

## ‘MY NAME WILL BE GREAT AMONG THE NATIONS’

THE *MISSIO DEI* IN THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE

Jerry Hwang  
(hwangjery@gmail.com)

### Summary

*Recent OT scholarship has increasingly recognised that the Minor Prophets were compiled by Hebrew scribes to be read as a cohesive anthology. While acknowledging that each book of the Minor Prophets exhibits a distinctive individuality, scholars continue to debate how to interpret the collection as a coherent whole. In this vein, I propose that the major themes of the Minor Prophets—land, kingship, the move from judgement to salvation, and the relationship of Israel to the nations—find a unifying link in the missio Dei. The plan of God to redeem his entire creation is progressively unfolded in the Minor Prophets, in that the apostasy of God’s people in God’s land (Hosea; Joel) is but the first step in a history of redemption which culminates with the recognition by all nations that YHWH alone is worthy: ‘For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations’ (Mal. 1:11). As such, the missio Dei in the Minor Prophets not only provides a reading strategy for interpreting the collection as a unified Book of the Twelve; it also shows how the Minor Prophets make a unique contribution to an OT theology of mission.*

### 1. Introduction

The Old Testament Minor Prophets appear at first glance to offer little of relevance and much which is problematic for a biblical theology of mission. Although the book of Jonah furnishes a notable exception, the rest of the Minor Prophets seem more concerned with judgement against the peoples rather than their salvation. Indeed, the sustained

intensity of their oracles against the nations ostensibly vindicates the claim of Richard Dawkins that '[t]he God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction' who is 'a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser.'<sup>1</sup> The character of God in Dawkins' account is antithetical to the *missio Dei* to redeem the world, for God's plan is to annihilate people rather than to bless them.

This verdict against the God of the Old Testament stands at odds with Christopher Wright's influential assertion that the *missio Dei* provides the key for 'unlocking the Bible's grand narrative.'<sup>2</sup> For all reading strategies which emphasise the primacy of mission among the Bible's many themes, like Wright's, the new-atheist charge of divine tyranny highlights the need for specifying the place of the OT Minor Prophets within such a missional hermeneutic. The explanatory power of any missional hermeneutic hinges on how well it deals with particularist texts such as the OT Minor Prophets rather than universalist texts such as Genesis 12:1-3 and Exodus 19:5-6.

Recent developments in OT scholarship have paved the way for precisely such a re-evaluation of the missional significance of the Minor Prophets. Whereas the Minor Prophets were once viewed as twelve individual books, there is an emerging consensus that the Minor Prophets are an anthology which was compiled to offer a theological commentary on Israel's history from the divided monarchy until the return from exile and beyond.<sup>3</sup> Though acknowledging that the individual books retain their own emphases and can still be interpreted discretely, many OT scholars now view the designation 'The Book of the Twelve' as more accurate for describing the thematic coherence of this collection.<sup>4</sup> Hence the missional message of Jonah contributes only

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 51.

<sup>2</sup> To quote the subtitle of Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Martin Beck, 'Das Dodekapheton als Anthologie', *ZAW* 118 (2006): 558-81; Rainer Albertz, James D. Nogalski, Jakob Wöhrle, eds., *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 433; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Jason T. LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2012). See, however, the important dissenting arguments of Ehud Ben Zvi in 'Twelve Prophetic Books or 'The Twelve': A Few Preliminary Considerations', in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House (JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) and 'Is the Twelve Hypothesis Likely from an Ancient Readers' Perspective?' in *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve / the Twelve Prophetic Books*, by Ehud Ben Zvi,

part of a larger tapestry of themes which envisions the ultimate restoration of Israel, the nations, and creation. The judgements anticipated in preexilic prophetic books such as Hosea eventually culminate in the salvation of all nations which is envisioned in postexilic books such as Malachi. Also, the imperfect human leadership of Israel which is criticised in the earlier books gives way to God's perfect leadership in the later books. Thus the Book of the Twelve culminates with YHWH's eschatological assertion that 'my name will be great among the nations' (Mal. 1:11).

## 2. Preliminary Issues

It is necessary to begin with two questions of methodology. First, how does one analyse a prophetic collection spanning nearly four centuries, from Hosea in the eighth century BC to Malachi in the fifth century BC? Two approaches have been significant in recent work on the Twelve. On the one hand, Aaron Schart and James Nogalski have proposed that the endings of individual books within the Twelve are linked to the beginning of the next by means of keywords and catchphrases, such as Amos' concluding reference to 'the remnant of Edom' (Amos 9:12) providing a bridge to Obadiah's oracle against Edom.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, scholars have observed that certain themes undergo a longitudinal development across the Book of the Twelve, such as the motif of the 'Day of YHWH' undergoing transformation from a historical day of judgement against Samaria (e.g. Amos 5) to an eschatological time of judgement against all nations (e.g. Zeph. 3).<sup>6</sup> Each approach has its merits. Thus this study will attempt a hybrid of both in arguing that the individual books of the Twelve unfold the three

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James D. Nogalski, and Thomas Römer (Analecta Gorgiana 201; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 47-96. Similar scepticism is voiced by John Barton in *The Theology of the Book of Amos* (OTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 32-38.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Aaron Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs* (BZAW 260; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998); James D. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 218; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); idem, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Jean-Daniel Macchi, 'Le thème du 'jour de YHWH' dans les XII petits prophètes', in *Les prophètes de la Bible et la fin des temps: XXIII<sup>e</sup> congrès de l'Association catholique française pour l'étude de la Bible (Lille, 24-27 août 2009)*, ed. Jacques Vermeylen (LD 240; Paris: Cerf, 2010), 147-81.

themes of land, kingship, and a new humanity in a distinctly missional way.

Such an approach raises the other methodological question of how to define the terms ‘missional’ and ‘*missio Dei*’. The need for precise definitions is underscored by the contemporary tendency to use these terms as synonymous with the *missio ecclesiae*, that is, everything that the church ought to be doing on earth.<sup>7</sup> But these definitions are not only too anthropocentric to describe something as cosmic in scope as God’s redemption, they also exhibit the lexical fallacy noted by Stephen Neill: ‘If everything is mission, nothing is mission. If everything that the church does is to be classed as ‘mission’, we shall have to find another term for the church’s particular responsibility for ‘the heathen’, those who have never yet heard the name of Christ.’<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to such approaches, my study on the Twelve seeks to recover the theocentric dimension of mission as YHWH’s redemption of his entire creation, including but not limited to humanity. Michael Kelly helpfully notes,

*Missional*, then, is a hermeneutical posture before the Scripture that assumes several things. It assumes that the Bible itself is a *product* of the mission of God in revealing himself to fallen humanity, providing humanity with the authoritative vision of God’s will for the universe. God revealed himself in history to correct, encourage, warn, and comfort his people; he spoke concretely in historical contexts, and the Bible is the result of that speaking ... A missional hermeneutic also assumes a posture that Scripture is a *witness* to God’s work in the world. Scripture truly narrates God’s intention for creation, the problem in creation, God’s solution in Jesus Christ for creation, and the destiny of creation. Scripture narrates the mission of God for the *whole* of the cosmos.<sup>9</sup>

Following Kelly, this study will define ‘mission’ as the consummation of God’s cosmic rule rather than limiting the scope of mission to the Great Commission (i.e. Matt. 28:18-20).<sup>10</sup> In definitions of mission

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, eds., *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension: The Duff Lectures, 1958* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1959), 81.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Kelly, ‘Biblical Theology and Missional Hermeneutics: A Match Made for Heaven ... on Earth?’, in *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: Essays in Memory of J. Alan Groves*, ed. Peter Enns (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 68, italics original.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 241-49.

which focus on the church's responsibility, the kingdom of God can easily become subordinate to verbal proclamation of the gospel.

### 3. The *missio Dei* in the Books of the Twelve

What follows is an overview of how each of the Twelve depicts YHWH's agency in restoring the creation, with special attention to how the *missio Dei* also seeks to redeem the fallen institutions of human leadership and Israel's place among the nations. The scope of the Book of the Twelve in reaching all the way from creation to new creation makes it useful for tracing the larger storyline of God's cosmic purposes in history.<sup>11</sup> With some important exceptions which will be explained on the way, the historical judgements against Israel, the nations, and creation prescribed in the earlier books of the Twelve pave the way for an eschatological salvation in the later books.

#### 3.1 *The missio Dei in Hosea*

The thematic trio of creation, kingship, and a new humanity is found in Hosea 1–3, the prologue to the Book of the Twelve.<sup>12</sup> Though chronologically later than Amos, the book of Hosea has been placed at the head of the collection in order to introduce themes common to the Twelve. The interwoven nature of these themes in Hosea is noted by Hilary Marlow: 'Hosea's symbolic marriage and the naming of his children provide the starting point for a drama which depicts the cycle of cause and effect in terms of human experience and that of the natural world, and which highlights the mutual interdependence of people and land, Israel and *erets*.'<sup>13</sup> In Hosea 1–2, the people of Israel have been unfaithful to YHWH (Hos. 1:2) in attributing the land's abundance to

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<sup>11</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, 'Some Reflections on Creation as a Topic in Old Testament Theology', in *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp*, ed. Philip R. Davies et al. (JSOTSup 149; London: T&T Clark, 1992), 204-12, notes that since creation provides the starting and ending point of biblical faith, so must any attempt to treat OT theology as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> On the function of Hosea 1–3 in introducing the Twelve, see John D. W. Watts, 'A Frame for the Book of the Twelve: Hosea 1–3 and Malachi', in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney (SBLSymS 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 209-17.

<sup>13</sup> Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-reading Hosea, Amos, and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167.

Baal rather than YHWH (Hos. 2:5-8[7-10]).<sup>14</sup> Worship of Baal is not simply a matter of religious syncretism, but an all-encompassing system of unholy political alliances and economic agreements with foreign nations. Israel apostatises from YHWH by deeming these nations ‘my lovers who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink’ (Hos. 2:5[7]).<sup>15</sup> Such unfaithfulness with the nations will lead to YHWH’s judgement of infertility upon Israel (Hos. 2:9-13[11-15]). But once YHWH removes the apostasy of Baal from his people (Hos. 2:14-17[16-19]; cf. 14:1-7[2-8]), creation and humanity will be reconciled to one another: ‘In that day I [YHWH] will make a covenant for them [Israel] in that day, with the beast of the field and the bird of the sky and the crawler of the earth’ (Hos. 2:18[20]; cf. 4:1-3). The renewed creation will be the dwelling place of a new people whom ‘God will sow’ (i.e. ‘Jezreel’; Hos. 2:22[24]) in the land.

Hosea 1–3 also foresees that this people will live in a new creation under the rule of a Davidic king. This redeemed humanity, whom Hosea portrays as countless ‘like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered’ (Hos. 1:10[2:1]; cf. Gen. 22:17; 32:12), will come under the leadership of ‘one leader’ (Hos. 1:11[2:2]). He will be a Davidide who will reign ‘in the latter days’ (Hos. 3:5), after the human institutions of kingship and the sacrificial system have ceased their usefulness to Israel (Hos. 3:3-4).<sup>16</sup> In light of these eschatological features, the king introduced in Hosea 1–3 clearly previews the Davidic hope in the Twelve as a whole rather than Hosea alone. The rest of Hosea is not only rather critical toward the institution of kingship;<sup>17</sup> the mention of David’s line from Judah is also surprising in a prophetic book which mainly deals with the northern kingdom.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the

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<sup>14</sup> All translations are my own. When versification differs among the versions, the Hebrew versification will follow in brackets after the English.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, ‘Accusing Whom of What? Hosea’s Rhetoric of Promiscuity’, in *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire*, ed. Marvin L. Chaney et al. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 97-115, esp. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Michael B. Shepherd, ‘Compositional Analysis of the Twelve’, *ZAW* 120 (2008): 184-93, esp. 185-86.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Machinist, ‘Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel’, in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.*, ed. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 153-81.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony R. Petterson, ‘The Shape of the Davidic Hope across the Book of the Twelve’, *JSOT* 35 (2010): 225-46, esp. 240.

prologue of Hosea lays the groundwork for how the *missio Dei* of renewing creation, kingship, and humanity will be depicted in the rest of the Twelve.

### 3.2 *The missio Dei in Joel*

The book of Hosea concludes with a call to repentance: ‘Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity ... Who is wise? Then let him understand these things—A discerning person, and may he know them—That the ways of YHWH are upright, and the righteous will walk in them; But the rebellious will stumble in them’ (Hos. 14:1[2], 9[10]). The book of Joel takes up similar language of Israel’s wisdom traditions in lamenting that Hosea’s call to repentance has gone unheeded: ‘Hear this, O elders, and give attention, O inhabitants of the land/earth [*erets*]! Has this happened in your days or in your fathers’ days?’ (Joel 1:2).<sup>19</sup> The subsequent verses respond to this question by identifying the referent of ‘this [disaster]’ (Joel 1:2) as the loss of fertility in the land (Joel 1:4–12). Thus Hosea’s closing invitation to repent and restore the land’s fertility (Hos. 14:5–7[6–8]) had been rejected by the time of Joel.<sup>20</sup>

This link between Hosea and Joel inevitably raises the issue of when Joel’s prophecy should be dated. In this regard, the book of Joel differs from Hosea’s setting in the eighth century BC (Hos. 1:1) by giving no information besides its author or compiler, a certain ‘Joel the son of Pethuel’ (Joel 1:1). Joel is therefore difficult to fix in any particular period.<sup>21</sup> Rather than being an interpretive liability, however, several features of the book of Joel suggest that this open-endedness is an intentional move to erect a typology of God’s rule over creation and the nations.

To begin with, Joel 1–2 presents a cascade of images to depict the Day of YHWH as both a natural catastrophe as well as an invasion by foreign armies (Joel 1:8–2:11). The multivalent pictures of a ‘nation’ of locusts (1:6) and ‘army’ of soldiers (2:11, 25) hold the literal and figurative dimensions of Israel’s invaders in imaginative tension, thereby highlighting the overlap between YHWH’s rule over both

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<sup>19</sup> Nogalski, ‘Joel as ‘Literary Anchor’ for the Book of the Twelve’, in *Reading and Hearing*, 98, n. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Nogalski, ‘Joel as ‘Literary Anchor’’, 101.

<sup>21</sup> The most common proposal is the exilic or postexilic period, e.g. Elie Assis, ‘The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel’, *VT* 61 (2011): 163–83.

creation and history.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Joel issues a call to penitence before YHWH (2:12-18) which is unexpectedly subdued about the sins from which its audience must repent. Prophetic oracles against the nations typically mention the sins of pride, injustice, or apostasy (e.g. Amos 1:3–2:3), yet Joel stands alone in the Twelve for levelling no specific accusations despite calling on its audience to repent.<sup>23</sup> The uniqueness of Joel in stating the general need for repentance apart from any particular sin leads to the third distinctive of Joel, namely, that the book concludes by presenting the Day of YHWH as a typological judgement against all peoples (Joel 3[4]). Given that YHWH summons ‘all nations’ to gather at the valley called ‘Jehoshaphat’ (i.e. ‘YHWH will judge’; Joel 3[4]:12), the subsequent references to Egypt and Edom (Joel 3[4]:19) as objects of YHWH’s judgement should probably be interpreted typologically.<sup>24</sup> Much like Egypt symbolises a past opponent of God’s people,<sup>25</sup> Edom typifies a present opponent who will soon be dealt with in the book of Obadiah. But before Obadiah depicts Edom as a paradigm of judgement against all nations on the Day of YHWH (Obad. 11-15), it is noteworthy that the Book of the Twelve proceeds first to assert that YHWH reigns from Zion as King (Joel 3[4]:16-21; cf. Amos 1:2). Thus the canon signals the transition from Joel to Amos by unfolding the theological interconnections among the *missio Dei*, Zion theology, and the ultimate fate of the nations.

### 3.3 *The missio Dei in Amos*

The opening and closing chapters of Amos are closely linked to Joel 3[4]. Amos 1:2 warns that ‘YHWH will roar from Zion’ (Amos 1:2), a phrase which is a verbatim match for Joel 3[4]:16. And at the

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<sup>22</sup> Ronald A. Simkins, ‘God, History, and the Natural World in Joel’, *CBQ* 55 (1993): 435-52.

<sup>23</sup> James L. Crenshaw, ‘Who Knows What YHWH Will Do? The Character of God in the Book of Joel’, in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 188-89.

<sup>24</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, ‘The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve’, in *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (FAT 45; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 201-2.

<sup>25</sup> Joel’s depiction of the Day of YHWH draws heavily on the plague narrative of Exod. 10, as shown by Anna Karen Müller, *Gottes Zukunft: Die Möglichkeit der Rettung am Tag JHWHs nach dem Joelbuch* (WMANT 119; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008), 41-57.

conclusion of Amos, various terms of fertility from Joel 3[4]:18 supply the promise of creation's restoration after its destruction (Amos 9:13). These two references to Joel 3[4] frame an *inclusio* which depicts the *missio Dei* in Amos as a promise of salvation after judgement, both in human history and the cosmic order.

The warning of Amos that 'YHWH will roar from Zion' (Amos 1:2) draws upon the Davidic-Solomonic traditions of YHWH ruling from Zion over his whole creation (e.g. Ps. 72).<sup>26</sup> This opening reference to Zion theology previews the doxologies of creation later in the book (Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6).<sup>27</sup> But in the more immediate context of Amos 1, YHWH's roar from Zion (Amos 1:2a) leads to the mourning of creation (Amos 1:2b), and oracles against both foreign nations (Amos 1:3-2:3) as well as his own people (Amos 2:4-3:8). Noteworthy here is the fact that Zion theology leads naturally to the condemnation of non-Israelite nations for their sins. While some scholars have argued that the sins of the nations are condemned on the basis of natural law or conventional morality,<sup>28</sup> the rhetorical logic of Amos 1 instead grounds YHWH's verdict against the nations in his opening declaration of kingship over creation. First in creation to be judged is the northern kingdom of Israel, which will serve as the template for a broader pattern in which 'a God who creates ... must also destroy in order to create anew.'<sup>29</sup> Hence Amos uses creational terms to portray the Day of YHWH against Israel as 'a day not of light but darkness, a day without brightness' (Amos 5:20). Amos' prediction of God's certain judgement raises the urgent question, then, of how the *missio Dei* will be consummated through renewal of the cosmic order. YHWH is right to judge evil, as the creation hymns attest in vindicating his 'name' (Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:6), but how will he also be vindicated as a gracious deity who redeems his people and creation?

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<sup>26</sup> For comprehensive discussion of Zion theology, see Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (JSOTSup 41; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Katherine M. Hayes, 'The Mourning Earth (Amos 1:2) and the God Who Is', *Word and World* 28 (2008): 141-49.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. John Barton, 'Amos' Oracles against the Nations', in *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 77-129.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Gillingham, "'Who Makes the Morning Darkness': God and Creation in the Book of Amos", *SJT* 45 (1992): 165-84, esp. 177.

This question of theodicy receives a preliminary answer in the last five verses of Amos. After God has finished dealing with his sinful people Israel (Amos 9:1-10), the book of Amos recalls its beginning by returning to the universal horizon of the nations and creation. Salvation will come when Zion is rebuilt (Amos 9:11) and the people of God possess the remnant of Edom (Amos 9:12a), that is, the nation which embodies ‘all the nations who are called by my name’ (Amos 9:12b).<sup>30</sup> This reference to Edom provides a link to Obadiah, the next book in the Twelve which presents Edom as a paradigm of judgement followed by salvation for all nations on the Day of YHWH. Yet before moving on to Obadiah, the book of Amos concludes with a glance back at Joel in promising that the restoration of divine kingship in Zion will result in the renewed fertility of creation (Amos 9:13-15; cf. Joel 3[4]:18).

### **3.4-5 *The missio Dei in Obadiah and Jonah***

The books of Obadiah and Jonah are juxtaposed in the Twelve as a model for how YHWH deals with non-Israelite nations. Obadiah predicts how God will judge the kingdom of Edom, whereas Jonah narrates YHWH’s offer of salvation to Nineveh, capital of the kingdom of Assyria. As indicated earlier, Obadiah is linked to Amos by virtue of outlining the fate of Edom (Amos 9:12a) as a nation to be destroyed for its pride (Obad. 2-9) and collusion against God’s people (Obad. 10-14). Especially striking is the way in which Obadiah portrays the destruction of Edom not as an isolated event, but as a prefiguration of what Paul Raabe has termed ‘the particularizing of universal judgement.’<sup>31</sup> The historical judgement against Edom on its ‘day of distress’ (Obad. 14; cf. 8, 11, 13) is rooted in a broader eschatological paradigm: ‘For [*ki*] the Day of YHWH is near upon all nations’ (Obad. 15a). Thus the Day of YHWH for Edom looks back to Joel as a prototype for all nations which threaten Jerusalem, while also looking ahead to Malachi when this eschatological timeline is set in motion through the destruction of Edom (Mal. 1:4).<sup>32</sup>

Obadiah’s significance is not limited to a prophecy of judgment, for the transition to the following book indicates that the prophet Jonah is

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<sup>30</sup> Shepherd, ‘Compositional Analysis’, 187.

<sup>31</sup> Paul R. Raabe, ‘The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse’, *CBQ* 64 (2002): 652-74, esp. 667.

<sup>32</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, ‘Sequence and Interpretation in the Book of the Twelve’, in *Reading and Hearing*, 58.

another ‘envoy’ (Obad. 1) who bears a message to Nineveh.<sup>33</sup> Yet rather than the expected prophecy of judgement, the book of Jonah presents a counterpoint to Obadiah by offering the possibility of salvation for non-Israelites, while also preparing the way for final judgement in Nahum should such a gracious offer be rejected. Since the missional significance of Jonah has been well-treated elsewhere,<sup>34</sup> my analysis will focus on this book’s function within its canonical context among the Twelve. In this respect, two cross-references within the Twelve are significant for extending Israel’s cherished traditions to non-Israelites. First, the Ninevite king’s prayer of penitence is a nearly exact quote of the hope of forgiveness already expressed in Joel: ‘Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn back from his fierce anger so that we might not perish’ (Jon. 3:9; cf. Joel 2:14). That the same prayer could be expressed by both a Judean and a Ninevite is evidence that YHWH may accept both peoples on equal terms. Second and more provocatively, the prophet Jonah overturns Israel’s ancient credo by blaming God’s character for the success of his preaching: ‘I knew that you are compassionate and gracious, abounding in mercy and relenting concerning calamity’ (Jon. 4:2). In this sarcastic citation of Exodus 34:6-7, the hope of forgiveness that fuels Israel’s hope elsewhere in the Twelve (e.g. Joel 2:12-14) and the OT (e.g. Ps. 103:8) has been upended by a prophet who wishes that the opposite were true, that God would kill rather than bringing back to life (Jon. 4:3, 8-9).<sup>35</sup> The prophet’s callousness toward Nineveh and the plant that shelters him proves that he cares nothing for foreigners and creation, a biting contrast to YHWH’s rhetorical question which concludes the book: ‘Shall I not have compassion on Nineveh the great city ... as well as many animals?’ (Jon. 4:11). By sparing the Ninevites and their animals, not to mention the xenophobic prophet himself, YHWH is true to his gracious nature, thereby anticipating how Micah will also cite Exodus 34:6-7 as the hope of all peoples for salvation after judgement.

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<sup>33</sup> Burkhard M. Zapff, ‘The Perspective on the Nations in the Book of Micah as a ‘Systematization’ of the Nations’ Role in Joel, Jonah and Nahum? Reflections on a Context-Oriented Exegesis in the Book of the Twelve’, in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul Redditt and Aaron Scharf (BZAW 235; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 298, observes that Jonah represents the continuation of Obadiah owing to its lack of superscription and beginning with the narrative marker *wayehi*.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Daniel C. Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah* (NSBT 26; Nottingham: Apollos, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 220.

### 3.6 *The missio Dei in Micah*

The book of Micah marks the halfway point of the Twelve by summarizing the twin themes of Zion theology and the promise of salvation after judgement which must come first. As Burkhard Zapff has shown, the book of Micah unifies several perspectives found elsewhere by presenting the restoration of Zion as the culmination of Israel's relationship with the nations.<sup>36</sup> Following its punishment by the hand of the nations, Zion will be remade into what it was originally intended to be—the centre of God's cosmic reign, the place to which all peoples would join Israel in worshipping YHWH (cf. Pss. 46-48).

The prophecy of Micah opens with a summons for all peoples to witness how YHWH's arrival in judgement will result in the upheaval of creation: 'All this [destruction] is for the rebellion of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Judah. What is the rebellion of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?' (Mic. 1:5). The holy city is filled with bloodguilt and violence (Mic. 3:9-11), so YHWH must first destroy Zion by razing it to the ground (Mic. 3:12; cf. 1:4). Yet this historical judgement will be followed by an eschatological time when the dwelling place of God among his people will be re-established as 'the chief of the mountains—it will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it' (Mic. 4:1).<sup>37</sup> The nations will stream to Zion, not as instruments of divine wrath, but on pilgrimage to confess their faith in the God of Israel: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH and to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us about his ways and that we may walk in his paths' (Mic. 4:2). Joel's earlier imagery of ploughshares and pruning hooks in the hands of the nations is now reversed. Instead of these implements being wielded as weapons against his people, YHWH will 'hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks' (Mic. 4:3; cf. Joel 3[4]:10). The upheaval of creation will end (cf. Mic. 1:2-4) when Zion shines again as the jewel of creation where 'each of them [i.e. the peoples] will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree with no one to terrify them' (Mic. 4:4).

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<sup>36</sup> Zapff, 'Perspective', 292-312.

<sup>37</sup> Rick R. Marrs, 'Back to the Future': Zion in the Book of Micah', in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 85.

The advent of this eschatological vision must wait, however, until the historical judgement upon Israel represented by the Assyrian exile. The humble Davidic shepherd from Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) will not arise to reign over God's people until this exile is over (Mic. 5:3-6).<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the conclusion of Micah peers beyond its canonical position among the eighth-century BC prophets in foreseeing a future for God's people after the Babylonian exile several centuries later: 'Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in mercy. He will have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot' (Mic. 7:18-19; cf. Exod. 34:6-7). In a hint of this gracious God's international purposes, the last verse of Micah indicates that God's forgiveness of his people will result in the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises (Mic. 7:20; cf. Gen. 12:1-3).<sup>39</sup>

### 3.7 *The missio Dei in Nahum*

The opening verses of Nahum mirror the end of Micah by citing Exodus 34:6-7, but instead highlight the negative aspects of the credo by declaring that the city of Nineveh will experience the wrath of the God who is both 'slow to anger' and 'great in power and will not leave the guilty punished' (Nah. 1:3). Hence Micah is bracketed by two books which offer salvation to Nineveh (i.e. Jonah) but revoke this offer when their repentance does not last (i.e. Nahum).<sup>40</sup> This canonical 'sandwich' suggests that the restoration of Zion is pivotally related to both the salvation and judgement of other nations.

The restoration promised in Micah 7 coincides with the destruction of God's enemies, typified in Nahum as the city of Nineveh. As several commentators have noted, the cosmic language used to describe the fall of Nineveh (e.g. Nah. 1:3-8) and the ambiguous referent of 'you' (e.g. Nah. 1:9-14) broaden the canonical horizons of Nahum to include

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<sup>38</sup> Marrs, 'Zion', 89-90.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth H. Cuffey, 'Remnant, Redactor, and Biblical Theologian: A Comparative Study of Coherence in Micah and the Twelve', in *Reading and Hearing*, 192.

<sup>40</sup> Hyun Chul Paul Kim, 'Jonah Read Intertextually', *JBL* 126 (2007): 497-528, observes, 'It is ironic here that Jonah's anger (Jonah 4:1, 4, 9) is mirrored by YHWH's wrath (Nah. 1:2, 6); together they establish a thematic contrast: whereas Jonah's indignation is subordinated by YHWH's mercy in the book of Jonah, Assyria's iniquity accentuates YHWH's righteous indignation in the book of Nahum' (509).

more, though not less, than the fall of the Assyrian capital in 612 BC.<sup>41</sup> The Assyrian sins of ‘arrogance and autonomy’<sup>42</sup> condemned in Nahum underscore the broader principle that God is opposed to every superpower which exalts itself against his rule. But more than being a threat that ‘I [YHWH] am against you [Nineveh]’ (Nah. 2:13[14]; 3:5), the book of Nahum declares that judgement for the oppressor means salvation for God’s people: ‘Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely’ (Nah. 1:15[2:1]; cf. Isa. 52:7). This declaration of salvation forms the centrepiece of Nahum’s vision,<sup>43</sup> yet such an eschatological hope belies the historical reality that ‘[t]he Assyrians may be wiped from the face of the earth, but demons seven times worse emerge in the form of the Babylonian oppressors.’<sup>44</sup> How then will the *missio Dei* triumph in the world when the fall of one sinful empire only leads to the rise of another?

### 3.8-9 *The missio Dei in Habakkuk and Zephaniah*

The books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah answer this question by presenting Babylon as the final empire which will serve as God’s rod of wrath before itself being destroyed.<sup>45</sup> Before the fates of Israel and Babylon cross, however, the book of Habakkuk opens with a mixed message concerning ‘the Chaldeans’ (i.e. Babylon; Hab. 1:6). As a rejoinder to Nahum, the prophet Habakkuk complains that God’s promise to destroy the invader fails to resolve the problem of why he grants the invader free rein against his people in the first place. For Habakkuk, the issue at hand is no longer the presence of any given superpower, but rather that God has become the ultimate enemy as one who commissions pagan nations against his people in inconceivable ways (Hab. 1:5-11). Thus the book which bears the prophet’s name

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<sup>41</sup> E.g. Shepherd, ‘Compositional Analysis’, 189; Richard J. Coggins, *Israel among the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of Obadiah and Obadiah* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 24-33; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 444-46.

<sup>42</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 506-09.

<sup>43</sup> E. R. Wendland, “What’s the ‘Good News’—Check Out ‘The Feet’!: Prophetic Rhetoric and the Salvific Centre of Nahum’s ‘Vision’”, *OTE* 11 (1998): 154-81.

<sup>44</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 73-74.

<sup>45</sup> Sweeney, ‘Sequence and Interpretation’, 61.

contains a unique combination of laments, prayers, theophanies, and prophetic oracles which struggle with the problem of theodicy.<sup>46</sup>

The transition between chapters 2 and 3 in Habakkuk relates the problem of theodicy to the *missio Dei*. After a lament about how tyranny seems never to end (Hab. 1:12-17), the prophet is commissioned to write down (2:1-3) a taunt song against the oppressor (2:4-20). In language reminiscent of the Babel narrative,<sup>47</sup> Babylon is condemned as one who ‘gathers to himself all nations and collects to himself all peoples’ (2:5). The imperialist ambitions of Babylon will fail because it is God’s worldwide purpose that will prevail: ‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of YHWH, as the waters cover the sea’ (2:14; cf. Isa. 11:9). In contrast to the lifeless and worthless idols (Hab. 2:18-19) in whose name Babylon conquered, YHWH is the only living God to be worshipped by all: ‘YHWH is in his holy temple—may the whole earth be silent before him!’ (Hab. 2:20; cf. Mic. 1:2). Habakkuk 3 then reworks the theme of Zion into a doxology when God is depicted as the glorious warrior whose arrival as King will both nourish the earth and defeat his enemies: ‘His splendour covers the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise; his radiance is like the sunlight, he has rays from his hand, and there is the hiding of his power’ (3:3b-4). Thus the problem of theodicy is resolved in Habakkuk by foreseeing that Israel’s judgement by the hand of the nations will lead both to God’s judgement of those same nations and to an eschatological climax in which the whole world will acknowledge God’s glory (2:14).

The contours of this eschatological hope are sharpened in Zephaniah, a book which portrays the nations’ acknowledgement of YHWH as nothing less than full-orbed worship, on equal terms with God’s people. Following destruction and judgement which are creational in scope (Zeph. 1:2-6),<sup>48</sup> the prophet Zephaniah echoes Habakkuk’s call for the nations to be silent before YHWH (Zeph. 1:7; cf. Hab. 2:20). The Day of YHWH must come first (Zeph. 1:7), not only for Judah (1:8-13), but also for ‘all the earth’ and ‘all the inhabitants of the earth’ (1:18). Once this universal judgement is

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<sup>46</sup> Michael E. W. Thompson, ‘Prayer, Oracle, and Theophany: The Book of Habbakuk’, *TynBul* 44 (1993): 33-53.

<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that Babel and Babylon are both *bavel* in Hebrew.

<sup>48</sup> Michael De Roche, ‘Zephaniah I 2-3: The ‘Sweeping’ of Creation’, *VT* 30 (1980): 104-9.

complete (3:8), salvation for all nations will arrive: ‘For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of YHWH, to serve him shoulder to shoulder’ (3:9). Together the people of God will worship in Zion, the place where ‘the king of Israel, YHWH, is in your midst—you will fear disaster no more!’ (3:15). Notable here is how the people of God are located both at Zion and in the whole world, for YHWH promises the remnant that ‘I will turn their shame into praise and renown *in all the earth*’ (3:19; cf. 2:11). More than any other book in the Twelve, Zephaniah predicts the necessity of divine judgement before salvation for creation and all nations can be consummated.

### **3.10-11 *The missio Dei in Haggai and Zechariah***

The books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi historicise the eschatological hope depicted in Zephaniah by accelerating the events leading to the restoration of the second Temple, the milestone which would supposedly result in the salvation of both Israel and the nations. In particular, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhort the postexilic community in 520 BC to resume construction on the second Temple (Ezra 5:1-2), this after rebuilding had stalled in the wake of Cyrus’ decree in 539 BC (Ezra 1:2-5; 2 Chron. 36:22-23). Inattention to reconstructing the Temple had also led to creational stagnation in the form of unproductive crops and drought (Hag. 1:6, 10-11). This curse on nation and creation can be reversed, however, if the people will only rebuild YHWH’s ‘house’ rather than focusing on their own ‘houses’ (Hab. 1:4, 8). The obedience of Zerubbabel and Jeshua to these commands (Hag. 1:12-15) results in the completion of the Temple in 515 BC (Ezra 6:14-22). Now that the Temple is done, Haggai seems to anticipate that Zion will shortly be re-established as God’s throne on earth: ‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the delight of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory, says YHWH of Hosts’ (Hag. 2:7). On a similar note, Zechariah 8 predicts that the nations will soon embark on pilgrimage to Jerusalem: “The inhabitants of one city will go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the face of YHWH, and to seek YHWH of Hosts ... thus many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek YHWH of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the face of YHWH’” (Zech. 8:21-22).

The ominous tone of Zechariah 9–14 shatters this joyful prospect, for the failure of Israel’s leaders apparently postpones the

eschatological vision. The second Temple, which features so prominently in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8, all but disappears from view in Zechariah 9–14 as the Book of the Twelve turns its gaze to the final institution which needs restoration, namely, the leadership of Israel. Though Zerubbabel was a Davidide who potentially could have filled the office of the Messiah (Hag. 2:21-23; Zech. 4:6-10), Zechariah 9 looks beyond the historical failures of the Davidic line toward a better King who is ‘just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey’ (Zech. 9:9). In contrast to the predatory shepherds of Israel (Zech. 10:2-3; 11:4-17), YHWH himself will come as the compassionate Shepherd-King who brings the people back to their land and defeats the nations (Zech. 9:16–10:2; 10:4-12; 12:1-9). Here the image of a Davidic king begins to overlap with a priestly figure whose piercing will result in the cleansing (Zech. 13:1-2) and final restoration of God’s people (Zech. 13:7-9).<sup>49</sup> This depiction of a suffering Messiah in Zechariah 12–13 gives way to a victorious God in chapter 14, where YHWH’s arrival as ‘King over all the earth’ (Zech. 14:9) will lead to the transformation of creation into a paradise like Eden (Zech. 14:6-11) as well as the defeat of the nations who surround Jerusalem (Zech. 14:12-15). Yet destruction will not be the ultimate destiny of the nations, for a remnant of them will come and worship YHWH by offering sacrifices in Zion (Zech. 14:16-19). The flawed Davidic kings of Israel’s past will now be replaced by YHWH when he arrives as King over creation.

### 3.12 *The missio Dei in Malachi*

The book of Malachi both brings the Twelve to a close as well as completing the transition from a historical to an eschatological conception of prophecy.<sup>50</sup> The persistent sinfulness of Israel’s leaders, even after the reforms implemented by Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 10; Neh. 8–12), leads to an occasion for Malachi’s rebuke of the priests in particular (Mal. 1:6–2:9). In contrast to the defiled sacrifices which they offered (Mal. 1:6-10), YHWH promises a time in which ‘from the

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<sup>49</sup> Iain Duguid, ‘Messianic Themes in Zechariah 9–14’, in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 266-76.

<sup>50</sup> Donald K. Berry, ‘Malachi’s Dual Design: The Close of the Canon and What Comes Afterward’, in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House (JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 269-302.

rising of the sun even to its setting, my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name—that is, a freewill offering; for my name will be great among the nations’ (Mal. 1:11). In the same context, Malachi warns that those who rebel against YHWH will fail in their sedition, for ‘I am a great King ... and my name is feared among the nations’ (Mal. 1:14). These depictions refer not to a universalism in which all are saved regardless of religious background,<sup>51</sup> but to the eschatological victory of the *missio Dei* in redeeming the nations despite the depravity of God’s people. Here the references to ‘incense’ and ‘freewill offering’ (Mal. 1:11) appear to function metaphorically, as in Zeph. 3:9-10, to denote worship of YHWH by all peoples rather than participation in Israel’s sacrificial system.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the ‘greatness’ of YHWH’s ‘name’ as ‘King’ recalls the Zion psalms (e.g. Ps. 47:3; 95:6) in which God is celebrated for subduing the earthly powers which rage against him. Hence the divine King’s arrival will eradicate the last vestiges of rebellion and chaos in his creation, including the disobedience of his people, and thereby initiate worship of YHWH on a global scale.

Malachi 3–4 elaborates upon this eschatological victory by replacing the sinful human leadership of Israel with that of God himself. When YHWH follows after his messenger in returning to his Temple (3:1),<sup>53</sup> he will purify his people so that ‘they will bring near freewill offerings in righteousness’ (3:2; cf. 1:11). The coming of the ‘Day of YHWH’ (3:2; 4:1[3:19], 4:5[3:23]) will be both a time of judgement (3:5; 4:1[3:19]) as well as a time of restoration for those who revere God’s ‘name’ (3:16; 4:2[3:20]; cf. 1:14). Just as Moses once gave laws to God’s people which must be remembered (4:4[3:22]), God will send a prophet like Elijah who will ‘restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the earth with a curse’ (4:6[3:24]). Here the reference to ridding the ‘land/earth’ of a divine curse echoes the threat which opens the Twelve: ‘The land/earth

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<sup>51</sup> See the history of interpretation of Mal. 1:1 offered by S. D. Snyman, ‘Different Meanings A Text May Acquire: The Case of Malachi 1:11’, *AcT* 6 (2004): 80-95.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. James Swetnam, ‘Malachi 1,11: An Interpretation’, *CBQ* 31 (1969): 200-209.

<sup>53</sup> That Mal. 3:1 describes the coming of YHWH, who is later revealed to be the Messiah, has been argued convincingly by Andrew S. Malone, ‘Is the Messiah Announced in Malachi 3:1?’, *TynBul* 57 (2006): 215-28.

commits heinous harlotry' (Hos. 1:2).<sup>54</sup> Thus the Twelve concludes by predicting that God will be reconciled with creation and his people, a redemptive process which starts with the arrival of an eschatological Elijah. The coming of this Elijah-like figure will reverse the punishment of de-creation which had afflicted the land/earth in the time of Hosea the prophet (Hos. 4:3; cf. Gen. 3:17; Isa. 24:6).

#### 4. Conclusion

In a matter not unlike today, the *missio Dei* in the Book of the Twelve moves in fits and starts, ebbing and flowing along with the vicissitudes of Israel's history as a chosen but rebellious nation. The question of how a holy God can use a sinful people to bless the nations raises the urgent issue of theodicy, a dilemma which finds resolution in the Twelve through the promise of salvation after the certainty of divine judgement. This overall trajectory of the Twelve, in describing historical judgement for Israel which eventually climaxes in eschatological salvation for all nations, initiated a pattern which proved compelling enough for the New Testament writers to cite the Twelve in several important passages relating to God's redemptive purposes.<sup>55</sup> Such a sweeping vision of divine sovereignty underscores how the particularism of God in history, as described in earlier books of the Twelve, ultimately serves the universalism of this same God in the eschatological redemption of all peoples and the entirety of creation as described in the later books.<sup>56</sup> Hence the Book of the Twelve continue to furnish the people of God with theological resources to partner with the *missio Dei*, on the one hand by anticipating the inevitable failures of his people, on the other hand by predicting that God's ultimate purposes in redemption will never be thwarted by human disobedience. As a special people who live between the inauguration and consummation of the age, both embracing their missional identity but

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<sup>54</sup> David M. Morgan, 'Land and Temple as Structural and Thematic Marks of Coherence for the Hebrew Edition of the Book of the Twelve', *BN* 145 (2010): 37-55, esp. 45-46.

<sup>55</sup> Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise, eds., *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament* (LNTS 377; New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> On the Bible's movement from the particular to the universal, see Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 27-54.

rejecting missionary triumphalism, the contemporary church is invited to work together with this holy and loving God who has determined to reclaim all things to flourish under his benevolent rule.