

I Volume Introduction



The books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos are the first three books of the Book of the Twelve Prophets, as Jewish tradition refers to them, or the Minor Prophets as they are known in Christian tradition. The term ‘minor’ may be taken to refer to their length rather than to their importance.

Hosea 1:1 indicates to the reader that they can expect to find prophetic words of the Lord that came to Hosea in the eighth century BCE, during the reigns of various kings of Judah and of King Jeroboam II of Israel.¹ Many sections of the book describe and warn of impending judgement and destruction of the people, principally for their idolatry and offering of sacrifices to Baal. However, such words are interspersed with others which portray the tender mercy of YHWH, and the concluding chapter contains a promise that ‘I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely’ (Hos. 14:4).

Amos 1:1, similarly, indicates that the book to follow contains words of Amos from the same century, in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam II king of Israel. Again, the words of this book describe and warn of impending judgement and destruction, with few words of mercy and hope. Indeed, most of the book is unrelenting in its message of judgement. The dominant reasons for judgement in this text are the unjust treatment of the poor and their exploitation by their rich fellow Israelites, rather than the unfaithfulness to YHWH described in the book of Hosea. However, similarly to Hosea, the book ends with words of promised blessing.

¹ The name ‘Israel’ refers variously in the Hebrew Bible to (1) the northern of the two kingdoms formed when the united monarchy came to an end after the death of Solomon (as recounted in 1 Kgs 12); (2) to the united monarchy, or to refer to the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah as an entity; and (3) from the Babylonian Exile onwards, to refer to the community of faith. In Hos. 1:1 and Amos 1:1 it refers to the northern kingdom.

Between these two books comes the book of Joel.² There is no chronological information given in the opening verse, and there is no internal evidence to indicate that the compilers of the book intended it to be read against any particular historical background. The first two chapters describe the devastation of a plague of locusts, with an invitation to return to YHWH and proclaim a fast in order to seek an end to the disaster. This is followed by promises of blessing on the people, and announcement of a universal judgement of the nations.

PROPHETS AND PROPHETIC TEXTS

Much scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, influenced by scholars such as Julius Wellhausen, held the eighth-century prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah – in high regard, seeing them as the pinnacle of Israelite ethical religion. This led to great interest in the figures of the prophets themselves, and many studies and commentaries approached the texts with the aim of stripping away any material deemed not to derive from the prophet in order to unearth the original, pure message delivered by the prophet. As Childs wrote with regard to Amos, ‘Great effort was expended throughout the literary critical period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by such commentators as Wellhausen and Harper to recover the *ipsissima verba* of Amos who was held in high esteem as the earliest written prophet and exponent of ethical monotheism.’³ A consequence was a tendency to denigrate material deemed to be ‘secondary’ or ‘inauthentic’, and to see less interpretative and theological significance in such material than in that deemed to be ‘original’.⁴

In the later part of the twentieth century, however, and on into the twenty-first century, literary approaches have come to the fore that value the texts as much as the people and events that the texts describe. This development reflects, partly, frustration that texts were being viewed more as a window to be looked through rather than as something to be studied and appreciated in their own right. It also reflects trends in modern literary

² This is the order in MT: the place of Joel in LXX is mentioned later.

³ B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979): 397.

⁴ See, for example, W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1905): cxxxi–xxxiv (with regard to Amos) and clix–cxliv (with regard to Hosea). His use of the terms ‘glosses’ and ‘interpolations’ also feels pejorative. Surprisingly the vocabulary of original/secondary and authentic/inauthentic resurfaces in M. D. Carroll R., *The Book of Amos* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

studies more widely.⁵ Some recent studies take a ‘final form’ approach, in which the composition history of the text is of less concern than the final form itself.⁶ Others seek to investigate the composition history of the text, considering that each purported stage in its composition can have interpretative significance. The method employed to discern the composition history of the text is redaction criticism, and it is a method and approach that this commentary will use. It has the merit that it takes seriously the final form of the text as being a key focus of interpretation, but is also ready to find interpretative significance in earlier compositional layers where they can be identified with reasonable confidence; and it does not rule out the possibility of reaching behind the text to the spoken words of an historical prophet, even though this is not the key focus of the method. Due humility is necessary in recognising that the further back in time and in numbers of compositional layers proposed, the more provisional scholarly reconstructions become. Yet for some texts there is a reasonable scholarly consensus regarding the main outlines of their composition history, despite the inevitable variation in detail between the proposals of different scholars.

Sweeney describes redaction-critical work as being ‘concerned with reconstructing the compositional and editorial process by which earlier texts are taken up to be reread, reinterpreted, edited, and rewritten in relation to the concerns of later times’.⁷ Barton notes that

respect for the original sources did not mean that the redactors *never* changed their raw materials. In prophetic texts, for example, it is common to find comments updating the original prophetic oracles (e.g. Isa 16:13–14), and it is probable that the desire to apply the prophet’s words to the editor’s own situation led to frequent changes in the wording of the original oracles.⁸

Such processes imply that those working with, copying, expanding, and developing prophetic texts held what they received as continuing to convey a divine message for their generation. But they did not regard the inherited tradition as so fixed that it could not be re-applied, with new material added, or with existing material placed in a new literary context. In these

⁵ As noted by C. Meyers with regard to a parallel move in Pentateuchal scholarship in her *Exodus* (NCBC; New York: Cambridge University Press): 2.

⁶ Childs’s *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* was significant and influential for the impetus towards final-form studies.

⁷ M. A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1 (Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000): xx.

⁸ J. Barton, ‘Redaction Criticism’, *ABD* 5:644–7 (646–7, italics original).

quotations Sweeney speaks of a ‘compositional and editorial process’, and Barton refers within a few lines both to ‘redactors’ and ‘editors’, and these and other terms are used by redaction critics. The choice of terminology is of less importance than the recognition that in the periods in which the texts were formed, there was both respect for what was inherited, and freedom to develop it.⁹ As Schart notes, ‘the ongoing rewriting of the prophetic heritage certifies that the prophetic collections were successful in mediating the word of God into different historical situations’.¹⁰ While some are critical of the redaction-critical method for dealing in probabilities and possibilities rather than in the supposed certitude of the final form of the text,¹¹ the riposte to be made is that a focus on only the final form is restrictive compared to what I have called elsewhere the ‘promising array of exegetical opportunities’¹² that redaction criticism opens up.

The identification of earlier compositional layers underlying the final form of the text is made on the basis of various kinds of indicator. Structural markers such as headings and endings to units of text, literary style and presentation, particular vocabulary which may be characteristic of texts widely dated to particular periods, historical references to particular times or circumstances, and thematic considerations all play a part. While there is always a danger of circular argument (‘Composition A contains particular vocabulary or themes, therefore material containing such vocabulary or themes belongs to Composition A’), a cumulative case built on a combination of these indicators can lead to a high degree of probability and plausibility that the compositional layer identified did indeed exist at a point in the history of the text’s development.¹³ In this commentary the introductions to each of Hosea, Joel, and Amos will explore what compositional layers may be plausibly identified in the case of each book.

⁹ This is in contrast to later centuries in which the Canon was deemed to be closed, and the text to be unalterable. At this point application to new contexts and generations is achieved by commentary on the text.

¹⁰ A. Schart, ‘Reconstructing the Redaction History of the Twelve Prophets: Problems and Models’, in J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney (eds.), *Reading and Hearing in the Book of the Twelve* (SBLSymS, 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2000): 34–48 (46).

¹¹ This certitude is itself not absolute, once textual difficulties and the difficulty of determining structural patterns in the final form of some texts are taken into account.

¹² G. R. Hamborg, ‘The Post-722 and Late Pre-exilic Redactional Compositions Underlying the Amos-Text’, in R. P. Gordon and H. M. Barstad (eds.), *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013): 143–59 (159).

¹³ See further G. R. Hamborg, *Still Selling the Righteous: A Redaction-Critical Investigation into Reasons for Judgment in Amos 2:6–16* (LHBOTS, 555; London: T&T Clark, 2012): 4–22.

The means by which sayings presumably spoken by the prophets such as Hosea and Amos became literary text is the part of the process about which we know least. P. R. Davies refers to ‘a deep chasm of ignorance’ to which scholars should own up in this respect.¹⁴ Elsewhere, however, he notes that while prophetic literary texts akin to those of the Hebrew Bible are not found in the ancient Near East, transcribing and retaining of prophetic oracles and similar material is. He writes of Amos:

That a number of oracles were written or uttered and transcribed, then placed in the local palace or temple archive (in this case, presumably at Bethel) is quite probable. This is a process attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East. But there are no parallels to scrolls as *edited* literary products, only a collection of texts from the same source, written, bound or stored together (and in this case, perhaps labelled ‘Words of Amos of Tekoa: What He Saw about Israel Two Years before the Earthquake’). But later, and for a presumably good reason, it was thought that the words of Amos had a new purpose and that they should be rearranged and supplemented to fulfil that purpose.¹⁵

Similarly, Edelman writes that ‘the temple complex at Bethel would have been a likely source for the materials in Hosea, Amos, and some of the Elijah and Elisha traditions’.¹⁶ Thus we may imagine that prophetic words were recorded and stored in places such as Bethel and Samaria, and that with the fall of the northern kingdom they were taken to Jerusalem for safe keeping.

The commentaries in this book will focus primarily on the text itself, seeking to find interpretative meaning in all the significant stages of composition which can plausibly be identified. Linville comments that ancient writers would have struck ‘a suitable balance between tradition, adaptation and innovation. There would always be circumstances that required new ideas and ways of thinking about tradition. Inherited stories and oracles attributed to the great prophets of old would have been given a new emphasis

¹⁴ P. R. Davies, ‘Amos, Man and Book’, in B. E. Kelle and M. B. Moore (eds.), *Israel’s Prophets and Israel’s Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes* (LHBOTS, 446; New York: T & T Clark International, 2006): 113–31 (117).

¹⁵ P. R. Davies, ‘Why Do We Know about Amos?’ in D. V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *The Production of Prophecy: Constructing Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2009): 55–72 (63–4, italics original).

¹⁶ D. V. Edelman, ‘From Prophets to Prophetic Books: The Fixing of the Divine Word’ in D. V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Production of Prophecy*: 29–54 (41).

and meaning as circumstances changed.¹⁷ The task of commentary today is to continue to explore how words from ancient times hold meaning and significance for much later, contemporary times.

THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE

In introducing and commenting on Hosea, Joel, and Amos as three separate texts, this commentary is following what has been usual and widespread practice. However, since the early 1990s several scholars have argued that ancient tradition, both Jewish and Christian, provides evidence that the twelve books of Hosea–Malachi were read as one ‘Book of the Twelve’ or ‘Minor Prophets’. That all were generally written on one scroll is indisputable. These scholars argue that this was not merely a technical convenience, however, arising from the fact that the individual texts would not warrant a whole scroll each. Rather, they suggest, we should endeavour to read and interpret the Book of the Twelve as one book, not as twelve books which happen to share a scroll.¹⁸

An early reference to the ‘Twelve Prophets’ is found in the apocryphal book of Sirach, which derives from the second century BCE.¹⁹ Chapters 44–49 are headed a ‘Hymn in Honour of Our Ancestors’. They laud figures from Enoch, Noah, and Abraham onwards, including Elijah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel as prophets. Then 49:10 says: ‘May the bones of the Twelve Prophets send forth new life from where they lie, for they comforted the people of Jacob and delivered them with confident hope.’ This, it is argued, provides evidence that there was a collection of twelve texts named after twelve prophets, which were seen as one book.

In the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Batra* (section 14b) states: ‘Our Rabbis taught: The order of the Prophets is, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve Minor Prophets.’²⁰ This is taken

¹⁷ J. R. Linville, *Amos and the Cosmic Imagination* (SOTSMS; Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008): 9.

¹⁸ Significant proponents of this view include P. R. House, A. Scharf, J. D. Nogalski, M. A. Sweeney, R. Albertz, J. Wöhrle. See the ‘Suggested Readings’.

¹⁹ The text can be reliably dated to the first quarter of the second century BCE on the basis of the information given in the book’s own prologue. See J. J. Collins, ‘Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach’, in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.), *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 667–98 (667).

²⁰ I. Epstein (ed.) *The Babylonian Talmud. Seder Neziḳin III. Baba Bathra. Tr. into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices*, vol. 1 (London: Soncino Press, 1935): 70.

as evidence that the ‘Twelve Minor Prophets’ were seen as one work in the same way that Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah were. The preceding section of Baba Batra (13b) also states that ‘Between each book of the Torah there should be left a space of four lines, and so between one Prophet and the next. In the twelve Minor Prophets, however, the space should only be three lines.’²¹ Nogalski draws attention, too, to Jerome’s Prologue to the Twelve Prophets, in which he states that ‘the Twelve is one book’, and from his review of external sources he concludes that ‘Jewish and Christian traditions from 200 BCE to the Middle Ages indicate that the Twelve Prophets were counted as a single book.’²²

Alongside such external evidence, advocates of interpreting the Book of the Twelve as one book seek to establish internal connections. Literary, structural, and thematic considerations are all brought into play. In literary terms, Nogalski has demonstrated the importance of ‘catchwords’ which link different texts within the Book of the Twelve. There are occurrences of these in Hosea, Joel, and Amos. For example, Joel 3:16a [4:16a] says: ‘YHWH roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem.’ A few lines of Hebrew text later, Amos 1:2a is identical. Again, Joel 3:18 [4:18] says ‘the mountains shall drip with sweet wine’, and the almost identical phrase is found in Amos 9:13. Such catchwords seem to be strategically placed to link the different texts together.

Structural considerations are less convincing across the twelve texts as a whole, but may indicate some earlier groupings of texts at a prior stage of development. Thus Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah all begin with superscriptions which include chronological references to kings of Judah, and in the cases of Hosea and Amos to kings of Judah and Israel. Further on in the Book of the Twelve, the headings to the texts of Haggai and Zechariah both contain a chronological reference to the reign of the Persian king Darius.

Thematically, Nogalski identifies four recurrent themes. First is the ‘Day of YHWH’, which, with regard to the books with which this volume is concerned, is strongly present in the book of Joel, and also in Amos 5:18–20. It recurs in Zephaniah 1, and is alluded to in other parts of the Book of the Twelve. The second recurring theme that he identifies is strongly present in Hosea and Joel, namely the fertility of the land. Hosea 2:8 refers to

²¹ *Babylonian Talmud*: 66.

²² J. D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea–Jonah* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011): 2–3 (3).

YHWH as the giver of grain, wine, and oil, and as punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness he threatens to take it back (2:9) and to lay waste the vines and fig trees (2:12); however, at a future time of restoration the earth will provide grain, wine, and oil once more (2:22). At the end of Hosea is the promise that Israel shall grow grain, and blossom like the vine (14:7 [8]). The opening section of Joel then describes a devastation of the land caused by a plague of locusts, leading to a call to repentance and the proclamation of a fast (2:12–17), which in turn leads to a promise of renewed blessing, as part of which 'You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied' (2:26). A third recurrent theme is exploration of the fate of God's people: put very broadly, Hosea and Amos deal with the punishment and restoration of Israel, and Micah and Zephaniah do the same with regard to Judah; Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 describe the people responding to the call to turn to YHWH, and the consequent re-building of the Temple and promise of restoration of Jerusalem; the remaining six texts and Zechariah 9–14 then continue to deal in various ways with the fate of the people. The fourth recurrent theme is that of theodicy, a theme which Nogalski sees as occurring principally within the first seven texts. Specifically, themes of YHWH's compassion and judgement are explored through quotations of Exodus 34:6–7, variously adjusted in Joel 2:13; 3:21 [4:21]; Jonah 4:2; Micah 7:18–20; Nahum 1:3.²³ Other thematic proposals have been put forward. For example, House sees themes of sin in the texts of Hosea–Micah, punishment in Nahum–Zephaniah, and restoration in Haggai–Malachi.²⁴ It is generally accepted that this is too simplistic: to make an obvious point, the books of Hosea–Micah contain many passages which promise restoration and blessing.

Not all scholars are persuaded, however, that there ever was such an intention that the Book of the Twelve should be read as one book. The external evidence admits of more than one possible interpretation. With regard to the much quoted Sirach 49:10, it may be noted that the verse refers to the twelve prophets as people rather than as texts (texts don't have bones!). While Baba Batra section 14b does indeed say that only three lines should be left between the twelve texts of the Minor Prophets, as opposed to four lines between other books, it also states that the reason why Hosea is not placed

²³ Nogalski presents a concise summary of these in his introduction in *Hosea–Jonah*: 11–16. His earlier article 'Book of the Twelve', *NIDB* 1:488–9 gives three of these same themes, but does not include the 'fate of God's people'.

²⁴ P. R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (JSOTSup 97; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

ahead of Isaiah, whom he preceded chronologically: ‘Since his book is so small, it might be lost.’²⁵ This suggests that the reason why the twelve texts were written on one scroll was precisely because of their short length, rather than because it was being suggested that they should be interpreted as one book. Furthermore, there is no superscription to the Book of the Twelve to suggest that it should be read or interpreted as one book.

With regard to internal evidence, the ‘catchwords’ to which Nogalski draws attention are, in some cases, noteworthy. However, the order in which the texts appear in different manuscript traditions varies. In the Hebrew, Masoretic text (MT), the order is Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Contrastingly, the Greek Septuagint (LXX) order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.²⁶ Some of the strongest apparent catchword links of adjacent books only hold good with the MT order, and Nogalski’s whole approach depends on his argument that the MT order is original, and that LXX has changed the order in the direction of making it more chronological. This change of order by LXX is, he argues, an understandable one, whereas there is no ready explanation of why MT would have changed the LXX order, were it older. The two significant commentaries to date on the Book of the Twelve as a single work take different approaches to the differing order of the books in MT and LXX. Nogalski, in accordance with his approach, treats solely the MT, while Sweeney sets out to interpret both the MT Book of the Twelve and the LXX Book of the Twelve synchronically.²⁷ Then even if Nogalski’s case on the precedence of the MT order is accepted, it remains true that some of the catchwords that he identifies as linking different texts may be more readily granted as being of significance than others.

²⁵ *Babylonian Talmud*: 70.

²⁶ A third variant is apparent in the Qumran scroll 4QXII^a, in which it appears that Jonah followed Malachi at the end of the collection.

²⁷ The terms ‘synchronic’ and ‘diachronic’ have become part of regular scholarly usage. Synchronic interpretation seeks to focus on the text as a whole, and to draw attention to commonalities rather than differences and discrepancies, while diachronic approaches seek to point up those features which suggest differences of origin and varying literary layers within a text. The two are not complete opposites, and many studies will draw on both approaches. Thus Sweeney writes that his commentary ‘necessarily includes diachronic considerations in order for the synchronic analysis to make sense’ (xxxix). See further C. M. Tuckett, ‘Synchronic Exegesis’, in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1990): 657–8.

There are also considerations of structure which count against the view that the Book of the Twelve should be read as one book. As Cuffey notes, ‘there are no clear markers (such as a superscription) which direct us to read it as a unified piece’;²⁸ and as Ben Zvi notes, the twelve books have never been assigned a common title.²⁹ Additionally, as Barton notes, later rabbinic or Christian texts never say ‘as it was written in the Book of the Twelve’; rather, if the source is identified it is by the name of the individual prophetic text.³⁰ In terms of thematic unity, the four ‘recurrent themes’ that Nogalski suggests can indeed be identified, but they are broad themes, which means that their identification has less value as an argument for the unity of the twelve texts than if they were more specific and focused.

Some scholars who work with the Book of the Twelve as a whole recognise earlier collections within it. Schart, Nogalski, Albertz, and Wöhrle all posit or accept the likelihood that there was a sixth-century collection, widely referred to as a ‘Book of the Four’, produced in the exilic or early post-exilic period, and comprising Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah. The common elements in the superscriptions of each of these four texts, the themes of sin, punishment, and restoration within them all, the fact that the four of them together provide an explanation of the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and some possible common editing of them as a group of texts combine to make this plausible.

Pushing further back still, many scholars think it likely that the texts of Hosea and Amos were read together and influenced each other. Jeremias argues that this process began early on, soon after the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722.³¹ Various verses in the Hosea-text appear to have been taken or adapted from the Amos-text: for example, Hosea 4:15b takes from Amos 4:4, and possibly also from Amos 8:14; Hosea 8:14 with its ‘I will send fire upon’ is derived from the refrain in the punishment announced

²⁸ K. H. Cuffey, ‘Remnant, Redactor, and Biblical Theologian: A Comparative Study of Coherence in Micah and the Twelve’, in J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney (eds.), *Reading and Hearing* (2000): 185–208 (201).

²⁹ E. Ben Zvi, ‘Twelve Prophetic Books or “The Twelve”’: A Few Preliminary Considerations’, in J. D. Watts and P. R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (JSOTSup, 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996): 125–57 (137).

³⁰ J. Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 37.

³¹ J. Jeremias, ‘The Interrelationship between Amos and Hosea’, in J. D. Watts and P. R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature* (1996): 171–86.