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Eighth Century BCE Prophetic Message

Introduction

“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

Isaiah boldly spoke to Eighth Century Judea and Israel concerning a time when both kingdoms have severely lost their way. Many times, when one thinks of the prophets of old, there is a tendency to turn their words into mere predictions of the future without a true dig into the context and purpose of their writings. It is the goal of this section to examine the prophetic messages of the eighth century in a way that gives weight to the meaning these words would have had to their original audience in their original context.

It is important to begin with a basic understanding of the text before analyzing its background. The New American Commentary gives insight to the terms “Wash” and “Make yourselves clean” that the passage opens with. Rahasu and hizzakku are Hebrew reflexives that refer to cultic responsibilities of Israel in association with cleansing themselves in accordance with performing spiritual duties at the temple. Careful examination of the verses directly prior to this reveal that the Lord is using customs associated with the temple as concrete examples of a change He wants to see come spiritually. This is why the Lord speaks through Isaiah saying “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths

1. Isaiah 1:16-17 (NIV)

and Convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.”

Similar declarations are made by the other eighth century prophets as well. The Lord sees all of the concrete rituals as meaningless when the hearts of the people are morally corrupt. This idea is the key to understanding the Lord’s overall message proclaimed by the prophets through the ages.

Social, Political, Economic, and Religious Context

Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah prophesied to a divided kingdom of Israel rich with economic prosperity, arrogant with military victory, and on the verge of a boiling point that would change the face of God’s people forever. Beginning in the early eighth century, the northern kingdom flourished under the leadership of Jeroboam II who reigned for forty-one years and is considered their greatest king.

“Thus, in less than twenty-five years Jeroboam II was able to take a nation that was just about ready to die and turn it into one of the great powers of his day.” Hence, Jeroboam II revived the northern kingdom to lengths most would have thought impossible.

Likewise, Uzziah ruled for fifty-two years in the south with a tenure that outmatched any king in the northern or southern kingdoms. “During his early period of reign, Uzziah accomplished all his outstanding achievements: construction of cities, towers, cisterns, cattle raising, planting fruit trees, and equipping his army with some of the most advanced weapons of

3. Isaiah 1:13 (NIV)


6. Ibid., 352.

7. Ibid.
the day.” Economic prosperity and military might may have seemed like good things but, much like has been observed of the Church in America as well as the Church in other powerful kingdoms today, not all was well in Israel. Widows, orphans, and the poor were just a few of the victims of a society that had become so rich they had forgotten their need for God. In the same way that Israel was called to care for and build these groups up, the Church today is called to do the same. One looks with fear on the similarities between the two. Enter the prophets.

Message of the Eighth Century Prophets

First on the scene to address the above discussed situation were Amos and Hosea. Amos was from Tekoa in Judah but was called by God to prophecy to the Northern kingdom. So destructive to the complacency of Israel’s small rich elite was Amos’s preaching that the priest Amaziah “called for royal support and expelled the prophet from Bethel.” “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks!’” In this passage, Amos calls out the area of Bashan east of the Sea of Galilee particularly known for its riches. So abundant was the spoiled nature of Samaria that its women were known for demanding practically impossible levels of riches and, in this case, food from their husbands. The literal meaning for “drink” in this passage comes from the Hebrew shathah. However, the noun that comes from the same root usually


9. James 1:27 (NIV)


11. Ibid., 204.

12. Amos 4:1 (NIV)
means “feast”. Here is yet another parallel to the Church in prosperous nations today where individuals, male and female, demand a standard of living from their spouse that pushes the other to frustration and even neglect of the rest of the world all while other less fortunate individuals are struggling just to have basic needs met. Oh how Amos calls to Christians of today!

Hosea originates a little differently than Amos but equally prophecies a deep message for God’s people both verbally and physically. Since the book of Hosea does not give any indication of the details of the fall of Israel in 722 BCE, it can be concluded that the events therein took place just after those of Amos in the third quarter of the eighth century. Though it is not known for sure exactly what the only northern-born prophet did for a living, Hosea’s message stands as “first among the Twelve Minor Prophets” and is subsequently one of the most powerful in all of the scripture. Most importantly, it comes with an object lesson; a failed marriage ravaged by infidelity and deceit but reconciled by a single gracious and compassionate party; the Lord God Almighty! “The Lord said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’”

The God Hosea proclaimed was angry with the people of Israel. He was not holding back on allowing the consequences to befall them that would come upon most anyone who had

16. Hosea 3:1 (NIV)
committed such treachery. Hosea also proclaimed that God was fed up with the monarchical system itself that Israel had put in place apart from God’s directive. “They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold, they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.” Despite all of the indictments, Yahweh loves Israel and buys her back from a life of sin to enjoy the benefits of marriage to the Almighty once again. Truly, this is the gospel even before the coming of Christ!

Since a profile of Isaiah will be given later in this essay, the remainder of this section will focus on the message of the prophet Micah who is the last of the eighth century prophets to enter the scene. One could think of Micah as a mini-Isaiah in that he capitulates to much of the form and theology of Isaiah with fewer words. So close are their messages that one can even observe practically identical statements in at least one example pertaining to eschatology. James Ward says, “the similarities between the two books are noteworthy, suggesting the possibility that the two may have been compiled in the same prophetic circle.”

Micah began his ministry around the same time as the siege of Samaria carried out by Shalmaneser V and Sargon II of Assyria. That siege ultimately ended the northern kingdom in 722 BCE. These unexpected events in the north provided a foundation for Micah to reference in regard to the coming fate of the southern kingdom of Judah. After spending close to half of the first chapter affirming God’s judgment on Ephraim for their rebellion, Micah proclaims “For

17. Coogan, 324.
18. Hosea 8:4 (NIV)
19. Micah 4:2-3 (NIV), Isaiah 2:3-4 (NIV)
Samaria’s plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself.”

His indictments against Judah focus primarily on crimes against the poor and helpless by the rich and elite. Ultimately, however, Micah gives hope on the other side of doom proclaiming that the Lord will restore all that is taken in the coming judgment; especially for the faithful remnant who strive to be just, loving, and humble like their God.

**Seventh Century BCE Prophetic Message**

**Introduction**

The transition from the eighth century to the seventh century BCE rendered major changes that had a great impact on the movement of God and His people. While Assyria was the oppressive power during the times of the prophets mentioned previously, the tides began to shift in a different direction shortly after the death of their last great king, Ashurbanipal, in 631 BCE. With Ashurbanipal’s passing, “the Babylonians moved to assert their independence and became entangled in the struggle for the Assyrian throne.”

Babylon was on the rise.

**Social, Political, Economic, and Religious Context**

Following the godly reign of Hezekiah and close to the beginning of the seventh century BCE, Judah found itself in the longest most wicked tenure the kingdom had ever known under King Manasseh. Manasseh polluted Judah by incorporating Canaanite and Assyrian gods into

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22. Micah 1:9 (NIV)

23. Micah 6:8 (NIV)


official worship practices. He also partook in coalitions with Assyria against Egypt in 667 BCE.\textsuperscript{26} Manasseh’s son, Amon, followed suit and crippled Judah to a point of weakness that paved the way for destruction.\textsuperscript{27} It was in this time of spiritual brokenness, political unrest, and pending conquest that the seventh century prophets entered the scene. The Lord was getting ready to bring judgement on the wicked and He wasn’t showing favoritism anymore. “…The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.”\textsuperscript{28} Even Judah would not escape the wrath of the Lord in these final days.

The prophetic works of Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah land in the middle of this beginning of the end for the remaining kingdom of Judah.

The book of Jeremiah, especially, provides important information on this period. Particularly useful are the prose sections of the book, which, interestingly enough, are cast in the same literary style as Deuteronomy and Joshua-2 Kings. Jeremiah’s career is said to have begun in the thirteenth year of Josiah (629-628; Jer. 1:1-2).\textsuperscript{29} With the changing scene politically and economically (i.e. Babylon becoming the dominant world power replacing Assyria), Josiah represented the last shimmer of light in a growing darkness. Scripture proclaims Josiah among the most righteous rulers ever to reign over Israel both kingdoms included.\textsuperscript{30} Miller and Hayes suggest that Josiah’s greatness was accentuated by the scripture’s horrific depiction of his predecessor, Manasseh (Amon was between them but


\footnotesize{28. Zephaniah 3:8 (NIV)}

\footnotesize{29. Miller and Hayes, 441.}

\footnotesize{30. 2 Kings 22:1-23:30 (NIV)}
only ruled for a short time.). This is a common Near Eastern practice used to add contrast and effectively glorify the great current king.\textsuperscript{31}

Josiah, at the astonishing age of twelve, began a religious reformation in Judah that included discovering the law book in the temple. In an effort to reestablish the Davidic dynasty in the Near East, Josiah joined a coalition to stop Egyptian conquest which ultimately resulted in his death at Megiddo. What followed was a complex tug of war battle for leadership between Judah’s people and the powers of Egypt and Babylon. Between the monarchical enactments of the citizens of Jerusalem, Pharaoh Neco, and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Judah went through four different kings in just under twenty-five years. This all culminated in Judah becoming a province of Babylon and beginning the time well known as the Babylonian Captivity or Babylonian Exile.\textsuperscript{32}

Message of the Seventh Century Prophets

Given the volatile political and economic situation in the years leading to the exile, the people of Judah feared for their independence and security. Nationalism in respect to Judah, Egypt and Babylon abounded as different groups rallied to decide who they would need to support in order to survive as greater powers than themselves fought for conquest of their territory. This is pivotal in examining Jeremiah whose message not only constituted a specific man with a message from the Lord but the voice of a minority political opinion in Judah as well.\textsuperscript{33} “If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 439-440.
\item Dillard and Longman III, 287.
\item Miller and Hayes, 462-463.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
declares the Lord, until I destroy it by his hand.”

Jeremiah proclaimed a spirit of peace and submission to the people of Judah who found themselves under the yoke of Babylon. This message is similar to Paul’s exhortation to the Church in Rome in regard to their participation in rebellion.

It would seem that Jeremiah was more concerned with dealing with the inward conflict of the hearts of Judah than the outward struggle for conquest going on around them. The ramifications of this message ring true today for Christians anywhere in the world who find themselves in a political firestorm. The most important thing is maintaining the gospel of love and peace. Christians need not get lost in the worldly battle that has been brought about by the sovereignty of the Lord and will ultimately be put away by Him as well.

The remaining minor (shorter in length but no less important) seventh century prophets echoed a similar message but in smaller instances at different points during the Assyrian Babylonian power shift. Zephaniah prophesied a little before Jeremiah resurfacing the voice of the prophets from fifty years of silence during Manasseh’s reign. His main emphasis was on the coming “great day of the Lord.” The full scope of this day is difficult to determine given the remnant of editorial additions later on. “Led by these considerations we can ascribe 1:2, 3 to an eschatological writer whom nothing less than universal destruction would satisfy.” Many have sought to take the descriptions of this day as a future cataclysmic event and, granted, this is certainly not the last place it is mentioned. Ultimately, even Paul uses the same words to describe

34. Jeremiah 27:8 (NIV)
35. Romans 13:1-2, (NIV)
36. Zephaniah 1:14, (NIV)
37. Buttrick et al., 1010.
something similar in the New Testament.\(^{38}\) What is known for certain is that both Zephaniah and Paul preceded two immense destructions culminating in the sacking of both Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BCE and Titus of Rome in 70 CE.\(^{39}\) Regardless of if there was a distant meaning for these passages, clearly there was an immediate one.

The prophet Nahum shines a beam of light amidst the darkness of this century for Judah as he proclaims justice manifested in the imminent fall of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. Well over a century and a half prior, Jonah had proclaimed a warning of 40 days for the Lord to smite the wicked city but the Lord relented when its people turned from their sin.\(^{40}\) Assyria had grown in power since and reached its apex of sovereignty when Assurbanipal captured Thebes, the capital of Egypt at that time. However, as has been detailed in earlier statements, through a series of battles, Nabopolassar of Babylon eventually led a revolt that concluded with the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BCE.\(^{41}\) No doubt, Nahum’s words fell on ears ready to hear them as Assyria had ravaged Judah for decades but the prophet Habakkuk gleaned another chapter of the Lord’s message for Judah; Judgment for their sins and idolatry.

Judah gets tough love from Yahweh in the prophetic work of Habakkuk. As the Chaldeans are sent by the Lord to judge Judah’s sins, dialogue takes place between the prophet and the Lord as to justice and how it should work. By default, Habakkuk, doesn’t understand why Judah should be judged by Babylon but ultimately the prophet closes the work by celebrating “the awe-inspiring divine appearance, which causes upheaval in nature…for even in

\(^{38}\) 1 Thessalonians 5:2, (NIV)

\(^{39}\) LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, 526-527.

\(^{40}\) Jonah 3:4, (NIV)

\(^{41}\) Dillard and Longman III, 405.
the midst of disaster, God provides ultimate victory.”\(^4^2\) Even in trials, those who believe thrive!

**Prophet Profile: Isaiah**

**Introduction**

“In that day, the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.”\(^4^3\) By looking at the complexities of this one seemingly simple verse concerning the *semah* of the Lord, one can gain much insight into the overall ambiguity of the writings of Isaiah as well as Second Isaiah; possibly even Third Isaiah.\(^4^4\) Two distinct camps diverge from this passage. “One views this phrase as a messianic title of the promised Davidic ruler, the other interprets it as a sign of God’s blessing on nature and considers the sprouting ’branch’ to be parallel to the ‘fruit of the land.’”\(^4^5\) This is one of many beautiful yet difficult passages in which the tension which has already been addressed in a discussion above of Zephaniah’s “Day of the Lord” can be clearly seen between future and present in the world of Hebrew prophetism. By examining the profile of Isaiah, hopefully even more clarity can be given to how the Lord speaks through prophetism in a way that both pierces the present and sheds light on things to come. For the purposes of this profile, a focus will be given on the background, calling, personality, and ministry context of “First Isaiah” only.

**Profile Discussion**

Isaiah ministered from the reigns of Uzziah until Hezekiah overlapping the last half of the eighth century and the beginning of the seventh century BCE. He was more than likely married

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42. Coogan, 364.

43. Isaiah 4:2, (NIV)

44. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, 281.

to a prophetess and had several children including *Shear-jashub, Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, and *Immanuel* all of which names meant something symbolically either positive or negative in his message to Judah.  

“Isaiah was the greatest theologian of the classical prophets. His sixty-six chapters cover both the holiness and coming glory of God, following the very pattern of his inaugural call.” That call began in the middle of a time that seemed pleasant on the surface but was quickly growing dark.

Recall the discussion in the first section of late eighth century near eastern politics. Fast forward about a decade from the mighty economically rich reign of Uzziah when Judah finds itself on a downhill slope fueled by happenings in the other kingdoms nearby. Pekah, the ruler of Ephraim, sought an alliance with Syria and more specifically Rezin, King of Damascus, in a coalition that came to be known as the Syro-Ephraimitic league. Both rulers tried to coerce Ahaz, king of Judah, into joining their alliance against infamous Assyria. The scene was set for Isaiah’s first major ministerial undertaking.

Patience in trials is never easy and the exhortation from Isaiah was not met with ultimate acceptance from Ahaz. Isaiah spoke the Lord’s message to Ahaz that he should remain patient in the trial of the Syro-Ephraimitic War but Ahaz vehemently refused. Isaiah responded with a poignant yet complex prophecy about a child who would be called *Immanuel*. In keeping with the thoughts expressed earlier in this section regarding the Branch of the Lord, it would serve the

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46. Coogan, 333.
47. Kaiser, Jr., 355.
48. Ibid., 361-362.
49. Isaiah 7:1-15, (NIV)
Church well to derive from this not only a messianic future meaning but a meaning for Ahaz in his day as well. Therefore, many scholars contend that the prophecy speaks of either the son of Isaiah or Ahaz in the late eighth century present and of Christ in the future early BCE.\textsuperscript{50} Regardless of our ultimate messianic interpretation of any Old Testament prophecy, it must be remembered that it seems next to illogical and certainly not in line with the rest of Hebrew prophecy for the Lord to impart a prophecy that would have no legitimate meaning for the people of the day it was given.\textsuperscript{51}

“Ahaz probably voluntarily offered submission to Tiglath-pileser III on the first available occasion. Second Kings 16:7-9 reports on Ahaz’s delivery of tribute to the Assyrian ruler put together by taking the gold and silver found in the temple and the royal treasury.”\textsuperscript{52} Ahaz rejected the Godly advice of Isaiah and took the “safe” road of joining forces with the Assyrians instead of faithfully staying out of the conflict as God had commanded.

Given this unilateral action against Isaiah’s better judgment, the prophet disappeared from the scene until the reign of Hezekiah. The tides had changed by that point and Assyria had proven not to be a great ally after all. In fact, during Hezekiah’s reign, Judah became involved in at least one rebellion against Assyria.\textsuperscript{53} “In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem…”\textsuperscript{54} Once again, Judah sets ready or not for the godly words of the prophet Isaiah.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Smith, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 204.
\item \textsuperscript{51} LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, 229.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Miller and Hayes, 398.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 400.
\end{itemize}
“‘It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are the only God.’”

Hezekiah prayed for the Lord to vindicate His name and power in accordance with the assurances of Isaiah. Therefore, the Lord answered the request. The scripture records that an angel went out and put 185,000 Assyrians to death in a single night causing the withdrawal of Sennacherib and the end of the current siege. Brueggemann calls Isaiah’s oracle in this particular event “the most complete expression of YHWH’s commitment to the Jerusalem establishment.” No doubt, this was one of the most amazing events in all of history that affirmed the faith of the prophet Isaiah and the remnant that heeded his words.

Conclusion

Postbiblical writings point to the conclusion that the wicked King Manasseh had Isaiah sawed in two. This may also be reflected in Hebrews 11:37. If the author of Hebrews is, in fact, referencing Isaiah here, he is most profoundly proclaiming the impact of Isaiah’s ministry context by associating that context with the rest of Hebrews 11:32-40. One of the major themes of Isaiah’s prophecy is the idea that God’s hand is in historical events including those enacted by powerful empires. This concept is proven in both major events discussed in this section: The

54. Isaiah 36:1-2, (NIV)
55. Isaiah 37:18-20, (NIV)
56. Isaiah 37:33-35, (NIV)
57. Isaiah 37:36-37, (NIV)
58. Brueggemann, 163.
59. Coogan, 334.
Syro-Ephraimite War as well as the siege of Sennacherib.\(^6^0\) It is in the distinction of these two events that the line between faithfulness and falling away in trials is clearly marked. As the passage in Hebrews mentioned above tells us, Isaiah is to be commended for his faith regardless of the outcome. The king could listen to his message or reject it and Isaiah was still faithful.

The Church throughout the world today would do well to imitate the steadfast nature of Isaiah seeking the Lord’s will when the enemies rally at the gates. The Church should not let insecurity and fear drive her decisions as the evil one plots to overthrow her. She should take heart in knowing that even if things look dark on this side, God has something better in store. Only then will she join in the chorus of the prophets and faithful of old (i.e. Isaiah) who grew so close to the Lord that “the world was not worthy of them.”\(^6^1\)

**The Book of the Twelve**

**Introduction**

It is common and expected that readers of the scripture might associate the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi as separate works with separate goals in mind both theologically and practically. After all, they are named separately and appear to be independent of one another in most common bibles one will find at the Christian bookstore.

However, recent studies have challenged this idea and concluded that this may not be the correct way to read these works. “Recently, modern scholars generally and German scholars in particular have accepted the view that the Twelve is the product of a common redactional


\(^{61}\) Hebrews 11:38, (NIV)
In other words, the Book of the Twelve may very well have been meant to be studied as a singular thought pattern pointing to a central theological idea of how God worked with Israel in the final centuries leading up to Christ.

It is the goal of this section to examine the Book of the Twelve in a way that unifies the otherwise separate works and ultimately brings new light to the message of the prophets. For the purpose of discussion, the pattern of books discussed will be the same as that of parts two and three of Paul Redditt’s lecture series on the subject of the Twelve. First, the Book of the Four as well as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi will be discussed. Moving forward, Nahum and Habakkuk as well as the obscure books of Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah will be examined. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn as to what the major overarching theme is of the Twelve as a whole.

Discussion

“Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.”

“Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up.”

“All this is because of Jacob’s transgression, because of the sins of the people of


65. Hosea 4:1 (NIV)

66. Amos 5:2 (NIV)
Israel. What is Jacob’s transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah’s high place? Is it not Jerusalem?” At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamp and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.’ At just a quick glance of these four scriptures in the books of Hosea, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah, one can already see some continuity in the overall pattern. It certainly needs to be noted that three out of four of these prophets find themselves in the eighth century. With reference to the first section of this essay as well as reference of the few verses mentioned above, the basic message comes quickly into clarity: God was displeased with Israel both in Ephraim and Judah for their hypocrisy.

Redditt points out that James D. Nogalski claims these books show Deuteronomistic tendencies. The New American Commentary echoes this sentiment for the work of Hosea stating “it is impossible to analyze Hosea without a thorough reckoning with his allusions to the Torah and to Israelite history.” In like fashion, Gowan references Deuteronomistic history when speaking of the eighth century prophets. Though Zephaniah finds himself a century later historically, his message rings in unison with the rest of the four in a way that transcends his own time. “As a word for all times and places, Zephaniah is in basic accord with the message of other

67. Micah 1:5, (NIV)
68. Zephaniah 1:12, (NIV)
prophetic writings. Behind the impassioned prophecy of turbulent times-frustration over the widespread, undeserved affliction of humble, pious people, and frustration over the undeserved privilege of the powerful.”73 Measure that statement especially against the preaching of Micah and it is near impossible to not see the resemblance. It can be concluded that the Book of the Four uniformly sought to reach into Israel’s deep roots going back as far as the covenantal promises given via Moses by Yahweh in hopes that those references would help back up proclamation of a guilty verdict against a people who had lost their compass of righteousness.

Where the Book of the Four spoke to Israel in a time when they were arrogant and confident in their prosperity, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi spoke to an Israel divided, conquered and reborn. With the geopolitical changes of the eighth and seventh centuries, Zerubbabel being appointed governor, the temple beginning to be rebuilt and Joshua becoming the high priest, the people of God had undergone immense changes including being reduced to a small impoverished Persian province.74 It was in the midst of this revolution of reality that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi spoke to Israel. “Haggai was the prophet to open this period of the foundations of Judaism, although others – the prophets Zechariah and Malachi, the scribe Ezra, and Nehemiah, the governor – made valuable contributions.”75 Not to prematurely state the conclusion but this statement from LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush goes to support an even greater point than that of unifying the Book of the Twelve. Though the initial intention of all of the biblical writers may not have been one combined volume, the Lord has, in fact, placed one combined volume in the hands of His people. Though much diversity exists, the people of God

73. Ward, 258.
74. Gowan, 163.
75. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, 399.
should search fervently for the unified truths therein.

Now that the Twelve had expounded on the Lord’s disdain for hypocritical pride of a prosperous people and love for a broken people, through Nahum and Habakkuk, the harsh but necessary justice side of God could clearly be seen. It is more important than ever, though, to not look at these books as islands in the sea but as parts of a larger continent: The Book of the Twelve. “Today, Nahum should certainly be read together with other prophetic texts, especially Jeremiah and Jonah, in order to keep it in perspective. The placement of Jonah ahead of Nahum in the scroll of the Twelve Prophets is particularly interesting. One wonders whether it was intentional on the part of the editors.”76 The point is that as truthful to the character of God these texts may be, it is dangerous to lead a study which only references the side of God portrayed in any one without reference to the others. God doesn’t fit in the boxes of tough and soft that mankind likes to fashion. He is an untamed God made of many emotions and many ways. He is, as the writer of Hebrews describes, a “consuming fire.”77

Joel, Obadiah and Jonah offered the final pieces to the puzzle of the Twelve though these pieces are spread out insofar as where they fit in that puzzle. It has already been stated that Jonah offers some balance to the picture of God that Nahum illuminates. Though Jonah’s date and genre may never be agreed on by scholars, one view that seems to capture somewhat of a consensus of thought in regard to Jonah’s contribution to the Twelve is that Jonah portrays the shift from judgment to promise during the Babylonian Exile.78 In this way, Jonah represents the first step of Yahweh paving the way for Christ to proclaim compassion even for the greatest foe.

76. Ward, 254.
77. Hebrews 12:29, (NIV)
78. Gowan, 138.
Joel points readers to a locust plague and the day of YHWH. The view that has prevailed today is that the locust plague was a current phenomenon for the people of Joel’s day that pointed to a future divine judgment.\textsuperscript{79} Obadiah, in similar fashion to Nahum, is a single proclamation of judgment against the Edomites.\textsuperscript{80} Though it is hard to date, it can rightfully be considered yet another encouragement to exiles that Yahweh is with them. In regards to where these works reside in the Twelve, Redditt states that one can see “careful placement of Joel and Obadiah around Amos by means of catchwords and of Jonah on chronological grounds. The Book of the Four was not destroyed, but enlarged by Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. It is otherwise left intact.”\textsuperscript{81}

**Conclusion**

Was the Book of the Twelve meant to be studied as a single volume? There seems to be a great deal of evidence to support this claim. The narrow nature of books such as Nahum and Obadiah discussed above almost require a reading of the Twelve in this way to hinder building theologies based on sequestered passages.

Regardless of if one agrees with a unified reading of the Twelve or not though, developing an understanding of Yahweh based on a convergent reading of not just the Twelve but the whole of the scripture is healthy in that it forces scholars to embrace the amazing, diverse, compassionate, just, and ultimately loving nature of God. One will search and search and still only grasp the surface of how vast His character really is.

\textsuperscript{79} Ward, 241.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 244.

\textsuperscript{81} Redditt, *Lecture Three*, 11.
Bibliography


