

Abilene Christian University

Digital Commons @ ACU

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

5-2022

## Reimagining the Prophets: Joel's Reception of (the Rest of) the Book of the Twelve

Brianna Wade  
bcr13a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wade, Brianna, "Reimagining the Prophets: Joel's Reception of (the Rest of) the Book of the Twelve" (2022). Digital Commons @ ACU, *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 453.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

## ABSTRACT

The book of Joel is classified as one of the twelve Minor Prophets. However, it is different from the books that surround it. In this study, we will explore how studying Joel by thinking of it as a reception and reimagining of what the prophets like Amos and Hosea spoke about helps us to understand the prophet's words for a new generation and context. Joel uses echoes and prophetic stock images that the author's audience knows to convey his message. The author draws from prophetic material from the preexilic and exilic world and creates something for this new generation of postexilic people in order to help them know what it means to be the people of God in this new world they now are in. This project identifies specific driving images in Joel and puts the author's use of these images in conversation with the way that the images are used in the rest of the Book of the Twelve. The purpose is to show that the book of Joel acts as more than just a prophetic book, but also as didactic and pseudo-apocalyptic literature, creating something different than the books around Joel in the canon and tying the Book of the Twelve together.

Reimagining the Prophets:  
Joel's Reception of (the Rest of) the Book of the Twelve

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology  
Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Old Testament

By  
Brianna Wade

May 2022

This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Brianna Wade, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Old Testament

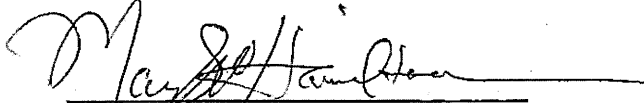


Assistant Provost for Residential Graduate Programs

Date

4/27/22

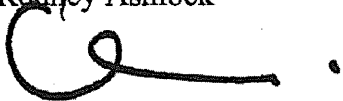
Thesis Committee



Mark Hamilton, Chair



Rodney Ashlock



Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my love, Troy Wade, thank you for putting up with the long rants and for keeping me sane while I worked. Also thank you for checking in on how the thesis process was going; without you and your sometimes daily checking in, I may not have finished this thesis. To my family, you have always been supportive of everything that I have done. I especially want to thank my dad for teaching me from an early age to love languages and encouraging me to pursue my passion. To Dr. Hamilton, thank you for putting up with me. I know that this has been a long road, and I want to thank you for your patience with me as I worked slowly at times. To Dr. Pemberton, thank you for sharing your wisdom and knowledge of the Hebrew Bible in the sophomore Old Testament course; it was your class that sparked my interest in the Hebrew Bible. And finally, to my grandmother, Joyce Raiser. Though you may be gone, you live on in my heart. You shared your faith with all your children and grandchildren. Without you, I would not be where I am today. I will try my hardest to make you proud.

והיה כל אשר־יקרא בשם יהוה ימלט  
כי בהר־ציון ובירושלם תהיה פליטה  
כאשר אמר יהוה  
ובשרידים אשר יהוה קרא:

And it will be that all who call in the name of YHWH will be saved  
for on the mountain of Zion and in Jerusalem, there will be deliverance  
as YHWH has said  
and among the remnant whom YHWH calls.

Joel 2:32 (3:5)

© Copyright by Brianna Wade (2022)

All Rights Reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. BASIC ORIENTATION .....	4
To What Books Did Joel Have Access?.....	6
Dating the Prophets in the Book of the Twelve.....	6
Intertextuality.....	9
“Prophetic Stock Images” .....	10
Echoes.....	11
The Audience of Joel.....	12
The Audience Behind the Text.....	13
The Audience of the Text.....	14
The Functions of the Book of Joel.....	17
Didactic Literature.....	17
Pseudo-Apocalyptic Literature as Didactic .....	23
II. THE PROPHETIC STOCK IMAGES .....	26
Imagery and Prophetic Poetry .....	26
Locust Plagues in the Twelve.....	29
The Locust Plague in Amos.....	32
The Locusts in Nahum.....	35
The Locust Plague in Joel 1.....	35
Locusts in Joel 2 .....	38

Famine and Harvest in the Twelve .....	40
Famine and Harvest in Hosea.....	41
Famine and Harvest in Amos .....	43
Famine and Harvest in Micah.....	47
Famine and Harvest in Joel .....	48
The Gathering of the Nations in the Twelve .....	50
The Nations Gathered in Hosea.....	51
The Nations Gathered in Micah.....	53
The Nations Gathered in Habakkuk .....	56
The Nations Gathered in Zephaniah.....	58
The Nations Gathered in Zechariah.....	59
The Nations Gathered in Joel .....	61
YHWH as a Lion in the Book of the Twelve .....	63
YHWH like a Lion in Hosea .....	64
YHWH like a Lion in Amos.....	65
YHWH like a Lion in Joel.....	66
Joel's Theological Purposes for Using the Images.....	67
III. AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT יום יהוה .....	70
The Mythos of the Day of YHWH.....	70
The Day of YHWH in the Minor Prophets.....	75
The Day of YHWH in Amos.....	75
The Day in Obadiah.....	77
The Day in Zephaniah .....	78



The Day in Zechariah .....	80
The Day in Malachi .....	84
The Day of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve.....	84
The Day of YHWH in Joel.....	85
The Day and Tragedy .....	86
The Day and Hope.....	87
What Has Changed for Joel.....	90
IV.    JOEL’S USE OF SCRIPTURE AND ITS PURPOSE.....	94
Joel’s Use of Scripture.....	94
Formulaic Sayings .....	94
Echoes in Joel.....	95
Why Does This Matter?.....	100
Reading Joel through a Didactic Lens.....	100
Joel’s Literary Function as Didactic Wisdom .....	101
How Joel Teaches.....	102
What Is Taught?.....	104
Joel’s Teaching on God’s Mercy.....	107
Reading Joel through a Pseudo-Apocalyptic Lens.....	108
Why Does This Matter?.....	113
CONCLUSION .....	114
APPENDIX: AUTHOR’S TRANSLATION OF JOEL.....	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	122

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Joel is classified as one of the twelve Minor Prophets. However, it is different from the books that surround it. In this study, we will explore how studying Joel by thinking of it as a reception and reimagining of what the prophets like Amos and Hosea spoke about helps us to understand the prophet's words for a new generation and context. I intend to show that the author of Joel uses previous prophetic material to construct a new and original prophetic book for a new generation of Israelites. The book is an early postexilic piece of literature, drawing from previous prophetic books such as Amos, Hosea, Micah, and others to craft something new.

This thesis project will demonstrate that (1) Joel is a piece of literature written to a community that needs to learn what it means to be the people of God in the postexilic world; (2) prophetic stock images used throughout the Book of the Twelve create connections with Joel; (3) within Joel, various echoes create connections between the book and the rest of the Book of the Twelve; and (4) the purpose of Joel in the reception and reimagining of the Book of the Twelve is to create a piece of prophetic literature for this postexilic generation.

Chapter 1 of this thesis will orient the reader to the terms and ideas that will be used throughout the paper. The terms introduced in Chapter 1 build the background for the case of how Joel pulls together the Book of the Twelve through the use of images while adding a new spin on them. Additionally, Chapter 1 will tackle the issue of the audience of Joel. Finally, I will argue for the two types of literature that Joel can be

assigned to, didactic literature and pseudo-apocalyptic literature. Laying out the audience of the book and orienting the reader to the two types of literature will help to build the argument in Chapter 4 of the purpose of Joel.

The next two chapters will contribute to the bulk of the thesis. They will show that Joel uses “prophetic stock images” to construct a vision of the world that will serve its readers. Chapter 2 focuses on the prophetic stock images of locust plague, famine and harvest, YHWH as a lion, and the gathering of the nations. These images recur in much of the book of Joel and therefore it is important to understand their use. I will address each image and its use in the Book of the Twelve (and any cultural background for each image), and then compare Joel’s usage to that of the other Minor Prophets. Chapter 3 will concentrate on how the image of the Day of YHWH is used throughout the Book of the Twelve and in Joel, where it is the driving image in the book. I will show how Joel constructs a paradoxical understanding of the Day of YHWH as both tragic and hopeful for the people of God.

Chapter 4 focuses on Joel’s intertextual relationships with other prophetic texts. I will also consider how Joel uses these echoes differently than the source material on which he draws for the purposes of teaching and revealing YHWH’s plan for the people. In this section, I will read Joel through both a didactic lens and a pseudo-apocalyptic lens. This chapter will argue that the book of Joel is meant to be read through both a didactic lens, teaching the audience to remember what was taught before, and a pseudo-apocalyptic lens, pointing toward a future where YHWH once again rules from Zion.

In summary, the four chapters of this thesis will show how Joel takes images and phrases from the other Minor Prophets and reuses them to craft oracles for a new

generation. The reuse of material from the other Minor Prophets shows how the images adapted over time to reflect the changes for the Israelite people. The author of Joel created oracles to be read in the context of the other Minor Prophets as a way of augmenting and updating their messages and drawing the Minor Prophets together. In doing so, the book puts the past in conversation with its readers' future.

## CHAPTER I

### BASIC ORIENTATION

The purpose of this chapter is to define the terminology that I will use in my discussion of Joel and the Book of the Twelve and to indicate ways in which Joel's intertextual connections with the rest of the Twelve create meaning. To begin, the Book of the Twelve is "a collection of twelve individual prophetic books that were placed together to form at least two versions of the Twelve."<sup>1</sup> These slightly different versions include twelve individual works that can function independently as well as within a collection edited together through the use of different redactional techniques.

There is an elaborate discussion among scholars about prior editions of the Minor Prophets. Within this discussion, we get the evidence for a prior edition of the Minor Prophets called the Book of the Four. This edition includes Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah. Jakob Wöhrle suggests that the Book of the Four is augmenting the Deuteronomistic History since each prophet "presents a history of prophecy relying on the history described in the books of Kings but with its own interpretation."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to discuss how the superscriptions (especially regarding certain dates) suggest that these prophets, while they may have been edited during the exile, are intended to be read "as a

---

1. Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, Berit Olam 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), xxxix.

2. Jakob Wöhrle, "'No Future for the Proud Exultant Ones' The Exilic Book of the Four Prophets (Hos., Am., Mic., Zeph.) as a Concept Opposed to the Deuteronomistic History," *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 608.

commentary on the pre-exilic history of Israel and Judah.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Nicholas R. Wense notes further that while the passages that use Deuteronomistic themes “do not always form a single coherent redactional layer . . . investigation of the Book of the Four intertextual parallels . . . yields coherent redactional layers.”<sup>4</sup> One of his main arguments is that the use of Deuteronomistic themes should not serve as the only decisive factor for proof of redaction and editing. However, for this thesis, it is important to note that the author of Joel is working within a tradition of redactional history of prophetic works, as evidence by the existence of prior editions of the Minor Prophets.

For this thesis, I will not go into all the redactional layers of the Book of the Twelve. I will not work through the redactional history of Joel or how its layers might relate to layers in other books. I will not decide whether an echo of Amos in Joel comes from the final “book” or from an earlier stage of Amos’s development. This approach is justified, I believe, by the recognition that Joel appeared late in the redaction history of the Twelve. Therefore, instead, I will focus on how Joel has been written to be read within some form of the Book of the Twelve, since as far as we know, Joel had no prior existence outside this collection. I will be working with the idea that the postexilic communities were continually using, reworking, and thinking of the preexilic prophets to guide them in their search to follow YHWH.

---

3. Wöhrle, “No Future for the Proud Exultant Ones,” 612. For this thesis, the term “preexilic” can be defined as the period of Israelite history prior to the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. The term “postexilic” will be defined as the period of time following the edict of King Cyrus of Persia in 538 BCE and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Consequentially, the term “exilic” will be used to describe the decades between 586 BCE and 538 BCE.

4. Nicholas R. Wense, *Reconsidering the Book of the Four: The Shaping of Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah as an Early Prophetic Collection* (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 303.

## **To What Books Did Joel Have Access?**

Joel uses many of the books ascribed to preexilic prophets in his oracles. This thesis focuses primarily on the sources from the Book of the Twelve, but Joel echoes other parts of the Hebrew Bible as well. It is also important to note that while Joel uses some of the same language and images, these are not necessarily echoing other prophetic books. That is, we must weigh carefully the possibilities of a given text in Joel alluding to or echoing a given text elsewhere. One tactic for prophecy in the Hebrew Bible was to draw on the common history of the people being addressed. Additionally, we will see that there is a formula for introducing prophetic oracles.

## **Dating the Prophets in the Book of the Twelve**

Identifying quotations, echoes, and allusions requires prior decisions on the relative dating of the texts in question, as I will address below.<sup>5</sup> Because the book of Joel does not offer any decisive evidence for a date, scholars have historically debated the issue.<sup>6</sup> Three arguments for a date come to the forefront of these debates. Early scholars, such as Karl A. Credner and Carl F. Keil, argue for a preexilic dating of the book. These authors suggest that the book can be placed in the eighth century BCE (or earlier) because of the placement of the book in the Hebrew canon of the Minor Prophets.<sup>7</sup> This argument is a conservative position that assumes that the order of the prophets in the Book of the Twelve is vitally important to the dating of the individual prophetic books.<sup>8</sup>

---

5. See the section titled “Echoes” in this thesis for the discussion of the method of identifying intertextual references.

6. James N. Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary of Joel* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2003), 1.

7. Karl A. Credner, *Der Prophet Joel übersetzt und erklärt* (Halle [Saale]: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1831); Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1868).

Another piece of evidence for an earlier dating (more substantial than simply the place in the canon) is the enemies listed in the judgment of the nations in Joel 3. The nations mentioned include Tyre, Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia, but not Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.<sup>9</sup> This more localized focus suggests to these commentators a date prior to the rise of the eastern superpowers.

A second position on the dating of Joel is that of scholars such as Johann Vatke, David Hubbard, James Pohlig, and James Crenshaw, who argue for a postexilic dating. The first scholar to offer this position was Vatke, in 1835.<sup>10</sup> Vatke argued in part for a later dating because Joel 4:7 suggests that the Greeks threatened the region.<sup>11</sup> Following Vatke's example, Hubbard, Crenshaw, and Pohlig continue this argument. Hubbard argues for a two-stage composition of the book, finding evidence for a later stage of the book after 500 BCE based on the astronomical calculations in Joel 2:10.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Joel's use of other prophetic works and the mention of the Jerusalem wall and the Ionians, suggest a postexilic date.<sup>13</sup> And finally, Pohlig provides the evidence that there is

---

8. Richard Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 14.

9. David A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 23–24.

10. Johann Vatke *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt*, Vol. 1: *Die Religion des Alten Testaments nach den kanonischen Buchern entwickelt* (Berlin: n.p., 1835), 462. See also Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary of Joel*, 1–4; Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 4–6; Raymond Dillard, “Joel” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary 1*, ed. T. E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 240–43; and Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 19–25.

11. Vatke, *Die biblische Theologie*, 463.

12. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 24–25. Hubbard also discusses the evidence for a date after 366 BCE but argues for a date of around 500 BCE as the probable date.

13. James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 23. Crenshaw states that “internal evidence . . . favors a late-dating of the book, perhaps fifth century.”



no reference to the monarchy, nor to Assyria or Babylon, which suggests a fifth century BCE or later dating for the book of Joel. Pohlig also argues that Joel's description of temple worship and lack of condemnation of idolatry excludes the exilic period when the temple was destroyed.<sup>14</sup> However, Elie Assis argues that "the reference to the cult in the book of Joel is not decisive in establishing its historical period."<sup>15</sup>

There is some debate, moreover, about the extent of the impact of the deportations on the daily lives of the common people of Judah. While the elite were taken captive to Babylon, many Israelites, perhaps most, remained in the land. However, just because there were people who remained in the land does not mean that religious aspects of life would have continued normally after the deportation of the monarchy and the installation of a Babylonian governor. Certainly, the communities would have continued with their daily lives, but because of the close connection of the monarchy and the religious cult, I cannot agree that the cult continued as normal without the center of the temple and monarchy. J. Bright argues that "Israel's true centre of gravity had temporarily shifted from the homeland" and that "though there were doubtless godly people in Judah who, like their brothers far away, mourned over Zion and longed for its restoration, they were too leaderless and helpless to do more than dream."<sup>16</sup> Bright seems to be drawing on the idea from some biblical writers, such as those of Ezra and Nehemiah, that there were

---

14. Pohlig, *An Exegetical Summary of Joel*, 1–4. Pohlig offers more evidence for a later date than I could discuss here.

15. Elie Assis, *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 9–10. I am aware of the Empty Land Debate, which discusses just how many deportations there were and the impact of those deportations on the people who remained in the land. I will not go into detail here on this as it is tangential to the date of Joel. What I will discuss is the impact of the deportations on cult life in response to Assis.

16. J. A. Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 345.

some who had remained. However, in the same writings of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people who remained are shown to be suspect in some way or another; they did not have the religious leadership that they had before the exile and so (according to these biblical writers) they strayed from YHWH. Because of this argument and the evidence for a postexilic date, I agree that Joel is a postexilic prophet, dated sometime during the late fifth to fourth century BCE.

### **Intertextuality**

The term intertextuality is difficult to define because “no firm or certain answer to what forms a true example of intertextuality exists.”<sup>17</sup> There is no true example of intertextuality because those who study this idea recognize that “any text can be placed into conversation with any other text, thereby forming an intertextual relationship.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the simplest definition of an intertextual relationship involves two pieces of literature that are connected in some way to each other. Instead of trying to find the form of intertextuality, it may be better to simply recognize that texts that are considered intertextual are in conversation with one another. James Nogalski gives an example of this with the Book of the Twelve. Nogalski’s definition of “intertextuality” sharpens the simple definition above. He proposes that intertextuality is “the interrelationship between two or more texts which evidence suggests (1) was deliberately established by ancient authors/editors or (2) was presupposed by those authors/editors.”<sup>19</sup> He argues that the

---

17. J. Todd Hibbard, *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27: The Reuse and Evocation of Earlier Texts and Traditions* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 4.

18. Hibbard, *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, 4.

19. James D. Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve,” 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 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 102.

authors and editors of the Book of the Twelve connected the prophetic books with catchwords and phrases.<sup>20</sup> This intertextual relationship can also be created through the use of “prophetic stock images” and echoes, as I will argue. These forms of more intentional intertextuality reveal how the ancient authors and editors were reflecting on and conversing with older texts.

#### “Prophetic Stock Images”

The idea of “prophetic stock images” imagines that the prophets drew from a set of “prophetic stock phrases”<sup>21</sup> when crafting their oracles. These phrases take the traditional images associated with the people of Israel’s past and spin them in a metaphorical way to express meaning to the listeners. The Book of the Twelve employs a set of these phrases because “the prophetic books share common literary motifs and common audience that would have appreciated those motifs.”<sup>22</sup> While many of the books in the Hebrew Bible use these images, I will place a special emphasis on the themes and motifs that are common in in the Book of the Twelve. It is these images that unify the Book of the Twelve. I will refer to these images as “prophetic stock images” since they carry prophetic imagery, following the pattern of “threats brought about by covenant disobedience, calls for change, promises associated with change, larger threats for rejecting the opportunity to change, and promises of eventual renewal.”<sup>23</sup>

---

20. Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve,” 102.

21. Paul R. House, “Endings as New Beginnings: Returning to the Lord, the Day of the Lord, and Renewal in the Book of the Twelve,” *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, eds. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Scharf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 321.

22. House, “Endings as New Beginnings,” 316.

23. House, “Endings as New Beginnings,” 318.

Since these images are found throughout the Book of the Twelve, they help to unify the collection. However, each prophet nuances the meaning of the phrase for their theological arguments for their individual social locations. These images, while used for different purposes, still have set meanings. The “prophetic stock images” that we will be examining in relation to Joel for this project include: the image of locust plague, famine and harvest, the deliverance on Zion (which can also be thought of as the image of YHWH’s rule), the gathering of the nations, and finally, the day of YHWH.

### Echoes

As stated above, echoes are another way that intertextual relationships are created. However, echoes cannot simply be a similarity between two pieces of literature. Echoes have to be tested in order to determine if they are in fact true echoes.

There are a couple of different camps on how to test for echoes. One of the major scholars in this field is Richard Hays, who proposes seven tests to determine echoes. These tests include availability of the source to the author, the volume of the text in the work, how often the author uses that passage, how well the echo fits within the theology of the argument, the historical plausibility of the author using that text, the history of interpretation for that text, and whether the reading of the text makes sense within the context.<sup>24</sup> Another scholar in this field is J. Todd Hibbard. Hibbard’s method tests fewer criteria than Hays’s but still focuses on the key issues. He gives four main issues to consider when identifying echoes: shared vocabulary, thematic coherence, meaningful textual relationship, and chronological possibility.<sup>25</sup>

---

24. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32.

25. Hibbard, *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, 5.

While Hays's categories include things such as the volume of the text in the work, how often the author uses the text, and the history of interpretation, Hibbard's method would include these two within the meaningful textual relationship category. Similarly, the categories of availability to the author and the historical plausibility would both fall into Hibbard's category of chronological possibility. Likewise, Hays's categories of how well the text fits theologically and whether the reading makes sense would both fall into Hibbard's category of thematic coherence. The only category that Hibbard includes that does not correspond to one of Hays's categories is the category of shared vocabulary. Because of the similarities in the two methods, I will be using Hibbard's shorter method since it covers the most important issues for identifying echoes.

### **The Audience of Joel**

We must consider three different audiences: the audience behind the text, the audience of the text, and the audience in front of the text. The audience behind the text refers to the culture, traditions, and social experiences of the people at the time the text was written. The audience of the text is who the characters in the text are and what they are saying and hearing. The audience in front of the text is the modern readers, who come to the text with different life experiences and social locations than those behind the text. That being said, we will forego discussing the audience in front of the text because I do not presume to know the experiences and social locations of all people who have read, do read, or will read the words from Joel. Instead, we will focus on the audience behind the text and the audience of the text.

## The Audience Behind the Text

For the book of Joel, this would be the people of the late fifth and fourth century BCE, those who have seen and experienced the aftermath of the exile for themselves. The author of Joel is writing in a time when many of the captives had returned and rebuilt Jerusalem's walls and the temple. They were dealing with what they believed to be impurities in their culture (i.e., the people not keeping themselves separate from those of the neighboring lands, among other issues). For example, in Ezra 9, the leaders of the people come before Ezra and say:

לא־נבדלו העם ישראל והכהנים והלויים מעמי הארצות כתועבתיהם לכנעני החתי הפרזי  
היבوسی העמני המאבי המצרי והאמרי: כי־נשאו מבנתיהם להם ולבניהם והתערבו זרע  
הקדש בעמי הארצות ויד השרים והסגנים היתה במעל הזה ראשונה:

The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not kept themselves divided from the people of the lands, from their abominations; the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters for themselves and their sons, so that the holy descendants are mixed with the people of the land. Even more, the princes and rulers have been the first in this treacherous act. (Ezra 9:1b–2).<sup>26</sup>

The author of Joel sees these impurities as a sign that the people of God have not changed their ways from what they were before the exile. This is true of other postexilic texts such as Malachi and Isa 57–59.<sup>27</sup> It is evident that the late prophets did not think that the indictments of the past were over. The same issues that had plagued the community of preexilic Israel continued to be an issue after the return. The authors want to remind the people what happened in the past (both what God had done for the people, as well as how God had punished them for their iniquities). In Neh 9, the Levites recount the history of

---

26. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the biblical text are my own translations.

27. This is a different view than that of Second Isaiah, which illustrates a return and hope for the people who are in exile.

the people of Israel and the sins of their ancestors before YHWH. They end their cry to YHWH by saying

הנה אנחנו היום עבדים  
והארץ אשר־נתתה לאבתינו לאכל את־פריה ואת־טובה  
הנה אנחנו עבדים עליה:  
ותבואתה מרבה למלכים אשר־נתתה עלינו בחטאותינו  
ועל גויתינו משלים ובבהמתנו כרצונם ובצרה גדולה אנחנו:

Here today we are slaves,  
in the land that you gave to our fathers to eat its fruit and its bounty;  
here we are slaves in it.  
Its produce increases for the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins.  
They have reign over our bodies and do what they please with our cattle.  
We are in great distress. (Neh 9:35–36)

The Levites are calling on God in the assembly gathered together, listening to the narrating of the sins of the people of Israel. They recount what has happened and declare that the people are in distress, recognizing that it is their own fault. In a sense, this is a call for the people gathered to repent of what their ancestors had done, to not repeat the same things. Similarly, the book of Joel calls its audience to gather and repent. In Joel, the author uses the current social experiences to reframe the prophetic traditions for this new postexilic generation, calling to mind the past while focusing on the future.

#### The Audience of the Text

The audience of the text is a little more difficult to ascertain. There are at least two or three audiences identified in the text of Joel itself. These include the keepers of memory, the people of Judah, and the nations. Each audience plays an important role in the oracles. The people of Judah are simply those who have lived in Judah, who have suffered at the hands of the nations, who have been living life the best that they can during the plagues and the wars. The nations are those who have oppressed the people of Judah. YHWH declares the nations will be repaid for what they have done to the people.

The main (and implied) audience of the text includes the keepers of memory. In the community, the keepers of memory are tasked with recording and remembering the events of their time. They listen and write down what they hear and see so that they can impart the knowledge of these events to those who would come after them. They are told to “listen because what I am going to say has never happened before.” The construction of Joel 1:2–3 sounds similar to the construction of the opening lines of Ps 78. Psalm 78 says,

הַאֲזִינָה עַמִּי תוֹרַתִּי הֵטוּ אַזְנוֹכֶם לְאִמְרֵי־פִי:  
אֶפְתַּח בְּמִשְׁלַל פִּי אֲבִיעָה חִידוֹת מִנִּי־קֶדֶם:  
אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעֵנוּ וְנָדַעְנוּ וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ סִפְרוּ־לָנוּ:

Listen my people, to my law; tilt your ears toward the words from my mouth.  
I will open my mouth with a parable; I will speak ancient riddles  
that we have heard and known for our ancestors have told us. (Ps 78:1b–3)

Joel, on the other hand states,

שִׁמְעוּ־זֶאת הַזְקֵנִים וְהַאֲזִינוּ כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַהִיטָה זֶאת בִּימֵיכֶם וְאִם בִּימֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם:  
עֲלֶיהָ לְבַבְנֵיכֶם סִפְרוּ וּבְנֵיכֶם לְבַנְיֵהֶם וּבְנֵיהֶם לְדוֹר אַחֵר:

Hear this, O elders, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land.  
Has this happened in your days? Or in the days of your ancestors?  
Recount it to your children and your children their children  
and their children to the generation after. (Joel 1:2–3)

Both the Joel passage and the passage from Ps 78 call the listener to hear the words of the person speaking. While the two authors of the passages choose different words to implore their listeners to listen, both authors ask that the listeners “give ear” to what they are about to say. Additionally, both authors reference the ancestors as a way of drawing on the tradition of the people and connecting the present with the past. The Psalter continues to admonish the listeners to continue the tradition that had been handed down to them. Similarly, Joel asks the keepers of the community memory to think back on the times of



old, the times that their predecessors had told them about and notice that this plague that is coming upon them is unlike any they had seen before. The similarity of the two passages suggests that there is a common didactic background behind them. It shows that there is a specific way that teachers in ancient Israel spoke.

Additional places within the text call upon the memory keepers to take notice.

When Joel describes YHWH's compassion and mercy in 2:13, he says

ושובו אליהוה אלהיכם כי־חנן ורחום הוא  
ארך אפים ורב־חסד ונחם על־הרעה:

return to YHWH your God for he is gracious and merciful.  
slow to anger and abounding in mercy and he relents from doing harm (Joel 2:13b).

Joel calls the people to recall the tradition of YHWH's self-declaration from Exod 34:6–

7. In Exod 34:6–7, when YHWH passes before Moses, Moses hears the words

יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת:  
נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה לא ינקה

a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and being great in goodness and truth, guarding mercy for thousands and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, but by no means leaving it unpunished (Exod 34:6b–7a).

This memory is a part of the foundational memory of the community. It reminds them of how YHWH has delivered them before and will do so again. It also reminds them of the compassion that the God they serve has for those who follow him. This is a God who is gracious and compassionate and who, while still punishing transgression, will not abandon the people.

Finally, in 4:20, Joel tells the keepers that they will not be the end of the memory.

He says that יהודה לעולם תשב וירושלם לדור ודור “Judah will abide forever and Jerusalem from generation to generation” (Joel 4:20). This allows the memory keepers to know that

YHWH will deliver them, and the memory of the community will be passed on. It will not end with this catastrophe. Joel's primary focus on the keepers of memory in the text is his way of shaping the audience, calling upon them to perform well in their act of listening, appealing to their highest self-estimation.

### **The Functions of the Book of Joel**

Now that we have identified the audience behind the text, we can discuss the functions that the book of Joel has for this community of believers. The first and foremost function of the book of Joel is that of a prophetic text. This text rightly finds its place among the Book of the Twelve (the Minor Prophets) as a collection of oracles.

It may very well be a collection of oracles handed down through oral tradition. However, it is more likely that the writer of Joel received the traditions of the former prophets and used their words and ideas to create something for his own generation. That is not to say that there was no oral tradition behind the text or that there was no prophet "Joel" who spoke of a locust plague. However, the author (not necessarily Joel himself) takes these oracles and puts them in conversation with the prophetic tradition. The two functions that Joel has aside from the function of prophetic literature are didactic literature and pseudo-apocalyptic literature.

#### Didactic Literature

The main role of the book of Joel is to teach the community. Another way of saying this is that the book has a didactic function for the community. Didactic literature is "a kind of composition that instructs an audience even as it praises the divine."<sup>28</sup> This type of literature has a history in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and other

---

28. Matthew Gordley, "The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions," *JBL* 128.4 (2009): 782.

Second Temple writings.<sup>29</sup> These different types of poetry are often connected to the temple, as the temple was a place of instruction (as can be seen in Joel's connection to the temple cult and the instruction on the role the priests should play in repentance). People from all around Israel would come to the temple to sacrifice and to worship, but also to hear the word of YHWH. When didactic literature is connected to the temple, "[its] main topic is the 'instruction' [תורה] of the Lord, and [it proclaims] the happiness [אשרי] of the just."<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the types of didactic literature already mentioned, prophecy also falls within this category. Prophecy, like other types of didactic literature, "[teaches] not merely through direct instruction but also through imagery and metaphor, creating a vision of ultimate reality."<sup>31</sup> The prophets use these images and metaphors to relay visions from God. These images also tell the people the reasons behind their oncoming punishment in hopes that they will learn and repent. Because of the connection that prophecy has to didactic literature, "some prophets were themselves sages or at least influenced by wisdom"<sup>32</sup> and wrote wisdom and teachings within their prophecies.

---

29. For a deeper discussion on wisdom literature in the ancient Near East see John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

30. André Lemaire, "The Sage in School and Temple," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 179.

31. Gordley, "The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions," 782.

32. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "The Sage in the Prophetic Literature," *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 297. See also Mark Sneed, ed., *Was There a Wisdom Tradition: New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Tradition* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

### *Turning Away from God in Joel*

As part of a manifestation of this didactic function, one of the main lessons the author is trying to teach the listener is to not turn away from YHWH in order to worship and serve another deity. The book of Joel does not name for the audience the explicit issue that causes the community to turn away from God. Instead, it uses various images for idolatry, including being drunkards, worshipping only outwardly (without changing the heart), evil thoughts, desires, and temptations. Gösta Ahlström states that based on the typical usage of the Hebrew phrase שבו עדי (“turn to me”), “the oracle of Joel 2:12 stresses the fact that the people must return to no other god than Yahweh” since they “[have] worshipped not only Yahweh but also other gods.”<sup>33</sup> An example of this form of idolatry can be found in Joel 1:5 which says

הקיצו שכורים ובכו והיללו כל-שתי יין על-עסיס כי נכרת מפיכם:

Wake up, O drunkards and weep; howl, all you who drink wine,  
over the new wine that has been cut off from your mouth. (Joel 1:5).

These people who have become drunkards and are now to weep because their drink is gone, have turned from YHWH to follow the desires of their heart—they have followed after wine and strong drink rather than after YHWH. Now the prophet is calling the people to fast from the wine that they have been holding on to. They are called to “cast [last year’s harvest] aside and assume a state appropriate to the absence that awaits them next year.”<sup>34</sup> The fast logically follows the call for mourning. It is the beginning of the

---

33. Gösta Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*, VT Sup 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 26.

34. David Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, & the Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 29.

prophet's call for the people to repent. The fasting is both an act of mourning and an appeal for YHWH to hear the cry of the people (Joel 2:17).<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, Joel relates to other texts in the Hebrew Bible because he addresses similar issues that have plagued Israelite history, despite “no such accusations appear[ing] *explicitly* in Joel.”<sup>36</sup> For example, Joel can be seen echoing stories from 1 Kings and Exodus. Specifically, “the intertextual interaction of Joel 2:12–17 with Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kgs 8:35–48 and the divine character credo of Exod 34:6–7 . . . implies that there is sin from which the community needs to turn.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1 Kgs 8, Solomon gives a prayer to dedicate the temple. He says

בהעצר שמים ולא יהיה מטר כי יחטאו־לך והתפללו אל המקום הזה והודו את־שמך  
ומחטאתם ישובו־ן כי תענם  
ואתה תשמע השמים וסלחת לחטאת עבדיך ועמך ישראל כי תורם את־הדרך הטובה  
אשר ילכו־בה ונתתה מטל על־ארצך אשר־נתתה לעמך לנחלה

When the heavens are closed up and there is no rain because Israel has sinned against you, and they pray toward this place and praise your name and turn away from their sin because you afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants and your people Israel so that you may teach them the best way for them to walk and send rain on your land that you have given to your people as an inheritance. (1 Kgs 8:35–36)

Solomon speaks of several different scenarios that may happen in the coming time of the kingdom of Israel. He speaks of famine, drought, locust, and even invasion. He asks that YHWH remember the people when they turn back to follow their God. Solomon continually speaks of what happens when the people turn back to YHWH. He implores YHWH to “תשמע השמים” “hear from heaven” and have mercy on the people. While Joel is

---

35. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 22.

36. Joel Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 71. See also Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*, 265.

37. Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence*, 265.

not echoing 1 Kings, he uses a similar tactic that is found in 1 Kings 8, Exodus, and the other prophets to get the people to whom he is speaking to return to YHWH. He reminds them of the tradition of YHWH's mercy. Joel's imploring to the people to **שובו אל־יהוה** "return to YHWH" echoes the prayer of Solomon because Joel recognizes that if the people turn back to YHWH, then YHWH will return back to them. Just as Solomon discusses the benefits of what will happen when the people return to YHWH, so too does Joel. Joel states,

ויען יהוה ויאמר לעמו הנני שלח לכם את־הדגן והתירוש והיצהר ושבעתם אתו ולא־אתן אתכם עוד חרפה בגוים:  
 ואת־הצפוני ארחיק מעליכם והדחתיו אל־ארץ ציה ושממה את־פניו אל־הים הקדמני וספו אל־הים האחרון ועלה באשו ותעל צחנתו כי הגדיל לעשות:  
 אל־תיראי אדמה גילי ושמחי כי־הגדיל יהוה לעשות:  
 אל־תיראו בהמות שדי כי דשאו נאות מדבר כי־עץ נשא פריו תאנה וגפן נתנו חילם:  
 ובני ציון גילו ושמחו ביהוה אלהיכם כי־נתן לכם את־המורה לצדקה ויורד לכם גשם מורה ומלקוש בראשון:  
 ומלאו הגרנות בר והשיקו היקבים תירוש ויצהר:  
 ושלמתי לכם את־השנים אשר אכל הארבה הילק והחסיל והגזם חילי הגדול אשר שלחתי בכם:  
 ואכלתם אכול ושבוע והללתם את־שם יהוה אלהיכם אשר־עשה עמכם להפליא ולא־יבשו עמי לעולם:

YHWH will answer and say to his people, "Look, I am sending you grain and new wine and oil and you will be satisfied by it and I will no longer give you over to shame among the nations; And I will remove the north from you and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea and his stench will come up and his foul odor will go up because of the "great" things he has done. Do not fear, O land. Be glad and rejoice for YHWH has done great things. Do not be afraid, O beasts of my field, for open pastures are springing up; for the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and the vine yield their produce. And Children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in YHWH your God for he has given you early rain faithfully and he will cause the shower to come down for you, the early rain and later rain at the beginning. And the floors of the threshing floors will be full of wheat and the vats of new wine and oil will overflow. And I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust have eaten,

the young locust, the eating locust, and the other locust, my great army which I sent among you.  
And you will certainly eat and be satisfied and praise the name of YHWH your God  
who has done extraordinary things among you and my people will never be disgraced again. (Joel 2:19–26)

Not only are the locusts devastating the land, but drought has been as well. Joel's community has been dealing with the same things that Solomon described in his prayer. They have dealt with famine, drought, locust, and invasion. Joel points out the things that they had been dealing with will be changed to blessings once they have turned back and their shame will be no more.

John Strazicich suggested that because of the intertextual references and the connection to the temple within the book, “the book of Joel should be understood in covenantal terms.”<sup>38</sup> So, one of the issues that the book of Joel seems to address is the act of breaking the covenant, which leads to the curses for those who break the covenant, found in Deuteronomy. These curses are said to bring trouble upon the city and the field and all the things that the community used for their livelihood. We are told in Deuteronomy that

ישלח יהוה בך את־המארה את־המהומה ואת־המגעת בכל־משלח ידך אשר תעשה עד  
השמדך ועד־אבדך מהר מפני רע מעלליך אשר עזבתני:  
ידבק יהוה בך את־הדבר עד כלתו אתך מעל האדמה אשר־אתה בא־שמה לרשתה:  
...כל־עצך ופרי אדמתך יירש הצלצל:

YHWH will send curses, confusion, and rebuke on you and all that you set your hand to do until you are destroyed and perish quickly because of the wickedness of your deeds for which you have forsaken me.<sup>39</sup>

---

38. John Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture and the Scripture's Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 56.

39. Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 752, 767–68.

YHWH will plague you until he has vanished you from the land which you are going to possess . . .  
Locusts will consume all your trees and the fields of your land. (Deut 28:20–21, 42).

In the book of Joel this curse of a plague of locusts sent upon the land is fulfilled. This intertextual reference to the covenant curses shows the “general national disobedience to Yahweh, regardless of whatever particular sets of violations may have been foremost in Joel’s day.”<sup>40</sup>

### Pseudo-Apocalyptic Literature as Didactic

One type of literature found within the Hebrew Bible is apocalyptic literature. These texts are used to inspire the audience using images that foster a sense of wonder for the listener. The most common form of apocalyptic text in the Hebrew Bible is actually prophetic apocalyptic texts, better labelled “pseudo-apocalyptic.”<sup>41</sup>

The prophetic authors used images that created “a picture of divine judgment on the nations, but of deliverance and vindication for the righteous Remnant, leading to the Golden Age of justice and peace and infinite bliss.”<sup>42</sup> While these specific prophetic writings might not be considered apocalyptic in the proper sense of the term, they carry elements that are the foundations for apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple period and onwards. However, as John Collins states, “prophesy and apocalypticism [are] distinct though related phenomena.”<sup>43</sup> Apocalypticism, in its own right, is a distinct genre

---

40. Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 230.

41. John Collins, *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 56.

42. H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Association Press, 1964), 24.

43. Collins, *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy*, 57.



not developed simply from prophetic literature. Collins proposes a position on the juncture of prophecy and apocalypticism that puts the two as separate genres that coincide with each other but are still distinct. Apocalyptic literature also draws from wisdom and myth just as much as it draws on prophecy, so it cannot be said that apocalyptic literature developed out of prophecy solely, but that prophecy can be thought of as one of many building blocks that paved the way for apocalyptic literature.<sup>44</sup> While pseudo-apocalyptic literature creates the fantastical images of apocalyptic literature, it still is more prophetic than apocalyptic. It draws on the surrounding history and culture to create the words for the community.

The main piece of pseudo-apocalyptic writing is found in Trito-Isaiah. Following Isaiah's example, other prophets use this form of pseudo-apocalyptic speech as a way of uncovering something that may have been hidden from the eyes of the Israelites. The exilic and postexilic prophets used this technique of foretelling the coming of YHWH and the renewal of the world in the coming of YHWH to inspire hope in the people of Israel. Joel uses this form of pseudo-apocalyptic speech as a teaching function for his listeners. It was hope for those who had lived the trauma of the exile and hoped for YHWH to come and renew the world and remain among them, reigning on Zion and making peace among the nations, destroying those who commit evil on the people of YHWH.

While pseudo-apocalyptic literature is one of the three specific types of prophetic literature, it can still be difficult to definitively state whether a text is pseudo-apocalyptic or not. Part of the reason for this is that many of the texts that are considered

---

44. Collins, *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy*, 69.

“apocalyptic” in the Hebrew Bible do not contain some of the vital characteristics that define the apocalyptic genre. Specifically, texts like Joel 3 and Isa 24–27 do not contain the characteristic apocalyptic vision (i.e., the author’s telling of the mystical journey through which something is revealed to them).<sup>45</sup> These texts do not use a dream or revealer of mysteries theme, but they do assume that radical destruction of the present age is about to happen. That destruction is cosmic rather than merely political. The reason that apocalyptic literature is difficult to determine is that there is not an agreement on how many characteristics are needed to qualify a text as apocalyptic. For the purposes of this thesis, we will refer to the literature that fits within this genre as pseudo-apocalyptic. For this thesis, we will focus solely on Joel, rather than looking at the other places that pseudo-apocalyptic literature shows up in the Book of the Twelve.

---

45. John Collins, *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 4–5.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PROPHETIC STOCK IMAGES

In constructing its message, the book of Joel employs a series of images, including locust plagues, famine and harvest, YHWH and Zion, and the gathering of the nations. The image of the Day of YHWH will be the subject of Chapter 3. In this chapter, I will give a brief overview of each of the other images as they appear in Joel and other parts of the Book of the Twelve. I will discuss how each image is used in the Book of the Twelve. Then, I will examine how each image is used specifically in Joel in relation to the other Minor Prophets. Following this brief overview, the chapter will show how Joel's use of these images reflects a theological engagement with their prior use elsewhere in the Book of the Twelve.

#### **Imagery and Prophetic Poetry**

Before we begin to discuss the different prophetic stock images, it is important to note that images are just that. They are a representation of something else. However, this does not mean that they are simply metaphors. These images create an imaginative world. The authors of these texts use these images in several different ways. It is rare that most of these prophetic stock images describe an actual event that has happened or will happen. Instead, they are figural, intending to convey a deeper meaning to their reader.

The current field of metaphor theory acknowledges the use of images and metaphors as an important part of the human thought process. They are “the fundamental

cognitive device by which humans think.”<sup>1</sup> People use things that are familiar to them to reason and understand the unfamiliar. Because the prophets are often discussing things that deal with YHWH and the heavenly realm’s interaction with the earthly realm, they employ concrete illustrations for their audiences.

According to Michael E. Travers, “Several theories on the nature of figures of speech have been offered (sic) in the philosophical literature . . . [but] three are particularly relevant to biblical figures of speech [t]hese are the substitution theory, the emotive theory, and the incremental theory.”<sup>2</sup> Substitution theory argues that the metaphors serve no other purpose than to embellish or “enhance the propositional ideas in the passage where they are found.”<sup>3</sup> The use of metaphors in this way simply adorns prophetic speech with ornaments to make their words sound better. Emotive theory suggests that metaphors are used to create an emotion within the reader. Like substitution theory, the emotive theory does not claim that metaphors add any particular meaning to the text. They are once again ornamental. However, incremental theory recognizes that metaphors are more than mere ornaments. They add something more to the text than just embellishments and emotion. According to incremental theory, metaphors have “special cognitive meaning . . . [that] cannot be expressed exactly the same way in any other form of words—including a propositional statement of the same or similar idea.”<sup>4</sup> I believe that this is the way that metaphor was used by the prophets.

---

1. Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 2

2. Michael E. Travers, “The Use of Figures of Speech in the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 281.

3. Travers, “The Use of Figures of Speech,” 281.

4. Travers, “The Use of Figures of Speech,” 282.

Using the incremental theory of metaphor, we see that authors crafted their oracles in ways that would be impactful and memorable for their listeners but also carried a significant meaning that could only be conveyed through the use of these metaphors. Because the prophets lived in an oral culture, the oracles were meant not to be read, but to be heard. Because of this, authors would use different literary devices such as sound play, pun, and parallelism so that the audience would be able to remember.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, authors often used multi-meaning words in crafting their oracles and poems. For example, an author might use the word פֶּרִי to mean either fruit or offspring (or even both). In doing so, they might create an easily remembered, effective, and often unsettling image for the audience.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, the use of imagery helps the audience recall what has been passed down from the past. The repetitive use of these images across the Book of the Twelve helps the readers/listeners to remember earlier texts. The images help form a world in the listener's mind through visions and imagination rather than through formally stated ideas. Eckart Reinmuth discusses allegorical and metaphorical readings, saying that "they are in no small measure interpretations of human existence within the visible and invisible orders of creation. The biblical text develops, illustrates, interprets, and narrates this dual perception."<sup>7</sup> The images that these prophets used were shared images that could be and were adapted for their own situations.

---

5. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 190.

6. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 190.

7. Eckart Reinmuth, "Allegorical Reading and Intertextuality: Narrative Abbreviations of the Adam Story in Paul (Romans 1:18–28)," in *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 54.

One of the controlling images of the book of Joel is the locust plague. Whatever its referent in the real world, the image functions in Joel as a catastrophic event that the prophet uses to implore the people to think about what it is that they have been doing and to change their ways. Without this image in Joel, there is no turning point for the book. But how does Joel use this image in ways that are similar to or different from the other Minor Prophets?

### **Locust Plagues in the Twelve**

Locust plagues were not an uncommon phenomenon in the ancient world. They could even be considered a “traditional pestilence.”<sup>8</sup> In the Major Prophets, locust swarms are mentioned in Isa 33:4 and Jer 51:14. In Isaiah, the image is used in an oracle against Assyria proclaiming the ruin of the Assyrian army and the way that they become prey for the people of Judah. They become like a tree laid bare by the locust swarm. In Jeremiah, the image is used in the prediction against Babylon’s fall. The prophet says that YHWH is going to bring a vast army against Babylon and fill Babylon with the enemy so much that it will be like a plague of locust upon the cities.

But the Major Prophets were not alone in using such imagery. The image of the locust plague also occurs in Exod 10:1–19. In these verses, Moses says to Pharaoh,

אִם־מֵאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי הַנִּנִּי מִבְּיַד מִחַר אַרְבֵּה בַּגְּבֻלְךָ: וְכִסָּה אֶת־  
עֵין הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־יִתְרַת הַפְּלֹטָה הַנִּשְׁאֶרֶת לָכֶם מִן־הַבְּרָד וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־  
כָּל־הָעֵץ הַצֵּמַח לָכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה: וּמִלֹּא בַתִּיךְ וּבַתִּי כָל־עַבְדֶּיךָ וּבַתִּי כָל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־  
רָאוּ אֶבְתִּיךָ וְאֶבּוֹת אֶבְתִּיךָ מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹתָם עַל־הָאָדָמָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

If you refuse to let my people go, then tomorrow I will bring a swarm of locusts into your land. It will cover the face of the earth, and no one will be able to see the land. It will eat the remainder of what is left for you from the hail, and it will eat every tree that grows for you out in the field. It will fill your houses and all the

---

8. Ched Myers, “Nature against Empire: Exodus Plagues, Climate Crisis, and Hard-Heartedness,” *Direction* 49.1 (2020): 11.

houses of your servants and all the houses of Egypt which none of your ancestors have seen from the time they were on the earth to today. (Exod 10:4b–6a)

These verses describe a locust plague unlike any other before. YHWH sends a locust plague upon Egypt because Pharaoh refuses to let the Hebrew people leave so that they can serve YHWH. Pharaoh continues to harden his heart. In these verses we see the devastation that is brought upon Egypt for the refusal to listen to YHWH. YHWH requested that Pharaoh allow all the Israelites (including the women and children) to go and celebrate a festival before him, but Pharaoh refused. This refusal leads to the Egyptian people being unable to feast because of the lack of crops (a sort of poetic justice). The author states that it is something that none of their ancestors had “seen from the time they were on the earth to today” (Exod 10:6). However, the author of the text describes it this way not based on any objective assessments of locust plagues in the past, but as a rhetorical device.

This plague is remembered in several places in the ancient Israelite tradition. Psalm 78 describes it, saying that the people, while wandering in the wilderness, did not remember what YHWH did when they were in Egypt. They had forgotten how YHWH *האריב* “handed over their crops to locust, their produce to the locust swarm” (Ps 78:46). Again, in Ps 106 the author tells how the people quickly forgot the wonders that YHWH had performed when they were in Egypt. They rebelled against YHWH instead. In Ps 105, the psalmist urges the people to give thanks for the wonders that YHWH has done, including reminding them of the plagues that YHWH sent upon the land of Egypt during the time of Moses. Within the Israelite tradition, there is emphasis on remembrance of YHWH’s mighty works for the people when they were brought out of Egypt. Within this call of remembrance there is a call not to be like their

ancestors who rebelled. Similarly, within the Book of the Twelve, the image of the plague of locust (as well as the story of the rebellious Israelites in general) is used to foreshadow what will happen if the people continue to sin and not trust in YHWH. The prophets echo the story of YHWH sending the plagues, imploring the people to not harden their hearts against YHWH.

Within the Minor Prophets, the image of the locust plague occurs only in Amos 4:9; 7:1–3; Joel; and Nah 3:15–17. In Amos 4, the image is used as a reminder for the people of Israel that YHWH had struck them with calamity, in hopes that they would return to him. Yet nothing worked. In Amos 7, the image is one of three that YHWH gives to Amos as a foreshadowing of what will happen to Israel. However, YHWH's divine mercy relents from these three calamities. In Nahum 3, the image is used against the city of Nineveh, proclaiming that the city will be destroyed just as locust destroy, and that its guards and soldiers are like grasshoppers, taking flight just when they are needed. Finally, in Joel the image is one of the prevailing images in the book. Some may even consider the book of Joel to be the book of the locust plague because of how prominent the image is in it.

Despite the limited use of the image in the Book of the Twelve, because the image appears in more than just the book of Joel, we will still consider it to be a part of the prophetic stock images because it shows a “divinely initiated” threat upon the people. What makes this a prophetic stock image is that the prophets use it as a metaphor to call upon the people to remember how the image has been used as part of the exodus tradition. The prophets alter the image and put the listener in the shoes of Egypt and



threaten them for their inaction in not following YHWH. This threat is thus “a typical part of the prophetic stock phrases.”<sup>9</sup>

### The Locust Plague in Amos

In Amos, even before YHWH gives Amos the vision of the locust plague, the people of Israel have suffered a loss of commercial produce. YHWH says

הכיתי אתכם בשדפון ובירקון  
הרבות גנותיכם וכרמיכם  
ותאניכם וזיתיכם יאכל הגזם  
ולא־שבתם עדי נאם־יהוה:

I struck your crops with blight and mildew.  
Your many orchards and vineyards  
your fig trees and olive trees  
the locust devoured them,  
yet you did not return to me, says YHWH. (Amos 4:9)

YHWH has destroyed all the crops, in a ploy to get Israel to return to him. These are the crops that may have been used as a celebration for the community signifying a fortuitous harvest. The fruit that would have been made into the wine is gone. YHWH tries to bring the people back, taking away fruit that would have been turned to the celebratory drink signifying the peoples’ successful harvest. The cereal crops have already been destroyed, so with the destruction of the vineyards and orchards, the people are left without some of their primary agricultural and commercial products. YHWH wishes to open their eyes, to get the attention of the people of Israel, but to no avail.

---

9. Paul R. House, “Endings as New Beginnings: Returning to the Lord, the Day of the Lord, and Renewal in the Book of the Twelve,” *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, eds. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 321.

Again, this “prophetic stock phrase” occurs in one of the visions in Amos 7:1–9:10, the final section of doom oracles in the book. In the vision found in Amos 7:1–3, YHWH is forming a locust plague, which devours the young shoots. The prophet says

כה הראני אדני יהוה והנה יוצר גבי בתחלת עלות הלקש והנה־לקש אחר גזי המלך: והיה  
אם־כלה לאכול את־עשב הארץ ואמר אדני יהוה סלח־נא מי יקום יעקב כי קטן הוא: נחם יהוה  
על־זאת לא תהיה אמר יהוה:

This is what the Lord YHWH showed me. Look, he was forming a swarm of locusts at the beginning of the late crop. Indeed, the late crop was after the king’s mowings. When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I say to the Lord YHWH, “Please forgive, who can survive from Jacob because he is small.” So, YHWH relented concerning this. “It will not happen,” said YHWH. (Amos 7:1–3)

This locust plague is forming just as the “crops were most vulnerable.”<sup>10</sup> Hubbard states that “the term for latter growth . . . stems from a root ‘to be late’ [לגש] . . . and refers to the late spring crop of cattle-feed which is further described as coming after the king’s mowings, an apparent reference to the royal right to tax the lands of farmers for fodder to feed the live-stock maintained by the court.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, when the latter growth, or spring growth, has started to sprout, the grain and other crops that would have been planted before these crops, have already been growing for a while. The coming of a locust plague at this time would have been catastrophic. It would have led to famine since all the crops would be destroyed.<sup>12</sup> However, instead of focusing on the image of the locusts themselves, Amos focuses more on the covenant curses. In the covenant curses in

---

10. David Hubbard, *Joel & Amos: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 206.

11. Hubbard, *Joel & Amos*, 206. Hubbard cites 1 Kgs 18:5 for the right for the monarchy to tax farmers’ fields and describes why this is an important issue, since “the April rains would have passed and the long drought of summer, usually six months, would make further growth impossible” (206).

12. Shalom Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 227.

Deut 28:15–44, locust is one of the plagues used to bring famine.<sup>13</sup> Amos seems to be using this image to describe the divine punishment for their sin against their fellow Israelites.

While a locust plague was a common occurrence in the ancient Near East, it was still considered to be a divine punishment.<sup>14</sup> Amos recognizes this vision as an oracle of divine punishment against Israel. Because this falls within a vision-report,<sup>15</sup> the interpretation of could be either a literal locust plague or a metaphor for an enemy army. Either is valid since both would be equally disastrous for the people of Israel and cause destruction. The oracles that follow the vision of the locusts in Amos suggest that the coming invasion is in the same category as the locust plague because of the culture-wide impact of the catastrophes. However, Amos intercedes. He asks for YHWH to have mercy since Israel (here called Jacob) “is so small” (Amos 7:2). He intercedes on behalf of the people. Therefore, instead of sending this plague, YHWH relents, showing compassion and adherence to the covenant YHWH made with the people. The people of Israel had already suffered economically. Amos says that if YHWH does not relent from the oncoming locust plague, that the famine that will result will be an unjust punishment, coming upon the rich and poor alike.

---

13. The specific verses that discuss the curses of the locust plague are Deut 28:38–39, and 42.

14. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “Locusts: I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, vol. 16, Stephen L. McKenzie and Thomas Römer, eds. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 974–75.

15. James Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 71. Nogalski discusses what a vision report is in terms of the prophetic literature. He states that “the implications of the vision are ... explained for the benefit of the reader,” following the report of seeing the “object” shown by the YHWH (71).

And YHWH does relent from the locust plague, but in the end, still sends an invasion upon Israel. While this invasion impacts the entire community of Israel, YHWH promises that there will be a remnant who remains, that those who have been faithful will be saved.

### The Locusts in Nahum

Like Amos, Nahum uses the word גַּבְיָ, meaning locusts or grasshoppers. However, it is not just the description of a plague (since it really never is). It is imagery used to discuss the overthrow of Assyria by Babylon. Nogalski argues that Nah 3:15–17 helps the transition in the “meta-narrative” of the Book of the Twelve.<sup>16</sup> It does this by taking the imagery in Nah 2 concerning the destruction and fall of Nineveh and escalating it. Just as the locusts come and quickly leave, so too will Nineveh “leave” without a trace. The comparison of the Ninevites to locusts dehumanizes them, as Angelika Berlejung argues.<sup>17</sup> The enemy that will destroy Nineveh will leave no trace of those from the city. Assyria’s portrayal as a locust plague has two implications: like a devastating locust plague, it destroys everything in its path, but also like such a plague, it vanishes entirely. So, Nahum plays on two sides of the same imagery to make a surprising point. The great nation that wipes out other nations will itself be wiped out.

### The Locust Plague in Joel 1

In the book of Joel, the image of the locust plague is a central theme. Joel reiterates the vision of the plague from Amos, expanding the image to focus on what the

---

16. James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 635.

17. Angelika Berlejung, “Erinnerungen an Assyrien in Nahum 2,4–3,19,” in *Die unwiderstehliche Wahrheit: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie: Festschrift für Arndt Meinhold*, ed. Rüdiger Lux and Ernst-Joachim Wascheke (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 343.

punishment is going to look like. In Amos, the prophet focuses more on the reasons that YHWH threatens to send a plague, whereas in Joel, the prophet does not really say much specifically about why the plague is being sent. The prophet expects the people to understand and think back on why YHWH might send a locust plague. Joel takes the vision given to Amos in Amos 7 and shows what happens when the vision of the plague is fulfilled. It is a catastrophic event that impacts the whole community. So, while in Amos, YHWH relents from the plague but not the invasion; in Joel, the invasion is the plague. Joel places the two again in the same category. The prophet uses the images of an invasion to describe the impact that the locust plague will have on the people.

From the outset of the book, Joel states:

יתר הגזם אכל הארבה ויתר הארבה אכל הילק  
ויתר הילק אכל החסיל

What the young locust leaves, the winged locust eats and what the winged locust leaves, the adult locust eats  
and what the adult locust leaves, the last locust eats. (Joel 1:4)

He describes a past locust plague of devastating proportions, the mention of which should cause the people to cry out in distress. The verses leading up to verse 4 function as rhetorical questions and a call to pass on this memory. The keepers of memory are called to remember and think back. Has anything like this ever happened before? Just as the author of Exodus 10 describes the plague rhetorically as unprecedented, the author of Joel uses the same rhetorical device. Past coping mechanisms to deal with immediate famine due to locust will not work this time; they must do something else. While in the past there may have been *something* left of the crops, nothing is left behind this time.

### *Excursus on the Locust Words in Joel*

The exact meanings of the four words (חכל, גזם, ארבה, ילק) that Joel uses to name the locust have been debated for centuries. In his discussion on patristic exegesis of Joel 1:4, Josef Lossl describes the tendency of patristic fathers to interpret the four types of locusts in Joel 1:4 as the different enemies or rulers that will invade Israel.<sup>18</sup> However, modern scholarship has focused more on how best to translate these four words. The first option is that these words describe four different species of locust (KJV, ASV). The second option is that these four words describe locusts in various stages of development. This second option is affirmed by Karl August Credner and Ovid R. Sellers.<sup>19</sup> Credner was the first to suggest that these four words refer to the various stages of locust. He suggests that the four words can be translated as “the old ones who lay their eggs,” “the ones who hop,” “the ones who crawl,” and “the ones who fly.” This second option is more likely because it emphasizes the impact that this plague has on the people. The locusts have to have time to go through these four stages of growth. While these locusts are growing, they are devouring everything that Israel has. This devastation not only is one that is like none before because of the greatness of loss, but also because of the length of time that the plague remains.

---

18. See the full discussion in Josef Lossl, “When Is a Locust Just a Locust? Patristic Exegesis of Joel 1:4 in the Light of Ancient Literary Theory,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 55.2 (2004): 575–99.

19. Karl A. Credner, *Der Prophet Joel übersetzt und erklärt* (Halle [Saale]: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1831), 102–103. See also: Ovid R. Sellers, “Stages of Locust in Joel,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52.2 (1936): 81–85. See also David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vols. 1–4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–98).

## Locusts in Joel 2

Again, in Joel 2 the image of the locust plague comes to the forefront. However, this time, it is not a past event but one to come. The locust plague is described as “a great and powerful people” who are “like the appearance of horses” and “upon the tops of the mountains they leap” (Joel 2:2, 4, 5). This army of YHWH strikes fear into the hearts of the people encountering it.

Like Amos’s vision in 7:1–3, “the interpretation of Joel depends upon a decision about the identity of the locusts.”<sup>20</sup> Scholars disagree on whether the locusts should be thought of as metaphorical (for an army) or in a literal sense (as a locust plague). For example, Pablo R. Andiñach argues for a metaphorical sense of the image, whereas Ronald Simkins takes the image as a more literal or “straightforward reading of the text.”<sup>21</sup> Both scholars think of the first two chapters of Joel and their connection to each other but come to different conclusions about what metaphor is being used.

On the one hand, Andiñach takes up the position that Joel 1 and 2 should be read as an image of a human army coming in and wiping out the land. For this reading, Andiñach argues that the metaphor of the locusts in chapter 1 “clarifies and enforces the characteristics of a human army” in chapter 2 and is not really meant to be taken as a literal locust plague.<sup>22</sup> He argues that the locusts are used as a metaphor for an invading army.

---

20. Pablo R. Andiñach, “The Locust in the Message of Joel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42.4 (1992): 433.

21. Ronald A. Simkins, “God, History, and the Natural World in the Book of Joel,” *CBQ* 55.3 (1993): 436.

22. Andiñach, “The Locust in the Message of Joel,” 441.

On the other hand, Simkins's argument relies on the reading of Joel 1 and 2 as being about a natural disaster (the locust plague and drought) that comes with the day of YHWH. While the text of Joel 2 does not explicitly refer to locusts, it does describe an army of superhuman warriors who leap and destroy, just as locusts would. Additionally, in 1:6 the term *gôy* is used in relation to the locusts. Simkins addresses whether this term should be translated literally or metaphorically, concluding that "the best interpretation of *gôy* in 1:6 is still that it is a metaphor for a locust plague."<sup>23</sup>

So how do we answer the question of whether this "great and powerful people" in Joel 2 is another reference to the locust plague or not? One option is that Joel, wanting to intensify the image of the locust plague, uses the past experience that the people would have had with invading armies to describe this locust plague in the same way. If Joel is doing this, he is equating the locust plague to the invasions and destruction that came with the exile. He is using past experience to show the horror of this plague that is like no other before. However, another option is that Joel is using the locust plague imagery in chapter 1 as a metaphor for the invasions and exile that the people had experienced. This option is in line with how the patristic fathers interpreted the text in Joel 1:4, and it has support in modern scholarship as well.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible to combine these two options into a third option where Joel is using an image that is deliberately multivalent. This option allows for the text to be a "living" text. It can change and grow as the community has new experiences with other locust plagues as well as with the inevitable onslaught of invading armies that would come in

---

23. Simkins, "God, History, and the Natural World," 438.

24. See the discussion in the Excursus above.



the postexilic world. The purpose of Joel's work is to create something that can be used for generations to reflect back on the history, so I agree with the third option. This third option gives us insight into how this text lives and breathes within its postexilic context.

So, the question we have now is: why does the author use this specific image? Is it because they are experiencing an actual locust plague or because the image is graphic enough to stand in for other calamities? I would argue that the author uses this image not just as a stand-in for other calamities. He uses the image to describe something that only the metaphor could. The image is not simply an adornment of an argument, but a way of inviting the audience to see the potential for the oncoming disaster because the people turned from following their God. He knows the tradition and knows the signs of YHWH's coming wrath. It is possible that the author sees the plague that the community is enduring and uses the image as a foreshadowing of what could happen. Rather than describing a possible invasion in the same ways that Isaiah and Ezekiel do, the author instead uses the experience to foreshadow a coming invasion if the people do not turn back to YHWH.

### **Famine and Harvest in the Twelve**

Another prophetic stock image found in the Book of the Twelve is the image of famine and harvest. In the agricultural societies of the ancient Near East, crops played a role in sacrifice, trade, and tax systems as well as providing most of the food supply. However, the land frequently suffered from irregular rainfall which would lead to drought and famine for the communities living there. Just as harvest was a part of their life, so too was drought and famine.

The prophets of Israel reflected on the droughts and famines and incorporated them into their messages as omens from YHWH. They reflected on how YHWH had used famine and drought in the past and show that YHWH, not any of the surrounding storm gods, was the one in control of the rain.<sup>25</sup> Whenever the people of Israel suffered from drought and famine, the prophets used these experiences as a sign for the people to turn back. They condemned the people for turning from YHWH. In the same way, whenever the harvests were bountiful, the prophets used these instances as proof of YHWH's care for the people. The image of harvest and famine can be found in the Book of the Twelve in Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Joel.

#### Famine and Harvest in Hosea

Hosea's use of harvest imagery is both "abrupt" and "not developed."<sup>26</sup> Andersen and Freedman argue that while Amos associates the image with God's judgment, Hosea's use does not speak as "if a final judgment is yet in mind."<sup>27</sup> Rather than following the accusations against Israel and Ephraim with an accusation against Judah in Hos 6:11 YHWH says

גמ'יהודה שת קציר לך  
בשובי שבות עמי

Also, Judah, a harvest is set for you.  
When I return the captives of my people. (Hos 6:11)

---

25. For discussion of storm gods in the ancient Near East, see Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 281.

26. Francis Andersen and David Freedman, *Hosea*, AB 24 (New Haven & London: Yale University, 1980), 443.

27. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 443.

Hans Walter Wolff suggested that Hos 6:11 is a Judaic gloss, added after the fall of Israel, as part of his overall theory of how Hosea developed.<sup>28</sup> However, I agree with Mayer Gruber that this particular verse is not a gloss, but a “fitting conclusion to the speech that begins in Hos 5:1 and ends in Hos. 6:11a.”<sup>29</sup> Hosea gives a word of hope to the people of Judah, that they will reap the harvest and not encounter the judgement that Israel and Ephraim will endure. W. Edward Glenny states that the use of the image in this verse “refers to a positive harvesting because the Lord commands it, and it is in conjunction with a time of blessing.”<sup>30</sup> I can agree with this summation because in the text, YHWH says that help will once again be provided for the people of Judah. While there has been judgment and condemnation of Israel/Ephraim, there is a word of hope for the people of Judah. The harvest was to be a blessing for Judah in correlation with the judgment of Israel and Ephraim. It is a positive image for Judah while also being a negative image for Israel.

The negative imagery continues for Israel in Hos 10:12–13, where the prophet says,

זרעו לכם לצדקה קצרו לפי־חסד  
 נירו לכם ניר ועת לדרוש  
 את־יהוה עד־וירה צדק לכם:  
 חרשתם־רשע עולתה רצרתם  
 אכלתם פרי־כחש  
 כי־בטחת בדרכך ברב גבוריך

---

28. Hans Wolff, *Hosea*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 123.

29. Mayer I. Gruber, *Hosea: A Textual Commentary* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 302.

30. W. Edward Glenny, *Hosea: A Commentary Based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 118; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 443; John Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 199–200. Andersen and Freedman also discuss the use of the harvest imagery. They state that the image is “abrupt” and “not developed.” They see the imagery in 6:11 as a hopeful contrast against the negative imagery used in the verse right before. Dearman, on the other hand, sees the image of Judah reaping a harvest as Judah also receiving punishment for failures, just like Ephraim and Israel.

Sow righteousness for yourselves; reap righteousness;  
plow your untilled land for the time to seek YHWH  
until he comes and rains righteousness to you.  
You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity;  
you have eaten the fruit of falsehood.  
Because you trusted in your way, in the greatness of your warriors.  
(Hos 10:12–13)

The prophet is carrying on the image of the harvest against Israel that is introduced in 6:11. The prophet begins telling the people to plow righteousness and reap faithfulness in hopes that YHWH will respond to the faithfulness with rain. However, as the prophet continues, he says that the people have instead plowed wickedness. As a result, they will reap the consequences of what they have done. The prophet says that their harvest has been a harvest of injustice. YHWH pronounces judgment upon Israel for these things that they have done, saying that the cities will be destroyed, and the people left to die.

#### Famine and Harvest in Amos

In Amos, the prophet uses the image of harvest and famine to show the people that YHWH is the one in control of the rain. The first instance of the harvest imagery in Amos is in Amos 4:7. In this verse, YHWH says

וגם אנעתי מכם את־הגשם עוד שלשה חדשים לקציר והמטרתי על־עיר אחת ועל־עיר לא אמטיר  
חלקה אחת תמטר וחלקה אשר־לא־תמטיר עליה תיבש

And I also withheld rain from you when there were still three months until harvest. I made it rain on one city and on one city I withheld the rain. One portion of land received rain and the portion which did not receive rain withered.  
(Amos 4:7)

YHWH's control over the rain allows him to create times of harvest and of drought. However, YHWH does not simply withhold the rain without reason, but in order to convince the people to return to YHWH. Andersen and Freedman suggest that the use of the word עיר suggests city-states, rather than individual local cities. This is based on the

use of the word throughout Amos.<sup>31</sup> If correct, this would mean that the drought and consequential famine that Amos prophesies about is not just regional, but international. Therefore, this text describes the international failure of crops and the social disruption and conflict that ensues between the city-states that have received rain (and so have a harvest) and the city-states that have not. Amos's interest in region-wide issues, seen also in the oracles against the nations in chapters 1–2, appears here as well.

The next place that the image of the harvest is found in Amos is in 8:1–3. While this is not an explicit use of the image, it is implied by the term קיץ כלוב “basket of summer fruit.” In this vision, YHWH asks Amos what he sees, and he replies, “a basket of summer fruit.” This spurs YHWH to say,

בא הקץ אל-עמי ישראל לא-אוסף עוד עבור לו:  
והילילו שירות היכל ביום ההוא נאם אדני יהוה  
רב הפגר בכל-מקום השליך הס:

The end has come upon my people Israel.  
I will not cover them again.  
And on that day, they will cry out the songs of the temple ...  
there will be many bodies  
everywhere  
one will cast silence. (Amos 8:2b–3)

The first thing that will help in understanding this vision and the image is the word play on the word for summer fruit (קיץ), the word for end (קץ), and the word for harvest (קציר). These words sound “alike in a Hebrew ear.”<sup>32</sup> They all have ק and צ. Scott Noegel argues that when a pun is used in an oracle or omen, it “limit[s] that power by

---

31. Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 440.

32. Johannes Lindblom, “Symbolic Perceptions and Literary Visions,” in *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu*, eds. John Maier and Vincent Tollers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 68.

restricting the parameters of an omen’s interpretation.”<sup>33</sup> Susan Niditch says that “[קִיץ] is used in synonymous parallelism with [קציר], ‘harvest’ or ‘harvesting’ in Jer 8:20, Prov 6:8, 10:5, and 26:1,” and therefore is referencing the harvest in this verse as well.<sup>34</sup> In a sense, this vision is illustrating that Israel is the harvest that is being gathered in. They are ripe for the harvest, that is, the end.

The prophet continues in Amos 8:11, saying

הנה ימים באים נאם אדני יהוה  
 והשלחתי רעב בארץ  
 לא־רעב ללחם ולא־צמא למים  
 כי אם־לשמע את דברי יהוה:

“Look! The days are coming,”  
 declares the Lord YHWH,  
 “when I will send a famine through the land—  
 not a famine of bread  
 or a thirst for water,  
 but a famine of hearing the words of the YHWH.” (Amos 8:11)

This explanation for the vision that YHWH gives to Amos explains that the famine will be of the prophetic word. Amos thinks that prophecy will cease and therefore YHWH will simply stop being these people’s God. Prophecy itself will fall because, as YHWH states, there will be “a famine of hearing the words of YHWH.” This severance of relationship between YHWH and the people is a threat, only to be removed at the very end of the book. It is worth noting that this is an oracle about the cessation of oracles. The paradoxical statement seems to be about the people being left in the dark as to what is happening and how to deal with it. In the end, we know that YHWH did not remove the

---

33. Scott Noegel, “‘Literary’ Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East: The Hebrew Bible in Context,” in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Writings*, eds. Klass Smelik and Karolien Vermeulen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 33. See also Scott Noegel, *Wordplay in Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020).

34. Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980), 35.

prophetic word from among Israel, since it lasted through the exile into the postexilic world.

The final use of the image is found in Amos 9:13–15. In this verse, Amos is proclaiming the oracle from YHWH that says,

הנה ימים באים נאם־יהוה ונגש חורש בקצר ודרך ענבים במשך הזרע והטיפו ההרים  
עסיס וכל־הגבעות תתמוגגנה:  
ושבתי את־שבות עמי ישראל ובהו ערים נשמות וישבו ונטעו כרמים ושתו את־ייןם ועשו  
גנות ואכלו את־פריהם:  
ונטעתים על־אדמתם ולא ינתשו עוד מעל אדמתם אשר נתתלהם אמר יהוה אלהיך:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says YHWH “when the one plowing will overtake the one reaping and the one who treads on the grapes the one sowing the seed. The mountains will drip with sweet wine and all the hills flow. And I will bring back the captives of my people Israel and they will build the desolate cities and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them in their land, and they will no longer be plucked up from the land which I have given them,” says YHWH your God. (Amos 9:13–15)

This oracle rounds out the book by foretelling the reversal of the poor harvests discussed earlier in the book. Amos tells of a time when the harvest will be so plentiful that the ones plowing will overtake the reapers. There will be so much to harvest that when the planting time comes, there will still be people harvesting the previous year’s crops. Additionally, YHWH says that the people will be planted back in their own land, no longer to be harvested and distributed among the nations. Rather, they will rebuild and prosper as they cultivate hills overflowing with wine. This oracle reverses the negative harvests that were foretold earlier in the book, giving the people hope for their future.

James Linville states that “this look to the future [found in Amos 9:13–15] is profoundly different from what has preceded it, and yet, it is intimately related to it.”<sup>35</sup> In

---

35. James R. Linville, *Amos and the Cosmic Imagination* (Routledge, 2008), 171.

giving this idyllic view of the future to come, where there will be no drought and harvest will roll into harvest, Amos reverses the negative use of the harvest imagery found earlier in the book. Linville states, “At the end of Amos, a basket of summer fruit would hardly mark the end of Israel but its new beginning.”<sup>36</sup> In Amos 8:3, the harvest imagery is associated with the end of the people and YHWH’s judgment. However, in Amos 9:13–15, harvest imagery is still associated with an end of the captivity and restoration of YHWH’s people. Amos gives a turning point at the end of the book to provide hope to the people listening. He reverses the negative imagery of harvest.<sup>37</sup>

#### Famine and Harvest in Micah

We again see the harvest imagery in the prophet Micah. In Mic 6:15, YHWH says

אתה תזרע ולא תקצור  
אתה תדרך־זית ולא־תסוך שמן ותירוש ולא תשתה־יין:

You will sow but not reap.  
You will press olives but not anoint yourself with oil.  
You will [press] crush wine but not drink it. (Mic 6:15)

There is a sense of futility to the harvest in Micah. This is again the image of producing something that the people cannot use. The text does not specify why the people cannot use the crops that they are growing. Some possible reasons might be an invasion, a drought, being sent into exile, or perhaps even crops paid as a tribute to a ruling nation. All that the prophet tells us is that this event is a part of the divine punishment on the people for the things that they did. William McKane suggests that the lack of specific

---

36. Linville, *Amos*, 173.

37. Göran Eidevall, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017), 241. Jörg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 168–70.



reason for the people not being able to use the crops themselves is because “the formulations of futility have a proverbial character, an openness of reference, which makes it inappropriate to link them precisely to the crimes committed.”<sup>38</sup> The prophet is presenting the punishment in a way that can be ascribed to any crime at any time, rather than one specific injustice.

### Famine and Harvest in Joel

Unlike the case with Micah or Amos, the symbol of the harvest is found throughout Joel, often in relation to the Day of YHWH. The first image of famine and harvest found in Joel is in conjunction with the image of the locust in chapters 1 and 2. The oracles begin with an exclamation about what the locusts have done. The locusts devoured the crops and so left the people with famine. All seems to be lost. But after the turn in Joel 2, we have the image of the restoration of the harvest that had been destroyed by the locusts. In Joel 2:21–24, the prophet pronounces an oracle of salvation.<sup>39</sup> Rather than ruined grain (as seen in Joel 1:10–12), ומלאו הגרנות בר “the threshing floors will be full of grain” (2:24a). Their return to YHWH instigates the return of their good fortunes. YHWH is faithful, and so when his people turn back to him, he turns his face back to them. The prophet goes on to say that not only will the harvest be returned to the people, but YHWH will also bless them and bring back those who have been carried off. He will bring back those who have been scattered by the nations and bring in the nations for judgment, which leads into the other way that harvest imagery is used in the book of Joel.

---

38. William McKane, *Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 205.

39. C.f. James Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 63. Nogalski defines an oracle of salvation as an oracle that “provides comfort rather than judgement” and “indicates the situation and usually has some kind of concluding characterization” (68).

The most recognizable use of harvest imagery in Joel is found in Joel 4:13 and is similar to that found in Amos 8:1–3, in that it “is a familiar one in a description of judgement.”<sup>40</sup> This image, like the one of YHWH roaring from Zion, occurs within the judgment of the nations section of the book. YHWH proclaims,

שלחו מגל כי בשל קציר  
באו רדו כי־מלאה גת  
השיקו היקבים כי רבה רעתם:

Send out the sickle for the harvest is ripe,  
come, go down for the winepress is full,  
the vats overflow because their wickedness is great. (Joel 4:13)

Again, there is a ripening of the harvest of the people (in this case the nations rather than Israel) due to the wickedness that they have caused. Joel turns the image. The imagery seems at first to describe a real harvest, but the last three words turn the meaning. The harvest imagery that Joel used in chapters 1 and 2 now has turned from a literal harvest of plants to the harvesting of people. These last three words also raise the question of who the subject of the imperative in this verse is. Who is YHWH telling to come harvest? Based on the verses leading up to this, YHWH is sending out his army to harvest the wicked for the deeds they have done to his people. It is a supernatural call to the heavenly army to send out the sickle and gather the people who have harmed the nation of Israel for their punishment. I will discuss the gathering in of the harvest of nations in the section below.

Joel echoes the sentiment of Amos 8:1–3 that the harvest is ready. In Joel, YHWH orders the sickle to be sent out to collect the harvest because of the iniquities of the

---

40. Richard Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 59.

nations. In Amos, YHWH shows the prophet the basket of summer fruit, telling him how the people's iniquities have become so great that the end has come for them—it is time for them to be reaped. Similarly, Hos 10:12–13 uses this same negative imagery to discuss how the people have been sowing injustice and the time has come for them to reap the punishments for their wrongdoings. Joel takes the ideas from these texts and redirects them from Israel as the people of God to any who have done injustice to the people of God (specifically, the nations).

As we have seen, harvest imagery is used throughout Joel. The prophet uses it to proclaim both the return of fortune to the people of YHWH and the judgment and destruction of the nations. Harvest imagery in Joel follows the typical pattern seen in the Book of the Twelve, where harvest is associated with judgment. The image is a prominent theme of the Day of YHWH image as well because it is used as a way of showing YHWH's control over the world and his power and judgment on whom he deems judgment to be upon. At the outset of Joel, YHWH's judgment has been on the people of YHWH because they have turned away from him; however, after returning to him, his judgment is cast upon those who had wished harm on his people.

### **The Gathering of the Nations in the Twelve**

In close relation to the image of the harvest, the prophets in the Twelve also use the image of gathering the nations. The following section looks at how the different prophets in the Book of the Twelve use the image of gathering the nations in their oracles. While harvest imagery in the Book of the Twelve is mostly used as a way of showing judgment, there are various reasons that YHWH gathers the nations in the Book of the Twelve. At times it is gathering them for war against Israel (Hos 10:10; Mic 4:11–

13; Zech 12:3, 14:2). At other times it is gathering them for judgment (Mic 4:11–13; Zeph 3:8; Joel 4:2, 9–13). At other times it seems to be a time of peace and the nations come to Jerusalem to worship alongside the Israelites (Mic 4:2; Isa 2:3; Zech 2:15, 8:22, 14:16). In about every case, YHWH is the one who gathers and is associated with destruction and restoration. The exception is in Habakkuk where the one gathering is doing so foolishly. The image is one that shows YHWH's power over all and his ability to bring all people together. When it is not YHWH who gathers the nations in the image, the gathering is something that goes against what YHWH desires.

#### The Nations Gathered in Hosea

In Hosea, we get the image of the gathering of nations in Hos 10:10. In this verse, the prophet says

בְּאוֹתִי וְאָסַרְםּ וְאִזְפּוּ עֲלֵיהֶם עַמִּים בְּאֶסְרִי  
לְשֵׁתִי עֹנֹתָם

In my desire, I will chasten them, and peoples will be gathered against them when I bind them for their two (acts of) iniquity.

The prophet discusses how the people of Israel will be punished for their crimes. YHWH declares that justice is coming upon them for the things that they did. But what exactly did they do to lead to YHWH gathering nations against them?

Scholars have suggested that the prophet is recalling a story associated with Gibeah and using it to draw a connection between the sins of Gibeah and the wickedness of the nation of Israel.<sup>41</sup> While there may be stories associated with Gibeah that the prophet knows about that we do not have record of, the story most commonly associated with Gibeah is the one found in Judg 19:16–30. In this story, a Levite comes to the town

---

41. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 561–62; Gruber, *Hosea*, 424–25; Wolff, *Hosea*, 158, 184.

of Gibeah on his way back to the Ephraim highlands. He, his secondary wife, his servant, and the donkeys with him intend to stay in the city square because no one has offered them a place to stay. Then an older man comes along and urges them to stay with him. This older man gives the travelers hospitality when no one else will. In fact, later that evening while the travelers are with the older man, the men of the city come and demand that the older man send out the Levite so that they might rape and abuse him. The older man tells the men of the city not to do this thing and to take his daughter and the Levite's secondary wife instead, but the crowd refuses, still demanding the Levite. The story ends with the Levite casting his secondary wife into the crowd and shutting the door, only to wake up to leave the next morning to the woman unresponsive at the door. He takes her body home with him and then cuts her to pieces and sends the pieces to all the areas of Israel, urging the people of Israel to decide what needs to be done about the citizens of Gibeah.

The prophet portrays Israel's entire history as a cycle of violence. Gruber suggests that the "two acts of iniquity" (שתי עונותם) that the prophet points out in Hos 10:10 are two sins committed by the Benjaminites in the story from Judg 19. Gruber suggests that the sins are "the failure . . . to provide hospitality to the passers-by" and "the failure . . . to turn over the culprits to the law enforcement officials."<sup>42</sup> The roots of the sins in Judg 19 are violence and inhospitality. These roots do not go away simply because of the response of the people about what must be done about Gibeah. In fact, that response itself carries on the tradition of violence. Wolff suggests that the double sins are Gibeah's former guilt and the current guilt.<sup>43</sup> I agree with Wolff that the double iniquities are both

---

42. Gruber, *Hosea*, 430.

the past and present sins. The cycle of violence has not stopped but continues into the time of Hosea. Wolff suggests that “since Gibeah’s former guilt is also its present guilt, the city’s former disaster will come once again.”<sup>44</sup> The two iniquities that Hosea is drawing on are the roots of the sins, the cycle of violence and inhospitality. And so, the cycle continues. However, how does this view apply to Hosea’s message to Northern Israel? Why would Hosea use this story even though it is not obviously applied to all of Northern Israel? The connection between the story and the message of Hosea is the recalling of the near annihilation and the threat that is coming for Northern Israel. So, while it is not obvious that the story applies to all of Northern Israel, the near annihilation of Benjamin for their sins is what the prophet is warning about with the echo of the story.<sup>45</sup>

#### The Nations Gathered in Micah

In Micah, we have two instances of the gathering of nations. The first one is found in Mic 4:2. The prophet is describing some future time when all people will journey to Jerusalem to be taught the ways of God. Micah says,

והלכו גוים רבים ואמרו  
לכו ונעלה אל־הר־יהוה ואל־בית אלהי יעקב  
ויורנו מדרכיו ונלכה בארחתיו  
כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר־יהוה מירושלם:

Many nations will come and say  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH and to the house of the God of  
Jacob  
and he will teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths  
for the law shall go out of Zion and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.  
(Mic 4:2, Isa 2:3)

---

43. Wolff, *Hosea*, 185.

44. Wolff, *Hosea*, 184.

45. Gruber, *Hosea*, 430.

This is a description of a peaceful time. There is no war, no judgment; just celebration and walking with YHWH. This is an idyllic scene, a hope for a better future. These Gentiles who had before gone up to Jerusalem to destroy the people, now are again going up to Jerusalem, but it is not a threat. Instead, they are moving toward the God of Israel.

The hope of YHWH's deliverance and restoration of peace continues using the image of the gathering of nations in Mic 4:11–13. In these verses, the prophet states that though the nations are gathered for war against the people, YHWH has a plan of deliverance. The people will not be left to die. They will be gathered back. YHWH says that the nations have been gathered as sheaves to the threshing floor (כעמיר גרונה). These nations that have gathered are not going to destroy the people of Israel. Though they want to desecrate Zion, YHWH will not let that happen. YHWH will fight against these nations, stripping them of the wickedness and evil that they intended for Israel.

These texts are closely related to Isa 2 where the prophet says

והלכו עמים רבים ואמרו לנו ונעלה אל־הר־יהוה אל־בית אלהי יעקב וירנו מדרכיו ונלעה  
בארחתיו כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר־יהוה מירושלם:  
ושפט בין הגוים והוכיח לעמים רבים וכתתו חרבותם לאתים וחניתותיהם למזמרות לא־  
ישא גוי אל־גוי חרב ולא־ילמדו עוד מלחמה:

Many people will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH, to the house of the God of Jacob  
and he will teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths  
for the law shall go out of Zion and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem  
and he will judge between the nations,  
and rebuke many people  
And they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning  
hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation and neither will they learn how to  
make war anymore. (Isa 2:3–4)

However, these two texts are not exactly the same and Micah and Isaiah handle these texts differently in their oracles. Micah describes a more thorough destruction of the city

before the restoration and does not focus on the human agency associated with the restoration.<sup>46</sup> However, both Micah and Isaiah use this reference following the nations rising against Israel.

Micah 4:11–13, then, develops the idea of the nations gathering in a way different from, but parallel to, the shift in Isaiah from 2:2–4 and 2:5–22. Micah has reversed the peace that was created in Mic 4:2.<sup>47</sup> Instead of the image of peace offered in Mic 4:2, the prophet describes a time when people are gathered *against* Jerusalem. This reversal of the image puts the two scenarios in conversation with each other. It seems like Micah goes back on the image presented earlier and says, “before we can get to a time of peace, there will be a time of war against us.” Micah gives the people hope for a peaceful future, while still directing them to the fact that this peace will not come cheap. This reversal of images influences Joel’s use of this image. William McKane describes the verse in Joel as a declaration of war rather than the declaration of universal peace that Micah has in mind.<sup>48</sup> Joel uses the “beating of swords into plowshares” image and flips it to say that the plowshares will be converted into swords. Joel focuses more on the image of the nations against the people of God, found in Mic 4:11–13. In these verses, Micah says

ועתה נאספו עליך גוים רבים האמרים תחנף ותחז בציון עינינו

And now many nations have gathered against you saying, “let her be defiled and let us cast our eye on Zion.” (Mic 4:11)

---

46. J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 39.

47. Philip Peter Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 153.

48. William McKane, *Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 124.



This verse demonstrates the violence that the nations gathered have planned for the people of God. Joel expands the image of the evils done to the people of Israel, describing how the nations carted off the people of God and sold them (Joel 4: 1–6). It is for these evils that YHWH is announcing judgment on the nations.

#### The Nations Gathered in Habakkuk

In Habakkuk, we again have the folly of gathering nations, though this time it is not the nations that gather themselves, but someone who gathers the nations to themselves. This reference to the image comes in the midst of the pronouncement of woe that the prophet declares. In Hab 2:5–8, the prophet discusses how the proud man who builds himself up and gathers the nations to himself does so foolishly.

At first, the prophet is not clear about who this “proud man” is. The prophet describes the man using the language of “Sheol” and “death” (Hab 2:5), indicating that this is a threatening presence. It is not just some insignificant person, but someone who rules many people. As we continue to read, we get the sense that this man could be a ruler who gathers an army and who takes captives and tribute from those under his reign. Walter Dietrich questions whether this ruler is of foreign origin or one from Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> S. Snyman and Tremper Longman agree and suggest the proud man could be the Babylonian army but also could be the person about whom Habakkuk had earlier complained to YHWH (Hab 1:2), perhaps listeners who did not trust Habakkuk’s vision from YHWH.<sup>50</sup> So, Hab 2:5 could be placing “the reliability of the vision . . . over against

---

49. Walter Dietrich, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 145.

50. S. D. Snyman and Tremper Longman III, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 71–72.

the deceitfulness of wealth and power.”<sup>51</sup> There is no real evidence to determine the identity of the person. In fact, the “proud man” could simply be an imaginary ruler that the prophet uses to stand in for any who would take up the foolishness that this “proud man” does. It does not matter whether it is a real person or not. What matters is that this is a person who is not faithful to YHWH and trusts only in himself.<sup>52</sup>

This imaginary ruler hopes that he will be glorified by these people whom he brings together because of his power and strength. The prophet says,

הלא־אלה כלם עליו משל ישאו ומליצה חידות לו ויאמר  
הוי המרבה לא־לו עד־מתי ומכביד עליו עבטיט:

Will not everyone take up a proverb against him, a taunt and riddle against him and they will say  
“Woe to him who increases what is not his own and loads himself up with many pledges. How long shall it last?” (Hab 2:6)

The prophet tells the people that though a person may try to make himself great by gathering people and things for himself, it will not last. He recalls Prov 28:25:<sup>53</sup>

רחב־נפש יגרה מדון ובוטח על־יהוה ידשן:

The one who has a great appetite stirs up contention, but the one trusting in YHWH will become prosperous. (Prov 28:25)

Habakkuk taunts the one who would do this, and then goes on to say how the man will fail. The prophet is describing how the king in question will lose what he has. Though he has tried to make himself great by showing his power to the surrounding nations and taking captives to serve him, these same captives will turn on him.

---

51. J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 116–17.

52. Heath A. Thomas, *Habakkuk* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 84.

53. Dietrich, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 145.

## The Nations Gathered in Zephaniah

In Zephaniah, the image is used in an oracle against the nations. In Zeph 3, YHWH is saying that the nations will be gathered so that judgment and wrath can be doled out upon them. This pronouncement comes at the end of a declaration of judgment on Jerusalem. The prophet has been describing how Jerusalem has neither listened to nor trusted YHWH. He says that יהוה צדיק בקרבה (“YHWH is righteous in her midst”), and yet Jerusalem still did not follow its God. The gathering of the nations is the culminating action that YHWH takes before wrath is poured out on all of the earth and it is destroyed. This image comes at a point in the book just before YHWH says that Jerusalem and even the nations (after they have been destroyed) will be restored. This image might be thought of as YHWH gathering all the nations of the world to devour them by the “fire of [his] jealousy” כי באש קנאתי (Zeph 3:8).

This image of the gathering of nations continues the theme of Zeph 3 that YHWH is the great creator who gives the law and is in control. The gathering of the nations is just one step in the ultimate plan of the restoration of creation. The restoration will only follow devastation. There are theological issues at stake about how, or even if, YHWH manages history. Zephaniah argues that YHWH demonstrates power over history through the tearing down and building up of nations. Marvin Sweeney states that

in order to demonstrate [that YHWH is the righteous creator], it is necessary to prove YHWH is responsible for all the punishment that has befallen Israel and Judah, that YHWH was compelled to bring punishment on Israel and Judah because they had acted contrary to YHWH’s will, that YHWH would bring punishment upon the nations as well for failing to adhere to YHWH’s will, and that the ultimate outcome of the process of punishment would be the restoration of Israel and Judah around Jerusalem at the center of creation.<sup>54</sup>

---

54. Marvin Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 175.

Sweeney points out that in order for the restoration of creation to even be necessary, there has to be destruction first. But YHWH does not dole out punishments on a whim. For a punishment to be necessary, there has to first be judgment, and before that there has to be a turning from YHWH. In order for Jerusalem to become the center of the restored creation, she cannot be exempt from the punishment.

#### The Nations Gathered in Zechariah

In Zechariah, there are many different uses of the image of gathering the nations. It is important to note that Zechariah is a later example of this image. The book of Zechariah assumes the people are still subjects of Persia yet does not give weight to the political structures in the use of the image. That is, the text does not consider the realities of contemporary political structures so much as the idea of the nations' interrelationships. The traditional language counts for more than the political structures that are at play in his world.

In the first part of Zechariah (chapters 1–8), the image of the gathering of nations is associated with a similar idea as in Micah. The nations are being gathered together in Jerusalem so that they can worship YHWH. The relationship between the nations and the people of YHWH is one of sharing culture and worship. YHWH brings together the people and together they worship him alone. The nations are being incorporated into the people of YHWH. In Zech 2:15, YHWH says

ונלוו גוים רבים אל־יהוה ביום ההוא והיו לי לעם  
ושכנתי בתוכך וידעת כי־יהוה צבאות שלחני אליך:

And many nations shall be gathered to YHWH on that day, and they shall be my people  
and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that YHWH of hosts has sent me to you. (Zech 2:15)

YHWH intends for these nations to partake in the promise. They are collected into his people. We see more evidence of this idea in Zech 8:22. The prophet describes how all people will come to Jerusalem to seek YHWH and pray.

In the second part of the book (chs. 9–14), the image changes. Instead of the people being gathered to seek YHWH, most of the references in this section are describing the gathering of the nations as gathering for battle. In Zech 12:3, YHWH says,

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא אֲשִׁים  
אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲבֵן מַעֲמָסָה לְכָל־הָעַמִּים כְּל־עַמְסִיָּה שְׂרוֹט יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְנֹאֲסָפוּ עָלֶיהָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ:

And it will happen on that day that I will make  
Jerusalem a heavy stone for all people, all who would carry it away will surely be  
cut to pieces  
yet the nations of the earth are gathered against it. (Zech 12:3)

Though Jerusalem is faced with the power of the nations, YHWH's power is greater; Jerusalem shall be protected. However, there is a shift in YHWH's intentions between this verse and chapter 14. At the outset of chapter 14, YHWH says that *YHWH* will gather the nations *against Jerusalem*, leaving only a remnant behind. How might we account for this shift?

The shift is common in pseudo-apocalyptic texts. In these texts, the writers set up paradoxes around the days of judgment. YHWH is both protector and executioner. We see this same sort of shift in Joel. In Zech 12, the prophet proclaims that the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem. In Zech 14, the shift is a paradox. The nations are gathered, but those who would carry away Jerusalem will be cut to pieces so that a remnant will remain. The text is describing the Day of YHWH, when YHWH will bring about final judgment. There will be a final battle against Jerusalem that will destroy many of the people, but there is hope. So long as a remnant remains, so too does the nation. The

prophet proclaims the hope for the people of Jerusalem and the remnant of the nations after the battle. He says,

והיה כל־הנותר מכל־הגוים הבאים על־ירושלם  
ועלו מדי שנה בשנה להשתחות למלך יהוה צבאות  
ולחג את־חג הסוכות:

And it will happen that everyone left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem,  
shall go up from year to year to worship the king YHWH of hosts  
and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zech 14:16)

Though they have all faced the judgment and terror of YHWH's final battle, there will still be a remnant of all the nations that will live peacefully with Israel. This remnant of the nations will join in the festival that commemorates Israel's time in the wilderness after the exodus and join in the remembrance of this migration. They themselves will be migrants among the Israelites and be able to join them in that remembrance. There is hope for these few who remain. There is hope for a future where the nations and Israel can coincide.

#### The Nations Gathered in Joel

In Joel, we again have the image of the nations being gathered for judgment.

YHWH says,

וקבצתי את־כל־הגוים והורדתי אל־עמק יהושפט ונשפטי עמם שם על־עמי ונחלתי  
ישראל אשר פזרו בגוים ואת־ארצי חלקו:

I will gather all the nations  
and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into  
judgment with them there  
on behalf of my people and my inheritance, Israel, whom they have  
scattered among the nations  
and my land which they have divided up. (Joel 4:2)

YHWH plans to gather the nations and bring them to the valley of Jehoshaphat where they will be judged for the evils that they have done against YHWH's people. This verse

is the beginning of the indictment against the nations. Following this verse, YHWH tells the specifics of what the nations have done, how they have sold and scattered YHWH's people. As a result, they will be scattered and sold by the Israelite people.

Following this indictment, YHWH continues the discourse on the gathering of the nations to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Similar to the use in the second part of Zechariah, this image again is associated with the Day of YHWH. The prophet says

קראו־זאת בגוים קדשו מלחמה העירו הגבורים יגשו יעלו כל אנשי המלחמה:  
כתו אתיכם לחרבות ומזמרתים לרמחים החלש יאמר גבור אני:  
עושו ובאו כל־הגוים מסביב ונקבצו שמה הנחת יהוה גבוריך:  
יעורו ויעלו הגוים אל־עמק יהושפט כי שם אשב לשפט את־כל־הגוים מסביב:  
שלחו מגל כי בשל קציר באו רדו כי־מלאה גת השיקו היקבים כי רבה רעתם:

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war!

Wake up the mighty men, let them come near, let them come up, all the men of war.

Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears.

Let the weak say "I am strong."

Be quick and come, all you nations all around and be collected there;

Bring down your mighty ones, O YHWH.

Let the nations be awakened and come down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

Send out the sickle for the harvest is ripe,

come, go down for the winepress is full,

the vats overflow because their wickedness is great. (Joel 4:9–13)

YHWH tells the nations to come prepared for battle. Their mighty warriors are to gather and prepare for a battle that they will inevitably lose. Unlike Zechariah's expectation of a remnant of the nations that live among Israel, Joel does not indicate that there will be anyone remaining among the nations (apart from those who have been sold and scattered by Judah). There are multitudes that YHWH intends to judge, so many that the prophet uses the metaphor of an overflowing vat of wine. The wickedness of the nations is great and the nations themselves who have oppressed the people of YHWH are crowds that fill the valley waiting for the holy war against YHWH. It is the image of an army gathered to

fight, but the fight will not end well for the nations. Both Joel and Isaiah 66 are similar here in that they envision a dramatic destruction of the enemy nations as a prelude to universal peace.

Additionally, whereas Micah describes a time of peace where people will turn their weapons into farming tools (Mic 4:3), Joel reverses this. Instead, the image of the people waiting for a fight continues as YHWH tells the nations to turn their agricultural implements into tools of war. In an ironic turn, YHWH calls for the sickle to be sent out, right after telling the nations to turn their agricultural implements into weapons.

Joel uses the imagery of the gathering of nations primarily as a gathering for judgment. He indicts the nations and tells them that YHWH has appointed them to be judged, and so they must come to the valley. They have been judged for what they have done to the faithful people of YHWH. YHWH allows them to have some sense of hope, telling them to bring implements of war (made from their farming tools) and fight against him. However, there is a sense that no matter if the equipment is for agriculture or for war, the nations will not need it. They are being gathered for judgment, a judgment that will lead to their destruction. Only then can the prophet end the oracles with the word of hope to the people of YHWH.

### **YHWH like a Lion in the Book of the Twelve**

The final image that I will discuss in brief is the image of YHWH as a lion. This may be one of the most common (or at least familiar) images for the audience of the Book of the Twelve. It is an image that evokes fear in the listener. The lion was a



common symbol in the Assyrian empire and was often associated with their conquest.<sup>55</sup> However, in the Book of the Twelve, YHWH is the lion, not Assyria. YHWH protects the people of Israel like a lion protects her young. However, at the same time, when the people turn from him, YHWH strikes the people like a lion upon her prey. In the Book of the Twelve, this image of the lion is found in Hosea, Amos, and Joel. In Hosea, it is used as an image of YHWH calling the people back, whereas in Amos and Joel, YHWH roars like a lion from Zion, striking fear into the hearts of those who hear.

#### YHWH like a Lion in Hosea

As mentioned, Hosea presents the image of YHWH as a lion as one where the call goes out to the lioness's cubs, and they return to follow her. This is the first time that this image is in the Book of the Twelve. In Hosea 11, YHWH proclaims mercy upon the people. YHWH says that they will not be destroyed because he is "God and not a human" (Hos 11:9). He goes on to say,

אחרי יהוה ילכו כאריה ישאג  
כי־הוא ישאג ויחרדו בנים מים:

"They will walk after YHWH, like a lion he will roar.  
When he roars, the children will come trembling from the sea."  
(Hos 11:10)

This is the image of a lion calling for her children. They are called to return to her protection. YHWH is calling the people to return after his anger has subsided. The people return to YHWH like cubs to their mother. The roar of YHWH is a call to them, calling them back to him. The terrifying roar reminds the people that YHWH is their God. This image is an image of hope for the return of the people from exile.

---

55. For an intensive look at lion imagery in the ancient Near East, see Brent Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

## YHWH like a Lion in Amos

Amos uses the image of YHWH roaring like a lion from Zion at the beginning of his collection of oracles, prior to the oracles against the nations. He says,

יהוה מציון ישאג ומירושלם יתן קולו  
ואבלו נאות הרעים ויבש ראש הכרמל:

YHWH roars from Zion  
and from Jerusalem he utters his voice.  
The pastures of the shepherds mourn,  
and the top of Carmel dries up. (Amos 1:2)

The lion attacking its prey is a prominent image in the ancient Near East. This image evokes a sense of a lion roaring, bringing terror to the one who hears. The lion is an image of power. Often associated with kings and gods, the power that the image has demanded to be felt. When the lion roars, all who hear tremble because they know that the lion is one of the most powerful creatures in the ancient Near Eastern world.<sup>56</sup> This is a fitting beginning for Amos's words of doom against the nations that follow this pronouncement of YHWH roaring.<sup>57</sup> It strikes fear into the heart of the listener.

We meet the lion again in Amos 3:3–8. It is in this section that we get the full image of YHWH roaring from Zion.

כי לא יעשה אדני יהוה דבר כי אם־גלה סודו אל־עבדיו הנביאים:  
אריה שאג מי לא יירא  
אדני יהוה דבר מי לא ינבא:

Surely the Lord YHWH does nothing  
unless he reveals his secret  
to his servants the prophets.  
A lion has roared;  
who will not fear?  
The Lord YHWH has spoken;

---

56. Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?*, 135.

57. Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 219.

who can not prophesy? (Amos 3:7–8)

This lion, roaring from its den because it has caught its prey, strikes fear into the hearts of the people of Israel who have turned from YHWH. Amos’s words here are not a choice, but a necessity. Amos was compelled to proclaim YHWH’s judgement. This section connects “the roaring of the lion in 1:2 and the prophets of 2:11–12 with Amos’s own role as a prophet” because it serves to say that “a true prophet has no choice.”<sup>58</sup>

#### YHWH like a Lion in Joel

Similar to Amos, the book of Joel contains the phrase “YHWH roars from Zion” (Joel 4:16). However, Joel does not simply take the image and use it the same way that Amos does. Amos uses the image as a way to instill fear and dread into the listener, telling the people of Israel of the coming judgment against them. Joel flips the image and uses it to instill hope in the listener, foretelling of the coming judgment on the nations who have oppressed the people. At the end of the book, as already noted, there is a section where YHWH is calling together the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat to judge them. Within this section, the prophet says:

ויהוה מציון ישאג ומירושלם יתן קולו  
ורעשו שמים וארץ  
ויהוה מחסה לעמו ומעוז לבני ישראל:

YHWH roars from Zion  
and from Jerusalem he utters his voice  
and the heavens and the earth shake,  
but YHWH will be a shelter for his people  
and strength for the sons of Israel. (Joel 4:16)

The image of YHWH roaring here evokes a feeling of awe mixed with fear, rather than fear by itself. We are told that not only does YHWH roar and the heavens and the earth

---

58. Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 384.

quake, but that YHWH is a refuge for the people. YHWH protects the people, even while passing judgment upon those who have oppressed them. Earlier, in 2:11, we see that “YHWH utters his voice at the head of his army” (Joel 2:11a). Upon first reading, we might wonder whether this is a good thing or a bad thing for the Jewish people. In the following sections, the army of YHWH could be viewed as the locusts who have ravaged the land. However, Crenshaw suggests that this verse in connection with 3:16 suggests that YHWH is providing “both a vanguard and a rearguard . . . protect[ing] both from ambush and pursuit.”<sup>59</sup> The battle cry in 2:11 is almost the same as the roar that is heard from Zion. Joel flips the image that Amos uses and makes what was an image of terror for the people of Israel into an image of hope.

### **Joel’s Theological Purposes for Using the Images**

To summarize the analysis so far, the examination of some of the common images in the Book of the Twelve has allowed a set of “prophetic stock” images to emerge.<sup>60</sup> However, the meaning behind these images is changed to fit the purposes of the different oracles. In this section, we will explore how Joel develops these images for his theological purposes.

The first question I want to address with this section is how the character of God is developed in these images in the Book of the Twelve. For Joel, YHWH is the one who sends the locust plague. YHWH is at the head of this heavenly army, marching them against the people who have turned away. In an effort to turn the people back, the locust is sent to devour the harvest, leaving nothing behind for the people. YHWH seems to be

---

59. James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 193.

60. House, “Endings as New Beginnings,” 321.

unrelenting toward the people. YHWH is jealous for the people and wants to have a renewed relationship with them. However, after they have returned, YHWH restores their harvest and provides abundance for them. In connection to the restoration of the harvest, YHWH goes further by using the harvesting imagery to declare judgment on the nations. The nations are gathered in as a harvest for judgment, while YHWH calls the people back from their exile.

The second question is: who are the people? The people in Joel are ones who are penitent toward YHWH, lamenting their actions that caused the plague of locust. They are those who have been oppressed by their enemies. Their enemies heap wickedness upon them and so YHWH marks those enemies for judgment, for the harvest of justice for their actions.

Finally, I want to address the images themselves. They are not merely metaphors to be used as adornment. The images carry significant meaning already, and Joel adapts these meanings for his own oracles. The image of the locusts serves as a call to repentance. YHWH sends the locusts or shows the prophet that the locusts are coming, in order to spark the people to repent. The harvest image serves to (1) show the faithfulness of YHWH in restoring what has been taken away and (2) indicate that those who have oppressed and created injustice for the faithful people of YHWH are receiving the judgement against them. They are being harvested for the fire. The image of the gathering of nations serves to show YHWH's power over the whole earth. YHWH is the one who sits in judgment over the misdeeds of the nations. And finally, the image of the lion roaring serves as a reminder for the people of Israel that YHWH will protect them.

The sequence of punishment-restoration portrayed through these metaphors in Joel does not give a resolution one way or the other. Individually, we see Joel using the metaphors in slightly different ways than the rest of the Minor Prophets. However, collectively, he carries on the messages of destruction and hope found in the rest of the Book of the Twelve. The author presents both sides, keeping the two in tension. This tension, in turn, presents readers with a choice. They can either continue down the path that leads to destruction from the locust plague (and possibly even invasion), or they can change their course and choose the path that allows YHWH to dwell amidst them, protecting them from these catastrophes. The prophet argues for a particular choice, joining in the communal lament he proposes in Joel 2:17, but offers the choice as a didactic tactic for the audience. Joel aims to teach them. The reader knows of both possibilities and must choose which he or she prefers to live into.

## CHAPTER III

### AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT יום יהוה

Continuing with prophetic stock images, the driving image that Joel employs in his text is the image of the Day of YHWH. First, it is important to establish the origin of the phrase *יום יהוה*. We discuss what two scholars have asserted concerning the origin of the phrase prior to its being used in the Hebrew Bible and then address what scholars have said about the phrase in the Hebrew Bible. Then, we will examine the use of the phrase in the Book of the Twelve. Finally, we will address the phrase in Joel, in particular how Joel nuances the image and creates a paradox for the meaning of the image.

#### **The Mythos of the Day of YHWH**

The construct chain, *יום יהוה*, appears sixteen times in the Hebrew Bible, all of which are in the prophets. In addition to the complete phrase, there is a shorthand phrase that is often used (especially in Joel). This shorthand phrase, *ביום ההוא*, is often used to illustrate “the simultaneity of two events . . . or even some future day.”<sup>1</sup> The prophets use this phrase to make sense of their current circumstances, putting current social reality in conversation with what YHWH says will happen. Whenever this phrase is used, it describes some future action (either near future or distant future) when God will judge the world. It looks forward to a future event while pointing to the present events that are leading up to this future. During the time of the eighth-century prophets, the people

---

1. M. Sæbø, “*יום יהוה*; *יום יהוה*; *יום יהוה*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 6 (1990): 29.

expected freedom from Assyrian rule and peace and prosperity. However, Amos tells them that this Day will bring their destruction. The prophetic works respond to what they perceive to be the delusions of the popular view of the Day of YHWH. But why is that? What lies behind this phrase that has led the people to have the wrong idea? By the time of the eighth-century prophets, the word יום had already been introduced into the cultural terminology of Israel's surrounding neighbors, especially in relation to future days, feast days, and days associated with the gods.<sup>2</sup> While there is not an exact parallel to the phrase "Day of YHWH" within other ancient Near Eastern texts, there were references to specific days that were important. Israel takes the term and its association with specific feast days and adds to the meaning, creating the phrase יום יהוה. This phrase is significant for the Israelite people because it signifies a day when YHWH will be amidst the people and at work in the world for them.

In the scholarly debate on the origin of this phrase, two major hypotheses have prevailed in the discussion of how the phrase works within Joel. Early scholarship focuses on the image and the relationship to nature mythology (Hugo Gressmann's hypothesis). Another position comes from Gerhard von Rad. He argues that the phrase originated in relation to the idea of "holy war."<sup>3</sup>

Hugo Gressmann's position on this topic is that it is rooted in the eschatology that is associated with ancient nature mythology.<sup>4</sup> Gressmann discusses the relationship of the

---

2. W. von Soden, "יום yôm; יומם yômām; יום יהוה yôm YHWH," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 6 (1990): 7–10. See also Martha T. Roth, Timothy J. Collins, Hermann Hunger, Remigius Jas, Jennie Myers, Erica Reiner, and Joan Goodnick, *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 20: *U and W* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 139–55.

3. Sæbø, "יום yôm; יומם yômām; יום יהוה yôm YHWH," 29.

4. H. Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905), 141–58.



Day of YHWH to the idea of nature at war. Different catastrophic events (such as the plague in Joel) were signs of the coming of YHWH. Natural disasters, plagues, etc. were all connected to the Day of YHWH. But there was still hope attached to this idea. The hope was that when the day arrived, YHWH would remember the promise made to the people of Israel and a new covenant would be created that restored the natural order that had been destroyed during this eschatological event.

A second position on this question comes from Gerhard von Rad. Von Rad argues that the phrase comes from the traditions of holy war.<sup>5</sup> Von Rad claims, “The Day of Yahweh encompasses a pure act of war. . . . There is no support whatsoever . . . for the supposition that the enthronement of Yahweh, too, belongs to the concept of the Day of Yahweh.”<sup>6</sup> He focuses on the war aspect of the Day of YHWH. The idea is again eschatological as it suggests that the coming of YHWH on the day is an act of war against the evil in the world. This suggests that the judgment on the nations during the Day of YHWH is an act of war on their wickedness, illuminating YHWH’s desire to make creation holy.

These two options for understanding the phrase help frame the discussion of Joel’s usage, but I do not think that one must pick one specific background for the phrase. The mythos of the Day of YHWH was multifaceted, meaning that many cultural ideas came together to influence how the ancient Israelites perceived the Day of YHWH.

Each of the cases of the use of the phrase יום יהוה carries the idea of God destroying something, showing God as a divine warrior who wipes out his enemies.

---

5. Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 97–108.

6. Von Rad, “Day of Yahweh,” 103.

However, there is a prophetic precedent for using nature imagery to describe warfare and its consequences. For example, in Isa 10, the prophet says,

ועורר עליו יהוה צבאות שוט כמכת מדין בצור עורב ומטהו על־הים ונשאו בדרך מצרים:

YHWH of Hosts will stir up for himself a whip like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and as his rod was over the sea, so he will lift it up the way he did in Egypt. (Isa 10:26)

Isaiah has portrayed Assyria as a force to be reckoned with. Yet here, the prophet describes YHWH as the one who leads the counterattack against the superpower.<sup>7</sup> The prophet tells how YHWH has and will defend the people, using nature imagery.

There are a few other cases, such as in Zechariah, Malachi, and Joel, that specifically talk about the natural phenomena YHWH uses as a weapon. Considering the prophetic tradition of pronouncing woe for the coming Day of YHWH and the idea of YHWH being in charge over all creation, it makes sense that YHWH might use creation as a weapon on the Day of YHWH to enact a holy war. In many cases, it is the darkness present with YHWH that foretells the future disaster of the Day of YHWH.

In the Hebrew Bible, wherever YHWH is, darkness and shadow surround him.

YHWH is so bright that everything around goes dark. We can see this in Ps 97:2–3:

ענן וערפל סביביו צדק ומשפט מכון כסאו:  
אש לפניו תלך ותלהט סביב ציו:

Clouds and thick clouds surround him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

Fire goes before him and consumes his enemies around him (Ps. 97:2–3)

This psalm is working through the obscurity that comes with YHWH's self-presentation.

The writer recognizes that YHWH exists and is obscured by darkness, yet that darkness is

---

7. Peter Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103.4 (1983): 722.

also what reveals him.<sup>8</sup> I think one of the best images to think of when reading this is the image of an ancient throne room (which really is what this psalm seems to be talking about). Research on ancient throne rooms and palaces has helped us to understand that the main room where the throne would be located was a large room with dim lighting. There would be lighting around the throne and possibly some lighting leading up to it, but overall, the room would have been dark. This meant that the throne (and so also the king) would receive the most light in the room.<sup>9</sup>

In Ps 97, we see YHWH in the divine throne room. It is in this throne room that judgment is pronounced upon the people of the earth. The darkness that we see is an aspect of YHWH's self-presentation, as well as a pronouncement of judgement against YHWH's enemies. YHWH's army marches through the darkness of the Day of YHWH, sounding similar to Ps 97. Destruction is in the wake of the army; fire surrounds the army, consuming everything around it.

Based on this discussion, I do not think that the Day of YHWH in Joel is based on only one of these ideas (natural phenomena or holy war). Instead, both von Rad and Gressmann's interpretations are valid. In fact, in Joel the two are interchangeable. YHWH's army is the locust plague. YHWH enacts holy war against the Israelite people. By combining both Gressmann's and von Rad's arguments, then we can truly interpret how Joel uses the phrase in his postexilic context.

---

8. Mark W. Hamilton, "Divine (In)Corporeality in Psalms and Job," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 71.1 (2020): 31.

9. Mary Shepperson, *Sunlight and Shade in the First Cities: A Sensory Archaeology of Early Iraq* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 227.

## The Day of YHWH in the Minor Prophets

The Day of YHWH is not exclusive to the book of Joel. It is found throughout the Book of the Twelve (Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi).<sup>10</sup> While in each of these books, the phrase carries slightly different connotations, depending on the social location of the prophet, each use of the image describes a time when YHWH will demonstrate power upon the earth. In this section we will explore how the prophets in the Book of the Twelve use this image and what it tells us about the audience of the prophet.

### The Day of YHWH in Amos

The Day of YHWH image in Amos portrays the people as foolish. They turn away from the injustice around them, instead hoping for an idyllic day when YHWH will take away their oppressors and prove his power to his enemies. They are content to wait for the Day to come. In Amos 5:18–20 the prophet refutes what the people believe about the Day of YHWH, saying,

הוא־חשך ולא־אור:  
כאשר ינוס איש מפני הארי ופגעו הדב ובא הבית וסמך ידו על־הקיר ונשכו הנחש:  
הלא־חשך יום יהוה ולא־אור ואפל ולא־נגה לו:

it is darkness, and not light.  
It is like if a man  
fled from a lion  
and happened upon a bear.  
Or went into the house  
and rested his hand upon the wall  
and a snake bit him.  
Is the day of YHWH not darkness  
and not light?  
Gloomy with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18b–20)

---

10. Micah and Habakkuk also reference “the Day” as a day of trouble.

The people have been longing for the Day of YHWH, having “well-developed and definite ideas about what the Day would bring.”<sup>11</sup> The people believed YHWH would fight for them and bring them safety. Following von Rad’s argument about the origin of the phrase *יום יהוה*, the idea that the people would be waiting for a day when their God would enact a holy war against his enemies makes sense. Anderson and Freedman suggest that the people of Israel expected that on the Day, YHWH would come as a warrior-god, fighting against Israel’s enemies. In doing so, the Day of YHWH would “bring security (6:1) and prosperity (6:4).”<sup>12</sup>

The image of the Day of YHWH has its origins in ancient Mesopotamian, more generally Near Eastern, mythology. In the mythology, the Day is when the god of the people will come. It is often considered to be similar to a festival day. For the Israelites this would be festivals such as Passover, which celebrates the day that YHWH rescued the people from Egypt. In texts such as the Deir ‘Alla texts, when divine power is demonstrated, it upsets the normal order of things. Divine intervention throws the world into chaos, changing the natural order of things.<sup>13</sup> The people of Amos’s time are expecting another event like the Exodus, where YHWH will deliver them from their enemies. They want YHWH to change the socio-political atmosphere surrounding them, making them a great nation again.

---

11. Francis Andersen and David Freedman, *Hosea*, AB 24 (New Haven & London: Yale University, 1980), 521.

12. Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 521.

13. Paul Albertus Kruger, “A World Turned on Its Head in Ancient Near Eastern Prophetic Literature: A Powerful Strategy to Depict Chaotic Scenarios,” *Vetus Testamentum* 62 (2012): 61.

But this Day is not going to be what they had hoped for. Rather than a day of judgment against the nations, it is a day of judgment against Israel. Amos did not share the idyllic view of the Day of YHWH that the people had. Amos does not simply reject the idea; he shared the view that YHWH's power would be manifested on that Day. Instead, he modifies this image, taking what the people expect (the coming of YHWH as a coming of deliverance of YHWH's people from the surrounding enemies) and flipping it. Amos uses the image to say, "you, YHWH's people, are the enemies of YHWH's people."

### The Day in Obadiah

In Obadiah, the prophet proclaims that the Day of YHWH is coming. The prophet proclaims the people's misdeeds, saying,

מחמס אחיך יעקב  
 תכסך בושׁה ונכרת לעולם:  
 ביום עמדך מנגד ביום שבות זרים חילו  
 ונכרים באו שערו ועל־ירושלם ידו גורל  
 גם־אתה כאחד מהם:  
 ואל־תרא ביום־אחריך ביום נכרו  
 ואל־תשמח לבני־יהודה ביום אבדם  
 ואל־תגדל פיך ביום צרה:  
 . . . כי־קרוב יום־יהוה על־כל־הגוים  
 כאשר עשית יעשה לך גמלך ישוב בראשך:

For the violence toward your brother Jacob,  
 shame will cover you; you will be cut off forever.  
 On the day you stood aside,  
 on the day strangers carried off his strength  
 and foreigners came into his gates  
 and cast lots for Jerusalem.  
 Moreover, you were like them.  
 But on that day, you should not watch your brother  
 on the day of his captivity,  
 nor rejoice over the sons of Judah  
 on the day of their destruction,  
 nor smile  
 on the day of distress . . .

See the day of YHWH is near  
upon all the nations.  
That which you have done, it will be done to you;  
your deeds will be returned upon your head. (Obad 10–12, 15)

In this oracle against the nation of Edom for what they have done and will do to Israel, YHWH speaks to Edom with this warning. The audience of this oracle is being warned that YHWH is coming to repay them for what they have done (and what they did not do) during the time of siege against Israel.

### The Day in Zephaniah

Adele Berlin points out that in Zephaniah, the prophet “uses a number of variations” on the phrase “the Day of YHWH.”<sup>14</sup> In Zephaniah, this Day of YHWH is a day of sacrifice of the people.<sup>15</sup> It is a day that YHWH established a sacrifice and will punish the princes and those rejoicing and taking advantage of the poor and outcast. In Zephaniah, the prophet says that the day is

יום עברה היום ההוא יום צרה ומצוקה  
יום שאה ומשואה יום חשך ואפלה  
יום ענן וערפל:  
יום שופר ותרועה  
על הערים הבצרות ועל הפנות הגבהות:

A day of wrath  
a day of distress and anxiety  
a day of ravages and desolation  
a day of darkness and gloom  
a day of clouds and deep darkness  
a day of the shofar and a battle cry  
against the inaccessible cities  
and against the high corner towers. (Zeph 1:15–16)

---

14. Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah*, AB 25A (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 78.

15. Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 79.

The description of the day again sounds similar to the self-presentation of YHWH in Ps 97. In Psalm 97, YHWH is surrounded by darkness. YHWH is enthroned in righteousness and justice and destroys the enemies that come against the Israelite people. In Zephaniah, YHWH comes in darkness and clouds and leads an army against his enemies. The prophet proclaims that this is a day to sound the battle cry, as YHWH comes against the unrighteous.

Within the discussion of the Day of the Lord metaphor in Zephaniah, two things are important when studying the literary structure of these verses (and the book as a whole).<sup>16</sup> The first is the author's use of imagery to create an imaginative world for the reader. The second is the author's use of liturgical language in crafting his oracles.

The idea of sound and sight are important to this imagery of the Day of YHWH in Zephaniah.<sup>17</sup> There is a tension with the idea that the day is a day of sacrifice. All of the imagery used for the day is associated with battle imagery. It is common for sacrifices to occur before a battle as it would invoke the god to be with the people in the battle. Additionally, a sacrifice following a battle, as well as a thanks to the god who was with the people, would be common. So, while it is not unusual to discuss sacrifice as something that the priest would do before and after a battle, there is some tension in the discussion of the sacrifice using battle language. The language is not one of a sacrifice before the battle, but the battle as the sacrifice in and of itself. The language of battle creates a mental image of the consequences of this sacrifice. Just as you would burn the whole burnt offering, so too shall the city be burned. Just as you would play the

---

16. Paul R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 56.

17. Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 92.



instruments of worship during the services at the temple, so too would the instruments of battle be played. However, instead of sacrifice that atoned for the people's sins or gave thanks for blessings, this would be a sacrifice that destroys them.

Additionally, Zephaniah's language takes on a liturgical tone. The author does so through the use of "terms or phrases which are relatively common in psalms and wisdom literature but rare in prophetic writing."<sup>18</sup> The author uses this language to connect his message with the wisdom tradition (especially invoking psalmic tradition). The use of the seven sets of speeches of YHWH and the prophet<sup>19</sup> resembles the structure of a lament psalm in that it includes the complaint (in this case, the complaint from YHWH about what the people have done and the pronouncement of the coming judgment to the people by the prophet) as well as ending with a note of confidence or encouragement to the reader. These sets of speeches create a drama between YHWH and the prophet (and people of God). The author uses the liturgical language within these speeches to help craft his drama, presenting the message in a way familiar to the listener.

#### The Day in Zechariah

In Zechariah, the Day of YHWH is a peculiar one, much like it is in Joel. In fact, Carol and Eric Meyers suggest that "Zechariah's is thus closest to the way it appears in Joel and Malachi."<sup>20</sup> Our first reference to the Day in Zechariah is in 9:16. In this verse, the prophet says,

והושיעם יהוה אלהיהם ביום ההוא כצאן עמו כי אבני־נזר מתנוססות על־אדמתו:

---

18. Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 16.

19. House, *Zephaniah*, 58–61.

20. Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, AB 25C (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 409.

On that day, YHWH their God will save them, like the flock of his people; for they will be like the jewels of a crown displayed over his land. (Zech 9:16)

This proclamation of salvation by YHWH comes after the announcement of the coming ruler of Zion. The prophet tells of a ruler who will come and rescue the people and make peace between the nations (Zech 9:9–15).

In chapter 12, the image shifts a little. Instead of describing a time when the great ruler of Zion comes and brings peace, the prophet describes it as a coming battle. He says,

והיה ביום־ההוא אשים את־ירושלם אבן מעמסה לכל־העמים כל־  
עמסיה שרוט ישרטו ונאספו עליה כל גויי הארץ: ...  
ביום ההוא אשים את־אלפי יהודה ככור אש בעצים וכלפיד אש בעמיר ואכלו על־ימין ועל־  
שמאל את־כל־העמים סביב וישבה ירושלם עוד תחיתה בירושלם:

And on that day, I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all the nations. All who would carry it away will certainly be cut to pieces; yet all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. ... On that day I will make the chiefs of Judah like a fire on timbers and like a fiery torch among the sheaves. They will consume on the right and left hands, all the surrounding nations. But Jerusalem will dwell again in its place, Jerusalem. (Zech 12:3, 6)

Rather than bringing peace among the nations, YHWH will make Jerusalem a stone against the nations. Another way to translate this phrase colloquially is to say, “Jerusalem will be a heavy load on the nations.”<sup>21</sup> The nations will be unable to carry the people away because YHWH is protecting them. Jerusalem will not be able to be carried off. Additionally, instead of leaders who will be taken away or pushed around, YHWH says that the leaders of Jerusalem will consume the nations all around them. Jerusalem will not be weak in the eyes of her enemies. Instead, she will be like one of the other superpowers surrounding her, taking over the nations who would have gone up against her.

---

21. Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 702.

This chapter not only resembles Joel in that it changes the idea of the Day from one where there is peace among the nations to a day of battle, it also uses similar language to that found in Joel 3. The prophet says,

ביום ההוא יגן יהוה בעד יושב ירושלם והיה הנכשל בהם ביום ההוא כדויד ובית דויד כאלהים כמלאך יהוה לפניהם:  
והיה ביום ההוא אבקש להשמיד את־כל־הגוים הבאים על־ירושלם:  
ושפכתי על־בית דויד ועלו יושב ירושלם רוח חן ותחנונים והביטו אלי את אשר־  
דקרו וספדו עליו כמספד על־היחיד והמר עליו כהמר על־הבכור:

On that day, YHWH will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem and any among them who stumbles on that day will be like David and the house of David will be like God; like the messenger of YHWH before them. And it will be on that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out the spirit of grace and favor upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they will look to me, the one whom they pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech 12:8–10)

Similar to the situation in Joel, YHWH pours out a spirit on the people. They will once again be favored and the Day of YHWH, will bring strength to the people of Jerusalem. YHWH intends to restore the house of David and remind the people about what they have done, though not in a way that punishes them. It is a bittersweet reunion. The people will mourn for the pain that they have caused YHWH, for the “piercing” they have done by turning away, and YHWH will once again bring favor upon Jerusalem.

The final place where the prophet discusses the Day of YHWH in Zechariah is in chapter 14. The prophet draws on the idea of the Day of YHWH as a day when miraculous and sometimes catastrophic events happen and YHWH’s power is revealed in the world. In the first two verses, we again have the Day of YHWH as a day of battle. The people are told that YHWH will

ואספתי את־כל־הגוים אל־ירושלם למלחמה ונלכדה העיר ונשסו הבתים והנשים  
תשגלנה ויצא חצי העיר בגולה ויתר העם לא יכרת מן־העיר:

gather all the nations against Jerusalem in battle, and the city will be taken, the houses will be plundered, the women will be violated, and half of the city will go into captivity. But the remnant of the people will not be cut off from the city.” (Zech 14:2)

The promise that the remnant will not be cut off is little consolation for the devastation that will befall Jerusalem. The people listening to this oracle surely remembered what was said back in chapter 12. They were promised that YHWH would bring them strength and favor. But the oracle does not end here. YHWH promises them that he will go forth and fight against those nations. The people will be defended, and even amidst the devastation in the city, a path for the remnant of the people will be created for them to flee through. The prophet says that YHWH will do marvelous things. He says that

ונבקע הר הזיתים מחציו מזרחה וימה גיא גדולה מאד ומש חצי ההר צפונה וחציו־נגבה:

Mount of Olives will be split in two, from east to west; a large valley will be made when half of the mountain moves toward the north and half toward the south (Zech 14:4).

However, not only will the mountain be miraculously split in two to create a valley for the people to flee through, but YHWH will also cause there to be *“neither day nor night”* (Zech 14:7a). This is a common theme with the Day of YHWH as we have seen in Amos, Zephaniah, and Joel. However, Zechariah shifts this image a little.

Zechariah begins by saying that *“there will be no light on that day”* (Zech 14:6a). However, whereas Amos, Zephaniah, and Joel continue to discuss the absence of day and night using terms of darkness, Zechariah changes this image. In Zechariah 14:7, the prophet explicitly states that *“it will happen at that time that there will be light in the evening”* (Zech 14:7b). So, while in Amos, Zephaniah, and Joel, the Day of YHWH blocks out all light, in Zechariah some light gets through.

The Day of YHWH in Zechariah is a strange one, much like in Joel. Within the span of five chapters, the prophet uses the image of the Day of YHWH to discuss the coming peace among the nations and the coming battle of the nations against Israel. This battle is given two outcomes: the first from chapter 12, the creation of Israel as a superpower, and the second from chapter 14, the seeming triumph of the nations against Jerusalem until YHWH steps in to defend the people. We will see this same paradox in Joel.

### The Day in Malachi

In Malachi, the Day is once again a day of judgment upon the wicked. It is a day when YHWH will pull up the wicked by the root and burn them. But on the same day, the righteous will be spared. They will be healed and go on to crush the wicked. But the people are warned, for the prophet proclaims the words of YHWH saying,

הנה אנכי שלח לכם את אליה הנביא  
לפני בוא יום יהוה הגדול והנורא:  
והשיב לב־אבות על־בנים ולב בנים על־אבותם  
פן־אבוא והכיתי את־הארץ חרם:

See, I am sending to you  
Elijah the prophet  
before the great and dreadful day of YHWH comes  
And he will turn the hearts of fathers to children  
and the hearts of children to fathers  
Lest I come and strike a curse on the earth. (Mal 3:23–24)

### The Day of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve

The Day of YHWH is a common image in the Book of the Twelve. One of the overarching themes has to do with the darkness of the day and the self-presentation of YHWH on that day as similar to the self-presentation in Ps 97. With this self-presentation, there is an eschatological theme that underlies each use of the image: the

theme of YHWH coming to judge. Additionally, destruction and calamity are associated with the day, as Ps 97 states that fire goes out and consumes his enemies.

However, each prophet nuances this image. In Amos, we see that the Day of YHWH is not one to be anticipated joyfully. It is a dreadful day when YHWH will enact judgment against the people who have turned from him. In Obadiah we see the Day of YHWH in relation to the nation Edom. It is the declaration for the destruction of those people who have sat by and watched Israel destroyed and even taken advantage of this situation for themselves. In Zephaniah, the Day of YHWH is a day of both wrath and sacrifice of the people. The people who have taken advantage of the lowly and outcast have been set aside for YHWH's destruction. The tension between the Day of YHWH as a day of sacrifice and the war imagery sends a message to God's people: "if you do this, the consequence is this." It is not a sacrifice that will save the people but one that destroys them. In Zechariah, the Day is a day when Jerusalem will be pillaged but YHWH will fight for the people and a remnant will remain. This is the same paradox in Joel. Finally, in Malachi, we see that the Day of YHWH will be one of both judgment and sparing. Judgment will be upon those who have made the poor suffer, while those who have suffered will be healed.

#### The Day of YHWH in Joel

Like Amos, in Joel, the Day of YHWH has both a hopeful and a gloomy aspect. In the realistic view, YHWH has sent the locust to devour the crops and sent the people into distress because of their turning away from him. It is a dreadful day that brings about mourning and repentance. However, there is also the idyllic view that is presented in Joel 3. In this view, YHWH is set as judge over the nations and refuge for the people. There is

a noticeable shift in how the image is used. The image shifts from one of tragedy to one of hope. The prophet creates this dichotomy of the Day of YHWH with a shift in the use following 2:18. In this section I will discuss the origin of the phrase יום ייחוד and the paradox that Joel creates in the Day as tragedy and the Day as hope.

### *The Day and Tragedy*

The first place in Joel where the term יום יהוה is used is in 1:15. In Joel 1:15, the first word, אהה, is often used to announce “elemental fright.”<sup>22</sup> This fear makes sense for the context of the verse. Joel has been describing the devastation that comes with the locust plague. The locusts wipe out all crops, leaving the people hungry and not able to sacrifice to YHWH. This social situation around the prophet shows that there is no way for the community to be close to God and bring him into their midst in order to reverse their situation. But the locust plague is not the end of the trouble. The prophet is able to see “the hand of God,”<sup>23</sup> the wrath of God coming down upon the people. This day of YHWH would not be a day of salvation, but a day of destruction. The prophet is crying out that their only hope is to lament and hope that YHWH listens.

The second reference to the Day of YHWH can be found in 2:1–2, expanding on the image in 1:15. Joel says,

תקעו שופר בציון והריעו בהר קדשי ירגזו כל ישבי הארץ כי־בא יום־יהוה כי קרוב:  
יום חשך ואפלה יום ענן וערפל כשחר פרש על־ההרים עם רב ועצום כמהו לא נהיה מן־  
העולם ואחריו לא יוסף עד־שני דור ודור:  
לפניו אכלה אש ואחריו תלהט להבה כגן־עדן הארץ לפניו ואחריו מדבר שממה וגם־  
פליטה לא־היתה לו...  
לפניו רגזה ארץ רעשו שמים שמש וירח קדרו וכוכבים אספו נגהם:  
ויהוה נתן קולו לפני חילו כי רב מאד מחנהו כי עצום עשה דברו כי־גדול יום־יהוה ונורא  
מאד ומי יכילנו:

---

22. Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 22.

23. Bruce Birch, *Hosea, Joel, and Amos* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 139.

Sound the trumpet in Zion, shout upon my holy mountain  
 let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of YHWH is coming  
 for it is near.  
 It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness;  
 like dawn spreading over the mountains, a great and powerful people  
 come,  
 the like of whom has never been from eternity  
 nor will there be after them again until a lifetime of generations and  
 generations.  
 Before him, a fire devours and behind him, a flame burns.  
 Like the Garden of Eden is the land before him and behind him a desolate  
 wilderness.  
 Surely nothing will be delivered from him ...  
 Before him, the earth quakes, the heavens tremble,  
 the sun and moon grow dark and the stars remove their brightness.  
 YHWH gives his voice before his army  
 for his camp is very great for the one who executes his word is strong  
 for the day of YHWH is great and invokes great fear. Who can endure it?  
 (Joel 2:1–3, 10–11)

Just as in Amos, this day is described as one that is not to be looked forward to.<sup>24</sup> In verse two, we get a description of the Day as one of calamity and thick darkness, the only light from the fires in the fields. These two verses set up the increasing terror that follows, culminating in the question in verse 11, וּמִי יִכִּילֵנוּ “who can endure [this terrible day]?” All that can be done is to repent and pray for YHWH to be merciful. This verse is a warning for the people to do something before it is too late. By this verse, there is little hope for the community to avert this disaster.

### ***The Day and Hope***

Following this terrifying description of the Day of YHWH, the prophet makes a turn. There is hope in the prophet’s voice when he speaks of the return of God in 2:18. Once God has listened and turned back from destruction on the people, God might restore the land (2:19–25) and provide food for the people (2:26). The prophet even says that

---

24. Birch, *Hosea, Joel, and Amos*, 142.



YHWH will dwell בקרב ישראל “in the midst of Israel” (2:27). Following this verse, YHWH declares,

והיה אחרי־כן  
אשפוך את־רוחי על־כל־בשר ונבאו בניכם ובנותיכם  
זקניכם חלמות יחלמון בחוריכם חזינות יראו:  
וגם על־העבדים ועל־השפחות בימים ההמה אשפוך את־רוחי:

And thus after,  
it will happen that I will pour out my spirit; upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams, your young man will see visions.  
And also, upon the male servants and female servants, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 3:1–2)

The pouring out of his spirit on that day is to be the “climax in God’s redemptive work.”<sup>25</sup> God blesses the land, the harvest, and now will bless the people with his spirit among them.

As the prophet continues, he reiterates the darkness of the Day of YHWH. In Joel 3:3–5, the prophet discusses the signs that the Day of YHWH is coming. The natural phenomena described in Joel 2:1–11 appear once again as an omen of YHWH’s inevitable judgment. However, the prophet flips the tone from one of abject terror about the oncoming destruction of Jerusalem to one of hope for the redemption of the people. He says,

כל אשר־יקרא בשם יהוה ימלט  
כי בהר־ציון ובירושלם תהיה פליטה כאשר אמר יהוה  
ובשרידים אשר יהוה קרא

All who call on the name of YHWH will be saved  
for on the mountain of Zion and in Jerusalem, there will be deliverance as YHWH has said  
and among the remnant whom YHWH calls. (Joel 3:5)

---

25. O Palmer Robertson, *Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1995), 80.

These people who call upon the name of YHWH are not going to face the judgment that was foretold in Joel 2:1–11. Instead, their God will return to them and be among them, delivering them from those who would try to capture them.

In Joel 4:1, YHWH declares that in those days, when the spirit of YHWH will be poured out among the people, those who had been carted off from their land, sold into slavery, and oppressed by the surrounding nations will be returned. There is a connection between the Day of YHWH and the days in 4:1. After YHWH pours out his spirit on the Day of YHWH, the singular day then turns to days. Joel takes it further than the other prophets by discussing what comes after the Day of YHWH. He tells us that after the Day, YHWH remains. It is no longer just one day when YHWH will rule, but it is an idyllic time when YHWH will remain among the people and the people will be returned to their own land. They will live freely among their own people and enjoy YHWH's promised blessing from chapter 3.

Not only are the captives delivered, but recompense is served to the people who had taken them from their families and land. The nations now receive the wrath of God on the Day of YHWH as he declares judgment against them. They are all called down into עמק יהושפט “the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The name of this valley acts as a symbol to further emphasize the legitimacy of YHWH acting as judge upon the nations. This is the place where YHWH will act as the judge, jury, and executioner. No longer will the nations have plentiful harvests, but instead will suffer the hunger that the people of Jerusalem suffered in the locust plague. The nations are told to prepare for war, turning their now useless harvest equipment into weapons. YHWH warns of their coming

judgment; the destruction which had been intended for the people of Israel is now turned against the nations.

And while the nations face destruction, YHWH's people are sheltered from the wrath of the oncoming storm. They once again enjoy the prosperity and mercy of YHWH. The prophet says,

יטפו ההרים עסיס והגבעות תלכנה חלב  
וכל-אפיקי יהודה ילכו מים  
ומעין מבית יהוה יצא והשקה את-נחל השטים...  
ויהודה לעולם תשב וירושלם לדור ודור:  
ונקיתי דמם לא-נקיתי ויהוה שכן בציון:

the mountains will drip with new wine and the hills will flow with milk  
and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water  
and a fountain from the house of YHWH will come out and water the valley of  
Shittim ...  
But Judah will abide forever and Jerusalem from generation to generation.  
And I will hold innocent their blood that I have not held innocent. YHWH dwells  
in Zion. (Joel 4:18, 20–21)

The land will be restored. The people of Judah and Jerusalem will live in the peace of YHWH. This final image recalls YHWH's statement about pouring out his spirit upon the people. No longer are the people separated from God, but he "dwells in Zion" with them.

#### What Has Changed for Joel

Bruce Birch says that "some have said that this is evidence for two different voices in the book of Joel, but it may simply reflect changed circumstances for the prophet's speaking."<sup>26</sup> I agree that there is no need to say that the book of Joel is comprised of two different prophetic voices.<sup>27</sup> Instead, we can think about this as a

---

26. Birch, *Hosea, Joel, and Amos*, 128.

27. For arguments on two separate authors of Joel versus one singular author, see: Bernhard Duhm, "Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 31 (1911): 187; Ernst Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, Kommentar zum Alten Testament 12.1 (Leipzig: Scholle 1922, 1929, 1930); Theodore Robinson and Friedrich Horst, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*,

paradox. The day is both tragedy and hope, depending on whose side YHWH is on. Like in Amos, the image still shows the people anticipating the Day of YHWH. However, the people are not as senseless with their hope. Joel tells them that “The day of YHWH is great; it stirs up great fear,” and they returned to YHWH (Joel 2:11b). The pouring out of YHWH’s spirit, comes before the Day of YHWH. It comes after the communal attitude shift, reversing the tragedies that would have been associated with the Day of YHWH. The people of the community change the outcome of what will happen. But the question remains, what within the community changed for YHWH to change sides?

The author deliberately uses the two juxtaposing images of tragedy and hope to fit within the didactic dimensions of his book. He leaves the choice up to the people, calling them to turn back. He uses the two situations as teaching moments, exploring with the community the two outcomes that YHWH presents: the destruction of everything in the community or the restoration of the community. The author has seen the outcome of the refusal to turn back. The history of Israel and Judah show the author and readers what has happened in the past. It shows that history repeats itself unless something fundamental changes in the attitudes of the people. Joel presents the possibility for something better. The turning point of the book allows the reader to see what the outcome is if they are to turn back to YHWH. Additionally, it describes the proper way to repent and turn back to YHWH.

---

Handbuch zum Alten Testament 1.14 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1938, 1954, 1964); Ludwig Dennefeld, “Les problèmes du livre de Joël,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 6 (1926): 26–49; G. M. Rinaldi, *Il libro di Joele ridotto e commentato* (Rapallo, 1938); Arvid S. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift (Uppsala: A.B. Lundquist, 1948); D. Deden, *De kleine Profeten uit de grondteskt vertaald en uitgelegd*, De Boeken van het Oude Testament 12.1 (Roermond: Romen, 1953); John A. Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955): 52–55; J. Bourke, “Le jour de Yahvé dans Joël,” *Revue Biblique* 66 (1959): 5–31, 191–212; and Artur Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957).

In Joel 2:12–17, the culmination of the communal lament comes to a head. YHWH calls the people to turn back to him, using the prophet to tell them what they should do. The priests are to weep, the people are to be gathered, the bridegroom and bride are to leave their chambers. It is not a time of celebration, but a time of repentance. There has to be a physical change in the heart. Within this call to repentance, we find the Mosaic formula concerning God’s mercy. Joel references the tradition found also in Exod 34:6–7 when he says,

ושובו אליהוה אלהיכם כי־חנן ורחום הוא  
ארך אפים ורב־חסד ונחם על־הרעה:

return to YHWH your God for he is gracious and merciful.  
slow to anger and abounding in mercy and he relents from doing harm  
(Joel 2:13b).

The Mosaic formula recalls YHWH’s divine mercy. There is a promise within this call to lament—the promise of YHWH’s relenting of the punishment and leaving a blessing instead of destruction. However, the “promise is contingent upon the people’s responding to the call to repent.”<sup>28</sup> The ending of the book is contingent upon the events that happen in this section. There has to be a moral change in the people.

Because of this change, ויקנא יהוה לארצו ויחמל על־עמו “YHWH is radically committed for his land and shows compassion upon his people” (Joel 2:18). The Mosaic formula holds true as YHWH is merciful upon the beloved people. This is the turning point for the Day of YHWH. No longer are the people under judgment but are to be blessed by what YHWH will do for them. This change in the heart of the community

---

28. James D. Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 72.

leads to a change in YHWH's heart. He will no longer simply live among them, but because of their own physical change to their hearts, he can now live within them and protect them. He can defend them and bring justice to their oppressors.

## CHAPTER IV

### JOEL'S USE OF SCRIPTURE AND ITS PURPOSE

#### **Joel's Use of Scripture**

This section will focus on possible echoes found in the book of Joel. However, first it is important to establish that there is a difference between formulaic sayings and echoes. Then we can discuss the echoes that Joel uses. Finally, we will examine how Joel uses these two elements differently in his oracles.

#### Formulaic Sayings

By the time of Joel's writing, there were already formulaic phrases in use in prophetic texts. One example of this can be seen in the introductions to the prophets. The typical introduction for a prophet includes the phrase "the word of YHWH came to . . ." followed by the prophet's name and any background information that the writer decides to provide. For Joel, the prophet includes the typical phrase and just the name of the prophet and the ancestor of the prophet. The writer does not include any geographical information or to whom the oracles are even necessarily addressed. In fact, the prophet rarely mentions the place names of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem until halfway through the book.

In addition to the prophetic introduction formula, there is also psalm-like material that seems to be formulaic as well. One example of this is the allusion to the liturgical formula, also seen in Exod 34:6–7, which appears in Joel 2:13. This allusion is found in several places in the Hebrew Bible, including Exod 20:5 and 33:19; Num 14:17–19; Deut

4:31 and 5:10; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:17; Ps 31:19, 57:10, 86:5, 86:15, 103:8–13, 108:4, 111:4, 112:4, 116:5, 138:2, and 145:8; Jer 32:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Mic 7:18–20; and Nah 1:3. While not all of these texts are directly quoting Exodus 34, they are alluding to the liturgical formula that predates these texts. Because of the widespread use of this allusion, it is plausible that this was a part of some psalmic material that the communities knew by heart.

### Echoes in Joel

In this section, I will address some of the more commonly known echoes that Joel uses from the rest of the Book of the Twelve. I will, by no means, be able to address all echoes as there are many that are either not a part of the Book of the Twelve or are better thought of as possible references rather than the more obvious ones. For each echo, I will give the text that Joel is referring to and discuss how Joel uses it in his writing.

Joel 2:1–2 echoes both Zeph 1:14–16 and Amos 5:18 and 20. We can know that Joel echoes these texts because both Zephaniah and Amos were prophets before the exile. This tells us that Joel, as a postexilic prophet, would have had access to these two prophets' works. Additionally, it is likely for Joel to allude to previous Day of YHWH works since his prophecies were centered around the Day of YHWH. He would have wanted to build on the past imagination of the Day of YHWH. His audience would have had knowledge of what earlier prophets had said about the Day of YHWH and would be expecting for him to use similar material and reflect on what those earlier prophets had said.

Our next reference comes from Joel 2:11. There is a possible echo of Mal 3:2 in this verse. Joel says



ויהוה נתן קולו לפני חילו  
כי רב מאד מחנהו כי עצום עשה דברו  
כי־גדול יום־יהוה ונורא מאד ומי יכילנו

YHWH gives his voice before his army  
for his camp is very great for the one who executes his word is strong  
for the day of YHWH is great and invokes great fear. Who can endure it?  
(Joel 2:11)

In this verse, Joel is again discussing the Day of YHWH. Because of this it is expected that he would be using common language. However, in Malachi, we get the same question that Joel posits at the end. Malachi says,

ומי מכלכל את־יום בואו ומי העמד בהראותו  
כי־הוא כאש מצרף וכברית מכבסים:

Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand his appearance?  
For he is like the fire of a smelter and like the soap of a launderer. (Mal 3:2)

So how can we account for this same question being in both? I am not fully convinced that Joel is echoing Malachi in this verse, especially since we cannot say without a doubt whether Malachi or Joel was written first. Based on the common themes of the need to fix the temple practices, I would actually suggest that these two prophets might have been writing around the same time. That being said, we can account for this “echo” by saying that both prophets were using a question that would have been asked by people in their community who had experienced the exile. Now, when those people think of the Day of YHWH, they think about how no one can really survive it. That Day overtakes everyone and so is not something to be joyfully anticipating.

The next echo is found in Joel 2:14. Joel *seems* to be echoing the question that Jonah posits in Jonah 3:9. In this verse, the king of Nineveh has been proclaiming for his people to repent. The king says, “who knows, maybe God will turn from this destruction that was planned.” In Joel 2:14, the prophet is asking the same rhetorical question as the

king of Nineveh is asking. However, like the previous potential echo, I am not convinced that this is an echo. Jonah appears to be another postexilic prophetic writing. The two writers likely are using formulaic rhetorical questions in their works because the answer is the obvious one. Based on the allusion to Exodus 34 in both Joel and Jonah, both prophets know that YHWH will turn from the destruction because he is merciful to those who repent.

The next reference comes from Micah 4:3. In this verse, the prophet says

ושפט בין עמים רבים והוכיח לגוים עצמים עד־רחוק  
וכתתו חרבתייהם לאתים וחניתתייהם למזמרות  
לא־ישאו גוי אל־גוי חרב ולא־ילמדון עוד מלחמה:

And he will judge between the many people and reprove the strong nations far away.

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation; nor shall ever again learn to make war. (Mic 4:3)

The prophet is describing a time of peace between the nations when YHWH will rule over creation. This image of turning tools of war into farming equipment (and vice versa in Joel) is also found in Isaiah 2:4. Much like Micah, the prophet Isaiah is speaking of a time when YHWH will judge the nations and the people will no longer need weapons. It will be a time of peace among nations and between YHWH and humans.

Joel takes this image and flips it, describing how YHWH will still sit and judge the nations, but he will not be peaceful against them. In Joel 4:10–11, the prophet says

כתו אתיכם לחרבות ומזמרתים לרמחים  
החלש יאמר גבור אני:  
עושו ובאו כל־הגוים מסביב ונקבצו שמה  
הנחת יהוה גבוריך:

Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears.

Let the weak say, “I am strong.”

Be quick and come, all you nations all around and be collected there.

Bring down your mighty ones, O YHWH. (Joel 4:10–11)

This reference is likely an echo based on the fact that Joel is later than Micah and Isaiah; therefore, Joel would have had access to these prophets' works. Additionally, whereas Isaiah and Micah were looking forward to a day when there would be peace and the nations would no longer war against each other, Joel is looking around his social location and sees the futility of that image. He cannot imagine a world where the nations can coexist because he has seen the horrors and the evils that have come about before, during, and after the exile. Because of this he takes the same image that was a symbol of peace and flips it on its head. He both receives the image and reverses it.

This reversal signifies that Joel believes that there will be a time of war before there can be a time of peace. However, the war will be against humans and YHWH. He puts the nations against YHWH, recognizing that they must receive their due punishment. To Joel, it seems that the nations have yet to face the same wrath of YHWH that the people of Jerusalem have faced. When he reverses the image of the weapons to farming equipment, he is making the point that before there can be the peace prophesied by Isaiah and Micah, there has to be a reckoning of the nations. They will not listen to YHWH otherwise and will not know the power of YHWH, unless they go up against him themselves in battle.

The final two references both come from Amos. The first is found in Amos 1:2. It is the image of the lion roaring. If this is indeed an echo, Joel uses the image that Amos does and again flips it. Rather than YHWH being a lion roaring against his own people, he is a lion roaring to protect them. The second reference comes from Amos 9:3. In this verse, the prophet says,

הנה ימים באים נאם־יהוה  
ונגש חורש בקצר ודרך ענבים במשך הזרע  
והטיפו ההרים עסיס וכל־הגבעות תתמוגגנה:

Behold, the days are coming, says YHWH,  
when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the one who crushes grapes shall  
overtake the one who sows seed.  
And the mountains shall drip with sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it.  
(Amos 9:13)

The prophet is describing a time when there will again be abundance for the people of  
Israel. Similarly, Joel is describing a time when YHWH will again bless the people with  
abundance. The prophet says,

והיה ביום ההוא  
יטפו ההרים עסיס והגבעות תלכנה חלב  
וכל־אפיקי יהודה ילכו מים  
ומעין מבית יהוה יצא והשקה את־נחל השטים:

And it will happen in that day  
that the mountains will drip with new wine and the hills will flow with  
milk  
and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water  
and a fountain from the house of YHWH will come out and water the valley of  
Shittim. (Joel 4:18)

Joel is using a similar image to Amos in the idea of the mountains dripping with new  
wine. However, Joel takes it a little further. He spins the metaphor out, expanding what  
Amos says about the mountains dripping wine. No longer is it just the mountains  
dripping with wine; the hills will again flow with milk (suggesting the increase in nursing  
cattle), the brooks will again flow, and the valley of Shittim (or the desert valley) will no  
longer be dry. Joel is saying that not only will there be abundance, but there will be  
abundant abundance.

## Why Does This Matter?

Because Joel is reflecting on the earlier prophetic material, there was a need for new ways to discuss the preexilic prophets. Joel is expanding on the things that former prophets discussed and at times flipping the quotes to illustrate his own reality. He makes these echoes accessible to his postexilic community, teaching them and helping them look forward to a new era (which we will explore more in the next chapter).

Unlike most of the earlier prophetic books, the book of Joel functions as more than just a prophetic book.<sup>1</sup> Joel can be read through two different lenses: through a didactic lens and through a pseudo-apocalyptic lens. Each of these two lenses allow us to see how the people to whom Joel is writing would have heard and understood the book.

### **Reading Joel through a Didactic Lens**

One way in which the book of Joel can be read is through a didactic lens. Reading it through this lens allows us to see the answers to the questions that the community is asking. We can assume that the community is asking the question “How are we to sacrifice and return to YHWH when we have lost all of our crops and food sources?” or even “What should we do to avoid the same consequences as our ancestors?” The prophet in Joel strives to answer this question through didactic literature (sometimes called “didactic hymnody”).<sup>2</sup>

In order to establish this claim, first I will demonstrate Joel’s literary function, demonstrating what makes Joel didactic literature. Then, I will explore what teachings the book brings up. With this step, we will specifically look at some of the different features

---

1. The exception to this is the book of Jonah, which functions as a parable or satire.

2. Matthew Gordley, “The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions,” *JBL* 128.4 (2009): 781.

of the book of Joel. The hope is that with this step, we can see how the different features create Joel's teaching.

### Joel's Literary Function as Didactic Wisdom

The prophet is portrayed as a sage, teaching wisdom to the audience. This wisdom instructs the listener against turning away from God, through the style and language of the book. The language and style of the book help us to see the rhetorical function of the book of Joel as didactic. There are different elements we can point to in order to illustrate Joel's didactic nature. One of these elements is the "linguistic features such as the commands."<sup>3</sup> By the time of Joel's writing "the announcement of salvation became increasingly *pedagogically developed as didactic eschatology*," such as can be found in "the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse, Isa 24–27, and in Joel as well as Zech 12–14."<sup>4</sup> This idea places Joel within the "works of 'didactic eschatology'" that give "instruction of how to respond in the Day of the LORD"<sup>5</sup>—that is, how to respond in times of destruction.

In the book, the prophet incorporates the elements of didactic literature and apocalyptic literature, creating a unique type of wisdom. Within the book, the prophet calls for the person to be wise and return to YHWH. Joel incorporates this wisdom through the use of commands. The fact that Joel uses "dual commands" illustrates the

---

3. Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve," *Thematic Threads of the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 138.

4. Ronald L. Troxel, *Joel: Scope, Genre(s), and Meaning* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 98. Troxel translates a quote from M. Sæbø, "Eschaton und Eschatologia im Alten Testament—in traditions-geschichtlicher Sicht," *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Biblische Theologie: FS Horst Dietrich Preuss*, eds. J. Haussmann and H. J. Zobel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), 329. Italics found in Troxel's quotation.

5. Troxel, *Joel*, 98.

pedagogical element of the book. This literary style “is a common rhetorical technique that introduces multiple literary forms, including wisdom instruction (Prov 4:1; 7:24).”<sup>6</sup> The commands to “recount it to your children” (Joel 1:3a), “gird yourselves and lament you priests; howl you who minister before the altar” (Joel 1:13b), “make holy a fast” (Joel 1:14a), and “call an assembly” (Joel 1:14b) give specific instruction to the listeners as to what they are to do. They “indicate an effort to address a listening or reading audience from the outset of the book.”<sup>7</sup> The prophet addresses the audience through these commands and “[introduces] a story that constitutes a lesson to be learned and handed down.”<sup>8</sup> In doing so, the prophet directs the audience to remember and teach for themselves, using the words of the book as a guide for how to go about repenting. This leads us to our final considerations: (1) how does the author teach and (2) what is the book teaching?

### ***How Joel Teaches***

The author of Joel echoes earlier texts and liturgical traditions to teach his audience. Presumably, the things he echoes are known by the audience, and so he is able to use them as a jumping off point for what he wants to teach. The author uses both the communal memory and his own example as teaching methods. Without explicitly stating the history of Israel and how they have turned away from YHWH in the past, the author of Joel is able to call to mind these stories through the use of the older texts and

---

6. Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence*, 77. It is also found in “diplomatic discourse (2Kgs 18:28–29), and [other] prophetic oracles (Hos 4:1; Amos 3:1; Mic 6:1; Isa 1:10; Ezek 6:3),” all of which I would consider as teaching instances.

7. Sweeney, “The Place and Function of Joel,” 138.

8. Troxel, *Joel*, 96.

traditions. He connects the current generation to the past generations, showing them that their story has not ended and that their ancestors' stories live on in them.

Additionally, the prophet himself plays a role in the book as an example of what he is teaching the listeners. He is a performer within this drama he has set up. He is an actor who “summons his audience to take the story to heart,”<sup>9</sup> demonstrating what it looks like for someone to return to YHWH with a broken heart. In doing so, this “warning or instruction, [tells] the people what they must do to advert divine judgment,”<sup>10</sup> showing the prophet himself tearing his heart and returning to YHWH.

This demonstrative teaching allows the prophet (the teacher) to act out what he is trying to have the audience (the student) learn. Through this mode of teaching, he allows the audience to know what sort of words to use in times of struggle. Just as the Psalms were to be used in worship settings, Joel's lament could also be used in the same way. As a demonstration to the audience, the prophet shows himself taking the story to heart. He cries out to YHWH, just as he tells the people to do. He says,

אליך יהוה אקרא  
כי אש אכלה נאות מדבר  
ולהבה להטה כל-עצי השדה:  
גם-בהמות שדה תערוג אליך  
כי יבשו אֶפְיֹקֵי הַמַּיִם  
וְאִשׁ אֶכְלָה נְאוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר:

“To you YHWH I cry out  
for fire has devoured the field of the wilderness  
and a flame has burned all the trees of the field.  
Also, the beasts of the field cry out to you  
for the riverbed has dried up  
and fire has devoured the field of the wilderness” (Joel 1:19–20).

---

9. Troxel, *Joel*, 95–96.

10. Joan E. Cook, *Hear, O Heavens and Listen, O Earth: An Introduction to the Prophets* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 19.



Joel does not just tell the people to mourn, “he does what he had urged his people to do.”<sup>11</sup> He is teaching the people by example, not just through the commands, as he tells the people, “Be not satisfied with rending your garment, with outward symbols and actions; rend, tear, your heart.”<sup>12</sup>

### ***What Is Taught?***

The book of Joel holds an important role within the Book of the Twelve. I would argue that Joel also holds an important role within the Hebrew Bible as a whole because the teachings found within the book echo texts throughout the Hebrew Bible. This being said, the book of Joel can be considered as teaching a theology of the Hebrew Bible, addressing issues of who God is and how to respond to God during times of trouble.

### **Joel as a Story**

The book of Joel tells a story of tragedy caused by the turning away from God. It is a story of the tragedy brought about by a locust plague, whether real or metaphorical, which has descended upon God’s people. He tells them to recall four types of locusts—“the young locust . . . the winged locust . . . the adult locust . . . [and] the last locust” (Joel 1:4). These four types of locust mentioned at the beginning of the book bring devastation upon the land and steal the livelihood of the people. There is nothing left. Joel pleads for the people to remember what they are going through. To remember this devastation and to tell the story of this tragedy.

---

11. Theo Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis, MO: Conocordia, 1956), 117.

12. Laetsch, *Bible Commentary*, 121.

Joel connects this plague of locusts, destroying everything, to a foreign invasion into the land. Just as a foreign army might invade and destroy the land, this plague of locusts destroys everything in their wake. Joel laments,

כִּי־גוֹי עָלָה עַל־אַרְצִי עֲצוּם וְאִין מִסְפָּר  
שְׁנֵי שָׁנֵי אַרְיָה וּמִתְלַעוֹת לְבִיא לּוֹ:

“For a nation has come up against my land, strong and beyond number,  
whose teeth are the teeth of a lion and who has the fangs of a lion.”  
(Joel 1:6).

This image of the locusts being like an army is carried throughout the book. In Joel 2, the prophet continues the image by describing the plague as if it were an army, bringing fire and burning everything, so that “nothing escapes them” (Joel 2:3b). Additionally, these locusts look like warhorses, leaping across the mountaintops (Joel 2:4–5). This plague leaves the people terrified, and the prophet acknowledges that this plague and the terror it brings is from YHWH,

וַיְהוֹה נָתַן קוֹלוֹ לְפָנָי חֵילוֹ  
כִּי רַב מְאֹד מִחֲנֵהוּ כִּי עֲצוּם עָשָׂה דְבָרוֹ  
כִּי־גָדוֹל יוֹם־יְהוָה וְנוֹרָא מְאֹד וּמִי יִכִּילֵנוּ:

YHWH gives his voice before his army  
for his camp is very great for the one who executes his word is strong  
for the day of YHWH is great and invokes great fear. Who can endure it?  
(Joel 2:11)

This story of tragedy is one that the prophet does not wish for the people to forget. He does not want the people to revert to their old ways because they have forgotten what the devastation was like when they turned from God. The prophet hopes to use this story to teach and remind the people of the power of YHWH.

#### Joel's Commands

Within this story, the prophet gives commands for how to act so that they might return to worshipping YHWH and the land might be spared from further calamity. He

presents it as a story that the community is invited to take part in acting out. The commands invite the community to play a part within the story, knowing what the “stage directions” tell them to do. The texts “gives precise instruction with regard to” how the people should repent.<sup>13</sup> Through these instructions, the prophet is telling the people where the priests should offer up the intercession, who will be offering the intercession (the priests and ministers of YHWH), and even what the prayer should be. These “stage directions” assist the audience to know the proper actions for repentance. These instructions include the commands to the community to

חגרו וספדו הכהנים הלילו משרתי מזבח  
 באו לינו בשקים משרתי אלהי  
 כי נמנע מבית אלהיכם מנחה ונסך:  
 קדשו־צום קראו עצרה  
 אספו זקנים כל ישבי הארץ  
 בית יהוה אלהיכם וזעקו אל־יהוה:

“Gird yourselves and lament you priests. Howl you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God for the grain offering and drink offering is withheld from the house of your God. Make holy a fast, call an assembly, gather, elders and all you who inhabit the land, to the house of YHWH your God and cry out to YHWH.” (Joel 1:13–14).

These commands instruct the priests and people, telling them how they should lament. The priests are instructed to dress a certain way, recalling the instruction found in Leviticus 16 for the Day of Atonement. However, unlike the instructions in Leviticus 16, the priests are unable to make an offering to God because the offerings “have gone from the temple” (Joel 1:13e). As a result, the people are to follow Joel’s example and lament alongside the priests.

---

13. James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 141.

Additionally, there is an atmosphere of learning in the gathering of the people. In Deuteronomy, Moses commands the people to

הקהל את־העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרך אשר בשערריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את־יהוה אלהיכם ושמרו לעשות את־כל־דברי התורה הזאת: ובניהם אשר לא־ידעו ישמעו ולמדו ליראה את־יהוה אלהיכם כל־הימים אשר אתם חיים על־הדזמה אשר אתם עברים את־הירדן שמה לרשתה:

Gather the people; men, women, children, and the strangers who live within your gates; So that they may hear it, learn it, and fear YHWH your God, carefully doing all the words of this law. And that their children, who don't yet know the law, may hear it and learn to fear YHWH your God for as long as you live in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. (Deut 31:12–13)

This gathering of the community is so Moses can tell them what they should do. In Joel, a similar phenomenon happens in Joel's command to have the people gather together. This gathering is not just so they can lament together, but also recalls the act of the community gathering to hear YHWH's instruction and repent as a community on the Day of Atonement.

### ***Joel's Teaching on God's Mercy***

Finally, Joel also teaches one of the main ideas found amidst many of the books of the Hebrew Bible—God's mercy. As mentioned in chapter two of this document, Joel echoes the Mosaic tradition exemplified by Exod 34:6–7 He does this by saying, “Who knows whether he will have a change of heart” (Joel 2:14). This statement recalls the tradition exemplified in Exod 34:6–7, where YHWH passes in front of Moses. In this passage, YHWH is said to be

יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת:  
נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה לא ינקה

a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and being great in goodness and truth, guarding mercy for thousands and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, but by no means leaving it unpunished. (Exod 34:6b–7a)

Joel echoes this tradition by exclaiming

ושבו אליהוּה אלהיכם כי־חַנוּן ורחוּם חוּא  
אַרְךְ אַפּיִם וּרְב־חַסֵּד וּנְחַם עַל־הַרְעָה:

return to YHWH your God for he is gracious and merciful.  
slow to anger and abounding in mercy and he relents from doing harm.  
(Joel 2:13b)

He uses the same phrase, “gracious and merciful,” recalling the tradition and then expands it. Knowing the history of his community, he is able to see how YHWH has been slow to anger and relenting from doing harm. He knows that YHWH in the past has not let the people suffer endlessly. The author uses both echoes of the earlier texts as well as a call to remember how YHWH has acted toward the community as evidence of what he is trying to teach them. The prophet has both the tradition and history of the community in mind as he is urging the people to tell this story to their children and to repent. He wants the audience to remember that YHWH is a gracious God, who has rescued them from their exile and restored them to the land promised to them. However, the author also wants the people to remember that YHWH is just and will hold the people accountable, just as he has done in the past.

### **Reading Joel through a Pseudo-Apocalyptic Lens**

While Joel may not fall directly into the genre of apocalyptic literature based on Collins’s definition, Joel still contains many of the features of apocalyptic literature. In order to classify the book of Joel as pseudo-apocalyptic, we must first determine if it contains the different features of pseudo-apocalyptic material. While the text does not fall within a narrative framework (there has been discussion on the unity of the book of Joel and whether it is a cohesive prophetic work), there is still the sense of a story behind the

text. The prophet uses the current reality of the people as a stage for his message. He tells the story of the locust plague and the tragedy that it causes. He tells the story of what happens when people turn from YHWH. Within this play, YHWH has his own speaking parts where the prophet is told what YHWH plans. In Joel 4, YHWH states,

וקבצתי את־כל־הגוים  
והורדתי אל־עמק יהושפט ונשפטי עמם שם  
על־עמי ונחלתי ישראל אשר פזרו בגוים  
ואת־ארצי חלקו:

I will gather all the nations  
and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into  
judgment with them there  
on behalf of my people and my inheritance, Israel, whom they have  
scattered among the nations  
and my land which they have divided up.

YHWH speaks directly to the prophet in telling what he plans to do. Following this verse, YHWH gives an indictment to the nations who have scattered the people, speaking directly to them and revealing his plan to enact judgment on them.

In addition to the book of Joel having places where YHWH acts as a character within the play that the prophet presents, there are several places within the entire book where the prophet calls for the people to be actors in the play as well. He calls for them to gather and be faithful. He tells them to leave what they are doing and come to one place in order to cry out to YHWH for deliverance. The culmination of the cry to remain faithful comes in Joel 2:12–17. The prophet says,

וגם־עתה נאם־יהוה  
שבו עדי בכל־לבבכם ובצום ובבכי ובמספד:  
וקרעו לבבכם ואל־בגדיכם  
ושבו אל־יהוה אלהיכם כי־חנן ורחום הוא  
ארך אפים ורב־חסד ונחם על־הרעה:  
מי יודע ישוב ונחם והשאיר אחריו ברכה

מנחה ונסך ליהוה אלהיכם:  
 תקעו שופר בציון  
 קדשו־צום קראו עצרה:  
 אספו־עם קדשו קהל קבצו זקנים  
 אספו עוללים וינקי שדים  
 יצא חתן מחדרו וכלה מחפתה:  
 בין האולם ולמזבח יבכו הכהנים  
 משרתי יהוה ויאמרו חוסה יהוה על־עמך  
 ואל־תתן נחלתך לחרפה למשל־בם גוים  
 למה יאמרו בעמים איה אלהיהם:

Indeed, now YHWH says,

“Turn to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with lamenting.”

Tear your heart and not your clothing

and return to YHWH your God for he is gracious and merciful,  
 slow to anger and abounding in mercy and he relents from harm.

Who knows? He may turn back and relent and leave behind him a blessing,  
 a grain offering and drink offering for YHWH your God.

Sound the trumpet in Zion, make holy a fast, call an assembly.

Gather the people and make the assembly holy; collect the elders,  
 gather the children and babies.

Let the bridegroom leave his chamber and the bride her room.

Between the porch and the altar, the priests will weep,

those who minister to YHWH, and let them say, “Have pity, YHWH, upon  
 your people

and do not give your inheritance over to reproach, to be ruled over by the  
 nations.

Why should they say among the people, ‘Where is their God?’”

(Joel 2:12–17)

By reminding the people of the faithfulness of YHWH, the prophet urges the people to return to him. He uses this reference to the tradition found in Exod 34:6–7, in order to remind them who exactly this God that they serve is. This call to repentance in 15–16 can be seen as a call for city-wide acts of lamentation and fasting.<sup>14</sup> It is a call for them to return to the faithfulness of their ancestors who YHWH brought out of Egypt. This final

---

14. Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 82.

culminating call to return to faithfulness comes just before the transition to chapter 3, where the bulk of the apocalyptic text is in Joel.

The prophet also tells us that YHWH will intervene by pouring out his spirit upon his people and rescuing them from where they have been scattered. He tells of a temporal transcendent reality where not only will YHWH save the people, but the nations will be judged for the harm that they dealt to the people. He also gives the spatial reality for this rescue as being on Zion. YHWH announces his intervention saying,

והיה כל אשר־יקרא בשם יהוה ימלט  
כי בהר־ציון ובירושלם תהיה פליטה כאשר אמר יהוה  
ובשרידים אשר יהוה קרא:  
כי הנה בימים ההמה ובעת ההיא אשר אשוב את־שבות יהודה וירושלם:  
וקבצתי את־כל־הגוים  
והורדתי אל־עמק יהושפט ונשפטי עמם שם  
על־עמי ונחלתי ישראל אשר פזרו בגוים  
ואת־ארצי חלקו:

And it will be that all who call in the name of YHWH will be saved  
for on the mountain of Zion and in Jerusalem, there will be deliverance as  
YHWH has said  
and among the remnant whom YHWH calls.  
For see, in those days and at that time when I bring back the captives of Judah and  
Jerusalem.  
I will gather all the nations  
and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into  
judgment with them there  
on behalf of my people and my inheritance, Israel, whom they have  
scattered among the nations  
and my land which they have divided up. (Joel 3:5–4:2)

YHWH intervenes, bringing the people out of their captivity. The prophet sets up this apocalyptic event as another exodus. He uses imagery that reminds the listener of the story of the exodus, where YHWH brought the faithful people out of the land of their captivity.



We can also look at how the text shows that the only option for the evil in the world is total destruction. In Joel, YHWH decides war must be declared against the nations, against the evil in the world. He tells them,

כתו אתיכם לחרבות ומזמרתים לרמחים  
החלש יאמר גבור אני:  
המונים המונים בעמק החרוץ  
...כי קרוב יום יהיה בעמק החרוץ:

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war!

Wake up the mighty men, let them come near, let them come up, all the men of war . . .

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision,

for the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision. (Joel 4:10, 14)

YHWH is intervening as he said that he would. YHWH is setting himself at war against the evil nations, to wipe them out so that the people can live in peace. YHWH intends to reign on Zion forever, leaving no room for his enemies to remain at Zion.

Not only does he declare war and destruction upon his enemies, but he also tells the people that he will create a new world for them, a world where they will prosper. He says,

והיה ביום ההוא  
יטפו ההרים עסיס והגבעות תלכנה חלב  
וכל־אפיקי יהודה ילכו מים  
ומעין מבית יהוה יצא והשקה את־נחל השטים:

And it will happen in that day

that the mountains will drip with new wine and the hills will flow with milk

and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water

and a fountain from the house of YHWH will come out and water the valley of Shittim. (Joel 4:18)

In this new world, the promise of living in a land filled with milk and honey is fulfilled.

YHWH describes a new promised land— a new Garden of Eden for the people. Once the war against the enemies is completed, the new land for the people will remain.

None of the texts above are pseudo-apocalyptic themselves, but they illustrate some of the different elements of apocalyptic literature. When put together, they draw the book of Joel together as a pseudo-apocalyptic drama, so to speak, in which the prophet, the people, the nations, and YHWH all have a role. The prophet is able to create a transcendent world where there is a day when YHWH will rescue the people and he will once again be among them, residing on Zion.

### **Why Does This Matter?**

So, Joel's function as a prophetic work is more than just another prophet. This book functions as both didactic literature and pseudo-apocalyptic literature. The book of Joel teaches the community through the oracles presented by the prophet. He teaches the community to remember what is happening to them and to teach it to their children so that they will not forget the power and mercy of YHWH. He crafts the story of what is happening to the community, allowing the audience to play a part in telling it. Finally, he echoes stories from Israel's past, such as the story on Sinai, hoping to avoid the same issues in the future, reminding the audience of the mercy that YHWH has consistently had upon the people. Each of these modes of teaching create the didactic nature of the book of Joel. In doing so, Joel's call to repent teaches against turning away from God.

We also see how Joel uses the latter half of his book to discuss a new time that is coming. The Day of YHWH rings in a new era where YHWH's people are once again safe, and evil has been wiped off the face of the earth. YHWH creates a new promised land for the people, where they will live at peace and YHWH will be their king forever. He reigns on Zion forever, and the people of Judah and Jerusalem "will abide forever" (Joel 4:20).

## CONCLUSION

In this study we have discussed some of the different terms associated with the study of the Book of Joel including postexilic, “prophetic stock images,” didactic literature, and pseudo-apocalyptic literature. We briefly addressed four different prophetic stock images and how Joel uses them in relation to how they are used in the rest of the Book of the Twelve. Then we discussed the image of the Day of YHWH in more depth, looking at how Joel uses it in ways both similar to and different from the other Minor Prophets. Also, we discussed how Joel creates a paradox through the use of this image, showing that it is both tragedy and hope for the people of YHWH. We also considered different minor prophet echoes found in Joel, noting that some of the “echoes” are better thought of as formulaic sayings rather than echoes. Finally, we discussed the different purposes that the author may have had for writing Joel, including the purpose of teaching and the purpose of revealing YHWH’s plan for the people.

The aim of this study has been to demonstrate that the author of Joel uses intertextual references to craft a piece of literature written to a community that needs to learn what it means to be a people of YHWH in the postexilic world. The purpose for writing this prophetic book is to both teach the community and reveal what YHWH has planned for the people and creation. The author intends to create a bridge between his community and the community from before the exile by using earlier prophetic material and changing how it is interpreted for his community.

We have seen that Joel is a unique piece of literature, recalling earlier works in the Book of the Twelve. While Joel continues to use the same prophetic stock images, the book nuances them for his new postexilic community—expanding and even flipping them. Additionally, Joel references earlier prophets and places his current society in conversation with that of the preexilic community. It reuses and reinterprets the things that the earlier prophets experienced and wrote about. Joel’s postexilic community had lived through the horrors that the earlier prophets had written about and now lived in a world different from the one before the exile. However, Joel is able to bridge the gap between the preexilic and postexilic communities by incorporating similar images and echoes from the earlier prophets, creating something new for his community. This new prophetic book functions as more than just another prophet. Joel is teaching his community about the past while looking forward to an eschatological future where YHWH reigns.

## APPENDIX

### AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION OF JOEL

**1**<sup>1</sup> The word of YHWH that was to Joel, son of Pethuel.

<sup>2</sup> Hear this, O elders, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land.

Has this happened in your days? Or in the days of your ancestors?

<sup>3</sup> Recount it to your children and your children their children  
and their children to the generation after.

<sup>4</sup> What the young locusts has left, the winged locusts will eat and what the winged  
locusts has left, the adult locusts will eat  
and what they adult locusts has left, the last locusts will eat.

<sup>5</sup> Wake up, O drunkards and weep; howl, all you who drink wine,  
over the new wine that has been cut off from your mouth.

<sup>6</sup> For a nation has come up against my land, strong and beyond number,  
whose teeth are the teeth of a lion and who has the fangs of a lion.

<sup>7</sup> He has put my vine to waste and my fig tree to ruin.

He has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches grow white.

<sup>8</sup> Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

<sup>9</sup> The grain offering<sup>1</sup> has been cut off and the drink offering<sup>2</sup> from the house of  
YHWH.

The priests mourn, those ministering to YHWH.

<sup>10</sup> The field is devastated, the land mourns

for the grain is devastated, the new wine is dried up, the oil wastes away.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Be ashamed you farmers, howl you vinedressers

over the wheat and the barley because the harvest of the field has perished.

<sup>12</sup> The vine has dried up and the fig tree has withered;

the pomegranate tree, also the date palm and the apricot tree. All the trees  
of the field are withered,

for joy has withered from the sons of men.

<sup>13</sup> Gird yourselves and lament you priests. Howl you who minister before the  
altar.

---

1. "the gift"

2. "the libation"

3. From מלל (pulol pf). Could also be translated as "fails."

Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God for the grain offering and drink offering is withheld from the house of your God.

<sup>14</sup> Make holy a fast, call an assembly,  
gather, elders and all you who inhabit the land,  
to the house of YHWH your God and cry out to YHWH.

<sup>15</sup> Woe for the day  
for the day of YHWH is near and like destruction from the Almighty it  
will come.

<sup>16</sup> Has not the food been cut off before our eyes;  
joy and gladness from the house of our God.

<sup>17</sup> The seed wastes away under the clods,  
the storehouses are desolate, the granaries are torn down for the grain has  
withered.

<sup>18</sup> How the animals groan, the herds of cattle are in confusion  
because there is not pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep are  
distressed.

<sup>19</sup> To you YHWH I cry out  
for fire has devoured the field of the wilderness  
and a flame has burned all the trees of the field.

<sup>20</sup> Also the beasts of the field cry out to you  
for the riverbed has dried up  
and fire has devoured the field of the wilderness.

**2**<sup>1</sup> Sound the trumpet in Zion, shout upon my holy mountain  
let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of YHWH is coming  
for it is near.

<sup>2</sup> It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness;  
like dawn spreading over the mountains, a great and powerful people  
come,  
the like of whom has never been from eternity  
nor will there be after them again until a lifetime of generations and  
generations.

<sup>3</sup> Before him, a fire devours and behind him, a flame burns.  
Like the Garden of Eden is the land before him and behind him a desolate  
wilderness.  
Surely nothing will be delivered from him.

<sup>4</sup> Like the appearance of horses is their appearance, and like warhorses so they  
run.

<sup>5</sup> Like the sound from chariots, upon the tops of the mountains they leap,  
like the sound of a flaming fire devouring the chaff,  
like a strong people arranged for battle.

<sup>6</sup> Before them the peoples writhe, all the faces gather heat.

<sup>7</sup> Like mighty men they run, like men of war they climb the wall  
and each in his manner marches and they do not entangle their paths.

<sup>8</sup> They do not crowd each other, they march, warrior on his [own] path  
and upon the spears they fall, yet they do not break.

- <sup>9</sup> In the city they run; about on the wall they run; into houses they climb;  
through the windows, they come like the thief.
- <sup>10</sup> Before him, the earth quakes, the heavens tremble,  
the sun and moon grow dark and the stars remove their brightness.
- <sup>11</sup> YHWH gives his voice before his army  
for his camp is very great for the one who executes his word is strong  
for the day of YHWH is great and invokes great fear. Who can endure it?
- <sup>12</sup> Indeed, now YHWH says,  
“Turn to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and  
with lamenting.”
- <sup>13</sup> Tear your heart and not your clothing  
and return to YHWH your God for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in mercy<sup>4</sup> and he relents from harm.<sup>5</sup>
- <sup>14</sup> Who knows? He may turn back and relent and leave behind him a blessing,  
a grain offering and drink offering for YHWH your God.
- <sup>15</sup> Sound the trumpet in Zion, make holy a fast, call an assembly.
- <sup>16</sup> Gather the people and make the assembly holy; collect the elders,  
gather the children and babies.  
Let the bridegroom leave his chamber and the bride her room.
- <sup>17</sup> Between the porch and the altar, the priests will weep,  
those who minister to YHWH, and let them say, “Have pity, YHWH, upon  
your people  
and do not give your inheritance over to reproach, to be ruled over by the  
nations.<sup>6</sup>  
Why should they say among the people, ‘Where is their God?’”
- <sup>18</sup> And YHWH is radically committed for his land and showed compassion upon  
his people.
- <sup>19</sup> YHWH will answer and say to his people, “Look, I am sending you  
grain and new wine and oil and you will be satisfied by it  
and I will no longer give you over to shame among the nations;
- <sup>20</sup> And I will remove the north from you  
and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land  
with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea  
and his stench will come up and his foul odor will go up  
because of the “great” things he has done.
- <sup>21</sup> Do not fear, O land. Be glad and rejoice for YHWH has done great things.
- <sup>22</sup> Do not be afraid, O beasts of my field for open pastures are springing up;  
for the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and the vine yield their produce.
- <sup>23</sup> And Children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in YHWH your God

---

4. reference back to Exod 34:6 tradition.

5. I am translating לַעֲרֹב as *from* instead of *upon* (etc.) because it makes better English sense to say from harm rather than upon harm.

6. Evidence for current occupation of a nation. Could this be a connecting point for the idea in ch. 4 where YHWH is enacting the Day of YHWH upon the nations that have captured and exiled Israel?

for he has given you early rain faithfully and he will cause the shower to come down for you,

the early rain and later rain at the beginning.

<sup>24</sup> And the floors of the threshing floors will be full of wheat and the vats of new wine and oil will overflow.

<sup>25</sup> And I will restore to you the years that the swarming locusts have eaten, the young locusts, the eating locusts, and the other locusts, my great army which I sent among you.

<sup>26</sup> And you will certainly eat and be satisfied and praise the name of YHWH your God

who has done extraordinary things among you and my people will never be disgraced again.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Then you will know that I am in the midst of Israel

and I am YHWH your God and there is no other and my people will never be put to shame again.

**3**<sup>1</sup> And thus after, it will happen

that I will pour out my spirit; upon all flesh. and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,

your old men shall dream dreams, your young man will see visions.

<sup>2</sup> And also, upon the male servants and female servants, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

<sup>3</sup> And I will give wonders in heaven and on the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

<sup>4</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and terrifying day of YHWH.

<sup>5</sup> And it will be that all who call in the name of YHWH will be saved

for on the mountain of Zion and in Jerusalem, there will be deliverance as YHWH has said

and among the remnant whom YHWH calls.

**4**<sup>1</sup> For see, in those days and at that time when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> I will gather all the nations

and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into judgment with them there

on behalf of my people and my inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations

and my land which they have divided up. <sup>3</sup> They have cast lots for my people

and have given a boy as payment for a harlot and they have sold a young girl for wine for them to drink.

<sup>4</sup> And also,

---

7. lit.: "for forever"



what do you have to do with me, Tyre and Sidon and all the territories of Philistia?

Are you the repayment against me? If you are going to repay me, be swift and speedy, for I will return your repayment upon your own head.

<sup>5</sup> Because, you have taken my silver and my gold, you have carried my prized possessions into your temples.

<sup>6</sup> And you have sold the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem to the Ionians in order to make them distant from their borders.

<sup>7</sup> Behold, I am raising them from the place which you have sold them there and I will return your repayment upon your own head.

<sup>8</sup> I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far away for YHWH has spoken.

<sup>9</sup> Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war!

Wake up the mighty men, let them come near, let them come up, all the men of war.

<sup>10</sup> Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears. Let the weak say "I am strong."

<sup>11</sup> Be quick and come, all you nations all around and be collected there; Bring down your mighty ones, O YHWH.

<sup>12</sup> Let the nations be awakened and come down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

<sup>13</sup> Send out the sickle for the harvest is ripe, come, go down for the winepress is full, the vats overflow because their wickedness is great.

<sup>14</sup> Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision.

<sup>15</sup> The sun and moon will grow dark and the stars will remove their brightness.

<sup>16</sup> YHWH roars from Zion and from Jerusalem he utters his voice and the heavens and the earth shake,

but YHWH will be a shelter for his people and strength for the sons of Israel

<sup>17</sup> And you will know that I am YHWH your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain,

and Jerusalem will be holy and no stranger will pass through her again.

<sup>18</sup> And it will happen in that day

that the mountains will drip with new wine and the hills will flow with milk

and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water

and a fountain from the house of YHWH will come out and water the valley of Shittim.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Egypt will be a desolation and Edom will be a desolate wilderness

---

8. "the desert valley"

from the violence of (against) the sons of Judah for they have poured out innocent blood in their land.

<sup>20</sup> But Judah will abide forever and Jerusalem from generation to generation.

<sup>21</sup> And I will hold innocent their blood that I have not held innocent. YHWH dwells in Zion.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahlström, Gösta. *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*. Vetus Testamentum Supplements 21. Leiden: Brill, 1971.
- Allen, Leslie C. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Andersen, Francis, and David Freedman. *Hosea*. Anchor Bible 24. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Andiñach, Pablo R. "The Locust in the Message of Joel." *Vetus Testamentum* 42 (1992): 433–41.
- Assis, Elie. *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Barker, Joel. *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.
- Berlejung, Angelika. "Erinnerungen an Assyrien in Nahum 2,4–3,19." Pages 323–356 in *Die unwiderstehliche Wahrheit: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie: Festschrift für Arndt Meinhold*. Edited by Rüdiger Lux and Ernst-Joachim Wascheke. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006.
- Berlin, Adele. *Zephaniah*. AB 25A. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- Birch, Bruce. *Hosea, Joel, and Amos*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.
- Boda, Mark J. *The Book of Zechariah*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Bourke, J. "Le jour de Yahvé dans Joël." *Revue Biblique* 66 (1959): 5–31, 191–212.
- Bright, J. A. *History of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.
- Clines, David J.A. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Volumes 1–4. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–98.
- Coggins, Richard. *Joel and Amos*. New Century Bible Commentary. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000.

- Collins, John. *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.
- . *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Cook, Joan E. *Hear, O Heavens and Listen, O Earth: An Introduction to the Prophets*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016.
- Cook, Stephen L. “Apocalyptic Prophecy.” Pages 19–35 in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*. Edited by John J. Collins. New York; Oxford: Oxford University, 2014.
- Credner, Karl A. *Der Prophet Joel übersetzt und erklärt*. Halle [Saale]: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1831.
- Crenshaw, James L. *Joel*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- Dearman, John Andrew. *The Book of Hosea*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Deden, D. *De kleine Profeten uit de grondteskt vertaald en uitgelegd*. De Boeken van het Oude Testament 12.1. Roermond: Romen, 1953.
- Dennefeld, Ludwig. “Les problèmes du livre de Joël.” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 6 (1926): 26–49.
- Dietrich, Walter. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016.
- Dillard, Raymond. “Joel.” Pages 239–313 in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* 1. Edited by T. E. McComiskey. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F.W. *On Biblical Poetry*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Duhm, Bernhard. “Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten.” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 31 (1911): 1–43, 81–110, 161–204.
- Eidevall, Göran. *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017.
- Gammie John G., and Leo G. Perdue, eds. *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

- Glenny, W. Edward. *Hosea: A Commentary Based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013.
- Gordley, Matthew. "The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.4 (2009): 781–802.
- Green, Alberto R. W. *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.
- Gressmann, Hugo. *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905.
- Gruber, Mayer I. *Hosea: A Textual Commentary*. London; New York: T & T Clark, 2017.
- Hamilton, Mark W. "Divine (In)Corporeality in Psalms and Job." *Journal of Theological Studies* 71.1 (2020): 11–35,
- Hays, Richard. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hibbard, J. Todd. *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27: The Reuse and Evocation of Earlier Texts and Traditions*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.
- House, Paul R. "Endings as New Beginnings: Returning to the Lord, the Day of the Lord, and Renewal in the Book of the Twelve." Pages 313–38 in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*. Edited by Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003.
- . *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989.
- Hubbard, David A. *Joel and Amos: An Introduction & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989.
- Jenson, Philip Peter. *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary*. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008.
- Jeremias, Jörg. *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Kapelrud, Arvid S. *Joel Studies*. Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift. Uppsala: A.B. Lundequist, 1948.
- Keil, Carl F. *The Twelve Minor Prophets*. Vol 1 of *The Twelve Minor Prophets*. Clark's Foreign Theological Library 18. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1868.

- Kruger, Paul Albertus. "A World Turned on its Head in ancient Near Eastern Prophetic Literature: A Powerful Strategy to Depict Chaotic Scenarios." *Vetus Testamentum* 62 (2012): 58–76.
- Laetsch, Theo. *Bible Commentary: The Minor Prophets*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956.
- Lambert, David A. *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. "The Sage in the Prophetic Literature." Pages 295–306 in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Lemaire, André. "The Sage in School and Temple." Pages 165–81 in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Lindblom, Johannes. "Symbolic Perceptions and Literary Visions." Pages 67–76 in *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu*. Edited by John Maier and Vincent Tollers. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Linville, James R. *Amos and the Cosmic Imagination*. Routledge, 2008.
- Lossl, Josef. "When Is a Locust Just a Locust? Patristic Exegesis of Joel 1:4 in the Light of Ancient Literary Theory." *Journal of Theological Studies* 55.2 (2004): 575–99.
- Lundbom, Jack R. *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Machinist, Peter. "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103.4 (1983): 719–37.
- McKane, William. *Micah: Introduction and Commentary*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998.
- Meyers, Carol L., and Eric M. Meyers. *Zechariah 9–14*. Anchor Bible 25C. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Myers, Ched. "Nature against Empire: Exodus Plagues, Climate Crisis, and Hard-Heartedness." *Direction* 49.1 (2020): 5–17.
- Niditch, Susan. *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition*. Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980.
- Noegel, Scott. "'Literary' Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East: The Hebrew Bible in Context." Pages 19–38 in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Writings*. Edited by Klaas Smelik and Karolien Vermeulen. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014.

- . *Wordplay in Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020.
- Nogalski, James D. *The Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011.
- . “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve.” Pages 192–213 in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*. Edited by Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003.
- . *Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015.
- . “Intertextuality and the Twelve.” Pages 102–24 in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D.W. Watts*. Edited by James W. Watts and Paul R. House. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996.
- Paul, Shalom. *Amos*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Pohlig, James N. *An Exegetical Summary of Joel*. Dallas: SIL International, 2003.
- von Rad, Gerhard. “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh.” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 97–108.
- Reinmuth, Eckart. “Allegorical Reading and Intertextuality: Narrative Abbreviations of the Adam Story in Paul (Romans 1:18–28).” Pages 53–62 in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009.
- Rinaldi, G. M. *Il libro di Joele ridotto e commentato*. Rapallo, 1938.
- Roberts, J. J. M. *First Isaiah*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.
- . *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.
- Robertson, O. Palmer. *Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord*. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1995.
- Robinson, Theodore, and Friedrich Horst. *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*. Handbuch zum Alten Testament 1.14. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1938, 1954, 1964.
- Rom-Shiloni, Dalit. “Locusts: I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament” Pages 974–75 in vol. 16 of *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*. Edited by Stephen L. McKenzie and Thomas Römer. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018.

- Roth, Martha T., Timothy J. Collins, Hermann Hunger, Remigius Jas, Jennie Myers, Erica Reiner, and Joan Goodnick, eds. *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 20: *U and W*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010.
- Rowley, H.H. *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation*. 3rd ed. New York: Association Press, 1964.
- Sæbø, M. “Eschaton und Eschatologia im Alten Testament—in traditionsgeschichtlicher Sicht,” Pages 321–30 in *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Biblische Theologie: FS Horst Dietrich Preuss*. Edited by J. Haussmann and H. J. Zobel. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992.
- . “יֹמַם yômām; יוֹמָם yômām; יוֹם יְהוָה yôm YHWH II: Ancient Near East Akkadian” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 6 (1990): 12–32.
- Sellers, Ovid R. “Stages of Locust in Joel.” *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52.2 (1936): 81–85.
- Sellin, Ernst. *Das Zwölfprophetenbuc*. Kommentar zum Alten Testament 12.1. Leipzig: Scholle, 1922, 1929, 1930.
- Shepperson, Mary. *Sunlight and Shade in the First Cities: A Sensory Archaeology of Early Iraq*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.
- Simkins, Ronald A. “God, History, and the Natural World in the Book of Joel.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55.3 (1993): 435–52.
- Sneed, Mark, ed. *Was There a Wisdom Tradition: New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Tradition*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.
- Snyman S. D., and Tremper Longman III. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.
- von Soden, W. “יֹמַם yômām; יוֹמָם yômām; יוֹם יְהוָה yôm YHWH: Ancient Near East Akkadian.” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 6 (1990): 7–10.
- Strawn, Brent. *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005.
- Strazicich, John. *Joel’s Use of Scripture and the Scripture’s Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*. Boston: Brill, 2007.



- Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea–Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary 31. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.
- Sweeney, Marvin A. “The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve.” Pages 133–54 in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*. Edited by Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003.
- . *The Twelve Prophets*. Berit Olam 1. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000.
- . *Zephaniah*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Thomas, Heath A. *Habakkuk*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Thompson, John A. “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955): 52–55.
- Tilford, Nicole L. *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017.
- Travers, Michael E. “The Use of Figures of Speech in the Bible.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 277–90.
- Troxel, Ronald L. *Joel: Scope, Genre(s), and Meaning*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.
- Vatke, Johann. *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt*, vol. 1: Die Religion des Alten Testaments nach den kanonischen Büchern entwickelt. Berlin: n.p., 1835.
- Weiser, Artur *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten*. Vol. 1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957.
- Werse, Nicholas R. *Reconsidering the Book of the Four: The Shaping of Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah as an Early Prophetic Collection*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019.
- Wöhrle, Jakob. “‘No Future for the Proud Exultant Ones’ The Exilic Book of the Four Prophets (Hos., Am., Mic., Zeph.) as a Concept Opposed to the Deuteronomistic History.” *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 608–27.
- Wolff, Hans Walter. *Hosea*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974.
- . *Joel and Amos*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977.