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Hosea–Micah

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Introduction to Hosea–Micah

These six prophetic scrolls record “Yahweh’s message that became a reality” to Hosea, Joel, and Micah (Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1), “the words of Amos . . . that he saw” (Amos 1:1), “the vision of Obadiah” (Obad. 1), and a story about how “Yahweh’s message became a reality to Jonah” (Jon. 1:1). They are messages and revelations from Yahweh. Along with Nahum to Malachi, these six scrolls form “The Twelve,” a collection of writings that individually are much shorter than Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, but between them, they occupy a similar number of pages to Ezekiel (in *BHS* they total 96 pages; Ezekiel has 95). In Latin they are the *Prophetes Minores* and thus in English the “Minor Prophets,” which could suggest that they are “lesser” prophets than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. But it is more likely that the Latin term simply designates them as the “shorter” prophets; there is nothing “minor” about them. Together they have in common with the “Major Prophets” (the longer ones) that they

- speak in the name of Yahweh as the one God, the God of grace and truth;
- presuppose that Israel is his special people;
- challenge Israel about its commitment to him and to one another;
- warn Israel that he intends to act against it (with a distinctive stress on “Yahweh’s day”);
- make promises to Israel about its destiny; and
- set Yahweh’s involvement with Israel in the context of his lordship over all the nations.

Sometime in the Second Temple period, the Twelve—along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—gained recognition by the Judahite community as having ongoing significance for the people of God and as placing an ongoing demand on them. In other words, the Twelve came to be among “the Scriptures,” or to

use the later Christian term, became canonical. The reference in Sirach that I quote in the epigraph to this book, which dates from soon after 200 BC, is the first extant reference to the Twelve as in effect authoritative Scriptures; we have no information on the process whereby they came to have this position. Such a status is then presupposed by Qumran documents, which include copies of them and commentaries on some of them. The community of people who came to believe in Jesus also acknowledged the position of these twelve scrolls. They are among the Scriptures from before Jesus’s day that have an extraordinary capacity to instruct Jews and gentiles about the faith in Jesus that brought us salvation, a capacity that issues from the fact that they were and are “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:14–17). These believers in Jesus recognized that “God spoke to our ancestors of old in many different ways through the prophets” (Heb. 1:1); Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah are part of what resulted from that speaking. In the twenty-first century we are not in a position to examine or evaluate the basis on which they and the rest of the First Testament came to be the Scriptures.

The six scrolls make some extraordinary statements. Below are a couple from each.

Go, get yourself a whorish woman and whorish children. (Hosea 1:2)

How can I give you over, Ephraim? (Hosea 11:8)

Yahweh your God is gracious and compassionate and relenting about anything bad. (Joel 2:13)

Beat your hoes into swords. (Joel 3:10 [4:10])

Listen to this message, you cows of the Bashan. (Amos 4:1)

Have recourse to me and live. (Amos 5:4)

I’m making you little among the nations. (Obad. 2)

The reign will be Yahweh’s. (Obad. 21)

When I cried for help from She’ol’s belly, you listened to my voice. (Jon. 2:2 [2:3])

My dying is good, better than my life. (Jon. 4:3)

“Don’t preach,” they preach. (Mic. 2:6)

Be circumspect in walking with your God. (Mic. 6:8)

Western Christians like some of these lines, and there are other lines from these prophets that they like. There are also some that they don’t like, and many more that they’re not aware of, which is odd, given the recognition in

the NT that they are all words that God spoke or words that God thought were a good idea to have in his book and words that were designed to be of ongoing significance for his people. “The claim to be the people of God today means to listen to these words . . . and to be willing to look at present moral conduct and attitudes from that perspective.”¹

There are commentaries on these scrolls that are prejudiced in favor of accepting their perspective and ones that are open to being critical of it.² I work with the first prejudice; readers who wish to see critique of the text will need to look elsewhere.

The Focus and the Setting

Individual prophets among our six may overtly focus on Ephraim (Hosea, Amos) or on Judah (Joel, Micah) or on the other nations in Israel’s world (Obadiah, Jonah). But they may also relate to one of those other foci: Hosea and Amos begin with references to Judah’s kings and subsequently say something about Judah, Micah says something about Ephraim, Obadiah and Jonah bring a message to Judah, and Joel and Amos say something about other nations. (Ephraim is the name I will use to refer to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Both the Prophets and modern writers often refer to it simply as “Israel,” which was its more regular designation as a nation, but the usage is confusing because that name also applies to the people of God as a whole, and it is sometimes used this way in Hosea to Micah. But Hosea also refers to the Northern Kingdom as “Ephraim,” which balances the name “Judah” for the Southern Kingdom; in both cases the name of a dominant clan out of the twelve clans became the name for the nation as a whole. Following Hosea’s example, I will keep the name “Israel” for the people of God as a whole.)

One might see the Twelve Prophets as snapshots or collections of snapshots from a family album, which later members of the family have put in a roughly chronological order and in three groups.

- To start from the end, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi come from the Second Temple period, from the late sixth and fifth centuries, when Babylon has fallen to Persia. The Haggai and Zechariah scrolls incorporate dates in the Persian era.
- Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah seem all to come from the seventh century, when Assyria is about to fall to Babylon.
- Of the first six, which are the subjects of this commentary, Hosea, Amos, and Micah begin with references to eighth-century kings. Thus these

1. A comment about Amos by Carroll, *Contexts for Amos*, 287.

2. Cf. the discussion in Clines, “Metacommentating Amos.”

three prophets belong to the period of Assyrian strength. Their scrolls come in an order that links with their respective introductory notes (the actual chronological questions are more complicated, and chronologically Amos comes first). Hosea 1:1 gives Hosea the widest time frame, the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah. Amos 1:1 refers only to Uzziah, while Mic. 1:1 refers only to Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. These introductory notes also connect Hosea and Amos with the time of Jeroboam ben Joash (Jeroboam II) as king of Ephraim; Jonah, too, lived in his reign (see 2 Kings 14:25), which puts him chronologically before Amos and Hosea.

- Neither Joel nor Obadiah provide dates; perhaps (like Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) they lived in a time when there were no Judahite kings by which to date their writing. Joel may have found a place between Hosea and Amos on the assumption that it belongs in the eighth century and/or to give prominence to its stress on Yahweh’s day and/or because of its closing reference to Yahweh dwelling in Zion, which is where Amos starts. Obadiah’s preoccupation with Edom fits the context of the Babylonian or Persian period, when Edom was a special problem for Judah, but it may follow Amos because Amos almost closes with a promise that David’s nation is going to possess Edom.³
- The Septuagint’s order puts the three dated scrolls (Hosea, Amos, Micah) together, then the three undated ones (Joel, Obadiah, Jonah).⁴
- It has been argued that the Qumran manuscript of the Twelve Prophets locates Jonah at the end, after Malachi.⁵

Not having the date of Joel and Jonah doesn’t hinder our understanding of them, and Obadiah provides as much indication of its general background as we need to understand it. With Hosea, Amos, and Micah, things are different. After declaring that they are messages from Yahweh, these three scrolls locate their prophets historically during the time of a sequence of Judahite and Ephraimite kings in the eighth century, the time from Uzziah to Hezekiah in Judah and from Jeroboam ben Joash to the fall of Samaria in Ephraim. By locating them in this way, the scrolls imply that their messages need to be understood against these backgrounds, about which we gain further information from the contents of the scrolls themselves, from 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, from Assyrian records, and from archaeological discoveries in Canaan. Both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles report the reigns of the four Judahite

3. Nogalski (“Not Just Another Nation”) suggests many more links between Amos 9 and Obadiah.

4. See further, e.g., Sweeney, “Sequence and Interpretation in the Book of the Twelve”; Sweeney, “Synchronic and Diachronic Concerns,” 25–30.

5. See, e.g., P. Guillaume, “Unlikely Malachi-Jonah Sequence.”

kings. Second Kings also reports the long and successful reign of Jeroboam ben Joash (2 Chronicles ignores Ephraim and its kings), while noting that he continued in the wrong ways of Jeroboam ben Nebat (Jeroboam I). It goes on to report the reigns of Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Ephraim's last king, Hoshea. These kings are not named in our prophets, but Hosea refers to events in their time. Ezra-Nehemiah gives us information about the early Persian period, which provides background to Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah.

Messages from God in a Political Context

So the Hosea, Amos, and Micah scrolls follow declarations that their words come from Yahweh with lists of the kings in their day. Part of the background to the prophets' work lies in its political context. An outline of the history at the background of Hosea, Amos, and Micah is as follows (though there are varying opinions about the dates).⁶

In 825 BC, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III erected an inscription with bas-relief images (the Black Obelisk) that portrays an Ephraimite king paying homage to him and lists things he brought to Shalmaneser (*ANET* 281). Subsequently, the reign of Jeroboam ben Joash (about 790 to 750) experienced freedom from international pressure, national strength, and internal political stability. It would thus also be a time of prosperity. It was the last such period in Ephraim. The next thirty years saw weakness and invasion as Assyria took increasing interest in the Levant and specifically in Ephraim, with its location on the trade routes from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean and Egypt. Internally, these years saw instability and turbulence, which can be indicated simply by listing the kings:

- Zechariah ben Jeroboam (750, assassinated)
- Shallum ben Jabesh, the assassin (750, assassinated)
- Menahem ben Gadi, the assassin (750–740). In his time Tiglath-pileser intervened in Ephraim and imposed tribute in return for supporting Menahem.
- Pekahiah ben Menahem (740–738, assassinated)
- Pekah ben Remaliah, the assassin, supported by fifty people from Gilead in Transjordan (738–732, assassinated). He allied with Aram (Syria) against Assyria and tried to force Judah to join the alliance, but Assyria under Tiglath-pileser invaded Ephraim, annexed much of northern Ephraim and Gilead, and transported many of their people.

6. See, e.g., Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 129–39.

- Hoshea ben Elah, the assassin (732–723, deposed). He stopped paying Assyria tribute and sought alliance with Egypt; the next Assyrian king, Shalmaneser, invaded Ephraim, and he or his successor Sargon II took Samaria and transported many Ephraimites.

Judah had an easier time through this period, particularly during the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham; Jerusalem was off the main trade routes, further south on the mountain ridge. But in Ahaz’s reign Assyrian pressure on Ephraim brought trouble to Judah as a side effect. Rather than join Ephraim and Aram in resisting Assyria, Judah sought Assyrian support in resisting Ephraim and Aram and thus became an Assyrian minion, which saved it from Ephraim’s fate.

Archaeological discoveries indicate that the late eighth century saw Jerusalem grow considerably in population, apparently through the arrival of refugees from the conflicts and invasions of Ephraim’s last years.⁷ But in Hezekiah’s reign Judah reneged on its subordination to Assyria and sought Egyptian support as it asserted its independence. This encouraged rather than held back Assyrian intervention in Judah, which issued in terrible devastation in the Judahite lowlands, documented by Sennacherib’s bas-reliefs of the capture of Lachish. But Sennacherib did not take Jerusalem itself.

Over the next two or three centuries—the periods of Assyrian supremacy and decline, of Babylonian power, and of Persian control—the messages of Hosea, Amos, and Micah were no doubt being studied and perhaps amplified in Judah, but the scrolls make no concrete reference to events during those periods. Likewise, eventually the messages in Joel were being proclaimed and the story of Jonah was being told there, in at least the latter part of this period. Only Obadiah makes something like definite reference to the situation in Judah, as it alludes to the occupation of much Judahite territory by Edom from the sixth century onward (see the introduction to Obadiah below).

Messages from God in a Religious and Societal Context

Hosea, Amos, and Micah also refer to religious and societal contexts, which are interwoven with each other and with the political contexts. While the prophets are committed to the fact that Yahweh is the only God and to the expectation that Israel should acknowledge him as such, the prophetic scrolls, works such as 1 and 2 Kings, and archaeological discoveries make clear that Ephraim in particular was not so committed. Perhaps it would be news to many people that they were supposed to recognize Yahweh as the only God. On one hand, the traditional religions of the region assumed that there were a number of gods. Even if some Ephraimite prophets, priests, kings, and other political

7. See, e.g., Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 154–55.

leaders did accept an exclusive commitment to Yahweh, the interweaving of politics and religion would make it hard for Ephraim to enter into political alliances with other nations without engaging in rites that involved formal acknowledgment of their gods (see further the introduction to Hosea below).

Even insofar as Ephraim made that formal acknowledgment of Yahweh, prophets critiqued another aspect of its religion—the use of aids to worship such as images of Yahweh. To put it in terms of the Decalogue, even if the Ephraimites kept the first commandment, they failed to keep the second. The use of images of Yahweh, especially at the sanctuaries at Beth-el and Dan, was accompanied by the use of other worship aids, such as effigies of deceased family members, who were consulted for guidance by means of their effigies. The Torah declares that Israel should have destroyed such worship aids on entering the country and not have imitated them. They easily encouraged a view of Yahweh that made him only too like other deities.

Worship in Ephraim was necessarily not confined to the two sanctuaries in the far north and the deep south, which people could not easily visit more than once or twice a year. In or near their towns and villages they had shrines, which constituted more practicable sites for worship—the *bāmôt*, traditionally called “high places.” There is less evidence of Judahites seeking the help of other deities but some indication of worship that contravened the second commandment. The problem with the existence of the shrines in Ephraim and in Judah is that they could easily become hard to distinguish from a Canaanite shrine with regard to whose help people sought there and how they did so.

The societal context lying behind much of the polemic in Hosea, Amos, and Micah implies a parallel clash between the kind of society the Torah envisages and the kind that had come to exist in Ephraim and in Judah. The Torah’s ideal is a society that is village based, with clans and extended families possessing the land and farming it, largely on a subsistence basis but with the implicit hope that they will produce enough surplus to barter for needs that they cannot fulfill for themselves, such as the acquisition of iron tools and jewelry.

Two related factors lay behind the malfunctioning of this system, which the prophets presuppose. One was the development of the state and the need to fund its life, its administration, its infrastructure projects, and its defense budget, with the associated need to pay imperial taxes when the Assyrians became overlords of Ephraim and then of Judah. The development of the state saw much land come under state control, with ordinary people working as the administration’s servants. It also resulted in the need to collect taxes and thus trim off some of the production of family farms, whether or not it was actually in surplus.

The other factor was that some families managed to take control of the land of other families and thus became large-scale landowners. At best, the people who had formerly possessed their allocation of land became servants

on what was once their own farm. One factor in this development was the economic failure of a family’s farm, through its inefficiency or laziness or bad luck. Another was fraud on the part of the more astute landowners. The large-scale landowners thus got themselves into a position whereby they could live well, while their servants ended up living poorly.

How a Prophet’s Words Became Known

In a Western context, Jews and Christians get to know the messages of the Prophets in at least two ways. Many may hear parts of the scrolls read out in worship; a few read them and study them as written texts. In the Second Temple period, something similar would be true. On one hand, synagogue lectionaries developed during this era, and the second reading in synagogue worship came from the Prophets. On the other hand, references from Qumran and from the NT indicate the practice of scholarly study. Convenient evidence surfaces in connection with Micah in the form of the fragmentary Micah expositions (*pesharim*) from Qumran (1QpMic and 4QpMic),⁸ which apply the references to Samaria and Jerusalem typologically (as we might put it) to the Pharisees and the Deceitful Preacher over against the Qumran community and the Faithful Teacher. It also surfaces in Matt. 2:6 in the way Jewish scholars respond to Herod’s question about where the Messiah would be born (cf. John 7:42).

The two dynamics (hearing and studying) correspond to data within the scrolls themselves. On one hand, the prophets are portrayed as something like preachers: see, for example, Amos 7:10–17; Jonah; the frequent exhortation to “listen”; and the prophets’ attention to rhetoric. Such data within these six scrolls correspond to the picture one gets extensively from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and also from Isaiah, Haggai, and Zechariah. The scrolls hint at three places where the prophets might seek a hearing for these messages. Several times Hosea and Amos refer to the Ephraimite capital (i.e., Samaria) and also to Beth-el, the sanctuary town nearer Samaria to which Amos makes more reference and which was where he got into trouble (Amos 7:1–17). One can picture Hosea preaching in the square in front of the town gate in Samaria when people were gathering or passing through there, and either prophet preaching in the sanctuary courtyard in Beth-el when people assembled for a festival there. One can similarly imagine Joel, Obadiah, and Micah preaching in Jerusalem in the square or in the temple courtyards on such occasions—and one can imagine a storyteller recounting Jonah’s story there.

On the other hand, the scrolls manifest logical structuring, and the messages they preserve are mostly expressed in poetry, much of whose effect

8. See, e.g., *DSS* 1:8–11, 334–35.

would not come across in a onetime oral presentation in the midst of a crowd in a sanctuary courtyard or a city square. These characteristics point to the expectation of study. Jeremiah 26:17–19 suggests that at least some of the contents of the Micah scroll were available for such study to “the elders of the country” in Jeremiah’s day and/or that the notion of appealing to them would make sense to people listening to this story about Jeremiah when it was being told a few decades later. Likewise 1 Kings 22:28 has Micah’s near namesake Micaiah “quoting” Micah’s opening words as they appear in the scroll, “Listen, you peoples, all of them” (Mic. 1:2).

Another passage within Micah points in a different but complementary direction. Although we have no accounts of prophets writing down individual messages, Mic. 4:1–3 may imply that they did, in that the verses are a variant of a message that also comes in Isa. 2:2–4. It may have derived from Micah or Isaiah or another prophet; it anyway apparently existed in a form that was stable enough to find its way into both the Micah and the Isaiah scrolls, though a form that was malleable enough to be adapted by both—either in writing or in oral form. It wouldn’t be surprising if many individual messages from prophets such as Micah, Hosea, Amos, and Joel, messages of varying lengths and in stable but adaptable form, were in circulation in Ephraim and Judah.

How Prophets Spoke

One might then imagine the generation of the scrolls issuing from a four-stage process.

First, the prophets delivered oral messages of varying length, from a couple of lines to the extensive dimensions of the pronouncement beginning in Amos 1:3 and stretching well into chapter 2.

The bulk of this preaching by the prophets took poetic form and can be compared with the poetry that appears elsewhere in the First Testament. Prophetic poetry is less regular in form than the poetry of Proverbs and Job; the Psalms come in between. Perhaps it was more often orally composed and less deliberate. But most of the material in the six scrolls does compare with the poetry elsewhere in the First Testament in dividing naturally into lines averaging about six words, though the difference between the way Hebrew and English work means that the lines involve more words in English: “A lion has roared” (Amos 3:8), for instance, is only two words in Hebrew. While the average length of a line may be about six words, each colon can be two, three, or four words—or rather, two, three, or four stresses, because the Masoretic Hebrew text (MT) can hyphenate two words so that between them they have only one stress. So a line can comprise between four and eight Hebrew words or stresses. Occasionally a colon may contain only one stress or as many as five stresses, which is then also a mark of emphasis (or a point at which I am

tempted to rework MT’s punctuation). Lines with short (two-stress) cola, especially in their second half, often suggest anguish or “agitation” rather than joy. And phrases such as “Yahweh has said this” commonly don’t count within the meter.

A poetic line then commonly divides into two halves or cola; along with the characteristic length of lines, this arrangement is a further formal sign that the material is verse rather than prose. Many such “bicola” manifest “synthetic parallelism” whereby the second colon restates the first in some way while also nuancing it or adding to it. In other bicola the second colon expands on or completes the first. Some lines divide into three cola (they are tricola); such lines characteristically come at significant points in the text such as the beginning and end of subsections or other points of emphasis. MT’s verse divisions imply the existence of many other tricola, but my suspicious hermeneutic questions many of them, and I look to see whether the verse division is open to being reworked (see, e.g., Hosea 2:10–11 [12–13]). Some lines are not self-contained, and/or their cola do not really relate to each other because the line’s main relationship is with the previous line (e.g., Joel 1:11, 18); in other words, the two lines form a tetracolon. Sometimes several lines may belong together in this way (e.g., Hosea 2:2–3 [4–5]; and a number of times in Amos). And sometimes parallelism works between lines rather than between cola. Hebrew syntax in poetry also differs from syntax in prose. It makes less use of the little words that facilitate immediate communication in prose, such as the object marker, the relative particle, and the definite article; and it makes less use of the waw-consecutive.

The formal characteristics of poetry apply less to Hosea, Amos, and Micah than to the other three scrolls. Indeed, the prophets themselves may not have thought in terms of a difference between what we call poetry and what we call prose, which might link with the way it’s sometimes hard to be sure whether to lay out the material as prose or as poetry; there is prosaic poetry and poetic prose. Hebrew manuscripts do not make the distinction. The prophets’ diction is characterized less by formal features such as rhythm and the syntactical characteristics we have noted and more by their fondness for paronomasia, which suggests links between things that might not seem to be linked, and their concentrated use of imagery.¹⁰ Their diction can also mean that they speak as Yahweh’s mouthpiece and therefore speak in the first person as they

9. Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 564. In this first reference to the monumental Andersen and Freedman commentaries on Hosea, Amos, and Micah, I am especially glad to acknowledge Francis Andersen, who after his retirement from New College, Berkeley, but while still in the midst of writing for the Anchor Bible, kept the David Allan Hubbard chair at Fuller Seminary warm for me before I arrived in Pasadena and hosted a welcome barbecue for our family in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains before he left to get back to Australia, where at the time of writing he still lives in his nineties.

10. See further the section “Poetry and Rhetoric in Hosea” below.

utter what “I,” Yahweh, say—because their words are Yahweh’s. But they also know that they stand between Yahweh and the people and can thus speak of Yahweh in the third person, as “he.” And they can move easily between the two ways of speaking. It might also be natural for them to speak of Yahweh as “he” when they are consciously formulating something themselves rather than having a sense of receiving actual words from Yahweh. Conversely, they move easily between speaking to Ephraim or Judah in the second person, as “you,” and speaking about Ephraim or Judah in the third person (e.g., Hosea 2:6 [8]), and move between speaking of, for instance, Ephraim or Samaria in the singular (as “he,” “it,” or “she”) and in the plural (as “they”). Yet further, speakers in the First Testament can refer to themselves in the third person, which allows some distancing and a broader angle of perception than obtains when one speaks in the first person.¹¹ Kings can speak in this way as an aspect of royal style, and Yahweh can do so (e.g., Hosea 2:20 [22]; 3:1; 4:10); I take Isa. 52:13–53:12 as an example of a prophet doing so. Amos 3:3–8 is close to being another example, and although I take Amos 7:10–17 as material formulated about Amos by someone else, it might be Amos speaking about himself. All these varying forms of diction have different rhetorical effects. Ancient and modern translations often rework the text to make the prophets more consistent, but another significance of the differences is that they can illustrate how “*fractures of syntax . . . are metaphors for the disintegration of the order of the world.*”¹²

How Words Spoken Became a Message Written

Stage one in the generation of a prophetic scroll, then, is that prophets speak and they or people who are convinced by them remember their individual messages and/or put individual messages into writing. Thus, stage two is that the prophets’ collected words find their way into writing.

The Latter Prophets are often called the Writing Prophets, but they were preachers, and they do not refer to writing. Our six scrolls do not tell us how and why they came into being, but Isa. 8:16 and Jer. 36 describe how Isaiah and Jeremiah took action to have their messages transcribed. Like Jer. 26 with its mention of Micah, the enthralling and entertaining story in Jer. 36 may not be a simple transcript of an event, but as a story it evidently provided an account that would not seem historically outrageous. It provides a way of thinking about how Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Micah could have commissioned the compilation of scrolls containing their messages; the eighth

11. Cf. Leung Lai, *Through the “I”-Window*.

12. Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma*, 281, italics original.

century may have been the time when writing scrolls as resources for teaching (as opposed to writing inscriptions or letters or records) began in Israel.¹³

Further, it wouldn't be surprising if this process involved some structuring, rethinking, reformulation, and expansion of the prophets' messages (as opposed to a simple transcription in random or in chronological order), and that it is the results of such work that we have in the scrolls that bear their names. All five manifest some structure and some correlation of sayings that might originally have been separate (as Jonah is a story rather than a collection of messages, its origin raises different questions). We can picture Hosea and Amos reaching a point where (not least in light of the rejection of their preaching) they dictated a collection of their messages in a coherent order to a friendly Ephraimite who could transcribe them. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, they would take this action in order to get their message into writing against the day when Yahweh did what they had said (at which time their message and they would be vindicated), and/or in order to fix it in writing and thereby make its fulfillment even more certain, and/or in order to allow the written form of the message to confront the people it concerned, and/or to allow it to speak to other people. Such a move would make it possible for a record of their message to reach Jerusalem, the fall of Samaria having vindicated much of it.

The nearest we get to an explicit indication of a prophet's involvement in bringing one of these six scrolls into being is the resumptive one-word expression "so I said" in Mic. 3:1. The Micah scroll gives the impression that much of Micah's messages comprised a smallish number of the "verses" into which they were eventually divided, but that they were then assembled not in random order but in related sequences. Micah 3 links onto Mic. 2, and Micah's "so I said" looks like his link between these two chapters in the scroll.¹⁴ The process whereby spoken words became a written message that had been dictated to someone who transcribed them could provide a further aspect of the explanation for some of the scrolls' jerkiness in moving between first, second, and third person, between singular and plural, and between one manner of speech when addressing Ephraim or Judah and a different manner of speech when speaking about Ephraim or Judah to followers and potential readers.

There's no reason to think that the scrolls include all the messages that each of these prophets ever delivered or all the messages God ever gave them, and it seems unlikely that, say, Obadiah simply delivered his one message and that was it. Nor is there any reason to think that the preaching that lies behind these short scrolls took place over only a short period, whereas the preaching of the Major Prophets extended over decades. Maybe, say, Micah preached more than Isaiah. What we have in each prophetic scroll is a collection of the material that this prophet and/or his followers thought was really

13. See, e.g., Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 162–63.

14. Cf. Wolff, *Micah*, 95.

important for the future and not just for the moment and that the community also recognized in a way that eventually led to their being sacred scriptures.

How Words Written Became a Message Affirmed

The opening words in this commentary are not mine; they are a preface by its editors. The same preface will appear in all the volumes in the series to which my book belongs. In Hosea, the opening words are, “Yahweh’s message that came to Hosea ben Be’eri in the time of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the time of Jeroboam ben Joash, king of Israel.” Prefaces expressed in similar words come at the beginning of Amos and Micah (and Isaiah and Jeremiah). The similarity plus the third-person form of the prefaces suggest that they resemble the preface to my book in being the work of the people who “published” the scrolls and had a set way of introducing one, though it is then adapted to match each individual book.

In scholarly parlance these people are known as the Deuteronomists, a term used to designate theologians who also made a key contribution to the development of the books from Deuteronomy to Kings. One could call them the scrolls’ editors, but editors may not care much about or agree with what they edit, and these people believed that the prophets’ words were important, not just for their own day but for the people of God in the future. They wanted to make sure that their messages didn’t get lost. They were more like these prophets’ disciples (Isa. 8:16 uses that word), even if they didn’t live in the prophets’ own day. In these prefaces they give guidance to the scrolls’ potential readers about how to read them, guidance about hermeneutics. To call them “disciples” is to give a name to a role rather than to identify a group of people.

It was presumably through the taking of the collected messages of Hosea and Amos to Jerusalem that they gained prefaces beginning with references to *Judahite* kings. Taking the messages to Judah implies the awareness that they were of significance beyond the particular context of their delivery in Ephraim, and it evidently carried conviction in Judah. The process whereby the Holy Spirit inspired the scrolls then included enabling the prophets or their followers to see the implications of their message for Judah and to incorporate some references to those implications. That awareness of their significance received further expression in the scrolls’ finding a place in Judah’s collection of materials that it hung on to as messages from Yahweh that were of continuing importance—in other words, the collection that came to be called the Scriptures.

In Hosea 1, Amos 7, and Jonah (and in Isaiah, and much more extensively in Jeremiah) the scrolls speak at some length in the third person about their prophets. Such passages indicate a more substantial way in which their followers were involved in the scrolls’ generation. My working hypothesis is

that Hosea 1–3 as a unit issued from the work of Hosea’s followers and was designed to introduce the main body of Hosea’s message in a way that highlighted and developed its promissory aspect (perhaps in light of the message’s vindication by the fall of Samaria), while chapters 4–14 are more or less the result of Hosea himself having his work put into writing. Amos 7 includes a story about Amos apparently told by someone else, as well as Amos’s own accounts of dealings Yahweh had with him, both of which complement the messages that his scroll also preserves. Jonah simply comprises a story about the prophet, though it would be paradoxical to call its author a disciple or follower of the prophet.

While Hosea, Amos, Jonah, and Micah themselves belong to the eighth century, this fact carries no necessary implications regarding the time when the scrolls bearing their names came into existence. The Isaiah scroll indicates that a prophet’s disciples could continue a process of reformulation and expansion over several centuries; the original compiling of a prophet’s work might be only the beginning of such a process. I would see (some of) Isaiah’s followers (mostly people who never met him) also as prophets, extending his message by adding further prophecies inspired by his message as well as providing information about him. One function of such prophetic work would be to make more explicit that the broadly threatening nature of the prophet’s words was not the end of what Yahweh had to say; the fulfillment of the threats opened up the possibility of Yahweh acting to restore his people. Something similar might be true about the shorter prophets, though there are not the concrete indications of it such as appear in the Isaiah scroll.

How Messages Affirmed Became the Scrolls We Know

Over the past century and a half, Western scholarship has put much energy into seeking to trace the process whereby the scrolls developed. In the case of Hosea, Amos, and Micah, this might involve the expansion of the original collection of their work in the time of Josiah at the end of the seventh century, after the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century, and then in the Persian period. Different processes (perhaps less complex) can be envisaged for Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. But one scholar has commented that the “ongoing scholarly debate on the emergence and composition of the book of Micah . . . has not yet reached a consensus,”¹⁵ and that comment could also be made about the other scrolls. Further, the word “yet” is a giveaway. There is no reason to think there ever will be a consensus.

One reason is that the focus on tracing the development of the material and linking it with different historical contexts comes from an agenda that

15. Becking, “Micah in Neo-Assyrian Light,” 111.

emerged from modernity. That fact in itself is not a fault; agendas from readers' contexts can be a way into a text's own agenda. But in this case, the modern agenda obscures as much as it illumines. These six scrolls do not overtly draw attention to contexts other than those of the prophet whose name appears in them. They incorporate no data to compare with the Isaiah scroll's messages referring to the fall of Jerusalem as an event long past and to the Medo-Persian king Cyrus as a figure of the present, and thus these messages more or less explicitly declare that they come from a time later than Isaiah ben Amoz. Much scholarly study has focused on discovering which parts of the scrolls are "authentic,"¹⁶ which go back to the prophet whose name appears at the beginning of the book. If it were possible, discovering the answer to that question would be an interesting exercise. It is not possible; but it is the scroll as a whole that is authentic.

If our own context gives us a primary concern with historical questions and questions about the text's development, we are free to search the text for answers to those questions, but we then resemble people reading Shakespeare for information on the development of the text and on English history and thus miss the play's own agenda. Focusing on questions about the process seems to have issued not in answers but only in academic debate and in conclusions that do not carry conviction with other people; the scholar who makes that observation about consensus in connection with Micah continues, "I therefore feel free to offer my personal view."¹⁷ The differences of opinion about the process reflect differences in personality and faith on the part of scholars (e.g., a more conservative or a more adventurous instinct) and changes in scholarly fashion, more than hard evidence within the scrolls.

Further, while some references to Judah in Hosea and Amos may be glosses to an earlier version of these scrolls, there seems no advantage in hypothesizing more thoroughgoing processes of redaction. In writing this commentary, then, I have submitted such theories to Occam's Razor, and I deal with the text as we have it. This is not so different from the stance implicitly commended by a scholar who especially emphasizes the creative work on the scrolls undertaken in the Persian period but who nevertheless observes that Mic. 1:1, in introducing its scroll to its readers, "asks them to associate the entire book with the figure of Micah the Morashtite."¹⁸ Micah 1:1 "places *readers* of the entire book in the reigns of the kings that are cited therein."¹⁹ The point can be extended to the other five scrolls. The Hosea, Amos, and Micah scrolls invite their readers to imagine themselves hearing their messages as the preaching of these prophets in Ephraim in the time of Jeroboam

16. See, e.g., the comment of Soggin (*Amos*, 55) on Amos 3:1b and of Andersen and Freedman (*Micah*, 332) on Mic. 2:12–13.

17. Becking, "Micah in Neo-Assyrian Light," 111.

18. Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 17.

19. Fretheim, *Hosea–Micah*, 205, italics original.

ben Joash or in Judah in the time of Uzziah, somewhat as the movie *Bridge of Spies* invites moviegoers to imagine themselves in the United States and in Germany during the Cold War. While I shall occasionally note points where the prophets' followers may have been inspired to expand on or reapply their master's work, I shall mostly follow that invitation.

A related consideration applies to the Twelve Prophets as a collection. The heading "The Twelve" both holds these shorter prophets together and recognizes that they are distinct entities, each with its own preface. Possibly the expanding of the words of the prophets who are named in the prefaces has generated further links between the scrolls and contributed to the twelve scrolls becoming one unit. But here, too, tracing the process involves building hypotheses on limited data, and the eventual compilers of each scroll (e.g., of Hosea or Joel) have presented it as a discrete unit over against the material out of which it was compiled and over against the other scrolls with which it came to be associated.²⁰ I shall pay more attention to the individual scrolls than to possible links between them.

The Text

The oldest complete or nearly complete Hebrew manuscripts of the Twelve Prophets are the three Masoretic manuscripts from about the tenth century AD: the Cairo, Aleppo (lacking Amos 8:12–Mic. 5:1 [5:2 Eng.]), and Leningrad Codices, which are named after the cities where they were long kept. I refer to them as MT^C, MT^A, and MT^L.²¹ There are much earlier fragments of these prophets among the Qumran scrolls (4QXII, or 4QMinor Prophets)²² and a fragmentary manuscript of the Twelve Prophets (including much of Joel to Micah) dating from the Second Jewish Revolt in AD 132–35, which was found among discoveries from Wadi Murabba'at, ten miles south of Qumran and is known as Mur 88.²³ From the same period as the Qumran scrolls, there is a fragmentary manuscript of a Greek translation of the Twelve found a little further south in Naḥal (Wadi) Ḥever and known as 8ḤevXIIgr.²⁴

Oddly, we have manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint translation of the Twelve Prophets that are older than the Masoretic Hebrew codices. From about AD 350 come the Sinai Codex (long kept in St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai) and the Vatican Codex (in the Vatican Library), and from about AD 450 the Alexandrian Codex (long kept in Alexandria, traditionally where the

20. See, e.g., the arguments of Ben Zvi, "Twelve Prophetic Books or 'The Twelve'"; Landy, "Three Sides of a Coin."

21. See Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*.

22. See Fuller, "Twelve."

23. See Milik, "Rouleau des Douze Prophètes"; Fuller, "Twelve."

24. See Tov, Kraft, and Parsons, *Greek Minor Prophets Scroll*.

translation was made). We also have a manuscript of Jerome’s translation into Latin, the Vulgate, which is older than the Masoretic manuscripts. The oldest manuscripts of Targum Jonathan, the Aramaic translation of the Prophets, are not as old as the Masoretic manuscripts.

It is customary to treat the Masoretic Text as the starting point for translating and studying the First Testament, and I have followed that custom, though sometimes it is hard to make sense of the Masoretic Text, especially in Hosea but also in Micah. Jerome comments that you need the Holy Spirit’s aid in interpreting all the prophets, but especially Hosea.²⁵ Possibly its text has suffered more from accidental alteration, or possibly its difficulties reflect its background in Ephraim with its distinctive dialect rather than in Judah,²⁶ or possibly they indicate that the prophet-poet Hosea spoke more allusively than (say) his contemporary Amos who worked in Ephraim but was himself a Judahite.

It seems hazardous to assume both that the difficulties in the text do result from accidental alteration and that we are in a position not only to identify such alterations but also to correct them. I remind my students that 10 percent of what I say is wrong; the trouble is, I don’t know which 10 percent—but that it’s likely not to be the 10 percent that they think. Perhaps 10 percent (or more likely 1 percent) of the Masoretic work is wrong, but I don’t think we can be confident about identifying it correctly, and putting right what we think is wrong is likely to generate a text that is further away from (say) Hosea than the one we start with.²⁷ I therefore nearly always work with the text as it appears in MT, though I note many interesting renderings in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the Targum.

Hosea through Micah and the New Testament

The NT includes a number of direct quotations from Hosea through Micah and many other allusions to them or reflections of their language. The following are the quotations and the clearest allusions (as listed in the marginal notes of the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament).

| | | |
|-------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Hosea | 1:6, 9 | 1 Pet. 2:10 |
| | 1:10; 2:1, 23 | Rom. 9:25–26 |
| | 6:6 | Matt. 9:13; 12:7 |
| | 9:7 | Luke 21:22 |
| | 10:8 | Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:16 |
| | 10:12 | 2 Cor. 9:10 |

25. Jerome, *In Osee prophetam* (PL 25, col. 815a); cf. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, 15.

26. See, e.g., Macintosh, *Hosea*, liii–lxi, 585–93.

27. Cf. McComiskey, “Hos 9:13,” 155–56.

| | | |
|--------------|-------------|---|
| | 11:1 | Matt. 2:15 |
| | 13:14 | 1 Cor. 15:55 |
| | 14:2 | Heb. 13:15 |
| Joel | 1:6; 2:4–5 | Rev. 9:7–9 |
| | 2:10–11 | Rev. 6:17; 9:2 |
| | 2:28–32 | Acts 2:17–21; Rev. 6:12; Rom. 10:13 |
| | 3:13 [4:13] | Mark 4:29; Rev. 14:15, 18–19 |
| | 3:18 [4:18] | Rev. 22:1 |
| Amos | 3:7 | Rev. 10:7 |
| | 5:25–27 | Acts 7:42–43 |
| | 9:11–12 | Acts 15:16–17 |
| Jonah | 1:17 | Matt. 12:39–41; 16:1–4; Luke 11:29–32 |
| Micah | 5:2 [1] | Matt. 2:6; John 7:42 |
| | 7:6 | Matt. 10:21, 35, 36; Mark 13:12; Luke 12:53 |
| | 7:20 | Luke 1:55 |

These quotations and allusions issue from the NT’s treating the Prophets as a resource in connection with questions it needs to think about. Thus the quotations reflect the NT’s agenda and reflect the Holy Spirit’s inspiring the NT writers to find significance in the prophetic text that is different from what the Spirit was communicating to the people of God when he originally inspired the text. The first passages in the list, for instance, use Hosea’s declarations about Yahweh’s intentions for Ephraim to illumine God’s intentions regarding a people of God drawn from all the nations. In this commentary we will consider these passages as they arise in the text of the six scrolls, but we will mostly focus on what the Holy Spirit was originally seeking to communicate to Israel and on the ongoing theological significance of that message for us.

Christians often assume that the key to understanding the relationship of the First Testament to Jesus and to the NT is that the First Testament makes promises about the Messiah that are fulfilled in Jesus, and our six prophets do include one promise of a coming ruler for the throne of David (Mic. 5:2 [1]). But the fact that the Hebrew word *māšîaḥ* doesn’t appear in the six scrolls is a sign that their focus lies elsewhere. The promise of the Messiah is not the key to understanding their relationship with Jesus and with the NT.

The main focus of our six prophets lies on a declaration that God is going to bring catastrophic disaster upon the people of God because of their wrongdoing, and upon the nations as a whole. There are two crucial qualifications to this declaration. On one hand, whereas one can sometimes get the impression that the disaster means the actual end of the people of God, this impression is evidently false, in that these prophets also talk about disaster as not being total and not being final. And on the other hand, whereas one can sometimes get

the impression that the disaster is inevitable, this impression is also evidently false, since they also indicate that, on turning back to God, a nation or city will find that God relents of the intention to bring calamity.

The theological background to the declaration and to its qualifications lies in the fact that Yahweh is on one hand the God of grace and truth, of compassion and forgiveness, but is also on the other hand the God who attends to wrongdoing and does not simply remit punishment. Those descriptions go back to Exod. 34:6–7. Our prophets reflect Yahweh’s self-description there, while adding that he can relent of bringing disaster (Hosea 2:19–20 [21–22]; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18–20)—as Exod. 32:1–14 also declares. The NT presupposes this theology and has nothing new to add to it, but in telling the story of Jesus, the NT reports an epoch-making embodiment of it. The many and varied ways in which God spoke through the prophets are now complemented, not by some new truths but by a new embodiment of the truth in God’s Son (Heb. 1:1).

The NT presupposes that God indeed brought calamity on his people and that they still live with the aftermath. But it declares that he is now restoring his people, bringing about the fulfillment of the promises of restoration that the Prophets proclaim. Yet it also declares that the pattern whereby God also acts in judgment upon his people is by no means finished, either for the Jewish people or for the expanded version of the people of God composed of Jews and gentiles who believe in Jesus. The NT further indicates that the catastrophe the Prophets announce for worldly powers is also the designated fate of the superpower of its day, which will fall as did the preceding superpowers in fulfillment of the Prophets’ warnings.

Resources for Text and Interpretation

I like the account J. Gerald Janzen once gave of how he goes about interpretation, formulated in connection with Hosea:

I characteristically try to approach a text with no specific posture or strategy, but with a sort of general alert emptiness . . . in which the sum total of what I know about things sleeps in readiness within me. The general intention is to allow the text to set the agenda by raising questions or posing issues or opening perspectives through the specific elements of the text which claim my special interest. When such interest has been awakened, I pursue it in whatever fashion, or with whatever combination of resources of understanding, seems to offer promise of illuminating the text. The control on such a pursuit is, of course, the text itself.²⁸

28. Janzen, “Metaphor and Reality,” 7–8.

Our resources for understanding how Jews interpreted the Prophets begin with references in the Qumran documents and in the NT, and then with the interpretive translation in the Targum of the Prophets, which comes from sometime after the fall of Jerusalem—though its origins “remain shrouded in heavy mist.”²⁹

The period during which the Septuagint codices were copied was also the era of the first surviving Christian commentaries, and I have used the commentaries on the Twelve Prophets by Jerome the great translator,³⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Cyril of Alexandria, who were all born in the fourth century and died in the fifth. I have also occasionally noted references to the six prophets in other church fathers. Their writings have further significance for their quotations from the other Greek translations of the First Testament dating from the second century—Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus. Like the Septuagint, they are interesting for the way they interpret passages as well as for text-critical purposes.

The period during which the Masoretic codices were copied is also the era from which come the commentaries by Jewish scholars such as Rashi (R. Shlomo Yitzhaki), Abraham Ibn Ezra, and David Qimchi (Radak), who were immortalized through being included in *Miqraot Gedolot*, the “Rabbinic Bible” (i.e., the Hebrew Bible plus the Targum and some classic rabbinic commentaries).

The sixteenth-century Reformation was the next creative era of commentary making, and I have consulted the works of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and some of the Puritans on the six prophets. I also refer to the work of some modern commentators, to some modern translations (especially the NRSV, NJPS, and NIV), and to the treatment of the six prophets in Karl Barth.

Modern books commonly refer to the difference between the chapter divisions in English Bibles and in the Hebrew Bible, by which they mean the chapter divisions in printed Hebrew Bibles. Although books refer to these Hebrew divisions as “MT,” they do not go back to the Masoretes; they are a variant on the system in printed English Bibles, which goes back to later in the medieval period. The Masoretes themselves mark divisions in the text by leaving spaces at the end of what we might call sections and subsections, marked in printed Hebrew Bibles by the Hebrew letter *P* or *S*, and I have paid attention to these markers in seeking to discern divisions in the text. In origin these Masoretic divisions are much older than the Masoretes’ own work; equivalent markers appear in Qumran manuscripts in the form of a space left open at the end of a line followed by a new line (hence *P* stands for *petuah*, “open”) and a space in the middle of a line followed by the continuing text (hence *S* stands for *setumah*, “closed”).

29. Cathcart and Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 1.

30. See Scheck, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets: Jerome*.