

## AN OVERLOOKED SCRIPTURAL PARADOX: THE PSEUDOSORITES

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That the OT prophets were particularly skilled in their use of figures of speech, imagery, and other literary features is well established. Such has been demonstrated in recent special studies relative to OT prophecy itself or the individual prophets, and in many standard commentaries.<sup>1</sup> This study is concerned with a little-noted and oft-neglected or misunderstood literary figure known as a pseudosorites.<sup>2</sup> By “pseudosorites” is meant a rhetorical device in which the speaker says that event A will (or will not) happen, but even if it does not (or does) it will be contradicted and conditioned substantially by event B.<sup>3</sup> As such the pseudosorites constitutes a type of literary, if not logical, paradox. Thus O’Connor explains it as, “a form of paradox involving two or three clauses tied by repetition, anaphora, or their equivalents. The form begins by excluding an event or outcome; it is logically irreal and grammatically counter-factual.”<sup>4</sup>

The pseudosorites stands in contrast to the more familiar sorites, which may be developed in one of two ways. In the Aristotelian type, the predicate of the opening statement of a series of statements becomes the subject of the next statement and so on with each succeeding statement until in the conclusion the subject of the first statement is linked with the predicate of immediately preceding statement. Consider the following example:

All true believers seek the will of God,  
All who seek the will of God desire to grow in grace,  
All who desire to grow in grace read the Bible daily,  
Therefore, all true believers read the Bible daily.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., “Prophecy in the Old Testament,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 668–70; D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002); James Limburg, *Jonah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993); Daniel L. Block, *Ezekiel* (NICOT; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, 1998); Waylon Bailey, “Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,” in *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); and Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See further Michael Patrick O’Connor, “The Pseudosorites: A Type of Paradox in Hebrew Verse,” in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup 40, ed. Elaine R. Follis, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987) 161–72.

<sup>3</sup> See Duane Garrett, *Hosea, Joel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997) 184.

<sup>4</sup> O’Connor, “Pseudosorites: A Type of Paradox in Hebrew Verse” 168.

<sup>5</sup> The sorites may be formed as a series of stated premises or in hypothetical terms (e.g. if one is a true believer, he seeks the will of God, etc.).

In the Goclenian type, the opposite order is followed. Thus the above example would be formed as follows:

All true believers read the Bible daily,  
 All who read the Bible daily desire to grow in grace,  
 All who desire to grow in grace seek the will of God,  
 Therefore all who seek the will of God are true believers.

In contrast to the logically progressive sorites, the pseudosorites conveys “a train of thought which does not seem logical as it moves from step to step.”<sup>6</sup> As such, the pseudosorites may seem to be a strange sort of illogic. Yet, it may not be quite so foreign to man’s thinking as it might first appear. One comes across pseudosorites in casual conversations. On occasion, one may hear someone say, “I will certainly come, but even if I don’t, I shall be there in spirit.” A similar pseudosorites appears in one of the tales of Sherlock Holmes, in which the famed detective wrote to Dr. Watson, “Come at once if convenient—if inconvenient, come all the same.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the existence of the pseudosorites in biblical literature may not be totally unexpected. Interestingly enough, discussions concerning this rhetorical device have been available for more than two decades. Nevertheless, it has received scant notice even in most commentaries.

As noted above, the pseudosorites is commonly expressed in two or three clauses and involves contrasting repetition or anaphora, although as O’Connor demonstrates, the argument may extend over several verses.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, pseudosorites may appear elsewhere than the prophets and be classified as to whether the terms or conditions involved are formally stated or developed in non-formal fashion. In the former, event A is clearly contradicted by event B. In some cases that contradiction expressing an unlikely occurrence is expressed by means of a particle, which may be translated, “even if” (e.g. in the OT: *ʔim*—Job 9: 13–17; *kī ʔim*—Hos 9:11–12; *kī*<sup>9</sup>—Hos 9:6; 13:12–15; *gam kī*—Hos 9:16; cf. *gam*—Isa 49:15; *hēn*—Dan 3:16–18; and in the NT: *ei kai*—1 Pet 3:13–14; 2 Cor 4: 2b–4; *ean gar*—2 Cor 12:5b–6) or where there is a slightly unusual use of a particle (e.g. *ʔūlay*, “if perhaps”<sup>10</sup>—Hos 8:7) or the syntax allows this rendering (e.g. Job 10:14–17; Isa 6:12–13). Non-formal pseudosorites may exist in situations where the contradiction between events A and B portraying an unlikely condition is demanded by contextual constraints (e.g. Job 3:3, 11, 16–20; Lev 25:47–54; Isa 24:17–18; Hos 10:3).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) 393.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Creeping Man,” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1992) 1071.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Patrick O’Connor, “The Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text* (ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 239–53.

<sup>9</sup> For *kī* as a conditional particle, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor (*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 637.

<sup>10</sup> For such an understanding, see also BDB 19.

<sup>11</sup> The distinction between formal and non-formal pseudosorites may help to modify O’Connor’s observation (“Pseudosorites: A Type of Paradox” 168) that “[t]he examples treated here and a few others I have examined do not favor a particular logical connector.”

As we shall note below, some examples included with the non-formal types may actually contain one of the formal particles, but nevertheless their full understanding as a pseudosorites depends on other contextual data or implications (e.g. Jer 5:1–2; 15:1; 37:9–10; Amos 5:21–22).

This study begins by noting scriptural examples of various types of pseudosorites before considering the unique case of Hosea where this rhetorical device is especially pronounced.<sup>12</sup> It is not intended to be comprehensive, only representative and suggestive of the impact a pseudosorites may have on a given text.

## I. SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES OF PSEUDOSORITES

1. *Formal types.* Perhaps the most familiar example of a pseudosorites may be that found in the reply of Daniel's three friends to King Nebuchadnezzar. Having been accused of failure to worship the Babylonian gods or to bow down to the king's newly erected image, and having been brought before the king who warned them that failure to bow down to the image would mean that they would be cast into a fiery furnace (Dan 3:8–15), they reply,

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (Dan 3:16–18)<sup>13</sup>

As a pseudosorites, the argument may be stated as follows: (A) If the three are thrown into the fiery furnace for not worshiping the Babylonian gods or Nebuchadnezzar's image, God is not only able to deliver them from the furnace but will do so; yet (B) even if he does not do so (*hēn*), the three would not participate in Babylonian pagan worship practices. The account seems straightforward enough, yet these verses have occasioned lively discussions among scholars of all persuasions as to the precise syntax here and the resultant interpretative and theological implications.<sup>14</sup> Among conservative scholars there is general agreement that the three young men are expressing not only confident faith in God's ability to deliver them but also the absolute submission of the three to the sovereign will of God.<sup>15</sup> For example, Miller concludes, "The Hebrews believed that their God *could*, but

<sup>12</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson (*Classical Hebrew Poetry* [Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1986] 213) observes that the pseudosorites is "common in Hos."

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references are from the NIV.

<sup>14</sup> See John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 187–88; James A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* (ICC: Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1927) 206–9; P. W. Coxon, "Daniel III 17: A Linguistic and Theological Problem," *VT* 26 (1976) 400–5. For the place of Daniel 3 among biblical narratives concerning life in a foreign court, see Richard D. Patterson, "Holding on to Daniel's Court Tales," *JETS* 36 (1993) 445–54; Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 75–152.

<sup>15</sup> See Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 91. See also C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (trans. M. G. Easton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 127.

not necessarily that he *would*, spare their lives. . . . Even if they had to suffer a horrible, painful death in a burning oven, these three young men refused to forsake their God and worship idols.”<sup>16</sup>

Preserving the force of the pseudosorites, however, the point appears to be that although the three leave the matter to God, they have faith to believe that he not only can but surely will do so. If he does not (though this seems unlikely to them), they still will not deny their faith by submitting to pagan practices. The pseudosorites thus testifies to the genuineness of their faith and full confidence in God’s deliverance.

A pseudosorites appears at times when Job is expressing his feeling of hopelessness in the midst of his constant suffering. Thus in his reply to Bildad (chap. 8), Job remarks that since even the great forces of nature cannot contend with God’s anger, how can a finite human being such as Job hope to do so (Job 9:13–14)? Despite his innocence, he could not satisfactorily present his case to God; he could only plead for God’s mercy (v. 15). Moreover, in the unlikely event that he as a mere mortal could summon God to court and the Lord responded to his request he remarks, “I do not believe he would give me a hearing. He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason” (vv. 16–17). Stated as a pseudosorites, (A) despite his innocence, Job cannot get a hearing from God; (B) even if (*?im*) Job could and were to summon God, God would still not listen to him. As Hartley suggests, “Job speculates further about what would happen should he be able to summon God into court. If God should grant him a hearing, he does not believe that God would really listen to his argument. At best he would be given only an occasion to air his grievances, not a real opportunity to win a court decision.”<sup>17</sup>

This passage is one of several in which Job expresses his strong desire, even longing, to be able to appear before God and present the case for his innocence, hence the fact that he is suffering unjustly (cf. Job 13:18; 23:7; 31:6). Likewise, he at times complains concerning God’s injustice toward him (cf. Job 14:3; 16:10–14; 23:10–16; 27:2–6; see also Job 34:5–6). In the light of God’s very nature, Job expresses his feeling that his situation is hopeless (cf. 9:2, 18–20; 10:15). Accordingly, Delitzsch points out, “The meaning of ver. 19 is that God stifles the attempts to maintain one’s right in the very beginning by His being superior to the creature in strength, and not entering into a dispute with him concerning his right. . . . Job forgets that God’s right in opposition to the creature is always the true objective right.”<sup>18</sup>

In similar fashion, Job once again expresses the seeming hopelessness of his situation, “If I am guilty—woe to me! Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction” (Job 10:15).

<sup>16</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (NAC; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 120. See also John F. Walvoord, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody, 1971; Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 88.

<sup>17</sup> John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 176.

<sup>18</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 1:155.

Hartley points out that “a raised head is a gesture of confident self-worth, while a lowered head expresses shame and humiliation. . . . Job feels that his affliction has robbed him of all his dignity even though he is innocent (cf. 11:15).”<sup>19</sup> Thus (A) if he is guilty, God’s punishment is certain (v. 14); yet (B) even if he is not guilty, God is still afflicting him (vv. 16–17). Clines describes Job’s seemingly hopeless situation: “If Job is in fact a wrongdoer, he is destined for punishment; and if he is innocent, he cannot lift his head high with justifiable pride in his innocence. . . . For he is already pronounced guilty by the shame and affliction which he has been made to drink.”<sup>20</sup> Simply put, (A) if Job is guilty he will be deservedly punished, but (B) even if he is not (and Job is certain that is the case), he is being punished as though he were.<sup>21</sup> The pseudosorites thus again reflects Job’s innermost feelings that God is not treating him fairly or justly.

An interesting pseudosorites occurs in Isa 6:12–13. Here, the Lord answers Isaiah’s question as to the length of his commission by telling him to deliver God’s warnings until the land is utterly ravaged by foreign invaders and all the people are sent into exile and, “Though a tenth remains in the land, it [i.e. the land] will again be laid waste” (v. 13). Thus (A) the land of Israel is to be laid waste and all its people exiled; (B) even if a tenth remains in the land, the land will again face devastation. This message of doom is subsequently followed by the promise in the rest of verse thirteen that, “As the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.” Young sees the reference to the tenth as a remnant’s survival through the exile.<sup>22</sup> Oswald pursues a slightly different path in holding that “not even a tenth part will remain. The nation will be like a forest whose stumps are burned after the trees are cut down.” Oswald does see hope for Israel, however, in connection with the imagery of the stump, by remarking that just as from such stumps new shoots can come forth, so “[t]here will be offspring holy to the Lord, for the Lord is not finished with Israel.”<sup>23</sup>

A balanced view allows the force of both the pseudosorites and the following lesson from nature to have their full impact. Thus the pseudosorites emphasizes the fact that the land faces devastation due to invasion, which will also carry God’s people into exile. In the unlikely event that even a tenth of the people should remain, they will face another wave of destruction. The following note concerning the stump provides a message of hope

<sup>19</sup> John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 189.

<sup>20</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989) 249–50.

<sup>21</sup> Although in the MT no formal particle exists in the B clause, The NIV is correct in assuming that it is to be understood due to the presence of the particle (*’im*) in the A clause. Such elliptical constructions are common in Hebrew as demonstrated in the standard grammars. See further Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* 304 and his helpful indices and M. Dahood, *Psalms III* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 429–44.

<sup>22</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (NICOT; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, 1969, 1972) 1:265.

<sup>23</sup> John N. Oswald, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 190, 191.

that even though destruction will be total and its exile certain, God will yet preserve a remnant, which he will restore in accordance with his earlier promises.

Grogan likewise comments, "The illustration from nature introduces an element of hope. God has so ordered the plant kingdom that almost total destruction does not always extinguish life. Similarly, God has a continuing purpose of life for the remnant of his people."<sup>24</sup> As Delitzsch points out, "Israel as a nation was indestructible, by virtue of the promise of God; but the mass of the people were doomed to destruction through the judicial sentence of God, and only a remnant, which would be converted, would perpetuate the nationality of Israel, and inherit the glorious future."<sup>25</sup> Despite this ray of hope, the pseudosorites makes it clear that contemporary Israel faced God's imminent severe judgment. The following note of hope perhaps serves as an incentive for Isaiah's people to begin repentance even now.

A poignant example of a pseudosorites is found in Isa 49:15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" Viewing the rhetorical question as indicating an implied "no," the pseudosorites may be constructed as follows: (A) A nursing mother cannot very well forget her suckling infant, but (B) even if she can (*gam*), God cannot (and will not) forget his (covenant with) his people. Young correctly observes, "It is a tragic truth, but a truth nevertheless, which deeply stirs the emotions of the heart. Mothers do forget their sucklings, for mothers are sinful and their love is sometimes overcome by business. Even the greatest of human love may fail. On the other hand, God's love, in distinction from even the highest of human love, will never fail."<sup>26</sup> Thus, although God may need to chastise his nation, ultimately he will restore a purified believing people and abundantly bless them (vv. 16–23; cf. Hos 11:8–11; 14:1–7).

A NT example of pseudosorites may be found in 1 Pet 3:13–14: "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed." Viewed as a pseudosorites the argument would proceed as follows. Having admonished the believers to pursue righteousness by alluding to the words of the psalmist (vv. 8–12; cf. Ps. 34:12–16), Peter declares that (A) no harm will come to those who are zealous for doing that which is right, but (B) even if (*ei kai*) they do suffer, whatever harm they experience is to be considered a blessing in as much as they are following Christ's example of suffering for righteousness sake (vv. 15–18).<sup>27</sup> Blum remarks, "This blessedness or happiness is the certainty that comes

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in EBC (rev. ed.) 6:510.

<sup>25</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 1:203.

<sup>26</sup> Young, *Isaiah* 3:285.

<sup>27</sup> J. Daryl Charles ("1, 2 Peter; Jude," in EBC (rev. ed.) 13:334) finds Peter's words to echo the teaching of Jesus, "Peter's response to suffering 'for what is right' is to reiterate the words of his master (Mt 5:10)."

from belonging to God and his kingdom with the promises of future vindication (cf. Matt 5:3–10). . . . The last part of v. 14 and the beginning of v. 15 are built on the words of Isaiah 8:12b–13.”<sup>28</sup>

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he declares that he has faithfully declared the gospel message in unmistakably clear and understandable terms:

We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the mind of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. (2 Cor 4:2b–4)

Seen as a possible pseudosorites, Paul’s argument would consist of the fact that (A) his presentation of the gospel is easily understood by all, but (B) even if (*ei kai*) it is not understood, it is because of satanic opposition in the recipients of the gospel message. The pseudosorites thus emphasizes the purity and clarity of God’s message. As Hodge remarks, “Although the gospel is thus glorious in itself, and although it was clearly set forth, yet to some it remained hid. That is, its true character and excellence as a revelation from God and of God was not apprehended or recognized. The reason or cause of this fact was not to be sought either in the nature of the gospel, or the mode of its exhibition, but in the state and character of those who rejected it.”<sup>29</sup>

Paul’s concern for speaking the truth is also felt later in the same epistle (2 Cor 12:5b–6) where a possible pseudosorites may also be understood. Thus Paul declares, “[A] I will not boast about myself, except about my weakness. [B] Even if (*ean gar*) I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth.” The reason for Paul’s adamant denial of self-glorifying may be as Hughes suggests, “He forebears to embark on that glorying which even he might recognize as legitimate, such as rejoicing over the wonderful privilege of his rapture into the third heaven; for he fears that to do so might lead others to form an estimate of him in excess of what they see him to be by his actions or hear him to be by his words, namely, a frail fellow mortal of like passions with themselves.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Edwin A. Blum, “1, 2 Peter, Jude,” in EBC 12:240. Peter shifts Ahaz’s concern with regard to foreign powers to that of persecutors.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 83–84. As Calvin remarks, “The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clearness of the gospel, for the sun is no less resplendent because the blind do not perceive its light.” John Calvin as cited by Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 125. See further Moyer V. Hubbard, “2 Corinthians,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 3:213–14.

<sup>30</sup> Hughes, *Second Corinthians* 440. Even Jesus accommodated himself to this figure. After pointing out to the Pharisees that he did not “judge anyone,” he then added: “And even if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me” John 8:15–16; NLT).

2. *Non-formal types.* In the first four examples a particle exists in the B clause. The presence of a pseudosorites, however, depends on additional contextual data.<sup>31</sup> In the first, a pseudosorites in Jer 5:1–2 provides a glimpse into the near-total depravity of society in late seventh-century BC Judah and Jerusalem. Here the Lord says through his prophet:

Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,  
look around and consider,  
search through the squares.  
If you can find but one person  
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,  
I will forgive this city.  
Although they say, “As surely as the Lord lives,”  
still they are swearing falsely.

The NET of verse 2 renders it well: “These people make promises in the name of the LORD. But the fact is, what they swear to is really a lie.” Recast as a non-formal pseudosorites, the argument would be constructed on the basis of a contextual implication that: (A) no citizen of Jerusalem is truly honest or searching for the truth; (B) even if (*ʿim*) they swear in God’s name to be telling the truth, they are lying and are dishonest (cf. 7:28; 9:5–9). Jeremiah thus faced a difficult ministry of proclaiming God’s truth in the midst of an unrighteous society. The pseudosorites illustrates dramatically God’s evaluation of his debased people, which necessitated their imminent judgment.

Jeremiah 37:9–10 presents an interesting possible non-formal pseudosorites: “This is what the LORD says: ‘Do not deceive yourselves thinking, The Babylonians will surely leave us. They will not! Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down.’” Feinberg follows the lead of others by treating this passage as hyperbole emphasizing “the hopeless condition of Jerusalem before the Babylonians.”<sup>32</sup> So also Martens remarks, “With ‘rhetorical exaggeration’ he [i.e., Jeremiah] added that even were the Babylonians to be routed, the wounded left along the way would be enough to bring about the city’s defeat.”<sup>33</sup> It would seem the better course, however, to understand these verses as making a non-formal pseudosorites.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the presence of the pseudosorites depends upon an otherwise unexpressed event A. Thus because the prior verses in the context mention something of the apparent hopes of King Zedekiah that with the coming of the Egyptian forces to rescue Jerusalem, they together with the forces of Judah would completely defeat the main Babylonian army deployed there. Then whatever Babylonian troops were left would surely die. The fact that the Babylonians had lifted the siege of

<sup>31</sup> As noted above, these four examples could possibly be categorized as “semi-formal.”

<sup>32</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” in EBC 6:611.

<sup>33</sup> Elmer A. Martens, *Jeremiah* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1986) 226. So also J. A. Thompson (*The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 632) adds, “Such rhetorical exaggeration served to portray in stark fashion the inevitability of Jerusalem’s fall and destruction.”

Jerusalem to meet the forces of Pharaoh (v. 5) might have spurred these hopes even further.

Granted such a scenario, the pseudosorites would constitute a non-formal type and be structured as follows: [(A) You will not defeat the Babylonian forces]; (B) Even if (*ki 'im*) you do and “only wounded men are left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down” (v. 10). In that vein, Bright describes the situation as follows: “Zedekiah, hoping to be told that danger had passed sent to Jeremiah asking him to intercede with Yahweh. But Jeremiah’s reply shattered all hope: The Egyptians would be defeated and the Babylonians would return. Indeed, said he, even if Zedekiah could defeat the Babylonians so badly that only wounded men remained in their ranks, even these casualties would get up from their beds and take the city.”<sup>34</sup>

If one allows the possibility of an inferred event A as forming part of a non-formal pseudosorites, Amos 5:21–22 may yield another (though less certain) example:

- [A] I hate, I despise your religious feasts  
 [together with the sacrifices you offer];  
 I cannot stand your assemblies.  
 [B] Even though [*'im*] you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
 I will not accept them.

Understood in this fashion, Amos chides his countrymen, pointing out that mere religiosity is insufficient without a genuine relation to Yahweh. As Niehaus observes, “By observing religious rituals they were lulled into thinking that they were fulfilling the whole law and giving God his due. . . . Amos viewed the sacrifices as objects of God’s hatred because they furthered the spiritual ignorance of the people by giving them a false sense of security.”<sup>35</sup>

Jeremiah 15:1 also provides an example of an inferred event A in a non-formal pseudosorites. Having heard Jeremiah’s passionate plea on behalf of the people (Jer 14:19–22), the Lord responds to his prophet saying, “Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people” (15:1). Seen as a possible pseudosorites, the implied argument would flow as follows: “[A] Despite your prayers, Jeremiah, I will not spare this people (cf. vv. 2–4)]; (B) even if (*'im*) Moses and Samuel were to intercede on their behalf, my decision is final.” “Moses and Samuel are legendary intercessors (Exod 32:11–12; Num 13:14–19; 1 Sam 7:8f; 12:19–23), . . . Jeremiah’s intercession resulted in judgment and not even the great intercessors of the past could avert judgment.”<sup>36</sup> Despite God’s heart for his people, this people

<sup>34</sup> John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 224. In the revised edition, Jack R. Lundbom (*Jeremiah 37–52* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 2004] 57) treats the text as a hyperbole “in which Yahweh hypothesizes a Judahite victory with both armies at the point of exhaustion,” which indicates Jerusalem’s destruction “without Babylonian military might.”

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Niehaus, “Amos,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992, 1993, 1998) 1:431. Isaiah conveys a similar message (cf. Isa 1:10–17). The same divine warning reverberates throughout the prophecies of Hosea (e.g. Hos 6:4–6; cf. Ps 40:6–8).

<sup>36</sup> Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991) 204.

as a nation had strayed from being his people (cf. 14:10), hence with a touch of irony he refers to them not as “my” but “this people.”

In another judgment oracle, Ezekiel (14:12–20) makes a similar point declaring that in the unlikely event that should Noah, Daniel, and Job be present, they would save only themselves from the coming judgment. Indeed, the people of all lands, including God’s people, were responsible for themselves to meet God’s standards of righteousness. As Alexander concludes, “The righteousness of Noah (Gen 6:9), Job (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3), and Daniel (Dan 6:4–5, 22) delivered each of them respectfully out of the dangers they faced, but each had little effect on his contemporary situation. They delivered no one else but themselves.”<sup>37</sup>

Another example of prophesied judgment that points to a possible pseudosorites may be found in Isa 24:17–18:

Terror and pit and snare await you,  
O people of the earth.  
Whoever flees at the sound of terror  
will fall into a pit;  
whoever climbs out of the pit  
will be caught in a snare.

Isaiah thus prophesies that the coming judgment upon the inhabitants of earth is inescapable. (A) If anyone attempts to escape the coming terror, he will fall into a pit; (B) even if he manages to climb out of the pit, he will be caught in a snare. The pseudosorites points out the unlikely event of a person caught in a pit to climb out of it, while emphasizing the fact that he cannot escape further entrapment. Commenting on the setting of verses 17–18, Oswalt remarks, “There is no reliability in earth, where at least in earth’s inhabitants; only treachery (v. 16). As a result, it is terror which awaits such persons, the terror of knowing that life is a series of traps from which there is no final escape.”<sup>38</sup> Granted the presence of a pseudosorites Isaiah’s point is most emphatic. Using imagery associated with hunting, Isaiah underscores the fact that any attempt to avoid God’s just judgment will fail. Every possible avenue of escape will be cut off.<sup>39</sup> This point is further emphasized in Isaiah’s use of alliteration and assonance in the words for terror, pit, and snare: *paḥad*, *paḥat*, *paḥ*.

O’Connor finds in the larger context of Job’s opening lament in 3:3–20 against his present situation an example of a double pseudosorites. O’Connor sees Job’s complaint as involving two curses (3–10) and two major questions (vv. 11, 16). O’Connor proposes that Job’s lamenting of his situation involves four stages of his early life: “his conception (3b), his gestation (16ab), his birth (3a), and his postpartum viability (11ab).”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in EBC 6:807.

<sup>38</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39* 453.

<sup>39</sup> See the similar scenario in Amos 5:18–19 where the imagery of escaping one dangerous situation only to be greeted by an equally frightful consequence is graphically portrayed.

<sup>40</sup> O’Connor, “Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse” 248.

In the opening couplet, the first and third stage are invoked: Job wishes that the night of his conception had not taken place; granted that it has, he wishes the day of his birth had not taken place. . . . In the two questions, the second and fourth stages are negatively stated: would that I had not survived gestation but had been a miscarriage; but given that I did survive gestation, would that I had died in early infancy.<sup>41</sup>

Granted the existence of what O'Connor terms a double pseudosorites here, the complex development would best be classified as another example of a non-formal pseudosorites. The argument could be understood on the basis of the thought that Job wishes that he were not alive. Thus (A) Job wishes that in his case his parents had never become intimate and (B) even if they had, there would have been neither conception nor gestation and even if there were, there would have been either a miscarriage or that he had died in early infancy. Since Job was obviously alive, although suffering, all four events in this proposed two-stage pseudosorites are not only unlikely, but absurdly contrary to fact. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that even as O'Connor points out, the concept of a double pseudosorites is very difficult to grasp.<sup>42</sup>

Leviticus 25:47–54 may provide another uncertain example of a multi-stage pseudosorites. This passage deals with the case of a Hebrew man who has sold himself into indebtedness to a non-Hebrew due to his inability to pay his debt. In the first stage, the Hebrew man sells himself into slavery but retains the right of paying off his debt. In stage two, if he or any of his relatives gain sufficient funds to satisfy the terms of the debt, he may pay the redemption price. Stage three provides for the man's unconditional release in the year of Jubilee.

Cast as a pseudosorites, the argument would proceed as follows: (A) a Hebrew man must not become a permanent slave to a foreigner, but (B) even if he does due to an indebtedness, if the Hebrew debtor or his relative gains sufficient funds for him to be redeemed, his non-Hebrew creditor must allow his redemption, and (B) even if such funds were not available, the debtor must be freed in the year of Jubilee. Thus Rooker explains the situation, "An Israelite who sold himself to an alien or a temporary resident could be redeemed or could redeem himself (25:47–49). The price of redemption is based on how soon the next Jubilee would occur (25:50–52)."<sup>43</sup> This law illustrates the fact that in a sense no Hebrew was to be considered ultimately to be a slave, but a hired worker. In the final analysis, God owned the land and his people belonged to him. They could not become the property of an alien creditor. As Wenham observes, "A theological reason underlies this discrimination: God redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery, to become his slaves (vv. 42, 55). It is unfitting, therefore that an Israelite should be resold into slavery, especially to a foreigner (cf. Rom. 6:15–22; Gal. 4:8–9; 5:1)."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 248–49.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 247.

<sup>43</sup> Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus* (NAC; Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 2000) 309–10.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 322–23.

Some of the texts given above demonstrate that the presence of a pseudosorites and the understanding of the precise flow of the argument demand more than a casual glance, while some (e.g. Job 3:3–10, 11, 16; Lev 25:47–54) provide instances where the presence of a pseudosorites could easily be missed without further reflection. With these data in mind, we turn next to the prophet Hosea.

Hosea was a master-craftsman with regard to literary matters, especially figures of speech and imagery. He was a particularly astute observer of the world around him. Accordingly, he drew upon imagery from the agrarian world (e.g. Hos 2:3, 5, 8–9, 22–23; 9:2, 4, 10), the animal world (e.g. 5:14–15; 11:10–11; 13:7–8), the political scene (e.g. 4:16; 8:9–10), and everyday life (e.g. 7: 9; 11:1–4). He also displayed his mastery over a rich array of metaphors (e.g. 6:11; 9:8) and similes (e.g. 7:8, 11; 8:9–19) as well as several other figures of speech and biblical motifs and themes.<sup>45</sup> It would not be unexpected, then that Hosea would also be familiar with the pseudosorites.

## II. CASE STUDY: PSEUDOSORITES IN HOSEA

It is in the prophecy of Hosea that one finds the greatest cluster of pseudosorites. They again may be classified as to whether they are formal or non-formal.

1. *Formal types.* In chapter eight, God's prophet is condemning Israel's covenant violations. The priests are likened to vultures swooping down over their prey in as much as they have led the people into shameful syncretistic worship practices with all of its debased morality. Israel's chosen kings have also failed to provide sound leadership and therefore face God's disapproval. Accordingly, God has summoned another bird of prey to punish his disobedient people. Because the people have willingly followed the bad example of their leaders, the entire kingdom has become an abomination to the Lord. Moreover, rather than promoting the fertility of the land, its devotion to paganism has guaranteed the opposite result. Therefore, the calf idol of Bethel will be carried off into captivity, while other objects of idolatry will be smashed to bits (vv. 1–6; cf. 10:5–6).

At this point in delivering God's oracle concerning the state of his people, Hosea introduces several striking images and figures of speech by way of underscoring God's basic charge against his people and details their coming judgment. In the first of these, Hosea compares Israel's flawed foreign policy to foolish farming procedures, saying,

They sow the wind  
and reap the whirlwind.  
The stalk has no head;  
it will produce no flour.

<sup>45</sup> See further Richard D. Patterson, "Portraits from a Prophets Portfolio," *BSac* 165 (2008) 294–308.

Were it to yield grain,  
 foreigners would swallow it up (v.7).<sup>46</sup>

“Farmer” Israel has sown the seeds of international relations with the very nation, which will destroy and scatter it in the whirlwind of God’s judgment (cf. 12:2). To emphasize the impossibility of international success and the certainty of Israel’s demise, Hosea now employs a pseudosorites (v.7). Using the imagery of sowing and harvesting, he declares that, (A) Israel’s “sown seed” of international diplomacy will produce no fruitful harvest, but (B) even if it should perhaps (*ʿûlay*) yield some “grain” (cf. NLT; HCSB)<sup>47</sup> of temporary benefit, it will ultimately fail when Israel falls to a foreign invader. Israel’s foreign policy of seeking the favor of other nations rather than relying on God will harvest no good result (vv. 8–10). Indeed, all of Israel’s problems can be traced to its penchant for breaking its covenant with the Lord, a situation that ensured their certain coming demise and exile (vv.1–6, 11–14).<sup>48</sup>

It is, of course, possible that Hosea also intended some reference to the actual sowing of grain, the meager benefits of which (if any) would serve as a visible sign of Israel’s general malaise spiritually, morally, and politically, all of which would climax in Israel’s defeat by the very nation it courted so fervently.<sup>49</sup> O’Connor suggests that the pseudosorites of verse seven is a double one in which, “It is the unsown seed of 7a that grows and then fails to sprout in 7c, and it is the unharvested grain of 7b that fails to be suitable for meal in 7d. In 7ab the sources of failure are external, while in 7cd the sources are internal.”<sup>50</sup>

A series of pseudosorites occurs in chapter nine. In the first of these (vv. 3–6) Hosea prophesies that the punishment of sinful Israel will result

<sup>46</sup> Stuart (*Hosea-Jonah* [WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1987] 133) suggests that Hosea’s condemnation finds its origin in the fertility curse mentioned in Deut 28:38 and adds, “In ancient times sowers would sow their seed with a gentle wind, which helped scatter it evenly on a tilled field. . . . The disaster which brings to naught the planning and effort of the sower is seen in the storm disintegrating and scattering the heads of grain before they can be harvested.”

<sup>47</sup> Thus similarly, BDB 19, “if peradventure.”

<sup>48</sup> Hosea’s mastery of literary matters is seen especially in verses 8–9 where Israel’s existence is likened to liquid from a cup, which is swallowed and the cup is then discarded as a “worthless thing,” and its foreign policy is compared to a wild donkey, which so lusts after its mate that it is much like a prostitute who, rather than receiving money for its affection, pays others. See further B. Ostreich, “Absurd Similes in the Book of Hosea,” in *Creation, Life, and Hope* (ed. J. Moskalal; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University (2000) 115–18. Ostreich suggests that the first image depicts a wild ass that has wandered off from the herd and thus has exposed itself to danger, while in the second the wild ass is likened to an unusual prostitute who pays her lovers.

<sup>49</sup> Garrett (*Hosea-Joel* 184–85) finds a multiple reference in Hosea’s words: “The stalk that has no head probably not only represents literal fields of wheat that will yield no harvest but also metaphorically the religious and political ideology on which Israel placed its trust, especially the fertility cults. These would not give them the prosperity they seek.” Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea* 496–500) see the theme of 8:7 as “a realistic comment on economic conditions in the country” (p. 500), a condition brought on by Israel’s twin sins of making idols and installing improper kings (p. 497).

<sup>50</sup> O’Connor, “Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse” 246. O’Connor goes on to entertain the unlikely thought that the foreigners will impose so heavy a tribute on Israel that it will destroy Israel’s economy.

in the people being carried off into exile (v. 3). There they will not be able to offer the formal sacrifices, which they presently made (tainted with syncretistic pagan ritual though they were). In exile, they would be ceremonially unclean, for the products they might choose to use may well have been previously offered to a pagan deity. As well, the “people will be eating the bread of mourners rather than the bread of sacrifice because when Hosea’s inspired words are fulfilled, cultic celebration will have given way to disease and death.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, there may be a veiled hint that they would be in mourning also due the death of their nation! Furthermore, not only because they were already covenant breakers (see below) who had defiled themselves with harlotries associated with pagan worship practices or because living in exile would have deprived them of the Temple in which to worship, but also because living in a pagan land defiled their lives, the lack of availability of ritually suitable food would have rendered any sacrifice polluted, and hence rejected by the Lord (vv. 4–5). As Sweeney points out, “Food suitable for Israelite consumption would not be available in a foreign land that lacked sanctuaries for YHWH at which meat was properly slaughtered (cf. Deuteronomy 12). . . . The absence of suitable sacrifices would render food unclean, like that eaten by mourners (cf. Ezek 4:9–17; 24:17, 22).”<sup>52</sup>

Hosea dashes all hope of the people being able to escape the coming destruction and exile. Expressed as a pseudosorites, the declaration underscores the disastrous effects of the judgment facing the people, including the loss of all that they hold dear, for when Assyria invades the Northern Kingdom, it will totally destroy the land and the people. Thus (A) the people cannot escape their coming defeat and exile (v.3) but (B) even if (*ki*) they do (i.e. escape the destruction so that they are able to flee to Egypt), “Egypt will gather them and Memphis will bury them” (v.6a). Therefore, any hope of escaping the coming destruction is baseless, for even if they are able to make their way to Egypt, they will leave behind their precious possessions (which in turn will suffer ruin) and ultimately they will not have escaped for they will die and be buried there.<sup>53</sup> The pseudosorites, then, emphasizes that God’s judgment is inescapable. Israel’s sin points to their lost condition, which will entail the forfeiture of all they hold dear, including their very lives.

A second example occurs in Hosea 9:11–12. In recording God’s case against his people, Hosea cites the Lord as recalling those early days when God’s people were yet faithful to him. He likens that joyous time to a traveler who finds “grapes in the desert” (v. 10). Alas, tasteful refreshment soon turned sour, for when the people came to Shittim, they became entangled with the god of Mount Peor (Num 25:1–3) through committing immorality with Moabite women (Num 31:16; cf. Rev 2:14).

<sup>51</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 144.

<sup>52</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 1:96.

<sup>53</sup> David Allan Hubbard (*Hosea* [TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989] 158) remarks, “Those who try to flee destruction at the hands of ravaging Assyrians to find refuge in Egypt will not find respite but will be collected . . . and buried in *Memphis* . . . with its huge graveyard and ancient pyramids.”

Hosea's Israel had seen prosperity and success in the first half of the eighth century BC. Indeed, under Jeroboam II's long forty-one year reign the Israelite king was able to restore "the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah" (2 Kgs 14:25) and achieve several other military successes (v. 28; cf. Amos 6:13). Nevertheless, that glory was to "fly away like a bird" (Hos 9:11a). Although Israel thus enjoyed political as well as economic prosperity, the Northern Kingdom's spiritual bankruptcy continued to grow adding to the perpetuation of the state sponsored religion established by Jeroboam I (2 Kgs 14:24). The sorry state of spirituality and morality is cataloged repeatedly by the eighth-century BC prophets, especially Hosea (e.g. 5:4–5; 8:1–6; 9:1; 12:6–8, 11; 13:1–2; cf. Amos 4:4–5; 5:5, 10–12).

Worst of all was the religious practice sponsored by Israel's religious leaders, the priests (see, e.g., Hos 4:6–9; 5:1). Because of the syncretistic practice of worshiping Baal while feigning allegiance to Yahweh who was Israel's real source of glory (2:13, 17; 11:2; cf. Isa 42:8), the Lord was about to execute his judgment against his people.<sup>54</sup> Israel was to suffer the penalty prescribed for covenant breakers (Deut 29:22–28; Hos 6:7; 8:1). Included in their punishment was, as in the earlier case at Baal-Peor (Num 25:4–9; cf. Deut 4:3; Ps 106:28) a great loss of life. This would take the form of the tragedy of being bereft of children, or there would be widespread inability to conceive or bear children (v. 11b). The pseudosorites underscores the seriousness of the situation: (A) There will be no birth, pregnancy, or conception in Ephraim, and (B) "even if (*ki 'im*) they rear children, I will bereave them of everyone" (v. 12b; cf. NRSV). Thus, in the extremely unlikely event that there would be successful childbirths, "The children will not survive."<sup>55</sup>

Reinforcing the historical and theological data resident in the ninth chapter of Hosea, the pseudosorites demonstrate an important contribution to the third crucial aspect of sound biblical exegesis: the literary dimension. They graphically emphasize the seriousness of Israel's spiritual and moral corruption and underscore Israel's inevitable judgment, which would include not only great destruction and loss of lives, but an inability even to prorogate new life.

In yet a third pseudosorites (v. 16) this same grisly prospect is repeated. Israelite society's degradation is portrayed metaphorically as a fruit bearing tree or perhaps a vine (cf. 10:1). This plant, however, is blighted, hence fruitless. The metaphor graphically portrays Israel's spiritual condition—it is fruitless for God. Israel is no longer alive with vitality for spiritual growth because God's people have allowed their relationship with Yahweh to slide downwards so greatly that their blighted condition points to the fact that Israel is a dying nation. Using the imagery of fruitbearing, Hosea's

<sup>54</sup> Hubbard (*Hosea* 165) points out the degraded nature of Israel's fascination with Baal as reflected in the Hebrew term (*šiqqūšim*) "vile" (NIV) "The Hebrew language is hard-pressed to come up with a more degrading term to describe the depths to which Israel's initial and continued contact with Baal had lowered them."

<sup>55</sup> Garrett, *Hosea*, *Joel* 201.

pseudosorites consists of the fact that because of Israel's desperate spiritual condition, God will give them a visible symbol of their fruitlessness by denying their ability to have children: (A) Israel's sin will result in an inability to have children, but (B) "Even if (*gam ki*) they bear children, I will slay their cherished offspring" (9:16; cf. NRSV).<sup>56</sup>

A particularly interesting case is found in the context of Hos 13:12–15. Viewed as a possible non-formal pseudosorites, the argument would be built around the imagery of Ephraim as a flourishing reed plant.<sup>57</sup> Likening Ephraim to a flourishing reed plant, Hosea warns the people that a scorching east wind was about to come, which would dry up the plant's life-giving water (v. 15). Ironically, Israel was guilty of pursuing the east wind (12:1); now that east wind would bring its demise. Allowing for this, the pseudosorites would entail the certain judgment of Ephraim/Israel: (A) God will have no compassion upon Ephraim/Israel, but (B) even if (*ki*) he should show compassion for a short while, he will soon send the Assyrians to devastate it.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Israel is again warned that their sin, including their reliance on things and people other than God, has doomed them to a horrendous destruction.<sup>59</sup> As Achtemeier explains, "that the east wind [*sic*] in verse 15 is Assyria, which comes across the eastern desert against Ephraim as the instrument of what Yahweh's wrath against his people. . . . In the metaphor of verse 15d-e, the water of life will fail for Ephraim. It will die as a waterless plant will die."<sup>60</sup>

*2. Non-formal types.* Non-formal pseudosorites also occur in the prophecy of Hosea. One such is the situation in Hos 5:4–6. At first sight, the passage may not appear to contain a pseudosorites, but as O'Connor explains, the pseudosorites entails Yahweh's rejection of Israel for its syncretistic worship

<sup>56</sup> O'Connor ("Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse" 252) sees Hos 9:11–16 as a complex triple pseudosorites covering eight stages of the birth process: potency (16abc), conception (11b, 16b) gestation (11b, 14c), birth (11b), neonatal (16d), nurturance (14 d), rearing (12a), and maturity (12a).

<sup>57</sup> The words for "bear fruit" and "fruit" lie behind the name Ephraim and form a word play (cf. Gen 41:52). Interestingly, Ephraim's father Joseph was also likened to a "fruitful bough" (Gen 49:22).

<sup>58</sup> The rendering of the NIV is admittedly based upon decisions as to the force of the difficult Hebrew text, hence the constraints of the context must determine the existence of a pseudosorites here. It is perhaps best to classify Hos 13:12–15 as less certain.

<sup>59</sup> The general flow of the context favors those versions that translate Hos 13:14 negatively by translating the opening two lines of the verse as a rhetorical question (e.g. ESV, NET, NJB, NRSV, REB). Some versions render the first two lines as a declarative statement (e.g. LXX, AB, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that no negative particle exists in the MT. To be sure, Paul understands these lines in a positive manner as pointing to the benefits of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:54–57). Granted this certainty, it is nonetheless true that both texts must be understood in the light of their contextual constraints. In both instances the point is that God alone has the power over death and life. In 1 Corinthians 15, the hold of death over the individual has been broken through Christ's victory over death, whereas in Hosea 13 God will not restrain his death sentence to the nation and its sinful people (especially his leadership). God's revelation through the apostle Paul, however, allows an updated answer to the implied question in Hos 13:14. There is now a sure hope of resurrection through Christ. As Peter C. Craigie (*Twelve Prophets* [2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984] 1:81) observes, "The meaning of human life cannot be determined apart from God, the giver of life."

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 107.

practices.<sup>61</sup> Because of Israel's commitment to paganism, it is the case that the people do not acknowledge God. Therefore, he has rejected them. The pseudosorites may be outlined as follows: (A) Israel's syncretistic worship forbids any true worship (i.e. genuine fellowship with God), but (B) even if they were to observe proper worship procedures, they would still not reach God, because the Lord has rejected them. Andersen and Freedman, however, see the matter a bit differently: "Although their doings will not let them return to Yahweh, even if they try, they will not find him. It is not that the spirit of promiscuity restrains them. Yahweh decides whether they will find him or not, and he has withdrawn."<sup>62</sup> With either understanding, the pseudosorites emphasizes the seriousness of Israel's condition. Israel has now been cut off from fellowship with God.

A similar situation occurs in Hos 2:6–7, 9–10 (MT 2:8–9, 11–12), but this time it involves Gomer's failure to find her lovers. O'Connor traces the argument in the pseudosorites as follows: "1. Gomer is prevented from moving about; 2. even if she manages to escape, she cannot get to her lovers; and 3. even if she gets to her lovers, they will be repulsed by her when 'Hosea' reveals her perfidy toward him."<sup>63</sup> The imagery here, however, goes beyond the situation with Hosea's wife, for Gomer served as a visible symbol of an existing spiritual reality. Much as Gomer sought the affection of other men, so Israel has gone after other gods, particularly Baal. Thus Stuart remarks, "Her 'lovers' are, of course, the Baals. . . . Israel's calling the Baals 'lovers' is a metaphor first attested in Hosea, and otherwise only in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where it also refers to rivals of Yahweh for Israel's allegiance."<sup>64</sup> Just as the case with Gomer's rejection by her lovers when Hosea reveals her infidelity and promiscuity, so God's chastisement of the Northern Kingdom will demonstrate the powerlessness of the nations and the gods it worshiped.

An inverted pseudosorites occurs in Hos 10:3:

Then they will say, "We have no king  
because we did not revere the LORD.  
But even if we had a king,  
what could he do for us?"

Building upon the Lord's discourse in 9:1–13, 15–16 and the prophet's own pronouncement in 9:17, Hosea details further reasons for God's rejection of wayward Israel. He employs the metaphor of a spreading vine, which rather than producing fruit for its owner, provided strictly for itself.<sup>65</sup> Such had proven to be the case with eighth-century BC Israel. Rather than being

<sup>61</sup> See O'Connor, "Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse" 242–43.

<sup>62</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* 394.

<sup>63</sup> O'Connor, "Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse" 243. See also Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* 393.

<sup>64</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 48. Garrett (*Hosea, Joel* 82, 83) suggests that Israel's sin is double: she seeks not only the foreign nations but their gods. Therefore "[t]he main point is Israel's attempts to get what she needed from the foreign nations and their gods would come to naught. . . . Hosea contrasts the power of God to lay waste Israel with human inability to protect her. Neither military strength nor even prayer will be effective; and no one, by cunning, effort, or saintliness, can allay the coming disaster."

<sup>65</sup> For the use of the metaphor of the vine to depict God's relation to his people and his blessings upon them, see Ps 80:8–13; Isa 5:2–6; Jer 2:21; Joel 1:11; Mic 4:3–4; Zech 13:1.

thankful to the Lord for his blessings and serving him, the people participated in pagan worship. Therefore, the Northern Kingdom faced certain judgment in which their reliance upon false altars and religious rites would prove useless.

At this point, Hosea pictures the prevailing public feelings by citing the commonly heard slogan, which no doubt echoed the chaotic political situation toward the latter days of the Northern Kingdom when local rulers vied for supremacy. Hosea's pseudosorites underscores the general viewpoint of the people. As they saw it, (A) "We have no king because we did not revere the Lord," and (B) "Even if we had a king, what could he do for us?" (v. 3). The folly of the whole scene is aptly captured by Garrett: "In such a situation, no doubt, many people became cynical and considered this succession of royal pretenders to have no legitimate claim to the title of king. Even so, rather than becoming alarmed at the political instability, they declared that they were free of all royal rule, be it divine or human."<sup>66</sup>

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The texts we have examined, particularly those that are formally stated, demonstrate not only the existence of pseudosorites, but that they supply an emphasis or insight that provides vividness to the context. The salient point that arrests the reader's attention is that because event B is not only unlikely and contradictory to event A, the combination presents a unique paradox. Therefore, the essential point in event A remains basically unaltered by event B. Yet the pseudosorites, thus formed, not only allows event B to reinforce the message of event A, but provides an emphasis that would not otherwise exist. In some cases, particularly in the prophets (e.g. Hosea), the pseudosorites underscores the essence or the seriousness of the issue at hand (e.g. Isa 6:12-13; 24:17-18; Jer 5:1-2; 15:1; 37: 9-10; Amos 5:21-22). In some cases, additional insight is given (e.g. 2 Cor 4:2b-4; 1 Pet 3:13-14). In some instances, the emphasis in the pseudosorites is accompanied by the revelation of the innermost feelings of the person involved, whether human (e.g. Job 9:14-17; 10:14-17; 2 Cor 12:5b-6) or divine (Isa 49:15-16; Jer 5:1-2[?]; 15:1; Hos 9:10-12; Amos 5:21-22). The pseudosorites with its paradoxical nature thus renders the situation at hand more dramatic and at times even more picturesque, hence it adds a valuable contribution to the literary dimension in the full exegetical process.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Garrett, *Hosea, Joel* 208. It should be noted, however, that some commentators suggest that Hosea's words probably point to a time after the fall of Samaria.

<sup>67</sup> The exploratory nature of this study may be seen at times in the tentative results gained in the identification of instances where possible or even probable pseudosorites exist. It is hoped that the information and conclusions reached in the study will not only be helpful in providing further insight for the texts that have been examined but also provide a stimulus for further research.