

Re-examining the Representation of the Land in Hosea 4–11 in Light of Sacred Space

STEFANIE REMBOLD (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA)

ABSTRACT¹

This article reconsiders the role of land in the YHWH-Israel relationship in Hos 4–11, a text which reworks positive notions of land—gift, inheritance, homeland—as the land becomes associated with Israel’s iniquitous actions and distorted values. To achieve this, the study explores how land is represented as a sacred space in the text and how sacred space is subject to the actions, ideas and perceptions of the people who inhabit the land. The study employs a synchronic, social-scientific approach and conducts a thematic analysis of the text, focusing on the interconnections of sacred space’s moderators—holiness, cultural memory and covenantal exchange—and their place in the land’s deconstruction and reconstruction. Considering these relational modes, the study shows that the representation of the land is reflected in the text’s movements from deconstruction to reconstruction, which suggests that the state of the YHWH-Israel relationship is interlaced with the physical landscape.

KEYWORDS: Hosea 4–11, Land, Sacred Space, Holiness, Covenant, Cultural Memory

A INTRODUCTION

To probe the land of Israel and its relevance in the Hebrew Bible is no new idea.² Contributions towards this endeavour have examined the extent of land’s purpose in the text and the lives of the Israelite people, often by analysing it thematically³ or by exploring its role as a theology and tracing its position as

* Stefanie Rembold, Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures, School of Humanities, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0028, South Africa. Email: stefanie.rembold@up.ac.za. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8398-3940>.

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¹ This article is based on research for my doctoral thesis, "Covenantal Nature: Representation of Land in Hosea" (University of Pretoria, 2023).

² Hereafter referred to as HB.

³ Some examples include Hilary F. Marlow, "Land," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophet* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012); Laurie Braaten, "God Sows: Hosea’s Land Theme in the

“gift” and “promise” throughout the HB.⁴ From these fruitful explorations comes an overarching point which suggests a visible “symbiotic relationship between Yahweh, the land, and the people of Israel in which the land is seen as a personal gift from Yahweh.”⁵

As YHWH’s gift to Israel, the land provides an ideal platform on which to serve YHWH as it gives the people access to YHWH.⁶ John Inge explains that “the Promised land is always a place with YHWH, a place filled with memories of life with him, with his promises and vows made to him ... it was a place with memories as well as hopes, with a past as well as future ... it was a storied place.”⁷ Thus, the land takes on various roles in the text—homeland, possession and promise,⁸ that is, until Israel’s prophets overturn these notions of land as they see the people’s ejection from this “place with YHWH” and recognise YHWH’s warning that the land is also a “problem.”⁹

The notion of land is manipulated in Hos 4–11, as it becomes swept up in the YHWH-Israel relationship. This bond breaks down due to the Northern Kingdom’s apostasy and then is rebuilt because YHWH chooses to forgive them and bring them back from exile (e.g. Hos 11). The people are, however, not alone in this, as the land is implicated in the affairs of this divine-human relationship (e.g. Hos 4:1–3). This is because the land of Israel cannot be reduced to its physical landscape or geographical borders. It is “always physical dirt freighted with social meanings derived from historical experience.”¹⁰ These are the perceptions of the land that the characters in the text create, change and reinforce, which suggest that landscape and earth are accompanied by social value. In light of this, the land should also be viewed as space since land and space are tied to physical and social constructs based on a people’s socio-political values,

Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Scharf; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 104–132; Gert Kwakkell, “The Land in the Book of Hosea,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort* (ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 167–182.

⁴ Chief among these is Walter Brueggemann’s seminal work, *The Land* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

⁵ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 42.

⁶ Hans E. Von Waldow, “Israel and Her Land: Some Theological Considerations,” in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honour of Jacob M. Myers* (ed. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 504.

⁷ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 36

⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 53–54, explains that the land is YHWH’s possession and it is only made Israel’s “possession” as an inheritance and as the place in which the people are allowed to dwell.

⁹ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

perceptions and beliefs.¹¹ Hosea then begs the question: If the land of Israel is intended to form part of a symbiotic relationship with YHWH and his people, what purpose does the land hold when the YHWH-Israel relationship breaks down, and the land is no longer a space of habitation and prosperity? Furthermore, how are space and the perceptions surrounding space impacted when land is re-established?

With these questions in mind, I posit that one must investigate the various intertwined conceptual links which bind this relationship to the land. To achieve this, I approach the text synchronically and employ a social-scientific analysis which considers the impact of social values and perceptions on the Israelite culture.¹² Furthermore, since the relationship between YHWH and Israel is between a god and a nation, it implies that the land, the arena in which these two parties interact, is a product of this relationship.¹³ As such, this study examines how Hos 4–11 represents land as sacred space and how it is impacted by the relational modes of sacred space, namely holiness, covenant and cultural memory.

1 Some Theoretical Concerns

In the HB, sacredness is indicated by קֹדֶשׁ , a verbal form, which means “to be, become, remain holy.”¹⁴ Common derivatives of קֹדֶשׁ include קֹדֶשׁ (n., “holiness”) and קֹדֶשׁ (adj., “holy”). Sacred space is another derivative indicated by the Hebrew term, מִקְדָּשׁ and translates as “holy place” and “sanctuary.”¹⁵ The term denotes a “closeness to God’s power,” which encourages “sanctification as a means of the community to partake in this power.”¹⁶ From an ancient Near

¹¹ Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 14–15.

¹² The study employs the so-called “final” version of the Masoretic text. I concur with Ehud Ben Zvi, *Hosea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 14, that the likely dating of this “final” version is during the Persian period in Yehud. Therefore, the “culture” to which I refer is the Yehudites and I treat the text as a reflection of the past as well as a warning to Israel of the allure of the iniquity which held their forebears so tightly. This study focuses on the “emic” or “insider” perspective and therefore considers how the land is represented in the narrative which the text presents. The careful use of social scientific criticism can help to mitigate “the hermeneutical gap” between those whom the text represents (“them”) and the modern reader (“us”), avoiding pitfalls such as anachronism. See Ernest van Eck, *Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark’s Story of Jesus: A Narratological and Social Scientific Reading* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1995), 163–164.

¹³ N. Blake Hearson, *Go Now to Shiloh: A Biblical Theology of Sacred Space* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 26.

¹⁴ Baruch Levine, “The Language of Holiness: Perceptions of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Backgrounds for the Bible* (ed. Michael P. O’Connor and David N. Freedman; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 241.

¹⁵ W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 211.

¹⁶ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 15.

Eastern perspective, Nicolas Wyatt states that sacred spaces, particularly the temple at the centre of the world, act as the “junction” where heaven and earth meet.¹⁷ The definitions offered here point to two key ideas—a sacred space is a site where humans can access the divine and pursue sanctification and holiness to experience the divine.

Since sacred space is tied to the state of being holy, one must understand how holiness functions. At its core, holiness is concerned with the divine, being “withheld from ordinary use” and is associated with actions of consecration, sanctification and dedication—the actions which make or alter something to be holy.¹⁸ Additionally, holiness “...may be defined basically as a state of being . . . that is commensurate with the divine presence. What is not holy or is impure poses a threat to holiness.”¹⁹ Therefore, when holiness is applied to space, one can expect that this sanctity is tenuous and can be removed if exposed to the impure.

Blake Hearson builds on discussions of YHWH’s role in sacred space by Sara Japhet, whose principal argument is that sacred space “at its most basic level” is the “existence of a direct and immediate link between that place and God,” which is established at the specific sites where God lives or chooses to convene with people.²⁰ Hearson explains that this space would be “where [God] cause[s] [his] name to be remembered”²¹ or “where God has declared himself accessible to the worshipper.”²² This position might highlight a divine role in creating sacred space, but Hearson also points to the role of humans in maintaining sacred space. YHWH may decide to remove this status, but the sacredness of space is also firmly in the hands of the people who guard it.

¹⁷ Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 161.

¹⁸ Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 313.

¹⁹ David P. Wright, “Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond: Differing Perspectives,” *Interpretation* 53/4 (1933): 352.

²⁰ Sara Japhet, “Some Biblical Concepts of Sacred Place,” in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land* (ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky; Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Society and Humanities, 1998), 57–59.

²¹ Exodus 20:24; all translations are my own. See Hearson, *Go Now to Shiloh*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 19. Hearson and Japhet’s analyses of sacred space diverge from two major definitions of sacred space. The substantial definition proposes that sacred space is an absolute reality determined by the divine and requires little human involvement. The situational definition is quite the opposite, as it holds that notions of the sacred and sacred space rely on the meaning that a society or culture gives to it, making sacred space a malleable social construct; David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6. Hearson and Japhet diverge from this perspective as they do not treat sacred space as an absolute reality (Japhet, “Some Biblical Concepts of Sacred Place,” 56), nor do they support the idea that sacred space is a completely human construction; Hearson, *Go Now to Shiloh*, 20. Instead, they propose something of a balance in which space is created by both human and divine participants but holiness is a contribution which the divine largely undertakes; *Ibid.*, 26.

Hearson explains that "[w]hile God could sever communication, the destruction of a place and the people's removal were described as Israel's responsibility."²³

This responsibility draws upon a more complex factor relating to holiness—it is a "volatile state" that is dependent on obedience to rules and regulations that YHWH sets out for Israel because "[d]efilement may virtually undo the effects of sanctification."²⁴ Additionally, holiness is a desired state due to YHWH's command to Israel: כִּי קְדוֹשִׁים וְהֵייתֶם וְהִתְקַדְּשֶׁתֶם אֲלֵהֶיכֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲנִי כִּי אֶת־נַפְשֵׁיכֶם תִּטְמְאוּ וְלֹא אֶנִּי קְדוֹשׁ.²⁵ The implication is that God is the source and Israel's foremost example of holiness. Inconsequently, "God and God's people [coming] into dialectical interplay: when the people live a life by divine holiness, they are, in turn, sanctified by God."²⁶ Ultimately, sacred space requires the people's commitment to holiness and the sanctification process to remain holy.

While holiness is an integral part of sacred space, it also depends on two more elements—the covenant and cultural memory. The covenant is a formal treaty between YHWH and Israel that delineates how Israel is expected to live in the land and enforces the codes, rituals, and laws used to govern the people. As outlined by the covenantal formula, this treaty is a form of asymmetrical reciprocity where YHWH, the benefactor and Israel's "God," protects and blesses Israel, his beneficiary and "people" with land, wealth and inheritance.²⁷ The asymmetrical nature of this relationship is found in what Israel is expected to return on YHWH's investment—remaining faithful to YHWH by loving him as a marriage partner, obeying his law and pursuing the knowledge of YHWH.²⁸ This covenant remains in place so long as the people adhere to the covenantal stipulations. However, if the people were to renege, YHWH could dissolve this relationship and place sanctions on the people and his promises to them.²⁹

A way for the covenant and sacred space to last over time is in cultural memory, which refers to a culture's ability to recall events, ideas and values that

²³ Ibid., 33.

²⁴ Levine, "The Language of Holiness," 246.

²⁵ "For I am YHWH, your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves..." (Lev 11:44).

²⁶ D.P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond," 353.

²⁷ Zeba Crook, "Reciprocity: Covenantal Exchange as a Test Case," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament and Its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 84. The covenant formula, as established in the Abrahamic covenant, is a two-part statement by YHWH: "I will be your God" (1) and "You will be my people" (2) (Gen 17:7–8). This formula is perhaps the clearest presentation of the covenant in the HB. See Tiberius Rata, "Covenant," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 100.

²⁸ Rata, "Covenant," 100

²⁹ Crook, "Reciprocity," 80.

have shaped them over generations.³⁰ These events, ideas and values are vital for upholding sacred space as they remind the people of their history with YHWH and what he has done for them, which, in turn, reminds them of how they are to live as YHWH’s covenant partners and ensure their loyalty to him.³¹

This study posits an interplay between holiness, covenant and cultural memory in the (re)production of sacred space. Without covenant, Israel would have little motivation to foster accountability towards YHWH. Without a need to bolster cultural memory, the people may eventually forget the purpose of the law, which may result in a rejection of the covenant and YHWH’s favour. Without memory and covenant, there would be no management of holiness, let alone a reason for needing or wanting YHWH (Lev 11:44–45). Lastly, without the presence of YHWH and Israel’s continued pursuit of sanctification, there would be no need for sacred space.

This article considers how this interplay between sacred space, covenant (or covenantal exchange), and cultural memory is illustrated in Hos 4–11 and its impact on the representation of the land in its maintenance, deconstruction, and reconstruction. As a result, the analysis may lead to a further understanding of the role of land in the YHWH-Israel relationship, which is tied up in these three elements.

2 Land/Sacred Space in Hosea: Preliminary Considerations

The land is denoted by two words, אֶרֶץ and אֲדָמָה, with the former comprising the majority of the references.³² In Hos 4–11, however, direct references to the land of Israel are limited to אֶרֶץ, which are supplemented by indirect references to land, including references to YHWH’s “house” or “place.”³³ While these references to the land are limited,³⁴ the notion of land is broad since it encompasses architectural and natural features such as cities and mountains – the “earthly turf” – and the symbols to which it is attached.³⁵ A critical symbolic feature of the land is that it is used to represent Israel, particularly as metonymy

³⁰ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16.

³¹ Leslie C. Allen, “זָכַר,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 1 (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1102.

³² The terms share three broad categories of meaning—the entire earth, a particular country or land (likely belonging to a person or nation) and a portion of land, soil or ground. Marlow, “Land,” 489.

³³ Indirect references to land include Hos 2:3 where YHWH reveals that the reunited Israel and Jacob will be gathered in the same place where they were disowned. This place is the land, as the dissolution of the YHWH-Israel relationship is said to have ended in the valley of Jezreel, in Israel (Hos 1:5).

³⁴ In the book of Hosea, the use of אֶרֶץ to refer to the land of Israel – whether the Northern Kingdom or the post-exilic territory of Israel – is limited to Hos 1:2; 2:2, 20, 23–25; 4:1, 9:3 and 10:1; Kwakkel, “The Land in the Book of Hosea,” 167.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 2.

(Hos 1:2), and it takes on ideas associated with the "house of Israel,"³⁶ including its politics, society, institutions and economics.

Unlike its religious features, the land is rarely attributed to the adjective "holy" in the HB.³⁷ Nonetheless, there are other ways the land can be ascribed holiness. Passages such as Hos 9:3–4 imply that the land is holy by comparing the land to places which are regarded as less holy or profane, like the lands of the nations. Furthermore, the land's holiness can be drawn from its features. For example, the land's sacredness has been connoted by inclusions of the *הַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ* ("holy mountain") as well as its most prominent city, Jerusalem.³⁸ Importantly, the land's holiness is not treated as "...an inherent status, but totally dependent on God's decision to be present in or withdraw from it," which resembles the sanctity of sacred space.³⁹ Additionally, since "God is holy and His presence ... and abode are holy ... they generate holiness... so the Land (as His people) is holy and must be maintained unmarred and undefiled by wrongdoing."⁴⁰ This means that land can also be regarded as a sacred space, subject to laws, codes and boundaries which govern its holiness because "sins pollute the land."⁴¹

In Hos 4–11, there are references to holy sites, including Bethel, Shechem and Gilgal and the land of Israel itself (e.g. Hos 10:15). Though references to implied sacred locations are plentiful, the text's primary concern is to relate the deconstruction and later reconstruction of these places. Therefore, this study is structured according to these concerns. It also reflects the book of Hosea's repeated motifs of accusation, punishment and reconciliation to fully capture the desecration and sanctification of land.⁴²

³⁶ In Hos 1–2, the land represents the adulterous wife/mother. Thus, the children are also condemned because they, too, have committed whoredom. Consequently, their joint actions mean that the land is defiled and liable for punishment. Braaten, "God Sows," 109, concludes that "[t]he fate of the land and people are united in corporate solidarity."

³⁷ Waldemar Janzen, "Land," *ABD* 4: 145. The term "holy" is not applied directly but implicitly to land in the HB. The direct references to the land's holiness by the phrase *אֶדְמַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ* ("Land of holiness") and can be found in Zech 2:1. See Ze'ev Safrai, *Seeking out the Land: Land of Israel Traditions in Ancient Jewish, Christian and Samaritan Literature (200 CE-400 CE)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

³⁸ D. P. Wright, "Holiness (OT)," in *ABD* (Vol. 3; ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 243. Textual references to the holy mountain include Zech 8:3 as well as Isa 11:9 and 57:13. Isaiah also includes references to the holy Jerusalem namely 48:2 but mentions can be found in Neh 11:1.

³⁹ Janzen, "Land," 145.

⁴⁰ Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Biblical Concept of the Land of Israel: Cornerstone of the Covenant between God and Israel," in *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives* (ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1986), 52.

⁴¹ D. P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond," 357.

⁴² This is maintained by several scholars, particularly by Eric J. Tully, *Hosea: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018) as well as Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

B LAND UNMADE

How Israel meets its destruction is summarised in Hos 4:1–3, which is regarded as an introduction to the oracles of Hosea:⁴³

1 Hear a word of YHWH, sons of Israel! For YHWH’s dispute [is] with the inhabitants of the land because no truth, and no kindness, and no knowledge of YHWH [is] in the land.

2 Cursing and deceiving, murder and stealing, and committing adultery. They have broken forth, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

3 Therefore, the land will mourn, and so all who dwell in her wither. The animals of the fields, with the flying creatures of the heavens and also the fish of the sea, will be taken away.

Herein lies a three-part issue, which begins with a central accusation against Israel—they do not value what YHWH values and, therefore, they do not know YHWH. This develops into a secondary problem: an increasing desire for iniquity. Lastly, YHWH responds to this outpouring of iniquity by punishing the land for its metonymic relationship with Israel. These three aspects are valuable places to start when exploring how the interplay between holiness, memory and covenant plays out as Israel and her land are destroyed.

1 “There is no knowledge of YHWH in the Land”

Hosea 4:1 begins by pointing out that the transgressions are so heinous that “no truth, and no kindness and no knowledge of YHWH” can be found “in the Land.” This knowledge of YHWH encompasses an understanding, a remembering of and an adherence to YHWH’s instructions, which impresses on the people to “assimilate[e] [the values] in a way that gives direction to all of life.”⁴⁴ The verse recalls Hos 2:21, where YHWH promotes a new covenant with Israel and highlights that a combination of “truth,” “covenantal love,” and the “knowledge of YHWH” signifies the intimacy with which “knowing” (יָדַעַת) is associated.⁴⁵ This also means that if the people “know” YHWH and are, therefore, in physical and metaphorical proximity to him, the space they share becomes imbued with

⁴³ The text of Hosea 4–14 constitutes the “oracles” of Hosea. Structurally, I follow a bi-partite reading of the full text and treat Hos 4–14 as a large section, but I refer only to Hos 4–11, the first of two “structural panels,” which make up Hos 4–14; Tully, *Hosea*, 3.

⁴⁴ J. Gordon McConville, “Hosea, Book of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophet* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 346.

⁴⁵ The root יָדַעַת (“to know”) has connotations of understanding, experience and knowledge; see “יָדַעַת,” in Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 128–129). In this context, “knowing” conveys intimacy because it refers to a deep connection only made possible by insight, discernment, respect and care.

holiness.⁴⁶ William Dumbrell captures the importance of memory and knowledge for the covenantal relationship thus:

The claims of Yahweh upon Israel cannot be understood apart from historical memory. The commandments are not expressions of abstract law, but are bound up in events, parts of God's redemptive history towards Israel. The covenant history of Yahweh with Israel continues to be based upon the divine interventions of the past. The role of Israel's memory is thus not to relive the past, but to emphasize obedience for the future.⁴⁷

By emphasising the role of remembering, it is clear that consequences follow when cultural memory fails or, rather, the act of forgetting prevails, such as Israel's rejection of and turning away from YHWH and the covenantal stipulations to which they are bound.⁴⁸ The impact of this inability to recall and its effects on Israel are documented throughout the text but most clearly in Hos 11:1–7, where YHWH recollects how he raised Israel, loving him (Hos 11:1), teaching him to walk (Hos 11:3) and liberating him from Egypt (Hos 11:2). These shared memories ought to remind the people of Israel of YHWH's loving care for them, increasing their gratitude toward him by their knowledge of how he treated them from when they were a young nation. Unfortunately, despite the "cords of love" with which YHWH was pulling his people, "they did not know that [he] healed them" (Hos 11:3) but ran after the Baalim and sacrificed to them, becoming "bent on apostasy from [YHWH]" (Hos 11:7). Evidently, the pursuit of gratitude that sustains the covenant is replaced by pursuits of iniquity which, in turn, violate the laws and guidelines to which they should adhere. To make matters worse, this repeated forgetfulness follows the people of Israel as they sojourn through the desert and live in the land. In Hos 9, YHWH thinks about Israel's iniquity at Baal-Peor,⁴⁹ where the people "devoted themselves to shame" and "became an abomination like their lover" (Hos 9:10). In Hos 10, Israel is accused of sinning "since the days of Gibeah" (Hos 10:9), alluding to several events in which Israel committed great evil.⁵⁰ Overall, these demonstrate the pervasiveness of the Israelites' memory loss and how it affected their ability to

⁴⁶ See "ידה," in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (16 Vols.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975–2004), 477.

⁴⁷ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (rev. and enl. ed.; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 183–184.

⁴⁸ Leslie C. Allen, "גשה," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 3 (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 185.

⁴⁹ See Num 25:1–5.

⁵⁰ Ward lists several possible events; one which stands out is the Benjamite tribe's rape of the Levite's concubine in Judg 19–20, which led to the destruction of the Benjamites; James M., *Hosea: A Theological Commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 167–170).

retain the codes intended to safeguard their purity and maintain YHWH's position in the covenant.⁵¹

The importance of these memories for the sanctity of the land are laid out in Hos 4:4–11 and 5:1–4, which deal with the rejection of the knowledge of YHWH by Israel's priesthood. This "rejection" comes from YHWH's accusation that the high priest "forg[ot] the law of [his] God" (Hos 4:6), which has significant consequences for the Israelites. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memories are necessarily maintained by "special carriers" who are tasked with reminding the members of their group of significant historical events, ideologies and values; in Israel's case, this would be the responsibility of the priesthood and the prophets, as they are "separated from everyday life and duties."⁵² As the passage details, the priests abandoned their posts, thereby "cut[ting] off" the Israelites from this vital knowledge and provoking them to "lift their heart to their iniquity" (Hos 4:8). This loss of knowledge and reverence for cultural values creates a picture of excess, as the people's craving for sin is compared to eating without satiation (Hos 4:10) and drinking to the point where "wine and new wine take the heart" (Hos 4:11).

The desire for iniquity is described as "the spirit of fornication" (Hos 4:12), which is set as the antithesis of the knowledge of YHWH since it prevents the people from discerning between righteousness and sinfulness.⁵³ Without this discernment, there is little hope for the land, and its institutions meant to be governed by the will and knowledge of YHWH. As seen in Hos 7 and 8, the people foolishly reneged on the covenant by taking on kings that YHWH did not know and making idols, like the calf of Samaria, which "[are] not God" (Hos 7:6). What must now be considered is whether there is space for YHWH and his holiness if there is "no truth, and no kindness, and no knowledge of YHWH in the Land" (Hos 4:1).

2 "Bloodshed follows bloodshed"

Whereas Hos 4:1 and the discussion above establish the importance of the "knowledge of YHWH" and begin to show what happens when this "knowledge" and the cultural memory and law that it entails are forgotten, Hos 4:2 highlights the immediate consequences of this lack of knowledge on the purity and holiness of the people: "Cursing and deceiving, murder and stealing, and committing adultery ... have broken forth," taking over the land to the extent that "bloodshed follows bloodshed." The lack of knowledge allows Israel to disregard the laws

⁵¹ Thomas McComiskey posits that though YHWH states that these events have passed, people have "remained" in these events and have "never removed themselves from the spirit of Gibeah." Thomas E. McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets* (Vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 172.

⁵² Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 39.

⁵³ J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 163.

and purity codes, which instruct the Israelites on how to live and to be "holy" like YHWH is.⁵⁴

These purity codes stem from what social-scientific criticism calls "biblical social values," which are concerned with two ultimate traits determining a person's or group's socially recognised worth—honour and shame.⁵⁵ Honour is ascribed to people when they have shown a good relationship with Israelite society, especially because they adhered to the covenantal ethics by which they are governed. Contrariwise, when a person has been shamed, they have demonstrated a lack of honour and an inappropriate relationship with society. As such, community members are expected to strive toward receiving and maintaining honour, which is partly achieved by learning to manage the codes regulating purity and impurity. These codes deal with every aspect of Israelite life, including in-culture dynamics, food and drink, management of pure and impure objects, engagement with foreigners and behaviour in domestic, public or religious spaces.⁵⁶ In the opening verses of Hos 4, these laws have been rejected entirely, as the knowledge of YHWH and other covenant values have been supplanted by a lack of faithfulness and impure behaviour. This is still the case later in the text, as YHWH recalls "10000 of [his] laws," which the Israelites "thought ... strange" (Hos 8:12) and disregarded when they "sacrifice[d] a sacrifice of [YHWH's] gifts," displeasing him in the process (Hos 8:13).

Purity and holiness are similar in that they are bestowed on a person or object by YHWH/God, but they are also states of being affected by impure objects and behaviour by those of questionable honour. These threats can lessen the purity or holiness of the objects and the places in which they dwell and hamper acts of sanctification. Therefore, holiness and purity function as a spectrum rather than a static condition. The priesthood is holier than the Israelite public since the priests abide by stricter purity rules.⁵⁷ However, in Hos 4:4-11, the priests have rejected the purity codes to which they are subject, disregarding the intimacy they were meant to have with YHWH, increasing their impurity and making the people fall with them (Hos 4:6, 9). These actions reached their apex as YHWH threatened to "change their glory into shame" (Hos 4:7).

David Wright applies similar principles to the holiness of space, explaining that holiness informs "the identity and conduct of persons within the ancient community of faith" and "gives structure to space, the community's habitation and God's."⁵⁸ He refers to this "structure" as "graded holiness," which

⁵⁴ See Lev 11:44.

⁵⁵ Joseph Plevnik, "Honor/Shame," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (ed. Pilch, John J. and Bruce J. Malina; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 106.

⁵⁶ Jerome H. Neyrey, "Clean/Unclean, Pure/Polluted, and Holy/Profane: The Idea and the System of Purity," in *The Social Sciences and the New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 91–92.

⁵⁷ D. P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond," 355.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

is rooted in the idea that holiness is measured and can be represented on varying levels. This spectrum, captured by the terms קדש (holy), חל (profane), טהר (clean) and טמא (unclean), functions on two axes.⁵⁹ The first pair, holiness and the profane, "represents the divine relation to the ordered world," while the second pair, clean and unclean, "embraces the normal state of human existence in the earthly realm."⁶⁰ The axes reach their most favourable (holy, clean) point at the temple, which ancient Near Eastern worldviews determine as where the divine meets the earth.⁶¹ This worldview implies that holiness is determined by one's proximity to the holiest place or access to YHWH.⁶² Furthermore, like the purity codes used to govern human behaviour, symbolic and social boundaries reinforce these gradations,⁶³ which may take the form of physical walls and doors but are also represented as purity codes, rituals, the law and covenantal ethics.

Throughout the text, it is clear that Israel breaks down the boundaries intended to retain its holiness and purity and the spaces around it. In addition to their idol worship, the people of Israel also misuse the land in Hos 4, burning incense and engaging in false worship on the mountains and hills and under large trees (Hos 4:13). While Israel imitates the rituals one would expect in sacred spaces, acts of worship carried out in naturalistic settings such as these were considered pagan and were prohibited by the law established by YHWH before Israel was given entry into the land.⁶⁴ The law commanded the removal of religious rites, idols and practices used by foreign nations.⁶⁵ This purposeful

⁵⁹ Since they function similarly, it is useful to treat holiness and purity as sister terms. The same can be said about the profane and the unclean. For further clarification, see Levine, "The Language of Holiness."

⁶⁰ Philip P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 47–48).

⁶¹ Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life*, 161.

⁶² Ibid., 192, makes the astute observation that references to a "Holy of holies" signifies that the "progressive degrees of purity, sanctity and separation from the profane world" "emphasize ... hierarchical and moral transformations" in temple spaces, reflecting a "heavenward journey."

⁶³ This "access" is seen in the structure of Israel's religious sites, like the tabernacle, which impose graded purity rituals on its priesthood. For example, the high priest was expected to undergo more rituals than the average priest to gain admittance into the "holiest of holies," the room in which YHWH dwelt; Exod 26:33-34; cf. D. P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond," 356. For further reading on boundaries in the ancient Near Eastern worldview, see Wyatt's *Space and Time in the Religious Life*.

⁶⁴ Since it is unclear who is being worshipped, the verse may refer to acts of syncretism or polytheism; Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 163–164. Wolff views the verse as demonstrating Israel's ties to cultic activity in Baalism and has a detailed explanation thereof in Hans W. Wolff, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (trans. Gary Stansell; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 85–87. Ultimately, however, the passage states that Israel is guilty of "wrongful cultic behaviour"; Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 104.

⁶⁵ See Deut 7:5 and Lev 18:24. Von Waldow, "Israel and Her Land," 503, considers this regulation's impact on Israel's management of the land and that in removing these foreign tools, it was impressed on Israel "to do everything necessary to keep and maintain [the land] and not to lose it."

engagement of foreign practices meant that the people flouted the boundaries set by the purity codes, tainting the land as the space was appropriated for sacrifices.⁶⁶

Alongside the profanation of the physical landscape comes a progressive spreading of iniquity and shame in the land, including its cult centres. In Hos 4:15, Bethel's change is marked by its renaming as Beth-Aven, "the house of iniquity." The verse further shows that Bethel and Gilgal, cultic centres and places associated with Israel's cultural memory, were so shameful that "even a prostitute [would] be corrupted at such places."⁶⁷ To make matters worse, the threat these places posed encompassed the Northern Kingdom as a whole, as Israel was warned not to "offend Judah" (Hos 4:15), which at that point maintained its covenantal relationship with YHWH. The threat of Israel's shame on Judah's relationship with YHWH is reinforced further as readers are warned to "[l]et [Ephraim] alone" (Hos 4:17) because of the people's religious apostasy. The land's sanctity appears entirely depleted by Israel's removal of the symbolic and social boundaries intended to safeguard its holiness.⁶⁸

While symbolic boundaries existed to retain the internal sanctity of the land, further boundaries were placed to protect it and its inhabitants from the impurity and shame posed by those beyond the physical borders of the land of Israel.⁶⁹ However, further guidelines prohibited political ties to the foreign nations so that Israel could continue to view and know YHWH as its sole "helper" (Hos 13:9), which in turn, met the covenantal requirements laid out by YHWH.⁷⁰ Like the priesthood, the kings and the judges before them were expected to remember and promote their knowledge of YHWH, history, cultural memory and the Torah.⁷¹

In Hos 7 and 8, Israel tears these political boundaries down. Since Israel has rejected the knowledge of YHWH, it is left with little to no discernment and an increased penchant for iniquitous behaviour. In Hos 7, this is captured by the likening of Israel to a furnace which devours its kings and judges (Hos 7:3–7).

⁶⁶ Hearson, *Go Now to Shiloh*, 27–28.

⁶⁷ Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 166.

⁶⁸ Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28/1(2002): 168–169, define symbolic boundaries as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space." These often translate to rules and values instituted by groups and support "group membership" and belonging.

⁶⁹ The foreign nations are treated as more impure than the Israelites because they are not under the covenant. Consequently, they are not expected to adhere to Israel's purity or moral codes (e.g. Gen 17; Lev 11:44–45). See D. P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond," 353, for further clarification.

⁷⁰ Israel meets the requirements of its covenant or "repays YHWH" for his favour by showing him gratitude (cf. Crook, *Reciprocity*, 87) and remaining loyal. Loyalty is demonstrated by forsaking the worship of other gods (Deut 6:4–5) and refusing to make covenants with the nations (Deut 7, particularly 7:2).

⁷¹ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 56, 71–73.

Furthermore, Israel's heart, which is ruled by pride (Hos 7:2), acts like a thief, ruining the leadership of Israel (Hos 7:5–7), preventing it from calling upon YHWH for guidance (Hos 7:7) and instead running to the nations "like a dove who is silly [and] without sense" (Hos 7:11). In this way Israel opens itself up to the nations, the "band of robbers [who] raids on the outside" (Hos 7:1).⁷² With these borders down, Israel begins to elect kings who were "not from [YHWH]" and set up princes who "[YHWH] did not know" (Hos 8:4). Though the identity of these leaders is unclear, it is significant that YHWH did not recognise them since Israel was intended to be led by someone "among the brethren" – knowledgeable about Israelite history and YHWH's values and law.⁷³ This accusation implies that these leaders have come to resemble the nations and no longer reflect the identity of YHWH's covenanted people. "Israel [has been] swallowed up" (Hos 8:8) and has become part of the nations.

Due to their iniquity, the people of Israel no longer reflect the covenantal values by which they were meant to live and manage the land because they are no longer set apart from the nations. The consequences of forsaking their values are captured in Hos 6:4–11 which, much like Hos 4:2, describes Israel's murder[ing], "plot[ting]" (Hos 6:9) and "troublemak[ing]" (Hos 6:8), which "...transgress [YHWH's] covenant," as they act "faithlessly against [YHWH]" (Hos 6:7). Significantly, the passage ties these violations to places in the land – Adam, Gilead and the road to Shechem – and with striking depictions of violence creates a bloody picture of the land. Gilead, "a city of troublemakers," has been left "tracked with blood" (Hos 6:8). The priests of Hos 6:9 have wholly departed from YHWH, ambushing people like a band of murderous thieves on the road to Shechem. The land has become "something horrible" through Israel's covenantal "fornication" (Hos 6:10) and, as such, can now only show the residue of the crimes Israel commits and is thus profaned.

3 "Therefore, the land will mourn"

In this final phase, YHWH makes his (seemingly) final move against Israel by inflicting his punishment on the land, causing it and its inhabitants to "mourn" (Hos 4:3) for ousting him from the land and replacing his knowledge with an outpouring of iniquity (Hos 4:1–2). What one can expect from Hos 4:3 is that Israel's iniquity and YHWH's punishment will result in the gradual decay of the land, which follows the covenantal curses or sanctions promised to Israel if the people violate the covenant they made with YHWH.⁷⁴

⁷² Francis Landy, *Hosea* (2nd ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 100.

⁷³ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 71-73. See also Deut 17:14–15.

⁷⁴ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 76–77. A main concern of Stuart's commentary is to highlight the presence of the covenant curses and blessings in the selected prophetic texts. It provides an exhaustive list of the categories of curses and blessings in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, xxxiii–xlii.

As discussed earlier, covenantal exchange is an asymmetrical exchange, which means that the beneficiary receives gifts from a benefactor that cannot be repaid in kind.⁷⁵ Due to this imbalance, the benefactor expects that some specified stipulations be met. In the case of the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants, this would be to adhere to the law he set and to embody the values those laws entail. Consequently, when these conditions are unmet, the benefactor (in this case, YHWH) can impose severe sanctions on the beneficiary (Israel), often by targeting the land's fertility, as Hos 4:3 suggests.⁷⁶ In Hos 4–11, the punishments YHWH chooses to inflict on Israel appear to revolve around these curses, which revoke the once realised covenantal promises YHWH made to Israel, particularly those of the Abrahamic covenant—"posterity, land, and a relationship with Himself."⁷⁷

The discarded promises explored in Hos 4–11 begin with the loss of the land's products, as Hos 4:3 outlines: "...the land will mourn, and so all who dwell in her wither. The animals of the fields, with the flying creatures of the heavens and also the fish of the sea, will be taken away." This mourning signifies the loss of the land's fertility and its ability to provide for the basic needs of its inhabitants, leaving them to "wither." Altogether, the land will become uninhabitable as the people will have no access to food, shelter or even protection, the items that were readily used as their "wages of prostitution" (Hos 9:1). However, these losses are the tip of the proverbial iceberg as YHWH speaks increasingly of exile, which comes as no surprise since Israel was already "in bed" with its future oppressors, Assyria (Hos 7:10–12). Mentions of exile in the passage reach their peak in Hos 9:1–9, which reveals what the Northern Kingdom's exile would look like. In response to their veneration of false gods for the gifts YHWH gave them, Israel will "eat unclean things in Assyria" (Hos 9:3), earning food and wine in the way they thought they had in Israel – by the nations' gods.⁷⁸ Therefore, the exile would only increase their profanation to the extent that Israel's sacrifices become like "mourner's bread" (Hos 9:4)—bread defiled by its nearness to death lacks nourishment and satisfaction.⁷⁹ Since the people of Israel cannot increase their purity, the bread comes to signify the condition of their souls—unfit "to enter the house of YHWH" (Hos 9:4).

Thus, the exile also represents the loss of another covenantal promise – their relationship with YHWH and, by extension, his favour. This loss is first

⁷⁵ Crook, "Reciprocity," 84.

⁷⁶ Stuart J. Foster, "A Prototypical Definition of בְּרִית, 'Covenant' in Biblical Hebrew," *OTE* 19/1 (2006): 40–41. See Deut 28 for a wide range of land-related curses.

⁷⁷ Silvia Linington, "The Concept of the Covenant in the Old Testament in Gerhard von Rad's Old Testament Theology, Volumes I and II and Other Theologies of the Old Testament," *OTE* 16/1 (2003): 58.

⁷⁸ Cf. Deut 6:10–11; Brueggemann, *The Land*, 112.

⁷⁹ Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 239, states, "[This f]ood will keep them alive when away from the Land, but it has no holy properties to help sustain a covenant ethos in exile."

referred to in Hos 5:4–6, which states that YHWH "has withdrawn from them" because of their actions against him, so that even when they pursue him, "walk[ing] with their flocks and with their herds to seek YHWH," they cannot find him. Since YHWH is no longer around to protect them, the once joyous festivals of the people of Israel are removed (Hos 9:5), and they are left open to war with Egypt and Memphis, resulting in the loss of their homes and the belongings which once showcased their wealth and pride (Hos 9:6). Therefore, Israel is no longer the great nation YHWH promised Abraham they would be (Gen 12). Instead, it is mocked by its adversaries (Hos 7:16), "like a vessel which no one delights in" (Hos 8:8). When the people are cut off from YHWH and his "house" or the land, they have and become nothing because they lose everything that represents Israelite life.⁸⁰

As for the final "nail in the coffin," due to their continued and historical attachment to the "wind of fornication," Israel will lose its once-promised posterity—its countless generations—as Israel's current and future children face death. In Hos 9:10–17, YHWH's response to Israel's desire to deceive, forget and disobey him and his law and the consequent loss of all sanctity in the land (Hos 9:15, 10:15) is to remove all ability to keep their children.⁸¹ In Hos 9:11, it begins with the ability to conceive, which moves on swiftly to bearing children (Hos 9:11, 14), birthing them (Hos 9:11), feeding them (Hos 9:14) and even raising them (Hos 9:12). Since "[Israel's] root is dry...and will not bear fruit" (Hos 9:16), the only punishment left is YHWH's admittance that he "no longer love[s] them" and "drive them out of [his] house" (Hos 9:15). This final point severs all connection between Israel and YHWH, thereby, denying all access to promises, favour and even holiness, removing the sanctity of the land at an end.

As Hearson indicates, Israel and YHWH are responsible for undoing sacred space. In the book of Hosea, this is undoubtedly the case as the people of Israel forsake YHWH in search of their lovers, effectively cutting off their line of communication with YHWH.⁸² Though YHWH could continue to pursue his people and attempt to retain what is left of this communication space, he decides instead to obliterate it and sever ties with them in the process.

C LAND HEALED

Capturing the recreation of the land of Israel in Hosea is a brief process. While Hos 1–3 gives an elaborate reunification of two couples,⁸³ Hos 4–11 provides a

⁸⁰ Ward, *Hosea: A Theological Commentary*, 167–168.

⁸¹ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 154.

⁸² Hearson, *Go Now to Shiloh*, 33.

⁸³ The marital metaphor of Hos 1–3 juxtaposes the marriages of Hosea and Gomer to YHWH and Israel/the Land. I support Ben Zvi's, *Hosea*, 79–80, argument that Hosea remarries Gomer in Hos 3 despite the lack of direct references to her after Hos 1. A second marriage to another adulteress would contradict the marital metaphor, which Hos 1–2 sets up.

far shorter reconciliation in 7 verses, spread between Hos 6:1–3 and Hos 11:8–11. With that said, the return of Israel to the land and the re-establishment of the land as a sacred space is a vital part of this narrative, as it confirms Israel's future after the exile through the creation of the new covenantal relationship between YHWH, Israel and the land. Like the punishment YHWH doles out to Israel and the land, the passage relies on covenantal promises – this time, however, focusing on the new covenant.⁸⁴ This covenant is preoccupied with the return of Israel to the land and, considering Israel's chronic apostasy, what this return would look like.

In Hos 11:8–9, Israel's reconciliation with YHWH begins with YHWH's compassion, as he ceases to "execute the fierceness of his rage." In Hos 6:1, divine rage is replaced with healing and the binding of wounds and promises to end the destruction of Israel and its cities come in Hos 11:9. YHWH's actions mark the return of his favour and beneficence toward Israel since he is now Israel's sole helper or benefactor. This is captured in the promises of Hos 6:3, in which the surety of YHWH's coming is compared to that of the dawn and the spring rains. These rains, in turn, rejuvenate the land made barren in Hos 4:3, signifying the return of YHWH's gifts of food, clothing and shelter. This means that the land can be re-inhabited and, as such, can be used as a space for YHWH and Israel to convene once more.

With YHWH's favour restored to Israel, a second promise is reinstated—Israel will have a relationship with YHWH. In Hos 11:9, YHWH utters his promises to cease his rage while also emphasising, "I am God and not a man – the Holy One in [Israel's] midst." This exclamation marks the re forging of the connection lines between YHWH and Israel, as YHWH has endowed the people with his presence; this point is supported by Hos 6:2, which states: "He will preserve us for two days. On the third day, he will raise us up, and we will live in his presence." This verse refers to the promise of rebuilding the people, making them fertile again so that they can see many generations under their new covenant.⁸⁵ Furthermore, with the "Holy One" in their midst, Israel is able and entrusted to pursue sanctification again.

Since the land has been remade and the favour and presence of YHWH have returned to the people, one final promise remains: YHWH will return the people to the land and "settle them in their houses" (Hos 11:11), ending their exile. The text of Hos 11:10–11 states that Israel "will walk after YHWH," who roars like a lion, calling to the children of Israel who come "trembling from the west" (Hos 11:10), "trembl[ing] like a bird from Egypt and like a dove from the land of Assyria" (Hos 11:11). This trembling is a marked change from the past

⁸⁴ See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 245–246; cf. Jer 31:31–32. From a Persian Yehud context, references to the new covenant would be possible, as the covenant is made to a reunified Israel, post exile. See Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, 236–238.

⁸⁵ See e.g. Jer 31:4-5, 12, 17.

which saw Israel forsaking YHWH for idols and political relationships. The action also prompts a response to Hosea's call to return and to "know YHWH" in Hos 6:3 because to "return" to YHWH is an action motivated by a desire for the knowledge of YHWH, of following his law and remembering their cultural memories.⁸⁶ Therefore, the people fulfil the primary stipulation of the new covenant—to write his law "upon their heart" and to "know [him]."⁸⁷ Since the people have returned to the healed land with a reforged relationship with YHWH in which holiness can thrive, the land can become the sacred space it once was, once more.

D CONCLUSION

As the title of this article suggests, this study explores how the land can be represented as sacred space in Hos 4–11, particularly by examining the interconnections between holiness, covenantal exchange and cultural memory. This task was undertaken through a thematic analysis of the text, which probed the presence and relationship between these concepts as indicated in the text's two events—the deconstruction and reconstruction of the land.

The text highlights three phases in the Israel-YHWH relationship. The first two, accusation and punishment, relate to the land's deconstruction, which sees Israel's actions against its covenantal relationship with YHWH and the associated obligations, as well as YHWH's punishment of Israel as he imposes covenantal sanctions on them for renegeing the covenantal stipulations. The people of Israel's violations of the covenant are illustrated mainly by their rejection of the knowledge of YHWH and cultural memory and by their continuous religious and political apostasy, which promotes a life of iniquity. This attachment to "the spirit of whoredom" effectively strips them and the land they inhabit of holiness. YHWH's punishments take this stripping further, as he dissolves his covenantal relationship with Israel by removing the once-realised covenantal promises he made to Israel, namely their access to him, their tenure in the land and future generations of Israelites. The final phase, reconciliation, leads to the reconstruction of the land, as YHWH begins a new covenant with Israel, reclaims the lost promises and rebuilds the land. This involves setting up the requirements of sacred space, a place in which the divine and human can communicate. It sees the land rejuvenated, YHWH's presence regained, his knowledge re-established, and the people returned from exile.

The discussion shows that the dissolving and reinstatement of the covenantal blessing mirror the deconstruction and reconstruction of the physical surroundings, creating ties between the land and the covenant between YHWH and Israel. Israel's iniquity breaks down its relationship with YHWH and

⁸⁶ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 265; see McConville, "Hosea, The Book of," 186.

⁸⁷ Jeremiah 31:33–34; see Rata, "Covenant," 104.

desacralises the land. Conversely, when the relationship is mended, the sacralisation of the natural world occurs. The ties between the relational modes and the cycles of destruction and restoration ultimately illustrate that the Land is a physical representation of YHWH and Israel's covenantal relationship.

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