



# The Book of the Twelve

*A Journey Through the  
Minor Prophets*

# The Prophets as Literature

- 21<sup>st</sup> Century America | Literate, not Literary
- Poetic Anthologies
  - Most of the prophets are collections of a few different kinds of literature and therefore, may be considered anthologies of a sort, often combining oracles, sermons, dialogues and short narrative accounts.
  - With clear exceptions like the one's just mentioned, the prophets *primarily* write in poetry, not prose. Unlike the nuanced grammatical arguments of Paul, they instead paint colorful pictures with words that have emotional impact
    - Four Primary Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry
      - Density (succinctness)

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

16 Like a stubborn heifer,  
Israel is stubborn;  
can the LORD now feed them  
like a lamb in a broad pasture?

17 <sup>q</sup>Ephraim is joined to idols;  
<sup>r</sup>leave him alone.

- Paralellism

4 <sup>j</sup>“Give attention to me, my people,  
and give ear to me, my nation;  
<sup>k</sup>for a law<sup>1</sup> will go out from me,  
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Figures of Speech (word pictures)
  - Analogical
    - Similes (Isa. 1:18)
      - “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:  
though your *sins are like scarlet*,  
they shall be *as white as snow*;  
though they are *red like crimson*,  
they shall *become like wool*.”

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Metaphors (Isa. 42:6)
  - “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;  
I will *take you by the hand* and keep you;  
I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
a light for the nations,”
- Hypocatastasis (Jer. 30:23)
  - “Behold *the storm of the LORD!*  
Wrath has gone forth,  
a *whirling tempest*;  
it will burst upon the head of the wicked.”

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Hyperbole (Jer. 14:17)
  - “You shall say to them this word: ‘Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease, for the virgin daughter of my people is shattered with a great wound, with a very grievous blow.’”
- Personification (Isa. 1:2)
  - “Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth! This is what the LORD says: “The children I raised and cared for have rebelled against me.”
- Anthropomorphism/Anthropopathism (Isa. 9:12)
  - “The Syrians on the east and the Philistines on the west devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.”

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Substitution
  - Metonymy (Isa. 9:5)
    - “For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.”
  - Synecdoche (e.g., “Ephraim” to refer to the entire northern kingdom)
- Irony and Sarcasm (Amos 4:4; Isa. 41:21-23)
  - “Come to Bethel, and transgress;  
to Gilgal, and multiply transgression;  
bring your sacrifices every morning,  
your tithes every three days.”

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Set forth your case, says the LORD;  
bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.  
Let them bring them, and tell us  
what is to happen.  
Tell us the former things, what they are,  
that we may consider them,  
that we may know their outcome;  
or declare to us the things to come.  
Tell us what is to come hereafter,  
that we may know that you are gods;  
do good, or do harm,  
that we may be dismayed and terrified (Isa.  
41:21-23)



# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Wordplay (Isa. 5:7)
  - Semantic range, rhyme, word association, assonance etc.
    - “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
and he looked for justice, *mishphat*  
but behold, bloodshed; *mishpach*  
for righteousness, *tsedakaha*  
but behold, an outcry!” *tse’akah*
- A Modest Suggestion
  - In light of the largely poetic nature of prophecy, interpretive slogans like “literal if possible” aren’t helpful. “Literal when likely” should be our approach.

# The Prophets as Literature Cont.

- Prophetic vs. Apocalyptic
  - Scholars make a justified distinction between what is typically considered prophetic and apocalyptic (or prophetic-apocalyptic) literature. Elements generally found within apocalyptic literature are:
    - Highly graphic—even bizarre—imagery and symbols, usually associated with visions
    - The periodization of world history
    - An emphasis on God's sovereignty
    - The use of angels and visions to reveal the future
    - The ultimate victory of God and his people over evil

# The Structure of the Twelve

- Incredible consistency in grouping *and* order earned the minor prophets the name “the Twelve” or “book of the Twelve” implying that they were understood as a multi-chapter literary unit.
- The consistent order of the Twelve does not seem to be easily explained by chronology, as only six out of twelve prophets open with historical superscriptions, some of their ministries were simultaneous or overlapping according to those superscriptions and the six undated prophets are distributed evenly throughout.

## Canonical Order and Historical Superscriptions in the Book of the Twelve

Book	Historical Superscription?	Date of Superscription
Hosea	Yes	786-746 BC
Joel	No	
Amos	Yes	786-746 BC
Obadiah	No	
Jonah	No	
Micah	Yes	750-687 BC
Nahum	No	
Habakkuk	No	
Zephaniah	Yes	640-609 BC
Haggai	Yes	520 BC
Zechariah	Yes	520 BC
Malachi	No	

# The Structure of the Twelve Cont.

- The Twelve as a Prophetic Oracle | A Structural Proposal
  - Recall the tri-partite, “standard” prophetic message
    - You’ve sinned against God and broken the covenant—you must repent.
    - If you don’t repent, judgment is coming for you as it will for the nations.
    - Yet, there is hope beyond judgment for glorious restoration, both for Israel/Judah and for the nations.
- While certainty is impossible, it is compelling and highly plausible to understand the overarching structure of the Book of the Twelve to largely be that of the standard prophetic message—an inscripturated, prophetic anthology to post-exilic Israel.

# The Structure of the Twelve Cont.

- Hosea
  - Joel
  - Amos
  - Obadiah
  - Jonah
  - Micah
- } Sin: Covenant and Cosmic
- Nahum
  - Habakkuk
  - Zephaniah
- } Punishment: Covenant and Cosmic
- Haggai
  - Zechariah
  - Malachi
- } Restoration: Covenant and Cosmic

# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Introduction to the Problem
  - Hosea
    - Introduction to the Twelve and Israel's descent into sin and covenant-breaking
      - The only hopes lies through coming catastrophe, the focus of Joel 1-2
  - Joel
    - The coming catastrophe is identified as the “day of the Yahweh”
    - The second “major” problem of the Twelve is introduced, expanding on Hosea: the nations have *also* sinned.

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi

# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Complication of the Problem
  - Amos
    - The judgment introduction of 1:2 follows the language of judgment of Joel 3:16 almost identically, and picks up with judgment against the nations, where Joel left off.
    - No single minor prophet lists the sins of all peoples with more painstaking detail than Amos.
      - The cosmic problem is even worse than Joel intimated.
    - Amos exhorts the people to *repent*
  - Obadiah
    - Plot complication pauses in Obadiah for a case-study of the sin of the nations started in Joel and emphasized in Amos
      - Edom has oppressed and hated the chosen people and those actions will lead to its destruction

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi



# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Complication of the Problem Cont.
  - Jonah
    - Jonah provides an “Edomic” image of Israel— they are not better
    - The theme of descent
  - Micah
    - Concludes the “sin” section of the Twelve and summarizes and reiterates the arguments of Hosea-Jonah, while adding the sad fact that restoration *could* be glorious if the nation would repent.
    - Uncertainty
      - At this point, only judgment could bring Israel lower, the subject of Nahum and Habbakuk.

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi

# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Crisis Point
  - Nahum
    - Describing judgment against Nineveh (the capital of Assyria) as a picture of the nations at large, Nahum announces that judgment no longer looms on the horizon—*it has come*, and no city or nation can do anything about it.
  - Habbakuk
    - Like Nineveh, Israel too will meet judgment with no obvious path to redemption (cf. 2:14)
      - Habbakuk 2:12-14 provides the climax of Hosea-Habbakuk.

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi

# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Climax and Falling Action
  - Zephaniah and De-creation
    - Singles out different sinful groups and describes their de-creation on account of the day of Yahweh.
      - Judah (1:13): houses destroyed and emptied; vineyards left uncultivated
      - Philistia (2:4-7): abandoned, in ruins, empty a place for grazing flocks
      - Moab and Ammon (2:9): like Sodom and Gomorrah, a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever
      - Cush (2:12): slain
      - Assyria (2:13-15): utterly desolate, dry as a desert, a pasture for livestock, a haunt for roosting owls, a ruin and a place for wild animals
    - Quiets any doubts that Yahweh is sovereign to accomplish his redemptive plans, even through judgment
    - Includes the nations in cosmic restoration and service of Yahweh as Hab. 2:12-14 declared
    - Perhaps most importantly, a remnant of righteous Israelis will be the key to the restoration of the nations, blending the story of Gen. 1-11 with Gen. 12 onward.

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi

# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Resolution of the Problem
  - Haggai
    - The people of God respond immediately in obedience to the word of the Lord, unlike in Hosea-Zephaniah. A new era has dawned.
    - Encourages the remnant, particularly in light of the inferior appearance of the new temple. The glory of this temple will be greater than the last because it will be a place of peace (2:9).
- Zechariah
  - Extends the scope of the restoration of Israel
  - Introduces the prominent role of Jerusalem and its ascension to glory in the restoration process, an ascension which mirrors the descent pattern in the Twelve.
    - Temple and priesthood to be restored
  - The only thing that could possibly stifle renewal is the attitude of the people—everything else has been addressed by Yahweh

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi

# The U-Shaped Plot of the Twelve

- Malachi
  - Concludes the Twelve with a final tension: remaining sin among the people (1:6-3:15).
    - Ironically, the problem stems largely from the lack of spiritual leadership by the priests of the new temple (1:8-13).
  - Despite this, Malachi is confident of restoration, introducing a new detail and reason for that confidence: a coming Elijah who will turn the hearts of the people before the Day of the Lord.

Hosea-Joel-Amos-Obadiah-Jonah-Micah

Nahum-Habbakuk

Zephaniah-Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi