# Twelve Books, One Theology?[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Twelve Prophets comprise twelve works each bearing the name of a different prophet, but in some contexts they have been treated as one book alongside Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; in length, they are comparable to Ezekiel. Thus in manuscripts from Qumran and from Nahal Hever, they come on one scroll. In Josephus (*Against Apion* 1:8), they count as one book out of the twenty-two that comprise the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and in the Talmud (Baba Batra 14b) as one of the twenty-four books. In the 1990s there developed a scholarly interest in understanding them as one book that might reflect a process of mutual redaction.[[2]](#footnote-2) In what way do they hold together in substance?

The other prophetic books point to three possible models for thinking about the theology of a prophetic scroll. Ezekiel is the nearest to constituting the deposit of one stream of religious, ethical, and theological thinking, though the Gog and Magog chapters especially suggest expansion from another stream. The Book of Isaiah has a consistent understanding of God and Israel, but chapters 24 – 27 and 40 – 55 and 56 – 66 nuance it further than Gog and Magog do for Ezekiel. The Book of Jeremiah is more complex again, so multi-hued that it has been thought not capable of being read as a unity. It can assert both that disaster is inevitable and that escape is possible, that disaster is deserved and that it is to be protested, that disaster will be the end and that restoration will come about.

While this diversity in Jeremiah might reflect a redactional process whereby different voices have added their perspectives to Jeremiah’s, it appears to me more likely that it reflects the breadth of Jeremiah’s own thinking. Either way, the diverse material has become one scroll. And Jeremiah provides a plausible model for thinking about the Twelve in their diversity. If they came into being by a redactional process, then process and end result have something in common with Jeremiah. But the Twelve remain also separate works within their more substantial whole, and they came together by a more serendipitous process than the deliberate one that generated the one Jeremiah scroll (even in its two major recensions, MT and LXX).

The Megillot provide another model for thinking about the compilation and theology of the Twelve. Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Qohelet, and Esther were of independent origin, but they came to be treated as a collection. That development has led to the possibility of asking about theological links between them. In some ways, the Megillot are further away from each other than the Twelve are. Their collocation happened only in the Middle Ages; they are an adoptive family. In some ways they are closer. They have theological features in common: they have God working behind the scenes if at all, make no reference to the great story of Yahweh’s dealings with Israel, and focus more on everyday life. If the Twelve are a family, while naturally they do not share all the family resemblances, they do have overlapping features. One might also understand the formulating of a theology of Jeremiah, of the Megillot, or of the Twelve, as a construction project. Given the diversity of the rocks that they comprise, what building might they form together – something greater than the parts but doing justice to them all? In considering the theology of the Twelve here, I look at their portrayal of Yahweh in light of their attachment to his self-description in Exodus 34:6-7, at the complexity of the way they affirm both Yahweh’s attachment to Israel and his being the God of all the nations, at the theme of Yahweh’s Day, at their promises concerning David, and (in the most overt exercise of rock assembly) at a spirituality of sacredness that might emerge from them.

## Gracious but Not Too Easygoing

At Sinai Yahweh announces himself as

God compassionate and gracious, long-tempered, vast in commitment and truthfulness, preserving commitment toward the thousands, carrying waywardness, rebellion, and wrongdoing; he certainly doesn’t treat people as free of guilt, attending to parents’ waywardness in connection with children and with grandchildren, with thirds and with fourths. (Exod 34:6-7)

Elements of this description of Yahweh recur in the Twelve.[[3]](#footnote-3)

I shall marry you to me permanently,

marry you to me with faithfulness and with the exercise of authority,

With commitment and with compassion,

marry you to me with truth. (Hosea 2:19-20 [21-22])

Tear your mind, not your clothes,

and turn back to Yahweh your God,

Because he is gracious and compassionate,

long tempered and vast in commitment,

and relenting about something bad. (Joel 2:13)

Oh, Yahweh, isn’t this what I said when I was in my country?... I knew that you’re a God gracious, compassionate, long-tempered, vast in commitment, and relenting about something bad. (Jonah 4:2)

Who is a God like you, carrying waywardness,

passing over rebellion for the remainder of his domain?

He doesn’t keep hold of his anger permanently,

because he delights in commitment.

When he has compassion on us again, he’ll trample on our wayward acts;

he’ll throw all our wrongdoings into the depths of the sea.

You will show truthfulness to Jacob,

commitment to Abraham. (Micah 7:18-20)

Yahweh is a God who is passionate and takes redress;

Yahweh takes redress and is a possessor of wrath.

Yahweh takes redress on his adversaries,

maintains it toward his enemies.

Yahweh is long-tempered but big in energy;

he certainly doesn’t treat people as free of guilt. (Nahum 1:2-3)

Although Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel don’t directly reflect Exodus 34:6-7, a different formulation implying a similar theology appears in Isaiah 28:21:

Yahweh will arise as on Mount Perisim,

he will be astir as in Gibeon Vale,

To do his deed – strange is his deed,

to perform his service – foreign is his service.

Lamentations 3:31-33 has its own formulation implying it:

Because the Lord

doesn’t reject permanently.

Rather he brings suffering, but has compassion,

in the vastness of his acts of commitment.

Because it’s not from his heart that he humbles

and brings suffering to human beings.

Yahweh’s self-revelation at Sinai, mirrored in the Twelve and paralleled in Isaiah and Lamentations, affirms that his character combines graciousness and sternness, but also that the two aspects are not equally balanced in Yahweh. Graciousness is closer to his heart than sternness. In Exodus 34 he speaks of being compassionate (the noun is the plural of the word for a womb, so it suggests motherly), gracious (acting on the basis of generosity and favor for reasons that come from himself rather than because of the recipient’s deserve), long-tempered (rather than taking quick punitive action), vast in commitment (faithful in a way that persists despite the object’s abandoning faithfulness), vast in truthfulness (staying true to his word), and carrying offenses (forgiving rather than requiring the wrongdoer to pay for them). Yet Yahweh does hold people responsible for their offenses and lets these offenses have a negative effect on their family, though he places a limit on how long that happens compared with the long-lasting nature of his commitment. I assume that the tension between the two statements implies that the compassion and grace look for a turning from waywardness; it is when people decline to do so that he attends to their wrongdoing.

The prophets use the Exodus formulation in ways that can be creative and subtle, even droll. Yahweh’s self-revelation explained what had happened at Sinai and made a promise regarding how things will be in the future. In Hosea and Micah, the promise relates to a threat to act again as he did at Sinai; this chastisement will not be the end of the story. In Joel, the promise opens up the possibility of Yahweh preventing the invasion(s) that Joel has portrayed. Jonah takes up the formulation with irony, in a way fitting his story: he knows Yahweh has this character and is happy for Yahweh to relate to Israel and to him on that basis, but doesn’t wish to see compassion extended to an oppressive superpower. Nahum also takes up the formulation with subtlety and irony in relation to the superpower that is oppressing Judah: while Jonah objects to the formulation, Nahum turns it upside down, and with further irony, whereas Yahweh critiques Jonah for his attitude to Nineveh, Nahum reassures people that Yahweh will take redress on Nineveh.

The other books among the Twelve imply the same theology as Exodus 34:6-7 even though not reflecting the formulation. Amos urges Yahweh to carry Ephraim in its waywardness, and Yahweh relents of action he had announced, though while he is thus long-tempered, he eventually acts (7:1-9). Then he promises eventually to restore Ephraim, as he does through Hosea when he does reflect the formulation. Yahweh’s chastising but then restoring is another way Yahweh squares the circle of acting in character by being gracious but not too easygoing.[[4]](#footnote-4) Zephaniah works in a similar way to Amos. Obadiah’s words about Edom parallel Nahum’s about Nineveh. Habakkuk’s words about Judah and Babylon compare with Hosea and Amos on one hand and with Nahum and Obadiah on the other, and Habakkuk appeals to Yahweh to keep in mind compassion (to Judah and Babylon?) (3:2). Yahweh tells Zechariah that he is impassioned and compassionate towards Jerusalem, will remove the country’s waywardness, and will be God for Israel in truthfulness and faithfulness (1:14, 16; 3:9; 8:2, 8; 10:6); and Zechariah talks about Yahweh’s anger with the present generation’s parents/ancestors (1:2; 8:14).

## Yahweh Got Israel Up from Egypt and the Philistines from Caphtor

In explaining how God had always intended to draw the nations into acknowledging him, Paul quotes Hosea 1:10:

I will call “not-my-people” my people, and “not-loved” loved. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” there they will be called “children of the living God.” (Rom 9:25-26)

Amusingly, Paul is turning a promise about Ephraim (whom Yahweh is about to cast off) into a promise about the nations. Paul changes the words’ reference, but does so in a way that matches the perspective of the Scriptures as a whole even though making this particular promise denote something different from what God was saying through Hosea. It happens in many New Testament quotations from the Scriptures. One can thus be relaxed about this inspired reapplication of God’s promise; many scriptural texts speak of Yahweh’s intention that the nations should come to recognize him along with Israel, even though Hosea 1 isn’t one of them. Paul’s reapplication of Hosea 1 encapsulates a scriptural insight, an insight that is one aspect of the vision of the Twelve.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Its neatest articulation comes as the promise that brings to a climax the first half of Zechariah.

Peoples and inhabitants of many towns will yet come, and the inhabitants of one will go to one another saying, “Let’s go, let’s go to seek Yahweh’s goodwill and seek Yahweh Armies. I myself intend to go, yes.” Many peoples will come, numerous nations, to seek Yahweh Armies in Jerusalem and to seek Yahweh’s goodwill…. In those days, when ten people from all the nations’ tongues will take hold, they will take hold of the hem of a Judahite individual’s coat, saying, “We want to go with you, because we’ve heard that God is with you.” (Zech 8:20-23)

Like many promises of this kind in both Testaments, these words constitute an encouragement to the people of God itself, but they can fulfill that function only insofar as they truly affirm that Yahweh intends the nations to recognize him. But Zechariah combines this vision with a promise of a kind that appears in other prophets, that Yahweh will put down imperial powers (1:18-21 [2:1-4]). Whereas Isaiah 40 – 55 sees Cyrus as Yahweh’s anointed and Yahweh’s shepherd, and points to Persia as Yahweh’s means of fulfilling his promises (as 2 Chron 36:20-23 and Ezra 1:1-2 confirm), Zechariah cannot rest with that assumption a couple of decades later, even though (or precisely because) he opens by noting that Darius is king.

A related but different double perspective on the nations appears in Amos. Amos almost begins (1:3 – 2:3) by declaring that Yahweh intends to act against Ephraim’s neighbors for committing what we might call war crimes. Like us when we use that category, and like Paul in Romans, Amos assumes that the nations know the basics about right and wrong. They don’t need the Torah to tell them that enslaving people, tearing open pregnant women, and dishonoring someone’s dead body are unethical. Acting thus, the nations ignore awarenesses they have as human beings. Obadiah extends the argument regarding Edom in particular, which knows that success and illustriousness are dangerous, but can deceive itself, and knows that brotherhood imposes obligations, but has ignored them (3, 10-14). Nahum knows that Nineveh is guilty for its bloodshed and for the plunder it has gained through its killing operations (3:1), and can assume that Nineveh does not need a special revelation to establish this guilt. In a paradoxical way, Jonah makes the same assumption about Nineveh.

But the Jonah story indeed knows that this assumption is not the totality of Yahweh’s attitude to Nineveh. Yahweh’s grace applies to Nineveh, too. And Amos almost ends with a surprising declaration about two of the peoples with whom he began, that Yahweh had got the Philistines and Syrians to their present homes from their original locations (9:7). In terms of God’s sovereignty, God’s provision, God’s expectations, and God’s chastisement, the nations and Israel are in the same position. Here, too, Amos makes his points to remind Israel about facts concerning itself, but the validity of his argument depends on the truth of those points about Yahweh’s relationship with the nations. Hosea argues in a similar way when he indicts the inhabitants of the earth (which I take to be the meaning of *hā’āreṣ* in 4:1-3, not the land), to entrap Ephraim for an indictment that will follow. Micah 1:2-5 and Zephaniah 2:4 – 3:7 work in the same way.

Even nearer the end of Amos, Yahweh takes up his opening comments about other nations and declares that Israel will gain possession of the remains of those nations over which his name had been called (9:12); the logic parallels that off the Torah and Joshua, that Israel finds collateral gain from Yahweh’s attending to the wrongdoing of nations into whose territory Israel can enter possession (the verb is *yāraš*, as in Deuteronomy and Joshua). Yahweh specifically mentions Edom, the focus in Obadiah, which follows in MT. The background to Obadiah is Edom’s takeover of Judahite territory in the sixth century; Yahweh will crush Edom in order to restore Judah. In Nahum, similarly, Nineveh is doomed both because of its violence and plunder, and because Judah as Yahweh’s people is Nineveh’s victim. Further, for Israel there is another aspect to these declarations. Hosea recurrently names Assyria and Egypt as the objects of Ephraim’s false trust. The nations are not to be Israel’s resources for support and defense. They are doomed.

A double attitude to the nations reappears in Micah. The promises in 4:1-5 appear in a variant form in Isaiah 2:2-5; we do not know whether they are original to either prophet or whether Yahweh gave them to an anonymous prophet and they found their way independently into the two books. (So by “Micah” I mean Micah the book rather than necessarily Micah the person, and something similar applies to my other references to the books that make up the Twelve). The promises follow an indictment of the Judahite leaders.

Because of you,

Zion – as open country it will be plowed,

Jerusalem—it will become ruins,

the mountain of the house—a great shrine in a forest.

But it will come about, at the end of the time:

The mountain of Yahweh’s house will become established

at the head of the mountains,

Raised above the hills,

and peoples will stream to it.

Many nations will go,

and will say, “Come,

Let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain,

to the house of Jacob’s God,

So he may instruct us from his ways,

and we may walk in his paths.”

Because from Zion instruction will go out,

Yahweh’s message from Jerusalem.

He will exercise authority among many peoples

and reprove massive nations far and wide.

They will beat their swords into hoes,

their lances into pruning knives.

Nation will not carry sword against nation;

they will not learn battle again.

They will sit, each one, under his vine

and under his fig tree,

and there will be no one disturbing.

Because the mouth of Yahweh Armies—it has spoken.

Because all the peoples—they walk

each in the name of its god.

But we—we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God,

for all time, forever. (Micah 3:12 – 4:5)

In Micah, the promise reverses the preceding threat, and it is again good news for Israel as for the nations, who don’t know about it. Through their flocking to the temple in Jerusalem as a place where priests instruct people in Torah, Yahweh’s message is to go out from Jerusalem. Through that process Yahweh will come to exercise authority in the world and cause the nations to give up war making in favor of improving their farming. They themselves find a collateral gain and a peace dividend. When the work is done, they share in the ideal image of a relaxed life. The closing line is a surprise, but it presupposes Israel having to wait for Yahweh to fulfil his promise. “It will come about, at the end of the time”; perhaps not this week or next week, but neither is the implication that it may take centuries. In the meantime, the nations will continue to recognize their gods rather than turning to Yahweh, and Israel’s job is to walk before Yahweh, with Yahweh, and like Yahweh.

Also in the meantime, however, before showing up for Yahweh to teach them things, the nations will show up to attack Jerusalem (4:11-13). And then Jerusalem will give them what for; for Judah, Micah would not disagree with Joel’s ironic bidding of the nations to turn their hoes into swords (Joel 3:10). Judah will “devote” the nations (*ḥāram* hiphil), another verb from Deuteronomy and Joshua). It is conventionally under-translated “utterly destroy,” but its meaning is closer to “sacrifice.” It indicates that Ms. Zion’s action does not issue in Judah’s gain; it will gain nothing.

The figure among the Twelve who most worries Western readers is Nahum with his relentless declarations that Yahweh is about to take redress on Nineveh, the city of bloodshed, and bring its empire to an end. There might be two reasons why Nahum gained a place in the Scriptures. First, it brought good news to Judah as Assyria’s underling, which links to a reason for readers in Britain and the United States finding Nahum troublesome. We have had a position in the world like Assyria’s. Nineveh stands for London or New York. Conversely, Nahum seemed good news in South Africa in the context of apartheid.[[6]](#footnote-6) Nahum is divinely-inspired resistance literature. It does not urge Judah to take up arms against Assyria; it does promise that Yahweh will. The book’s nature thereby links with the second possible reason why it found a place in the Scriptures. It was proved true by events. Although the prophecy did not find fulfillment in a literal implementing of its pictorial portrait of Nineveh’s destiny (as also happens with messianic promises), city and empire did fall. Nahum proved to be a true prophet. Something similar is true of Habakkuk with its promises about the fall of Babylon.

The double perspective on the nations in the Twelve compares with and is related to the portrayal of Yahweh as gracious but not too easygoing. Yahweh is the God of the nations and is at work in their lives. The Twelve do not come as close as Genesis does to indicating that Yahweh has the nations’ benefit in mind when gets involved with Israel for its benefit, but they do indicate that he is concerned about the nations and that Israel’s blessing can become their blessing. His design for them is good but they commonly surrender the fruits of that good design, and experience his action as bringing trouble. Yet that need not be the end of their story.

## Yahweh’s Day

In discussion of the possible redaction of the Twelve, the day of Yahweh has had a significant place.[[7]](#footnote-7) While the word *yôm* indeed denotes a “day,” the phrase “the day of the Lord” requires defamiliarizing. Yahweh’s day is not a twenty-four hour period and we might do better to think of it as “Yahweh’s moment” or “Yahweh’s time.”

The precise expression “Yahweh’s day” comes twelve times in the Twelve (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 2:31 [3:4]; 3:14 [4:14]; Amos 5:18a, 18b, 20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14a, 14b; Mal 4:5 [3:23]). The theological ideas it expresses are not unique to the Twelve over against Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (it comes in Isa 13:6, 9; Ezek 13:5), but its prominence is distinctive. Similar phrases such as “a day for Yahweh” and “the day of Yahweh’s anger/fury/sacrifice” also recur more often in the Twelve than elsewhere (e.g., Zech 14:1; Zeph 1:8; 1:18; 2:2, 3). It is sometimes accompanied by other allusions to a “day” that gloss these references retrospectively (e.g., Joel 2:2), sometimes by describing it as “that day” (e.g., Zeph 1:9, 10; Zech 14:4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21). This vaguer expression is more common throughout the Prophets. It can refer back to a particular day that has just been mentioned (e.g., Zech 6:10), but it may commonly carry the connotations of “that [well-known] day,” Yahweh’s day (e.g., Amos 8:3, 9; Mic 5:10 [9]; Zech 12:1-14), particularly where it has no antecedent temporal expression to which it could be referring back (e.g., Obad 8). Although the precise phrase comes in only five of the Twelve, all but Jonah use expressions that may be related.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Chronologically, the expression leaps onto the stage fully-formed in Amos 5:18-20. In the MT order of the Twelve, Joel with its multiplicity of occurrences precedes Amos, as do Isaiah and Ezekiel with their references. In LXX Amos precedes Joel, and the Twelve precede Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, so there the Amos references come first in the Scriptures. We do not know the background or origin of the expression, but it evidently denoted a time when things would be light and bright. In Amos’s day things likely were light and bright for many people, at least for the sort of people who write and read papers like this one. And Amos’s audience knew that Yahweh was a God who loved to bless his people and purposed to open the storehouses in the heavens for them, and that Yahweh’s moment would mean an even fuller experience of those realities. Amos’s message about Yahweh’s day appears in conjunction with observations about festivals in a sanctuary such as Bethel, when people’s worship might remind them of those intentions on Yahweh’s part. Amos turns their expectations upside down in declaring that Yahweh’s moment will mean gloom not brightness. Either side of the threat are exhortations to have recourse to Yahweh himself rather than to a sanctuary such as Bethel, and to see that authority is exercised in a faithful way in the community so as to ensure that ordinary people do as well in their lives as professors and pastors. By implication, however, Yahweh’s threat can be forestalled.

Joel makes the same assumption and gives the same warnings, but elaborates on the point; Yahweh’s day is the distinctive focus of his prophecy. As a key aspect of his exposition, he spells out two sets of events to which Yahweh’s day can refer; he does not clash with Amos but he may go beyond Amos’s implications. Joel 1 describes a locust epidemic that in the prophet’s vision has apparently already happened but that is in prospect for his audience. The threat of this epidemic means that “a day of Yahweh is near” (1:15). The vision might imply a literal epidemic or might be a figure for military invasion. Joel 2 then relates a further vision that certainly describes military invasion. Both visions seek to press people into turning to Yahweh with fasting and prayer. The two visions, then, portray Yahweh’s moment as one or more events that are to overwhelm the community.

Joel speaks further about Yahweh’s day in 2:28-32, which forms a new paragraph in MT and constitutes chapter 3 in printed Hebrew Bibles. The variation from the English chapter division matches the way Joel now speaks differently of Yahweh’s day, describing cosmic portents that will herald it. The description of the day itself follows as a new chapter in printed Bibles (3:1-21 English, 4:1-21 Hebrew), though not in MT.

Joel’s distinctive insight is that Yahweh’s day in its catastrophic reality can happen in the course of regular human experience, taking the form of a natural calamity or a military calamity. Or it can constitute an ultimate exercise of divine authority after which nothing will be the same. “Yahweh’s day” need not always refer to the same actual moment, as the conventional English translation “*the* day of the Lord” implies. When a construct noun links to a name, the construct noun can be indefinite.[[9]](#footnote-9) So *yôm yhwh* is open to meaning “*a* day of Yahweh.”

The closing verses of Joel suggest another insight. Following on the declaration that a day of Yahweh is near, in Determination Vale (3:14 [4:14]), Joel adds:

And it will happen on that day:

the mountains will drop treading.

The hills will run with milk,

all the channels in Judah will run with water.

A fountain will go out from Yahweh’s house,

and water Acacias Wadi. (3:18 [4:18])

Here, “that day” refers back to Yahweh’s day (3:14 [4:14], but that day is now a day of blessing. The assumptions countered by Amos and by himself were not so wrong after all. Amos agrees:

11On that day:

I will raise up David’s fallen bivouac

and repair its breaches

I will raise its ruins,

and build it up as in days of old. (Amos 9:11)

“That day” with positive implications in passages such as Hosea 1:5; 2:16, 18, 21 [18, 20, 23]; Haggai 2:23, and a phrase such as “the day of Jezreel” in 1:11, likewise look like a reference to Yahweh’s day as a day of restoration and blessing.

Joel, then, puts us on the track of two double significances about Yahweh’s day that run through the Twelve and constitute one the themes that unites the Twelve. There can be a day of Yahweh (maybe more than one) that embodies in history a final epoch-changing day still to come. And whereas people thought of Yahweh’s day as simply a destined moment of blessing, in the short term it will be a day of catastrophe, unless reorder their community life and reaffirm their commitment to Yahweh. But the other side of catastrophe, Yahweh’s day can be the day of blessing that Yahweh intended. The alternatives that the Twelve put before Israel are actually the ones laid out in Deuteronomy 28 in the promises and threats attached to Yahweh’s covenant.

## A New David

Like Paul interpreting God’s purpose for the nations with a reference to Hosea 1:10, Matthew interprets the Lord’s telling Joseph to take Jesus and his mother to Egypt with a reference to Hosea 11:1. Joseph thereby “fulfilled” Yahweh’s reminder that he had called his son from of Egypt. Originally, that reminder was thus not a message about the future but a recollection concerning the past. God fulfilled it in the story of Jesus in the sense of filling it out, giving it a new significance. Further, in Hosea Yahweh had more precisely called *to* his son, which suggests his calling to Israel ever since Egypt. It is the Septuagint that has “called my son,” a version more directly open to reapplication to Jesus.

Hosea’s actual prophecy concerning David comes at the climax of the book’s opening three chapters, which form an introduction to the book as a whole with more focus on promise than on the warning that dominates Hosea 4 – 14. The other side of Yahweh’s chastisement, “the Israelites will turn back and have recourse to Yahweh their God and David their king” (3:5). “David” stands for whoever is the Davidic king at the time, and “Israelites” means the Ephraimites who are Hosea’s people and the people among whom he operates. Turning back to the right way will mean returning to an association with Judah and Jerusalem, and recognizing David’s line. Presumably the formation of Hosea 1 – 3 as the book’s introduction postdates the fall of Samaria, the taking of a collection Hosea’s of messages to Judah, and their shaping into a message for the future there; hence the book’s beginning with dates in terms of Judahite kings and its applying Hosea’s message to Judah from time to time.

We have noted that Amos almost ends in a related fashion with a promise about restoring David’s fallen bivouac “on that day” (Amos 9:11). Here, too, a prophet who worked in Ephraim (though he was a Judahite) makes a promise concerning the monarchy based in Jerusalem. David’s fallen bivouac is likely a figure for the twelve-clan “household” over which David was head, which had been in an emaciated state since the northern clans’ departure. Amos goes on to describe the household’s also taking possession of Edom, which might presuppose either Edom’s declaration of independence from Judah not long before Amos’s day (2 Kings 8:20-22) or Edom’s later occupying much of Judah. Either way, Yahweh promises to rebuild the Davidic nation. After the felling of the Davidic tree in 587 and the promise that Yahweh would revive it, the Davidic bivouac suggest David’s line itself, and the promise came to suggest the restoration of David’s line. An anthology of First Testament texts from Qumran, 4QFlorilegium (4Q174), seems to interpret it of an expected Davidic Messiah and speaks of some fulfillment in its own community as a “human sanctuary.” James does the same in Acts 15:16.

Micah’s promises refer most explicitly to an individual Davidic king.

You, Bethlehem Epratah,

little to be among Judah’s clans,

From you there will emerge for me

someone to be ruler in Israel,

Though his emergings are from long ago,

from days of old.

Therefore he will give them up

until the time when the one who is going to give birth has given birth.

When the rest of his brothers turn back

to the Israelites,

He will stand and shepherd in Yahweh’s power,

in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God.

So they will settle, because now he will be great, right to the ends of the earth,

and he will be the one of peace. (5:2-5 [1-4])

The promise does not name David, though the one from long ago must surely be a descendant of that son of Bethlehem to whom God made promises centuries previously. Nor does Yahweh call this ruler a king. He does declare as he does in Hosea that people who have turned away from David, even though they were his brothers, will return to him. Together they will settle down in peace. Matthew again picks up this promise to apply to the one actually born in Bethlehem, though he (or someone he follows) modifies the text in light of its fulfillment: Bethlehem is now “not at all” least among Judah’s clans.

There is a family resemblance between these three promises in Hosea, Amos, and Micah, and then a different family resemblance between promises in Haggai and Zechariah 1 – 8. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, now rules in Jerusalem, as governor. He is in some measure a fulfillment of promises about David, though Yahweh has much more to do before things in Judah count as real fulfillment. He now makes promises concerning when he does act. Haggai begins by recognizing that Darius is king, but he almost closes by declaring Yahweh’s intention to overturn the throne of the nations’ kingdoms (2:22). Yahweh goes on: “I will take you, Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel my servant… and make you like a signet, because I have chosen you” (2:23). He thus doesn’t call Zerubbabel king or note his Davidic lineage, but everyone would know the implications of his being son of Shealtiel. “My servant” and “I have chosen you” are Davidic designations, and “my signet ring,” my seal, was Yahweh’s designation in connection with his grandfather (Jer 22:24-27). The negative implications of the reference in Jehoiachin’s story find a contrast in connection with his grandson.

In Zechariah, Zerubbabel is the person who initiated the temple building and will complete it (4:6-9).

There is the man whose name is branch. From his place he will branch out and build Yahweh’s palace. He is the one who will build Yahweh’s palace. He is the one who will put on majesty and sit and rule on his throne. (Zech 6:12-13)

Like Haggai, Zechariah does not refer to David or use “king” language, but describing Zerubbabel as branch (*ṣemaḥ*;cf. 3:8) associates him with the Davidic tree in language that appears in Jeremiah just after the signet ring passage (Jer 23:5; cf. 33:15). In Isaianic terms, he will prove that felling the Davidic tree does not mean it cannot generate new growth (*nēṣer* in Isa 11:1). And he will put on the majesty that his great-grandfather lost (Jer 22:18) and will sit and rule on his throne. Further, unlike the book of Haggai, the book of Zechariah has pointedly not called Darius king (1:1), though it will do so momentarily (7:1).

While the Judahites did rebuild the temple, as far as we know Zerubbabel never sat on a throne in Jerusalem. Apparently Yahweh had a change of mind about this possibility, though the preservation of the unfulfilled promise suggests that the community was not too fazed about it.

Perhaps Zerubbabel is the unnamed shepherd in Zechariah 13:7. In Zechariah 9 – 14 as a whole, the allusions to David and to kingship are ambivalent and ambiguous. They begin with a vision of Ms. Zion having a king who is faithful and finds deliverance, but who is lowly and riding on a donkey, as anyone else does if they are lucky; he is not given a link with David (9:9). The notion of David and of kingship is more understated in Zechariah 12 – 14. The splendor of David’s household and of Jerusalem’s people is not to be greater than Judah’s or too great for Judah, and the feeblest among the people is to be like David (12:7-10). The household of David is to be like God, like Yahweh’s messenger at their head. There will be cleansing for the household of David (13:1). It is Yahweh who will be king (14:9, 16, 17). The ambivalence in Zechariah 9 – 14 over Davidic kingship extends to other forms of leadership. Yahweh’s anger burns against the “shepherds,” the “he-goats” (10:3; cf. 11:5), who might be Davidic leaders or would-be leaders, and/or other officials, and/or the prophets who explicitly feature later (13:2-6), and if they don’t include priests, Malachi is keen to add them (1:6; 2:1, 7).

While Haggai and Zechariah 1 – 8 are explicit on the context of their promises, uncertainty attaches to the historical context of the prophecies on either side. Historical-critical study sees the promises in Hosea, Amos, and Micah as later than their day, while the setting and reference of the passages in Zechariah 9 – 14 is purely guesswork. There is no one vision of David in the Twelve.[[10]](#footnote-10) The diversity recalls that within the other three prophetic scrolls, especially Isaiah, where there is an individual embodiment of David, a corporate embodiment, and a Persian embodiment. The David of Hosea 3:5 has been called “a messianic figure,”[[11]](#footnote-11) but this terminology risks being more confusing than illuminating. It’s no coincidence that the First Testament never applies the word *māšîaḥ* to the future David it speaks of. The Messiah of later Jewish and Christian thinking stands in continuity with the David of the Twelve, but he is a development from that figure. The prominence of the David theme in the Twelve may again link with the process of their redaction. Theologically, the significance of David and of Yahweh’s promise to David meant prophets could not get away from David, but the implications of his image can vary through the Twelve.

## A Spirituality of Sacredness

How might the Twelve shape the community’s life with God? In this connection, no distinctive motif runs through them, though a number have their own distinctive or characteristic motifs. In discussing their spirituality I shall proceed by picking out one motif from each book. It will be a different kind of intertextual or canonical exercise, and not one making any redactional assumptions.

Eleven of the books do use the word sacred or holy: the adjective *qādôš*, the noun *qōdeš*, and the verb *qādaš* (Nahum is the exception; one could easily argue that sacredness is part of its thinking).Be sacred like me, Yahweh urges in the Torah (e.g., Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2). I’m sacred, which expresses itself in the fact that I needn’t act in my anger towards you, Yahweh says in the first book in the Twelve (Hos 11:9); my mountain is sacred, he says the second (Joel 2:1); he swears an oath by his sacredness, says the third (Amos 4:2); and so on.

Yahweh’s sacredness is his distinctiveness. It marks the difference between him and human beings. “I’m God, not a human being, among you as the sacred one,” he says in that declaration in the first of the Twelve. Now Yahweh is not the only embodiment of sacredness; he has an entourage of sacred beings, and the horses and pots associated with him can be sacred (Zech 14:5, 20, 21). Further, sacredness need not imply positive qualities; there are heavenly sacred beings that lack such qualities, and there are apparently *qədēšôt*, hierodules, in Ephraim who lack them (Hos 4:14). But Yahweh’s sacredness expresses itself in that positive personal quality of not needing to act in anger (Hos 11:9). And the positive qualities for which Yahweh looks in Israel will constitute its sacredness.

In Hosea, the quality for which Yahweh looks is acknowledgment of him as God. The verb *yāda‘* runs through Hosea. The traditional translation “know” misses the way the word denotes recognition expressed in action not merely a close personal relationship or an awareness of facts about Yahweh. Yahweh wants acknowledgment rather than burnt offerings, commitment (*ḥesed*) not sacrifices (Hos 6:6; cf. 8:13). The reminder might puzzle Ephraimites who thought they were acknowledging him with their offerings, but the acknowledgment he seeks finds expression in life outside worship as well as inside. Hosea make clear elsewhere that we should not be literalistic in interpreting his declaration about acknowledgment rather than offerings; he assumes the propriety and necessity of worship. But the problem is that swearing oaths (falsely), lying, murder, stealing, and adultery replace acknowledgment, truthfulness, and commitment (4:1-2). A spirituality of sacredness means acknowledging that it is Yahweh who gives us food (2:8 [10]), who bandages us when we are wounded (11:9), who delivers us from bondage, thirst, and hunger (13:4-6). Acknowledging Yahweh is the opposite of whoring, a faithlessness that treats other agencies as key to having something to eat (5:4), and of putting Yahweh out of mind as we enjoy his blessings (13:6). It means a faithfulness that looks to him alone in the way a wife looks to her husband alone (1:2 – 3:5; 4:1-19; 10:12). It means not abandoning him and looking to other nations, to strongholds, to military resources (4:10, 12; 5:13; 7:11; 8:9-10, 14; 10:13; 12:1 [2]). It means keeping faith, keeping the covenant pledge, staying on the way (4:10, 12; 5:7; 6:4-7; 7:1, 13; 8:1; 10:12). It means having recourse to Yahweh and being awestruck towards Yahweh (Hos 3:5)

In Joel, the key verb is turn (*šûb*), which runs through Joel 1 – 2. Turning to Yahweh is a way of describing acknowledgment of Yahweh (for which see Joel 3:17 [4:17]), though in Joel, turning eventually leads to that acknowledgment (2:27). Joel’s sharing his visions of the epidemic and the army aims to get people to turn to Yahweh. Whereas turning in Hosea implies turning from wrongdoing and from having recourse to other deities and resources (e.g., 5:4; 12:6 [7]; 14:1 [2]), and thus could be translated “repentance,” Joel does not imply that the community has sin to repent of. It seems simply to need to turn to Yahweh as deliverer and protector in a coming crisis. Turning might still contrast with confidence about taking responsibility for yourself and making your own decisions (Hos 5:5; 7:10, 13). And whereas Hosea emphasizes the inadequacy of sacramental actions such as offering sacrifice, when it is unaccompanied by a turning of the whole person, Joel calls for sacramental action, for fasting, weeping, and mourning (1:14; 2:12, 15-17), for crying out (1:5, 8, 11, 13, 14), for trembling and being in anguish (2:1, 6), for calling on Yahweh (2:32 [3:5]). Rip your heart, your inner being, your thinking, not your clothes, Yahweh urges (2:13): the context indicates that he means your heart as well as your clothes. People need to turn with their whole being, inward as well as outward, symbolic as well as substantial. Similarly, Hosea is not reluctant to urge people to turn to Yahweh with words (Hos 14:2 [3]).

Amos makes distinctive use of the idea of pursuing or seeking or looking to (*dāraš*), which appears in connection with the priorities he urges. “Pursue me…. Don’t pursue Bethel…. Pursue Yahweh…. Pursue the good and not the bad…. Repudiate the bad, be loyal to the good, establish the proper exercise of authority at the gate” (5:4-6, 14-15). Among the Twelve, only Amos issues this bidding to pursue, as his term for acknowledging or turning. Like them, it issues in action; it distinctively suggests energy.

Obadiah speaks of brotherhood (12). It parallels the reference to brotherhood in the Edom passage in Amos (1:11) and the stress on brotherhood as a principle for community life in the Torah, especially in Deuteronomy. There is (presumably unintentional) irony in the Obadiah reference, since the prophet critiques Edom for a failure of brotherhood but doesn’t seem very brotherly in his promises about Edom’s destiny.

Jonah ends up with a double reference to pity (4:10-12). Jonah feels sorry for the bush that grew but withered, yet he has not shown pity for the Ninevites. The reference suggests a different irony: it is Ezekiel who talks most about pity (*ḥûs*) in order to deny that Yahweh will show any to Judah (e.g., 7:4, 9), though Joel invites Judah to make it an object of appeal (2:17), and the First Testament also makes it a principle for the king’s relationship with the needy (Ps 72:13).

The well-known bidding in Micah concerns (conventionally) justice, kindness, and a humble walk with God (6:8). Actually, Micah is concerned about *mišpāṭ*, which impliesthe proper exercise of authority by people who have authority such as kings, officials, elders, and heads of households. If we wonder what the proper exercise of authority means, then Micah clarifies the point by glossing *mišpāṭ* with *ḥesed*, which denotes the faithfulness that persists when the other party has forfeited any right to it. Third, Micah wants people to walk circumspectly with Yahweh (*ṣāna‘* hiphil). The verb comes only here, but the related adjective contrasts with presumptuousness (*zādôn*;Prov 11:2). It suggests being deferential about thinking we know what Yahweh wants us to do or what Yahweh is doing. Micah’s trinity of words compares with Hosea’s vision for a turning to Yahweh that will issue in *mišpāṭ*, *ḥesed*, and a willingness to wait for Yahweh to act (12:6 [7]), and with his warning about making our own political decisions (8:4).

“Celebrate your festivals” (*ḥoggəgî ḥāggayik*)Nahum bids (1:15 [2:1]) in a neat contrast with Hos 2:11 [13]; Amos 5:21; 8:10 (but cf. Zech 14:16). It illustrates further how the Twelve can both critique and affirm worship. Nahum would no doubt oppose the innovative worship that Hosea confronts (8:4-6, 11; 10:1; 13:2).

“How long?” is Habakkuk’s first word, and “why?” follows. Habakkuk models a spirituality that comes to Yahweh with straight questions, like the Psalms, though it then allows for listening to Yahweh’s answers, like Job.

Like Nahum but going further, Zephaniah urges Zion to chant and shout, to rejoice and exult (3:14).

In Haggai, three times Yahweh urges people who should be rebuilding the temple to “take courage” or “be strong” (*ḥāzaq*;2:4); Zechariah uses the same verb in the jussive (8:9, 13). In connection with the rebuilding, Haggai and Zechariah embody a complementarity in their respective stresses on Israel’s obligation and Yahweh’s promise. You must take action; he will ensure you succeed.

It is thus tempting to link Haggai and Zechariah 1 – 8, but working with the book of Zechariah makes it possible to note the motif of mindfulness, what is usually translated remembering (*zākar*, *zikkārôn*;6:14; 10:9; 13:2). A key theme in First Testament spirituality is an attentiveness that gives its mind to the past (so it is remembering) but also in the present, to Yahweh and not to images.

In Malachi, revering or being in awe (*yārē’*, verb and adjective)recurs more than anywhere else in the Twelve (1:14 2:5; 3:5, 16a, 16b; 4:5 [3:23]). And awe for Yahweh has been described as the First Testament way of denoting spirituality.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Through a process of redaction and/or some other process, then, the Twelve came to have a mutually overlapping theology that also shared common ground with the other three prophetic scrolls. In their understanding of Yahweh this overlapping theology is symbolized by the recurrence of motifs from Exodus 34:6 – 7, though the prophets who do not incorporate an allusion to that text do have a similar understanding of Yahweh as gracious but not too easy-going. The overlap is also symbolized by the distinctive recurrence of allusion to Yahweh’s Day with its reference to a final ultimate event that would turn out to be embodied in the meantime partially but not finally in a particular historical event; again, the prophets who do not use the expression Yahweh’s Day imply a similar theology. Without sharing another comparable form of words, the Twelve as a group suggest that Yahweh was involved with Israel in a distinctive way but was also involved with all the nations, and they look forward to the arrival of a new David through whom Yahweh’s purpose will be fulfilled. And out of the Twelve it is possible to articulate a spirituality of sacredness that involves being in awe of Yahweh, being mindful of Yahweh, questioning Yahweh, acknowledging Yahweh, turning to Yahweh, pursuing Yahweh, celebrating, chanting and shouting, being circumspect yet courageous in doing what Yahweh says and promises to support, and living in brotherhood, in pity, and in an exercise of authority that manifests commitment.

1. Translations in this paper are my own; I have sometimes presupposed exegesis from J. Goldingay, *Hosea to Micah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020) and J. Goldingay and P. J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II* (reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See especially James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993) and *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 218; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J. Wöhrle sees this recurrence as redactionally significant: see e.g., *Der Abschluss des Zwölfprophetenbuches* (BZAW 389; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 363-419. P. R. House closes with this passage in “The Character of God in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney (SBL Symposium Series 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 125-45 (145). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. C. van der Leeuwen thus reframes the use of Exodus 34:6-7 in the Twelve in terms of the modern notion of theodicy, in “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. L. G. Perdue et al. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 31-49; cf. J. L. Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. P. L. Redditt and A. Schart (BZAW 325; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 175-91; J. Barker, “From Where Does My Hope Come?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* 61 (2018): 697-715. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See D. C. Timmer, *The Non-Israelite Nations in the* *Book of the Twelve* (Biblical Interpretation Series 135; Leiden: Brill, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See W. Wessels, “Nahum: An Uneasy Expression of Yahweh’s Power,” *Old Testament Essays* 11 (1998): 615-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See R. Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve,*, ed. J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney (SBL Symposium Series 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 75-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah in this connection, see J. D. Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. P. L. Redditt and A. Schart (BZAW 325; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 192-213; more broadly, J. D. Nogalski, “Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve,” *Interpretation* 61 (2007): 125-36 (125-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See e.g., B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. But contrast A. R. Patterson’s argument in “The Shape of the Davidic Hope across the Book of the Twelve,” *JSOT* 35 (2010): 225-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. E. Ben Zvi, *Hosea* (Forms of the Old Testament Literature 21A/1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See R. Knierim, “The Spirituality of the Old Testament,” in *The Task of Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 269-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)