

HOS 9:13 AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE MASORETIC TRADITION IN THE PROPHECY OF HOSEA

THOMAS E. MCCOMISKEY*

The text of Hosea presents the exegete with numerous problems of interpretation. When David Noel Freedman and Francis I. Andersen completed their commentary on Hosea, Freedman wrote:

For ten years, Professor Frank Andersen and I have been struggling with the book of Hosea in the Bible and now the bell has rung for us too: the manuscript must be sent to the press. It is monumental in size, but I would regard it at the present as a monumental failure. Needless to say, we do not blame ourselves; the fault lies in the book.¹

I have just completed a commentary on Hosea as well, and I agree with Freedman's assessment of the difficulties of this book. One finds challenging exegetical problems in almost every verse of the text. Several of the major commentaries on Hosea that have appeared in recent years attempt to resolve its problems by extensive emendation. Perhaps the best recent example is the commentary by Hans Walter Wolff.² Freedman says of Wolff's approach: "First he emends the text because it does not make sense as it stands, and then he says he does not understand what it means."³ Probably anyone who attempts serious exegetical work in Hosea will share Freedman's frustrations. The text contains numerous apparent anomalies, and modern reconstructionist approaches to the problems of the text have yielded generally unsatisfying results.

When I began the task of interpreting Hosea, I expected to make considerable use of the tools of textual criticism. The more I attempted to reconstruct the text, however, the more frustrated I became with the results. I felt I was not reconstructing the text itself but constructing a text of doubtful Hosean authenticity. Only when I accepted the consonantal text on its own terms did I feel I was in touch with the author. The purpose of this article is to suggest that the current state of affairs in Hosea studies is due in large part to the tendency of scholars to resort too quickly to processes of text reconstruction without giving adequate consideration to the possibility that many of the apparent anomalies in the

* Thomas McComiskey is professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

¹ D. N. Freedman, "Problems of Textual Criticism in the Book of Hosea," in *The Critical Study of the Sacred Texts* (ed. W. O'Flaherty; Graduate Theological Union, 1979) 55.

² H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

³ Freedman, "Problems" 55.

text are valid components and structures of the Hebrew language or peculiarities of the author's literary style.

Hosea 9:13 is our test case. The limitations of space and the complexities of this passage prohibit our examining other texts. The verse reads as follows:

²*eprayim ka²āšer-rā²tti lēšôr šētûlâ bēnāweh*
wē²eprayim lēhōšî² el-hôreg bānāyw

The problem will stand out clearly if we translate the verse woodenly: "Ephraim as I have seen for Tyre planted in a place; and Ephraim to bring forth to a murderer his sons." The verse seems hopelessly corrupt.

Wolff offers this reconstruction: "Ephraim, as I see, (has exposed his sons to the hunt). Now Ephraim must lead his sons to the butcher."⁴ Andersen and Freedman, who have made a sterling effort to reflect the consonantal text in their commentary, render as follows: "I saw Ephraim as in that place, by the Rival—[a fig tree] planted in a meadow—Ephraim indeed brought his children to the Slayer."⁵ Martin J. Buss reconstructs it like this: "Ephraim, as far as I can see, is planted on a rock as a (or: in the) meadow; Ephraim must bring forth his *children* to the slayer."⁶

Modern commentators frequently fail to consider *rā²â lē-* as a collocation,⁷ even though it is an attested component of the Hebrew language. It occurs elsewhere in Gen 22:8; 1 Sam 16:1, 17. In each case it has the sense "choose for": "God will choose ['see'] for himself a lamb" (Gen 22:8); "I have chosen ['seen'] for myself a king among his sons" (1 Sam 16:1); "Choose ['see'] for me a man" (v. 17).

If we understand *rā²â lē-* as a collocation in Hos 9:13, then "Tyre" functions as the indirect object of *rā²â* (as do the suffixes with *lāmed* in the examples above). Since the collocation occurs in a comparison clause governed by *ka²āšer*, we may translate the entire clause as follows: "Ephraim—just as I have chosen for Tyre."

The initial ²*eprayim* is problematical. It appears to govern the comparison clause, but that clause speaks of Tyre (*šôr*), not Ephraim. The scholars whose reconstructions we quoted above meet this difficulty by emending *šôr* in various ways. The distinctive placement of ²*eprayim* in the clause-initial position, however is similar to other structures in the book in which a syntactically independent substantive appears at the head of a statement containing material that describes the substantive. The function of such *casus pendens*⁸ substantives appears in modern

⁴ Wolff, *Hosea* 160–161.

⁵ F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (New York: Doubleday, 1980) 536.

⁶ M. J. Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1969) 19.

⁷ After I had written this article I found that C. F. Keil suggested that this construction is a collocation. He translates the first line: "Ephraim as I selected it for a Tyre planted in the valley" (*The Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 10 of *The Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* [ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969 reprint] 126).

⁸ For a discussion of *casus pendens* see GKC 458; A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1942) 148–151.

works on linguistics with the designation “topic and comment.”⁹ We find it in several places in Hosea: “Ephraim—among the nations he mixes himself” (7:8); “Ephraim—like a bird their glory will fly away” (9:11); “A merchant—in his hand are deceptive scales” (12:8); “Samaria—her king shall be brought to an end” (10:7). Thus “topic and comment” is an attested aspect of Hosea’s style.

By emending MT *šôr*, scholars have reconstructed the first line so as to make Ephraim the topic of the entire line. But there is no reason not to retain the MT here. It is true that as the *ka-āšer* clause stands in the MT it makes a statement about Tyre, not Ephraim, but this clause is apparently not the “comment.” It is a statement that establishes an illustrative comparison before going on to the “comment” about Ephraim, which follows in the second line.

This understanding of the clausal relationships in Hos 9:13 gains support from the repetition of *ʔep̄rayim* in the second line, which takes up the “topic” (Ephraim) from the first line after the digressional comparison clause that speaks of Tyre. It introduces the “comment” about Ephraim. Suspension of the topic by a subordinate clause is common in “topic and comment” constructions in the OT. In most instances the resumptive element is a pronoun.¹⁰ There appears to be no reason, however, why a writer could not resume the reference to the “topic” by restating it (particularly in a complex sentence such as this). The *wě-* (“so”) on *ʔep̄rayim* also adds a resumptive force to the second line by establishing a logical connection with *ʔep̄rayim* in the first line of the binary structure.

The first line does not tell us what God had chosen for Tyre, but it is not difficult to surmise. The prophets who spoke about Tyre were unanimous in their pronouncements of judgment on this city.¹¹ But we have a more objective linguistic control to support the idea that God had chosen judgment for Tyre: the parallel element in the binary structure.

- A Ephraim / just as I have chosen for Tyre / planted in [its] place,
- B so Ephraim / to lead forth its sons to a murderer.

The dynamics of Biblical parallelism exert a force on the context that warrants our understanding the verbal elements in the second clause of each line to sustain a conceptual relationship. The element in B that answers to “chosen for Tyre” in A is the pronouncement of judgment for Ephraim: “to lead forth its sons to a murderer.”¹²

⁹ See J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge; Cambridge University, 1968) 334–335.

¹⁰ See e.g. Gen 3:12: *hā-ʔiššā ʔāšer nātattā ʔimmādī hiwʔ nātēnā lī*. Here the pronoun *hiwʔ* (“she”) is the resumptive element. For other examples see GKC 458; Davidson, *Syntax* 148–150.

¹¹ Isa 23:1–18; Jer 25:22; 47:4; Ezek 26:1–21; 27:1–36; 28:1–10; Joel 3:4–8; Amos 1:9–10.

¹² The function of the B line in Semitic binary structures is explained in various ways by modern scholars. J. L. Kugel understands the B line to have an emphatic character and stresses the idea: “A is so, and what’s more, B” (*The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* [New Haven: Yale University, 1981] 58). A. Berlin assigns the function of “disambiguation” to

The word *šētûlâ* ("planted") may modify either "Tyre" or "Ephraim." The more likely antecedent is "Tyre." Not only is *šētûlâ* closest to this element, but also the author's application of the rules of agreement support this antecedence. With only one possible exception (5:9) *ʿeprayim* is masculine in Hosea,¹³ while in 9:13 *šētûlâ* is feminine. The masculine suffix on *bānāyw* ("his sons") in the second line indicates that the writer understood *ʿeprayim* to be masculine in this context. It would be unusual even for Hosea to assign different genders to a substantive within the narrow confines of one sentence. The description of Tyre as firmly established in its place may reflect an eighth-century prophetic tradition of Tyre as a stronghold (Isa 23:14; cf. v. 15). Yahweh's choosing Tyre for judgment reflects the thrust of the oracle in Amos 1:9-10, which declares that Yahweh had destined Tyre for destruction (see also Isa 23:13-18).

In the second line *wě-* introduces the apodosis of the comparison clause governed by *kaʿăšer*, as it does in Exod 16:34: "As [*kaʿăšer*] the LORD commanded Moses, so [*wě-*] Aaron placed it before the testimony."¹⁴

The construction *lēhōšîʿ* ("to lead forth") appears to be a purpose clause, but there is no stated verbal idea on which it depends. Andersen and Freedman view the *lamed* as asseverative ("indeed") and read *hōšîʿ* as a perfect.¹⁵ The existence of asseverative *lamed* with the perfect is questionable, however.¹⁶ It is more likely that *lēhōšîʿ* is a purpose clause that points to the presence of an unexpressed verbal idea on which it depends. This suggestion may be inappropriate for some OT books but not for Hosea, which contains elliptical constructions. It is difficult to know why this is so. Perhaps it is the result of an excited mode of speech, or perhaps the prophet spoke a crude dialectal form of Hebrew. At any rate, ellipsis is integral to the style of the book, and the possibility that there is an implicit verbal idea in the clause deserves consideration.

I have posited eight instances of verbal ellipsis in Hosea (8:1, 6, 10, 13; 9:4, 11; 10:5; 13:15). For example, 8:1a says literally, "The horn to your

the B line (*The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* [Bloomington: Indiana University, 1985] 96-99). While neither of these descriptions is adequate to explain all binary structures, both apply to Hos 9:13. On the basis of Kugel's thesis we may paraphrase the verse: "I have chosen judgment for Tyre, and what's more I have chosen for Ephraim to lead its sons to a murderer." We may understand the B line to disambiguate the A line (so Berlin) in that it amplifies and explains the reference to Tyre in A.

¹³ It is possible that *ʿeprayim* is masculine even in Hos 5:9. The construction *ʿeprayim lēšammâ tihyeh* may be translated either "Ephraim shall become a desolation" or "Ephraim, you shall become a desolation." In the latter case *ʿeprayim* would be masculine.

¹⁴ For a discussion of *wāw*-apodosis see GKC 458.

¹⁵ Andersen and Freedman state: "Asseverative *l*, followed by a perfect verb, rather than an infinitive, which does not make a suitable predicate" (*Hosea* 544).

¹⁶ For an opposing viewpoint see I. Eitan ("Hebrew and Semitic Particles—Continued," *AJSL* 45/3 [April 1929] 197-211). Eitan posits asseverative *lamed* in several linguistic contexts: (1) oath (Isa 8:20), (2) prefixed to the predicate (Lam 4:3), and (3) attached to the perfect (Hos 9:13). With the exception of Hos 9:13, however, in none of the examples that he cites is there an undisputed perfect with *lamed*. GKC 458 limits the use of asseverative *lamed* to nonverbal forms.

mouth! Like an eagle over the house of Yahweh." The blast of a trumpet warns of the approach of the enemy, and a verbal idea appropriate to an eagle over a house is implicit in the statement. We translate the second clause: "[The enemy swoops] like an eagle over the house of Yahweh."

In Hos 9:13 we need a verbal idea that will fit the linguistic equation: "Just as I have chosen for Tyre, so [] Ephraim to lead forth." Two linguistic forces at work in this verse give us a measure of control in determining the verbal concept on which *lēhōšî* may depend: (1) the binary structure of the verse, and (2) the fact that it forms a comparison clause. There are numerous instances in the poetic material of the OT where a verbal concept in the A line of a binary structure is implicit in the B line. Hosea 5:8a is a simple but adequate illustration of this. It states: "Blow the trumpet in Gibeah, [] the horn in Ramah." In comparison clauses we expect some degree of relational similarity. The verbal concept that responds best to these forces and that fits the linguistic equation is *rā'ā lē-* ("choose for"). It provides a verbal action that is appropriate to *lēhōšî* and that is also consonant with the comparative element *ka'āšer*. The translation that results is as follows: "Just as I have chosen [judgment] for Tyre, planted in [its] place, so [I have chosen for] Ephraim to lead forth its sons to the murderer."

This comparison with Tyre is similar to Amos 1:3-2:16, where the prophet grouped Israel and Judah with several pagan nations including Tyre (1:9-10) and pronounced divine judgment on all of them. If we view Hos 9:13 in this way it is a powerful amplification of the previous words: "Woe to them when I depart from them" (9:12). Without Yahweh, the northern kingdom was no different from Tyre. Ephraim was to suffer the same fate as her pagan neighbors.

The LXX renders Hos 9:13 in this way: *Ephraim, hon tropon eidon, eis thēran parestēsan ta tekna autōn, kai Ephraim tou exagagein eis apoken-tēsin ta tekna autou* ("Ephraim, as I saw, has given their children for a prey [*thēran*]; and Ephraim . . . to bring out his children to slaughter"). With the exception of *thēran* (which evidently stands for the Hebrew *ṣayid*, "hunting, game," BDB; not *šōr*), the LXX substantially represents the consonantal text of the MT, even to the extent of reflecting the ellipsis in the B line.

The word *parestēsan* ("has given") may indicate that the translators of the LXX read the first three letters of *šētûlâ* as *šātû* ("they gave") from *šît*. They may have understood the remaining *lâ* (if it was present in their texts) as a directive or reflexive element ("with regard to it"?), which they did not express in the translation. The words *ta tekna autōn* ("their children") appear to reflect the MT consonants *bnwh*, which the translators of the LXX may have read as *bnyh* ("her sons").

The MT appears to be superior to the LXX in Hos 9:13 because the translation of the LXX (as we have reconstructed it) has several severe grammatical anomalies that are foreign even to Hosea's unusual speech forms. One cannot explain *lâ* on *šētûlâ* as a separate reflexive element in the text of the MT. If we construe *ṣep̄rayim* as feminine and refer *lâ* to it,

the result is syntactically grotesque. It creates the anomaly of a singular feminine reflexive element (*lâ*) modifying a substantive (^ʿ*eprayim*) that is grammatically construed as a third person plural (*šātû*). If one posits the hypothetical *sayid* as the modifier of *lâ*, the result is an awkward redundancy with the *lamed* on *sayid*. It is also doubtful that *sayid* is feminine. If *bnwh* is read *bnyh* ("her sons"), then the writer assigned both feminine and masculine genders to ^ʿ*eprayim* within the scope of the same verse (*bnyw* in the second line has a masculine suffix). While the use of gender indicators in Hosea is not precise, nowhere else in the book can we find different genders assigned to "Ephraim" in such a narrow compass.

The translation suggested in this article is logically coherent and compatible with its context. It accords with constructs of the Hebrew language and attested aspects of the literary style of the book of Hosea. It will not win universal agreement, of course, but it illustrates that the MT deserves more serious consideration in 9:13 than it often receives. In my opinion, this is true of much of the book of Hosea.

It is axiomatic that the exegete must understand the constructs of a biblical author's language and style in order to represent the author's thoughts adequately. If the application of this age-old principle of literary interpretation can make sense out of what appears to be a fractured sentence in Hos 9:13, then we need more balance in the use of the exegetical tools we possess. I do not wish to demean critical methodologies. We need all the help we can get in interpreting literary materials that have undergone centuries of transmission. I wish only to say that if the MT can be shown to be a valid representation of logical thought, it deserves more consideration than it receives in modern Hosea studies.