

## JONAH AMONG THE PROPHETS: A STUDY IN CANONICAL CONTEXT

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On two counts, the book of Jonah is unique in the prophetic literature. First, the prophet is the subject of stinging satire. He is clearly the anti-hero of the story. This is not the way in which prophets, unless they are deemed to be false, are portrayed.<sup>1</sup> Second, the book is a story about a prophet rather than a collection of his oracles. Some prophetic books do contain biography, but in none—with the quite radical exception of Jonah—does it make up more than a fraction of the book.<sup>2</sup>

Jonah's uniqueness raises a number of questions. Why was Jonah included in a collection so unlike itself? What factors were taken into account in the formation of a collection, in this case the so-called minor prophets or book of the Twelve? What does the fact of the book's inclusion in the collection suggest about the way in which it might be interpreted?

### I. JONAH AS ONE OF THE TWELVE

Jonah's place in the canon is incontrovertible. Its canonicity is unquestioned, its place among the Twelve uncontested in the MSS and in canonical lists.<sup>3</sup> There is not the slightest hint that the inclusion of the book among the Twelve was, until modern times, considered at all problematic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are some grounds for suspecting that Jonah was, in fact, believed to be a false prophet. His message of territorial expansion recorded in 2 Kgs 14:25, though fulfilled, must have sounded hollow in the extreme (if not ultimately false) to those who not too many years later experienced Samaria's collapse at the hand of the Assyrians. Whereas Hosea and Amos had been forthright in their tales of doom, Jonah had generated hopes in national strength, hopes that had come to nothing. One might even wonder whether grave disappointment in the prophet at such an historical moment might not have precipitated the negative portrayal of the prophet that we find in this book.

<sup>2</sup> See W. E. March, "Prophecy," in *Old Testament Form Criticism* (ed. J. H. Hayes; San Antonio: Trinity University, 1977) 141-177, for a useful survey on prophetic form.

<sup>3</sup> For a convenient collection of lists see H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1914) 201-214; R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 450-464.

<sup>4</sup> The idea that Jonah's canonicity was doubted in certain rabbinic circles (so G. Wildeboer, *The Origin of the Canon of the Old Testament* [London: Luzac, 1895] 70) is suspect; see Beckwith, *Canon* 306-307.

The modern objection to the inclusion of Jonah in the Twelve is strictly formal. The underlying assumption is that properly prophetic material is oracular. It will allow a fair bit of autobiography, even a little biography, but a book that is entirely biography is by virtue of that fact alone something other than prophecy.<sup>5</sup> It is assumed moreover that the shapers of the collection were guided by these formal principles and that by implication they erred in the case of Jonah.

The remarkable degree of formal similarity among prophetic books notwithstanding, one might well question whether prophecy had as clearly a formal definition in ancient Israel as is generally supposed. Oracle is, by measure of quantity, the most important type of prophetic material. It is the originally spoken word put in print and so derives directly from the prophet himself. For that reason it is unquestionably prophetic. Autobiography, though it does not derive from an originally spoken word, is nevertheless equally the word of the prophet and so, like the oracle, would bear prophetic force. There is no indication in the text itself to suggest that it was considered to be something less than prophetic. With biographical material the situation is slightly different. It is supposedly the work of editors or redactors and not of the prophets themselves. Is it therefore something less than—or at least other than—prophecy?

I am unable to find any evidence either in or outside the prophetic corpus to suggest that such material was not considered prophetic by ancient Israel. Had prophecy necessarily been of one type as opposed to another, it would be impossible to believe that a mixing of types would ever have been attempted or been approved by the community. Though it is theoretically possible that there was once more biographical material in the collections than exists today, there is no evidence to suggest that it was removed because it was something other than prophetic. Had this been the reason one would expect that all the biographical material would have been deleted.<sup>6</sup> The fact that there is any biographical material at all is enough to suggest that it was presumed to be as prophetic as the oracle.<sup>7</sup>

These differences are very real to the modern analyst, but once again we have no clear evidence to suggest that they were of any consequence to

<sup>5</sup> Studies on the form of prophecy uniformly exclude Jonah; see March, "Prophecy"; K. Koch, *Was ist Formgeschichte?* (3d ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1974); C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967); cf. also general works on the prophets such as J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967); R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (rev ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> See discussion below on the removal of narrative.

<sup>7</sup> While the book of Jonah is a story about a prophet, it is not typically biographical. To begin with, the material is not used to provide a framework for the oracle as is the case in the other prophecies. The five words of oracle that can be found in Jonah, while not incidental to the story, could easily have been left out. Their general substance is clearly assumed without them. Moreover there is reason to question whether the story has any historical foundation. Though the principal character is clearly an historical figure, the experiences attributed to him in the book are almost certainly fictional. Most interpreters, conservatives included, assume that the book is something very much like a parable. There are, however, a number of modern detractors; see D. J. Wiseman, "Jonah's Nineveh," *TynBul* 30 (1979) 29-52; T. D. Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," *TynBul* 36 (1985) 35-69.

ancient Israel. With respect to the prophetic collection, then, one can say that the book of Jonah is different in degree from the other books in the Twelve and that it is more like some episodes in the Former Prophets than the Latter Prophets. But one cannot say that, to ancient Israel at least, the book was unbecoming of the collection of which it is a part. By ancient reckoning the book was entirely appropriate to its location.

Governed by a strictly formal definition of prophecy, modern scholarship has sometimes given a rather torturous account of Jonah's place among the Twelve. Karl Budde, for instance, explained its inclusion in the collection in terms of numerical symbolism.<sup>8</sup> The book, he argued, was originally a midrash on 2 Kgs 14:25, perhaps part of the longer midrash alluded to in 2 Chr 24:27.<sup>9</sup> It was presumably dislodged from this station and put into the prophetic collection in order to satisfy the Hebrew disposition with respect to numbers. Twelve was the number of tribes in Israel, and it was thought that the number of books in the collection should correspond.

That the number twelve would have suited Hebrew sensibilities better than the number eleven is no doubt true.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the collection contains twelve books is probably due to deliberate design, even if we cannot be certain just what that design is. The question before us, however, is whether the fact of a twelve-book collection is due to the inclusion of Jonah in particular. If it is, then Jonah would necessarily have been the last included, and that is far from certain.<sup>11</sup> And if form had been the primary criterion for inclusion as Budde suggests it was, then the inclusion of Jonah would have been an unhappy one, made for no other reason than that there were no other prophecies of worth available. That too is far from certain. Surely an artificial means of arranging the collection would have been preferred to the unnatural selection Jonah is supposed to have been.<sup>12</sup>

Why, then, if the book of Jonah was not included due to the pressures of numerical symbolism, was it made part of the collection? Because, some would urge, it is full of the prophetic spirit. Its substance, argues George Adam Smith, makes it prophetic: "The truth which we find in the book of Jonah is as full and fresh a revelation of God's will as prophecy anywhere achieves."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> K. Budde, "Jonah, Book of," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 7 (1904) 229.

<sup>9</sup> K. Budde, "Vermutungen zum Midrasch des Buches der Könige," *ZAW* 12 (1892) 37-51.

<sup>10</sup> M. H. Pope, "Twelve," in *IDB* 4 (1969) 719.

<sup>11</sup> The majority of scholars date the book of Jonah around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, some as late as the third century. Still, the possibility of an earlier date is not without support. Y. Kaufmann (*The Religion of Israel* [New York: Schocken, 1972] 282) assigns it an eighth-century date. See my discussion and defense of a late-eighth-century date in *Canon and Interpretation: Recent Canonical Approaches and the Book of Jonah* (dissertation; McGill University, 1986) 188-198.

<sup>12</sup> Some have argued that the number twelve was artificially attained by separating the book of Malachi from the two oracles at the end of Zechariah that feature a similar introduction; see A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (5th ed.; Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads, 1959), 2. 158; R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1941) 612.

<sup>13</sup> G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898) 495.

This answer seems to me to be essentially correct. One has only to recognize the obvious—namely, that the book is included in the collection despite its formal uniqueness. This fact cannot but lead us to the conclusion that form is not all that unifies the prophetic literature. While the high degree of formal similarity is truly significant, one cannot but wonder whether the substance of the prophetic literature is not the more fundamental unifying factor.

R. E. Clements' brief study on the prophets has shown, for instance, that the prophets present a unified and coherent message.<sup>14</sup> Basic to all prophecy, he argues, are the messages of destruction and restoration. This unity was not accidental but was the consequence of concrete experiences for both Israel and Judah. Both lived under a protracted threat of disintegration under the indomitable forces of the superpowers. Nor was this unity something that was forced on the material at a late point in time, as though it were an afterthought. The pattern is discernible already in Amos. Clements believes it to be undoubtedly true that many of the messages of hope to be found in the earlier prophecies were secondarily added, but this was done because there was already the conviction that all the prophets were referring to a single theme of Israel's destruction and renewal. This unity is therefore integral to all the prophetic material, and the factor that unifies it is noticeably the substance of the prophets, not the form.

If this is so, then the inclusion of a work like Jonah is not a serious problem at all. The book is in the collection because, like the other books included, it contributes directly to concerns about destruction and renewal. Israel and Judah, like the Nineveh of the story, are destined for destruction. All that can prevent it is a quick and genuine repentance. Yahweh will draw on his vast reserves of mercy and call the destruction off. Formally the book of Jonah may be prophetic legend or history or novella or parable,<sup>15</sup> but functionally it is prophecy as genuine as one can find anywhere in the OT. That, at least, seems to have been the judgment of those who originally classified it as such and included it with other books believed to be of the same kind. It is to that process of the compilation of the Twelve that we now turn.

## II. THE EDITING OF THE TWELVE

By the beginning of the second century B.C. a collection of twelve prophetic books was already in existence. Writing about 190, Jesus ben Sirach memorialized the great kings and prophets. Among the latter he included Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and "the Twelve" (Sir 49:10). The Twelve are not named, indicating that they were already known as an

<sup>14</sup> R. E. Clements, "Patterns in the Prophetic Canon," in *Canon and Authority* (ed. G. W. Coats and B. O. Long; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 42-55.

<sup>15</sup> For a slightly dated but still useful survey on the form of Jonah see M. Burrows, "The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament* (ed. H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed; New York: Abingdon, 1970) 80-107.

integrated unit. We have no reason to doubt their identity. They were undoubtedly the Twelve we know from our present canons.

Other early sources confirm the presence of a twelve-book collection of prophecies. Josephus' canon of twenty-two books contained thirteen that were considered prophetic.<sup>16</sup> None are named, but the Twelve are apparently counted once again as one.<sup>17</sup> Though the talmudic count is twenty-four and the order is structurally different (some books Josephus counted as prophecies are now among the Writings), it also counts the Twelve as one.<sup>18</sup>

The fact of an early collection of twelve prophecies being established, we are led to ask how this collection came into existence and what difference the fact of a collection makes to the interpretation of Jonah.

One view of the collection's history is that the books simply accumulated and when there were twelve in number the accumulation ceased. As books were written they were, so to speak, put side by side on a shelf until the writing stopped. Each book was completely independent of the others, the only reason for their accumulation being their size. They are relatively short and would be lost if they circulated independently. This is the talmudic opinion,<sup>19</sup> but it is also defended by modern conservative scholarship in the tradition of William Henry Green.<sup>20</sup>

Variations of this view can be found in the writings of Ryle and Budde. Ryle assumed that each book had an independent history, but he attributed some broad later redaction of material to editors. No explanation is given for the formation of the collection, though size was presumably a factor. Once so assembled, however, they were edited *en masse*. Proper superscriptions were added to the books to lend them a semblance of uniformity.<sup>21</sup> Budde likewise envisioned a single comprehensive redaction, but in his case it was believed to be more substantial. He believed that the books at one time contained a considerable amount of narrative material. Once collected, all those narrative sections that focused on the lives of the prophets were deleted by the redactor. In this way the divine character of the prophetic word was enhanced.<sup>22</sup>

All other questions aside, Budde's theory runs into obvious problems with the book of Jonah since it is in its entirety a narrative about a prophet. To solve this problem Budde supposed that Jonah must have

<sup>16</sup> *Ag. Ap.* 1.37-43.

<sup>17</sup> See the discussion in S. Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture* (Hamden: Archon, 1976) 31-34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 53-56.

<sup>19</sup> *B. Bat.* 14b.

<sup>20</sup> W. H. Green (*General Introduction to the Old Testament. The Canon* [New York: Scribners, 1898] 35) argued that "each individual book of an acknowledged prophet . . . was accepted as the word of God immediately upon its appearance" and so considered canonical. By this account the quantity of books is entirely providential. The community had no decisions to make about the matter. See also E. J. Young, "The Canon of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible* (ed. C. F. H. Henry; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 155-168; R. L. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969).

<sup>21</sup> H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1895) 115.

<sup>22</sup> K. Budde, "Eine folgenschwere Redaktion des Zwölfprophetenbuchs," *ZAW* 39 (1921) 225.

been added after the general redaction. Why a book that contradicted the exact nature of the redaction would be added later is not at all clear. His own answer has already been mentioned: The editor felt compelled to round off the number of books to twelve. All in all, Budde's theory is not convincing.

A study by R. E. Wolfe signaled the virtual end to this accumulation theory.<sup>23</sup> In his view, composition and collection were not distinct processes; the two overlapped. There was a continuous though protracted process, the whole characterized by many growth spurts and comprehensive redactions. No fewer than thirteen stages in the process were identified. It began with some early prophecies that were edited as a unit. In later stages more original prophecies would be added, the sum total being subjected to further comprehensive reworkings by a variety of groups. The result was a highly unified collection with many common redactional strands running through each book.

This description is overly precise, too sweeping to be convincing. There is simply too much conjecture in it. Despite these weaknesses, Wolfe succeeded in dispelling the notion that each book in the collection had a completely independent history. The interrelatedness of the literature at a very early stage was believed to be of such a nature that the composition and collection of the material overlapped.

Nearly four decades passed before the question of the growth of the collection was once again taken up in a systematic way, this time by Dale Schneider.<sup>24</sup> His study is very thorough and, apart from disagreement over detail, will probably serve as the point of reference for study on the structure and collection of the books for some time.

Schneider believes that the collection was created in four stages. In the first the books of Hosea, Amos and Micah were acknowledged and assembled. Their union was due to mutual dependence. Hosea had endorsed Amos' prophecies, and Micah had built on Hosea. Besides, they had all preached against Israel. Hezekiah's men assembled this significant literature and used it to support his national policy. The second stage was prompted by the reforms of Josiah. Three more books—Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah—grew out of this second nationalist revival. They owe their association to common revivalist concerns and, again, to literary connections. This small collection remained independent of the earlier collection until some time in the exilic period. While there were now six books, they existed in two distinct collections.

While Joel was already written in preexilic times, it was so different from the second collection that it was not included in it. The book was rather more like Amos and Hosea. In the third stage it was included with the first collection along with other and more recent books—namely, Obadiah and Jonah. Obadiah was appended to Amos since it functioned as a fitting extension of Amos' and Joel's prophecies against Edom. Since Jonah dealt so directly with Nineveh, it was put at the head of other

<sup>23</sup> R. E. Wolfe, "The Editing of the Book of the Twelve," *ZAW* 53 (1935) 90-129.

<sup>24</sup> D. Schneider, *The Unity of the Book of the Twelve* (dissertation: Yale University, 1979).

books dealing with Assyria (i.e. before Micah). These three additions, all exilic except for Joel, never formed an independent unit but were included in the earlier collection upon composition. At the same time, the second collection was appended to this expanded unit so that a structured collection of nine books was in circulation already in the exilic period.

The fourth stage was obviously postexilic. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were included when Nehemiah sponsored a collection of national literature. The book of the Twelve was thus an established and unified collection by the middle of the fifth century B.C. No attempt was made at a later date to add to the collection. Therefore when Sirach recognized the Twelve as a unit he reflected a longstanding tradition.

The details of Schneider's reconstruction will need to be carefully scrutinized. Many will undoubtedly consider his dating of certain books and the closing of the collection as a whole to be too early.<sup>25</sup> Even so the general thrust of his work is quite convincing.

Given the direction that research has taken on the formation of the Twelve, I shall now make some summary comments and describe what seem to me to be the implications of this process for the interpretation of the book of Jonah.

1. *The collection was the result of a long and conscious process.* Contrary to this view is the supposition that the selection of books was a late decision reflecting the sensibilities of an official body assigned the task of selecting which books should or should not be canonical. That there were more than twelve short prophecies in existence at a given point is quite possible, even likely. Decisions with respect to the continuing function of each were not made, however, by a single body of authorities that had before it an extensive anthology of prophetic books out of which they were to select the most valuable. Rather, decisions were registered over the course of time and in direct relation to the ability of the prophecies of serve the perceived needs of the community.<sup>26</sup>

2. *The contours of the process can be drawn in lines that correspond to Judah's political and religious life.* The collection process was not carried out by politically indifferent or religiously isolated scholars. It was most likely carried out by men in the courts of kings and governors, especially Hezekiah, Josiah and Nehemiah.<sup>27</sup> The times in which this was done are significant in both political and religious terms. The rebuilding of the nation was of paramount importance at each of these points. In each case the rebuilding was understood to be possible only if the right conditions were met. These conditions were the basis for religious reform, and literature was used to further this cause.

<sup>25</sup> Schneider is not without general support on his earlier dating (cf. Clements, "Patterns" 50).

<sup>26</sup> I owe much to B. S. Childs' general formulation of the canonical process (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]).

<sup>27</sup> See Beckwith, *Canon* 80-85, for a discussion on the use of the sacred shrine, whether tabernacle or temple, as the place used by the national leadership to store canonical literature.

3. *The process was most likely terminated during the time of Nehemiah.* The next known social crisis after the exile (and it seems that the collection of literature was precipitated by social crises<sup>28</sup>) was enforced Hellenization by Antiochus in the mid-second century, some three decades after ben Sirach's reference to the Twelve. It may well be that the full prophetic section of the canon as we know it was fixed in this latter crisis,<sup>29</sup> but for the fixing of the Twelve the date is simply too late. One might argue, as critical scholarship generally does, that individual books were subject to some continuing editing. But even if that were so the parameters of the collection were already established.

4. *Tied as it was to nationalist revival, the process had a functional character.* It served the purposes of the national leadership, which were of course to bring about or preserve the security of the nation. To suggest that the literature was little more than political propaganda is to overstate the case,<sup>30</sup> but to deny that it served political as well as religious ends is to err in the other extreme.

5. *If the collection owes its unity to a common function, then it follows that individual books, as diverse as they might be, contributed to this function.* The implications of this fact for Jonah are several. Jonah was understood from the beginning to be reformation literature. While the book allows for a number of themes, among them universalism, not all of these were germane to the purposes of either the author or collectors. Their focus was not on such abstract (if worthy) questions as the place of the nations in the divine order of things. Their concerns were more immediate and concrete—namely, bringing the nations of Israel and Judah to a point of repentance, the key to any reform. Furthermore Jonah was understood to be prophetic literature. It was flanked on both sides by unquestionably prophetic books, and thus a framework was established for its continuing function.

### III. THE POSITION OF JONAH IN THE TWELVE

In the previous section I suggested that the selection and editing process was deliberate and careful. If the various books are as intertwined as the research suggests, then it follows that the order of books will also exhibit design. Even a cursory glance at the collection confirms this assumption. The order is neither haphazard nor accidental. The issues that face us now are the criteria used in establishing the order and the

<sup>28</sup> J. Sanders' (*Torah and Canon* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972]) suggestion that the exile was the crucible of the canon is certainly correct. His point must not, however, be taken to mean that this was the only vital historical moment in the process. The earlier Samaritan and later Maccabean crises almost certainly played a major part in the process.

<sup>29</sup> See Beckwith, *Canon* 150-153, on the role of Judas Maccabeus in giving shape to the Prophets and the Writings.

<sup>30</sup> So M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University, 1971).



implications the order has for the way in which the book of Jonah was and might still be understood.

Actually the order of books is not everywhere the same. Manuscripts agree on the order of the last six books but vary slightly on the order of the first six. The order of the MT for the first six is the most familiar: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. The LXX has another order: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah. The latter order is generally understood to be a departure from the more original MT order, the change intending to reflect greater chronological accuracy.<sup>31</sup>

It has long been recognized that the order of books is generally chronological. Where scholars differ is in the extent to which this general principle has been applied. Jerome, the first to comment on the order, suggested that it was strictly chronological. Hosea was the first of the prophets, Malachi the last. In those cases where the time of the prophet was not clearly suggested by the text it was assumed that he prophesied during the rule of the king who was identified in the preceding book.<sup>32</sup> This strict view has now been virtually abandoned.

Scholars are in general agreement regarding the times in which each of the prophets prophesied. Hosea, Amos, Joel and Micah belong to the eighth century, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah to the seventh, Haggai and Zechariah to the sixth, and Malachi to the fifth. Most of the books have superscriptions that so date them. Jonah does not, but we know from 2 Kgs 14:25 that he lived during the eighth century. Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi also lack superscriptions, but in these cases the subject matter points unmistakably to the time periods already indicated.

The prophets Joel and Obadiah are not so easily dated. Very few would date them in the eighth century, as are the prophets placed next to them.<sup>33</sup> If they are of a later period, why do they appear beside eighth-century prophets? Rudolph believes that their position was secured by catchwords. Since Amos cites Joel twice (Amos 1:2; 9:13b quote Joel 4:16a, 18a), the latter appropriately precedes the commentary on it. So also with Obadiah. Its oracle against Edom expands on Amos 9:12 and so fittingly follows it.<sup>34</sup>

This catchword hypothesis is attractive in that it is able to account for the literary affinities between neighboring books. But it does not explain why an otherwise chronological arrangement should be interrupted in order to introduce a new scheme. This is especially curious since the place of Obadiah can just as readily be explained on chronological grounds as could the other ten. H. W. Wolff is most probably correct in suggesting

<sup>31</sup> So Ryle, *Canon* 240.

<sup>32</sup> See Jerome's prologue to the Vg in *Biblia Sacra. Iuxta Vulgatum Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

<sup>33</sup> See, however, G. L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1964) 287-295; H. E. Freedman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 139-156. Others may allow for a seventh-century date, at least for Joel; see W. Rudolph, *Joel* (KAT; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1976). Most assign the book to the early postexilic period.

<sup>34</sup> W. Rudolph, *Haggai, Sacharja 1-8, Sacharja 9-12, Malachi* (KAT; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1976) 297.

that the editors confused this prophet with his namesake in 1 Kings 18.<sup>35</sup> This would account for his place among the eighth-century prophets. This being so, only the place of Joel remains unexplained. Could it be that the editors believed that Joel was also an early prophet?

I would like to suggest that those responsible for the ordering of books used several criteria. The first was generally chronological. Individual prophets were grouped according to the relationship either Israel or Judah had with the superpowers.<sup>36</sup> Hosea through Nahum were believed to belong to the Assyrian period, Habakkuk and Zephaniah to the Babylonian, and Haggai through Malachi to the Persian period. Critical analysis suggests that they may not always have been correct in their judgments, especially with respect to Joel and Obadiah. So does the revised order of the LXX. Whether they were right in their judgment is not irrelevant, but misunderstanding on their part cannot disguise their apparent intention—namely, to put the books into a relative chronology reflecting the times during which the prophets were believed to have lived.

But while these groupings were strictly chronological it does not appear that the individual books within a group were in chronological order. The latter two groups appear to be internally chronological but the first does not. Obadiah, assuming that he was identified with the prophet in 1 Kings 18, should head the list. Next should follow Jonah, Amos and Hosea.

While we can register only reasonable guesses, the following explanation for the order in this first group seems the most likely. Hosea stands at the head due to its size. It is the longest of the group. More than that, Hosea is theologically formative. It establishes more forcibly than any other book in the collection what it means to be a covenant people. Amos would probably have followed, except that it contains, as Rudolph pointed out, an apparent commentary on Joel and therefore succeeded it. Obadiah followed Amos because of its apparent commentary on it. Jonah came next since it identified the prophet sent to the nations mentioned in the previous book (Obadiah 17).<sup>37</sup> Micah's place after Jonah is appropriate since it explains how Israel could be destroyed by Assyria, the nation that repented. And since it envisions an Assyria that once again trembles in fear of Yahweh's judgment (Mic 7:8-13) it fittingly precedes Nahum, a book that holds out no further hope for the once-powerful nation. Thus the criteria used for the internal structuring of this group were size,

<sup>35</sup> H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 3: Obadja und Jona* (BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1977) 53.

<sup>36</sup> I am indebted for this view to C. F. Keil, *Manual of Historico-Critical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1892) 364-368.

<sup>37</sup> Wolff, *Jona* 53, believes that because the book of Jonah begins with *why* it is necessarily linked to what precedes—namely, to the book of Obadiah. This is not necessarily so. The verb, especially when it begins a book (Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ezekiel, Ruth, Esther) or a chapter in a book, has little more force than “now it happened”; see J. Weingreen, *A Practical Hebrew Grammar* (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1959) 92.

theological priority and literary association, especially association in the form of commentary.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The Twelve exhibits a carefully planned structure. Included in it are relatively brief prophetic writings, classified in the main along chronological lines. The fact that Jonah is in this collection illustrates that its formal uniqueness was not a hindrance to its inclusion. The book delivers a message that is prophetic in character, so that in this respect at least the book is not inconsonant with whatever criteria the collectors used to determine selection. The position it occupies in the collection is not accidental either. It was placed in an eighth-century context since it was believed that the prophet lived in the period of Assyrian hegemony.

One cannot take lightly the fact that both the subject matter of the story and the context it is given in the collection point to the eighth century. It was the obvious intention of both the author and the shapers of the collection that the reader interpret the book with that context in mind. Our modern historical inclination is to interpret a text in the context of the author himself and not the context to which either he or the collectors refer. Brevard Childs is right. The very thing that our hermeneutic demands we find (the original historical context) is the thing most obscured. Jonah, it is generally admitted, is mute with respect to the context of composition. But neither the book nor the process of collection is mute. They may not answer the question of original historical context, but they do provide us with a literary or canonical context. Could it be that in focusing on what the text does not tell us we miss what it does? Perhaps if intentionality is at all important we will be closer to the mark if we redirect our attention from the context of the author to the context to which he refers. This, it appears, was both his and the collectors' actual intention.