

## The “Judaizing Calvin” & His Christian Exposition of Hosea 1–3†

By Jackson Gravitt

“Calvin is ... strange.”<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the sixteenth century, John Calvin’s critics have noted that he often showed an affinity for Jewish interpretations throughout his works on the Old Testament. Aegidius Hunnius’s work *Calvinus Iudaizans* (1593) questioned Calvin on precisely this point.<sup>2</sup> Hunnius argued that Calvin’s exegesis lacked catholicity: when expounding texts traditionally read “as literal prophecies of Christ’s incarnation, passion, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom,” Calvin would often take divergent readings, finding the text’s fulfillment in a more immediate event or person.<sup>3</sup> G. Sujin Pak’s 2010 work *The Judaizing Calvin* explored Hunnius’s claim by examining Calvin’s exposition of eight messianic Psalms. After surveying interpretations of these texts from both pre-Reformational and Reformational commentators, Pak concluded

that Calvin often shifted from the received tradition to some degree, finding more benefit in Jewish commentators than his predecessors or contemporaries did.<sup>4</sup> Pak offered a defense of Calvin’s exegesis and claimed that it was thoroughly Christian, yet she nevertheless concluded, “Calvin may not be a judaizer, but it is certainly understandable that Hunnius sees in his exegesis significant departures from the antecedent Christian tradition...”<sup>5</sup> Calvin’s supposed “Judaizing” has in recent decades been investigated by numerous other respected scholars.<sup>6</sup>

Hunnus noticed, and Pak affirms, the uniqueness of Calvin’s exegesis.<sup>7</sup> This article seeks to build on Pak’s findings by examining Calvin’s next work after his Psalms commentary: his lectures on Hosea.<sup>8</sup> Calvin broke from most earlier Christian commentators by

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1. This is part of Karl Barth’s 1922 letter to Eduard Thurneysen, which includes a poem that Barth wrote about Calvin. See *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914–1925*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 101.

2. Aegidius Hunnius, *Calvinus iudaizans: hoc est, iudaicae glossae et corruptelae, quibus Iohannes Calvinus illustrissima scripturae sacrae loca & testimonia, de gloriosa Trinitate, deitate Christi, & Spiritus Sancti, cum primis autem vaticinia prophetarum de adventu Messiae, nativitate eius, passione, resurrectione, ascensione in coelos & sessione ad dextram Dei, detestandum in modum corrumpere non exhorruit: addita est corruptelarum confutatio* (Wittenberg: Mattaeus Welack, 1593). Hunnius’ treatise has been translated into English as *The Judaizing Calvin* (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2012).

3. G. Sujin Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 6.

4. Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin*, pp. 77–101.

5. Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin*, p. 124.

6. David Steinmetz, “Calvin and His Lutheran Critics,” in *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 172–186; Salo W. Baron, “John Calvin and the Jews,” in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), pp. 380–400; Ken Schurb, “Sixteenth-Century Lutheran-Calvinist Conflict on the *Protoevangelium*,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (1990): 25–47; Louis Israel Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements*, Columbia University Oriental Studies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), pp. 584–596. I am indebted to Pak’s extensive bibliography for these sources (*The Judaizing Calvin*, pp. 193–208).

7. Pak notes that many contemporary scholars find something “modern” in Calvin’s exegesis and are tempted to see in him a forerunner of the “principles of modern historical criticism,” while others praise his “premodern presuppositions and practices” (*The Judaizing Calvin*, p. 3). This indicates that Calvin’s exegetical method does not contain total continuity with either the schools that preceded or preceded him, making him a unique exegete.

8. The introductory material to the Hosea commentary from Calvin, Budæus, and Crispin explains that the success of Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms compelled him to allow his students to transcribe his lecture notes, which were then published as his Hosea commentary. See *Ioannis Calvinii Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, in *Corpus Reformatorum*, vols. 29–88, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss

(1) agreeing with Jewish interpreters that Hosea's marriage was ahistoric and (2) neglecting to adopt overt Christological readings of the marriage narratives.<sup>9</sup> However, as David L. Puckett has noted, the "Judaizing Calvin" thesis tells only a half-truth.<sup>10</sup> Calvin believed that through the narratives of his fictitious marriage, Hosea preached about death and resurrection, the age of the Messiah, and the new covenant that Jesus would inaugurate. Finally, a brief comment in lecture seven regarding exegesis and pedagogy helps to explain Calvin's "strange" expositions.<sup>11</sup>

#### THEATRICALS & PARABLES: CALVIN'S INTERPRETATION OF HOSEA'S MARRIAGE

In his first lecture, Calvin briefly introduced Hosea's ministry<sup>12</sup> before coming to the Lord's command in Hosea 1:2 that the prophet should take "a wife of prostitution" (*uxorem scortationum*).<sup>13</sup> While some interpreters believed this was an extraordinary command given solely to Hosea, Calvin dismissed this interpretation on three counts. First, operating under the assumption that strong continuity exists between the offices of prophet and pastor, Calvin emphasized Paul's command that ministers ought to have holy families, asserting that the same standard would have been required for Hosea.<sup>14</sup>

(Brunswick and Berlin, 1863–1900), 42:193–200. The *Calvini Opera* will hereafter be abbreviated CO. See also T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), pp. 26–29.

9. Hunnius specifically criticized Calvin's interpretations of Hosea 6:2 and 13:14, though he did not mention his reading of Hosea 1–3 (*The Judaizing Calvin*, pp. 96–101).

10. David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), pp. 52–104. The language of "half-truth" comes from Dustyn Eudaly's review of Puckett's book in *Unio Cum Christo* 2.1 (2016): 227–231.

11. Puckett does occasionally refer to Calvin's Hosea commentary (e.g., *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, pp. 17, 53), but he overlooks the comment mentioned here. Parker completely overlooks Calvin's Hosea commentary despite dedicating an entire chapter to "The Exposition of Prophecy" (*Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, pp. 176–223).

12. CO, 42:199–201. All translations, unless otherwise specified, are based on CO and are my own.

13. CO, 42:201. The Vulgate here reads *fornicationum*, which could have a broad range of meanings. To specify that Gomer was engaged in harlotry rather than a lesser form of sexual immorality, Calvin chose *scortationum*.

14. Calvin does not cite a particular passage here, but he has in mind 1 Timothy 3:4 and/or Titus 1:6. For the strong continuity between old covenant prophets and new covenant pastors, see Calvin's later comment that the Jews had "pastors" (CO, 42:213: *relinquit Iudaeos: sciebat enim illos non carere probis pastoribus, qui eorum scelera conaruerent...*).

Second, Calvin argued that marriage to a harlot would have ruined Hosea's ministry since he would have been mocked as he tried to proclaim God's Word. In fact, God Himself would have been responsible for this derision: "Yet it does not seem consistent with reason that the Lord would willingly make His prophet contemptible."<sup>15</sup> Finally, Calvin maintained that had this command been historic, Hosea would have been guilty of sexual immorality. Since the prophet was commanded to take both a wife *and children* of prostitution, the Lord must have seen this as an unlawful marriage; otherwise, why would their offspring be considered "adulterous"?<sup>16</sup> It would have been "as if [Hosea] himself begat prostitution."<sup>17</sup> Calvin acknowledged that other commentators—specifically Jerome—disagreed with this reading, but he found their arguments unconvincing. If Hosea 1 reported history, then God not only gave an extraordinary command to the prophet to marry a prostitute, but also compelled him to commit sexual sin at least three times. This, to Calvin, seemed "scarcely probable," so he rejected the historicity of the Hosea and Gomer narrative.<sup>18</sup>

Calvin instead favored an interpretation with which "almost all the Hebrews agree": Hosea never married Gomer.<sup>19</sup> Jewish interpreters taught that Hosea 1 recorded a vision that the prophet received. Calvin, for his part, suggested that a visionary interpretation was unlikely since visions were private events, experienced only

15. CO, 42:204: *Atqui non videtur hoc rationi consentaneum, quod Dominus ultro reddiderit prophetam suum contemptibilem.*

16. CO, 42:204: *Vult enim Deus totam sobolem esse adulterinam.* The editors at the Calvin Translation Society disagreed with Calvin's reading. Hosea 1:2 shows God telling the prophet to take a wife of prostitution and children of prostitution (Calvin's Latin reads, *sume tibi uxorem scortationum, et filios scortationum*). The editors note that this could be read as Hosea taking at *time same time* both Gomer and her children. Hence, Hosea adopted children that Gomer had already had during her life of wantonness. Hosea's three children are therefore not the same as the "children of prostitution" (see *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets, Vol. 1: Hosea*, in *Calvin's Commentaries on Scripture, Volume XIII*, transl. John Owen [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999], 44n1). Calvin, however, interpreted the "children of prostitution" as Hosea's three children, arguing that this implied that Hosea's marriage was illegitimate. If this was the case, then God commanded Hosea not only to take an immoral wife, but also to commit sexual immorality three times. This certainly would raise difficulties for a historical interpretation of the chapter. A survey of popular modern English translations shows that the NIV, NLT, CSB, HCSB, and ESV follow Calvin by having God tell Hosea to "have" the children of prostitution with Gomer; the KJV, NKJV, and NASB preserve the ambiguity by simply having Hosea take a wife of prostitution and children of prostitution.

17. CO, 42:204: *Perinde est igitur ac si ipse scortatione genitos.*

18. CO, 42:203: *... parum probabile....*

19. CO, 42:204: *Et idio fere omnes Hebraei in hoc consentiunt.*

by the prophets who received them. Hosea’s marriage, on the contrary, was to be part of his public ministry, calling Israel to repentance. Despite this discrepancy, Calvin did adopt the Jewish view that the story was ahistoric, positing that the narrative should be understood as a play: Hosea performed as if “in a theatre” (*in theatro*) by “assuming a character when going before the public” (*induit enim personam antequam in medium prodeat*). In this play, Hosea became a “living picture” (*viva pictura*) and “visible form” (*visibili forma*) of Israel’s spiritual condition. Hosea 1 records Hosea’s performance: It is not about the historic life of Hosea, but about Hosea’s “Hosea” character. His exhibition preached truth, but the story itself was fictitious. Calvin thus called the performance a “parable” (*parabola*) or “similitude” (*similitudinem*).<sup>20</sup>

Through the remainder of Calvin’s explanation of Hosea 1–2, Hosea and Gomer receive no further attention, apart from a few passing remarks that remind readers that the story is fictitious.<sup>21</sup> In lectures 2–7 (Hosea 1:3–2:23), Calvin instead focused on what the prophet meant to say about God and his relationship with Israel through the parable: God has been faithful to Israel, but she has prostituted herself by worshiping Baal. God thus divorced his adulterous bride, and she is now led into exile. However, God held out promises of restoration and adoption for his people, ensuring that the exile will come to an end (Hosea 1:10–2:1; 2:14–23).<sup>22</sup>

Only when Calvin reached Hosea 3:1–5 (lectures eight and nine) do Hosea and Gomer return to the forefront. Calvin anticipated in his first lecture that he would continue to interpret Hosea’s marriage as ahistoric when he commented on Hosea 3.<sup>23</sup> As Bradford A. Anderson notes, though, Calvin did not read Hosea 3 as a continuation of the story from Hosea 1–2. It is *not* a “subsequent scene between Hosea and Gomer” that shows how “Gomer was an originally faithful bride, who subsequently committed adultery, underwent divorce and perhaps descent into slavery, but was eventually taken back by Hosea...”<sup>24</sup> Rather, Calvin read Hosea 3 as a related but separate parable. For Calvin, Hosea 1–2 predicted the exile, and the story’s promises (Hosea 1:10–2:1; 2:14–23) predicted the restoration. Hosea 3, on the other hand, spoke to faithful Israelites tempted to despair both before and during the exile.<sup>25</sup> Despite their hardships, God’s hidden favor was still theirs. While Hosea 3 also predicts the restoration (verse 5), Calvin believed the emphasis of this chapter was on God’s provision *during* the exile, while Hosea 1–2 focused more on the restoration *after* the exile. This means Hosea 1–3 should not be read chronologically. God’s provision during the exile

(Hosea 3) precedes the restoration (Hosea 1–2). Since the God-Israel story in Hosea 1–3 is not chronological, neither is the Hosea-Gomer story.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the narrative utilizes the same characters to tell a new story that has a different point. Figure 1 illustrates Calvin’s view of this chronology.

Figure 1:  
Calvin on the Relationship Between  
Hosea 1–2 and Hosea 3

Exile Predicted	God’s Provision During Exile Predicted	Restoration Predicted
Hosea 1:2–9 Hosea 2:2–13	Hosea 3:1–4	Hosea 1:10–2:1 Hosea 2:14–23 Hosea 3:5

Hosea 3:1 is a difficult verse and requires some comment. The Hebrew word *אִשָּׁה* lacks a direct article, meaning that the object of Hosea’s love here is “(a) woman,” not “the woman.” The latter would clearly indicate Gomer; the former is ambiguous. Calvin translated the command, “*Adhuc vade, ama mulierem dilectam a marito...*”<sup>27</sup> He explained that *adhuc* “refers to the vision that was explained in the first chapter.”<sup>28</sup> This means that the woman in Hosea 3 is the same (fictional) character from Hosea 1. Once again, the prophet puts forward “a type or vision” (*figura, aut visione*).<sup>29</sup>

20. CO, 42:204–205. Calvin believed Hosea maintained his character anytime he went before the public, so this was not a one-time play. His viewers understood that the prophet was acting and had not married a harlot.

21. E.g., CO, 42:206.

22. See Bradford A. Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques: The Reception of Hosea 1–3 through the Centuries,” *Religions* 12.674 (2021): 12–15.

23. CO, 42:204.

24. Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 5. The second quotation is cited by Anderson from Brad E. Kelle, “Hosea 1–3 in Twentieth Century Scholarship,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 7 (2009): 190.

25. CO, 42:256: *Deus vult retinere bona spe animos fidelium in exilio, ne desperatione obruti prorsus deficient.*

26. Anderson’s assertion that Hosea 3 is for Calvin “a first-person retelling of the events from Hosea 1” misses the mark since the two parables have different messages and purposes (“Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” 5). It is a new story, not a simple retelling of the first story.

27. CO, 42:256.

28. CO, 42:256: *Et quum dicit, Adhuc, refertur hoc ad visionem, quae exposita fuit primo capite.*

29. Interestingly, Calvin introduced this story by using the Hebraic

In this second sermon, Hosea “acquired” Gomer (Hosea 3:2) by giving her fifteen silver pieces and a homer-and-a-half of barley.<sup>30</sup> In Calvin’s estimation, this was a meager payment: While the provisions show Hosea’s lovingkindness in taking the prostitute as his bride, Gomer was not lavishly supplied. Her harlotry was disciplined in some sense, since she did not receive a larger bridal price. In fact, Calvin referenced Exodus 21:32, which shows that servants were valued at thirty silver pieces when injured by oxen; Gomer is worth only half as much! Calvin noted that some commentators—specifically Jerome—found in this payment a lavish allegory, likening Hosea’s purchase to the exodus and giving of the Law. This will be discussed in more detail below; here, it suffices to say that Calvin quickly dismissed this reading. The point of the meager gift was to display Gomer’s “abject and base condition” (*abjecta et sordida conditio*).<sup>31</sup>

term “vision” four times, despite having critiqued that language in his lecture on Hosea 1:2 (see CO, 42:256 [3x], 259 [1x]).

30. Calvin used the Latin word *acquisivi* (CO, 42:258). Calvin understood that Hosea gave the payment to Gomer, not to her creditor(s) or owner(s); after all, she was a prostitute (see CO, 42:259).

31. CO, 42:259.

32. Calvin’s marital rhetoric (as well as that of other early modern and pre-modern commentators) has been critiqued by contemporary feminist theologians. John L. Thompson provides a balanced discussion of this issue in which he notes the importance of reading Calvin’s comments in light of his biographical details. Calvin (1) lobbied the Genevan city council to allow wives to divorce unfaithful husbands (whereas previously only husbands could divorce unfaithful wives), (2) promoted companionable marital relationships, and (3) promoted new laws that helped deter wife-beating (*Reading the Bible with the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can’t Learn from Exegesis Alone* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007], p. 107). Even if Calvin’s language grates against modern sensibilities, a balanced historiographical evaluation of Calvin and women must note that he championed their marital/legal rights and safety in considerable ways.

33. CO, 42:256–257, 260.

34. Anderson has no references to Calvin in his discussion of various typological interpretations of Hosea 1–3 (“Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 3). The same is true for John L. Thompson’s limited survey (*Reading the Bible with the Dead*, pp. 99, 102–103).

35. These surveys overlap, though they do not cite each other. Due to this overlap, I will not always distinguish which source(s) mentions a certain historic figure. For Anderson’s survey, see “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” pp. 1–7; for Thompson’s, see *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, pp. 99–103. Both surveys reference modern commentators and, occasionally, heretics. Both of these types of interpreters are omitted in what follows.

36. The supplementary material will not make the surveys exhaustive, either. Several commentaries on Hosea were written during the Reformation. I will consult a few representative examples while omitting others for the sake of space.

Calvin further surmised that Hosea 3:1–3 implied a command that Hosea and Gomer live celibately for some time. Before Gomer was restored to full wifely favor, she would be loved in a type of “widowhood.” In this, God’s relationship with Israel was typified: just as Hosea cared for Gomer by giving her meager supplies during her period of chastisement, God would show hidden favor towards the Israelites during their season of discipline. Further, Gomer’s time of testing would eventually end with her restoration.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Israel would live “without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar,” but God promised to later restore the nation (Hosea 3:4–5).<sup>33</sup>

Calvin’s approach to Hosea 1–3 limits attempts at Christological interpretations.<sup>34</sup> Hosea and Gomer are metaphors for God, Israel, the exile, and the restoration. This means that Hosea and Gomer are historically contextualized symbols: they represent God and Israel prior to and during the exile, *not* Christ and the church in the present day, *nor* God and Israel at other times throughout redemptive history. While the story contains timeless applications for all believers, Calvin’s interpretation never strayed from this historical context.

Calvin’s interpretation of Hosea’s marriage narratives can be summarized as follows: (1) Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was not historic; (2) Hosea purchased Gomer for a meager payment; and (3) Hosea and Gomer are respective types of God and Israel before and during the exile, and this historical context limits Christological interpretation of the narratives. These three summative points guide what follows in terms of comparing Calvin’s interpretation with those of other Christian and Jewish commentators.

#### HOSEA 1–3 IN THE CHRISTIAN & JEWISH INTERPRETIVE TRADITIONS

Now that Calvin’s reading of Hosea 1–3 has been summarized, it is time to compare it with the Christian and Jewish interpretive traditions. Differences of opinion exist in both traditions, but broad trends can nevertheless be observed. Surveys of Hosea 1–3’s reception history by Bradford A. Anderson and John L. Thompson prove useful here.<sup>35</sup> Neither survey is exhaustive, and they will be supplemented where necessary.<sup>36</sup> The focus here will be on pre-Reformational and Reformational interpreters since the goal is to establish a milieu in which to understand Calvin’s exegetical efforts.

1. *Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was not historic.* Anderson and Thompson tally twelve pre-Reformational commentators who interpret Hosea’s marriage with

Gomer as historic: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, Jerome, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrus, Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, and Denis the Carthusian.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, these surveys find only four pre-Reformational commentators who take an ahistorical interpretation of Hosea’s marriage: Origen, Isidore of Seville, Haymo, and Paul of Bourges.<sup>38</sup> We can add Didymus the Blind, bringing the total to five.<sup>39</sup>

The historical interpretation has more adherents and boasts greater prestige. Three of the doctors of the western church believed Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was historic (i.e., Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine), as did the greatest of the scholastics (i.e., Aquinas). Further, several of the commentaries which interpret the marriage as historical (e.g., Jerome, Cyril, and Theodore) were written at least partly in response to ahistorical commentaries which needed correction (e.g., Origen and Didymus the Blind).<sup>40</sup> Anderson acknowledges that the *Ordinary Gloss* mentioned both the historic and ahistoric interpretations of Hosea 1, and this suggests that both views fell within the bounds of interpretive orthodoxy in the Middle Ages. He concludes, though, that “a common interpretive move in early Christianity was to understand the marriage ... as literal.”<sup>41</sup>

Calvin’s rationale for rejecting the historicity of the narrative was that it would have disgraced Hosea and tarnished his ministry. Further, such an extraordinary command would raise questions about God’s character and wisdom since, on Calvin’s reading, it would have required Hosea not only to marry a prostitute but to thrice conceive “children of prostitution.” However, earlier commentators (e.g., Irenaeus, Jerome, Augustine, and Cyril) defended God’s right to command what he wills, celebrated Hosea’s obedience, and speculated that Gomer repented, making it a holy matrimony.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned above, Calvin clashed specifically with Jerome over the notion that Hosea’s three children were adulterous.<sup>43</sup> Jerome instead reasoned that the phrase “children of prostitution” could be explained in one of two ways: Either Hosea adopted children that Gomer had already borne, or Hosea’s children would carry a stigma due to their mother’s previous sinful conduct, despite being legitimately conceived.<sup>44</sup> Some commentators (e.g., Cyril and Theodoret) skipped over the question of the legitimacy of Hosea’s children altogether.<sup>45</sup> Overall, pre-Reformational commentators affirmed the historicity of the narrative, the righteousness of God’s command and Hosea’s obedience, and the legitimacy of Hosea’s children.

This consensus was challenged during the

Reformation. Some Reformers continued to adopt a historical reading of the text. Wolfgang Capito, for example, noted that some commentators glossed Hosea 1 to avoid the “affront to morality” presented by God’s command for the prophet to marry a prostitute. Capito had recourse to the argument that what God commands is just and thus excused God and the prophet.<sup>46</sup> James M. Kittelson notes that Capito’s commentary enjoyed endorsements from both Martin Bucer and Ulrich Zwingli.<sup>47</sup>

Martin Luther, on the other hand, argued that Hosea and Gomer were truly married but that Gomer adopted a character along with her husband, allowing herself

37. Anderson does not include Ambrose in his list of those who interpreted Hosea 1 historically, but he later mentions that Ambrose read Hosea 3 as a retelling of Hosea 1 (“Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 5). Ambrose’s *Letter 49* suggests a historic reading in section 7: “But in the former verses God had commanded him to hire to himself a harlot, and it is manifest that he did so, in that he has mentioned the price of her hiring” (accessed on [www.tertullian.org](http://www.tertullian.org)).

38. Where necessary, Anderson and Thompson gave defenses/clarifications of their inclusion of these figures. This is particularly helpful with a figure like Jerome, who eventually rooted the narrative in history, but only after considering a visionary interpretation at length. For Jerome, see Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” pp. 1–3, and Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, pp. 99ff.

39. Hauna T. Ondrey, *The Minor Prophets as Christian Scripture in the Commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Cyril of Alexandria*, in *Oxford Early Christian Studies*, gen. eds. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 66n87.

40. See Ondrey, *The Minor Prophets as Christian Scripture in the Commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Cyril of Alexandria*, pp. 49–71, and Robert Hill, “Introduction,” *Cyril of Alexandria: A Commentary on the Twelve Prophets, Vol. 1*, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Vol. 115* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 22, 40.

41. Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 3.

42. Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 3, and Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, p. 99.

43. CO, 42:204.

44. Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 10. See note 16 above.

45. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, pp. 39–47; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets, Vol. 3*, trans. Robert Hill (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), pp. 38–42.

46. James M. Kittelson, *Wolfgang Capito: From Humanist to Reformer* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 223, 228–229.

47. Kittelson, *Wolfgang Capito*, p. 181. Despite this, a major emphasis in Kittelson’s work is that Capito’s commentary on Hosea seemingly benefitted from and supported certain Anabaptist leaders and ideals. This eventually created conflict between Capito and his two endorsers, especially Bucer.

to be called a harlot so that Israel's harlotry would be condemned. Both Hosea and Gomer performed a stage play before the people, but the prophet did not really marry "a wife of prostitution."<sup>48</sup> Other commentators went further, completely de-historicizing the narrative. Thompson notes that Johannes Oecolampadius and Jerome Zanchi both interpreted the marriage ahistorically.<sup>49</sup> We can add to this list both Lambert Daneau and David Pareus.<sup>50</sup> The Geneva Bible also explained Hosea 1 as a "vision ... or parable."<sup>51</sup> Anderson rightly asserts that "the literal understanding of the marriage, particularly the infidelity, became unfashionable in the Reformation."<sup>52</sup>

Calvin correctly noted that the ahistorical interpretation prevailed among Jewish commentators. Thompson notes that "Abraham Ibn Ezra reduces Gomer to an allegory, while Maimonides casts her in a dream sequence."<sup>53</sup> Anderson mentions that Rashi follows

the *Babylonian Talmud* by adopting an historical interpretation, but Thompson contradicts this, showing that Rashi "neutralized the offense" of the text by following *Targum Jonathan*, which scrubs any reference to Gomer, instead making the command to "Go, marry" into "Go, teach."<sup>54</sup> Citing the words of Rashi as an example, Thompson concludes that Jewish commentators de-historicized the narrative for the same reason as Calvin: "It is inconceivable that God should command one to take a harlot and conceive children of harlotry."<sup>55</sup> With Calvin, Rashi concluded that Hosea's marriage, if historic, raised problematic moral questions and would have resulted in Hosea conceiving adulterous children. Calvin (and several other Reformers) therefore explained Hosea's marriage in ways that resonate more with the Jewish interpretive tradition than with that of the Christians. It should be noted that many of these commentators (Calvin, Oecolampadius, Zanchi, and Pareus) explicitly cited here the opinion not of Origen<sup>56</sup> or Didymus, but of Jewish interpreters.<sup>57</sup> This shows that these Reformers denied the historicity of Hosea's marriage at least in part because of the influence of Jewish—rather than Christian—interpreters.

2. *Hosea purchased Gomer for a meager payment.* Neither Anderson nor Thompson broach this topic in their surveys, so a cursory sketch is drawn here. As mentioned above, Calvin criticized Jerome for providing an elaborate allegory of Hosea's payment. Jerome (and several other early Christian thinkers) seems to follow the interpretation offered in *Targum Jonathan*. A. J. Rosenberg notes *Targum Jonathan* taught that the fifteen pieces of silver alluded to the exodus (which was accomplished on the fifteenth of Nisan) and that the silver and barley corresponded to undemanding offerings which God commanded the Israelites to make in thanksgiving. Rashi followed this interpretation, while Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel attributed the number 15 to the kings of Judah or to the prophets of Israel, respectively.<sup>58</sup> All of these commentators believed the payment represented something of immense worth since it corresponded to gifts that God had given Israel. In the Christian tradition, few commentators concurred with this view of the payment's worth. Theodore of Mopsuestia serves as a lonely example. While not allegorizing the story, he did conclude that the payment was immense "since God has also attached the Jews to himself with great gifts as well as payments."<sup>59</sup>

Jerome, on the other hand, adopted the view that the 15 silver pieces corresponded to the exodus. The homer-and-a-half of barley was synonymous with 45 measures of barley, and this alluded to Israel's 45-day journey

48. Anderson, "Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques," p. 4. Anderson cites directly from Martin Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Richard J. Dinda, in *Luther's Works: Volume 18* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Press, 1975), p. 4.

49. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, pp. 100ff.

50. Lambert Daneau, *Commentarii Lambertii Danae in Prophetas Minores* (Geneva: Vignon, 1586), p. 279; David Pareus, *Hoseas Propheta commentariis illustratus: cum translatione triplici* (Heidelberg: Voegelin, 1605), p. 7ff.

51. *Geneva Bible: 1560 Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), p. 365.

52. Anderson, "Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques," p. 3.

53. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, p. 100.

54. Anderson, "Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques," 2–3, and Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, p. 100.

55. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, 100. It is noteworthy that Rashi also rejected the idea that Hosea 1:2 allowed the possibility of Hosea adopting Gomer's previous children, instead assuming Hosea's own children were the "children of harlotry."

56. Thompson notes with irony that Origen's exegesis was widely criticized by the Reformers, yet they here largely shared his interpretation and even cited the same rationale for denying the text's historicity (*Reading the Bible with the Dead*, p. 105).

57. CO, 42:204; Johannes Oecolampadius, *Commentarii omnes in libros Prophetarum* (Genevae: Crispin, 1558), pp. 1f; and Pareus, *Hoseas Propheta commentariis illustratus: cum translatione triplici*, pp. 7–9. For Zanchi, see Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, p. 100.

58. See A. J. Rosenberg, *Mikraoth Gedeloth, The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, volume 1 (New York, New York: Judaica Press, 1991), pp. 19ff. Rosenberg notes that there were sixteen kings of Judah. Ibn Ezra omitted one, but it remains unclear who or why.

59. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. 108, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), p. 53.

through the wilderness until they reached Sinai. Israel then waited as Moses ascended Sinai and received the Law. Likewise, Israel would now be purchased from exile and would wait once again for the “advent of her husband.” However, Jerome continued by asserting that the gift was meager: rather than the life-giving food of humans, Gomer received “the barley, [the food] of irrational cattle, ruminating on the emptiness of the letter that kills and not having the spirit that gives life.”<sup>60</sup> Though Calvin disfavored Jerome’s allegory, he agreed that Hosea’s gift was scanty, emphasizing the unworthiness of the woman. Cyril of Alexandria also followed the Jewish allegory, and—like Calvin and Jerome—he concluded that the gifts showed the woman’s unworthiness as she ate the food not of humans but of cattle. The gift also showed the insufficiency of the old covenant: The “strict letter of the law” must be complemented by the understanding of “the mysteries of Christ.”<sup>61</sup> The meager gift is insufficient; Israel needs not only law, but gospel. Here, Calvin is found to be less “Jewish” in his interpretation than these three earlier commentators. The Jewish interpretive tradition believed the payment was valuable and allegorical. Cyril and Jerome thought it was meager, but they did see an allegory in the text. Theodore denied the allegory but affirmed the payment’s value. Only Calvin affirmed the meagerness of the payment and denied the allegory, showing the greatest degree of separation from the Jewish interpretive tradition. Figure 2 illustrates this point.

Figure 2:

Calvin’s Non-Jewish Interpretation of Hosea 3:2<sup>62</sup>

Commentator	Meager or Valuable?	Allegorical?
Jewish Tradition	Valuable	Yes
Jerome	Meager	Yes
Theodore	Valuable	No
Cyril	Meager	Yes
Calvin	Meager	No

Other interpreters writing during the Reformation read the text in similar fashion to Calvin. Oecolampadius, Daneau, Zanchi, Pareus and the Geneva Bible all emphasized the meagerness of Hosea’s payment, arguing that it showed Israel’s low esteem and the graciousness and condescension of God.<sup>63</sup> Like Calvin, these commentators also avoided allegorizing Hosea’s payment. On this point, Calvin and the other Reformers cited

above cannot be accused of Judaizing; instead, they denied the Jewish allegory that was adopted by earlier Christian interpreters and affirmed the meagerness of the payment, an insight only present in the Christian interpretive tradition.

3. *Hosea and Gomer are respective types of God and Israel before and during the exile, and this historical context limits a Christological interpretation of the narratives.* Anderson and Thompson note several Christological interpretations of Hosea’s marriage given by early Christians. Anderson cites two examples: Irenaeus and Jerome both taught that Gomer was sanctified through her union to the holy prophet, and, in the same way, the church is made holy through its union with Christ.<sup>64</sup> Jerome added to this that the marriage prefigured Jesus’s interactions with specific sinful women throughout the Gospels, such as the one who washed his feet.<sup>65</sup> According to Thompson, Augustine followed Jerome on this latter point in his *Reply to Faustus*.<sup>66</sup> Cyril of Alexandria likewise connected the marriage with the Gospels, showing that both Hosea and Jesus “approach[ed] those who are defiled and not yet cleansed of sin.”<sup>67</sup>

60. Jerome, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets: Volume 2*, ed. Thomas P. Scheck, *Ancient Christian Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2016), p. 172.

61. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, pp. 96–98.

62. Boldface indicates disagreement with the Jewish interpretive tradition.

63. Oecolampadius, *Commentarii omnes in libros Prophetarum*, p. 13; Daneau, *Commentarii Lamberti Danae in Prophetas Minores*, p. 310; Jerome Zanchi, *In Hoseam primum et difficilimum ... prophetam Commentarius* (Neustadt an der Haardt, 1600), p. 219; Pareus, *Hoseas Propheta commentariis illustrates*, pp. 61f; and *Geneva Bible*, p. 366. Oecolampadius, Daneau, Zanchi, and the Geneva Bible all, like Calvin, cited Exodus 21:32 to substantiate this point. Surveys by Rosenberg and Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon show that Jewish interpreters did not use Exodus 21:32 to explain Hosea 3:2, probably due to their allegorical interpretation of the verse, which teaches that the gift was of inestimable worth (Rosenburg, *Mikraoth Gedeloth*, pp. 19ff., and Kevin Cathcart and Robert Gordon, *The Targum of the Twelve Minor Prophets* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989], p. 35). Further, neither Jerome, Theodore, Cyril, nor Theodoret used this text in connection with Hosea 3:2.

64. Anderson includes comments about Theodore of Mopsuestia here, noting that he argued that Hosea’s condescension to marry a harlot paralleled God’s condescension in taking sinful people to himself. A survey of this section of Theodore’s commentary reveals that this is not an explicitly Christological typology; instead, Theodore had God’s relationship with Israel in view (*Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, pp. 41ff.). Anderson dealt with typology more broadly than is here warranted, so his inclusion of Theodore has been omitted.

65. Anderson, “Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques,” p. 3.

66. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, p. 99.

67. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, p. 45.

During the Reformation, such Christological readings also fell out of favor with commentators. Capito and Zanchi continued to see Hosea and Gomer as types of Christ and the church,<sup>68</sup> but Luther, Oecolampadius, Daneau, Pareus, and the Genevan Bible limit Christological readings of Hosea's marriage.<sup>69</sup> Of course, Jewish commentators did not read Hosea's marriage with Gomer as a type of the future Messiah's work. The non-Christological reading of Hosea's marriage common among the Reformers thus bore some semblance to the Jewish interpretive tradition.

68. Wolfgang Capito, *In Hoseam Prophetam* (Argentorati, 1528). The pagination is incorrect, so I omit page number references. See also Kittelson, *Wolfgang Capito*, pp. 232ff. For Zanchi, see John L. Farthing, "Holy Harlotry: Jerome Zanchi and the Exegetical History of Gomer (Hosea 1–3)," *Biblical Interpretation in the Age of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), pp. 307ff.

69. See relevant page citations in footnotes 51–52 and 64 above. Luther hinted at a typological interpretation quite different from that of earlier commentators: Like Christ, Hosea preached repentance prior to the judgment; however, he seemingly contradicted the covenant of Moses, leading him to be labeled a heretic. Hosea, like Christ, bore a "cross" of suffering (*Lectures on the Minor Prophets I*, p. 4). As Farthing notes in the previous citation, Zanchi took a more positive reading of Gomer because he saw her as "the church of Israel." Given the continuity between the old and new covenant communities in Reformed thought, Zanchi found in Gomer the church of the elect. She thus became the sanctified wife of Christ. Some of the commentators mentioned here emphasized a similar ecclesiology, but they—except for Luther—adopted more negative readings of Gomer, which discouraged them from equating her with the elect bride of Christ. More substantial investigation into the typology of these sources would reveal that typology exists on a spectrum. I have classified these commentaries together because they reveal greater similarity with Calvin on this point than with Irenaeus, Jerome, or Augustine. However, I use the word "limit" rather than the stronger "omit" intentionally.

70. See note 10 above.

71. Schurb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran-Calvinist Conflict on the Protoevangelium," pp. 31–34.

72. See Richard A. Muller, "Reception and response: Referencing and understanding Calvin in seventeenth-century Calvinism," *Calvin and his Influence, 1509–2009*, eds. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 182–201. It cannot therefore be assumed that Daneau, Zanchi, Pareus, and the Geneva Bible uncritically adopted Calvin's reading of Hosea 1–3.

73. See, for example, Kenneth Austin, *The Jews and the Reformation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 78–103; David H. Price, "Christian Humanism and the Representation of Judaism: Johannes Reuchlin and the Discovery of Hebrew," *Arthuriana* 19.3 (2009): 80–96; Alice L. Eckardt, "The Reformation and the Jews," *Shofar* 7.4 (1989): 23–47.

74. Anderson, "Family Dynamics, Fertility Cults, and Feminist Critiques," p. 5. Early and Reformational Christian interpreters gave various opinions about the woman's identity, and many chose to simply preserve the ambiguity. Since no consensus can be observed on this question, its discussion has been limited here.

This data seemingly vindicates Puckett's contention that the "Judaizing Calvin" thesis presents only a half-truth.<sup>70</sup> First, Calvin's exegetical decisions represent broader interpretive trends in the Reformed tradition. As Ken Schurb notes, the "Judaizing Calvin" thesis stemmed from a misunderstanding of Reformed ecclesiology. Hunnius saw Calvin as the fountainhead of the Reformed tradition, assuming Calvin held the same prestigious position in his tradition as Luther held among his. Pareus, while defending Calvin against charges of Judaizing, nevertheless countered this notion by expressing his disagreement with Calvin on several exegetical points (e.g., their interpretations of Genesis 3:15).<sup>71</sup> Calvin's students appreciated their teacher but saw him as a co-laborer with whom they could freely disagree.<sup>72</sup> Further, three of the commentaries surveyed here—Luther (1526), Capito (1528), and Oecolampadius (1535)—predate Calvin's (1557). This demonstrates that Calvin did not unilaterally influence the Reformed tradition's interpretation of Hosea; rather, Calvin was one Reformer among many who found the Jewish reading of Hosea's marriage persuasive. It seems more probable that early modern interpreters were influenced by the humanistic desire to return to the original sources. This encouraged them to read Hebrew, and to do so, they needed to learn from Hebraists. This then led them to benefit from Jewish exegesis.<sup>73</sup>

Second, Calvin was critical of Jewish exegesis in these lectures. He denied the Jewish allegory of Hosea's payment. Further, his affirmation that Gomer was the woman in Hosea 3 contradicted several prominent Jewish sources which instead taught she was a second woman (e.g., Ibn Ezra, Kara).<sup>74</sup> Though Calvin appreciated certain insights from Jewish interpreters, he was thoughtful with his appropriations. Calvin felt comfortable gleaming from and dismissing both the Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions where he deemed appropriate.

#### HOSEA AS CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE IN CALVIN'S LECTURES

While Calvin's interpretation of Hosea's marriage differed substantially at times from that of earlier Christians, he nevertheless believed that Hosea preached the Christian gospel. For Calvin, the book of Hosea—and the Old Testament as a whole—functioned as Christian Scripture. As Puckett notes, "For Calvin, the Old and New Testaments are one book ... [The Old Testament] can only be properly understood when its interpretation is informed by the superior clarity of the New

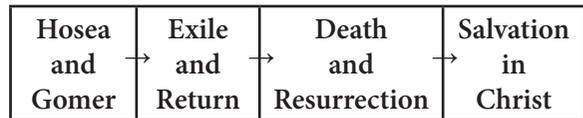
Testament.”<sup>75</sup> Calvin believed that Hosea’s marriage preached the Christian gospel in at least three ways: (1) The exile and restoration typify death and resurrection in Christ, (2) God’s promises anticipated the now-present age of the Messiah, and (3) Hosea articulated the new covenant that Jesus would inaugurate. The focus here shifts from Calvin’s continuity with previous exegetical traditions to how he expressed the gospel in his exposition of Hosea 1–3. For this reason, his exegesis will only be compared with that of other commentators where necessary.

1. *The exile and restoration typify death and resurrection in Christ.* Despite not seeing Hosea as a direct type of Christ, Calvin did find a layered typology in Hosea 1–3. As mentioned above, Calvin ceased to consider Hosea and Gomer as he commented on Hosea 1:3–2:23, instead focusing on what the prophet’s parable communicated about the relationship between God and Israel: Israel has been unfaithful to the Lord; therefore, she will be led into exile. However, God gave his bride promises about her future restoration. Throughout these lectures, Calvin saw the exile and restoration as types of death and resurrection: “The Babylonian exile was a certain sort of death....”<sup>76</sup> In his third lecture, Calvin explained Hosea 1:11 (“...they shall ascend from the land...”) by noting that Judea is higher than Babylon. However, this imagery has greater import: When the Jews ascended from Babylon, it would be “as if [God] was raising them from their graves.”<sup>77</sup> Calvin ended this lecture with a prayer that connected this motif with the work of Christ: “...we have not only been redeemed from Babylonian exile, but have also emerged from hell itself ... that thou mayest at last gather us together into thy celestial kingdom....”<sup>78</sup>

Lecture six follows a similar pattern. Calvin here emphasized that because Israel had sinned, she was sent to the wilderness, which was a place of “a thousand deaths” (*cum mille mortibus in deserto*), and “their restoration would be as if from death to life.”<sup>79</sup> His closing prayer again shows that this exile–restoration motif typified the work of Christ. Christians, like Israel, sin and fall under God’s paternal discipline. However, God “doſt ... invite us to [him]self, that being allured by [his] sweet invitation, we may run ... as not to be weary in our course, until Christ shall at length bring us together to [him], and ... lead us to ... eternal life.”<sup>80</sup> For Calvin, Israel symbolically died during the exile, but God raised her from the dead, anticipating how God in Christ would raise Christians from “hell ... into thy celestial city.” In this way, Calvin perceived a layered typology in Hosea 1–3: (1) Hosea and Gomer typified God, Israel, the exile,

and the restoration; (2) the exile and restoration typified death and resurrection; and (3) death and resurrection typified the work of Christ in the gospel. This layered typology, illustrated in Figure 3, demonstrates one way that Calvin believed Hosea preached the Christian gospel.

Figure 3:  
Calvin’s Layered Typology in Hosea 1–3



2. *God’s promises anticipated the now-present age of the Messiah.* To further the previous point, Calvin asserted throughout his lectures that God’s promises concerning the restoration were only truly fulfilled with Christ’s coming: “The prophet thus speaks about the people’s restoration, so that his prophecies extend to the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>81</sup> While commenting on Hosea 3:5, Calvin argued that Hosea’s promises had dual fulfillments: according to this verse, the promises of the restoration would be fulfilled during “the end of days” which

had its beginning from the return of the people. When therefore liberty was granted to the Jews to return to their homeland, it was the end or fullness of days, of which the prophet speaks. But a continued series from the people’s return until the advent of Christ must simultaneously be understood because the Lord then more fully performed what he declared here by his prophet.<sup>82</sup>

For Calvin, the Messiah is the fulfillment of Hosea’s promises because only through him are the people truly restored to God. This idea is not entirely at odds with

75. Puckett, *John Calvin’s Exegesis of the Old Testament*, p. 82.

76. CO, 42:228: *Exsilium babilonicum fuit quaedam species mortis.*

77. CO, 42:222: *...ut scilicet populum restituat mirabiliter, ac si mortuoyſ educeret e sepulcris.*

78. Calvin, *Hosea*, p. 72. CO excludes Calvin’s prayers.

79. CO, 42:244: *...restitutionem fore quasi a morte in vitam.*

80. Calvin, *Hosea*, p. 109.

81. CO, 42:248: *Prophetam sic loqui de populi restitutione, ut vaticinia sua extendat usque ad regnum Christi.*

82. CO, 42:265: *Porro haec dierum extremitas initium habuit a populi reditu. Quum ergo libertas permessa fuit Iudaeis, ut in patriam redirent, fuit haec extremitas dierum, vel plenitudo, de qua loquitur propheta. Sed continua series a reditu populi usque ad Christi adventum simul tenenda est: qua tunc plenius praestiti Dominus quod hic per prophetam suum denuntiat.*

the Jewish interpretive tradition. Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon show that *Targum Jonathan* also took a Messianic reading of Hosea's promises, asserting that the Messiah's advent and the restoration were inexplicably linked.<sup>83</sup> The idea that the exile continued even after the Jews returned to Canaan can even be found in post-exilic Scripture: After rebuilding Jerusalem, the people declared, "We are slaves" (Nehemiah 9:36).

However, two differences exist between the readings of Calvin and those of the Jewish interpretive tradition. First, Calvin maintained that Hosea's promises were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the "one head" under whom God's people enjoy liberation (Hosea 1:11).<sup>84</sup> Hosea 3:5 likewise predicts the advent of Christ: God promised that the people would "seek the Lord their God, and David their king." "David" served here as a metonym for the Messiah.<sup>85</sup> This verse takes on a polemic quality for Calvin. Since Jesus is the Messiah, Hosea 3:5 "shows that God now is not to be sought except in Christ the mediator." Calvin continued, "Whoever therefore rejects Christ relinquishes God himself" Calvin utilized 1 John 2:23 to substantiate these claims: "He who does not have the Son does not have the Father."<sup>86</sup> Since the Jews do not seek Jesus as Hosea 3:5 dictates, they have not received the promise of restoration, and

their exilic status continues. Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of Hosea's promises since He is the one mediator who can bring man into a restorative relationship with God. Without Jesus, readers of Hosea see only words of promise; only with Christ are these promises apprehended.<sup>87</sup>

Second, Calvin recognized that Hosea's prophecies concerning the restoration included the ingrafting of the Gentiles. Hosea 1:10, for example, reads, "...in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'" Calvin explained that some commentators attributed this promise only to the nation of Israel, but this was unlikely since the ten tribes never returned from exile. Instead, "Hosea therefore is not preaching here about the kingdom of Israel, but about the church, which was to be restored by a return, both from Jews and Gentiles." Calvin substantiated this argument by appealing to Romans 9:24ff, where Paul quoted Hosea 1:10 to explain God's election of Gentiles who were formerly not his people.<sup>88</sup> Calvin expressed the logic of his argumentation more clearly in his commentary on Romans 9:25. After "the Jews were banished from God's family" in Hosea 1:2–9,

they were thus reduced to a common class, and put on a level with the Gentiles.... God's mercy is now indiscriminately extended to all the Gentiles ... after having equalized the Jews and the Gentiles, [God] would gather a Church for himself from aliens, so that they who were not a people would begin to be so.<sup>89</sup>

Hosea 1:2–9 therefore saw Israel stripped of her covenantal status due to her sin, making her a "Gentile" of sorts. Yet Hosea 1:10 promised that God would restore Gentiles to relationship with himself, including the now "Gentile-ized" Israelites.<sup>90</sup> This has happened in the church, which has as its Head Jesus, the Davidic King (Hosea 1:11).<sup>91</sup>

Peter cited the same prophecy in 1 Peter 2:10, and Calvin there explained the prophecy in the same way, adding, "Peter reminds us that this was fulfilled in his own age; for the Jews ... seemed no longer to be God's people ... [and] were repudiated by the Lord. But when they are gathered in Christ, from no people they really become the people of God."<sup>92</sup> Calvin thus understood Hosea 1:10 as a prediction that the Messiah's advent would restore both Jews and Gentiles to God. Since this has happened in the church through Jesus' gospel, Hosea 1:10 became for Calvin a proof-text that supports Jesus' identity as the Messiah. Unsurprisingly,

83. E.g., see Cathcart and Gordon, *The Targum of the Twelve Minor Prophets*, p. 31 (Hosea 1:10–11 [=2:1–2 in Targum]) and 35 (Hosea 3:5).

84. CO, 42:219–222.

85. "David" stands for the Davidic Kingdom, which in turn represents the reign of the son of David.

86. CO, 42:264: *Haec doctrina apprime nobis utilis est. Ostendit enim nunc Deum a nobis quaeri non posse, nisi in mediatore Christo. Quisquis ergo a Christo declinat, Deum ipsum relinquit.*

87. Calvin noted that some Christian interpreters tried to use Hosea 3:5 as a proof-text for Christ's divinity. They argued that since Hosea commanded the people to seek God and to seek their king, this implied that the Messianic king would be God. Calvin found this reading unconvincing and posited that it would be unconvincing to Jewish interlocutors who already denied Christ's deity (CO, 42:264).

88. CO, 42:217: *Hoseas ergo hic non de regno Israel concionatur, sed de ecclesia quae postliminio restituenda erat tam ex Iudaeis quam ex gentibus.*

89. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, in *Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XIX*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), p. 372.

90. Calvin was aware that some Christian interpreters read Hosea 1:10 as a prophecy only about God's salvation of the Gentiles, omitting anything about the restoration of the Jews. For Calvin, this missed Hosea's point: The Jews have been stripped of covenant status and are like the Gentiles. They will be with the nations, first in their alienation and then in the restoration (CO, 42:218–219).

91. CO, 42:219–222.

92. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, in *Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XXII*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), pp. 76ff.

Figure 4:  
Calvin on Jeremiah 31’s Use of Hosea 2

Hosea 2	Jeremiah 31
Covenant of Firmness (righteousness, judgment, faithfulness [vv. 19–20])	Covenant of Firmness (Law engraved on people’s hearts, unlike in the broken old covenant [vv. 31–33])
Covenant of Forgiveness (goodness and mercies [v. 19])	Covenant of Forgiveness (God forgives the people’s iniquities [v. 34])
Reciprocal Covenant (people will know the Lord [v. 20])	Reciprocal Covenant (all the people know the Lord [v. 34])
	Necessary Work of the Covenant (God gives the people new hearts [v. 33])

the Jewish interpretive tradition believed Hosea here only prophesied about the restoration of the Jews.<sup>93</sup> Calvin’s insistence that Hosea also predicted the ingrafting of the Gentiles is thus a uniquely Christian interpretation.

3. *Hosea articulated the new covenant that Jesus would inaugurate.* Since the promises of the restoration find complete fulfillment in the age of the Messiah, Calvin took a Christocentric reading of God’s promises in Hosea 2:18–20. There, God promised to “betroth” Israel to himself through a “covenant.” Having dissolved the marital covenant with Israel, God now returns his bride to himself.<sup>94</sup> Calvin here found numerous parallels with the “new covenant” passage in Jeremiah 31:31–34. When God promised in Hosea 2:19–20 that Israel’s betrothment would be “in righteousness and in judgment” (*in iusticia, et in iudicio*) and “in faithfulness” (*in fide*), Calvin interpreted this as a prediction of the new covenant’s firmness.<sup>95</sup> He found a parallel in Jeremiah 31:31–33, where Jeremiah contrasted the broken old covenant with the new covenant, which “God would ensure ... to be preserved or both sides” by engraving the law on the people’s hearts.<sup>96</sup> Hosea 2:20 also described Israel’s betrothal as “in goodness and in mercies” (*et in clementia [vel, bonitate], et in misericordiis*). Calvin believed these terms indicated the forgiveness offered in the covenant, causing him to find a parallel with Jeremiah 31:34’s promise to “forgive their iniquity and ... remember their sin no more.” Finally, Hosea 2:20 showed the reciprocal nature of this covenant: “[The people] shall know the Lord.” The covenant would be confirmed because the people would no longer walk in ignorance, but would instead have true knowledge of God. Jeremiah 31:34 showed the same characteristic: “They shall all know Me.” Since Hosea ministered

earlier than Jeremiah, Calvin concluded that “Jeremiah ... borrowed from this place.”<sup>97</sup> Ministering later in history, though, Jeremiah added to Hosea’s insights by explaining the mechanism of the new covenant: God would restore His people by writing the Law on their hearts (31:33). Figure 4 illustrates the connections between the two texts.

Calvin was not the first Christian commentator to notice parallels between these passages. Alberto Ferreiro’s short survey of early Christian interpreters shows that commentators such as Jerome and John Chrysostom arrived at comparable interpretations.<sup>98</sup> Calvin’s comments on Hosea 2:18–20 are nevertheless unique. Despite reading the prophecies as pertaining to the new covenant, Calvin omitted any reference to Christ here. Nevertheless, Calvin’s covenantal framework is inherently Christological, assuming the superiority of the new covenant to that of the old due to the realized work of the Messiah. This differs from the Jewish understanding of the new covenant, where it is merely a renewal of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>99</sup> Calvin read Hosea 2:18–20

93. Rosenberg, *Mikraoth Gedeloth*, pp. 8, 200.

94. CO, 42:248.

95. For convenience, I have only translated Calvin’s comments throughout this section. When citing the language of Hosea 2:18–20, I have adopted the translation found in Calvin, *Hosea*, 109–116. For Jeremiah 31:31–33, I have relied on the ESV.

96. CO, 42:250: *Deum facturum ut servetur utrinque fides coniugii.*

97. CO, 42:250–251: *Non dubito quin mutuatus sit ex hoc loco Ieremias quae habentur illo 31 capite.*

98. Alberto Ferreiro (ed.), *The Twelve Prophets*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament XIV*, gen. ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), pp. 11–14. Despite their many similarities, Calvin criticized portions of Jerome’s exegesis of this text (CO, 42:251).

99. See A. J. Rosenberg, *Mikraoth Gedeloth, Jeremiah*, vol. 2 (New York: New York: Judaica Press, 1985), pp. 254–255.

Figure 5:  
Calvin’s Christian Reading of Hosea 1–3

<p><i>Problem:</i> Jews Divorced Because of Sin and Become “Gentiles”</p> <p>(“Not My People”)</p> <p>Hosea 1:2–9</p>	<p><i>Promise 1:</i> The Gentiles (including the Jews) Will Be Gathered</p> <p>(“Not My People” Will Become “My People”)</p> <p>Hosea 1:10</p>	<p><i>Promise 2:</i> This Gathering Will Happen Under the Messiah</p> <p>(“One Head”; “David”)</p> <p>Hosea 1:11; 3:5</p>	<p><i>Promise 3:</i> The Gathered People Will Join in a New Covenant with God</p> <p>(“Bethrothed”)</p> <p>Hosea 2:18–20</p>	<p><i>Solution:</i> God Restores Jews and Gentiles from Life to Death in Christ</p> <p>(Exile-Restoration)</p> <p>cf. Romans 9:24ff; 1 Peter 2:10; Jeremiah 31:31–34</p>
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in light of a Christian covenantal theology, making his exegesis here thoroughly Christian. His Christian interpretation of Hosea 1–3 is summarized in Figure 5:

NOT BORROWING: INSIGHTS INTO CALVIN’S EXEGETICAL METHOD

Calvin ended his discussion of the parallels between Hosea 2:18–20 and Jeremiah 31:31–34 rather abruptly: “But let us not seem to borrow from elsewhere...”<sup>100</sup> Why was Calvin so anxious not to “borrow”? Pak’s insights into Calvin’s exegetical efforts are instructive here. Explaining Calvin’s downplaying of Christological interpretations of certain Psalms, Pak wrote, “[Calvin] finds that a reading in reference to the life of David renders a meaning sufficient and powerful for the church.”<sup>101</sup> For Calvin, not only is Scripture inspired, but every word of Scripture is inspired. This means that overtly Christian doctrines or types do not need to be read back into Old Testament texts to make them relevant for Christians; the historically situated text is already capable of edifying and instructing the people of God.

This does not mean that Calvin denied the analogy of faith. Calvin used Jeremiah 31:31–34 to clarify the teachings of Hosea 2:18–20. Likewise, he believed Paul’s command that pastors have holy families clarified Hosea

1:2 by removing the possibility of a historical interpretation. In these instances, other texts allowed Calvin to achieve greater clarity as he explained Hosea. What Calvin seemed anxious to avoid was the impression that he used one text (e.g., Hosea 2:18–20) as a springboard to begin speaking on a different text altogether (e.g., Jeremiah 31:31–34). If Hosea is inspired, then Hosea is valuable *in itself* and should be read, preached, and taught for its own merits. Calvin’s doctrine of Scripture thus influenced his pedagogy. Constantly “borrowing” from other pericopes could unintentionally communicate that the text at hand lacked importance or relevance for the contemporary Christian. Calvin thus limited himself to a straightforward, historically contextualized exposition of Hosea 1–3.

Though more limited than earlier Christian readings, Calvin’s interpretation of Hosea 1–3 did not remove everything pertaining to Christ and His gospel because the prophet truly had eyes towards the Messiah. When Christ appeared, He would raise His people from the dead by restoring them (both Jews and Gentiles) to right relationship with God through His new covenant. Calvin cannot be accused of Judaizing here. His exposition of the text might appear “strange” in some aspects, but it is nonetheless thoroughly Christian. Calvin found Christ in Hosea 1–3 because He is truly there. ■

100. CO, 42:252: *Sed ne quid videamur aliunde accersere...*

101. Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin*, p. 82.