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A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets

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A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets

Description

The books of the twelve Minor Prophets are some of the least studied by Christians today, but they contain some of the great themes of Scripture, such as God's mercy and judgment, His covenant with Israel, the day of the Lord, and the coming of the Messiah. Arguing for a canonical unity that recognizes the Minor Prophets as one cohesive composition, Michael Shepherd explains the historical meaning of each verse of the twelve books and also provides guidance for application and preaching. Pastors, teachers, and serious students of Scripture will find a wealth of insights for understanding the Minor Prophets.

Keywords

Old Testament, prophets, preaching

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A COMMENTARY ON THE
BOOK OF THE TWELVE

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A COMMENTARY ON THE
BOOK OF THE TWELVE

The Minor Prophets

MICHAEL B. SHEPHERD

 Kregel
Academic

A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets

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*Dedicated to my Mom, Janice D. Shepherd,
who encouraged me to read the Bible at a young age*

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COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

BDB	The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i>
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>LXX</i>	<i>Septuagint</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Masoretic Text</i>
<i>Syr.</i>	<i>Syriac Peshitta</i>
<i>Tg. Jon.</i>	<i>Targum Jonathan</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>Vulg.</i>	<i>Latin Vulgate</i> ¹

1. Abbreviations in footnotes can be found in the Bibliography. See also the second edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*.

INTRODUCTION

This volume offers something unique when compared to other commentaries on the so-called Minor Prophets. Numerous works have been published on Hosea–Malachi in either single-volume or multi-volume format that treat these prophetic books as twelve separate compositions, often rearranging them in chronological order. This approach is largely due to the lasting effects of the rise of historical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ More recent biblical scholarship has sought to give an account of the transmission of the Book of the Twelve as a single composition in antiquity by highlighting the historical evidence for its unity and by tracing the internal clues to the work of a final composer. The present volume is an effort to bring that scholarship into a commentary setting that will be accessible to students, pastors, and scholars alike.² It is hoped that a better

1. See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). It may be helpful to think of the analogy of commentaries on the Pentateuch. It is quite rare to see a single volume commentary on Genesis–Deuteronomy (e.g., John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]), even though the book of Moses was considered a single work in antiquity.
2. Marvin Sweeney (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000]) and James Nogalski (Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary series [2011]) have published multivolume commentaries (Hos.–Jon. and Mic.–Mal.) on the Twelve. The present commentary differs in approach and presentation. Sweeney highlights common themes among the Twelve (cf., the work of Paul House on the Twelve). Nogalski traces the historical development of the Twelve through

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understanding of the compositional unity of the Twelve will remove the sense of disconnectedness that readers initially experience with the Prophets and lead to a greater appreciation of the ongoing relevance of the Twelve as Christian Scripture.

THE PLACE OF THE TWELVE IN THE HEBREW CANON

The threefold shape of the Hebrew Canon features the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings (Prol. Sir.; 4QMMT; Luke 24:44; *Contempl.* 1f., 25).³ The Book of Twelve falls within the second of these three divisions, although the exact location of the Twelve in the Prophets varies among the witnesses. The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) provide the narrative context for the Latter Prophets, whose writings display the form and style that readers of the Bible typically associate with prophecy.⁴ The earliest attestation (c. 200 BC) to the arrangement of the Latter Prophets occurs in Sirach 48–49, which mentions them in the order of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and “the Twelve Prophets” (Sir. 49:10). This order of the Latter Prophets is what appears in the major codices of the Prophets and the Hebrew Bible from the medieval period.⁵

The Babylonian Talmud (c. AD 600), however, bears witness to a different arrangement of the Latter Prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve Prophets (*b. B. Bat.* 14b).⁶ This order does

various hypothetical stages of redaction. The present work, however, follows the compositional strategy of a single author.

3. See Roger T. Beckwith, “Formation of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 39–88. The terminology is variable. “Torah” alone or “Prophets” alone can refer to the entire canon (John 10:34; Rom. 1:2). “The Torah (or, Moses) and the Prophets” can refer to the entire canon (Luke 24:27; cf., Luke 24:44).
4. See Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991). See also John H. Sailhamer, *Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
5. See Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 2d ed., trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 35–37.
6. It is possible that Matt. 27:9–10—a citation from Zech. 11:13 attributed to Jeremiah—reflects the understanding that Jeremiah was the head of the Prophets (but see Mark 1:2–3 where citations from Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3 are attributed to Isaiah, presumably as the head of the Prophets [textual witnesses to Mark 1:2 vary]). See Michael B. Shepherd, *The Twelve Prophets in the New Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 59.

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not find any support from the manuscript witnesses. But the Talmud does raise an interesting question about why Hosea does not come first among the eighth-century prophets Hosea, Isaiah, Amos, and Micah.⁷ The initial response is that Hosea is written with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi who conclude prophecy. The Talmud then asks why Hosea cannot be separated and placed first. The response is that the scroll would be too small and might be lost. This issue apparently affected the arrangement of the Latter Prophets in the early Septuagint codices (c. fourth century AD). Both Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus place the Book of the Twelve prior to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Codex Sinaiticus, on the other hand, has Isaiah, Jeremiah (Ezekiel is missing), and the Book of the Twelve (missing Hosea–Micah). All three codices group Lamentations with Jeremiah—presumably because of the reference to Jeremiah in the Greek superscription to Lamentations. Vaticanus and Alexandrinus also group Daniel with Ezekiel, due to Daniel’s reputation as a prophet (Matt. 24:15).⁸

Codex Vaticanus departs from the threefold shape of the Hebrew Bible—Torah, Prophets, Writings—when it puts the Prophets section last. This Christian tradition, which is usually assumed to be based on the relationship between the Prophets and the New Testament documents, has had a lasting influence on Latin, German, and English translations. Nevertheless, it is a secondary tradition with no foundation in witnesses to the Hebrew canon. One of the earliest references to Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible occurs in the Prologue to Sirach, which speaks of translation of “the Law and the Prophets and the rest of the books.”⁹ Furthermore, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus both follow the general order of the Hebrew canon.

If the intended order of the Latter Prophets is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve, then it stands to reason that these books

7. Modern scholarship typically considers Amos to be the first of the “writing” prophets (e.g., Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed. [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1986], 292).

8. See Michael B. Shepherd, *Daniel in the Context of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 4.

9. Incidentally, the Prologue to Sirach and the conclusion to the book in Sirach 48–50 make it clear that Sirach and his grandson did not see their book as part of the Tanakh. The apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books, while valuable for the early history of interpretation, never found a place in the composition of the Hebrew canon. The inclusion of apocryphal books in later Septuagint codices has no bearing on this.

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bear some meaningful relationship to one another.¹⁰ Isaiah comes first, sharing a substantial section of material with the book of Kings (2 Kgs. 18–20; Isa. 36–39). Then follow Jeremiah and Ezekiel in chronological order. The Book of the Twelve shares the same scope (preexilic, exilic, and postexilic) and the same interest in the nations as the book of Isaiah. It is also evident from the composition of the Twelve that the final composer of the book was a careful student of the book of Jeremiah (see below, The Composition of the Twelve). The Babylonian Talmud even claims that Ezekiel and the Twelve were produced by the same group—the Men of the Great Assembly (*b. B. Bat.* 15a). At the very least, these books all share the same interest in judgment resulting from the broken Sinai covenant, as well as the hope of future restoration in a new covenant relationship.

If the Book of the Twelve appears at the end of the Prophets section, there is some question about what connection it might have to what stands at the beginning of the Writings division. According to Luke 24:44 (cf., 4QMMT; *Contempl.* 1f., 25), the book of Psalms heads the third division of the Hebrew Bible. The Babylonian Talmud (*b. B. Bat.* 14b) has the book of Ruth prior to the book of Psalms, but this separates Ruth from the Megilloth (the festival scrolls) with which the book would normally circulate (i.e., Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther).¹¹ The Leningrad Codex places Chronicles

10. See Odil Hannes Steck, *The Prophetic Books and Their Theological Witness*, trans. James D. Nogalski (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Christopher R. Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); Michael B. Shepherd, *The Text in the Middle* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014).

11. The Megilloth circulated in this arrangement for compositional reasons prior to their rearrangement in Rabbinic Bibles according to the order of the festivals for liturgical purposes (see Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone, “The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity,” in *The Shape of the Writings*, ed. Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], 49–51; see also Shepherd, *Daniel in the Context of the Hebrew Bible*, 59–61). The argument that this placement of Ruth somehow introduces the book of Psalms (see Stephen Dempster, “A Wandering Moabite: Ruth—A Book in Search of a Canonical Home,” in *The Shape of the Writings*, 87–118) is not very strong, nor is the argument that the placement of Ruth prior to Samuel (e.g., Vaticanus and Alexandrinus) introduces the reader to David (Ruth 4:22). The inclusion of the genealogy at the end of the story of Ruth presupposes that the reader

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ahead of Psalms (cf., the Aleppo Codex), but a good case can be made for the placement of Chronicles at the conclusion of the Hebrew canon (Matt. 23:35; *b. B. Bat.* 14b). The book of Chronicles itself presupposes a canon that begins with Genesis (1 Chr. 1:1) and ends with the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–4) in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah (2 Chr. 36:22–23), which corresponds to the arrangement of the Tanakh.

Assuming for a moment that the book of Psalms follows the Twelve, it is worth noting that this order more than the others shows evidence of an awareness of canon formation.¹² The first division of the canon—the Pentateuch—ends with the expectation of a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18; 34:10). The beginning of the second division of the canon—the Prophets—instructs Joshua to murmur in the Torah day and night (Josh. 1:8). At the end of the Prophets section, the Book of the Twelve concludes with the expectation of a prophet like Elijah (Mal. 3:1, 23 [Eng., 3:1; 4:5]). The beginning of the third division—the Writings—then commends to the reader the practice of murmuring in the Torah day and night (Ps. 1:2). This use of such unique language at these strategic locations can hardly be a coincidence.¹³

There is good evidence for the prophetic shaping of the entire canon of Hebrew Scripture.¹⁴ The Torah itself is ultimately the product of Moses and the Prophets (2 Kgs. 17:13; Dan. 9:10; Ezra 9:10–11), and already within the Hebrew Bible there are references to the Torah and the Prophets together (Isa. 1:10; 2:3; 8:16, 20; Zech. 7:12).¹⁵ Several passages are conscious of a corpus of prophetic literature that serves

already knows David. Furthermore, David's name does not appear in the book of Samuel until 1 Samuel 16. With all due respect to the historical note in Ruth 1:1 that connects the story to the period of the Judges, it is Ruth's position after Proverbs in the Leningrad Codex that bears the marks of compositional intentionality (e.g., Prov. 31:10, 31; Ruth 3:11).

12. See John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 239–49.
13. What this reflects is not a single scroll with all the books in a particular arrangement (but see *b. B. Bat.* 13b). Rather, it reflects the shaping of the individual books in light of one another and with a specific order of the books in mind. Thus, it is possible to speak of the Hebrew Bible as a book made of many books. Both are the product of authorship. In many ways, the Book of the Twelve is a microcosm of this phenomenon.
14. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
15. See Hans-Christoph Schmitt, "Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie," *VT* 32 (1982): 170–89; Stephen B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets*, *FAT* 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); John H. Sailhamer, *The*

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as the object of study for later prophets (e.g., Ezek. 38:17; Zech. 1:4; Dan. 9:2). Thus, later prophets play the role of scribe (i.e., sage or biblical scholar) in relation to a collection of prophetic writings in much the same way that earlier prophets played such a role in relationship to the Pentateuch (see Prov. 29:18 LXX; Ezra 7:6, 10; *b. B. Bat.* 12).¹⁶ Even the Writings section shows signs of prophetic shaping. Of course, the book of Daniel falls within this division, but another key example would be the book of Psalms, which both the Chronicler (e.g., 1 Chr. 25:1) and the New Testament authors (e.g., Acts 2:30) interpret as a prophetic composition rather than as a hymnbook.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

It is possible to talk about authorship of the Twelve on two different levels. On the one hand, there are twelve separate works, each marked by its own superscription (Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1; Obad. 1; Jon. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1). The superscriptions identify the contents of each book as the word(s), prophetic vision, or burden/oracle that a particular prophet received. In several cases, there is an indication of the dates that the prophet's ministry spanned. These dates range from the eighth century down to the postexilic period. On the other hand, there is internal evidence that an unnamed final composer (cf., Hebrews) brought these twelve works together to form a single composition.¹⁷ This evidence primarily appears in the seams that connect the end of one book to the beginning of another (see below, *The Composition of the Twelve*).¹⁸ Since the material of the twelve individual prophets takes the reader at least into the fifth century

Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

16. See Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2. Ezra's involvement in the shaping of the canon is a good example of how someone from priestly circles with scribal training and access to texts could acknowledge indebtedness to prophetic tradition (Ezra 9:10–11). See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 36. Of course, several of the "writing" prophets had priestly backgrounds themselves (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah).
17. The Babylonian Talmud (*b. B. Bat.* 15a) attributes the book to the Men of the Great Assembly. These scholars were associated with the reforms and compositional efforts of Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 10; Neh. 8–9).
18. It is not in the interest of the present commentary to entertain the possibility of reconstructing hypothetical previous stages in the composition of the Twelve. Current research on this suggests that the enterprise is

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BC, and since Sirach refers to “the Twelve Prophets” circa 200 B.C., it is most likely that the composer of the Twelve completed his work either in the fourth or the third century BC. The work of this biblical author was designed to give the Book of the Twelve a message for future generations of believers beyond the lifetime of the historical prophets.

Lest the reader think that the final composer of the Twelve was an editor, it is important to recognize that biblical authors (and authors from the ancient Near East in general) were those who put together (i.e., composed) larger and smaller pieces of material from different times and places.¹⁹ This was their normal mode of operation. These authors gave the resulting literary works their essential theological message. Furthermore, the biblical authors openly cited their sources.²⁰ Perhaps an appropriate analogy for the Book of the Twelve would be the book of Psalms. Recent scholarship has come to recognize that the book of Psalms is more than a collection of individual psalms. The book as a whole is the product of anonymous authorship/composition.²¹ Much like the Book of the Twelve, the individual parts have superscriptions associated with particular figures (e.g., Ps. 3), but the seams of the five books of the larger Psalter betray an effort to organize the psalms in a meaningful way (Pss. 41:14 [Eng., 41:13]; 72:18–20; 89:53 [89:52]; 106:48).

It is not the goal of the present commentary to give a biographical account of the historical prophets by reconstructing the life setting of their words and actions as if the texts were nothing more than transcripts of sermons designed only for ancient audiences and now in need of updating for contemporary readers.²² The textualization of

dubious at best. The extant form of the Twelve reflects the work of a single ordering mind. It is not the product of conflict or compromise.

19. See S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), xi; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982; reprint, Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2002), 42.
20. E.g., Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18; 1 Kgs. 11:41; 14:19, 29; Jer. 25:13; 30:2; 36; 51:60; Isa. 2:1; 13:1; Prov. 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1; 1 Chr. 4:22; 9:1; 28:12, 19; 29:29; 2 Chr. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 16:11; 20:34; 24:27; 25:26; 26:22; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18–19; 35:26–27; 36:8.
21. See, e.g., Gerald H. Wilson, “Psalms and Psalter: Paradigm for Biblical Theology,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 100–110.
22. “The moments that passed in their lives are not now available and cannot become the object of scientific analysis. All we have is the consciousness of those moments as preserved in words” (Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* [New York: HarperCollins, 1969; reprint, Peabody, MA: Prince, 2001], vii).

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the prophets means that the literary work—the verbal meaning of the composer—becomes the object of study.²³ This literary work refers to real events, but it now has a life of its own and creates a world of its own.²⁴ That is, it is not a question of the book's historicity. Rather, it is a matter of the book's unique and revelatory depiction of things, in distinction from the events themselves.²⁵ Furthermore, the Book of the Twelve is not designed for any one particular audience. It is intended for whoever reads it.

We should not concern ourselves with the question of how one can read a prophetic book from then to now (the possibilities are legion). We should instead concern ourselves with how a prophetic book should be read according to the desire of those who shaped it during its formative period. This reading determines the formation as a historical process in its time. It is a question of the signals placed in the book itself and a question of

“Prophecy, then, may be described as *exegesis of existence from a divine perspective*. Understanding prophecy is an understanding of an understanding rather than an understanding of knowledge; it is exegesis of exegesis” (ibid., xii). Cf., 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21.

23. See William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Schniedewind makes the case that the textualization process was transformative. It is not so much the story of how the Bible became a book as it is the story of how it became bookish. That is, the Bible became authoritative and spoke on its own terms.
24. “The term *figural* entails a *literary dimension*, that is, the way that prophetic materials have been intentionally related to one another by known and unknown authors, editors, and tradents—terms that within the context of the Old and New Testaments have their own distinctive character, as over against modern analogues. Original utterances, in literary form, have occasioned cross-references and a wider field of association, to which they now belong and within which meaning is generated” (Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 8.) “*History* is the term we frequently use to describe, by appeal to an external grid of association, how the biblical materials can be rearranged, so as to reconstruct their movement from earliest to latest developmental moments. But understood by attention to the figural character of prophetic speech, the term *history* will here refer to the achievement of the biblical witness in its final literary form, as the temporal dimension” (ibid.).
25. This relationship of works of art to the world is captured beautifully in the famous painting of the pipe by Rene Magritte whose caption reads: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (“This is not a pipe”).

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the processes of reworking that were conducted and received in the book itself. Hence, in our method the only observations of indicators and inter-relationships that play a role are those in which the text of the book itself (as a historical entity at the time of its formation) signals how it wants to be received using the configuration and assertions of its vocabulary.²⁶

THE TEXT OF THE TWELVE

The original text of the Book of the Twelve must be established on a case-by-case basis from all the available textual witnesses. The following commentary does not favor or give priority to any one textual tradition over the others. At the same time, the plurality of witnesses should not discourage the reader from seeking a text that stood at the beginning of transmission.²⁷ Textual difficulties and complexities have led many modern scholars to abandon the pursuit of original texts in favor of theories of multiple pristine texts or multiple manifestations of the same oral tradition. While it would be an infinitely easier task to bail out in this fashion, the bulk of the evidence suggests that in most cases it is possible to trace linear development.²⁸ Having said this, it is not the desire of this commentary simply to discard anything not considered original. On the contrary, non-original texts often provide valuable insight into the early history of interpretation.

The Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) feature different arrangements of the first six books of the Twelve (MT: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah; LXX: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah). One Hebrew manuscript of the Twelve from the Dead Sea Scrolls ends with Zechariah, Malachi, and Jonah (4QXII^a). Because these witnesses represent variant literary editions of the Book

26. Steck, *The Prophetic Books*, 16.

27. “Rather, we focus on the written text or edition (or a number of consecutive editions) that contained the finished literary product (or one of its earlier stages) that stood at the beginning of the textual transmission process. This formulation gives a certain twist to the assumption of an original text as often described in the scholarly literature. Our definition does not refer to the original text in the usual sense of the word, since the copy described here as the final literary product could have been preceded by earlier literary crystallizations” (Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3d ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 165).

28. “Even if one is unable to decide between two or more readings, the possibility that one of them was nevertheless original and that the other(s) was (were) secondary cannot be rejected. One’s inability to decide between different readings should not be confused with the question of the original form of the biblical text” (ibid., 164).

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of the Twelve, it is necessary to make a decision about which composition of the Twelve to translate and interpret.²⁹ The MT order has much to commend it. On the surface, it is the strange or “difficult” arrangement that likely gave rise to the others. It is not arranged according to length or date or any other obvious ordering principle. There is very little reason to think that someone would have changed something like the order of the LXX to that of the MT. The arrangement of the MT also has support from the Dead Sea Scrolls: (1) 4QXII^{a-c, e} (Hebrew), (2) MurXII (Hebrew) with parts of Joel–Zechariah, and (3) the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll found at Nahal Hever (8HevXII gr, c. 50 BC–AD 50), which has parts of Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk.³⁰

The order of the first six books in the LXX arrangement of the Twelve is roughly according to length and date when compared to the MT (cf., *Lives of the Prophets* 5–10: Hosea, Micah, Amos, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah). This arrangement appears to be a purely editorial decision and does not show sufficient signs of original authorial/compositional intent. Furthermore, there is no Hebrew manuscript evidence to support the LXX. Even the earliest extant Greek scroll of the Twelve (8HevXII gr) follows the order of the MT. But perhaps the most telling indication of the secondary nature of the LXX order is the fact that the Greek text itself seems to presuppose the MT arrangement in several places. For example, the Greek rendering of Amos 9:12 appears to have the Amos-Obadiah sequence in view (cf., Acts 15:17), which would only be the case in the MT (see below, The Composition of the Twelve).

Barry Alan Jones has made a case for the priority of the LXX order and the 4QXII^a order.³¹ That is, he argues for the arrangement of the

29. See Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 283–326; Shepherd, *The Twelve Prophets*, 69–78.

30. It is well known that the text of the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll is a revision of the Old Greek translation toward the proto-Masoretic text. This revision is known as proto-Theodotion or *kaige*-Theodotion. Nevertheless, a decision about the secondary nature of this translation is not necessarily a decision about the order of the books. It is quite possible that the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll has a revised translation whose order of books has the priority. It is then equally possible that the LXX Book of the Twelve has a more original translation but a secondary arrangement of the books. See Aaron Schart, “Zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Zwölfprophetenbuchs,” *VF* 43 (1998): 13–33.

31. Barry Alan Jones, *The Formation of the Book of the Twelve: A Study in Text and Canon* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995). See also Mika S. Pajunen and Hanne

first six books of the Twelve in the LXX with the exception of Jonah, which he places at the end of the Twelve according to 4QXII^a. Not only does this position carry with it the problems of the LXX mentioned above, but also it involves an anomalous witness (4QXII^a) that has no support anywhere. As intriguing as it might be to speculate about the meaning of the placement of Jonah at the end of the Twelve, the paucity of evidence for this reading is overwhelming.³² This hypothetical proposal by Jones does not appear in any extant manuscript witness.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE TWELVE

Perhaps the most compelling case for the priority of the MT order comes from the internal clues to the work of a final composer deliberately connecting the books so that they occur in a particular arrangement in order to communicate the intended theological message. Scholarly interest in this phenomenon has reached an all-time high in the last thirty years.³³ The present section will review the historical evidence

von Weissenberg, "The Book of Malachi, Manuscript 4Q76 (4QXII^a), and the Formation of the 'Book of the Twelve,'" *JBL* 134 (2015): 731–51.

32. This is not to mention the fact that such an order would disrupt the canonical relationship between Malachi and Psalms noted above (see the earlier section, The Place of the Twelve in the Hebrew Canon).
33. E.g., Paul House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (Sheffield: Almond, 1990); James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 217 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); idem, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 218 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Jones, *The Formation of the Book of the Twelve*; James Nogalski and Marvin Sweeney, eds., *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (Atlanta: SBL, 2000); Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden: Deo, 2005) 264–66; Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*; Michael B. Shepherd, "Compositional Analysis of the Twelve," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 184–93; idem, "The New Exodus in the Composition of the Twelve," in *Text and Canon: Essays in Honor of John H. Sailhamer*, ed., Robert L. Cole and Paul J. Kissling (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 120–36; Ehud Ben Zvi and James D. Nogalski, *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve / the Twelve Prophetic Books* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009). See also K. Budde, "Eine folgenschwere Redaktion des Zwölfprophetenbuchs," *ZAW* 39 (1922): 218–29; R. E. Wolfe, "The Editing of the Book of the Twelve," *ZAW* 53 (1935): 90–129; D. Schneider, "The Unity of the Book of the Twelve" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1979). Andersen and Forbes have even suggested that the orthography of the Twelve is an important piece of evidence for unity: "The Minor Prophets are . . . remarkably homogeneous in their spelling. The Book of the Twelve was evidently edited and transmitted as a single scroll"

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for the unity of the Twelve and then provide an overview of the internal evidence for the composition of the Twelve. Detailed explanation of the internal evidence will appear at the appropriate points in the commentary. Also, the interpretive framework provided by the composer's work will inform exposition at lower levels of the text.

Historical Evidence for the Unity of the Twelve

As mentioned above (see *The Place of the Twelve in the Hebrew Canon*), the earliest reference (c. 200 BC) to the Book of the Twelve as a unit occurs in Sirach 49:10. After the references to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (Sir. 48–49) the reader might expect a list of the twelve prophets from Hosea to Malachi, but Sirach simply refers to “the Twelve Prophets.” This is similar to the practice in the New Testament documents (first century AD) where the authors typically cite Isaiah (e.g., Matt. 3:3; 4:14) and Jeremiah (Matt. 2:17) by name, but in Acts 7:42 Stephen introduces a quote from Amos as that which is “written in the Book of the Prophets.” Paul introduces a quote from Habakkuk as that which is “said in the Prophets” (Acts 13:40). James introduces a quote from Amos as “the words of the Prophets” (Acts 15:15).³⁴

The Dead Scrolls also bear witness to the unity of the Twelve. Several fragmentary scrolls from Qumran combine more than one book of the Twelve on a single scroll (4QXII^{a-c, e}, c. 150–25 BC). This is comparable to the practice of combining more than one book of the Pentateuch on a single scroll (e.g., 4QGen-Exod^a; 4QPaleoGen-Exod¹). That is, the combination of more than one book of the Twelve was not simply due to their short length. There were other short books like the Megilloth that could have been included, but the Scrolls witness to the combination of the same books of the Twelve in the same order (with the exception of the oldest fragment, 4QXII^a, which ends with Jonah). The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Hever (8HevXII gr, c. 50 BC–AD 50) and the Hebrew scroll of the Twelve from Murabba'at (Mur XII, c. AD 75–100) also testify to the combination of the Twelve on a single scroll in the traditional Hebrew order (see above, *The Text of the Twelve*).

(Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible*, BibOr 41 [Rome: Biblical Institute, 1986], 315–16).

34. Of course, it is also possible to introduce a citation from Mic. 5:1 (Eng., 5:2) as that which was “written by the prophet” (Matt. 2:5; cf., Matt. 2:15; 21:4; textual witnesses vary for Acts 2:16) or to quote from Hosea by name (Rom. 9:25; cf., Tob. 2:6), but more often there is no reference to a name or individual prophet.

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Jewish (e.g., *b. B. Bat.* 14b) and Christian (e.g., Jerome: *unum librum esse duodecim Prophetarum*) lists of canonical books from the first century to the medieval period count the Twelve Prophets as one book.³⁵ The traditional number of twenty-two or twenty-four books in the Hebrew Bible cannot be achieved without counting the Twelve as one (not to mention the combination of other “books” now separated in modern English translations). Furthermore, the Masoretic Text marks the middle verse of every biblical book with a note in the margin (e.g., Isa. 33:21; Jer. 28:11; Ezek. 26:1),³⁶ but the Masoretes did not mark the middle verse of each of the twelve prophets from Hosea to Malachi. Rather, there is an indication in the margin of Mic. 3:12 that this is the middle of “the book” in verses. The masora at the end of Malachi clarifies that “the book” is the Book of the Twelve, showing that the Masoretes thought of Hosea–Malachi as a single composition that was to be transmitted as a whole.

Internal Evidence for the Composition of the Twelve

There are essentially three criteria for identification of the activity of the final composer of the Twelve. The first and most obvious is the way in which the content of the “seams” (pieces of text that connect the end of one book to the beginning of the next) stands apart from the material that precedes and follows. The second criterion is the development of the author’s programmatic text in Hosea 3:4–5. When each of the seams picks up the message of these verses and develops their language and theme, it is a sign of intelligent design. The author uses this technique to unify the theological message of the Twelve. The final criterion is dependence upon the book of Jeremiah. Wherever the first two criteria are met (seam and message), there is a citation from the book of Jeremiah. It is evident that the book of Jeremiah had a

35. See E. Earle Ellis, “The Old Testament Canon in the Early Church,” in *Mikra*, 653–90. See also Calvin: “the Twelve Minor Prophets form but one volume” (*Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 1, *Hosea*, trans. John Owen, Calvin’s Commentaries XIII [reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 35).

36. The MT also marks the middle of the Prophets (Isa. 17:2), the middle of the Writings (Ps. 130:2), and the middle letter of the Tanakh (Jer. 6:7). For the Pentateuch, the Masoretes marked the middle word (Lev. 11:16) and the middle letter (Lev. 11:42) of the whole book as well as the middle verse for each of the five parts (Gen. 27:40; Exod. 22:27; Lev. 15:7; Num. 17:20; Deut. 17:10). This was a way to safeguard the accuracy of the Bible’s transmission.

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profound influence on the composer and informed the way the Book of the Twelve was put together. No effort is made here to reconstruct hypothetical stages in the development of the Twelve. The primary focus will be the final form of the text.

The program in Hosea 3:4–5 sets forth the themes of judgment and messianic salvation in the last days (cf., Isa. 2:1–5; Mic. 4:1–5).³⁷ This text stands out from its surroundings not only because it introduces material that the seams of the Twelve will develop but also because it is not directed to the northern kingdom of Israel as the reader might expect from the prophet Hosea. It is also not part of the so-called Judean redaction of the book that made Hosea's prophecies applicable to the southern kingdom.³⁸ Rather, the text of Hosea 3:5 envisions a reunited kingdom under the rule of the future ideal Davidic king (cf., Jer. 3:14–18). This is the trajectory of the final composer's work. It is then consistent with this composer's work elsewhere in the Twelve that Hosea 3:5 is a citation from the book of Jeremiah:³⁹

Afterwards the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king and fear to the LORD and to his goodness at the end of the days (Hos. 3:5).

In that day . . . they will serve the LORD their God and David their king whom I will raise up for them (Jer. 30:8–9 [see *Tg. Jon.*]; Jer. 23:5–6; cf., 2 Sam. 7:12).

37. See the rendering of Hosea 3:5 in *Targum Jonathan*: "After thus the sons of Israel will return and seek the fear of the LORD their God, and they will obey the Messiah the son of David their king, and they will follow eagerly the worship of the LORD and the abundance of his goodness that will come to them at the end of the days." See also W. Staerk, "Der Begrauch der Wendung **בְּאַחֲרֵי יְמֵי** im alttestamentliche Kanon," *ZAW* 11 (1891): 247–53.

38. Hos. 1:7; 2:2 (Eng., 1:11); 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12–14; 6:4, 11; 8:14; 10:11; 12:1, 3 (Eng., 12:2, 4).

39. The pattern and wording of Hosea 3:4–5 is also very close to 2 Chronicles 15:3–4 where the prophet Azariah tells Asa the story of how Israel went for many days without a true God, a teaching priest, or the Torah (cf., Hos. 3:4), but the people returned to the LORD and sought him, and he allowed himself to be found by them (cf., Hos. 3:5; see also Jer. 29:12–14). This account lacks the eschatology and messianism of Jer. 31:8 and Hos. 3:5, but it does provide the general framework for the prophecy of both judgment (Hos. 3:4) and restoration (Hos. 3:5). The Chronicles story does not appear in the presentation of Asa in the book of Kings, but the Chronicler does cite an earlier written source for his Asa material (2 Chr. 16:11).

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This text from Jeremiah occurs at the beginning of a “book” (Jer. 30:2) that speaks of restoration (Jer. 30:3; cf., Deut. 30:3) “at the end of the days” (Jer. 30:24; cf., Hos. 3:5) in a new exodus (Jer. 31:2–6; cf., Exod. 15:20) and in a new covenant relationship (Jer. 31:31–34). Both Hosea and the rest of the Twelve will employ this imagery of a new act of divine deliverance (e.g., Hos. 2:16–25; Eng., 2:14–23).

Hosea-Joel

The first compositional seam of the Twelve occurs at Hosea 14:10 (Eng., 14:9) and Joel 1:2–3, connecting the end of Hosea to the beginning of Joel. This material meets the first criterion of a seam in that it stands apart from what precedes and follows. The contrast of the righteous and the wicked (Hos. 14:10 [Eng., 14:9]; cf., Prov. 10:1–22:16) and the passing of instruction from the older generation to the younger generation (Joel 1:2–3; cf., Prov. 1–9) are the hallmarks of the wisdom literature, not the Prophets. This guides the reader to seek wisdom about the future work of God (Hos. 3:4–5) in the Book of the Twelve, meeting the second criterion of a seam (cf., Deut. 34:5–Josh. 1:9 [“Spirit of wisdom” (Deut. 34:9)]).⁴⁰ It is also the way the Book of the Twelve ends and connects to the following book of Psalms (Mal. 3:22 [Eng., 4:4]–Ps. 1 [righteous and wicked]). And lastly, this seam meets the third criterion when it quotes from the book of Jeremiah:

Who is wise? (or, Whoever is wise,) Let him understand these things. [Who] has understanding? (or, [Whoever] has understanding,) Let him know them (Hos. 14:10a [14:9a]).

Who is the wise man? Let him understand this. And to whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken? Let him declare it (Jer. 9:11a [9:12a]).⁴¹

According to the Jeremiah context, the people have abandoned the LORD’s instruction. The LORD will scatter the people among the nations (Jer. 9:12–15 [9:13–16])—the cause of a sound of wailing (Jer. 9:18 [9:19]; cf., 31:15). The wise man should not boast in his wisdom

40. According to Brevard Childs, Hos. 14:10 (Eng., 14:9) “functions as an explicit directive to the reader to instruct him in the proper understanding of the collection” (*Introduction to the Old Testament Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 382). Childs, however, is only referring to the collection of Hosea’s oracles. The suggestion here is that the verse has this function for the entirety of the Twelve.

41. See also Ps. 107:43; Eccl. 8:1; Jas. 3:13.

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but in his knowledge of the LORD (Jer. 9:22, 23 [9:23, 24]). The LORD will judge those who are uncircumcised of heart (Jer. 9:24, 25 [9:25, 26]; cf., Jer 4:4), directing the reader to the hope of the circumcised heart in the new covenant beyond exile (Deut. 30:6; Jer 31:31–34).

Joel-Amos

The next “seam” has a slightly different character to it, involving a text inserted at the end of Joel (Joel 4:16a [Eng., 3:16a]) and at the beginning of Amos (Amos 1:2a): “The LORD from Zion roars, and from Jerusalem gives his voice.”⁴² The text of Amos 1:2 is sandwiched between the superscription (Amos 1:1) and the opening address to the nations (Amos 1:3–2:16). The context of the Joel insertion is the Day of the LORD (Joel 4:14–15, 17 [Eng., 3:14–15, 17]),⁴³ a time in which there will be both judgment (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11) and restoration (Joel 3:1–5 [Eng., 2:28–32]) in accordance with the program of the Twelve (Hos. 3:4–5). According to Rolf Rendtorff, “the theme of the Day of YHWH which dominates the book of Joel also occurs in Amos 5.18–20, with echoes of Joel 2.2.”⁴⁴ Also, the text of Joel 4:16a (Eng., 3:16a) and Amos 1:2a comes from the book of Jeremiah: “The LORD from on high roars, and from his holy habitation gives his voice” (Jer. 25:30a). The context there is the cup of judgment (Jer. 25:15) that passes to all the nations. Thus, the Joel-Amos seam meets all the qualifications: distinct language, the message of Hos. 3:4–5, and citation from Jeremiah.

Amos-Obadiah

After nine chapters of words of judgment directed primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel, the book of Amos concludes with one of the most glorious pictures of restoration for the fallen booth of David anywhere in Scripture (Amos 9:11–15). This striking contrast has not gone unnoticed by critical scholars who typically assign this conclusion to someone living at a much later time than that of Amos.⁴⁵ This often

42. There is also a text in Joel 4:18 (Eng., 3:18) that finds its way into the seam at the end of Amos (Amos 9:13b). Moreover, the reference to Edom in Joel 4:19 (Eng., 3:19) anticipates the key role of Edom at the beginning and the end of Amos (Amos 1:6, 9, 11; 9:12).

43. The third person reference to the LORD in Joel 4:16 (Eng., 3:16) interrupts the LORD’s discourse in the preceding and following verses.

44. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 220.

45. E.g., William R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 195–200.

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gives the impression that the passage is secondary and not original to the words of the prophet, and is therefore to be discarded. But such a decision would miss the fact that the text is primary to the prophetic composer of the Twelve. It is precisely this small piece of text at the end of Amos that links the book to the following work of Obadiah.

According to Amos 9:11–12, the restoration of the Davidic kingdom will take place in order that the people of God may “possess (יִרְשׁוּ) the remnant of Edom (אֲדוֹם)” and all the nations on whom the LORD’s name is called. Edom here represents all the nations to be possessed in God’s kingdom (cf., Isa. 34). This is the way the Greek text of Codex Alexandrinus interprets the passage: “that the remnant of mankind (= אֲדָם) may seek (= יִדְרְשׁוּ) the Lord (= אֱלֹהִים).”⁴⁶ That is, the believing remnant from the nations will seek the Lord in the last days along with the believing remnant of Israel in accordance with Hosea 3:5 (cf., Acts 15:17). The following book of Obadiah then focuses on the judgment of Edom for the first two-thirds of the text before shifting to the Day of the LORD (Obad. 15) and the list of those to be “possessed” in God’s kingdom (Obad. 16–21), a list that includes Edom—the mountain of Esau (Obad. 19).⁴⁷

And so, the content of this seam that connects Amos to Obadiah stands apart from the material that precedes it, and the message develops the program of Hosea 3:4–5, informing the reader that the believing Gentiles will also take part in God’s kingdom. It is not for ethnic Israel alone (Gen. 12:1–3; Isa. 2:1–5; 66:18–25)—a theme that will continue in Jonah. But does this seam also quote from the book of Jeremiah and thus fulfill the third criterion for the work of the final composer of the Twelve? As it turns out, the first part of Obadiah (Obad. 1–5) cites extensively from the oracle against Edom in Jeremiah 49:7–22,

46. “Israel’s enemies are collectivized here in the form of the nation of Edom, not only because Edom was historically a perennial enemy of Israel, but more importantly because the Hebrew name *Edom* can also be read as ‘humanity’” (Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 251). Cf., Ezek. 34:31; 35; 36:37–38. The difference between the verbs “possess” and “seek” would only be a single consonant in the Hebrew text. It is possible that the translator had a different Hebrew text, but it is also possible that the translator chose to introduce his interpretation of the original text on this basis of this slight alteration. As for the object marker (אֵת), there is good evidence that this stood for the Lord himself in some cases (e.g., Zech. 12:10), the first and last letters of the alphabet representing the one who is the beginning and the end (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; Rev. 1:8; 22:13).

47. The root יִרְשׁוּ (“possess”) from Amos 9:12 occurs five times in Obadiah 17–21. The possession of the nations involves dispossession of the enemies of God’s people and inclusion of those who desire to be part of his kingdom.

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particularly Jeremiah 49:9, 14–16. Obadiah’s text consistently has the longer version, suggesting that the direction of dependence was from Jeremiah to Obadiah.⁴⁸ The composer’s inclusion of Obadiah between Amos and Jonah has breathed new, long-lasting life into the little book that it likely would not have had on its own. The book now contributes greatly to what the Prophets want to say about the nations.

Obadiah-Jonah

The decision to juxtapose Obadiah and Jonah creates a meaning of its own.⁴⁹ The initial oddness of the Amos-Obadiah-Jonah sequence is what catches the reader’s eye, almost as if the short text of Obadiah itself were in its entirety functioning as a seam. The use of Jeremiah there has already been noted (Obad. 1–5). So, in what way does the book of Jonah continue from Amos-Obadiah the message of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s plan according to Hosea 3:5? In short, what Edom was to Amos and Obadiah (i.e., a representative of the nations to be included in God’s kingdom), Nineveh is to the book of Jonah. Nineveh is “the great city” (Jon. 1:2; 3:2; 4:11) in the book of Jonah in the sense that it has great importance in the Gentile world (Gen. 10:11–12).⁵⁰ It thus serves well to represent those from the nations who believe and thus stand in stark contrast to the prophet Jonah (Jon. 1:16; 3:5).⁵¹ It is God’s prerogative to include them (Jon. 4:11).

Jonah-Micah

In terms of genre, the book of Jonah stands apart from the book of Micah as much as it does from Obadiah or any other book of the

48. Also, the text of Amos 9:14 uses deuteronomic language of restoration (Deut. 30:3) that is common to the book of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer. 29:14; 30:3; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7).

49. This phenomenon is familiar from other art forms in addition to literature: “two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition” (Sergei M. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda [San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1942], 4).

50. C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866–91; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 106.

51. Because the city of Nineveh represents the Gentile world so well, the Book of the Twelve can also use it or the nation of Assyria in a negative way for those who do not believe among the nations (e.g., Nahum). Note how Jonah and Nahum both end with very different rhetorical questions about Nineveh (Jon. 4:11; Nah. 3:19).

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Twelve. But the language of the final chapter of Jonah, which cites from Exod. 34:6–7 (Jon. 4:2b; cf., Joel 2:13–14),⁵² already anticipates the language of the final composer’s seam work that connects the end of Micah (Mic. 7:18–20) to the beginning of Nahum (Nah. 1:2b–3a). This language from God’s revelation of himself to Moses highlights the two themes of judgment and restoration from the programmatic passage in Hosea 3:4–5.⁵³ The two books do share an interest in the inclusion of Assyria and the nations (e.g., Mic. 4:1–5; 5:1–5 [Eng., 5:2–6]; cf., Isa. 2:1–5; 19:24–25). One passage in particular (Mic. 4:1–5) occurs directly after the middle verse of the Twelve in Micah 3:12. The text of this verse also appears in Jer. 26:18 as part of the advice from the elders to the people not to execute Jeremiah for the harshness of his temple gate speech (Jer. 7:1–15). According to this advice, Hezekiah did not kill Micah for his prophecy about Jerusalem being turned into ruins, therefore, the people should not kill Jeremiah for his words of judgment. This prophecy of Micah obviously preceded the lifetime of Jeremiah, but that does not mean it occupied its current place in the book of Micah before the completion of Jeremiah’s book. The clue in the text of Micah 3:12 is the Aramaic plural spelling of “ruins” (עײן) in contrast to the usual Hebrew plural spelling in Jer. 26:18 (עײם). The Aramaic masculine plural ending on Hebrew words is a feature of later Hebrew texts in the Bible (e.g., הַיַּמִּין in Dan. 12:13b). It appears that the composer of the Twelve has left his mark at this central location in the makeup of his final product.

Micah-Nahum

The hymn in the final three verses of the book of Micah (Mic. 7:18–20) stands apart from the content of the prayer that precedes it (Mic. 7:14–17). These verses borrow extensively from the language of God’s revelation of himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6–7. Likewise, the beginning of the following book of Nahum has a piece of text (Nah. 1:2b–3a) that stands apart from its surroundings and cites from Exod. 34:6–7. Verses 2b–3a of Nahum 1 interrupt the partial Hebrew acrostic poem in Nah. 1:2–8 between the *aleph* (Nah. 1:2a) and *beth* (Nah. 1:3b) lines.⁵⁴

Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity,⁵⁵

52. Note how it is possible to read directly from Jonah 4:2a to Jonah 4:3.

53. See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 335–50.

54. See Michael B. Shepherd, “Hebrew Acrostic Poems and Their Vocabulary Stock,” *JNSL* 36/2 (2010): 95–108.

55. See Exod. 34:7a.

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And passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?
(He does not hold forever on to his anger,
For delighting in covenant loyalty [לֶחֶסֶד] is he.
He will have compassion [from רַחֲמִים] on us again,
He will subdue our iniquities;
And you will cast into sea's depths all their sins.
You will give faithfulness to Jacob,
Covenant loyalty (לֶחֶסֶד) to Abraham,
Which you swore to our fathers long ago
(Mic. 7:18–20).

The LORD takes vengeance against his foes,
And he keeps wrath for his enemies.
The LORD is slow to anger (אֲרֵךְ אַפַּיִם) and great of strength,
But the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished⁵⁶
(Nah. 1:2b–3a).

This seam harkens back to the themes of judgment and restoration in Hosea 3:4–5 by using the language of Exodus 34:6–7. And while it is possible to identify some of Jeremiah's language here (e.g., Jer. 3:5; 31:34), it is perhaps best to be content with the influence of Jeremiah at Micah 3:12.

Nahum-Habakkuk

The historical oracles of the prophets Nahum and Habakkuk have now been framed by two poems (Nah. 1:2–8; Hab. 3:3–15) that reflect the eschatological interests of the composer of the Twelve (Hos. 3:4–5). They recast the prophecies of the past as images of future and final judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous. Nahum's vision was primarily about the historical deliverance of Judah, the downfall of Assyria, and the demise of the city of Nineveh (Nah. 1:9–3:19). The partial acrostic poem in Nahum 1:2–8 (which was likely excerpted from a larger, complete acrostic), however, mentions none of those things, speaking instead about God's judgment of the world and his deliverance of those who take refuge in him in terms drawn from the exodus story and from biblical theophanies like Psalm 18:8–16 (Eng., 18:7–15). Likewise, the poem in Habakkuk 3:3–15 talks not about Habakkuk's immediate circumstances but about God coming to judge the wicked and deliver the righteous using images from the biblical narrative such as the exodus, the flood, and the conquest of the land. The poem was probably taken from a larger collection of poetry.

56. See Exod. 34:7b.

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We know this because the superscription to the following psalm was included in Habakkuk 3:19b.⁵⁷

The two poems in Nahum and Habakkuk share the language of the “day of distress” (Nah. 1:7; Hab. 3:16). What they lack is any direct citation from the book of Jeremiah. In this case, the composer has included his quote from Jeremiah slightly prior to the poem in Habakkuk 3. The text of Habakkuk 2:13–14 does not fit into the pattern of the woe oracles in Habakkuk 2:5–20. These two verses are citations from Jeremiah 51:58b and Isaiah 11:9. It is likely that Habakkuk prophesied earlier than Jeremiah (see commentary), but it is also true that the text of Jeremiah 51:58b; Habakkuk 2:13b is more at home in the Jeremiah context. Thus, in Habakkuk 2:13b the text does not come from the prophet Habakkuk, but from the prophetic composer of the Twelve who has studied the book of Jeremiah.

Habakkuk-Zephaniah

The phrase “day of distress” (Nah. 1:7; Hab. 3:16) that links the two poems in Nah. 1:2–8 and Hab. 3:3–15 surfaces at the beginning of the following book of Zephaniah with reference to the Day of the LORD (Zeph. 1:14–16). The theme of the Day of the LORD, which was so crucial to Joel, Amos, and Obadiah, now returns in the latter part of the Twelve in the books of Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi. As mentioned above, this theme develops the two parts of the program of the Twelve in Hosea 3:4–5: judgment (Zeph. 1:2–3:8) and restoration (Zeph. 3:9–20). Zephaniah even uses Habakkuk’s language to say that the Day of the LORD is near (Hab. 2:20b; Zeph. 1:7a).

57. The superscription in Habakkuk 3:1 refers to Habakkuk 3:2, 16–19a. The superscription in Habakkuk 3:19b is usually rendered, “For the director on my stringed instruments.” This makes little sense in context and often gives the impression that its inclusion was an accidental oversight. But the translation, “For the director,” assumes that the Hebrew phrase refers to the one who is preeminent in the musical setting. It is also possible, however, to render the phrase as “For the one who endures [to the end].” See BDB, 663–64. This understanding is perhaps behind the translation of this phrase in a number of superscriptions in LXX Psalms: *eis to telos* (“to/for the end”). As for the phrase, “on my stringed instruments,” it is possible to render it as “in my afflictions” (see A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1923; reprint, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005], 100). Thus, the translation of Habakkuk 3:18b would be, “For the one who endures to the end, in my afflictions.” This matches the situation of Habakkuk who must hope in the future work of God in the midst of troublesome times (cf., Isa. 8:16–20; Dan. 12:13).

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Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1–3; Zeph. 1:1). The first and last words of the book that bears Zephaniah’s name contain material very close to that of the book of Jeremiah. In a reversal of Genesis 1:1–2:3, the opening words announce that the LORD will make an “end” (אַסַּף אַסַּף) of everything on the surface of “the earth” (הָאָדָמָה), including “people” (אָדָם), “animals” (בְּהֵמָה), “birds” (עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם), and “fish” (דָּגֵי הַיָּם) (Zeph. 1:2–3; cf., Ezek. 38:20; Hos. 4:3). Very similar terminology appears in Jeremiah 7:20; 8:13; 9:9 (Eng., 9:10); 15:3. The last words of Zephaniah include the statement in Zephaniah 3:17b, “He will rejoice over you” (יִשֵּׁשׂ עֲלֶיךָ). This is similar to Deuteronomy 28:63; 30:9; and Isaiah 62:5b; 65:19a. But it is also close to Jeremiah 32:41: “And I will rejoice over them” (וַיִּשְׂשֹׁתִי עֲלֵיהֶם).

Zephaniah-Haggai

The concluding section in Zephaniah 3:9–20 stands apart from the predominant judgment language of the book and uses the language of restoration, remnant, and gathering known to the reader of other prophets, including the book of Jeremiah. This message of restoration provides an eschatological context for reading the following prophecies of Haggai—prophecies that were initially limited to events surrounding the construction of the Second Temple. Now within the context of the Twelve the book of Haggai has new life and ongoing relevance, speaking not only of the past but also of the last days (Hos. 3:5). This is analogous to the placement of Ezekiel 33–39 and Ezekiel 40–48 next to one another. Ezekiel 33–39 is the prophet’s restoration section (cf., Zeph. 3:9–20). Ezekiel 40–48 is his vision of the new temple (cf., Hag.). The vision thus becomes a priestly prophet’s way to illustrate what future and final restoration will look like.

Haggai-Zechariah

The Haggai-Zechariah sequence is a natural one given the fact that these prophets were contemporaries who prophesied together in support of the rebuilding project led by Zerubbabel and Joshua (Ezra 5:1–2; see the date formulae in Haggai 1:1, 15; 2:1, 10, 20; Zech. 1:1, 7: 7:1). But it is the small piece of text at the end of Haggai (Hag. 2:20–23) that serves to connect the two books most closely in terms of composition and content. The text of Haggai 2:23 is a citation and a reversal of Jeremiah 22:24. The LORD announced in Jeremiah 22:24 that he would tear Jehoiachin off his right hand as a seal/signet-ring. But now in Haggai 2:23 Zerubbabel, a descendant of the Davidic king Jehoiachin (1 Chr. 3:17–19), is the chosen seal/signet-ring. The messianic implications are hard to miss, especially when the LORD refers to Zerubbabel as “my servant” (cf., Isa. 42:1–7; 49:1–9; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). It will

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be up to the following book of Zechariah to clarify that Zerubbabel is only a prefiguration of the real servant of the LORD. Zechariah uses the language of Haggai 2:23 in Zechariah 3:8; 6:12–13 to indicate that the servant is not a contemporary of Joshua. Rather, he is the messianic Branch from Jeremiah 23:5–6 who will build the temple in accordance with the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:13) and occupy the offices of priest and king. This corresponds to the eschatological messianism of Hosea 3:5. Furthermore, in light of the dependence upon Jeremiah 22:24; 23:5–6 in the connection between Haggai and Zechariah, it is also worth noting that the opening verses of Zechariah (Zech. 1:2–6), which stand apart from the visions of the first six chapters, also quote from the book of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:4–7; 31:18; Zech. 1:3, 4).

Zechariah-Malachi

The final two sections of the book of Zechariah both have the same heading: “The oracle of the word of the LORD” (Zech. 9:1; 12:1). The only other place where this heading occurs in the entire Hebrew Bible is at the beginning of the following book of Malachi (Mal. 1:1). Such a distinctive use of section markers serves to join the two books. Furthermore, the eschatology and messianism of these sections are well known (e.g., Zech. 9:9–10; 12; 14; Mal. 3:1) and fit nicely with the program of the Twelve (Hos. 3:4–5). Matthew cites this latter part of Zechariah as if it were from the prophet Jeremiah (Zech. 11:13; Matt. 27:9–10). There are several plausible suggestions to explain this phenomenon, but one possibility is that Zechariah or the composer of the Twelve has borrowed from material of Jeremiah that never made it into Jeremiah’s book. At the very least, we know that both Zechariah (e.g., Zech. 1:12; 7:5; see Jer. 25:11; 29:10) and the composer of the Twelve read Jeremiah faithfully.

Malachi-Psalms

This last seam suggests that the Book of the Twelve has been fitted to the context of the larger canon in a manner that is consistent with the composer’s work elsewhere. The book of Malachi consists of six disputations designed to show that the postexilic community is still in a broken covenant relationship and in need of a new covenant (Mal. 1:2–5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6–12; 3:13–21 [Eng., 4:3]). The last three verses, however, are almost universally recognized as an appendix (or two appendices) that stands outside of the main content of the book.⁵⁸ This piece of text connects the end of the Twelve to the following Psalm

58. See Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, WBC 32 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 340–42.

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1 in a manner similar to the way the end of the book of Moses connects to the beginning of Joshua (see above, The Place of the Twelve in the Hebrew Canon).⁵⁹ It highlights the Day of the LORD theme so important to the development of Hosea 3:4–5 elsewhere in the Twelve (Mal. 3:23 [Eng., 4:5]). Furthermore, there is a citation from Jeremiah in Psalm 1. The psalm in its entirety is modeled on the contrast of the righteous and the wicked in Jeremiah 17:5–8, but the wording is most closely aligned in the description of the righteous person:⁶⁰

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD (Jer 17:7a).

Blessed is the man who . . . murmurs in his Torah (Ps 1:1a, 2b).

He will be like a tree planted by water (Jer 17:8a1).

He will be like a tree planted by streams of water (Ps 1:3a1).

Summary

This section is designed to bring together the preceding discussion on the composition of the Twelve in a way that the reader can see at a quick glance the author's seams and how those seams meet the criteria.

- I. The Program of the Twelve (Hos. 3:4–5)
 - A. Distinctiveness: not directed to the northern kingdom and not part of Judean redaction
 - B. Message: judgment and messianic salvation in the last days
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Hosea 3:5 cites Jeremiah 30:9
- II. Hosea-Joel Seam (Hos. 14:10 [Eng., 14:9]; Joel 1:2–3)
 - A. Distinctiveness: wisdom language in prophetic books
 - B. Message: reading strategy for the Twelve
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Hos. 14:10a (Eng., 14:9a) cites Jeremiah 9:11a (Eng., 9:12a)
- III. Joel-Amos Seam (Joel 4:16a [Eng., 3:16a]; Amos 1:2a)
 - A. Distinctiveness: same text inserted at end of Joel and beginning of Amos
 - B. Message: the Day of the LORD (Joel 4:14 [Eng., 3:14])

59. Psalms 1 and 2 form a separate introduction to the book (*b. Ber.* 9b–10a).

60. William Holladay argues for the priority of Psalm 1 (*Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 489–90), but it appears more likely that the psalmist has taken something abstract (“trusts”) and given it concrete expression (“murmurs in his Torah”).

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- C. Citation of Jeremiah: Joel 4:16a (Eng., 3:16a) and Amos 1:2a cite Jeremiah 25:30b
- IV. Amos-Obadiah Seam (Amos 9:11–15; Obad. 1–5; 17–21)
- A. Distinctiveness: restoration for fallen booth of David (Amos 9:11–15)
 - B. Message: Edom represents nations included in God's kingdom (Amos 9:12; Obad. 19)
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Obadiah 1–5 cites from Jeremiah 49:9, 14–16
- V. Obadiah-Jonah Sequence⁶¹
- A. Distinctiveness: juxtaposition
 - B. Message: Nineveh is to Jonah what Edom was to Amos-Obadiah (Jon 1:2; 3:2; 4:11)
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Obadiah 1–5
- VI. Jonah-Micah Sequence
- A. Distinctiveness: quote from Exodus 34:6–7 (Jon. 4:2b; Mic. 7:18–20)⁶²
 - B. Message: judgment and restoration
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Micah 3:12 cites Jeremiah 26:18 in a later form⁶³
- VII. Micah-Nahum Seam (Mic. 7:18–20; Nah. 1:2b–3a)
- A. Distinctiveness: separate hymn (Mic 7:18–20) and insertion to acrostic (Nah. 1:2b–3a)
 - B. Message: quotation from Exodus 34:6–7 (judgment and restoration)
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Micah 3:12
- VIII. Nahum-Habakkuk Frame (Nah. 1:2–8; Hab. 3:3–15)
- A. Distinctiveness: poems at the beginning and the end serve as bookends
 - B. Message: judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous in the last days
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Habakkuk 2:13–14 cites Jeremiah 51:58 and Isaiah 11:9

61. The small book of Obadiah functions like a seam between Amos and Jonah.

62. This practice of using material from the end of one book in the seam at the end of the following book is also attested in Joel 4:18a (Eng., 3:18a); Amos 9:13b.

63. Remember, this is the middle verse of the Twelve.

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- IX. Habakkuk-Zephaniah Sequence/Seam (Hab. 2:20b; 3:16b; Zeph. 1:2–3, 7a, 15)
- A. Distinctiveness: distinctive language (“Hush”; “day of distress”)
 - B. Message: the Day of the LORD
 - C. Citation from Jeremiah: Zephaniah 1:2–3 cites from Jeremiah 7:20; 8:13; 15:3
- X. Zephaniah-Haggai Sequence/Seam (Zeph. 3:9–20)
- A. Distinctiveness: restoration section
 - B. Message: temple project in Haggai is now a picture of future restoration
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Zeph. 3:17b cites Jeremiah 32:41a
- XI. Haggai-Zechariah Seam (Hag. 2:20–23; Zech. 1:2–6)
- A. Distinctiveness:
 - 1. separate ending on Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:20–23)
 - 2. separate introduction to the visions (Zech. 1:2–6)
 - B. Message: Zerubbabel prefigures the Messiah (Zech. 3:8; 6:12–13)⁶⁴
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah:
 - 1. Haggai 2:23 cites Jeremiah 22:24
 - 2. Zechariah 1:4 cites Jeremiah 25:4–7⁶⁵
- XII. Zechariah-Malachi Combination (Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1)
- A. Distinctiveness: the only three occurrences of this heading
 - B. Message: eschatology and messianism (Zech. 9:9–10; 12; 14; Mal. 3:1)
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Zech. 11:13; Matt. 27:9–10
- XIII. Malachi-Psalms (Canonical) Seam (Mal. 3:22–24 [Eng., 4:4–6]; Ps. 1)⁶⁶
- A. Distinctiveness:
 - 1. Malachi 3:22–24 is not part of the six disputations in the book
 - 2. Psalms 1 and 2 form a separate introduction (*b. Ber.* 9b–10a)
 - B. Message: the Day of the LORD
 - C. Citation of Jeremiah: Psalm 1 cites Jeremiah 17:5–8

64. Cf., 2 Sam. 7:13; Isa. 52:13–53:12; Jer. 23:5–6; Zech. 9:9–10; 12:10.

65. See also Jer. 31:18 and Zech. 1:3.

66. Cf., Deut. 34:5–Josh. 1:9.

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HOSEA

HOSEA 1:1

1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah the kings of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash the king of Israel.

The superscription to the book of Hosea is comparable in form and function to other superscriptions in the Latter Prophets (e.g., Isa. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1; Mic. 1:1). The “word of the LORD” here does not refer to one specific prophecy of Hosea but to the entirety of what the reader encounters in the book that bears Hosea’s name. It encompasses the full span of Hosea’s prophetic ministry. The text does not explain how the word of the LORD came to Hosea (e.g., visions, dreams, etc.). It only indicates that Hosea’s message is in fact divine revelation and not merely the prophet’s own assessment of things (see 2 Pet. 1:19–21). Furthermore, this revelation is rooted in real time and space. When the superscription says that Hosea was the son of Beeri, it is not because Beeri is well known from elsewhere. Rather, it is because Hosea was a historical prophet and not a figment of the writer’s imagination. This is confirmed by the temporal reference to the days of four eighth-century Judean kings and the days of Jeroboam II. Such a reference provides a narrative context for the prophecies in the book (2 Kgs. 12–20) much like the way the stories of David and Solomon provide context for the psalms and the wisdom literature. But the arrangement of this temporal reference raises an important question. Why are the kings of Judah listed first even though Hosea was primarily a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel? This follows the pattern of the book

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of Kings, which normally correlates the reign of kings in the north with that of those in the south (e.g., 2 Kgs. 14:23). Hosea's ministry is now correlated with his prophetic contemporaries in the south (Isa. 1:1; Mic. 1:1). In addition, it will be evident that the content of the book ultimately reaches beyond the northern kingdom of Israel to include not only Judah but also the nations, especially when read within the larger context of the Book of the Twelve.

HOSEA 1:2–9¹

*1:2a The first part of the word of the LORD through Hosea.*²

1:2b And the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of fornication and children of fornication, for the land certainly fornicates away from the LORD.”³ 1:3 And he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore to him a son.⁴

The text of Hosea 1:2a is the superscription for the first subsection of the book in Hosea 1:2b–9. The Hebrew word תחלה (“first part”) does not simply mean “beginning” in the sense of “an initial point in time” (ראשון) or “an initial indefinite duration” (ראשית). It is the first stage in a series of equal stages, and so it is a fitting way to refer to the first section of many that make up “the word of the LORD” from Hosea 1:1. The message came to Hosea, and now it comes to the audience through

1. See *b. Pesah.* 87.

2. The Masoretic vocalization of Hosea 1:2a, which requires a finite verb after a noun in the construct state (“The first part of the LORD spoke”), is unusual although not unprecedented (cf., Num. 3:1b; Isa. 29:1a; see also GKC §130d). The Septuagint, the Syriac, and *Targum Jonathan*, however, reflect a vocalization of the same consonantal text (תחלה דבר יהוה) that would be more in accordance with the ordinary use of the construct state, involving a chain of nominal elements (“The first part of the word of the LORD”). This is not really a text-critical issue, in which case the more difficult reading might be preferable. It is more a matter of interpretation of the same text, in which case the option with the least attendant problems is preferable.

3. *Targum Jonathan*: “Go, prophesy against the inhabitants of the idolatrous city who continue to sin. For the inhabitants of the land surely go astray from the worship of the Lord.”

4. *Targum Jonathan*: And he went and prophesied concerning them that if they repented, they would be forgiven. If not, they would fall as the leaves of a fig tree fall. But they continued to do evil deeds.

Hosea. There is some question about whether this section and subsequent sections in Hosea constitute poetry. This is more likely the case where there is sustained use of parallelism, figurative language, and terseness of expression. It is perhaps better to speak of the prophetic literature in terms of a heightened style.⁵

When the LORD instructs the prophet to take “a wife of fornication” (אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים), there is no indication in the present context of the exact nature of this woman’s sexual promiscuity.⁶ There is also no indication of whether she is engaged in this activity at the time of the marriage or simply inclined to be engaged in it at some later point, although the analogy with the LORD’s relationship to Israel would seem to suggest the latter.⁷ The “children of fornication” are not necessarily those who are the product of illegitimate relationships. Rather, they are those who, like their mother, are inclined to a certain type of unfaithful behavior. The LORD wants the prophet to do this because generations of the people of the land have been engaged in this activity in a spiritual sense. That is, Hosea’s marriage to Gomer will be a sign act (cf., Ezek. 24:15–27) that illustrates how the LORD made a covenant with Israel, but Israel became unfaithful (cf., Jer. 3; Ezek. 16). It is important for the reader to remember that these words are not here primarily to teach lessons about marriage.⁸ They are here to communicate a message about human infidelity toward God and about divine faithfulness toward humanity.

1:4 And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in yet a little while I will visit the bloodshed of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu and cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease.”⁹ 1:5 And so, in that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.”

5. See James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

6. The law against this kind of marriage in Leviticus 21:7 applies specifically to priests and refers to women who are currently engaged in fornication of some kind.

7. See Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, WBC 31 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 26–27.

8. Note the absence of any indication of Hosea’s emotion or concern (cf., Gen. 22).

9. *Targum Jonathan*: And the Lord said to him, “Call their name ‘Scattered Ones,’ for in yet a little while I will avenge the blood of the idol worshipers that Jehu shed in Jezreel when he killed them because they worshiped Baal. They turned to go astray after the calves at Bethel. Thus, I will