

## Inner Biblical Exegesis As A Model For Bridging The “Then” And “Now” Gap: Hos 12:1-6

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One question our generation of Biblical interpreters must solve is this: Is the meaning of a Biblical text and its application one process (as Hans-Georg Gadamer<sup>1</sup> would urge us to believe), or are these two separate actions (as Emilio Betti and E. D. Hirsch<sup>2</sup> argue)? Is there a difference between the meaning of a text (which, according to Hirsch, does not change) and the significance of a text for us today (which changes, depending on the situation)?

### I. The Problem Of Application

The outstanding achievement of Gadamer is his revolt against separating application from both understanding and interpretation. He considered “application to be as integral a part of the hermeneutical act as are understanding and interpretation.”<sup>3</sup> Together they comprised “one unified process ... The text,... if it is to be understood properly, i.e. according to the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.”<sup>4</sup> Gadamer goes on to say: “If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that the same tradition must always be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, is that of the relationship between the universal and the particular. Understanding, then, is a particular case of the application of something universal to a particular situation.”<sup>5</sup>

Now we can partially agree with Gadamer that this is one half of the hermeneutical problem (and even “the heart of the... problem”—on the significance side)—that is, the task of finding the proper alignment between the universal and the particular. But we must, with Hirsch, observe that “it will not do to say in one breath that a written text has a self-identical and repeatable meaning and in the next that the meaning of a text changes ... It is precisely because the meaning of the text is always the same that its relationship to a different situation is a different relationship.”<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, rather than “fusing the horizons” (Gadamer’s *Horizontverschmelzung*<sup>7</sup>) or melting these processes into one process of understanding, it is best to keep the two processes separate and distinct. The prior act of understanding is controlled by the text’s set of linguistic symbols and is fixed, single and unchanging. But this act must be followed by one of relating this meaning to the interpreter or to a particular instance or set of circumstances in order to name the relevance or a particularization of the discovered universal or principle in the text. There are two

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1. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 274-278.

2. E. Betti, *Teoria generale della interpretazione*, 2 vols. (Milan: Giuffrè, 1955); E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1967), esp. pp. 245-264.

3. Gadamer, *Truth* 275.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 278.

6. Hirsch, *Validity* 255.

7. Gadamer, *Truth* 273, 337-341, 358-359.

interdependent acts, therefore, and not one—and the control must rest in the truth-intentions laid out by the writers of Scripture as symbolized by the grammar and syntax of their texts of Scripture.

## II. Inner Biblical Exegesis

Of course it is one thing to affirm in theory that there are two separate acts in determining meaning and application, but it is another matter to suggest how this gap may be bridged. One fruitful line of study has opened up the process called inner Biblical exegesis.<sup>8</sup>

According to most of its contemporary users,<sup>9</sup> inner Biblical exegesis is the study of the relationship between earlier Biblical texts (which have already assumed a normative or even a canonical status in the community) and their reuse in subsequent texts. The accent, however, usually falls on the reinterpretation or reapplication of earlier oracles by later communities that faced obscurities in that text due to (1) unfamiliar terms, (2) insufficient detail, (3) apparent contradictions, or (4) the obsolescence of an earlier custom or statement.<sup>10</sup> The focus of most scholars is on the nexus between the fixed form of the earlier text and its free formulation in a later context. Such free formulations are said to involve transformation in the function and meaning of the text as well as readaptation or blending of the transmitted teachings of the authoritative text. Thus there grew up two types of exegeses of earlier texts that are now preserved within the OT: the one a dynamic exegesis, and the other a protective exegesis.<sup>11</sup> “The former... often extends or interprets scripture against its plain-sense, but for the sake of ongoing contemporaneity; the latter... safeguards the divine law from human encroachment.”<sup>12</sup>

How extensive, then, is this phenomenon according to its advocates? Michael Fishbane has promised to give us in the near future a “comprehensive study of types and cases of inner-

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8. In 1936 H. W. Hertzberg used the term *Nachgeschichte* to describe the process where a text continued to reverberate throughout the rest of the Bible (“Die Nachgeschichte alttestamentlicher Texte in-nerhalb des Alten Testaments,” *BZAW* 66 [1936] 110-121). I. L. Seeligmann joined this process with *Kanonbewusstsein* in “Voraussetzungen des Midrashexegese,” *VTSup* 1 (1953) 150-181. Both citations I owe to B. S. Childs, “Reflections on Modern Study of Psalms,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God* (ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke and P. Miller, Jr.; New York: Doubleday, 1976) 382.

9. S. Holm-Nielsen, “The Importance of Late Jewish Psalmody for the Understanding of Old Testament Psalmic Tradition,” *ST* 14 (1960) 1-53; N.M. Sarna, “Psalm 89: A Study of Inner Biblical Exegesis,” in *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1963) 29-46.

10. G. Vermes, “Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans; Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 1. 203-220.

11. M. Fishbane, “Torah and Tradition,” in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (ed. D. A. Knight; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 292-293.

12. *Ibid.*

Biblical exegesis,” but in the meantime he has suggested these patterns:<sup>13</sup>

- (1) “Dynamic elaborations [of legal texts] necessitated by changing concerns [of the contemporary culture]”;
- (2) “Protective restrictions ... added to Biblical laws to safeguard them from infraction”;
- (3) “Subsequent recombination of earlier and disparate Torah-texts [to] create a new divine law”;
- (4) “The use of... older texts... reflected in later homiletical transformations .of authoritative texts”; and
- (5) “The reinterpretation of prophetic oracles ... [while] retain[ing their] authoritative status as a divine word[s]—require redirec-tion, respecification, revivification,” since they were never actualized or fulfilled in the manner they were originally given.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly he would include everything from a mere reapplication of earlier Biblical oracles (a perfectly legitimate process of applying and not exegeting the text in our view) to a deconstruction of the older text—especially in homilies and prophecies—so that the original package is often either neutralized or neglected. Such transformations may be due to *an*” incipient belief in the plenitude of meanings of a revelation or [in] the fluidity of [the] context.”<sup>15</sup>

But such an analysis of the OT’s exegesis of its own earlier texts only plays into the hands of Gadamer’s contention that this process of understanding and applying involved one process, not two, and that there was a plurality of meanings that changed with the circumstance and desires of the one applying the text. Of course if it can be demonstrated that this did indeed happen, then more than a theory exists here. But our study of the texts alleged to illustrate this phenomenon does not reach that conclusion. Instead we observe that both the earlier and the latter adaptations or uses of the OT text share a common universal in spite of the multiplicity of the particulars to which that one universal is applied.

If it be argued, as many evangelicals will, that such multiplication of senses or readaptations are little more than “letting Scripture interpret Scripture,” we will contend that either such conclusions do not represent what is normally called “interpretation” or that the text has been wrongly exegeted by us and arbitrarily assigned multiple meanings. The question then turns out to be: Do we now really wish to condone eisegesis after rejecting it all these years? Do we really wish to conclude that some texts were without a “meaning” or even our newly-discovered “meaning” (not “meaning” in the sense of [1] entailment [“This means war”], [2] value [“This means so much to me”], or [3] significance [“I now realize the significance of his statement”]<sup>16</sup>) until a later text assigned a referent, concept or truth to it? The only way to conclusively settle such arguments is to turn to specific texts that utilize an inner Biblical exegesis and describe

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13. M. Fishbane, “Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis,” *JBL* 99 (1980) 361 n. 21.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 343-361.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

16. These distinctions were helpfully pointed out by G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 37-40.

what they are doing. One of the best examples in the OT, and one that has aroused the interests of a broad spectrum of scholarship recently, is Hos 12:3-6, 13.

### III. Hos 12:2-5 (Mt 12:3-6)

#### 1. *History of Its Commentary.*

Hosea 12 is Hosea’s sermon based on a series of older Scriptural texts coming mainly from the Jacob stories in Genesis. That much is fairly certain. But what remains for debate is whether the ancient narrative has been retold, reworked and so altered that it yielded a multitude of new meanings more suitable to the political happenings and moral conduct of the prophet’s times than those of the patriarch’s day. Few will deny that the events of Jacob’s life have been rearranged and that words, names and concepts have been used in word assonances, word plays or even as “word bridges.”<sup>17</sup> But almost all will deny that the meaning of the patriarchal narrative has remained the same for Hosea as it was in Genesis.

It must also be noticed that there is more here than meets the eye—at least at first glance. For if Hosea knew in his eighth-century setting a sequence of the Jacob narratives that involves approximately or exactly the same text form as we currently possess in Genesis, then the propriety of entertaining the existence of a document such as an alleged eighth-century “J,” an alleged seventh-century “E,” or even a sixth-century combined “JE” as the sources from which the writer of Genesis drew his material for the Jacob narrative is completely passe. This question cannot be pursued here, but it is no wonder that the text has occasioned so much attention. This one issue alone, apart from a host of other legitimate considerations, would be reason enough to stir up much literary excitement.

The investigation of Hosea’s use of the Jacob narratives appears to have been inaugurated in recent times by Th. C. Vriezen<sup>18</sup> in 1942. In 1946 P. A. H. De-Boer<sup>19</sup> also commented on the matter briefly. Beginning, however, with 1960 the discussion increased, for in that year M. Gertner<sup>20</sup> published a massive study with a special appendix devoted to the interpretive question. He concluded that Hosea composed an anachronistic midrashic commentary from what must be assumed to have been a written (!) text of the Jacob tradition. In 1961 H. L. Ginsberg<sup>21</sup> touched

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17. Word bridges, or “*Leitworte*” as M. Buber referred to them, are seen by some as the *gezerah shawah* of Midrash. See M. Gertner, “Appendix: An Attempt at an Interpretation of Hosea XII,” *VT* 10 (1960) 274 n. 4.

18. Th. C. Vriezen, “La tradition de Jacob dans Osée XII,” *OTS* 1 (1942) 64-78.

19. P. A. H. DeBoer, “Genesis xxxii 23-33: Some Remarks on the Composition and Character of the Story,” *NedTTs* 1 (1946-47) 149-163. Mention should, however, be made of A. Bentzen, “The Weeping of Jacob, Hosea 12:5a,” *VT* 1 (1951) 58-59.

20. Gertner, “Appendix” 272-284.

21. H. L. Ginsberg, “Hosea’s Ephraim, More Fool than Knave: A New Interpretation of Hosea 12:1-14,” *JBL* 80 (1961) 339-347.

on the subject, and P. Ackroyd<sup>22</sup> took up the problem in greater depth in 1963. E. M. Good<sup>23</sup> concluded in 1966 that Hosea built his remarks on the five incidents from the Jacob narrative in Genesis (plus one story that we do not otherwise know) in order to make a contemporary point. In that same year W. L. Holladay<sup>24</sup> argued that there was no need to posit for Hosea another patriarchal tradition beyond those found in Genesis: Hosea had chosen all his allusions from Genesis and in the order found in Genesis. These two essays in 1966 were followed by R. B. Coote's<sup>25</sup> article in 1971, which stressed the unity of the interpretation of Hosea 12 as a whole. Then in 1980 L. M. Eslinger<sup>26</sup> argued that Hosea represented a radical revision of the Jacob traditions so as to reapply them to his own day. There the matter stands at present.

## **2. The Issues Involved.**

The questions posed by this passage are numerous, but some are indeed pivotal. The first concerns the text itself. The Hebrew text is extremely laconic and enigmatic—even for Hosea. “Nowhere,” asserts James Ward, “is the text of Hosea more obscure than in chapter 12.”<sup>27</sup> Some examples of these phenomena are: (1) Should not “Judah” be emended to read “Israel” in v 2 (MT 3), since it is in parallelism to “Jacob” and Yahweh's controversy is with Israel? (2) Should not the “angel” in v 4 (MT 5) be deleted and *’et*, “with,” be emended to *’ēl*, “God,” and made the subject of the sentence? (3) Should not the *’immānû*, “with us,” of v 4 (MT 5) be emended to read *’immô*, “with him”?

The second issue involves the orientation of the passage. The basic concern here is this: Is the Jacob tradition recounted by Hosea used in a positive way, as C. F. Keil, Otto Schmoller and P. Ackroyd<sup>28</sup> argued, or does it present a negative picture, as most commentators view it? If it is a positive reference approving of Jacob's action in the womb and at Peniel, why is the section introduced in the context of Yahweh's *rgb* (“legal accusation” or “court case”) against “Judah” and “Jacob”? The text, however, does not go on to list the specific grievance or to prefer the charges—unless the two verses that preceded v 2 (MT 3) contain those indictments.

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22. P. Ackroyd, “Hosea and Jacob,” *VT* 13 (1963) 245-259.

23. E. M. Good, “Hosea and the Jacob Tradition,” *VT* 16 (1966) 137-151.

24. W. L. Holladay, “Chiasmus, the Key to Hosea XII 3-6,” *VT* 16 (1966) 53-64.

25. R. B. Coote, “Hosea XII,” *VT* 21 (1971) 389-402. Also in this year appeared L. Ruppert, “Herkunft und Bedeutung der Jacob-Tradition bei Hosea,” *Bib* 52 (1971) 488-504.

26. L. M. Eslinger, “Hosea 12:5a and Genesis 32:29: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 18 (1980) 91-99.

27. J. M. Ward, *Hosea: A Theological Commentary* (New York: Harper, 1966) 212.

28. C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 146; O. Schmoller, *The Book of Hosea: Lange's Commentary* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1976) 90-91; P. Ackroyd, “Hosea and Jacob” 245-259.

A third issue that causes more trouble than any other for most commentators appears in v 4 (MT 5): “Why should the victor Jacob weep and make supplication?”<sup>29</sup> Following close behind this problem is another set of exegetical problems created in v 3 (MT 4): “Who is represented by the pronominal subjects and objects? Who prevails—[the] angel or Jacob? Who finds whom at Bethel, and who speaks to whom?”<sup>30</sup>

If we are to successfully identify the type and amount of inner Biblical exegesis, we must address each of these three issues:

- (1) the proper text,
- (2) the basic orientation of the passage, and
- (3) key exegetical decisions on the identity of the persons, objects and situations referred to in this text.

### **3. The Meaning of Hosea and Genesis.**

In vv 3-4 (MT 4-5) of Hosea 12, the prophet appeals to two events in Jacob’s life from Genesis: his seizing his brother’s heel in the womb (Gen 25:26), and his wrestling in his manhood (Gen 32:24). The two lines of v 3 are meant to parallel each other, while the second stich represents an advance and climax to the first: “In the womb he grasped the heel of his brother, and in his manhood he struggled with God.”

What must have immediately impressed those who first heard these words of Hosea was the allusion to the two names for the patriarch (“Jacob” and “Israel”) and the significance attached to both of these names on the occasion when they were first issued. The name “Jacob” was conferred on the twin who was born second but who nevertheless grasped the “heel” of his brother (ʔāqēb, Gen 25:26)<sup>31</sup> “from the womb” (i.e., after birth; cf. Job 3:11).<sup>32</sup> The second verb reflects the name “Israel” and was conferred on Jacob when he “strove” or “struggled” (šārītā; Gen 32:28) with God. But there is a stylistic problem with translating the verb šārā in Hos 12:4 to mean “strive” since Hosea uses the preposition ʔet, “with,” with the verb in MT v 4 (which can alternate with the Genesis preposition ʔim, “with”), but in MT v 5, surprisingly enough, he uses the preposition ʔel, “to, towards.” Since v 3 (MT 4) is acceptable, let us delete v 4 (MT 5) from the discussion for the moment.

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29. H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 212.

30. J. L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 163.

31. The West Semitic name Yahgub-ilu, “May God protect,” does not appear to be known in Israel; see M. Noth, “Mari und Israel,” in *Geschichte und Altes Testament* (ed. W. Zimmerli; Tübingen, 1953) 142, as cited by Wolff, *Hosea* 211.

32. F. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 607.

The point, then, is that the two names, one from an episode in Jacob’s birth and the other from his manhood, connoted a grasping and striving man. But were these incidents meant to be exemplary, or were they pejorative references?

A positive interpretation would offer this type of analysis. Jacob grasped and sought to lay hold of the favor of God from the womb, even though he did not have the rights of the firstborn by nature, and he struggled and wrestled with God himself in his later life in quest of the same blessing of God. Thus all three elements figure in Hosea’s preaching:

a	b	c
3a from the womb	3b he seized the heel	3c of his brother
3a’ even in manhood <sup>33</sup>	3b’ he wrestled	3c’ with God

The nature of this struggle, argues this interpretation, becomes clear in the next verse of Hosea. It was found in his persistent but humble supplication to God with weeping.

The negative interpretation, however, disallows the latent synergism of the positive analysis and understands the names to contain a rebuke first to the patriarch, and now—says Hosea—the same applies to his descendants. Indeed that was the point made by a later incident in Genesis. Jacob’s father had used the same word Hosea used as he opened this chapter in 11:12 (MT 12:1). Isaac commented, “Your brother came deceitfully” (mirrod, Gen 27:35), to which Esau responded, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me (ya’aqōb wayya’qēbēnī) these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing.” Likewise the wrestling with a “person” (‘iš) at the Jabbok river probably reflects the verb śry (“to strive” or “contend”<sup>34</sup>) and refers to Jacob’s misconception that his conniving work was responsible for attracting the blessing of God. The man who was a cheat from the womb continued in his manhood to fight even God himself.

The names “Jacob” and Israel” continue to signify a mixed message: They mark the time when God met the ancestors of Hosea’s day and blessed them in spite of all human effort, but they also signal the wasted effort to earn or work for the blessing that God already had decided to freely give them.

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33. Lit. “strength,” “vigor” or “wealth” (‘5n). No doubt it refers to one’s fully developed “strength,” or more precisely one’s procreative powers (Gen 49:3; Deut 21:17; Ps 78:51). Thus “manhood” balances the natal or recent postnatal condition.

34. Some have attempted to derive this verb from śrr, “to reign,” a verb developed from the noun śar, “ruler,” but these attempts have not been successful; see Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* 607.

Verse 4 (MT 5) is the most enigmatic of all the verses. Almost all modern commentators recommend that the word “angel” (mal’āk) be deleted as a gloss for “God”<sup>35</sup> from the text and ’el “to, towards” be emended to ’ēl, “God,” and made the subject of the verb. Accordingly they translate it: “But God proved himself lord and prevailed.”<sup>36</sup>

Now even though Genesis 32 does not mention an “angel” but simply refers to a “person” (32:25) who in v 29 is identified as Elohim, there is no reason to doubt its authenticity in this text. In fact the glossing of God with “angel” eliminated the offensive anthropomorphism that would otherwise portray the incorporeal God of the universe wrestling in hand combat with a mere mortal like Jacob. Furthermore no conclusive objections can be raised against the appropriateness of using the preposition ’el (“to, towards”) with the verb “to struggle”<sup>37</sup> as well as the preposition ’et, “with.” In fact v 29 uses a third preposition (’im, “with”). The fact that Jacob struggled with/against this angel and “prevailed” or “overcame” (tûkal, v 29) him accords with Hosea’s use of the same verb (yûkal).

But what shall we make of the next statement in Hosea: “He wept and sought favor with him”? Since there is no record in the Peniel incident in Gen 32:22-32 of Jacob’s weeping (bākâ) or “seeking favor” (hithannēn), commentators like William Holladay<sup>38</sup> have turned for an answer to the framework of 32:22-32 provided in 32:1-21; 33:1-17. There in 33:4 we do find that the brothers Jacob and Esau “wept” (wayyibkiû) when they met. While the Hithpael form of the verb hnn, “to seek favor,” does not appear in either Genesis narrative, the related noun hñn (“favor, grace”) is used of Esau’s response to Jacob (32:5 [MT 6]). It is true, as Holladay suggests, that the Jabbok incident of Jacob’s struggle with the stranger appears to interrupt the narrative of Jacob’s reunion with his brother Esau and that the connection between the two accounts may be the word “face.”

Just as Robert Alter<sup>39</sup> showed that the two verbal cues for connecting the story of Tamar and Judah (Genesis 38)—which is set between the story of the selling of Joseph by his brothers and Joseph’s work in Potiphar’s house—are the words “recognize” and “kid,” so we would contend

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35. Gertner, Wolff and Ruppert take “angel” to be a later gloss.

36. E.g. Wolff, *Hosea* 206.

37. If the idea of the preposition is “against,” much like Hebrew ’al, then ’el is an appropriate equivalent. See R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University Press, 1967) 303, as pointed out to me by Richard Schultz.

38. Holladay, “Chiasmus” 56-58. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* 613-614, argue that the two verbs “weeping” and “seeking favor” are an example of hendiadys and form the single act of “imploring,” an act of supplication to God or man (as the second verb illustrates in Esth 8:3).

39. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 3-14.

that the words “face” (pānim) and “find favor” (h̄nn) link Genesis 32 and 33. The linkage appears like this:

**“Face” (pānim)**

Section I. Jacob prepares to meet Esau (Gen 32:1-21)

“For he thought, I may appease him with the present that I am sending on ahead; later I shall see his *face*, perhaps he will accept me” (32:20 [MT 21]).

Section II. Jacob wrestles with the unidentified person (Gen 32:22-32)

“So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, For I have seen God *face to face*” (32:30 [MT 31]).

Section III. Jacob meets Esau (Gen 33:1-17)

“For to see your *face* is like seeing the *face* of God” (33:10).

**“Favor” (h̄n) or “to bless” (b̄rak)**

Section I. Jacob prepares to meet Esau

“I am certainly sending to my lord [Esau] to learn if I have found *favor* in your estimation” (32:5 [MT 6]).

Section II. Jacob wrestles with the unidentified person

“Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me (b̄raktānī)’ (32:26 [MT 27]). Then he blessed (wayēbārek) him there” (32:29 [MT 30]).

Section III. Jacob meets Esau

[Jacob to Esau]: “To find favor (h̄n) in your eyes” (33:8). “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift” (33:10). “Let me find favor in the eyes of my lord” (33:11).

Hosea then has reference to both of these meetings at the Jabbok. Holladay rightly contends that in addition to the dual verbal cues of “weeping” and “seeking favor/blessing” there is evidence for two meetings based on the chiasmic form of Hosea. This was preceded by another chiasm: “Yahweh has an indictment against Judah, (MT 3b) (a) even-to-visit (b) Jacob (c) according-to-his-ways, (MT 3c) (c’) according-to-his-deeds (a’) he-requites (b’) him.” The middle pair in this a-b-c/c’-a’-b’ is formed by a noun beginning with kē-, “according to.”

This gives us confidence for finding a chiasmic order in the next two verses: (MT 4a) Jacob’s struggle with *Esau* in the womb; (MT 4b) Jacob’s struggle with *God* in his manhood; (MT 5aa) Jacob’s struggle with the angel of the *Lord*; (MT 5ab) Jacob’s weeping and seeking favor of *Esau*.

Accordingly Jacob is the subject of all the verbs in vv 4-5ab, and each action forms another indictment. “In the womb he seized his brother, and in his manhood he strove with God; and he strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept [with his brother] and sought his favor.”

When we came to v 4b (MT 5b) there are two abrupt changes: The subject of the verbs is now God, and the verbs are now imperfect instead of perfect (or the equivalent waw-consecutive

imperfect).<sup>40</sup> Both of these changes signal that Ho-sea has readjusted his perspective to a new angle. The text reads: “[At?] Bethel he [God] keeps on finding him, and there he keeps on speaking with us.” Very few versions or commentaries have noticed that the verbs in v 4b (MT 5b) are no longer perfects but are now to be treated as present (or even future) tenses.

Is God indeed the subject of these two lines? E. M. Good<sup>41</sup> found eight (or sixteen) possible ways to render this first line. The best responses to this inquiry are that at both of the Bethel incidents of Genesis 28 and 35 the Lord/God took the initiative and appeared to Jacob. Especially strong are repeated references to E1 in Genesis 35. Jacob was to build the altar at Bethel to “the God” (hăʾēl, vv 1, 3) and name the place El-Bethel (v 7) for God, who revealed himself as El-Shaddai (v 11). But even more significant is the juxtaposition of Hos 12:5 (MT 6) with these two lines. Hosea declared, “The Lord God of hosts, Yahweh is his memorial (zikrâ) [name].” Clearly Hosea’s reference was to the antecedent theology of Exod 3:15: “God spoke again to Moses: ‘Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, sent me to you; this is my name forever, and this is my memorial (zikrî) [name] to all generations.’” What is even more striking is the fact that the next verse in Exodus (3:16) uses the same verb, “to visit” (pāqad), as Hosea announced when he opened this section in Hos 12:2 (MT 3).<sup>42</sup> Along with both of these lines of argumentation, the fact that God is the more likely subject and not the object can be observed from the verb (“to find”) itself. “Find” (maṣâ) is a technical expression for God’s election in several important texts. For example, there is the “finding of David” (Ps 89:21)<sup>43</sup> and the “discovery” of Israel in the wilderness (Deut 32:10; Jer 2:2).

The other area of serious debate is the object of the line, “There he keeps on speaking with us.” Most versions and commentators insist on taking the consonantal ʾmnw to mean “with him” in parallelism with the suffix of the preceding line and in agreement with the LXX (pros auton). Mitchell Dahood proposed reading it as the preposition ʾm, “with,” plus the affirmative ending

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40. Holladay, “Chiasmus” 58. Coote disagrees: “The tense of the verbs in the last two lines cannot be the issue that others have made of it. The use of the prefix conjugation in a perfective sense preserved from the old jussive yaqtul has long been recognized in Hebrew poetry. The reference is to the past” (“Hosea XII” 396). More seems to depend on his last statement than on his otherwise fair linguistic observations.

41. Good, “Hosea” 144-145. The variations basically come from using either God, Jacob or Bethel (as a divine name) in the subject and object position and substituting a future verb form for the present.

42. For a discussion on pāqad, “visit,” see Gertnet, “Appendix” 278 n. 1. But it is Holladay who makes the connections observed here most clearly.

43. Wolff, *Hosea* 164.

-n and the third masculine suffix -û (\*’imman-hû becoming ’immannû).<sup>44</sup> But how shall we explain the loss of the double -n? This reading is too dependent on the suffix of “find” in the previous line and on subjective expectations. Likewise the Peshitta reads “him” for both lines, but the Targum and Vulgate reflect the present Hebrew text, “us.” However, in light of the fact that Hosea elsewhere uses first person plural statements (Hos 6:1-3; 8:2; 10:3, 8; 14:2-3 [MT 3-4]), we should not be surprised by his usage here. In fact the reading “us” is the *lectio difficilior* and is, therefore, the original *lectio* since we have seen no need for emending the immediately preceding verses as many others have needlessly suggested.<sup>45</sup>

The reference to Bethel, contrary to Engnell’s<sup>46</sup> and Ginsberg’s<sup>47</sup> attempt to make it refer to the cult deity Bethel or El-Bethel, is the place where El—the “Lord God of the hosts” whose “memorial [name] is Yahweh” (as v 6 explains exegetically)—met Jacob twice. Hosea generally uses Beth Awen,<sup>48</sup> “House of Nothing” (4:15; 5:8; 10:5), when referring to what Bethel had become by virtue of Jeroboam’s idol-calf and its associated paganism, but the site had special significance when it came to remembering that it was “there” that God had met Jacob twice (Gen 28:11-22; 35:6-15).

Hosea’s reference to Bethel is a positive note; otherwise he would have reverted to his pejorative Beth Awen designation. The point, then, is that God blessed Jacob not only at the brook Jabbok but most significantly “there” at Bethel (note the emphatic particle in Gen 32:30, “and he blessed him there [šām] at Jabbok,” but the emphatic and repeated use of Bethel and the particle “there” [šām] in Genesis 35 [v 1 twice, v 3, v 7 twice, v 15; also 28:11]). In fact there is a remarkable similarity between Hos 12:5cd and Gen 35:15: “... the place where God spoke (dibber) with him there (šām)[was] Bethel.” Thus while at Jabbok the ’iš refused to divulge his name; at Bethel he announced that “I am El Shaddai” (Gen 35:10) and reaffirmed Jacob’s new name of Israel on the occasion of Jacob ridding himself of all his foreign gods and purifying himself for worship of

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44. Such a third masculine form of the preposition ‘im is attested by W. Kuhnigk, *Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch* (BibOr 27; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974) 146, as cited by Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* 615. See M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 50-100* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968) 275. Dahood’s discussion of this word in Hos 12:5 may be found in *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965) 32. DeBoer, “Genesis xxxii” 162, reads ’immennû on the analogy of mimmennû and taḥṭennâ as a deliberate rhyme with yimsâ’ennû, which, to his way of thinking, allowed for a deliberate double referent: “him” (Jacob), and “us.”

45. This view is shared by Holladay, “Chiasmus” 61-62.

46. I. Engnell, “Hosea,” *Svenskt Bibliskt Uppslagsverk*<sup>2</sup> I, col. 980; “Jacob,” *ibid.*, col. 1081; “Bethel,” *ibid.*, col. 251 treat Bethel as a place name, but he interprets the prophet as polemicizing against the cult deity Bethel. See the citation in Good, “Hosea” 145-146.

47. Ginsberg, “Hosea’s Ephraim” 343-347.

48. Contrariwise, Amos referred to “Bethel” by its proper name seven times.

God at Bethel (35:2-5). This also became the occasion on which God reaffirmed the patriarchal promise of land, seed and multiplied blessing.

#### **IV. A Model For Solving The Problem Of Application**

By now it is clear that Hosea found the authority for what he wished to say from seven events<sup>49</sup> in the life of Jacob as recorded in Genesis. But what is even more surprising is the major shift that comes in the midst of Hosea’s exposition. He felt that the events in the life of Jacob had a major import in the lives of his hearers. The shift in the subject (from Jacob to God), the shift in tense (from Hebrew perfects or waw-consecutive imperfect) and the shift in object (to the nation of Hosea’s day) all speak of a contemporization of Biblical events.

It is just as important, however, to note that there have been no reinterpretations or deliberate transformations of the Biblical tradition about Jacob. In not one single detail have we found any encouragement for saying that the prophet dehistoricized the Genesis narratives in order to make his applications. On the contrary, it was only because Hosea’s audience knew the Genesis texts and agreed with his single-meaning interpretation of them that it became possible to build on that base. As Eslinger said, “Had the etymology of Gen. 32:29 not been widely accepted and even more, approved by Hosea’s audience, his brilliant efforts would have been completely useless. One does not cite proof texts from the Koran to convict a Christian or Jew of sinfulness.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore on the basis of this detailed study of Hos 12:3-6 we cannot agree with those who would define inner Biblical exegesis in a way that leaves the earlier canonical texts flexible, malleable and transformed in meaning and truth-intention. The older, antecedent materials are reused, but not in an arbitrary or pioneering sense.

But how then may we speak of a “consequent” or “implicit” sense by way of attaching significance, contemporary relevance, or immediate application to a text on which we agree as to its past meaning or truth-intention? Does Scripture have a “consequent” sense as well as a literal (i.e., grammatical-syntactical) sense? And, if it does, do both the consequent and the literal senses carry the same divine authority?

The answer would seem to lie in this direction: When the significance or application is “separate” and “different.”<sup>51</sup> from the point made in the literal sense, then there is no authority for

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49. (1) He seized his brother’s heel in birth (v 4a; Gen 25:26); (2) he went to Paddan Aram (v 13a; Gen 28:5); (3) he served for two wives (v 13b; Gen 29:15-30); (4) he struggled with the angel (v 4b; Gen 32:23-33); (5) he was renamed “Israel” (v 4b; Gen 32:28; 35:10); (6) he was reunited with his brother Esau (v 5b; Gen 33:4); (7) God met him at Bethel (v 5c; Gen 28:13, 19; 35:15).

50. Eslinger, “Hosea 12:5a” 95.

51. See E. Johnson, “Author’s Intention and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 409-429, and my response in *ibid.*, pp. 441-447; see also R. Bierberg, “Does Scripture Have a *Sensus Plenior*?”, *CBQ* 10 (1948) 187.

that application. In fact, that in all likelihood must be judged as a wrong application. But when one applies a general or universal term or concept “*in the same sense* to each of an *indefinite* number of individual things”<sup>52</sup> rather than to separate or different things, then that is a proper extension of a the literal sense.

The point, then, is that all derived significances must be restricted to the same sense or meaning even though that sense is attached to any number of individual items, persons, institutions or practices in any number of times, situations or cultures. It is here that the two horizons or the writer and listener/ reader are fused. We will only balk when the fusion links up things that are different and separate from the sense or meaning given by the author and indicated by his selection of grammar, syntax and context.<sup>53</sup> The application, clarification, illustration, implication or significance may not exceed the basic sense or meaning of the legitimately derived principles, universals, propositions or laws of Scripture as determined by the single truth-intention of the divinely gifted writer of the text.

It would be improper to so stress the original sense or meaning of a passage that we freeze it and bind it up merely to the past. The fact that Scripture so frequently surprises us with the presence of the first-person plural pronoun (“us,” “our,” “we”) is another encouragement to extend the horizon and sphere of the text’s influence beyond the past. Some instances of this phenomenon in the NT are Matt 15:7; 22:31; Mark 7:6; Acts 4:11; Rom 4:23 fl.; 15:4; Heb 10:15; 12:15-17.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, books in the OT like the Psalms constantly exhort us to remember the previous works of God as a present basis for knowing, believing and acting. Hosea is in their train.

It is to be noticed, then, how Hosea not only addresses the nation of his day (“There God speaks with us”) but also quickly draws a corollary: “You (emphatic), therefore, turn to your God: Keep covenantal love and justice and wait on your God continually” (Hos 12:6 [MT 7]). Once again in v 13 Jacob is mentioned, not in his conduct towards God but of God’s dealings with him—in raising him from his humiliation.<sup>55</sup> Yet, even more clearly than in vv 4-5, it was not only Jacob the individual but also the total nation that was intended. The shift from “him” to “us,” from the patriarch to the nation, is at the heart of the prophet’s design.

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52. Bierberg, “Does Scripture” 188.

53. In a startling moment of candor J. Neusner, *Midrash in Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 136, says, “The simple fact is what rabbis were willing to do to the Mishnah is precisely what they were prepared to do to Scripture—impose upon it their own judgment of its meaning .... The source of authority [was] the rabbi himself .... “This is the opposite of what we are contending for here.

54. For a discussion of this phenomenon see P. Fairbairn, “The Historical Element in God’s Revelation,” in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation* (ed. W. C. Kaiser, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972) 72-79.

55. Schmoller, *The Book of Hosea* 92.

God found Jacob at Bethel—i.e., he made himself known to Jacob twice: when he was on his way to Haran, and when he had the vision of the ladder with angels descending and ascending. On both occasions God found Jacob and came to him, and thus it may also be said that Jacob found God at Bethel.

But it was also at Bethel that Jacob’s descendants deserted God by setting up the worship of the calf. Thus the place that had been consecrated by the revelation of God became desecrated by the worship of the calves.

Accordingly it is possible for one’s posterity to be represented in their ancestor and for the descendants to continue what was begun in their titular representative. That is why Ps 66:6 also reads: “He turned the sea [= the Red Sea] into dry land, they crossed over the river [= the Jordan] on foot—there, let us keep on rejoicing in him.” Thus the psalmist and his generation also rejoiced there at the Red Sea and the Jordan River even though they were separated by generations. When God delivered their fathers, he likewise delivered them as well.

This is very much like Levi paying tithes while he was yet in the loins of Abraham (Heb 7:9-10) or like Paul saying that what was said to Abraham “was not written for his sake alone, but for us as well, . . . if we believe” (Rom 4:23-24).

In the same manner God spoke to the men and women of Hosea’s day when he spoke to Jacob at Bethel, for when he spoke to Jacob in his loneliness he also spoke to subsequent generations in their needs and in proportion to their entreaty of believing faith.

The gap between the “then” and the “now,” we conclude, may indeed be bridged exactly as Hosea solved the issue. Only let us fear imposing values or meanings where there are none or that are distinct and different from those indicated by our authoritative texts, which form the foundations of our concepts, principles, doctrines or illustrations. Where Jacob exhibits a character defect or is guilty of *hybris*, let us avoid inventing positive thrusts for our generation. But where God has blessings even for such an undeserving recipient, who nevertheless is the source of blessing of all the nations on the earth, then let us hear ourselves also addressed—and may we promptly respond. There, indeed, God continues to speak to us.