

THE WOMAN FROM HOSEA 3:1-3. THE PROPHET'S WIFE OR A SECOND WIFE?

Pr. dr. Ioan-Lucian RADU

Redactor-șef, Editura Doxologia, Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei

Abstract

*In order to illustrate the intimate relationship between God and the people of Israel, a metaphor that represents God as a husband, and Israel as His wife appears in the prophetic books, and the first prophet to present this metaphor is Hosea. Overall, the metaphor knows different approaches among researchers and has created many controversies. One controversy is given by the command received by Hosea in 3:1 and takes into account the identity of the presented woman, which is mostly interpreted to be a second woman that the prophet receives the commandment to marry. In my study I will make a grammatical and contextual analysis of Hosea 3:1, focusing on the expression *וַיֹּמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי עֹד גֵּרָה לְךָ* (wayōmer yehwāh 'ēlay 'ōd lēk), and I will analyze whether the Masoretic Text supports the theory asserting that Hosea has married for the second time.*

Keywords: marriage metaphor, second marriage, Hosea, slave.

Hosea is the first prophet to speak about the metaphor of marriage between God and Israel. Hosea receives the mission to marry a notorious harlot and this strange act commanded by God is interpreted as an image of the fact that Israel, the people committed to God through the Covenant from Mount Sinai, has voluntarily left Him and turned to the veneration of the idols. Thus the marriage is an image of the relationship between God and the humans, and the harlotry is an image of idolatry.

The image of God's marriage to humans appears in the Book of the Hosea three times and each time it has the same structure: the presentation of Israel's infidelity of God, the punishment and the restoration of Israel.

In Chapter 3 it is presented the third picture of the divine-human marriage, with a few differences from the others: if in the first two situations there was a woman who, although she was unfaithful, was still in her husband's house, the woman in this case is in a different situation: she is no longer with her husband and she is in slavery.

For this verse, there is a rather intense debate about the identity of this woman whose name is not presented. The researchers are divided into two sides: one holds that it was impossible for this woman to be the prophet's wife because of the terminology used¹, and the other side claims that this was really Gomer, but its social status was different from that in Chapter 1².

In the table below there is a comparison of the four most important classical texts. The differences between the Masoretic Text and the others are pointed in italics.

MT	LXX	Itala	Vulgata
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי עוֹד לְךָ אֶהְבֶּ-אִשָּׁה אֲהַבֶּת רַע וּמְנַאֲפֶת כְּאֲהַבֶּת יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהֵם פְּנִים אֶל-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְאֲהַבֵי אֲשֵׁי עֲנָבִים:	καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς με ἔτι πορεύ- θητι καὶ ἀγάπησον γυναῖκα ἀγαπῶσαν πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλίν καθὼς ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀποβλέ- πουσιν ἐπὶ θεοὺς ἄλλοτριούς καὶ φι- λοῦσιν πέμματα μετὰ σταφίδων	Et dixit Do- minus ad me: Adhuc vade et dilige mulie- rem <i>diligentem</i> <i>mala</i> et adulte- ram: sicut diligit Dominus filios Israël et ipsi res- piciunt ad deos alienos et amant coctiones cum vinaciis.	Et dixit Do- minus ad me adhuc vade di- lige mulierem dilectam amico et adulteram si- cut diligit Do- minus filios Israhel et ipsi respectant ad deos alienos et diligunt vina- cea uvarum.

¹ Those who hold this view disagree as to whether this chapter in the book of Hosea is related to the previous chapters or it is a different account of the original divine call. Because the styles are different, the authenticity of either Chapter 1 or Chapter 3 has often been denied. See Marvin Alan Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2000, pp. 38-39. Graham Davies, *Hosea*, Wm. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, pp. 150-109. Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1987, pp. 10-12. T.M. Lemos, *Marriage gifts and social change in Ancient Palestine*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, pp. 49-50.

² Harold Henry Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea", in *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, 1963, p. 90. William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1905, p. 216. A.A. Macintosh, *A critical and exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, T&T Clark International, Edinburgh, 1997, p. 96. Eugen J. Pentiu, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, traducere, traducere și comentariu, Editura Albatros, București, 2001, pp. 102-104. Ioan Chirilă, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, Editura Limes, Cluj-Napoca, 1999, pp. 135-137. Mays shows that Gomer fits best with the prophetic context because, first, the term adultery defines a woman who was married, and second, because of the symbolism that is meant here: that God will find a way to reach the heart of Israel, even if he turned his face to foreign gods (James Luther Mays, *Hosea*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1969, p. 56).

Textual differences

The first part of verse 1, וַיֹּמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי עוֹד לָךְ (wayōmer yehwāh 'ēlay 'ôḏ lēk), made of two sentences, was interpreted in two ways, depending on the placement of the adverb עוֹד ('ôḏ) in one of the two sentences: "and the Lord said to me again: go" or "and the Lord said to me: again, go". The choice for the second interpretation gave rise to the theory that this is the case of a second marriage of the Prophet Hosea here, marked by the "again" adverb, and the indication of a woman whose status is different from that of the woman indicated in the chapter 1. However, the grammatical analysis does not confirm the correctness of this translation.

By checking the context in which עוֹד ('ôḏ) comes with the verb, we see that, in cases where it appears in this middle position, it is always dependent on the verb before it, not on the subsequent one (cf. Gen. 4:25; 8:10; 17:5; 29:33-35; 30:19; 32:29). There are also cases where עוֹד ('ôḏ) is dependent on the subsequent verb, but this happens when the adverb is in an incipient position in the sentence, and there is no other verb on which to depend (Hos. 12:10; Jer. 2:9; 31:4). In an imperative proposition, similar to the analyzed Hoseanic case, it appears in the Book of Zechariah, but also in this case, the adverb is in an early position and is dependent on the verb that follows it (Zech. 1:17)³.

Given this grammatical analysis, we consider that in the case of Hosea 3:1, עוֹד ('ôḏ) must be interpreted in relation to וַיֹּמַר (wayōmer), not with לָךְ (lēk). That is why we conclude that the correct translation is "and the Lord said to me again: go", indicating a new speech of God with the prophet, not a reference to a new marriage. The Hebrew text is rendered literally in Greek and

³ Considering the similar construction from Zechariah, some commentators indicated as the only possibility of translation the variant "and the Lord said to me: Again, go", but taking into account only the position of the adverb towards the verb, without analyzing the position in the sentence. As this variant is generally accepted among researchers, we mention here only those who make a detailed analysis of the targeted construction, but without taking into account the details we have mentioned: Richtsje Abma, *Bonds of love: methodic studies of prophetic texts with marriage imagery*, Van Gorcum & Comp, Assen, The Netherlands, 1999, pp. 203-204. Father Ioan Chirilă mentions that both translation variants can be accepted, without opting for one of them (Ioan Chirilă, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, p. 135), while

Latin, without punctuation, which allowed modern translators who followed these variants to translate into the second version, allowed by the text.

אַהֲבַת רֵעַ ([`*āhubat rē`a*] "loved by a friend") has been translated as "lover of evil things" (ἀγαπῶσαν πονηρὰ – *Septuagint, Itala*), "loved by a close person" (ἠγαπημένην τῷ πλησίον – *Aquila*⁴), "loved by someone else" (ἠγαπημένην ὑφ' ἐτέρου – *Symmachus*), "beloved by a friend" (*dilectam amico – Vulgata*).

The fact that Israel turned his face from God to other deities shows a total change of attitude and an abandonment of his own divinity in favor of others. The verb הָנַף (*pānā^h*) in this verse, from which the noun הַנֶּפֶץ ([*pāne^h*] face) is derived, has several meanings, of which the most common, and the one used here, is that of "to turn", "to return", to someone, in order to interact with him⁵. Therefore, the return of Israel to other deities is equivalent to their pursuit (Hos. 2.5) and the impossibility of truly following God, despite the preservation of some initial cultic elements.

The etymology of אִשִּׁישָׁה (*’āšīšē*) is not clear enough, being still disputed. These אִשִּׁישָׁה (*’āšīšāh*) are mentioned among the foods that David offered to the people after bringing the Ark of the Law into the Tabernacle of Testimony (II Kings 6:19; I Par. 16:3), and Solomon considers them foods with special nutritional capacities (Song. 2.5). There are no other details about these foods, but starting from the radical אִשָּׁה (*’šš*), which means "to press", it is assumed that they were a kind of cake made from pressed grapes,

Macintosh recognizes the ambivalence of the *Targum*, but not of the Masoretic Text, although the construction is similar, citing the interpretation of Rabbi Kimchi (A.A. Macintosh, *A critical and exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, p. 93). Friedrich Keil tries to make a grammatical analysis of this formulation, but only succeeds in concluding that וְלֵךְ (*’ōd*) must be interpreted in connection with לְךָ (*lēk*), being placed before him "for the sake of emphasis" (Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. II, trad. de James Martin, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1878, p. 67.). In other words, he considers that the positioning of וְלֵךְ (*’ōd*) within the expression has a simple poetic role.

⁴For the versions of Aquila and Symmachus we have used *Origenis Hexaplorum*, vol. II, Oxford, E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1875, and *Hexaplorum Origenis quae supersunt, multis partibus auctiora*, Bernardus de Montfaucon (ed.), tomus secundus, Paris, 1713.

⁵"הָנַף", in *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, and *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

possibly even from the must resulting from squeezing the grapes⁶. This is the variant that the Septuagint adopts (πέμματα μετὰ σταφίδων), facilitating the recording of this meaning in modern translations. But the same radical allows the interpretation of the noun as wine, the product resulting from pressing grapes. Aquila opts for this interpretation, translating it as "old grape wine" (παλαιὰ σταφυλῶν), probably given its effects on the body.

The Jewish sages considered that "wine is the most effective of all treatments"⁷, but especially the old wine was used as a medicine, to the detriment of the usual one, which was considered harmful to the intestines⁸. The *Talmud* teaches that three things reduce the movement of the intestines, straighten the posture and give light to the eyes. These are clean bread, fat meat and old wine. The *Talmud* states that what is good for one organ is to the detriment of another, apart from wet ginger, long peppers, white bread, fatty meat, and old wine, which are good for the whole body⁹. The ordinary wine was the one obtained from the recent harvest, after forty days of fermentation, the old wine was the one from the previous year, and the very old wine was considered the one older than three years. The latter was a wine that, by maturing over time, became highly alcoholic and was therefore called a "strong drink".

Aquila, in his translation, probably considered the negative effect of this strong drink here, namely drunkenness. Symmachus translates this passage as "fruitless (naked) grapes" (ἀκάρπου σταφυλάς), and Jerome translates as *vinacea*, the must left after pressing the grapes, interpreting Symmachus' rendering in connection with the futility of the sacrifices made by the Jews to the demons, which are barren just as the must is dried by wine¹⁰.

Comparing the analyzed Hoseanic verse with other similar references in the prophetic corpus, it is found that its use is negative,

⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, "הַיַּיִן", în *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris (ed.), Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, pp. 82-83.

⁷ Emil G. Hirsch, Judah David Eisenstein, "Wine", in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, available at <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14941-wine> (accessed on 30.07.2015).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *The Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 5, *Pesachim*, trans. Michael L. Rodkinson, The Talmud Society, Boston, 1918, pp. 68-69.

¹⁰ S. Eusebii Hieronymi, *Commentariorum in Osee prophetam*, PL 25,842B-C.

alluding to the use in connection with the worship of other gods. Isaiah says about such sacrifices that they were specific to the Moabites (Isa. 16:7), and Jeremiah mentions the cakes that the Jews baked in honor of the "goddess of heaven" (Jer. 7:18; 44:17).

The *Targum* completely avoids the image of Hosea's love for his wife and, implicitly, the image of God's love for people in the marital metaphor, which is reduced to a simple resemblance to a man's love for his wife: "And God said to me again":

וְאָמַר יְיָ לִי עוֹד אֵינִיל אֶתְנָבִי נְבוּאָה עַל בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּאֵינִין דְּמִן לְאַתְתָּא
 דְּרַחֲמִימָא עַל בַּעֲלָהּ וּמְזִנְיָא עֲלוּהִי וְכָל כְּדִין רַחֲמִים לָהּ וְלֹא צָבִי לְמַפְטָרָה
 כִּין רַחֲמַת יְיָ עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵינִין מִתְפָּנִן בְּתַר טְעֻנַּת עֲמֻמְיָא כְּרַם אִם
 יִתְוַבֵּון יִשְׁתַּבֵּיךְ לְהוֹן וְיִהוֹן דְּמִן לְגַבְר דְּאִשְׁתְּלִי וְאָמַר מִלְּא מִלְּא בְּחַמְרִיָּה

"And the LORD said to me again: Go and tell a prophecy about the house of Israel, which is like a woman loved by her husband, but betrayed by her. And as the Lord loves the children of Israel, and will not drive them out from before him, so the Lord loves the children of Israel, even if they turn to the idols of the heathen. However, if they repent, they will be forgiven and will be considered as a man who made a mistake [when he was] under the influence of wine" (Tg. Os. 3,1)¹¹.

The reason for this adultery is seen as similar to that sin committed in a state of intoxication, out of ignorance, as interpreted also by Theodore of Mopsuestia¹², considerably reducing the responsibility for it. The *Targum*, by introducing this "diminished" sinfulness, contradicts the prophetic text both by reducing the gravity of the sin and its implications. A mistake made in drunkenness is somewhat excusable and involves the possibility that the sinner to recover as soon as the effect of the alcohol has passed, but Hosea speaks of a much more serious state of mind of the people, a perversion of the heart that could not be eliminated without God's intervention (cf. Hos. 2).

¹¹ The aramaic text can be found in *Targum Jonathan for the Prophet Hosea*, Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter edition, Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, Israel, 1992, indexed in "Bible Works". Personal translation.

¹² Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the twelve prophets*, trans. Robert C. Hill, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2004, p. 47; cf. Theodor Antiochienen, *Commentarius in Oseam Prophetam*, PG 66,137A.

After presenting the textual differences of the translations that may have led to different interpretations concerning the identity of the woman, we will undergo further analyses on the Hebrew text in order to make the subject clearer. In our opinion Hos. 3:1 is an addition to Hos. 1:2, adapted in form in respect to the evolution of the prophet's family.

If the commandment to marry a "woman of fornication" (אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים ['ēšet zenûnym]), a phrase used for unmarried women, appeared in Hos. 1:2, it would have been logical, in order to emphasize the symbolic act of idolatrous Israel, that God would have used a similar formula in a commandment to contract a second marriage, since the first would have ended in divorce. But the verb used here is a different one, אָהַב ('ahab), which designates a feeling¹³, not an act with legal valences, such as marriage, and the status of the woman is described by the phrase woman "committing adultery" (מְנַאֲפֵת [menā 'āfet]). Here Duane Garrett makes a very important comment on the principle that should be followed in analyzing this woman's identity: if a fornicating woman can only be unmarried, an adulteress can only be a married woman¹⁴. If we were to accept the theory that supports here the existence of a second woman in the life of the prophet, not only could it not be a second marriage, but a cohabitation relationship with a woman who is married to another man, and even moreover, it would mean that God would have allowed and commanded this, a situation that does not correspond to the prescriptions of the Law, nor would it have served in any way in the construction of the symbolism that targeted the situation of the people of Israel.

An analysis of the noun רֵעָה (rē'ā) is very useful in supporting the theory we have adopted. It designates a very dear person, with whom someone lives in intimate communion¹⁵. It can designate either a close friend, as in the case of the friendship between

¹³ See "אָהַב", in *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, William L. Holladay (ed.), Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2000, and *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

¹⁴ Duane A. Garret, *Hosea, Joel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 19A, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, 1997, p. 133.

¹⁵ R. Laird Harris, "רֵעָה", in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, p. 853.

David and Jonathan, a husband (Jer. 3:20) or a lover (Jer. 3:1)¹⁶. Since the first meaning cannot be involved here, and the third is even less likely because it is used in connection with fornication, not love¹⁷, it follows that רַב ($r\bar{e}'a$) designates this woman's husband. So Hosea is sent to love a woman who, although she was loved by her husband, committed adultery. This reality is clarified by the finality of the symbolic act to which the prophet is sent, stated in the words "love her as God loves the children of Israel, but they turn their faces to other gods". If the tenor of the metaphor is the relationship between God and the same sons of Israel, the vehicle can only be the relationship between the prophet and the same wife, who was indifferent to His love.

Father Ioan Chirilă proposes here an interesting hypothesis, which assumes the existence of two marriages of the prophet: starting from the two sisters presented by Ezekiel (ch. 20), he says that the women in chapters 1 and 3 of Hosea can refer to the two kingdoms that God chose as wives¹⁸. For this hypothesis to be true, it would mean that the woman in chapter 3 symbolizes the kingdom of Judah, and the references to Israel in the last two verses indicate not the northern kingdom, which was addressed in the first two chapters with this name, but the Jews in general, who, left without pagan rulers and cults, would return to their monotheistic and monarchical roots. Although the hypothesis may seem plausible, the analysis we made earlier states clearly that this cannot be the situation: the tenor of the metaphor is the relation between God and the sons of Israel from the Northern kingdom and vehicle of the metaphor is the relationship between Hosea and the same Gomer in the previous chapters.

The Patristic writers do not deal particularly with this aspect of the woman's identity. Without going into details, St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks of a second woman, focusing on the significance of her status: the woman enslaved means the exile of Israel, and

¹⁶ Although he quotes the text from Jer. 3:1, Keil erroneously states that רַב ($r\bar{e}'a$) never appears as a reference to a lover with whom fornication is committed. Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Without making an analysis, Eugen Pentiu states that רַב ($r\bar{e}'\bar{a}$) "designates the person of the lover" (Eugen Pentiu, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, p. 105).

¹⁸ Ioan Chirilă, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, p. 65.

her redemption means the return of the people from exile¹⁹. As in the case of the analysis of the relationship in chapter 1, the typology is very important for the Holy Father here, the prophet acting as a type of Christ²⁰. The observed messianic aspect is very important, but we consider that the interpretation of the woman in this verse as Gomer, who has meanwhile become a slave due to her distance from her husband, is much more appropriate, because her identity with it is implied by the identity of the exiled people to the people that returns from exile, being one and the same, but with a different social status²¹.

Theodore of Mopsuestia²² and Theodoret of Cyrus²³ adopt the same attitude as St. Cyril towards the woman, assuming that she is different, the former focusing on the Prophet's attitude, which symbolizes God's love for His people, adding that the woman's adultery represents the syncretism that the Israelites had introduced into the worship of God²⁴.

Unlike the mentioned Fathers, Jerome considers that the adverb "again" is an indication of the fact that Hosea first loved a prostitute, who had now become adulterous, being the same woman²⁵. Important in this verse is the remark that Jerome makes in connection with the translation of the Hebrew רַע (rē 'a), which is used as πονηρὰ in Greek. Since רַע (r '), appeared unvocalized in the Hebrew text, it could be translated at the same time as רַע

¹⁹ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the twelve prophets*, trans. Robert C. Hill, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2007, p. 94; cf. Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini, *In XII prophetas, prophetas*, vol. 1, Philip Edward Pussey (ed.), Typographeo Clarendoniano, Oxford, 1868, p. 82.

²⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the twelve prophets*, p. 95; cf. Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini, *In XII prophetas*, p. 83.

²¹ Cf. James Luther Mays, *Hosea*, pp. 55-56.

²² Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the twelve prophets*, trans. Robert C. Hill, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2004, pp. 52-53; cf. Theodori Antiochieni, *Commentarius in Oseam Prophetam*, PG 66,144B-145A.

²³ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, trans. Robert Charles Hill, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2006, pp. 46-47; cf. Beati Theodreti, Episcopi Cyrensis, *Enarratio in Oseam Prophetam*, PG 81,1568C.

²⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the twelve prophets*, pp. 52-53; cf. Theodori Antiochieni, *Commentarius in Oseam Prophetam*, PG 66,144B-145A.

²⁵ S. Eusebii Hieronymi, *Commentariorum in Osee prophetam*, PL 25,842A.

([rē 'a] friend), or רַע ([ra '] evil)²⁶, as in *Septuagint* and *Itala*. The adulterous woman is interpreted by Jerome in two ways: as the Church of the Gentiles, though he does not argue his choice, and as the synagogue of the Jews²⁷. Wolff is of the same opinion as Jerome concerning the identity of the woman in this verse, for God wants to show by accepting back the woman that He is able to overcome the prohibitions of the Law which He Himself instituted, out of love for humans²⁸.

From the analysis of the verse, we can assert that this woman cannot be the woman who had received a separation card and had been deprived of the care of her husband and left to suffer because of it (2:11-15), nor even the one who had been deprived of the encounter with her idols (2:8-9), because she was still in their sinful bondage, without the possibility of coming out of this bondage alone, which kept her closely connected with those who offered her pleasure. Although the writing of the Prophet Hosea, at least in the first three chapters, is not chronological, which is why its authenticity has been intensely contested, it is generally accepted that the third chapter of the book follows chronologically the previous ones²⁹.

Following the analysis made previously, we cannot subscribe to this opinion, but if we were to classify paragraph 3.1-2 chronologically, we consider that it should be established between the descriptions from paragraphs 2:4-7 and 2:8-9. In this framework,

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ "And how can I talk about the prostitute married to the prophet? She is either the image of the Church gathered from the Gentiles, or, in an interpretation that fits better in this passage, the synagogue. She, Israel, was first adopted from the idolaters by Abraham and Moses. She now denied the Savior and was unfaithful to Him. For this, she was deprived for a long time of her altar, priests and prophets, and she had to wait many days before returning to her first husband. For when all the faith of the Gentiles is fulfilled, Israel will be saved" (S. Eusebii Hieronymi, *Epistula CXXIII*, 13, in CSEL, vol. 54, Vienna, 1918, p. 87).

²⁸ Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansel, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1974, p. 63.

²⁹ William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, p. 216; Harold Henry Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea", p. 90; James Luther Mays, *Hosea*, pp. 54-56; A.A. Macintosh, *A critical and exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, p. 96; Eugen J. Pentiu, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, p. 103; Ioan Chirilă, *Cartea Profetului Osea*, pp. 134-135.

3:3 can be a parallel of 2:9; 3:4, an announcement of the events from 2:11-15, and 3:5, a parallel and a completion for 2:3 and 2:25. Thus, the prophet realizes here a ransom of his wife from the hand of her lovers, depriving her of the reunion with them and announcing the future deprivation of Israel of the ruling class, the priestly class and everything related to idolatrous cults³⁰.

We can assume that just as Jehu, king of Israel, did not ask himself why his dynasty would last only five generations (IV Kings 10:30), continuing to worship idols, so it is likely that the woman was not concerned of divine warning (Hos. 3:4), did not repent for the deeds done, not recognizing the One who offered her the true blessing and continued to worship the Baals. In this context the return with the soul to her husband (Hos. 2:9) would have been only a façade. In this sense, chapter 4 continues with the analysis of this degraded state in which the people had reached, a state that announced the inevitable end.

It is observed, however, that at 2:9, the initiative of the return belongs to the woman, while at 3:1, the prophet makes this return possible. Reading in parallel the book of Prophet Jeremiah, it is observed that the restoration of the communion with God is impossible when man spends his life in spiritual debauchery (Jer. 3:1), and God asks from him only repentance, acknowledgement of his guilt and a sincere desire to return to Him. But only God is the One who makes possible this return in communion and transforms the person who desires to return in order to be capable of it (Jer. 3:11-15).

According to our analysis, it is much more logical to assume that the Prophet Hosea received a command from God to bring home his own wife, who was living in a relationship with another man, than to assert that he would have been ordered to marry another man's wife, who, more than the fact that she was still tied to her husband, she lived in fornication. In order for the second assumption to be viable, it would have meant that Hosea would pay

³⁰Mays is also a follower of a chronological setting interspersed in the events related above, but because he is in favor of the divorce theory for Hos. 2:4, he frames it before this verse (James Luther Mays, *Hosea*, p. 55). For an analysis of the divorce theory relating Hos. 2:4, see Ioan-Lucian Radu, "«Divorțul» lui Dumnezeu la Osea 2, 4", in *Educația vârștelor și vârștele educației*, "Studia Theologica Doctoralia", vol. VIII, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2016, pp. 456-464.

the woman's husband for her release, but the trading of a wife was not allowed by the Law. Therefore, it is much more appropriate to consider that the woman redeemed by Hosea was none other than Gomer, who had now been enslaved by the voluntary abandonment of the marital home and because of the impossibility of supporting herself in this situation.

This conclusion is very important for the interpretation of the divine-human marriage metaphor, and it fits into the Orthodox way of interpreting God's salvation plan. This shows that God remains faithful to the promises He made and, regardless the moral and spiritual state of man, with whom He chooses to unite with through an intimate bond, He restores him and brings him to a perfect state of purity, similar to the one of a virgin ready for engagement (*cf.* Hos. 2:21-22).