

INTRODUCTION  
TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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533-54; *idem*, "Erkenntnis Gottes im Alten Testament," *ibid.*, XV (1955), 426-31; *idem*, "Hoseas geistige Heimat," *TbLZ*, LXXXI (1956), 83-94; cf. also the bibliographies in FOHRER, *TbR*, NF XIX, XX, and XXVIII (§ 52).

1. *Hosea's personal situation.* Concerning Hosea's personal situation, we learn only the name of his father Beeri and what chapters 1 and 3 tell us of his marital life and his children. This is not so much because the message he was commissioned to deliver relegates the biographical element to the background as because the later Judean transmission of his words was not interested in the details of his life. He was active in Northern Israel and probably dwelt there. There is no reason to assume from the images of nature and animals he employs that he was a farmer and cattle breeder (Sellin), from his knowledge of the priestly milieu (4:1 ff.; 5:1 ff.) that he was a priest (Duhm), or from the taunt in 9:7 that he belonged to a guild of *nebiim* (Eissfeldt\*; Sellin-Rost\*). He was, however, a member of the intelligentsia, as his knowledge of the past, his judgment upon history and the present, and his mode of expression all show (T. H. Robinson). When we also note the way wisdom has influenced his language, we may conclude that he was educated in a wisdom school, which served primarily for the training of royal officials.

Hosea was very early aware of his call to be a prophet, since his marriage (1:2-3) probably took place, as was customary, when he was a young man, and his activity as a prophet lasts more than three decades. It began while the dynasty of Jehu was still on the throne, as is shown by the threat in 1:4 as well as by the superscription (1:1), with its reference to Jeroboam II (786/82-753/46), followed by his son Zechariah, who was soon murdered. The additional mention of the four kings of Judah, which is a later addition, is intended to make Hosea a contemporary of Isaiah. His activity continued long after the end of the dynasty of Jehu. He experienced the period of internal strife and royal assassinations (7:7; 8:4), the Syro-Ephraimite War (5:8 ff.), and the foreign ambitions of Hoshea, the last king (7:11-12; 12:2 [Eng. 12:1]), but obviously not the fall of Samaria and the dissolution of the Northern Kingdom. We may therefore date the period of his activity roughly between 755/750 and 725. He probably carried out his ministry mostly in Samaria, and on occasion at a sanctuary like Bethel or Gilgal.

2. *Hosea's wife and children.* The most discussed and disputed problem is that of Hosea's marriage and children, as reported in chapters 1 and 3. According to the third-person report in 1, Hosea is to marry an *'ēšet z'ōnūnīm* ("unchaste woman") named Gomer bat Diblaim and have children by her, who are to receive the symbolic names "Jezreel," "Not pitied," and "Not my people." According to the first-person report in 3, the prophet is to marry *again*—an adulteress, whom he is to keep shut up for a long time, not even visiting her himself. The very impropriety of this description has led to various interpretations; the prophet could not possibly have married an unchaste woman, as Jerome explains, *quia si fiat turpissimum est*. The different theories can be classified into several basic types.

a) The report in chapter 1 is understood in the following ways: (1) It is to be interpreted allegorically (Gressmann, Young,<sup>1</sup> *et al.*), so that it does not report a real marriage, but is instead the literary form given to a threat. (2) It reports a real event, but deletions are made from the text so as to free Gomer from all reproach (Hosea married a woman who bore him children: Hölscher<sup>2</sup>) or the text is not taken literally, so that the prophet married a blameless woman who later became unfaithful to him (Wellhausen). (3) It reports a real marriage with an unchaste woman entered into by Hosea deliberately and with full awareness (Heermann, van den Born,<sup>3</sup> *et al.*); the account has occasionally been romantically elaborated in remarkable fashion (Gunkel<sup>4</sup>) or explained psychoanalytically (Allwohn, Sellers<sup>5</sup>).

b) The report in chapter 3 is understood in the following ways: (1) It is to be interpreted allegorically, perhaps as an allegorical parallel to chapter 1 (Humbert, Gressmann, May,<sup>6</sup> *et al.*). (2) It is a parallel account to chapter 1, to be understood literally, in which Hosea himself depicts what someone else describes in chapter 1 (Lindblom, Mowinckel,<sup>7</sup> Gordis: a second revelation). (3) It is considered a later addition because its message is that of promise (Hölscher, Batten, Stinespring).

c) Most frequently 1 and 3 are taken together and, along with 2, viewed as a continuous narrative (particularly by Budde and H. Schmidt), or else 1 and 3 are considered reports of two stages in a lengthy series of events (Eissfeldt\*). In this view the "marriage story" of Hosea, as it has occasionally been called, deals with one and the same woman, Gomer, who became unfaithful to the prophet some time after their marriage, came into someone else's possession either by running away or through divorce, but is finally bought back by Hosea so that she may reform. On the basis of the assumption that Canaanite rites of initiation were practiced at the sanctuaries of Yahweh and that Hosea's wife submitted to them, while the prophet himself only gradually came to recognize the impiousness of this practice (Sellin-Rost\*), Wolff has extended the rites so as to have them apply to all marriageable Israelite girls and turned the narrative into a kind of theological marriage story with a symbolic and allegorical meaning. Rudolph has attacked this theory.<sup>8</sup>

Arguments against the allegorical interpretation of chapter 1 include the impossibility of understanding the name "Gomer" allegorically and the use of symbolic names in Isa. 7:3; 8:1-4. The clear and unambiguous wording of the text argues against the various qualifications that have been suggested, as does the damage to the meter brought about by arbitrary deletions. Arguments

<sup>1</sup> Young\*, pp. 245-46.

<sup>2</sup> G. Hölscher, *Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion*, 1922, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> A. van den Born, *De symbolische handelingen der Oud-Testamentische profeten*, 1935, pp. 52-53.

<sup>4</sup> H. Gunkel, "Hosea," *RGK*, 2nd ed., 1928, II, pp. 20-21 ff.

<sup>5</sup> O. Sellers, "Hosea's Motives," *AJSL*, XLI (1924/25), 243-47.

<sup>6</sup> H. G. May, "An Interpretation of the Names of Hosea's Children," *JBL*, LV (1936), 285-91.

<sup>7</sup> S. Mowinckel in *Det Gamle Testamentet*, III, 1944, pp. 576-77.

<sup>8</sup> W. Rudolph, "Präparierte Jungfrauen?" *ZAW*, LXXV (1963), 65-73.

