I. COMPARISON TO AMOS (KOCH, 76FF.)

A. Similarities:

1. Points to the same catastrophe

2. See the same downfall of state and people, approach of Assyria, defeat and deportation.

3. Both preach Yhwh’s rejection of his people

B. Differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMOS</th>
<th>HOSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences several visions</td>
<td>Experiences no visions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains short, easy-to-read sentences</td>
<td>Extensive sections of switching back and forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God matter-of-factly plans, strategically the downfall of Israel and her neighbors.</td>
<td>God is compassionate, torn between the two alternatives of destruction and salvation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of social injustice is in the foreground; the criticism of the cult derives from this.</td>
<td>Criticism of the cult is the center of the argument; social criticism spring from this.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

II. THE MAN.

A. Hosea "... was a man of tremendous emotional range, able ... to reflect in his own feelings the gamut of divine wrath and compassion. Through his sayings and person Yahweh, the God of Israel, wages his final battle, against Baal for the soul of Israel" (Mays, 1).

B. Little is known of this intriguing prophet outside of his father's name, "Beeri," 1:1-2a.

C. Certain general facts do present themselves.

1. His oracles were directed mostly to Ephraim.

   a. "The places most frequently mentioned in his sayings are the royal city of Samaria (7:1; 8:5f.; 10:5,7; 14:1) and the cultic centres at

b. Probably these were the places where most of his oracles were spoken" (Mays, 1-2).

2. He was acquainted with wisdom, and knew the history of Israel in depth, as well as knowing of such cosmopolitan things as the graves of Memphis, 9:6.

3. He was selected as a prophet at a young marriageable age, and his career lasted some 25 years.

4. He had a high view of the prophetic office.

a. Similar to that in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy.

b. He knew the prophetic office went back to Moses, 12:13 — "By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded."

III. HIS MARRIAGE.

A. The two accounts of Hosea's marriage (1:2f; 3:1f.) are reports of symbolic acts.

1. These two accounts were to portray Hosea's relationship to Gomer as descriptive of Yhwh's relation to Israel

2. Anything without significance remains unspoken.

3. This leaves the account full of riddles.

B. Yet, he gives us many details—so much are “His own marriage and family . . . made the living symbol of his people’s situation in the present and the future . . . that he even makes public the secrets of his bedroom” (Koch, 78).

1. Gomer was probably a sacred prostitute of the fertility cult.

2. This was "a symbolic demonstration of Yahweh's situation in his relation to faithless Israel" (Mays, 3).

a. “. . . Gomer was probably no exception in her own day; rather, she
was simply one of many Israelite women who had submitted to the bridal rites customary among the Canaanites" (Wolff, xxii, see also id., "The Sex Cult," 14-15).

b. Gomer symbolizes:

(1) The terrible consequences for Hosea and God when their wives engaged in such practices

(2) All the women in Israel who had wrecked their own marriages by their participation in the fertility rites at the idolatrous cult.

c. Thus Hosea and Gomer's marriage symbolize the contemporary home life of the day as well as the spiritual marriage between Yhwh and Israel.

(1) The children ("Jezreel," "Without-Mercy," and "Not-My-People" (1:4f, 6, 9) likewise become symbols of what was occurring in Israel at the time as well as portraying Yhwh's relationship to his people.

(2) So powerful are these symbols that the very names are used to symbolize the events.

(3) For example, "Not-My-People" symbolizes the father's rejection of the child as his (Hosea, and other cuckolds in Israel) as well as Yhwh's rejection of Israel.

3. The second story (3:1) fits the above pattern only if the woman is Gomer.

a. "We can only infer that one day Gomer, having committed adultery, left Hosea and became the legal wife of another man. It was most likely Gomer whom Hosea was later commanded to 'love again', and whom he had to buy back for this purpose" (Wolff, xxii).

b. This illustrates how much Yhwh still loved Israel in spite of their apostasy.

c. It was a violation of the law, cf. Deut 24:1ff.
IV. THE TIME—750-722 BC.

A. Hosea's interest in history allows us to date his oracles rather accurately in spite of our lack of biographical information about him (Wolff, xxi) as follows.

B. Hosea began his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam, the great-grandson of Jehu (1:4).

C. His marriage and children occurred during this reign (1:2-9), as well as other sections (Wolff, xxi).

1. "Much of the material in the first chapters of the book mirrors those early years of stable rule, economic prosperity, and flourishing religion (1:2-9; 2:2-15; 4:1-5:7) [Mays, 4]."

2. His oracles foretold a rough future: Jeroboam's son, Zechariah (746-45) was murdered by Shallum (2 Kgs 15:8-12), who also was murdered by Menachem (745-738; 2 Kgs 15:13-16). Israel's waning history, characterized by conspiracy and murder had begun (7:7; 8:4).

D. In 745 Tiglath-pileser II ascended the Assyrian throne. This signaled the downfall of Israel.

1. In 743 he moved west and Menachem submitted (2 Kgs 15:19ff; ANET, 283)
   a. Political intrigue involving Egypt began (7:11).
   b. Pekahiah (738-737) succeeded his father, but was murdered by Pekah (737-32; 2 Kgs 15:22-28).
   c. This was part-and-parcel of the Syrian-Ephraimitic war against Judah (Isa 9:8-12; Hos 5:8-11; 2 Kgs 16:5-6; [Wolff, xxi]).

2. In 733 Tiglath-pileser II ravaged the land, leaving the city of Samaria and the Hill country to the kingdom.

3. Pekah was murdered by Hoshea, who surrendered and paid tribute (5:13; 8:9; 2 Kgs 15:29-31; ANET, 284).
4. Hoshea remained subservient and Israel had a period of peace. Chs 9-12 would probably fit here; cf Wolff, xxi.

E. When Shalmaneser V (727-722) succeeded Tiglath-pileser II, Hoshea withheld tribute, sought Egyptian help, and ultimately revolted against Assyria (9:3; 11:5; 12:1; 2 Kgs 17:1-6).

1. Chs 13-14 echo the consequences of this move. In 725 Shalmaneser took Hoshea captive (13:10).

2. Israel was defeated.

3. 13:16 anticipates the fall of Samaria though nothing of its fall is recorded by Hosea — "Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open."

4. The preservation of the book indicates that he, or some of his support group, escaped to the southern kingdom during the final months of Israel's existence (Mays, 5).

V. THE SAYINGS. There several reasons why the "analysis and interpretation" of the sayings are more difficult than any other prophetic book.

A. State of the text: is bad.

1. Exegetical decisions often rest on reconstructions of the MT

   a. AT9:7-8: (7) The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

   (8) [A/The] watchman [is] Ephraim with my God, [A/The] prophet [is] a fowler's snare on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God.

   b. Regarded as the most difficult passage in Hosea
c. Possible translations include:

[The watchman of Ephraim is with God,]
[A/The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God,]
[A/The prophet is [the] watchman of Ephraim, the people of my God,]
yet a fowler’s snare is on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God.

2. Scholars hesitate to describe the most difficult texts as "corrupt."
   a. Hosea is the only northern prophet whose words are preserved
   b. Some of the "strange" dialect may be due to the northern manner of speech rather than the southern (cf. Mays, 5).

3. Curiously 1-3 has few problems and 4-14 is equally clear for the most part.

4. But scattered in difficult places include: 4:4f, 17-18; 6:7-9; 7:4-6, 14-16; 8:9f., 13; 10:9-10; 11:12; 13:9-10

5. Such differences indicate that even students who do not read Hebrew should study Hosea using several different translations.

B. **Style:**

1. Blurring of individual units of speech.

2. Oracle formula found, "says the Lord," only in 2:13, 16, 21; 11:11.


4. The announcement of judgment is rare (Mays, 6).

5. Instead, there is a bewildering practice of shifting from direct address to third-person reference to the audience or vice versa (e.g. 2:2, 4; 4:4-10, 11-14).

C. Though the prophet uses divine speech — "Hear the word of the Lord," etc., 4:1
D. He also uses prophetic says, "My people," etc., (4:6; cf. 5:3-7; 9:1-9, 13f., 17; 12:2-6)

E. However, most of the time Hosea and God are so closely identified the reader has difficulty determining whether Hosea or God is speaking.

F. Hosea combines reproach and announcement of punishment, e.g.,

5:1-2: **Hear this**, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For the judgment pertains to you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor, and a pit dug deep in Shittim; but I will punish all of them.

G. Uses complaint ("the Lord has an indictment"; rib; 2:2; 4:1, 4; 12:2) drawn from Israelite trial procedure (Mays, 6).

1. This has its "Sitz im Leben in the legal dispute between two parties, especially when they bring their case before the elders at the city gate" (Wolff, xxiii).

2. This explains the connection between the prophet's accusations and announcements of judgment (e.g., 4:1-3; 8:1-3; 13:1-3)

   a. One hardly occurs without the other

   b. Even the unity of longer passages is explicable in terms of the lawsuit

   c. One such example are the court proceedings against the unfaithful wife (2:4-17 [2-15] or the rebellious son (11:1-9).

   d. These also explain many of the abrupt changes from the first to the third persons of Yahweh and also from the second to the third persons

   e. Such is much like a trial where were someone voiced an objection that is left unquoted (cf. Wolff, xxiii).

H. Two "prophetic liturgies" (5:15-6:6; 14:1-8) furnish divine answers to the people's repentance
1. **Negative** — **NRS Hosea 6:4** What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

2. **Positive** — **NRS Hosea 14:4** I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon. They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me.

I. Hosea's language is so poignant simply because he lived his message.

1. His psychological intimacy of prophet with God
2. His emotions run the gamut from hate to love, from anguish to anger.
3. Hosea's struggles reflect God's struggles.
4. We come to see Yhwh "himself suffers under the distress their estrangement prepares for them" (Wolff, xxviii).
5. Even more so we come to see how "God not only struggles with Israel but with himself as well; indeed, he calls his own decisions into question (2:4-17 [2-15]; 6:4; 11:8f following vv 1-7)" (Wolff, xviii).
6. The result is that Yhwh's "unqualified love is . . . represented as the only precondition for healing Israel's apostasy . . . 11:8f" (Wolff, xxix).
7. By saying no to his own burning anger, Yhwh has acted independently of human reaction.
8. All of this points to the sufferings of Christ
   a. God's struggle for his people and his suffering under their guilt is
sealed by Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:19-21)

b. Hosea in Israel becomes a model for the struggle carried on by Jesus' messengers on behalf of man in today's world (Wolff, xxix).

VI. THE MESSAGE.

A. **Covenant:** appears five times

1. 2:18 [H.20]: A new marriage covenant
2. 6:7: Like Adam the people transgressed the covenant
3. 8:1: The people have broken covenant
4. 10:4: With empty words they make covenants
5. 12:1 [H 2]: Make covenants with Assyria and Egypt

B. "Covenant" in Hosea is understood as a conjugal relationship

1. This allows a wealth of emotional implications.
2. No one comes close to Hosea's ability to described this relationship
3. As husband, Hosea/Yhwh
   a. Dissolves the marriage
   b. Rejects the children/people as his kindred
   c. Will no longer be available to them
4. Emphasizes a covenant history that is seen such symbolic language as:
   a. Familiar with "I am" (1:9; Ex 3:14).
   b. God chose Israel from Egypt (11:1).
   c. God nurtured the nation in the wilderness (13:5; 11:3ff; 9:10).
   d. The conquest is the sequel to the Exodus/Wilderness (11:2; 13:6).
   e. Land belongs to Yhwh (9:3) and is called "The house of Yhwh" (9:5, 8; 8:11).
   f. The people are Yhwh's tenants (2:8; 10:11; 11:2; 13:6)
5. A necessary part of covenant is “torah” (8:1), a concept much broader than the later term “law.”
   a. “Torah” “. . . feeds the knowledge of God; and for Hosea this is the concept which provides the guide for good conduct” (Koch, 91)
   b. "Knowledge" in Hosea refers to relationships — it “is not interpreted as detached, objective investigation, but as an understanding, with emotional and sympathetic connotations and practical consequences, which is possible only as a result of close personal community with what is known. Anyone who knows God avoids bloody deeds, deceit, theft and adultery (4.1f.); but will also avoid the senseless slaughter of sacrificial beasts and all idolatrous worship of Yahweh, which brings him down to the level of images of bulls and sexual practices” (Koch, 91).
   c. Lovingkindness a faithfulness to the covenant that determines behavior towards both God and human beings (cf. 6:6, Koch, 91).

C. Three features stand out:
   1. His dialogue with the fertility religion of Canaan
   2. The freedom with which he theologizes by the use of metaphorical images
   3. His knowledge and use of history as a source of meaning.
   4. These features combine to create a sense of the dramatic, colorful, urgent prophecy that impacts the mind, senses, and emotion (Mays, 8).

D. Of major concern to Hosea was the idolatry of Baal.
   1. Yhwhism had avoided this, but Hosea was able to use it as an extended metaphor with profound results.
   2. "In Hosea's hands the myth of the divine marriage became an allegory of Yahweh's experience with Israel in Canaan; and the context in which the relation was understood was removed from the magical and cultic world of Canaan to the moral structure of the covenant. The deities worshipped at the state and local shrines became Israel's illicit lovers whom she pursued
to gain a harlot's hire of wine, grain, and oil (2:5, 7, 10). 'Harlotry' was coined as the term for every unfaithfulness of Israel to Yahweh" (Mays, 9).

3. This metaphor opens the door for others which describe Israel and Yhwh (Mays, 9-10).
   a. In the Exodus Yhwh was a father watching his son (11:1ff).
   b. In his help Yhwh is a physician (14:4; 7:1; 11:3), shepherd (13:5).
   c. In judgment he is a hunter (7:12), carnivore (5:14; 13:7f.), wound and infection (5:12).
   d. As savior he is dew (14:5), a fruitful tree (14:8).
   e. Yhwh perceives Israel as a herd (13:5-8), heifer (10:11), vine (10:1), grapes and early figs (9:10).
   f. Regarding sin, Israel is sick (5:13); a fickle bird (7:11); a stubborn cow (4:16); an unborn child (13:13); a cake of bread (7:8); morning mist (6:4); chaff, smoke, and dew (13:3).
   g. Restored Israel is a flourishing plant (14:5-7) and sown ground (2:21).

E. As with the covenant history Hosea draws an overview which describes how Israel reached its present state. Two ideals run counter to each other:

1. The definitive period of Israel's existence was the time of the Exodus and wilderness and conquest (2:14f.; 9:10; 11:1; 13:4f.).
   a. In those days Yhwh was the exclusive subject of Israel' history
   b. The people received their true identity as they were shaped and defined by Yhwh's acts.

2. But with the nation's entry into the land, a counter-history began of which the people themselves were the subject.
   a. This second period had its own beginnings which supplied a perspective for understanding the present.
b. At the land's very edge, at the shire of Baal-peor, Israel began a flirtation with Baal (9:10).

c. The significant sites which came within Israel's horizons as she entered the land all became points of departure for a history of sin that still continued.

d. Gilgal (9:15; 4:15; 12:11) and Gibeah (9:9; 10:9) and Jezreel (1:4) were sources of Israel's faithlessness.

e. Hosea portrays Yhwh's strategy was to blot out this second history and force a change of course (Mays, 10).

3. Three reasons for Hosea's use history in this manner.

a. Shows that Israel's present transgressions were rooted in Israel's history.

b. Yhwh has had to struggle with Israel from the beginning (Wolff, xxvii).

c. Hosea's emphasizes beginnings:

(1) Jehu is the first king of the present dynasty (1:4)

(2) Gilgal and Saul represent the beginning of the present kingship (9:15; 13:10f)

(3) Baal-Peor was the beginning of the cult of shame (9:10)

(4) The wandering in the wilderness and the deliverance from Egypt were the initial saving acts of Yhwh (2:17 [15]; 9:10; 11:1; 12:10 [9], 14 [13]; 13:4-6)

(5) The Jacob story was when Israel's deceitfulness began (124f, [3f], 13f [12f]).

(6) The point is made that Israel was in Hosea's day just as she was in the beginning
(7) Indeed, the present is the end of the earlier beginnings of that history.

(8) Thus the end of the ancient saving history now has actually begun (Wolff, xxvii).

F. Against this background Hosea drew the indictments against all Israel

1. Israel broke covenant and instruction (8:1).

2. Now it is a prisoner of sin (7:1; 4:12).

3. They have earned the name "not my people" (1:9).

G. Hosea had two targets.

1. **Cultic life:**

   a. The first part of the book is occupied with Israel's practice in fertility religion of Canaan.

   (1) Jeroboam's sin had grown till Yhwh's worship had been Canaanized.

   (2) The outright practice of Baal worship was the result.

   b. Baals were adored as deities of the land at state shrines and local high places (2:13, 17; 9:10; 11:2; 13:1).

   (1) Baal devotees believed him to be the creator of the land's fertility and divine source of crops, flocks, and children (2:5, 8, 12; 7:14; 9:1f., 11f.).

   (2) The rituals attempted to insure the effectiveness of the deity's procreative powers dominated the cult

   (3) Sexual rites with the use of sacred prostitutes and bacchanalian celebration marked the festivals (4:11-14, 18)

   (4) Sacrifice was understood as a means of influencing God to procure his material blessings (4:13; 5:6; 8:11, 13; 10:1).
(5) Pure Yhwhism had been abandoned

(6) Images were all over the land (8:4-6; 10:5; 11:2; 14:3, 8).

(7) In all this apostasy the priests who were responsible for the knowledge of God in Israel bore a particular guilt

(8) Their corruption infected the very sources of faith for the people (4:4-10; 6:9)” (Mays, 11-12).

2. **Political life:** political leaders were responsible for such conditions.

   a. Their stratagems substituted for Yhwh.
   
   b. Jeroboam II was guilty for the blood of Jezreel (1:4)
   
   c. Assassination was the normal order of the day (7:3-4)
   
   d. They continually turned to Egypt and Assyria (5:13; 7:8f., 11; 8:9f.; 14:3).

H. Hosea bypasses the normative terms of *righteousness* and *justice*, emphasized by Amos and Isaiah in, and uses *knowledge of God, devotion,* and *faithfulness* (4:1; 6:4, 6; 12:6)” (Mays, 13).

I. Punishment is of two kinds of public disaster.

   1. Richness of the land, which Israel though came from Baal, would be taken away (2:9-13).
   
   2. They would be defeated militarily (7:16; 8:3, 13f.; 10:6, 10, 14; 11:6; 13:15.

J. This punishment is for discipline and correction (5:2; 10:10)—not simple revenge (Mays, 13-14).

VII. **THE BOOK.**

A. The book is probably comprised of copies of sermons which Hosea preserved and had his disciples retain.
B. There are two major sections: 1-3 and 4-14.

1. 1-3 serve as an introduction — the material relates all that deals with the relationship among Hosea's life (marriage and children) to his prophecy.

2. 4-14 has no clear plan. The arrangement is by themes and outlook.
   b. 5:8-6:6 — Syrian Ephraimite war.
   c. 10-14 — Reign of Hoshea.
   d. The rest comes somewhere between Jeroboam and Hoshea.