 2013, 65). Despite the Israelites' sin, God remains merciful and will welcome them as they return (vv. 10–11). In contrast to this tender imagery stands the recalcitrant attitude of the Israelites. The depravity and apostasy of the people are manifested in their refusal to repent of their sins, even if they are admonished to do so (vv. 2; 5–7). Although on arguable textual evidence (v. 4), it seems that a perverted picture of YHWH is presented as a fundamental hindrance to their repentance in 11:3–4 (Gruber 2017, 467–468). Similar to the third servant in the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:24), the Israelites not only disobeyed their master but accused him of harshness. As a means of discipline, judgement is inevitable (vv. 5–6), though it will be only temporary. YHWH's holiness is manifested in the persistence of his compassion towards Israel (vv. 8–9). His demonstration of majesty will lead to Israel's spiritual and physical return in restoration (vv. 10–11).

7. Hosea 14:2–9

7.1. Preliminary Analysis

7.1.1. Translation of the text

2 Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God, because you have stumbled in your iniquity.

3 Take words with you and return to YHWH, say to him: "Take away iniquity and accept good, let us pay the bull of our lips^a.

4 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will no longer say 'Our God' to the work of our hands, for in you an orphan finds compassion."

5 I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, because my anger has turned away from them.

6 I will be like the dew to Israel, he will blossom like the lily, and he will strike his roots like Lebanon.

7 His new shoots will spread out and his majesty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.

8 They will return to dwell in his shadow,^b they will grow grain, they will blossom like the vine, his renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

9 Ephraim [will say]: “What need do I have of idols any longer?”^c [YHWH]: It is I who answers and looks after you.” [Ephraim]: “I am like a green cypress.” [YHWH]: “Your fruit comes from me.”

6.1.2 Notes on Translation

a. (v. 3) The MT’s פָּרִים (“bulls”) has been emended by the LXX to פְּרִי (“fruit,” (followed by LEB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, ELB; Dearman 2010, 186) probably for reasons of syntax and the potential parallels with passages like Isaiah 57:19 or Proverbs 12:14 (Hwang 2021, 32; Macintosh 1997, 563). In my view, it is better to follow the original MT version since it appears to correspond well with the sacrificial theme of נִשְׁלַם (cf. ESV, NET; Hwang 2021, 316; Gruber 2017, 569).

b. (v. 8) The expression יָשְׁבוּ יִשְׁבֵי בְצֵלוֹ יְחִיו דָּגָן allows different interpretations, the primary issue being the relationship between יָשְׁבוּ (“they will return”) and the participle יִשְׁבֵי (“those who dwell”; Ben Zvi 2005, 298). In my view, it is best to understand the participle יִשְׁבֵי functioning as a modification of יָשְׁבוּ (“They shall return and dwell,” ESV). Other options include the function as a noun (“Es kehren zurück, die in seinem Schatten wohnen” [those return who live in his shadow], ELB) or the more auxiliary modification of יָשְׁבוּ (“They will again dwell,” LEB; Hebrew Reference Grammar 20.3.2).

c. (v. 9) Verse 9 is another example of Hosea’s ambiguous language, especially the first half of the verse (literal translation: “Ephraim ... what ... I ... to idols; I will respond and I will look to him.” The primary issues are the allocation of the text’s elements to potential speakers and the interconnected decisions in translations. Many ascribe the text wholly to YHWH and understand verse 9a as a rhetorical question that emphasises the superiority of YHWH over idols (“O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?” ESV; cf. LEB; NIV; Dearman 2010, 189; Hwang 2021, 216; Moon 2018, 216; Nogalski 2011, 192). Others see the introductory “Ephraim” as signifying the speaker

without “*verbum dicendi*” and understand verse 9 as a dialogue between redeemed Israel and YHWH (“Ephraim [will ask]: ‘For what more do I need images?’”; Gruber 2017, 594–595; cf. ELB; SLT; Macintosh 1997, 576). In my view, the dialogue in verse 9 seems to be the more suitable approach in interpretation, especially in light of the preceding dialogue of verses 2–4 and 5–8 between Israel and YHWH (Gruber p. 594; Macintosh 1997, 577). According to the studies of Frisch (2009 in Gruber 2017, 595), the form of unmarked quotations is found in various other ancient sources and texts.

7.2 Contextual Analysis

As the final main unit, the section 14:2–9 presents the climax of the Book of Hosea, especially in its theme of repentance. This is why Olson (2017, 168) understands this section “to be the most important of all the *šûb*/return texts in Hosea.” Hosea 14 features links all over the Book of Hosea: besides verses 5–7, most words are already used elsewhere (Moon 2018, 218). Furthermore, theological key themes of the book are taken up: e.g., divine love (14:4; 3:1; 9:15; 11:1, 4), healing (14:5; 6:1; 7:1; 11:3), mercy (14:4; 1:6–7; 2:4, 19, 23; Fretheim 2013, 78). It is also important to emphasise the relationship between 13:1–14:1 and 14:2–9 and the conspicuous lexical and topical parallels (e.g., iniquity [13:12, 14:1, 14:2]; dew [13:3, 14:6]; salvation only by YHWH [3:4; 14:4]; work of their hands [13:2; 14:4]). While 14:1 should not be ascribed to the section of 14:2–9, the verse should be understood as transitional in summarizing Israel’s guilt (Ben Zvi 2005, 288; Hwang 2021, 313; Moon 2018, 219).

In my view, 14:2–9 is best understood in the following structure (cf. Gisin 2014, 557; Gruber 2017, 576):

2–4 Pious repentance

2–3a Call to repentance

3b–4 Prescribed prayer

5–8 Restoration promise

9 Dialogue between YHWH and Ephraim

7.3 Verse Analysis

2 Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God, because you have stumbled in your iniquity. 3 Take words with you and return to YHWH, say to him: "Take away iniquity and accept good, let us pay the bull of our lips. 4 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will no longer say "Our God" to the work of our hands, for in you an orphan finds compassion."

The unit is introduced by the imperative שׁוּבָה ("return") that directly links the passage to earlier calls or references to repentance in Hosea. It has been revealed throughout the Book of Hosea that a comprehensive return is the ultimate goal of YHWH in his relationship with Israel (2:17; 3:5; 11:10; McCarty 2016, 37). In the final section of the Book, this message is reemphasised and finalized by the prophet: "*Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God*" (v .1; Moon 2018, 219).

Israel's need to return is directly linked to their sin (Nogalski 2011, 195). As a rather general term, עֲוֹן is used to describe a variety of sins in Hosea and therefore summarizes different forms of covenant breaches (11x in Hosea, e.g., 4:8; 7:1; 10:10; Hwang 2021, 319; Nogalski 2011, 190). The reference to Israel's stumbling (כָּשַׁל) refers to the destruction of judgement that Israel has already experienced at this point (cf. imperfect in 5:5 vs. perfect in 14:2). The call to repentance, however, seems to indicate that the northern kingdom of Israel still existed, and it is reasonable to assume that these final words of Hosea have been written prior to the fall of Samaria (722 BC; Egelkraut 2017, 1051; McCarty 2016, 36).

The introductory imperative is followed by three further imperatives: "take words," "return," "say to him" (v. 3). The link between repentance and the commandments to speak emphasises here the importance of words that are to be enunciated by the penitent (Routledge 2020, 159). The prophet illuminates the parallels between the sacrificial system and the utterance of sincere penitential prayers.²³ Whereas Torah

²³ As De Andrado (2016, 63–65) rightly points out, this does not mean that the prophet is advocating a removal of the sacrificial system but is giving the appropriate theological framework for such.

law commanded the Israelites to bring animals when seeking the presence of God (Exod 25:15; Deut 16:16), the people are here told to take words (דְּבָרִים) with them as they approach the Lord (Routledge 2020, 160). Although the translation is debated by scholars (cf. 6.1.2a), it seems that the phrase וְנִשְׁלַמְהָ פָּרִים עֹפְתֵינוּ (“let us pay the bull of our lips,” v. 3) is further emphasising this point and also implies a cultic reference (De Andrado 2016, 63). Both the imperatives to speak (v. 3) and the aforementioned hortative (v. 4) are put in the plural, which signifies that the prophet is addressing these words to all people. Whereas animals were only sacrificed by the priests, prayers of repentance could be expressed by everyone (Hwang 2021, 319).

The people are so deeply involved in their sinful behaviour that they require guidance in their prospective return to the Lord (Fretheim 2013, 78; Gisin 2014, 561). Verses 3c–4 should be understood as the prescription of a prayer by the prophet to the people which includes all aspects of pious repentance (McCarty 2016, 36; Gruber 2017, 566). The prayer is best structured in three parts (cf. Gisin 2014, 559):

1. Request for forgiveness (v. 3c)
2. Acts of repentance (vv. 3d–4d)
 - a. Deeds will follow the words of repentance (v. 3d)
 - b. No longer trust in Assyria (v. 4a)
 - c. No longer trust in horses (v. 4b)
 - d. No longer worship of idols (v. 4c)
3. Acknowledgement of the mercy of YHWH (v. 4e)

The first aspect of the prescribed prayer is the request for the forgiveness of sin (“Take away all iniquity and accept good,” v. 3). The positioning of this component also seems to indicate its priority in the penitential prayer. As their iniquity (עֲוֹן) was the condition that destroyed them (v. 2), it has to be forgiven and the deserved punishment must be “taken away” (the central meaning of נִשְׁאַ, Hamilton 1997, נִשְׂא). Only with their sincere confession and renunciation of sin, can the people return to the Lord and open the door for their restoration (Routledge 2020, 164). Furthermore, the people are to ask YHWH to “accept good,” i.e., to respond positively to their prayer and accept their verbal commitment toward him (Gruber 2017, 569). In this, the pious nature of the

prayer is emphasised: the “good” (טוֹב) refers to YHWH’s nature and his holiness (e.g., Psa 25:8; 136:1; Hwang 2021, 319).

The second section of the penitential prayer includes different commitments made to YHWH. This shows that the actions after their penitential prayer are an important element of their repentance. Even though there is a strong emphasis on saying words in verse 3, these words must be understood as opening a door to a new lifestyle that will follow afterwards (Nogalski 2011, 190). This also appears to be the message of 3d: "let us pay the bulls of our lips." The term נְשַׁלֵּם specifically emphasises the completion of a matter, or the "payment of ... vows" (Nel 1997, 4:130). The words offered by lips become a God-pleasing sacrifice when fulfilled by deeds (Gisin 2014, 561). This statement is particularly interesting in contrast to descriptions of superficial repentance in the book of Hosea. In 5:4–6, the prophet criticises the insincere repentance of his people, by which they try to hastily return to YHWH's blessing. But as the prayer of repentance in 14:2–4 shows, both the heartfelt request for forgiveness and the honest change of life are components of genuine repentance (Nogalski 2011, 190; Routledge 2020, 160).

The people's promise of renewed fidelity includes renunciation in three areas: Assyria, military force (or Egypt) and idolatry (v. 4). Here the text addresses a central theme in Hosea, i.e., the perverse reliance on anything other than YHWH (e.g., 2:7, 10; 10:13; Moon 2018, 220). The first promise is to turn away from Assyria ("shall not save us"; v. 4a). Although YHWH is the one who saves Israel (יִשְׁע; cf. 1:7; 13:4, 10), it has repeatedly placed its trust in Assyria (cf. 5:13; 7:11; 12:2). The primary meaning of אַשּׁוּר here should be understood as the political nation to which King Menahem paid tribute (2 Kgs 15:19) or which became Judah's military aid (2 Kgs 16:1–18). But as I have already presented under §2.3.2, this political dimension cannot be separated from the religious one and this statement also has implications regarding the worship of the state god Assur (Hwang 2021, 320). In its repentance, Israel is to renounce false reliance on Assur and acknowledge YHWH as their saviour and protector (McCarty 2016, 38).

The next confession has a similar direction: "we will not ride on horses" (v. 4b). In the Ancient Near East, horses were considered the epitome of military strength (Hwang

2021, 320). Gruber (2017, 571) emphasises the importance of Egypt for the trading of horses at this point (cf. Deut 17: 16; Isa 31:1) and argues that this statement should thus be understood as a rejection of Egypt in parallel with Assyria. While this is a possibility, the importance of military strength seems to be paramount (cf. 1:7; 10:13; Routledge 2020, 160). Israel must turn away from its reliance on its own strength to receive YHWH's salvation and strength.

The third concrete renunciation in Israel's repentance is supposed to be on the cultic level: "we will no longer say 'Our God' to the work of our hands" (v. 4c). In their history, the Israelites had repeatedly worshipped figurines and similar fabrications as idols (Deut 4:28; Isa 2:8; Mic 5:12), such as the calf of Bethel (Hos 8:6; 10:5; 13:2; Gruber 2017, 573). In their heartfelt repentance, the people had to cleanse themselves from these idols and promise that they would never again bow to these images in open idolatry or syncretistic worship.

The prescribed prayer of repentance is concluded by a remark on God's gracious character: "for in you an orphan finds compassion (v. 4d)." With this final statement, the penitent people summarize why repentance is possible: YHWH, who desists according to the sins of his people, grants undeserved compassion to them (cf. 11:8; Gisin 2014, 559; Gruber 2017). The self-description as an orphan (יְתוֹם) is interesting, especially as YHWH has revealed himself as the father of Israel (11:1–4). It seems appropriate to understand this declaration as an expression of contrite humility, similar to the statement of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:19 (Caroll 2008, pos. 4007–4008). Israel is to acknowledge the consequences of its infidelity (Routledge 2020, 161). At the same time, this statement is an affirmation of YHWH's חַסְדֵּךָ and their dependence on it (Moon 2018, 220; McCarty 2016, 38).

5 I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, because my anger has turned away from them. 6 I will be like the dew to Israel, he will blossom like the lily, and he will strike his roots like Lebanon. 7 His new shoots will spread out and his majesty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. 8 They will return to dwell in his shadow, they will grow grain, they will blossom like the vine, his renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

In verses 5–8, YHWH promises restoration to his people. The largest controversy among scholars regarding the promises of verses 5–9 has been their relation to the penitential prayer of verses 2–4. Two main streams of opinion are visible among academics. The larger group of scholars sees verses 5–8 as a direct response to Israel’s repentance in verses 2–4 (Gruber 2017, 576; Hwang 2021, 322; McCarty pp. 36, 39; Nogalski 2011, 91; Lim 2015:280; Routledge 2020, 159). For them, the divine promises given in verses 5–8 are tied to the human completion of the sincere repentance of verses 2–4, including the acknowledgement of sin and the vows of renewal (McCarty p. 39; Hwang 2021, 322). Nogalski (2011, 191) argues that God is willing to forgive Israel their sin, but this forgiveness demands their heartfelt repentance and return to him.

Ben Zvi (2005, 304–305) and Fretheim (2013, 78–79) have argued against this first view. According to them, the restoration in verses 5–8 is not announced as a response to Israel’s return but is made in the face of their refusal to do so. Ben Zvi (2005, 304–305) emphasises that Israel did not repent in the prophet’s generation and argues that the “target readership” of Hosea would therefore not see a direct correlation between the sections of verses 2–4 and verses 5–8. For him, this form of restoration is a display of God’s unconditional love and fidelity toward Israel. Fretheim (p. 79) takes a similar stance:

God seems to pronounce the word of healing not because they have returned but in the face of their having not returned! ... Repentance is certainly a key theme in Hosea, right up to this point in the text (14:1). Now, God’s healing is stated unconditionally, and in the first person, without any reference to repentance on their part! (Fretheim 2013, 79)

For Ben Zvi and Fretheim, YHWH demonstrates his רָחֵם in restoring his people back to him without their approach with repentance.

In my view, the latter interpretation is not convincing for two primary reasons. Firstly, the approach to assume such a strong break between verse 4 and verse 5 does not seem appropriate or supported by textual evidence. Secondly, it seems that the theological construct of restoration without any form of repentance is hardly reconcilable with the rest of the Book of Hosea. As has been demonstrated before,

judgement and chastisement have the goal of repentance (2:8–9; 3:4–5). The prophet states that shallow repentance without the confession of sin or a change in behaviour is not sufficient (5:3–7; 6:4–7:2) and calls people to realign their lives to come back to YHWH (10:12–13). With the backdrop of the Book of Hosea and a plain reading of the text, I think it appropriate to adopt the classic reading of the passage, i.e., the promises of restoration (vv. 5–8) as an answer to the repentance of the people (vv. 2–4).

YHWH's role in the restoration is expressed in three first-person actions: "I will heal," "I will love," "I will be like dew" (vv. 5–6; McCarty 2016, 39). It is interesting to note that the first aspect is the healing of apostasy. In the way the first request for forgiveness has been the first component of the penitential prayer (v. 3), healing from sinful tendencies comes before all other aspects of restoration (Hwang 2021, 322). It becomes clear that Israel cannot continue any further with its apostasy (מְשׁוּבָה), i.e., their attachment to idolatry and rebellion against God (Ben Zvi 2005, 305; Gisin 2014, 564). YHWH is the physician who can heal (רפא) his people from this spiritual sickness; it is only his רִפּוּי that can redeem them from their corrupt condition (Wakely 1997b, 2:1123).

The second promise of YHWH is that he would "love them freely." Firstly, this statement presents another reference to the רִפּוּי-theme of Hosea: God's healing of Israel is rooted in his generous love (Gisin 2014, 564–565; Gruber 2017, 578). The term נְדָבָה ("freely") refers to this voluntary nature and is otherwise used specifically in the context of freewill offerings (Exod 35:29; Lev 22:18; cf. Carpenter and Grisanti 1997b, 3:31; Routledge 2020, 161). As the redeeming husband, YHWH will give out his unmerited love to the Israelites who repent towards him (Hwang 2021, 322). Secondly, this statement appears to be a reversal of 9:15 ("I will love them no more") and therefore announces the transition from judgement to restoration (Dearman 2010, 188). This is underlined by the subsequent causal declaration: "because my anger has turned away from them." Because the Israelites will have returned (שׁוּב) to YHWH with sincere hearts, he willingly withdraws (שׁוּב) his anger from them and approaches them in gracious generosity.

This approach is illuminated with another metaphor: YHWH promises to be “like dew to Israel” (v. 6). Previous similes of predators (5:14; 13:7–8) have suggested that proximity to YHWH is dangerous in the context of judgement. Having repented, however, Israel will receive life from God as they come close to him (Hwang 2021, 323). In Ancient Israel, dew was the main source of water for agriculture in dry periods (Dearman 2010, 188). In the OT, dew (טל) therefore is associated with provision and blessing (e.g., Gen 27:28) and even divine resurrection (Isa 26:19; McCarty 2016, 40).

YHWH’s third first-person promise to be “like dew” introduces the agricultural imagery of verses 6b–8 that describes the manifestations of restoration (Routledge 2020, 161–162). As YHWH becomes the source of blessing and fertility, Israel will grow and prosper like plants (Nogalski 2011, 191). Their beauty again will “blossom like the lily,” they will live in a secure manner in the land (“strike roots”), they will expand (“new shoots”) and their glory among the nations will be restored (“like the olive tree”; Gisin 2014, 566; Routledge 2020, 162). The botanical imagery provokes twofold associations in the reader. Firstly, the imagery of water and plants (esp. trees) alludes to the garden of Eden (Gen 2:9–10; Hwang 2021, 324; Dearman 2010, 188). Secondly, the metaphoric language alludes to the husband/wife relationship between YHWH and Israel by showing numerous parallels to the Song of Songs (blossom [2x], lily [8x], Lebanon [7x], fragrance [8x], vine [4x]; wine [7x]; Carroll 2008, pos. 4044–4046). The restoration of Israel is not only manifested in various forms of individual blessings but means the restoration of their relationship with YHWH.

Verse 8 includes the last of the 22 appearances of the root שׁוּב in the Book of Hosea: “they will return (שׁוּב) to dwell in his shadow” (LHB 2012). Although an allusion to repentance is included, it seems that the primary emphasis of שׁוּב in this context is on the physical return of the people to the land of Israel and therefore to the shadow of YHWH (LeCureux in Lim 2015:49; Thompson and Martens 1997, שׁוּב). The repentant Israelites return to their God’s realm of divine protection (“his shadow”; cf. Psa 91:1; 121:5) as they no longer seek security from any other sources (Dearman 2010, 189).

9 Ephraim [will say]: “What need do I have of idols any longer?” [YHWH]: *It is I who answers and looks after you.*” [Ephraim]: “I am like a green cypress.” [YHWH]: “Your fruit comes from me.”

Again, translation issues make an obvious interpretation difficult. However, the dialogue between Ephraim and YHWH appears to be a suitable approach (cf. 6.1.2c). After YHWH’s response regarding restoration (vv. 5–8), Ephraim’s rhetorical question (“What need do I have of idols any longer?”) seems a reaffirmation of his commitment to abstain from idolatry (v. 4) in the light of the demonstration of God’s overwhelming *חַסְדּוֹ* (Gruber 2017, 590). In receiving divine blessing and restoration, the Israelites will have the certainty that YHWH is the only deity worthy of worship. In his response (“*It is I who answers and looks after you*”), YHWH reemphasises this superiority over idolatry, especially in the aspect of protection. Whereas the lexeme *שׁוֹרֵץ* is used in 13:7 to describe the couching of YHWH as a predator, it is here used positively in the sense of “watchful care” over Israel (Routledge 2020, 163). The dialogue continues by revisiting the botanical theme of verses 6–8 and re-emphasises YHWH’s role in Israel’s restoration to prosperity and glory (“green cypress”; “Your fruit comes from me”; Gisin 2014, 569–570). As the culmination of the unit of 14:2–9, the dialogue of verse 9 demonstrates the restored relationship between Israel and YHWH, especially the exclusivity of this (Dearman 2010, 190). In both of his statements, YHWH emphasises that he alone is the source of security (v. 9b) and life (v. 9d). In this way, the section picks up the book’s theme of infidelity as the central sin of the people. After the interdependent processes of sincere repentance on Israel’s side (vv. 2–4) and YHWH’s works of healing, reversal of judgement and blessing (vv. 5–8), the outcome will be a renewed marriage relationship (Brueggemann 2008, 11; Gisin 2014, 570).

7.4 Exegetical Synthesis

The call to repentance in the Book of Hosea finds its climax in the section 14:2–9 (Moon 2018, 219). The section includes the most comprehensive picture of pious, sincere repentance in the book and seems to describe the return that has been alluded to, e.g., in 2:17–18 or 3:5 (Hwang 2021, 318). One can identify four central aspects of the return in 14:2–9. Firstly, there is a strong emphasis on the words that the repentant people are to offer as a form of sacrifice (v. 3; Nogalski 2011, 190). The

sincere words of repentance signify not only a change of heart towards YHWH but also serve as guidance for the renewed life of the repentant people (Dearman 2010, 186). Secondly, since repentance is provoked by the experiences of the consequences of sin (v. 2b), a penitential prayer must include a request for forgiveness (v. 3b). Thirdly, this asking for forgiveness must be followed by the renunciation of political, military, and religious objects which have been trusted before (v. 4a–c). Fourthly, repentance must be rooted in the gracious character of YHWH (v. 4d).

The רָחַם -character of YHWH is again deeply reflected in his response of restoration to Israel's (potential) contrite repentance (McCarty 2016, 35; Nogalski 2011, 195–196). YHWH answers their prayer with the healing of their apostate nature (v. 5a), the transition away from judgement towards relationship (vv. 5b; 8–9) and the renewal of the nation (vv. 6–8; Brueggemann 2008, 10–11). Repentance is demonstrated to be the central key to accessing the manifestations of divine רָחַם (McCarty 2016, 35; Routledge 2020, 164). As the people let themselves be guided by the penitential words of the prophet and approach God with sincere hearts, their relationship with him will be restored to the divine original plan in which YHWH is Israel's only object of worship and their exclusive source of life (v. 9).

8. Hosea 14:10

8.1 Preliminary Analysis

8.1.1 Translation of the text

10 Who is wise? He shall understand. Who is discerning? He shall perceive that the ways of YHWH are upright. The righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

8.1.2 Notes on translation

Many translations understand כִּי as a causal clause (“for”; e.g., CSB; ESV; NET). In my view, it is better to translate כִּי as an explanatory clause (“that”) to the superordinated verbs בִּין (“understand”) and יָדַע (“perceive”; cf. Hwang 2021, 317).

8.2 Contextual Analysis

Hosea 14:10 presents the final words of the Book of Hosea and it seems well to understand them as an epilogue to the prophet's work (Macintosh 1997, 582). Following the climactic call to repentance in 14:2–9, the final verse both summarizes the message of the prophet and transitions it to the coming generations of hearers (Nogalski 2011, 194; Routledge 2020, 163).

8.3 Verse Analysis

The epilogue connects the Book of Hosea to the Old Testament wisdom tradition (Macintosh 1997, 582; Routledge 2020, 163). This is evident in the wording of the verse (“wise,” “discerning”; cf. Prov 1:5; Eccl 8:1) and the theme of the “ways of YHWH” (cf. Prov 10:29; 16:17). In the line of this wisdom tradition, the book's epilogue invites the reader to meditate on its message and seek the application to one's own life (McCarty 2016, 42; Nogalski 2011, 195). Through thoughtful study and repeated reading, those who pursue divine guidance will find it in the Book of Hosea.

The central message of the book is summarized as “the ways of YHWH are upright.” Throughout the Book of Hosea, it has been shown that YHWH's treatment of Israel has been determined by righteousness, *ṭṭṭ*, and holiness, both in judgement and in restoration (cf. 2:21–22; Dearman 2010, 190). Whatever the God of Israel does, it has its source in his unwavering divine nature and is in accordance with his law (Deut 32:4). Therefore, the experience of restoration or judgement is determined by one's decisions to conform to or oppose these “covenantal guidelines” (Caroll 2008, pos. 4078–4091). The “rebellious” (*פִּשְׁעֵי*) who remain indifferent to the book's call to repentance will “stumble” in their sin (cf. 14:2). Those who let themselves be warned by Israel's dramatic example in the time of Hosea will seek to return to YHWH and “walk” in his ways (Moon 2018, 222).

8.4 Exegetical Synthesis

In summarizing the message of the book, the epilogue of 14:10 presents an invitation to repentance. As trust in things other than the living God will lead to frustration and result in judgement, it is only the return to YHWH that leads to sustainable renewal and blessing (Routledge 2020, 164). The message is presented as

deeply relevant not only for Hosea's contemporaries, but also for coming generations (Hwang 2021, 327).

9. Conclusion

The section Hosea 4–14 presents the exhortation of the Israelites by the prophet due to their apostasy through cultic and moral sins (Butler 2016, s.v. Hosea, Book of). As has been demonstrated in this chapter, the accusation of sin is often interconnected with a call for a sincere return to YHWH. Repentance remains shallow if the people are unwilling to abjure their sin; they cannot expect to find YHWH if they do not lay aside their godless practices (5:4–6). YHWH may bring his people under judgement to shake this complacency (5:14–15; 11:5–7), with the eventual objective of their turning their backs on other false sources of trust and returning to him (5:15–6:3; 10:10–11). YHWH seeks the sincere טָוֹב in the hearts and lives of his people, both towards him (6:4–6) and other people (10:12–13a).

Repentance is the key to this transformation from sinful practices towards renewal and healing (6:1; 10:12; 14:2–9). In the knowledge that YHWH is well aware of their iniquity (5:3; 6:7–7:2), the people must both confess and reject their sinful behaviour and idolatry (7:1; 14:2–4). As Israel repents in sincerity, YHWH may respond with healing and restore his people to their land and the relationship with him (11:10–11; 14:4–9). As the Book of Hosea concludes, people have the responsibility to choose the right way of repentance and blessing rather than rebellion and downfall (14:10).

Chapter 5: Exegetical Synthesis

1. Introduction

In the last two Chapters, I have provided an in-depth analysis of different pericopes on the theme of repentance in the Book of Hosea. Different themes and subcategories of repentance have been demonstrated and all passages have been reviewed largely independently from one another. In this chapter, my purpose will be to synthesize these different insights and summarize them under seven propositions on repentance in the Book of Hosea. In so doing, I will attempt to track themes and lines of thought throughout the book and bring together the teachings of the passages relevant to these themes. These seven propositions should give a comprehensive overview of what the Book of Hosea reveals on the theme of repentance.

In the second part of this chapter, the presented exegetical synthesis will be compared to two theological works on the theme of repentance in the Old Testament, by authors Bachmann (2013) and Lambert (2016). After summarizing the position of each author, I will interact with his work and identify potential congruencies and discrepancies with my exegetical findings in the Book of Hosea.

2. Seven Propositions on Repentance in the Book of Hosea

Proposition 1: God's Plan is the restoration of Israel

Throughout the Book of Hosea, it is clear that God's purpose is centred on the restoration of the covenant relationship between Israel and himself. As I argued in Chapter 2, the primary sin of the people is their unfaithfulness to their God, which is expressed in idolatry and ungodly political alliances (2.5.3). Just as the wife's adulterous behaviour is a humiliation to her husband, so does this unfaithful behaviour of the people constitute an embarrassment to their God (Moon 2018, 73). All the more evident in this context is the דָּוָה -love of God that overcomes this shame and is directed towards the restoration of Israel. For this, the marriage of the prophet himself becomes an image. Just as Hosea is to love (בָּאֵהָבָה) his adulterous wife and (presumably) take

her back (3:1), so the God of Israel loves his people and restores them to himself (2:21–22). YHWH's unceasing רַחֲמָיו -love springs from his holiness, and his existing commitment to his people transcends human possibilities (11:8–9).

The recurring "cycles of judgement and restoration" in the book of Hosea make it clear that every form of divine judgement only reaches its goal with the restoration of Israel (3:5; 11:10–11; 14:2–9; Egelkraut 2017, 1055). YHWH's purpose is that the covenant relationship with him should be restored, which means that his people worship him alone (3:5); he becomes their only source of help and healing (6:1–3; 14:2–4, 9) and they remain faithful to him (2:18–19; 6:6). As the Book of Hosea repeatedly demonstrates, the restoration of the covenant relationship involves the national restoration of Israel and blessing on the physical land (2:23–25; 11:11; 14:6–8).

Proposition 2: A central element of Israel's restoration is their repentance and return to YHWH

The Book of Hosea demonstrates that their heartfelt return to YHWH is the central requirement on Israel's side for their restoration. Lady Israel responds wholeheartedly to the wooing of YHWH (2:17) and recommits herself to the loving relationship with her husband YHWH (v. 18), before he cleanses her from the contamination of her idolatry (v. 19) and renews the marriage with her (vv. 21–22). Ethical transformation must happen before the Lord pours out his rain of "righteousness" upon his people (i.e., blessing and salvation; 10:12; Routledge 2020, 136). For their restoration, YHWH is not seeking superficial sacrifices or prayers but waits for them to cleanse their lives and hearts through confession and repentance until they resemble divine רַחֲמָיו (5:6; 6:6; 6:11b–7:2). The objective of judgement goes hand in hand with Israel's repentance (2:4; 5:15). Throughout the Book of Hosea, their national restoration is interwoven with their fearful return to YHWH (3:5; 11:10–11; 14:2–9). In my view, Lim (2015, 280) is right when he argues that "repentance ... is viewed ... as a characteristic of the eschaton" and as "the mechanism to receive eschatological blessing" in the Book of Hosea.

Interestingly, the repentance that is demanded and expected in the Book of Hosea is primarily corporate or national. Surely, the denial of idolatrous practices (e.g., 2:4) or the change in moral behaviour (10:12) involves personal decisions and transformation.

Still, against the common Western mindset of individuality, the Book of Hosea demands *corporate* penitence and return to YHWH. Both articulated prayers of repentance in 6:1–3 and 14:2–4 are found in the first-person plural, which signifies their communal aspect (Olson 2017, 173). As idolatrous worship was often pursued in community, and the sins of political infidelity were committed on a national level, it appears reasonable that repentance had to be done by corporate Israel (Hwang 2021, 189; Carroll 2008, pos. 4002–4003). Furthermore, the Book of Hosea (like other OT literature) reveals a sense of communal responsibility that even includes the people's ancestry and history (e.g., 10:9–11; 11:1–4; 12:4–7; Lim 2015, 103; McConville 2012, n.p.). After generations of rebellion, deep repentance for past and present sins is the key to the restoration of Israel.

Proposition 3: YHWH provokes Israel's repentance

Because Israel's repentance is the key to his purposes of restoration, YHWH encourages the return of the people. The Book of Hosea demonstrates three ways in which the Lord prompts their repentance. The first of these is communication and exhortation. Through the words of the prophet, YHWH prompts the Israelites to return to him in repentance (e.g., 2:4; 10:12; 12:7; 14:2). Secondly, the God of Israel seeks to reach the hearts of his people by demonstrating his love. This aspect is specifically visible in 2:16–17: YHWH brings Israel into the desert (the place of dependence and their "first honeymoon," Gruber 2017, 141) and "speaks to her heart" (lit. translation of the Hebrew phrase). In this intimate setting, the Lord woos his bride and seeks her response (עֲנֵה) in repentance (v. 17; Gisin 2014, 144; Routledge 2020, 70).

The third method of provoking repentance in the messages of the prophet is the matter of judgement. Throughout the Book of Hosea, judgement is presented as the appropriate answer to apostasy and "construed ... as a purifying and even educative process necessary to ensure Israel's proper behavior" (Ben Zvi 2005, 224). With judgement and punishment, YHWH reveals the hideous nature and the dramatic consequences of sin (Moon 2018, 59). In this, some passages allude to future exile (e.g., 9:3; 11:5–7; Hwang 2021, 272). As the Israelites turn their back on God, they lose the blessing they received in their covenant relationship with him ("I strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born"; 2:5; cf. 2:11–15). In the same way, YHWH actively frustrates the approaches of the people's sinful behaviour

and exposes the vanity of their pursuit (4:10). He hinders their seeking of idols (2:8–9) and puts an end to various established religious practices (3:4; McConville 2012, n.p.). YHWH corrects Israel's misplaced belief in trusting religious and political idols for provision and security, and thereby encourages their repentance (3:4–5). According to my understanding of the passage, the process of punishment of 5:11–14 eventually leads to Israel's return towards exclusive trust in YHWH (5:15–6:3). The repentance of 14:2–4 is grounded in the revelation of the consequences of sin ("because you have stumbled in your iniquity"; v. 2) and includes the confession of the futility of idolatry ("and we will no longer say 'Our God' to the work of our hands"; v. 4). In his judgement of punishment and constraint, YHWH lovingly seeks to expose sin and provoke Israel to return to him in penitence (cf. 14:10).

In the context of the encouragement to repentance in the Book of Hosea, the question of free will choice on Israel's part arises: Is Israel "forced" to repent? How do we understand the responsibility on Israel's side if they need YHWH's encouragement for repentance to happen? At this point, it must be noted that this question touches on more complicated issues in the context of justification, salvation, and predestination, and an interpretation is often influenced by someone's theological background regarding these themes. Furthermore, different passages throughout the Book of Hosea seem to emphasise different aspects of YHWH's and Israel's role in the people's repentance.

Passages such as 2:9, 3:4–5 or 11:7–11 seem to emphasise God's action in bringing about change within the people of Israel and subsequent repentance. Typically, scholars have argued based on these passages that the divine prompting of repentance is compulsory for Israel (e.g., Fretheim 2013, 17; Kessler 2008, 579). Furthermore, it can be argued that 5:4 and 11:7 describe Israel's inability to return to YHWH and therefore signify their need for divine intervention to realize repentance (e.g., Ben Zvi 2005, 303–304; Dearman 2010, 102; Gisin 2014, 244). On the other hand, passages like 2:4, 5:14–6:3; 6:6; 10:12 or 14:2–4 point to the steps they need to take to come back to their God and have been understood to emphasise Israel's responsibility in their return (e.g., Lim 2015, 280; Hwang 2021, 318–319; Moon 2018, 219).

In my view, it is important to recognise the statements on Israel's problem of pride and perpetual propensity to sin (5:4–5; 7:10; 11:7). This condition demands YHWH's intervention with communication and judgement for Israel to be able to return to him. In my view, however, this does not mean that we should assume some kind of automatism when it comes to repentance. As has been demonstrated in the exegetical discussion, the passage of 2:16–26 evidences a form of synergy between God's gentle persuasion, Israel's response to this, and their subsequent restoration (Lim 2015, 53–54). While acknowledging the difficulty of the question, it seems adequate, in my opinion, to assume this synergy in return in the Book of Hosea. Rather than imposing repentance, it seems best to understand YHWH addressing Israel's free will in encouraging and prompting repentance.

Proposition 4: Repentance includes turning away from sin

The Book of Hosea delineates repentance in the conjunction of two primary aspects: the turning away from sin and the exclusive trust in YHWH (Boda 2015, 96). These two dimensions are often represented by the verbs *שׁוּב* and *בִּקֵּשׁ*, which is exemplary in 3:5: "Afterwards, the children of Israel will return [*שׁוּב*] and seek [*בִּקֵּשׁ*] the Lord their God and David their king" (cf. 7:10 and 12:7 for other connections of the terms). Since both connected aspects are central to Hosea's theology of repentance, they will be discussed separately.

The first aspect is found in turning away from sin. Four times, the audience is explicitly requested to turn (*שׁוּב*) and correct the direction of their lives (6:1; 12:7; 14:2, 3). As 14:2 suggests, the realization of their iniquity (*עֲוֹן*) is the starting point for their repentance and the articulated renunciation of sin for the practical steps of this return (vv. 3–4; cf. 5:15). For Israel, it is important to understand that their sinful behaviour cannot be hidden from YHWH (5:3, 5; 6:10–7:2). The people cannot successfully return to YHWH if they decide to remain in this condition (5:4); therefore, the confession and subsequent abstaining from sinful behaviour are central to Israel's repentance (Ben Zvi 2005, 303). This includes the practical removal of idolatrous images (2:4) and the repudiation of syncretistic practices of worship (2:18–19), two central issues in Israel's infidelity. Furthermore, the people are to correct their ethical apostasy in the forms of murder, deception and adultery (e.g., 4:2, 14; 6:8–10; 7:1)

towards the righteousness (הַצְדִּיקוּת) and moral standards of YHWH (10:12). Repentance involves the explicit submission to the law of YHWH and continuous fidelity (i.e., אֱמוּנָה) towards him (6:4; 14:10; Ben Zvi 2005, 303). In contrast to the “lament prayer” of the Ancient Near East (which is focused on one’s experience of suffering), the penitential steps presented in Hosea involve Israel’s admission of guilt in seeking reconciliation with their God (Hwang 2021, 329–330).

Proposition 5: Repentance includes the renewal of trust in YHWH

Since Israel’s central sin in the theology of Hosea is the sin of infidelity, it appears conclusive that the repentance in the Book of Hosea includes a return to faithfulness to YHWH. As has been presented in the last point, this fidelity includes submission to his commandments. At the same time, the prophet illuminates the renewal of trust in YHWH as a central component of repentance (Boda 2015, 96). YHWH’s frustration with Israel’s pursuit of idolatry leads them to again accept him as the only source of blessing (2:9) and seek (בְּקִשׁ) his guidance (3:5). In the process of divine wooing, YHWH seeks Israel’s inner transformation until she will “respond as [she did] in the days of her youth” and trust YHWH in the way she did when she followed the voice of the Lord in the night of the Exodus (“in the day she came up from the land of Egypt“ [2:17]). After seeking help from the Assyrian king (5:13) and experiencing consequent judgement (vv. 14–15), the people will return (שׁוּב) to YHWH (6:1). The prayer of repentance of 6:1–3 has its primary emphasis on the sincere expectation of God’s אֲחֻזָּה in restoration and again acknowledging YHWH’s sovereignty in judgement and redemption (cf. Deut 32:39; Ramirez 2017, 121).

In trusting YHWH, repentance presents a response to the “goodness” (טוֹב) and אֲחֻזָּה of God. This dynamic is also demonstrated in the book’s clearest revelation of repentance in Hosea 14. The penitential process of verses 2–4c is grounded in the confidence of divine mercy, as verse 4d makes clear: “for in you an orphan finds compassion.” Furthermore, after the process of divine healing and restoration of vv. 5–8, the passage climaxes in the apparent dialogue of verse 9 which demonstrates the restored unity of YHWH and his people (Gruber 2017, 590). In this, Israel expresses its trust, and indicates renewed dependence on their God (“*What need do*

I have of idols any longer?"). In the perfectly restored relationship between YHWH and his people, Israel can receive all blessings and abundance from their God (vv. 5–9).

Proposition 6: Repentance is accompanied by an attitude of reverence

The prophet emphasises the urgency for repentance ("it is time to seek YHWH until he comes and rains righteousness upon you"; 10:12). Although repentance is presented as a response to the דָּוָה of YHWH in the Book of Hosea (2:17; 3:5), this return is always accompanied by an attitude of holy reverence. This aspect is specifically evident in the two verbs פָּחַד (3:5) and הִרָד (11:10), both of which describe Israel's return to their God. Both verbs signify a movement of trembling or shaking and appear to indicate notions of fear (Custis 2014, s.v. Fear). The Book of Hosea presents pride and arrogance as fundamental obstacles to a transforming repentance (5:5; 7:2; 7:10; Smith and Hamilton 1997, 1:788). It appears that, in order to return to YHWH, the people's complacency has to be shaken and exchanged with an attitude of reverence towards YHWH (Hwang 2021, 318).

Proposition 7: Words are of importance

The last insight on the topic of repentance is found in the emphasis on words. As the Book of Hosea reveals, the penitential process must be accompanied by the utterance of words by the Israelites. The emphasis on words is already visible in the metaphors of Hosea 2. YHWH seeks the verbal response (עֲנֵה) of his wife in renewed love (v. 17), and the cleansing "of the Baalim from her mouth" (v. 19). Decisions to turn away from sin and to turn in trust towards YHWH may not only be made silently in the hearts of the Israelites but must be uttered in verbal form (6:1–3). The importance of words in Hosea is demonstrated most clearly in the penitential prayer of 14:2–4. The prayer itself evidences the centrality of spoken words in the penitential process and is often regarded as liturgical in character (e.g., Hwang 2021, 317; Moon 2018, 218; Routledge 2020, 159). Due to the corruption of sin, the people need guidance as they approach YHWH (Fretheim 2013, 78; Gisin 2014, 561).

Furthermore, the speaker exhorts the listeners three times to make use of their tongue in the process of repentance ("Take words with you," "say to him," "let us pay the bull of our lips"). Interestingly, the utterance of prayer is taking the place of animal

sacrifices, a pivotal element in the OT concepts of both worship and atonement (McCarty 2016, 38). Steps of repentance in the Book of Hosea are primarily articulated by the means of language. This does not mean that shallow words replace sincerity in repentance (5:4–6; 6:4). However, as a sincere commitment, words of prayer can open the door for divine *חֶסֶד* to work in the lives of the Israelites (14:5) and provide the direction for a renewed lifestyle (Nogalski 2011, 190).

3. Comparison with Theological Literature

3.1 Bachmann (2013)

Bachmann (2013, 52) argues that the theme of "Bekehrung" (repentance) or "Umkehr" (return) is primarily linked to the use of the term *שׁוּב* in the Old Testament. According to him, the use of *שׁוּב* in the theological or ethical context describes the return towards a normative system ("normativ anerkannten Bezugsgrößen"), which in many cases in the Old Testament is represented by obedience to YHWH. He emphasises the importance of the theme of fidelity and infidelity in Old Testament metaphoric language and argues that the denial of repentance is often rooted in one's unwillingness to submit to YHWH's law. Furthermore, Bachmann advances the view that the time frame for a return of penitence is limited. Based on passages like Amos 4:6–12, Isaiah 9:12, and 30:15, he argues that people can forfeit their opportunity of repentance if they continuously reject the invitation ("dass es einen Punkt gibt, ab dem die Chancen zur Umkehr verspielt sind" [that there is a point at which the chances for a return are lost]; p. 53). For him, the failure to repent can be rooted either in one's unwillingness or inability to return ("Umkehrunfähigkeit"), the latter being specifically evident in the Book of Hosea (5:4; 11:7).

In my view, the general picture of repentance in the Old Testament as presented by Bachmann can be well unified with the results of the exegetical studies on the Book of Hosea in the previous Chapters of this thesis. Like in Bachmann's statement of *תְּשׁוּבָה* in the OT, repentance in Hosea is primarily seen in the context of covenant relationship which describes the "normativ anerkannten Bezugsgrößen" (normative accepted reference figure; Bachmann 2013, 52). The emphasis on the marriage metaphor (Hosea 1–3), the demand of human *חֶסֶד* towards YHWH (4:1; 6:6), and the

encouragement to trust in him (6:1–3; 14:4) illuminate the need for covenant fidelity in repentance.

Differences between Bachmann's presentation of repentance in the Old Testament and my interpretation of the Book of Hosea in this thesis can be identified in the approach to neglected or failed repentance. In contrast to Bachmann's advocacy of a limited frame for repentance, it seems that the Book of Hosea does not evidence such a concept. Although demonstrating a sense of urgency in the call to repentance in the face of judgement (2:4–5; 5:14–6:3; 10:12; 14:2), the Book of Hosea at the same time emphasises the compassion as well as the continuous *רחמים* of YHWH. Apart from the marriage metaphor (Hos 1–3), this patience is especially evident in the section of 11:8–9 as YHWH refuses to repudiate his people: "How can I give you over O Ephraim?" (Gisin 2014, 463). Furthermore, the prophet seems to point towards the future event of Israel's eventual repentance and does not perceive judgement as the final stage of the nation's history (3:5; 11:10–11; 14:2–9; Ben Zvi 2005, 291).

In my opinion, Bachmann (2013, 53) correctly captures Israel's attachment to sin in the Book of Hosea, which necessitates God's intervention to bring about repentance. Bachmann, however, limits God's intervention to the change of heart following the pattern of Ezekiel 36:26–28. As I have presented earlier in this chapter, God's methods of encouraging repentance in the Book of Hosea are manifold and include communication, love, and judgment.

3.2 Lambert (2016)

With his work "How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture," David A. Lambert attempts to identify and correct common misunderstandings of repentance in the Old Testament. Lambert argues for a "penitential lens" in contemporary interpretation (p. 10). According to him, penitential concepts are often imposed on texts which did not refer to such in the author's intended meaning, e.g., in the context of fasting. For Lambert, this issue also concerns the use of the term *שוב* as this verb of movement is often guided by a "logic of appeal" (p. 61). Instead of describing a movement of inner reorientation towards YHWH in repentance, he argues that the term in many places should be understood in the sense of turning towards YHWH for the sake of inquiry (e.g. Exod 5:22;

1 Sam 15:26; pp. 75–77). Lambert advocates that the interpretation of this "shuv of appeal" should also be the primary understanding of the term in the Book of Hosea and cites 2:9; 5:13–6:4; 7:10–11 as evidence for such (pp. 79–81).

I agree with Lambert regarding the general importance of renewed trust in YHWH in Hosea's theology of repentance. In my opinion, however, Lambert goes too far in his argument concerning the interpretation of the term שׁוּב. While the texts Lambert uses as evidence for the "shuv of appeal" emphasise the search for YHWH in the context of repentance (2:9; 5:13–6:3; 7:10–11), this does not mean that the שׁוּב concept in Hosea can be defined solely from them. Passages like 5:3–7 or 11:13–14 in particular show that the request alone is not yet sufficient to reach YHWH. Rather, the Book of Hosea demands some form of inner transformation, as seen in 2:16 or 14:2–4. As 10:12 presents, a renewed and purified lifestyle goes hand in hand with "time to seek YHWH." Despite the importance of exclusive trust in YHWH in the Book of Hosea, it does not seem convincing to me that this theme overrides any reference to turning away from sin.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have summarized and synthesized the different insights from the Book of Hosea on repentance. As the marriage metaphor and further statements in the book demonstrate, the foundation for Hosea's theology on repentance is found in divine רַחֵם and God's will for restoration. The Book of Hosea emphasises that for this purpose of YHWH to be realized, sincere repentance must be demonstrated by the Israelites. YHWH encourages repentance through communicative invocation, the display of his love, and the educative means of restriction and punishment. Against the notion of Bachmann (2013, 53), judgement should not be seen as the final verdict of God's dealing with his people, but as the ongoing procedure to encourage repentance.

Furthermore, I have presented statements on the character of pious repentance as presented in the Book of Hosea. In a penitential return to YHWH, the people have to turn away from sin and change their behaviour to receive all the blessings of reconciliation and restoration. Beyond that, the Israelites are to renew their trust in

YHWH for provision or military security. Although an important aspect, this element should not be understood as the only formative aspect in Hosea's theology on repentance, as Lambert (2016, 79) suggests. The attitude of pious repentance is presented as being one of divine reverence and fear of God. Finally, the Book of Hosea emphasises the importance of verbal utterances in the process of repentance.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

1. Summary

The objective of this thesis was the analysis of the nature of repentance in the Book of Hosea with special attention to its correlation with divine דָּוָה -love. For this purpose, I examined the general, historical, and literary context of the Book of Hosea (Chapter 2). As the analysis of the relevant historical literature of the OT has demonstrated, the prophet Hosea uttered his message at a politically turbulent time for Ancient Israel with both interior and exterior threats to the nation. Furthermore, studies on the religious landscape in Hosea's time have demonstrated the extent of idolatry and syncretism among the Israelites and the resulting apostasy from YHWH. Due to its frequent appearance in the book, it has been important to discuss the meaning and association of the term בָּעַל in Hosea.

Regarding the literary context, it has been shown that the Book of Hosea presents several interpretative challenges. Not only does the prophet employ several phrases unique in the OT, but generally evidences a high density of poetic and picturesque language. The primary imagery, the marriage metaphor, appears as the structuring element for the book as it divides Hosea 1–3 from Hosea 4–14. Furthermore, it has been shown that the marriage metaphor connects central theological themes in the Book of Hosea, i.e., covenant and the tension between divine faithfulness and Israel's infidelity.

In Chapter 3, I expounded the theme of repentance in relation to divine דָּוָה in Hosea 1–3 in the passages of 2:4–9; 2:16–22 and 3:1–5. In the realm of this marriage metaphor, different expressions and pictures are used to illuminate Israel's repentance and YHWH's encouragement of this. God restricts Israel's provision and reveals her dependence on him (2:8–9). Contrary to the statements of most scholars, I have argued that verse 9 does not describe false repentance but demonstrates the beginning of a successful return to YHWH. In the second relevant passage of 2:16–22, repentance is described as the response (עֲנָה) to the wooing of YHWH in the desert

(vv. 16–17), followed by cleansing (vv. 18–19) and the eventual renewal of covenant (vv. 20–22). The third picture in Chapter 3 describes the divine quarantine from religious and political institutions that leads to Israel's repentance in trembling (תַּרְסָס).

I continued to track the theme of repentance in Chapter 4 through the much more complex structure of Hosea 4–14. The theme of repentance is again deeply interwoven with the theme of divine תַּרְסָס as well as God's demand on Israel to reflect the same faithfulness. I showed that the prophet refers to the topic of superficial repentance in the context of Israel's unwillingness to abjure sinful behaviour (5:3–7). Contrary to the common interpretation of the passage, I argued that 5:15–6:3 describes Israel's expected response to YHWH's judgement in repentance and renewed trust in his faithfulness. In deliberate contrast to this, 6:4–7:2 describes the contemporary failure of the people to reflect divine תַּרְסָס and therefore presents an implicit call to repentance.

The examination of the agricultural imagery of 10:11–13a showed that YHWH calls his people to moral renewal and repentance in the light of their past relationship. The historical backdrop is also evident in 11:1–11 where divine fatherhood is emphasised. Regarding this passage, I discussed the relationship between divine holiness and compassion in verses 8–9 with the repentance of verses 10–11. Furthermore, I demonstrated that 14:2–9 should be understood as the climax of the Book of Hosea and its theme of repentance. After sincere confession in the penitential prayer (vv. 2–4), the section reveals the consequences of a restored relationship (vv. 5–9). Finally, a discussion of 14:10 showed that the call to repentance in Hosea is relevant to readers of all generations.

In Chapter 5, I presented the synthesis of the exegetical findings under seven propositions. I argued that (1) the Book of Hosea presents restoration as the central divine plan for Israel. (2) Because sincere repentance is the vital component on the part of the Israelites for this restoration, (3) YHWH seeks to encourage this return with communication and judgement. Regarding the nature of pious repentance, I argued that it must comprise both the (4) renunciation of sin and idolatry as well as (5) the deliberate placing of trust in YHWH. Furthermore, the Book of Hosea presents (6) the

attitude of reverence as the central posture for an authentic return and (7) the words of people as the primary vehicle for their decisions of repentance. In the comparison with Bachmann (2013) and Lambert (2016), similarities and differences in the presentation of repentance were highlighted.

Regarding the general study of the Book of Hosea, this thesis uniquely analysed the theme of repentance in the overall book and sought to connect the different teachings. I showed that large portions of the Book of Hosea refer to the theme of repentance and invite the readership to a sincere return to YHWH either explicitly or implicitly. In the course of the study of different pericopes, new perspectives were given on passages like 2:7–9 or 6:1–3. Examined in their context, I demonstrated that these passages do not refer to the theme of insincere repentance, but rather underline the importance of renewed trust in the process of repentance as presented by the prophet. Furthermore, the discussions of different passages illuminated the unique relationship between God's רַחֻם -love and his discipline through judgement. As has been demonstrated in this paper, it is the interplay of both aspects of the divine character that creates the best environment for people's sincere and contrite return. In its presentation of repentance, the Book of Hosea links the furious judgement of YHWH with his will for healing and restoration (14:5–9) and therefore encourages the healthy theological balance between the love of God and his requirement of obedience and sanctification. In this, as 14:10 emphasises, the teachings of the Book of Hosea are highly significant for readers of all generations who seek to conform to the "ways of YHWH." Therefore, the final element of this thesis will be the practical application for the contemporary church.

2. Implications for the Church

As introduced by Mead (2007, 9), "biblical theology clearly requires the work of description, but it also implies the validity of the search for normative applications." Therefore, it seems appropriate to conclude this thesis with a view on application and "releasing the Bible's theological treasures for the contemporary church, academy and culture" (Boda 2012a, 122). For this purpose, the exegetical discoveries of the last chapters will be applied to the life of a local church and its approach to repentance. The field of application will be my local church, the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig. TOS

Gemeinde is to be understood as an evangelical free church with a charismatic orientation. The local congregation in Leipzig, Eastern Germany, was founded in 1998. In addition to the general postmodern influences of Western society, the widespread atheism in Eastern Germany should be mentioned as an important influence in the understanding of sin and repentance (Kamann 2012, n.p.).

2.1 Repentance of Israel

In my view, the first approach of the church to the theme of repentance in Hosea must be in its original context, i.e., the fall and expected restoration of Israel. While being a general quality of YHWH's character, it must be acknowledged that his אָהַב -love in the Book of Hosea is directed toward the people of Israel. His continuous covenant faithfulness, expressed in the image of marriage, is promised not to humanity in general, but specifically to his chosen nation. Theologians with supersessionist views have argued that Israel has been superseded or replaced by the church and has received the promises of restoration.²⁴ However, beyond the theme of continuous fidelity in the marriage metaphor, Hosea 11:8–9 seems to explicitly reject this notion (Moon 2018, 189). In my view, the first field of application of the Book of Hosea for the church would be to acknowledge its relevance for the descendants of Israel (the Jewish people) and to expect Israel's eschatological repentance following the description of 3:5, 11:10–11 or 14:2–9. Seen in a larger theological framework, it can be argued that Israel's repentance has a central place in biblical eschatology and results in blessing for the Gentile church (e.g., Rom 11:11–15; Matt 23:39; cf. Vlach 2016, 161–186).²⁵

2.2 Teaching Repentance

2.2.1 Repentance and the Christian life

Having acknowledged the original context of the Book of Hose, we can now move to its application to the Christian life and the contemporary church's approach to repentance. But how can we transfer the Old Testament teaching on repentance to

²⁴ An extensive discussion on the different nuances and argument of the supersessionist approach is presented by Vlach (2009).

²⁵ I have examined this topic more deeply in *Kind* (2019).

New Testament Christianity? Firstly, it must be recognized that the Tanach was the Bible for Jesus, the apostles, and the early church and is understood as authoritative in the New Testament (2 Tim 3:16; Boda 2012a, 133; Egelkraut 2017, 21–22). It is to be expected, therefore, that the perception of repentance in the Jewish early church was founded on the teaching of the Old Testament, including the Book of Hosea. As argued by Boda (2015, 182), “Repentance in the New Testament resonates with the holistic penitential vision of the Old Testament. It entails a relational shift that engages one’s affections, actions and words.” A contemporary Christian understanding and application of repentance can therefore be drawn from the revelation of the Old Testament, and in this context, specifically the Book of Hosea.

A vital element in the application of Hosea’s teaching on repentance is to teach the church its key role in redemption and restoration. The New Testament sets out not only the nature of repentance of the Old Testament but also its centrality for restoration: “repentance is identified as the key posture of those who enter into relationship with Jesus as Messiah” (Matt 4:17; Acts 2:38–41) and “has continuing relevance for Christians throughout the life of discipleship” (Boda 2015, 181). Just as YHWH’s ṭṭṭ is demonstrated in the Book of Hosea in his covenant faithfulness towards Israel and his will to restore, so this ṭṭṭ has been revealed for all nations in the arrival of Jesus Christ and his atoning death on the cross (Rev 5:9). In both instances, the key to receiving the outworking of divine ṭṭṭ is repentance. Therefore, sound teaching on repentance is vital in the context of evangelism (i.e., in conversion) as well as discipleship (i.e., in sanctification).

2.2.2 Repentance, Judgement, and the Fear of God

In the preaching of repentance, the connection between repentance and judgement must also be underlined. It must be acknowledged that divine judgement is certainly a controversial subject in today's Western Christianity. The main focus often seems to be on the question of whether certain crises and difficulties are to be understood as God's judgement on an increasingly secular society, such as most recently in the Corona (Covid-19) crisis (e.g., Denison 2020). Regardless of what specific events we understand as God's judgement, the Book of Hosea gives us an understanding that God's judgement is linked to the goal of repentance. In his educative judgment, the Lord frustrates the erroneous ways of those he loves (2:8–9; 3:4; 4:10). He reveals the

shamefulness of sin and idolatry (2:5) and in his punishment makes clear the dramatic consequences of falling away from him (5:11–14; 11:5–7; 14:2). As the prophet Hosea demonstrates, God's judgment is designed to bring about the repentance that leads people into restoration and healing. Due to this theological foundation, the themes of judgement and repentance should be preached in connection with each other to the church.

From the context of judgement, an earnestness for repentance should be carried over into preaching and teaching. As the passages in 3:5 and 11:10 have shown, repentance according to the pattern of Hosea is accompanied by an attitude of awe and fear of God. Therefore, with all the emphasis on the רָחֻם grace of God, the biblical aspect of reverence for God's holiness should not be disregarded. In this regard, it seems that the main obstacle to this kind of repentance in today's Western world is "Hyper-Grace" theology. Brown (2014, 20) characterises this theological movement as having an over-emphasis on divine grace while neglecting aspects such as sanctification, the danger of sin or even the scriptures of the Old Testament in general. Frequently, proponents of "Hyper-Grace" theology portray the God of the Bible as One who is always in a good mood, unaffected by the supposed faults of human beings (Crisco in Brown pp. 150–151). As I have presented in this thesis, these thoughts do not correspond to insights from the Book of Hosea, which portrays God's grace in the context of his holy wrath concerning sin and unfaithfulness (e.g., 2:4–23; 3:1–5; 5:3–7; 6:10–7:2). As Chapell (2013, pos. 5708–5712) rightly states, "real repentance must begin with recognition of God's incomparable and unachievable holiness."

2.3 The Steps of Repentance

2.3.1 Turning away from sin

If repentance begins with divine reverence, how should it unfold in practice? It has been argued in this paper that repentance according to the Book of Hosea comprises both the turning away from sin and the turning towards YHWH in trust, and both of these aspects should find their expression in Christian repentance. The Book of Hosea presents two central steps that constitute the people's turning away from apostasy: the confession of sin (6:10–7:2; 14:2–3) and a change in behaviour (2:4; 10:12; 14:4). For a biblical repentance, sin must be confessed privately before God (Psa 32:5) as well as in community (Jas 5:16; 1 John 1:7–10), in the knowledge that nothing

can remain hidden before the almighty God (Hos 5:3–5; 6:10–7:2). Furthermore, the verbal confession must be accompanied by practical steps of renewal towards sanctification and the putting aside of sin (Rom 6:12–16; Eph 5:1–14).

Again, those who tend toward the “Hyper-Grace” Theology have disregarded the importance of renouncing sinful behaviour. A common argument on the nature of repentance is based on the Greek verb μετανοέω and its literal translation “to change one’s mind” (Prince in Brown 2014, 83). Oftentimes, theologians associated with the “Hyper-Grace” movement have stated that repentance for Christians means an interior change of thoughts in contrast to penitential sorrows or outward change in behaviour (McVey in Brown 2014, 82). This argument can be rejected already on a linguistic level. Although the verb μετανοέω had its roots in the changing of one’s mind, “by the time of the NT it had taken on a meaning in Jewish thought of a return to God.” (DiFransico 2014, s.v. Repentance). As the Book of Hosea and other biblical scriptures present, biblical repentance must involve the penitent confession of sin, connected with a willingness to change one’s practical behaviour (e.g., 2:4; 5:4–6; 14:2–4).

Because corruption in sin is a deadly disease, confession in sincere repentance to YHWH opens the door for healing and redemption (Hos 14:5; Mark 2:17; McConville 2012, n.p.). This perspective encourages people to consummate the process of repentance and turn away from their sins. In my view, Long (2022, 21) rightly identifies the realization of sin as a central obstacle to repentance in the present age: “Those who truly repent must accomplish one of the most difficult of all human acts: naming and owning the painful parts of our lives and our society from which we are repenting.” The prospect of healing and restoration in the Book of Hosea encourages and enables humans to look at the darkness of their sin and honestly confess their iniquity before God and man (Hos 14:2–3).

Furthermore, to encourage this repentance, it seems vital to openly address specific sins in preaching and counselling. As the prophet confronted the wrongdoings of his people (e.g., 4:1–2), preachers and ministers in the church may not relativize sin under humanistic influence (Carson 2014, pos. 515–520). For the application in the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig, this should encompass especially those sins that are culturally relevant in contemporary Germany (e.g., sexual misconduct, pornography, rebellion, bitterness).

2.3.2 Trust in YHWH

In the context of the covenantal theme of fidelity and infidelity, the Book of Hosea emphasises the second aspect of repentance, the turning towards God in trust (2:9; 6:1–3; 14:9). Teaching repentance must not be limited to the first aspect of renunciation of sin but should also guide to a relationship of trust in the God of the Bible. When people turn away from their expectations and turn for satisfaction or provision from ungodly sources, they must learn to receive these needs in faith from the living God. When YHWH restores Israel to a relationship that entails his blessing (14:5–9), he seeks to restore people from all nations to his רִצְוֹן and abundance (Rom 15:10–12). In a predominately atheistic surrounding that has taught people to chase their desires on their own, it seems that this aspect is especially important for the church in Eastern Germany.

In all of this, it is important to again emphasise the importance of words, as demonstrated by the Book of Hosea (5:15–6:3; 14:2–4). Within the church, as well as in personal prayer, repentance should be explicitly articulated and named. Steps of repentance of both confession and renewal of trust should not be limited to feelings but must be expressed in concrete words.

2.4 Practising Repentance in the Church

It is important that the proper teaching and understanding of repentance are applied in the practical life of the church. The primary goal should be to create an atmosphere in the church that encourages and welcomes authentic repentance (Boda 2015, 197). The congregational life of the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig comprises various events in which the importance of repentance can be applied.

2.4.1 Church Service

Firstly, there are two church services each weekend, which consist of worship, varying short contributions (e.g., testimonies, short prayer), and a biblical sermon. In addition to the preaching aspect discussed above, there seem to be further possibilities to make repentance part of the service. In leading the church service, for example, it seems appropriate to invite the attendants to a short personal time of cleansing and repentance as part of worship (cf. Psa 24:3–4). An important part of the church service of the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig is also the call to prayer that follows the sermon. Usually,

there is an opportunity to pray personally with a staff member in response to the message. Although other concerns should not be excluded entirely (e.g., prayer for miracles, healing or personal direction), the importance of repentance should be emphasised by those ministering, as it leads to healing, joy and restoration in relationship with God (Hos 14:2–9). In these times of short personal ministry as part of the service, as well as longer interactions in counselling, ministers need to be able to guide others in both confession of sin and the renewal of trust in God.

2.4.2 House Groups

Another important activity for the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig is the house groups, which usually consist of prayer, Bible study and the sharing of personal experiences. The last point, in particular, seems to be an appropriate setting for the application of repentance. House group leaders might encourage members to be honest about their weaknesses, confess their sins to one another and corporately bring them to God in prayer. When repentance is practised this way in community, it cultivates a lifestyle of humility and openness in personal interaction with other believers.

2.4.3 Leadership

The prophet Hosea repeatedly addresses the sins of the priesthood and thereby underlines the significance of their holiness for the state of the nation (4:4–10; 5:1; 6:9). In the same way, the leadership of the congregation has a special function in developing the environment of repentance. For the TOS Gemeinde Leipzig, therefore, it seems necessary to make sure that those in leadership personally seek repentance and sanctification. A practical implication would be the development of regular sessions of corporate repentance as part of leadership meetings.

3. Conclusion

It has been shown that the application of Hosea's teaching on repentance must begin with the expectation of Israel's eschatological repentance. Furthermore, the approach of Christian repentance is to be influenced by the teaching of the Book of Hosea, beginning with its importance for restoration. The context of judgement provides the right seriousness for the issue of repentance, which corrects some contemporary misperceptions of God's "Hyper-Grace." Those who repent must confess their sins in

penitence and should deliberately put their trust in the living God. To encourage this form of repentance, the local church must create the right environment of humility and offer practical opportunities in its gatherings.

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