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Douglas William Watson Date

Let the Priests Lament:
A Study of the Composition of the Book of Joel

By

Douglas William Watson
Doctor of Philosophy

Hebrew Bible

____
David L. Petersen
Advisor

____
Carol Newsom
Committee Member

____
Jacob Wright
Committee Member

Accepted:

____
Dean of the Graduate School

____
Date

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By

Douglas William Watson
M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005
B.A., Mercer University, 2002

Adviser: David L. Petersen, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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2013

Abstract

Let the Priests Lament:
A Study of the Composition of the Book of Joel
By Douglas William Watson

Research on the Book of Joel has been complicated by a lack of consensus on its compositional history and, in particular, a recent tendency to ignore redactional considerations entirely. This study focuses renewed attention on the history of the book's composition, demonstrating that the book of Joel includes a fierce debate about the future restoration of Israel. The original composition in chs. 1-2 calls for a national mourning ceremony to lament the state of extreme national distress—characterized by the collapse of social, economic, and cosmic order—and then offers reassurance that the deity has heard the petitions and will address the concerns. The update in ch. 4 reinterprets the nation's distress as a fear of foreign nations, promising divine vengeance on Israel's enemies. Finally, ch. 3 finds in the original composition a clue to deciphering the timing of the deity's future judgment, from which only the elect and discerning will escape. This investigation brings clarity to the structure and coherence of the earliest stage of the book's composition and discusses the interpretive strategies that animated the later scribal updates.

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Introduction

The way one understands the compositional history of the book of Joel largely determines how one interprets the book as a whole. Did the book of Joel originate as a series of oracles about a locust plague? Or, conversely, did it begin as a warning about an invading army, with later editors embellishing it with locust imagery? Are chs. 3-4 "proto-apocalyptic" additions to an original series of oracles that showed no concern for the distant future, or does the text demonstrate a literary coherence that resists any effort to decipher redactional layers? The answers to these questions are fundamental for research on the book of Joel, since they help clarify what the text is actually describing—which is not as clear as one might expect. As Hans Wolff notes, "The possibility of understanding [the book] would be foreclosed from the outset were we" to mistake its compositional history.[1] Robert Wilson points out that even the "answer to the question of Joel's social functions depends largely on how the editorial history of the book is analyzed."[2] Perhaps Theodore Hiebert puts the matter most succinctly: "Underlying all aspects of the study of Joel is the fundamental issue

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[1] Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (trans. W. Janzen, et al.; ed. S. Dean McBride; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); trans. of *Dodekapropheton 2 Joel und Amos* (2d ed.; BKAT 14:2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975; orig. 1969), 7. All citations and quotations from Wolff follow Janzen's translation, unless I indicate otherwise.

[2] Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 290.

of the book's unity."[3] Indeed, nearly every question posed to the book of Joel must contend with the issue of its redactional history, or lack thereof.[4]

Despite the need for such clarity, surprisingly few scholars have offered a sustained argument concerning the composition of the book; many simply note their reasoning in a footnote.[5] Richard Coggins, for example, describes such research as "unfashionable" and suggests that "it is unlikely that discussion of the unity or otherwise of the book will become a main current in Joel studies."[6] His reasoning, though, spelled out in more detail in his commentary,[7] basically amounts to a despair regarding the whole historical-critical enterprise: "can we really claim the detailed knowledge of ancient literary habits which would allow such precise delineation of authors and sources?"[8] One response is that the recognition of different, even competing, voices at work in a text demands some attention to their distinctive viewpoints. To be sure, there is some value in the "final form" readings Coggins and others undertake, but such an approach does not replace the need for attention to a text's redactional history (any more than redactional considerations replace the need

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[3] Theodore Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," *ABD* 3:873.

[4] John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1984), 70; Barton notes the importance of addressing redactional questions initially: "[R]edaction criticism has consequences for exegesis: once again, we cannot say, Get the exegesis right *first*, and *then* go on to ask about the intentions of the redactor. The process of understanding is not so simply linear."

[5] A recent example is Tova Ganzel, "The Shattered Dream: The Prophecies of Joel: A Bridge Between Ezekiel and Haggai?" *JHS* 11.6 (2011): 3, n. 4. Ganzel's cursory treatment of the composition of the book of Joel is particularly troublesome, since the article focuses specifically on the dating of the book—an issue that is largely contingent upon how one views Joel's redactional history.

[6] Coggins, "Joel," *CBR* 2 (2003): 94.

[7] Coggins, *Joel and Amos* (NCBC; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 17-19.

[8] Ibid., 18.

for final form readings). This lack of attention to the redactional history of the book, as this study elucidates, creates problems for interpreting the work as a whole. Therefore, renewed focus on the redactional issues at stake in the book of Joel is warranted.

Notwithstanding claims to the contrary,[9] no consensus has yet emerged regarding the book's composition, but debate on the topic has a long history in biblical scholarship. At least since a seminal essay by Bernhard Duhm in 1911,[10] a number of scholars have seen the book of Joel as reflecting the views of several editorial hands. The description of the locust plagues in ch. 1, for example, appears to have little in common with the eschatological portrait of Yahweh's triumph over the world's armies in ch. 4.[11] Those who follow Duhm's thinking read Joel as a collection of prophetic material that was later reinterpreted and expanded with eschatological speculation about Israel's future victory over the nations. Not all have been convinced that the book of Joel can be so easily bifurcated, so many scholars, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, have made a case for reading Joel

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[9] Several scholars have declared the emergence of a new consensus regarding the book's compositional history, including: John Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture and the Scripture's Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (BIS 82; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 38-39; Graham Ogden, "Joel 4 and Prophetic Responses to National Laments," *JSOT* 26 (1983): 105-106, n. 5; and Coggins, "Joel," 93-94.

[10] Bernhard Duhm, "Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten," *ZAW* 31 (1911): 161-204. The unity of the book of Joel was questioned by several scholars prior to Duhm, including Vernes (1872) and Rothstein (1896), but Duhm's essay was the most persuasive, leading to a new, if tenuous, scholarly consensus. See Maurice Vernes, *Le peuple d'Israël et ses espérances relatives à son avenir depuis les origines jusqu'à l'époque persane (Ve siècle avant J. C.)* (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1872); and Samuel Rolles Driver, *Einleitung in die Literatur des Alten Testaments* (trans. and annotated by Johann Wilhelm Rothstein; Berlin: Reuther, 1896).

[11] Chapter and verse are cited according to the Masoretic Text (MT). The division of the Septuagint (LXX), which most English translations follow, differs after 2:27. LXX 2:28-32 is equivalent to MT 3:1-5. LXX 3:1-21 is equivalent to MT 4:1-21.

as a unity. For these scholars, the book of Joel is not a patchwork of independent and contradictory compositions but a sophisticated and coherent work of literature affirming the deity's provisions for Israel in the present and in the future.

These two approaches to the book of Joel's redactional history are clearly distinguished, but the preceding summary obscures and oversimplifies the issues raised in addressing the composition of the book. This study, therefore, will offer a sustained analysis of the two main schools of thought on this question, providing a critical appraisal of previous research in this area. The second major part of this study will offer a critical judgment about the debate, defending the position that the book of Joel reflects multiple redactional layers. Discussion of the evidence in support of this thesis will also help articulate the nature of the disagreement between the author of chs. 1-2 and those responsible for the later additions.

For all the discussion of original layers and scribal additions, this study primarily utilizes the tools of literary criticism. After all, the questions posed are essentially those of a literary critic: How does the imagery of disaster in chs. 1-2 cohere? What tropes are used to express the community's distress, and what function do they perform? Do the descriptions of future salvation in chs. 3-4 complement the anxieties and hopes in chs. 1-2, or do they stand in some tension with the first part of the book? Attention to literary analysis helps clarify the persuasive intent of the literature, i.e., the *rhetoric* that animates the book's composition. Understanding the rhetoric of the book of Joel, I contend, is crucial in delineating the different voices it contains.

At one level, the results of this study are quite narrow. The analysis focuses specifically on two broad questions: whether Joel 1-2 constitutes a unified, coherent work, or a compilation of various layers and conflicting traditions; and whether chs. 3-4 represent the same authorial viewpoint of chs. 1-2, or later re-interpretations with competing perspectives. The discussion of these questions, though, should elucidate some of the on-going conundrums that plague Joel research. For example, my discussion of the unity of chs. 1-2 provides a fresh perspective on the nature of the disaster threatening the community. Additionally, my analysis of chs. 3-4 brings renewed focus to the nature of the prophetic indictment of the people's wrongdoing. Hopefully, the implications of my study even help advance critical questions in related research. The book of Joel, if the conclusions here are valid, may offer direct insight into the liturgical traditions of early Second Temple Judaism. Moreover, the work likely attests to some of the latest writings in the Book of the Twelve,[12] providing empirical evidence for early scribal practices and interpretive strategies. In short, the conclusions reached here have broader repercussions than may be assumed in the narrow framing of the question about the compositional history of the book of Joel.

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[12] Raymond van Leeuwen argues that analysis of the book of Joel "is crucial for an understanding of the literary theo-logic that governed the final compilation of the Twelve" (Raymond van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* [eds. Leo Perdue, et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 40).

I.

The Unity of the Book of Joel:

A History of Critical Research

Duhm's hypothesis, although the closest one could find to a scholarly consensus in the early 1900's, never went unchallenged. Dennefeld and Kapelrud, for example, offered early critiques emphasizing the overarching unity of the book.[13] In the middle decades of the twentieth century, further research added to the early questions about Duhm's position, and several studies proposed that essentially all of the book of Joel represented the perspective of one author. By the end of the century, numerous commentaries and other studies reflected this conclusion, leading some to declare the emergence of a new consensus.[14] Without question, the most important study to argue that Joel should be read mainly as the product of a single author is that of Hans W. Wolff.[15] Graham Ogden's summary of the scholarly debate is typical: "The most forceful statement to date [i.e., 1983] on the book's unity is that in Wolff's commentary. Most recent scholars now accept these arguments and agree that the book is a literary unity."[16] Ogden's conclusion that "most" scholars agree that Joel is

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[13] See esp., L. Dennefeld, "Les problèmes du livre de Joël," *RevSR* 4 (1924): 555-75; 5 (1925): 35-57; 591-608; 6 (1926): 26-49; Arvid Kapelrud, *Joel Studies* (UUA 48:4; Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln; and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1948).

[14] Richard Coggins, "Joel," 93.

[15] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*. Notably, Wolff singled out Joel 4:4-8 as the work of a later editor.

[16] Graham Ogden, "Joel 4," 106. The "recent" scholars Ogden likely had in mind in 1983 include: Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Gösta Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem* (VTSup 21; Leiden: Brill, 1971), and John Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

a literary unity will be addressed in the next section. Here, another of Ogden's observations is more pertinent. A number of scholars do agree with Wolff that Joel is a literary unity, but, unlike Ogden suggests, *rarely* do they accept Wolff's arguments. In fact, even Ogden disagrees with the primary evidence Wolff marshals in support of his conclusion. Wolff is ultimately convinced that the book of Joel was composed as a unity because he discerns two separate disasters threatening the people for which two separate oracles of reassurance are needed; Ogden uses the conclusion that the book is a unity to argue that only one disaster is described. Put another way, the evidence marshaled in support of reading the book of Joel as a unity is far more diverse (and contradictory) than is implied in a list of scholars who have noted some type of unity to the book.[17] In fact, the diversity of attempts to demonstrate the literary unity of the book of Joel pre-dates the contributions of Wolff.

Early Studies

Even the earliest advocates for viewing the book of Joel as the product of a single author disagreed about the unifying element that gave the book of Joel a sense of cohesion. Arvid Kapelrud, who was among the first to offer a sustained challenge to Duhm's hypothesis, discerned in the book of Joel a consistent *plot* that drives the action from locust invasion to apocalyptic turmoil and restoration. He asserted that Duhm, in arguing for redactional additions to the book of Joel, had essentially confused two methods: literary criticism and redaction criticism.[18] Kapelrud acknowledged that the prophet relied on various source-material in constructing his

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[17] For such a list, see John Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 39.

[18] Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 3.

message, as any redactor might. Importantly, though, the book follows a clear and consistent plot, so it likely reflects the perspective of one author. In other words, Kapelrud argued, the book of Joel demonstrates a logical progression, so that there is no need to separate chs. 3-4 from the preceding material. The locust invasion of ch. 1 is presented in even more ominous detail in ch. 2, as the locusts are envisioned as harbingers of the day of Yahweh.[19] The divine response then addresses the locust plague (2:19-27) before describing the day of Yahweh and the future (chs. 3-4). Kapelrud's analysis of Joel's narrative development has proven more convincing[20] than his argument that the book of Joel contains an anti-Canaanite polemic that drives the plot.[21]

J. Bourke was also convinced that the book of Joel reflected the perspective of a single author, but he focused less on the development of plot and more on the consistent *theme* of the "day of Yahweh."[22] The "afterward" (אחריי־כן) of 3:1 signifies that what follows is a second day of Yahweh, distinct from the first day described in chs. 1-2. The day in chs. 1-2 concerns agricultural disaster for Judah, but the day of chs. 3-4 promises eschatological destruction of Judah's enemies. Nonetheless, Bourke resists attempts to assign different authors to the two sections, since both sections revolve around a common theme—"le jugement de Yahvé sur les

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[19] Ibid., 4, 58.

[20] For example, Leslie Allen's analysis of the narrative arc of Joel is hardly distinguishable from that of Kapelrud; see Allen, *The Books of Joel*, 39-43.

[21] Cf., though, Oswald Loretz (*Regenritual und Jahwetag im Joelbuch: Kanaanäischer Hintergrund, Kolometrie, Aufbau und Symbolik eines Prophetenbuches* [UBL 4; Altenberge: CIS-Verlag, 1986]), who supports and extends the arguments for an anti-Canaanite polemic in the earliest versions of Joel.

[22] J. Bourke, "Le Jour de Yahvé dans Joël," *RB* 66 (1959): 5-31, 191-212.

pécheurs"[23]—crystallized in the day of Yahweh motif. In fact, Bourke argues that this theme provides the crucial element in identifying a larger structure at work, with two descriptions of the day of Yahweh (chs. 1-2 and chs. 3-4) mirroring one another: "Le deux sections se complètent comme les deux tables d'un diptyque. Apercevoir comment elles se contrebalancent l'une l'autre, c'est la première condition pour saisir le message plus profond de Joël."[24] He notes, for example, how the agricultural disaster of chs. 1-2 is described in militaristic terms (1:6), while the destruction of the nations' armies in chs. 3-4 is presented in agricultural terms (4:13).[25]

By the time of Wolff's commentary, then, the primary defenders of the unity of the book of Joel had largely focused on *plot* or *theme* in making their case. Wolff's contribution lay in how he reframed the debate, giving primary attention to the book's *structure*. In so doing, he finds a symmetrical pattern in the book's arrangement that, for him, is convincing evidence of the work's unity. Wolff suggested that the central issue driving the redactional debate concerns the relationship between the first two chapters of the book: "How one views the relationship of chaps. 1 and 2 to each other defines the problem and already determines its solution."[26] If Joel 1 and 2 are reformulations of the same disaster—whether locust plague, drought, or military invasion—the deity's response in 2:18-27 provides a thorough reversal of the disaster and would serve as a logical conclusion to the book. In that case, the eschatological visions of chs. 3-4 have little connection

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[23] Ibid., 7.

[24] Ibid., 11.

[25] Ibid., 14.

[26] Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 6.

with chs. 1-2 and can be easily understood as later (re)interpretations of the original prophecy (as Duhm argued). If, however, ch. 2 describes an event distinct from that in ch. 1, particularly an eschatological event, then the structure of the book of Joel cannot be so easily dissected. In this latter case—the position Wolff supports—Joel contains *two* descriptions of disaster (1:2-20 and 2:1-17) followed by *two* assurances of divine restoration (2:18-27 and 3:1-4:21).[27] The agricultural disaster of ch. 1 is balanced by the agricultural bounty promised in 2:18-27, while the eschatological army of ch. 2 is countered by the eschatological deliverance promised in chs. 3-4.[28]

Wolff finds further support for the literary unity of the book of Joel in the two-fold "assurances of recognition" (*Erkenntniszusagen*) in 2:27 and 4:17. These formulas serve as parallel 'book-ends' of the two salvation oracles, in Wolff's view, and lead him to conclude confidently that the book forms "an almost perfect symmetry."

> The lament over the current scarcity of provisions (1:4-20) is balanced by the promise that this calamity will be reversed (2:21-27). The announcement of the eschatological catastrophe imminent for Jerusalem (2:1-11) is balanced by the promise that Jerusalem's fortunes too will be reversed (4:1-3, 9-17). The call to return to Yahweh as the necessity of the moment (2:12-17) is balanced by the pouring out of the spirit and the deliverance on Zion as the eschatological necessity (chap. 3).[29]

One might illustrate Wolff's understanding of the book of Joel's structure with the following outline:

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[27] The argument for this parallel structure is made more clearly by Stephen Cook than by Wolff; see Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 167-80.

[28] Wolff, it should be noted, allowed for editorial additions to Joel, especially 4:4-8, but argued that the vast majority of the book should be attributed to the prophet himself; *Joel and Amos*, 8.

[29] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 7.

A Lament over agricultural disaster (1:4-20)
  B Announcement of eschatological catastrophe (2:1-11)
    C Call to return to Yahweh (2:12-17)
A’ Reversal of agricultural disaster (2:21-27)
    C’ Pouring out of the spirit (3:1-5)
  B’ Reversal of eschatological catastrophe (4:1-3, 9-17)

The outline helps clarify the qualifications in Wolff’s phrase, “almost perfect symmetry.” Though each unit is balanced by a response, the units do not occur in symmetrical order. The “pouring out of the spirit” should follow the “reversal of eschatological catastrophe,” but no one proposes such a rearrangement of the text. Additionally, as John Barton has sharply noted,[30] the link between the “call to return to Yahweh as the necessity of the moment” and the “pouring out of the spirit and the deliverance on Zion as the eschatological necessity” share little more in common than Wolff’s use of the term “necessity” (*Notwendige*).[31] These qualifications to Wolff’s hypothesis, along with the continued debate about the nature of the disaster in 2:1-11, have led to further disagreements about the structure of the book of Joel. Wolff’s contention that the unity of the book can be discerned by careful analysis of its structural arrangement, though, has been particularly influential on later interpreters.

Among the scholars to adopt and advance Wolff’s conclusions about the structure of the book of Joel is Gösta Ahlström, whose study explored the cultic setting that animates the language in the book. Ahlström viewed Joel as an attempt at

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[30] John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 11.

[31] Cf. also Duane Garrett’s attempt to find a parallel for 3:1-5 in the first half of the book. He argues that 2:21-27 provides a parallel based on the following observations: the agricultural benefits of a good harvest (2:21-27) parallel the spiritual benefits of the outpouring of the spirit (3:1-5); the sending of the rain (2:23) serves as a typology for the sending of the spirit (3:1-2); the mighty acts of the deity in saving Judah/Jerusalem (2:25-26) are balanced by the cosmic demonstrations of divine power (3:3-4); and the “nationalistic benediction” (2:27) is transformed into a “universalistic offer of salvation” (3:5); “The Structure of Joel,” *JETS* 28 (1985): 296.

"reestablishing the right order, צדקה, for Yahweh's own people."[32] The "lamentation style" of the first two chapters abruptly changes at 2:18, the "turning point of the book."[33] Following Wolff, Ahlström argues that Joel "is composed in a symmetrical way. What is mentioned in the first part of the book as lacking, or what is mentioned in terms of disaster, is turned into its opposite in the second part of the book."[34] In other words, the (presumably successful) call to cultic obedience in 2:12-17 ensures that the disasters of 1:2-2:11 are reversed in 2:18-4:21 with prosperity for Zion and humiliation for her enemies. Ahlström even goes beyond Wolff in arguing that "there is no reason to advocate that any verse be considered as secondary,"[35] including 4:4-8, which he likens to the prose "interruption" found in Amos' clash with Amaziah (Amos 7:10-17).

Arguments for the unity of the book of Joel since the 1980's have largely followed the two approaches so-far outlined: the positions of Wolff and Ahlström who argued that some sort of structural balance holds the book of Joel together; and the earlier positions of Kapelrud and Bourke who emphasized a theme, tradition, or logical progression that unites the book. Obviously, these positions are not mutually exclusive, and most scholars cite both types of arguments as evidence for their conclusions. Nonetheless, this general division among scholars who emphasize the book's unity can be discerned.

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[32] Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 135.

[33] Ibid., 132.

[34] Ibid., 133.

[35] Ibid., 137.

Structural Unity

Willem Prinsloo accepts Wolff's argument that the unity of the book of Joel should be grounded in its highly-organized literary structure, but he finds a very different structure at work than that discerned by Wolff or Ahlström.[36] Instead of discerning a major turning-point in the book at 2:18, Prinsloo sees a series of smaller units that build upon the preceding units, presenting a stair-step structure.[37] Rather than Wolff's "almost perfect symmetry," Prinsloo suggests that it "would be better to depict the structure of the book so that the various pericopes interrelate in a step-by-step progression, each representing a *Steigerung* on its precursor."[38] To give an example, the promises of divine blessing are not entirely new elements in 2:18-27, since they have been foreshadowed in 2:12-17. The promises in vv. 18-27 simply build upon the latent hopes for divine protection in the earlier passage. Prinsloo offers an illustration for the structural unity that he believes binds the book of Joel together:

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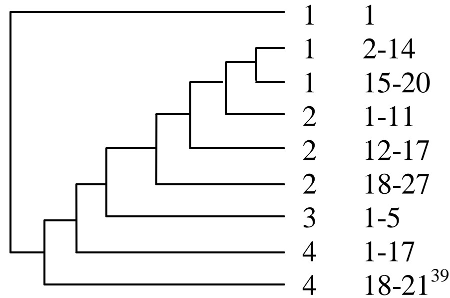
[36] Willem Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel* (BZAW 163; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985).

[37] To be clear, Prinsloo's discussion of the book of Joel's unity is not a redactional argument, since he is really concerned only with the "final form of the book" (ibid., 123). For example, he concedes that arguments about Joel 4:4-8 as a redactional addition are persuasive (ibid., 110), but his canonical approach does not lead him to speculate about the redactional history of the book. His analysis is included here, though, because he treats the book of Joel as a literary unity.

[38] Ibid., 123.



Prinsloo's suspicion that the book of Joel contains a highly complex literary structure persuades Duane Garrett. Beginning with the conviction that the book of Joel "possesses a structural unity...more profound than that described by Wolff,"[40] he proposes that the book contains not one, but two chiastic structures that interlock to form a unity:

A Punishment: Locusts (1:1-20)
B Punishment: Apocalyptic army (2:1-11)
C Transition: Repentance (2:12-17)
Introduction to Yahweh's oracular response (2:18-19)
B' Forgiveness: Apocalyptic army destroyed (2:20)
A' Forgiveness: Locust-plagued land restored (2:21-27)[41]

To this point, Garrett's diagram supports the argument that Joel 2:27 provides a fitting and proper conclusion to the entire book, suggesting that chaps. 3-4 are likely later additions. Garrett discerns a second chiasm, though, that helps unify the collection. The second chiasm begins with the latter half of the first chiasm:

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[39] Ibid. The numbers on the left are chapter numbers; the numbers on the right correspond to verses. It should be noted that Prinsloo's chart offers only the macro-structure that he discerns in the book of Joel. Within each pericope Prinsloo discerns a similar interlocking structure with words, phrases, or themes referring back to previous lines or foreshadowing future ones. For examples, see the charts in ibid., 39, 62, 91.

[40] Garrett, "The Structure of Joel," 291.

[41] Ibid., 295.

Introduction to Yahweh's oracular response (2:18-19)
D Judgment: Apocalyptic army destroyed (2:20)
E Grace: Land restored (2:21-27)
E' Grace: Spirit poured out (3:1-5)
D' Judgment: Nations destroyed (4:1-21)[42]

Garrett's chiastic structures are not convincing. The "introduction to Yahweh's oracular response," for example, falls outside of both chiasms, calling into question the structural unity for which Prinsloo argues. One might also question the description of some of the individual sections. To give an obvious example, the first chiasm describes 2:20 and 2:21-27 as similarly developing the theme of *forgiveness*, while the second chiasm describes 2:20 as *judgment* and 2:21-27 as *grace*. The analyses of Garrett and Prinsloo join a long history of scholarly attempts to discern a pattern to the book of Joel's literary structure, but ultimately the position that the book of Joel is a "tightly bound theological unit"[43] held together by interlocking chiasms simultaneously overcomplicates the picture of a unified composition and oversimplifies the diversity of material.

Marvin Sweeney, too, focuses on the structure of the book of Joel and argues that it demonstrates a literary unity. His approach, though, also differs considerably from the structural balance discerned by Wolff.[44] Sweeney attends primarily to the "formal literary structure" of the book, focusing more on shifts in syntax rather than

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[42] Ibid., 296.

[43] Ibid., 297.

[44] Marvin Sweeney, "The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve," in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. Paul Redditt and Aaron Schart; BZAW 325; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 133-54.

shifts in theme.[45] For example, the major shifts others have discerned at 2:18 (“Then Yahweh became jealous for his land”); 3:1 (“And it shall come to pass afterwards”); and 4:1 (“For then, in those days and at that time”) are all marked by conjunctives (*wāw* or *kî*), indicating to Sweeney that these lines are syntactically related to the previous units.[46] Divisions between units of text, Sweeney argues, are marked by imperative formulations, yielding the following three major sections:

A. **1:2-20** – “Hear this!” (שִׁמְעוּ־זֹאת): Prophets’ Call to Communal Complaint concerning the Threat of the Locust Plague
B. **2:1-14** – “Blow a Shofar!” (תקעו שׁופר): Prophet’s Call to Communal Complaint concerning the Threat of Invasion
C. **2:15-4:21** – “Blow a Shofar!” (תקעו שׁופר): Prophet’s Announcement of YHWH’s Response to Protect People from Threats[47]

Sweeney’s attention to the preponderance of imperative verbs in the book of Joel is warranted, as they do offer clues about the structure of the book. Sweeney, though, may have missed the significance of the imperative forms by proposing a break at 2:15. The series of imperatives in 2:15-17 (“Blow a shofar in Zion! / sanctify a fast; / call a solemn assembly; / gather the people...”) echoes the call in 2:1 (“Blow a shofar in Zion!”) and connects that call with the summons in ch. 1 (“Sanctify a fast, / call a solemn assembly, / gather the elders...;” 1:14). The complaints over the disaster(s) of chs. 1-2 are brought together in a final summons for

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[45] Ibid., 137.

[46] Sweeney provides a mini-commentary on Joel (*The Twelve Prophets* [Berit Olam; 2 vols.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000-2001], 1:147-187) that fleshes out further observations on the book’s focus. In particular, Sweeney interprets much of the language of cosmic upheaval to reflect rather common experiences with the *Ḥamsin/Sharav* dry desert winds that accompany seasonal changes in the Levant (ibid., 1:173-176).

[47] See the outline in Sweeney, “The Place and Function of Joel,” 142.

the people to participate in the necessary cultic rites. The imperatives in 2:15-17, in other words, do not introduce a new section; they conclude (and unite) the previous poems of complaint. With Joel 2:18, the imperative verbs are no longer as dominant,[48] as the focus of the deity's speech is on what Yahweh will do, rather than what the people should do.

Most recently, Ernst Wendland offers a detailed chart to illustrate the structural unity he finds in the book (see chart 1).[49] Wendland's diagram is notable for the remarkable degree of symmetry he finds in the book's macro-structure, although, as with similar proposals, Wendland's orderly chart obscures the diversity of material under discussion. One might challenge several of Wendland's descriptions of the individual pericopes, such as the distinction between the "physical" and "spiritual" restorations in 2:18-27 and 3:1-5, but a larger question looms in discerning how the second half of the chart balances the first half. For example, it is unclear how stanza D' ("YHWH effects his judgment on all pagan nations") relates to stanza D ("YHWH summons his people to communal repentance"), or stanza B' ("YHWH promises to restore his people spiritually") to stanza B ("Communal lamentation to YHWH for mercy"). Wendland's diagram, while distinct from the proposals of Wolff and his followers, offers a similarly insufficient case for the book of Joel's structural unity.

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[48] Imperative verbs, not including jussives, appear 45 times in the book of Joel. The frequencies are as follows: 1:2-2:17 (31x); 2:21-23 (4x); and 4:9-13 (10x).

[49] The chart reproduces Wendland's diagram of Joel with only minor variations in formatting and the use of the MT chapter/verse division. See Ernst Wendland, "Dramatic Rhetoric, Metaphoric Imagery, and Discourse Structure in Joel," *JSem* 18 (2009): 211.

Chart 1: Wendland's Diagram of the Book of Joel

<table>
<tr><td colspan="8">JOEL - Theme: RETRIBUTION, REVERSAL, AND RESTORATION IN THE DAY OF THE LORD</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Part I (1:1-2:17) - YHWH exhorts his covenant people to "return" to him in repentance</td><td colspan="4">Part II (2:18-4:17) - YHWH responds by "returning" to his people to deliver them from their enemies</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Oracle 1 (1:2-20)</td><td colspan="2">Oracle 2 (2:1-17)</td><td colspan="2">Oracle 3 (2:18-3:5)</td><td colspan="2">Oracle 4 (4:1-17)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stanza A
(1:2-12)
->
Prophetic call to lament over natural disasters</td><td>Stanza B
(1:13-20)

Communal lamentation to YHWH for mercy</td><td>Stanza C
(2:1-11)
->
An army of locusts prefigures the Day of YHWH</td><td>Stanza D
(2:12-17)

YHWH summons his people to communal repentance</td><td>Stanza A'
(2:18-27)
->
YHWH promises to restore his people physically</td><td>Stanza B'
(3:1-5)

YHWH promises to restore his people spiritually</td><td>Stanza C'
(4:1-8)
->
YHWH announces a time for universal judgment</td><td>Stanza D'
(4:9-17)

YHWH effects his judgment on all pagan nations</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Conclusion - Oracle 5 (4:18-21): YHWH blesses Zion by restoring his people in the eschaton ("in that day")</td></tr>
</table>

Non-structural Unity

Although Prinsloo, Garrett, Sweeney, and Wendland generally accepted the positions of Wolff and Ahlström, namely, that the key to Joel's unity lies in its literary structure, a second group of scholars have followed Bourke and Kapelrud in focusing on thematic or traditio-historical issues, calling into question the notion that a structural balance exists at all. Graham Ogden, for example, argues that the imagery and language of lament provides a unifying element that holds the book of Joel together.[50] The prophet's call for the people to join in rituals of lamentation is answered quite clearly by the direct response of the deity in 2:18-27. The oracles in ch. 4, though, focus less on lamentation, a sign often taken as evidence that ch. 4 was a later addition to the book. Ogden counters that ch. 4 *does* exhibit a concern with answering a national lament, as evidenced by a comparison of the imagery and phrases found in Joel 4 with those common to Israelite laments. For example, he finds the concern of Joel 4:2-3, that nations have sold Israel and cast lots for them, echoed in similar language in a national psalm of lament (Ps. 44:11-12).[51] For Ogden, the consistent use of the language of lamentation suggests the book of Joel is the product of a single author, but it also leads to a reevaluation of the original disaster described in ch. 1. If ch. 4, with its assurance of divine victory over Israel's military enemies, is the response to the laments of chs. 1-2, Ogden concludes that the agricultural imagery of ch. 1 must be metaphorical for the military invasion of

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[50] Ogden, "Joel 4," 97-106; Ogden also presents a theologically-oriented commentary on Joel in Ogden, "Restoring the Years: A Commentary on the Book of Joel," in *A Promise of Hope—A Call to Obedience: A Commentary on the Books of Joel and Malachi* (Graham Ogden and Richard Deutsch; ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1987).

[51] Ogden, "Joel 4," 99.

surrounding armies.[52] In other words, chs. 1-2 offer different angles of vision on one single threat—a military one—rather than two distinct disasters—locusts (ch. 1) and foreign armies (ch. 2)—as Wolff argued. Put simply, Ogden replaces the "symmetry" upon which Wolff based his argument concerning Joel's unity with a focus on the book's relationship with the "lament traditions."[53]

Ogden's case for reading Joel 4 as the deity's response to the people's lamentation in Joel 1-2 is hardly persuasive. A more thorough examination of the cultic character of ch. 4 is provided below,[54] but it is worth mentioning here that the "lamentation language" Ogden discerns is quite generic and is found in many contexts. Most importantly, though, Ogden's research at most indicates that ch. 4 could respond to *a* lament, not that it responds to the cries of distress in chs. 1-2. The author of ch. 4 most certainly responded to a set of anxieties—principally the hostility of foreign nations—but those concerns are far removed from the agricultural and economic fears of chs. 1-2.

Kathleen Nash also defends the unity of the book of Joel, but again she finds little in common with Wolff's reasoning.[55] The turning-point of the book is 2:18, which separates the "first speech" (1:2-2:17) from the "second speech" (2:19-4:1-3, 9-21). For Nash, the prophetic announcements are offered in reaction to the severe agricultural conditions after a winter drought (1:10-12, 18-20) and an unusually

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[52] Ibid., 105.

[53] Ibid., 97.

[54] See the discussion about Joel 3-4 and its "Relation to the Cult" below, III.B.v.

[55] Kathleen Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year and the Book of Joel" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1989).

severe locust invasion (1:4-7). To make matters worse, the prophet sees a great east-wind storm coming (the day of Yahweh) that will prevent the west-wind storms that usually bring rain in the fall (2:1-11). The deity's response to the people's repentance includes the promise to restore the rainy season (by holding off the catastrophic east-wind storm; 2:19-27) and destroy Judah's enemies with a devastating fall sirocco (4:9-16). For Nash, then, the unity of the book of Joel derives from its "logical argument"[56]—specifically, how the people should respond to the agricultural conditions at the end of a particularly brutal summer[57]—not from its structural symmetry. Nash's research is informative for its insight into the seasonal patterns and agricultural calendars of the Levant, but her contention that most of the imagery in Joel reflects the fall sirocco storm does not account for the literary license with which the poet presents the disaster. The description of the crisis is far removed from any scientific accounting of agricultural conditions.

Similarly, Ronald Simkins supports Wolff's conclusion about the unity of Joel, while simultaneously undermining his reasoning.[58] Simkins maintains that scholarly discussions of Israelite religion tend to be based on a false dichotomy between "history" and "nature," with the natural world relegated to a secondary and largely irrelevant role in the *history* of Yahweh's saving acts. Such a dichotomy manifests in studies of the book of Joel when scholars sharply distinguish between the "natural" disaster of the locust plague, and the "historical" salvation envisioned in the

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[56] Ibid., 9.

[57] A helpful summary of Nash's outline of Joel can be found in ibid., 27-31.

[58] Ronald Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity in History and Nature in the Book of Joel* (ANETS 10; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991); Simkins, "God, History, and the Natural World in the Book of Joel," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 435-452.

day of Yahweh. Specifically, attempts to present the locust plague of ch. 1 as a preview of an eschatological military assault on Jerusalem (ch. 2) confine the natural world to a secondary place in the religion of Israel. Simkins counters that "Yahweh's activity in human history cannot be divorced from his activity in the natural world. Yahweh acts in the totality of the natural world in order to achieve his purposes in the history of creation."[59] Simkins is specifically challenging the conclusion of Kapelrud (and the many who followed Kapelrud in this judgment) that the locust plague is presented as a metaphor for the truly significant disaster that the deity is preparing on his day. For Simkins, the locust invasion is not a harbinger of the day of Yahweh, as Kapelrud maintained, but an integral part of that day. According to most scholars, "the natural catastrophe could have at best only a tangential relationship to the day of Yahweh; the locust plague would serve merely as a harbinger of that day. But by examining the structure of the book in the light of this possibility—namely, that the locust plague in chaps. 1-2 is directly connected with Yahweh's historical activity described in chaps. 3-4—an integral relationship between the natural catastrophe and the day of Yahweh emerges."[60]

Simkins finds in Joel's structure then not an "almost perfect symmetry,"[61] but a sequential exposition of the events that are to occur on the anticipated day of Yahweh. A devastating locust plague (or series of successive locust plagues; chs. 1-2) challenges the very foundations of the created order only to be defeated by the

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[59] Simkins, "God, History," 436.

[60] Ibid., 445. See also, Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 244-65.

[61] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 7.

deity's overwhelming host (2:11, 18-27),[62] the same cosmogonic myth Simkins finds in Ezekiel's description of Gog of Magog (Ezek 38-39). Chapter 3 turns attention to those saved during the locust plague, while ch. 4 focuses primarily on the enemy nations that are also to be defeated on Yahweh's day (although nature still has a part to play; e.g., 4:15). For Simkins, the key to understanding the unity of the book of Joel is not structural symmetry but rather the correct understanding of the day of Yahweh tradition in which the deity engages both the natural world and human history in a complex interplay of threatened disaster and divine deliverance. Simkins' analysis rightly challenges those who denigrate the role of the natural world in Israelite religion, but his prescription for alleviating this problem still falls short. Unfortunately, his understanding of the book of Joel's compositional history precludes a better explanation. The turmoil of the natural world may not be a warning about an eschatological conflict including all the world's armies, but neither is it an element of that larger conflict, at least if chs. 3-4 are secondary additions. For Simkins, the environmental catastrophe highlights the important role of nature on the day of Yahweh. I contend, rather, that in chs. 1-2 the day of Yahweh tradition illustrates the magnitude of the environmental disaster at hand; the subject is the natural world, not the day of Yahweh. Only in chs. 3-4, where the day of Yahweh is reinterpreted as a future international conflict, do the environmental concerns recede in importance. According to my reading, the natural world in Joel 1-2 is not

[62] Simkins understands the deity's 'army' (2:11) to be at war with the army-like enemy of 2:1-10, much as the deity rouses and then defeats Gog of Magog in Ezek 38-39. Most scholars, conversely, understand Joel 2:1-11 to be describing one terrible and overwhelming force led by the deity, as there is no indication that the deity is fighting on behalf of the people. Simkins' novel interpretation of Joel 2:11 is developed in Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 258-60; and Simkins, "God, History," 450-51.

subsumed in a larger narrative about Yahweh's conflict with the nations; the destruction of the land provides the existential threat to which the people and the deity must respond.

James Crenshaw also treats the book of Joel as a unity without discerning a highly sophisticated literary structure. He outlines the book as follows:

I. Calamity in Judah and its Reversal (1:1-2:27)

II. Signs and Portents (3:1-5)

III. Judgment of the Foreign Nations (4:1-21)[63]

Crenshaw does not discern a literary structure that makes a convincing case for unity, but he does find a consistent narrative. In fact, he sees chs. 3-4 as related to the preceding material by the dramatic narrative that builds throughout the book. The outpouring of the spirit and the promise of salvation adds to the climactic image of restored prosperity described in 2:18-27, and a final judgment on the nations serves as a resolution to the drama.[64] Crenshaw, though, does not offer a strong conclusion about the book of Joel's compositional history. He focuses on describing the canonical form of the book, so considerations of the book's redactional history largely fall outside his purview. For example, he allows for the existence of a "living tradition" to the literature of Joel, which is his way of acknowledging the influence of later tradents and scribes without offering conclusions about how they have

[63] James Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 12-13.

[64] See his dramatization of the 'plot' of the book of Joel in ibid., 11-21.

(re)shaped the text.[65] If Crenshaw is right that the literature associated with Joel includes "responses that challenged, confirmed, and/or elaborated on previous understandings" of the book,[66] then some attention to the dialogue between these different voices should help clarify the concerns to which this literature responded.

Finally, John Strazicich also offers a lengthy study of the book of Joel that makes the case for the book's unity.[67] Although he provides an extensive (8-page!) outline for the structure of the book,[68] he finds no clear symmetry that suggests a unified composition. Instead, Strazicich focuses on motifs and themes that indicate to him the book is the product of a single author. He points, for example, to the "day of Yahweh" tradition that appears throughout the work (1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:15) and "unites both halves of the book under an enemy sketch."[69] Strazicich's primary focus, however, is on the writing style of the book of Joel, particularly its use of earlier biblical material. He finds throughout the book numerous allusions to earlier biblical texts, indicating a consistent method of engaging these authoritative sources. Of course, not all of the "allusions" Strazicich discerns are equally convincing. For example, Strazicich notes that Joel 1 echoes the depictions of disaster in the Solomonic prayer of 1 Kgs 8; both, after all, include references to locust plagues and other agricultural failures. His contention, though, that Joel 1 *alludes* to Solomon's

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[65] For a broader discussion of Crenshaw's thinking on a "living tradition" in prophetic literature, see Crenshaw, "A Living Tradition: The Book of Jeremiah in Current Research," *Int* 37 (1983): 117-29.

[66] Crenshaw, *Joel*, 28, n. 31.

[67] John Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*.

[68] Ibid., 40-47.

[69] Ibid., 47-48.

prayer—inviting the reader/hearer to understand the disaster of Joel 1 in light of Solomon's warning about unfaithfulness to the covenant—is dubious.[70] The book of Joel is noticeably silent on covenantal obligations, and there is no indication that the people have been unfaithful. One might suggest that Strazicich's study, rather than proving that the book of Joel employs a consistent writing style, merely reflects a commitment to employing a consistent methodological approach, namely "comparative midrash."[71]

Strazicich is likely correct that the book of Joel alludes to and reinterprets earlier biblical texts, at least in some cases. The correspondences between Joel 3:5 and Obad 17, for example, are unlikely to be coincidental because of the citation formula, "just as Yahweh has said" (Joel 3:5b).[72] Such an observation is strong evidence for dating portions of the book of Joel well into the Persian (or even Hellenistic) period, but its "exegetical and eclectic character" actually undermines the case for the book's unity.[73] The latest redactions of prophetic literature were added to the older collections in part to clarify, update, and (re)interpret earlier prophecies. As a result, the secondary additions tend to be primarily exegetical, a phenomenon now

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[70] Ibid., 78-82.

[71] Ibid., 15.

[72] MT, it should be noted, does not reflect a direct quotation of Obad 17 in Joel, at least not without emendations. Whether MT reflects textual corruption or Joel 3:5 includes a mis-quotation of a text much like Obad 17 (perhaps known from an oral tradition), the allusion to some other text is clear from the citation formula. For discussion of the text-critical issues at stake here, see the discussion in III.B.i. below.

[73] So, David L. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (SBLMS 23; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 39. Petersen notes that much of the prophetic material generally attributed to later editors contains references to earlier prophetic works.

well documented in other prophetic texts.[74] To offer one example, Sommer makes a persuasive case that Deutero-Isaiah consistently responds to and reverses earlier oracles of judgment from pre-exilic prophets. In response to Jeremiah's indictment that the people had forgotten the deity more easily than a woman forgets her jewelry (Jer 2:32), Deutero-Isaiah reassures the people that the deity could never forget Zion, any more than a woman could forget her children (Isa 49:14-18). In this new promise, Zion is comforted that she will have new children that she can wear as jewelry (Isa 49:18).[75] The new oracle borrows the same imagery and rhetorical form to provide an update to the earlier judgment, making the message more relevant to the changed historical circumstances of an exilic audience. Sommer makes the case that this exegetical technique—of updating, reversing, or reaffirming earlier prophecies—is consistent in the additions to the book of Isaiah, and one can find a similar technique at work in the additions to the book of Joel. A more thorough treatment of the exegetical and dependent nature of Joel 3-4 appears below,[76] but at this stage it is

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[74] Otto Plöger noted that a primary function of the late prophetic additions was to "interpret the testimonies already collected so that men could live by them" (*Theocracy and Eschatology* [trans. S. Rudman; Richmond: John Knox, 1968], 110; trans. of *Theokratie und Eschatologie*; WMANT 2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959). More extensive treatments of the exegetical nature of secondary prophetic material are provided in Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Seabury, 1979); Marvin Sweeney, "Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27: Toward an Understanding of the Redactional Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 107 (1988): 39-52; Donald Polaski, *Authorizing an End: The Isaiah Apocalypse and Intertextuality* (BibInt 50; Leiden: Brill, 2001); Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, eds., *Bringing out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-14* (JSOTSup 370; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

[75] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 37-38. Sommer's case for an allusion is strengthened by the use of rhetorical questions in both passages as well as by the repetition of vocabulary: עדי ("jewelry"); קשר ("adorn"); and כלה ("bride").

[76] See the discussion in III.B.ii. below.

sufficient to point out that the cluster of citations and interpretations of earlier prophetic literature in chs. 3-4 makes it consistent with the additions to Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. In particular, the repeated references to the day of Yahweh in Joel 3-4 serve to re-interpret the presentation of that tradition in chs. 1-2. Put simply, the exegetical nature of much of the book of Joel provides support for treating those sections as secondary.

The discussion thus far provides a broad overview of the main currents in research on the book of Joel's unity. A more thorough discussion of one scholar's approach, though, may help illuminate the debate and the nature of the available evidence. For this analysis, the extensive treatment in Stephen Cook's monograph, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, provides one of the most sustained arguments about the book's unity and offers perhaps the most detailed examination of the topic.

Stephen Cook

Cook's study provides a useful entrée into a discussion of the book of Joel's unity, as it claims the support of both groups of scholars outlined above—those discerning a structural unity as well as those arguing for a thematic or narrative unity. Cook robustly defends the work of Wolff, basing his analysis on the same structural symmetry. In fact, the conclusion Cook offers to his own redactional argument can be fairly read as a concise summary of Wolff's position:

> When it is accepted that Joel 2:1-11 makes reference to an end-time desolation, the whole unified structure of Joel becomes clear. Indeed, the apocalyptic pericopes of Joel are integral to the book's literary symmetry. This symmetry has its midpoint at Joel 2:18, with the preceding texts describing a double

> desolation and the succeeding texts describing a double deliverance.[77]

At the same time, Cook elevates the importance of thematic elements, following the same general approach of Kapelrud and Bourke. The preoccupation with apocalyptic themes and motifs, Cook argues, proves the book of Joel reflects the perspective of a single author.

The primary question for Cook, though, centers on the relationship between the material in Joel 2:1-11 and 3:1-4:21. In his examination of the apocalyptic nature of Second Temple cultic officials, Cook concludes: "Since Joel 2:1-11 is closely connected structurally and thematically both with its immediate context and with Joel 3 and 4 (Eng.: 2:28-3:21), the book emerges as a unity, an apocalyptic text produced by temple officials."[78] In other words, Cook seeks to establish that the threat described in Joel 2 is intimately connected—"structurally and thematically"—with the oracles of Joel 3-4, as this connection is essential in making the case that the material in chs. 3-4 responds to the people's concerns expressed earlier.

Cook presents two thematic elements, drawn from his understanding of "proto-apocalyptic" literature, that unite Joel 2:1-11 and 3:1-4:21. The first of these elements is *radical eschatology*.[79] "In both parts of the book, Joel's eschatological scenario centers on the same event: the apocalyptic attack of the nations on

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[77] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 183.

[78] Ibid., 171. He also notes: "The problem of the unity of Joel, and hence the issue of whether this cult prophet had a millennial worldview, hinges on the interpretation of the cry of alarm in 2:1-11;" ibid., 181.

[79] Ibid., 172-75.

Jerusalem that overturns the order of the cosmos and causes writhing and anguish."[80] Cook points to the image of a final judgment (4:12) ushering in a new era of peace and security for Jerusalem (3:5; 4:17-18) to support his uncontroversial thesis that chs. 3-4 reflect an eschatological orientation. His understanding of Joel 2:1-11 as reflecting "the apocalyptic attack of the nations on Jerusalem," though, is less certain. He proposes reading the threat against Jerusalem in Joel 2 as parallel to Ezek 38-39 and Zech 9-14. In those cases, the deity summons great enemies against Judah (Ezek 38:14-16; Zech 14:2) in order to defeat them decisively, thereby ushering in a period of eternal security (Ezek 39:25-29; Zech 14:8-11).[81]

Clearly, a similar mythological motif animates portions of Joel 4:

> Let the nations rouse themselves and come up
>   to the valley of Jehoshaphat;
> for there I will sit to judge
>   all the nations roundabout. (4:12; cf. 4:2)

Reading the threat described in Joel 2:1-11 in light of this same motif, though, requires overlooking some major differences. The enemy of Joel 2 is not a foreign nation summoned so that the deity's strength can be demonstrated, but rather Yahweh himself and his own army. The vision of an approaching militaristic disaster concludes with the terrible realization that Yahweh himself is leading the charge against the people:

> Yahweh utters his voice
>   before his army.
> Indeed, his camp is exceedingly large;
>   indeed, mighty are those who obey his command. (2:11)

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[80] Ibid., 172-3.

[81] See also, Zech 12:1-9.

In Ezek 38, the deity summons Gog "so that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I display my holiness before their eyes" (Ezek 38:16). In Zech 14, Yahweh summons "the nations" to purge the people of Jerusalem before their restoration (14:2). In both cases, as in Joel 4, the enemy is Yahweh's instrument to demonstrate his power to restore Jerusalem. In Joel 2, though, the enemy is Yahweh, not "the nations" as Cooks suggests,[82] and there is no hint that the threatened assault serves a broader purpose of making Jerusalem more secure. Rather, Joel 2 reflects a very different mythological motif, one of divine aggression against Judah.[83] The admonition of 2:12-14 is premised on the hope that the deity may "turn and relent" from the threatened disaster that he is leading, not that the deity will defeat an international army. The eschatological vision of divine power overwhelming the world's armies, as exemplified in Ezek 38-39, Zech 14, and Joel 4, should not be conflated with the frightening vision of Yahweh's destruction of Judah presented in Joel 2.

Cook recognizes that Joel 2 does not detail each of the elements of the mythological motif found in Ezek 38-39; Zech 14; or Joel 4. Rather, he suggests that the motif can still be discerned in Joel 2 by appealing to Joel 3-4, which "*further specifies* the threat of 2:1-11 as the attack by the united kings and nations of the

[82] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 172-73.

[83] See, for example, Mic 1:8-16; Zeph 1:2-13; Lam 2:1-10; Ps 88:7-8, 16-19. For a discussion of this motif in lament psalms, see Amy Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (LHBOTS 493; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 130-36. A broader discussion of the motif of a deity's aggression against his own people, including in Mesopotamian literature, can be found in F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (BibOr 44; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute: 1993), 55-65.

world."[84] Cook's analysis, though, has piled assumptions upon assumptions. *If* Joel 4 elucidates and "further specifies" ch. 2, *then* ch. 2 shares a similar mythological motif, adding support for the book's unity. And *if* the book is a unity, *then* the mythology of ch. 2 is likely clarified by the description in ch. 4. These conditionals may be correct or not, but neither can be cited as evidence with which to support the other claim. In my view, Cook's analysis erases the distinction between the original text (ch. 2) and its interpretation (ch. 4). The author of Joel 4 sought to interpret the threat of chs. 1-2 as hostile foreign nations, perhaps because agricultural failure or locust plagues were no longer of greatest concern.[85] Such a reading, though, represents a secondary reflection on how chs. 1-2 might remain relevant for a different community; it does not clarify the imagery of chs. 1-2.

Cook further seeks to establish the eschatological nature of Joel 2 by pointing to its language of cosmic upheaval. The imagery of the sun and moon growing dark (v. 10), Cook argues, reflects an apocalyptic view of the darkening of the skies at the eschaton. He points to the same imagery in the "(proto-)apocalyptic texts" of Isa 13:10; Jer 4:23; and Zech 14:6.[86] Besides the difficulties in referring to such texts as "proto-apocalyptic,"[87] this argument fails to account for the prevalence of such

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[84] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 173; italics added.

[85] Other early biblical exegetes, such as Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Jerome, followed this interpretation. See the discussion below under III.A.ii.

[86] Ibid., 173-74.

[87] See Cook's explanation for his use of the term: "those Persian-period religious texts, viewpoints, and practices that have clear affinities with the full-blown apocalypticism found in the subsequent Hellenistic and Roman periods;" ibid., 34-35. Cook's citation of "proto-apocalyptic" prophecies has roots in the important studies of Paul Hanson (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975]) and Plöger (*Theocracy and Eschatology*). More recently, though, the conclusion that these texts presage the apocalypses of later times has come under more scrutiny. Cf. George

imagery in the Hebrew Bible. In the first place, the upheaval of the cosmos, and specifically the quaking of the heavens and the earth (Joel 2:10a), is associated with the theophanic tradition,[88] so it need not indicate the eschaton or the "transformation from history to a realm beyond history."[89] Secondly, the darkening of the heavens was a classic feature of the "day of Yahweh" tradition, at least as early as Amos.[90] To be sure, apocalyptic authors could borrow such an image for their own purposes (e.g., Rev 6:12), but one can hardly claim that such imagery is exclusive to visions of the eschaton.[91] Put simply, Joel 2:10 clearly reflects imagery of cosmic upheaval, but it is not clear that such imagery reflects an apocalyptic "trans-historical cataclysm."[92]

A second thematic element Cook identifies linking Joel 2:1-11 with 3:1-4:21 is *dualism*. Cook actually identifies three different types of dualism, one of which is

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Nickelsburg, "Eschatology (Early Jewish Literature)," *ABD* 2: 593: "The salutary distinction between the literary genre of apocalypse and the kind of eschatology that typifies some apocalypses needs to be maintained and investigated with greater precision." Nickelsburg's call is heeded in John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 33-37, in which Collins locates the origins of apocalyptic literature in the general cultural "mood" of the Hellenistic period, rather in postexilic prophecy. See Collins' analysis of postexilic prophecy and the ways in which it fundamentally differs from apocalyptic literature in ibid., 23-25. In sum, it is perhaps inadvisable to refer to texts from Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel as "proto-apocalyptic."

[88] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 47; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 74. See also Judg 5:4; Ps 18:8; 68:9; 77:19.

[89] Cf. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 126.

[90] Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9; see also Deut 5:22-23, where darkness and the theophany tradition are brought together: "These words Yahweh spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and *the thick darkness,* and he added no more... When you heard the voice *out of the darkness*..."

[91] Even John Strazicich, whose argument for the unity of the book of Joel is supported by Cook's analysis, acknowledges the distinction between the "*this-worldly* perspective" of Joel 1-2 and the eschatological orientation of Joel 3-4, although his use of the terms "prophetic eschatology" and "apocalyptic eschatology" to describe this distinction should not be followed; see Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 97-102.

[92] *Contra* Brevard Childs, "The Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," *JBL* 78 (1959): 197.

a "dualism involving the present age and the age to come," which generally follows his explanation for a *radical eschatology*, discussed above.[93] A second type of dualism Cook finds, *moral dualism*, is found only in Joel 4, as the nations' punishment is attributed to their great wickedness (4:13). Cook sees in this reference a parallel to the apocalyptic tension between the forces of good and evil.[94] What is noteworthy, though, is that such a tension is not present in Joel 2:1-11. Neither the wickedness nor the righteousness of the people is at issue, and certainly there is no hint of the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. The third type of dualism Cook finds is a "dualism between the natural and supernatural worlds." He identifies this dualism in the "mythic-realistic images of Joel 2:1-11," which "transcend the usual realities of history."[95] Cook's support comes from finding similar images in other "(proto-)apocalyptic" texts, such as Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation. For example,

> Joel's designation of the horde as a עם רב ועצום ("a great and powerful people/army," Joel 2:2) reminds us of the "great army" (חיל רב) of Ezekiel 38:15 and the later reference in Daniel 11:25 to an "extremely large and mighty army" (עד־מאד חיל־גדול ועצום).[96]

Cook's analysis raises several issues. First, he identifies "dualism" as a hallmark of Joel 2:1-11 and 3:1-4:21, but he acknowledges that they contain different *kinds* of dualism. In other words, the "moral dualism" of chs. 3-4 is not found in ch.

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[93] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 177-79.

[94] Ibid., 177.

[95] Ibid., 175.

[96] Ibid.

2, nor is the "supernatural dualism" of ch. 2 found in chs. 3-4. Quite simply, dualism provides very little foundation upon which to make a case that ch. 2 and chs. 3-4 share a similar ideological orientation.[97] Secondly, Cook's suggestion that the imagery of Joel 2 ties it closely with other apocalyptic texts is less than convincing. To be sure, Joel 2 does use military imagery, and military imagery is quite common in apocalyptic literature. Such a connection, however, is hardly evidence that Joel 2 advances an apocalyptic worldview similar to the books of Daniel or Revelation. In the example above, the image of a "people great and mighty" (עם רב ועצום; Joel 2:2) need not invoke a supernatural horde on the scale of later apocalyptic literature, as Cook would suggest. In fact, the same language is used to describe the Israelites in Exodus (עם בני ישׂראל רב ועצום; 1:9)[98] and devout worshippers in a psalm of complaint.[99] Similar descriptions appear elsewhere without invoking an apocalyptic worldview.[100] Thirdly, the dualism that Cook purports to find in Joel 2 is not consistent with the dualism between the earthly and heavenly realms found in later

[97] In fact, one should exercise caution in using "dualism" as a distinguishing marker, as most literature involves some sort of dualistic thinking. Wisdom literature, for example, has a *dualistic* view of the world in that there are wise and foolish, righteous and wicked.

[98] Siegfried Bergler argues this parallel, along with others, mark a conscious allusion to Exodus by the author of the book of Joel. See Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret* (BEATAJ 16; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 265. I do not find Bergler's position persuasive here, but this type of language is clearly not confined to apocalyptic literature.

[99] Ps 35:18. אודך בקהל רב בעם עצום אהללך. "I will praise you in a great congregation, worship you in a mighty throng."

[100] For example, 1 Kgs 3:8; 1 Chr 1:9.

apocalyptic texts.[101] The motif of Yahweh's "army" may introduce a supernatural element to Joel 2,[102] but such an image is hardly consistent with the cosmic battles waged between angels and demons in Dan 10:13 or Rev 12:7-9. The description of the approaching force in Joel 2 borrows from various traditions, perhaps including the divine warrior[103] and theophanic[104] traditions—traditions that also play an important role in some apocalyptic texts—but it does not develop the type of dualistic worldview Cook purports to find. In short, it is difficult to make the case that Joel 2 shares a *dualistic* worldview with later apocalyptic texts.

In addition to these thematic connections, Cook identifies a list of "linguistic reverberations and thematic reversals" that appear in Joel 2:1-11 and 3:1-4:21.[105] He cites, for example, the repetition of the phrase, "The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (שמש וירח קדרו וכוכבים אספו נגהם), in the

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[101] Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 24, notes the profound difference in speculation about the heavenly world, including angels, between prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature.

[102] Cook is not consistent with his description of the threat in Joel 2:1-11. At times, he describes the threat as coming from "the united kings and nations of the world" (*Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 173), while in his description of the supernatural dualism of Joel 2, he describes the enemy as "a massive otherworldly force ... from another, nonearthly, plane of existence" (ibid., 175-76).

[103] Patrick Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 139; Miller is more confident in the divine warrior tradition behind Joel 4, and relies largely on Wolff's analysis to speculate that Joel 2 might also contain elements of the same tradition. See also Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 91-111.

[104] See Anna Karena Müller, *Gottes Zukunft: Die Möglichkeit der Rettung am Tag JHWHs nach dem Joelbuch* (WMANT 119; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008), esp. 59-91.

[105] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 184-85. See also the study by David Marcus: "Nonrecurring Doublets in the Book of Joel," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 56-67. Marcus, like Cook, identifies a series of repetitive words or phrases—"doublets"—in Joel, which he concludes offers support for reading the book as a unity. Marcus' study, though, suffers from some of the same shortcomings as Cook's. For example, he does not distinguish between those "doublets" that serve to emphasize the prior expression and those that seek to reinterpret it to address new concerns.

descriptions of the day of Yahweh (2:10; 4:15). Other similar descriptions of the day of Yahweh tradition include: "near" (קרוב; 2:1; 4:14); "fire" (אשׁ; 2:3, 5; 3:3); "blackness" (חשׁך; 2:2; 3:4); "great" (גדול; 2:11; 3:4) and "awesome" (נורא; 2:11; 3:4). Of course, this imagery is quite common in the day of Yahweh and theophanic traditions,[106] so some of these similarities could be explained as appeals to a common tradition. Nonetheless, some of the correspondences are quite strong. Joel 4:15, for example, is identical to Joel 2:10b, and 4:16 shares imagery from 2:10-11 (Yahweh uttering his voice and the heavens and earth shaking).[107] In other words, it is unlikely that all of these correspondences are accidental.

Cook deduces that these correspondences indicate that the book is a unity, reflecting a single apocalyptic perspective. This conclusion overstates the evidence he presents. Correspondences and thematic reversals need not be explained as indicative of shared authorship. Redactors often used imagery borrowed from their source material to give credence to their additions. Especially in secondary prophetic

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[106] The "nearness" of the day of Yahweh, can be found in: Isa 13:6; Ezek 7:7; 30:3; Joel 1:15; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14; cf. Jer 48:16. The imagery of "fire" is widespread in biblical and non-biblical theophanies: Gen 15:17; 19:24; Exod 3:2; 13:21; 19:18; 24:17; Deut 4:12; Ps 50:3; 97:3 (for non-biblical references, see Patrick D. Miller, "Fire in the Mythology of Canaan and Israel," *CBQ* 27 [1965]: 256-61). The "darkening" of the day of Yahweh is attested in: Isa 13:10; Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9; Zeph 1:15; Jer 4:23, 28; darkening is also attested with the theophany tradition: Deut 4:11; 5:22-23; Ps 18:12. The notion that the day of Yahweh is "great and/or awesome" can be found in Mal 3:23 (cf. also Mal 3:2; Strazicich even suggests that Joel 2:11 is alluding to Malachi; Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 140); Zeph 1:14; Jer 30:7; "great and awesome" is also used to describe the deity in Deut 7:21.

[107] Barton (*Joel and Obadiah*, 106) sees Joel 4:16 as part of a "floating" tradition, rather than as a direct response to 2:10-11, since, as he notes, the imagery of the deity uttering his voice and the "shaking" of the cosmos is commonly attested in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Amos 1:2; Hag 2:6-7; Jdg 5:4; 2 Sam 22:8, 14; Ps 18:8; 60:24; 68:9; 77:19; Jer 25:30). Barton may be correct, but the inclusion of this imagery at the end of the book of Joel is not likely coincidental. The trope is used in Joel 2:10-11 to illustrate the deity's terrible power and to frighten the people; the appeal to that same imagery in 4:16 reassures the people that the deity is not their enemy but their powerful protector.

literature, as discussed above, additional material often has an exegetical quality, offering (re)interpretations of or allusions to earlier prophecies.[108] In fact, Cook himself seems to acknowledge this point. He actually refrains from speaking of the author of the book of Joel, suggesting that it may reflect the contributions of a group of cultic officials: "[I]t is not crucial here to know whether the verbal and thematic interlocking within Joel is the product of the prophet himself or of his ongoing group. In either case, Joel's apocalyptic pericopes must be associated with a group supportive of the central cult."[109] Offered as an irrelevant aside, Cook's concession here presents a more serious challenge to his thesis than is acknowledged. If members of an "ongoing group" are responsible for the latter half of the book of Joel, it is not at all clear that the members of this group continued to address the same concerns as the author of the original collection. Not all members of a group share the same fears, express the same perspective, or write in the same style. In other words, Cook's study ultimately abandons the case for the book's unity, focusing instead on a new argument, namely, that the eschatological concerns of chs. 3-4 are in some sense consistent with the calls for cultic participation in chs. 1-2, so that both sections may be thought to originate from the same priestly group. In my view, Cook's analysis vastly overstates the amount of overlap between these sections, and, more importantly, ignores the various ways—both subtle and overt—in which the authors of chs. 3-4 update, clarify, and reinterpret the earlier poetry to address new

[108] David Petersen identifies the exegetical character of "deutero-prophetic" literature as one of the hallmarks of post-exilic prophetic writings; *Late Israelite Prophecy*, 14-19. See the discussion of John Strazicich's study in I.C. above.

[109] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 188, n. 72.

issues. The additional material in chs. 3-4 does not reflect the same perspective as the original collection in chs. 1-2 but rather re-frames the earlier prophecies so that the older texts are seen to support a new set of concerns. The correspondences Cook discerns are a direct result of the exegetical program the authors of Joel 3-4 undertook.

Summary

The foregoing analysis—besides mapping the contours of the scholarly arguments for the book of Joel's unity—reveals how diverse and varied the arguments for that unity are. Although many scholars state confidently that a consensus has emerged that the book of Joel is a literary unity, the diversity of competing and often contradictory arguments for that unity call into question assertions that a consensus has developed.[110] Wolff, for example, finds a structural unity based on a symmetrical pattern: a two-fold appeal for deliverance (locusts and enemy nations) balanced by a two-fold response of the deity; and a call to return to the deity balanced by a promise to pour out the divine spirit. Prinsloo, Garrett, and Sweeney follow Wolff in suggesting that structural patterns help unify the book, but they all disagree profoundly about what structure the book follows. Ogden, meanwhile, finds only one threat (enemy nations) but detects a thematic unity through the constant appeal to language of lament. Kapelrud finds only one primary threat (locusts), but sees in this threat greater implications for a destructive "day of

[110] James Nogalski (*Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* [BZAW 218; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993], 1) also noted this trend: "Earlier work spent much time and energy discussing the unity of Joel, often characterizing chapters 1-2 as 'historical' over against the 'eschatological' material in 3-4. By contrast, a considerable consensus of recent commentators treats Joel as a unified work. Descriptions of this unity, however, offer no such consensus."

Yahweh." Simkins, though, understands the "day of Yahweh" tradition as the unifying theme, including a concern with both humanity and the natural world. Nash agrees that the natural world is central to the book's focus but insists that the key to the book's unity is its setting—the weather conditions after a brutal summer drought—not eschatological visions of cosmic warfare. Crenshaw understands the book of Joel to develop a dramatic narrative, while Strazicich focuses on the use of earlier biblical texts as a unifying marker. Richard Coggins' observation regarding this debate is pertinent: "It seems best to regard such suggestions as a form of reader-response criticism. If the discerning of a particular structure is of value in helping a particular reader to achieve a better understanding of the book, then it can be welcomed as such; it should not necessarily be regarded as having any objective status."[111]

Despite this diversity of opinions regarding the unity of Joel, many of the disagreements revolve around a few central issues. For example, many scholars have identified a 'turning-point' in the book of Joel, but whether it begins with 2:18 or 3:1 is a matter of much debate.[112] Related to this question is the notion of symmetry. Does the 'turning-point' divide the book into two symmetrical halves, and if so, what structure does that symmetry follow? Perhaps even more importantly, what does a symmetrical pattern mean for arguments about the book's compositional history? Another issue dividing scholars—and not simply the ones arguing for the unity of the book—is the relationship between the first two chapters and the nature of the

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[111] Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 18.

[112] But note Sweeney, who suggests that the turning-point occurs at 2:15; "The Place and Function of Joel," 136-138.

disasters they describe. At least in Wolff's opinion, this single issue determines how one judges the redactional unity of the book.[113] As David Petersen puts the question: "Is [the nature of the catastrophe] a locust plague described as if it were a military attack (1:4), or is it a military attack described as if it were a locust plague (1:6)?"[114] Of course, Wolff suggests a third possibility: Could a locust plague (ch. 1) be interpreted as a harbinger of something more ominous, the eschatological day of Yahweh (2:1-11)? How one answers these questions is influential—if not determinative, as Wolff claims—in how one understands the redactional unity of the book.

Arriving at different answers to these questions (and posing different questions to begin with), a long line of scholars have argued forcefully that the book of Joel contains material with competing viewpoints and betrays signs of redactional activity. This position now deserves exploration.

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[113] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 6. Obviously, a number of more recent scholars would disagree with Wolff's conclusion here, including Nash, Ogden, Simkins, Prinsloo, among others.

[114] David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: A Introduction* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 181.

II.

Redactional Additions to the Book of Joel: A History of Critical Research

Arguments that the book of Joel is a composite work—reflecting different authorial/editorial viewpoints—are not quite as diverse as those advanced for the book's unity, but a clear consensus has hardly emerged. Much of the material in Joel 3-4 is usually thought to be secondary, but there is still wide disagreement about how to understand chs. 1-2. Moreover, the relationship of chs. 3-4 to the preceding material is widely disputed.

Early Studies

Perhaps the most influential study to make the case for the composite nature of the book of Joel is that by Bernhard Duhm.[115] Duhm saw in the book a division between 1:2-2:17, a series of oracles threatening destruction, and 2:18-4:21, which was written in prose and was "durchaus apokalyptischen Charakters."[116] He speculated that a Maccabean[117] synagogue preacher had taken a series of oracles about an invading army (1:2, 3, 6, 7, 9-11, 12) and a locust plague (1:4, 5, 8, 12,16, 10; 2:1-11) and supplemented them with his own apocalyptic outlook, resembling the sort of updating he found in Zech 12-14; Amos 9; Trito-Isaiah; and other prophetic works. Joel 2:18-27, Duhm argued, was a rather awkward transition inserted by the

[115] Duhm, "Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten," esp. 184-88.

[116] Ibid., 187.

[117] He dates the additions to the book of Joel to the time of the Maccabees because of the concern with the Greeks, Phoenicians and Edomites in Joel 4.

synagogue preacher to connect the original oracles of judgment with the eschatological speeches of 3:1-4:21, "die ihm am Herzen liegen."[118] In addition to writing these future-oriented speeches at the end of Joel, the preacher re-interpreted the earlier oracles by including references to the day of Yahweh tradition (1:15; 2:1, 11), adding, according to Duhm, an apocalyptic character to the very real threats of locusts and armies originally envisioned. Duhm's precise identification of the additions to Joel have not been widely followed, in particular his suspicion that references to the day of Yahweh are secondary, but his general sense of an addition to and reinterpretation of the book's original form has attracted many followers.

Otto Plöger expounded upon and refined Duhm's position, finding a similar disconnect between the book of Joel's descriptions of disaster and promises of eschatological deliverance.[119] Plöger actually detects within the compositional history of the book of Joel evidence of a broader theological dispute in Second Temple Judaism, a dispute that would eventually produce apocalyptic literature. Plöger views much of the literature produced in the Persian and Hellenistic periods as the expression of a conflict between a theocratic group, who envisioned post-exilic Yehud as in some sense the fulfillment of the deity's plans for Israel, and an eschatological group, who anticipated a radical intervention by the deity to overturn world affairs. Comparing Joel with other post-exilic prophetic texts, such as Zech 12-14 and the so-called "Isaianic Apocalypse" (Isa 24-27), Plöger finds hints of the eschatological group at work in Joel 3-4, where speculation about radical divine

[118] Duhm, "Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten," 187.

[119] Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology*.

intervention trumps the more mundane agricultural concerns of chs. 1-2. He understands chs. 1-2 to be the work of a cultic figure, who may "have understood himself as a prophet, although apart from the name he has little in common with the opposition prophets of an earlier period, whose sayings he utilized."[120] This cultic figure adapted the day of Yahweh tradition to express the distress of the people, although, in Plöger's view, the day of Yahweh tradition in Joel 1-2 is stripped of its original eschatological focus. Plöger's eschatological group, though, later finds in the use of this tradition an opportunity to express their own visions of Israel's future:

> [I]n circles which still retained their respect for the old prophetic word the message of the earlier prophets, although only serving as illustration, provoked definite reactions, namely to hold fast to the eschatological meaning of certain parts of the prophetic message and to attain to a new historico-eschatological interpretation of this message.[121]

In other words, the work of a cultic functionary in Joel 1-2 finds resonance with a later eschatological group who reinterpret the message in light of their own concerns. The eschatological group supplements the 'cultic' text of chs. 1-2 in two stages. In the first stage, ch. 4 is added to [re-]re-interpret the day of Yahweh tradition back to its original eschatological focus, promising blessing and fertility as the "ultimate conclusion of Yahweh's activity in history."[122] In the second stage, ch. 3 is added to further refine the blessing of salvation to an elect portion of Israel: "[only] those whom Yahweh calls" (Joel 3:5b). "Deliverance on the day of Yahweh is still

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[120] Ibid., 100.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., 101. By contrast, the promises of fertility and blessing in 2:18-27 are described as "a consequence of cultic piety."

promised to all Israel, but this must mean the Israel that has responded to the eschatological faith and considers the day of Yahweh as an eschatological entity."[123]

Plöger's analysis suffers from the denigration of cultic ritual over against what he understands to be the more authentic religious expression of the eschatologists. In addition, the line he charts from pre-exilic prophecy to apocalyptic literature has been thoroughly and successfully challenged.[124] What Plöger views as the eschatologists' return to the original pre-exilic prophetic traditions actually marks a novel appropriation of earlier traditions to address new challenges. Even his larger thesis, namely, that post-exilic Judaism was divided between a theocratic and an eschatological community, rests upon rather meager evidence, namely the literary divisions he discerns between different corpora written over several centuries.[125] Post-exilic biblical literature undoubtedly attests to theological disputes among various competing groups, but Plöger's division between theocratic and eschatological communities is overly simplistic.

Nonetheless, Plöger's understanding of the compositional history of the book of Joel is not without merit. His view that Joel 3-4 are at odds ideologically with the concerns of chs. 1-2 has garnered widespread support, more so than Duhm's understanding of the main literary break occurring at 2:18. Wilhelm Rudolph,[126]

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[123] Ibid., 103.

[124] See, for example, Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 33-37.

[125] Cook's study, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, is largely written as a challenge to Plöger's thesis.

[126] Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona* (KAT 13.2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 23-92. Rudolph summarizes his position concisely: "Das kleine Joelbuch zerfällt in

Brevard Childs,[127] Joseph Blenkinsopp,[128] and Paul Hanson[129] have all largely accepted Plöger's general position. David Petersen, without exploring the book of Joel in great detail, supports Plöger's division of the book through his treatment of "deutero-prophetic" literature. He discerns in Joel 3-4 characteristics similar to those found in other late additions to prophetic works, such as Isa 24-27; Ezek 38-39; and Zech 9-14.[130] In short, Ploger's contributions, more so than Duhm's, have helped set the stage for later investigations of the book of Joel's compositional history.

Multi-layered Redactional Theories

Paul Redditt also builds upon Plöger's work in arguing that Joel 3-4 includes later additions to an earlier collection in chs. 1-2, although his redactional model is more complicated.[131] Redditt actually finds several layers of redaction in Joel 1-2, suggesting that the images of locusts (1:4), drought (1:20, perhaps also 1:10-12), and military invasion (2:1-11) were brought together secondarily. He speculates that a drought-themed speech (1:5-20) was originally combined with an army-themed speech (2:1-11), and supplemented with a prayer to avert the disaster (2:12-17). This prayer, characterized by the "note of uncertainty" in 2:14 ("Who knows whether

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zwei Teile: Kap. 1/2 und Kap. 3/4... Der erste enthält einen Bericht, der in eine doppelte Heilsweissagung ausmündet, der zweite gibt nur eschatologische Weissagungen" (ibid., 23).

[127] Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 389-92.

[128] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 253-63.

[129] Paul Hanson follows Plöger quite closely; see Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 312-14.

[130] David Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy*, 13-19, 38-42.

[131] Redditt, "The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 225-40.

[Yahweh] will not turn and relent?"),[132] serves as a response to the threats described in 1:5-2:11, although it focuses more on the concerns of 2:1-11. Not content with this conclusion, another writer provided a second stage of redaction, offering the certainty of divine blessing in 2:18-27, which responds more fully to the concerns of the agricultural disaster (1:5-20). In the third stage of redaction, an introduction (1:1-4) was appended to the existing collection (1:5-2:27), identifying the prophet (1:1) and providing the description of a locust invasion (1:4) based on the imagery of 2:25.[133] The fourth and fifth stages of redaction largely follow Plöger's analysis, with ch. 4 adding an eschatological focus before the inclusion of ch. 3, which points in an even more sectarian direction.[134]

The complexity of Redditt's redactional proposal is superseded by several studies that seek to explain the presence of diverse images of destruction in the book of Joel. Oswald Loretz,[135] for example, discerns eight distinct layers of redaction in the book. Like Redditt, Loretz distinguishes between different images of

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[132] Ibid., 231.

[133] Ibid., 227-28. Redditt notes that 1:4 and 2:25 include the same four locust names but in different orders. He argues that the more natural (and hence, original) order is found in 2:25, so 1:4 must be a later addition to provide an *inclusio* with 2:25. This argument still does not explain why 2:25 would *introduce* the imagery of locusts in the deity's response, if it was not already present in the concerns of chs. 1-2. Redditt is also on very shaky grounds in arguing that one list of locusts is more 'natural' than the other. Such an argument assumes a level of entomological (and etymological) expertise regarding the nature of locusts in the ancient Near East that current research cannot provide. Finally, even if Redditt is correct that Joel 2:25 offers the more natural reading of the locust invasion, where the arrival of young locusts precede the destruction of more mature locusts, it is not clear why this order would be altered to an "unnatural" arrangement by a later redactor who adds Joel 1:4.

[134] Redditt, "The Book of Joel," 227-31. Redditt differs from Plöger in his analysis of chs. 1-2, which Redditt understands to be a prophetic indictment of the cultic functionaries, against Plöger's contention that chs. 1-2 comprised a liturgy originating from and supportive of the cult. As a result, Redditt understands the additions of ch. 4 and then ch. 3 to be a natural result of the increasing marginalization of the Joel-group from the temple-centered priests indicted in chs. 1-2. See esp. his discussion in ibid., 231-40.

[135] Loretz, *Regenritual und Yahwetag*.

destruction—locust, drought, and military invasion—arguing that each represents the contributions of a different author. The original layer, Loretz argues, comprised a ritual lament over drought, including much of 1:8-20; 2:12-24; and 4:18a.[136] To this lament over drought were added descriptions of a locust plague (1:4, 5-7; 2:3-8, 25) and then a military invasion (2:1-2, 9-11, 20). Later additions included judgment on the nations and further promises of blessing for Israel in chs. 3-4. Finally, Loretz resurrects Duhm's contention that the references to the "day of Yahweh" throughout the book are secondary, attributing all references to this tradition to one of the final layers of redaction.[137]

Loretz's study relies on a colometric analysis of the poetry in the book of Joel, leading from the conviction that the original poetic form had a consistent metrical style. Deviations from this style, then, are explained as secondary additions by later editors. Joel 1:14-17 provides an illustrative example of this approach. MT reads:

1.14 קדשו־צום
קראו עצרה
אספו זקנים
כל ישבי הארץ
בית יהוה אלהיכם
וזעקו אל־יהוה
1.15 אהה ליום
כי קרוב יום יהוה
וכשד משדי יבוא
1.16 הלוא נגד עינינו
אכל נכרת
מבית אלהינו

136 Ibid., 71-76.

137 See his summary in ibid., 141-43.

שׂמחה וגיל
[1.17] עבשו פרדות
תחת מגרפתיהם
נשמו אצרות
נהרסו ממגרות
כי הביש דגן

[1:14] Sanctify a fast;
call an assembly;
gather the elders,
all inhabitants of the land,
to the house of Yahweh your God;
and cry out to Yahweh!
[1:15] Alas, for the day!
For near is the day of Yahweh,
and like destruction from Shaddai it comes.
[1:16] Before our very eyes isn't
the food cut off;
from the house of our God
joy and gladness?
[1:17] The seeds are rotten
under their spades.
The storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down,[138]
for the grain is dried up.

Loretz argues that the original form of the oracle can be reconstructed as follows:

קדשׁו־צום
קראו עצרה
זעקו אל־יהוה
אהה ליום

Sanctify a fast!
Call a solemn assembly!
Cry out to Yahweh!
Alas for the day!

Each of these lines contains between 7 and 10 Hebrew letters and has a fairly consistent pattern: imperative verb or interjection + object. Reference to the day of

[138] For discussion of the text-critical and philological issues in this section, especially in v. 17, see III.A.i. below.

Yahweh in 1:15b, though, breaks this pattern sharply, with lines containing 12-13 Hebrew letters and no imperative verbs. From this evidence Loretz argues that the reference to the day of Yahweh is a later addition.

Studies such as Loretz's assume that Hebrew poets worked with a very rigid system of poetic rules, in which each line must have nearly the same form as the previous one. A cursory glance at Hebrew poetry, though, cautions against this assumption. In fact, even in the case of Joel 1:14-17, Loretz must remove several other "additions" and "commentaries" to resurrect the original colometric form. For example, Loretz eliminates much of v. 14 and all of v. 16, simply because the lines do not fit the colometric structure he thinks to be original. One might plausibly argue that the day of Yahweh tradition is out of place in the context of ch. 1, but the same case cannot be made for v. 14b and v. 16. Loretz must even jettison the *waw* at the beginning of "and cry out to Yahweh" (v. 14c) to keep his proposed structure consistent. Consequently, the use of colometry for redactional issues has not been widespread. Simkins aptly notes: "Previous scholarly attempts to dissect the book into its incongruous parts based on the criteria of meter ... have exacted undue violence on the text."[139]

The proposals of Redditt and Loretz both built upon the work of Duhm and Plöger in distinguishing chs. 3-4 from the preceding material. Redditt and Loretz, though, focused more attention on the diverse images of destruction in chs. 1-2, suggesting that some of these images may be secondary as well. Siegfried Bergler has provided another approach to explaining the different images of destruction in the

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[139] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity,* 122, n. 6.

book,[140] arguing that the author should be understood as an interpreter of biblical material (*Schriftinterpret*), combining old sources and traditions with his own view of the current crisis. For example, Bergler argues that the book of Joel is written to make sense of a severe drought, which is supplemented with descriptions of locusts[141] to recall the plagues in Exodus. The locust plague from Exodus 10 serves as a typology of the chaos unleashed in the current drought.

Regarding the book's redactional history, Bergler begins with the same observations of Loretz and Redditt—that the images of drought, locust plague and military invasion appear inconsistent. Bergler utilizes form-criticism, at least initially, to reconstruct the original source-material from which the book was formed, finding a drought poem (1:5, 9-10, 12-13, 17-20),[142] a description of an invading army (1:6-8; 2:1-9),[143] and a salvation oracle (2:21-24, 26a). Bergler speaks of a "unity" to the book by which he means that someone, "Joel," fashioned a unified composition out of diverse source-material (day of Yahweh traditions, an Exodus typology, a drought poem, among others). In the final product, Bergler finds a structural unity in Joel's "two-fold appeal" (1:14; 2:15-17a), "two-fold prayer" (1:15-20; 2:17b), and "two-fold response" of the deity (2:18-27; 3:1-4:21). The turning point (*Wendepunkt*) of the book occurs at 2:18, after which the divine speech

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[140] Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*.

[141] Most explicitly in 1:4 and 2:25, but also in descriptions of the locusts penetrating houses, coming up on the land, and their characterization as a numerous and mighty nation, all of which have parallels in Exodus 10; see ibid., 256-73.

[142] Ibid., 59-64. Bergler actually rearranges the material in these verses. See his reconstruction of the five-strophe drought-poem in ibid., 349.

[143] Ibid., 49-52, 54-56, 350. Again, he rearranges the material here and does not include all verses.

responds to the prayers of the first part of the book.[144] This structural schema, coupled with the heavy reliance on ancient traditions, suggests a probable liturgical function: "Jener zwei(t)aktige Aufriß des Jo-Buches sowie seiner einzelnen Teile bestätigt m.E. die These, daß es nach einem liturgischen Schema gestaltet wurde."[145] Bergler attributes this 'unity' to the prophet, but his discussion of the diverse source material brought together in the book follows more closely the research of those who see in Joel a composite text. As the discussion below indicates,[146] Bergler, like Loretz and Redditt earlier, overstates the diversity of material in Joel 1-2. Although it is certain that various traditions and literary conventions are employed in the description of disaster, Bergler's identification of an independent drought-themed poem is not convincing, especially as he must undertake extensive emendations to reconstruct it. Perhaps more problematic for Bergler's thesis is why the author of Joel, if confronted with a severe drought, would appeal to the book of Exodus' description of locusts. In other words, rather than the author of Joel relying on an "Exodus typology" to make sense of a drought, perhaps both the book of Joel and the book of Exodus use similar literary conventions to describe locust invasions.

The Day of Yahweh

Jörg Jeremias has called for more attention to what he identifies as the central theme of the book of Joel: the day of Yahweh.[147] Instead of finding in this theme

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[144] Ibid., 86.

[145] Ibid., 107.

[146] Extensive discussion of the unity of Joel 1-2 is provided below in III.A.

[147] Jeremias explores this theme initially in his brief treatment of Joel in "Joel/Joelbuch," *TRE* 17:91-97. He offers a more thorough commentary in Jeremias, *Die Propheten Joel, Obadja, Jona,*

evidence of a unified composition,[148] though, Jeremias explores precisely how disjointed the day of Yahweh traditions are in the book. The day of Yahweh motif helps hold together the concerns of chs. 1-2, where a locust plague foreshadows the imminent threat of an enemy assault. The day tradition, in this first part of Joel, marks the danger posed by this attack on Zion. In ch. 4, though, the day of Yahweh tradition is re-cast as a day of decisive judgment on Israel's neighbors; threats to the people of Israel are no longer in view, as the deity is in complete control. Joel 3 stands out even more starkly. Rather than serving as a transition between the ominous day in chs. 1-2 and the glorious day of divine triumph in ch. 4, ch. 3 limits the salvation of the day of Yahweh to a select group of Yahweh-worshippers.[149] Only the elect will be saved on that day.

Jeremias' extensive treatment of the day of Yahweh tradition differs radically from the approach of Duhm (and Loretz), who concluded that the tradition was not original to chs. 1-2. For Jeremias, the day tradition is *the* central issue at stake in the book of Joel, even in chs. 1-2; the interpretation of that tradition is what sets the oracles of chs. 3-4 apart from the earlier descriptions of disaster and divine response. Advancing similar positions, Ferdinand Deist[150] and Anna Karena Müller[151] also

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Micha (ATD 24.3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 1-55. Interestingly, Jeremias switches his position on the book's unity from his early encyclopedia entry, in which he largely follows Wolff's analysis of the book's literary unity. In his own commentary, Jeremias concludes that the "day of Yahweh" traditions are distinct in chs. 3-4 from the traditions represented in chs. 1-2. See specifically his discussion in *Die Propheten*, 3-4.

[148] So Bourke, "Le Jour de Yahvé."

[149] Jeremias, *Die Propheten*, 3-8.

[150] Deist, "Parallels and Reinterpretation in the Book of Joel: A Theology of the Yom Yahweh?" in *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F. C. Fensham* (ed. W. Claassen; JSOTSup 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 63-79. Deist suggests the book of Joel be read as a "compilation—albeit artistically composed—of different theologies of the Yom Yahweh

explore the centrality of the day of Yahweh traditions in the book, a logical area of study considering how frequently the phrase appears in Joel.[152] Müller's study is the most exhaustive treatment on the subject, focusing specifically on the possibility of rescue on the day of Yahweh. Instead of a locust plague, drought and/or military threat being described with a stock prophetic motif—the day of Yahweh—Müller suggests the book of Joel's real concern is the day of Yahweh, and various images (war, theophany, locusts, drought) are employed to highlight the magnitude of the day and the importance of divine rescue.[153] Following Jeremias, she argues chs. 4 and 3 (in that order) are "updates" on the same theme.[154]

The positions advanced by Jeremias, Deist, and Müller have brought renewed appreciation for the significance of the day of Yahweh traditions in Joel 1-2, a point largely overlooked by those positing such references as secondary additions. Their research also avoids the superficial harmonizing of the day of Yahweh traditions in

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arranged in such a manner that they may be read as reinterpretations of each other" (75). Deist, in fact, distinguishes sharply between the "day of Yahweh" traditions in chs. 1 and 2, as well. His understanding of ch. 1 as reflecting an anti-Canaanite polemic, however, has not been widely accepted.

[151] Müller, *Gottes Zukunft*.

[152] Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; and 4:14. In all, the phrase "the day of Yahweh" (יום יהוה) appears 5 times in the book of Joel, and 9 times in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (counting Amos 5:18 and Zeph 1:14 only once, although the phrase is repeated in these verses). The *day* tradition is far more extensive, obviously, occurring in many other formulations, such as יום ליהוה (Isa 2:12); יום עברת יהוה (Ezek 7:19); ביום אפו (Lam 2:1); ביום זבח יהוה (Zeph 1:8); or the more generic ביום ההוא (Joel 4:18). Still, the book of Joel features this tradition more prominently than most prophetic works. For a more complete (though not exhaustive) list of variations on the *day* tradition, see A. Joseph Everson, "The Days of Yahweh," *JBL* 93 (1974): 330-31, n. 6. See also, Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 33-34.

[153] Ibid., 195-96.

[154] Ibid., 200-209. See also the same conclusion reached by Rolf Rendtorff, "How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James Nogalski and Marvin Sweeney; SBLSymS 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 78-80. "Therefore, we have to read Joel not as one consistent message of one prophet but as a collection of different and in certain respects divergent views of what could be meant by the phrase 'the Day of the LORD'" (80).

Joel, a problem that undermines some of the studies pointing to that tradition as evidence of a consistent theme throughout the book. There is some risk, however, of overstating the centrality of the day of Yahweh. The deity's response in 2:18-27, for example, offers no mention of the tradition, nor is any reference found in 2:12-17, the final appeal for the people's participation in the cult. In fact, the day tradition does not feature prominently in ch. 1 at all, appearing only once and not until v. 15. Put simply, the day of Yahweh adds a sense of magnitude to the descriptions of disaster and the threats of judgment, but it hardly serves as the primary focus of the first half of the book. Only with ch. 3 and, to a lesser extent, ch. 4 does the day of Yahweh appear as the dominant theme driving speculation about Israel's future.

The Book of the Twelve

Odil Hannes Steck's research on the latest redactions in prophetic literature supports the basic divisions identified by Plöger.[155] He focuses specifically on the different perspectives toward "the nations" and "the people of God," finding distinct "theological profiles" among the last redactions of the Book of the Twelve and the book of Isaiah. In the book of Joel, he distinguishes between ch. 4, where "the nations" are judged and all of Israel enjoys prosperity, and ch. 3, where the deity's judgment falls on portions of Israel, too.[156]

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[155] Steck, *Der Abschluß der Prophetie im Alten Testament: Ein Versuch zur Frage der Vorgeschichte des Kanons* (Biblisch Theologische Studien 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1991).

[156] Ibid., 36-42.

Following the earlier work of Steck, several recent scholars have re-examined the book of Joel in light of the larger Book of the Twelve. James Nogalski,[157] for example, explores the placement of each book in its context. In other words, Nogalski investigates Joel's placement between Hosea and Amos within the Masoretic text, and concludes that this placement is not accidental. In fact, he argues that "Joel was either composed, or altered to such an extent, that it must be read in its context in the Book of the Twelve in order to grasp its full implications."[158] Specifically, Nogalski argues that the opening of the book of Joel looks back to the end of Hosea, while the end of Joel looks forward to the book of Amos and the rest of the Twelve. Nogalski, in fact, understands Joel as such an important part of the editorial shaping of the Twelve that he speaks of a "Joel-related layer" that helps link the Haggai-Zechariah corpus and the Deuteronomistic corpus (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah). The resulting collection essentially followed the thematic developments in the book of Joel—from prophetic indictment of the people's lack of repentance (Joel 1-2), to promises of agricultural restoration (2:18-27), to judgment on the nations and the salvation of a remnant (chs. 3-4).[159] Nogalski finds this movement—the same movement, incidentally, in the book of Isaiah—to be the result of the intentional shaping of the redactors of the book of Joel and the larger collection of the Twelve.

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[157] Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*.

[158] Ibid., 13.

[159] Ibid., 276. Nogalski finds these same themes played out in the Twelve, with calls to repentance echoed in Hosea and Amos; the threatened 'locusts' identified in Nahum and Habakkuk; the promises of restoration explicated in Haggai and Zechariah; judgment on the nations consistently emphasized (e.g., Obadiah); and even the salvation of a remnant in Malachi.

The similarity between the end of Joel and the beginning of Amos (cf. Joel 4:16; Amos 1:2) has long been noted, and Nogalski finds numerous parallels between Joel's message and that of other works in the Book of the Twelve.[160] As others have pointed out,[161] though, Nogalski often highlights these connections to the exclusion of more obvious connections with other biblical texts. In other words, the authors/redactors of the book of Joel appear to make reference to a wide array of biblical texts, not simply the 'Joel-related layer' of the Twelve.[162] Additionally, the arguments linking the book of Joel and the end of Hosea[163] are not particularly compelling, certainly not as clear as the parallels between Joel and Amos (e.g., Joel 4:16a = Amos 1:2a). Perhaps even more problematic for Nogalski's position is the presence of the Septuagint's (re)arrangement of the Twelve, with the book of Joel appearing between Micah and Obadiah; if the ordering of MT was as intentional as Nogalski suggests, one would not expect to find a completely different arrangement of the same texts in LXX.[164]

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[160] Ibid., 275-276.

[161] See Richard Coggins, "Interbiblical Quotations in Joel," in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (ed. John Barton and David Reimer; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996), 76-78.

[162] Hence, the argument that the prophet may be best understood as a 'writing prophet.' See Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, esp. 335-347; Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 28-29.

[163] Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 13-22. Nogalski finds the following words shared by Joel 1:2-14 and Hosea 14:5-10: "this," "inhabitants," "wine," "vine," and "grain." Supporting a redactional position based on the repetition of these common words is dubious. Even less convincing is Nogalski's characterization of these two units as both dealing with *repentance*. Hosea's ending offers promises of future deliverance, while the book of Joel's opening concerns lamentation over agricultural disaster—the thematic connection is not clear.

[164] For one scholar's take on the intentions behind these different arrangements, see Marvin Sweeney, "Sequence and Interpretation in the Book of the Twelve," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James Nogalski and Marvin Sweeney; SBLSymS 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 49-64.

Further work on the book of Joel's redactional history in light of the Book of the Twelve has also undermined Nogalski's claim about Joel. Studies by Martin Roth[165] and Jakob Wöhrle,[166] for example, have offered little support to Nogalski's position that the book of Joel was composed for its placement between Hosea and Amos in MT. Wöhrle even argues that the inclusion of Joel resulted in the separation of Hosea from the collection.[167] Wöhrle's study offers more support to Steck's research into the redactional additions of the Twelve than to Nogalski's. Concerning the book of Joel, Wöhrle's *Grundschicht* includes the description of a severe drought and its interpretation in light of the day of Yahweh tradition (including Joel 1:1-3, 5, 8-20; 2:1, 2*, 3, 6, 10, 11b, 15-17, 21-24, 26a). This primary layer is supplemented with the addition of a military threat (through a locust metaphor) and the deity's judgment on the nations (specifically: Joel 1:4, 6-7; 2:2*, 4-5, 7-9, 11a, 18-20, 25, 26b, 27; 4:1-3, 9-17). The final layers of redaction are primarily found in chs. 3-4, adding utopian visions of the future (4:18-21), judgment on specific nations (e.g., 4:4-8), or promises of salvation (3:1-5). Wöhrle associates these final redactions to a broader updating of an early edition of the Twelve (the "Foreign Nations Corpus I"),

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[165] Roth, *Israel und die Völker im Zwölfprophetenbuch: Eine Untersuchung zu den Büchern Joel, Jona, Micha und Nahum* (FRLANT 210; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 56-109. Roth investigates the role of the nations in the Book of the Twelve, focusing on the book of Joel's use of the "day of Yahweh" tradition. He follows a rather traditional approach in finding eschatological additions in chs. 3-4, but like Redditt and Loretz challenges the notion that a simple division exists between chs. 1-2 and chs. 3-4. Instead of a simple two-part division (i.e., between the 'historical' in chs. 1-2 and the 'eschatological' in chs. 3-4), Roth finds the book of Joel made up of "Verschiedene Teile," such as descriptions of economic catastrophe (1:1-20; 2:19-26), visions of eschatological judgment (2:1b-10; 4:1-21), calls to repentance (2:12-17), and images of the sign of the "day of Yahweh" (3:1-5).

[166] Jakob Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Entstehung und Komposition* (BZAW 360; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), esp. 391-435.

[167] Ibid., 450.

which focuses mostly on oracles against "the nations."[168] Much like Roth's study, Wöhrle's redactional model is basically a variation on the positions of Redditt and Loretz, but Wöhrle connects the final additions to Joel to a broader editing of the Book of the Twelve. Although the correspondences between the end of the book of Joel are not confined to other works among the Twelve, the studies of Wöhrle and Steck do help strengthen the case for treating chs. 3-4 as secondary additions.

Structural Patterns

John Barton's commentary on Joel revives the basic division outlined by Plöger, namely that a "real caesura" occurs between chs. 2 and 3. Whereas Plöger supported his position by discussing the theme of the two sections—concerns over locusts and drought in chs. 1-2 but promises of eschatological vindication in chs. 3-4—Barton appeals primarily to a structural analysis. In doing so, he counters the central claim in Wolff's research—that the structure of the book of Joel offers evidence for its unity—by pointing to the break-down of a structural scheme in chs. 3-4. Joel 1-2 contain two "well-structured" cycles of oracles:

Details of disaster	1:2-4	2:1-11
Call to lament	1:5-14	2:12-17a
The lament	1:15-20	2:17b

The two cycles of oracles are answered in the deity's response in 2:18-27, which completes the original composition.[169] The material in chs. 3-4, on the other hand, contains no such structure or consistency. Barton finds the oracles here a hodgepodge

[168] For a more elaborate discussion of this particular redactional layer, see Wöhrle, "Israel's Identity and the Threat of the Nations in the Persian Period: Reflections from a Redactional Layer of the Book of the Twelve," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 153-72.

[169] Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 5-14.

of various apocalyptic visions with no discernible order, suggesting they are likely later additions included by those reading the book of Joel with an eschatological focus.[170] For Barton, then, as for others working on Joel, the primary question about the book's structure is not whether there is balance (à la Wolff), but whether the structural unity is *literary* or *redactional*.[171] The difference in how one interprets this structural scheme is enormously influential in how one reads the book.

Summary

This history of interpretation has not revealed an overwhelming consensus on every issue, but there are some tendencies in more recent studies. First, those who discern redactional additions in the book of Joel generally follow Plöger in finding the primary transition occurring at 3:1, rather than as Duhm had suggested at 2:18. Secondly, the day of Yahweh tradition is increasingly viewed as integral to chs. 1-2, rather than as secondary additions to give the original disasters an eschatological orientation.[172] Thirdly, many draw parallels between the "addition" of chs. 3-4 to the book of Joel and the additions to other prophetic collections, such as those found in

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[170] Ibid., 92-93. In a separate study, Katherine Hayes reaches a similar conclusion, focusing primarily on the literary techniques in Joel 1. See Hayes, *"The Earth Mourns": Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (SBLABib 8; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 183-85.

[171] Barton distinguishes between an "organic" and an "imposed" unity; *Joel and Obadiah*, 14. Many other scholars have noted the same distinction in the case of the book of Joel. See Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 3; Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 344-47; Simkins, "Ecology and the Book of Joel," 444-45, n. 38. Kapelrud and Simkins, in fact, argue only for a *redactional*, *imposed* unity, not one inherent to the material. Bergler takes a similar approach: "Joel als Persönlichkeit, als 'Dichter' bleibt völlig im Hintergrund. Nicht seine Botschaft, sondern die seiner Vorgänger steht im Zentrum. Er weiβ sich als Verwalter und Erbe vor allem der prophetischen Überlieferungen, die er weiterreichen und für seine Tage neu interpretieren will. Er sieht sich als ein Glied in der ununterbrochenen Kette der Propheten, als Erfüllungsgehilfe bislang unerfüllt gebliebener Worte, die er kompiliert, radikalisiert und aktualisiert;" Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 344.

[172] Duhm's understanding of the day of Yahweh references as secondary ("Anmerkungen," 185) is rarely defended, although Loretz (*Regenritual*, 143) is an exception.

Isaiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel. These additions present not only a similar redactional model, but also a similar ideological and theological perspective to that which is found in Joel 3-4. Redaction critics have not reached agreement, however, on the unity of chs. 1-2. Redditt, Loretz, Bergler, Roth, and Wöhrle find in the combination of images of disaster—locusts, drought, and military invasion, at a minimum—evidence for a complex redactional history, while Barton, Jeremias, and Müller understand chs. 1-2 to reflect a unified composition. Evaluating the unity of Joel 1-2, and indeed of the entire book, therefore, is warranted.

III.

The Composition of the Book of Joel: Disaster, Distress and Deliverance

Redactional arguments rarely yield to universal consensus, for, as Barton cautions, "the best we can hope for are reasonable and defensible hypotheses,"[173] not verifiable proofs. Where one sees the obvious seams of a sloppy editorial addition, another sees a brilliant and intentional rhetorical move by a sophisticated author. The failure to attain a consensus, however, need not be taken as evidence that redactional investigations are without merit. Indeed, as the history of research provided above has shown, how one understands the compositional history of the book of Joel determines to a large degree how one reads the book in its current form. If the obscure imagery of Joel 2:1-11 is clarified by the divine promises in ch. 4, the book of Joel describes (or at least includes a description of) a vast international army marching against Jerusalem. If chs. 3-4 are later additions, though, the nature of the threat in Joel 1-2 is not so obvious. When read as a unified composition, the book of Joel demonstrates an eschatological preoccupation, in which all threats are decisively eliminated at a future time of divine judgment. If it contains later additions, though, the original composition may offer far more pedestrian insights: descriptions of community mourning rites over drought or locust infestation, for example. Every interpretation of the book of Joel is based upon a theory regarding its compositional history.

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[173] Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 3.

This section presents one “reasonable and defensible” hypothesis, namely that Joel 3-4 contains material added secondarily to the poetry of chs. 1-2. The oracles of chs. 3-4, therefore, stand in some tension with the earlier poetry of complaint and promise, reinterpreting the threats of greatest concern and offering new promises to allay those unexpressed fears. Such a conclusion is not new, of course, and may, in fact, be increasingly “unfashionable”[174] and less “popular.”[175] The following analysis, though, will provide a more extensive discussion of the evidence than previous efforts and articulate with greater precision the nature of the disagreement between the author(s) of the original layer and those responsible for chs. 3-4. The result is not only a renewed focus on the influence of later scribal communities in prophetic literature, but also a fresh appreciation for the coherence and function of chs. 1-2.

Since the book of Joel, as I contend, can be rather neatly divided into an original composition (chs. 1-2) and later additions (chs. 3-4), these units provide a helpful outline to guide the discussion of the book’s compositional history. The following section evaluates the degree to which Joel 1-2 coheres as a unified work—rather than a collection of independent traditions, on the one hand, or the first part of a longer work, on the other—while the remaining analysis deals with the reinterpretations of that original composition in chs. 3-4. These issues require attention to some of the most vexing topics in research on the book of Joel: the nature of the imagery of disaster; the influence of rites of lamentation; and the

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[174] Coggins, “Joel,” 94.

[175] Hiebert, “Joel, Book of,” 874.

development of early eschatological speculation. In addressing these broader topics, the discontinuity between chs. 1-2 and chs. 3-4 comes into sharper focus.

The Coherence of Joel 1-2

Joel 1:1-2:17

1.1 דבר־יהוה אשר היה אל־יואל בן־פתואל

1.2 שמעו־זאת הזקנים

והאזינו כל יושבי הארץ

ההיתה זאת בימיכם

ואם בימי אבתיכם

1.3 עליה לבניכם ספרו

ובניכם לבניהם

ובניהם לדור אחר

1.4 יתר הגזם אכל הארבה

ויתר הארבה אכל הילק

ויתר הילק אכל החסיל

1:1 The word of Yahweh which came to Joel, son of Pethuel:[176]

1:2 Hear this, O elders;
give ear, all inhabitants of the land:
Has such a thing[177] happened in your days,
or in the days of your ancestors?

1:3 Tell your children about it,
and your children their children,
and their children the next generation.

1:4 What the *gāzām* locust[178] left, the *ʾarbeh* locust has eaten;
and what the *ʾarbeh* locust left, the *yeleq* locust has eaten;
and what the *yeleq* locust left, the *ḥāsîl* locust has eaten.

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[176] *Pethuel* is unattested elsewhere. LXX reads Βαθουηλ, the name of Rebekah's father (Gen 22:22-23). The corruption of *bêṯ* and *peh* is possible, but since the other textual evidence is mixed, there is insufficient evidence to warrant an emendation.

[177] Literally: "Has *this* happened..." As Wolff notes (*Joel and Amos*, 17), זאת functions here much like כזאת does in similar expressions. Cf. 1 Sam 4:7; 2 Sam 14:13; 2 Chr 30:26; Isa 66:8; Jer 2:10.

[178] For an extended discussion of these insects, see the discussion below. The precise nuance of these terms is not clear, so I leave them untranslated above. The best guess from the available evidence is that they are different types of locusts or locust-like insects.

[1.5] הקיצו שכורים ובכו
והיללו כל־שתי יין
על־עסיס כי נכרת מפיכם
[1.6] כי־גוי עלה על־ארצי
עצום ואין מספר
שניו שני אריה
ומתלעות לביא לו
[1.7] שם גפני לשמה
ותאנתי לקצפה
חשף חשפה[179] והשליך
הלבינו שריגיה

1:5 Wake up, you who are drunk,[180] and weep;

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[179] BHS and others propose emending to חשפה חשף, moving the infinitive absolute after the finite verb. Such a pattern is common with expressions of this kind, but is not universal. Cf. Gen 31:30. See also the discussion in Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 588.

[180] The common translation of שכורים here as "drunkards" (so NRSV, JPS, Wolff, Simkins, among others) conveys in English a sense of moral disapproval that is unsupportable ("you who are drunk" may not be much better, but at least does not indicate a pattern of behavior). As an initial matter, being drunk (שכר) in Hebrew does not by itself denote moral disapprobation (cf. Gen 43:34). Moreover, in context the drinking of wine is clearly not discouraged; in fact, it is the absence of wine that those addressed are called to lament! At the same time, Crenshaw's "imbibers" (*Joel*, 94) and Barton's "drinkers" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 50-51) are perhaps over-corrections, if understandable ones. שכר does not mean "to drink" but "to be drunk," as illustrated in the description of Noah drinking (שתה) until he was drunk (שכר; Gen 9:21). Barton and Crenshaw are certainly correct that the people are not being indicted for their drunkenness and debauchery (cf. Isa 5:11-12), but their reading of שכורים is difficult to credit. Simkins dismisses focus on the term at all: "The emphasis of the text is completely on the catastrophe; no attention is given to the drunkards themselves. They merely represent those who have been directly affected by the destruction caused by the locusts" (*Yahweh's Activity*, 125). Simkins is surely correct that the primary focus is on the disaster, not the people, but it is nonetheless appropriate to ask why explicit mention is made of those who are "drunk." The significance of the vocative here is best understood in the context of other warnings of doom and destruction. The poet of Lam 4, for example, warns the Daughter of Edom that she will be destroyed: "to you also the cup shall pass; you shall be drunk (תשכרי) and expose your nakedness" (Lam 4:21). Drunkenness undermines one's defenses and exposes vulnerabilities, making it an apt expression for the defenselessness of the doomed nation. The same idea operates in an oracle describing Babylon's destruction: "When they are heated, I will set out their drink and make them drunk (השכרתים), until they become merry and then sleep a perpetual sleep and never wake, says Yahweh" (Jer 51:39; see also Nah 3:11). The deity need not defeat the Babylonians in their fury; he merely lulls them to sleep in their drunkenness, so that they put up no fight. In fact, the ability of drunkenness to mollify and subdue those in great peril finds its most explicit expression in wisdom literature: "Give strong drink (שכר) to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their

wail, all who drink wine,
over the sweet wine for it is cut off from your mouths.

1:6 For a nation has arisen against my land,
strong and without number.
It has the teeth of a lion;
and the jaws of a lioness.

1:7 It has turned my vine into a desolation,
and my fig tree into a stump—[181]
it has stripped off her[182] bark and thrown it away;
her branches have turned white.

1.8 אלי[183] כבתולה חגרת־שק

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poverty, and remember their misery no more" (Prov 31:6-7). The poet in the book of Joel warns the people to "wake up" from their drunkenness in time to petition the deity for mercy. Rather than getting drunk so that they forget about their misery (and "sleep a perpetual sleep"), the people are encouraged to become sober so that they can mount an effective defense against their social and economic troubles.

[181] קצפה is a *hapax legomenon*, whose precise meaning is not certain. LXX reads *συγκλασμόν* ("breaking"), likely indicating some association with Arb. *qaṣafa* ("to break, shatter"). A similar expression occurs in Hosea, where the king of Israel is destroyed כקצף upon the face of the water (Hos 10:7). The phrase in Hosea should offer some clarity, but its meaning, too, is disputed. Based on the Arabic cognate, perhaps the root was associated with broken twigs or sticks. Hence, the phrase in Hosea could recall the image of driftwood floating in the water, and the passage in Joel conjures a picture of a bare stump where a healthy tree once stood. Hence, "stump" or "splinters."

[182] That is, the bark of the fig tree. Using the gender neutral possessive pronoun ("its") in this line and the next (v. 7d) would add confusion, so the translation here reflects the gender of the Hebrew suffixes.

[183] The feminine, singular imperative of אלה is otherwise unattested, and it fits oddly in the context of the masculine, plural imperatives throughout Joel 1-2. At the same time, the simile makes the feminine singular defensible: "Lament like a maiden..." LXX, though, offers another possibility. It reads: *θρήνησον πρός με* ("lament for me"), perhaps reflecting a Hebrew *Vorlage*: הילילו אלי. Wolff views the LXX reading as evidence of the corruption of MT. He proposes restoring the verb הילילו (cf. vv. 5, 11, 13) and rearranging the order so that v. 9b comes prior to v. 8. With the repointing of v. 9b to an imperative formulation ("Mourn, O priests"), Wolff reconstructs a form similar to that in vv. 5-7 or 11-12: "Mourn, O priests, and wail! / Lament, O ministers of the altar / like a maiden dressed in sackcloth..." (see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 18, 29-31). Wolff's reconstruction is unnecessary to make sense of the imagery and assumes several unsupported corruptions. Perhaps אלי is a corruption of אלו (masc., pl., impv.), due to the influence of the maiden imagery. Another possibility is that the addressee is Jerusalem personified. Lamentations, for example, frequently addresses "Virgin Daughter of Zion" (בתולת בת־ציון; 2:13), and Deutero-Isaiah plays with the image of the personified city (see, for example, Isa 52:1-2; cf. also Zeph 3:14; for further discussion of this imagery, see Tod Linafelt, "Surviving Lamentations: A Literary-Theological Study of the Afterlife of a Biblical Text" [PhD diss., Emory University, 1997], 126-62; Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* [SemeiaSt 58; Atlanta: SBL, 2007], 29-54; and for a discussion of the weeping goddess motif in ancient Mesopotamia and its influence on biblical descriptions of the Daughter of Zion, see Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 75-90). The

על־בעל נעוריה
[1.9] הכרת מנחה ונסך
מבית יהוה
אבלו[184] הכהנים
משרתי יהוה
[1.10] שׁדד שׂדה
אבלה אדמה
כי שׁדד דגן
הוביש תירוש
אמלל יצהר

1:8 Lament like a maiden dressed in sackcloth
over the husband of her youth.[185]

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book of Joel does not develop this imagery, so such a conclusion must remain speculative; nonetheless, the feminine imperative here need not indicate corruption (see the similar conclusions reached by Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 131; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 97-98; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 52).

[184] LXX reads an imperative here, but MT's pointing as a Qal perfect is preferable. The mourning priests, like the mourning ground in v. 10, explains why the community should join in lamentation. Later, in v. 13, the priests are singled out for specific instructions. If one follows LXX here, though, one should also include כי ("for") at the beginning of v. 10, which LXX apparently reads (ὅτι). In short, LXX and MT offer two different defensible readings of this short pericope (vv. 8-10). In my judgment, the MT is the preferable reading, especially since LXX seems to take some liberties with the Hebrew in other places.

[185] Scholars have long been troubled by the apparent contradiction in this verse. How can a "virgin" (בתולה) lament over the "husband of her youth"? Three main approaches have been taken to make sense of this expression: 1) an issue of translation; 2) a legal definition; or 3) a cultic matter. The issue of translation is straightforward: perhaps בתולה means "young woman of marriageable age," "maiden," or the like, not "virgin." Therefore, there is no contradiction with the notion that a בתולה may have a husband. This position has been explored at length by G. Wenham, "*Betûlah*. 'A Girl of Marriageable Age,'" *VT* 22 (1972): 326-48. The second proposal suggests that, legally speaking, a בתולה may still be said to have a "husband" if she is betrothed. According to Deut 22:23-24, a young woman, a בתולה engaged to be married, is still considered the "wife of one's neighbor" for legal purposes. Thus, the "husband of her youth" could refer to the time between her betrothal and the consummation of her marriage. Wolff (*Joel and Amos*, 30-31) advocates for this position. A third option, the cultic one, notes the correspondences between the phraseology here and the Canaanite myth of Baal, where "Virgin Anat" is said to mourn over Baal in an annual ritual. The echo of this cultic myth may indicate that the prophet is displeased with the syncretistic worship practices of the Yahwists. This position is defended most forcefully by Kapelrud (*Joel Studies*, 31-34), but also to a lesser degree by Flemming Friis Hvidberg (*Weeping and Laughter in the Old Testament: A Study of Canaanite-Israelite Religion* [Leiden: Brill, 1962], 140-42) and Ahlström (*Joel and the Temple Cult*, 48-51). The third option can be rejected. The difference in time between the Ugaritic texts that recount the myth of Baal and the writing of the book of Joel is sufficient to call into question any correlation. In addition, though, this argument confuses the role of myth. Young women in the ancient Levant did not mourn over their husbands *because* "Virgin Anat" mourned over Baal; Anat's

1:9 Offering and libation have been cut off
from the house of Yahweh.
The priests mourn,
the ministers of Yahweh.
1:10 The field is devastated;
the ground mourns.[186]
For devastated is the grain;
the wine is dried up;
the oil fails.

1.11 הבישו אכרים
הילילו כרמים
על־חטה ועל־שׂערה
כי אבד קציר שׂדה
1.12 הגפן הובישה[187]
והתאנה אמללה
רמון גם־תמר ותפוח
כל־עצי השׂדה יבשו
כי־הביש ששׂון
מן־בני אדם

1:11 Be ashamed, O farmers;
wail, O vinedressers
over the wheat and over the barley,
for the harvest of the field is ruined.
1:12 The vine is dried up,
and the fig tree fails.
The pomegranate, even the palm and the apple—
all the trees of the field are dried up.

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mourning over Baal was a reflection of the ritual practices that already took place. The fact that a "virgin's" mourning over her husband was codified in myth is testament to the prevalence of this particular ritual. Moreover, one simply need not resort to this myth to make sense of the book of Joel. Choosing between the other two options is less clear, and perhaps both are correct. In any case, the imagery invoked is not in dispute.

[186] All translations require trade-offs, and this one is no different. The sound-play in v. 10a is quite strong, but this translation refrains from offering an English equivalent (e.g., "the field lies fallow; the ground groans") since doing so would sacrifice the sense of repetition, which is equally strong (e.g., the ground "mourns" as do the priests in v. 9b; the field is "devastated" as is the grain in v. 10c). Crenshaw's translation, although quite loose with the Hebrew in some cases, offers a welcome alternative (*Joel*, 1-9).

[187] The Hiphil forms of בושׁ ("be ashamed") and יבשׁ ("dry up") are orthographically identical. Although יבשׁ makes more sense in this context, the wordplay is likely intentional here and in v. 12e (cf. v. 11a). See the discussion in Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 188-90.

Indeed,[188] joy is dried up
from the people.[189]

[1.13] חגרו וספדו הכהנים
הילילו משרתי מזבח
באו לינו בשׂקים
משרתי אלהים[190]
כי נמנע מבית אלהיכם
מנחה ונסך
[1.14] קדשׁו־צום
קראו עצרה
אספו זקנים
כל ישׁבי הארץ
בית יהוה אלהיכם
וזעקו אל־יהוה

1:13 Gird yourselves and lament, O priests;
wail, O ministers of the altar.
Come, pass the night in sackcloth,
O ministers of God.
For withheld from the house of your God

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[188] Crenshaw rightly notes that כי here denotes the result of the disaster, not the cause (*Joel*, 101), but cf. Thérése Frankfort, "Le כי de Joël 1:12," *VT* 10 (1960): 445-48.

[189] As with v. 12a, there is no orthographic distinction between the Hiphil of בושׁ ("be ashamed") and יבשׁ ("dry up"). Hence, LXX: *ᾔσχυναν χαρὰν οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων* ("the sons of men have put joy to shame"). Simkins follows LXX in taking בושׁ as the operative verb, finding the expression בושׁ + מן to convey "put to shame by." He then argues that בני אדם are foreigners as opposed to the בני ציון (2:23). His translation, therefore, indicates that the foreigners are blamed, in part, for the disaster: "for joy has been put to shame by the sons of men" (*Yahweh's Activity*, 138-41). Simkins' reading is not persuasive. The "sons of men" here are not in opposition to the "sons of Zion" in 2:23, but are synonymous with them. In addition, the operative verb is best understood as יבשׁ, rather than בושׁ. The metaphor equates the effects of harsh drought conditions "drying up" the vine and trees with the "drying up" of joy among the people. In fact, the cessation of "joy" (שׂשׂון)—the cultic shorthand for worship and praise—is of primary concern in Joel 1 (vv. 9, 13, 16), and seems to be the focus here as well (cf. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 42-45).

[190] MT's אֱלֹהָי ("my God") is supported by some versions (e.g., Vulgate), but fits awkwardly in context, especially in light of v. 13b. LXX's θεῷ ("God;" likely reflecting אלהים), then, makes more sense, and the loss of the final *mêm* in MT can be easily explained (the previous word also ends in *yōḏ*).

is the offering and libation.
1:14 Sanctify a fast;
call an assembly;
gather the elders,
all inhabitants of the land,
to the house of Yahweh your God;
and cry out to Yahweh!

1.15 אהה[191] ליום
כי קרוב יום יהוה
וכשד משדי יבוא
1.16 הלוא נגד עינינו
אכל נכרת
מבית אלהינו
שׂמחה וגיל
1.17 עפשו פרדות
תחת מגרפתיהן[192]

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[191] The versions repeat this exclamation (LXX: οἴμμοι οἴμμοι οἴμμοι; Vulgate: *a a a*), but they likely still reflect the same Hebrew *Vorlage*. The repetition is probably due to different exclamation conventions in the translated languages.

[192] Text-critically, v. 17a is the most difficult in the entire book of Joel. Of the four words here, three are *hapax legomena*. The task of deciphering the meaning is made more difficult since the versions do not agree among themselves about the sense or about the underlying Hebrew. To offer a few examples, the traditional understanding of MT, based on rabbinic analysis, yields a translation like: "seeds have shriveled under their clods." LXX offers: "Heifers have jumped up at their mangers." The Vulgate reads: "the mules rot in their dung." Targum Jonathan suggests: "the bottles of wine are melted under their stoppers." And Theodotion proposes: "they were ashamed upon their division for their dust." For extensive discussion of the versions, see M. Sprengling, "Joel 1, 17a," *JBL* 38 (1919): 129-41.

MT's פְּרֻדוֹת is pointed as a passive participle, from פרד ("to separate"). Hence, it may mean those things that have been separated, i.e., stored provisions. A Syriac cognate refers to "seed," which is perhaps a further specification—those seed that have been stored for future plantings. LXX, though, reads δαμάλεις ("heifers") and is supported by 4QXII[c]: פורות. The Vulgate (*iumenta*; "mules") supports the consonantal text of MT, but agrees with LXX that a reference to animals fits the context better. Uncertainty about the subject leads to further uncertainty about what the subject is doing. MT's עבשו is sometimes translated "shriveled," based on the Arabic *ʿabisa* ("to frown"). This cognate, however, is doubtful, and is not supported among the versions. 4QXII[c] offers עפשו ("to grow moldy, rot, decay"), which is supported by the Vulgate (*computruerunt*) and provides a better reading than MT. The Hebrew behind LXX and other versions cannot be ascertained with certainty. The final crux, מגרפתיהם, is often translated "their clods," understanding the reference to be the dirt clods that are "swept away" (גרף). In later Hebrew, מגרף refers to a shovel, which perhaps offers a better reading: some type of hoe or other farming implement used to clear weeds or divert water channels. If so,

נשמו אצרות

נהרסו ממגרות[193]

כי הביש דגן

[1.18] מה־נאנחה בהמה[194]

נבכו עדרי בקר

כי אין מרעה להם

גם־עדרי הצאן נשמו[195]

[1.19] אליך יהוה אקרא

כי אשׁ אכלה

נאות מדבר

ולהבה להטה

כל־עצי השׂדה

[1.20] גם־בהמות שׂדה

תערוג[196] אליך

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though, none of the versions were aware of this meaning. Even still, the Hebrew appears corrupt, as the suffix at the end of מגרפת appears out of place. There is no clear antecedent for the masculine, plural, possessive pronoun of MT. The feminine, plural, with פרדות as the antecedent, is more likely.

Although the prospect of corruption here has provided leeway for many emendations (e.g, Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 45-47), most scholars are now resigned to the uncertainty. Barton concludes decisively: "It is pretty clear that we are never going to know what this verse means and that there is no realistic prospect of restoring the original Hebrew or, if MT is correct, of deciphering it" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 58). Simkins even chooses to leave it untranslated (*Yahweh's Activity*, 146-47). I provide a translation below based on the best that can be gleaned from the context and from etymology, but note here my uncertainty.

[193] MT's מַמְּגֻרוֹת is unattested elsewhere. The problem is the initial *mêm*; מגורה is a grain pit or barn (cf. Hag 2:19), which fits the context quite well. MT could reflect an alternative spelling for the same type of granary, or the initial *mêm* could be the result of dittography (so, BHS). Either option is possible.

[194] LXX reads this line as a continuation of v. 17b, which refers to the terrible state of the storehouses: *τί ἀποθήσομεν ἑαυτοῖς* ("What shall we store in them?"), likely reading the Hebrew as: מה־נניח בהם. MT is preferable, since the storehouses appear to be destroyed in v. 17b. LXX, though, has (rarely) been defended; see Julius Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Obadiah and Joel* (ICC 24; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), 89.

[195] MT offers: נאשׁמו; the Niphal perfect of אשׁם, "to suffer punishment." This would be a unique form, as אשׁם occurs nowhere else in the Niphal. LXX (*ἠφανίσθησαν*; "have been destroyed") seems to presuppose נשׁמו; the Niphal of שׁמם, "to be appalled, stunned, made to tremble." If one can glean anything from the context, the herds of cattle in v. 18b "wander about," as though confused or lost. This verb likely conveys a similar sense. If MT is followed, Crenshaw's "are hurting" is a fair translation (*Joel*, 84, 110).

כי יבשו
אפיקי מים
ואש אכלה
נאות המדבר

1:15 Alas, for the day!
For near is the day of Yahweh,
and like destruction from Shaddai[197] it comes.
1:16 Before our very eyes isn't
the food cut off;
from the house of our God
joy and gladness?
1:17 The seeds are rotten
under their spades.
The storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down,
for the grain is dried up.
1:18 How the animals groan!
The herds of cattle wander aimlessly.[198]
For there is no pasture for them;
even the herds of sheep are confused.
1:19 To you, O Yahweh, I call.
For fire devours
the pasture of the wilderness;
and flames burn
all the trees of the field.
1:20 Even the beasts of the field
cry out[199] to you.

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[196] The subject (בהמות) and verb (תערוג) do not agree in number here. Although emendations have been proposed to make the subject singular (בהמת) or the verb plural (תערגנה), likely neither emendation is warranted. Collective nouns can sometimes take feminine singular verbs (see the discussion in Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 148-49). The general sense, in any case, is almost certainly plural, as LXX attests and Joel 2:22 confirms.

[197] Crenshaw's "like destruction from the Destroyer" helpfully captures the alliteration of the poetry (*Joel*, 84). Cf. also Wolff's "Wie Gewalt vom Gewaltigen kommt er" (*Joel and Amos*, 19).

[198] LXX (ἔκλαυσαν) seems to understand this verb as related to בכה ("to weep"), either in the Niphal form, which is otherwise unattested, or in Qal, reading בכו instead. MT's reading, Niphal of the rare בוך ("to wander aimlessly, be confused;" see Est 3:15; Exod 14:3), is more likely original. LXX can be explained as a simplification of the difficult Hebrew, influenced by the "groaning" of the animals in v. 18a.

[199] The basic meaning of this verb, ערג, is unclear. It appears only here and in Ps 42:2, where the soul of the petitioner performs this action to (אל) God, as the deer does for (על) streams of water.

For dried up
    are the watercourses;[200]
and fire devours
    the pastures of the wilderness.

[2.1] תקעו שופר בציון
והריעו בהר קדשי
ירגזו כל ישבי הארץ
כי־בא יום־יהוה
כי קרוב
[2.2] 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

2:1 Blow a trumpet in Zion!
    Raise a shout on my holy mountain!
Let all inhabitants of the land tremble,
    for the day of Yahweh is coming—
    indeed, it is near.
2:2 A day of blackness and night,
    a day of cloud and thick darkness.
Like soot[201] spread out upon the mountains

The similarities in context suggest it was generally thought to be the type of action animals perform when they are in search of water, hence LXX's ἐπιποθέω ("long for;" Ps 42:2). If such a translation is adequate to the psalm, though, it fits quite poorly here in Joel, where the animals' actions are not *for* water, but *to* God because of a lack of water. LXX offers ἀναβλέπω as a translation here, "look up," which is closer to the Semitic cognates, which generally deal with ascending or climbing. Perhaps the sense, then, is that animals *raise* their voices, as in a mournful and unintelligible cry, when they cannot find water, but in this case, they raise their cries in petition to the deity. Hence, the Peshitta: "cry out."

[200] אפיקים may, in some cases, refer to "fountains," as evidence from Ugarit suggests. For example, El's abode is the *apq thmtm,* "the fountains of the double-deep." Simkins, then, argues that the drying up of the "fountains" here in Joel is a reference to the divine dwelling-place, symbolizing the end of divine favor (*Yahweh's Activity*, 150-53). It is certainly correct that water was thought to be a gift of the deity—a sign of divine favor—but it is difficult to make the case that אפיקים always refers to a fountain, rather than a streambed (e.g., Isa 8:7). Nor is it likely that we have a reference to the mythological fountain at the home of the gods. The animals simply want water (cf. Ps 42:2), and there is none available.

is a people great and mighty.
There hasn't been anything like it
since ancient times,
nor will there be again in the future
for generation after generation.

2.3 לפניו אכלה אש
ואחריו תלהט להבה
כגן־עדן הארץ לפניו
ואחריו מדבר שממה
וגם־פליטה לא־היתה לו
2.4 כמראה סוסים מראהו
וכפרשים כן ירוצון
2.5 כקול מרכבות
על־ראשי ההרים ירקדון
כקול להב אש
אכלה קש
כעם עצום
ערוך מלחמה[202]

2:3 In front of it fire devours,
and behind it flames burn.
The land is like the garden of Eden in front of it,
but behind it a desolate wilderness—
there is no escape from it.
2:4 They have the appearance of horses,
and they run like steeds.

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[201] The Masoretes read כְּשַׁחַר, "like the dawn," which LXX supports (ὄρθρος). As early as Duhm ("Anmerkungen," 185), however, many scholars have proposed repointing the Hebrew to כִּשְׁחֹר, "like blackness," or more precisely like something that is paradigmatically black (JPS: "soot"). This impulse is understandable, especially in light of v. 2a and the many synonyms for darkness there. Some caution should likely be exercised in relying on this emendation, though, as the meaning of שְׁחֹר is not entirely clear, appearing only in Lam 4:8 where the versions differ as to its meaning (from "coal" to "ember"). Still, the sense of the simile in MT is not particularly lucid. Are the people approaching as quickly as the dawn, as Wolff suggests (*Joel and Amos*, 44), or is the dawn thought to spread comprehensively over the mountains? In addition, the image of the dawn breaking over the mountains contrasts so sharply with the preceding imagery of darkness, that alternatives should be entertained. I choose tentatively to translate with those following Duhm.

[202] 4QXII[g] reads the same as MT: ערוך מלחמה; but then adds a supralinear *lāmeḏ* to the front of מלחמה. ערך often is followed by a *lāmeḏ*, but the expression here does not elsewhere occur with one.

2:5 With the rumble as of chariots[203]
they bound over the tops of the hills.
Like the crackle of a flame of fire
devouring stubble;
like a mighty people
arrayed for battle.

2.6 מפניו יחילו עמים
כל־פנים קבצו פארור
2.7 כגבורים ירצון
כאנשי מלחמה יעלו חומה
ואיש בדרכיו ילכון
ולא יעותון[204] ארחותם
2.8 ואיש אחיו לא ידחקון
גבר במסלתו ילכון
ובעד השלח יפלו
לא יבצעו
2.9 בעיר ישקו
בחומה ירצון
בבתים יעלו
בעד החלונים

[203] Literally: "Like the sound of chariots they bound over the tops of the hills." Such a word-for-word translation is not intelligible. An emendation on the pattern of v. 4a could restore קולם, so that it reads: "its sound is like the sound of the chariot; they bound over the tops of the hills" (so Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 67; BHS). This emendation, though, does violence to the metaphor. The comparison equates the sound of the "bounding chariot" (מרכבה מרקדה; Nah 3:2) to that of the approaching force. Dividing the subject ("chariot") and the verb ("bound") into separate independent clauses is, therefore, unwarranted. The translation above, if not literal, does capture the nature of the metaphor.

[204] The sense of this line appears clear from the context, as LXX attests: *οὐ μὴ ἐκκλίνωσιν τὰς τρίβους αὐτῶν* ("they do not turn aside from their paths"). The text-critical issue deals with the underlying Hebrew. MT offers: יעבטון. עבט has the basic meaning "to borrow" or "to lend" (e.g., Deut 24:10). Whether it can also have the meaning "to turn aside, change course" has attracted some attention. For example, Akkadian *ḫabātu* could offer support for an עבט II, "to wander, lose the way;" but such an etymology is uncertain. The other option, of course, is to emend the Hebrew, which is perhaps the easiest course. Wellhausen's proposal to emend from יעבטון to יעותון is attractive, as phonetically the two are practically identical (Julius Wellhausen, *Die Kleinen Propheten: Übersetzt und Erklärt* [Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1898], 216-17). A similar expression is also attested in Ps 146:9, where one's way (דרך) is turned aside (יעות). For an extended discussion of the philological arguments for an עבט II (although without a definitive conclusion), see Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 157.

2:6 In front of it people tremble;
all faces turn pale.[205]
2:7 They run like warriors;
like men of battle they scale the wall.
Each marches in his path;
they do not change their course.
2:8 They do not jostle one another;
each marches in his own track.
Through spears they attack;[206]

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[205] The idiom קבצו פארור is uncertain, at least etymologically. LXX reads: ὡς πρόσκαυμα χύτρας ("will be like a scorched pot"), the general sense of which is supported by the Vulgate. פרור, without the *ʾāleph*, can mean "pot," and the Masoretes suggested this reading as well, pointing: פָּארוּר. The unanimity of the ancient interpreters, unfortunately, exacerbates the problem. Even if this emendation is correct, the meaning of the expression, "all faces gather pots," is far from clear. Perhaps the comparison equates the redness of a heated pot to the color of faces. Thus, the expression could signal the reddening (or heating; so Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 38) of faces in a state of extreme excitement. Alternatively, the redness may be "gathered up," i.e., disappear, so that the expression conveys the sense that the people's faces have lost color. These explanations make sense in context, but strain the etymological evidence. Attempts to explain פארור as related to פאר ("to glorify") are no more satisfying. If etymology is of little help, though, the context of the expression provides more clarity. Aside from the reference here, the idiom occurs also in Nah 2:11, which lists the ways in which a besieged populace shows fear: hearts melt; knees shake; loins tremble; and this expression. The faces may be heated or reddened, or they may be ghastly pale. In any case, though, the sense of the idiom is not in doubt—the people's faces betray the fear and terror of a community under assault.

[206] This line is difficult with no interpretation inspiring much confidence. LXX offers one possibility: ἐν τοῖς βέλεσιν αὐτῶν πεσοῦνται καὶ οὐ μὴ συντελεσθῶσιν ("they shall fall by their arrows and not come to an end"). This reading also finds support from the Kirta epic from Ugarit, which describes those who "were felled by the sword" (*bšlḥ / ttpl*; KTU 1.14 I 20-21; cf. also the similar expression in Job 36:12, בשלח יעברו). A. Schoors argues that this occurrence in Joel should be read similarly: "And with the spear they fell" (Schoors, "Literary Phrases," in vol. 1 of *Ras Shamra Parallels* [ed. Loren Fisher; Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1972], 63). One difficulty with this reading is the instrumental use of בעד, which would be highly unusual if not unprecedented. The more pressing problem, though, may simply be that it makes little sense of the context. Whether one understands the attacking force as a supernatural horde, a plague of locusts, or a human army, why would a description of their invincibility describe them as being killed? The verb נפל can mean "to fall upon," as in "to attack" (cf. Josh 11:7), which seems to fit the context better. Perhaps then the expression suggests the force attacks through the weapons, which cannot stop them (so Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 38). One is unlikely to defend a city against a locust plague with spears or javelins, but perhaps that is the point. This option may be the best one, but the association of שֶׁלַח with weapons is not absolutely certain in this context. In at least one case (and perhaps others), שֶׁלַח seems to mean a type of water canal or aqueduct (Neh 3:15). If this is the sense here, the invading force may invade through the city's underground water canals (so Crenshaw, *Joel*, 128). Finally, שֶׁלַח may even be a place name, as in the region of Shiloah (so Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 158). Although the designation as a place name is the least likely (especially because of the presence of the definite article), the uncertainty with each word makes a wide variety of translations defensible.

they do not stop.[207]

2:9 Into the city they rush;
upon the wall they run.
Into the houses they climb;
through the windows
they enter like a thief.

2.10 לפניו רגזה ארץ
רעשו שמים
שמש וירח קדרו
וכוכבים אספו נגהם
2.11 ויהוה נתן קולו
לפני חילו
כי רב מאד מחנהו
כי עצום עשה דברו
כי־גדול יום־יהוה
ונורא מאד
ומי יכילנו[208]

2:10 In front of it the earth quakes;
the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.

2:11 Yahweh utters his voice
before his army.
Indeed,[209] his camp is exceedingly large;
indeed, mighty are those[210] who obey his command;

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[207] The basic sense of בצע is "to cut," and seems here to mean, "cut away," i.e., from one's path. The description here suggests that the approaching force will not stop or turn around, no matter the weapons (?) used against it.

[208] Mal 3:2 poses essentially the same question: ומי מכלכל את־יום בואו ("Who can endure the day of his coming?"). It is noteworthy that the question in Malachi uses the more common Pilpel form of כול, rather than the Hiphil, which MT reads here in Joel. 4QXII[c], on the other hand, suggests the Pilpel should be read here, too. It is likely the Qumran scribes have "corrected" to the more common Pilpel form, perhaps because of the influence of Malachi.

[209] Wolff interprets the first of the three successive כי clauses causally ("for"), explaining why the earth quakes and the heavens tremble in v. 10a. The material in vv. 10b-11a, in that case, is largely parenthetical, interrupting the main point that the cosmos is shaking because of the size of Yahweh's army (Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 38). More likely, the כי here and the two that follow are emphatic ("indeed, truly") or even merely rhetorical, providing a rhythmic cadence to dramatize the conclusion of the portrait of Yahweh's army.

indeed, great is the day of Yahweh
    and very terrible—
    who can endure it?

2.12 וגם־עתה נאם־יהוה
שׁבו עדי בכל־לבבכם
ובצום ובבכי ובמספד
2.13 וקרעו לבבכם
ואל־בגדיכם
ושובו אל־יהוה אלהיכם
כי־חנון ורחום הוא
ארך אפים ורב־חסד
ונחם על־הרעה
2.14 מי יודע ישוב ונחם
והשאיר אחריו ברכה
מנחה ונסך
ליהוה אלהיכם

2:12 Even now, says Yahweh:
Return to me with all your heart,
    and with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.
2:13 Rend your heart,
    not only[211] your garments,
    and return to Yahweh your God.
For he is gracious and merciful,
    slow to anger and abounding in kindness;
    and he relents from disaster.
2:14 Who knows? He may turn and relent,
    and leave behind him a blessing:
    an offering and a libation
    for Yahweh your God.

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[210] Literally: "the one who obeys his command." I take the participle here, עשׂה, to be feminine, with the camp (מחנה) from the previous line as the antecedent, thus: "mighty is that (camp) which obeys his command." The translation seems to read more smoothly by simply treating it as plural, an approach also taken by LXX's translators.

[211] Literally: "not your garments." The call to "rend the heart" is an addition to the other cultic rites of mourning called for elsewhere, like the tearing of one's clothing. It should not be understood to discourage such cultic behavior. In fact, v. 12b explicitly includes such rites in the call to "return" to the deity, which makes it unlikely that they would be prohibited in the very next line. So also, Crenshaw, *Joel*, 135.

[2.15] תקעו שופר בציון

קדשו־צום

קראו עצרה

[2.16] אספו־עם

קדשו קהל

קבצו זקנים

אספו עוללים

וינקי שדים

יצא חתן מחדרו

וכלה מחפתה

[2.17] בין האולם ולמזבח

יבכו הכהנים

משרתי יהוה

ויאמרו

חוסה יהוה על־עמך

ואל־תתן נחלתך לחרפה

למשל־בם גוים

למה יאמרו בעמים

איה אלהיהם

2:15 Blow a trumpet in Zion!
    Sanctify a fast;
call an assembly;
2:16 gather the people;
sanctify the congregation;
    assemble the elders;
gather the children—
    even those still nursing.
Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom,
    and the bride her bridal chambers.
2:17 Between the porch and the altar,
    let the priests weep,
    the ministers of Yahweh.
Let them say:
"Spare, O Yahweh, your people;
    and do not make your heritage a disgrace,
    a byword among the nations.[212]

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[212] The syntax is awkward in this line, leading to a wide variety of interpretations. The Masoretes read a verb here: לִמְשָׁל. The versions read similarly, taking the root as משל II ("to rule").

Why should it be said among the peoples:
'Where is their god?'"

The Disaster

The complexity of the catastrophe depicted in Joel 1-2 is belied by the relative simplicity of the book's introduction:

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

What the *gāzām* locust left, the *ʾarbeh* locust has eaten;
and what the *ʾarbeh* locust left, the *yeleq* locust has eaten;
and what the *yeleq* locust left, the *ḥāsîl* locust has eaten. (Joel 1:4)

Although the precise identification of these insects (גזם, ארבה, ילק, חסיל) may be unclear, the imagery appears to describe a locust invasion or a wave of successive locust invasions. The remainder of Joel 1:2-2:17 can be read as an elaboration of the devastation wrought by this locust swarm. "It has the teeth of a lion" (1:6b); "the

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Hence, LXX (*κατάρξαι*) and the Vulgate (*dominentur*) both suggest a translation like: "to be ruled over by the nations." Wolff is among the few modern scholars to defend this reading (*Joel and Amos*, 39). The biggest problem with this interpretation is that nothing in the context indicates concern over foreign rule animates the call for cultic participation; the context describes international shame (חרפה) and humiliation ("Where is their god?"), not foreign dominance. A verb here could also have another meaning: משל I has the sense "to mock" (cf. Ezek 16:44). Thus, Crenshaw proposes: "nations mocking them" (*Joel*, 133, 142-43); and Simkins offers: "to be taunted by the nations" (*Yahweh's Activity*, 173). A third possibility arises if one re-points to a noun: לְמָשָׁל ("byword, song of jest"). Allen's "a swear word bandied about by the nations" (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 77) reflects this reading (see also Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 82-83). Several scholars, including Simkins and Crenshaw, suggest more than one meaning may operate simultaneously—a form of double entendre—a position Linville argues for at length in his essay (James Linville, "Letting the 'Bi-word' 'Rule' in Joel 2:17," *JHS* 5.2 [2004]: 1-15). Although the syntax is awkward in the reading offered here, "a byword among them, (that is) the nations," this reading makes most sense of the context—international shame, not domination by foreign armies. Secondly, it accurately reflects the sense of the deity's response in 2:18, where the people will no longer be made "a disgrace among the nations" (חרפה בגוים). Thirdly, it also mirrors a similar expression in Jer 24:9, where משל and חרפה appear in a list of nouns, each with a *lāmeḏ* prefix, governed by the verb נתן: "I will make them ... a disgrace (לחרפה), and a byword (ולמשל), a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them." Joel 2:17 offers the same pattern: נתן + לחרפה + למשל. A form of double entendre in which multiple readings operate simultaneously is unlikely given the singular focus of the context.

field is devastated" (1:10a); "the harvest of the field is ruined" (1:11b). In ch. 2, the locusts march on Zion "like a mighty people arrayed for battle" (v. 5c); "they run like steeds" (v. 4); "like men of battle they scale the wall" (v. 7a). In fact, they appear in such numbers that "the sun and the moon are darkened" (2:10b) as they cover the sky. The deity's response promises to restore the land's fertility, specifically to repay the people for the devastation wrought by the locusts (2:25). In short, all of the imagery in chs. 1-2 can be understood as a highly elaborate depiction of a locust invasion.[213]

Closer analysis, though, reveals that the nature of the disaster is not so straightforward. Even early biblical interpreters suspected that the imagery of destruction fit poorly with a mere locust invasion. Theodore of Mopsuestia, for example, argued that the locusts must be metaphorical for foreign kings:

> Tiglath-pilesar, king of the Assyrians, came like a cutting locust [גזם], he is saying, and laid waste no small proportion of your possessions. After him Shalmaneser [came] like some kind of locust [ארבה] further ravaging your goods. After them Sennacherib [came] like a young locust [ילק] wreaking general destruction on the twelve tribes of Israel. Like some kind of blight [חסיל] in addition to these came the attack of the Babylonian, who took the people of Judah as well and inflicted the evil of captivity on all in common.[214]

A similar interpretation of the disaster in Joel is reflected in St. Jerome's commentary[215] and in Targum Jonathan, where the four "locusts" are interpreted as

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[213] So argue Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 42-48; Simkins, "God, History," 437-44; among others.

[214] Theodore of Mopsuestia, "Commentary on Joel 1.4-5" (PG 66:213); translation from Alberto Ferreiro, ed. *The Twelve Prophets* (vol. 14 of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*; ed. Thomas C. Oden; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 60-61.

[215] Like Theodore of Mopsuestia, Jerome interpreted the disaster allegorically as foreign nations (see Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 43), a view apparently common among ancient interpreters.

"peoples, tongues, governments, and kingdoms" (עממיא ולישניא שלטוניא ומלכותא; Joel 2:25).[216] Many modern interpreters display a similar unease about attributing all of the disaster to a locust plague. Wolff, for example, points to the prevalence of military imagery in ch. 2 to argue that the locust plague is here superseded by a vision of an eschatological army attacking Jerusalem.[217] Loretz suggests that even ch. 1 fits poorly as a description of a locust infestation, as most of the imagery applies better to a description of drought conditions.[218] Andiñach notes that large armies are often compared to locusts in biblical material, concluding that the reference to locusts in Joel 1 should be taken as a metaphor for a foreign enemy.[219] As a result, questions about the compositional history of Joel 1-2 must begin with an examination of the nature of the disaster envisioned.

1. The locusts of Joel 1:4

The attention devoted to discerning the types of locusts (גזם, ארבה, ילק, חסיל) mentioned in Joel 1:4 has exaggerated the significance of the distinctions, especially since the effort has produced so little payoff. Crenshaw, for example, provides a helpful summary of the different attempts to identify the insects here more precisely, before concluding that the exact meaning of these terms will likely never be

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The gloss in a 6th century version of LXX, Q, offers a similar allegorical reading of the locusts: "Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans." See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 55-56.

[216] The allegorical interpretation of the disaster in Targum Jonathan may reflect an allusion to Dan 3:7, where "peoples, nations, and languages" are referenced. See Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 14; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), 70.

[217] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 41-43.

[218] Loretz, *Regenritual und Yahwetag*, 71-77.

[219] Pablo Andiñach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," *VT* 42 (1992): 433-41.

recovered with much certainty.[220] The most common explanations (among those who venture such) include: 1) four stages in the maturation of locusts; 2) four different insects; or 3) four different types of locusts. Each of these proposed explanations deserves comment.

Wolff follows the first proposal—that Joel 1:4 refers to multiple developmental stages in the maturation of the locust—although he does so with some hesitation. He notes, for example, that entomologists distinguish as many as six stages in the maturation of locusts, although it is unclear which, if any, of these stages were commonly distinguished in the ancient Levant.[221] Wolff is certainly not alone in advancing this theory, though, as scholars, at least as early as K. A. Credner, have speculated that the life-cycle of the locust must be in view.[222] John A. Thompson suggests support for the theory may also be found in Arabic, which offers distinct names for the developmental stages of the locust,[223] although it should be pointed out that the Arabic names for the various stages in the life-cycle of the locust are not etymologically related to the names that appear in Joel.

Despite its widespread support, numerous considerations caution against viewing the threats of Joel 1:4 (גזם, ארבה, ילק, חסיל) as four developmental stages of the locust. As Simkins notes in his extensive analysis of locust entomology, the casual observer discerns at most three stages in the maturation of locusts, making it

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[220] See Crenshaw, *Joel*, 88-89.

[221] See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 27-28.

[222] Credner, *Der Prophet Joel* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1831), 102-103.

[223] Thompson, "Joel's Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels," *JNES* 14 (1955): 54. Thompson cites Arabic *sirwatun*, *dabban*, *ghawghaʾun*, *khayfānun*, *kutfānun*, and *jarādun*.

unlikely that ancient Hebrew would distinguish four or more stages of development.[224] Furthermore, the terms used in Joel are used elsewhere as synonyms. For example, ארבה and ילק appear in parallel in Ps 105:34, while ארבה and חסיל are treated similarly in Ps 78:46. In a paraphrase of Exodus found at Qumran, ארבה and חסיל again appear as synonyms, perhaps due to the influence of Ps 78:

> ויבא ארבֿהֿ לכסות עין הֿאֿ[רצ] חסל כבד בכולֿ גֿבולם
> "And He brought locusts to cover the face of the ear[th], heavy locust in all of their territory." (4Q422 III, 10)[225]

From these references, it is unclear if the authors were aware of any distinction between the pests. Perhaps most significantly, the terms are listed in a different order in Joel 2:25—*ʾarbeh, yeleq, ḥāsîl, gāzām*—than they are in 1:4—*gāzām, ʾarbeh, yeleq, ḥāsîl*. The rearrangement of the terms suggests the ordering principle is something other than the life-cycle of the locust, even if the logic of the rearrangement remains elusive. O. R. Sellers, convinced that the terms must refer to the developmental stages of the locust, proposes rearranging the order in 1:4 to match 2:25;[226] such unsupported textual emendations merely attest to the lack of clarity regarding these terms.

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[224] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 103.

[225] Transcription and translation provided by Torleif Elgvin and Emanuel Tov, "Paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus," in *Qumran Cave 4 VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 1* (Harold Attridge, et al.; DJD XIII; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 429-31.

[226] Sellers, "Stages of Locust in Joel," *AJSL* 52 (1936): 81-85.

In spite of these challenges, some scholars still maintain the developmental theory. Aaron Pinker, for example, applies the theory to his analysis of the puzzling imagery in Nah 3:15-16.[227] MT's התכבד כילק התכבדי כארבה is often translated roughly: "Multiply like the *ʾarbeh* locust, multiply like the *yeleq* locust." For Pinker, though, such a reading is "strange, since *ylq* (the young locust) can not [*sic*] multiply."[228] Pinker resolves this tension by relying on heavy emendations to make Nah 3:15-16 compatible with his understanding of the term *yeleq* as referring to a particular stage in the locust's development, a stage in which the locust does not reproduce. Pinker does not wrestle with another possibility, namely, that *yeleq* may not refer to a particular stage of the locust's development at all. Obviously, the logic here quickly becomes circular. If emendations are necessary to make the text support the theory, perhaps the theory (rather than the text) is in error.

Unfortunately, etymology provides little more assistance than entomology. The most common term for the locust is ארבה, related to other Semitic terms for the locust: Ugaritic *irby*; Akkadian *a/eribu, erbū*. It almost certainly derives from רבה, "to be numerous, increase," with the addition of a prosthetic aleph. The other terms are less clear. גזם may derive from a root meaning "to cut." ילק, based on a possible (but dubious) Arabic cognate (*wlq*), could reflect the quickness of locust swarms;

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[227] Pinker, "On the Meaning of *HTKBD* in Nahum III 15," *VT* 53 (2003): 558-561, esp. n. 6.

[228] Ibid., 558.

hence, some translate "hurrier."[229] The etymology of חסיל may be reflected in Deut 28:38, where the ארבה threatens to "consume" (חסל) the seeds planted in the field. Thus, חסיל may mean "the one who devours."[230] Simkins aptly notes that these etymologies, if correct, provide little help in distinguishing the stages of the locust, as the distinguishing traits of each term (i.e., being numerous, cutting, hurrying, devouring) are characteristic of the locust at every stage of development.[231]

Hebrew is not alone among Semitic languages in offering a variety of names for the locust, even if the precise identity of the "locusts" in each language is no clearer than in Hebrew. Ugaritic, for example, offers *qṣm* and *ḥsn*, in addition to *irby*.[232] Akkadian attests to a long list of "locusts" in addition to the common *erbu*, including *adudillu, ḫilimu, irgilu, kulīlu, lallarītu, zīr(zir)u*, among others.[233] In fact, even in the Hebrew Bible other locust-like names are attested: סלעם, חרגל, חגב, גבה, and גבי. These names may not be etymologically related to the various names in Joel

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[229] This etymological proposal is but a guess, supported only in that locusts could reasonably be described as quick. The use of Arabic in such a manner should be avoided, as noted in John Kaltner, "Arabic," in *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages* (ed. John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie; SBLRBS 42; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 82-87.

[230] Cf. Sellers, "Stages of Locust in Joel," 83. Based on Arabic, Sellers suggests חסיל should be associated with "peeling."

[231] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 104-105; see also Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 36-38; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 88.

[232] *CAT* 1.14 III 1; IV 30; and *CAT* 1.3 II 9-11. For analysis of the Ugaritic terms, see Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; 2 vols.; HO 67; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1:373, 2:716.

[233] *CAD* 4:256-58; see also, B. Landsberger and I. Krumbiegel, *Die Fauna des alten Mesopotamien nach der 14. Tafel der Serie ḪAR-RA = ḪUBULLU* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1934), 122-23.

1:4, but they do suggest that a variety of locust (or locust-like) names are well attested in ancient Semitic languages; identifying a particular developmental stage in the life-cycle of the locust for each one is unwarranted.

Proposals that different insects or different kinds of locusts are reflected here similarly suffer from a dearth of strong supporting evidence. As the discussion has already indicated, ארבה appears parallel to ילק and חסיל without a clear distinction (e.g., Nah 3:15; Ps 78:46). The list of plagues in 1 Kgs 8:37 includes both ארבה and חסיל, perhaps indicating they were thought of as distinct threats. The list, however, also includes the stereotypical pairing שׁדפון ירקון ("blight and mildew"), which always appears together as a unit (Deut 28:22; 2 Chr 6:28; Amos 4:9; Hag 2:17). Therefore, it is not clear from 1 Kgs 8:37 whether the two "locusts" are considered distinct plagues (as NRSV suggests: "locust" and "caterpillar") or a single, double-barreled disaster (as in "blight and mildew"). Simkins also notes that only one species of locust, the desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*), presents a real threat to the region of Syria-Palestine,[234] so it is unlikely Hebrew would identify four or more species.

Although the precise nuance of these terms, if they were in fact ever truly distinguished, may not be recoverable,[235] Barton, Crenshaw and Simkins (among

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[234] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 107.

[235] Despite these difficulties, scholars have certainly tried to discern distinctions between these insects. The bibliography on locusts in the book of Joel is extensive. In addition to the sources mentioned above, see Andiñach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," 433-41; Harold Brodsky, "'An Enormous Horde Arrayed for Battle': Locusts in the Book of Joel," *BRev* 6 (1990): 32-39; Victor Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II's Hymn to Nanaya," *JBL* 112 (1993): 597-603;

others) are on the right track in suggesting the primary effect of the four-fold insect catastrophe is rhetorical, rather than scientific; it may not accurately describe events that transpired, but it presents a portrait of destruction that emphasizes the seriousness of the threat to the community. A literal reading of Joel 1:4, after all, would suggest that the second insect, הארבה, devoured all that remained (יתר), leaving nothing for the other insects. The following line, "what הארבה left," is thus a non sequitur. Taken as hyperbole, though, the poetry conveys a picture of complete destruction from which nothing survives. One cataclysmic disaster follows another, until all is destroyed.

Crenshaw calls attention to the significance of the number *four* in the description of disaster, suggesting that the four locust names may have been chosen "because the wind which swept the locusts into Judah may have come from any one of four directions."[236] Although entomologists may disagree with Crenshaw's suggestion that locusts may come from any direction,[237] he is certainly correct to emphasize the description's literary style, rather than its scientific precision. Indeed, the number "four" is likely significant, even if not associated with the directions from which locusts would enter Judah. The four-fold locust plague may illustrate that the

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John A. Thompson, "Translation of the Words for Locust," *BT* 25 (1974): 405-411. For a description of a twentieth-century locust plague in Syria-Palestine, see John Whiting, "Jerusalem's Locust Plague: Being a Description of the Recent Locust Influx into Palestine, and Comparing Same with Ancient Locust Invasions as Narrated in the Old World's History Book, the Bible," *National Geographic Magazine* 28.6 (1915): 511-550.

[236] Crenshaw, *Joel*, 88.

[237] Cf. Simkins (*Yahweh's Activity*, 119-20), who notes that locusts generally invade Judah from the south or southeast. Even allowing for some artistic license, it is difficult to imagine locusts coming from the west (i.e., the sea), especially since that region is associated with the desolate realm to which the deity will drive them in Joel 2:20. According to Exodus the plague of locusts that invade Egypt is brought by an east wind (Exod 10:13) and driven away by a powerful west wind (10:19).

destruction is complete and total, as the number "four" can serve as a symbol of totality (e.g., Ezek 1:6) and is even associated with images of complete disaster (e.g., Ezek 14:21). As Barton concludes, "we should not press every detail of [Joel's] description of the effects of the locust plague as if he were performing some kind of official enquiry into the state of the country."[238] In short, the book of Joel begins with the description of a dire plague, one which threatens all the agricultural produce of the land. The precise identity of the "locusts" in Joel 1:4, though, is less certain and less significant than the way in which the repeating disaster conveys a portrait of complete social distress.

2. Drought and military imagery in Joel 1-2

If the designation of the "locusts" that introduce the book of Joel is unclear, the imagery that follows does little to clarify matters. Although locusts are explicitly mentioned in Joel 1:4, much of the imagery, especially in ch. 1, seems more appropriate in describing a drought, rather than a locust plague. The new wine (1:10), the vine, and all the trees (1:12) are depicted as "drying up" (הוביש; הובישה; יבשו).[239] The animals of the field are said to mourn, not because of a locust invasion, but because "dried up (יבשו) are the watercourses; and fire devours the pastures of the wilderness" (1:20), a description more consistent with drought than with a plague of

[238] Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 47.

[239] For an analysis of the verbs here and the wordplay with "to be ashamed" (הבישו; 1:11), see Katherine Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 188-90.

insects. Even the image of the ground mourning (אבלה אדמה; 1:10) arguably reflects drought conditions.[240]

In fact, much of the imagery of disaster in ch. 1 is of a general agricultural failure, not specifically of a locust plague: "devastated is the grain" (v. 10); "there is no pasture" (v. 18); "isn't the food cut off?" (v. 16). In other words, without the explicit mention of the locusts in 1:4, most of ch. 1 could read quite naturally as the result of a drought.[241] This suspicion is reinforced by the deity's response, which promises to restore rain upon the land:

> He will bring down for you the rain,
> the early rain and the latter rain as before. (Joel 2:23)

Complicating the picture further, droughts and locust plagues are not generally compatible; locusts may swarm together and migrate during times of exceptional rain, but during a drought locusts leave in search of healthier vegetation.[242] Put simply, the imagery of agricultural disaster in ch. 1 is not a self-evident description of the

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[240] So argues Hayes in her study of the metaphor in several passages, including here in Joel. See Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 12-18; 193. See also, David Clines, "Was There an ʾ*BL* II 'Be Dry' in Classical Hebrew?" *VT* 42 (1992): 9; and Delbert Hillers, "The Roads to Zion Mourn (Lam 1:4)," *Perspective* 12.1-2 (1971): 126-27. The evidence is based largely on the Akkadian *abālu*, which means to "dry up" (*CAD* 1:29-31) and the common sense notion that the ground is more likely to "dry up" than to "mourn," which the Hebrew אבל clearly means in some contexts. It is possible that the image of the ground "mourning" contains traces of a dead metaphor, where the ground's drying up is taken as a sign of its mourning, but, as Clines points out, many other inanimate objects (e.g., roads, Lam 1:4; gates, Isa 3:26; and walls, Lam 2:8) also "mourn" (אבל) with no such obvious connection to drying up.

[241] So argue Loretz, Bergler, Redditt, and others.

[242] See Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 78; also Simkins, "God, History," 441. For a more thorough discussion of locust entomology, see Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 101-120. His discussion of the compatibility of locusts and drought is nuanced, as certain arid conditions can actually exacerbate a locust infestation, at least temporarily. Still, a drought of any duration or severity, as may be described in Joel 1:5-20, will wipe out the locust species that generally infests Syria-Palestine. Simkins understands the drought imagery to reflect the conditions that follow the locust infestation (ibid., 137-38).

aftermath of a locust infestation but, in fact, stands in some tension with the claim in 1:4 that locusts are in view.

The nature of the disaster is even murkier in ch. 2, where the "locusts" are described with military imagery. Nowhere in 2:1-11 are the locusts (or the drought) explicitly mentioned. In fact, an entirely different problem may be introduced:

> Like soot spread out upon the mountains
>   is a people (עם) great and mighty.
> There hasn't been anything like it
>   since ancient times,
> nor will there be again in the future
>   for generation after generation. (Joel 2:2)

Although one might reasonably interpret this "people" (עם) as metaphorical for a locust swarm, the imagery implies a military invasion. The "people" are "arrayed for battle" (ערוך מלחמה; 2:5c); they "scale the wall" (יעלו חומה; 2:7a); they even march in formation (2:7b-8a), descriptions that could reflect an actual military threat. Joel 2, based on this reading, describes a second disaster—an invading army—in addition to the agricultural disaster of ch. 1. In support of this reading, Wolff argues that the initial catastrophe (ch. 1) has already taken place, but a second threat (ch. 2) looms on the horizon. He notes the predominance of the perfect or *qāṭal* verbal form in 1:4-20, indicating that the locust invasion is a past event, and a shift to the imperfect or *yiqṭōl* form in 2:1-11, suggesting that the "army is *still* approaching."[243]

Although Wolff deduces that the book of Joel must be describing multiple disasters—a locust invasion followed by an invading army—an investigation of

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[243] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 41-42. Italics added in translation; orig.: "Sein Heer ist noch im Kommen" (*Dodekapopheton 2*, 48). Jeremias emphasizes the same point (*Die Propheten*, 23).

Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and other biblical references to locusts provides another possibility, namely, that the locusts are metaphorical for an invading army. In fact, when describing the overwhelming numbers of a powerful military force, ancient Near Eastern texts routinely compare the army to a swarm of locusts. The description of Kirta's army found at Ugarit is illustrative:

> *k ʾirby / tškn . šd /*
> *km . ḥsn . pʾat . mdbr /*
> *ki ʾirbĭ̄yi tiškanū šadâ*
> *kimā ḥasīni piʾāti madbari*
> Like a locust swarm, they'll inhabit the steppe;
> Like crickets,[244] the desert's edge.[245] (KTU 1.14 II 50-III 1)[246]

In context, the metaphor suggests Kirta's army is locust-like because the vast number of soldiers mirrors the swarms in which locusts move.[247] The same comparison is used in a Sumerian text, "The Curse of Agade," to describe the invading Gutian troops: "Numerous like locusts / they came striding."[248] Akkadian sources also attest to the metaphor of the locust-like army, as in Sargon's boast: "I had the vast armies

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[244] The translation of *ḥsn* as "crickets" is a guess based on context. Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín offer "grasshoppers, locusts" (*A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Lanugage*, 1:373), even suggesting that it may be related to Heb. חסיל; hence, the proposed vocalization: *ḥasīnu*. Such a proposal is enticing, although the shift from *n* to *l* is not easily explained. Even still, such a proposal does little to clarify exactly what is meant by the term. Much like the various terms in Joel 1:4, it is perhaps best thought of as a locust-like insect.

[245] This translation follows Edward L. Greenstein, "Kirta," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. Simon B. Parker; SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: SBL, 1997), 15, 19.

[246] Cf. also KTU 1.14 IV 29-31.

[247] KTU 1.14 II 35-40: "Let your host be a very large force, / As many as three hundred myriads! / Soldiers beyond number, / Archers beyond count! / They'll march by the thousand, in rows, / In myriads, by rank arrayed" (Greenstein, "Kirta," 15).

[248] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 369. Cf. the translation of Jerrold S. Cooper (*The Curse of Agade* [JHNES; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983], 59): "Like hordes of locusts they lie over the land."

of Aššur cover their cities like locusts (*e-ri-biš*)."[249] Even other biblical texts employ the same imagery. The book of Jeremiah describes an unstoppable army invading Egypt as "more numerous than locusts (רבו מארבה); they are without number" (Jer 46:23).[250]

Pablo Andiñach argues that this army-as-locusts metaphor may help clarify the jumble of images in the book of Joel. Rather than finding a locust plague described with imagery of a human army, Andiñach sees in the book of Joel a human army envisioned in terms of a locust swarm, much as early interpreters (e.g., Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Jerome) suggested. In other words, the description of the attacking "locusts" in ch. 1 is metaphorical for an invading army that threatens Judah:

> Placed at the very beginning of the book (i 4), reference to the locusts introduces the reader to the tragedy that will be narrated, and at the same time the reference helps define the character of that tragedy. In this prologue, the locusts provide a semantic clue to interpret the military invasion.[251]

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[249] *CAD* 4:258. Other Akkadian texts employing the same metaphor are cited in the entries for "*erbu*" and "*erebiš*" in *CAD* 4:256-58.

[250] Other examples of this metaphor include Judg 7:12, where the Midianite and Amalekite armies are described "as thick as locusts" (כארבה לרב). Jeremiah 51:14 may also rely on the metaphor, at least if the NRSV is correct: כי אם־מלאתיך אדם כילק; "Surely I will fill you with troops like a swarm of locusts" (NRSV; similarly JPS; see also, Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008], 518, 527-28). More literally, though, the Hebrew reads: "I have filled you with people like locusts" (so William Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* [ed. Paul Hanson; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989], 397). According to the first translation, the deity offers a harsh judgment, promising to send an army as numerous as locusts against the city. According to the second reading, though, the deity states how formerly the city was filled with people. In both cases, locusts are used as a metaphor to indicate a large quantity of people, but only the first compares a human army with locusts. Both readings can find ample support among biblical and non-biblical sources; the "numerous-as-locusts" metaphor is common in descriptions of armies, but is by no means limited to militaristic imagery.

[251] Andiñach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," 441.

In short, the disaster threatening the people and the land in Joel 1-2 is presented as a combination of several crises, including a locust plague, a drought, and an invading army. How these threats relate to one another is unclear. A locust infestation is explicitly mentioned in Joel 1:4, but the precise nuance of the four-fold plague—with *gāzām, ʾarbeh, yeleq,* and *ḥāsîl* locusts—is difficult to ascertain. In fact, the use of hyperbole suggests the description of the locusts seeks to emphasize the magnitude of the disaster and the seriousness of the threat to the community. After Joel 1:4, though, locusts are no longer explicitly mentioned, with much of the imagery more suitable to a general agricultural failure, especially one marked by a severe drought. Finally, ch. 2 utilizes imagery of a military assault, offering no hint that a drought or locust plague is still in view. Even if some of the imagery is metaphorical, the direction of the metaphor (locusts-as-armies or armies-as-locusts?) is not self-evident. Nor is it entirely clear if the events are all transpiring simultaneously, or are some described as future threats? Before offering my own conclusions, then, discussion of the issues of metaphor and chronology (i.e., whether the images of disaster can be arranged in sequential order) is warranted.

3. *Qāṭal/Yiqṭōl and the question of chronology*

Based on the available evidence, scholars have proposed a myriad of options to explain the disaster in Joel 1-2: the book of Joel recounts either 1) a locust infestation;[252] 2) a locust infestation followed by a military assault;[253] 3) a locust

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[252] E.g., Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*.

[253] E.g., Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*.

infestation, followed by a drought, followed by a military assault;[254] 4) a locust infestation, followed by a drought, followed by a second locust infestation;[255] 5) a drought and a military assault, but no locust infestation;[256] or 6) a military assault and nothing else.[257] Even this list does not clarify whether the military assault (if there is one) is "historical" or "apocalyptic," another point of contention. Clearly, consensus on the nature of the disaster reflected in the book of Joel is hard to find.

Although this diversity of scholarly opinion can be daunting, not all proposals regarding the nature of the disaster in the book of Joel are of equal merit. In particular, attempts to arrange the material chronologically, as though some of the destruction has already occurred and some is a future threat, are not compelling. Wolff, for example, cites the predominance of the *qāṭal* verbal form in Joel 1:2-20 and the *yiqṭōl* form in 2:1-11 as indicating that a past event is recorded in ch. 1, while a second, impending disaster must be in view in ch. 2.[258] Wolff's conclusion overstates the certainty with which these verbal forms can be distinguished. As an initial matter, the use of verbal forms in the book of Joel is not consistent. The *qāṭal*

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[254] E.g., Crenshaw, *Joel*; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*; Jeremias, *Die Propheten*.

[255] E.g., Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*. The theory of a *second* locust infestation has often been proposed, primarily to account for the shift in primary verbal form from ch. 1 (*qāṭal*) to ch. 2 (*yiqṭōl*). One locust invasion (ch. 1) has already come, but a second one (ch. 2) would be catastrophic and is, hence, associated with the "day of Yahweh." See D. Ernst Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (KAT 12; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1922), 110-143; Artur Weiser *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten: Die Propheten Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona, Micha* (ATD 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963). Cf. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 62-67. Bewer sees two locust invasions, but idiosyncratically reverses the order, so that ch. 2 precedes the even more ominous disaster in ch. 1.

[256] E.g., Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*; Wöhrle, "Israel's Identity," 155.

[257] Andiñach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel;" see also Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 232-33.

[258] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 41-42.

form dominates the description of disaster in ch. 1,[259] but ch. 2 includes many *qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl* forms.[260] To give an obvious example, Joel 2:3 reports: "In front of it fire devours (*qāṭal*), and behind it a flame burns (*yiqṭōl*)" (לפניו אכלה אש ואחריו תלהט להבה). Distinguishing the two halves of this poetic line in terms of tense would strain credibility. In addition, Joel 2:10-11 is dominated by *qāṭal* forms: the earth "quakes" (רגזה); the heavens "tremble" (רעשו); sun and moon "are darkened" (קדרו); stars "withdraw" (אספו); Yahweh "utters" (נתן). The switch to *qāṭal* forms here makes it difficult to argue that the *yiqṭōl* forms in 2:1-9 demand reading the threat as predictive.

In fact, the distinction between the *yiqṭōl* and the *qāṭal* verbal forms remains a highly complex and disputed issue, especially in Hebrew poetry.[261] A recent study by

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[259] The only *yiqṭōl* forms appear in 1:15, in which the day of Yahweh "comes/is coming" (יבוא), and 1:19-20, where the prophet and animals "cry out" (אקרא) because of the disaster. The former is likely influenced by Isa 13:6 (or a common expression that also influenced Isa 13:6), while the latter describes the people's reaction, not the disaster itself.

[260] The description of the threat is really confined to 2:1-11. *Qāṭal* verbal forms describing the threat include: fire "devours" (אכלה; v. 3); faces "gather up" (קבצו; v. 6; see the textual notes above for discussion of the meaning of this expression); earth "quakes" (רגזה; v. 10); heavens "tremble" (רעשו; v. 10); sun and moon "are darkened" (קדרו; v. 10); stars "withdraw" (אספו; v. 10); Yahweh "utters" (נתן; v. 11). *Yiqṭōl* verbal forms characterizing the disaster are confined to 2:3-9, including: flame "burns" (תלהט; v. 3); they "run" (ירוצון; v. 4); they "bound" (ירקדון; v. 5); people "temble" (יחילו; v. 6); they "scale" (יעלו; v. 7); each "marches" (ילכון; v. 7); they do not "change" (יעבטון; v. 7); among others.

[261] The issue is quite vexing in Hebrew prose as well; see Tal Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). A helpful historical overview of the debate regarding these verbal forms is provided by Waltke and O'Connor, who ultimately endorse a modified view of the aspectual theory (Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 455-78). Goldfajn's analysis, which focuses on the temporal nature of the verbal forms, is illuminating, but her exclusive focus on Hebrew narrative mitigates the study's relevance to the book of Joel.

Silviu Tatu concludes that in the Psalter "*qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl* verbal forms...can be used primarily for aesthetic reasons, with no individual reference to time or aspect."[262] Similarly, Wilfred Watson points to the shift between *qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl*—often within a single poetic line—as a device to avoid repetition, not as a shift in verbal tense.[263] In other words, the *yiqṭōl* forms in ch. 2 hardly offer convincing evidence that a second, more ominous disaster is still to come.[264]

A better explanation for the shift in verbal forms is found when comparing the content of the two descriptions of disaster in chs. 1 and 2. The main subject of ch. 1 is the agricultural disaster and its interruption of proper cultic rites. Chapter 2, meanwhile, details the power and size of the divine army that threatens the land. This shift in focus—from the devastation of the land to the agent of destruction—may explain the decision to rely more heavily on the *yiqṭōl* form in ch. 2. The use of the *qāṭal* form indicates that the disaster has already ravaged the land and its effects are current. By contrast, the *yiqṭōl* form conveys the sense that the divine army's attack is relentless and continuing.[265] A similar play with these verbal forms can be found in other laments, as when Job complains about the deity's abusive treatment:

אפו טרף וישׂטמני

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[262] Silviu Tatu, *The Qatal//Yiqtol (Yiqtol//Qatal) Verbal Sequence in Semitic Couplets: A Case Study in Systemic Functional Grammar with Applications on the Hebrew Psalter and Ugaritic Poetry* (GUS 3; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 22.

[263] Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 279-80.

[264] As Barton succinctly notes: "Nothing can really be said about the time references in Joel on the basis of the verb forms used" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 69).

[265] Using the categories of Waltke and O'Connor, then, this use of the *yiqṭōl* would be the "progressive non-perfective," while the *qāṭal* would function as the "present perfect" (Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 490-91, 504-505).

חרק עלי בשניו
יפרצני פרץ על־פני־פרץ
ירץ עלי כגבור

> He has torn (*qāṭal*) me in his wrath and hated me;
> he has gnashed (*qāṭal*) his teeth at me...
> He bursts (*yiqṭōl*) upon me again and again;
> he rushes (*yiqṭōl*) at me like a warrior. (Job 16:9a, 14)

Without more certainty about the precise function of the *qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl* verbal forms in Hebrew poetry, though, such conclusions are at best preliminary.[266] The time of the disaster—whether past, future, or current—is somewhat unclear,[267] but little evidence can be garnered that supports arranging the imagery of disaster in chs. 1 and 2 in chronological sequence.

4. Locusts and locust-imagery in context

If the various images of disaster in Joel 1-2 are not to be arranged sequentially, other attempts to harmonize the disparate imagery by focusing on the locusts are also unconvincing. In particular, several studies suggest the locusts are merely metaphorical for a broader disaster. For example, Bergler claims that the reference to locusts signals that the disaster is as ominous as the plagues on Egypt,[268]

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[266] One further qualification: This proposal may explain the general frequency of *qāṭal* forms in ch. 1 and *yiqṭōl* forms in ch. 2, but it does not work as a slavish rule to elucidate the use of each verbal form. As the studies of Watson (*Classical Hebrew Poetry*) and Tatu (*The Qatal//Yiqtol [Yiqtol//Qatal] Verbal Sequence*) stipulate, aesthetic and rhetorical concerns are likely also at play.

[267] Mourning in ancient Israel could be either *posthumous* (after-the-fact) or *petitionary* (before a disaster/death in hopes of averting it); see Diana Lipton, "Early Mourning?: Petitionary Versus Posthumous Ritual in Ezekiel XXIV[1]," *VT* 56 (2006): 192-93. Thus, the author of Joel could lament an on-going crisis or petition for deliverance from an approaching one. Barton suspects the crisis is viewed as a future event to be avoided, but correctly notes that the moment of utterance in the book of Joel is not a settled issue: "I do not see how we are to tell" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 47). I am inclined to see the disaster as already occurring—an on-going event—which makes more sense of the deity's promise to "repay" the people for the destruction (2:25).

[268] Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 256-73. Bergler discusses the similarities between Joel 1-2 and the locust plague description in Exod 10:1-20, finding enough overlap to conclude that the

while Andiñach contends that the locusts are metaphorical for an invading army. Although the studies of Bergler and Andiñach reach different conclusions, they both oversimplify the depictions of locusts in ancient sources by concentrating solely on one feature: the presence of locusts in the exodus tradition, in the case of Bergler, and the army-as-locusts metaphor, in the case of Andiñach. In short, the case for treating the locusts in Joel as symbols of a broader disaster is weak.

Locusts appear far more widely in ancient sources than the studies of Bergler and Andiñach imply. Concerns over the destructive power of locusts are expressed in treaty curses, such as the following from the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon: "Like locusts devour ... lice and caterpillars / may they cause your towns, your land (and) your district to be devoured."[269] Prayers for deliverance from the devastation of locust plagues were also apparently common, even if few of these prayers have been preserved. Lead figurines of locusts have been found in temples, likely reflecting petitioners' concerns over the insects devouring their crops.[270] A brick orthostat from Ashur, depicting a worshipper standing before a deity, may also reflect a prayer for deliverance from locusts (or thanksgiving for answering such a plea), because a locust

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book of Joel must be alluding to the exodus tradition. I find the parallels convincing evidence that the book of Joel describes, at least, a locust infestation, but not that a locust plague explains all of the imagery, or that, as Bergler suggests, an Exodus "Typologie" frames the presentation of the disaster. The book of Joel and Exod 10 both describe general agricultural failure, so one would expect some of the imagery to be standard fare in any such portrait. In addition, some of the parallels between Exod 10 and Joel 1-2 recur in descriptions of other plagues, too. For example, the unprecedented nature of the disaster (Joel 1:2; 2:2c; Exod 10:6, 14)—a key parallel for Bergler—similarly illustrates the plague of hail (Exod 9:18, 24) and the death of the firstborn (Exod 11:6).

[269] The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, VIII.599-600. Transcription and translation provided in D. J. Wiseman, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," *Iraq* 20.1 (1958): 73-74. See also Deut 28:38: "You shall carry much seed into the field, but shall gather little in, for the locust (ארבה) shall consume it."

[270] E. Douglas van Buren, *The Fauna of Ancient Mesopotamia as Represented in Art* (AnOr 18; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1939), 109-110.

appears prominently above the head of the worshipper.[271] At least one prayer for deliverance from a locust plague is preserved, in the midst of a longer hymn to the goddess Nanaya: "The evil locust which destroys the crop/grain ... may by your command it be turned into nothing."[272] Divination reports also attest to the devastating potential of locust plagues: "if the inner side of the liver is curved in at the spot (which indicates) devastation by locusts, and stays like that, there will be pestilence in the prince's country."[273]

Locusts, though, were not merely viewed as destructive forces. They were also apparently an important source of food, as attested in both textual and iconographic remains. A relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal, for example, shows a servant carrying skewers of locusts, presumably for a feast.[274] Leviticus 11:22 also lists the locust among various insects that may be eaten. In short, the evidence from Mesopotamian and other biblical sources suggests that locusts were a routine feature of daily life—as a source of food but also with destructive potential—not not merely a cipher for the exodus tradition or for human armies.

To be sure, Andiñach correctly notes that locusts routinely serve as a source of comparison, but the comparisons are not always used to describe large armies, as in

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[271] For the image, see James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 180, 314; ill. 535.

[272] This translation of the prayer follows Hurowitz's treatment in "Joel's Locust Plague," 597-603. For more discussion of the broader Hymn to Nanaya, see A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (SAAS 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 13-16.

[273] *CAD*, 4:256-57.

[274] See the discussion in James A. Kelhoffer, "Did John the Baptist Eat like a Former Essene? Locust-eating in the Ancient Near East and at Qumran," *DSD* 11.3 (2004): 293-314, esp. 301. *CAD* also lists a series of Akkadian texts in which locusts are referenced as food (4:257).

the examples he cites. In fact, in at least one case, the discipline of soldiers is used to describe the behavior of locusts:

> The locusts have no king,
> yet all of them march in rank. (Prov 30:27)

In other cases, the weakness of the locust provides the source of comparison. The psalmist, for example, appeals to the fragility of the locust to convey a sense of despair and desperation: "I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like the locust" (כארבה; Ps 109:23). The author of the early Jewish apocalypse of *4 Ezra* makes a similar comparison to highlight the ephemeral nature of life: "We pass from the world like locusts, and our life is like a mist..."[275] Egyptian literature, in fact, frequently cites the locust as a sign of weakness and transitoriness. An inscription reporting of Merneptah's victory over the Libyans, for example, boasts: "Libya is like a petitioner brought as a captive. Thou hast made them to be like grasshoppers, for every road is strewed with their bodies."[276] Based on this understanding of locusts as weak and powerless, Jaromir Malek interprets the inscriptions of locusts on the daggers of Ahmose I to represent defeated foes.[277] The inscription contains a scene with four locusts facing a galloping lion. Malek compares the representation of

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[275] 2 Esdras 4:24. The weakness of the locust is also important to the comparison made by the Israelite spies after surveying the promised land: "and we were like locusts (כחגבים) in our eyes, and thus we were in their eyes" (Num 13:33). For the designation of the חגב as "locust," see Berel Dov Lerner, "Timid Grasshoppers and Fierce Locusts: An Ironic Pair of Biblical Metaphors," *VT* 49 (1999): 545-48.

[276] Translation from James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (5 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 3:252, §592.

[277] See Malek, "The Locusts on the Daggers of Ahmose," in *Chief of Seers: Egyptian Studies in Memory of Cyril Aldred* (eds. Elizabeth Goring, et al.; London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 207-219.

the locusts to the stylized depiction of subjugated enemies "under the foot" of the king, and finds a remarkable resemblance. His conclusion that the locusts symbolize the king's defeated enemies is consistent with the Egyptian emphasis on the locust's weakness, even though it must remain tentative.

More commonly, locusts serve as a useful metaphor for anything that flies or appears in large numbers, as the following examples attest:

> As booty, I carried off to Assyria horses, mules, asses, oxen and sheep, more numerous than locusts (BURU5.ḪI.A *maʾdū*).[278]
>
> Under her, like balls, are hea[ds,]
> Above her, like locusts (*kirbym*), hands,
> Like locusts (*k.qṣm*), heaps of warrior-hands.[279]
>
> My stores forsooth rose, taking wings
> like the rising of a heavy cloud of locusts.[280]
>
> Javelins quivered over my camp like locusts (*eribū*).[281]
>
> Multiply yourselves like the locust (כילק),
> multiply like the grasshopper (כארבה)![282]

A common trope includes a comparison between locusts and things that are numerous (אין מספר; Joel 1:6), which can apply to cattle, spoils of war, and, yes, often armies.

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[278] *CAD* 4:257.

[279] This description of Anat appears in the Baal cycle (KTU 1.3 II 9-11); translation follows Mark Smith, "The Baal Cycle," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. Simon B. Parker; SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: SBL, 1997), 107.

[280] The Lament for Ur, line 275. For this translation, see Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once...*, 464.

[281] From an inscription of the governor of Mari dating to the 8th cent. BCE. Cited in Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague," 602, n. 15.

[282] Nah 3:15; NRSV. The meaning and translation of this line is the matter of some debate. Cf. Aron Pinker, "On the Meaning of *HTKBD*," 558-60.

To suggest that locusts consistently serve as a signal for human armies, though, is to overlook the frequency of locust imagery in general and in particular the broader numerous-as-locusts metaphor.

Even though locusts do often serve as a source of comparison in metaphors and similes, treating the reference to locusts in the book of Joel as metaphorical or symbolic does little to reconcile the other images of disaster. If Bergler is correct that the locusts are merely descriptive of a severe drought,[283] then one must read the military imagery in ch. 2 as metaphorical for a non-existent locust plague. If the army-as-locust metaphor is operative, though, as Andiñach contends, one could explain the presence of locust and military imagery, but not the agonized lament over drought conditions and crop failure. Explaining away the reference to locusts as metaphorical, in other words, does not help clarify the tension in the book of Joel's description of disaster. An additional problem with Andiñach's thesis is that the comparison in Joel 2 works in precisely the opposite direction. The disaster approaches *like* an army—"like a mighty people" (כעם עצום; 2:5), "like warriors" (כגבורים; 2:7aα), and "like men of battle" (כאנשי מלחמה; 2:7aβ)—not like a locust plague. As Allen rightly notes, "to conceive of figurative locusts who are like the soldiers they are supposed to represent is a tortuous and improbable interpretation."[284]

If the proposals of Bergler and Andiñach are unsatisfactory, though, so are those that take the opposite position. Several scholars argue that a locust infestation accounts sufficiently for the range of images of destruction. Victor Hurowitz, for

[283] Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 273-76.

[284] Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 29; see also Barton, *Joel*, 44.

example, draws attention to an Akkadian prayer that asks for deliverance from the *zirziru*-locust, "which dries up the orchards (*mubbil ṣippāti*)." He concludes from this line that locusts were thought to cause droughts, or at least were associated with the effects of drought, so that there is no contradiction in the book of Joel's description of a locust infestation as causing the fields and harvest to dry up as if in drought.[285] Hurowitz's analysis of this prayer is instructive, but the comparisons he makes to the book of Joel deserve careful scrutiny. For example, the Akkadian prayer dates to the eighth century, several centuries prior to the composition of Joel. The distance in time and place between these compositions cautions against hasty comparisons. Secondly, as Hurowitz acknowledges, the translation of this short prayer—including the identification of the *zirziru*-locust—is the matter of some debate. Importantly, even the reference to drought is not certain, as *mubbil* may derive from one of several verbs, including *(w)abālu*, "to carry off."[286] Hurowitz's reading, "to dry up" (from *abālu*), is possible, but not conclusive. Since the association of locusts with drought imagery rests on the correct nuance of this verb, one might question whether this contested reading offers enough support upon which to base one's understanding of Joel. Even if his reading is confirmed, though, the drought imagery in Joel is far more pervasive. The drought not only dries up the trees and harvests; it becomes a raging fire consuming pastures and even watercourses (1:19-20). In addition, the deity's promise to restore rainfall ("He will bring down for you the rain, / the early rain and the latter rain as before;" 2:23) indicates concern over a lack of rain, not

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[285] Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague," 598-601.

[286] If the root is *(w)abālu*, perhaps the concern is over the locust "which carries off (the fruit of) the orchards," which would be an apt description of a locust swarm.

simply the agricultural failure of a locust infestation. Put simply, the prayer that Hurowitz draws attention to attests to an ancient concern over locust infestations, but does little to clarify the precise imagery in the book of Joel.

In short, attempts to explain away the presence of locusts in Joel's description of disaster as a cipher for a more ominous threat are unsatisfactory. They neither make sense of the jumble of images of disaster in the book of Joel, nor deal adequately with the variety of contexts in which locusts appear in ancient sources. In addition, studies that attempt to conflate the imagery of destruction with the effects of a locust plague fail to make sense of the array of images of destruction. As with proposals that seek to arrange a drought, a military invasion and a locust plague in sequential order, these studies merely attest to the difficulty of the question: why does the book of Joel use so many and such contradictory images of disaster?

5. Conventions of national distress: a rhetorical approach

The difficulty in comprehending the portrait of disaster presented in Joel 1-2, I contend, derives from a misunderstanding of the persuasive intent of the description of national crisis. The disaster is not merely reported; it is arranged, shaped, and ordered so that the community experiences a growing sense of anxiety about their survival. The tools of literary analysis helps illuminate this persuasive function of the disaster—the classic domain of rhetoric. The result is a greater appreciation for the way in which the presentation of national disaster in the book of Joel coheres.

As the discussion of the "locusts" in Joel 1:4 attests, too much attention (with too little payoff) has been devoted to offering a scientific (or historical) explanation for the crisis that elicited the complaint without sufficient regard for how the

presentation of disaster functions. Historically, it may be difficult to imagine the rather bizarre set of circumstances in which locusts would threaten the land during a severe drought, while at the same time foreign armies would also muster forces to march on Jerusalem. Rhetorically, though, this escalating series of disasters conveys a sense of utter destruction for the land and the people. This rhetorical concern—to persuade the hearers/readers that all bonds of social, political and religious order are threatened—animates the poetic description of disaster, a crucial point often downplayed in historical or scientific reconstructions. The repetitive nature of the disaster—with locusts and drought and a military assault—illustrates the magnitude of the crisis, much as the four-fold locust infestation of 1:4 highlights the severity of that plague.

Further discussion of the rhetorical function of the disaster in chs. 1-2, though, should await some attention to the literary conventions employed in ancient literature to describe national distress. The presentation of the crisis in Joel 1-2 does not arise in a vacuum, but borrows from and depends upon ancient literary customs. In particular, the way in which national distress is presented is highly conventional, as every imaginable ill compounds to offer a picture of complete chaos. A brief investigation of this literary convention helps clarify the rhetorical concerns at stake in the book of Joel's presentation of national destruction.

The combination of various images of disaster to highlight social, political, and economic chaos was widespread in the ancient Near East. Egyptian literature from the Old and Middle Kingdoms, for example, attests to a standardized portrait of national distress, including social unrest, foreign invaders, and the drying up of the

Nile.[287] A classic example of this motif appears in "The Prophecies of Neferti," which foreshadows (*ex post facto*, no doubt) a series of troubles that will threaten the land until the ascension of a new king, Amenemhet I (1990-1960 BCE). These troubles include all facets of Egyptian life:

> The sun is covered and does not shine for the people to see... (line 25)
>
> The river of Egypt is empty... (27)
>
> Foes have arisen in the east,
> Asiatics have descended into Egypt. (32-33)
>
> The land has perished, laws are destined for it,
> Deprived of produce, lacking in crops... (46)[288]

Importantly, cosmic turmoil (the darkening of the sun) accompanies the national disasters of famine, war, and drought, so that every element of communal order—including the heavens—is threatened. The heaping of disaster upon disaster highlights the despondency of Egyptian life, making all the more miraculous the arrival of Amenemhet I, who brings order and security to the land. Of course, reading these disasters as historical reports—by asking, for example, which Asiastic force is mentioned in line 33—would do tremendous injustice to the presentation of disaster, which conveys the experience of complete national distress. As Hilary Marlow notes, "these descriptions do not represent actual historical events or social revolutions.

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[287] See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 10. Lichtheim makes the case that, especially in the Middle Kingdom, there was a literary topos of "national distress" that was distinct from any historical event. She elaborates on this theme in her discussion of "The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb" and "The Admonitions of Ipuwer" (ibid., 145-62).

[288] Translation follows Nili Shupak, "The Prophecies of Neferti," *COS* 1.45.

Rather they are rhetorical devices, composed to address the problem of evil as a social phenomenon..."[289]

Ancient Sumerian literature attests to a similar literary convention, as the destruction of cities is described with multiple, even contradictory, images. For example, "The Curse of Agade" lists a series of disasters that Enlil brought upon King Naramsin of Agade in retribution for the plundering of Enlil's temple. These disasters include: military defeat (lines 155-61); wandering cattle (164-65); agricultural failure (172); bad fishing (173); famine (183); and general social chaos:

> Honest people were confounded with liars,
> Young men lay upon young men,
> The blood of liars ran upon the blood of honest men. (190-92)[290]

The destruction also includes both drought (175) and severe flooding (149-50), proving that consistency was less important than conveying the proper mood of extreme national distress. Discussing the historical veracity of these descriptions, Jerrold Cooper concludes:

> When dealing with events of even the relatively recent past, authors are less constrained by historical reality, more susceptible to the use of literary topoi rather than accurate description, and unabashedly distort the past—consciously or not—to support the thesis underlying their composition, or simply to make a better story.[291]

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[289] Hilary Marlow, "The Lament over the River Nile—Isaiah xix 5-10 in Its Wider Context," *VT* 57 (2007): 230-31. Marlow's analysis of this Egyptian trope helps her explain the combination of drought and war imagery in Isa 15:1-9 and Isa 19:1-15.

[290] Translation from Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, 59.

[291] Ibid., 15. Jacobsen also notes that it is "somewhat surprising to find that [the Curse of Agade's] presentation of events differs on important points from what we know to have taken place," especially since the earliest versions were apparently composed soon after the fall of the Agade dynasty. Jacobsen also concludes that "literary reasons" seem to explain the historical discrepancies (*Harps that Once...*, 360).

As in Egyptian literature, the imagery of destruction functions to present a community in turmoil. The explanation for the turmoil may be different—Enlil's anger in "The Curse of Agade;" the lack of a strong king in "The Prophecies of Neferti"—but the literary convention is remarkably similar: disasters are heaped upon disasters to express the complete unraveling of all bonds of social, political and economic life.

Within biblical literature, one finds a similar tendency to convey extreme distress by incorporating imagery from multiple types of catastrophe, even those that seem contradictory. Barton calls attention to psalms of individual lament, where metaphors are often mixed together to convey the petitioner's extreme plight.[292] In Ps 69, for example, the psalmist complains that he is sinking into "deep waters," but then laments that his "throat is parched" (vv. 3-4). In Ps 22, the petitioner complains of being surrounded by dogs, wild oxen, and bulls at the same time. Despite the tension within the imagery here, the petitioners' broader claim is still advanced: life for the petitioner is marked by extreme misery, which can only be alleviated by divine assistance.[293]

Communal laments that describe the distress of the nation or the destruction of Jerusalem operate with a similar principle and provide a better analogy with the book of Joel. The presentation of disaster in communal laments seeks to convey the experience of complete social chaos, which will (hopefully) persuade the deity to

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[292] Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 46-47.

[293] Cottrill offers an insightful study in how distress is communicated in psalms of individual lament, focusing specifically on the petitioner's suffering body and collapse in social standing and how power dynamics are negotiated in light of these experiences (*Language, Power, and Identity*). The discussion of individual laments is of only tangential relevance to the book of Joel, but Cottrill's findings are broadly consistent with the investigation here.

have compassion. It is difficult to know in some cases how accurate these descriptions are, as they often use traditional motifs that appear in a variety of contexts.[294] In any case, the imagery of disaster is not dispassionate, but advances a specific thesis: that all bonds of life and communal order are imperiled. For example, Ps 60 offers a communal lament that specifically addresses military failures, citing the deity's resistance to "go out with our armies" (v. 10). This complaint, though, is supplemented with descriptions of severe earthquakes and the bitterness of wine (vv. 2-3), which offer a broader portrait of national distress with which to persuade the deity. An even more extensive complaint can be found in Lam 5, which presents the destruction of Jerusalem as marked by the breakdown of all order and stability: famine (v. 10) and drought (v. 4) ravage the land; slaves are in charge of governance (v. 8);[295] women cannot be protected and are raped even in the heart of the city (v. 11); elders are shown no respect (v. 12); judicial customs have been abandoned (v. 14); and all worship has ceased (v. 15). In other words, the natural world no longer functions normally providing food and water; the proper channels of social order are in disarray, as crime and injustice prevail while the incompetent attempt to govern; and even the cult has ceased to offer regular communion with the deity. The particulars of any historical event aside, distress in biblical laments is conveyed in the broadest possible terms to illustrate the experience of misery and to persuade the deity to respond.

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[294] For example, see the discussion of the similarities between how Lamentations describes the destruction of Jerusalem and how Mesopotamian city laments bemoan the ruin of cities in Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 66-75.

[295] A slave as king is a classic motif of social chaos. See Prov 30:22, and the discussion of this motif in Raymond van Leeuwen, "Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down," *JBL* 105 (1986): 599-610.

Considering this tendency to exaggerate the magnitude of national distress, it is not surprising to find the particular confluence of disasters in the book of Joel—locusts, drought, and warfare—attested elsewhere as a group. Despite what entomologists may say about the migratory patterns of locusts,[296] Israelite writers seem to have understood locusts, droughts, and other threats to present a coherent portrait of national destruction. For example, curses appended to treaties often include extensive lists of calamities that will befall those who violate their obligations. Deuteronomy 28 warns the Israelites that their failure to abide by the covenant would result in plagues of locusts (v. 38), drought (vv. 22-24), and military defeat (vv. 25, 36, 48-57), along with pestilence (v. 21), skin diseases (vv. 27, 35), and many other disasters.[297] The Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon presents a similar image of destruction, discussing locusts, drought, and military defeat in the context of unimagined (and somewhat inconsistent) calamities:

> With a great flood (may he submerge) your land (VI.442).
>
> Just as rain does not fall from a brazen heaven so may rain and dew not come upon your fields and your meadows; may it

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[296] See Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 101-120, for a discussion of why locusts infestations are unlikely to accompany severe droughts. Locusts and military assaults, though, do not present the same contradiction. Jacob Wright observes that locusts often thrive during periods of extended military conflict, when fields cannot be plowed. See Wright, "Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19-20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft," *JBL* 127 (2008): 429.

[297] Stuart makes a similar observation (*Hosea-Jonah*, 232-33) but, in my view, draws the wrong conclusion. Stuart suggests that the book of Joel's use of imagery from locusts, drought, and warfare intentionally reflects the covenant curses of Deut 28 and signals that the people have violated the covenant. In fact, such imagery is widespread in depictions of disaster—not only in the covenant curses of Deut 28—and the book of Joel offers no reason to suppose that covenant violations are behind the disaster(s) in view.

James Linville's conclusion is more apt: "On the whole, this chapter's [Deut 28] conflation of famine, infestation, and dominations suggests that in Joel 1:2-2:11 a similar mix of catastrophe may be in view." See Linville, "Letting the 'Bi-word' 'Rule,'" 8.

rain burning coals instead of dew on your land (VII.530-33).

[May the] locust who diminishes the land [devour] your harvest (VI.442-3).

(In) hunger may one man eat the flesh of another (VI.450).

May Ishtar, lady of battle and war, [smash your bow in a stiff] battle. May she bind your arm; may she [end? your life] in your enemy's presence (VI.453-4).[298]

Beyond treaties, these particular images of disaster—locusts, drought and military invasion—still appear together, especially in reference to divine judgment. The deity's promise to Solomon in Chronicles, for example, addresses drought and locusts simultaneously:

הן אעצר השמים ולא־יהיה מטר והן־אצוה על־חגב לאכול הארץ ואם־אשלח
דבר בעמי ויכנעו עמי אשר נקרא־שמי עליהם ויתפללו ויבקשו פני וישבו
מדרכיהם הרעים ואני אשמע מן־השמים ואסלח לחטאתם וארפא את־ארצם

If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain; if I command the locust[299] to devour the land; if I send a plague among my people, when my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chr 7:13-14)

The Chronicler here adds to the divine promises of 1 Kgs 9:3 to address specifically the concerns over drought, locust infestations, and plague (דבר), all traditional images of disaster. In fact, these same threats are mentioned explicitly in Solomon's prayer

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[298] Translation follows Wiseman, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," 29-80.

[299] The identification of this "locust" (חגב) is, unfortunately, no clearer than the identification of the various locusts in the book of Joel. It appears in a list of four-legged, winged insects in Lev 11:21-22, along with ארבה. Its appearance in 2 Chr 7:13 functions as a response to Solomon's prayer in 2 Chr 6:28 (cf. 1 Kgs 8:37), which lists ארבה and חסיל. As a result, its designation as a (type of?) locust or locust-like insect is certain, but further precision may not be possible. See Lerner, "Timid Grasshoppers and Fierce Locusts," 545-48; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 664-66.

at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8; 2 Chr 6). Solomon offers a long list of possible threats from which the deity may need to save the people, citing in particular locusts (1 Kgs 8:37; 2 Chr 6:28); drought (1 Kgs 8:35; 2 Chr 6:26); and foreign armies (1 Kgs 8:33, 37, 44, 46; 2 Chr 6:24, 34, 36).

In prophetic literature, the deity's judgment often assumes multiple (and seemingly inconsistent) forms of disaster. Ezekiel identifies Yahweh's "four terrible judgments: sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence" (Ezek 14:21).[300] These punishments can be grouped together in oracles against the nations to highlight the comprehensive nature of the deity's destruction. Isaiah 19, an oracle describing judgment on Egypt, predicts oppression by foreign enemies as well as extreme drought, which dries up the Nile. The oracle against Moab in Jer 48 envisions destruction by the sword (48:2), exile (v. 7), fire (v. 45), and agricultural failure (vv. 32-33). Perhaps the closest comparison to the book of Joel, though, appears in the book of Amos and is worth quoting at length:

וגם־אני נתתי לכם
נקיון שׁנים בכל־עריכם
וחסר לחם בכל מקומתיכם
ולא־שׁבתם עדי נאם־יהוה
וגם אנכי מנעתי מכם את־הגשׁם
בעוד שׁלשׁה חדשׁים לקציר [...]
ולא־שׁבתם עדי נאם־יהוה
הכיתי אתכם בשׁדפון ובירקון
החרבתי[301] גנותיכם וכרמיכם

[300] Cf. Jer 15:2, which identifies plague, sword, famine and captivity as Yahweh's four-fold judgment, three of which (sword, famine, captivity) would appear as threats to a besieged city.

[301] Reading החרבתי, rather than MT: הרבות. Shalom Paul defends MT, identifying it as the adverbial use of the Hiphil infinitive construct of רבה, hence "frequently, repeatedly." He translates

ותאניכם וזיתיכם יאכל הגזם
ולא־שבתם עדי נאם־יהוה
שלחתי בכם דבר בדרך מצרים
הרגתי בחרב בחוריכם [...]
ולא־שבתם עדי נאם־יהוה
הפכתי בכם
כמהפכת אלהים את־סדם ואת עמרה [...]
ולא־שבתם עדי נאם־יהוה

I, for my part, gave you
cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
and lack of food in all your places,
yet you did not return to me, declares Yahweh.
And I also withheld the rain from you
when there were still three months to the harvest...
yet you did not return to me, declares Yahweh.
I struck you with blight and mildew;
I dried up your gardens and your vineyards;
your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured;
yet you did not return to me, declares Yahweh.
I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt;
I killed your young men with the sword...
yet you did not return to me, declares Yahweh.
I overthrew some of you,
as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah...
yet you did not return to me, declares Yahweh. (Amos 4:6-11)

This oracle presents a picture of increasingly severe punishments, with images of famine, drought, crop disease, locust infestation, and plague combined with military disasters: young men killed in battle and cities overthrown by enemy forces. Attempts to identify which cities were overthrown, or what time of the year a locust

the poetic line as follows: "Repeatedly your gardens and vineyards, / Your fig trees and olive trees the locust devoured." See his discussion in Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 147. In context, though, a verbal form is preferable to Paul's suggestion of the highly unusual 'retrospective ellipsis' (for the use and rarity of this poetic device in biblical Hebrew, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, 1985], 23; Nicholas Lunn, *Word Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* [PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006], 188-89), so many have amended to the Hiphil Perfect of חרב, hence "I dried up." See, for example, Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 210; also, BHS and HALOT. The subject of drought is addressed explicitly in v. 7, so its appearance here is reasonable.

infestation, a drought, and crop diseases might coincide, miss the rhetorical function of the description of disaster—the repetition and intensification of destructive forces magnifies the people's culpability and heightens the sense of impending doom. The book of Joel includes the same imagery. Famine (Joel 1:16a), drought (1:20b), the failure of crops (1:7), locusts (1:4), and a military assault (2:5b) are clear parallels. If one understands the "plague (דבר) after the manner of Egypt" to be a reference to the affliction of the livestock,[302] then Joel 1:18-20 reflects a similar concern as well. One need not conclude that the book of Joel alludes specifically to Amos 4, but the comparison does suggest that the confluence of disasters in Joel is consistent with a conventional way of expressing national distress.

One specific example of how the disaster in Joel follows literary conventions deserves discussion, as it illustrates my broader point that the imagery of destruction offers a standardized portrait of national distress. The description of the military-like assault in Joel 2:1-11 is not unique. A very similar description of Yahweh's army is found also in Nahum 2-3. Both descriptions include an army (חיל; Joel 2:11; Nah 2:4) led by Yahweh, attacking a city with chariots (מרכבה; Joel 2:5; Nah 3:2; רכב; Nah 2:5), fire (אשׁ; Joel 2:5; Nah 2:4), horses (סוס; Joel 2:4; Nah 3:2), and soldiers (גבור; Joel 2:7; Nah 2:4). In both accounts, they leap (רקד; Joel 2:5; Nah 3:2) through the air, scale walls (חומה; Joel 2:7, 9; Nah 2:6), and terrify the people (כל־פנים קבצו

[302] Cf. Exodus 9:3: "The hand of Yahweh will strike your livestock in the field—the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks—with a very severe plague (דבר)."

פארור; Joel 2:6; ופני כלם קבצו פארור; Nah 2:11). Indeed, Jakob Wöhrle finds the correspondences between Joel 2:1-11 and Nah 2-3 so striking that he concludes they must both be additions by the same redactor.[303] Strazicich, noting some of these similarities, argues that the author of Joel is alluding to Nahum to draw a parallel with the destruction of Nineveh.[304]

Wöhrle and Strazicich, though, mistake the conventional imagery of an attacking army for the hallmarks of a redactor's contribution or a conscious allusion. The similarities, in other words, are not confined to Nahum and Joel, but can be found in other descriptions of invading forces. Isaiah 13, for example, an oracle against Babylon, contains a similar description of Yahweh's invading army (v. 4; cf. Joel 2:11), announced by a herald's cry (v. 2; cf. Joel 2:1), bringing anguish (v. 8; cf. Joel 2:6), darkness (v. 10; cf. Joel 2:2), and cosmic upheaval (v. 13; cf. Joel 2:10). Jeremiah 4-6 also presents a comparable portrait, as Yahweh musters a foreign army (5:15; cf. Joel 2:11) with mighty soldiers (5:16; cf. Joel 2:7), horses and chariots (4:13; cf. Joel 4-5) to lay siege to Jerusalem (6:3-5; cf. Joel 2:6-9).[305] Perhaps one of the closest parallels, though, is not found in biblical literature at all, but appears in an Ugaritic text composed many centuries prior to the book of Joel. The description of

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[303] Wöhrle, "Israel's Identity," 160-61.

[304] Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 131-32.

[305] See also Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *JSS* 4.2 (1959): 101-103. Von Rad notes the way in which conventional descriptions of warfare dominate the presentation of disaster in Joel 2:1-11.

Kirta's army in the Kirta Epic, as Ferdinand Deist has observed,[306] mirrors the invading army in Joel 2. In both cases, the armies are descried as a numberless force (KTU 1.14 II 35-38; Joel 2:11); marching in rank (II 39-40; Joel 2:7-8); attacking cities (III 6-7; Joel 2:9); even calling the bride-groom away from his bride (II 47-50; Joel 2:16; see chart 2). Clearly, the author of Joel is not alluding to the long-lost Ugaritic text. Rather, the military imagery in Joel 2:1-11 is highly conventional, reflecting a well-established custom of describing besieging armies.

[306] Deist, "Parallels and Reinterpretation," 66-67. Deist produces a chart illustrating some of the correspondences he finds between Joel 2 and the Kirta epic; chart 2 below mirrors his analysis, providing an updated translation and a few minor changes.

Chart 2: Comparison of Joel 2 and the Kirta Epic

Joel 2:1-17	*Kirta Epic*[307]
He may...leave behind him a blessing: an offering and a libation for Yahweh your God. (v. 14)	Adore Baal with your sacrifice, Dagon's Son with your offering. (II 24-26)
Yahweh utters his voice before his army. Indeed, his camp is exceedingly large; indeed, mighty are those who obey his command. (v. 11)	Let your host be a very large force, As many as three hundred myriads! Soldiers beyond number, Archers beyond count! (II 35-38)
Each marches in his path; they do not change their course. They do not jostle one another; each marches in his own track. (vv. 7-8)	They'll march by the thousand, in rows, In myriads, by rank arrayed. After two, two will march; After three, all of them. (II 39-42)
Gather the children— even those still nursing. Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom, and the bride her bridal chambers. (v. 16)	The sole survivor'll shut his house. The widow'll hire on for a fee. Even the ill will be carried in bed. Even the blind will blink his way. The new-wed groom will go forth; To another man he'll drive his wife; To a stranger, his own true love. (II 43-50)
They have the appearance of horses, and they run like steeds... like a mighty people arrayed for battle. (vv. 4-5)	Like a locust swarm, they'll inhabit the steppe; Like crickets, the desert's edge. (II 50-III 1)
Into the city they rush; upon the wall they run. Into the houses they climb; through the windows they enter like a thief. (v. 9)	Attack its outlying towns, Assault the surrounding villages! (III 6-7)

[307] Translations of the Kirta Epic follow Greenstein, "Kirta," 14-16.

If, as I argue, there is an established convention of national distress attested in biblical and non-biblical sources, and if the military imagery of Joel 2 demonstrates the use of a traditional approach in describing the threat in Joel, the rhetorical effect of the imagery of disaster in Joel 1-2 demands closer scrutiny. In other words, by relying on literary conventions in framing the disaster threatening the people, the author of Joel does not provide an objective accounting with which one can offer an historical reconstruction. The way in which the portrait of distress is presented, though—how the text conveys the plight of the people; what and whom the disaster threatens—should help to clarify the purpose the disaster serves. It is the function of the disaster, rather than the nature of the historic event in view, that most assists our study of the compositional history of the book.

In describing the disaster, Joel 1-2 uses repetition and intensification to convey a complete collapse of the communal and social order. Joel 1:4, as discussed extensively above, offers one example of this approach. The poet describes not simply a locust plague, but a four-fold invasion, with each wave consuming any scraps that remained. The repetition of the same line three times—"what the __ left, the __ has eaten"—provides an ominous and increasingly dire picture of the harvest. A similar technique is used to describe the condition of the trees. In 1:7, the fig trees are described as threatened, stripped of their bark and foliage. The description is ominous, as such a tree can yield no fruit. The situation becomes even worse, though, in 1:12, where the fig trees reappear. Here, not only do the figs fail (אמל) to bear fruit, but so do the pomegranate, palm, and apple trees. In fact, "all the trees of the field" are dried up (יבשׁ), threatening their production. The motif of the failing trees is

repeated, but also broadened to include more than the figs; every cultivatable tree is in danger. When the same trope reappears in 1:19, then, the situation is not surprisingly even worse. The threat to the trees exceeds concern over the current harvest, as "all the trees of the field" are consumed by fire (ולהבה להטה כל־עצי השׂדה). The description of the damage to the trees illustrates how the destruction grows and intensifies, giving greater urgency to the poet's call.

Several other examples attest to the repetition and intensification of the disaster. Joel 1:2 notes that the threat is unusual: "Has such a thing happened in your days, / or in the days of your ancestors?" When the uniqueness of the event is repeated, it is completely unlike anything in history:

> There hasn't been anything like it
>   since ancient times,
> nor will there be again in the future
>   for generation after generation. (Joel 2:2)

The destruction in ch. 1 is so severe that the earth is said to "mourn" (אבל; 1:10), while in ch. 2 the destruction is even more climactic: the earth quakes; the heavens tremble; and the sky grows dark (2:10). The use of the day of Yahweh tradition also shows an intensifying effect. The day initially marks a day of "destruction" (שׁד; 1:15), then a day of "darkness" (חשך; 2:2); but in its third appearance the day of Yahweh offers no hope for survival:

> Indeed, great is the day of Yahweh
>   and very terrible—
>   who can endure it? (2:11)

The disaster is not simply repeated, but magnified, so that the destruction is even more ominous and severe.

This literary trope of repetition and intensification highlights the severity of the crisis and adds a sense of urgency to the call for cultic participation. In addition, this trope, I contend, helps make the most sense of the jumble of images of disaster in the book of Joel. The disaster is presented initially as a severe and devastating locust plague (1:4), consuming the land's produce. The repeated descriptions of agricultural failure (1:5-7, 8-10, 11-12), though, allow for an intensification of the crisis. A drought, too, is consuming the land: "the wine is dried up" (1:10b); "the vine is dried up" (1:12a); even the trees "are dried up" (1:12b). The description of drought conditions offers further opportunity to magnify the sense of crisis, as famine breaks out among the people (1:16) and cattle (1:18). Indeed, the disaster is so severe, it rages like a fire consuming pastures and watercourses (1:19-20). With ch. 2, the disaster takes on martial imagery, rushing forth as an invading army that cannot be halted. As the heavens tremble and the skies grow dark (2:10), the disaster reaches its climactic conclusion: the destruction results from Yahweh leading his own army against the land (2:11). The poetry in Joel 1-2 repeats and intensifies the disaster with a broad array of conventional threats: locusts, drought, and military invasion, to be sure, but also fire, famine, earthquake, darkened skies, and divine aggression. With each additional threat, the situation is revealed to be increasingly dire, reinforcing the need for divine assistance to avert complete destruction.

The use of multiple images of disaster, then, is not contradictory; it does not reveal a complex redactional history behind the text, nor, as Wolff maintained, a two-fold disaster for which two divine promises are expected. The various images of disaster, taken together, contribute to a larger rhetorical program that presents the

people and the land in extreme distress. The disaster threatens every segment of society: the countryside (ch. 1) and the city (2:7-9); the young and the old (2:16). It endangers the animals (1:18-20) as much as humans. The destruction may be primarily economic, but it also disrupts the cultic sphere, preventing sacrifice and offering (1:9, 13). The various images of disaster reinforce this portrait of national calamity, giving credence to the call for enthusiastic and universal participation in national mourning rites.

6. Summary

Discussion of the compositional history of the book of Joel begins with one of the main cruxes in Joel research: what is the nature of the disaster in Joel 1-2? Scholarly treatments have generally focused on whether a locust infestation, a drought, or a military invasion is in view, or whether some combination of these disasters are thought to threaten the land. Unfortunately, no consensus has emerged on this question, and the debate has offered little clarity about the book of Joel. Perhaps the dissatisfaction with this debate is a consequence of beginning with the wrong question. My analysis of the disaster asks not what the nature of it is—by reference to entomology, meteorology, or history—but what is its rhetorical function. What portrait is presented with this particular combination of disasters? How is the experience of disaster expressed? What tropes are employed to describe the crisis, and what do they accomplish? The result is not greater clarity about the historical event that may (or may not) be in view, but a better sense of how the images of disaster cohere to convey the experience of national distress.

Biblical and non-biblical sources attest to a literary convention of national distress, which combines various types of threats to highlight the breakdown of social, political, and economic bonds. This convention is employed especially in communal laments, lamenting the sorrow of the people, and in oracles of judgment, warning that the deity will bring catastrophe on the unjust. The poet of Joel 1-2 uses this trope in a specific way: to repeat and intensify the severity of the threat. The disaster, in other words, is not simply an accumulation of threats; it moves in a specific direction: from a locust infestation, to a drought, to a raging fire and enemy assault. Ultimately, the disaster is revealed as the deity's own army waging war against his people. This rhetorical trope—of repetition and intensification—is consistent in the description of disaster, as the threat moves from a rare and destructive insect plague to an unprecedented assault against Zion from which no one can escape. The growing sense of terror and alarm seeks to persuade the people that the trouble cannot be ignored; only through petitioning the deity for mercy can the community hope to escape full-scale destruction.

To describe the disaster in Joel 1-2 in this way is not to deny that some historical event took place. Presumably, the intended audience for the poetry in Joel did not need an explicit description of the events that were occurring; rather, they were offered a new way of envisioning what was happening and expressing their collective distress at the breakdown of social order. If a specific disaster did elicit this poetry—probable but not absolutely certain[308]—I am not convinced that a locust

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[308] Hilary Marlow argues that "national laments do not necessarily represent actual situations" (Marlow, "The Lament over the River Nile," 234). As a result, it can be difficult to resolve historical (or entomological) tensions in literature so closely associated with national laments as the book of Joel.

plague can be ruled out. In other words, a description of the devastating effects of a locust infestation could reasonably be presented much like Joel 1-2, with a severe locust plague described at the outset (1:4) and traditional motifs of national distress offering a broader portrait of social chaos. Joel 2:25 seems to support this possibility, as it specifically identifies the locust plague as Yahweh's "great army, which I sent against you" (חילי הגדול אשר שלחתי בכם).

Nevertheless, attempts to press every detail of the book of Joel to discern the particulars of this "locust plague" ignore the use of conventional imagery and miss the rhetorical function of the disaster. For example, Nash argues the imagery of the book reflects the conditions at the end of a particularly brutal summer that followed a winter drought and a spring locust invasion.[309] In a similar fashion, Simkins views the disaster as a locust plague, followed by a summer drought, with a second locust plague in view.[310] In my view, the author of the book of Joel uses conventional imagery of destruction to convince the reader/hearer that the current situation is extremely dire and cannot be endured without divine assistance. The consistent focus on locust, drought, and military imagery in discussions of the nature of the disaster obscures the use of other conventional motifs of national distress, such as fire, famine, darkness, earthquake, and divine aggression. For example, the darkening of the heavens served as a stock image for an ominous and foreboding disaster:

> When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens,
> and make their stars dark;
> I will cover the sun with a cloud,

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[309] Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 51-61.

[310] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 168-69.

and the moon shall not give its light.
All the shining lights of the heavens
I will darken above you;
And I will put darkness on your land,
says the Lord Yahweh. (Ezek 32:7-8)

The sun is covered and does not shine for the people to see.
("Prophecies of Neferti," 25)[311]

The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining. (Joel 2:10b)

The darkened heavens in Joel are not proof that a thick swarm of locusts is being described as covering the skies[312] or that the seasonal dust-clouds that sweep through the Levant must be in view.[313] The imagery is part of a conventional set of disasters, expressing the experience of national distress in terms of cosmic turmoil. The breakdown of the social order is so complete that the very foundations of the heavens and the earth are thought to tremble (2:10a). As Linville argues: "Perhaps the prophet Joel did have some real-world catastrophe in mind, but the book presents a *literary* world, and it is only to the latter world that the modern critic has any direct access."[314]

Discussion of the rhetorical function of the disaster helps our analysis of the compositional history of the book of Joel by demonstrating that the depiction of

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[311] Translation in Shupak, "The Prophecies of Neferti," *COS* 1.45.

[312] Cf. Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 133-35.

[313] Cf. Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 151-52. Nash interprets this imagery as reflecting the effects of the fall sirocco storm. See also Sweeney's discussion of how this imagery is explained by the dry desert *Ḥamsin/Sharav* winds (*The Twelve Prophets*, 1:173-76).

[314] Linville, "The Day of Yahweh and the Mourning of the Priests in Joel," in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets* (eds. Lester Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis; JSOTSup 408; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 100. Linville here echoes a point made earlier by Deist, who noted that the author of the book of Joel has created a "*literary* world of calamities" ("Parallels and Reinterpretation," 64-65).

distress in chs. 1-2 is not disjointed and contradictory. Despite the use of various images for destruction, the broader portrait of social chaos is comprehensible and coheres to emphasize the need for collective participation in communal mourning rites. The nature of the historical event to which the poetry alludes may be obscure, but the experience of national distress is clear and consistent. The disaster threatens the very existence of the community, so that the only hope for survival, the poet maintains, is divine assistance.

Poems of National Distress

Far from a redactional mess, then, the imagery of disaster in Joel 1-2 actually presents a unified and (somewhat) coherent portrait of complete national distress—even if the identity of the historical event in view remains obscure. The accumulation of threats magnifies the sense of anxiety, underscoring the need for the people to participate in appropriate ritual activity. This broader portrait of disaster is presented in the form of two poems, each of which describes the community's plight and calls for specific action to appeal to the deity. Further analysis of these poems—in terms of both their formal structure and their use of literary tropes—not only supports the position that the various descriptions of national disaster cohere, but leads to a stronger conclusion, namely, that the two poems in Joel 1-2 were actually composed to complement one another.

1. *Formal structure*

The structure of Joel 1-2 demonstrates how closely related the presentations of disaster are. The prologue to the book (1:1) is followed by two poems of roughly

equal length: 1:2-20 and 2:1-17.[315] These two poems, although not structurally identical,[316] contain many of the same features and emphasize the same general message:

1:2-20	2:1-17
Call to attention (vv. 2-4)	Call to attention (vv. 1-2)
Calls to lament (5-14)	Image of destructive force (3-11)
Complaint (15-20)	Calls to lament (12-17)

The "calls to attention" that introduce the two poems are structurally parallel and echo the same warning: the community's current plight is uniquely dire. Both begin with a pair of imperative verbs (שמעו, והאזינו; Joel 1:2; תקעו, והריעו; 2:1) that call for the people to take seriously the threat at hand, and each summons "all inhabitants of the land" (כל ישבי הארץ) to take note of the magnitude of the disaster. They also both introduce the nature of the disaster, however obliquely, with the first poem describing a locust swarm and the second describing an approaching "people." Additionally, they even emphasize that the current calamity is unprecedented in history ("Has such a thing happened in your days...," 1:2b; "There hasn't been anything like it since ancient times...," 2:2c) and will have lasting significance for future generations (לדור אחר, 1:3; דור ודור, 2:2; see chart 3).

[315] Following the JPS delineation of the poetry, 1:2-20 has 79 lines; 2:1-17 has 80. I count 81 and 84 lines, respectively.

[316] Barton proposes a structural outline that does offer an identical pattern in ch. 1 and ch. 2: details of disaster (1:2-4; 2:1-11); calls to lament (1:5-14; 2:12-17a); the lament (1:15-20; 2:17bc). See *Joel and Obadiah*, 14. Although Barton's outline supports the unity I discern in Joel 1-2, it has its drawbacks. "The lament," for example, in 2:17bc hardly constitutes a unit on balance with 1:15-20; the former has only 5 lines of poetry, while the latter has nearly 30. In addition, the structure Barton offers does not account adequately for the differences between the poems.

Chart 3: The Calls to Attention in Joel 1 and 2

Hear this, O elders,
  give ear, <u>all inhabitants of the land</u>
Has such a thing happened in your days,
  or in the days of your ancestors?
Tell your children about it,
  and your children their children,
  and their children the next generation (לדור אחר).
What the *gāzām* locust left,
  the *ʾarbeh* locust has eaten;
and what the *ʾarbeh* locust left,
  the *yeleq* locust has eaten;
and what the *yeleq* locust left,
  the *ḥāsîl* locust has eaten. (1:2-4)

Blow a trumpet in Zion!
  Raise a shout on my holy mountain!
Let <u>all inhabitants of the land</u> tremble,
  for the day of Yahweh is coming—
  indeed, it is near.
A day of blackness and night,
  a day of cloud and thick darkness.
Like soot spread upon the mountains
  is a people great and mighty.
There hasn't been anything like it
  since ancient times,
nor will there be again in the future
  for generation after generation (דור ודור). (2:1-2)

In both poems, these "calls to attention" set the stage for extended "calls to lament," or more precisely calls to participate in communal mourning rites. These calls to lament also take a similar form. Imperative verbs dominate,[317] calling the people to fasting (צום; 1:14; 2:12, 15), weeping (בכה; 1:5; 2:12, 17), and mourning (ספד; 1:13; 2:12). Clauses of motivation (usually beginning with כי) often follow, providing the impetus for communal action (1:6, 10b, 11bβ, 13c; 2:13b).[318] The calls to lament also reflect the same concerns with the ritual world, often using nearly identical vocabulary. The temple emerges as the primary locus of activity, as the people are urged to congregate around the "house of Yahweh" (בית יהוה; בית אלהיכם; בית יהוה אלהיכם; 1:9, 13, 14) and its altar (מזבח; 1:13; 2:17). In particular, both poems emphasize the importance of restoring worship to the temple and bemoan the lack of grain and drink offerings (מנחה ונסך; 1:9, 13; 2:14). The priests—the

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[317] As Sweeney has demonstrated ("The Place and Function of Joel"), imperative verbs play an important role in the structure of the book of Joel. The use of imperatives is most pronounced in these "calls to lament." The first poem includes the following imperatives in 1:5-14: wake up; weep (v. 5); wail (vv. 5, 11, 13); lament (v. 8); be ashamed (v. 11); gird; mourn; come; spend the night (v. 13); sanctify; call; gather; and cry out (v. 14). The second poem echoes many of these same calls in 2:12-17; imperative verbs (not including jussives) include: return (vv. 12, 13); rend (v. 13); blow (v. 15); sanctify (vv. 15, 16); call (v. 15); gather; and assemble (v. 16).

[318] For an extended discussion of the form of the "call to communal lamentation," see Wolff, "Der Aufruf zur Volksklage," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 48-56; and Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 20-22. Wolff identifies 13 examples of this "genre" outside the book of Joel: 2 Sam 3:31; Jer 4:8; 6:26; 7:29; 22:20; 25:34; 49:3; Zeph 1:11; Ezek 21:17; Isa 14:31; 23:1-14; 32:11-14; and Zech 11:2. The formal features include: imperative verb; vocative; and motivational clause (usually introduced by כי). Wolff uses this analysis to identify four "strophes" of the call to lament in Joel 1:5-14 (vv. 5-7; 8-10; 11-12; 13-14) and to reconstruct the "corrupted" form of vv. 8-10. Several points should be mentioned in response to Wolff's analysis. First, the formal features that Wolff identifies (imperative + vocative + *kî* clause) are hardly unique to calls to lament as they appear routinely in imperative formulations, especially in poetry (e.g., Gen 4:23; Ps 130:7). In addition, not all calls to lament fit this pattern neatly (e.g., 2 Sam 3:31; Joel 2:15-17), so one need not resort to emendations to make Joel 1:8-10 conform to the structure. In other words, the clearest signal of the form should probably be the imperative verbs to "lament," "cry out," and "wail," not the pattern Wolff identifies. Thus, a number of other texts should also be included in the analysis (e.g., Jer 48:17-20; 51:8; Lam 2:18-19).

"ministers of Yahweh" (משרתי יהוה; 1:9; 2:17)[319]—are also singled out to play an important role in leading the people through the necessary rites. Finally, the communal nature of the lamentation is emphasized in both poems, as all the people—"even those still nursing" (וינקי שדים; 2:16)—are implored to join the ritual activity (see chart 4).

[319] Cf. 1:13, where the priests are referred to as "the ministers of the altar" (משרתי מזבח) and "the ministers of God" (משרתי אלהים).

Chart 4: Calls to Lament in Joel 1 and 2

Gird yourselves and lament, O *priests*;
wail, O *ministers* of the *altar*.
Come, pass the night in sackcloth,
O *ministers* of God.
For withheld from the house of your God
is the offering and libation.
Sanctify a fast;
call an assembly;
gather the *elders*,
all inhabitants of the land,
to the house of Yahweh your God,
and cry out to Yahweh! (1:13-14)

Blow a trumpet in Zion!
Sanctify a fast;
call an assembly;
gather the people;
sanctify the congregation;
assemble the *elders*;
gather the children—
even those still nursing.
Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom,
and the bride her bridal chambers.
Between the porch and the *altar*,
let the *priests* weep,
the *ministers* of Yahweh.
(2:15-17a)

The similarities between these poems may be striking, but the two are not identical. Specifically, the two poems focus on distinct elements of the disaster. The first poem examines the impact of the disaster on the people, the land, and the broader natural world. Joel 1:15-20, in particular, offers a series of complaints ("Alas for the day!" v. 15; "How the animals groan!" v. 18; "To you, O Yahweh, I call!" v. 19) that describe how the catastrophe disrupts normal social, economic, and religious order: food is "cut off" from the people (v. 16); crops have failed (v. 17); animals suffer in the fields (vv. 18-20). The second poem, by contrast, focuses on the agent of destruction (esp. 2:3-11) and provides graphic detail about the power and relentless force of the deity's threatening army. The violent images of rumbling chariots (v. 5) and charging warriors (v. 7) replace the portrait of ruined crops and starving cattle from the first poem. The subject of the complaints in ch. 1 is the economic and social chaos left in the wake of the disaster; the subject of the "image of destructive force"[320] in ch. 2 is the power and terror of the deity's military.

That the same disaster may be in view in both poems is suggested by the fact that both poems associate the disaster with the "day of Yahweh" tradition (1:15; 2:1, 11) and by the repetition of fire as an element of the destruction (see chart 5). Even still, the use of such imagery illustrates the different emphases in the two poems. In ch. 1, fire focuses attention on the devastation to the pastures and trees, highlighting the desperate plight of the people, the land, and the livestock. The second poem, by

[320] The "image of destructive force" may not be a form-critical category, but it parallels the descriptions in other lament literature and in oracles against the nations. See, for example, Lam 2:1-9, which discusses the violence of the deity's destruction of Jerusalem; Jer 50:41-43, which describes the might of the force invading Babylon and the fright that strikes the king of Babylon; and Isa 13:2-22, which details the terror that the army of Yahweh of hosts will bring upon the earth and, in particular, Babylon.

contrast, employs the same image to reinforce the power and terror of the agent of destruction. All around the attacking force a raging fire consumes everything in its path—"there is no escape from it" (2:3). Similarly, in ch. 1, the "day of Yahweh" focuses attention on very concrete ways in which the people are suffering, as it marks the absence of food (אכל), joy (שׂמחה), and gladness (וגיל; 1:16). In ch. 2, on the other hand, the "day of Yahweh" illustrates the unstoppable force of the divine army—"who can endure it?" (2:11). Put simply, the second poem does not merely re-state the message of the first but complements it,[321] offering a different angle of vision on the disaster that threatens the land.[322]

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[321] Deist makes a similar point in his comparison of Joel 1 and 2, although he believes Joel 2 to be a deliberate mis-interpretation of the first poem. In other words, he finds the use of military imagery and the divine warrior tradition in ch. 2 to be at odds with the agricultural concerns of ch. 1. Although I disagree with his conclusion, his analysis of the "parallelisms" between ch. 1 and ch. 2 is insightful; see his discussion in "Parallels and Reinterpretation," 65-70.

[322] John Watts supports this reading, although he is confident that the disaster in view is a locust plague: "[Joel 2:1-11] describes the locusts themselves rather than the destruction they have caused. The harm to fields and pastures was pictured in the first chapter. Now [in Joel 2] the city is attacked" (*The Books of Joel*, 24).

Chart 5: Fire Imagery in Joel 1 and 2

To you, O Yahweh, I call.
For *fire devours* (אש אכלה)
the pastures of the wilderness;
and *flames burn* (ולהבה להטה)
all the trees of the field.
Even the beasts of the field
cry out to you.
For dried up
are the watercourses;
and *fire devours* (ואש אכלה)
the pastures of the wilderness.
(1:19-20)

In front of it *fire devours* (אכלה אש),
and behind it *flames burn* (תלהט להבה).
The land is like the garden of Eden
in front of it,
but behind it a desolate wilderness—
there is no escape from it. (2:3)

2. *Poetic unity*

The risk in outlining these two poems in Joel in this manner—with a "call to attention," "calls to lament," and a "complaint" or "image of destructive force"—is that one gets the impression that the two poems are collections of independent stanzas. In fact, each poem is far more integrated than such an outline suggests. The outline serves as a heuristic device to illustrate the formal structure of the poems, but each poem also displays an internal coherence. As arranged in the first poem, for example, the "call to attention" (1:2-4) and "calls to lament" (1:5-14) begin and end with a plea to the "elders" (זקנים; 1:2, 14) and "all inhabitants of the land" (כל ישבי הארץ; 1:2, 14), forming an inclusio that unites the two sections. Additionally, the first poem uses repetition and wordplay to offer a sense of unity to the composition. For example, הוביש ("be dismayed;" 1:10, 11, 12a, 12c, 17) and שׂדה ("field;" 1:10, 11, 12, 19, 20) recur throughout ch. 1 to emphasize the devastation to the land, but the first poem also uses wordplay to highlight these thematic terms. The *dismay* (הוביש) among the people stems from the *drying up* (יבשׁ; 1:12, 20) of the crops, and the *devastation* (שׁדד; v. 10a, c) of the *fields* (שׂדה) is likened to *destruction* (שׁד; v. 15c) from the *deity* (שׁדי; v. 15c). The repetition and wordplay, as James Linville has pointed out, unites the natural world with the human world, so that the destruction of the land is experienced as a direct assault on the people and their cultic functionaries. "These word-plays and associations articulate a *symbiotic and organic relationship*

between the land, the people and its priesthood."[323] The consistent use of repetition and wordplay (see chart 6) also offers evidence that Joel 1:2-20 is better viewed as a unified poem, rather than a collection of independent units.

[323] Linville, "The Day of Yahweh," 104; italics original.

Chart 6: Repeated Elements in Joel 1

Call to the "elders" and "all inhabitants of the land" (v. 2)	Call to gather the "elders" and "all inhabitants of the land" (14)
Description of the locusts eating (אכל) the land (4)	Description of the fire eating (אכל) the land (19-20)
"Offering and libation have been cut off (כרת) from the house of Yahweh" (9)	"Before our very eyes isn't the food cut off (כרת); from the house of our God joy and gladness?" (16)
Wordplay with שדד and שׂדה (10)	Wordplay with שד and שדי (15)
The grain (דגן) is devastated (10)	The grain (דגן) is dried up (17)
The oil fails (אמלל; 10)	The fig tree fails (אמללה; 12)
"All the trees of the field" are dried up (12)	"All the trees of the field" are consumed (19)

The description of national distress in Joel 2:1-17 is also a unified poem. The "call to attention" introduces the topics that are developed throughout the second poem, warning of the "day of Yahweh" (2:1b) and urging the sentinels to alert the people to the magnitude of the calamity ("blow a trumpet in Zion;" 2:1a). The "day of Yahweh" reappears in the description of the agent of destruction as an ominous sign of the deity's assault against Jerusalem (2:11), and the call of alarm ("blow a trumpet in Zion") recurs in 2:15, summoning the entire populace to participate in communal mourning rites. The introduction thus sets the stage for the concerns of the entire poem.

Sound-play also illustrates the way in which the second poem coheres. In particular, the repetition of the similarly-sounding prepositions לפני (vv. 3 [2x], 10, and 11) and מפני (v. 6)—"before"—provides a response to the repeated use of אחרי (vv. 2, 3 [2x])—"after"—that opens the poem.[324] Additionally, the recurring use of *kaph* (and occasionally *qôph*) at the beginning of poetic lines, especially with the *kaph* preformative, provides an audible refrain that integrates the call of alarm (vv. 1-2) with the description of the approaching threat (vv. 3-11). The following words and phrases all introduce poetic lines in Joel 2:1-11 with *kaph* sounds:

כי־בא, כי קרוב, כשחר, כמהו, כגן, כמראה, וכפרשים, כקול מרכבות, כקול להב, כעם,

כל־פנים, כגבורים, כאנשי, וכוכבים, כי רב, כי עצום, כי־גדול.

[324] Allen makes a similar point in his analysis of the structure of ch. 2; *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 66-67.

Perhaps the strongest case for the unity of ch. 2, though, emerges when one compares this poem with ch. 1. Structurally, thematically, and linguistically, the two poems are complementary, each offering a distinct vision of the ravages of some uncertain but catastrophic disaster, and each using these visions to implore the people to participate in communal cultic rites. They both follow (generally) the same plot: an unprecedented disaster is consuming the land so the people must respond with ritually appropriate behavior. Indeed, this liturgical function—that the disasters should lead to communal lamentation—demonstrates that both poems express the same view of the ritual world and its relevance in addressing national problems. These similarities are hardly accidental and suggest that chs. 1 and 2 were composed to complement one another. After all, each poem adds an element that the other does not address. The first poem focuses on the plight of the people, the animals, and the land and the nature of their suffering; the second poem, meanwhile, describes in greater detail the relentless force responsible for the disaster. Together, they provide a broad portrait of complete social, economic, and religious distress, interpret that distress as a result of the deity's own destructive army, and call for the people to join in rites of national lamentation.

Joel 2:18-27

2.18 ויקנא יהוה לארצו ויחמל על־עמו 2.19 ויען יהוה ויאמר לעמו
הנני שׁלח לכם
את־הדגן והתירושׁ והיצהר
ושׂבעתם[325] אתו

[325] 4QXII[c] offers: ואכלתמה ושׂבעתמ[ה אותו] ("and you shall eat and be satiated with it"). Since the versions do not reflect this reading, it likely marks an attempt to harmonize the expression with that found in v. 26a. Therefore, the MT is to be preferred.

ולא־אתן אתכם עוד

חרפה בגוים

[2.20] ואת־הצפוני ארחיק מעליכם

והדחתיו אל־ארץ

ציה ושממה

את־פניו אל־הים הקדמני

וספו אל־הים האחרון

ועלה באשו

ותעל צחנתו[326]

2:18 Then Yahweh became jealous for his land and he had compassion on his people. [2:19] Yahweh answered and said to his people:
I am sending you
  the grain, the wine, and the oil,
  and you shall be satiated with it.
I will no longer make you
  a disgrace among the nations.

2:20 I will remove the northerner from you,
  and drive it away to a land
  dry and desolate;
its front to the eastern sea
  and its rear to the western sea.
Its stink shall rise;
  its stench[327] shall ascend.

[2.21] אל־תיראי אדמה

גילי ושׂמחי

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[326] The texts and versions read an additional line here: כי הגדיל לעשׂות ("indeed, he has done great things!"). One difficulty lies with identifying the subject. The most natural reading would make the "northerner" the subject, but then the sense of the line must be altered. LXX reads: *ὅτι ἐμεγάλυνεν τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ* ("because he magnified his works"), suggesting that the "northerner" is to be judged for his arrogance. More recently, some scholars have defended this reading (e.g., Allen, Simkins, Crenshaw), but it is problematic for two reasons. In the first case, it seems to indict the very same group identified as Yahweh's army for doing that which they were commanded to do (2:11, 25). Secondly, though, the same expression, with Yahweh as the subject, appears in the very next verse, where it clearly has the sense, "he has done great things." It seems improbable that the same expression would appear back-to-back with contradictory meanings. Therefore, I understand the line as a case of dittography from v. 21, or perhaps even a scribal gloss, foreshadowing the praise of the deity. One other possibility should be mentioned, though. Perhaps the line belongs at the end of v. 22, so that two "do not fear" oracles end the same way. This explanation would have the benefit of explaining why no subject is identified. "Do not fear, O ground!...for Yahweh has done great things. Do not fear, O beasts of the field!...for he has done great things."

[327] Despite the hapax here (צחנה), the sense is clear from the context and numerous cognates.

כי־הגדיל יהוה לעשׂות
2.22 אל־תיראו בהמות שׂדי
כי דשׁאו נאות מדבר
כי־עץ נשׂא פריו
תאנה וגפן נתנו חילם
2.23 ובני ציון גילו
ושׂמחו ביהוה אלהיכם
כי־נתן לכם
את־המאכל לצדקה[328]
ויורד לכם גשׁם
מורה[329] ומלקושׁ כראשׁון[330]

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[328] MT offers a peculiar expression: המורה לצדקה. The Vulgate translates this line in the most natural sense: *doctorem iustitiae* ("teacher of righteousness"). The Qumran community would later call their leader the "teacher of righteousness," and it is possible that they were influenced by this expression. See C. Roth, "The Teacher of Righteousness and the Prophecy of Joel," *VT* 13 (1963): 91-95. There are reasons to be skeptical of the influence of Joel 2:23 on the Qumran community, though. Since no copy of this line among the Dead Sea Scrolls has survived, some caution is in order. In addition, the expression here differs slightly from that used at Qumran to describe the leader of the sect, מורה הצדק. In any case, the notion of a "teacher of righteousness" is alien to the context here (but cf. Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 98-110). A more likely interpretation of MT is that מורה is a variant form of יורה ("early rain;" cf. Ps 84:7). The following lines (v. 23c) describe the rains provided by the deity, so the context supports such a reading. Other versions, though, apparently read a different Hebrew *Vorlage*: המאכל ("food"). So, LXX (τὰ βρώματα), Peshitta (*mʾkwltʾ*), and Old Latin (*escas*). The versions here have likely preserved the older form. In Joel 1:16, "joy and gladness" (שׂמחה וגיל) are cut off from the temple when there is no "food" (אכל). Here, the people are encouraged to "be glad and rejoice" (גילו ושׂמחו) because of the return of food. It is also easier to explain the corruption of MT due to the influence of v. 23cβ, rather than an original המורה being corrupted to המאכל. It is even possible that later speculation about a "teacher of righteousness" could have influenced the corruption of MT. The emendation to מאכל, unfortunately, does not resolve all the difficulties with the expression. The meaning of המאכל לצדקה is not obvious. Kapelrud (*Joel Studies*, 115-16), Allen ("in token of covenant harmony;" *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 93-94), and Wolff ("according to covenant righteousness;" *Joel and Amos*, 55) relate the expression to covenant loyalty. NRSV's "for your vindication" presumably reflects a legal context. Crenshaw ("in its season;" *Joel*, 154-55) and Simkins (*Yahweh's Activity*, 198-99) take it more as a philosophical expression of world order, which makes more sense of the context. As the rain is provided at the appropriate times in v. 23c, the food here seems to be provided in just measure. See further Hans Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (BHT 40; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), esp. 15-16.

[329] Many texts read יורה instead of MT's מורה. MT's reading is the more difficult. Similar expressions occur elsewhere (Jer 5:24; Deut 11:14) with יורה. Only once (Ps 84:7) outside of this verse does מורה appear as a form of precipitation. Thus, two explanations are possible. MT was altered after

2.24 ומלאו הגרנות בר

והשיקו היקבים תירוש ויצהר

2:21 Do not fear, O ground!
Be glad and rejoice,
for Yahweh has done great things.
2:22 Do not fear, O beasts of the field!
For the pastures of the wilderness will be green.
Indeed, the tree shall bear its fruit;
the fig tree and the vine shall offer their yield.
2:23 O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in Yahweh your God!
For he will provide for you
the food in just measure.
He will bring down for you the rain,
the early rain and the latter rain as before.
2:24 The threshing floors will be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

2.25 ושלמתי לכם את־השנים[331]

אשר אכל הארבה

הילק והחסיל והגזם

חילי הגדול אשר שלחתי בכם

2.26 ואכלתם אכול ושׂבוע

והללתם את־שם יהוה אלהיכם

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the corruption of v. 23b, so that both lines refer to מורה. Alternatively, and more likely, מורה is simply a variant (and rare) spelling for יורה. The other texts have been "corrected" to the more common form.

[330] Reading כראשון for MT בראשון, "in the first [month]." Most ancient versions, including LXX (καθὼς ἔμπροσθεν), Peshitta, and the Vulgate support this emendation.

[331] Several scholars are puzzled by this line. Barton considers it "odd," choosing to put it in parentheses in his translation and hinting that שׁנים might be a corruption of משׁנה, "double" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 85, 89-90). Andiñach summarizes the difficulty: "The plural noun, 'years', poses a problem, because, as is well known, a plague never takes more than a few days; and it typically affects no more than the year in which it happened" ("The Locusts in the Message of Joel," 437). At least one Akkadian text, though, challenges this conclusion: "For three years, on account of locusts (*ir-bi-im*), my district could not harvest (anything)." This translation follows Simkins (*Yahweh's Activity*, 154-55, n. 114). The original publication is offered by Charles-F. Jean, "Lettres de Mari IV: Transcrites et Traduites," *RA* 42 (1942): 70. Jean translates the text differently, taking *ir-bi-im* as "four," hence "my four districts." Simkins, though, follows CAD, reading *ir-bi-im* as the "locusts" that prevent the districts from harvesting. The reading from CAD is more persuasive, but of greater import is the question of the duration of locust plagues. Several major locust plagues occurred between 1908 and 1964, and each lasted more than a few days, ranging in length from 7 years to as many as 13. See further the discussion in Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 119. As a result, I see no reason to emend this text or deny that it could refer to locusts.

אשר־עשׂה עמכם להפליא[332]
[2.27] וידעתם כי בקרב ישׂראל אני
ואני יהוה אלהיכם ואין עוד
ולא־יבשׁו עמי לעולם

2:25 I will repay you for the years
that the *ʾarbeh* locust devoured,
the *yeleq* locust, the *ḥāsîl* locust, and the *gāzām* locust,
my great army which I sent against you.
2:26 You shall truly eat and be satiated,
and praise the name of Yahweh your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.
2:27 You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, Yahweh, am your God, and there is no other;
and my people shall never again be put to shame.

The Divine Response

If the nature of the disaster—complete social disorder—and the literary structure of the poetry lend credence to viewing Joel 1-2 as two complementary poems, the adequacy of the deity's response in 2:18-27 also deserves attention in exploring the coherence of the first part of the book. Joel 2:18 signals a major break with the cries of distress that dominate the two poems in 1:2-2:17, as the deity shows compassion on the people and addresses their concerns. The response in 2:18-27 functions as a single unit—the deity's answer to the people's complaints—even though one can distinguish several smaller sections. The divine response might be outlined as follows:

2:18-19a	narrative introduction
2:19b-20	divine promises
2:21-24	priestly oracles of salvation
2:25-27	divine promises[333]

[332] MT includes an additional line at the conclusion of v. 26: ולא־יבשׁו עמי לעולם ("and my people shall never again be put to shame"), which is the same line that concludes v. 27. Marcus identifies this line as an example of the "nonrecurring doublet," that he finds operative throughout the book of Joel ("Nonrecurring Doublets," 64). More likely, though, it is a simple case of dittography, and, in my opinion, reads more naturally at the end of v. 27. Therefore, I delete it here.

These divisions are signaled by the shift in speakers, from first person speech by the deity (the divine promises) to third person speech about the deity (the oracles of salvation). These divisions, though, should not obscure the over-arching unity that binds these oracles together, namely, the deity's reassurance that the people's complaints have been heard and that their requests will be granted. Indeed, it is hard to make much of the shifts from first person to third person speech, as these divisions do not so neatly correspond to the switch in speakers as the outline suggests. The priestly oracles of salvation (vv. 21-24) do, following the form (cf. Deut 20:3-4), refer to the deity in the third person, but they are not alone. Even taking MT's v. 20e ("he has done great things!") as a scribal error—a case of dittography due to the influence of v. 21c—one is at pains to explain the significance of the switch in vv. 26-27: "...you shall praise the name of Yahweh your God, / who has dealt wondrously with you. / You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel."[334] Perhaps one should not expect consistency in this regard, especially if the text was used liturgically. A cultic official might quote the deity's words directly, praise the deity in hymns, or offer promises of divine blessing, all without contradiction. It is interesting to note that in a similar context (2 Chr 20), a cultic official responds to the people's lamentation with a promise of the deity's very own words ("Thus says Yahweh to you..."), but, in fact, the priestly oracle of salvation that follows refers to the deity in the third person

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[333] Wolff proposes a similar division (cf. *Joel and Amos*, 58), although he also includes ch. 3 in his analysis of the divine response. His proposal that the divine response takes the form of an "assurance oracle answering a plea" is convincing, but less convincing is his suggestion that the oracle extends into ch. 3.

[334] There is a textual issue at the conclusion of this line as noted in the text-critical discussion above. Joel 2:26d in MT ("and my people shall never again be put to shame") is likely another case of dittography due to v. 27c. Even if one prefers the location at the end of v. 26, or defends keeping both occurrences, the switch in speakers is equally abrupt.

(vv. 15-17). Here in Joel, too, it appears that the voice of the cultic official and the voice of the deity are indistinguishable.[335]

This abrupt shift from lamentation to divine reassurance could signal the hand of a new author—one seeking to update a message of gloom with a more optimistic promise of security and prosperity. Such a conclusion, however, is not necessary, and likely obscures the broader context of communal lamentation. Several lament psalms indicate that communal laments would often be followed by an assurance of divine assistance.[336] For example, Ps 60 includes both petition for help in battle (vv. 1-5) and assurance that the deity will grant victory (vv. 6-8, 12). Ps 85 attests to a similar transition from a request for help (vv. 2-8) to a promise of divine blessing (vv. 9-14). Perhaps most helpfully, the narrative description of national lament in 2 Chr 20 documents a fast and prayer for deliverance (vv. 3-12), after which a cultic official announces the deity's encouraging answer: "Thus says Yahweh to you: 'Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's'" (v. 15). The lack of narrative in the book of Joel makes the transition a bit more abrupt, but the script followed is the same: confronted by an ominous threat the community is called to fast and petition the deity for help; in response, the deity offers reassurance that deliverance is at hand. In short, the deity's response likely does not reflect the influence of a new author, but, rather, illustrates that the petition-response formula

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[335] For a more extensive discussion of the shifting of speakers in psalms, see Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (JSOTSup 357; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), esp. 17-21. Her research focuses mainly on distinguishing the voice of the petitioner from those of other figures, such as cultic functionaries or the deity. It is rare to find divine speech quoted verbatim in psalms (cf. Ps 12:6), so there is little parallel to the divine response in Joel. Nonetheless, the "dialogic tension" Mandolfo explores in psalms suggests that liturgies of lamentation would likely include multiple voices.

[336] For recent form-critical analysis of these transitions, see ibid., 30-92.

evident in Chronicles and the Psalter also governed the composition of the book of Joel. Determining the degree to which the divine assurances in the remainder of the book of Joel (2:18-4:21) responds adequately to the concerns expressed in the poems of distress will largely guide the rest of this study.

The close relationship of the deity's response to ch. 1 has been well documented.[337] Yahweh responds directly to many of the complaints of ch. 1, providing verbal and thematic connections: the four-fold locust plague (1:4) is reversed (2:25); the food (אכל) cut off from the people (1:16) is resoundingly restored (ואכלתם אכול; 2:26); joy and gladness (שׂמחה וגיל; 1:16) can even return to the land (גילי ושׂמחי; 2:21). Indeed, the animals who mourn the devastation to the land (1:18-20) are directly addressed and reassured (2:22). Put simply, the divine response specifically answers many of the complaints in the first poem (see chart 7).

[337] Deist offers a particularly helpful chart to illustrate the connections between 2:18-27 and 1:2-20 ("Parallels and Reinterpretation," 64). See also Heibert, "Joel, Book of," 875.

Chart 7: Parallels between Joel 1:2-20 and 2:18-27

Locust plague: *gāzām, ʾarbeh, yeleq, ḥāsîl* (1:4)	Repayment for locust plague: *ʾarbeh, yeleq, ḥāsîl, gāzām* (2:25)
People summoned to wail (היללו; 1:5, 11, 13)	People called to praise (הללתם) deity (2:26)
“The ground (אדמה) mourns” (1:10)	“Do not fear, O ground” (אדמה; 2:21)
“Grain, wine, and oil” (דגן תירוש יצהר) fail (1:10)	“The grain, the wine, and the oil” (הדגן והתירוש והיצהר) are restored (2:19, 24)
“Be ashamed (הבישו), O farmers” (1:11)	“And my people shall never again be put to shame (ולא־יבשו)” (2:27)
Trees are dried up (1:12)	Trees bear fruit (2:22)
“The vine (הגפן) is dried up, and the fig tree (התאנה) fails” (1:12)	“The fig tree and the vine (תאנה וגפן) shall offer their yield” (2:22)
Food (אכל) is cut off from the people (1:16)	Food is in abundance (ואכלתם אכול; 2:26)
Absence of joy and gladness (שׂמחה וגיל; 1:16)	Command to “be glad and rejoice” (גילי ושׂמחי; 2:21, 23)
“The beasts of the field” (בהמות שׂדה) mourn (1:20)	“Do not fear, O beasts of the field” (בהמות שׂדי; 2:22)
“The pastures of the wilderness” (נאות מדבר) are consumed (1:19-20)	“The pastures of the wilderness” (נאות מדבר) are green (2:22)
The watercourses are dried up (1:20)	Rain is abundant (2:23)

The cries of distress in the second poem (2:1-17), though, receive less explicit attention in the divine response, suggesting to several scholars that the second poem is out of place. According to this reading, the second poem may be a later addition to a petition-response liturgy (1:2-20 + 2:18-27),[338] or the second poem may indicate that a second divine response is also forthcoming (chs. 3-4).[339] As Cook argues, chs. 3-4 are integral to the book of Joel, because without them one is left with only a "torso" precisely where "the reader should expect a depiction of radical deliverance explaining the horrific crisis of 2:1-11."[340] Such a conclusion, though, is premised on the conviction that Joel 2:18-27 does not respond to the concerns of 2:1-17. This conviction is not persuasive.

To examine the way in which the deity's response addresses the second poem of distress (2:1-17), it is helpful to keep in mind the differences between the two complementary poems in chs. 1-2. The first poem specifically focuses on the *devastation* that the disaster has caused—to the people, the animals, and the broader natural world. The deity's response must attend to that devastation and offer assurances that it can be reversed. The second poem, meanwhile, focuses more concretely on the relentless *power* of the agent of destruction; very few details of the devastation are offered, at least compared to ch. 1. As a result, the divine response to the second poem is unlikely to attend to the specifics of the devastation, as it does

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[338] For example, Redditt's analysis, although a bit more complicated than outlined here, envisions Joel 2:1-17 as interrupting the petition-response over drought and locusts and concludes it comes from a different redactional layer; see Redditt, "The Book of Joel," 225-31.

[339] Notable among the scholars who argue for this position are: Wolff, *Joel and Amos*; Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, and Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*.

[340] Stephen Cook, review of John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, RBL 4 (2003): 3, http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/1483_3368.pdf.

with the first poem. An assurance of the deity's power to rescue the people would, presumably, be expected, but the second poem does not present a list of complaints that the deity's response can address one-by-one. In short, the expectation that the deity's response in 2:18-27 will reverse the complaints of the second poem (as it does for the first poem) obfuscates the differences between the two poems of distress.

With these differences in view, it is clear the divine response in 2:18-27 is not limited to the concerns of ch. 1 but also addresses the key themes of 2:1-17. For example, the deity's introductory remarks answer the fears of both poems simultaneously:

> I am sending you
> the grain, the wine, and the oil,
> and you shall be satiated with it.
> I will no more make you
> a disgrace among the nations (חרפה בגוים). (2:19b)

The promise of the grain, wine, and oil (הדגן והתירוש והיצהר) recalls the vivid depiction of the disastrous agricultural conditions from 1:10, where the grain, wine, and oil (דגן תירוש יצהר) have failed, serving as a direct response to the concerns of the first poem. The second part of the promise—to prevent the international shame of becoming a "disgrace" (חרפה)—is not, however, related to ch. 1. In fact, the first poem offers no complaint over Judah's international standing, focusing instead on the devastation to the land.[341] Rather, the deity's promise answers the plaintive cry of the people from the second poem:

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[341] There is some concern expressed with shame in ch. 1, although the focus is still on the devastation to the crops and has no international focus. The clearest expression is 1:11, where the

חוסה יהוה על־עמך
ואל־תתן נחלתך לחרפה
למשל־בם גוים[342]

Spare, O Yahweh, your people;
and do not make your heritage a disgrace,
a byword among the nations. (2:17b)

This anxiety that "the nations" would look on the people with reproach is the final complaint and, notably, the one that finally rouses the deity to action. By addressing this concern so directly in 2:19 and pairing it with the first poem's concern over the grain, wine, and oil, the divine response signals that the concerns of both poems of distress are in view.

Another key theme from the second poem that the deity's response addresses is the threat of a (pseudo-)military invasion. The second poem relies primarily on military imagery in offering its vision of the on-going threat. The disaster approaches "like a mighty people arrayed for battle" (כעם עצום ערוך מלחמה; v. 5); they run "like warriors" (כגבורים; v. 7aα); "like men of battle they scale the wall" (כאנשי מלחמה יעלו

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farmers are dismayed (הבישו) that the produce of the fields is lost. For a broader discussion on shame in the book of Joel, see Simkins, "'Return to Yahweh': Honor and Shame in Joel," *Semeia* 68 (1994): 41-54. See also the insightful study of Amy Cottrill on lament psalms (*Language, Power, and Identity*). She helpfully distinguishes the way the concepts of honor and shame function depending upon the relationship at issue, writing: "...[S]hame and honor are central to both the psalmist/hostile other relationship and the psalmist/God relationship, but are experienced and expressed differently by the psalmist. Honor and shame in the psalmist/hostile other relationship is best understood as the discourse of an intensely public and agonistic relationship. In contrast, honor and shame in the psalmist/God relationship relate to the ability and willingness of these two parties to remain in a relationship of interdependent loyalty" (ibid., 66). Using Cottrill's concepts, the honor/shame model of Joel 1:11 and 2:17 might be clarified. The "shame" of the farmers (1:11) is not imposed outwardly by a hostile other, but apparently reflects the realization of a lack of divine favor—through the failure of crops. The "shaming" of the nations in 2:17 points in the direction of a different relationship, that between the people and a "hostile other." The nature of this relationship is surprisingly muted in Joel 1-2, though, and even in 2:17, the people/deity relationship seems paramount, as the primary concern is that other nations express skepticism about the loyalty of Israel's deity: "Where is their god?" It is this shaming (i.e., divine abandonment) that the deity promises to end in 2:26d, 27c.

[342] For discussion of the awkward syntax here, see the text-critical notes above.

חומה; v. 7aβ). Yahweh, in fact, leads this military-like horde into battle: "Yahweh utters his voice before *his army*" (חילו; v. 11).

The divine response in 2:18-27 acknowledges this militaristic threat and reassures the people that Yahweh is powerful enough to thwart its advances.

> I will remove the northerner from you,
> and drive it away to a land
> dry and desolate;
> its front to the eastern sea
> and its rear to the western sea.
> Its stink shall rise;
> its stench shall ascend. (v. 20)

This promise dramatically emphasizes the deity's power. The enemy is not simply defeated, but driven away to a deserted land and thrown into two different seas. These claims appear contradictory when juxtaposed, but they may point to a larger mythological framework that highlights the deity's power over chaotic forces. The mythic tale of Yahweh's victory over the sea and the sea-dragon echoes in the description of divine intervention. In Psalm 74, for example, Yahweh defeats Sea[343] and deposits Leviathan in the "desert" (ציים; vv. 13-14), much like the "dry (ציה) and desolate" land referenced here.[344] This foundational myth of Yahweh's victory over the primordial sea dragon provides a basic reassurance that no approaching force will be too much for the deity to handle. In fact, the scope of the deity's boast apparently led ancient scribes, if not the author himself, to erupt in praise. MT includes an

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[343] Perhaps Yahweh "divides" (פוררת) Sea, as Ps 78:13 describes (בקע), but the meaning of the hapax פוררת is not clear.

[344] For discussion on the development of the tradition regarding Yahweh's victory at the Sea, see Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 131-38.

additional line concluding this promise: "Indeed, he has done great things!"[345] If the focus of the second poem of distress is the power of the approaching disaster, the divine promise of v. 20 counters that Yahweh will not be overmatched.

Additionally, verbal clues in 2:20 signal that the threat of the approaching disaster in 2:1-11 will be repelled. The "desolate" (שממה) realm to which the enemy is driven includes a measure of ironic justice, since the approaching force in 2:3 is responsible for turning the land into a "desolate" (שממה) wilderness. Even the promise to divide the threat in half—its "front" (פניו) sent east and its rear sent "west" (אחרון)—recalls the poetic play with לפניו and אחריו in the second poem of distress:

> In front of it (לפניו) fire devours,
> and after it (ואחריו) a flame burns.
> The land is like the garden of Eden in front of it (לפניו),
> but behind it (ואחריו) a desolate wilderness. (Joel 2:3)[346]

The reference to the "northerner" (הצפוני) offers a further clue that the deity's response in 2:18-27 addresses the threat posed in the second poem of distress. Although not identified explicitly as a "foe from the north" in Joel 2:1-11, the attacking divine "army" here likely reflects this tradition. The description of the "foe from the north" in Jer 4-6 provides a helpful introduction to the tradition, illustrating

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[345] Although praise of the deity often concludes or interrupts a divine promise (e.g., Amos 4:13), Barton finds this particular line "awkward" and suggests deleting it (*Joel and Obadiah*, 85). The presence of the same line in v. 21b (with the addition of יהוה as the subject) suggests a likely case of dittography. Barton may be correct to delete the line as a scribal error, but I find the sentiment a natural (even if secondary) response to the portrait of the deity's power to save the people. For further discussion, see the text-critical notes above.

[346] See also Joel 2:6a (מפניו); and 2:10a (לפניו).

how closely the description of the approaching threat in Joel 2 mirrors this mythological enemy. As in Jeremiah, the threat in Joel 2 is described as a besieging army (Jer 6:3-5; Joel 2:6-9) with horses and chariots (Jer 4:13, 29; Joel 2:4-5). As in Jeremiah, the proper response is to blow a trumpet throughout the land (Jer 4:5, 19; 6:1; Joel 2:1, 15) and offer a lament (Jer 4:8, 13; 6:4, 26; Joel 2:17). Joel even promises to drive far away (רחק; Joel 2:20) the threatening force, which might be a play on the vision of Jeremiah, where a foe from far away (מרחק; Jer 4:16; 5:15) invades Judah. Perhaps most importantly, though, in both cases the approaching threat is led by Yahweh himself (Jer 4:6, 13; 5:15; Joel 2:11), providing a mythological significance to a powerful and ominous force. In short, the description of the oncoming threat in Joel 2:1-11 bears close resemblance to the "foe from the north" tradition in Jeremiah.

From these parallels with Jeremiah, it is possible to conclude that the book of Joel makes conscious allusion to Jeremiah 4-6 and its description of the "foe from the north,"[347] but caution should be exercised when examining these correspondences. Many of the similarities, as has been demonstrated, derive from the conventional means of describing military invasions. Moreover, the depiction of Yahweh as leading the charge is an integral part of the "northerner" tradition, so it need not

[347] So argue Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 189-211; and Müller, *Gottes Zukunft*, 174-86. Strazicich (*Joel's Use of Scripture*, 175-80) understands the description of the invading force to echo Ezek 38-39, which is also connected with the northerner tradition (Ezek 38:15). Although much of the imagery of Joel 4 has parallels with Ezek 38-39, Strazicich's suggestion that the attacking force of Joel 2 should be understood as parallel to the attack of Gog is unpersuasive. Gog is summoned for a very clear purpose—to demonstrate the deity's power and holiness to the nations: "so that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I display my holiness before their eyes" (Ezek 38:16). There is no indication in Joel 2 that Yahweh's "army" serves any other purpose than to attack and destroy Judah/Jerusalem. As a result, the description in Jeremiah 4-6 is a closer parallel. Still, one need not conclude that any conscious allusion is present.

indicate a reliance on Jeremiah in particular. The "northerner" tradition, to be sure, changes over time and exhibits a remarkable degree of fluidity.[348] David Reimer's research into the identity of the "foe from the north" concludes that there is no one historical enemy (e.g., the Babylonians). Rather, the "north" serves as a symbol of divine destruction, whether by human or natural means. For example, a fly comes out of the "north" to antagonize Egypt (Jer 46:20), and a flood comes from the "north" against the Philistines (Jer 47:2). Reimer, in fact, suggests that the "north," צפון, may not refer to a geographical direction at all, but to the mythological home of the gods in the ancient Levant, Mount Zaphon, the seat of divine judgment.[349] As a result, references to a "northern" enemy may refer to any disaster, as long as it is initiated by the deity.

Reimer's conclusion offers a better explanation for the appeal to the "northerner" tradition in the book of Joel than those who posit a conscious allusion to Jeremiah or, perhaps, Ezekiel (chs. 38-39). Yahweh's active participation in leading the charge at the head of "his army" (חילו; 2:11) makes the identification of this enemy a "foe from the north" apt.[350] In any case, the promise to combat the "northerner" in Joel 2:20 is a specific reference to the threat described at length in

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[348] See R. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 172-74. In some post-exilic texts, the tradition takes on an eschatological focus; see also Childs, "The Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," 187-98.

[349] David J. Reimer, "The 'Foe' and the 'North' in Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 223-32. Cf. the designation of Mount Zion in Ps 48:3 as ירכתי צפון ("in the far north").

[350] See also C. van Leeuwen, "The 'Northern One' in the Composition of Joel 2,19-27," in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. van der Woude on the Occassion of his 65th Birthday* (eds., F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst, and C.J. Labuschagne; VTSupp 49; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 95-97.

Joel 2:1-11. That approaching force, the divine promise maintains, will not be allowed to destroy the people; Yahweh's very own "army" will be defeated.

Most scholars, including those who argue for the book of Joel's unity, accept the "northerner" here as a reference to the danger of 2:1-11,[351] but this designation poses problems for the structure they discern in the book, in which the threat of the second poem is not addressed until chs. 3-4. Strazicich explains this anomaly as "evidence of Yahweh's *anticipated answer*," which isn't spelled out until chs. 3-4; Joel 2:20 is simply a foreshadowing of future deliverance.[352] A less strained interpretation regards the divine promise here as sufficient to allay the concerns regarding the Yahweh-led army of the second poem. The militaristic horde approaching Zion in 2:1-11 threatens utter destruction, but the divine promise puts the danger in a familiar mythological context, reassuring the people that the deity is powerful enough to conquer any foe—no matter its size or strength. In addition, the divine response explicitly links the locust horde of 1:4 with the very same "army" (חיל; 2:11) led by Yahweh in ch. 2, suggesting the threats in the two poems of distress should not be sharply distinguished at all:

> I will repay you for the years
> that the ʾ*arbeh* locust devoured,
> the *yeleq* locust, the *ḥāsîl* locust, and the *gāzām* locust,
> my great army (חילי הגדול) which I sent against you. (2:25)

[351] So Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 62; Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 72-74; Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 175-80.

[352] Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 175; see also, Andiñach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," 433-41.

The deity's response in Joel 2:18-27 acknowledges the military-like threat of the second poem of distress and offers reassurance that Yahweh is powerful enough and willing to stop it.[353] A second divine oracle of reassurance (e.g., 3:1-4:21) to counter that particular threat is unnecessary to bring closure to the complaints of the people.

Excursus: Secondary Material in Joel 1-2?

The broader literary and structural arguments thus far advanced for the unity of Joel 1-2 do not preclude any possibility of secondary material, and a few cases deserve brief mention. For example, the superscription in Joel 1:1 is universally regarded as secondary, as are the other superscriptions in prophetic works. The closest parallel is Jonah 1:1; both introduce the work as simply the "word of Yahweh," and neither provides any historical context besides the name of the prophetic figure.

A good case can also be made that the awkward transition in 2:18 signals some editorial shaping. Following a call for the priests to petition the deity for mercy is this narrative interlude:

> ויקנא יהוה לארצו ויחמל על־עמו ויען יהוה ויאמר לעמו
> Then Yahweh became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.
> Yahweh answered and said to his people... (2:18-19a)

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[353] Other militaristic language in the deity's response insinuates that the approaching "army" from 2:1-11 is in view. The word describing the rising "stink" (באש) of the defeated enemy in 2:20 occurs rarely in biblical Hebrew, but always as a description of a defeated army (cf. Isa 34:3; Amos 4:10). In addition, the encouragement, "do not fear," which appears in Joel 2:21 and 2:22, signals the deity's protection from military threats (cf. Num 21:34; Josh 8:1). This call, part of the holy war tradition, is attributed to the priestly oracle of salvation in Deut 20:3. In 2 Chr 20, it introduces the divine response to the community's prayer for victory in battle. Interestingly, in Joel the call "do not fear" is directed to the soil and the animals, rather than the people, again suggesting that the militaristic imagery is largely metaphorical.

These lines narrate the sudden transition from communal petition to divine promise, signaling that the deity did, in fact, take note of the people's dire circumstances. This narrative element, though, is otherwise lacking from the dramatized dialogue between the community and the deity. The *wayyiqṭōl* verbal forms (ויקנא ויחמל ויען ויאמר) that dominate 2:18-19a, for example, are nearly absent from the rest of chs. 1-2.[354] In addition, as commentators have routinely noted, the transition does not really fit the movement of the drama. The poems of distress (1:2-2:17) describe the seriousness of the danger and call for the people to participate in the proper cultic rites, but the narrative fails to mention whether or not the people responded appropriately. Put simply, the narrative break in 2:18-19a intrudes awkwardly into the dramatized dialogue between the community and the deity. The impulse to smooth out the abrupt transition from call-to-petition to divine response—a transition that may be signaled in other ways if performed as liturgy—is understandable, so it is not difficult to imagine why a redactor might feel the need to supplement the dialogue. If the poetry was performed initially in a ritual setting, vv. 18-19a likely reflect an editorial addition, narrating the action that took place in the cult. If Joel 1-2 was originally composed as a written document, though, the transition here, awkward as it is, was probably original.

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[354] The only *wayyiqṭōl* form in chs. 1-2 outside of 2:18-19a is וירד in 2:23d. To avoid this tension, Merx proposed repointing MT's *wayyiqṭōl* forms to jussives ("May Yahweh become jealous...and may he say to his people..."), reading the entire divine response as an extension of the prayer from 2:17 (*Die Prophetie des Joel und ihre Ausleger von den ältesten Zeiten bis zu den Reformatoren* [Halle: Waisenhauses, 1879], 16). The textual tradition argues against this radical approach, but Merx's discomfort highlights the awkwardness of the transition. For a more detailed discussion, see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 57-58.

One final section deserves mention, as the case for its integration with the rest of chs. 1-2 is not necessarily self-evident. Joel 2:12-14 has struck many as odd in its context.[355] Although these verses do offer themes not important elsewhere in Joel, I propose such themes were essential elements in the national mourning ritual in which the people are being invited to participate, and, thus, vv. 12-14 were likely original to the composition, not secondary additions. Three themes introduced here deserve attention.

Joel 1-2 calls for ritual action in response to the disaster, but 2:12-14 appears to call into question the value of that ritual. Here, cultic participation is set in opposition to an inner transformation: "return to me with all your heart... rend your heart, not only your garments" (2:13). The emphasis placed here on the inward expression of grief is new. The calls for cultic participation in 1:5-14 or 2:15-17 focus specifically on external performance: fasting, wearing sackcloth, lamenting, gathering together, and weeping. One could imagine a later editor adding a text such as 2:12-14 to downplay the role of cultic rites relative to an inner response. In fact, some commentators, whether or not they view this section as secondary, exaggerate the point here such that their reading of 2:12-14 undermines the calls for lamentation elsewhere in chs. 1-2. Wolff, for example, argues that "no stress is placed" on the calls for cultic ritual, but rather "the prophetic criticism of an empty ritualism shows

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[355] See David Lambert, "Fasting as a Penitential Rite: A Biblical Phenomenon?," *HTR* 96:4 (2003): 493, n. 71; James Crenshaw, "Who Knows What YHWH Will Do? The Character of God in the Book of Joel," in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Astrid Beck, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 185-86; and the bibliography cited therein.

its aftereffect."[356] Concern over "empty ritualism" is simply nowhere to be found in the repeated calls for fasting, mourning, and lamentation in 1:5-14. If Wolff is right, 2:12-14 likely does originate from a later source. The addition of a call for an inwardly focused grief, however, if understood narrowly, is entirely consistent with the broader call for participation in national rites of lamentation. As v. 12 makes clear, the people are still called to respond "with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning," but must now also respond with an inner transformation—"with all your heart." The call for an inwardly focused grief is an *addition* to the communal practices of lamentation, not a *more authentic* response to the disaster.[357] As Lambert points out, this focus on inner transformation is a late addition to national fast day rites,[358] but is clearly well developed by the time of the writing of Jonah.[359] As a result, this somewhat ambiguous call need not be attributed to an author wanting to

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[356] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 49. Similarly, Allen suggests that the concern here is primarily in avoiding empty ritualism: the deity "will not be satisfied with a perfunctory show of repentance, prompted by a shrewd and selfish desire to save their skins...Yahweh called for the performance of ritual actions to serve as signs of true repentance" (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 79).

[357] In fact, the interpretations advocated by Wolff and Allen, that Joel 2:12-14 demonstrates a concern with empty ritualism, reflect a widespread, common-sense notion about weeping, namely that "real" tears are signs of an internal emotional state. As Gary Ebersole has demonstrated, though, such a "common-sense" view is not universal and can be traced back to certain developments during the Renaissance (Gary Ebersole, "The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse," *HR* 39.3 [2000]: 211-46). In many cultures, including, I would submit, ancient Israel, ritualized weeping and fasting was thought to be efficacious in its own right; no internal emotional state was a precondition for such expressions of mourning. For example, David's mourning over Bathsheba's child (2 Sam 12:15-23) demonstrates that his ritual behavior was intended to persuade the deity to spare his child, not to express an internal emotional state. Therefore, as soon as the child dies, David ends his fast and stops weeping. In the case of the book of Joel, there *is* a call for a particular emotional state—expressed with the phrases "return with all your heart" and "rend your heart"—to accompany the ritualized weeping. This development is significant, but it does not imply that rituals otherwise performed are "empty" or meaningless; they may be less effective at moving the deity to compassion, but they are not hollow. It is worth noting that the whole point of the ritual is to attract the deity's attention and solicit compassion (Joel 2:14), not to instill a sense of guilt or remorse in the petitioners.

[358] Lambert, "Fasting as a Penitential Rite," 477-512.

[359] Cf. Jonah 3:6-9; and see the helpful discussion of this text in ibid., 501-503.

downplay the value of ritual. Rather, it likely reflects a development in the requirements for rituals of communal lamentation: some sort of inwardly focused angst should accompany the outward signs of grief and desperation.[360]

A second point to consider in the redactional history of vv. 12-14 is the presence of a standard confession of the deity's mercy: "Return to Yahweh your God. / For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in kindness, and he relents from disaster" (Joel 2:13b).[361] The confession does sound strange in the context of a poem about the deity's assault against Jerusalem, but essentially the same confession appears in other contexts of complaint and petition. Indeed, the national mourning ritual described in 2 Chr 20 contains a similar (although abbreviated) confession of the deity's mercy: "Give thanks to Yahweh, for his kindness endures forever" (v. 21). A longer version of the confession interrupts the lament of Ps 86: "O God, the insolent rise up against me...But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in kindness and faithfulness" (vv. 14-15).[362] Put simply, these poems of national distress offer a natural place to reassure the

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[360] For further discussion on the nature of this inwardly focused angst, see the discussion below under III.B.iii. "Divine Judgment."

[361] Various formulations of the confession appear in biblical literature. Like Joel 2:13, some emphasize the deity's compassion (Ps 103:8, 145:8;Neh 9:17; Jonah 4:2). Others balance the confession of the deity's mercy with a warning of divine judgment: Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Nah 1:3.

[362] For discussion on the use of this confession in Joel and elsewhere, see Thomas Dozeman, "Inner-biblical Interpretation of Yahweh's Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* 108 (1989): 207-23; Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, 145-55; Raymond van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy," 39-41; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 347-50. Leeuwen's study is an intertextual analysis discussing how the confession functions in the final shaping of the Book of the Twelve. The studies of Dozeman and Strazicich have the benefit of sustained attention to the occurrence here in Joel. Unfortunately, their conclusions that the book of Joel is *alluding* to specific texts, such as Exod 32-34, are unpersuasive. As Fishbane observes, the confession of Yahweh's merciful character occurs frequently in psalms as part of a "larger liturgical structure of lament, confession, and assurance of divine grace" (ibid., 349). The appearance in Joel fits well within this liturgical context.

hearers (and to remind the deity) that Yahweh is predisposed to show mercy and compassion. The confession could have been added by a later redactor, but it was likely considered a necessary element in the call to national lamentation.

The rhetorical question in 2:14 is also without parallel in ch. 1:[363]

> Who knows? He may turn and relent,
> and leave behind him a blessing:
> an offering and a libation
> for Yahweh your God.

Again, however, such a question is entirely appropriate in the context of complaint-and-petition. For example, David explains why he fasted and prayed during his son's illness as follows: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows? Yahweh may be gracious to me, and the child may live'" (2 Sam 12:22; cf. also Jonah 3:9). In sum, Joel 2:12-14 offers several elements—a call for an inner expression of grief, a confession of the deity's mercy, and even speculation that the disaster might be averted—that are not found elsewhere in Joel 1-2. The larger context of national distress, though, suggests these themes were critical elements in the communal complaint-and-petition liturgy, rather than secondary additions from a later source.

Summary

The analysis thus far leads to one over-riding conclusion: Joel 1-2 contains two complementary poems of national distress and the deity's response to those poems. Together, the collection offers an expansive portrait of communal distress, specific instructions to alleviate that distress through ritual behavior, and the

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[363] Although, cf. Joel 2:17d: "Why should it be said among the peoples: 'Where is their God?'"

reassurance of divine mercy and salvation. Although various traditions—including the "day of Yahweh" and the "foe from the north" traditions—help illustrate the magnitude of the danger and the certainty of the response, they do not interrupt or contradict the broader call for cultic participation and should not be considered secondary. In fact, the best available evidence suggests that chs. 1-2, with the likely exceptions of 1:1 and 2:18-19a, comprised the earliest layer of the book of Joel.

This conclusion rests on the examination of three vexing issues. First, the wide-ranging discussion of disaster imagery concludes that the book of Joel presents a coherent portrait of national distress, even if the precise nature of the threat remains in doubt. Ancient texts from Egypt to Sumer illustrate a convention in describing disasters in which various forms of social, economic and political chaos are combined to heighten the sense of terror or despair. Biblical texts, especially prophetic judgment oracles and complaint literature, betray a similar tendency to rely more on hyperbole, rather than scientific precision, in describing disasters. As a result, the description of multiple threats ravaging the community in the book of Joel is not the sign of redactional layers supplementing the original material; instead, it continues a rich tradition of highlighting the dire nature of the community's plight by insisting that all bonds of social, political, and economic order are threatened.

In this light, the precise identity of the event that inspired the composition of the book of Joel may be unrecoverable. The description of disaster may even be a pure literary fantasy—a trope to express the need for cultic renewal. More likely, though, the onslaught of a locust infestation gave rise to the call for mourning, with imagery of drought, fire, military invasion, cosmic disturbances, and the cessation of

the cult magnifying the sense of danger. Whatever event may be in view, the portrait of disaster presented expresses the conviction that every segment of the community is threatened.

Secondly, attention to the poetry of distress illustrates the way in which the material coheres. Two poems (1:2-20; 2:1-17) describe the threat to the people and the land, and call for cultic participation in communal mourning rites. The poems share similar introductions and calls to lament, echoing the same concerns and even using much of the same language. The two poems are not identical, though. The first focuses attention on the devastation wrought by the disaster. The people, the land, and even the animals are said to suffer, to mourn, and to cry out for help. The second poem, by contrast, examines in horrific detail the power and relentless force of the approaching onslaught. The two poems, then, are not redundant, but complementary, offering distinct angles of vision on the community's distress. Consequently, it is probable that the two poems were composed as a pair, so that the full portrait of national chaos could be more comprehensively presented.

Thirdly, the divine response in 2:18-27 reassures the people that their prosperity will be restored, offering a fitting conclusion to the drama and further support for the coherence of chs. 1-2. The deity answers many of the complaints of ch. 1 directly, promising to restore the grain, wine, and oil that were depleted; to return rain in its season and food in abundance; to make the trees fruitful and the pastures green again; and to repay the people for the destruction of the locusts. Since ch. 2 focuses on the power of the attacking force, not the plight of the people, the deity's response has fewer direct reversals. Nonetheless, the threat of the devastating

force is countered with boasts of the deity's might and echoes of his power over the "foe from the north." Moreover, the priests' complaint over international humiliation (2:17) provokes a direct response (2:19c, 27c), indicating how the divine promises comprehensively addressed the threats to the community in the poems of national distress.

If Joel 1-2 coheres, though, its form is sui generis. Within prophetic literature, there are examples of the deity responding to the people's complaints. Deutero-Isaiah, for example, offers reassurances to Zion (e.g., Isa 49:14-26), similar to those in Joel 2:18-27, but does not contain extended complaints like the book of Joel.[364] Among the complaints of Jeremiah is a communal lament (14:1-9), but it is explicitly rejected by the deity (14:10).[365] The prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk engage in a dialogue with Yahweh, in which the deity responds to their complaints. These individual objections, though, do not share the broader setting of national mourning like the book of Joel.

Communal lament psalms provide a helpful comparison, as they illustrate how unusual the form of Joel 1-2 actually is. The movement from complaint to reassurance is familiar from lament psalms, offering a thematic parallel to the drama of Joel 1-2. The communal lament of Ps 85, for example, concludes with a promise of divine assistance: "Yahweh will provide what is good, and our land will yield its produce" (v. 13). Formally, though, the communal lament psalms do not offer a close

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[364] Portions of Deutero-Isaiah likely respond directly to the complaints of Lamentations; see Linafelt, "Surviving Lamentations," 126-62.

[365] See Mark Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts: A Literary and Redactional Study of Jeremiah 11-20* (SBLMS 42; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 50-51.

parallel. Divine first-person speech, for example, is not found among the lament psalms, unlike the divine response in the book of Joel; in Ps 85, the people express their own confidence in the deity's restoration. In addition, the "poetry of national distress" in Joel 1-2 rarely addresses the deity directly,[366] a hallmark of the communal lament psalms.[367] Communal lament psalms take the form of prayers to the deity for assistance. Joel 1-2, though, addresses the various members of the community—farmers, priests, elders, children, brides, and bridegrooms—requesting that they take part in petitioning the deity for mercy.

If the form of Joel 1-2 is not elsewhere attested, there is some indication of the setting from which it may have originated. As noted periodically in the discussion above, 2 Chr 20 provides a narrative account of a national mourning ceremony with a number of striking parallels to Joel 1-2. Besieged by foreign armies, Jehoshaphat proclaims a fast (20:3; cf. Joel 1:4; 2:15) and gathers (20:4; cf. Joel 2:16) all the people—even women and children (20:13; cf. Joel 2:16)—at the temple (20:5; cf. Joel 1:14; 2:17). He then offers a prayer of national lamentation, petitioning the deity for deliverance (20:6-12; cf. Joel 2:17). Then the spirit of Yahweh comes upon Jahaziel, a Levite, who issues the deity's response in the form of a priestly oracle of salvation: "Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's" (20:15; cf. esp. Joel 2:21-24). In response, the people worship and

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[366] Only 1:19-20 and the quotation of the priests in 2:17b are exceptions.

[367] Ferris, in discussing communal lament psalms, observes: "[A]lthough a formal invocation which is structurally distinct is not a feature of the communal laments, the motif of direct address is a classic feature. It seems clear that the communal laments are not to be seen as having been a collective groan or moan, but rather a direct corporate dialogical expression of grief to God" (Paul W. Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (SBLDS 127; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992, 111). It should be noted that this feature is far less consistent in Lamentations, which includes many voices addressing different members of the community (for discussion, see ibid., 136-38).

praise the deity (20:18-19; cf. Joel 2:23, 26), singing of his mercy and faithfulness (20:21; cf. Joel 2:13), while Yahweh routs the foreign armies and provides an abundance of spoils (20:25; cf. esp. Joel 2:24). Based on these similarities, it is likely the Chronicler here narrates the type of national mourning ceremony for which the poetry of Joel 1-2 was performed.[368]

In addition, the comparison with 2 Chr 20 may offer clues about the identity of the speaker, the prophet "Joel." He has been variously described as a "writing prophet"[369] or a "cultic prophet,"[370] even as others have associated him more closely with the traditions of Jeremiah or other pre-exilic figures.[371] In 2 Chr 20, though, the prophetic figure is a Levite, a singer-prophet.[372] The Levite Jahaziel receives the spirit of Yahweh[373] and offers the deity's response to the communal lamentation and fasting rites. Although nothing in 2 Chr 20 reflects the form of the call to lamentation in Joel 1-2, it is likely that such a role would also be performed by a Levitical singer. The Chronicler notes that David appointed Levites "to invoke (literally, *to remind*;

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[368] Whether the poetry of Joel 1-2 actually reflects the text of a mourning liturgy or is simply modeled on that form is impossible to know. Wolff asserts that "the major structural parts of a conventional lamentation liturgy have undergone extensive elaboration, and it is only because of the additional content that the liturgy itself becomes worthy of transmission to later generations" (*Joel and Amos*, 9). This conclusion tracks with Wolff's contention that the author of the book of Joel reflects an anti-cultic bias, but in my view this argument is not persuasive. It seems entirely possible that the very words of a national mourning ceremony might be preserved, especially if the disaster is averted as promised.

[369] Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*; see also Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*, esp. 28-31.

[370] For discussion of the cultic prophet, see Aubrey Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962).

[371] Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 189-90.

[372] For discussion of the view of prophets and prophecy in Chronicles, with special attention to the role of Levitical singers as prophets, see Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy*, 55-96.

[373] Receiving the spirit of Yahweh is a sign of assuming the prophetic role. See, for example, Num 11:25; 1 Sam 10:10; 1 Sam 19:20; 1 Kings 22:22; Joel 3:1-2.

להזכיר), to thank, and to praise Yahweh, the God of Israel" (1 Chr 16:4). A common motif in laments deals with the importance of *remembering* (זכר) the distress of the petitioner (cf. Joel 1:3),[374] and להזכיר appears in the title of psalms 38 and 70, both of which are laments. The Chronicler, by using זכר here, may be indicating that Levites shared some responsibility in mourning and lamentation rituals.[375] If so, the calls to communal lamentation and the divine response in Joel 1-2 would seem to be, at least according to the Chronicler, Levitical functions.

The name of the prophetic figure associated with the book, "Joel" (יואל), appears almost exclusively in post-exilic texts,[376] and many commentators point to this fact as evidence (albeit weak evidence) that the book derives from the Second Temple period.[377] Perhaps more significantly, though, these post-exilic texts often associate the name Joel with *Levitical* families. According to the Chronicler, David charges Joel, one of the "heads of the families of the Levites" (1 Chr 15:12), to assist in bringing the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr 15:11-15), and Joel appears prominently in the

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[374] For example, Ps 74: "Remember (זכר) your congregation, which you acquired long ago... Remember (זכר) this, O Yahweh, how the enemy scoffs... Rise up, O God, plead your cause. Remember (זכר) how the impious scoff at you all day long" (vv. 2, 18, 22).

[375] Ferris entertains a similar possibility in his discussion of communal laments; see Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 104.

[376] Of the 19 occurrences of the name "Joel" (excluding Joel 1:1), 18 occur in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 10:43; Neh 11:9) and Chronicles (1 Chr 4:35; 5:4, 8, 12; 6:28, 33, 36; 7:3; 11:38; 15:7, 11, 17; 23:8; 26:22; 27:20; and 2 Chr 29:12). The only other occurrence is 1 Sam 8:2. It should be noted that MT lacks the name Joel in 1 Chr 6:28, but that is likely a scribal error; LXX and Syr include Joel as one of the sons of Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 8:2).

[377] For example, see Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 39.

genealogy of the Levitical temple singers David appoints (1 Chr 6:33, 36). In addition, Hezekiah selects a Levite named Joel to help sanctify the temple during his reforms (2 Chr 29:12-19). In short, it is probable that the association of the book with "Joel" marks it as a script to be performed by (or having been performed by) a Levitical singer.

The description of Joel 1:2-2:17 as "poems of national distress" has avoided firm conclusions about the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the poetry, as such a conclusion is inherently tentative. If the comparison with 2 Chr 20 is apt, though, Joel 1-2 may very well contain the part of one figure, likely a Levite, in a national mourning ceremony. In the face of a national disaster (real or perceived), such as a locust plague or widespread agricultural failure, the Levite entreats the people to join in petitioning the deity for mercy and renewed fertility. Specifically, he asks the priests to take an active role in leading the community through the necessary mourning rites: fasting, weeping, donning sackcloth, and offering prayers of lamentation. When all the people are gathered at the temple crying out in distress, the prophetic figure receives a word from Yahweh, promising renewed prosperity for the people and for the land. The people are then invited to join in worship and praise of the deity because of the certainty of his merciful actions on their behalf. With the reassurance of the deity's presence once again in their midst, the social rift in the community as a result of the disaster is alleviated and right order with the deity is restored.

The Additions in Joel 3-4

The divine response in 2:18-27 decisively counters the disastrous state of affairs outlined in the two poems of distress and promises that the entire crisis of social, economic, and religious chaos—the plague of insects, the failure of agriculture, the drought of the land, the cessation of the cult, the threat of international shame, the invasion of military and mythological forces—will be abruptly reversed in Yahweh's triumphant validation of his people. Even if the people's concerns are sufficiently addressed, though, the deity's response does not end. A series of oracles in chs. 3-4 continues the promise of blessing and prosperity for Judah, but these oracles have a different flavor and a new focus. They offer deliverance from threats not foreseen in the poetry of distress and reinterpret the divine promise of restoration in light of new concerns. In the divine promises of chs. 3-4 new themes emerge; new threats are envisioned; and new assurances are given that Israel's future will be radically transformed.

The promises of the latter half of the book of Joel, though, do not comprise a seamless whole. In contrast to the focused response in 2:18-27, the situation changes with chs. 3-4 where, as Barton notes, "the rot sets in"[378] and the literary coherence breaks down. Barton may overstate the case in treating chs. 3-4 as a series of independent and unrelated oracles,[379] but at the very least one can discern a significant break from ch. 3 to ch. 4, yielding two distinct perspectives on Israel's

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[378] Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 13.

[379] Barton, following Merx (*Die Prophetie des Joel*), treats Joel 3-4 as a series of eschatological oracles in no particular order, describing them as without "consistency or clarity." He divides the material as follows: 3:1-2; 3:3-5; 4:1-3; 4:4-8; 4:9-13; 4:14-15; 4:16; 4:17; 4:18; 4:19-21. See his discussion in *Joel and Obadiah*, 13-14, 92-111.

restoration. The following analysis will examine these perspectives with a particular eye on their divergence from chs. 1-2.

Joel 3:1-4:21

3.1 והיה אחרי־כן
אשפוך את־רוחי על־כל־בשׂר
ונבאו בניכם ובנותיכם
זקניכם חלמות יחלמון
בחוריכם חזינות יראו
3.2 וגם על־העבדים ועל־השׁפחות
בימים ההמה אשפוך את־רוחי

3:1 Afterward
I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh,
so that[380] your sons and your daughters will prophesy;
your elders will have dreams;[381]
your young will see visions.
3:2 Even upon the menservants and the maidservants
in those days I will pour our my spirit.

3.3 ונתתי מופתים בשׁמים ובארץ
דם ואשׁ ותימרות עשׁן
3.4 השׁמשׁ יהפך לחשׁך
והירח לדם
לפני בוא יום יהוה
הגדול והנורא

3:3 I will set portents in the heavens and on the earth:
blood, fire, and columns of smoke.[382]

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[380] The *waw* here indicates result; see Crenshaw, *Joel,* 165.

[381] An example of the *cognate effected accusative* (Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 166-67). The customary translation, "they will dream dreams," conveys the right sense, but is perhaps too literal a reading of the Hebrew.

[382] The general explanation for this phrasing (תימרות עשׁן) is that תימרות derives from the root meaning date palm. Hence, the expression connotes an image of smoke rising up and mushrooming like a palm-tree does. A similar expression occurs in Jud 20:40, עמוד עשׁן. If the derivation of this imagery is correct, the expression likely relates to a volcanic eruption. See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 56. Even if the imagery of a volcanic eruption lies behind this expression, though, one need not conclude

3:4 The sun will turn to darkness;
and the moon to blood,
before[383] the coming of the day of Yahweh—
great and terrible!

[3:5] והיה כל אשר־יקרא בשם יהוה ימלט
כי בהר־ציון[384] תהיה פליטה
כאשר אמר יהוה
ובירושלם שׂרידים[385] אשר יהוה קרא

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that the description here simply portends volcanic activity; we may have here an example of a dead metaphor.

[383] Simkins takes לפני to be referential here, hence "at the coming of the great and terrible day of Yahweh" (*Yahweh's Activity*, 210), and Nash reads similarly ("The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 161-62). They both suggest that reading לפני in its more common temporal sense, "before," would create tensions between this image of the "day of Yahweh" and that presented in Joel 4:14-16 and elsewhere. In many cases, as in ch. 4, a theophany accompanies the "day of Yahweh," but here in ch. 3 it appears that cosmic signs are a precursor, a signal that the "day of Yahweh" lies still further into the future. Simkins and Nash may be correct that there is a tension between the "day of Yahweh" tradition in ch. 3 and ch. 4, but such a tension does not justify their reading of לפני. The temporal sense of the expression is supported not only by all of the versions (LXX: πρὶν; Vulgate: *antequam*), but also by a remarkably similar expression in Mal 3:23, which describes the coming of another prophet "before the coming of the great and terrible day of Yahweh" (לפני בוא יום יהוה הגדול והנורא). For further discussion on the temporal nature of this unit, see the discussion below and Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy*, 38-42.

[384] MT: בהר־ציון ובירושלם; "on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem." For an explanation of the proposed emendation, see the note below.

[385] MT (ובשׂרידים אשר יהוה קרא) poses difficulties. Wolff attempts to translate it: "and among those who survive (are those) whom Yahweh calls," but he readily admits the awkwardness of the syntax, suggesting it must be a later gloss (*Joel and Amos*, 57). Even if it were a later addition, though, one would expect something more intelligible than the reading Wolff proposes. The versions provide mixed evidence, some following MT (Aquila, *kaige*-Theodotion) and others proposing emendations. For example, LXX (*καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι*) offers: "and messengers of good news," changing MT perhaps to: ומבשׂרים. Peshitta replaces the initial ב with a ל, and omits the ו, allowing it to alter the syntax: "as Yahweh has said to those whom survive, whom Yahweh appoints." These emendations testify to the discomfort with MT, but their proposals are not convincing. The most intriguing analysis, still, is that offered by Sellin (E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch übersetzt und erklärt* [KAT 12:1; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche, 1929], 169, 171). He proposes a *Vorlage* as printed above, in which ירושׁלם in 3:5d falls out in a case of haplography due to the graphically similar שׂרידים, yielding the awkward ובשׂרידים. When ובירושלם is restored, it appears erroneously in 3:5b, because of the influence of בהר־ציון. Sellin's emendation, though not supported by any versions, is most tempting, because it eliminates the syntactical difficulties, offers a parallel poetic structure between 3:5b and 3:5d, and accords better with the other biblical text presumably referenced here. Following Sellin's proposal, Obad 17 and Joel 3:5b are identical ("on Mount Zion there shall be escape"), and the citation formula ("just as Yahweh has said;" 3:5c) implies that another text is being quoted. The clarity offered by this

3:5 And it shall be:
All who call upon the name of Yahweh will be saved;
for on Mount Zion there will be those who escape—[386]
just as Yahweh has said—[387]
and in Jerusalem survivors whom Yahweh calls.

4.1 כי הנה בימים ההמה ובעת ההיא אשר[388] אשוב[389] את־שבות יהודה וירושלם
4.2 וקבצתי את־כל־הגוים
והורדתים אל־עמק יהושפט
ונשפטתי עמם שם
על־עמי ונחלתי ישׂראל
אשר פזרו בגוים
ואת־ארצי חלקו
4.3 ואל־עמי ידו גורל
ויתנו הילד בזונה
והילדה מכרו ביין וישתו

4:1 For in those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes[390] of Judah and Jerusalem:

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emendation is perhaps reason enough to view it with suspicion—it offers a text devoid of difficulties. It is likely, as Wolff maintains, that there is some later editing involved, and some corruption (or confusion) could have been added in that process. Fortunately, the sense of the passage does not hinge critically on how one resolves the text-critical questions here. It seems clear that "those whom Yahweh calls" and those "who call upon the name of Yahweh" will be rescued, and their deliverance will be centered in Jerusalem. Cf. Zech 13:9.

[386] Literally: "to become a rescue." The expression means that some (i.e., a remnant) will escape (hence, JPS: "for there shall be a remnant on Mount Zion..."). The opposite is expressed in Joel 2:3: "nothing escapes it" (פליטה לא־היתה לו).

[387] The citation formula here may refer to Obad 17, which is identical to the proposed emendation ("on Mount Zion there will be those who escape"). It does interrupt the flow of the poetic unit, but likely derives from the compiler of ch. 3 recognizing the contradiction with 2:3 ("there is no escape from it"). Cf. Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 210.

[388] אשר is omitted in some manuscripts, which changes the meaning quite noticeably. Instead of an oracle about judgment on the nations (which will accompany the restoration of Judah), the omission of אשר offers an oracle about the restoration of Judah (which will also include judgment on the nations). The context suggests the former interpretation is most likely. It is also easy to explain the loss of אשר as a case of haplography, due to the influence of אשיב.

[389] Following *Ketib* (אשוב; Qal), rather than *Qere* (אשיב; Hiphil). The expression שוב שבו\ית appears 27 times, twice as often in Qal as in Hiphil, so there seems little reason to doubt the *Ketib*. The Masoretes may have been uncomfortable with the Qal form functioning as a transitive verb, but in this expression it apparently could. See, for example, Ezek 16:53.

4:2 I will gather all the nations,
  and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.
I will execute judgment upon[391] them there
  on account of my people and my heritage, Israel,
  whom they scattered among the nations.
They even divided my land,
4:3 and over my people they cast lots.
They traded boys[392] for prostitutes,
  and girls they sold for wine—and then drank it!

[4.4] וגם מה־אתם לי צר וצידון וכל גלילות פלשת הגמול אתם משלמים עלי ואם־גמלים אתם עלי קל מהרה אשיב גמלכם בראשכם [4.5] אשר־כספי וזהבי לקחתם ומחמדי הטבים הבאתם להיכליכם [4.6] ובני יהודה ובני ירושלם מכרתם לבני היונים למען הרחיקם מעל גבולם [4.7] הנני מעירם מן־המקום אשר־מכרתם אתם שמה והשבתי גמלכם בראשכם [4.8] ומכרתי את־בניכם ואת־בנותיכם ביד בני יהודה ומכרום לשבאים[393] אל־גוי רחוק כי יהוה[394] דבר

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[390] The meaning of the expression שוב שבו\ית has posed difficulties apparently as early as the Masoretes, as the number of *Ketib*/*Qere* variants would attest. The versions, with few exceptions, took the phrase to mean the "returning from captivity," which is a defensible reading in most occurrences of the phrase. Based on this understanding, שבות derives etymologically from שבה, "to take captive." Preuschen offered a defense of this position in his study of the idiom ("Die Bedeutung von שוב שבות im Alten Testaments: Eine alte Controverse," *ZAW* 15 [1895]: 1-74.). Dietrich disagreed, arguing that שבות derives from שוב, and thus should be translated "to render a restoration" (שוב שבות, *Die endzeitliche Wiederherstellung bei den Propheten* [BZAW 40; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1925]). More recent studies have focused on the importance of context to help determine the meaning, since captivity does seem relevant in some occurrences (Jer 29:14; Ezek 29:14), but is clearly ruled out in others (Job 42:10; see also Sefire stele 3.24). In the case of the book of Joel, concern with a return from exile cannot be excluded, as it appears in 4:2, 6-7. If 4:1 is a redactional formula, though, serving to connect the eschatological visions that follow with the restoration promised in Joel 2:18-27, then the more generic promise to "restore the fortunes" of the people is the better translation. I follow this latter view, especially since 4:1 reads better as a prose introduction than as poetry. See also, Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 223-26.

[391] The Niphal of שפט occurs only once with עם (2 Chr 22:8) and the context there implies that Jehu is executing judgment upon Ahab, rather than entering into judgment with him, as in a lawsuit. Therefore, contra Wolff (*Joel and Amos*, 76-77), Yahweh's "judgment," in this context, is not so much a trial, but rather the execution of his sentence, as in Ezek 38:22 ("I will execute judgment upon him [ונשפטתי אתו] with pestilence and bloodshed"). See also Crenshaw (*Joel*, 175), Nash ("The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 166), and Simkins (*Yahweh's Activity*, 222).

[392] The nouns in these two lines are singular in form, but the definite article signals that they should be taken as generic; see Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 244-46.

[393] LXX offers: *εις αἰχμαλωσίαν* ("into captivity"), perhaps reading לשבי. The LXX reading is a bit less awkward than MT, which is probably sufficient reason to defend MT. After all, a reference to the Sabeans also appears in a similar context in a list of other traders (Ezek 38:13). Wolff defends

4:4 In addition:
What are you to me, O Tyre, and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back,[395] swiftly and speedily I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. [4:5] Because you took my silver and my gold; and you brought my good treasures to your temples;[396] [4:6] and you sold the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem to the children of Greece to remove them far from their own border; [4:7] look, I am rousing them from the place to which you sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. [4:8] I will sell your sons and your daughters through[397] the children of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for Yahweh has spoken.

4.9 קראו־זאת בגוים
קדשו מלחמה
העירו הגבורים
יגשו יעלו
כל אנשי המלחמה
4.10 כתו אתיכם לחרבות
ומזמרתיכם לרמחים
החלש יאמר
גבור אני
4.11 חושו[398] ובאו

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the reference to Sabeans, concluding the following line, אל־גוי רחוק, must be a later gloss (*Joel and Amos,* 72). His position is likely correct.

[394] 4QXII^c reads: כי יהוה צב[אות דבר]; "[for Yahweh of ho]sts has spoken."

[395] Wolff proposes reading this line as another interrogative: "Or do you want to do something to me?" (*Joel and Amos*, 72), following LXX. This reading must distinguish different meanings between sentences with essentially the same Hebrew wording: הגמול אתם משלמים עלי; and ואם־גמלים אתם עלי. The more likely reading is that one rhetorical question is posed, and then the conditional phrase (beginning ואם) begins the deity's answer to his own question.

[396] The term here (היכליכם) could mean "palaces" or "temples." Since the context suggests the looting of the temple in Jerusalem, I prefer the latter option.

[397] As Wolff points out (*Joel and Amos*, 72), the phrase מכר ביד indicates an instrumental use. The phrasing in vv. 6 and 8, מכר ל, illustrates the expression one would expect if something is sold "to the children of Judah."

[398] MT reads: עושו, a verb which is otherwise unattested in Hebrew and whose meaning is unclear. If MT is correct, the closest cognates come from Arabic and Old South Arabian (*ġwṯ*),

כל־הגוים מסביב

הקבצו[399] שמה

ויחת[400] יהוה גבוריך

4.12 יעורו ויעלו הגוים

אל־עמק יהושפט[401]

כי שם אשב לשפט

את־כל־הגוים מסביב

4.13 שלחו מגל

כי בשל קציר

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meaning "to help." The versions, however, do not reflect this meaning, and were likely translating a different word altogether. The Vulgate (*erumpite*, "break forth") likely reads עורו, which is attested in vv. 9 and 12. LXX (*συναθροίζεσθε*, "assemble") reads הקבצו or perhaps נועו (so Wolff, *Joel and Amos,* 72), likely due to the influence of v. 11c. Scholars have also proposed that MT may reflect the corruption of the initial guttural, from an original חושו, "hurry up" (so Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 169-70). Among these options, the last one is to be preferred, if only slightly, as the confusion due to phonetic similarity can be attested elsewhere (cf. *Ketib/Qere* in 1 Sam 17:7); see the discussion in Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2d rev. ed.; Minneapolis/Assen: Fortress/Royal Van Gorcum, 2001), 251. However one resolves the text-critical question, the context demands some form of battle preparation.

[399] MT reads: ונקבצו (Niphal jussive; "and let them be gathered"). The jussive is unlikely here, especially if גבוריך in v. 11d refers to the warriors of the nations (rather than Yahweh's warriors). LXX reads an imperative here (*συνάχθητε*), which accords better with the context.

[400] As with much of v. 11, MT (הנחת יהוה גבוריך; "Bring down, O Yahweh, your warriors") is troublesome and likely corrupt, since nowhere else in ch. 4 is the deity addressed directly. The sentiment that Yahweh "bring down" (נחת) his "warriors" (גבורים) is appropriate to the context and becomes widely popular in later apocalyptic texts (see, for example, 1 Enoch 56:5-8; 1QM 1.10-11), but the form of the expression here is difficult to defend. In fact, the popularity of this sentiment among later scribal groups, such as those at Qumran, likely explains the corruption of MT. It could be a later gloss or an editorial plea, but the versions provide more reasonable interpretations. LXX offers a variant of v. 10b: *ὁ πραῢς ἔστω μαχητής*; "let the weak become a warrior;" likely reading: העני יהוה גבור. Although a plausible reading in context, it assumes the corruption of two different words and is not otherwise supported. LXX most likely reflects an attempt to make sense of an already corrupt text by appealing to v. 10b. Targum Jonathan (יתבר יוי תקוף גיבריהון), the Peshitta (*wtmn tbr mry' gnbrwtkwm*), and the Vulgate (*ibi occumbere faciet Dominus robustos tuos*) may all reflect the same Hebrew: ויחת יהוה גבוריך; "that Yahweh may shatter your warriors." This reading is preferable, as similar expressions are found in other judgment oracles against surrounding nations: Obad 9; Jer 48:20; 49:37; 50:2, 36; 51:56.

[401] 4QXII[c] reads: יושפט, an alternative spelling of the name (cf. 1 Chr 11:43; 15:24). Targum Jonathan translates the name here (as in v. 2) to emphasize its symbolic meaning: במישר פלוג דינא; "in the plain of judicial decision."

באו רדו
כי־מלאה גת
השיקו היקבים
כי רבה רעתם

4:9 Declare this among the nations:
"Sanctify war!
Rouse the warriors.
Let them draw near; let them come up—
all the men of war.
4:10 Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruning knives into spears.
Let the weakling say,
'I am a warrior.'
4:11 Hurry and come,
all you nations round about;
gather yourselves there,
that Yahweh may shatter your warriors."
4:12 Let the nations rouse themselves and come up
to the valley of Jehoshaphat;
for there I will sit to judge
all the nations round about.
4:13 Put in the sickle
for the harvest is ripe.
Come, tread,
for the winepress is full.
The vats overflow
for great is their wickedness.

4.14 המונים המונים
בעמק החרוץ
כי קרוב יום יהוה
בעמק החרוץ
4.15 שמש וירח קדרו
וכוכבים אספו נגהם
4.16 ויהוה מציון ישאג
ומירושלם יתן קולו
ורעשו[402] שמים וארץ

[402] 4QXII^c reads: וירעשו. This same expression (רעש שמים וארץ) appears with perfect and imperfect forms, with no apparent difference in meaning (cf. Isa 13:13; Ezek 38:20), so either form is possible.

ויהוה מחסה לעמו

ומעוז לבני ישׂראל

4.17 וידעתם כי אני יהוה אלהיכם

שׁכן בציון הר־קדשׁי

והיתה ירושׁלם קדשׁ

וזרים לא־יעברו־בה עוד

4:14 Multitudes, multitudes
in the valley of decision![403]
For near is the day of Yahweh
in the valley of decision.
4:15 The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.
4:16 Yahweh roars from Zion;
and from Jerusalem he utters his voice.
The heavens and the earth shake;
but Yahweh is a refuge for his people,
a stronghold for the children of Israel.
4:17 So you shall know that I, Yahweh your God,
dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be a holy place;
foreigners shall never again pass through it.

4.18 והיה ביום ההוא

יטיפו[404] ההרים עסיס

והגבעות תלכנה חלב

וכל־אפיקי יהודה

ילכו מים

ומעין מבית יהוה יצא

והשׁקה את־נחל השׁטים

4.19 מצרים לשׁממה תהיה

ואדום למדבר

[403] חרוץ could have multiple meanings, including: "threshing sledge" (cf. Amos 1:3) or "judgment." The versions generally translate with an emphasis on judgment, but Ahlström suggests both meanings could operate simultaneously—a form of double entendre (*Joel and the Temple Cult*, 81). Agricultural imagery is used in v. 13, and the same term is used metaphorically in similar contexts (Isa 41:15), so Ahlström may be correct.

[404] MT: יטפו. MT's reading of נטף in Qal is possible, but the Hiphil is to be preferred (cf. Amos 9:13; והטיפו). 4QXII[c], which I follow, supports reading the Hiphil form here.

למדבר[405] שממה תהיה

מחמס בני יהודה

אשר־שפכו דם־נקיא בארצם

[4.20] ויהודה לעולם תשב

וירושלם לדור ודור

[4.21] ונקמתי דמם ולא־אנקה[406]

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[405] This reading follows 4QXII^{c}, which has למדבר written twice; MT and other versions reflect only one למדבר, and hence, read a bicolon, rather than a tricolon here (MT: "Egypt shall become a desolation, / and Edom shall become a desolate wilderness"). MT's syntax is awkward (though not impossible), as one would expect an ellipsis of the verb (תהיה) in the second line. The second תהיה may be a case of dittography (so Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 237), but 4QXII^{c} presents a second, and perhaps better, option. If למדבר is written twice, a tricolon appears, where the punishment on Egypt and Edom builds until its climax in the third line (לשממה / למדבר / למדבר שממה). See also Isa 64:10, where a similar structure is found: "Your holy cities have become a wilderness (מדבר), / Zion has become a wilderness (מדבר), / Jerusalem a desolation (שממה)." This three-part structure to the oracle of judgment against Egypt and Edom would also balance what may be the original form of the oracle of weal for Jerusalem and Judah in vv. 20-21: "But Judah shall be inhabited forever / and Jerusalem for generation after generation; / for Yahweh dwells in Zion."

[406] This line poses several challenges, only the first of which is what it means. MT offers: ונקיתי דמם לא־נקיתי, which could be translated something like: "I will leave unpunished their blood, which I have not left unpunished." The sense of such a reading is difficult to discern. LXX (*καὶ ἐκδικήσω τὸ αἷμα αὐτῶν καὶ οὐ μὴ ἀθῳώσω*), Targum Jonathan, and the Peshitta reflect a different Hebrew *Vorlage*: ונקמתי דמם ולא אנקה; "I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty." This reading makes more sense, but it presupposes the corruption not only of the first verb (ונקמתי > ונקיתי) but also of the form of the final verb (אנקה > נקיתי). Jeremias suggests a quotation of Exod 34:7 lies behind the corrupted MT, taking the first verb as an infinitive absolute: ונקה דמם לא אנקה; "But I cannot let their blood be completely unpunished" (*Die Propheten Joel*, 47; cf. also Barton and Leeuwen, who consider similar proposals; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 109-110; Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy," 41-42). Jeremias' emendation only draws attention to how misplaced such a sentiment is in its context. According to his reading, the conclusion of a vision of perpetual bliss and fertility for Judah reminds the people that they will also bear some punishment. Such a sentiment is expressed nowhere else in ch. 4, so I find it unlikely in the conclusion. Thus, the textual tradition represented in LXX may be the most likely.

Even if one accepts the LXX reading, though, the line is still problematic. The reference to "their blood" (דמם) presumably relates to the "innocent blood" of v. 19e. In that case, v. 21a appears out of place, separated from the discussion of blood vengeance and interrupting the concluding tricolon about Jerusalem ("But Judah shall be inhabited forever / and Jerusalem for generation after generation, / for Yahweh dwells in Zion"). For these reasons, many propose moving it to the conclusion of v. 19. See, for example, Nash, "The Palestinian Agricultural Year," 175-77; Crenshaw, *Joel*, 203; and Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 237-38. Unfortunately, such emendations and rearrangements do not resolve all of the difficulties with this line. Even at the end of v. 19, it interrupts the concluding oracle contrasting the desolation of Egypt/Edom with the perpetual blessing of Judah/Jerusalem. In addition, v. 21a is the only direct speech of the deity in the concluding lines, so it reads awkwardly no matter

4:18 It shall happen on that day:
The mountains shall drip sweet wine;
the hills shall flow with milk;
all the watercourses of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a spring shall come forth from the house of Yahweh
and water the Wadi Shittim.[407]
4:19 Egypt shall become a desolation,
and Edom a wilderness;
it shall become a desolate wilderness,
because of the violence done to the children of Judah
in whose land they poured out innocent blood.
4:20 But Judah shall be inhabited forever
and Jerusalem for generation after generation—
4:21 I will avenge their blood and I will not clear the guilty—
for Yahweh dwells in Zion.

The Eschatological Scenario

If Barton finds in chs. 3-4 a loose collection of independent oracles grouped in no particular order, other scholars have discerned a greater sense of logic in the arrangement of the material. In particular, Theodore Hiebert argues Joel 4 betrays all the hallmarks of the Divine Warrior Hymn, an ancient mythic pattern Israel adopted from its neighbors to celebrate Yahweh's triumph over his enemies and his reign from Mount Zion.[408] In ancient Israel, this conflict myth helped bring together two

where it is placed. It seems to be a later gloss or perhaps a redactional addition to a pre-existing oracle, but the apparent corruption of the text makes it difficult to offer firm conclusions (so also, Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 73).

[407] The Wadi Shittim is not cited elsewhere, although Shittim does appear as a place name in a few texts (e.g., Num 25:1) and as the name of a well in Num 33:49. The root word is associated with acacia wood, so one could translate "the valley of the acacias" (so Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 73); cf. LXX: *τὸν χειμάρρουν τῶν σχοίνων*; "the valley of reeds." In any case, the location of this valley, if it is a real valley, is unknown. Like the valley of Jehoshaphat and the valley of decision, the name is probably symbolic.

[408] Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," 875-76. Patrick Miller made essentially the same case in his study of the divine warrior tradition (*The Divine Warrior*, 137-39), although he focuses only on Joel 4:9-21. Hiebert's contribution was to include all of ch. 4 in his analysis. See also the discussion in Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 292-333.

distinct traditions: those in which the Exodus-conquest was ritually re-enacted and those of the royal cult, which celebrated the deity's enthronement in Zion.[409] As reinterpreted in early Second Temple Judaism, the mythic pattern describes a future clash in which Yahweh will defeat his enemies in battle, sit enthroned in Jerusalem, and grant blessing and prosperity for Israel.[410] Notable features of the genre include a challenge to Yahweh's authority, a summons to battle, a theophany, Yahweh's victory, and his triumphant return to Zion. Joel 4 follows this basic outline. Because foreign nations have mistreated Yahweh's people and looted his sanctuary (vv. 1-8), the divine warrior declares war and prepares for battle (vv. 9-14), while the cosmos convulses in response (vv. 15-16). After defeating his enemies, Yahweh sits enthroned on Mount Zion (v. 17) and ensures fertility for Israel (vv. 18-21).

Hiebert's analysis is essentially correct in capturing the narrative arc of Joel 4. In other words, Barton's contention that the material in Joel 4 is arranged in no particular order misses the general movement from conflict to victory and restoration.[411] Moreover, ch. 3 follows a similar pattern, although in a more cryptic fashion. Following social (3:1-2) and cosmic (vv. 3-4) upheaval, Yahweh will achieve a decisive victory from Jerusalem leading to the salvation of his people (v. 5). Joel 3 clearly does not detail the more elaborate mythic pattern of the Divine Warrior

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[409] For more discussion of the origin of the divine warrior tradition, see Patrick Miller, *The Divine Warrior*; and Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 91-111.

[410] For more on the mythic pattern in post-exilic literature, see Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 123-34; and Hanson, "Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern," *JBL* 92 (1973), 37-59.

[411] Cf. Barton's conclusion: "[The oracles of chs. 3-4] do not amount to a coherent set of expectations, such that we could draw up a temporal scheme in which we might expect them to be fulfilled in any particular order; they are individual shafts of light in an obscure future" (*Joel and Obadiah*, 92).

Hymn, but it does present a narrative framework to set expectations for Judah's future restoration.[412] The two chapters present slightly different versions of this restoration, but they both point to a crucial moment when Yahweh will intervene to transform the normal political, social and cosmic order on Israel's behalf. As a result, chs. 3 and 4 might best be described as distinct visions of an eschatological scenario[413] described at length in some of the latest additions to prophetic literature.[414] Various traditions and motifs are marshaled to help frame these eschatological visions—including the divine warrior, the day of Yahweh, theophany, and Zion traditions—but the main focus in ch. 3 and in ch. 4 falls on eschatological vindication.[415]

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[412] Another form of literature that provides a narrative framework for Judah's future restoration are the oracles against the nations. In many respects, Joel 4, if not ch. 3, belongs in this general category, as it pronounces judgments on various nations, indicting them for their sins. Unfortunately, the *form* of this genre is not clear, certainly not in any way that unifies the pre-exilic condemnations of surrounding peoples (e.g., Amos 1-2) with the much later speculation about decisive—even eschatological—judgment (as in Zech 9-14). See the discussion in A. C. Hagedorn, "Looking at Foreigners in Biblical and Greek Prophecy," *VT* 57 (2007): 432-48. Thus, I prefer describing Joel 3-4 as visions of the eschatological scenario, which borrow heavily from the earlier traditions associated with the oracles against the nations, rather than as members of that earlier form.

[413] I borrow the term "eschatological scenario" from Petersen's study of so-called "deutero-prophetic" literature (*Late Israelite Prophecy*, 13-53). The elements Petersen discerns in the eschatological scenario of later prophetic writings correspond, to a large degree, with the Divine Warrior Hymn that Hanson, Miller, and Cross identify: conflict that is cosmic in scope; a theophany; a victory for Yahweh; and a return to Zion where his kingship is celebrated. Petersen even includes Joel 3-4 (as a unit) in his analysis of this eschatological expectation (see, in particular, ibid., 16-18). Building upon Petersen's outline, I propose that these eschatological visions are not entirely homogeneous, so that we might actually speak of two distinct and even competing eschatological scenarios within Joel 3-4. The differences between these distinct visions—such as whether salvation will come to all of Israel or only a remnant—are discussed below.

[414] Other examples of eschatological visions are included in the following late prophetic texts: Isa 24-27; 56-66; Ezek 38-39; Zech 9-14; Mal 3-4.

[415] I use the term "eschatological" loosely to mean a preoccupation with a future event that will radically alter the social, political, and religious order. By applying the term to Joel 3-4, I do not suggest that a fully-developed apocalyptic worldview is articulated. See, for example, the discussion by Bill Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (ed. Jerry Walls; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24-29. According to Arnold's analysis, Israelite eschatology reflects "the expectation of a future eon radically discontinuous with the present" (24). Such a description is generally applicable to the visions of chs. 3-4.

If Barton's analysis exaggerates the fractured nature of the material in the second half of the book of Joel, though, Hiebert's proposal overstates its unity. Joel 4, in particular, displays the seams of redactional activity. For example, 4:4-8 discusses specific grievances against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, while v. 19 indicts Egypt and Edom. The rest of ch. 4, though, envisions judgment against "all the nations" (v. 2), with no specific people or region identified. This tension in identifying the object of the deity's wrath—Philistia, Egypt and Edom, or "all the nations"—indicates that the material in ch. 4 has been brought together secondarily.[416] The introductory formula beginning v. 18, "it shall happen on that day" (והיה ביום ההוא), is probably also a sign of redactional activity—a standard way to link disparate eschatological material.[417] The formula occurs more than 30 times in the Hebrew Bible (all of which are in the prophetic books), but is particularly common in late prophetic literature associated with eschatological speculation, such as Isa 24-27 (24:21; 27:12, 13); Ezek 38-39 (38:10, 18; 39:11); and Zech 12-14 (12:3, 9; 13:2, 4; 14:6, 8, 13). In Zech 14, for example, the formula, along with the shorter form ביום ההוא, appears seven times, offering structure to a diverse collection of oracles concerning the defeat of the nations (vv. 4, 13), the glory of Jerusalem (8, 21), a great cosmic disturbance (6), and Yahweh's enthronement (9, 20). Moreover, Joel 4:4-8 is set off from the surrounding material by the introductory וגם ("in addition") and the concluding phrase: כי יהוה דבר ("for Yahweh has spoken"). The pattern

[416] Cf. the similar tension between Zech 9, which indicts Tyre, Sidon (v. 2), Philistia (v. 6), and Greece (v. 13), and Zech 12, which promises judgment on "all the nations of the earth" (v. 3).

[417] So Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 75.

Hiebert discerns in Joel 4, then, is a redactional creation. Rather than a coherent and seamless vision, ch. 4 presents a series of distinct pericopes stitched together secondarily:

4:1-3	announcement of judgment
4:4-8	oracle of judgment
4:9-13	summons to battle[418]
4:14-17	description of the day of Yahweh
4:18-21	vision of restoration[419]

The material in Joel 4 also demonstrates awareness of other prophetic texts, especially late prophetic material (see chart 8). At times, the direction of influence can be difficult to determine. The latest additions to Zechariah (chs. 9-14) may have provided the inspiration for the writing of Joel 4, but one could also argue that Joel 4 helped shape some of the visions in Zechariah (esp. Zech 14). It is even possible that sections of Deutero-Zechariah and Joel 4 were composed by the same author or

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[418] The classic study of the "summons to battle" form is: R. Bach, *Die Aufforderungen zum Flucht und zum Kampf im Alttestamentlichen Prophetenspruch* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1962). The form is chiefly marked by imperatives or jussives and includes a description of the enemy and the ones being called to war. Interestingly, the summons to battle in Joel 4 is quiet on who is being addressed. Following Miller (*The Divine Warrior*, 137-39), Barton (*Joel and Obadiah*, 103-104), and others, I understand the deity to be addressing the divine council, whose responsibility it is to gather the nations together. If so, the summons to battle is not to the armies of Judah who are to make preparations for holy war against the nations; the initial summons to battle (vv. 9-11) is made by the members of the divine council to the nations. A second summons to battle (vv. 12-13) is then spoken by the divine warrior to the members of his heavenly army that they defeat the gathered forces. For further discussion of the "summons to battle" form in Joel, see Wolff (*Joel and Amos*, 74-75), and Simkins (*Yahweh's Activity*, 231-32).

[419] Wolff proposes a similar arrangement of ch. 4. The only difference in Wolff's outline is the placement of v. 14, which he includes with the preceding section (vv. 9-13) rather than that which follows (vv. 15-17). Thematically, v. 14 extends the discussion of the valley of judgment metaphor from v. 12, but formally it interrupts the consistent use of imperative (or jussive) verbs from v. 9 and begins to refer to the deity in the third person. I prefer reading v. 14 with the following unit, as together vv. 14-17 reverse the imagery of 2:10-11: a theophany signals the deity leading his army against Jerusalem on the "day of Yahweh" in ch. 2; but in 4:14-17, a theophany accompanies the deity's protection of Jerusalem on the "day of Yahweh." The valley of judgment metaphor, then, serves as the link between the summons to battle in vv. 9-13 and the following description of the "day of Yahweh."

group.[420] Moreover, there are good reasons to be cautious about claiming conscious allusions on a large scale. For example, the summons to battle in Joel 4:10 ("Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning knives into spears") echoes and apparently reverses the image of peace found in Isa 2:4 and Micah 4:3: "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning knives." Even here, though, the diction is not identical, as the expression in Joel uses a different term for "spear" (רמח instead of חנית) than either Micah or Isaiah and a *Qal* rather than *Piel* form of the verb (כתת). It is probable, then, that the author alludes to a common expression, perhaps a standard call to battle refrain, rather than to a specific text. Other parallels may also be explained as a result of appeals to a common tradition, such as the "day of Yahweh."

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[420] Steck attributes Zech 10:3-11:3 to the same redactional layer as Joel 4 (*Der Abschluß,* 36-37).

Chart 8: Correspondences Between Joel 4
and Other Israelite Prophetic Literature

Joel 4	Prophetic Literature[421]
"In those days and at that time" (v. 1a)	*Jer 33:15; 50:4, 20*
"When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem" (v. 1b)	*Jer 29:14; Zeph 3:20; Amos 9:14; Ezek 39:25; Jer 29:14; 30:3; 31:23; 33:7, 26*
"I will gather (קבץ) all the nations" (v. 2)	*Isa 66:18*; *Zech 14:2; Zeph 3:8*; Zech 12:3 – all the nations attack Jerusalem
The nations have "cast lots over my people" (v. 3)	*Obad 11*; Nah 3:10 – casting lots as image of Thebes' destruction
Oracle of judgment against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia (vv. 4-8)	Zech 9:2-8 – oracle against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia
"I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads" (v. 4)	*Obad 15*
"for Yahweh has spoken" (v. 8)	*Obad 18; Jer 13:15; Isa 22:25; 24:3; 25:8*
Instructions to rouse "the warriors" (הגבורים) for holy war (v. 9)	Zech 10:5, 7 – people of Judah and Ephraim shall be "like warriors" (כגבורים) in holy war
"Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears" (v. 10)	Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3 – "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning knives"
"I will sit to judge all the nations round about" (v. 12)	Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3 – Yahweh will judge between the nations
"Come, tread, for the wine press is full" (v. 13)	Isa 63:1-6 – metaphor of divine judgment as treading a wine press
"Near is the day of Yahweh" (v. 14)	*Isa 13:6; Ezek 7:7; 30:3; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14;* ***Joel 1:15; 2:1***
"The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (v. 15)	*Isa 13:10;* ***Joel 2:10***; darkness on the day of Yahweh is also attested in: Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9; Zeph 1:15; Jer 4:23, 28
"Yahweh roars from Zion; and from Jerusalem he utters his voice" (v. 16a)	*Amos 1:2;* ***Joel 2:11***
"The heavens and the earth shake" (v. 16b)	*Isa 13:13; Hag 2:6, 21;* ***Joel 2:10***; Ezek 38:19 – a great shaking in the land of Israel

[421] This list is illustrative, not exhaustive. Italicized citations signal nearly identical wording. Those not italicized refer to similar themes and motifs, as indicated. Bold typeface indicates parallels with Joel 1-2.

"So you shall know that I, Yahweh your God" (v. 17a)	*Isa 60:16; Ezek 6:7* (*passim*); ***Joel 2:27***
"And Jerusalem shall be a holy place" (v. 17c)	Obad 17; Isa 27:13; Zech 8:3 – Jerusalem will be holy
"Foreigners shall never again pass through" Jerusalem (v. 17d)	Isa 52:1 – the uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer enter Jerusalem; Zech 14:21 – Canaanites will not be allowed in the temple
"The mountains shall drip sweet wine" (v. 18a)	*Amos 9:13*
"A spring shall come forth from the house of Yahweh" (v. 18c)	Zech 14:8; Ezek 47:1-12 – descriptions of water flowing from the temple (Ezek) and from Jerusalem (Zech)
Edom shall become a "desolate wilderness" (למדבר שממה; v. 19)	Mal 1:3 – Edom's land has become a desolation (שממה) and a wilderness (מדבר)
"Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for generation after generation" (v. 20)	Zech 14:11 – Jerusalem shall be inhabited and abide in security

Despite such cautions, there is no denying that Joel 4 is informed by prophetic material emphasizing the deity's judgment on foreign nations and vindication of Israel, such as Isa 13 and Obadiah. The result of this exegetical and composite quality—gathering from various, especially prophetic, traditions—is a rather awkward narrative development. For example, the deity sits to judge the nations in v. 12, but appears to march out from Jerusalem to defeat them in v. 16.[422] The indictment of Egypt and Edom in v. 19 also interrupts the vision of blessing and prosperity for Jerusalem in the concluding lines. In addition, attention to grammatical forms indicates several speakers are represented, adding to the sense that ch. 4 includes a jumble of originally separate parts. For example, the recognition formula in v. 17 ("so you shall know that I, Yahweh your God...") follows a description of the deity in the third person in vv. 14-16.[423] In short, the narrative flow of ch. 4 is not smooth, reading as a somewhat disjointed compilation of future expectations. One may then credit Barton's contention that the material in Joel 4 is largely derivative and fragmentary, borrowed from various sources and theological traditions. At the same time, the material demonstrates enough of a pattern, as Hiebert discerns, to suggest that Joel 4 might be attributed to a compiler of eschatological visions, rather than a series of independent additions.

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[422] Crenshaw (*Joel*, 192) suggests this tension is not necessarily a contradiction, but it certainly does complicate the narrative development.

[423] Several shifts can be discerned in ch. 4 both in terms of the speaker and the addressee. In 4:1-3, the deity speaks to an unknown audience, perhaps the divine council. In vv. 4-8, the deity addresses specific nations slated for judgment. In v. 9a, the deity speaks again to an unknown audience and tells them what to announce to the nations, which follows in vv. 9b-11. In vv. 12-13, the deity speaks again, offering further instructions. In vv. 14-16, the speaker and the audience are unknown, but the deity is referred to in the third person. In v. 17, the deity speaks to the people of Judah/Jerusalem presumably. Finally, in vv. 18-21, the deity again is referenced in the third person. This outline does not account for the most problematic text-critical sections (vv. 11d and 21a), which, if one follows MT, would complicate matters further.

If Joel 4 presents one eschatological scenario stitched together from various traditions, ch. 3 follows a similar pattern. Three distinct movements in the text can be discerned:

3:1-2 Outpouring of the divine spirit
3:3-4 Announcement of signs
3:5 Announcement of salvation[424]

Evidence suggests these units were secondarily combined, much like the material in ch. 4. The introductory promise (vv. 1-2), for example, begins and ends with the same phrase (אשפוך את־רוחי; "I will pour out my spirit"), forming an inclusio that suggests a self-contained unit. The announcement of salvation (v. 5) is also introduced by what is likely a redactional sign: "And it shall be..." (והיה). Wolff's observation that ch. 3 has the character of a "chain of quotations" is apt.[425]

As in ch. 4, these eschatological expectations also share similar themes and imagery with other late prophetic writings. The promise that the deity's spirit will be poured out on the people (3:1-2) echoes similar expectations in Ezek 39:29; and Zech 12:10.[426] The signs (מופתים) that are announced to presage the "day of Yahweh"

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[424] Wolff finds a similar structure in ch. 3: an oracle of salvation (*Heilszuspruch*; vv. 1-2); an announcement of a sign (*Zeichenansage*; vv. 3-4); and an announcement of salvation (*Heilsansage*; v. 5). See his discussion in *Joel and Amos*, 57-59. This general structure seems right, even though I am not convinced that the outpouring of the spirit in vv. 1-2 are fairly characterized as promising salvation.

[425] Ibid., 59.

[426] The motif of the outpouring of the divine spirit can also be found in: Ezek 11:19; 36:26; Isa 32:15; 44:3. Cf. also Num 11:29, where Moses offers the following hope: "Would that all the people of Yahweh were prophets, and that Yahweh put his spirit upon them." Joel 3:1-2 anticipates that Moses' wish will be fulfilled.

(3:3-4) are built on related traditions about the day's darkness[427] and its other theophanic elements.[428] The announcement of salvation in 3:5, if the proposed textual emendations are correct, even quotes Obad 17 directly, a conclusion strengthened by the citation formula, "just as Yahweh has said." Even without the emendations, though, Joel 3:5 points to a broader expectation of survival in Jerusalem found elsewhere in late prophetic writings.[429]

The point here is not to exhaust all the possible inner-biblical allusions in ch. 3; other studies have focused exclusively on the exegetical character of Joel.[430] It is enough at this point to note simply that the imagery and subject matter in ch. 3 are largely derived from other late prophetic writings (or at least from the same sources that animate those late prophetic writings), and consequently, as in ch. 4, the narrative development is cryptic and disjointed. The promise of the outpouring of the divine spirit normally offers reassurance (Ezek 39:29) and renewed fertility (Isa 32:15;

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[427] For examples, see Isa 13:10; 34:4; Jer 4:23; Ezek 32:7-8; Amos 8.9; Zeph 1:15. See also the similar description in Joel 2:2, 10.

[428] A theophany is widely attested as part of the Divine Warrior Hymn or the eschatological scenario, as in: Isa 63:19; 64:2; Zech 9:14; 14:4-7. The imagery of Joel 3:3-4, with blood, fire, and smoke, is a bit unusual among theophanies, although smoke and fire often accompany the deity's presence (e.g., Exod 19:18). The theophany that most closely resembles that found in Joel 3:3-4, and which may be responsible for this confluence of images, is Ezek 38:19-22; which includes the spilling of blood and fire raining down from the heavens. See also the similar description of signs *before* the "day of Yahweh" in Mal 3:23.

[429] E.g., Zech 13:8-9; 14:2. Cf. Barton, who posits that the reference is likely to be to Isa 4:2-6 (*Joel and Obadiah*, 98). Isa 4, after all, does include a reference to "survivors" (פליטת; v. 2); speaks of a remnant in Jerusalem (v. 3); describes the coming of the divine spirit (v. 4); and even mentions cloud, smoke, and fire (v. 5). Barton may be correct here, especially since the quotation of Obad 17 relies on an emendation of MT. Strazicich, meanwhile, argues that Isa 37:31-32 may also be referenced here (*Joel's Use of Scripture*, 219). Perhaps more likely, there was a general expectation of survival in Jerusalem among the prophetic tradents, and this hope was expressed in several passages, including Joel 3:5.

[430] See, in particular, the studies of Strazicich (*Joel's Use of Scripture*); Bergler (*Joel als Schriftinterpret*); Müller (*Gottes Zukunft*); and Katheryn Kit-King Leung ("An Intertextual Study of the Motif-Complex יום יהוה in the Book of Joel" [PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997]).

44:3), but here such a vision is followed by descriptions of cosmic upheaval prior to the "great and terrible day of Yahweh" (vv. 3-4). Even the promise of salvation (v. 5) appears abruptly and without clear context, as the threat from which the people are saved is not articulated—foreign nations, cosmic and natural disruption, or Yahweh himself? Put simply, ch. 3 seems to *assume* a future conflict that it does not narrate; instead it focuses on describing the signs that will announce the eschatological moment is near.

Thus, we might speak of two eschatological scenarios envisioned in chs. 3 and 4, offering different perspectives on the future salvation and restoration of Israel. These two scenarios share a number of features in common: they have a composite character, as though independent units have been compiled secondarily; they both share an exegetical curiosity, reflecting an awareness of and interest in other biblical (especially prophetic) texts; they both envision the future as a time of great conflict, in particular through the traditions of the "day of Yahweh;" they are both preoccupied with temporal markers, reflecting a keen interest in the sequence of future events;[431] they both privilege the city of Jerusalem as the central focus of eschatological expectations. The two scenarios, in other words, clearly share formal and thematic features.

Nevertheless, there are differences between ch. 3 and ch. 4 that merit attention. Joel 4 describes in great detail the deity's battle with "the nations,"

[431] Temporal markers include: "afterward" (והיה אחרי־כן; 3:1); "in those days" (בימים ההמה; 3:2); "before" (לפני; 3:4); "for in those days and at that time when" (כי הנה בימים ההמה ובעת ההיא אשר; 4:1); "near" (קרוב; 4:14); "it shall happen on that day" (והיה ביום ההוא; 4:18). See the discussion in "Time and the 'Day of Yahweh'" (III.B.vi.) below.

outlining the various reasons for the deity's judgment and the military preparations for the conflict. This war is not described in ch. 3; it may be assumed as part of the "great and terrible day of Yahweh," but there is no mention of the other nations. In fact, ch. 3 focuses primarily on the "portents" (מופתים) that are to precede the "day of Yahweh," rather than on the conflict itself. One might also note a difference in mood between ch. 3 and ch. 4. While ch. 4 sounds triumphant—the deity's grand boast that he will defeat the enemy nations—ch. 3 offers a more cautionary tone. The signs and portents give clues about how to survive the "day of Yahweh," rather than reassurance that it is "near" (4:14).

By far the most significant difference between chs. 3 and 4, though, lies in how the fate of the people of Israel is understood. The expectation of ch. 4 is clear and consistent: the deity's judgment on foreign nations will result in prosperity for all of Israel. This pan-Israel understanding is noteworthy, because it contrasts with similar visions in late prophetic writings. There is no hint of a dispute between Judah and Israel (cf. Zech 11:14) or between Judah and Jerusalem (cf. Zech 12:2). In fact, there is no inner-Israel tension that ch. 4 anticipates to be settled by the deity's intervention (cf. Zech 13:7-9). Those for whom Yahweh's salvation comes are named with broadly inclusive language in ch. 4: "my people and my heritage, Israel" (v. 2); "the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem" (v. 6); "the children of Israel" (v. 16).[432] Indeed, ch. 4 looks forward to a reunification of the exiles

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[432] Joel 4 also mentions place-names as among those saved: "Zion, my holy mountain" (v. 17); "Judah and Jerusalem" (vv. 1, 20).

"scattered among the nations" (vv. 2, 6-7) rather than a judgment on or division among the people.

By contrast, ch. 3 offers a more limited view of salvation. The coming conflict appears to threaten the people of Judah/Israel, too, as Jerusalem is the only place where deliverance can be found. Again, the conflict in ch. 3 is not described, as much as assumed, so the reading of a restricted salvation here has not been universally embraced.[433] Simkins, for example, focuses on the outpouring of the divine spirit in 3:1-2, arguing that, based on Isa 32:9-14 and 44:1-5, this sign offers an unqualified assurance of blessing and prosperity: "Thus Joel proclaims that as the fertility of the land will be restored so also will the people be restored by the outpouring of Yahweh's spirit."[434] For Simkins, v. 5 is merely a further elaboration on this promise of salvation. Simkins rightly ascertains a reassuring note in traditions about the outpouring of the divine spirit, but, in my view, his reading does not attend adequately to the role of vv. 3-4. The outpouring of the divine spirit is here not a promise of fertility signaling the deity's restoration of the people; placed before vv. 3-4, it becomes a marker—along with blood, fire, smoke, and the darkened heavens—offering a warning that the "great and terrible day of Yahweh" is approaching. There is no hint at this point that the coming day will be a moment of great vindication for the people; it is an ominous time, much as in Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14-18; or Joel 2:1-11. The announcement of salvation in v. 5, then, offers hope that escape is

[433] The argument that a limited salvation is in view here was most forcefully advanced by Ploger, and has been followed by Petersen, Jeremias, others. Those challenging this interpretation include: Simkins, Allen (?), others.

[434] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 215.

possible, but it also offers guidance, a plan for surviving that fateful day. Salvation is not universal, but comes to those "who call upon the name of Yahweh" (v. 5a), to those who are in Jerusalem (v. 5b), and (most exclusively) to those to "whom Yahweh calls" (v. 5d). This (increasingly) narrow group of survivors stands in stark contrast to the sweeping view of salvation in ch. 4: "my people and my heritage, Israel" (4:2); or "the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem" (4:6). In ch. 4, the deity's intervention divides "Israel" from "the nations;" but here in ch. 3, the division is between those in Jerusalem who call upon Yahweh and who are called by him, and everyone else.

This same tension described here between ch. 4 and ch. 3—between a pan-Israel reunification and a more restrained salvation—can be identified in other late prophetic material, so that one is not surprised to find such a distinction in late additions to the book of Joel. Steck's work on the final redactions to the Book of the Twelve and the book of Isaiah focuses specifically on this tension.[435] The vision of Joel 4—of a reunified Israel returned from exile and triumphant over the world's armies—is also echoed in Zech 10:3-11:3; Zeph 3:8, 14-19; Obad; Isa 27:12-13; 34:2-4; 35. These visions of Israel's glorious future, though, are countered by sober predictions of an intra-Israel divide. Isa 4:2-6, for example, echoes much of the imagery of ch. 3, describing a remnant in Zion after the divine spirit has cleansed the "blood of Jerusalem." Mal 3-4 describes a divide, not between Israel and the nations, but between "the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him" (3:18). Perhaps the closest parallel to Joel 3:5, though, is

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[435] See Steck, *Der Abschluß*, esp 25-60.

Zech 13:7-9, which describes the land as being "refined" and "tested," so that two thirds of the people perish. The remaining remnant can be readily identified:

הוא יקרא בשמי
ואני אענה אתו
אאמר[436] עמי הוא
והוא יאמר יהוה אלהי

They will call upon my name,
  and I will answer them.
I will say, "They are my people,"
  and they will say, "Yahweh is our God." (Zech 13:9b)

Joel 3 converts this portrait of a refined remnant and their intimate trust in and relationship with their deity into a strategy for surviving the eschatological moment: by calling upon the name of Yahweh (קרא בשם יהוה), and by being called by him (v. 5). The text in Joel offers one further specification, though: salvation is further confined to the city of Jerusalem; only there can deliverance be found. In other words, Joel 3 reflects a similar description of eschatological deliverance—confined increasingly to an elect few—as found in other late prophetic material.

The image of deliverance in Joel 3, then, responds not only to the promise in ch. 2 of agricultural fertility but also to ch. 4, with its assurance of deliverance for all the people of Israel. The author of ch. 3, echoing the refined remnant language from Zech 13, warns that salvation will not come for all the people, but only for those who at the proper time call upon the name of Yahweh from Jerusalem. One should keep watch for the signs that announce the coming of the great and terrible day, rather than waiting eagerly for its arrival, as ch. 4 indicates. Chapter 3, then, is likely the final

[436] Reading with LXX and Syriac versions, rather than MT's אמרתי.

addition to the book of Joel, inserted after ch. 4 to warn that divine judgment will also fall upon the people of Israel. Whereas ch. 4 updates Joel 1-2 to expand the promise of blessing to include judgment on Israel's foreign enemies, ch. 3 updates the whole collection to limit the deity's salvation to those who call and are called in Jerusalem. This reconstruction is premised on the conviction that the sectarian impulse of ch. 3 is later than the more inclusive eschatological vision of ch. 4, as is suggested by updates to the books of Isaiah and Zechariah. It is entirely possible, though, that ch. 4 could be the final addition, providing a pan-Israelite view of restoration to augment the narrow claims of ch. 3. Although I consider this scenario less likely, convincing evidence for either position is wanting.

Joel 3-4 contains two distinct eschatological scenarios that describe the future salvation of the people. As dual portraits of Israel's future restoration, they exhibit a basic thematic consistency with the divine response in 2:18-27, which also promises a glorious restoration for the people and the land. The twin poems of national distress that begin the book of Joel are followed by a series of visions that offer reassurance that the disaster will not be total, that the present trouble will only be temporary, and that Yahweh's future deliverance will come to his people. Aside from this generic thematic unity, though, the visions of restoration in chs. 3-4 make a very poor response to the complaints in Joel 1:2-2:17, such that it is difficult to imagine them coming from the same source. Before attending to some of the reasons that this division is so pronounced, it should be noted that those prophetic texts sharing the closest affinity with Joel 3-4—those that anticipate a return of the divine warrior, a decisive conflict with the nations, a purification of Israel and prosperity for the land;

in other words, those texts pointing toward an eschatological event—are generally considered additions to the works in which they reside.[437] For example, Isa 24-27; Ezek 38-39; and Zech 9-14 are widely identified as secondary to those prophetic books and each offers a similar set of eschatological expectations as found in Joel 3-4.[438] Put simply, visions of the eschatological scenario in late prophetic literature might be inherently redactional—a further elucidation or reinterpretation of an earlier writing, rather than an independent composition.

Divine Judgment

Joel 4, despite its composite character, does develop consistently a single theme, one that helps distinguish the character of this material from that of Joel 1-2. This theme—Yahweh as judge of the foreign nations—introduces (v. 2) and concludes (v. 21a) the chapter, and permeates every section in between. The theme is developed in geographic terms, as the setting moves to the valleys of יהושפט ("Yahweh has judged;" vv. 2, 12)[439] and החרוץ ("decision;" v. 14).[440] The deity's judgment is harsh and swift, but it is also just. The penalty is not arbitrary, but will

[437] Several studies make this case in more detail. See, for example, the research of Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology*; Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy*, esp. 1-53; Steck, *Der Abschluß*; Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*; all of whom view Joel 3-4 as secondary.

[438] Other examples include: Obad 15b, 16-21; Isa 34-35; Zeph 3:8-20. The book of Malachi is unlikely to be an exception to this trend, as it was likely an addition to Zechariah before being detached to form the Book of the Twelve (see, for example, Steck, *Der Abschluß,* 34-35).

[439] That this place-name, the valley of Jehoshaphat, should be taken symbolically as a place of judgment is made clear in v. 12, where the deity explains the significance of the valley: "for there I will sit to judge (אשב לשׁפט) all the nations round about."

[440] חרוץ has several meanings, ranging from "gold" (Zech. 9:3) to "threshing sledge" (Amos 1:3). The context here suggests a play on the theme of divine judgment; cf. 1 Kgs. 20:40. Targum Jonathan, sensing the symbolism of the name, translated it with the same phrase as עמק יהושפט: "the plain of judicial decision" (במישר פילוג דינא).

be in proportion to the severity of the nations' crimes (vv. 4, 7-8). In fact, there are repeated efforts made to specify the wrongdoing of the nations. Their sins include a whole litany of offenses: selling Israel into slavery (v. 2, 6); dividing the land (v. 2); treating people as worthless (v. 3);[441] raiding the temple treasures (v. 5); general wickedness (v. 13); and shedding innocent blood (v. 19). Even the final vision of Jerusalem's perpetual security is interrupted to underscore the image of Yahweh as one who exacts vengeance on the wicked: "I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty" (4:21).[442]

Judah and Jerusalem will certainly reap benefits from Yahweh's actions—in utopian visions of an eternally prosperous future (vv. 18, 20)—but these benefits are almost presented as byproducts of the primary focus: that the foreign nations will suffer in proportion to the evil they have done. The nations are sometimes grouped together and judged as one (4:2; כל־הגוים); sometimes only the "neighboring" nations are of concern (4:11, 12; כל־הגוים מסביב). Other references single out specific peoples for judgment: Tyre, Sidon, Philistia (4:4), Egypt, and Edom (4:19). The outcome in each case, though, is the same: Yahweh's judgment will be swift and sure.

Even Wolff, who argues for the basic unity of the book, acknowledges this thematic shift with ch. 4: "Within this second major part of the book of Joel there is a

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[441] This seems to be the sense of the indictment in Joel 4:3. Not only are the people of Israel sold into slavery; they are bartered for prostitutes and wine, commodities that provide fleeting value. Cf. Amos 2:6; which indicts Israel for selling "the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals." See also Lam 4:2.

[442] This translation follows LXX (see text-critical discussion above). Even if one reads with MT, though, the theme of divine judgment is still present: MT implies lenient judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, while LXX points toward harsh judgment on Egypt and Edom.

significant division after 3:5, since the foreign nations move to the fore thematically only from 4:1 on, the Day of Yahweh then being proclaimed as a day of judgment on the enemies of Jerusalem."[443] Wolff here actually acknowledges two parts of the thematic shift: towards a focus on the *foreign nations*, as well as a shift toward *divine judgment*. In fact, chs. 1-2 display little concern with either of these topics.

The only references to "the nations" (הגוים) in the first half of the book occur in the context of international shame, which the people will suffer if their deity allows them to be destroyed (2:17, 19). The description of "a nation" (גוי) attacking with overwhelming force in 1:6 could imply a military assault: "For a nation has arisen against my land..." In context, though, this "nation," with its teeth gnawing on the vines and trees of the land (vv. 6b-7), appears to be a metaphor for the larger disaster (perhaps, locusts) of ch. 1. If one were inclined to take it literally, though, the attack of nations is clearly not the primary focus in the poetry of distress, which is more concerned with agricultural failure. Even with the military-like assault described in 2:1-11, foreign nations are not blamed, as Yahweh and his very own army (2:11) are said to threaten the people. When "all the nations" are gathered together in Joel 4:2, then, a new focus emerges with no organic connection to the poetry of distress.

Another way to illustrate this thematic shift to foreign nations is to examine the ways in which the community itself is identified. In chs. 1-2, the focus is primarily domestic, so those addressed are members of the community: elders (1:2), children (2:16), farmers (1:11), priests (1:13), wine-drinkers (1:5), even all the

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[443] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 57.

inhabitants of the land (2:1). The "people" (עם; 2:16) are gathered for mourning; the "sons of men" (בני אדם; 1:12) petition for mercy. In other words, the community is presented as the very human, mortal, vulnerable group seeking the favor of the merciful deity. This rhetorical juxtaposition changes quite dramatically with ch. 4, where the community is now opposed to "the nations." The names and identity of the community, then, must alter to reflect this new geopolitical framework. The "people" now become identified in international terms: "Judah and Jerusalem" (v. 1); "my people and my heritage, Israel" (v. 2); "the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem" (v. 6); "the children of Israel" (v. 16). The shift to an international focus in ch. 4 changes even the way in which the community identifies itself.

As for the other half of the thematic shift—divine judgment—chs. 1-2 indicate no interest in this larger judicial metaphor, either. Because this motif of divine judgment is so pervasive in the Hebrew Bible generally and in prophetic literature specifically,[444] it is worth dwelling on its absence in Joel 1-2. The portrait that emerges in this investigation reveals just how far removed chs. 1-2 are from the repeated emphasis on divine judgment in ch. 4. Never do the people repent or acknowledge a role in causing the disastrous state of affairs, and, perhaps more surprisingly, the prophet never indicts them for wrongdoing. The disaster(s) of chs. 1-2 are described in graphic terms, and the people are encouraged to participate in cultic mourning rites (e.g., 1:14) in order to move the deity to compassion. Their

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[444] Walter Brueggemann notes that one of Israel's favorite metaphors for Yahweh is judge; see his discussion in *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 233-41. Simkins discusses the prevalence of this metaphor in prophetic literature specifically: "That the people of Judah were culpable before Yahweh is difficult to deny and still remain faithful to the prophetic tradition" (*Yahweh's Activity*, 183).

suffering, though, is never explained as a consequence of sin or disloyalty. The agricultural failure is not presented as divine judgment for the people's failings, even though agricultural disasters were commonly explained as a result of covenantal violations.[445] No attempt is made to justify Yahweh's assault on Jerusalem (2:1-11) as a response to the people's wrongdoing, as is expected within the "day of Yahweh" tradition.[446] Neither is there an appeal for judgment on the enemies of the people, as one commonly finds in complaint literature.[447] Even the confession of Yahweh's merciful character (Joel 2:13) omits the complementary claim of the deity's harsh treatment of the guilty.[448] Moreover, the deity's response in 2:18-27 offers to restore the land, repay the people for their loss, and remove the threat of destruction, but it never promises judgment or issues an indictment, as the deity takes responsibility for sending the threat (v. 25). Quite simply, the judicial metaphor that dominates the ending of the book of Joel is absent from the poems of distress in chs. 1-2.

The absence of any mention of divine judgment, or some acknowledgement of the people's own culpability in the disaster, has not gone unnoticed in scholarship on

[445] See, for example, Amos 4:6-9, in which drought, locusts, and the destruction of crops—the same concerns in Joel 1—are all said to be means of correction and judgment by the deity. Note also that the curses for failure to obey the Mosaic covenant (Deut 28:15-68) include locusts and drought.

[446] The "day of Yahweh" tradition is explicitly related to divine judgment, for example, in Zeph 1:7-18; Obad 15-18; and in the numerous variations of יום יהוה that emphasize the deity's anger: יום עברת יהוה (Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:18); יום אף יהוה (Zeph 2:2-3; Lam 2:22); יום חרון אפו (Lam 1:12). F. Fensham, in fact, has suggested that the entire tradition may be related to the execution of curses outlined in covenants ("A Possible Origin of the Concept of the Day of the Lord," in *Biblical Essays* [OTWSA 9; Bepeck: Potchefstroom Herald, 1966], 90-97), although the tradition clearly has many different manifestations as exemplified in the book of Joel; so, Deist, "Parallels and Reinterpretation," 63-79; Rendtorff, "How to Read the Book of the Twelve," 78-80.

[447] See, for example, Pss 9:20; 82:8; 94:2.

[448] Exod 34:7; see also, Nah 1:3, in which the deity's harsh judgment overwhelms the claim of divine mercy. Of course, Joel 2:13 is not the only occurrence of this confession in which no mention is made of divine judgment; see, for example, Ps 86:15.

the book of Joel. Most scholars, certain that the judicial metaphor is present, have speculated about the crimes that the people have likely committed. Ahlström, for example, suggests the people are worshipping other gods.[449] Redditt suspects the cultic functionaries have abdicated their roles during the crisis.[450] Wolff views the people as inattentive to the prophetic word on account of "pious self-sufficiency."[451] Paul House detects that the "religion pictured in Joel has lost its vitality. The Lord and His presence are taken for granted."[452] One is more sympathetic to Katherine Hayes, who argues that sin must be implied but acknowledges that any wrongdoing is "unspecified."[453] Allen similarly argues for an assumed indictment, noting:

> Strangely there is no explicit reference to the sin of the people... Joel's whole interpretation of the locust plague does presuppose serious sin in the life of the community. It is evidently left to the people and priests to search their own hearts and habits for evidence of the sin that God's reaction proved to be there. Self-criticism could be an aid to true repentance...[454]

Simkins rejects these approaches, arguing that they mistakenly assume the book of Joel relies on a covenant model, in which the people are cursed by the deity for violating their covenantal obligations. Instead, Simkins suggests the book of Joel assumes an honor/shame model, as described by anthropological research on traditional Mediterranean societies. The people are shamed before the nations

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[449] Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 25-26.

[450] Redditt, "The Book of Joel," 225-40.

[451] Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 13.

[452] Paul House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 76.

[453] Katherine Hayes, *"The Earth Mourns,"* 196-99.

[454] Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 79.

because the deity has ceased to provide them the appropriate blessings. Simkins suspects the people have tried to hide their shame by abandoning the daily sacrifices, which only serves to make a mockery of the people's claim of divine favor during an agricultural collapse.[455] His approach acquits the people of full responsibility, but still blames them for not responding appropriately to the disaster: "Their zeal for serving their God waned; their practice of cultic rites became lethargic."[456] Simkins' insightful study does help tease out the important role that honor and shame play in the distress of the people,[457] and successfully deconstructs the widespread assumption that the people are being blamed for covenantal violations. The notion that the people's cultic participation is insufficient, though, is unpersuasive. The people are not being indicted for their failure to offer sacrifices; they are called to mourn that the disaster has eliminated their ability to offer sacrifices (Joel 1:13, 16; 2:14). Joel 1-2 simply offers little indication that the people are guilty of anything.[458]

One particular text deserves extended treatment in this discussion, as it is often cited as evidence that the people are not wholly without guilt:

> Even now, says Yahweh:
> Return (שׁבו) to me with all your heart,

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[455] See Simkins, "'Return to Yahweh,'" 41-45; and *Yahweh's Activity*, 171-91.

[456] Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 188-89.

[457] For a discussion of the honor/shame motif in psalms of lament, see Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity*, 64-74. Cottrill's discussion here centers on the ways in which the language of honor and shame frames the relationship between the petitioner and the "hostile other." The honor/shame dynamics in the book of Joel are generally framed in terms of the people/deity relationship, which Cottrill discusses in the broader context of the patron/client model (ibid., 102-37). For the purposes of the book of Joel, an overriding fear is that the people will be shamed because their deity does not demonstrate sufficient loyalty to them: "Where is their god?" (2:17).

[458] So also Linville, "The Day of Yahweh," 100-101; Crenshaw, "Who Knows?" 185-196; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 76-80; Ogden, "Joel 4," 105; Ganzel, "The Shattered Dream," 20; Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 339-40; and Jeremias, *Die Propheten Joel*, 29.

and with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.
Rend your heart,
not only your garments,
and return (ושובו) to Yahweh your God. (Joel 2:12-13a)

This passage, often taken as a call for the people to repent of their sins,[459] could indicate that the people are thought to share some blame for their current situation, or that the disaster is a form of judgment on the people for their crimes. The fundamental question for the purposes of this discussion deals with the meaning of the call to "return" (שׁוב) to the deity. The directive to שׁוב often signals a call for repentance. Prophets routinely admonish the people to "return" from their "evil ways":

> Return (שׁובו) and turn away (השׁיבו) from your idols; and turn away (השׁיבו) your faces from all your abominations. (Ezek 14:6)
>
> Return (שׁובו) now, each of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings. (Jer 18:11)
>
> Return (שׁבו) from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes. (2 Kgs 17:13)
>
> Return (שׁובה), O Israel, to Yahweh your God, for you have stumbled because of your sin. (Hos 14:2)
>
> Return (שׁובו) from your evil ways and from your evil deeds. (Zech 1:4)

[459] So Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 49-50; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 76-82; Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 42-43; Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 81-84; Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 56-57; Watts, *The Books of Joel*, 27-28; Margaret Dee Bratcher, "Joel," in *Mercer Commentary on the Bible* (Watson Mills and Richard Wilson, eds.; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995), 740; Douglas R. Jones, *Isaiah 56-66 and Joel: Introduction and Commentary* (TBC; London: SCM Press, 1964), 159-60.

In fact, in certain prophetic traditions, this call to repentance was a defining element of the prophetic office.[460] Thomas Raitt's study of the call to repentance in prophetic literature highlights the importance of this theme and outlines the form that the call to repentance takes: appeal (messenger formula, vocative, and admonition) and motivation (promise, accusation, and threat).[461] The following example helps illustrate the main features of the form:

> Return (שׁובו) now, each of you, from your evil way and wicked doings, and you will dwell upon the land that Yahweh has given to you and your ancestors from of old and forever. Do not go after other gods to worship and bow down before them, and do not provoke me to anger with the work of your hands; and I will not bring disaster upon you." (Jer 25:5-6)

The admonition to "return" offers the promise that the deity will allow the people to dwell permanently in the land of their ancestors, but it also includes an indictment and a threat: if the people continue to walk in their "evil ways" and practice their "wicked doings," including the worship of other gods, then Yahweh will bring disaster upon them.

I focus on the theme of repentance in prophetic literature here to illustrate how remarkable the text from Joel is. The people are admonished to "return," and there is a promise—that the deity, who is merciful, might "return" (שׁוב) and "relent" (נחם) from the destruction. However, there is no hint of an indictment or threat for unfaithfulness. In fact, if Joel 2:12-14 is understood as a call to repentance, it would

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[460] See Zech 1:1-6 and the discussion in Petersen, "Remembering the Prophets," in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* (eds. John Ahn and Stephen Cook; LHBOTS 502; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 199-204.

[461] Raitt, "The Prophetic Summons to Repentance," *ZAW* 83 (1971): 30-49. Cf. also, Wolff, "Das Theme 'Umkehr' in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie," *ZTK* 48 (1951): 129-48. Wolff downplays the importance of the theme of repentance in prophetic literature.

be the only one that offers a promise without a corresponding indictment or threat.[462] It is not certain, though, that 2:12-14 should be understood as a call to *repentance*. The people are called to שׁוב *to* Yahweh, not *from* their evil ways. In fact, a better parallel than the calls to repentance in prophetic literature might be Hezekiah's invitation for the observance of the Passover, in which the call to "return" features prominently:

> So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his officials, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return (שׁובו) to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he may return (וישׁב) again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your ancestors and your kindred, who were faithless to Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. Do not now be stiff-necked as your ancestors were, but yield yourselves to Yahweh and come to his sanctuary, which he has sanctified forever, and worship Yahweh your God, so that his fierce anger may turn away (וישׁב) from you. For as you return (בשׁובכם) to Yahweh, your kindred and your children will find compassion with their captors, and return (ולשׁוב) to this land. For Yahweh your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return (תשׁובו) to him." (2 Chr 30:6-9)

The call for the people to "return" (שׁובו) here is not a call for repentance,[463] but a call for cultic participation, namely in the Passover celebration. The instructions are quite

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[462] Raitt, "The Prophetic Summons," 36. See also the discussions in Simkins, *Yahweh's Activity*, 172; and Allen, 77.

[463] The unfaithfulness of the ancestors is noted, but, according to the Chronicler's theology, the sins of the ancestors are not visited on future generations. There is no indictment of the present generation, but only an admonition that they engage fully in cultic rites.

detailed, as though the people may not know what the call to "return" means.[464] The explanation provided includes: surrendering (נתן־יד) to Yahweh; going (בוא) to his sanctuary; and worshipping (עבד) the deity. The call to "return," therefore, is not necessarily a call to repentance, but can be a call to participate fully in the appropriate cultic rites—to go to the temple, to gather together, to praise, to petition, and to worship.[465]

In the context of the book of Joel, this latter interpretation, I contend, is the more compelling. In fact, Joel 2:12 may demand such a reading: "Return to me with all your heart, / and *with fasting*, *with weeping*, and *with mourning*." The act of returning (שׁוב) is accomplished with fasting, weeping, and mourning, cultic behaviors associated with national rites of lamentation. The emphasis here may be on the internal mechanism of returning—with all your heart—but the entreaty clearly indicates that cultic behavior is the primary means by which returning is practiced. In addition, the parallels between Hezekiah's call and Joel 2:12-14 demonstrate that these texts share a common perspective. The people are admonished to "return" to Yahweh so that he might "return" (שׁוב) to them, as anticipated in Joel 2:14. The Chronicler further grounds this hope in the confession of the deity's gracious and merciful (חנון ורחום) character, as does Joel 2:13b.

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[464] Cf. Mal 3:7, where the people specifically ask, "How shall we return?" Apparently, there is some debate, especially in post-exilic Yehud, about precisely what it means to "return." See also, Zech 1:3-6.

[465] Ahlström also emphasizes the cultic character of this call to "return": "The importance of the oracle [2:12-14] is that the demand for the people to turn back to Yahweh is at the same time a demand for return to his cult" (*Joel and the Temple Cult*, 26).

The call for the people to “return” to Yahweh in the book of Joel, then, is not an acknowledgement that the people are to blame for the disaster, or that the deity’s assault is punitive. The people are admonished to participate fully in the cultic rites of mourning—through fasting, weeping, and the wearing of sackcloth. In addition, they are now admonished to engage in the cultic rituals “with all your heart,” so that their inwardly directed angst mirrors their outer trappings of mourning.[466] As Barton argues, “A heart that is ‘rent’ (2:13) is not necessarily a repentant heart but one that acknowledges its own desolation.”[467]

What is clear from the preceding analysis is that the theme of judgment and retribution that dominates ch. 4 is remarkably muted—even absent—from chs. 1-2. Even if understood as a call to repentance, the admonition to “return” includes no indictment of the people and never blames them for any part in the disaster. Divine justice, especially with regard to the foreign nations, is simply not of primary concern in the poetry of distress.[468] In ch. 4, though, it moves to the fore so dramatically that

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[466] This interpretation also resolves a nagging problem in Lambert’s study on biblical fasting rites. His persuasive thesis is that fasting in the Hebrew Bible is not an act of penitence, but rather an expression of the petitioners’ desolate state. As he argues, “fasting and its accompanying rites of weeping, rending clothes, donning sackcloth, and applying ashes function as a physical manifestation and communicative expression of anguish and affliction. ‘See,’ the one fasting declares, ‘how awful is my state!’” (“Fasting as a Penitential Rite,” 479). Lambert’s study is convincing, except in the case of Joel 2:12-14, where the people are called to “return to me with all your heart, / and with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” If the admonition to “return” here is understood as a call to repent, as Lambert maintains, penitence is apparently achieved *through* fasting, weeping, and mourning, at least partially. If the call to “return,” though, is an element of the call for cultic participation, then penitence may not be in view here at all. The invitation is to join the communal mourning rites through inward and outward expressions of grief, giving one the best possible opportunity to move the deity to compassion. See Lambert, “Fasting as a Penitential Rite,” 503-504.

[467] Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 80. The metaphor operative in the call to “rend your heart” is similar to the admonition to “circumcise the foreskin of your heart” (Deut 10:16). In both cases, the cultic ritual is internalized.

[468] Of course, this conclusion leaves open the question about the *causes* of the disaster in chs. 1-2, if not divine judgment for the people’s sins. The disaster is actually presented as the consequence

it is hard to imagine the same hand composing the entire work. Research on the Book of the Twelve suggests that the last additions were largely preoccupied with the theme of divine judgment,[469] indicating that Joel 4 might be considered among those late redactions. In fact, one might read ch. 4 as a corrective to this lack of judgment in chs. 1-2. In the first half of the book, the deity "repays" the people for the loss of their land (2:25); in ch. 4, the nations will be "repaid" for their evil deeds (4:4, 7). In the divine response of ch. 2, the deity promises an abundant harvest (2:24); in ch. 4, the "harvest" becomes a metaphor for Yahweh's judgment on the nations (4:13). In chs. 1-2, the deity is praised as one who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and relents from disaster;" in ch. 4, he "will not clear the guilty" (4:21a),[470] completing the traditional confession (cf. Exod 34:6-7) and illustrating the fundamental tension between the two main parts of the book of Joel.

Determinism

Stephen Cook also helps highlight the division in the book of Joel, when he notes that the latter half of the book develops a notion of *apocalyptic determinism*:

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of two competing, even contradictory, events: the deity's abandonment of his people (cf. Joel 2:17c, "where is their god?"), and the deity's aggressive assault against them (2:1-11, 25). No explanation for why the deity is acting this way is provided, though.

[469] See James Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 279.

[470] See the text-critical discussion of 4:21a above. Jeremias (*Die Propheten Joel*, 47) and van Leeuwen ("Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy," 41-42) argue that a quotation of Exod 34:7 should be restored, emending the first finite verb to an infinitive absolute: ונקה דמם לא אנקה. Such an emendation does not resolve the difficulties with this line, as even Jeremias and Leeuwen disagree about how to translate the corrected text (Jeremias: "But I cannot let their blood be completely unpunished." Leeuwen: "And I shall certainly not hold innocent their [the nations'] bloodshed."). Still, if their emendations are correct, the case for reading this line as an update to the confession of Yahweh's mercy in 2:13 is strong. The study of Leeuwen, in fact, argues that the final redactions to the Book of the Twelve were concerned with holding in tension the "the bipolar attributes of mercy and retributive justice" ("Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy," 32). Joel 4:21a, he argues, was a corrective to help restore this tension. I am persuaded by his view of the function of 4:21a, even though the proposed emendation remains speculative.

"As in Ezekiel 38-39, Joel 4 (Eng.: 3) says that God brings the nations against Jerusalem as pawns, predestined for judgment (Joel 4:2, 12 [Eng.: 3:2, 12])."[471] The nations are not the only ones whose fate is pre-determined, though, as only a remnant of the people of Jerusalem will be called by the deity and allowed to escape the coming destruction (3:5d). It would be easy to overstate how determinism functions in chs. 3-4.[472] The book of Joel does not develop a structure or pattern of history on the scale of Dan 7-12 or 1 Enoch 83-90, and it is not clear that all human agency is irrelevant. The nations are not predestined for destruction from the beginning of time; their coming judgment is a result of their actions against the people of Judah. Nonetheless, chs. 3-4 do reflect a certainty about a radically different future that is lacking from the poetry in chs. 1-2. Chapter 3 announces radical social (vv. 1-2) and cosmic (vv. 3-4) upheaval that is to precede a terrible and momentous event, in which the survival even of the people of Israel is dependent upon their election by Yahweh. In ch. 4 the deity promises that a new era is beginning, in which the nations will be judged harshly for their crimes and Jerusalem will remain prosperous and secure. "In that day" (v. 18) points to a future time when Jerusalem will be synonymous with fertility and Israel's enemies will be desolate. Importantly, the future is determined and cannot be altered, "for Yahweh has spoken" (v. 8).

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[471] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 179.

[472] One might point to Otto Plöger as an example of one who exaggerates the nature of *determinism* here. Regarding the images of prosperity in 2:18-27 and 4:1-21, he writes: "But there is a difference between such a situation being promised as a consequence of cultic piety, despite the permanent contradiction with actual reality, and being interpreted eschatologically as the ultimate conclusion of Yahweh's activity in history. This is precisely what the additions in ch. iv wish to emphasize;" *Theocracy and Eschatology*, 101. One might agree with the fundamental distinction between ch. 4 and chs. 1-2 without seeing in ch. 4 "the ultimate conclusion of Yahweh's activity in history."

Complaint literature sometimes does develop a notion of determinism. Destruction, even when the result of a natural disaster, was often lamented as a consequence of the divine will. In ancient Mesopotamian laments, for example, the divine "word" was often seen as the cause of the tragedy, and the divine word could not be altered: "An is never to change his word, Enlil is never to alter the word he utters!"[473] Similar reflexes can be found in Israelite literature, as Yahweh is said to "proclaim" and "plan" the destruction of Jerusalem: "Yahweh has done what he planned; he has carried out his word which he commanded from long ago" (Lam 2:17).[474] The poetry of distress in chs. 1-2, in other words, could appeal to this deterministic outlook in describing the disaster.

Instead of mourning the deity's predetermined destruction, though, Joel 1-2 calls for petitionary prayer: "Spare your people, O Yahweh!" (2:17). As such, it stands in direct contradiction with notions of determinism. If the future is fully determined by the deity, there is really no use for petitions—that which will happen has already been decided. The literature from Qumran provides a good example. Petitionary prayer is very rare among the sectarian writings, because of their doctrine of predestination. The only petitions allowed are those for that which is already predestined.[475] Such a request is quite different from the call for cultic mourning

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[473] Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, 168-69; translation follows Jacob Klein, "Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur," *COS* 1.166. See also the discussion in Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 55.

[474] Cf. also Lam 1:21; see further the discussion in Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 61.

[475] See Israel Knohl, "Between Voice and Silence: The Relationship between Prayer and Temple Cult." *JBL* 115 (1996): (29-30) 17-30. "The doctrine of predestination, which was dominant in the Qumran sect, does not allow for petitional prayer in the usual sense of the word. At most, the

described in Joel 1-2, where the future is quite open-ended. Disaster is not accepted as a necessary part of the deity's plan; it is resisted through lamentation and cultic participation.

The description of the approaching threat in chs. 1-2 is not fatalistic; it serves to motivate the hearers to participate in the appropriate communal rites. In fact, ch. 2 highlights precisely how *un*determined the future should be considered, imploring the people to lament despite the dire threat that is looming over them:

> Who knows? He may turn and relent,
> and leave behind him a blessing:
> an offering and a libation
> for Yahweh your God. (2:14)

Perhaps the most obvious evidence that chs. 1-2 do not exhibit a notion of determinism, in which future events cannot be altered, is that the disaster threatened in 1:2-2:17 is reversed in 2:18-27; the people and land, in fact, are not ultimately destroyed. With the visions of chs. 3-4, though, the deity's judgment on the nations and blessings on Israel are not in doubt.

Relation to the Cult

The focus on cultic participation and its accompanying rites—fasting, wearing sackcloth, weeping, convening assemblies—fades as the deity responds in 2:18, but it is not true to say that cultic matters disappear entirely. Cook, in fact, finds a whole range of priestly vocabulary and syntax in the latter half of the book, such that he offers conclusions about the identity of the priests he thinks responsible for

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person who is chosen by God may ask God to deepen and complete the kindness which God has freely given" (29). See also, Carol Newsom, *Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 206.

composing the book of Joel.[476] Still, there is generally thought to be a significant break from chs. 1-2, on the one hand, with their focus on the cult and ritual practice, and chs. 3-4, on the other, where priestly concerns are less of an issue.[477] This division merits some attention.

One approach to examining the cultic character of the book of Joel has been advanced by Ogden, discussed above, and a more extensive treatment of his analysis is relevant here. His study concludes that the oracles of Joel 4 "are all responses to the preceding lament ritual," and counts as evidence "any similarities with ideas typical of the national laments preserved in the Psalms."[478] In other words, he demonstrates linguistic and thematic similarities between ch. 4 and lament psalms (especially Pss 40; 44; 53; 79; 80; and 83)[479] to prove that ch. 4 was part of a liturgy of national lamentation. He concludes that this evidence strengthens the case for reading the book of Joel as a unity, since the entire work reflects a setting in Israel's lament ritual.[480] The evidence marshaled, though, does not support the thesis that Joel 4 was a response to the *preceding* material in Joel 1-2, a point Ogden seems to

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[476] Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 188-209. He identifies the "Joel group" as closer to the Zecharian Zadokites than to the Ezekielian Zadokites, but suggests it should not be equated with either group. For a critique of approaches that assume this level of confidence about Zadokite priestly groups in ancient Israel/Judah, see Alice Hunt, *Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History* (LHBOTS 452; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), esp 37-49, 176-90.

[477] Note, for example, Simkins, who concludes: "The functioning of the cult in chaps. 3-4 is simply not a concern for Joel" (*Yahweh's Activity*, 179).

[478] Ogden, "Joel 4 and Prophetic Responses," 97-98.

[479] Note, though, that Ps 40 is a, somewhat atypical, *individual* lament, rather than communal lament. Ps 53 is not a lament, although defining its genre is not easy. Erhard Gerstenberger calls it "communal instruction;" see Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 218-20.

[480] See further the discussion in Ogden, "Restoring the Years," 10-12.

acknowledge.[481] In addition, the connections between ch. 4 and the communal lament psalms are not particularly strong. Still, Ogden's thesis deserves attention, as it actually points to another way in which ch. 4 (and ch. 3) differs markedly from the concerns of chs. 1-2.

Ogden identifies several parallels between Joel 4 and communal lament psalms. He argues, for example, that the motifs of "stirring up" and of divine judgment from Joel 4:12 "are significant in the vocabulary of lamentation."[482] In another example, he cites the image of the nations "casting lots" (ידו גורל) over the people of Judah (4:3) and points to Ps 22:19 as "evidence that such a phrase was familiar in the lament tradition."[483] Joel 4:16 offers the reassurance that Yahweh will be a "refuge" and a "stronghold" for the people, a concern Ogden finds expressed in some lament psalms (e.g., Pss 31:3; 43:2; 61:4).

As these examples attest, the evidence that ch. 4 responds directly to a communal lament is tenuous at best. Most of these motifs and terms are common, found in any number of genres. It is actually noteworthy that the image of lots (גורל) occurs only this once in Israelite laments (an individual lament, and with a different verb: נפל), and it is certainly not the case that such imagery was unique to lament

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[481] He notes that "we have no direct evidence as to which of the lament psalms might have been used in the liturgy behind Joel 4" ("Joel 4 and Prophetic Responses," 99). In other words, the lament ritual apparently would include a communal lament psalm, which was not included in the composition of the book of Joel, and it is to this (now lost) lament psalm that ch. 4 responds.

[482] Ibid., 101. For example, Ps 94:2 offers: "Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay the arrogant what they deserve!"

[483] Ibid., 99. Ps 22:19 complains that the petitioner's enemies have "cast lots (יפילו גורל) for my clothing."

literature.[484] Moreover, Ogden's study assumes a rather low burden of proof. In other words, a correlation of themes and terms between Joel 4 and lament psalms does not suffice to prove that they share a liturgical character. Joel 2:18-27, by contrast, offers a stronger case for a liturgical setting, as it includes the priestly admonition "do not fear" (2:21-22).[485] In addition, the calls to "be glad" (גיל) and "rejoice" (שׂמח; 2:23), as Anderson's study notes, provide the obverse of the call to lament.[486] Weeping, fasting, and mourning in the poems of distress are answered in 2:18-27 with a promise of worship and praise (הלל; 2:26). Liturgically, then, not to mention thematically, Joel 2:18-27 provides a better response to national lamentation than ch. 4.

Nonetheless, in its present context in the book of Joel it is hard to deny that ch. 4 was thought of as a response to the cries of distress. It certainly responds to the anxieties and fears of some group, reassuring them that the future will be prosperous and secure for Judah and Jerusalem. In fact, some research suggests that the whole tradition of oracles against foreign nations may lie in the Israelite cult, specifically in the liturgical pattern of lamentation and response.[487] Even if such conclusions—

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[484] Wolff connects the expression to the tradition of oracles against the nations, citing Obad 11 and Nah 3:10; *Joel and Amos*, 77.

[485] See Deut 20:3.

[486] Gary Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 49-57.

[487] So argues John Hayes, "The Usage of Oracles Against Foreign Nations in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 87 (1968): 81-92. For a more recent discussion, see John B. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations* (SOTSMS; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), esp. 131-48; and

largely speculative—were correct for pre-exilic oracles against foreign nations, though, they still offer very meager support for helping to elucidate the setting of eschatological visions in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. It would thus be going beyond the evidence to suggest that Joel 4 served as a divine response in a liturgy of national lamentation, but one can suggest that it responds to an anxiety latent in some communal laments—that foreign nations be judged for their mistreatment of the people of Israel (Lam 4:21-22), their plundering of the temple (Lam 1:10), and their general wickedness (Lam 1:22).[488]

Ogden's study draws attention to the ways in which ch. 4 might be conceived as a response to national lamentation, but it does not address how different the underlying lament would have to be from the cries of distress in chs. 1-2. In other words, ch. 4 serves as the divine response to a lament that the people have not uttered. The appeal to the deity's compassion (2:13) is met with vengeance on their enemies (4:2). The people mourn an agricultural failure led by an "army" of locusts (2:25); the deity responds by defeating an international army with farming implements (4:13). The people complain of Yahweh's assault on Jerusalem (2:1-11); he responds by leading an army into battle from Jerusalem (4:16). The land is ravaged and desolate in chs. 1-2 (1:10; 2:3); the response indicts the nations for dividing the land (4:2). The economic conditions are so desperate that the people plead for enough of a harvest to make an offering (2:14); the deity blames foreigners for stealing silver and

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Geyer, "Another Look at the Oracles about the Nations in the Hebrew Bible. A Response to A. C. Hagedorn," *VT* 59 (2009): 80-87.

[488] In fact, Joel 4, along with eschatological visions in other late prophetic literature, likely served as a new approach to coping with the anxieties of an uncertain geopolitical climate in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, as communal laments apparently grew increasingly out of fashion.

gold from the temple (4:5). The "response" of ch. 4 is not unrelated to the poetry of distress, but it does not engage the concerns expressed there, as 2:18-27 does. In fact, ch. 4 serves as an intentional mis-reading or re-interpretation of the preceding complaints, so that judgment on the foreign nations becomes the overriding concern.

The cultic character of the book of Joel need not be confined to the rhetoric of lamentation and mourning, though. A broader discussion of the view of priests and ritual in the book of Joel only confirms that chs. 1-2 are quite distinct from the material that follows. Attempts to find an anti-cultic message in chs. 1-2 have not proven convincing. Redditt's contention, for example, that priests and cultic officials have abdicated their responsibility misses one of the main complaints of the poetry of distress: the disaster threatens even the ability to offer sacrifices (Joel 1:9, 13; 2:14).[489] The call for lamentation and fasting, then, is not evidence of a split between the speaker and the priestly groups in charge of the temple; it demonstrates that they share the same concerns. The people, in a time of social, economic, even cosmic distress, are called to participate fully in the cultic program of fasting, weeping, the donning of sackcloth, and petitioning the deity for mercy. The priests, "the ministers of Yahweh," are the central figures in this drama (1:9, 13; 2:17).

The cultic character of Joel 3-4 is less clear, but again, attempts to discern an anti-cultic bias fail to persuade. Redditt, for example, contends: "It was a simple step, then, for Joel's group to conclude that the cultus was too narrowly constituted and to envision a future in which all sorts of persons might communicate directly with

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[489] Redditt, "The Book of Joel," 235-36. See also the attempts by Wolff, who blames the cultic officials for hubris (*Joel and Amos*, 13), and Ahlström, who blames them for worshipping other gods (*Joel and the Temple Cult*, 25-26).

God (3:1-5)."[490] As an initial matter, ch. 3 does not present a utopian vision of anti-priestly harmony in which everyone communicates directly with the deity; it presents a warning about the signs and portents that will signal the eschatological moment is at hand. If Petersen is correct and ch. 3 is to be read alongside the anti-prophetic polemics of late prophetic literature,[491] then the vision of the return of prophecy in the future (3:1-2) may signal a tacit indictment of then-current prophetic groups. It can hardly be read, though, as an indictment of the priesthood, a group that is simply not mentioned in ch. 3.

Joel 4, meanwhile, does not echo a concern that the "cultus was too narrowly constituted." As Cook discusses, it reflects a traditional Zion theology in which Jerusalem is the center of the religious, political, and cosmic universe—"for Yahweh dwells (שֹׁכֵן) in Zion" (4:21; cf. 4:17).[492] Hanson makes much of this form of שכן (*Qal* participle), indicating that it reflects the interests of "hierocratic," central-priestly groups in charge of the temple.[493] The composite nature of the material here mitigates how much should be made of this term, assuming that Hanson's thesis is even correct.[494] The temple does play a role as the source of life-sustaining water

[490] Redditt, "The Book of Joel," 236.

[491] Jer 23:34-40; Zech 13:2-6; Mal 3:23-24. The consistent thread would be that prophecy, per se, is not disparaged, but it is something to be done in the future, as part of the eschatological scenario, not in the present. See Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy*, 27-45.

[492] See Cook's discussion in *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 191-94.

[493] Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 249 n. 56.

[494] Much of Hanson's research has been questioned recently, in, for example, Cook's monograph (*Prophecy and Apocalypticism*).

(4:18),[495] but it would be pure speculation to discuss how close to the priestly hierarchy the author/compiler of this material was. Perhaps the most that can be said, then, about ch. 4's cultic character is that priests and cultic ritual are not of grave concern—except in one respect. The broader indictment of the nations includes a bitter memory that Jerusalem and the temple have been pillaged and defiled by foreign troops: "And Jerusalem shall be a holy place; foreigners shall never again pass through it" (2:17b). The oracle against the regions of Philistia recalls their part in stealing "my silver and my gold" (4:5), presumably a reference to treasures taken from the temple. The concern with the cult here is a geopolitical one; foreign troops must be kept out of Jerusalem.[496]

This brief analysis of the cultic character of the book of Joel provides further illustration of the chasm between the two halves of the book. The divine "response" of ch. 4 is to a complaint quite different from the one expressed in the poetry of distress in chs. 1-2. Whether or not ch. 4 has its origins in a liturgical setting, it addresses a set of anxieties far removed from the agricultural and economic disaster that introduces the book of Joel. Moreover, ch. 4 displays a concern with the temple and cultic function, but not the one from chs. 1-2, where offerings cannot be made because of the devastation to the land. The cult, in ch. 4, is threatened by the defilement of foreign invaders, and it is this threat that the divine "response" addresses. Put another way, in ch. 4 the people are assured of the divine presence—

[495] Cf. the similar imagery in Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 14:8.

[496] The concern with the purity of the sanctuary and of Jerusalem is of primary concern in oracles against the nations, so it is not surprising to find it in Joel 4. See the discussion in Geyer, "Another Look," 84-85.

"you shall know that I, Yahweh your God, dwell in Zion..."—when "foreigners" (זרים) are prevented from entering Jerusalem (4:17); in ch. 2, the people know Yahweh is in their midst when they can eat in plenty and be satisfied (2:26).

Time and the "Day of Yahweh"

The book of Joel is fixated on time and temporal matters. The opening lines try to place the disaster threatening the people in historical perspective, highlighting the twin concerns that the situation is historically without precedent and that future generations should never forget its severity:

> Has such a thing happened in your days,
> or in the days of your ancestors?
> Tell your children about it,
> and your children their children,
> and their children the next generation. (Joel 1:2b-3)[497]

Framing the disaster in terms of its historic scope helps bring a sense of urgency to the crisis: the *present* is a unique and crucial moment. In fact, it is likely that this focus on the imminence of disaster and the magnitude of the crisis made the appeal to the "day of Yahweh" tradition so natural. The "day" of such great and terrible destruction is routinely presented as quickly approaching in earlier references to the tradition,[498] and the book of Joel echoes this concern: "for the day of Yahweh is coming—for it is near!" (2:1b). The nearness of this threat heightens the call for cultic participation in the present: "yet even now" (וגם־עתה; 2:12), the people are encouraged, there remains the possibility of hope if the appropriate actions are taken.

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[497] Cf. the similar description of the unprecedented nature of the disaster in 2:2: "Its like has not been from of old / and after it there will not be again for generation after generation."

[498] The "nearness" of the "day of Yahweh" is mentioned in: Isa 13:6; Ezek 30:3; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14. See also Joel 1:15; 4:14.

With the divine response in 2:18-27, the promise of restoration changes the temporal focus. Even still, specific attention to the temporality of the vision remains: the "years" of destruction will be repaid (2:25); the blessings will flow "as before" (בראשון; 2:23); and the people will be secure "forever" (לעולם; 2:26-27).

In Joel 3-4, the focus on time is not abandoned; if anything, it may be heightened. Temporal markers, though, are no longer concrete and definite, framing the present moment in historic perspective; they are far more nebulous and imprecise. Joel 4, for example, sets its vision within temporally ambiguous phrases: "in those days and at that time..." (v. 1); and "in that day..." (v. 18); which contrast markedly with the specificity of the temporal markers in chs. 1-2.

Moreover, ch. 3 is especially troublesome to harmonize chronologically with the preceding material. The "afterward" of 3:1 presumably refers to some moment following the restoration detailed in 2:18-27. A series of portents and signs will then occur "in those days" (3:2), all to be accomplished "*before* (לפני) the coming of the day of Yahweh" (3:4). In other words, at a time in the unspecified future, a series of events will occur, signaling to the community to prepare for the "day of Yahweh." Such a vision stands in direct contradiction with the warning of chs. 1-2, that the day is near and requires immediate action. In addition, Joel 4 describes action that comes chronologically prior to ch. 3, since it refers back to the time "when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem" (4:1), presumably a reference to 2:18-27. The divine response in ch. 2 (vv. 18-27) reports the restoration of the land; ch. 4 explains that such a restoration will be accompanied by judgment on the nations; ch. 3 intrudes into this narrative, explaining that "afterward" a series of portents will precede the

eschatological moment. The chronological confusion here demonstrates that ch. 3 was a later addition to a collection including chs. 1-2 and 4, added to clarify that the people of Israel would also face divine judgment and to offer instructions about surviving the great and terrible "day of Yahweh."

The temporal confusion ch. 3 introduces also signals serious disagreement about when the "day of Yahweh" is expected to come (and what it will entail).[499] In chs. 1-2, the day signals the immediacy of the crisis ("it is near!" 2:1) and the catastrophic consequences that it brings ("very terrible—who can endure it?" 2:11). The other elements of the tradition—theophany,[500] darkness,[501] martial imagery[502]—all support these primary themes, namely, that the day is imminent and will be terrible. There is no hint that the day is or has the potential to be salvific for anyone:

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[499] Bibliography about the "day of Yahweh" tradition is extensive. For discussion of the tradition in the book of Joel, see in particular Leung, "An Intertextual Study;" Deist, "Parallels and Reinterpretation," 63-79; Müller, *Gottes Zukunft*; Loretz, *Regenritual und Jahwetag*, esp 77-112; Bourke, "Le Jour de Yahvé," 5-31, 191-212; and Linville, "The Day of Yahweh," 98-114. For robust debate about the origin of the concept, see Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; BRS; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 1:115-16; von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept," 97-108; Miller, *The Divine Warrior*, 135-41; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 91-111; Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord'—Reconsidered," *HUCA* 37 (1966): 29-60; Fensham, "A Possible Origin of the Concept," 90-97; Everson, "The Days of Yahweh," 329-37; Yair Hoffman, "The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 37-50. The debate about the origin of the day tradition has at times generated more heat than light. In part, the difficulties lie with the problem of defining the boundaries of the day tradition. Does it include only texts that mention specifically the "day of Yahweh," or should it include a broader set, such as the "day of his anger," or even "in that day"? In selecting the texts to consider, scholars often determine the conclusions they will reach. Mowinckel, for example, privileges Hos 9:5 ("the day of the festival of Yahweh") to locate the concept in the cult, while von Rad prefers Isa 13:6 to describe the day as "an event of pure war." For our purposes, the question of the origin of the concept need not be resolved, although Cross' synthesis is still the most persuasive. Everson's research correctly documents the variety of ways in which the concept can be used, including in reference to a past event (e.g., Lam 2:21-22). The book of Joel, as discussed below, aptly demonstrates the flexibility of the day tradition in the post-exilic period.

[500] Joel 2:10a; cf. Isa 13:13.

[501] Joel 2:2a, 10b; cf. Amos 5:18, 20; Isa 13:10; Ezek 30:3c; Zeph 1:15.

[502] Joel 2:1-11; cf. Isa 13:2-22; Ezek 30:2-19; Zeph 1:14-16.

“there is no escape from it” (2:3).[503] The petition of the community, therefore, is that the day be averted—that the day not come and that the people be spared. In the divine response (2:18-27), the threat of the “day of Yahweh” disappears, as the people are assured of a prosperous future.

Clearly, a different conception of the “day of Yahweh” operates in ch. 4 (esp vv. 14-16). The day is still “near” (4:14), although exactly how near is far from certain, as the entire vision is set within the context of an ambiguous temporal framework: “in those days and at that time” (v. 1); “it shall happen on that day” (v. 18). Even more striking, though, the day is no longer “very terrible;” it now signals deliverance and salvation for Israel.[504] The wicked nations will be judged and punished for the violence they did to Judah and to the land. The day, then, is not to be averted, but eagerly anticipated as a glorious vindication for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Joel 4 still borrows from the same stock imagery of the day tradition in Joel 1-2—darkness (v. 15), theophany (v. 16c), martial imagery (v. 16ab)—but these themes now depict a new drama: the awesome power of Yahweh’s army advancing against Israel’s enemies, not against Jerusalem.

When the “day of Yahweh” is reflected in ch. 3, the tradition is again reformulated and refashioned, offering yet another set of expectations and warnings. As in chs. 1-2, the day is again “great and terrible,” but it is not hopeless. Joel 2

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[503] For similar descriptions of the “day” tradition, see Zeph 1:7-18, which concludes: “for indeed what a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth” (v. 18); and Lam 2:22, which looks back on the destruction of Jerusalem: “and on the day of the anger of Yahweh no one escaped or survived.”

[504] This conception of the “day” tradition is common in late prophetic visions, but it also was apparently operative as early as the 8th century, as Amos 5:18 attests. See also the descriptions in Zech 14:6-22; Zeph 3:8, 16-20; Obad 15-21.

warns that “there is no escape from it” (וגם־פליטה לא־היתה לו; 2:3), but ch. 3 disagrees: “for on Mount Zion there will be those who escape” (תהיה פליטה; 3:5). The day can now no longer be prevented, but it can be survived—by calling upon the name of Yahweh, by seeking refuge in Jerusalem, and by being called by the deity.

One more innovation of the day tradition is noteworthy in ch. 3. The darkening of the heavens and other cosmic disruptions are commonly found in descriptions of the “day of Yahweh,” as in Joel 2:10; and 4:15-16. These signs are part of the theophanic tradition, in which the cosmos reacts to the appearance of the deity.[505] In Joel 3, though, a similar set of images—darkness, smoke, blood, fire—are not part of a divine theophany; they come prior to (לפני) the day. In other words, the same elements of the tradition that ch. 2 and ch. 4 use to focus attention on how terrible (ch. 2) or how glorious (ch. 4) the day will be, are used in ch. 3 to address how one might discern its timing. One can know that the day is approaching when these cosmic signs and portents begin. Interestingly, the author of ch. 3 arrives at this conviction by a careful mis-reading of chs. 1-2. In the description of the disaster ravaging the land, the poet of chs. 1-2 uses spatial prepositions (especially in 2:1-11) to illustrate the devastation: “In front of it (לפניו) fire devours, / and behind it (ואחריו) a flame burns. / Like the garden of Eden is the land in front of it (לפניו), / but behind it (ואחריו) a desolate wilderness” (2:3); “In front of it (מפניו) peoples tremble; / all faces

[505] See, for example, Exod 19:18; Pss 18:7; 68:8. For extensive treatment of the close relationship of theophany traditions to the day tradition, see Weiss, “The Origin of the ‘Day of the Lord,’” 29-60.

turn pale" (2:6). This dramatic picture of an approaching military-like disaster culminates with the disclosure that the approaching force is Yahweh and his very own army; this disaster signals the "day of Yahweh" (2:11). Thus, the final spatial preposition introduces the traditional theophanic elements of the day tradition: "In front of it (לפניו; i.e. Yahweh's army) the earth quakes; the heavens tremble. / The sun and the moon are darkened, / and the stars withdraw their shining" (2:10). The scribe(s) who authored Joel 3 found the clue to deciphering the timing of the "day of Yahweh" by simply interpreting this preposition (לפניו) temporally, rather than spatially, and altering the antecedent. The cosmic upheaval will take place *prior to* (לפני) the "day of Yahweh," rather than *in front of* the deity's army. The author of ch. 3 re-interpreted and reframed ch. 2 to address a question never envisioned in the poetry of national distress: how can one discern the timing of the deity's terrible day of judgment?

Ferdinand Deist suggests that the book of Joel be read "as a compilation...of different theologies of the Yom Yahweh arranged in such a manner that they may be read as reinterpretations of each other."[506] I would suggest that this proposal overstates the importance of the day tradition in the book of Joel. The day tradition is but one among many that are used to highlight the magnitude of the disaster in chs. 1-2, and the day of Yahweh is never mentioned in some of the most crucial texts (e.g., 1:5-14; 2:12-17, 18-27). Nevertheless, Deist's broader point is correct, that the day of Yahweh becomes a focal point for later reinterpretations of the book of Joel in chs. 3-

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[506] Deist, "Parallels and Reinterpretation," 75.

4. Chapter 4 and ch. 3 are added to Joel 1-2 in large part because they all share a fascination with the day tradition and are engaged in a dialogue about how that tradition helps address their concerns. These debates are, to some degree, about the content of the day—whether it offers hope for salvation or the threat of utter destruction—but also about its timing: does the day require immediate attention or a discerning mind capable of reading the heavens for the proper signs?

Summary

The additions of ch. 3 and ch. 4 to the book of Joel provide little insight into the agricultural disaster of chs. 1-2, but they do offer a glimpse of the concerns of later prophetic tradents. These scribes were particularly interested in an approaching drama in which the deity would intervene in social and political affairs in a new and decisive way. According to ch. 4, this eschatological scenario is reason for optimism: Yahweh will respond to the violence done to his people, muster the heavenly hosts for battle, defeat the enemy nations, return triumphantly to Zion, and sit enthroned in the midst of Israel, granting prosperity and blessings for the people forevermore. The addition of Joel 3, though, adds a more somber note to the celebration. Only *some* of the people will be delivered—namely those who can read the signs and portents correctly and call upon the name of Yahweh from Jerusalem.

Analysis of the themes and motifs central to chs. 3-4 reveals how far removed these texts are from the complaints over agricultural failure in chs. 1-2. The emphasis on divine judgment of foreign nations in ch. 4 dominates the promise of restoration; at the same time, it brings attention to the glaring lack of divine judgment in chs. 1-2. The disaster is not presented as the deity's righteous judgment for the people's

unfaithfulness; in fact, the reasons for the crisis are never explained. Rather, chs. 1-2 focus on the efficacy of the people's response—how can they petition the deity to change course? If divine judgment plays no role in the first half of the book, though, ch. 4 provides a counterbalance, promising that the deity will not forget the wickedness of the surrounding nations. The merciful deity who has compassion on the people in chs. 1-2 is transformed into a harsh judge in ch. 4, exacting vengeance on Israel's enemies.

The two halves of the book of Joel also demonstrate different conceptual frameworks that are difficult to harmonize. Joel 3-4, for example, operates with an understanding that Yahweh's intervention is decided. The fate of the nations and the people is determined, and nothing can alter that decision: "for Yahweh has spoken" (4:8). Joel 1-2, on the other hand, petitions precisely for a change in Yahweh's course: "yet even now" (2:12) it is not too late. Moreover, the two halves of the book are in disagreement about the character of the primary temporal marker, the "day of Yahweh." In chs. 1-2, the urgency of the present crisis is highlighted; utter destruction is at hand. With ch. 4, though, and especially with ch. 3, the timing of the day is less precise. It will come at some point—"in those days" (4:1)—but at least with ch. 3 there will be signs and portents in the heavens prior to its arrival. The two parts of the book disagree even about the central threat to the cult. In chs. 1-2, the agricultural disaster has eliminated the ability to offer sacrifices, but in ch. 4 the only threat mentioned is that of foreign invaders polluting and pillaging the sanctuary.

Joel 3-4, then, present fundamentally different conceptions of the social and political world than that offered in chs. 1-2. They present portraits of restoration in

the distant future, a time about which Joel 1-2 is not concerned. They offer promises of vengeance against the nations, about whom chs. 1-2 are not concerned. They distinguish between those who respond appropriately to the deity and those who do not, a division among the people that is unattested in chs. 1-2. One might then legitimately ask why chs. 3-4 would be appended to a collection with which it differs so fundamentally in the first place. Put another way, what is the relationship between the additional material in chs. 3-4 to the *urtext* of the book of Joel?

To answer this question, brief mention should be made of the scribal practices of the late prophetic tradents—the scribes who collected and preserved the prophetic texts in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Recent research has underscored how conservative the scribes were toward the received texts.[507] They sought to preserve the "ancient" prophetic material as a unique revelation of divine will, as increasingly a notion developed that the era of prophecy had ended.[508] In addition to this impulse to *preserve* the received texts, though, a competing impulse developed to *interpret* the texts to respond to new realities. As the production of new prophecies was discouraged (see, e.g., Zech 13:2-6), scribes sought to address the community's concerns through the study and elucidation of the older prophetic words.

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[507] John Van Seters' critique of redaction criticism is largely animated by this conviction that scribes were hesitant to alter or "edit" the received texts. His semantic assault on the notion of "editors" in the ancient world may suffer from an over-reliance on Hellenistic parallels and an under-appreciation for Mesopotamian evidence, but at least this larger point is well heeded. See his discussion in *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2006), esp 298-401. See also William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[508] See the helpful discussion in Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 252-62. Further research on scribal culture, with a particular emphasis on the role of orality in the scribal curriculum, includes: David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Raymond Person, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Book of Chronicles: Scribal Work in an Oral World* (AIL 6; Atlanta: SBL, 2010), esp 41-68.

Several examples attest to this process whereby prophecy becomes a predominantly written mode of textual interpretation. The *pesharim* from Qumran and the interpretation of "seventy years" in Dan 9 illustrate the basic concept—prophetic words, with the proper interpretation, could offer instruction to understand and cope with current troubles. Short of this explicit interpretive move, scribal additions could help clarify and harmonize various prophetic traditions to cope with new concerns.[509] Some of these interpretations were even included in the prophetic works that they sought to elucidate. Recent research in the additions to the books of Isaiah[510] and Zechariah[511] offer ample evidence of this phenomenon.

Perhaps the best illustrations, though, come from the book of Jeremiah, where the major text-critical differences between the Masoretic and Septuagint forms offer concrete evidence of the process of textual growth. The Septuagint version of Jeremiah (Jer^{LXX}), although significantly shorter than the Masoretic text (Jer^{MT}), corresponds faithfully to a Hebrew *Vorlage*, as the evidence from Qumran indicates. Text-critical research indicates that Jer^{LXX} was an earlier edition of the prophetic collection, which was later expanded and revised.[512] As a result, the pluses of Jer^{MT}

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[509] Steck's discussion of the *schriftliche Tradentenprophetie* further explores this scribal activity; Steck, *Der Absluß*, 61-63.

[510] See Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 32-107.

[511] See Rex Mason, "The Use of Earlier Biblical Material in Zechariah 9-14: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis," in *Bringing out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-14* (Mark Boda and Michael Floyd, eds.; JSOTSup 370; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 2-209.

[512] Emanuel Tov, "Some Aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah," in *Le livre de Jérémie: Le prophète et son milieu, les oracles et leur transmission* (ed. P.-M. Bogaert; BETL 54; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 145-67. For further discussion of the differences between Jer^{LXX} and Jer^{MT}, see William Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* (ed. Paul Hanson; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 5, 23-24; and Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 319-27, 348-50.

provide some insight into the interpretive strategies of late prophetic tradents. Karel van der Toorn's research on the scribal additions in Jer^{MT} concludes: "The different versions ... show that the scribes of the Jeremiah tradition were not only adding 'many [other] words like these'; they were also reframing the message of the prophet in such a way as to make it relevant for their own time."[513]

The discussion of scribal practices here serves to underscore a simple point: that the secondary material added to prophetic collections often seeks to interpret the earlier material in light of new concerns.[514] One would, therefore, expect Joel 3-4 not simply to add an eschatological coda to an earlier collection, but to (re)interpret that earlier collection to respond to new realities. The evidence presented here indicates that the scribes who added Joel 3-4 did find in chs. 1-2 a framework for addressing their concerns.

The compiler of ch. 4, likely the first addition to Joel 1-2, offered an updated divine response, because the promises to ensure agricultural fertility and "restore the fortunes" (4:1) of the people in 2:18-27 did not address the concerns of the later scribal community. Apparently, the threat of foreign nations—their pillaging of the temple and mistreatment of the people—overwhelmed any agricultural and economic issues, and, as a result, Joel 1-2 offered an incomplete portrait of restoration. At the

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[513] Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 202.

[514] Michael Floyd makes a similar case, noting that scribal additions allow "the writer to assume the persona of his prophetic predecessor and in this guise elaborate on whatever records there may be of what that prophet once said. In the name of the original prophet, and informed by studying the records of his oracles, the writer addresses his own prophecies to his readers. The writer, in effect, draws an analogy between what the past prophet perceived Yahweh to be doing in that day and what the writer perceives Yahweh to be doing in his own day. In this sense, the past prophet can be portrayed as having foretold what the writer perceives Yahweh to be bringing about in the writer's own time" ("The Production of Prophetic Books in the Early Second Temple Period," in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* [Michael Floyd and Robert Haak, eds.; LHBOTS 427; New York: T&T Clark, 2006], 289).

same time, the poetry of distress contains traditions and imagery that provided opportunities to reformulate a broader vision of salvation. The depiction of the divine warrior in 2:1-11, for example, contained the seeds for a hopeful vision if turned against Israel's enemies. If the divine army can attack so viciously the city of Jerusalem, "my holy mountain" (2:1; 4:17), then surely the foreign nations who abused the people of Israel should face a terrible judgment. As indicated in the earlier collection, on the "day of Yahweh" the divine warrior will "utter his voice" as the cosmos quakes in response (2:10-11; 4:14-16), but in this new formulation, Yahweh marches out *from* Jerusalem, as the protector and guardian of his people, not as the enemy force laying siege to the city. In this new formulation, even agricultural fertility is metaphorical for the deity's punishment of the wicked nations (4:13).[515] In this new formulation, the threats to the land, the people, and the sanctuary are still very real, but they come from the cruelty of foreign nations, not a lack of rainfall or a plague of insects. The compiler of ch. 4 sees in the early collection of Joel a reason for optimism—the deity hears the people's complaints and responds to their concerns. Since the nature of those concerns had changed, though, an updated divine response was needed.

The compiler of ch. 3 offers a different interpretive strategy and a correction to the overly optimistic portrait of the day tradition in ch. 4. Rather than updating chs. 1-2 to include a new set of concerns or divine promises, ch. 3 interprets the earlier collection as a harbinger of the future, warning that divine judgment will be "great and terrible." The sequence of events in chs. 1-2 contains a foreshadowing of

[515] Judgment described with harvesting imagery was a common trope; cf. Jer 6:9; 50:16; 51:33; Mic 4:12.

the eschatological scenario: a prophetic voice (1:1) announcing the coming "day of Yahweh" (1:15; 2:1, 11); complete social (2:16) and cosmic (2:10) upheaval; a faithful community crying out to Yahweh from the temple (1:14; 2:17); and the promise of divine salvation (2:18-27). Joel 3 announces that this pattern provides a guide for understanding and surviving the future day of terrible destruction. The outpouring of the divine spirit will signal the return of prophecy, but in such a universal way as to upend social and class distinctions (3:1-2). Further chaos in the heavens and on the earth will occur, serving as signs of the coming "day of Yahweh" (3:3-4). When the day comes, those in Jerusalem calling out to the deity will be called in turn and saved (3:5). Only here in the announcement of salvation does the compiler of ch. 3 note some tension with chs. 1-2. In the description of the attacking force in Joel 2:3, the disaster is inescapable: "there is no escape from it." If understood as a description of the approaching and inevitable eschatological moment, then this description offers no hope for anyone—all will perish. The compiler of ch. 3, though, appeals to other prophetic material, likely Obad 17,[516] to offer hope for salvation: "on Mount Zion there will be those who escape," adding the citation formula ("just as Yahweh has said") to justify the apparent contradiction. Joel 1-2 even invites this interpretation as those who cry out to Yahweh from the temple (2:17) do escape the destruction. In short, ch. 3 interprets the earlier collection of the book of Joel as narrating the sequence of events that will transpire in the future. Consequently, ch. 3 warns that the day of Yahweh should not be eagerly anticipated,

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[516] Based on the proposed emendation, the citation of Obad 17 is quite persuasive. Interestingly, the context of the line in Obadiah is that Judah/Israel will be protected when the nations, and in particular Edom, are judged for their wickedness. In Joel 3:5, the line is interpreted in the most exclusive sense—that *only* in Jerusalem will some be able to escape.

as ch. 4 indicates, but argues that the terrible day can be survived by properly discerning the social and cosmic signs.

Joel 3-4, then, offer concerns and hopes far removed from the agricultural crisis in the first half of the book, but treating the material here as wholly independent misses the creative ways in which chs. 1-2 were (re)interpreted for later scribal communities. The authors/compilers of chs. 3-4 may not be responsible for writing the poetry of distress, but they were among the first engaged in a contest over how this material should be understood. As a result, it is really not surprising that scholars disagree about the compositional history of this book, as such a debate gets at the very heart of the dispute among late prophetic tradents. When scribes added the material in Joel 3-4, they not only offered a new set of reassurances for their communities; they reframed and reinterpreted the original collection as authoritative prophetic words offering guidance and hope to address their new anxieties. How the original concerns and fears are understood largely determines how one reconstructs the book of Joel's compositional history.

Conclusions

This study explores the history of the book of Joel's composition. The conclusions, though, are not confined to this topic, but have broader implications for how one understands the book of Joel, the latest additions to the Book of the Twelve, early eschatological speculation, and even Second Temple liturgical traditions. The book of Joel, I contend, contains two distinct sections: the poetry of national distress and divine response of chs. 1-2; and the eschatological scenarios of chs. 3-4. This study is not the first one to reach this conclusion, as the history of research outlined above has indicated. In fact, the results here are largely consistent with the basic divisions discerned by Plöger as early as the 1950's. Nevertheless, research in the decades since has not produced an emerging consensus; rather, the number of competing theories have multiplied, leaving many preferring to ignore the question concerning the book's composition altogether. A broader study to examine this topic, therefore, was warranted, since how one understands the book's compositional history largely determines how one comprehends the book more generally. My research provides the most extensive treatment to date on the redactional history of Joel and offers a sustained examination of the competing claims advanced by the authors of chs. 1-2, ch. 3, and ch. 4.

The conclusions reached about the book's compositional history rest on two theses: that Joel 1-2 constitutes a coherent and balanced composition; and that chs. 3-4 offer reinterpretations of the earlier material in chs. 1-2. The first thesis—that chs. 1-2 cohere—begins with the fundamental question of what kind of disaster the book

is describing—a vexing problem for researchers. The disaster is presented in terms of a four-fold locust infestation, a consuming drought, raging fires, an attacking army, and cosmic disruption. The confluence of images of disaster obscures the nature of the historical crisis that may, in fact, have taken place, but the various images are not proof of secondary additions; they merely attest to a conventional approach for describing a community in extreme distress. Rather than speculating about what crisis may have given rise to the book's composition, then, I focused on how the disaster functioned in the book of Joel to convey the magnitude of the community's peril. The repeating and escalating disasters heighten the sense of alarm and seek to convince the hearers that immediate and collective ritual activity provides the only hope of survival. If my analysis of the poetry of chs. 1-2 is correct, the book of Joel presents two complementary poems—one focusing on the devastation, the other on the agent of destruction—that together highlight the depth of the community's suffering. These poems share a similar form, but they are not identical. Each offers a different perspective on the disaster and the importance of communal cultic participation. It is likely, therefore, that they were composed to complement one another, so that combined they present a broader portrait of national anguish—including social, economic, and religious chaos—than either does alone. The coherence of these twin poems of distress is reinforced by the divine response, which addresses the nature of the suffering articulated in both poems. The deity has heard the people's cries, will restore their fortunes, and will deliver them from their misery.

The second thesis—that chs. 3-4 re-interpret and mis-interpret the nature of the disaster in chs. 1-2—explores thematic and structural issues that indicate chs. 3-4

are later additions to the book. The eschatological preoccupation with Yahweh's future judgment of the world demonstrates a continuity between chs. 3-4 and other "deutero-prophetic" literature, such as Ezek 38-39; Isa 24-27; Zech 9-14; and Mal 3-4. Structurally, in other words, Joel 3-4 betrays a closer resemblance to these other late additions to prophetic works than to Joel 1-2. Thematically, chs. 3-4 introduce a preoccupation with judgment and foreign nations, issues nearly or completely absent from the earlier material. In fact, the constant refrain of divine judgment on the nations in ch. 4 illustrates how far removed its author is from the distress in chs. 1-2, where divine judgment is never cited in the appeal for mercy. My research actually shows that chs. 1-2 never indict the people for any type of wrongdoing and never attempt to justify the deity's actions as a response to sin. Chapter 4, in other words, introduces a new element when it presents Yahweh as judge of the world. The certitude with which the future is envisioned as unfolding in chs. 3-4 also marks a transition from the earlier petitionary prayers, as does the emphasis on foreign armies polluting the temple, of little concern when there is little with which to offer sacrifices anyway. Even the "day of Yahweh" tradition—the theme that some interpreters have claimed demonstrates the unity of the book—illustrates the degree to which the authors of chs. 3-4 have re-interpreted chs. 1-2. The terrible and ominous day of divine destruction, as chs. 1-2 articulates, is refashioned as a great and glorious day in ch. 4, one to be eagerly anticipated as the deity's validation of his people. With the final addition of ch. 3 the fear and trepidation over the day's approach is restored, but its timing is altered: rather than a disaster that is at hand, the day of Yahweh becomes an eschatological event whose timing can be discerned only

by reading the signs in the heavens. Importantly, though, chs. 3-4 are not simply later traditions clumsily attached to an older document; they actually demonstrate an engagement with and interpretation of the earlier material in chs. 1-2. Therefore, they offer clues about the interpretive strategies in early scribal practice.

With the book of Joel's compositional history in view, a better understanding of the book in its final form emerges. Perhaps what makes Joel open to so many conflicting interpretations is its tendency to reframe issues from multiple perspectives. The disaster ravaging the land comes not merely as a locust plague, but as a four-fold locust plague, with each wave more destructive than the last (1:4). The locust infestation, then, is supplemented with a series of escalating disasters, from drought to fire to an assault by the deity's own army. The resulting catastrophe threatens not only the fruits of the year's harvest; it endangers all bonds of social, religious, economic, and cosmic order. Even the divine reassurance of salvation takes multiple forms, offering renewed agricultural fertility (2:18-27), relief from foreign enemies (ch. 4), and instructions to survive the coming divine judgment (ch. 3). In other words, the book's progression is less like the dramatic plot Crenshaw discerns in which the events can be narrated in chronological succession, or the "almost perfect symmetry" of Wolff in which the concerns of the first part are balanced by direct reassurances in the second part, but more like the recurring, repeating, returning outlines proposed by Prinsloo or Garrett.[517] The book's main topics—destruction, the "day of Yahweh," salvation—are visited again and again, offering new and, at times, conflicting theories about how to understand the deity's promise of

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[517] See the discussion of (and limitations of) Prinsloo and Garrett in I.B. above.

future vindication. Rather than choosing one or another perspective, the book of Joel, in its current form, allows these different angles of vision to compete with one another, thereby offering a broader view of the struggle within post-exilic Judaism to contend with political and economic uncertainty.

My research here also helps shed light on a number of related issues in biblical studies. For example, the dating of the book of Joel, as with most topics, has generated widespread disagreement. Scholars have contended that the book of Joel was composed anywhere from the seventh century (or earlier)[518] to the second century BCE.[519] One of the primary difficulties is that few datable references (e.g., reigns of kings or broader political events) appear within the book, so that one is left making arguments from silence. For example, the lack of references to the Babylonians and Assyrians makes a pre-exilic date unlikely. In addition, the lack of historical markers in Joel 1:1 indicates that no king reigned in Jerusalem during the time that the prophet was thought to be active. As a result, most scholars now favor a post-exilic date, but few venture precise dates with much confidence.[520] Although the research presented in this study does not readily identify a specific date for the composition of any part of the book of Joel, it does make the case that other considerations can help inform the discussion. For example, the close correlation

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[518] Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 191-92. Kapelrud suspects the prophet operated during the seventh century, but the placement of the book of Joel between Hosea and Amos in the MT led earlier scholars to consider an eighth or even ninth century dating.

[519] See Duhm, "Anmerkungen," 161-204. For a more extensive analysis of attempts at dating the book of Joel, see John A. Thompson, "The Date of Joel," in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (eds. Howard N. Bream et al.; Gettysburg Theological Studies 4; Philadelphia: Temple University, 1974), 453-64.

[520] Cf. Ganzel's determination that the book dates prior to Haggai, between 538-520 ("The Shattered Dream," 2-22).

between the Levitical singer-prophets in the Chronicler's history and the speaker who calls the community to mourning in Joel 1-2 demonstrates that the Chronicler and the author of Joel 1-2 shared similar ideas about the functioning of the cult at Jerusalem. If the Chronicler's description of Levites in the pre-exilic period was a retrojection of the role of Levites in his own time, it is likely that Joel 1-2 was composed no earlier than the Persian period. The additions in chs. 3-4 provide scant evidence with which to offer a precise date. Based on their associations with Zech 9-14 and other late prophetic writings, though, one might posit a date in the early Hellenistic period, reflecting the changed geo-political setting after Alexander's conquest of the Levant.[521]

This study also points beyond the book of Joel to the character and influence of the latest additions to the Book of the Twelve and prophetic literature generally. These late compositions share similar themes and phraseology with earlier prophetic texts, so that they are often described as having an "exegetical character." The nature of these parallels has not been explored in depth in this study, since several recent

[521] If Steck's conclusions about the dating of late prophetic material are correct, ch. 4 may have been added in the late 320's, and ch. 3 would date toward the end of the fourth century. See his discussion in Steck, *Der Abschluß*, 76-91. This argument rests on making a connection between the additions in Joel and other late prophetic material, which does have more concrete historical references (although still debatable). For example, the material in Zech 10:3-11:3 offers a promise of restoration for all of Israel and judgment for all the nations, much like Joel 4. The promise of return from exile in Egypt (Zech 10:10), Steck concludes, dates to the beginning of Ptolemy I's reign, which leads to a possible date for Joel 4 in the late 320's. Steck interprets Zech 11:4-13:9, with its language of a worthless shepherd, as reflecting the events of 312 BCE, when a Jewish high-priest named Hezekiah led his supporters to Egypt, following Ptolemy (see further, Peter Schäfer, "The Hellenistic and Maccabaean Periods," in *Israelite and Judaean History* [John Hayes and Maxwell Miller, eds.; London: SCM Press, 1977], 570). Since Joel 3 reflects a similar sectarian outlook, it may date to the same general period.

monographs have already done so.[522] In addition, due caution should be exercised in claiming conscious allusions on a large scale. Nonetheless, the analysis here does demonstrate that these late scribal additions were consciously interpreting the texts to which they were appended. The addition of Joel 4 helps to update the earlier divine promises to explain that the divine warrior will now engage the new threats facing the community—foreign nations. In so doing, it re-interprets the earlier complaints as reflecting concerns with hostile armies. The agricultural imagery, used in ch. 1 to highlight the magnitude of the social and economic catastrophe at hand, becomes merely metaphorical for warfare in ch. 4, as the deity harvests the nations like grain and tramples foreign armies like grapes in a winepress (vv. 10, 13). Distress over the land ravaged by locusts, fire, and drought is construed as anger at the nations for having divided the land. Similarly, ch. 3 reflects an attempt to interpret chs. 1-2 as foreshadowing Yahweh's eschatological intervention. The description of the present economic disaster as so calamitous that it represents the arrival of the "day of Yahweh" (chs. 1-2) becomes a future prediction for the order of events that are to occur prior to that fateful day (ch. 3). The deity's promise of salvation to those gathered at the temple (chs. 1-2) becomes a prophetic guide for how one might survive the day of terrible destruction (ch. 3). Chapter 3 reads chs. 1-2 as an allegory for the deity's future judgment on the world, and offers a correction to ch. 4, noting that even the people of Israel will be in danger of Yahweh's wrath. Already in these early scribal additions, one finds writers wrestling with how to understand the earlier

[522] E.g., Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture*; Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*; Müller, *Gottes Zukunft*; and Leung, "An Intertextual Study."

prophetic collections and how to interpret the relevance of ancient prophecies for their own time.

The conclusion that Joel 1-2 constitutes an independent, likely liturgical composition also has broader implications for further study. The precise form here—poetry of distress calling a community to national mourning rites—may be unusual, but it should not be surprising. Communal and individual lament psalms—the prayers of petition directly to the deity—were surely not the only types of lament discourse in ancient Israel. The poetry of Lamentations, especially chs. 1-4, attests to a myriad of voices offering mournful cries over the devastated city, with direct petition to the deity as the most dominant.[523] The dirge, or funerary song, was presumably a very common form of lament, although few examples are preserved.[524] In one of the few dirges recorded in the Bible, David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19-27), the deity is not petitioned, but members of the community are called to weep and participate in appropriate rituals, much as in Joel 1-2.[525] In fact, such a call for the community to join in lamentation and communal mourning rites may have been quite common. Petitions to cities and nations to lament are frequent tropes in oracles against the nations.[526] Of course, in these cases, the call for lamentation is ironic since the people addressed are not (yet) ruined; the call to lament serves as a

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[523] For discussion of the mixing of voices in Lamentations, see Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations* (Int; Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 134-37.

[524] See the discussion of funerary behaviors in Saul Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 28-61.

[525] The "daughters of Israel" are called to weep in 2 Sam 1:24, and the mountains are invited to participate in appropriate mourning behavior (refrain from dew, rain, or lush fields) in 1:21 (cf. the description of cattle groaning in Joel 1:18-20; and the ground mourning in 1:10).

[526] See Jer 49:3; Isa 14:31; 23:1-14; and Zech 11:2. Cf. Ezek 21:17.

form of indictment. In the case of the book of Joel, though, the call to the community to join in national mourning rites is an authentic appeal for social solidarity. This type of lament speech may not be as widely attested as the lament psalms, but it was undoubtedly an important element of communal mourning ceremonies. As Emile Durkheim reported, after examining aboriginal mourning rites, "Mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. One weeps, not simply because he is sad, but because he is forced to weep."[527] The call to the community to take part in mourning rites is the way in which this duty was conveyed in ancient Israel. Perhaps further attention is warranted into the social dynamics of the call to communal mourning in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature.

John Barton begins his commentary on the book of Joel by offering a counsel of despair: "Joel is a complex book, about which we do not possess enough information to come to firm conclusions."[528] Barton's despair aptly captures the sentiment of many scholars who have offered interpretations of this enigmatic text. In fact, the difficulties confronting scholars working on the book of Joel are somewhat proverbial, as Merx noted more than a century ago when he described Joel as "the problem-child of Old Testament exegesis."[529] Nonetheless, the present study demonstrates that despair is not the only response to the book of Joel. Difficult questions deserve serious treatment, and the issue of the compositional history of the

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[527] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 442-43.

[528] Barton, *Joel*, 3.

[529] Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel*, iii-iv.

book is one such question worthy of focused study. My research demonstrates that Joel 1-2 coheres as a call to mourning and divine response, likely the liturgical script of a Levitical prophet in post-exilic Yehud. The additions in ch. 4 and later in ch. 3 reinterpreted the earlier poetry as offering hope and guidance to address new concerns about foreign nations and eschatological conflict. These conclusions do not resolve all the complexities of the book, but neither are they irrelevant to the main conundrums that have vexed scholars, such as the type of disaster described in chs. 1-2, the nature of the correspondences with other prophetic literature, and the dating of the material. Arriving at firmer conclusions about the book's compositional history is an important step in establishing a broader consensus about this "problem-child" of Hebrew Bible study.

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