CHAPTER 2

The Nations in Hosea

Particularly with respect to the various theories that advocate reading the Twelve as a literary whole, Hosea is a puzzling point of departure for the collection. It is the only book of the Twelve that includes no address whatsoever to the nations, and the nations-theme paradoxically removes the nations from the scene. To a significant extent this can be explained by Hosea’s focus on Israel/Judah as the only and exclusive metaphorical spouse for YHWH and by the corresponding relegation of the nations to a secondary role. Despite the unusual way that Hosea treats the nations-theme, however, it can still be studied productively in the larger context of the Twelve.¹

2.1 Terminology

We begin with a survey of Hosea’s terminology for non-Israelite entities. Unlike many other books in the Twelve, Hosea rarely speaks of the ‘nations’ with general terms for ethnic groups or states, preferring either proper nouns or oblique references to such groups via metaphor (‘lovers’) or metonymy (‘the great king’ [of Assyria]).

2.1.1 Proper Nouns

These include, first, Egypt and Assyria, nations to the southwest and northeast of Israel, respectively, whose historic importance for Israel was, at least by the eighth century, unsurpassed.² Egypt (2:15; 7:11; 8:13; 9:3, 6; 11:5, 11; 12:1[11:12], 9[12:8], 13[12:12]; 13:4; once the Egyptian city of Memphis, 9:6) and Assyria (5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 9:3; 10:6; 11:5, 11; 12:1[11:12]; 14:4[3]) usually occur together in Hosea, and in such contexts they are either a potential source of political/military aid or

¹ Note especially H.M. Barstad, “Hosea and the Assyrians,” in Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period (ed. R.P. Gordon and H.M. Barstad; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 91–110, which also deals with Hosea’s references to Egypt.

² Note the detailed survey of occurrences of Egypt and Assyria in F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 24; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 469.
the place of Israel’s future exile.\(^3\) When Egypt appears alone, it is usually in passages that refer to the exodus (2:15) or to the reversal of the exodus in exile (8:13), or to the place where YHWH’s relationship with national Israel began (12:9[8], 13[12]; 13:4). Once Egypt by itself is the destination of Israel’s future exile (9:6). When Assyria occurs by itself it is either the focus of contemporary Israel’s political hopes (5:13; 8:9) or the unintended destination of a vassal payment in the form of a cult object (10:6).

The reference to the destruction of Beth-Arbel by Shalman in 10:14 continues to puzzle interpreters since Shalmaneser III, Shalmaneser V, and Salamanu king of Moab are among the possible referents.\(^4\) Historical distance from the book’s eighth-century setting makes Shalmaneser III less likely than Shalmaneser V, and Salamanu’s submission to Assyria makes it unlikely that one vassal would go marauding against another.\(^5\) But as Ben Zvi points out, the verse is not at all forthcoming if Shalmaneser V is indeed in view, and for our purposes we can simply conclude that a non-Israelite king destroyed an Israelite city in the Transjordan in a particularly violent and brutal fashion.

A few other obscure passages may refer to non-Israelite nations. While רִב in 9:13 can be read as ‘Tyre,’ it is difficult to make sense of such a reference in context, and the mention of planting makes a botanical referent much more likely.\(^6\) A king (רְבֶּךָ מֶלֶךְ) appears twice (5:13; 10:6), both times in parallel with Assyria as the focus of Israel’s hopes or tribute. While several interpretative options exist, the words should probably be read as the ‘great king’ (מֶלֶךְ רְבֶּךָ), and thus as a reference to Assyria’s king.\(^7\)

Finally, two locales are mentioned. Baal Peor is mentioned as the site at which Israel ‘consecrated itself’ to participation in Baal worship with the

---


5. “Salamanu of the land of Moab” appears in a list in one of Tigrath-Pileser III’s royal inscriptions (K3751) of “newly subjugated western vassals and their tribute” covering the years 738, 734. See H. Tadmor and S. Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tigrath-Pileser III (744–727 BC), and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC)*, *Kings of Assyria* (RINAP 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 122 (text 48, rev. 7’–13’).


7. As BFS and J. Jeremias suggest (*Der Prophet Hosea* [ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983], 130), although A. Gelston, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (BHQ 13; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010), 60*, notes that both G and S confirm the word division presented in the Massoretic text. Barstad, “Hosea and the Assyrians,” 107–110, cites some of the relevant literature and argues that the term refers to Jeroboam.