The Future of the Prophets

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Review of Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun's book Prophets Against Empires *(in Hebrew),*

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When historians catalog Jewish people's successes of the past 50 years, one of the undoubted great successes they will list is the rebirth and explosive growth of Tanakh study as an integral part of the Torah curriculum. Long sidelined in traditional yeshiva curriculum,[2] we are witnessing a veritable renaissance of knowledge and resources among scholars and laypeople alike. Corresponding with this outburst is a new appreciation of those biblical texts generally thought to be inaccessible, including the later prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of Twelve). In describing how this revolution came about, the name of Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun will undoubtedly feature prominently among the pioneers who blazed the way in restoring the popularity of Tanakh study. One of the original staff members of Yeshivat Har Etzion, he was among the founders of Gush Emunim (which he would later break away from), Michlelet Herzog, as well as the settlements of Alon Shevut and Ofra. One of the most prolific writers and scholars in Israel, he is rightfully considered one of the pioneers of the modern religious approach, described by Rabbi Shalom Carmy as the "literary-theological" approach. Based on modern literary techniques, combined with insights from history and archeology yet infused with awareness of the traditional sources and commentaries, his approach is among the most influential among in modern Israel today.[3] His most recent work, "Prophets Against Empires," provides a creative and comprehensive overview to the difficult prophetic literature that flourished in ancient Israel from the mid-nineth century to the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in

587 bce.

Throughout history, the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of Twelve were a locked treasure chest, containing tremendous pearls of wisdom, yet inaccessible to most. The biblical Hebrew is poetic and unfamiliar, an iron barrier between the reader and the prophets. Additionally, the prophetic books' lack of narrative structure, as well as generally not providing the historical background and context for what provoked the prophetic preaching create large obstacles between the prophets and the modern audience. These difficulties are not new; Martin Luther is often quoted as having complained:

> They (the prophets) have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at. [4]

Historically, the lack of knowledge regarding the historical background of the prophetic literature has led some to argue that this knowledge is not necessary to comprehend their message. After all, the Talmud declares that “Many prophets arose in Israel, double the number of those who left Egypt; but prophecy that was needed for future generations was written, and that which was not needed was not written” (TB *Megillah* 14). Even the towering biblical scholar Nechama Leibowitz was quoted as stating that "Nineveh is New York is Tokyo!"[5] Since the prophets' message is eternal, its exact details are irrelevant. However, this focus on the timeless ignores the reality that the prophets attempted to convey timely messages to their listeners (and readers). As such, without an understanding of the historical background of the prophecies, their full import and ultimately impact would be lost. Additionally, as recent archeological discoveries continue to constantly increase and enrich our knowledge and understanding of the time period in which the prophets navigated, not applying this knowledge would deviate from the manner in which our earlier commentators operated. [6]

Influenced by Rabbi Bin Nun's focus on attempting to locate and recreate the historical background for the prophetic works, many of the latest commentaries attempt to understand the prophets' messages within their reality and milieu.[7] Now, Rabbi Bin Nun attempts to provide the comprehensive overview for a period of time that spans over 150 years and almost a dozen of the biblical prophets, providing both the historical overview of the era as well as locating the specific time when each prophecy was uttered. He divides the era into four distinct periods; two of which saw the ascent of the fortunes of the Jewish people, each followed by two rapid descents. The first period commences with the reign of Ahab, whose marriage to Jezebel the Phoenician ushered in a period of prosperity and success, combined with pagan corruption and idolatry. Jehu's assassination of Ahab's family begins a rapid descent, and for half a century, the people suffered under the assaults of Aram. However, two generations later during the reign of Jehu's grandson and great-grandson, Joash and Jeroboam, the northern kingdom of Israel regained its prosperity and ascendancy, concurrently with a dramatic change in the fortunes of the southern kingdom Judah under Uzziah. Both kingdoms expanded their borders to unprecedented heights; and in this period of material abundance and extraordinary military and political dominion, the two kingdoms worked in close cooperation. Finally, this idyllic period disappeared quickly. A devastating earthquake, Uzziah's fall from grace due to contracting the skin affliction *tzara’at* (commonly mistranslated as “leprosy”), the assassination of

Jeroboam's son led to an extended period of political instability in Israel. This coincided with the reappearance of a more dangerous and militaristic Assyria on the eastern border which led to the relatively quick disappearance of the northern kingdom and the near extinction of the kingdom of Judah in the south. While discussing each of these periods, Rabbi Bin Nun attempts to locate the prophecies of each of the prophets who spoke at each time, connecting their words with the historical records. The book concludes with a brief summary of the lengthy reign of King Manasseh, and the people's final attempt to rebuild themselves under the reign of King Josiah.

The greatest strength and contribution of "Prophets Against Empires" is in Rabbi Bin Nun's almost unequalled tremendous breadth and depth of historical knowledge, in addition to his complete command of the biblical and traditional sources. In Jeremiah's attempts to renew the ancient covenant (Jer. 11), he has to wrestle with widespread Shabbat desecration (Jer. 17:22–27)—which enables Bin Nun to survey all the biblical texts that deal with business on Shabbat, from Exodus 16, Amos 8:5–6, Isaiah 1:15–16, and Nehemiah 13:15–22. Bin Nun is also up-to-date with all the recent developments in archeology. Reflecting on the miracle that Isaiah performed for Hezekiah, causing the sun to move backwards ten degrees (2 Kings 20:8–11), Bin Nun notes that Yigael Yadin found a sundial matching this description in the Cairo Museum.[8] Similarly, Isaiah's accounts in chapter 20 of the Assyrian campaign in the coastal region, specifically the attack on Ashdod in 713 bce, are corroborated from Sargon's own records and inscriptions found on the walls of the palace in his capital, Dur-Sharrukin.[9] The careful combining of all these disparate sources of knowledge together with Rabbi Bin Nun's tremendous exegetical imagination creates a masterpiece; the book is both an easy-to-read summary of a relatively forsaken period of Jewish history that makes the words of the prophets understandable and accessible, yet does not sacrifice depth and insight. Most importantly, as one proceeds into the work, one begins to form connections between the time of the prophets and ours.

One of the book's strengths is the division of the historical period into four distinct periods, which enable him to locate prophecies in their approximate historical context. Different times required differing prophets. The reign of Ahab required an Elijah to stand against him. However, Elijah could never envision the Jews being exiled out of their own land. Only when Amos appears, two generations later, when the Assyrian empire begins its meteoric ascent to the role of superpower, does the destruction of the Israelite kingdom and exile become real and imminent possibilities. Amos' rhetoric has to reflect this new reality.

Additionally, Rabbi Bin Nun capably notes that the book of Kings presentation of historical events is suspect chronologically. For example, chapters 4–8 of II Kings describe a northern kingdom that is beaten and subservient to Aram. Following the chronology, most commentators assume that the unnamed king of Israel is Ahab's son Jehoram. However, Rabbi Bin Nun notes that this decrepit situation does not reflect the state of the northern kingdom under Ahab's dynasty, which maintained a strong military and expanded borders. However, these chapters dovetail nicely with the political decline of the northern kingdom under Jehu and Jehoahaz as described later in the book (II Kings 10, 13). Therefore, suggests Rabbi Bin Nun, chapters 4–8 actually occur later chronologically, but are located earlier in order to present the prophet Elisha in a positive manner.

While dividing his historical recounting into broad time periods, Rabbi Bin Nun avoids dealing with some of the more difficult issues of the book of Kings' bewildering chronology. The number of years that Kings lists for each kingdom for the period of time beginning with the year when both Jehu and Ataliah ascend the respective thrones of Israel and Judah respectively under the final destruction of the northern kingdom diverge from both each other and the accepted historical record (Kings lists 143

years for the northern kingdom, 166 years for the southern kingdom, while the accepted historical record only spans 121 years). The problems have been known for generations; efforts to resolve them began in the second century ce, when R. Yose bar Halafta composed the *Seder Olam Rabba*, continue through the traditional medieval commentators and into modern-day scholarship, which attempt to account for newly discovered Assyrian (and other) records when reconciling the various discrepancies.[10] Wisely, Rabbi Bin Nun avoids murkying the clear waters that he has so painstakingly constructed by avoiding the minutiae of the competing chronologies found in both biblical sources and historical records.

One of the novel exegetical tools that Rabbi Bin Nun presents to the reader is the concept that certain prophecies are restatements of older oracles being recycled by the prophets for rhetorical purposes. If a speaker today would tell his audiences that “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat,” clearly the orator wishes to draw a comparison between his listener's situation and that of Winston Churchill in World War II. Similarly, Rabbi Bin Nun argues that several prophecies are only comprehensible if understood as ancient oracles that the speaker is using to either shock or alarm his listeners. Amos himself alludes to the existence of earlier prophetic traditions when he warns his audience "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light" (Amos 5:18). Clearly the prophet has to wrestle with an earlier understanding, common among the people, that the upcoming "day of the Lord" will see the destruction of God's enemies—only they can't imagine that they, the Jewish people, would be included in that group. We shall content ourselves with two examples of "old prophecies.” The first example encompasses Amos' opening verses, which describes a series of harsh punishments that await Israel's neighbors that encircle her, including Aram, Edom, the Philistines, and even Judah to the south. Suddenly, Amos' rhetorical trap springs shut, and the northern kingdom finds itself the recipient of the harshest prophecy of all.[11] Rabbi Bin Nun notices that many of the crimes that Amos accuses the surrounding nations of had been committed decades, if not a century earlier.[12] For example, Amos accuses Edom of the crime of "pursuing their brother with a sword" (Amos 1:11), which Rabbi Bin Nun connects with the events that occurred in the time of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat (see II Chronicles 21:9–10, 16–17). Similarly, the sins of Judah include "rejected the Law of the Lord, and they did not keep God’s statutes" (Amos 2:4), which would not have been true in Amos' time, when Uzziah sat on the throne, but would accurately reflect the reign of Amaziah, Uzziah's father. Therefore, he concludes that Amos is drawing his listeners in by regaling them with tales of divine justice from time gone by, only to surprise them with a new prophecy directed at them for their failings. He writes:

> There is no point or significance to a declaration now, in the time of Jeroboam, that God will send a fire upon the house of Hazael in Damascus and upon the walls of Israel's other enemies; it all happened already. Amos's audience can look back nostalgically at the extraordinary string of victories that they experienced, and smile at the memory. It is precisely for this reason that Amos refers back to the ancient prophecy, which opened with God's condemnation of the terrible crimes of Aram against Israel—a prophecy that is familiar to his audience … Amos cites the ancient prophecy against each of the enemies as a necessary preface to his own prophecy concerning the crimes committed by Israel themselves. This latter prophecy is long and detailed, and its style differs from the brief enumeration in the earlier prophecy.[13]

The second, and perhaps most creative exegesis in the book, again evoking the usage of "old prophecies,” involves the opening verses of Hosea. Hosea is ordered by God to marry "a promiscuous

woman” (in Hebrew, *eshet zenunim*) and have children with her. Together, they have two boys and one girl. The three children are given clearly symbolic and negative names; Yizreel, Lo-Ruchama, and Lo-Ami (meaning "the Jezreel valley,” a place seared into the nation's consciousness as a site of horrendous violence, "No mercy,” and "Not My people.” Rabbi Bin Nun will suggest that these names are clearly symbolic, but in an unexpected way. Chapter 2 in Hosea describes the bond between God and Israel one of husband and wife; however, since Israel has turned to Ba’al, whose worship Hosea dramatically describes, this connection has been tainted and desecrated. A tremendous problem exists. Hosea speaks in the time of the last kings of Jehu's dynasty, and later. Jehu, who lived at least half a century earlier, had completely eradicated Ba'al worship from the northern kingdom (II Kings 10:30), and no sources indicate that it ever returned. Rabbi Bin Nun asks: What point would there be in a prophet standing up to decry the harlotry of Jezebel, and the Ba’al-worship that she had introduced to Samaria, a whole century after it was no longer an issue? Again, Rabbi Bin Nun turns to Yehezkel Kaufmann, who argued that the first three chapters of Hosea should be attributed to an ancient prophet who spoke during the time of the house of Ahab.[14] After criticizing some of the weak points in Kaufmann's presentation, Bin Nun makes the following original suggestion. He suggests that any listener of Hosea would immediately recognize the promiscuous mother and her three wayward children. Clearly, Hosea was alluding to Jezebel, about whom Jehu exclaims, "What peace, so long *as the harlotries of your mother, Jezebel*, and her witchcrafts, are so many?" (II Kings 9:22). The daughter "Lo-Ruchama" (No Mercy) refers to Ataliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel who slaughtered many of her own grandchildren during her *coup d'etat* (II Kings 11). The son "Lo-Ami" (Not My People) hints towards Achaziah, who had consulted with foreign gods and not a prophet of Israel (*ibid*., ch. 1); while "Yizre'el" was obviously a reference to Jehoram, who was killed in the Yizre'el valley (*ibid*., ch. 8). Again, the purpose of recycling the old prophecies is to shock Hosea's listeners out of their complacency and shake their self-confidence; by failing to maintain the high standards that God demanded of them, they had become as deserving of punishment and destruction as the house of Ahab.

As to be expected with a book with such an ambitious agenda, several prophets appear to be short-changed. Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah are seriously examined, and their prophecies are carefully parsed and assigned to where Rabbi Bin Nun assumes they were uttered. Specifically, Isaiah's historical and political prophecies, the events of Isaiah 1–12 and 36–39, are carefully assigned among the kings of Judah at that time. Chapters 2–5, which lambast the people for their arrogance and failure to utilize their affluence to improve the lives of their countrymen, Bin Nun identifies as having occurred during the reign of Uzziah, while the country was still prosperous. Chapters 7–12, which describe both the Syro-Israelite invasion of Judah in 734 bce and the encroaching Assyrian military are allocated to Ahaz and Hezekiah's reign. However, other prophets, including Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are shortchanged in their presentation, receiving little more than a superficial introduction. Micah's vision of Judah's lowlands being ravaged by invasion (Mic. 1:9–16) is summarily assigned to the Assyrian invasion of 701 bce, even though the previous verses describe the northern kingdom of Samaria as still functioning (the capital would be destroyed in 721 bce).[15] More concerningly, in several places, Bin Nun's confidence in his dating suggestions border on speculation and circular logic, as opposed to concrete evidence. He argues that in the time of Ahab, there was a movement toward national unity, symbolized by the joining of the two royal houses together by marriage. His proof is Hosea 2:2: "And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head.” However, as he noted, the very dating of Hosea 2 to the time of Ahab is itself a novel suggestion, as well as the fact that the verse is written in the future tense, and is not describing an event, present or past. Similarly, Rabbi Bin Nun confidently assigns Nahum's prophecy that the Assyrian empire will not arise again, to the communal Passover sacrifice that Josiah performs in the year 622 bce, in his eighteenth year. Arguing that the people needed encouragement, fearful of Assyrian reprisals, Bin Nun states that Nahum declared his

words of encouragement at this time. "Trouble shall not rise up a second time…. So says the Lord: Although [the Assyrians] are in full strength, and likewise many, even so they shall be cut down, and [their time] shall pass, and though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more … [therefore] keep your holidays, Judah; perform your vows, for the wicked one shall no more pass through you; he is utterly cut off" (Nah. 1:11–2:1). However, the Tanakh does not explicit time mentioned for Nahum's prophecy. Midrashic tradition states that Nahum actually prophesied earlier, during the reign of Manasseh (*Seder Olam* 20). This, however, is not mentioned by Rabbi Bin Nun. This is an unfortunate and expected shortcoming of the book; given the need to summarize the time period without becoming too bulky, Rabbi Bin Nun often ignores the alternative approaches found within the traditional commentators.[16] Historically, the midrashic identification of Nahum's prophecy to a generation before Josiah appears more logical, as Nahum himself states that "[the Assyrians] are in full strength"—which accurately describes the state of the Assyrian Empire during Manasseh's reign, but not during Josiah's.[17] The last real king of Assyria, Assurbanipal, found himself on the defensive on many fronts as enemies began to attack his overextended weakened forces during the last decade of his reign, and upon his death in 626 bce Assyria faced a rebellion from Babylon, which seceded from the empire. In the political vacuum that followed, Josiah had already begun to reclaim many of the lands of Israel that Judah had lost. At this juncture, no one would have been fearful of Assyrian reprisals; Nahum's words would have been seen as redundant.

Perhaps the strongest question that arises from Bin Nun's presentation of the prophetic literature is the role that he assigns the prophets. Binyamin Lau, in his work on Jeremiah, attempts to portray them as public intellectuals: "a man of letters … an outsider to the system, a gadfly who must summon all his literary or oratory powers to persuade the audience of his words—and of the mortal danger of ignoring them" (Lau, "Jeremiah", p. xiv). Bin Nun appears to maintain a similar approach, except that he appears to place the prophet into the role of government advisor. When Hezekiah ponders whether to oppose the Assyrians militarily, Bin Nun speculates that Isaiah and Micah argued.[18] While Isaiah counselled the king to maintain his focus on religious reforms, Bin Nun portrays Micah as leading a nationalistic, populist party demanding that the king fight with Assyria. In doing so, Bin Nun focuses on the middle of Micah's prophecy ("Should Assyria come into our land, and should they tread upon our palaces, we will appoint over them seven shepherds and eight princes of men. And they shall break the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its gates" (Micah 5:4–5); yet ignores the clear end of the prophecy:

> And it shall come to pass on that day, says the Lord, that I will cut your horses out of your midst, and I will destroy your chariots. And I will destroy the cities of your land, and I will break down all your fortresses… (*ibid*., 5:9–10)

The suggestion that any prophet (let alone Micah, whom history remembers as the one who saved them from the Assyrian invasion; see Jer. 26:17–18) would counsel the king of Judah to embark on a reckless adventure to challenge the world's pre-existing military superpower is ludicrous, especially when the resulting consequences include the destruction of almost the entire kingdom.[19] More troublingly, however, is that in his attempt to portray the prophets in terms that are accessible to the modern reader, Bin Nun almost removes the divine aspect of their messages. It is precisely this dimension that separated the prophets from our understanding, but from their listeners as well. Prophets may have served as advisors, intellectuals, gadflies, and counsellors—but their role was to convey the divine message, and the humanizing of the prophets by reducing them to roles that we can

comprehend tends to diminish their primary function; they are God's messenger to the people, nothing less.

Finally, most readers have a propensity to condense all mentions of idolatry into one large mold. This tendency is fueled by the rabbinic statement that the Jewish people only worshipped idols in order to permit themselves to publicly engage in forbidden sexual relations (*Sanhedrin* 63b). In response, Rabbi Bin Nun capably discusses the theological issues that motivated the Jewish people to abandon single-minded worship of God for a syncretic approach to allow them to interact with the other nations. However, even after Bin Nun's masterful survey of the political forces that moved our prophets one fundamental topic of prophetic concern still remains underdeveloped. This is the question of social justice. That the prophets demanded economic justice and social equality is undeniable—yet unfortunately, the underlying questions that led to their concerns and complaints have not yet been addressed. Recent scholarship suggests that in addition to the ever-present factors of human avarice and greed, the prophets were railing against larger economic structural forces that inevitably led to economic inequality. For example, Marvin Chaney argues that the very institution of the monarchy with its accompanying centralized government set in motion forces that led to the schism between the urban elite and the rural peasants. Other social scientists who study the modern effects of urbanization on highly rural, agrarian communities argue, with some possible merit, that the same economic forces of wealth concentration were at play during this period in eighth-century Israel and Judah.[20] These issues, the effects of changing economic systems and realities, and the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of an elite few, should be very relatable to modern audiences, who struggle with the same economic forces as did the listeners of the prophets of Judah and Israel in the eighth century bce.

In conclusion, the above criticisms should not in any way diminish the appreciation we should have for the fundamental *tour de force* that Rabbi Bin Nun has produced. Certain great works can only be produced after a lifetime of committed and dedicated scholarship. Fortunately, Rabbi Bin Nun's herculean efforts, as embodied in this book, open the door to the prophetic works even wider, so that ultimately, Jeremiah's hopeful vision that "I will place My law in their midst and I will inscribe it upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be My people. And no longer shall one teach his neighbor or [shall] one [teach] his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me" (Jer. 31:33–34) one step closer to fruition.

Notes

[1] Ed. Note: An English version of this volume can be found at the Yeshivat Har Etzion Virutal Beit Midrash, beginning at https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/neviim/sefer-melakhim-bet/early-prophecies- (there are a total of 35 lectures in the archive).

[2] To understand the sidelining of See Mordechai Breuer, see "The Study of Tanach in the Yeshiva Curriculum," *Studies Presented to Moshe Arend*, p. 229, "*Mine'u Bneichem min ha-Higayon*" ["Keep your children from *Higayyon*"], in the *Memorial Volume Book for Rabbi David Ochs* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan, 1978), and Yaakov Beasley, "Of Fainting Maidens and Wells": Bible Study in the Yeshiva Curriculum, available online at https://www.lookstein.org/professional-dev/bible/fainting-maidens-wells-bible-study-yeshiva-curriculum/.

[3] See Hayyim Angel, "*Torat Hashem Temima*: The Contributions of Rav Yoel Bin-Nun to Religious Tanakh Study" for an excellent introduction and survey of his thought (*Tradition* 40:3), Spring 2007, pp. 5–18.

[4] Martin Luther, quoted in Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 33. (Luther's Works, Weimar edition, Volume 19: 350).

[5] Heard orally from several of her students. Hayyim Angel notes Yisrael Rozenson's suggestion that "Professor Nehama Leibowitz's work on Jeremiah never gained popularity primarily because she did not associate prophetic books with their historical periods … regarding *Nevi'im Aharonim*, however, too vital a component is lost by ignoring historical setting, since prophets delivered their messages to specific audiences." Angel, "Bringing the Prophets to Life: Rabbi Binyamin Lau's Study of Jeremiah," *Tradition* 44:1, 2011, pp. 53–54 and footnotes 3, 4.

[6] For example, upon arriving in Akko in the year 1263, the Ramban saw an original shekel for the first time, and famously changed his understanding of its weight to align with interpretation of Rashi, even though he argues with Rashi's interpretation in his commentary to the Humash (noted in *Sefer haIkkarim* 3:16), and found in Dr. Yosef Ofer's work on the additions Ramban made to his commentary when he arrived in the land of Israel.

[7] Recent examples can be located in the Maggid Tanakh Series volumes on the later prophets. Both of Benjamin Lau's works on Isaiah and Jeremiah, Hayyim Angel's work on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, as well as my work on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (and upcoming volume on Joel, Obadiah, and Micah) contain either historical overviews of the prophet's time period, or in Lau's case, a reordering of the books' chapters into chronological order. However, it should be noted that while providing a general historical overview is recommended, the ability to definitely declare exactly which section was uttered in a specific year (except when otherwise noted) remains an extremely speculative act. See Angel, "Jeremiah", pp. 57–58.

[8] Y. Yadin, "*Ma'alot Achaz*," *Eretz Yisrael* 5 (5719).

[9] To corroborate his recreation of the historical events, Bin Nun brings Chaim Tadmor, "*Chet'o shel Sargon*," *Eretz Yisrael* 5 (5719); G. Galil, "*Ha-Yechasim Bein Yehuda le-Ashur bi-Yemei Sargon ha-Sheni*," *Tzion* 57 (5752), pp. 113–133; N. Ne'eman, "*Mediniutam shel Achaz ve-Chizkiyahu Klapei Ashur bi-Yemei Sargon*," *Tzion* 59 (5754), pp. 5–30.

[10] For examples of traditional commentators attempting to reconcile the contradicting verses regarding the dating of the various kings, see Rashi and the Radak's commentary to II Kings 14:22 and II Kings 15:8. For modern scholarship on chronology issues in the book of Kings, see E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983); Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); M. Christine Tetley, *The Reconstructed Chronology of the Divided Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005). A summary of these issues appears as an appendix in my upcoming Maggid Tanakh Series volume on Joel, Obadiah, and Micah.

[11] This is commonly referred to in scholarship as "rhetorical entrapment," where the speaker frames and disguises his message in such a way that the real meaning is not revealed until the listeners have fully engaged themselves. When the true meaning of the message is revealed, the listener is forced to render judgement on themselves. In addition to the beginning of Amos, other biblical examples of "rhetorical entrapment" include Nathan's metaphor of the lone sheep to David, who orders the wicked rich person killed, only to discover that he himself is the wicked rich person (II Samuel 12), and Isaiah's metaphor of the Song of the Vineyard (Is. 5:1–7). See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 144, for an expanded discussion of the usage of rhetorical entrapment in biblical prophecy and poetry.

[12] Bin Nun points out that this is first noted by Yehekzel Kaufmann, in "*Toldot ha-Emuna ha-Yisraelit*," vol. III (Jerusalem 5732), pp. 59–63; see *ibid*., pp. 51–55.

[13] "Prophets and Empires," pp. 51–52. John Barton suggests a similar rhetorical goal: Having won the people's sympathy [through his expression of moral outrage], he rounds on them by proclaiming judgment on Israel too. This technique has two obvious advantages…he has gained his audience's attention by flattering their feelings of superiority.… Secondly, it makes it much harder for them to exculpate themselves…since they have implicitly conceded that sin and judgment are rightly linked. (J. Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 3.)

[14] *Toldot ha-Emuna ha-Yisraelit*, vol. III, pp. 93–107.

[15] While Radak argues that the prophecy jumps from the events of 721 bce in verse 8 to the events of 701 bce in verse 9, Malbim convincingly argues that Micah laments the destruction inflicted on the lowlands during the Syro-Israelite invasion of Judah in 734 bce during Ahaz's reign.

[16] It should not be surprising that Hayyim Angel levels similar criticism—the speculative nature of dating prophecies to a specific instant (as opposed to identifying the general milieu in which they occurred), as well as not referring to alternative voices within traditional commentators—at Binyamin Lau's work on Jeremiah ("Jeremiah," pp. 57, 60). Lau is heavily influenced by Bin Nun; indeed, they collaborated on Lau's next work on Isaiah. In fairness, Bin Nun uses more classical commentary in this volume, and bringing every disagreement in it may have detracted from its readability.

[17] In our work on Nahum, we suggest that Nahum's words of encouragement are directed at King Manasseh, and provoke him to repent (see 2 Chr. 33), as the last verse of ch. 1 in Nahum contains clear allusions to Manasseh.

[18] Unfortunately, Bin Nun does not address the theological implications of his claim. How do two legitimate prophets, speaking in God's name, arrive at such conflicting interpretations of their visions?

[19] Most commentators understand the earlier bellicose oracles in Micah as referring to future messianic times, and not as a prescription for Hezekiah. An alternative approach, which I adopt in the upcoming volume on Micah, argues that a close reading of these verses reveals that Micah is quoting his opponents and mocking them—do you think that you can simply invade Assyria?—so in fact Micah and Isaiah remain united in their opposition to Hezekiah's militaristic folly.

[20] Marvin Chaney, "Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy," *Semeia* 37 [1986]: 72. In chapters 7 and 8 of *Peasants, Prophets, & Political Economy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), Chaney argues that the intensification of agriculture that occurred during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, increasing their participation in international trade, was the main factor behind the social crisis encountered by the prophets. For other approaches, see B. Lang, "The Social Organization of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 83f, and D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003).