of purging, cleansing and purification. A burning coal was taken from the altar and applied to his mouth with the assurance that "your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven" (Isa 6.7, RSV). This is an instance of a connection between burning coals and repentance and cleansing. Like the Egyptian story, the story of Isaiah is a symbolic demonstration that repentance and cleansing had taken place.

Conclusion

In the light of the above analysis, it is reasonable to assume that Paul's meaning in Romans is the same as that in Proverbs 25.21-22. We might even suggest that Paul's meaning is similar to the meaning of the Egyptian "repentance ritual".

Two current Study Bibles take the same position that we have suggested:

1) The **NIV Study Bible** says this on Proverbs 25.22a, "you will heap burning coals on his head": "the expression may reflect an Egyptian expiation ritual, in which a guilty person, as a sign of repentance, carried a basin of glowing coals on his head. The meaning here, then, would be that in returning good for evil and so being kind to your enemy, you may cause him to repent or change."

2) The **MacArthur Study Bible** on Romans 12.20c, "you will heap coals of fire on his head," says: "Refers to an ancient Egyptian custom in which a person who wanted to show public contrition carried a pan of burning coals on his head."

L.O. DORN

IS GOMER THE WOMAN IN HOSEA 3?

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Hosea was a prophet who had problems in marriage. These problems are described in the Book of Hosea as a symbol of the problems Yahweh had in his relations with Israel.

Chapter 3 has presented a puzzle to interpreters. Is the woman in chapter 3 the same woman, Gomer, mentioned in chapter 1?

> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the LORD." (Hos 1.2)

The text in chapter 1 is in the form of a narration by someone other than the prophet. We see that this marriage took place at the command of Yahweh, and both Yahweh and Hosea knew in advance that Gomer was "a wife of harlotry." The Hebrew idiom, "wife of harlotry," can mean that Gomer was already a harlot, or else that she was destined to become a harlot; without further information from the context, we cannot be sure which interpretation to accept. A further question, whether the

"harlotry" involved sacred prostitution in the worship of Baal, cannot be answered at all from the text.

As the marriage progressed, children were born, and their names, given at the command of Yahweh, seem to be a symbol of an increasing separation between Yahweh and his people Israel. It is possible that the names reflect a growing suspicion, or even a growing certainty, on the part of Hosea that his wife was not faithful, but again, we cannot know this for certain on the basis of the text. The name of the firstborn son, Jezreel, can mean "God has sown," and this may at first glance reflect God's blessing upon the family with the birth of the firstborn. Yet the significance turns out to be, rather, that God's punishment will come upon the royal house of Jehu as punishment for blood shed in the place named "Jezreel."

> And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." (Hos 1.4-5)

The second child, a girl, bears the unhappy name "Not pitied," *Lo Ruchama*, symbolizing God's refusal to pity the northern kingdom of Israel.

> And the LORD said to him, "Call her name Not pitied, for I will no more have pity on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will deliver them by the LORD their God; I will not deliver them by bow, nor by sword, nor by war, nor by horses, nor by horsemen." (Hos 1.6-7)

The third child, a son, bears an even more unhappy name, "Not my people," *Lo Ammi*.

> And the LORD said, "Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God." (Hos 1.9)

The reason for giving this name is stated in terms that resemble a formal declaration of divorce, which would be "You are not my wife and I am not your husband." Just a few verses later we find a full statement of divorce separating Gomer and Hosea, and this comes within a plea that Gomer should stop her adultery:

> "Plead with your mother, plead – *for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband* – that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts ..." (Hos 2.2, my emphasis)

In 1.9 the statement of divorce is expressed in terms relating to the nation of Israel. We will assume, on the basis of Hosea 2.2, that the book refers to an actual divorce here between Hosea and Gomer, and that this divorce represents a separation between Yahweh and the northern kingdom of Israel. The separation has occurred because of the idolatry of the people.

Chapter 2 expresses God's anguish, the anger and the mercy of God, and God's desire to have his people united with him again.

The problem

In chapter 3 we come to our problem passage. RSV translates verse 1 as follows:

> And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."

In chapter 1 a narrator described how Yahweh was speaking to Hosea and commanding him to marry Gomer. In chapter 3 Hosea reports in first-person narrative what Yahweh has told him to do. Is Hosea repeating in his own words what occurred in chapter 1? Is he here directed by Yahweh to take back to himself the woman who had gone astray? Or is this another woman?

The description of the woman in chapter 3 can possibly apply to Gomer. And Yahweh's yearning for Israel in chapter 2 makes a case for this being the reunion with Gomer that symbolizes God's reunion with his people. Yet the fact that the woman of chapter 3 is referred to as "a woman" rather than "the woman," "that woman," or simply "Gomer," makes it less likely that it is Gomer.

A further problem to take into consideration is the condition of the Hebrew text available to us. There is, of course, the clear division between the two parts of the book. The first three chapters contain narrative about Hosea's personal life, while the rest of the book consists of prophetic messages. However, throughout the book it is clear that pieces of prophecy were placed together in a manner that is not always logical; nor do the pieces fit together within themselves as clearly as we wish they did. Instead phrases, sentences, and sections give the appearance of being assembled and inserted, possibly at a later time (a process that is often called "redaction"). For the translator it does not matter whether the prophet himself assembled all the parts, or whether a series of collectors of prophetic statements – scribes, for example – inserted and pieced these together. We now have to deal with the book as it stands, and it is not our task as translators to untangle the parts. However, it is useful to recognize the ways in which these pieces have been assembled and sewn together into one book.

Gale A. Yee has done careful work applying redaction-critical standards to this book (*Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation*, 1987). While not everyone may agree with her basic theory of redaction criticism, her observations about the ways in which the text was finally brought together as we have it are quite useful for us. She concludes that there were four stages in the development of the book: the prophet's own words, the portions added by a collector of the prophetic statements, and the material added by

two redactors, both influenced by Deuteronomistic theology. Some of her work is useful as we deal with the problem at hand.

The issues

When reading the Scriptures there is an important principle that we need to follow: If the writer felt a need for clarity with respect to communicating with the audience, the writer would make things clear. If such clarity was not essential, the writer may or may not have made things clear. We must not impose upon the material our opinion as to what needs to be clear, from our point of view. It may be useful to ask our own questions, often with satisfying results, but we cannot expect to get satisfying answers every time.

It is good to see that a number of interpreters recognize this principle, even as they favor one opinion or the other with regard to Hosea 3 (Mays, Wolff, Beeby, and Birch, to name a few). This principle is valuable especially as we think of the point of view of early readers of the full book of Hosea as it came to them in their day, and as it answered to their needs.

The Hebrew adverb translated "again" in 3.1 can be understand in more than one way: We can read the beginning of the verse as "Yahweh said to me again, 'Go love ...' "; or we can read it as "Yahweh said to me, 'Again go, love ...' "

In the first case it can mean that Yahweh spoke a second time, upon a second occasion, and that makes it unlikely that this is Gomer, especially since Hosea is told to love "a woman," indefinite, one not previously mentioned. In the second case it would be a repetition of Hosea's going to love that is in focus, and this says nothing about whether "a woman" is the same woman who he goes to "again," or if he "again" is to love, but to love a woman who was not previously mentioned.

The main thing that makes some interpreters believe this to be Gomer is the expression of Yahweh's steadfast love for Israel. He would not turn aside to another nation. Such steadfastness would favor Hosea not turning aside to a second woman as his actions portray God's relations with Israel. However, the fact remains that "a woman," without the Hebrew equivalent of a definite article, makes it much less likely that this is Gomer, and all agree to that, even some who prefer to believe that Gomer is the woman.

Interpreters struggle with whether an actual marriage occurred between Hosea and Gomer, and between Hosea and the woman of chapter 3. A price is mentioned in chapter 3 but not in chapter 1. Yet in chapter 1 Hosea is clearly commanded to "take for yourself a wife." We therefore assume that chapter 1 speaks of a marriage, whether to a concubine or to a wife in the usual sense of the term. Did the second story involve an arrangement with a prostitute, without a price being mentioned? Did either woman become a concubine to Hosea, that is, one sometimes called "wife" but with fewer rights? Was the price mentioned in chapter 3 a full bride price?

We must say honestly that the text is not clear with regard to this point. In any of the above possibilities, the important thing seems to be that Hosea cherished a relationship with a woman in both chapter 1 and

chapter 3, and that in each case this was symbolic of the way Yahweh cherishes his people.

In both cases, of course, some form of adultery is involved or was previously involved, and this becomes symbolic of the unfaithfulness of the people to their God, Yahweh. Whether the adultery occurred before or during Hosea's marriage with Gomer is not completely clear, nor does the text seem interested in making this clear for us. Further investigation into the nature of this feature of the two chapters is not necessary for purposes of this study.

However, in chapter 3 one more feature is important for our investigation. As Hosea relates in verse 3:

> And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

The word for "dwell," from the root *y-sh-v*, means to dwell or to sit. It refers to a steady maintaining of position of the person involved. The original Hebrew receptor may have understood this to mean:

1) the woman was to stay in Hosea's home as his wife and no longer roam the city as a prostitute, and Hosea would play the counterpart role of a faithful husband to her;
2) the woman was fully espoused to Hosea and was therefore his wife, but was to await Hosea's time for bringing his espoused wife to the home he had prepared for her, and in that interim time, during which they were not actually cohabiting, they would be faithful to each other by having no relations with anyone else; or
3) the woman came to "sit, remain, dwell" in Hosea's home "for many days" and would belong to him, but no one else would have relations with her, nor would Hosea himself during those "many days," even though he was her husband.

For our purposes the important feature is not whether she would sit in Hosea's house or in her own house. It is important that the great majority of interpreters agree that Hosea himself was not to have sexual relations with her during the "many days." This interpretation is strengthened by the application of this prophetic act to the children of Israel, verses 4-5:

> 4 For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim.
> 5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

This passage speaks of both royalty and of features of worship in normal Israelite life, and it states that the people of Israel are deprived of such features even while Yahweh remains their God. It is clear that this is intended to describe an actual experience in the life of Israel, for which Hosea is the figure. He is properly bonded to the woman of chapter 3, yet without having intercourse with his wife.

The identity of the people

The life and work of the prophet Hosea was clearly in the northern kingdom, often referred to simply as "Israel." Concern for the northern kingdom clearly dominates the content of this book. However, there are occasional references to Judah in chapters 4 through 14, sometimes speaking of the two kingdoms as clearly in parallel with each other, but also at times mentioning Judah as if as an afterthought. The two kingdoms are mentioned together in 4.15; 5.9-14; 6.4; 8.14; 10.11; and 12.2. Judah seems to be mentioned as if as an afterthought in 5.5; 6.11; and possibly 11.12b. The text clearly mentions the two together in several of these instances, but those having the appearance of an afterthought may have been added later to the collection of prophetic sayings. Within the narrative section Judah may have been added later at 1.7, but Judah is clearly paired with Israel in 1.11.

The importance for us here is that both Israel and Judah were in the total picture of the book of Hosea as we have the text today. They were, in one sense, a single people derived from the stock of Jacob (who is mentioned three times: 10.11; 12.2, 12). Yet they were clearly two kingdoms. Or does Hosea sometimes speak of them as the same, and at other times as two separate nations?

The expression bene Yisrael, "children of Israel," appears only in the narrative portion of the book. In 1.10, 11 RSV renders it "people of Israel," while in 3.4, 5 it is rendered "children of Israel." In 1.10 it seems to refer to all the descendants of Jacob as one people, but in 1.11 it is paired with bene Yehudah, "children of Judah," in a context that clearly sets them side-by-side, coming together under one head, fulfilling a glorious ideal of unity for the two kingdoms.

In this connection it is important to note the statement in Hos 3.5: "Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king." This yearning for a kingdom ruled by a descendant of David would not have been stated by someone eager to maintain a separate kingdom to the north.

It is useful to note that Gale Yee consigns a good many of the "Judah" passages to the final redactors of the book, and all those passages that seem to be an afterthought. All "children of Israel" references are assigned by her to the final redactor. The entire third chapter, which contains the problem we are dealing with, she also assigns to the final redactor.

A proposal

This study attempts to provide a solution for translators in particular, but the solution may be useful for others as well. It may be stated briefly as follows:

The writer or final redactor of Hosea seems interested in making a reference to the people of Judah and to their captivity. This person saw no problem throughout the book in extending the earlier message to the people of the southern kingdom, even though it was originally intended for the northern kingdom, since after all they were basically

one people and even shared the same sins of idolatrous practices leading them away from Yahweh. The two are the same "beloved of Yahweh," yet they are not the same politically. The northern kingdom went into its Assyrian captivity apparently while Hosea was still living. Since they never returned, we may say that the "divorce" was permanent. But the southern kingdom was removed to Babylon later, and "sat alone," so to speak, in constant hope of being allowed to return. Therefore we can consider the message of chapter 3 as applicable to the captives in Babylon, and understood by those readers as applicable to themselves.

Translators have no right to say in their translation that the woman of chapter 3 is symbolic of Judah, since the text itself does not say who she is. But when they are finished with rendering the text in their own language, this concept can be the test of whether they have translated the material fairly: Does the text of chapter 3 in a sense apply to all Israel as beloved of God? And can it apply to Judah in particular as waiting in exile for the return to her God? If the answer to both questions is positive, the translation will probably be faithful in this regard.

Can we then state as historical and biographical fact that Hosea dealt with two distinct women in chapters 1 and 3? No. This is like asking whether Israel is one nation or two. The text does not seem interested in making this absolutely clear, and it is therefore not our business as translators to do so. However, if it becomes necessary to translate clearly one way or the other, it seems better to allow readers to have the understanding that a separate woman is the intended meaning of chapter 3, since the Hebrew seems to point in that direction.

[All quotations from the text of Hosea are from RSV.]

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