

Ezekiel, Hosea and the Song of Moses¹

Ezekiel, Hosea and Deuteronomy 32 are intensely related passages. All three are poetic prophecies that articulate the same themes. In the case of Deuteronomy & Ezekiel the arguments are in the same order as well.² God's intent seems to be that Ezekiel's audience understand not just the certainty but the legitimacy of his impending judgment on Jerusalem.

Around 1600 BC³, right before the death of Moses - on the eve of Israel entering the land under the leadership of Joshua - God predicted Israel's eventual infidelity and His response to it. God was very intent that the people memorize this prophecy and so he put it in the form of a song - the song of Moses.⁴ He did not want them to be confused about the reasons for his judgment when the day finally came and so He made sure that Moses taught them the song before he died (Exodus 31:19,22,30).

Around 1000 years later (622 BC), the Torah was rediscovered in the temple, the year Ezekiel was born. He grew up under Josiah's reforms as a priest-in-training. He may have heard the Song of Moses chanted or sung at temple hundreds of times before being exiled with Jehoiachin.⁵ As part of his training, he must certainly have memorized it as well.

It's not surprising then, that Ezekiel refers back to the song of Moses as he predicts that the day of destruction has finally arrived. In fact, Ezekiel 16 appears to be a direct reference to the song of Moses. The structure of the arguments and many of the terms used are identical. The only difference between these passages is the imagery Ezekiel uses - the imagery of a whoring wife.

Where does the whoring wife imagery come from? It seems obvious on the face of things that Ezekiel is borrowing the image from Hosea 1-3 (especially ch.2). Chapter 2 is a poetic prophecy about God's imminent destruction of the northern kingdom for their idolatry - adultery.

[Read Deuteronomy 31:6 - 32:47; Hosea 2 and Ezekiel 16]

Common themes and order

Deuteronomy 32	Hosea 2	Ezekiel 16
YHWH <i>finds</i> Israel v.10a In a <i>desert/wilderness</i> He encircles him		YHWH <i>sees</i> ⁶ Jerusalem v.6 In a <i>field</i> ⁷ He passes by her
YHWH takes care of Israel v.10b-14 Like an eagle - spreading wings	YHWH takes care of Israel v.8f,	YHWH takes care of Jerusalem v.7a,9-13a

¹ I am entirely indebted to Jason Gile, *Ezekiel 16 and the Song of Moses: A Prophetic Transformation?* for his insights into the relationship between Deut.32 & Ezek.16; *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 130, no.1 (2011): 87-108.

² The themes of Hosea are identical to those of the other two prophecies but the order of the themes is much more iterative (recursive) throughout the book.

³ c.1600 BC; around 1000 years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. The dating is uncertain but the Thera volcanic eruption of 1628 BC (i.e. which may relate to some of the plagues of the Exodus) & the Jericho destruction of ~1580 BC (based on C¹⁴ dating; Bruins, H.J. and J. van der Plicht. 1996. The Exodus enigma. *Nature* 382: 213-214) lead to the suggestion that this happened around 1600 BC

⁴ Deuteronomy 32

⁵ Rabbinic tradition claims that the song of Moses was sung by the Levites every Sabbath. See *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Dead Seas scrolls and the Qumran Community*, Charlesworth, p.118 viz. *b. Rosh Hashanna 31a & y. Meg. 3.8, 74b*)

⁶ Hosea 9:10 uses these terms interchangeably; the whoring wife imagery seems borrowed from Hosea 1-3, which is a prophecy to Israel that predates Ezekiel by over 200 years.

⁷ The Hebrew terms are also used interchangeably in poetry (Josh.8:24; Job 24:5-6; Isa.43:19-20; Joel 1:19-20; 2:22)

Feeding honey & oil	Like a husband v.15f	Like a husband – spread garment Feeding flour, honey & oil
Israel prospers v.15a	Israel prospers v.8f	Jerusalem prospers v.13b-14
Israel forsakes God v.15b	Israel forsakes God vv.2-7	Jerusalem forsakes God v.15a
Israel becomes idolatrous v.16-17 Arousing God's jealousy with <i>gods</i>	Israel is an adulteress vv.2-7	Jerusalem becomes adulterous v.15b-34 Arousing God's jealousy with <i>strangers</i> ⁸
Israel forgets its beginnings v.18	Israel forgets its beginnings v.8	Jerusalem forgets its beginnings v.22,43
Israel angers YHWH v.16,21	Israel angers YHWH v.3f	Jerusalem angers YHWH v.26
Israel is punished vv.23-25	Israel is punished vv.9-13	Jerusalem is punished vv.35-43
Israel is restored through atonement vv.35-43	Israel is restored through atonement vv.14-23	Jerusalem is restored through atonement vv.53-63

Common words and phrases in the song of Moses & Ezekiel

- *Arrows & famine* (Ez.5:16-17; Deut.32:23-25,42)
- *My sword* (Ez.21; Deut.32:41f)
- *To make jealous* (Ez.8:3; Deut.32:16,21) (c.f. 1 Ki.14:22 & Ps.78:58)

Common words and phrases in Hosea & Ezekiel

- *Wife* (Ez.16:32; Hosea 2:2)
- *Whore* (Ez. 6:9; 16:15,16,17,26,28,30,31,33,34,35,41; 20:30; 23:3,5,19,30, 44; Hosea 2:5; 3:3; 4:10,12,13,14,15,18; 5:3; 9:1)
- *Lewd* (Ez.16:27,36,43,58; 22:9; 23:21,27,29,35,44,48,49; 24:13; Hosea 2:10)

⁸ The term translated gods in Deut.v.16 is translated strangers in Ezekiel v.32