

EXEGETICAL NOTES ON HOSEA 11:1-11

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Translation

When Israel was an infant, I loved him and called my son out of Egypt. They have called on *them*, thus they have departed from me—they—to the Baals they are sacrificing and to the idols they are offering up incense. Yet I myself taught Ephraim to walk, and I took them up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I healed them. With the cords of man I used to pull them along—with the ropes of love, and I was to them like those who remove (the) yoke upon their jaws in order that I might bend down to him and feed him.

He will return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria—he will be his king, for they have refused to repent [lit. return]. A sword will whirl round his cities and destroy his false prophets and consume them because of their counsels. But my people are clinging to apostasy from me, and God will be angry at his precious things, he will not exalt.

How can I deliver you up, O Ephraim, hand you over, O Israel?
How can I present you like Admah, make you like Zeboiim?

My heart is overthrown upon me, my consolation is altogether agitated. I will not execute my anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man, the holy one in your midst, and I will not come in rage.

They will walk after Yahweh, like a lion he will roar, indeed he himself will roar, in order that (his) sons may come trembling from the West. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like (the) dove from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares Yahweh.

כִּי נָעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶהְבֵּהוּ וּמִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבָנִי:
2 קָרָאוּ לָהֶם כִּן הִלְכוּ מִפְּנֵי הֵם¹ לְבַעֲלִים יִזְבְּחוּ וּלְפִסְלִים
יִקְטְרוּן: 3 וְאֲנֹכִי תִרְגַּלְתִּי לְאִפְרַיִם וְלִקְחָתָם³ עַל-זְרוּעֹתַי² וְלֹא
יָדְעוּ כִּי רַפְּאִיתִים: 4 בְּחִבְלֵי אָדָם אֲמַשְׁכֶּם בְּעִבְתוֹת אֶהְבֶּה
וְאֶהְיֶה לָהֶם כַּמְרִימִי עַל עַל לְחִיָּהֶם וְאֵט אֲלִיוֹ אוֹכִיל: 5 לֹא
יָשׁוּב אֶל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲשׁוּר הוּא מְלִפּוֹ כִּי מֵאֲנוּ לָשׁוּב: 6
וַחֲלָה חֶרֶב בְּעָרָיו וְכִלְתָּה בְּדָוִו וְאֶכְלָתָם⁴ מִמַּעֲצוֹתֵיהֶם: 7 וְעַמִּי
תָּלוּאִים לְמִשׁוֹבְתִי וְאֵל עַל יִקְרוּתָיו יַחַד⁵ לֹא יְרוּמָם: 8 אִיךְ
אֶתְנַךְ אִפְרַיִם אֲמֹנֶכֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אִיךְ אֶתְנַךְ כְּאֲדָמָה אֲשִׁימֶכֶךְ
כַּצְּבָאִים נְהַפֵּךְ עָלַי לְבִי יַחַד נִכְמְרוּ נְחוּמִי: 9 לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה
חֶרֶן אִפִּי לֹא אָשׁוּב לְשַׁחַת אִפְרַיִם כִּי אֵל אֲנֹכִי וְלֹא-אִישׁ
בְּקִרְבֶּךָ קָדוֹשׁ וְלֹא אָבוֹא בְּעִיר: 10 אֲחֲרֵי יְהוָה יִלְכוּ כְּאֲרִיָּה
יִשָּׂא כִּי-הוּא יִשָּׂא וְיִחַרְדּוּ בָנִים מִיָּם: 11 יִחַרְדּוּ כַצְּפוּר
מִמִּצְרַיִם וּכְיוֹנָה מֵאֶרֶץ אֲשׁוּר וְהִשְׁבַּתִּים⁶ עַל-בְּתֵיהֶם
נְאֻם-יְהוָה:

¹ MT = מִפְּנֵיהֶם. See notes below.

² MT = עַל-זְרוּעֵתָיו. The extra *waw* is an example of dittography.

³ MT = קָחָם which is certainly corrupt.

⁴ MT = וְאֶכְלָה.

⁵ MT = יַחַד עַל יִקְרָאוּ יַחַד. This is manifestly corrupt.

⁶ MT = וְהוֹשְׁבֵיהֶם. See notes below.

V.1

כִּי

According to Williams (445) temporal כִּי is only found in verbal clauses. While other possibilities exist here, the temporal sense seems to fit the context best, cf. Brown / Driver / Briggs (henceforth BDB) s.v. 2.a. A causative meaning does not make adequate sense (contra LXX, why would God love Israel because he was young?), and the less common emphatic meaning (“indeed”) should give way here to the more common temporal usage.

נַעַר

This noun can denote anything from an infant (cf. Ex. 3:6; I Sam. 4:21) to a young man / servant (cf. I Sam. 14:1). The implied contrast is between Israel as an infant (who still needs to learn to walk, cf. v.3) in Egypt, and a grown man in the eighth century BC, who has spurned the love of the father who saved, adopted and reared him up.

יִשְׂרָאֵל

The use of “Israel” here is deliberate as this verse reflects back on Yahweh’s description of Israel as his son at the time of the Exodus, Ex. 4:22 f. (cf. Dt. 14:1; 32:5-6). This relationship was the motivating factor for the final and most devastating plague. The LXX misses this connection by referring Israel to the historical person (Jacob) whose sons (pl) Yahweh summoned out of Egypt. According to BHS this is also the sense found in the targum. Matthew correctly translates MT.

וְאַהֲבָהוּ

Waw consecutive after an expression of time may be used to connect such expressions. The *waw* thus completes the sense of the temporal כִּי (i.e. when ... then). In such a case English often drops a copulative altogether, cf. GesK. 111b.⁷ For the same construction in connection with Yahweh’s deliverance from Egypt, cf. Dt. 4:37; 7:8.

וּבְמִוְצָרִים

The order here: *waw* + subject + predicate, is that of a circumstantial clause. Here the clause describes the love that Yahweh had for Israel. It was a love demonstrated in saving action.⁸ Reflection back to the exodus from Egypt is fairly prominent in Hosea, cf. 2:17; 12:10, 13:4 (cf. other historical allusions 9:10; 10:9).

קָרָאתִי

The verb קָרָא with ל of person is a regular construction for “summon,” BDB *sub verbum* 5.a.

V.2

קָרְאוּ לָהֶם

In total contrast to 1b comes the first line of v.2. Whilst Yahweh in love for his son so long ago had called him out of Egypt, Israel’s response has only been to call on “them.” In translation the tense here should be perfect, i.e. the reference is to Israel’s subsequent behaviour, not that at the time of the exodus specifically (cf. the present aspects in v.2b). The use of קָרָא with ל again here is deliberate. It heightens the unfaithful and unthankful response of Israel to Yahweh’s saving love. Those upon whom Israel has called are of course well known but their identification is not disclosed in the first half of the verse. One can almost feel the bitter reaction in referring to the Baals initially as “them,” those not even worthy to be named! There is a striking relation between the progression from v.1 to v.2 and Ex. 20:2 and following!⁹

⁷ It must be said that normally when *waw* following a temporal כִּי means “then,” the verb הִיָּה precedes the כִּי. Yet Waltke / O’Connor state that “the function of *waw* after non-finite verbal constructions is similar to its use after הִיָּה in the leading clause,” and proceeds to cite Hos. 11:1 as an example of this, see B. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 553.

⁸ Gispén does not really take this into account when he suggests that the love in the first half of the verse refers to the time before the exodus, thus “de verkiezende liefde van Jahwe,” see C. van Gelderen and W. H. Gispén, *Het boek Hosea. Commentaar op het Oude Testament* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1953) 380.

⁹ The suggestion that perhaps prophets are the subject of the verb here, calling Israel back, is not sufficiently indicated by the text (cf. Calvin, Van Gelderen / Gispén *ad loc.*).

כִּן הִלְכוּ מִפְּנֵי הָם

The כִּן here refers back to v.2a. The result of calling on them has been that they have departed from Yahweh. The text as pointed and divided in MT makes little sense. However the pointing and division as given here involves no change in the consonantal text and little change in the pointing. It is supported by the Peshitta and LXX.¹⁰ Thus the third person pronoun at the end of the line is emphatic, mirroring the use of the same pronoun after the first verb in the line. The same contempt with which הָם was coloured, is thus now given to הֵם (i.e. Israel). The pronoun thus reflects back, reinforcing the verb הִלְכוּ, and forward, as the subject of the next line. The use of the pronoun הֵם is common in Hosea (cf. 2:23,24; 3:1; 4:14; 8:4; 13:2).

לְבַעֲלִים

Clearly this is a plural here (cf. לָהֶם).¹¹ Although Baal was probably a single god, yet he was worshipped in many places and often with different emphases.¹² Thus the plural here probably refers to local Baals. Baal worship plagued Israel right from its early days even before entering the land of Canaan and throughout its history till the exile, cf. Num. 25; Jud. 6:25 ff.; I Ki. 16:30 ff., etc. Baal appears to have been a storm god who was also connected to a certain extent with fertility rites.¹³ It was Hosea's prophetic struggle throughout his ministry to combat Israel's love for the Baals, and point out Yahweh's love for Israel, cf. Hos. 2:10 ff. Hosea was acutely aware of Israel's history of love for Baal (cf. 9:10 – ref. to Num. 25; 13:1 ff.). The placement of the subject first in order not only serves to emphasise the horror of the sort of gods to whom Israel is sacrificing, but also finally identifies the לָהֶם of v.2a.

יִזְבַּח

This should be taken as referring to the contemporary practice of Israel in Hosea's time, and not as a frequentative imperfect of past action. It is an indictment on the Israel to whom Hosea was prophesying. The change of aspect from perfect in v.2a to imperfect is significant and thus emphasises the continuing practice of apostate Israel.

וּלְפִסְלִים

The synonymous parallelism intensifies Yahweh's complaint, cf. Ex. 20:4. הַפִּסְלִים are carved images of wood, stone, or metal, cognate to the verb פָּסַל "to hew into shape." The parallelism here reinforces the argument above that the Baals referred to are local manifestations of the one storm god Baal.

יִקְטְרוּ

"To offer up in smoke." The use of this verb here may point more specifically to incense (קְטֹרֶת) offerings, cf. BDB s.v. 2. The verbs זָבַח and קָטַר often appear in collocation (e.g. I Ki. 3:3; 11:8; 22:44; II Ki. 12:4; 16:4; II Chron. 28:4; Hos. 4:13 *et al.*). Together they serve to sum up the whole sacrificial ritual toward God / gods.

V.3

וְאֵנֹכִי

The circumstantial clause here is reinforced by the pronoun. It introduces a strong contrast to v.2. Israel is worshipping the Baals, yet Yahweh himself had taught Ephraim to walk, took him in his arms, in short, reared him up. It was Yahweh who did all this, not the Baals! In this verse Yahweh more strongly represents himself as a father figure to Israel.

¹⁰ The LXX in this verse supplements the כִּן by translating καθὼς at the beginning of the verse. This has been taken by many to presuppose a כ before the first verb (cf. BHS), but may only be a matter of producing a smooth translation. The first verb is taken as a first person by the LXX, a divergence easily explained by the proximity between ך and ך. MT should probably be preferred here, particularly as there is no pressing contextual need to have the first person and no other evidence which supports this reading.

¹¹ Even without the evidence of v.2a this should probably be taken as a regular plural and not a plural of respect, cf. M. J. Mulder, "Baal in the OT," in TDOT, vol. 2, 1983 (1977), 192.

¹² Witness the different epithets that were variously attached to his name, see J. C. de Moor, "The Canaanite Baal outside the OT," in TDOT, vol. 2, 185-192.

¹³ See De Moor, *op.cit.* De Moor notes that while there is little trace in Ugaritic material, nevertheless the Old Testament, late classical antiquity, and early Christianity all note that many obscene rites took place in the cult of the Baals and their partners (191).

תִּפְהֵל

The *Tiphel* form is rare in the Old Testament. For examples with other verbs see GesK 55h¹⁴. The lexicon of Koehler/Baumgartner *et al* in fact suggest that we might read a *Hiphel* form הִפְהֵל.

לְאֶפְרַיִם

Ephraim here stands, as it frequently does in Scripture, for the Northern kingdom. The tribe of Ephraim was the strongest of the Northern tribes and at the division of the kingdom it became the seat of the Northern king (Jereboam I). Hosea has a distinct predilection for the term “Ephraim,” using it more than any other prophet, some 37 times in comparison with a total of 29 occurrences in all the other prophets put together! (It is striking that Hosea does not use “Ephraim” in the first three chapters of his book) Thus the frequency of the use of “Ephraim” almost equals that of “Israel” (44 times). Some have attempted to explain his frequent use of “Ephraim” by pointing to the fact that the name “Hosea” itself appears to be an Ephraimite name,¹⁵ suggesting that perhaps Hosea himself was an Ephraimite.

קָחָם

The form קָחָם is most often taken as corrupt. Some (cf. GesK 19i) have suggested that it is a form of לָקַח (Qal perfect third person singular of לָקַח “to take,” plus third person masculine plural suffix) with the weak ל being an example of aphaeresis. This suggestion would fit with קָחָהֶם and its third person singular suffix, but does not explain the sudden and unexpected change of person in the verse.¹⁶ This change of person is all the more out of place, when it is realised that vs 1-7 uniformly represent Yahweh speaking in the first person. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any real evidence that such aphaeresis should be expected with ל.¹⁷ The verb behind קָחָם is indeed probably לָקַח as it easily fits the context and seems to be supported by the LXX (ἀνέλαβον).¹⁸ GesK itself recommends the emendation לָקַחָהֶם. The hypothesis of a third person plural suffix (and not singular as LXX) would seem to be supported by the *mem* in the MT and the plural verb in the next line. Thus I would support this reading which adds a missing ל and ה and reprints the remaining consonants.

עַל־זְרוּעֵתִי

The final *waw* rendering MT a third person singular suffix should be seen as an example of dittography (note the *waw* beginning the next line). This is supported by a few Hebrew mss as well as LXX, Syriac, and vulgate.

The image here is of Yahweh teaching Ephraim to walk and picking him up in his arms whenever he fell. The reference is evidently to the history of Israel, a history of learning to walk in the ways of Yahweh and yet time and again stumbling, only to be healed (i.e. delivered) each time again by Yahweh, though Israel did not appreciate this. The sequence of the book of Judges would seem to form a good illustration of this process. Although Hosea is primarily thinking of the Northern kingdom, it is clear that in placing them in the broader context of Yahweh’s saving dealings with His people, Hosea is also thinking of Israel’s history before the division of the kingdom, cf. v.1.¹⁹

¹⁴ The LXX συνεπόδισα (from συμποδίζω - “to tie the feet together”) is interesting here. The translation implies a resonance with Mishnaic Hebrew, where the passive participle (רָגוּל) denotes a tying together of the lower leg and thigh (see the lexicon of Koehler/Baumgartner *et al*). Is this a reference to some kind of parental practice with an infant in ancient times (as would seem to be indicated by the context in the LXX)? Similar or related perhaps to the medieval practice of binding an infant up hand and foot (another meaning of the verb) soon after birth?

¹⁵ “Hosea” was the original name of Joshua, an Ephraimite (Num. 13:8). Hosea was also the name of an Ephraimite chief officer over the Ephraimites under David (I Chron. 27:20,22). The only other “Hosea” in the OT was the last king of Israel who reigned from Ephraim. His tribe is not mentioned.

¹⁶ Gispén’s suggestion of an added note by the prophet really does no more than point to the very problem (Van Gelderen/ Gispén, 383).

¹⁷ Ezek. 17:5 is also usually regarded as corrupt.

¹⁸ Targum, Vulgate, and Peshitta also indicate this verb, and in the first person.

¹⁹ Keil (138) supposes an allusion to Dt. 1:31. I doubt this, but the verse does make an interesting comparison and could be homiletically a valuable reference in the explication of the verse. Keil, in these verses, tends to err on the side of attempting to relate every detail of the metaphors to events in the history of Israel. We should rather take the metaphors presented in this chapter as a whole and see the general point each is intending to make.

וְלֹא יָדְעוּ

The verb ידע is used no less than 16 times in Hosea. Time and again he stresses that the knowledge of Yahweh has been lost (5:4). Israel serves the Baals but do not know that it is Yahweh who gives grain, new wine, and oil (2:10). Despite their cry to know God, they have rejected the ways of Yahweh (8:2 ff.). And yet Yahweh has not forgotten Israel! He knows their apostasy (5:3) but calls them back to a true knowledge of himself (2:22; 6:3). It is probable that here (and also in 2:10) a meaning such as “acknowledge” is more fitting, cf. Ps. 51:5; Jer. 3:13; 14:20; Is. 59:12 (BDB s.v. qal 1.f). Here, in line with 2:10, Hosea again remarks how even when Yahweh was teaching Ephraim to walk they still did not acknowledge that it was Yahweh who was healing them when he picked them up after they stumbled. It was Yahweh who raised up judges, Yahweh who kept their enemies at bay, Yahweh who gave them rain and crops.

כִּי רָפְאוּתוֹ

Yahweh is represented in Hosea as the only one who can heal Israel (and Judah) of her wounds, cf. 6:1. Assyria cannot do it, cf. 5:13. These wounds are the wounds of sin and apostasy, cf. 7:1; 14:5 (cf. also Ex. 15:26b!). It is tempting to see a play upon words with אֶפְרַיִם, though this must remain no more than a suggestion.²⁰

V.4

בְּחַבְלֵי

The LXX interprets חבל as “destruction” (ἐν διαφθορῇ = KB root III). Most modern translators interpret it to be parallel to עֲבוּהוּ “rope” (= KB root II). That it should be taken in this latter sense is also supported by the fact that חבל in this sense elsewhere appears in connection with the verb מָשַׁךְ, cf. Is. 5:18 (where it is also paralleled by עֲבוּהוּ); Jer. 38:13. Nowhere else is חבל found in a construct relation with “man” or any kindred relation. Scripture elsewhere attests “cords of death / Sheol” (II Sam. 22:6; Ps. 18:5-6; 116:3; “cords of sin / deceit” (Prov. 5:22; Is. 5:18); “cords of affliction” (Job 36:8). In Ps. 119:61 we have “cords of (the) wicked” cf. Ps. 129:4 using the synonym עֲבוּהוּ. Personal study of six other possible synonyms did not yield any further helpful parallels.²¹

G. R. Driver in 1938 suggested another root for חבל in Hos. 11:4 meaning “leather” based on comparative philology.²² He viewed the text of Hos. 11:3-5 as corrupt and suggested a rather far-reaching emendation. Stating that “cords of man” is not a Semitic figure, he went on to suggest a cognate Arabic word meaning “skin.” In connection with another Arabic root cognate to חבל he understood the terms of our text to mean “bands of leather” and “bonds of hide” respectively.²³ We need to be particularly careful here however. Hess (among others), for instance, has rejected the meaning “leather,” though without much argumentation. His basic reason is that the comparative philological suggestion is not necessary because the Hebrew makes sense as it stands. This reason is valid, but is not all that one can say. It ought to be noted not only that Arabic is a rather late Semitic language,²⁴ but also that there are many words in Arabic cognate with Hebrew that

²⁰ Cf. F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company Inc. , 1980) 581.

²¹ When doing a word study it is important to pay attention to both the *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* relationships of the word concerned. Syntagmatic relationships have to do with how the word is commonly used in conjunction with other words. In this case, for example, the fact that חבל is elsewhere construed with מָשַׁךְ in the sense “cord” is a strong argument for interpreting it in this sense in our passage. Paradigmatic relationships have to do with the similar constructions using synonyms of the word studied. In this case we have considered whether there are similar metaphorical phrases using various words with the meaning “rope” which may help elucidate the metaphor in our text. See further M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Academie Books (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983) 119 ff.

²² *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1938), 161 f.

²³ With respect to חבל, H. H. Hirschberg (*Vetus Testamentum* 11 [1961] 373 f.) also took up the suggestion that its relation to an Arabic root meaning “(human) skin” and “(raw) leather” provides a Hebrew homonym meaning “leather” for Hos. 11:4 and S of Songs 3:10. He argues that the Arabic root must be related to the Ugaritic cognate (“to love” in a sexual sense), and so demonstrates a semantic development from “love” to “skin.” He then adduces what he conceives to be another semantic relation between “sexual love” and “skin.” I do not find this argument strong however. The relation between the Ugaritic root and the Arabic word is not really demonstrated. Furthermore, Ugaritic (a semitic language much closer to Hebrew than Arabic) clearly supports the traditional Hebrew meaning for the root חבל.

²⁴ See G. Bergsträsser, *Einführung in die semitischen Sprachen* (Munich, 1928) 134 f., cited in J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 114.

have little or no formal correspondence with Hebrew vocabulary.²⁵ Furthermore the state of Arabic lexicography itself is also highly problematic.²⁶ We ought therefore to be extremely weary of a comparative philological suggestion from Arabic, particularly when such a suggestion is made without an examination of the place and development of the suggested cognate word in Arabic itself. Suffice to say, Driver did not attempt this. In light of the many question marks yet remaining over this comparative philological relation, and the fact that the traditional Hebrew meanings do not seem to yield an impossible sense, I reject the suggestions of Driver.

The image in this verse changes to that of a master who lovingly removes the yoke of his domestic animals to allow them to feed. The phrase “cords of man,” given the parallel expression “bonds of love,” seems to imply a humane and loving way of leading a domestic animal along.

אֲמָשְׁכֶם

This verb literally means “to drag” or “to pull.” In Dt. 21:3 it is also used in connection with an animal pulled by a yoke (עַל).

בְּעֵבְתוֹת אֶהְבֶּה

If אֶהְבֶּה is taken as “love” then a possible (later) parallel may be Jer. 31:3, which is also in the context of Yahweh’s love for Israel. It is striking that Jeremiah in the same pericope, speaking of Ephraim’s restoration, refers to him as his first born son (Ex. 4:22—cf. Hosea’s similar allusion in this chapter). Thus Jeremiah also speaks of dragging / pulling (מָשַׁךְ) Israel with love (אֶהְבֶּה in parallel with חָסֵד).

כְּמָרְיָמִי עַל לְחִיָּהֶם

To place a עַל (yoke) upon an animal, the verb עַל + נָחַ is usually used (Dt. 28:48; I Ki. 12:4,9; II Chron. 10:4,9; Jer. 28:14). However verbs meaning “to go up,” “to lift” are also frequently used in the sense of placing a yoke upon an animal (עַל + עָלָה Num. 19:2; I Sam. 6:7; עָמַס + עַל hiph. I Ki. 12:11; II Chron. 10:11; נָשָׂא Lam. 3:27). For this reason we would seem to expect רוּם hiph. + עַל to mean placing a yoke upon an animal, and not lifting it off. The context however appears to demand the opposite. The yoke here must be taken off to allow the animal to feed.²⁷ Further lexical study confirms this, for whilst, for example, עַל + עָלָה often refers to putting on (e.g. garment Lev. 19:19; Ezek. 44:17; razor Jud. 13:5; 16:17; I Sam. 1:11), רוּם hiph. is elsewhere used for removing things (e.g. memorial portion Lev. 2:9; fat Lev. 4:8,19; flour Lev. 6:8 [Eng. v.15]; obstacle Is. 57:14; crown Ezek. 21:31 [Eng. v.26]), i.e. lifting them off. The only problem that still remains is the use of the preposition עַל. We should pay careful attention to the word order and note that עַל לְחִיָּהֶם directly follows עַל. This could suggest the reading “the yoke (which is) upon their jaws.” This is the only time עַל is used in conjunction with “jaws.” The specific reference to jaws should be seen in connection with the reference in this verse to feeding.²⁸

וְאָט אֶלְיוֹ

The verb וְאָט here should be taken in the sense of “bend down,” “incline” (KB s.v. hif. 4.; BDB hif. 3.). The hiphil is usually transitive but there are other occurrences of an intransitive use (cf. Is. 30:11; Amos 2:8). The metaphor of one bending down to feed an animal is what is here envisaged.²⁹ וְ + imperfect should be taken, as is customary, as a purpose clause.

אוֹכִיל לוֹ

A *waw* is possibly missing in the text of the MT by haplography, although the LXX appears to support the

²⁵ See Barr, *op.cit.*, 162. This fact alone should make us very cautious.

²⁶ See Barr, *op.cit.*, 114 ff.

²⁷ Note that this appears to be the only place in Scripture where a yoke is taken off an animal. There are therefore no parallel passages which may be used for comparison.

²⁸ It should be noted that it is not really to the point here to wax eloquent on the use of the word “yoke” as a symbol of oppression (cf. D. Stuart, *Hosea - Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary 31 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987] 179). The word occurs in the midst of a metaphor picturing Yahweh’s tender care for his people. Compare the comment re: Keil above.

²⁹ Gispen (Van Gelderen / Gispen, 384, cf. Keil, 139) opts for what he admits is the difficult reading of אָט as the noun (normally with לוֹ) meaning then here “gentle” (cf. Calvin *ad loc.*). Yet, as I have noted, the intransitive use of the hiphil וְאָט has precedent and on the whole seems a more likely interpretation.

MT here (omitting a copulative). The first word of v.5 in MT (אֵל) should be taken with v.4 and read לוֹ (אֵל for לוֹ and vica versa is a not uncommon textual error). This reading is suggested by the way codex Leningradensis is written and spaced,³⁰ and supported by the LXX (αὐτῷ). See below for further arguments relating to v.5 itself. Although אֵל regularly takes a direct object, the use of לוֹ here (on my reading of the text) is not a weighty enough consideration to challenge this reading (see e.g. Williams 273).

V.5

Enough! Israel's apostasy can no longer be tolerated (cf. theme of chapter 1f). In the words of Ex. 22:20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to Yahweh alone, shall be utterly destroyed." Covenant punishment is thus announced.

יָשׁוּב

The correlation between a return (in judgement) to Egypt and to Assyria occurs also in Hos. 9:3, cf. 8:13; 9:6 where a return to Egypt is also prophesied. Zech. 10:10-11 contains the same parallel with respect to the exile of the Northern kingdom. Furthermore in Hos. 11:11 and 12:2 (Eng. v.1) Assyria and Egypt are also paralleled, cf. the covenant curse in Dt. 28:68.³¹ For this reason to take אֵל with v.5 is distinctly out of place.³² When the arguments above, relating to v.4 are also considered, the case for the proposed reading of the text is quite strong.

מֵאֲנִי לְשׁוּב

The verb שׁוּב is used all of 22 times by Hosea, 6 times of returning to God (5:4; 6:1; 7:10; 12:7; 14:2,3; cf. 7:16; 3:5). Here, as in 3:5, it is used absolutely, virtually equivalent to the sense of "repent," cf. BDB s.v. 6.d.

V.6

וְחָלָה חֵרֵב

KB separate the root חוּל (to dance) from חָיַל (to writhe in pain) as partial homonyms, however BDB does not. Thus in KB's separation, the respective verbs do in the main conform to their paradigms, though חָיַל sometimes takes forms of חוּל. Is there a relation in meaning between these verbs or should they merely be treated as partial homonyms?³³ The latter seems to be the trend in modern studies. This is perhaps reinforced by Ugarit which has both forms, חוּל and חָיַל, meaning "to be in labour," and "to dance" respectively.³⁴ Even-Shoshan goes further separating three homonyms under חוּל.³⁵ The third consists merely of those examples of חָיַל taking the form of חוּל. To the first he gives the meaning "to dance," and to the second (within which our passage is contained) he assigns the meaning "to fall (upon)" (these passages are Hos. 11:6; Lam. 4:6; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; II Sam. 3:29). Eising considers this (second division) merely a metaphorical use of חוּל "to

³⁰ The strength of this argument is perhaps debatable.

³¹ It is interesting to ask whether this actually took place. King Hoshea did have contact with Egypt at the time of the invasion by Shalmanezzer V (in fact this contact combined with refusal to pay tribute provoked the attack, cf. II Ki. 15:3 ff.). Although not mentioned in the biblical text, it is not inconceivable that some fled to Egypt upon Shalmanezzer's appearance. Dt. 28:68 and the prophecies of Hosea may thus have been fulfilled. Note that Hosea in our text makes a distinction between the exile to Egypt, and that to Assyria which he clearly intimates will be the dominating power. Others however have seen the references to Egypt in Hosea as merely a typological / metonymic reference to the land of Israel's oppression, (e.g. Stuart, 179). The text would seem rather to suggest a literal fulfilment. We must remember that we are not in possession of a detailed critical historical report of the history of the downfall of Israel and Judah. Many (politically) important events occurred of which we have little or no knowledge.

³² Gispén (Van Gelderen/ Gispén, 385) argues that it should be interpreted as *nonne* and cites Ex. 8:22; II Ki. 5:26; and Jon. 4:11 as further examples of this phenomenon. Yet I still doubt whether this is correct. In the examples from Ex. 8:22 and Jon. 4:11 the immediate context demands a question. Yet it is by no means clear that it is the אֵל that indicates such (cf. e.g. Keil on Jon. 4:11 who argues that it is וְאֵינִי that suggests a question, together with context). II Ki. 5:26 is more difficult, but the text is sometimes treated as reading אֵל on the strength of the LXX (cf. T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary 13 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985] *ad loc.*). Here, when all considerations are weighed together, the strength of the evidence still suggests emendation as the best solution.

³³ For this discussion I am in part indebted to Barr's discussion on homonymity *op.cit.*, 125-155. As Barr has argued, the existence of partial homonyms in any language represents little problem in communication and therefore no objection can be raised on that score, *op.cit.* cf. 130.

³⁴ See Eising, TDOT, vol. 4, 261.

³⁵ A. Even-Shoshan (ed. *A New Concordance of the Bible: Thesaurus of the Language of the Bible Hebrew and Aramaic Roots, Words, Proper Names Phrases and Synonyms* [Jerusalem: "Kiryat Sefer" Publishing House Ltd., Sivan, 1989]).

dance,” though he does recognise that even this is harsh in II Sam. 3:28.³⁶ However, since there appears to be no external testimony for separating another homonym meaning “to fall upon,” I would agree with Eising and view, for example, this passage in Hosea as a metaphorical use of הוֹל “to dance.”³⁷

The personification of the sword here is reminiscent of the covenantal curse in Lev. 26:25,33.

וּכְלָתָהּ בְּדִי

The crucial question here is the meaning of בַּד. BDB divides the word into three homonyms, one meaning “linen,” another covering all the senses from “part,” “portion,” “alone,” to “limb,” “pole,” and “bar,” and a third meaning “idle talk(er).” The second rather extensive division may or may not be historically correct, but it is hard to conceive that, for instance, the meaning “bar” would have been, to the mind of the average Hebrew, linguistically related to the meaning “alone.”³⁸ Thus KB would seem to have a point when they separate more homonyms. In fact they list five. I. “portion,” “solitude,” II. “carrying poles,” “shoots,” III. “linen,” IV. “loose talk,” and V. “oracle priest.” Even-Shoshan has three homonyms I. “shoot,” “pole for carrying,” “bone,” “linen,” II. “portion,” “alone,” etc. III. “falsehood” (wherein he places KB’s text for “oracle priest” Is. 44:25; as BDB also does). Without further evidence, it is difficult for me to see how the meaning “linen” could be related to “shoot,” “pole,” or “bone.” Thus with KB I would be inclined to at least separate those texts.³⁹

With regard to the meaning of בַּד in Hos. 11:6, BDB provides the meaning “bar” of a gate, as does Goldberg.⁴⁰ Even-Shoshan however classifies it under those texts meaning “bones.” The meaning “bones” or “limbs” is not in dispute for certain texts, however Hos. 11:6 is not always classed here. Whilst the meaning “bars” (of a gate) would seem to render the phrase in parallel with “cities,” nevertheless this would then be the only occurrence of בַּד meaning the bar of a gate (the more usual word for this being בַּרְיָה—a word that seems to have been used in all periods⁴¹). Furthermore, the word “gate” is not in our text, and there is no evidence that בַּד by itself has the specialised meaning of “gate-bar.” The meaning “bone(s),” however, would on the one hand stand adequately by itself, and would seem to fit the context, i.e., of a sword whirling around the cities, and of the next verb “devouring them.” However whilst I was at first inclined to accept Even-Shoshan’s definition for this text, another alternative seems even better. That is בַּד in the sense of “empty talker” (BDB III. b; = KB V). As mentioned above, both BDB and Even-Shoshan relate this concrete meaning of בַּד in texts like Is. 44:25 and Jer. 50:36 to the abstract meaning “empty talk,” “falsehood,” cf. Job 11:3; Is. 16:6; Jer. 48:30. This would seem at least probable. Yet it ought to be realised that in both Is. 44:25 and Jer. 50:36 the term seems to be used in a technical sense to designate an official office (probably false prophets). In Is. 44:25 it is directly parallel with חֲקִימִים and in Jer. 50:36 appears in the context of Babylonian שָׂרִים (officials), חֲקִימִים (wise men), and גְּבוּרִים (mighty men). A meaning such as “false prophet” then would seem to be warranted and also fits in the context of Hos. 11:6. Yahweh has already said that the people will be exiled, but he now continues to add that the false prophets who counselled them (in their abominations) will be devoured by the sword along with the cities.

וְאִכְלָתָם

Whether or not a third person plural suffix was originally in the text (as I have suggested as a possibility in line with BHSn), or not, it is surely implied.⁴² The *mem* may have been lost by haplography and the ה later taken for a ה under the influence of the necessity to conform to the verbal paradigm then required. For a

³⁶ *Op.cit.*, 261.

³⁷ I am, at least, not aware of any philological treatment identifying any suitable proto-Semitic cognate root that would explain and justify the homonym “to fall upon.” One might further add that, although in Even-Shoshan’s division there are no specific overlaps in form between הוֹל I and II, the verb is so rarely attested that one would suspect that many such overlaps would have occurred in reality (cf. Barr, 147 “We should consider not only how many forms there are which have homonyms but also, where a form has homonymity at all, how many homonyms it is likely to have.” And p.149 “... forms which are not attested may nevertheless have occurred.”) Even so it is perhaps debatable whether communicative efficiency would have been diminished by homonyms meaning “dance” and “fall.” Given a satisfactory reading of MT, there is thus no need for proposed emendations, cf. Stuart, 175 for some suggestions.

³⁸ See, for interesting points made on polysemy and homonymy as perceived by the user of the language, Silva, *op.cit.* 37.

³⁹ A full treatment of the possible roots behind all these meanings is beyond the scope of these notes and of limited relevance to the exegesis.

⁴⁰ L. Goldberg in TWOT, s. v. .

⁴¹ At least it is found in books from the Pentateuch through to post exilic times.

⁴² An argument against adding the suffix is the evidence of the LXX which also seems to omit it.

similar expression of God's judgement, cf. Dt. 32:42.

מִמְעֻצוֹתֵיהֶם

The מן here is causative (Williams 319). Reference to the wicked counsel of Israel in connection with judgement (and exile to Assyria) is also made in 10:6. Causative מן is also used there.

V. 7

וְעַמֵּי תְלוּאִים לְמִשׁוֹבְתֵי

Although difficult, the MT here can be maintained. It is also supported by the LXX (which differs only in the person of the suffixes).⁴³ The clause is circumstantial in an adversative sense. Yahweh having announced the covenant judgment to come, reflects again on their stubborn rebellion. תְלוּא is a variant form of תלה "to hang" (GesK 75rr). The form תְלוּא is found elsewhere (Dt. 28:66, cf. Josh. 10:26). The verb generally goes with על "to hang on," but here as in Dt. 28:66 only, it is found with ל in the metaphorical sense of "clinging to." The suffix to the verb שׁוּב should be taken in an objective sense "apostasy from me."

וְאֵל עַל יִקְרוֹתָיו יִחַר

This line is manifestly corrupt in the MT.⁴⁴ I have tentatively followed my own retroversion from the LXX which preserves rather closely the consonantal text of MT. Was the pronominal suffix changed to a verbal suffix when the text was confused with the verb יִקְרָא? I am inclined to think that perhaps the LXX also made the best of a very confused text and read יִקְרָאֵהוּ as well. The final word on this line has not been said. In my text יִקְרוֹת should be read as a substantive (BDB s.v. 1.b., cf. Ps. 45:10). The suffix refers to Israel, and the substantive itself to what Israel regarded as precious (certainly not what Yahweh would have them regard as precious!) The fact that God would here be speaking of himself in the third person is no objection for this way of speaking is more common in Hosea, heightening the royal majesty of his speech, cf. 1:2; 2:22; 4:10; 5:4,6.

לֹא יְרוּמָם

There may or may not have been a copulative here (as per LXX).

V.8

Again we see a change in the nature of the prophecy. The message of covenant judgement is followed by a message of covenant restoration. The judgment will not be a total and complete wipe out as was the case with Admah and Zeboiim. Yahweh will not return again (v.9, i.e. another time) to finish them off. Rather the pattern of Yahweh's dealings here follows that outlined in Dt. 4:25-31, and also in the well known Song of Moses (Dt. 32, esp. v.26f)⁴⁵.

Admah and Zeboiim were two cities apparently situated in the same valley as Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 10:19; 14:2,8). According to Dt. 29:22 (Eng. v.23) they shared in the devastating destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, their land being turned to brimstone and salt (thereby making it completely impossible to grow anything there). In Dt. 29 this judgement is used as an example of curse of the covenant to fall upon Israel if they prove unfaithful to Yahweh's covenant and go after the idols of the nations. Yahweh by referring to Dt. 29:22 makes it quite clear that the apostasy of Israel has rendered them liable to the awful covenant curse.

נִהְפָךְ עָלַי לְבִי

There is possibly a play on words here with Dt. 29:22 (Eng. v.23), referred to above, wherein Moses records how Yahweh overthrew (הִפָּךְ) Sodom and Gomorrah along with Admah and Zeboiim. At that time he overthrew Admah and Zeboiim in his wrath, but now his heart is overthrown upon him (i.e. agitated). Thus

⁴³ E. Tov has shown that the LXX has an etymological interpretation here, see *The Text-critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, Jerusalem Biblical Studies 3 (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1981) 247. The third person suffix is possibly from a dittographic reading of waw.

⁴⁴ Out of interest, the MT pointing of יִקְרָאֵהוּ ("he calls him") is unusual. The *qames* under the *resh* seems to be pausal (we would expect vocal *shewa*). Possibly this is effected by the secondary pause (*zaqeph qaton*) in the text above the *aleph*.

⁴⁵ Did Hosea work with Dt. 32 in the background (cf. Dt. 32:21 with Hos. 1:9)?

although somewhat unusual in English, I prefer a fairly literal translation here.⁴⁶ The parallel of לְבִי with נְחוּמִי may suggest that “heart” should here be interpreted in the sense of emotions, or even comfort (cf. the expression “to speak to the heart” meaning “to comfort” Gen. 34:3; Is. 40:2).⁴⁷

יָחַד נִכְמְרוּ נְחוּמִי

This is an idiom also found in Gen. 43:30 and I Ki. 3:26 (both using רָחַם with כָּמַר).⁴⁸

V.9

חֲרוֹן אַפִּי

This expression (lit. “the glow of my nose”) is a common metaphor for “anger.” Its use with the verb עָשָׂה occurs also in I Sam. 28:18 (= “to execute anger”).

לֹא אָשׁוּב לְשַׁחַת

The verb שׁוּב with another verb, is frequently idiomatic for “again,” e.g. Gen. 26:18; Is. 6:13 *et al* (BDB s.v. 8.; KB s.v. 5., cf. GesK 114n²). This places the context of this portion of the prophecy squarely in the future, i.e. after the destruction and exile of 722 BC. Yahweh will not return to finish them off.

כִּי אֵל אֲנֹכִי וְלֹא-אִישׁ

The point here (in context) seems to be that Yahweh’s covenant punishment is not the same as man’s spiteful anger and total vengeance. The wrath of the covenant is not man’s wrath. Yahweh’s covenant dealings with Ephraim work towards an end, that end is repentance and restoration. Thus Yahweh also brings his holiness into view. I am led to think here of Ps. 99 where Yahweh’s holiness (a thrice recurring theme in this psalm dividing the stanzas) is related to his justice, a justice that while on the one hand avenges, yet also forgives (cf. v.8).

בְּעִיר

This is difficult. The form is not verbal which leaves us with עִיר + בְּ if we do not wish to emend (an unlikely option given that LXX clearly read the MT text translating εἰς πόλιν). Despite the LXX, the translation “city” is not contextually an attractive option. Apart from the word meaning “city” BDB isolates a homonym with the meaning “excitement” citing Jer. 15:8; Hos. 11:9 (i.e. rage) and Ps. 73:20. KB similarly isolates a homonym meaning “agitation,” and cites Jer. 15:8 as an applicable text and probably also Hos. 11:9. In Jer. 15:8 a parallel word is בְּהִלּוֹת “terror.” Barr (125-126) mentions several suggestions that have been made from comparative philology including (for Hos. 11:9) “excitement,” “reviling,” and “fire” or “heat.” Only the first suggestion seems to have caught on, and without examining the other suggestions in detail I accept this in the sense of “agitation,” or “furore.”

V.10

אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה יֵלְכוּ

The indirect object is placed first for emphasis. A physical return to the holy land will only take place with a consequent spiritual return to Yahweh, their God.

כְּאַרְיֵה יִשְׂאֵן

The lion appears to have been a popular image associated both with kings and gods in the ancient near East. It was used to symbolise fierceness, rage, and majesty.⁴⁹ The Old Testament records similar qualities in the lion. That the lion’s roar causes trembling is also noted in Am. 3:8. Indeed the prophet Amos depicts Yahweh as roaring his judgements from Zion (1:2; cf. Job 37:4). In Hos. 5:14 Yahweh had said that he would be like a lion to Ephraim and Judah. This was spoken in a judgemental context, for Yahweh would tear them up (cf. Ps. 50:22) and carry them away (i.e. into exile) with none to deliver (cf. 13:7; Lam. 3:10 f.). Yet here in our text the same image is used of the saving Yahweh (cf. Is. 31:4-5)! As a lion he roars and summons his people

⁴⁶ A translation such as this should of course reference the intended wordplay with Dt. 29:22.

⁴⁷ See Andrew Bowling s.v. in TWOT. Stuart’s interpretation (*ad loc.*) “change the *mind*” (my italics) does not do justice to the parallelism, but ‘heart’ in Hebrew does indeed have more to do with the mind or intent than with the emotions, which are more often associated with the kidneys.

⁴⁸ The suggestion in BHSn to emend Hosea’s נְחוּמִי to נְחֻמִּי is completely unnecessary.

⁴⁹ G. J. Botterweck, TDOT, vol. 1, 374-388.

back to him. The image used stresses the humility with which his people return. They come trembling at his call, not at their own instigation, or by their own doing. This aspect is reinforced in v.11.

וַיִּחַרְרוּ בָנָיִם

Waw imperfect should, as customary, be here taken as a purpose clause. The verb *חרר* can have the meaning (as here) “to go / come trembling,” cf. Gen. 42:28; I Sam. 13:7; 16:4; 21:2; Hos. 3:5 as well as this verse and the next (BDB *s.v.* 4.; KB *s.v.* 2.).

That Yahweh here calls Israel “sons” is highly significant. The return will mean that a restoration of the covenant relationship, the same relationship that Yahweh had when Israel was an infant (11:1). Thus the pericope comes full circle. Just as Yahweh called his son out of Egypt so long ago, so also he will in the future, also bring his sons back to their homes in the promised land.

מִיָּם

From the “sea” or “west.” What precisely is meant here is unclear to me. Gispén (Van Gelderen / Gispén, 393) suggests “de verschillende windstreken” and compares Is. 11:11. But the problem here is that only one compass region seems to be signified (and if Egypt and Assyria are included as North and South, what of the East?). Andersen / Freedman suggest that the seas mark the east-west extremities and cite texts as Amos 8:12; Zech. 9:10; Ps. 72:8. But the expression “from sea to sea” is not what is found here. Thus I remain uncertain as to the exact meaning at this point. Sometimes it is better to admit uncertainty than to side with an interpretation one is not convinced of.

V.11

The verb *חרר* is repeated here for emphasis. Yahweh is deliberately emphasising the attitude of the returning exiles. He compares this trembling to that of birds (*צפור* is a generic term). Birds are used to symbolise a variety of things in the Old Testament, but it appears that only here are they used in connection with trembling. See further below.

The phrases “from Egypt,” and “from the land of Assyria,” should not be taken as a further specification of the kinds of birds. Rather the sons of Yahweh come trembling from Egypt and Assyria. Yahweh had prophesied that Israel would be exiled to these places, e.g. v.5. For the connection often made between Egypt and Assyria, see above under v.5.

וּכְיוֹנָה

We need to ask why the dove has been specifically singled out here. Is there a quality of the dove that serves as a point of reference? Botterweck has suggested that it is the haste of the dove returning home.⁵⁰ He then compares Is. 60:8 (cf. Ps. 55:7). It is true that Israel is pictured as returning home, but there is no hint in the text of an emphasis on haste.⁵¹ Hosea elsewhere uses the dove to symbolise a lack of sense (7:11). Another Old Testament use of the dove is to symbolise moaning (cf. its cooing, Is. 59:11; Ezek. 7:16; Nah. 2:8). But here, as noted above, the specific point of comparison is that of “trembling.” Botterweck does not reference any comparison of the dove to trembling, either in the Old Testament or in the ancient near East generally. That does not necessarily mean, however, that such a connection never existed in the minds of the ancients. Certainly in classical Greece the dove was frequently used as an image of trembling or fright. Thus it may be quite deliberate that the image in this verse moves from birds in general to the dove in particular. There may well be a deliberate allusion in this verse to 7:11. The stupid dove that called to Egypt and went to Assyria will return trembling!

וְהִשְׁבַּתִּים עַל-בְּתֵיהֶם

⁵⁰ TDOT vol. 6, 37.

⁵¹ Stuart’s suggestion (175) that *חרר* should be translated “hurry” because “the basic sense is to “jump” or “shake”“ reveals a lack of sensibility to basic principles of semantics. In the first place what is meant by “basic sense”? This statement seems to belie an unwarranted faith in what James Barr has called the root fallacy (*Semantics*, 100 ff., cf. 115 ff. where some examples from N. H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, are raked over the coals). In the second place there is no justification for the leap in meaning from “jump” to “hurry.” In the third place there is no argumentation to justify this semantic development, its effect on the lexical stock, its relation to established principles of semantic change, etc. In short the suggestion of Stuart, without further documentation, is whimsical to say the least and ignores several decades of important semantic discussion.

The verb here in the hiphil sense of “cause to dwell (remain)” (as pointed in BHS) regularly takes the accusative of person and ב of place, cf. Gen. 47:6; Lev. 23:43; I Sam. 12:8; 30:21; II Ki. 17:6,(24),26; Ps. 143:3; Lam. 3:6; Ezek. 26:20 and also (significantly) Hos. 12:10. Only in the MT would it appear to take accusative of person with על apparently meaning “in.” This meaning is not generally attested for על. Therefore KB, BHSn and BDB suggest reading וַיְשִׁבְתֵּם. This is supported by the LXX which reads καὶ ἀποκαταστήσω αὐτοὺς εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν. The LXX uses ἀποκαθίστημι (“to restore,” “to return”) twelve times to translate the hiphil of שׁוּב in the Old Testament (besides this text). The emendation itself requires only some repointing together with the dropping of a *waw*, which may have come into the text only later anyway as (an interpretative) *mater lectionis*. With this reading the preposition makes more sense, as על and ב are frequently interchangeable in Biblical Hebrew.