

HOSEA'S MARRIAGE RECONSIDERED

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Summary

Whilst there is general agreement that Hosea 1–3 contains prophetic sign-acts, biographical information is sparse, and some argue that it is unwise to try to reconstruct details of Hosea's marriage(s). This article argues from the premise that the historical context of sign-acts, insofar as it may be discerned, is significant for interpretation, and seeks to re-examine proposed historical scenarios and present a partial reconstruction. Issues include the interpretation of אִשֶּׁת זְנוּנִים ('eshet zenunim), translated 'wife of whoredom', in 1:2, and the identity of the unnamed woman in 3:1. The article concludes that 'eshet zenunim is best understood, proleptically, to relate to Gomer's adultery after her marriage to Hosea, and that 3:1-5 points to the restoration of their earlier relationship. This view best fits the text and the parallel with Israel's spiritual adultery, forgiveness, and restoration by her divine husband.

1. Introduction

One of the attractions of the book of Hosea is its portrayal of the intimacy of the relationship between God and his people. In chapter 11, God is viewed as Israel's father, calling his son out of Egypt, teaching him to walk, bending down and feeding him. In chapters 1–3, God's relationship with Israel is viewed in terms of a marriage. Both reflect language and ideas associated with the Exodus. In particular, the covenant established at Sinai lends itself to being described in terms of a marriage bond,¹ though Hosea seems to be the first to make the

¹ E.g. Călin Sechelea, 'The Relationship between God's Covenant with His People and Marriage in the Old Testament', *ST* 8.4 (2009): 250-73; Gordon P. Hugenberg,

connection explicit.² Israel's covenant unfaithfulness is sometimes referred to as *prostitution* (Exod. 34:15-16; Deut. 31:16), but in those passages it is not related specifically to breaking a marriage bond. In Exodus 34:15 other nations' worship of their own gods is also described as prostitution, suggesting that the term may be applied to false worship more generally. Hosea, though, clearly characterises Israel's apostasy as marital unfaithfulness, and this appears to be prompted by his own family circumstances.

This article will focus, primarily, on those family circumstances. These are widely regarded as having a significant impact on the prophet's message and have given rise to substantial debate.³ My purpose in this article is to review, re-evaluate, and, where appropriate, expand on key points and arguments in that debate, and set out a partial historical reconstruction of Hosea's marriage. Whilst this may not necessarily be something new, it seeks to present an alternative to recent trends.

There seems to be some agreement that Hosea prophesied in Israel in the third quarter of the eighth century BC. Punishment of the house of Jehu (1:4) seems imminent, suggesting *terminus a quo* of around the time of Jeroboam's death (755–750 BC), while the lack of specific reference to the fall of Samaria (722/721 BC) indicates a *terminus ad quem* of shortly before that.⁴ There appears to be evidence, too, of a

Marriage as Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1994): 294-96; cf. J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010): 54-55, 59.

² E.g. Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as a Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 2003): 85; Gary Hall, 'Origin of the Marriage Metaphor', *HS* 23 (1982): 169-71; Hugenberger, *Marriage as Covenant*, 295; P. A. Kruger, 'Israel, the Harlot (Hos. 2.4-9)', *JNSL* 11 (1983): 107-16, esp. 107; Sebastian R. Smolarz, *Covenant and the Metaphor of Divine Marriage in Biblical Thought: A Study with Special Reference to the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011): 61.

³ For a survey of approaches to Hos. 1–3 see Brad E. Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship', *CBR* 72 (2009): 177-218; see also Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Reading Hosea in the Late Twentieth Century* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), previously published as *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (JSOTSup, 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996). Sherwood surveys older approaches and sets out four postmodern literary approaches: metacommentary, semiotics, deconstruction, and feminist reading.

⁴ However, see Ehud Ben Zvi, *Hosea* (FOTL 21A/1; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005); James M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian Period Yehud* (LOBS; London, New York:

Judean redaction after the fall of Samaria, and some suggest exilic and post-exilic additions.⁵ There is, though, substantial support for the view that most of the material relating to Hosea's marriage in chapters 1–3 comes from the prophet himself or, in the case of the third-person account in 1:2–11,⁶ from someone who was familiar with his message and his family circumstances.⁷ There is, though, significant disagreement about how the material should be interpreted.⁸

According to 1:2, Hosea was commanded by God to take an אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים ('eshet zenunim), a 'wife/woman of whoredom',⁹ and to have יְלֵדֵי זְנוּנִים (yalde zenunim), 'children of whoredom'. Hosea then took Gomer (1:3), and she gave birth to children who were given symbolic names (1:3–9). Hosea's relationship with Gomer and the naming of the children are usually understood as prophetic sign-acts, reflecting the relationship between God and unfaithful Israel (1:10–2:23).¹⁰ Chapter 3 then describes the prophet forming an attachment with an adulterous woman. This, too, is usually taken to symbolise God's relationship with, and forgiveness of, his unfaithful people (3:4–5), though only following a period of discipline, which is probably linked to the fall of Samaria to Assyria and the subsequent exile.

We are told little about Hosea and his family life and it is unwise to try to construct too precise a picture from the limited information available.¹¹ However, for a sign-act to function there must be a clear correlation between what happened and its theological significance. And it seems reasonable to assume that the interpretation of the sign-

T&T Clark, 2013); Gale A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redactional Critical Investigation* (SBLDS; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar's, 1987).

⁵ E.g. Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3', 179.

⁶ For simplicity, this article will generally follow the verse and chapter numbering of English Versions. MT numbering will be indicated where appropriate.

⁷ E.g. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980): 58.

⁸ For the main areas of discussion see Dearman, *Hosea*, 80–88; Kelle, 'Hosea 1–3', 177–218, esp. 179; A. A. Macintosh, *Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997): 113–26; H. H. Rowley, 'The Marriage of Hosea', *BJRL* 39 (1956): 200–33.

⁹ Except where stated otherwise, all quotations are from the NRSV.

¹⁰ However, see Graham I. Davies, *Hosea* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993): 89–90; Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 215–24. Their views are discussed further, below.

¹¹ E.g. Dearman, *Hosea*, 81; Bo H. Lim and Daniel Castelo, *Hosea* (THOTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, Eerdmans, 2015): 46–47; Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 213–14; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, Texas: Word, 1987).

act is facilitated by its historical reconstruction, insofar as that may be possible. Moughtin-Mumby argues that in prophetic sign-acts the primary emphasis is on the action itself, with little or no concern for the personal life or feelings of the prophet, and concludes that the details of Hosea's actual relationship with Gomer are not relevant to the sign's interpretation.¹² In contrast, some commentators do attach considerable significance to Hosea's personal feelings, which are then related to God's feelings towards his people.¹³ And in the light of 3:1 – 'love a woman ... as the LORD loves the people of Israel' – such a comparison does seem legitimate. Some sign-acts may not require us to know details of the prophet's personal life. When Ezekiel was told to lie on one side and then the other for prescribed periods of time (Ezek. 4:4-8) only the action itself and its interpretation were significant. However, when he was told not to mourn the death of his wife (Ezek. 24:15-24), his personal feelings cannot be excluded. She is described as the 'delight of [his] eyes' (v. 16), and Ezekiel's lack of mourning is significant precisely because, in the light of his feelings towards his wife, he would have been expected to weep, even though that is not stated explicitly. Lim notes Sweeney's description of this genre, in which the symbolic action illustrates and confirms the prophetic word,¹⁴ and concludes that 'actions are not to be interpreted beyond that of the interpretative word or vision'.¹⁵ However, it seems possible that, in some cases, an action might have symbolic content that would be clear to the original audience, and is not, therefore, necessary for it to be detailed in the interpretative statement (as in the case of Ezekiel not mourning for his wife). In such cases, a better understanding of the sign-act might require looking more closely at the context as well as the interpretative statement relating to it. It seems better, therefore, to consider each prophetic sign-act separately rather than assume they all

¹² Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 210-14.

¹³ E.g. G. A. F. Knight, *Hosea* (TB; London: SCM, 1960): 28-29; James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (IBC; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1988): 6, 9-10; Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (AOTC; Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 2005): 7-8.

¹⁴ Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 48-49; cf. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL, 16; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996): 19-20.

¹⁵ Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 49. Sweeney places Hos. 1 and 3 in the category, 'Report of a Symbolic Action', which has three elements: '(1) an instruction to perform a symbolic act; (2) the report that the act was performed; and (3) a statement that interprets the significance of the act'.

follow the same fixed generic rules. In my view, in order to arrive at the best interpretation of the sign-act associated with Hosea's marriage to Gomer, we should seek as full an understanding of their relationship and its context as may reasonably be ascertained. That premise is the basis for my attempt, in this article, to reconstruct elements of that relationship.

There are several key issues in the discussion. One relates to Gomer's status prior to, and after, the marriage. This is linked, primarily to the interpretation of *'eshet zenunim* ('wife/woman of whoredom'). Some recent discussion also questions whether Hosea's relationship with Gomer does, in fact, symbolise God's relationship with Israel. A further issue is the relationship between chapter 1 and chapter 3. Is the unnamed woman in 3:1-3 Gomer, or someone else? And, if the former, do these verses offer a parallel account of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, or do they refer to a subsequent event?¹⁶

2. Gomer's Status

A common view is that Gomer was promiscuous at the time of her marriage to Hosea. The precise expression *'eshet zenunim* occurs only in Hosea. The term *zenunim* is generally understood as 'prostitution'. It is related to the verb זָנָה (*zanah*), 'to commit fornication, to be a

¹⁶ Another significant issue, though one that lies beyond the scope of this article, is the extent to which the marriage metaphor in Hosea 1-3 reinforces sexual stereotyping. Addressed to a predominantly male audience, it portrays the man positively and the woman negatively, and allows the woman to be subjected to humiliation, which, for some, is pornographic and misogynistic. See Athalya Brenner, 'On "Jeremiah" and the Poetics of (Prophetic) Pornography' in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1996): 177-94; 'Pornoprophets Revisited: Some Additional Reflections', *JSOT* 70 (1996): 63-86; T. Drorah Setel, 'Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea 1-3' in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1985): 86-95; Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, 'The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23' in Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 167-76; Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (OBT; Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 1995); Gale A. Yee, 'Hosea' in *Woman's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (rev. edn; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2012): 207-15; *Poor, Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2003). For a response, particularly to Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, see Andrew Sloane, 'Aberrant Textuality? The Case of Ezekiel the (Porno) Prophet', *TynBul* 59.1 (2008): 53-76.

prostitute', and to the noun זֹנָה (*zonah*), 'prostitute'.¹⁷ A natural interpretation of 1:2 is that God commanded Hosea to marry a woman who was known to be a prostitute. Some suggest that she may have been a temple prostitute,¹⁸ though, in the light of current research, it is by no means certain that such a group existed in Israel.¹⁹ Others note a distinction between *zanah*, which relates to acts of fornication, and *zonah*, which suggests a 'professional or habitual fornicator'.²⁰ Gomer is not characterised, specifically, as a *zonah*, so it may be better to see her as either promiscuous or having promiscuous tendencies, but not necessarily as a prostitute.

There are objections to this view of Gomer. The command to marry a woman of known disreputable character is, in the eyes of some, morally unthinkable, even allowing for the strange actions that might be included in prophetic symbolism.²¹ A priest, for example, was not permitted to marry such a woman (Lev. 21:7, 13-14), though there is

¹⁷ See S. Erlandsson, 'זֹנָה', in *TDOT* 4:99-104; Gary H. Hall, 'זֹנָה', in *NIDOTTE* 1:1122-25. The NRSV translates *zenunim* as 'whoredom' (Gen. 38:24; 2 Kgs 9:22; Hos. 1:2; 2:4; 4:12; 5:4), 'whorings' (Ezek. 23:11, 29), and 'debaucheries' (Nah. 3:4).

¹⁸ E.g. Mays, *Hosea*, 26; A. S. van der Woude, 'Three Classical Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Micah' in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd*, ed. Richard Coggins, Anthony Phillips, and Michael Knibb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 32-57, esp. 46. Macintosh suggests, though, that if this was the case the text would be more likely to use the more specific term קִדְשָׁה (*qedeshah*), which is often translated 'shrine/temple prostitute' (cf. Hos. 4:14).

¹⁹ A recent, common view is that there was no cultic prostitution in Israel, and that the term *qedeshah* refers to more general servants of the cult. The close association of *qedeshah* with *zonah*, the usual term for 'prostitute' (e.g. Gen. 38:15, cf. vv. 21-22; Deut. 23:17-18 [MT: 18-19]; Hos. 4:14), suggest that these temple servants engaged in sexual activity, even if it was not their primary role; e.g. Alice A. Keefe, 'The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: A Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1-2' in *Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995): 70-100, esp. 81 n.6; Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL, 2005): 123-32; Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 123; Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (London: SPCK; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2000): 205-06; H. Ringgren, 'קִדְשָׁה' in *TDOT* 12:521-45, esp. 542-43; Yee, 'Hosea', in Newsome, Ringe, Lapsley, *Woman's Bible Commentary*, 209. Others suggest that *qedeshah* has no direct cultic significance; e.g. M. I. Gruber, 'Marital Fidelity and Intimacy: A View from Hosea 4' in Brenner, *Feminist Companion*, 169-79, esp. 176-77; Karel Van Der Toorn, 'Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 108.2 (1989): 183-205, esp. 203.

²⁰ Phyllis Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor" in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2006): 75-94, esp. 78; see also Ehud Ben Zvi, 'Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in its Ancient Israelite Context: General Considerations and Particular Images in Hosea 1.2', *JSOT* 28.3 (2004): 363-84, esp. 379 n.31.

²¹ E.g. Yosef Green, 'Hosea and Gomer Revisited', *JBQ* 31 (2003): 84-89, esp. 84.

no indication that Hosea was a priest, and it seems clear from the other restrictions noted in Leviticus 21 that the instructions about marriage were not applicable to the wider community. Also, the sheer offensiveness of Hosea's action might be seen as integral to its prophetic symbolism.²²

In view of the moral objection, some have, in the past, regarded the story of Hosea's marriage as an allegory.²³ That, though, seems unlikely. If the account is allegorical, the name 'Gomer' would be expected to have some symbolic significance, but there is no evidence of that.²⁴ It has been noted, too, that a divine command to do something immoral remains objectionable even in an allegory.²⁵ Consequently, recent commentators view Hosea's marriage to Gomer as an actual event in the prophet's life.

It has also been suggested that Gomer was neither a prostitute nor adulterous, but was 'a *typical* Israelite' who is described as a 'prostitute' only because she is part of a prostituting nation.²⁶ A variation of this is that she, like other young Israelite women, had, in preparation for marriage, submitted herself to Canaanite bridal rites that included acts of fornication.²⁷ This second view is based on an

²² Dearman, *Hosea*, 83. See also Richard D. Nelson, 'Priestly Purity and Prophetic Lunacy: Hosea 1:2-3 and 9:7' in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis (JSOTSup, 408; London: T&T Clark International, 2004): 115-33. Nelson argues that the prophet's outrageous action may have contributed to the description of the prophet as a 'fool' and 'mad' in Hos. 9:7 ('Priestly Purity', 130).

²³ E.g. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (5 vols; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library): vol. 1, 28-29; Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (2 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871): vol. 1, 24-35; Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989): 253.

²⁴ E.g. John H. Johansen, 'The Prophet Hosea: His Marriage and Message', *JETS* 14.3 (1971): 179-84, esp. 181-82; Mays, *Hosea*, 23; see also Graham I. Davies, *Hosea* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1992): 53; Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel* (NAC 19a; Nashville, Tennessee: B&H, 1997): 49.

²⁵ E.g. Green, 'Hosea and Gomer Revisited', 86; van der Woude, 'Three Classical Prophets' in Coggins, Phillips and Knibb, *Israel's Prophetic Tradition*, 45-46.

²⁶ E.g. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 11-12, 26-27; see also Robert Gordis, 'Hosea's Marriage and Message: A New Approach', *HUCA* 25 (1954): 9-35, esp. 15. Gruber suggests that the promiscuity in 1:2 is a metaphorical reference to idolatry, though argues that this unnamed 'woman of harlotry' is not Gomer; see Mayer I. Gruber, *Hosea: A Textual Commentary* (LOBS; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017): 79-82. This, though, seems an unnecessary complication. And the repeated reference to לָקַח (*laqakh*), 'to take', suggests continuity between 1:2 and 1:3.

²⁷ E.g. Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress, 1974): 14-15. See also F. C. Fensham, 'The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea for the

understanding of Israelite ritual practices associated with Baal worship that has, more recently, been questioned, and in the light of current research seems unlikely.²⁸ It is also difficult to see how an ordinary marriage to a ‘typical Israelite’ would have constituted a prophetic sign-act.²⁹ The charge of adultery in 2:2, and what appear to be further actions taken following the charge of adultery (2:3),³⁰ also seem to require Gomer’s marital infidelity.

Davies and Moughtin-Mumby argue that Gomer did not commit adultery and maintain that the traditional view, that Gomer and Hosea represent Israel and Yahweh respectively, is incorrect. In Davies’ view, Gomer was a prostitute, but Hosea did not marry her. Instead, their illicit relationship symbolised Israel’s prostitution with Baal (in this case represented by Hosea).³¹ Davies notes that the term לָקַח (*laqakh*), ‘to take’, in 1:3 – ‘so he went and *took* Gomer’ – may refer to sexual relationships outside marriage.³² However, in the divine command (1:2), *laqakh* appears with לָ (le), ‘to’, and also with אִשָּׁה (*’ishah*), ‘wife, woman’, and such combinations almost always relate to marriage.³³ It would be very strange if Hosea was commanded to *marry*, but instead began an illicit sexual relationship. We may assume, therefore, that 1:3 is elliptical, and does refer to taking Gomer in marriage. Moughtin-Mumby does not focus on the symbolic roles of Hosea and Gomer, but argues, instead, that ‘the act of sexual encounter

Covenant Relationship between the Lord and his People’, *JNSL* 12 (1984): 71–78, esp. 71 (though Fensham does not associate this with initiation); Simundson, *Hosea, Joel*, 14–16. Craigie sees her not as a professional prostitute but as an ordinary woman who had committed acts of prostitution within the Baal cult; see Peter C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets: Volume 1: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (DSB; Louisville, Kentucky; London: Westminster John Knox, 1984): 9.

²⁸ Some argue that there is little evidence of a Baal cult in Israel in the eighth century BC and references to Baal are metaphorical, e.g. Keefe, *Woman’s Body*; ‘Family Metaphors’; Kelle, *Metaphor and Rhetoric*, 16–20, 122–36; Gale A. Yee, ‘“She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband”: A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1–2’, *Biblical Interpretation* 9.4 (2001): 345–83, esp. 354–57. Others argue that while such a cult may have existed, rituals associated with it are speculative; e.g. Dearman, *Hosea*, 366–67; Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 52; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 123–25.

²⁹ E.g. van der Woude, ‘Three Classical Prophets’ in Coggins, Phillips and Knibb, *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition*, 46.

³⁰ E.g. Kruger, ‘Israel, the Harlot’, 111–16.

³¹ Davies, *Hosea*, 87–92.

³² Davies, *Hosea*, 90. Davies notes Lev. 20:14, 17, 21.

³³ E.g. Gen. 24:3–4; 27:46; Exod. 6:20, 23, 25; Lev. 18:18; 21:7; Deut. 21:11; 25:5; Judg. 4:2–3; Jer. 16:2; Ruth 4:13. See also P. J. J. S. Els, ‘לָקַח’ in *NIDOTTE* 2:812–17, esp. 814; H. Seebass, ‘לָקַח’ in *TDOT* 8:16–21 esp. 19; Fensham, ‘Marriage Metaphor’, 72; Gruber, *Hosea*, 74–75; see also Kruger, ‘Israel, the Harlot’, 107.

between Hosea and this “woman of prostitutions” conveys the horror of Israel's “prostitution” *away from YHWH*.³⁴

Another issue with this view is that the language of 1:10-11, which points to the hope of restoring the relationship, would not be applicable if it was illicit. These verses also link that hope with the restoration of Israel, envisaged in 2:14-23. Moughtin-Mumby regards 1:10-2:1 and 2:14-23 as later additions,³⁵ and they certainly contain a clear change in emphasis. However, there are no compelling reasons for suggesting that the promise of hope beyond judgement was not part of Hosea's original message.³⁶

In my view, the most likely interpretation is that Hosea married a woman (Gomer) who was not a prostitute at the time, but who may have had promiscuous tendencies, which became apparent only later in their relationship.³⁷ That might, then, account for why the text uses the more abstract *'eshet zenunim* rather than the usual term for prostitute, *zonah* or *'ishah zona* (cf. Prov. 6:26; Ezek. 16:30; 23:44).³⁸ It is true that there is no specific mention of Gomer or her adultery elsewhere in Hosea 1, and some have suggested, therefore, that we may not assume that she was unfaithful to Hosea. However, the reference to ‘adulteries’ (נֶאֱפֻפִּים, *naphuphim*) in 2:2 indicates promiscuous behaviour after

³⁴ Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 215-24, esp. 221; emphasis mine.

³⁵ Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 218.

³⁶ See Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 199-201, 264; Dearman, *Hosea*, 19-20; Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 47-48; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 33-35, 69-71; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 36-37. Commenting on 1:10-2:1, Mays points out that ‘it has many connections with undoubtedly authentic oracles and draws on traditions with which Hosea was at home. If it does not derive from Hosea, it must come from his period and the circles sympathetic to his prophecy’ (*Hosea*, 31). Wolff, similarly, notes the probability that ‘its basic content comes from Hosea’ (*Hosea*, 26). Sweeney views 1:2-2:1 and 2:2-25 as narrative units; see Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (vol. 1; Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 2000): 11-13. Clines does not comment on their authenticity, but argues that 2:4-17 and 2:18-25 together form an ‘integrated work’ and cannot be interpreted ‘in isolation from one another’; see David J. A. Clines, ‘Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation’ in *Studia Biblica 1978 I: Old Testament and Related Themes. Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies, Oxford, 3-7 April 1978*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (JSOTSup, 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978): 83-103, esp. 98.

³⁷ Cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*; David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1989): 54-55; Johansen, ‘The Prophet Hosea’; Knight, *Hosea*; Richard D. Patterson, ‘Hosea’ in Richard D. Patterson and Andrew E. Hill, *Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi* (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 10; Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2008): 2-96, esp. 12.

³⁸ E.g. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 26; Wolff, *Hosea*, 13, though Stuart and Wolff do not accept the view that *'eshet zenunim* necessarily indicates promiscuous tendencies.

marriage³⁹ and the structure of the metaphor suggests that this is intended to reflect Gomer's behaviour in her relationship with Hosea.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy, too, that in 2:2 *naphuphim* is paralleled with *zenunim*. The link between them suggests that although *zenunim* is a wider term that may include, but is not limited to, adultery, here it may point to adulterous behaviour. It does not seem unreasonable to understand *zenunim* in 1:2 in the same way. That, though, would only be applicable if it took place after Gomer was married. In this case, the divine command has been re-interpreted, proleptically, in the light of Hosea's subsequent experience of his wife's adultery, and his awareness of God's purpose to use that experience to reveal his love for Israel.

It is objected that for the prophetic sign-act to be effective the woman's pre-marital promiscuity would need to be evident to observers.⁴¹ That assumes, though, that the symbolism relates to the act of marriage, whereas the application of the symbolism to the relationship between God and Israel focuses not on the start of that relationship but on God's willingness to forgive and restore his 'bride' after she has proven unfaithful.⁴²

One portrayal of the God-Israel relationship is that it began well, with the early days in the desert presented as an idealised 'honeymoon' period. So, Jeremiah, whose message has close ties to Hosea,⁴³ refers to the 'devotion (תְּשׁוּבָה, *khesed*) of [Israel's] youth' (2:2).⁴⁴ And for Hosea

³⁹ *naphuphim* presupposes breaking a marriage contract; see D. N. Freedman and B. E. Willoughby, 'תִּנְיָ' in *TDOT* 9:113-18.

⁴⁰ In accordance with their view that Hosea's marriage to Gomer does not symbolise God's relationship with Israel, Davies (*Hosea*, 91) and Moughtin-Mumby (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 209-10) argue that chapter 2 may not be used to fill in missing details in chapter 1. Taking the more usual view, that their marriage is a prophetic sign-act which is applied to God's relationship with his people, we expect some correlation between the sign in chapter 1 and the theological interpretation in chapter 2.

⁴¹ E.g. Mays, *Hosea*, 24-26.

⁴² E.g. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 166.

⁴³ E.g. Dearman, *Hosea*, 7, 19-20, 143-44; Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Illinois; Nottingham: IVP, 2013): 57-58; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980): 81-85

⁴⁴ See the discussion by Moughtin-Mumby, who argues that Israel's idyllic past is contrasted with her current unfaithfulness (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 95-96). See also Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 76; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 163. However, cf. Michael V. Fox, 'Jeremiah 2:2 and the "Desert Ideal"', *CBQ* 35 (1973): 441-50. Fox argues that *khesed* is never shown by people to God and so cannot refer to Israel's 'ideal' love for God in Jer. 2:2, but refers, instead, to God's love for Israel. For a

the goal of restoration and renewal is Israel's return to 'the days of her youth' (2:15), also reflecting that idealised beginning.⁴⁵ To parallel this, it seems reasonable to suppose that Gomer was faithful at the start of her relationship with Hosea, but fell into adultery later. It is not impossible that Gomer had promiscuous tendencies and may even have been involved in illicit relationships before her marriage to Hosea. That remains speculation. The symbolism, though, suggests that she was faithful to Hosea when their relationship began. And if that is the case, it seems very unlikely that *'eshet zenunim* is intended to relate to Gomer's previous, though now (albeit temporarily) reformed, character rather than to her behaviour within the marriage, which appears to be a primary focus of the metaphor. If the prophetic sign act also requires her unfaithfulness both to be publicly demonstrable and to mirror Israel's spiritual adultery, it is not impossible that, following the breakdown of her marriage, Gomer became a prostitute.⁴⁶ But that does not seem necessary.

counter-argument see Robin Routledge, '*Hesed* as Obligation: A Re-Examination', *TynBul* 46.1 (1995): 179-96, esp. 193-95.

⁴⁵ E.g. Clines, 'Hosea 2', 87; Jon. D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987): 77-78; Mays, *Hosea*, 44. This is not the only view. Ezek. 23 suggests that the nation's promiscuity began in Egypt, though this appears at odds with the view expressed in Hos. 2:15 and Jer. 2:2, and, in my view, reflects a different perception. There are elements in Ezekiel's metaphor that are not historical, and his version of Israel's time in Egypt seems to have the rhetorical aim of shocking his audience; cf. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997): 462, 734. It may be a retrojection of the current historical situation, in which Egypt had seduced Judah to rebel against Babylon; cf. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48* (WBC 29; Dallas, Texas: Word, 1990): 48, 52. Or, possibly, it is intended to challenge the complacency that might have been built on a view of Judah's 'innocent' past; cf. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 1979): 489. Van Dijk-Hemmes suggests that the actions in Egypt are passive and constitute abuse, which Ezekiel misnames as prostitution ('Metaphorization of Woman', 172-73; see also Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 192-94); this, though seems to conflict with Ezekiel's rhetorical purpose. For the view that Ezekiel has a particular agenda in his portrayal of Egypt, see Safwat Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel* (FAT 2.76; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

⁴⁶ A common suggestion is that this may have been in connection with the Baal cult (e.g. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 166; Knight, *Hosea*, 28-29). The references to putting off 'whoring from her face' and 'adulteries from between her breasts' (2:2) are sometimes taken to suggest objects worn by a participant in Canaanite fertility rites or to the marks of such participation (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 224; Wolff, *Hosea*, 33-34). As noted already, there is considerable recent opposition to the view that cult prostitution was part of Israel's syncretistic worship; see above, n.16. Hos. 2:2 may also point to prostitution more generally (Hubbard, *Hosea*, 73; Kruger, 'Israel, the

There has been discussion about whether all the children born to Gomer were Hosea's. The text (1:3) specifically states that Jezreel was born 'to him' (לוֹ, *lo*). The omission of that expression, from the accounts of the births of the next two children, together with the names of the children 'not pitied' and, especially, 'not my people', which suggest a lack of fatherly commitment, has led to speculation about their parentage.⁴⁷ Verses 3, 6, and 8 otherwise use the same terms – 'and she conceived [וַתְּהַר, *wattahar*] ... and she bore [וַתֵּלֶד, *watteled*] ... a son/daughter [בֶּן/בַּת, *ben/bat*]', and a close reading of the text might point to an intentional hint, by the narrator, that the second and third children were not Hosea's. The text, though, is not explicit. Andersen and Freedman suggest that if Hosea was not the father it is more likely that this would be indicated positively rather than by omission.⁴⁸ Recent discussions of OT narrative do, though, highlight the possible significance of variations of this kind in otherwise repeated statements, and the question of doubtful parentage should not be ruled out too quickly.⁴⁹ The expression *yalde zenunim* ('children of whoredom') might also be taken to indicate that some of Gomer's children were born following acts of adultery.⁵⁰ However, it may also be understood in the sense of children born from a relationship with a promiscuous or adulterous woman.⁵¹

Harlot', 109-11). Some prefer to take the references metaphorically; e.g. Dearman, *Hosea*, 110; Kelle, *Metaphor and Rhetoric*, 95-97.

⁴⁷ E.g. Knight, *Hosea*, 44-47; Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless* (BST; Leicester: IVP, 1981): 22. The possibility is also noted, though with less certainty, by, e.g. H. D. Beeby, *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea* (ITC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989): 16; Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 57; Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001): 47.

⁴⁸ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 187; see also Hubbard, *Hosea*, 63; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 21; Mays, *Hosea*, 28; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 27; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 15.

⁴⁹ See Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Introduction: Text, Interpretation, Structure, Themes* (London: Apollos, 2016): 172-75; see also e.g. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (rev. edn; New York: Basic, 2011): 111-42; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup, 70; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2000): 211-16; David Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 148-55; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985): 390-93; Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2009): 81-94.

⁵⁰ Cf. Knight, *Hosea*, 40.

⁵¹ Wolff argues that the double use of *zenunim* in 1:2 indicates that the children share the characteristics of the mother (*Hosea*, 13). That seems to be the point of the

3. The Relationship between Chapters 1 and 3

The relationship between the description of Hosea's marriage Gomer in chapter 1 and the command to 'love' an unnamed woman in chapter 3 is also the subject of some debate.

One view is that 3:1-5 is a parallel account of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, told in the first person, and maybe offering a separate reflection on the unhappy circumstances of his marriage at a different point in Israel's history. Thus, chapter 1 may relate to an early period in Hosea's ministry, when the nation's repentance and restoration seemed possible, whereas chapter 3 interprets the same events after the fall of Samaria, when Hosea recognised that restoration could only take place after judgement and a period of penance.⁵² However, the appearance of **וַיֵּן** (*'od*), which is usually translated 'again', makes this unlikely. There is some debate about whether 3:1 should read along the lines of 'the LORD said to me, *again*, go ...' (NRSV), or 'go *again*, love a woman ...' (cf. NIV).⁵³ In both cases, however, *'od* suggests action subsequent to the events described in chapter 1 rather than a fresh interpretation of their significance.⁵⁴ The structure and content of the accounts also present problems. So, for example, chapter 3 notes a period of discipline and sexual abstinence, whereas chapter 1 suggests that children were born at an early stage in the marriage.⁵⁵ It is possible that the passages may relate to different historical scenarios, but they appear to recall separate, sequential, events in the prophet's life.

metaphor: the children, like Gomer, represent sinful Israel, and that may be seen as the rhetorical purpose of describing both as *zenunim*. Bird suggests that the parallel reference to wife and children is intended to shock, though needs to be interpreted in the light of its symbolism, which identifies the wife and children with the unfaithful nation ('To Play the Harlot', 80-81). In my view, though, insofar as it may relate to Hosea's family, the most likely explanations are those noted above.

⁵² E.g. Green, 'Hosea and Gomer', 87-89; see also, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. edn; Louisville, Kentucky; London: Westminster John Knox): 86; Gordis, 'Hosea's Marriage', 30-35; Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 16.

⁵³ See Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 293; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 93; Mays, *Hosea*, 54; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 62-63; Wolff, *Hosea*, 59.

⁵⁴ E.g. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 291-94; Dearman, *Hosea*, 84-85; Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 51; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 96; van der Woude, 'Three Classical Prophets' in Coggins, Phillips, and Knibb, *Israel's Prophetic Tradition*, 44; Wolff, *Hosea*, 59-60. The view that *'od* might have been added later seems unlikely in view of the lack of any supporting textual evidence.

⁵⁵ E.g. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 294-95; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 53-54; Rowley, 'Marriage', 205-8.

If the events described in 3:1-5 do take place after Hosea's marriage to Gomer, the significant question remains: is the unnamed woman, referred to in 3:1, Gomer or someone else? To some extent, the answer is bound up with the understanding of Gomer's status. Davies and Moughtin-Mumby argue that Hosea did not marry Gomer and that his relationship with a prostitute symbolises Israel's prostitution. Since the charge of adultery requires a married woman, the woman in 3:1 cannot be Gomer.⁵⁶ Similarly, those who see Gomer not, specifically, as promiscuous herself, but typical of the promiscuity of the nation, also point to a different woman in 3:1, maybe Hosea's second wife.⁵⁷ However, as discussed already, those interpretations of Gomer's status are problematic.

A significant issue in this discussion is the use, in 3:1, of the, apparently indefinite term '*ishah*, 'a woman'. If Gomer is intended, why is that not made clear? Van der Woude notes that neither Gomer nor the children are mentioned in 3:1-5, and argues that the 'undetermined '*ishah* ... can hardly refer to the previously mentioned Gomer'.⁵⁸ Andersen and Freedman suggest, though, that the statement in 3:2, 'so I bought *her*' (italics mine), does point to a specific woman (i.e. Gomer).⁵⁹ They note, too, that '*ishah* has been chosen deliberately, to parallel the same term in 1:2, though in this case 'take', indicating marriage, has been replaced by 'love', because they are already married.⁶⁰ Referring to the previously mentioned Gomer as 'a woman' may be unusual, but it is not impossible.⁶¹ And, following Andersen

⁵⁶ Davies, *Hosea*, 90–91; Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 232–36. In line with her negative interpretation of chapter 1, Moughtin-Mumby argues that the hopeful element of 3:4–5 is a later addition, and that 3:1–3 expresses the nature of Yahweh's 'love', which does not consist in 'forgiveness and redemption', but in 'punishment and loss' (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 235).

⁵⁷ E.g. Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 64.

⁵⁸ Van der Woude, 'Three Classical Prophets' in Coggins, Phillips, and Knibb, *Israel's Prophetic Tradition*, 44–45, esp. 44; see also L. O. Dorn, 'Is Gomer the Woman in Hosea 3?', *The Bible Translator* 51.4 (2000): 424–30; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 38–39.

⁵⁹ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 296; see also Thomas E. McComiskey, 'Hosea' in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1998): 1–237, esp. 50.

⁶⁰ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 295–96.

⁶¹ E.g. Rowley, 'Marriage', 219–21. See also e.g. Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 35–37; Craigie, *Twelve Prophets I*, 26–27; Dearman, *Hosea*, 84–85; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 53–54; Limburg, *Hosea–Micah*, 13; Mays, *Hosea*, 55–56; Richard D. Patterson, 'Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations', *JETS* 51.4 (2008): 689–702, esp.

and Freeman, it seems reasonable to argue that the choice of language in 3:1 ('go love a woman') is a deliberate echo of 1:2 ('go take/marry a woman'), indicating two phases of connected activity.⁶² That continuity is reinforced by the appearance of 'again'.

Another objection to identifying the *'ishah* in 3:1 with Gomer relates to the status of the marriage. Hosea 3:2 is sometimes taken to refer to a bride price. This would then indicate a remarriage, which, in turn, implies a previous divorce. Because the law appears to prevent remarriage to a divorced partner (Deut. 24:1-4), this must be to a different woman.⁶³ However, that law is restricted to the case where a divorced wife has, in the meantime, married someone else, and there is no indication of that here.⁶⁴ The statement in 2:2 – 'she is not my wife and I am not her husband' – has been compared with standard ANE divorce formulae.⁶⁵ However, the call to 'put away her whoring ... and her adultery ... or ...' (2:2-3b) suggests that, while there may have been some legal process, the aim is to bring about reconciliation, and so no actual divorce took place.⁶⁶

696-97; 'Hosea' in Patterson and Hill, *Minor Prophets*, 25-26; Simundson, *Hosea*, Joel, 31-32. In Wolff's view, arguments for a second marriage are not compelling (*Hosea*, 59). Lim notes that there is nothing in the text to identify the unnamed adulteress with Gomer, though does not rule out the possibility (*Hosea*, 80). Macintosh suggests that 3:1-5 is Hosea's own account of the latter part of his ministry, which may have existed as a separate unit, and does not presuppose the record in chapter 1 (cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 59), which is a third-party recollection of an earlier event in Hosea's ministry. The inclusion of 'again', though, suggests intended continuity with the previous section; e.g. Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 79-80; Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 79.

⁶² See also e.g. Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 37; Laldinsuah, *Responsibility, Chastisement and Restoration*, 133; Mays, *Hosea*, 55.

⁶³ Sweeney notes this prohibition (*Twelve Prophets*, 39).

⁶⁴ A similar idea is expressed in Jer. 3:1, which does appear to suggest a divorce between God and his people. That passage also notes the impossibility of return when an intervening marriage has taken place, and that is related to the prostitution of God's people with many lovers. This highlights the difficulty of reconciliation and remarriage. However, the language seems to indicate that no further marriage has taken place, and thus, whilst difficult, the restoration of the relationship is not impossible. E.g. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 190-91.

⁶⁵ See Anthony Phillips, *Essays on Biblical Law* (JSOTSup, 344; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002): 89-90. Phillips maintains this was part of family law and the formal proceedings would take place in the home rather than court. See also e.g. David Instone Brewer, 'Three Weddings and a Divorce: God's Covenant with Israel, Judah and the Church', *TynBul* 47.1 (1996): 1-25, esp. 4; Wolff, *Hosea*, 33.

⁶⁶ E.g. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 221-24; Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective* (JSOTSup, 28; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984): 15; Laldinsuah, *Responsibility, Chastisement and Restoration*, 140-41; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 41-42; Mays, *Hosea*, 37-38; cf. Dearman, *Hosea*, 109.

While, based on the foregoing discussion, the text does not necessarily rule out identifying the unnamed woman in 3:1 with Gomer, the symbolism of the prophetic sign-act would appear to require it. As noted earlier, the description of the woman in 3:1 as an *adulteress* indicates that she must have been married. This suggests two main possibilities. Either this woman was married to someone other than Hosea and had committed adultery in that relationship before Hosea acquired her,⁶⁷ or the woman was Gomer.⁶⁸ In the first case, the emphasis is on the woman's status as an adulteress,⁶⁹ without specific regard for whom that adultery was against. Hosea's love for such a woman is then linked with God's love for his adulterous people. That, though, seems to be missing a key part of the symbolism. The nation that God continues to love is not one that has committed general acts of adultery, but one whose adulterous behaviour, in turning to 'other gods', is *specifically directed against him*. The people are certainly indicted for their wider moral failure, but a central charge is that they have turned away from their divine husband (cf. 2:2-13). For the prophetic sign-act to be meaningful, this must be paralleled in Hosea's relationship. As Wolff notes, 'it is an essential presupposition for the comparison that the wife in 3:1 committed adultery against Hosea'.⁷⁰ Another significant element is the possibility of reconciliation following desertion (cf. 2:14-23). This, too, would appear to require that Hosea, like God, was the wronged party.⁷¹ If the woman was already an adulteress, as the text of 3:1 implies,⁷² she and Hosea must have previously been married. In the context of Hosea 1-3, the only viable candidate for the unnamed woman is Gomer. This is also a better reflection of the relationship between God and Israel, since, following her unfaithfulness, God seeks reconciliation with *the same bride*.⁷³

⁶⁷ E.g. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 65.

⁶⁸ A third possibility, that she was Hosea's second wife who committed adultery against him seems somewhat remote.

⁶⁹ E.g. Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 80; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 63-69

⁷⁰ Wolff, *Hosea*, 59.

⁷¹ Reconciliation in the case of a woman who was previously married to someone else would involve going back to her original husband (cf. 2:9). Rowley points out that it would then be the unnamed husband who symbolises God in the comparison (Rowley, 'Marriage', 207-8).

⁷² While the language of 1:2 allows for a proleptic interpretation of Gomer's promiscuity, the same is not true of 3:1, which states that the woman is an adulteress.

⁷³ E.g. Hubbard, *Hosea*, 54. Stuart's explanation that God buys back a new, transformed Israel (*Hosea-Jonah*, 66) seems somewhat forced. That is not the picture

There has been some discussion regarding the nature of the payment recorded in 3:2 – ‘fifteen (shekels of) silver and a homer of barley and a lethek of barley’. As noted, this is sometimes taken as the bride-price, which would, normally, be paid to a bride's father. Vogels suggests that in the case of renewed betrothal it is given, instead, to the bride.⁷⁴ Though that seems unlikely if the woman is already Hosea's wife. Some have calculated the barley to be worth around fifteen shekels, giving a total payment of thirty shekels. In Exodus 21:32, this is the value of a slave, and it is suggested that Gomer must have become a slave.⁷⁵ Or was it the price paid to release her from prostitution? The clear itemisation emphasises that the woman now belongs to Hosea.⁷⁶ However, the text remains unclear as to both her situation and to whom the payment was made.⁷⁷ It is perhaps best to see this, more generally, as ‘a cancelling of her indebtedness’,⁷⁸ which thus allowed her to return to Hosea. The nature of the payment, part in silver and part in kind, may also suggest that Hosea was not wealthy. Nevertheless, reflecting God's love for his people, it was a price Hosea was willing to pay.

4. Conclusions

The biographical information in Hosea 1–3 is limited, and, as noted, it is unwise to attempt a precise reconstruction of the prophet's marital situation. The text does, though, allow for some partial conclusions. Based on the foregoing discussion I want to suggest the following:

1. Because of the correlation between the prophetic sign-act associated with Hosea's marriage to Gomer and its application to God's relationship with his people, interpretation is facilitated by as clear a historical reconstruction of the former as the text may allow.

presented in 3:1-5, which indicates continuing promiscuity and the need for further discipline. Lim follows Davies in suggesting that there is symbolic but not biographical continuity between the sign-acts in 1:2-11 and 3:1-5 (Lim and Castelo, *Hosea*, 47-48). As we have seen, though, that is required by Davies' diverse interpretation of the sign-acts. The view argued for here allows a greater measure of biographical continuity.

⁷⁴ Walter Vogels, ‘Hosea's Gift to Gomer (Hos. 3,2)’, *Biblica* 69.3 (1988): 412-21.

⁷⁵ E.g. Mays, *Hosea*, 57-58; Wolff, *Hosea*, 61.

⁷⁶ Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 33.

⁷⁷ See Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 298-300.

⁷⁸ Dearman, *Hosea*, 135; see also, Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 74.

2. Gomer's promiscuity in 1:2 should be interpreted proleptically. She may have had such tendencies before her relationship with Hosea, but it was only during their marriage that her adultery emerged.

3. No firm conclusions can be drawn about the parentage of Gomer's children, though it is possible that only Jezreel was born legitimately to Hosea.

4. The unnamed adulteress in 3:1 is to be identified with Gomer. What happened to her between chapters 1 and 3 is unclear. Whatever it was appears to have necessitated a payment by Hosea to secure her release. The payee is unknown.

5. The relationship between Hosea and Gomer, which includes Gomer's adultery and Hosea's love and willingness to retrieve her from whatever difficulties she found herself in, and to make whatever payment was necessary, reflects God's continuing loving commitment to an unfaithful Israel.

The elements in this partial reconstruction are not new.⁷⁹ However, in view of the volume of debate and the number of alternative suggestions, together with the relative unpopularity of the proleptic approach among recent commentators, it seems important to revisit the discussion and to set out, again, the case for this particular interpretation.

⁷⁹ E.g. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 116-18; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 51-56. Johansen, 'The Prophet Hosea', 183; Knight, *Hosea*, 28-29; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 117-18.