Since the 1994 creation of the Society of Biblical Literature’s “Seminar on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve,” scholarly interest has increasingly focused on the unifying features of the Minor Prophets and the prospect of reading the collection as a unified whole. In this revision of his doctoral dissertation, Jason LeCureux argues that the Book of the Twelve is unified around the theme of שׁוב (“return”), in the sense of “return to me and I will return to you.” Building on an earlier proposal made by Craig Bowman concerning the importance of שׁוב in Hosea 1–3 and Malachi, LeCureux successfully demonstrates that the theme of שׁוב appears in some form in each book in the Minor Prophets and is overly represented in the beginning (Hosea, Joel, and Amos) and the end (Zechariah and Malachi) of the corpus.

The first three chapters cover many of the preliminary considerations expected in a dissertation. The first chapter reviews the history of research and historical evidence for the unified transmission of the Twelve. In addition to the strong tradition of identifying the Twelve as a unity, LeCureux recognizes that there is likewise evidence preserving their individuality (5). Thus while there is a historical precedent for reading the Book of the Twelve as a unified corpus, LeCureux identifies the importance of allowing each book to retain its individual character. The author proposes that the exploration of a theme is the best way to balance the individuality and unity of the Minor Prophets (16). The second chapter therefore introduces the volume’s methodological approach to a thematic study. LeCureux defines a theme as “a recurring idea, communicated by word or phrase, which supports the main thrusts of the prophecy and gives theological shape and meaning to the work” (32). The third chapter concludes the preliminary methodological discussion by exploring the unifying function of the Jerusalem/Zion theme in Isaiah as a comparative analogy for the function of the שׁוב theme in the Book of the Twelve.

Chapters 4 through 9 present LeCureux’s textual exploration of the use of שׁוב in each of the Minor Prophets. In Chapter 4, LeCureux observes how שׁוב functions in Hosea’s messages of punishment, restoration, and repentance (64). Hosea’s diverse utilizations of שׁוב introduce LeCureux’s perceived dual struggle for both YHWH to “turn” and forgive YHWH’s people, as well as for the people to “turn” from sin and toward YHWH (107–110). Chapter 5 continues the theme of שׁוב in relation to Joel’s emphasis on the Day of YHWH. Joel is also the first prophet to include the fully articulated imperative “return to me,” which is
the implied thrust of the theme throughout the Twelve that only reaches complete expression in Zech. 1:3 and Mal. 3:7 as “return to me and I will return to you.” Curiously, LeCureux skips Amos to next explore Jonah (Chapter 6) as a text that opens salvation to the nations and underhandedly denounces YHWH’s own people for their failure to repent (143). Whereas the nations are exclusively the recipient of divine wrath in Hosea-Obadiah, Jonah allows them to repent and receive salvation (144). Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai (Chapter 7) are all handled together as texts which more subtly contribute to the theme of שׁוּב. Each in some way addresses how YHWH turns to Israel and the nations in judgment, and by judging the nations eventually restores Israel. In Chapter 8, LeCureux suggests that the theme of return is most explicitly articulated as Zechariah intentionally blurs the distinction between שׁוּב as the return from exile and שׁוּב as the call to repentance (205). As the people return, Zechariah declares that a continual state of repentance is required (206). Malachi (Chapter 9) closes the Twelve declaring that in addition to returning to the land, the law, the cult, and social justice (all things found elsewhere in the Minor Prophets), the people must also return to YHWH himself.

LeCureux’s volume will undoubtedly be a welcomed voice in the continuing conversation exploring the thematic unity of the Book of the Twelve. His investigation, however, does raise a number of important questions. First, how unified does a theme have to be to serve a unifying function in a corpus of prophetic texts? LeCureux recognizes the diverse uses of שׁוּב in the Minor Prophets. He treats the function of שׁוּב in Hosea under three broad categories (64) and its employment in Zechariah under five categories (173). LeCureux handles this challenge well. For him, the diverse utilizations of שׁוּב in the Minor Prophets are part of what allows each book to be unified by the common theme while retaining their individual nature. However the diverse functions of שׁוּב itself pose a challenge to its proposed function as a unifying concept.

Second, though LeCureux does not entirely neglect discussion of the diachronic factors at work in the Book of the Twelve, his synchronic literary approach still leaves many historical questions unanswered. He notes, for example, the late addition of Jonah and Zechariah 9–14 as well as previous scholarly investigations of the redactional development of Joel, but these insights have minimal impact on his synchronic investigation. While he shows the presence of שׁוּב in the beginning and end of the corpus, he does not discuss whether or not this theme was added or strengthened by later redactors, when this would have taken place, or if the editors merely observed the theme already present in each prophetic text and merely arranged them to provide