

## THE PROPHETIC DENUNCIATION OF RELIGION IN HOSEA 4-7

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### *Defining the Approach*

The issue of religion is central to any understanding of the background and message of the Book of Hosea. In this prophetic text both the personal life of the prophet, as well as national religious life, have drawn scholarly interest. The most celebrated interpretative problem, of course, concerns the first three chapters and the relationship of the prophet with Gomer (and, some would argue, with another woman in chap. 3), and the connection of this narrative to Canaanite religious practice.<sup>1</sup>

In years past, certain scholars also highlighted the harsh critique of ritual in 6:6 (cf. 4:1-2, 15; 5:5; 8:13; 9:4; 12:11) and other prophetic texts (e.g., Amos 4:4-5; 5:4-5, 21-26); ethical monotheism was claimed

<sup>1</sup> For recent detailed surveys of scholarly opinions, see, e.g., R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 861-68; R. E. Clements, *Understanding the Book of Hosea*, *Rev Exp* 72 (1975) 408-12; G. I. Davies, *Hosea* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 79-92. Cf. H. Ringgren, "The Marriage Motif in Israelite Religion in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. P. D. Miller, Jr., P. Hanson, S. D. McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 421-28. H. L. Ginsberg, following Kaufmann, believes that chaps. 1-3 come from another prophet and refer to the Baal worship of the ninth-century under Ahab: chaps. 4ff. would reflect later struggles within Yahwism ("Hosea, Book of," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* [New York: McMillan, 1971], Vol. 8, cols. 1012-19). M. L. Chaney has recently offered a materialist reading of these chapters and concludes that they are a metaphoric description of the political economy: the wife alludes to the warrior elite and the children to the peasant classes ("Agricultural Intensification as Promiscuity in the Book of Hosea; unpublished paper, Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, 1993; for a summary, see AAR/SBL Abstracts 1993, 137).

to be the unique and lasting contribution of those who spoke for Yahweh. Accordingly, textbooks on prophetism sometimes have dedicated space to clarifying that the prophets did not desire the eradication of all formal religion, but rather exhorted the people to live out their faith in mercy and justice and not to limit belief in God to mere external religious rites.<sup>2</sup>

Recent research into the nature of religion in eighth-century Palestine and the analysis of the textual data of Hosea have moved beyond simply attempting to establish the practice of certain non-Yahwistic rituals, such as cultic prostitution,<sup>3</sup> to a broader investigation of monotheism in ancient Israel. Archaeological findings increasingly point to widespread syncretism, popular as well as official, throughout the monarchical period. New approaches posit a contested and difficult rise of monotheism, which would contrast with the biblical picture of the revelation of a single deity at the very beginning of Israel's history.<sup>4</sup> Lang, for instance, postulates that the prophet Hosea is an important figure in the development and eventual success of what he labels the

2 E.g., J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962) 351-60 (Interestingly, some of the concerns of Wellhausen and Duhm have been raised again by J. Barton in *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986]). Speaking from the perspective of Latin American Liberation Theology, J. P. Miranda defends the strict anti-cultus stance that a first reading of certain prophetic passages might suggest: according to his critical reconstruction, God can only be found in interhuman justice (*Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, trans. J. Eagleson [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974] 44-67; cf. J. Pixley, "dExige el Dios verdadero sacrificios cruentos?," *Revista de interpretaciOn biblica latinoamericana* 2 [1988] 109-31). On the other hand, some suggest a close tie between Hosea and the cult. H. W. Wolff has proposed that Hosea was a member of a Levitical circle in *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) xxii-xxiii (cf. R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980] 22 & 31), but his hypothesis has not received widespread acceptance.

<sup>3</sup> See below, n. 37.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful introduction to issues involved in the larger debate, see D. L. Petersen, "Israel and Monotheism: The Unfinished Agenda" in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, eds. G. M. Tucker, D. L. Petersen, R. R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 92-107. Those sympathetic to the idea of the gradual growth and official imposition of monotheism and who provide helpful bibliography, although defending different reconstructions, include M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gottinnen, Gotter und Gottessymbole. Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (Freiberg: Herder, 1992); and various essays in part one of *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 3-299. A helpful survey of the archaeological data, which does not deal directly with the thorny issue of development, is found in R. S. Hess, "Yahweh and his Asherah? Epigraphic Evidence for Religious Pluralism in Old Testament Times" in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*, eds. A. D. Clarke and B. W. Winter (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991) 5-33.

"Yahweh-alone movement."<sup>5</sup> Some scholars, accordingly, would also question the objectivity of the presentation of the nature of Canaanite religion in OT texts, as these are now evaluated as evidence of this concerted effort to give an aggressively negative view of a competing faith. This article, however, does not try to tackle the complex task of trying either to define precisely what were the elements of Canaanite religion that the prophet Hosea found distasteful, or to locate his ministry and message within the current debate on monotheism.

In addition to this issue of uncertainty in the establishing of a precise religious setting for the background of the Book of Hosea, is the problem of ascertaining clear historical referents. The lack of explicit historical information and the fact that the title (1:1) suggest a ministry spanning decades sometimes can make confident identification of textual particulars difficult.<sup>6</sup>

The following discussion of chaps. 4-7 takes a more literary approach to the final form of this prophetic text.<sup>7</sup> The goal is to try to understand the world within the text, instead of focusing on the relationship of the biblical data to eighth-century Israel to which it refers and which lies behind the text. Space will not permit a detailed reading, which would involve a careful investigation of the poetics of the book--that is, elements such as detailed structural analysis, style, figurative

<sup>5</sup> B. Lang, "The Yahweh-alone Movement and the Making of Jewish Monotheism; *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority* (The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series 1; Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 13-56. Other recent studies dealing with the religious critique of Hosea include G. I. Emmerson's attempt to differentiate the prophet's original religious critique from the one embodied in the present form of the text, which is claimed to be the work of Judaeen redactors (*Hosea, An Israelite Prophet in Judaeen Perspective* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1984] chap. 3); W. I. Toews analyzes Hosea's critique within the larger framework of the reforms of Jeroboam I (*Monarchy and Religious Institution under Jeroboam I* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993] 151-72).

<sup>6</sup> Note, e.g., the comments by F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 313. Their reluctance to specify historical details with absolute certainty goes beyond just facile identification of historical referents (names, places and events) to include avoiding speculation about possible cultic or social settings of the prophetic oracles (72-74, 313-17), which is a major concern of the form critical approach utilized by commentators such as Wolff and Mays. Attempts to coordinate oracles with particular moments in the prophet's ministry abound. For a recent effort, see Davies, *Hosea*, 30-37. Another related issue is how the book itself portrays Israel's history; note, e.g., D. R Daniels, *Hosea and Salvation History* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990) 117-30.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase "the final form of the text" distinguishes our approach from others that concentrate on sorting out what are considered to be original from later material (For a defense of the canonical form, see Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* 868-72, and some conservative commentaries such as D. A. Hubbard, *Hosea* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990] 31-34; cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 52-76, 316f.). Some evangelicals would defend the integrity of the text on theological grounds. Elsewhere I argue for taking the prophetic text (in that case, Amos) as literature for methodological and

language, point of view, plot, and characterization.<sup>8</sup> Rather, some attention will be paid to the shape of these four chapters and to how that might contribute to the highlighting of thematic aspects of the prophetic message. In other words, this presentation combines a literary with a topical concern.

The issue to be explored is the nature of Yahweh religion within the world of the text of Hosea 4-7. Several questions spark the reading of these chapters. For example, what is the nature of Israel's Yahwism in these chapters? What is Yahweh himself perceived to be like in this religious world? Why does the prophet condemn this religion which claims to worship Yahweh? Who are those most responsible for practicing and propagating this kind of belief in Yahweh?

pastoral reasons (M. D Carroll R, *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992] 140-56). Of course, several different kinds of reading strategies deal with the final form of the biblical text. Note the helpful methodological discussions by D. J. A. Clines ("Reading Esther from Left to Right: Contemporary Strategies for Reading a Biblical Text") and M. G. Brett ("Four or Five Things to do With Texts: A Taxonomy of Interpretive Interests") in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, eds. D. J. A. Clines, S. A Fowl, S. E. Porter (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990) 31-52 and 357-77, respectively. For recent surveys of critical approaches, see G. A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redactional Critical Investigation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 1-25, and Davies, *Hosea*, 93-106. Finally, it should be emphasized that this is a reading of Hosea alone. No effort will be made to pursue the fruitful insights generated by intertextual readings; cf. D N. Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). For an example of such an approach to the Book of Hosea, see the essay in the same volume by D Krause, "A Blessing Cursed: The Prophet's Prayer for Barren Womb and Dry Breasts in Hosea 9," 191-202.

<sup>8</sup> For a general bibliography for these features, see Carroll R, *Contexts for Amos*, 178-80. For some poetic details in this particular prophetic text, note, e.g., R. B. Chisolm, Jr., "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets," *BS* 144 (1987) 44-52; P. A. Krueger, "Prophetic Imagery: On Metaphors and Similes in the Book Hosea," *JNSL* 14 (1988) 143-51; P. J. Botha, "The Communicative Function of Comparison in Hosea," *Old Testament Essays* 6 (1993) 57-71; Davies, *Hosea* (OTG), 107-115; 1: Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1992) 84-116; H. Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 136-57. P. R House has touched on characterization and plot in the book of Hosea, but within the larger literary framework of the Book of the Twelve (*The Unity of the Twelve* [Sheffield: Almond, 1990]). Others argue that the unity and coherence of the prophetic text, which some literary readings suggest, should not ignore supposed redactional development Note, e.g., Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the book of Hosea* (cf. D. Carr, "Reaching for Unity in Isaiah," *JSOT* 57 [1993] 61-80). H. Marks connects his views on the literariness of each of the Twelve with observations concerning perceived redactional layers and the possible canonical markers of the final compilers ("The Twelve Prophets," *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, eds. R. Alter and E Kermode [Cambridge: Belknap, 1987] 207-33).

In the discussion, Hosea 4-7 is divided into three principle parts. These chapters open with 4:1-3, which offers an introduction to what follows; 4:4-5:7 describes the worship in Israel that is found to be so contrary to the divine demands; and, lastly, 5:8-7:16 critiques Israel's internal politics and foreign policy and their relationship to Israelite religion.

*Introductory Accusation and Judgment (4:1-3)*

Most commentators consider this passage to be the introduction which sets the tone and lists the basic violations deserving of judgment which will be developed in the following chapters.<sup>9</sup> The theological framework for this pericope is the Mosaic Covenant,<sup>10</sup> whether in a formal sense as a covenant lawsuit<sup>11</sup> or simply in a broader manner of an Indictment because of covenant violation.<sup>12</sup>

4:1 opens the accusation by mentioning the lack of three key covenantal qualities: אֱמֶת ('emet), חֶסֶד (hesed), and דַּ'אָת (da'at). The first has been translated in the versions as "good faith" (NEB) and "faithfulness" (NASB, NIV, NRSV). This term is related to the concept of truth and carries the notions of constancy, reliability, and integrity in word and deed. Yahweh himself is the standard by which this faithfulness is measured (2:20 [MT = 2:22]).<sup>13</sup> The second term, חֶסֶד, appears in the versions as

<sup>9</sup> E.g., for Andersen and Freedman, 4: 1-3 is the introduction to chaps. 4-7 (*Hosea*, 331); for D. A. Hubbard it introduces chaps. 4-11 (*Hosea*, 95-96); for J. L. Mays these verses introduce chaps. 4-14 (*Hosea* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969] 61).

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive exposition of the notion of covenant in Hosea, see W. Brueggemann, *Hosea: Tradition for Crisis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1968). Besides commentaries such as D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Waco: Word, 1987), which makes extensive use of covenant theology, also note J. Bright, *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-Exilic Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 87-94; K. Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol. I: The Assyrian Period, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 90-93; J. Day, "Pre-Deuteronomic Allusions to the Covenant in Hosea and Psalm lxxviii; *VT* 36 (1986) 1-12. Those not supporting a well developed covenant background for the prophets include D. J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinion* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1972) 35-40, 78f.; R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) 8-23. Cf. the discussion on recent developments in covenant studies in K. Kitchen, "The Fall and Rise of Covenant, Law and Treaty; *Tyn Bul* 40 (1989) 118-35.

<sup>11</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise* 89-90; K. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib Pattern)*, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978) 32-34; Mays, *Hosea*, 61; Wolff, *Hosea*, 66; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 7&-75 (Stuart extends the lawsuit to the end of the chapter). Note, however, M. De Roche, "Yahweh's RIB against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the Preexilic Prophets; *JBL* 102 (1983) 563-74.

<sup>12</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 331; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 96.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Jepsen, "אֱמֶת," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 1: 292-323; W. C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand

"mutual trust" (NEB), "kindness" (NASB), "love" (NIV), and "loyalty" (NRSV). A reciprocal relationship is presupposed, and this bond is to be made manifest in actions. In the context of the prophets, this relationship is the covenant: Yahweh has committed himself to a particular people, and they are called to reflect this love and grace concretely with one another in the community.<sup>14</sup> The last quality that is mentioned is דעת or "knowledge."<sup>15</sup> In the context of the book, this knowledge certainly does refer to a certain theological content, such as the traditions of the Patriarchs (12:3-4, 12 [MT = 12:4-5, 13]), of the Exodus (2:14-15 [MT = 2:16-17]; 11:1-4; 12:9, 13 [MT = 12:10, 14]; 13:4) and of the Wilderness (9:10; 13:5) and the teachings of the Torah (4:6; 8:1, 12). But the term includes as well an understanding of Yahweh's covenantal demands which is to be reflected in obedience and moral conduct. Hence, the NIV translates the phrase דעת אלֵהִים here as "acknowledgement of God."

The list of five charges that follow in 4:2a offer an application of the three sins of omission in 4:1 within human relationships.<sup>16</sup> Although the knowledge of God is a more general concept, the lack of faithfulness (אִמָּת) probably could be taken as fleshed out in cursing and lying, and the absence of steadfast love (חֶסֶד) in murder, stealing, and adultery. Each of these five corresponds to one of the Ten Commandments.<sup>17</sup> The last line of this verse is very problematic,<sup>18</sup> but it is possible that the

Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 222-34. אִמָּת and חֶסֶד often appear in hendiadys, but the fact that these terms appear as part of a list of three and each is prefixed by the conjunction + negative particle would suggest that here they be considered separately.

<sup>14</sup> See N. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1967); H.-J. Zobel, "חֶסֶד," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 5.44-64; Davies, *Hosea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 94-97; B. C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991) 151.-53.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Bergman and G. J. Botterweck, "יָדַע," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 5.444-81; H. B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA"; *BASOR* 181 (1966) 131-77; Daniels, *Hosea and Salvation History*, 111-16.

<sup>16</sup> Some commentators hold that the last term, "knowledge," summarizes and is the basis of the preceding two. See Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 57; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 75; C. E. Keil, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) X: 74f.; W. R. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979) 250.

<sup>17</sup> For details, note especially Brueggemann, *Hosea*, 38-43; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 97. Cf. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 17f.

<sup>18</sup> The three primary options concerning the difficult פָּרַצוּ are to consider it as: (1) the finite verb for the preceding five infinitive absolutes (Wolff, *Hosea*, 68; Mays, *Hosea*, 65; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 72; Davies, *Hosea*, 116; NRSV); (2) connected with the following clause describing the bloodshed (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 338f.; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 98); (3) a separate item with its own meaning (T. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary, I: Hosea, Joel, and Amos* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992] 57; Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 75; Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, 250; NEB, NASB, NIV). We take this last option.

reference is to two acts of cruel violence, making a total of seven violations. Thus the indictment is poetically emphasized, as the sins of Israel add up to a perfect number; their wickedness is complete.<sup>19</sup> Several of these seven sins will be mentioned again in the following two major sections. They will be evident in cultic deviation and in the degrading activities of the people's worship (4:4-5:7), and then both in the refusal to trust him in national political affairs and in the struggles for power and influence (5:8-7:16).

If the discussion of 4:1-3 thus far has summarized the reasons for the denunciation (the "what" and the "why" in 4:1-2), there still remain to be identified the "who" and "where"--that is, those that practice and are responsible for the sin and the place of the sin and of the coming judgment. 4:1 is a call to the "sons of Israel" and to the "inhabitants of the land"; and 4:3a announces chastisement on "all who dwell in it." This thematic inclusio in this introductory pericope helps to emphasize that the whole population stands guilty before Yahweh. The transgressors are not limited to certain groups; all in one way or another are involved in the conduct condemned by the prophet. Yet, even if the society as a whole is in rebellion against God and its members sin against one another, might there not be some who are held particularly accountable before the divine tribunal for the paths that the nation has chosen to pursue? The following oracles will develop the tension between universal guilt and more circumscribed responsibility.

The mention of "the land" in 4:3aα also forms an inclusio with its double use in v 1. It is the land of the covenant that will suffer the effects of the covenant curses.<sup>20</sup> The vocabulary of judgment reaches cosmic dimensions in the last line of v 3 to emphasize the awful devastation that awaits Israel because of the indictment that Yahweh announces through his prophet (cf. Isa 24:1ff., 33:8-9).<sup>21</sup> If future blessing beyond

<sup>19</sup> J. Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988) 17.

<sup>20</sup> For a theology of the land and the importance of obedience for blessing there, see especially W. Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 90-129. Unlike Brueggemann, however, I believe that the guilt cannot be limited almost exclusively to the leadership. Also note P. D. Miller, Jr., *Sin and Judgment and the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico: CA: Scholars Press, 1982) 9-11; and D. I. Block's discussion of the relationship between a deity and the land and its people against the background of the Ancient Near East, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (Jackson: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988). For the specification of the corresponding covenant curses and blessings here and elsewhere, note especially Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, xxxi-xlii and ad loc. Not all take the verbs in 4:3 as future. Those who understand a reference to the present state of affairs include Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 75f.; Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, 251 (cf. NASB, NIV; NRSV). Note Wolff's arguments for assuming the future, *Hosea*, 65f.

<sup>21</sup> For the idea of a cosmic dimension, the reversal of creation itself, which would go beyond the idea of simply the rhetorical use of such vocabulary, see M. Deroche, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea," *VT* 31 (1981) 400-409; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 98.

the judgment will mean the restoration of blessing and prosperity (cf. 2:16-23 [MT = 2:18-25]; 11:8-11; 14:4-8 [MT = 14:5-9]), the judgment itself will bring drought and terrible loss of life. Though not made explicit in this verse, these references to the abrogation of rain and fertility could very well be an indirect attack on other deities and the belief in their power in nature by the nation (cf. 2:3,5-13 [MT = 2:5, 7-15]). In sum, through its vocabulary and literary devices, this opening pericope announces the accusations of Yahweh against his people and the judgment that Israel's sin deserves. The closing verse, however, in its proclamation of the end of the nation actually is pronouncing the end of a world--that is, of this people and this land. Transgression against the deity and thus against others in the covenant community will mean that Israel will be no more. Why is religious belief and practice taken so seriously in the world of this prophetic text. Why is the prophetic decree so all-consuming?

At this point a digression will prove helpful. Although the focus of this article is textual and literary, insight into the prophetic complaint can be gained by appealing to the theoretical perspectives of the social sciences.<sup>22</sup> From this perspective, religion is understood as a system of beliefs, traditions, symbols, and rituals that work together to explain to a people how nature, life, and death function and why things are the way they are. This religious system provides an intelligible order for individual and social relationships, helps locate social identity, and gives transcendental reasons for disasters and success in every human sphere. Religion, in other words, helps to establish and to maintain what people would consider to be the "natural order" of things.

The sociology of knowledge would label this assumed natural order of existence the "social construction of reality"--that is, the shared fabric which is society, where a language, socially defined roles and behavior, certain institutions, and a complex set of beliefs are held in common. This humanly crafted "world" is held together and legitimated in part by religion: this social world is believed to have been established by divine decree, to be blessed by divine grace, and to be protected by divine promise. Participation in religious rites is understood as a means of assuring the deity's favor and succor, of securing the maintenance of the way life "truly is" and "should be." Moreover, the religious establishment of temple and priesthood are a constant visible

<sup>22</sup> For what follows regarding the use of other disciplines, see the discussion and bibliography in Carroll R, *Contexts for Amos*, 48-91, 122-35. The theoretical issues presented there are then applied to the book of Amos and modern Latin America. For Hosea, see Davies, *Hosea* (OTG), 58-62. Cf. G. V. Smith, "The Application of Principles from the Sociology of Knowledge for Understanding the Setting, Tradition and Theology of the Prophets," *JETS* 32 (1989) 145-57; and the different social science framework for R S. Hendel, "Worldmaking in Ancient Israel," *JSOT* 56 (1992) 3-18.

reminder of the supposed correctness and divine approval of this society and its worldview.

This religious world, though, is not monolithic. To begin with, an official theology, cult, and religious personnel support and sanction the status quo for the society's leadership and institutions. At a popular level, however, faith might embrace this official religion as well as move beyond it and hold to beliefs and superstitions from other sources, which are accepted on the basis of experiences, folklore, and community tradition.

This picture of religious life accords well with the phenomena attacked by the classical prophets. On the one hand, they decry how religious officials do not question the sad state of affairs in Judah and Israel, and condemn the priests for benefiting from and defending the social construction of reality; they censure rival prophets who claim to speak for Yahweh, yet proclaim nothing that would criticize national life and how politics are pursued. The traditions of the mighty acts of God, the classical prophets claim, are manipulated to convince the people and the government of continued and unfailing divine help. What is more, political and economic alliances with surrounding nations or empires demonstrate an inadequate perception of the power of Yahweh and also lead to the acceptance and support of other deities and their cults. In other words, the official religion has offered a distorted Yahweh faith and does not even limit worship to Yahweh as the only true god of Israel. On the other hand, the general populace crowds the cult centers and is actively involved in the official ceremonies and rituals, but also follows after other deities and celebrates at other cult centers without fear of condemnation from the religious establishment.

What the classical prophets announce is the coming destruction of the social world that claims to be Yahweh's. The prophets are not just saying that certain aspects of national life must come to an end, but that national life itself is to be no more. Yahweh will need to begin all over again in the future, beyond the judgment. There will be no reform or revolution to transform the present order; the prophetic hope is of a new and different social construction of reality, of another "world" of justice, holiness, and proper worship. Brueggemann has coined the phrase "the prophetic imagination" to describe how these spokespersons judged reality differently than the regimes of their day. They declared the guilt of the leadership and the terrible inadequacies of national worship, while at the same time offering a vision of hope of a new world beyond the imminent disaster of the divine visitation.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For bibliographic details of some of Brueggemann's works dealing with the imagination and an interaction with his construct, see Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos* 140-43.

Ultimately, what is at stake in the prophetic mind is the very nature of Yahweh himself. It is not that Judah and Israel are not religious or that they do not believe in Yahweh. The issue, rather, is what sort of Yahweh do they believe in and what kind of Lord is worshipped in the cult. The canonical texts continually emphasize that the Yahweh of the prophets is not the Yahweh of the temples and of the masses. The Yahweh of the prophets is neither some sort of appendage to daily realities nor a god to be fashioned according to human designs. It is because Yahweh is the sovereign Lord, who demands to be at the very heart of individual life and national existence, that the prophets do not separate religious critique from the denunciation of social and political evil. The "worlds" of Judah and Israel's making have come under prophetic scrutiny and have been found deserving of severe punishment.

The Book of Hosea, therefore, asserts that the issue of religion is fundamental. To evaluate religion is to get at the heart of Israel's self-understanding and to touch the basis of national survival. 4:1-3 introduces the primary concerns of Yahweh and declares his judgment. What follows in chaps. 4-7 are more details regarding primarily the sins of Israel, and to a lesser extent those of Judah. These chapters present almost exclusively the prophetic accusations. Little is said regarding the judgment or future hope, aspects of the divine message expounded more fully elsewhere in the book.

#### *The Perversion of Worship (4:4-5:7)*

The section of Hosea that extends from 4:4 to 5:7 provides the divine and prophetic condemnation of the worship of the nation of Israel. Attention here will be directed primarily at 4:4-10, which serves both to layout the basis of the nature and guilt of this worship and to announce the judgment that awaits the veneration that Yahweh so deplors.

4:4-10 is a notoriously difficult passage to interpret. Textual problems abound, and changes in pronouns make it hard to specify who is coming under the ire of Yahweh.<sup>24</sup> Most commentators believe that these verses refer to the priesthood (in the person of a particular individual

Most recently, his concept of imagination is developed in idem, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). Even if one might not agree with some of Brueggemann's commitments and convictions, his notion of the imagination is helpful and full of fresh and challenging insights.

<sup>24</sup> H. Fisch holds that the complexity and apparent incoherence in the language of the Book of Hosea voice the passions of the "covenantal discourse" of a God, who in his holiness hates the state of the nation but who at the same time desperately loves his chosen people (*Poetry with a Purpose*, 138f.).

like the high priest or the priests in general)<sup>25</sup> and will suggest textual emendations to support a consistent interpretation along these lines.<sup>26</sup> The Masoretic Text, however, can point to the people throughout.<sup>27</sup>

The first thing that is important to notice are the lexical links that 4:4-10 have with 4:1-3. Key terms reappear: "accuse, bring charges" (the root: **רִיב** [*rib*]; 4:1, 4 [twice]), "knowledge" (**דַּעַת**; 4:1, 6), and "break out, increase" (**פָּרַץ** [*prs*]; 4:2, 10). These verses can be taken, therefore, as going into more detail regarding the accusations against the people mentioned in the introduction. At the same time, however, the lexical continuity is the vehicle for expressing a sharp contrast through a wordplay. This contrast is between the actions and character of Yahweh and Israel. 4:4 declares that none can question ("contend," the root **רִיב**) the divine accusation (Yahweh's **רִיב** of 4:1), as Yahweh's evaluation of the state of the nation is just.<sup>28</sup> The people also are "like those who contend (the root **רִיב**) with a priest" (NASB, NIV). On the one hand, these words could mean that Israel has a stubborn heart, which is unwilling to submit to divine directives (cf. Deut 17:12-13). On the other hand, why use this phrase if the priests themselves will come under divine scrutiny later for several kinds of sin? The point is to focus on the contentious character of the people, not on the character of the priests of the official cult. The literary irony of the choice of "priest" will become more apparent in the course of the literary reading.

The passage continues, saying that the people will "stumble" continually ("day and night" can be taken as a merism to denote "all the time") in their sin (v 5; cf. 5:5; 14:1, 9 [MT = 14:2, 10]) accompanied by

<sup>25</sup> Note the commentaries by Harper, Mays, Wolff, Andersen and Freedman, Stuart, Hubbard and Davies. Because of the change to the third person plural pronoun in 4:7, Andersen and Freedman hold that 4:7-10 refer to the children of the priests (*Hosea*, 354, 358); Hubbard agrees (*Hosea*, 101). The difficulty in interpretation is also evident in the Targum, which sees references to both the people (4:4-7, 9-10) and the priests (4:8). See *The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, eds. K. J. Cathcart, M. Maher, M. McNamara (Edinburgh: or & or Clark, 1989) 14.36f.

<sup>26</sup> The two most important emendations are at 4:4b, which is changed to read "with you, O priest, is my contention" (cf. NEB, NRSV), and at 4:7b, where "I will exchange" becomes "they exchange" (cf. NIV, NRSV). Note BHS and especially the discussions in Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 344-50 and 355-58, respectively.

<sup>27</sup> For this interpretation, see the commentaries by Keil and McComiskey ad loc, as well as M. Deroche, "Structure and Meaning in Hosea IV 4-10; *VT* 33 (1983) 185-98.

<sup>28</sup> Some have suggested that Yahweh's (or the prophet's) discourse in 4:4a is a response to a complaint or an objection by a priest in the style of Amos 7:10-17. For Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, 345f.) and Davies (*Hosea*, 117), 4:4a could be the words of the priest; for Mays (*Hosea*, 67), Stuart (*Hosea-Jonah*, 77), and Limburg (*Hosea-Micah*, 19), all of the verse is from the deity; Hubbard suggests that either view is possible (*Hosea*, 99f.). Of course, this point of view is intimately linked to the interpretation of 4:4-10 as an indictment of the priesthood.

some of the prophets, who ideally were to be an example of holiness and truth.<sup>29</sup> Once again, one encounters the unexpected, but in reverse. Whereas in 4:4 the reader at first glance wonders why the character of the nation is connected with the wayward priests, here the mention of the prophets does not seem to cohere with the other allusions to prophets in the book, which are positive (6:5; 9:7-9; 12:10, 13 [MT = 12:11, 14]): the supposed divine spokesperson accompanies the people in both guilt and judgment. The literary effect is to communicate a world turned upside down and full of contradictions. Israel argues with sinful priests, yet will participate in their cult; prophets (perhaps just some of them?) can proclaim Yahweh's message, while joining in sin. The power of the passage is grounded in the incoherence and the opposing images: this is a world bound for self-destruction, not only divine judgment.

This negative description of 4:4-5a is born out by the following series of pictures; the multiplication of accusations cannot but underline the waywardness of the people. 4:5b-6 demonstrate a structure of alternating indictment and punishment in which the repetition of the verbs suggests a close correspondence between sin and chastisement.<sup>30</sup> The list marks its beginning and close with Yahweh's actions against Israel.

5b <i>I will destroy your mother</i>	6a <i>my people are destroyed</i>
6ba <i>you rejected knowledge</i>	6bb <i>I will reject you</i>
6ca <i>you ignored the Torah</i>	6cb <i>I also will ignore your children</i>

In addition to this structure, which shows graphically how the nation is deserving of punishment, the content of these lines also proves Israel's wilful guilt. There is no heeding the voice and instruction of God (v 6): knowledge is lacking, even rejected, and the Torah is ignored. The totality of Israel is to be judged, a fact metaphorically presented by the use of "mother" (v 5b; observe the parallelism between "I will destroy your mother" and "my people are destroyed") and "children" (v 6cb) to refer to the nation.<sup>31</sup> "Mother" and "children" form an inclusio to this sequence, serving as a reminder of the powerful image of family through-

<sup>29</sup> Because of the contrast with other references to the prophets, Wolff (*Hosea*, 77f.) and Davies (*Hosea*, 118) see this phrase as a later gloss. Commentators who do not excise the reference postulate that the criticism was directed at cult prophets (e.g., cf. Jer 2:8, 5:31, 14:18, 18:18).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets*, 12-14. Miller, however, takes 4:4-6 to be speaking of the priesthood.

<sup>31</sup> Some who see 4:4-10 as referring to the priesthood will suggest that, along with the direct condemnation, the mention of the mother and children would imply a judgment upon three generations (cf. Amos 7:17; 1 Sam 2:27ff.). Note Mays, *Hosea*, 68f.;

out the book. Israel as mother echoes the opening chaps. (e.g., 2:2, 5 [MT = 2:4, 7]; cf. Isa 50:1), where the nation is chastened and put aside for a time. The mention of children also turns the reader back to those same chapters in which the names of the children of the prophet and Gomer reflect the fate of Israel (also note 9:12, 13, 16; 10:14; 13:13). In contrast to the character and fate of this mother and children at this time Yahweh in the future will restore her and her children (1:10, 2:14-23 [MT = 2:1, 16-25]). Yahweh is a loving parent who yearns to bring Israel, his child/children, back to himself (11:1-4, 8-11; 14:7-8 [MT = 14:8-9]).

4:6 also declares that Israel's privileged position as "priest" (cf. Exod 19:6, Isa 61 :5-6) among the nations is being rescinded. Once again the term "priest" is utilized, and the literary play adds to the irony: the people, who are like those who contend with a priest (v 4), will themselves no longer be Yahweh's priest. The rejection of **קֹהֵן**, with all that this implies, disqualifies Israel from its special role. The use of "priest" could also refer to the concept of Israel as a nation coming before Yahweh at the sanctuaries and during the holy days to offer sacrifices. The Book of Hosea is replete with divine accusations against false worship both at historic cult centers and the high places and Yahweh's rejection of Israel's devotion.

The next pericope, 4:7-10, emphasizes the nation's lusting after sin.<sup>32</sup> Prosperity<sup>33</sup> did not yield gratitude to Yahweh, but rather the multiplication of sin (4:7a), its devouring ("feed on") and craving (4:8). Thus Yahweh will humiliate the people, by exchanging their glory as a successful nation for the shame of judgment (4:7b),<sup>34</sup> and will punish according to the measure of their evil deeds (4:9b). The last verse serves as a transition to later prophetic words. 4:10 reintroduces the theme of

Wolff, *Hosea*, 78; Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, 19. For a helpful discussion of the family metaphor, although from a feminist perspective, see G. A. Yee, "Hosea," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 198-202.

<sup>32</sup> Deroche suggests that 4:7-10 have a chiasmic structure ("Structure, Rhetoric, and Meaning in Hosea IV 4-10, 195).

<sup>33</sup> Those assuming 4:4-10 to speak of the priesthood take the "increase" in several ways. E.g., Wolff (*Hosea*, 80f.) and Hubbard (*Hosea*, 102) see a reference to the increase in the number of priests; Andersen and Freedman to their pride (*Hosea*, 354); Stuart to their wealth (*Hosea-Jonah*, 78f.). NEB and NIV even interpolate the word "priests" at 4:7 (note also that at v 6 the singular MT "priest" is altered in NIV to the plural, again injecting an interpretation into the translation).

<sup>34</sup> For the textual change proposed by BHS and several commentators, see above n 26. If "increase" refers to national prosperity, then "glory" probably should be taken as its parallel (cf. Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 78; and McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 63). Deroche takes the term to mean Israel's fertility ("Structure, Rhetoric, and Meaning in Hosea IV 4-10; 196). 4:7 is by rabbinic tradition a *tiqune sopherim*, a scribal change from "my glory" to "their glory."

Israel's promiscuity which had been dramatically portrayed in the first three chapters. The next section (4:11-19) will return to the description of the nations following after other gods instead of maintaining loyalty to Yahweh alone, and other oracles will also use the metaphor for the political arena (e.g., 7:4).

At the same time, it is important to notice three theoretical links between these verses and the preceding pericope (4:4-6), which demonstrate that the nation continues in view. To begin with, there is the mention of the taking away of Israel's special status, as a priest in 4:6 and as the recipient of glory in 4:7. Second, the punishment corresponds to the sin. In 4:5b-6 this is expressed by an alternating structure, in 4:9b by the two statements about suffering the just consequences of the sinful "ways" and "deeds." Third, "priest" is used yet once more, here in the proverbial comparative phrase "like people, like priest" (4:9). Still another facet of the word play is added: the people, whose nature is to contest priests and who no longer merit the privilege of serving as priest before God, also set the pattern for the punishment of the priests, as the latter are involved in the same sort of transgressions and are incorporated into the same fate (notice that it is not the other way around). This juxtaposition of people and priest in prophetic condemnation also appears at 5:1 and 6:8-9.

In sum, 4:4-10 is a message directed at the entire nation. In God's view Israel has deliberately turned its back on him and enjoyed its sin. These verses paint a dark picture of the heart of the people. The sin which particularly deserves punishment is described in 4:11-19 and 5:1-7.

A quick look at 4:11-19 reveals several items that are worthy of judgment. Structurally it should be noticed that 4:11-14 are marked by an *inclusio* which describes the people's lack of understanding (cf. 4:1, 6).<sup>35</sup> Within this set of verses the prophetic word condemns several worship practices which reflect and perpetuate this blindness. The reference to drink that dulls the mind (4:11) should probably be understood in a cultic context (cf. 2:8, 9, 22 [MT = 2:10, 11, 24]; 7:14; 9:1-2); the people consult idols of wood (4:12; cf. Isa 44:8-20; Jer 2:2-3:9; Deut 18:9-22) and offer sacrifices at non-Yahwistic cult centers (4:13). But who is being worshipped at these places? Chapter two specifically mentions following after the Baals, but does this signify that the veneration of other deities was limited to the hilltop groves or simply that these were the only gods worshipped there? Is some sort of Yahweh also adored at the high places along with other deities? The text is neither clear nor specific.

<sup>35</sup> Note, e.g., J. R. Lundbom, "Poetic Structure and Prophetic Rhetoric in Hosea," *VT* 29 (1979) 300-308.

Israel is also described as being under the influence of a "spirit of whoredom" (4:12, NRSV).<sup>36</sup> In other words, this blameworthy ritualistic activity is more than a passing phenomenon. Its hold goes much deeper; it has seductively captured the heart and mind of the nation. But, whereas vv 11 and 12 could very well be a metaphoric description of the nation deserting the proper worship of Yahweh and seeking out other deities or adoring Yahweh in an improper fashion, 4:13-14 do appear to be an account of some sort of sexual perversion within the cult. Opinions differ over exactly what is being referred to, whether sacred prostitution, a bridal initiation rite, general debauchery, or a combination of these activities.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the precise charge, perversion is tied in with worship, and both female and male take part.<sup>38</sup>

This picture of deplorable worship continues in 4:15-19. Drinking is referred to again (v 18); the harlotry language reappears (vv 15, 19); the term "spirit" is utilized once more to describe the grip of the false worship that pushes Israel inexorably to ruin (v 19);<sup>39</sup> and the idols of v 17 connect back to the objects of v 12. The inability and unwillingness to follow the guidance of the Yahweh of the prophet and appreciate his nurture is underscored in 4:16 by the sharply sarcastic comparison of

<sup>36</sup> Whereas the רוּחַ ("spirit") in 4:12 is usually taken to refer simply to the strong influence of idolatry upon the nation, Andersen and Freedman see other deities in the verse (*Hosea*, 365-67; 650). Hubbard does not go that far, but does use the phrase "demonic power" both at 4:12 and 5:4 (*Hosea*, 105, 115, respectively).

<sup>37</sup> See the discussion and references in H. M Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2, 7B-8; 4,1-13; 5,1-27; 6,4-7; 8,14* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984) 17-36. Barstad does not believe that cultic prostitution was practiced in the ancient Near East and suggests that Hos 4:14 is a metaphoric description of worshipping other gods (cf. Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution under Jeroboam I*; 162-65). Commentators who do hold to the practice of cultic prostitution include: Harper (*Amos and Hosea*, 261f.), Mays (*Hosea*, 74f.), Stuart (*Hosea-Jonah*. 82f.), Hubbard (*Hosea*, 81f.), Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, 157-69, 370-72). Cf. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) 210-29; Phillip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah--An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988) 88-107. Wolff has proposed the idea of a bridal initiation rite (*Hosea*, 14-15, 86-87) and is followed by Koch (*The Prophets*, 80, 83-85), and Hubbard (*Hosea*, 106). For a combination of these options, see Davies, *Hosea* (OTG), 48-50.

<sup>38</sup> Some who understand chap. 4 as speaking of the priesthood take those mentioned in 4:13-14 to be the family members of the priesthood (Wolff, *Hosea*, 86-88; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 369f.; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 106).

<sup>39</sup> רוּחַ can mean both "wind" (8:7; 12:1 [Heb 12:2]; 13:15) and "spirit" (as in 4:12; cf. 5:4). This could be a double entendre, which describes the power of the wind/spirit. Our reading, in light of the proximity to 4:12 and 5:4, is to understand the term here to be another reference to the "spirit of whoredom" (cf. Mays, *Hosea*, 79; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 111). Not all commentators would agree, however. E.g., Andersen and Freedman see an allusion to a deity (*Hosea*, 376, 650). Stuart takes the reference to be to literal destruction (*Hosea-Jonah*. 86; cf. Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 84), McComiskey to the flow of events beyond the nation's control (*The Minor Prophets*, 73).

Israel to a "stubborn heifer" (cf. 10:11). Elsewhere this prophetic book will describe the nation as a dove (7:11f., 11:11) and as a donkey (8:9). Each of these metaphors gives a different nuance to the character of Israel: In this case, the import of the description is to vividly emphasize that the nation cannot and will not heed its shepherd.

What is particularly striking is the mention of two historic shrines in 4:15 (though note the ironic change of Bethel to Beth-Aven, "house of evil") in the midst of this diatribe against Israel's religious practices. This prophetic word commands Israel not to go to the ancient Yahwistic holy places and forbids the people to make traditional oaths. What actually is being communicated? Is this a denunciation of these cultic centers per se? Is the problem that the kind of worship decried in the preceding verses is also evident at these sites? Or, is it that the veneration at the high places disqualifies the people from being able to go to the Yahwistic centers? On the other hand, what is the Yahweh worshipped at Gilgal and Bethel like? Is he the Yahweh of the official religious establishment and/or one of the people's making? How do these differ from each other and how does each match up with the god of the prophet? Questions abound and serve to complicate even more the picture of religious faith and practice in this textual world.

Although the entire nation is the target in 4:11-19, could there be those who are most directly responsible for this state of affairs? 5:1-7 could provide the answer. The opening verse to this pericope mentions three groups: the priests, the people ("house of Israel"),<sup>40</sup> and the political bureaucracy of the monarchy ("house of the king"). Because 5:1 mentions two other important sites in Israel's traditions, Mizpah and Tabor,<sup>41</sup> some commentators see that this pericope is directed at the national leadership, especially the religious functionaries. This view could find support in that cultic activities are listed in vv 6 and 7.<sup>42</sup> However, though 5:1 does cite the leadership, this section seems to have a broader

<sup>40</sup> Some take "house of Israel" to mean just the North (Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 85; Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, 268; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 384; McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 95; Davies, *Hosea*, 137), others both Israel and Judah (Hubbard, *Hosea*, 112). Our reading accepts the former point of view. Mays (*Hosea*, 80f.), Wolff (*Hosea*, 97f.), and Stuart (*Hosea-Jonah*, 91) would see the phrase as another reference to the leadership.

<sup>41</sup> The first line of 5:2 is an interpretative crux. Many commentators would emend the text to create a triple accusation and a third place name (Shittim; cf. 9:10; Num 25) to parallel the three indictments of 5:1 (cf. NRSV). Those suggesting the changes include Harper (*Amos and Hosea*, 269), Wolff (*Hosea*, 98), Mays (*Hosea*, 81), Stuart (*Hosea-Jonah*, 90-92), and Yair Mazar, "Hosea 5.1-3: Between Compositional Rhetoric and Rhetorical Composition," *JSOT* 45 (1989) 115-26. Our reading retains the MT See Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*. 386-88.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Hubbard, *Hosea*, 112.

scope. Not only is the nation referred to in 5:1, a number of words and phrases echo the earlier descriptions of Israel in chap. 4. Notice, for example, the reference to prostitution (v 3; 4:10-15, 18), "their deeds" (v 4; 4:9), "do not acknowledge Yahweh" (v 4; 4:1; cf. 4:11,14), "spirit of whoredom" (v 4; 4:12), "stumble" (v 5; 4:5), and "children" (v 7; 4:6). As in 4:9, others in 5:1- 7 are mentioned and incorporated into the broader population's sin and judgment.

5:1- 7 once again demonstrates that a lack of religious zeal is not the problem. These verses imply worship at Yahweh cult centers, because of the mention of Mizpah and Tabor (5:1) and because the nation is pictured as bringing animals for sacrifice (5:6) and celebrating the New Moon festival (5:7).<sup>43</sup> Even so, the stiff-necked and self-indulgent nature of the religious activity emphasized by the character traits alluded to in the previous paragraph make communion with Yahweh based upon repentance impossible ("return," רָשׁוּ [sub]; 5:4a). The prophetic invective, as in 4:11-19, is full of irony: Yahweh "knows" the depth of Israel's sin (5:3), though the nation refuses to "acknowledge" him (5:4); they "seek" him at the sanctuaries, but he has withdrawn himself from them (5:6); their cult symbolizes unfaithfulness, thus the New Moon will destroy crop yields and not be a celebration of divine blessing (5:7). 4:4-5:7; therefore, is a sustained attack on religious activity in Israel (with the occasional remark for Judah--4:15, 5:5). Though precise reconstruction is difficult, several impressions stand out. To begin with, this is a very religiously active people. The nation goes to a variety of sanctuaries, both those linked with the historical traditions (4:15; 5:1,6) as well as the high places (4:13). In addition, the activity is varied: Israel offers sacrifices (4:13, 14; 5:6) and consults different cult articles (4:12). Yet, this worship is censured, as it is based on blind ignorance (4:6, 11, 14, 16; 5:4) and characterized by debauchery (4:13-14, 18). Their efforts are considered to be mere harlotry, the forsaking of Yahweh to follow after other gods and customs (4:10-12, 15, 17; 5:4).

But, understanding the divine object of all this religiosity is more difficult. Earlier chapters give notice that the nation venerates other deities and 4:17 mentions idols, but other issues surface. How, for instance, do these beliefs affect faith in Yahweh, at both official and popular levels? Is Yahweh worshipped solely at the sanctuaries, or also at the high places? At the very least, it can be said that the nation does not appear to see any contradiction of faith in worshipping various deities and

<sup>43</sup> 5:7b has been interpreted in various ways, and several have suggested emendations (e.g., Wolff, *Hosea*, 95, who follows LXX; cf. NEB). Although some recent commentators understand Yahweh to be the subject (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 396-98; Davies, *Hosea*, 144-45), a more natural grammatical reading is for New Moon (שֶׁמֶן) to be the subject.

feels that Yahweh will be pleased with their offerings. The Yahweh of the prophet, however, brooks no rivals and thus announces judgment. Sometimes this word of chastisement is vague (4:5, 9, 14; 5:2), but in one verse Yahweh declares that he will withdraw and not meet them at the cult centers (5:6). On two occasions he says that punishment will affect provisions and crops (4:10; 5:7), thus repeating the message in chap. 2 of a judgment of want that challenges the pretensions of the baals (2:8-13, 22 [MT = 2:10-15, 24]). Whatever the various theologies of the nation, changing the people's comprehension to a truer picture of Yahweh seems practically impossible. The spirit of whoredom has dug deep roots (4:12, 19; 5:4); Yahweh can only reject this incorrigible and perverse religious farce and depart.

*Religion and Politics (5:8-7:16)*

The long section that begins at 5:8 with a change in imagery and a series of imperatives and extends through chap. 7 redirects attention from the practice of worship to the political arena. Religion, however, is still a central concern, as demonstrated, for instance, by the well-known divine demand in 6:6 for an ethical faith. Religion signifies more than cultic activity; it encompasses the interweaving of that activity and theology into different spheres of national existence.

Even though the general scholarly consensus is that the first set of verses of this section (5:8-15) has as its historical background the events surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite War of 734-732 B.C.,<sup>44</sup> the particular allusions can be difficult to confidently identify. 5:8-11 are often understood as a reference to a counter-attack on Israel by Judah in the war's aftermath,<sup>45</sup> and 5:13 (also 7:8-13) would point to appeals to the super-powers Assyria<sup>46</sup> and Egypt in the context of that turmoil. Whatever the exact historical setting, it is clear that the national political leaders and

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., H. Donner, "The Separate States of Israel and Judah; *Israelite and Judaeon History*, eds. J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 422-32, and J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 314-39. Among commentators, note especially Wolff, *Hosea*, 110-12; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 99-101; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 118-20, Davies, *Hosea*, 145-48. Andersen and Freedman are more cautious *Hosea*, 401-05.

<sup>45</sup> When taken in the context of the Syro-Ephraimite War, the moving of the boundary stones (cf. Deut 19:14, 27:17) in 5:10 could refer to Judah making inroads into Israel. See the commentaries and J. A. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century prophets: The Conflict and its Background* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 34-37. For a contrary opinion regarding this historical reconstruction, see P. M. Arnold, "Hosea and the Sin of Gibeah," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 447-60.

<sup>46</sup> Commentators usually take מלך יר (also at 10:6) as a title for the Assyrian monarch: "the great king" (cf. NEB, NIV; NRSV). Exceptions include seeing the phrase as a

the people look to other empires, not Yahweh, when facing this major crisis. No matter what they might espouse about Yahweh, the experience of the alliances reveal a lack of faith and a limited view of God. In a sense, Assyria and Egypt take Yahweh's place as Israel's protector and savior. On the other hand, the turning to others exposes the nation to the arrogance of the superpowers and puts Israel at the mercy of these empires' plans and ambitions.<sup>47</sup> The disfavor of Yahweh is vividly portrayed by two metaphors of judgment: He is like putrefaction to both Israel and Judah (5:12), and like a vociferous lion that rips the flesh of his people who have sought help elsewhere (5:14; cf. 13:7-8). Later, the metaphor of judgment will change: Yahweh is a hunter who entraps the silly dove that is Israel (7:11-12).

The natural flow of these initial verses to 6:6 suggests an interchange between Yahweh and Israel: Yahweh accuses (5:8-15), the nation responds (6:1-3), and Yahweh replies (6:4-6).<sup>48</sup> Catchwords bind Israel's speech in 6:1-3 with Yahweh's earlier criticism: **שׁוּב** (*sub*, "return," 6:1a, 5:15a), **טָרַף** (*trp*, "tear to pieces; 6:1b, 5:14b), and **רָפָא** (*rp'*, "heal;" 6:1b, 5:13c). Yahweh has brought suffering to Israel, but he, unlike Assyria, can heal the nation's wounds; he rends them asunder and then returns to his place until they repent, so they issue a call to return to Yahweh. The mimicry of Yahweh's vocabulary by Israel in 6:1-3 can give the impression that the nation sincerely does desire, or at least is open, to respond to Yahweh's demands.<sup>49</sup> A more careful reading, however, yields a different interpretation.

To begin with, it is important to place 6:1-3 within the broader context of the world of the book. This is a religious nation that worships

proper name ("King Yareb," NASB [cf. LXX]) or as a name with special prophetic significance ("king of Yareb" with Yareb meaning "let him contend," McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 85).

<sup>47</sup> J. L. Sicre, *Los dioses olvidados. Poder y riqueza en los profetas preexilicos* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1979) 34-50; M. C. Lind, "Hosea 5:8-6:6," *Int* 38 (1984) 398-403. Also note the different contributions to the discussion of Israelite faith and international relations by N. K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 351-92; W McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (London: SCM, 1969); Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel under Jeroboam I* 159-66.

<sup>48</sup> Though some identify 6:1-3 as the prophet's speech (e.g., McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 88; Davies, *Hosea*, 150-52, 160), most commentators see these as representing the nation's words. LXX makes this latter option clear by adding λέγοντες to 5:15 to introduce 6:1-3.

<sup>49</sup> So Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 416; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 107; McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 88; Davies, *Hosea*, 150-52; J. Wingaards, "Death and Resurrection in Covenantal Context (Hos VI 2)," *VT* 17 (1967) 226-39. Mays (*Hosea*, 94) and Wolff (*Hosea*, 117) believe that these lines are drawn from a liturgy of repentance and are a later addition by redactors.

Yahweh, that has priests who fulfill cultic obligations, and that celebrates traditional feast days. The mere fact, therefore, that Israel mouths proper jargon is no proof of a true commitment to change. These lines also do not contain any hint of repentance (contrast especially 14:1-3 [MT = 14:2-4]). Other oracles in chaps. 4-7 stridently declare that, no matter what Israel might say, the nation does not acknowledge Yahweh (4:1, 6; cf. 4:11, 14); their seeking is only cultic (4:15, 5:6-7), so any confidence that restoration automatically will follow in the manner of nature's rain cycles (6:2-3) is misplaced; and their return to him (6:1) is impossible because of rebellion (5:4; 6:11-7:2; 7:10, 14-16; cf. 11:7). Therefore, 6:1-3 are consistent with the picture of a religious people who claim Yahweh as their own but who have strayed far from his demands and ideals.

The ambivalence of Yahweh's reaction in 6:4 reflects the tension between the desire to accept the people's religious gesture and his realization of its emptiness.<sup>50</sup> Yahweh's frustration is rhetorically emphasized by the double question of v 4 (cf. 11:8), and the divine displeasure is marked by the ironic words which follow. Drawing upon the earlier allusion to nature's rains (6:3), Yahweh compares Israel's fickle love to mist and dew (6:4; cf. 13:3, 14:5 [MT = 14:6]). While they expect him to go forth (אצ"ו, [ysʿ]) and appear as the dawn (6:3), he declares that his piercing judgment,<sup>51</sup> as it had done in the past through the prophets, goes forth (אצ"ו) like the light (6:5). And, instead of the self-assured recourse to ritual, he desires the covenant qualities חסד and רצת (6:6) that is, those virtues which introduce chaps. 4-7.

The desire for mercy and acknowledgment of God in 6:6 cannot be limited to individual ethics. 5:8-7:16 locate this requirement within the political sphere, and this at two levels: 5:8-15 and 7:8-13 refer particularly to international relations, whereas 6:9-7:7 allude to problems within Israel's borders. This positioning of 6:1-3 within this context suggests a view of Yahweh within this political framework, possibly as the national deity at the official cult. There is then at least a formal turning to Yahweh at the cult in time of national need. The words of the people, though, betray a theology that could reflect belief in the efficaciousness of traditional ritual and doctrinal formulas, rather than a substantial trusting in Yahweh. In other words, religion and Yahweh himself are placed at the service of the state and the status quo.

The denunciation continues in 6:7-7:7. Differences in interpretation arise over the nature of the crimes mentioned in 6:7-11a,<sup>52</sup> but

<sup>50</sup> Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, 149-57.

<sup>51</sup> Reading "my judgment" with LXX for MT "your judgments." See the commentaries and versions.

<sup>52</sup> Important interpretative issues in 6:7-9 include (a) the meaning of כַּדָּמ (k'dm) in 6:7; (b) the question as to the meaning of the reference to "covenant" in 6:7; and

whatever their exact details, it is clear that violence reigns and that the priests are somehow involved. Lexical links to 5:1-7 suggest that the involvement of the religious hierarchy in the rebellion alluded to there is given greater explanation here in chap. 6. Space will only permit the listing of some of these connections. Note, for example: "deal falsely" (בגד [bgd]; 6:7; 5:7), the explicit condemnation of the priests (6:9; 5:1), the mention of a sanctuary (Shechem, 6:9; 5:1), the defilement of Ephraim-Israel (6:10; 5:3), the metaphor of harlotry (6:10; 5:4), and the juxtaposition of Israel-Ephraim-Judah (6:10-11a; 5:5). These literary observations signal the interweaving of various spheres of national life within this textual world. Religion is not an isolated area of existence, sanctuaries are places of both worship and intrigue, and religious personnel are not piously removed from the harsh realities of the struggles of greed and power.

The priests also could very well be involved in the political violence that is described in 6:11b-7:7. There are similarities in vocabulary and ideas between 7:1-2 and 6:7-9, and the third person plural verbs and suffixes in this passage might continue the accusation of the preceding pericope.<sup>53</sup> 7:3-7 appear to refer to a plot to assassinate the king and remove his princes,<sup>54</sup> and the passion of the protagonists of the coup is vividly depicted with the metaphor of a heated oven.<sup>55</sup> The denunciation

(c) whether these verses refer to three separate crimes at the three places mentioned or to three episodes of a single atrocity. Concerning (a): most commentators read כַּאֲדָם אֲדָם--i.e., as reference to a place called Adam (Josh 3:16). Harper, though, reads "like men" (*Amos and Hosea*, 288), and McComiskey "as Adam" and understands the phrase as an allusion to Genesis 2-3 (*Minor Prophets*, 95; cf. idem, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985] 213-16; cf. Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 99f.). (b) see the references in supra, n. 10. (c) Most see three separate sins in 6:7-9. Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, 438f.) and Hubbard (*Hosea*, 128f.) relate these lines to the conspiracy against the throne in 7:3-7. If 6:9 is a separate crime, perhaps the allusion is to priestly violence against any opposition to their status and role (Mays, *Hosea*, 101; Wolff, *Hosea*, 122; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 111f.).

<sup>53</sup> Note פְּעֻלֵי אֵין (p'ly 'wn "doers of evil," 6:8) and פְּעֻלוֹ שֶׁקֶר (p'lw sqr "they do falsehood; 7:1); גַּדּוֹד (gdwd "robber") in 6:9, 7:1. In addition, if 6:7-11a refer to the coup in 7:3-7, then the mention of Gilead in 6:8 might allude to those of Gilead who participated in Pekah's conspiracy (2 Kgs 15:25). Cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 447f.; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 129, 132. Most commentators speak in a more vague way of "conspirators."

<sup>54</sup> The scenario of 7:3-7 is most often taken as the coup of Hoshea against Pekah (2 Kgs 15:30), though some would also consider Pekah's revolt (2 Kgs 15:25) a possibility. "The day of our king" of 7:5 is vague and has been understood as a reference to the royal coronation, the anniversary of the king's birthday, or the day of his death. "All their kings have fallen" in 7:7 could be more general and include all or some of the coups of the final decades of Israel's existence as a state.

<sup>55</sup> See S. M. Paul, "The Image of the Oven and the Cake in Hosea VII 4-10," *VT* 18 (1968) 114-20 and the commentaries. There is disagreement on some details and their meaning. E.g., Is the baker part of the metaphor or an allusion to a particular official?

of this tumultuous scene explains in part the text's aversion to Israel's monarchy.<sup>56</sup> What is of concern here, however, is not a decision regarding Hosea's evaluation of the institution of the monarchy, but rather the relationship of politics to faith and religious practice.

On the one hand, the cult functionaries take part in the political violence. They lead the people in the religious ceremonies and in the confessions of faith at the sanctuaries, but do not themselves practice mercy or exhibit the knowledge of God. Their involvement in the intrigue results in the sanctuaries and traditional centers being included in the prophetic condemnation. On the other hand, 6:7-7:7 confirm the nation's refusal to truly seek Yahweh in the midst of political turmoil and upheaval. 7:7 ends with "and none of them calls upon me." This refusal is repeated in 7:10 within the broader context of international politics. In 7:14-16, when the people do call out, it is in some sort of entreaty to another deity.<sup>57</sup> This final accusation at the end of this section is an echo of 6:4-6: Yahweh would wish for repentance and trust, instead of the misdirected and inappropriate cries of Israel's religiosity. Perhaps 7:14-16 also returns to scenes of more popular belief and practice described in earlier chapters.

Religion, therefore, is tied in with politics and foreign policy. If 4:4-5:7 condemned primarily the rituals of Israel's worship (both official and popular), 5:8-7:16 concentrate on the nation's incorrect perception of Yahweh's relationship to national decision making and politics. The discussion has demonstrated that the shared vocabulary and themes underscore that these two major sections of chaps. 4-7 hit at different elements of a large picture of religious life and understanding. Two other links are

<sup>56</sup> For discussions on the book's evaluation of the monarchy, see for instance, A Caquot, "Osee et la Royauté," *RevQ* 7 (1960) 123-46; J. A. Soggin, "Profezia e Rivoluzione Nell'Antico Testamento: L'opera di Elia e di Eliseo nella valutazione di Osea," *Protestantesimo* 25 (1970) 1-14; M. A. Cohen, "The Prophets as Revolutionaries: A Sociopolitical Analysis," *BAR* 5 (1979) 12-19; Emerson, *Hosea*, 105-13; Davies, *Hosea* (OTG), 62-65; L. McComiskey, "Prophetic Irony in Hosea 1:4: A Study of the Collocation פקל על and its Implications for the Fall of Jehu's Dynasty," *JSOT* 58 (1993) 93-101. The basic options are: opposition to the institution of the monarchy, antipathy to the turbulent politics of the North but not to the monarchy as such, and support of a Davidic dynasty instead of the Northern monarchy. J. Pixley contextualizes the topic to Latin America in "Oseas: Una propuesta de lectura desde América Latina," *Revista de interpretación bíblica latinoamericana* 1 (1988) 67-86.

<sup>57</sup> The difficult יַשׁוּבָו לֵאלֹהֵי (yswbw l' l) of 7:16a has been taken in several ways, though all interpretations communicate in their own way the condemnation of Israel's religious rebellion. E.g., BHS, Harper (*Amos and Hosea*, 307), and Davies (*Hosea*, 192) suggest emending to "to Baal," Wolff (*Hosea*, 108) to "not to me"; Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, 477f.) and Hubbard (*Hosea*, 142) understand לֵאלֹהֵי as an epithet ("no god") for Baal; Keil (*The Minor Prophets*, 110) and McComiskey (*The Minor Prophets*, 116) take לֵאלֹהֵי as "upward" ("they do not turn upward," i.e., to Yahweh).

especially telling. First, the arrogance of Israel which is condemned in 5:5 reappears verbatim in 7:10. Unsuccessful cultic seeking (שָׁקַב [bqs, 5:6-7) immediately follows these words in 5:5; 7:10, though, says there is no seeking (שָׁקַב). This is not a contradiction. Both statements are true: Israel does come to a Yahweh of its own making according to its own desires and preconceived theology, but the Yahweh of the prophet rejects this manipulative ritual and erroneous faith. Second, 6:10 clearly picks up the vocabulary of 5:3. This coupling reveals that the spirit of harlotry is also to be found in politics (5:8-7:16) and not only in cultic irregularities (4:4-5:7).

The accusations and condemnation are both particular and broad. Though certain groups, such as the priests and the political leaders are singled out in 5:8-7:16, it is evident that the nation stands condemned. "Ephraim" appears in parallel to "Israel" (note 5:9, 6:10; 7:8-10)<sup>58</sup> and in 5:12-14 and 6:4, 10-11 is juxtaposed to the nation of Judah; "all" is used repeatedly in chapter 7 (7:2, 4, 7, 10), and at least in 7:7b most probably refers to the entire nation; and the descriptions of stubbornness and sin echo other passages in the book. The references to the "tribes of Israel" (5:9), the "house of Israel" (6:10) and "my people" (6:11) also show that the prophetic word is directed at the entire nation. That is, although 5:8-7:16 focuses on the leadership more clearly and consistently than 4:4-5:7, in both sections the tension between general and more circumscribed guilt and responsibility remains. The leadership is held especially accountable for the sin and resulting disasters, but the people are accused because they too participate in and support this social construction of reality. This world stands condemned to destruction. Yahweh himself has made them ill and exposed their internal rot and silliness (5:12-13; 7:8-11); they will be devoured and carried off (5:14; 7:9, 12-13, 16). This world which presents itself as Yahweh's and which comes to offer him worship can no longer continue.

### *Conclusion*

This brief perusal of Hosea 4-7 has attempted to demonstrate the breadth of the comprehensive prophetic condemnation of religion in the textual world of this prophetic book. What is denounced is an incorrect view of God that is manifest in the cultic centers and feasts (4:4-5:7), as well as fleshed out in national politics and international relations (5:8-7:16). This misconstrual of the nature of Yahweh and the perverse consequences are visible in all the interconnected facets

<sup>58</sup> Some try to distinguish between Israel and Ephraim at several points. Note, e.g., Hubbard on 6:10-11 (*Hosea*, 130).

of Israel's life and cannot be limited to any one realm. This religious "world," which is the complex socio-political, cultic and cultural entity called "Israel" (or "Ephraim"), is to be judged. It claims in some way to be Yahweh's, yet for Yahweh, all is harlotry, hypocrisy, and defilement. The entire nation, and especially the religious and political leadership, stand charged before the prophetic tribunal as worthy of divine chastisement, even abandonment by the covenant God.

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