

Divine Forgiveness in the Book of Joel

Another Perspective on the Theology of the
Book of Joel

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Foreword

Finally, it's finished! My thesis, the result of two years studying one of the most wonderful masters at the university of Groningen. Two years in which I have gotten to know many new people, have gained a lot of knowledge, experienced some wonderful adventures.

This thesis, on the notion of forgiveness in the book of Joel, would not have been finished without the help and encouragement of so many people, who all deserve a big thank you for their efforts.

I would like to start by thanking my first supervisor, Michael van der Meer, for his never ceasing enthusiasm and encouraging words whenever I decided I did not want to write a thesis anymore. Moreover, I want to thank him for motivating me, when finishing my Minor in religious sciences, to keep on studying at the faculty of Theology and Religions Sciences. Without him I probably would not have joined the master 'The Origins of Abrahamic Religions'. So thank you, for being part of that choice.

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Summary

Although the book of Joel has been discussed for many years, it remains one of the most enigmatic books of the twelve Minor Prophets. Many hypotheses have been formed with regard to the date, author, context, theology and interpretation of the book. The Dutch New Bible Translation, translating *nħm* as “ready to forgive” (“*tot vergeving bereid*”) in Joel 2:13 prompted the study of how much the content and structure of the book of Joel are shaped by the theme of forgiveness, in relationship to the themes of vengeance and the coming day of the Lord. Based upon literature research, content analysis and structural analysis, I conclude that the content and structure of the book of Joel are shaped by the opposition between the day of the Lord which is a threat, and the promise of restoration. My study shows that this opposition is dependent upon the people turning around to the Lord, and the forgiving character of the Lord, that enables the people to turn around. Divine forgiveness therefore did not shape the content and structure of the book of Joel. A second conclusion of my study is that the translation of *nħm* as ‘ready to forgive’ was mistaken. I therefore propose an alternative translation for the revised Dutch New Bible Translation in 2016.

*Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
Rend you hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing*
Joel 2:12-13, NRSV

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testament und des antiken Judentums
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BOT	Boeken van het Oude Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
GTT	<i>Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
NBG	Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap (Dutch Bible Organization)
NBV	De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling (Dutch New Bible Translation)
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
OTG	Old Testament Guides
POT	Prediking van het Oude Testament
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>

<i>RSR</i>	<i>Revue des Sciences Religieuses</i>
SPIB	Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici
TAuJCC	Theologische Academie uitgaande van de Johannes Calvijnstichting Kampen
<i>TV</i>	<i>Theologica Viatorum</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>UUÅ</i>	<i>Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTS</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplement</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

1. Introduction

In our current society we often read or hear stories of violence. Consider, for example an overview of news headlines written today, November 20th 2013: “Car bomb kills 10 in Egypt,”¹ “Many deaths after suicide bomb attack in Somalia,”² and “Genocide risk in Central-Africa.”³ Additionally, periodically articles inform their readers on the current ‘results’ of the Syrian war, the situation in Libya, and the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Northern India.⁴ Coming from a Mennonite background, I have been confronted with stories concerning violence and peacemaking for a large part of my life. As a consequence, headlines as stated above raise questions about the motivation of people who act violently, as well as the aftermath of this violence. How do people respond when harm is inflicted upon them, and what are the possible means of reacting when confronted with violence?

According to Martha Minow, the possible responses to violence can be found across a vengeance-forgiveness continuum.⁵ Her argument is comparable to the argument of Holmgren, who proposes two basic attitudes as an answer to wrongdoing: resentment and forgiveness. Holmgren states that both these attitudes come to the fore when people are wronged by others.⁶ Compared to biblical concepts, the possible responses to violence vary from ‘an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth’ to ‘turning the other cheek’.⁷ Berman, who studied religious extremists and religious perspectives on violence, argues that although the Abrahamic religions do sometimes offer a legitimization of (religious) violence, they also offer essential answers to (faith-based) violence: although legitimized, (religious) violence is also treated critically. According to Berman, the religious books of the three monotheistic religions intend to lead their

¹ CNN International. Cited: 20-11-2013. Online: http://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/20/world/africa/egypt-car-bomb/index.html?hpt=hp_t.

² Nu.nl. Cited 20-11-2013. Online: <http://www.nu.nl/buitenland/3632705/veel-doden-bij-aanslag-au-in-somalie.html>.

³ Trouw. Cited: 20-11-2013. Online:

<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4496/Buitenland/article/detail/3548054/2013/11/20/Genocide-dreigt-in-hart-van-Afrika.dhtml>.

⁴ Cf. Huffington Post. “Syria Death Toll tops 115.000.”; Cited 20-11-2013. Online: 1-10-2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/01/syria-death-toll_n_4022414.html; Nu.nl. “Sektarisch Geweld Noord-India verspreid zich. Cited: 20-11-2013. Online: 9-9-2013, <http://www.nu.nl/buitenland/3570533/sektarisch-geweld-noord-india-verspreidt-zich.html>.

⁵ Martha Minow, “Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Feminist Responses to Violent Injustice,” *New England Law Review* 32:4 (1998): 967-982.

⁶ Margaret R. Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution: Responding to Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: University Press, 2012), 3.

⁷ Cf. William I. Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

readers to a life of forgiveness and respect.⁸ His hypothesis, ‘religious books disapprove of violence’, appears to hold true when studying academic literature on the message of Christianity. In several sources the central message of Jesus calls his followers to forgive people.⁹ It is argued that ‘to forgive’ is an act inherent to Christianity. For example, the most famous and central Christian prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, emphasizes forgiving and being forgiven. The seventh and eighth line read: “and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”¹⁰ However, it is important to note, that most examples regarding this message of forgiveness in the Bible, are predominantly examples from the New Testament.¹¹ By contrast, when discussing violence in the Bible, notions of biblical violence stem mostly from the Old Testament.¹² One might wonder whether a notion of forgiveness can even be found among the Old Testament books.

In a search for a word combination of ‘forgiveness and Bible’ in the Old Testament, one of the first entries that appears online is a reference to the website of the Dutch Youth Bible. On this website, the books of the Old and New Testament are listed, each with a central theme connected to them. The editor of the site describes the central themes of the book of Joel as ‘forgiveness’ and ‘guilt’, themes that supposedly surface in 2:12-13 of the book.¹³ This notion of forgiveness and guilt stands in contrast with themes like the threat of the coming day of the Lord and his wrath to the people because they did not listen to him. Themes frequently ascribed as central and important to the book of Joel.¹⁴ It therefore seems worthwhile to explore in more depth this notion of forgiveness in Joel, as well as scholarly interpretations of the message and theology of this book.

⁸ Eli Berman and Laurence R. Iannaccone, “The Good, the Bad and the Deadly” *Public Choice*, Springer 128:1 (2006): 109-129.

⁹ Matthew 18:22. Cf. Evert L. Smelik, *Wraak, Vergelding en Vergeving* (Den Haag: D.A. Daamen’s Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1941).

¹⁰ Luke 11:4.

¹¹ Cf. Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation, a Study in New Testament Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1956).

¹² As we read for example in Walter Brueggemann’s *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 116; Cf. Hendrik G.L. Peels, *God en Geweld in het Oude Testament* (Apeldoornse Studies 47; Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit, 2007).

¹³ Dutch Online Youth Bible, n.p. [cited 20 November 2013]. Online: <http://www.jongerenbijbel.nl/thema>.

¹⁴ Cf. D. Deden, *De kleine profeten* (Roermond: Romen, 1953), 85; Hans W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2 Joel und Amos* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969), 12; Douane Garrett, “The Structure of Joel,” *JETS* 28:3 (1985): 289-297; Joseph Bourke, “Le Jour de Yahvé dans Joël,” *RB* 66 (1959): 5-31 and 191-212.

Biblical scholars have often described the book of Joel as one of the most ‘unclear’ books of the twelve Minor Prophets. The date, theology, context and unity of the book of Joel have been discussed fervently among scholars, and there is a large variety in the (theological) interpretations of the book. Consensus is not likely to be achieved. Nevertheless, this thesis is concerned with yet another perspective; of forgiveness as the central theme and message of the book of Joel.

The goal of this thesis is to examine the notion of forgiveness in the book of Joel, and additionally to try and answer the question whether forgiveness can be regarded –to some extent – as the central theme of the book of Joel, in contrast to the coming day of the Lord, and the vengeance of the Lord as a central theme. Therefore the question central to my thesis is: *To what extent does the theme of forgiveness shape the content and structure of the book of Joel in relationship to the themes of vengeance and the coming of the day of the Lord?* The first step of my study is an exploration of the book of Joel. In the second chapter, the question ‘*what can be said about the context, unity and theology of the book of Joel,*’ will be answered by analyzing a variety in theories on these subjects found in secondary literature. Second, by analyzing the Hebrew Bible and a selection of secondary sources, an answer will be given to the question: ‘*what can be said about the notion of ‘forgiveness’ in the Hebrew Bible? Can we find a conceptual clarification and how can this concept be related to the themes of vengeance and the Day of the Lord that is coming?*’ This question is the focus of chapter three. Chapter four concerns the results of my analysis of the book of Joel, comparing these to answers given in the second and third chapter. In the fifth chapter, I formulate an answer to the main research question. The sixth chapter, then, is concerned with a discussion about the results and findings in relation to various biblical translations.

2. The Book of Joel: Context, Structure and Theology

While the book of Joel has been studied for many years, scholars seem to be unable to agree upon the placement in canon, date, structure and theology of the book. Using the words of Adalbert Merx: “Our Joel is the problem-child of Old Testament exegesis.”¹⁵ In this chapter a short overview will be given of the most important interpretations and discussions concerning the unity, context, theology and interpretation of the book of Joel.¹⁶

2.1 Unity

During the past century several theories on the unity of the book of Joel have been put forward. First, there are scholars who argue for the full unity of the book, sometimes including an argument for an almost perfect symmetry. The first scholar arguing for the unity of the book of Joel was Ludwig Dennefeld in 1924.¹⁷ His arguments were carried and developed further by various scholars afterwards.¹⁸ One of the most renowned scholars to follow Dennefeld, is Hans Walter Wolff. Who’s theoretical model for symmetry within the book,¹⁹ led him to argue for the books unity. The similarities between main keywords and word-combinations in both the first two chapters and the final two, form the base for Wolff’s argument. Who consequently concludes that the book is written by a single author.²⁰ Another scholar who argued for the unity of the book of Joel is Richard Moulton. According to him, the book of Joel could be divided in seven visions that were perfectly symmetrical.²¹ Wilhelm Rudolph states that the unity of the book of Joel is self-evident. In his point of view, the only disruption of the central focus of the book (the eschatological framework), are verses 4:4-8. Which, according to

¹⁵ Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel und ihre Ausleger von den ältesten Zeiten bis zu den Reformatoren* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1879).

¹⁶ The discussion on the book of Joel concerns many more aspects, for example the discussion on the date of the book of Joel. Although most aspects are linked to each other, arguing for a certain date has a certain argument upon unity and author as its consequence, this thesis is limited to the discussion upon unity, context and theology. For an extensive discussion upon the date of the book of Joel, I refer to Jacob M. Myers, “Some Considerations Bearing on the Date of Joel,” *ZAW* 74:2 (1962): 177-195.

¹⁷ Ludwig Dennefeld, “Les problèmes du livre de Joël,” *RSR* 4 (1924): 555-575.

¹⁸ For example: Gösta Werner Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem* (VTS 21; Leiden 1971); Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona* (KAT 13:2 ; Gütersloh: Gert Mohn, 1971); and Arvid S. Kapelrud, “Joel Studies,” *UUÅ* 4 (1948) : 181-192.

¹⁹ He divides the book in six parts: A (1:4-20); B (2:1-11); C (2:12-17); D (2:18-27); E (3:1-5); F (4:1-3, 9-17). He argues that A and D, B and F, C and E are symmetrical. (*Joel und Amos*, 5-12).

²⁰ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 6-7. It must be noted though that he does believe that there might have been later additions to the fourth chapter. These do not however affect his interpretation of structure, unity and theology.

²¹ Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature: An Introduction to Literary Theory and Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928).

him, originally might have been placed at another position in the book.²² Duane Garrett is one of the more recent scholars who argue for the unity of the book of Joel. Garrett bases his argument upon structural and theological reasons, as well as linguistic evidence.²³ Contrastingly, Brevard Childs, who argues as well that Joel is a literary unity, does not attribute this fact to a single author. He suggests that this literary unity is the result of the efforts of a final redactor, implying that the book has been written over a longer span of time.²⁴

In line with this hypothesis, other authors argue that the book of Joel was written over a length of time. According to them, the book of Joel does not form a coherent whole, written by one single author. The discussion started with Maurice Vernes in 1872, who proposed a theory of two authors: one who wrote the first two chapters and one who wrote chapters three and four.²⁵ This hypothesis was expanded in 1911, when Duhm suggested that the first part of the book (which in his opinion ended at 2:17) was written in verse in early post-exilic times by the prophet Joel, whereas the second part was an addition in prose from a synagogal preacher from the Maccabean period. Furthermore, Duhm proposed that the same person who added the second part, was responsible for the references to the day of the Lord in the first part as well.²⁶ Similarly Bewer argued for two main sections in the book of Joel, separating the book at the third chapter. He further suggested that an apocalyptic editor inserted several sections in the first two chapters.²⁷ A third author arguing for a division in two parts, is Plöger. He argues that this division is based upon a post-exilic separation between Judaist eschatologists and theocrats. The theocrats (responsible for the first part), were people who believed in a permanent order of things, as the Lord had planned it. Contrastingly, the eschatologists believed that a radical change was possible in this order: the Lord would intervene and take over the rule of the world. These eschatologists, as Plöger stated, were responsible for editing the book of Joel. He believes that the book of Joel was an older book, possibly written as early as the pre-exilic period, in which the eschatologists implemented their ideas.²⁸ One recent author who argues for the separation of the book of Joel in two parts is Barton. He states that the book consists of

²² Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel*, 24.

²³ Garrett, "The Structure of Joel," 289-297.

²⁴ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ 1:15a, 2:1c and 2:11c. Duhm, "Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten," *ZAW* 31:3 (1911): 161-204.

²⁷ Julius A. Bewer, *Commentary on Obadiah and Joel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 49-56.

²⁸ Otto Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1968).

two sets of material, which should be dated and examined separately, as well as the process with which they were connected together.²⁹

The arguments for a division of the book of Joel are however more complicated. There are scholars who argue that there is not just a division between the first and second half of the book, but that both parts consist of various compositions. One of the scholars following this theory is Hans-Peter Müller. He suggests that the whole book was written by Joel, but that it was written in various stages: first the original oracles and their redaction at a later stage.³⁰ Willem van der Meer offers yet another possibility. In his opinion there are three parts in the book of Joel, which can be analysed as a triptych based upon poetic units.³¹ Van der Meer states that these three parts were written in three different time periods, with the first part written in the seventh or eighth century, and a certainty that the last part cannot have been written before 586 B.C.E., since it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.³²

2.2 Author and Social Context

The author of the book, as is made clear from the first sentences, is believed to be ‘Joel, son of Pethuel’. However, as seen above, some scholars believe that the book of Joel was written over a length of time by multiple authors. Secondly, some scholars argue that although the *words* of the book derive from Joel, he did not commit them to writing.³³ Little is known about the person Joel. According to James Crenshaw, there are several references to a Joel in the Old Testament. First, 1 Samuel 8:2 reads: ‘the name of his firstborn son was Joel’, referring to the sons of Samuel. Other notions appear only in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. The name is associated with various tribes,³⁴ and some random people in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra were named Joel as well.³⁵ This demonstrates that the name Joel was fairly popular from the tenth century

²⁹ John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 13.

³⁰ Hans-Peter Müller, “Prophetie und Apokalyptik bei Joel,” *TV 10* (1966): 231-252.

³¹ Canto, canticle, strophe, verse, colon or foot.

³² Willem van der Meer, *Oude Woorden worden nieuw: De opbouw van het boek Joel* (TAUJCC; Kampen: Kok, 1989).

³³ In their opinion the words were transmitted orally, and committed to writing in a later era. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 176. For the purpose of this thesis, acknowledging that arguments have been offered for an alternative, I will assume that the book of Joel (for a large part) has been written by Joel as stated in Joel 1:1.

³⁴ Respectively: 1 Chronicles 5:4.8 (Reuben); 1 Chronicles 7:3 (Issachar); 1 Chronicles 5:12 (Gad); 1 Chronicles 6:21, 15:7.11, 23:8, 26:22, 2 Chronicles 29:12 (Levi); 1 Chronicles 27:20 (Manasseh) and 1 Chronicles 4:35 (Simeon).

³⁵ Nehemiah 11:9; Ezra 10:43.

until the late fifth and early fourth centuries, but does not lead to more information on the person who wrote the book of Joel.³⁶

Knowledge of Joel stems solely from the first sentence in the book, which reveals nothing of his occupation or the location in which the word of the Lord came to him. As a consequence, there has been some discussion on the status of Joel; whether he was a prophet, a priest, or neither. Based upon the statement that the ‘word of the Lord came to Joel’³⁷ one could argue that this proves that Joel was indeed a prophet. Referring to the definition of ‘a prophet’ as “*a person who is claimed to have been contacted by the supernatural or the divine, and to speak for them.*”³⁸ In this sense, Joel is as much a prophet as Jonah, Hosea or Micah, who all state that the Lord spoke to them.³⁹ Nevertheless, critical scholars in early years stated that Joel, when compared to notorious prophets as Jeremiah, Isaiah and Hosea, was a degenerate prophet.⁴⁰ They argued that his prophecies, especially those in chapters three and four, were oracles without any clarity or spiritual aspect, lacking structure.⁴¹ Other scholars accused Joel to be an epigone, a person who was completely dependent upon contemporary and historical prophets’ words to create their own prophecy.⁴² This theory is countered by Kapelrud, who argues that prophets living in the midst of a tradition were all in various degrees dependent upon each other.⁴³

The theory of scholars, regarding Joel as a an inferior post-exilic prophet, should be understood in the scholars’ social context. This early view on Joel reflects the common attitudes of late nineteenth century upon post-exilic Judaism, which was regarded as particularistic.⁴⁴ In the nineteenth century, the late Romantics stood up against the established power. Prophets like Isaiah were compared to this ‘rebel

³⁶ James L. Crenshaw, *Joel: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 21-22.

³⁷ Joel 1:1.

³⁸ Karina van Dalen-Oskam & Marijke Mooijaart, *Nieuw Bijbels Lexicon: Woorden en Uitdrukkingen uit de Bijbel in het Nederlands van Nu, Uitgebreid met De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2005 derde herziene druk), 301.

³⁹ Cf. Jonah 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1.

⁴⁰ Examples are Vernes, Wellhausen and Duhm.

⁴¹ See for example Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel*, 21. One can also suggest here that, following Barton, the first half of the text was written by Joel, a prophet in every sense of the word. The second half then was written by someone else. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 13.

⁴² Cf. Gustav Hölscher, *Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion* (Sammlung Töpelmann 1, Die Theologie im Abriss 7; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1922).

⁴³ Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 176.

⁴⁴ Cf. Julius Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt* (Skizzen und Vorarbeiten 5; Berlin: 1893).

attitude,' were seen as people who criticized society.⁴⁵ In contrast, Joel did not stand up against the established power whatsoever.

The opinion of these early scholars is countered by more recent scholars like Barton. According to him, the difference between the pre-exilic prophets and Joel, does not imply that both cannot be prophets. He emphasizes the historical contexts in which the prophets lived, arguing that each prophet prophesied what the people needed to hear. Whether this was judgment (pre-exilic) or encouragement (Joel).⁴⁶

Additionally, when established that Joel indeed was a prophet, the question arises whether Joel belonged to the temple cult. Several authors mention the references by Joel to Zion, the sons of Zion, Jerusalem, Judah, Judah's sons, as well as his positive words on the temple and its priests. To some of these scholars this merely implies that Joel was a Judean, living within or near Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Other scholars argue that this 'cult friendly stance' only demonstrates the affinity between Joel and the temple cult. Which does not entail that Joel indeed was a temple prophet.⁴⁸ However, the fact that these references to the temple lack condemnations of the cult,⁴⁹ has led some scholars to the conclusion that Joel was a cult prophet.⁵⁰ One scholar arguing that Joel was a cult (or temple) prophet, is Gösta Ahlström. He bases his argument not solely on the affinity between Joel and the temple, but refers as well to the cultic use of words, and the structure of the book that draws on ancient liturgy. He states that the first part of the book resembles a psalm of lament, with a liturgical structure.⁵¹ In contrast, the theory that the overall structure of the book of Joel does not resemble a liturgy has lead Erich Zenger to disagree with the theory that Joel was a cult prophet. In his opinion the book of Joel must be seen as a literary prophecy, dependent in various ways upon other prophetic books. This implies, according to Zenger, that Joel was a literary prophet, explaining other prophetic books.⁵²

⁴⁵ Cf. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 19.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cf. Deden, *kleine profeten*, 86.

⁴⁸ Cf. Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 7.

⁴⁹ Which can be found in the books of Isaiah and Amos

⁵⁰ Cf. Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1944); Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 177. He argues that the book of Joel is a liturgy, reflecting old traditions.

⁵¹ Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 130-132. The third and fourth chapter, are to be seen as a continuation of the previous chapters, but there is no mentioning of these chapters referring to ancient liturgy.

⁵² Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament; 7. Auflage* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie, 1995), 531-533. „Die Außergewöhnlich intensive Aufnahme (Zitation, Variation, Anspielung, Kontexteinspielung) anderer Prophetenbücher machen deutlich, dass das Buch Joël als *literarische Prophetie* und als *prophetische Prophetenauslegung* in eschatologischer Perspektive entstanden ist und verstanden werden muss.“ (531).

2.3 *Theology and Interpretation*

The interpretation of the theology of Joel depends upon one's implementation of aspects discussed in the previous paragraphs. Arguing that Joel is written by one person in one period, the interpretation of the theology will vary from the interpretation when arguing for two different authors, who wrote the book over a span of 100 years. The possible theories can be divided roughly into two categories: theories that deal with the day of the Lord, its thread and promise, and secondly theories that are concerned with the bond between the Lord and the people of Israel.

Standing in line with the first category of theory, is the position of Zenger. He argues that the book of Joel is merely written to actualize the 'prophetic day of the Lord-theology', a theology described – among others – in Isaiah 13 and 34.⁵³ A second author arguing for the day of the Lord as a central theme in Joel, is Garrett, who states that the theme of the day of the Lord unifies the whole book.⁵⁴ This is comparable to Joseph Bourke's argument, who suggests a central theme of 'speeches on the Lord's day'.⁵⁵ Barton proposes a twofold theology, based upon his theory that the book was written in two separate parts. According to him, the first part is concerned with a specific dramatic situation and the method of dealing with this situation. The second part then contains a different perspective, dealing with the end of time, judgment on the nations and intervention of the Lord.⁵⁶ Barton bases his theory upon Müller who stressed the open future in the first part, in opposition to a more deterministic future in the second part: the day (and judgment) of the Lord will come, no matter what.⁵⁷ Scholars who argue for a theology concerned with the day of the Lord frequently refer to eschatological and apocalyptic themes, often used to indicate that a text is dealing with the disastrous events introducing the end of time.⁵⁸ Wolff for example describes Joel's theology as "standing on a threshold between prophetic eschatology and apocalypticism."⁵⁹ Deden, who states that the central theme of the book of Joel is the day of the Lord, combines this with the second category as described above. He argues that the day of the Lord forms a theme of threat, which refers to the bond between the

⁵³ Other occurrences of this theology are: Ezekiel 30 and 38, Jeremiah 4-6, Amos 5:8-20, Obadiah 1:15a, 16-18, Zephaniah 1:14-18 and Malachi 3. Zenger, *Einleitung*, 532.

⁵⁴ Garrett, "Structure of Joel", 297.

⁵⁵ Joseph Bourke, "Le jour de Yahvé," 5-31. In his opinion the whole book is centered around chapter 2:2b-9.

⁵⁶ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 27-32.

⁵⁷ Müller, *Prophetie und Apokalypik*, 244.

⁵⁸ Cf. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 27-32.

⁵⁹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 14.

people of Israel and their Lord as well.⁶⁰ The combination between the two strands, is also proposed by Arvid Kapelrud. He argues that the core message of Joel is the imminent warning of Yahweh's day, a serious trial for the people of Judah, who must bear in mind that the Lord is the ruler and has all the power: He can decide between blessing or destruction, therefore they need to turn to him.⁶¹

This leads me to scholars arguing that the book of Joel is concerned with the bond between the Lord and the people of Israel. One scholar arguing in favour of this position is Crenshaw, who states that in the first two chapters of the book of Joel, the prophet is especially concerned with the actions of the Lord and the consequences of these actions.⁶² According to Crenshaw the bond between the Lord and his people is highlighted by the special formula found in Joel 2:13, emphasizing the Lord's compassion and mercy. Important to note is that this compassion is restricted to the people of Judah, and can be received by the people individually, while the fate of the foreign countries is dependent on their innocence or guilt as a group.⁶³ A second scholar suggesting a theology which fits in this category is Willem Prinsloo, who proposes to divide the book of Joel in a first sentence, followed by eight pericopes.⁶⁴ According to Prinsloo, Joel is a theocentric book, which is demonstrated in the first sentence: "The words of the Lord that came to Joel, son of Pethuel". Throughout the book, Prinsloo argues, the Lord is at the centre of events. The Lord is the subject of lamentation, He promises salvation, He is responsible for crisis but also the reason to have hope. Additionally, Prinsloo argues that the central theme of the book of Joel is the turning of the book's sentiment from lamentation to a promise of salvation, and from crisis to hope. The final words, as Prinsloo states, are triumphal and end on a positive note: the Lord dwells in Zion. This is what he believes the message of Joel is about, to enflame fresh hope for the future.⁶⁵ Ahlström points his readers to a similar message. According to him, the book of Joel is concerned with re-establishing the right order for Yahweh's own people, therefore concerned with the bond between the Lord and his people.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Deden, *Kleine profeten*, 85-88.

⁶¹ Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 178.

⁶² Note, Crenshaw emphasizes that this is not only true for people, but all things are submissive to the will of the Lord (Crenshaw, *Joel*, 43).

⁶³ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 43.

⁶⁴ In his opinion, each pericope refers to a previous pericope or pericopes, by repetition of words and phrases, unfolding an obvious pattern.

⁶⁵ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel* (BZAW 163; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 122-127. Cf. also Garrett, "Structure of Joel," 297.

⁶⁶ Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 135.

2.4 Some Remarks

In the previous paragraphs I have provided an overview of a selection of different perspectives concerning the book of Joel, a selection that is representative of the variation, although not sufficient to have demonstrated all the different theories. However, in these paragraphs the most notorious perspectives have been highlighted to entrust you with an idea of the broad spectrum of possibilities in opinions. For a broader overview I would like to refer to my bibliography. Especially the publications of Crenshaw and Barton.

Additionally I would like to draw your attention to the circularity of the arguments offered by scholars concerned with the book of Joel. Deciding upon one element (author, date or structure) of the book of Joel, leads to the immediate exclusion of several possibilities for the understanding and interpretation of the theology. In my understanding, this leads several authors to an artificial argument for one of the elements, in order to have a well-rounded argument for the theology or interpretation.

Finally, I have omitted my own opinion on the subjects covered in the previous paragraphs. Only in the fourth chapter will I carry out my own analysis of the book of Joel, trying to describe (shortly) what I believe are the most logical conclusions drawn when speaking of the unity, theology, context and structure of the book of Joel.

3. Forgiveness

Before trying to find an answer to my main research question, whether or not forgiveness constitutes a key element of the theology of the book of Joel, it is important to set a framework of the concept of forgiveness. What is implied when talking about ‘forgiveness,’ what includes the definition of forgiveness, and how is forgiveness understood in a biblical context? In this chapter I will provide some answers to these questions, until finally a concept of forgiveness is formed, that can be applied throughout this thesis. In addition to providing an overview of the concept of forgiveness, in this chapter I will pay attention to the concepts of the day of the Lord and vengeance in relation to the concept of forgiveness.

3.1 *The Concept of Forgiveness*

There seems to be a lack of a universal definition of the concept of forgiveness.⁶⁷ However, there is some agreement upon what forgiveness should entail. Scholars have found a consensus in that forgiveness is seen as one of many possible responses to harm, which includes a decision to step away from anger and revenge.⁶⁸ A more precise form of this consensus has been formulated in 1987 by North. She states:⁶⁹

If we are to forgive, our resentment is to be overcome not by denying ourselves the right to that resentment, but by endeavoring to view the wrongdoers with compassion, benevolence, and love while recognizing that he has willfully abandoned his right to them.

This is however, where the commonalities between research definitions end. Research has proven that models of forgiveness can involve cognitive, affective, behavioral and motivational components, or a combination of all four. They can include one person (self-forgiveness), two persons (interpersonal forgiveness) or at least one person and a divine being (divine forgiveness).⁷⁰ Furthermore, forgiveness has been linked to terms as ‘apology’, ‘pardon’, ‘remorse’, ‘reconciliation’ and ‘mercy’. These words are used frequently in our current society, but their usage shifts and their various definitions

⁶⁷ This was also noted by Roy T. Denton and Michael W. Martin, “Defining Forgiveness: An Empirical Exploration of Process and Role,” *American Journal of Family Therapy* 26:4 (1998): 281-292.

⁶⁸ Jarred W. Younger, Rachel L. Piferi, Rebecca L. Jobe and Kathleen A. Lawler. “Dimensions of Forgiveness: The Views of Laypersons,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 21 (2004): 837-855.

⁶⁹ Joanna D. North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness,” *Philosophy* 42 (1987): 499-508.

⁷⁰ Robert D. Enright and R.L. Zell, “Problems encountered when we forgive one another,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8:10 (1989): 52-60.

contrast.⁷¹ In the Hebrew Bible as well, we find that forgiveness forms part of a cluster of related topics like ‘law’, ‘sin’, ‘justice’, ‘mercy’, ‘compassion’, ‘vengeance’ and ‘repentance’.⁷²

In line with the general consensus, I adopt the definition of forgiveness as stated above by North, in order to keep the understanding of the concept of forgiveness as clear as possible. While interpersonal forgiveness or self-forgiveness form a small part of the Old Testament,⁷³ the Old Testament is mainly concerned with forgiveness as an act of the Lord. Consequently, my focus will be upon divine forgiveness as apparent in the Old Testament. As described above, the concept of forgiveness forms part of a cluster of interrelated terms. To separate forgiveness from this cluster is nearly impossible. Therefore, (divine) forgiveness will be taken up as a concept inside this cluster.

3.2 Forgiveness in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament divine forgiveness is a concrete process which influences the society externally, instead of persons internally. Important to note is that the Lord is most of the times the subject of forgiveness, while the people are its object. The ‘victim’ in the Old Testament, the one who has been wronged, is therefore the Lord. In this paragraph I will first concentrate on the words for forgiveness in Hebrew, but afterwards will have a more conceptual focus on forgiveness as understood in the Hebrew Bible.

3.2.1 ‘Salach’

There is one root in Hebrew that literally means ‘to forgive’. This is the verb *slh* (salach), a common Semitic word. In Akkadian *slh* means ‘to sprinkle’.⁷⁴ It survives as well in Aramese and Syriac where it means ‘to pour out’. In Ugarit there is one mentioning of *slh npš*. It occurs in a ritual text and is translated as ‘forgiveness of

⁷¹ Charles L. Griswold and David Konstan, eds. *Ancient Forgiveness: Classical, Judean and Christian*. (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), xii.

⁷² Michael J. Morgan, “Mercy, Repentance, and Forgiveness in Ancient Judaism,” pages 137-157 in *Ancient Forgiveness*.

⁷³ For example the story of Joseph might be seen as a biblical explanation on interpersonal forgiveness.

⁷⁴ Johann J. Stamm, *Erlösen und Vergeben im Alten Testament* (Bern: A Francke, 1940), states that this is probably the original meaning of the word.

soul'.⁷⁵ To these appearances I may add the findings of *yslḥ* in the Elephantine Papyri. This can be understood either as a wish: 'may (he) forgive' or a statement of thankfulness: 'he has forgiven'.⁷⁶

In the Old Testament *slḥ* can be found 46 times, predominantly in the Qal (33) and Niph'al (13).⁷⁷ The subject of *slḥ* is solely the Lord. In the Qal the involvement of the Lord is explicitly stated. In the Niph'al this is more indirect, although strongly implied by the *kipper* formula found in Leviticus and Numbers. In this formula (*nislāḥ lo/lahem*), meaning: 'and the priest will effect atonement for him/them, and it will be forgiven them/him', the Lord is the implied subject. This expression implies two stages: a priestly sacrifice and the recognition by the Lord. The bringing of offerings or the participation in ritual however, do not suggest necessarily that the people will be forgiven. It does show that the Lord was seen as the one to turn to when in need of forgiveness. Only the mercy of the Lord would be sufficient for forgiveness.

Slḥ occurs in various contexts. First to describe the offer of forgiveness, as can be found in 2 Chronicles 7:14 which reads: 'If my people (...) turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land'.⁷⁸ Secondly, *slḥ* can be found in a wish or request, for example in Exodus 34:9.⁷⁹ A third manner in which *slḥ* occurs, is in prophetic promises. This is illustrated in Jeremiah 31:34: 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more, says Jahweh'.⁸⁰ *Slḥ* can further appear in a statement of refusing to forgive, as can be found in Jeremiah 5:7 in which the Lord asks: "How can I forgive you, your children have forsaken me."⁸¹ Finally *slḥ* can be used in songs of praise.⁸² Synonyms to *slḥ* are *ns'* (removing sin), *kpr* (to cover sin), and – in specific use – *br* (cleansing).

⁷⁵ The ritual text is identified by: KTU 1.46.1, translated in 1949 by Cyrus H. Gordon in his *Ugaritic Literature: a Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts*, (SPIB 98; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum), 113.

⁷⁶ Johann J. Stamm, "Salach" in E. Jenni & C. Westerman (eds.) *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament Vol. 2* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 797-803.

⁷⁷ It can be found 43 times either in qal or ni. 3 times it is found as an abstract substantive (*sliha*) and one time in the adj. of habit (*sallah*).

⁷⁸ The other occurrences are: Leviticus 4f.; 19:22; Numbers 14:20, 15:25.28, 30:6.9.13.

⁷⁹ Additionally: Numbers 14:19; 1 Kings. 8:30.34.36.39.50 = 2 Chronicles 6:21.25.27.30.39; Amos 7:2; Psalm 25:11; Daniel 9:19.

⁸⁰ Other examples of this are: Jeremiah 5:1, 33:8, 36:3, 50:2; Isaiah 55:7.

⁸¹ This can be found in Deuteronomy 29:19; 2 Kings 24:4 and Lamentations 3:42 as well.

⁸² Psalms 103:3, 130:4; Daniel 9:9; Nehemiah 9:17.

3.2.2. *Divine Forgiveness*

As described above, the root *slh* occurs 46 times in the Old Testament. According to Walther Eichrodt this is less often as expected, when taking in account the significance of the message of forgiveness.⁸³ To search for the concept of forgiveness, one therefore has to turn to alternative methods. One possibility is to search for synonyms for *slh*, as listed in the previous paragraph. A second option is to turn to a conceptual approach to divine forgiveness in the Old Testament, not limiting oneself to occurrences of the root *slh* and similar expressions.

In the Old Testament the Lord is described by the Old Testament authors in various ways: as jealous,⁸⁴ unforgiving,⁸⁵ and vindictive.⁸⁶ But in contrast also as loving⁸⁷ and forgiving. This last characterisation of the Lord occurs for example in Exodus 34:6-7:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (Exodus 34:6-7).

The first part of these verses⁸⁸ forms a standard formula, appearing various times in the Old Testament.⁸⁹ The formula is described by various authors as the grace formula (“Gnadenformel”) and to some of them is a biblical form to describe the limitations and conditions of divine forgiveness.⁹⁰ Based upon this formula, and adding other descriptions of the forgiveness of the Lord, it can be established that the Lord was accepted as a forgiving being. Descriptions of a forgiving Lord however, do not lead us to the *act* of divine forgiveness. This paragraph is therefore focused on analysing the manner in which authors of the Old Testament describe this practice of forgiveness.

The practice of forgiveness, as described in paragraph 3.1 is defined as an act of responding to harm. When reading the Old Testament, it appears that the Lord is often

⁸³ Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testament* (Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1933-1939), 443ff.

⁸⁴ For example in Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 4:24; 1 Kings 24:22.

⁸⁵ This can be read among others in Josiah 24:19; Jeremiah 14:12; Ezekiel 8:18.

⁸⁶ As seen in Deuteronomy 32:34; Numbers 11:1; Micah 5:15.

⁸⁷ Like in Deuteronomy 7:6-7; Hosea 3:1; Psalm 145:14-17.

⁸⁸ The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

⁸⁹ Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:5; Manasseh's Prayer 1:7. The formula, with small alterations can also be found in Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:2; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Jeremiah 26:13; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Micah 7:18.

⁹⁰ Jakob Wöhrle. “A Prophetic Reflection on Divine Forgiveness: The Integration of the Book of Jonah into the Book of the Twelve,” *JHS* 9:7 (2009), 2-17. Wöhrle argues that in the Book of the Twelve, a shared Grace-corpus can be found, a theological superstructure, which specifies the concept of divine forgiveness.

described as being harmed by the people of Israel.⁹¹ Usually this harm is connected to the covenant between the Lord and his people. Besides descriptions of the Lord based upon characteristics, in the Old Testament the Lord is described as well as a Lord of law or justice. A divine being who has a covenant with the people of Israel, with rules and commandments as set by this divine being. When these rules and commandments are transgressed by the people of Israel, harm is done to the Lord. Consequently, this harm can be forgiven by the Lord. This act of forgiveness will be looked upon further in this paragraph: does the Lord actually forgive his people? Or should his response be placed somewhere else on the continuum of vengeance – harm, the possible responses to violence?

Studying the Old Testament, it appears there are various manners in which the Lord responded to the people who transgressed his divine law. When placing these on the continuum of vengeance to harm, responses vary across the whole continuum. First, we find descriptions of a Lord who is vengeful. For example in the third chapter of Genesis, where the Lord curses Adam and Eve for eating from the tree, sending them away from the garden of Eden.⁹² Comparable, in Malachi the Lord scolds his people for not following the covenant with Levi, and as a consequence he will ‘make them despised and abased before all the people’.⁹³ Another example can be found in Lamentations 2, in which the author describes the acts of the Lord:⁹⁴

The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the dwellings
of Jacob; in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds
of daughter Judah; he has brought down to the ground in
dishonor the kingdom and its rulers.

Second, there are examples to be found of the Lord stepping away from the evil he intended to do, but in which he does not forgive the people for their harm. Examples can be found within several prophetic books, for example Hosea 11:18 and Amos 7:2-3. Here we find that the Lord changes his mind to hurt the people, however is still angry with them for what they have done. A similar example can be found in Exodus: where it is written that the Lord does not only repent from acting upon the evil he intended to do, he is also concerned about his people and does not want to hurt them.⁹⁵ This is not only true for the people of Israel, a comparable act of remorse can be found in the book of

⁹¹ In some cases other people have harmed the Lord (cf. the book of Jonah).

⁹² Genesis 3:16-19.

⁹³ Malachi 2:9.

⁹⁴ Lamentations 2:2. Cf. Lamentations 3:42 ‘we have transgressed and rebelled and you have not forgiven.’

⁹⁵ Exodus 32:1-14.

Jonah, in which the Lord changed his mind about the evil he said he would bring upon them.⁹⁶

Third, there are some examples of a Lord who forgives the people for the harm they have caused him. The clearest example can be found in Numbers 14:20 in which the Lord answers: “I will forgive them, as you have asked.” Another example occurs in the book of Jeremiah, in which the Lord claims that he ‘is merciful and will not be angry forever.’⁹⁷ Although merciful is not synonymous to forgiving, it appeared in the previous paragraph as one of the words that forms part of the cluster of words surrounding forgiveness. Therefore, it can be taken as an indication of forgiveness, in this occasion, to the people of Nineveh. Furthermore, in the book of Nehemiah, the author refers to an earlier time in which the Lord acted forgiving, for ‘he did not forsake them.’⁹⁸

Examining these and other acts of forgiveness and repentance found in the Old Testament, it comes to the fore that there are two forms in which these acts take place. The first manner is forgiveness based upon the plea of a prophet or spokesperson. An example is the story of Sodom and Gomorra, when Abraham asks the Lord whether he can save the people there. God answers that he *will* repent from acting upon the evil he intends to do, when one person in the city was not sinful.⁹⁹ Other examples of one person pleading for forgiveness of the sinful people, can be found in Exodus 32:12-14, and Amos 7:2-3. In this last example the prophet asks: ‘O Lord God, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!’ The Lord repented considering this; ‘It shall not be,’ said the Lord.’ Remarkable is that these spokesmen do not feel that the punishment of the Lord is unjust or too severe. Even more, they do not deny the peoples sins, they just ask for another chance.

The second manner is forgiveness based upon human action. Within several prophetic books we find that the Lord is only inclined to reverse the evil he did, or to forgive the people, when they return to him. A return not only with words (prayer), but with a change of heart, a total life change. Furthermore, the turn should be personal, executed by every single person. Examples can be found –among others- within Zechariah (1:3), Hosea (14:2-4) and Jeremiah (3:12). Forgiveness in this sense becomes a conditional act, dependent upon a remorseful act of the people. A divine answer to

⁹⁶ Jonah 3:9-10.

⁹⁷ Jeremiah 3:12.

⁹⁸ Nehemiah 9:17c.

⁹⁹ Genesis 18:23-26.

human action.¹⁰⁰ However, both methods of forgiveness have the Lord as the one who forgives, while the people need to be forgiven.

3.2.3 *Repenting From Evil*

Based upon literal notions of forgiveness, the overview given in the previous paragraph, encompasses most of the Old Testament concept of forgiveness in practice. However, depending on definition and perspective, forgiveness of the Lord cannot solely be found in the chapters and verses in which the Lord literally forgives his people, but as well in the verses where he repents from the evil he intended to inflict upon them.¹⁰¹

Repenting from evil is, in the Old Testament, connected to the Hebrew root *nḥm*. The root occurs 119 times in the Old Testament, most often in the Niph'al (48) and Pi'el (51) form. In the Pi'el form, *nḥm* usually means to comfort, with a person as subject and death as occasion. For example in Genesis 37:35 where sons and daughters seek to comfort their mourning father. In the Niph'al form, *nḥm* can be translated as 'to feel pain' or 'to regret (something)'. In the Old Testament the subject is most often the Lord (30 times), and secondly the people (7). The Niph'al form of *nḥm* is frequently combined with 'al ha-ra'ah: 'The Lord regretted the evil with which he had threatened his people'.¹⁰² This formula can be found fifteen times,¹⁰³ among which some of the verses analysed above.¹⁰⁴

When the Lord regrets the evil he has inflicted, this is regularly connected to a whole nation. The basic stages of this process of regret are usual: (1) people have transgressed the laws of the Lord. (2) The Lord gets angry, and inflicts (or threatens to) evil upon them. (3) The Lord starts to regret this evil and (sometimes) offers to turn the threat around. As already observed in the paragraphs above, this repenting of evil can be evoked by a plea of a single person, or by the people turning away from their evil

¹⁰⁰ Precisely this fact, the divine reaction to peoples repentance, forms part of the concept of divine forgiveness according to Jakob Wöhrle ("Prophetic Reflection on Divine Forgiveness", 13).

¹⁰¹ Proponents of this theory are Krašovec, Jeremias and Morgan. This can be found in the consensus of scholars on the concept of forgiveness as well: forgiveness is seen as one of many possible responses to harm, which includes a decision to step away from anger. Important to note is though, that it includes, but is not limited to stepping away from anger.

¹⁰² Or which he had inflicted upon his people.

¹⁰³ Exodus 32:12, 14; 2 Samuel 24:16 (= 1 Chronicles 21:15); Jeremiah 18:8.10, 26:3.13.19, 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10, 4:2; Amos 7:3.6.

¹⁰⁴ H.J. Stoebe, "Nicham" in E. Jenni & C. Westerman (eds.) *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament Vol. 2* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 734-739.

behavior. In addition, this act of repenting from evil is not reserved for the Lord's own people, but can concern other nations, as for example the people of Nineveh.¹⁰⁵

3.2.4 To Forgive and to Repent

Forgiving and forgiveness seem prominent themes in the Old Testament, although it is hard to pinpoint where exactly these themes come to the surface. The idea is expressed most clearly in the statements that the Lord is a forgiving Lord, that he will forgive the people when they have sinned. Other references to the Lord are more concerned with a Lord who is regretting the threats he has uttered against his people. These are references to a Lord who repents from the evil he intended to do. Forgiveness in these cases is merely an act of not acting out upon these threats, an act of mercy.

Furthermore, forgiving in the pre-exilic times was an act dependent on the Lord's will, often initiated by someone pleading the Lord to save the people of Israel. In post-exilic times, forgiving became less unconditional and more an act depending on human retribution. The acts of the Lord became more closely linked to human action; the change of the Lord being angry to a Lord feeling sorrow became dependent upon people turning away from their sinful behavior.

3.3 Forgiveness Connected to the Themes of Vengeance and the Day of the Lord

3.3.1 Forgiveness and Vengeance

As already observed in the first paragraph of this chapter, vengeance is one of the concepts that forms part of the cluster of concepts connected to the concept of 'forgiveness'.¹⁰⁶ This close relation between vengeance and forgiveness appears not exclusively in the context of ancient biblical texts, but in the context of contemporary behavioral and political sciences as well. A characteristic example of this is the research done by Martha Minow in 1998. She analysed the different responses to violent injustice. According to her, there were two possible responses to this injustice: vengeance and forgiveness. Both terms, in her view, were the opposites of the same scale, with vengeance as the most negative answer to injustice, and forgiveness (combined with reconciliation) the most positive. Important to note is that while both terms are each other's opposites, they are not mutually exclusive. One person can

¹⁰⁵ Jonah 3:1-10.

¹⁰⁶ As stated by Morgan in his article *Ancient Forgiveness*.

experience both forgiveness and vengeance in their search for closure of the injustice inflicted upon them.¹⁰⁷

With regard to the Old Testament, much attention has been paid to the contrast between the description of the Lord's characterization as loving, forgiving and merciful on the one hand, and his jealousy, anger and vengeance as its contrast.¹⁰⁸ The connection between forgiveness and vengeance is most apparent in Deuteronomy 7:2

which states: and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and
 you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make
 no covenant with them and show them no mercy.
 Deuteronomy 7:2)

This verse shows that, comparable to examples found in contemporary literature and the New Testament, the authors of the Old Testament recognized vengeance as the opposite of concepts related to forgiveness (for example as translated here: mercy) as well. The focus of this verse is however on vengeance. This Old Testament emphasis on vengeance has led several scholars to propose an overall theology of the Old Testament, concerned mainly with revenge.¹⁰⁹ Other scholars describe the Lord of the Hebrew bible as a God of wrath, a divine being who refrains from forgiveness without sacrifice.¹¹⁰ However, some scholars have pleaded for a more 'forgiving' characterization of the Old Testament. For example Smelik, who argues that the theologies of the Old and New Testament do not differ. According to him, both Old and New Testament are concerned with forgiving, albeit written down in diverse descriptions.¹¹¹ Whether or not the Old Testament is concerned with either forgiveness or vengeance, the discussion suggests that both themes are closely related. Indeed, the opposition between the themes implies a common base, a shared foundation upon which both react in opposite ways.

3.3.2 *Forgiveness and the Day of the Lord*

'The day of the Lord' is a term used throughout the Old Testament. In all, the phrase appears 47 times in the Old Testament. The day of the Lord, or the terrible day of the

¹⁰⁷ Minow, "Between Vengeance and Forgiveness, 367-382. Feelings of vengeance might occur first, but in a later stadium it can be realised that forgiveness is the only way to be freed from the inflicted injustice.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hendrik G.L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: the Meaning of the Root Nqm and the Function of the Nqm-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (OS 31. Leiden: Brill, 1994).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 297: "It is surely justified to assume that the notion of God's vengeance has deep roots in the confession of Israel and in the entirety of the Old Testament revelation of God."

¹¹⁰ Marianné Akl and Etienne Mullet, "Forgivingness: Relationships With Conceptualizations of Divine Forgiveness and Childhood Memories," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20:3 (2010), 187-200. They refer to Leviticus 17:11: "It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

¹¹¹ Evert L. Smelik, *Wraak, Vergeving en Vergelding* (Den Haag: Daamen, 1941).

Lord as Maleachi denotes it,¹¹² has been understood among the Old Testament prophets as a great battle in which the Lord will show that he is victorious. Across the descriptions, the prophets used various terms to describe this battle. In Joel for example, it is described as ‘the battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat’.¹¹³ Interestingly, Isaiah added to the regular phrase ‘the day of the Lord’, the word vengeance, as well as the words fierce anger (31:19).¹¹⁴ In Isaiah 34:8 the following sentence can be found; ‘for the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication by Zion’s cause’. According to Amos, the day of the Lord was to be feared. He described it as a day of darkness for the people that did not live according to the Lord’s rules (5:18). In the verses previous to 5:18, Amos calls the people of the land to seek the Lord and to turn to his ways, when they did, maybe the Lord would be gracious to the remnants of Joseph.

Is forgiveness by the Lord then connected to the concept of the day of the Lord? Based upon the previous section, there seems to be a connection between the day of the Lord and the quest for forgiveness. Turning to the Lord in order to stay alive on the day of the Lord’s vengeance recalls the sentences found above, in the search for forgiveness of the Lord. When people wanted forgiveness in post-exilic times, when they wanted the Lord to repent from the evil he threatened to inflict upon them they had to turn to his way and the Lord would repent. Therefore there seems to be at least a certain connection between the day of the Lord and forgiveness, albeit indirect: the word forgiveness is not directly used when describing events surrounding the day of the Lord.

3.4 The Notion of Forgiveness in the Book of Joel

As explained in the first chapter, the main question of this thesis is based upon the editor of the Dutch Online Youth Bible website stating that the central theme of Joel is forgiveness. This statement is based on the Dutch New Bible translation, where Joel 2:13 is translated as:¹¹⁵

Niet je kleren moet je scheuren, maar je hart. Keer terug tot de HEER, jullie God, want hij is genadig en liefdevol, geduldig en trouw, en tot vergeving bereid. (NBV, Joël 2:13)

Since this verse forms the foundation for describing the central theme of the book of Joel as forgiveness, my focus in this paragraph will be upon this verse and verses that are concerned with this same notion. This leads me to an analysis of verses 2:12-13a,

¹¹² Maleachi 2:31.

¹¹³ Which means: the battle in the valley of Jehovah. Cf. Jeffrey R. Grant. *Apocalypse*. (Toronto, Ontario: Frontier Research Publications, 1992).

¹¹⁴ Yair Hoffmann, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept in Prophetic Literature,” *ZAW* 93:1 (1981): 37-50.

¹¹⁵ Underscored section can be translated as: “The Lord is ready to forgive”.

which are the words of the Lord in direct speech, concerned with turning the people to him, and verses 13b-17 which form the explanation and explication of verses 12-13a by the prophet.

Turning to the Hebrew text, the root *salach* ('to forgive') does not occur in Joel 2:13, but instead one can find the phrase *weniḥam 'al ha-ra'ah* (he repents from evil). As seen in paragraph 3.2.3, the root connected to this (*nḥm*), is used more often in connection to *'al ha-ra'ah*, denoting a Lord that is repenting from the evil that he intended to do. In the book of Joel this notion of a Lord who repents from evil has been connected to the formula of divine mercy, discussed briefly in the previous chapter.

Similar to Zephaniah (2:1-3) and Jonah (3:6-10), the repenting of the Lord in the book of Joel is dependent upon the acts of people. It can be read that the people have to turn to the Lord, not only demonstrating this turn in external ways (rend your clothes, fasting and mourning) but, even more important, internally as well (rend you hearts). The act of turning to the Lord is not merely praying, but a total life change. As described in Joel 2:14, this change of heart does not directly imply the repentance of the Lord, but *might* lead to a remainder of blessing by the Lord. Another factor, which is comparable for example to Zachariah 1:2-3, is that all the people who want to be saved from the wrath of the Lord should act in such way, instead of forgiveness based upon the plea of one single person. Therefore, it is not the prophet who can save his people by pleading to the Lord, but in order to save his people, he has to summon them *all* to turn to the Lord. This can be read in Joel 2:16: 'gather the people, and gather the congregation.' This verse shows as well that both old and young people should be assembled. One can conclude that in the book of Joel, the Lord's repenting from evil is a conditional act, depending on human action.¹¹⁶ Another fact that should be noted is the combination of the notion of divine repentance (*niḥam 'al ha-ra'ah*) and the formula of divine mercy: a characterization of the Lord as a Lord who is merciful, compassionate and loyal. This combination occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible: in Joel 2:13 and in Jonah 4:2.¹¹⁷

Finally, verses fifteen till seventeen seem to be concerned with a more exact notion of what the people should do, in order to make the Lord turn around and repent. Verse seventeen is especially detailed. It forms a special assignment for the priests, the servants of the Lord: they have to pray, to plea in the temple, with a request to the Lord:

¹¹⁶ This is what we saw as well with Jeremiah for example.

¹¹⁷ It is important to note though, that Jonah regrets the act of divine repentance, whereas Joel hopes this divine repentance will occur, to help him and his people.

“Spare your people, do not let them be the subject of mocking by other people.” It is important to note, that these are rather specific assignments which Joel gives the people of Israel. It seems he is certain of what the Lord needs of the people, in order to turn around and repent from the evil he wants to inflict upon them.

In summary, the description of forgiveness in the book of Joel leads to a similar discussion as seen in the previous chapter: within the book of Joel one does not find the Hebrew root *slh* which is the sole root to describe forgiveness, but instead the root *nhm* occurs, a root concerned with a God who repents from the evil he inflicted upon his people, or which he intended to inflict upon his people. The conditions for the repenting of the Lord are similar to the conditions described by various prophets: all the people have to repent, and this should be a complete turnover: external and internal.

4. Analysis

Now that both the context of the book of Joel, the concepts of ‘forgiveness’ and ‘to repent from evil’ have been explored, we can apply the findings of these previous chapters in this chapter to the main research question: *To what extent does the theme of forgiveness shape the content and structure of the book of Joel, in relationship to the themes of vengeance and the coming day of the Lord?* In this chapter I will try to answer whether the notion of forgiveness as found in the book of Joel, is central to the book of Joel. Results of this analysis will be compared to theories of various scholars concerned with the content and structure of the book of Joel.

4.1 Forgiveness as a Central Theme in Joel?

The description of the idea of forgiveness in the book of Joel as seen in paragraph 3.4 leads to two separate questions. First, one should ask whether the notion of repenting from evil, combined with a description of a merciful and compassionate Lord, should be understood as a notion of forgiveness. A second question that should be asked, is whether this notion is central to the book of Joel, and therefore might be the central message of this Bible book.

Can the notion of divine repentance be accepted as a substitute or synonym for divine forgiveness? In the light of the exploration of (divine) forgiveness in chapter three I would answer this question affirmatively. When divine repentance is used in the sense that the Lord will repent from the evil he intended to do, the remorse of the Lord (*nḥm*) may be seen as divine forgiveness. Important here is the fact that in the second chapter of Joel, the (forgiving) act of the Lord, occurs in answer to the people’s regret. It appears that the Lord reinforces the bond with his people. This recalls the story of Moses, in which the Lord reacts to the remorse of the people (based upon a plea of the prophet) as well, forgiving them their sins and reinforcing his promise of a bright future.¹¹⁸ Similar, in verses 2:18-20 in the book of Joel, it is written that the Lord will take care of his people: he will give them grain, wine and oil in abundance, and free them from the enemy. All are signs of a hopeful future.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Exodus 34:8-10.

¹¹⁹ The importance of a future (relationship) is emphasized as well by Glen Pettigrove in his article: “The Dilemma of Divine Forgiveness.” (*Religious Studies* 44:4 (2008), 457-464). He argues that this notion of a future relationship is the key distinction between *mercy* and *forgiveness*. “Forgiveness,” as he states, “is concerned with the good or ill will that exists between wrongdoer and wronged, and with the future of their relationship” (p. 459). Therefore, divine forgiveness should encompass a notion of a shared future/bond between the Lord and his wrongdoers.

Another notable factor is the combination of the formula of divine mercy to the notion of divine repentance, which can only be found in Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2. This combination of the notion of divine mercy to the notion of repentance is remarkable, especially when returning to the definition of forgiveness as ascribed in the third chapter:¹²⁰

If we are to forgive, our resentment is to be overcome not by denying ourselves the right to that resentment, but by endeavoring to the view the wrongdoers with compassion, benevolence, and love, while recognizing that he has willfully abandoned his right to them.

Therefore, I would argue that divine repentance connected to the formula of divine mercy, can be seen as a notion of forgiveness. This also leads me to state, that the other biblical notions of divine repentance, are not consequently a notion of forgiveness. Repenting from evil is not sufficient. An attitude of having mercy upon the people who have wronged you, is an additional requirement. Only when repentance is connected to mercy or compassion, I would argue for a notion of forgiveness.¹²¹

To answer the second question: can the notion of forgiveness be seen as the central theme of the book of Joel, I will first outline the methods used to find the central theme and message of a text. There are several ways in which one can search for the central meaning of a text. In biblical exegesis it has been a common method to search for the central message of the text by trying to discern the central part of the text based upon structural analysis. Another possible method used to find the central theme is to research a text based upon content analysis¹²². A method with which one searches for a recurrent pattern of sentences, words or ideas.¹²³ In the following paragraphs I will elaborate further upon these possible methods.

4.1.1 Structural Analysis

There are various ways to structure a (prophetic) bible book. Tyler Mayfield, for example, described in his chapter ‘structuring prophetic books’ the difference between structuring the book based upon form or content.¹²⁴ Also, these two different methods have many subcategories. One can for example structure a book based upon textual

¹²⁰ North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness,” 499-508.

¹²¹ Cf. Jakob Wöhrle, “Prophetic Reflection on Divine Forgiveness,” p. 13. Who argues that the theological key for the understanding of Gods willingness to forgive, can be found in the fact that he is gracious and merciful, turns to the people and relents from the evil he intended to do.

¹²² Comparable to semantic analysis is biblical studies.

¹²³ Peter J. Schellens and Michaël Steehouder (eds.), *Tekstanalyse: methoden en toepassingen* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2010).

¹²⁴ Tyler D. Mayfield, *Literary Structure and Setting in Ezekiel*. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2*, Reihe 43. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

markers found in ancient manuscripts, for instance the *setumah* and *petuhah* in the Masoretic text.¹²⁵ This *delimitation criticism* can be used to examine in which way the bible book was divided at a certain point, across various manuscripts. Although this division based upon textual markers differs sometimes across the various manuscripts and therefore does not proof a set way for bible books to be structured,¹²⁶ it is an additional method to demonstrate the structure of a bible book, and enhances other arguments based upon content or literary structure. Another possibility is to structure the book based upon *discourse*. This methodology attempts to structure a book based upon linguistic features as direct and indirect speech, narration and addressees.¹²⁷ A third method to structure a text is to analyze *diachronic growth*. Scholars who apply this method, search for indications of historical development. This methodology has received some criticism: various scholars argue that primarily the structure of a text is a *synchronic* concept and therefore cannot be analyzed diachronically.¹²⁸ One last example is to search for a structure based upon *literary patterns*, like chiasmus, parallelism, or concentric symmetry.¹²⁹

These methods of structuring – among others – have resulted in various ways in which the bible book of Joel has been structured, based upon different arguments. One example is Van Leeuwen who bases his structure upon the textual markers in the Masoretic Text.¹³⁰ Barton on the other hand, bases his structure upon content of the book: a switch in content introduces a new pericope.¹³¹ In this chapter I will offer and defend my structure of the book of Joel, justifying my arguments based upon structures and theories argued for by a selection of scholars who analyzed the structure of the book of Joel in previous years.¹³² Based upon both content and vocabulary analysis of the

¹²⁵ Marjo C.A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, *Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000). In the book of Joel seven of these markers can be found: 1:1-12 (S), 1:13-20 (S), 2:1-14 (P), 2:15-27 (P), 3:1-4:8 (P), 4:9-17 (S), 4:18-21 (P). Cf. also Scharneck who provided an analysis of several Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the first chapter of Joel, based upon text markers. (Rudolph Scharneck, “The Demarcation of the First Pericope of Joel in Hebrew and Greek Manuscripts: A Comparison of Ancient and Modern Scholars,” *Journal for Semitics* 19:2 (2010): 548-565).

¹²⁶ Mayfield, *Literary structure*, 61.

¹²⁷ Robert D. Bergen (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

¹²⁸ Mayfield, *Literary Structure*, 62.

¹²⁹ Jan Fokkelman, *Dichtkunst in de bijbel: een handleiding bij literair lezen* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000).

¹³⁰ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*.

¹³¹ Cf. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 37-112

¹³² Including, but not limited to: Willem S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel* (BZAW 163; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985); Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel – Amos – Obadiah – Jona* (KZAT XIII/2; Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 23-94; John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 37-112; (4) Hans Walter Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2

book of Joel, focusing on the implied narrator, addressee, and style of speaking (i.e. a summons, an explanation), I would argue for a structure separated into thirteen parts (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Structure of the Book of Joel

A.	1:1	Superscript
B.	1:2-14	Description of disaster, call to lament
C.	1:15-20	Lament
D.	2:1-11	Description of disaster (army of the Lord)
E.	2:12-13a	Call to lament and turning to the Lord
F.	2:13b-17	Specification of method ‘turning to the Lord’
G.	2:18-20e	<i>The Lord’s Answer</i>
H.	2:20f-24	Praise song for the Lord
I.	2:25-3:5	Promise of restoration and shelter
J.	4:1-8	Warning to foreign nations
K.	4:9-13	Call to the people
L.	4:14-16	Day of the Lord
M.	4:17-21	Promise of blessing

A. *Superscript 1:1*

¹ The word of the Lord that came to Joel son of Pethuel:

The superscript of the Book of Joel is a straightforward sentence. Revealing the name of the author, as well as his fathers’ name. The superscript indicates further that the words that follow are in fact the words of the Lord.¹³³ The sentence can be seen as a standard formula,¹³⁴ which also appears in Hosea 1:1, Micah 1:1 and Zephaniah 1:1. However, the formula in Joel differs from these three prophets, since he does not supply his readers with any historical or contextual information.¹³⁵ Therefore we have only the

Joel und Amos (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969), James L. Crenshaw, *Joel: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1995); Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing co., 1976).

¹³³ Joel does not depict himself here as a prophet, but this is rather common among the books in the Dodekapropheton, just in Habakkuk. 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1 the author is described as a prophet, spokesperson (*nābī’*). Cf Crenshaw, *Joel*, 82.

¹³⁴ Adam S. van der Woude, *Micha* (POT; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1976), 13, describes the occurrence of this formula in Deuteronomic circles. Hans W. Wolff describes the same in his Dodekapropheton I, Hosea (BKAT XIV/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 196.

¹³⁵ Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 11.

content of the text to discern the place and time in which Joel wrote his book.¹³⁶ Although not comparable in literary form, but similar to Joel in the omission of contextual and historical framework are the introductions in Jonah 1:1 and Malachi 1:1.¹³⁷ The introduction in Jonah being the most similar in the restriction to supplying the reader with just the fathers' name.¹³⁸

I have chosen to set this verse apart, since this is an 'editorial comment' by Joel in which he introduces his prophecy. The separation of the superscript from the subsequent verses is almost a norm by scholars concerned with the book of Joel. There are, however, some scholars who regard the superscript as a separate part, but include it in their first 'structural unit' since setting the sentence apart would damage their structure and, as a result, their hypothesis.¹³⁹

B. Description of disaster, call to lament 1:2-14

- 2 Hear this, O elders,
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your ancestors?
- 3 Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children another generation.
- 4 What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.
- 5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep;
and wail, all you wine-drinkers,
over the sweet wine,
for it is cut off from your mouth.
- 6 For a nation has invaded my land,
powerful and innumerable;
its teeth are lions' teeth,
and it has the fangs of a lioness.
- 7 It has laid waste my vines,
and splintered my fig trees;

¹³⁶ As seen in chapter 2 there has been much discussion upon this subject.

¹³⁷ Cf. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 39.

¹³⁸ Cf. Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 22.

¹³⁹ One example is H.W. Wolff, who sees the superscript as an element above the actual content, but who includes it in his first unit, in order to prevent his symmetrical structure from being a-symmetrical.

it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
their branches have turned white.

- ⁸ Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth
for the husband of her youth.
- ⁹ The grain-offering and the drink-offering are cut off
from the house of the LORD.
The priests mourn,
the ministers of the LORD.
- ¹⁰ The fields are devastated,
the ground mourns;
for the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil fails.
- ¹¹ Be dismayed, you farmers,
wail, you vine-dressers,
over the wheat and the barley;
for the crops of the field are ruined.
- ¹² The vine withers,
the fig tree droops.
Pomegranate, palm, and apple—
all the trees of the field are dried up;
surely, joy withers away
among the people.
- ¹³ Put on sackcloth and lament, you priests;
wail, you ministers of the altar.
Come, pass the night in sackcloth,
you ministers of my God!
Grain-offering and drink-offering
are withheld from the house of your God.
- ¹⁴ Sanctify a fast,
call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders
and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.

The second part in my structure starts, again, with a standard Hebrew formula, which separates this verse (1:2) from the superscript. According to Wolff, this formula was popular with ancient Wisdom teachers.¹⁴⁰ This part – verses 1:2-14 – of the book of Joel is concerned with a description of disaster, intertwined with a call to lament. Starting with verse 1:2 and 1:3 there is a call to *all* the inhabitants of the land to listen to what is said, while the actual description of disaster starts in verse 1:4. The remaining verses in

¹⁴⁰ He describes the formula (combined with verses 2-4) as ‘Lehreröffnungsrufs’: H.W. Wolff, *Joel* (BK XIV/1), 122f. For an extended discussion of this formula (*šim ‘û*) see Yair Hoffmann, “Two Opening Formulae in Biblical Style,” *Tarbiz* 46 (1976/77): 157-180 (in Hebrew, English summary).

this pericope (1:5-14) form a specification of these disasters, interwoven with a call to lament, aimed at certain groups of people¹⁴¹. The connection of verses 1:2-14 is evident when focusing on the sole narrator of this unit. One finds indirect words of the Lord, spoken (written down) by the prophet and directed at the inhabitants of the land. This has been made clear, as seen above, by the first verse, where we read: “The word of the Lord, that came to Joel.” Logically this ‘word of the Lord’ is expressed in the ensuing verses.¹⁴²

According to Prinsloo, there are three reasons to suggest the end of this section after verse 1:14. The first reason is the similarity between verse 1:2 and 1:14, which form the two outer verses of this section, and therefore envelope the remaining verses. The second reason is the recurrence of various lexemes as well as the wordplays which appear in this section.¹⁴³ The third argument consists of the repetitions in the formal structure.¹⁴⁴

Other authors offer alternative delimitations of verses 1:2-14. Barton for example argues for an extra sub section: he additionally divides the chapter after 1:4, but does propose a new section after 1:14 as well.¹⁴⁵ Wolff is comparable to Barton in this additional division. Interestingly they both argue as well for a complete *lament cycle*¹⁴⁶ in this chapter, ending at the final verse (1:20).¹⁴⁷ Similar to Wolff and Barton, Rudolph defends a connection between all verses until the final verse of the chapter, but does divide the chapter in various sub sections.¹⁴⁸ He suggests that in verse 1:4 we find the main motive, which caused Joel to write his prophecy. The other verses, as Rudolph states, are summons to lament and repent which are common for a prophet to give to the people.¹⁴⁹ Crenshaw divides the text of the book of Joel at 2:20 as well, but divides this part in seven strophes, of which the fifth ends at verse 1:14.¹⁵⁰ Other scholars however, do not agree with a division of the book of Joel at the fifteenth verse. They suggest a division between verses 1:12 and 1:13. For example Allen, who suggests a division at

¹⁴¹ E.g. drunkards (v5), farmers (v11), priests (13).

¹⁴² There are Bible translations which end the first verse with a colon, to explicate that in verse two the words of God start. An example is the New Revised Standard Version, another example is the Dutch Statenvertaling.

¹⁴³ Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 13-27.

¹⁴⁴ For example the numerous imperatives found in this passage, as well as the frequent use of *kî*. (Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 12).

¹⁴⁵ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 50-57.

¹⁴⁶ Bartons term.

¹⁴⁷ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 24.

¹⁴⁸ He divides the chapter in: 1:1, 1:2-4, 1:5-12, 1:13-14, 1:15-18, 1:19-20.

¹⁴⁹ Rudolph, BKAT XIII/2, 42.

¹⁵⁰ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 112-115. Interestingly, later on in his analysis Crenshaw does argue for a separate unite of 1:15-20, when referring to it from his discussion of 2:1-11 , p. 128.

this point based upon ancient liturgy and the fact that verses 1:13 and 1:14 seem to fit better with the content of the ensuing verses.¹⁵¹

Another argument has been introduced by Van Leeuwen, who argues that at 1:13 a demarcation in the Masoretic Text can be found, and therefore the first pericope must end with verse 1:12.¹⁵² Scharneck presented a comparable argument after analyzing the major divisions in the first chapter of Joel in ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, finding four ancient texts¹⁵³ that put a textual demarcation between the twelfth and thirteenth verse.¹⁵⁴ Tov however, has suggested that these textual markers in the ancient texts were based upon content, therefore demonstrating that other divisions based upon, for example, literary patterns might still hold true.¹⁵⁵

C. *Lament 1:15-20*

- ¹⁵ Alas for the day!
For the day of the LORD is near,
and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.
- ¹⁶ Is not the food cut off
before our eyes,
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?
- ¹⁷ The seed shrivels under the clods,
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are ruined
because the grain has failed.
- ¹⁸ How the animals groan!
The herds of cattle wander about
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep are dazed.
- ¹⁹ To you, O LORD, I cry.
For fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness,
and flames have burned
all the trees of the field.
- ²⁰ Even the wild animals cry to you
because the watercourses are dried up,

¹⁵¹ Allen, *the Books*, 39-42; Cf also Milos Bič, *Das Buch Joel* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 34 and Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 4.

¹⁵² Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 27.

¹⁵³ Three Hebrew: codices Leningradensis, Aleppo and Vatican Ms. Urbinati; One Greek: Codex Alexandrinus.

¹⁵⁴ Scharneck, 'Demarcation of Joel 1', 554.

¹⁵⁵ Tov, "Textual Criticism Old Testament," *ABD* 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 51.

and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.

The third part of my structure starts with an exclamation, a cry of despair: the day of the Lord is near, a day which causes the destruction of the people. This exclamation precedes three verses describing the portents announcing this day of the Lord: cattle that wanders about, grain that has failed and gladness that has been cut off from the house of the Lord. Important to note is the use (twice) of the first person plural in verse sixteen. In verses 1:19-20 the narrator personally calls out to the Lord, not asking the Lord to help him, but hoping to attract his attention to the people. This personal account forms the climax to the lament. The reason to separate these verses from verses 1:2-14, and ending this section with verse 1:20, is based upon the use of the first person plural and singular in the text, especially in the verses 1:16b and 1:19a. In these verses the phrases ‘house of our God’ and ‘to you, O Lord, I cry’ can be found. These sentences suggest that the narrator has changed from the Lord in indirect speech, to the prophet in direct speech, saying a prayer for his people, with the Lord as addressee. In verse 2:1b on the other hand, one reads: “sound the alarm on *my* Holy Mountain”, indicating that these are again (indirect) words spoken by the Lord.

Many scholars have discussed this section of the book of Joel extensively, focusing especially on verse 1:15, while this is the first notion of ‘the day of the Lord’ in the book. Suggestions have been made that this part has been inserted by a later author,¹⁵⁶ other scholars argue that this is not a reference to *the* day of the Lord, but just *a* day. These authors stress the point that this verse is not an eschatological reference.¹⁵⁷ Finally there are scholars who argue that Joel stands in a tradition of the *eschatology of Israel*¹⁵⁸, and see the reference to the day of the Lord, as a first mentioning of this imminent day that is to come.¹⁵⁹

Another discussion concerning verses 1:15-20 is the discussion about the use of the two types of person: first person singular and first person plural. Wolff for example, argues for dividing this part into two separate fragments of laments. The first running from verse 1:16 till 1:18, in which the plural form has been used. The second, he states,

¹⁵⁶ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*. Another example is Duhm, who argued for two different authors. The first writing chapters 1 and 2, the second writing the last chapters, and adding small sections to the first two chapters. Verse fifteen, according to him, was added by this second (Maccabean apocalyptic) author. Duhm, “Zwölf Propheten,” 184-188.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. A. Joseph Everson, “The Days of Yahweh,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 329-337. He argues for the fact that there is no single day of the Lord, but multiple days in which the presence of the Lord is really visible.

¹⁵⁸ Term by Ernst Kutsch, “Heuschreckenplage und Tag Jahwes in Joel 1 und 2,” *TZ* 18/2 (1962): 81-94.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 36.

starts in verse 1:19, where the singular form has been used. Furthermore, Wolff suggests that these verses are no complete laments, but fragments, since some essential lament elements are missing in these verses.¹⁶⁰ Rudolph argues as well for a difference between these two sections, but based upon a rather different argumentation. His theory concerns a difference between a prayer, and an intercession. The prayer to which the people have been called in 1:14b, starts according to him with verse 1:19, in which we see the prayer of the prophets. The verses in between then, are the reasons Joel believes the day of the Lord is coming. A section in which, Rudolph notes, ‘jede Bitte fehlt’.¹⁶¹ Kapelrud’s theory is similar to the one Rudolph presents. He denotes verses 1:16-18 as a complaint to the Lord, whereas in verses 1:19-20, as he argues, a personal prayer, an individual lament can be found.¹⁶² There are other scholars, though, who argue for the unity of this section, and see the whole part as a ‘prayer of lamentation’.¹⁶³

Finally there is some controversy surrounding verse 1:17, since three out of four words in verse 1:17a are *hapax legomena*, causing scholars to guess the meaning of these words. This has resulted in many suggestions and numerous possibilities for this sentence, as can be found in academic literature.¹⁶⁴ Bič concludes thus that, despite of all the possible solutions, it is impossible to capture the essence of this verse.¹⁶⁵ Bewer therefore suggest to omit the whole verse.¹⁶⁶

There is little discussion concerning the end of this section. Most scholars argue that verse 1:20 is supposed to form the end of a section. However, some scholars suggest that the first part of the book ends with either verse 2:17 or 2:27, arguing that verse 1:20 merely denotes a subsection of this part.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 24-25. Elements he is missing are the requests and vows (‘*Der Bitte und des Gelübdes*’), as well as a statement of trust in the Lord.

¹⁶¹ Rudolph, *Joel*, 47.

¹⁶² Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*.

¹⁶³ Cf. Artur Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950). Barton (*Joel and Obadiah*, 58) sees in verse 15-20 the prayer to which the people and priests have been summoned. In verse 16 he states, the first person plural can suggest the whole congregation praying, or Joel providing his congregation with the ‘text’ to pray, as can be seen in verse 17b.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 65-66; Rudolph, *Joel*, 39-40, i.a.

¹⁶⁵ Bič, *Das Buch Joel*, 44.

¹⁶⁶ Bewer, *Commentary on Joel*, 91

¹⁶⁷ Cf. B. Duhm who divides the book in two parts: 1:1-2:27 and 2:28-4:21; Jan Ridderbos, *De Kleine Profeten*, (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1966), divides the book into larger subsections, ending the first section with verse 2:17.

D. Description of disaster (army of the Lord) 2:1-11

- 1 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—
- 2 a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.
- 3 Fire devours in front of them,
 and behind them a flame burns.
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,
 but after them a desolate wilderness,
 and nothing escapes them.
- 4 They have the appearance of horses,
 and like warhorses they charge.
- 5 As with the rumbling of chariots,
 they leap on the tops of the mountains,
like the crackling of a flame of fire
 devouring the stubble,
like a powerful army
 drawn up for battle.
- 6 Before them peoples are in anguish,
 all faces grow pale.
- 7 Like warriors they charge,
 like soldiers they scale the wall.
Each keeps to its own course,
 they do not swerve from their paths.
- 8 They do not jostle one another,
 each keeps to its own track;
they burst through the weapons
 and are not halted.
- 9 They leap upon the city,
 they run upon the walls;
they climb up into the houses,
 they enter through the windows like a thief.
- 10 The earth quakes before them,
 the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
 and the stars withdraw their shining.

¹¹ The LORD utters his voice
at the head of his army;
how vast is his host!
Numberless are those who obey his command.
Truly the day of the LORD is great;
terrible indeed—who can endure it?

The fourth section starts at the beginning of the second chapter. As already indicated in the previous section, we read again indirect words spoken by the Lord, as represented by the prophet, which is suggested by the phrase ‘my holy mountain’ in verse 2:1b. Furthermore, this section starts and ends with the same subject: the day of the Lord that is getting near.¹⁶⁸ Reasons to end this section after 2:11 are the switch of narrator in the following verses, as well as the change of subject found in verse 2:12.

In between these accounts of the day of the Lord, there is a description of an army approaching the inhabitants of the city¹⁶⁹. This army is dreadful: nothing can escape them, nothing can stop them, and even the earth and sky are afraid of them. Finally, in verse 2:11, it becomes clear why the army is terrifying and invincible: the Lord is the leader of this army, to his voice they listen.

The division between the first and second chapter of the book of Joel is, according to Prinsloo, fairly common because verse 2:1 starts with a stereotype introductory formula (*tīqē ‘u šōpar*).¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, he argues, there is a central theme and content to this pericope: the day of the Lord as a theme, with a description of his army as content.¹⁷¹ Additionally, the frequent return of the word for ‘faces’ (*panîm/panâw*), as Keller claims, results in a well-rounded and coherent poem in verses 2:1-11.¹⁷² Barton agrees that the division at verse 2:12 is logical. He describes verses 2:1-17 as a second lament cycle, with the first part describing the disaster (2:1-11), while the second (2:12-17a) and third (2:17b) form respectively a call to lament and the actual lament.¹⁷³ Crenshaw refers as well to 2:1-11 as a separate pericope in his structure of the book of Joel, and characterizes this as ‘YHWH’s Efficient Army.’ He

¹⁶⁸ This is described both in 2:1b/2:2 and in 2:11c.

¹⁶⁹ Most probably Jerusalem.

¹⁷⁰ The same formula can for example be found with Joshua 6:20.

¹⁷¹ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 39-40. Some scholars disagree upon this notion, they state that 2:1b-2a and 2:10-11 are insertions by a ‘Day of Yahweh editor’ or ‘Apokalyptiker’, the same who – according to them – wrote the final chapters of the book of Joel. Cf. Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 398; Bewer, *Commentary on Joel*; Ernst Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (Leipzig, Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. Werner Scholl, 1922), 158.

¹⁷² Carl A. Keller, *Osee, Joël, Abdias, Jonas, Amos* (Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament XIa; Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1965).

¹⁷³ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 75-83.

describes this section as being a whole, due to form and content. The content, he states, elaborates on the notion of the day of the Lord as described in verse 1:15.¹⁷⁴

Bourke offers a different theory, and argues for a central turning point in the book of Joel at verses 2:2b-9. In these verses he sees the description of an army of locusts, marching towards Jerusalem. According to Bourke, this description of an army is surrounded by five motives: repentance, lament, sound of *šôpar*, the day of YHWH and a meeting. Bourke suggests that these motives form an inclusion around the notion of the army.¹⁷⁵

Finally, the observation by Prinsloo concerning the eleventh verse should be noted. He argues that in this verse, the Lord is subject of what has been spoken, instead of the one who speaks.¹⁷⁶ Rudolph states however, that Joel is certain he is executing the will of the Lord and therefore uses the term ‘my holy mountain’ in the first verse. This first person subsequently is freely displayed throughout the following verses, using the *terminus technicus* ‘the day of the Lord’ until the eleventh verse.¹⁷⁷ I would disagree with Prinsloo, using similar argumentation as Rudolph. The repetition of the phrase ‘the day of the Lord’ and the single subject of content, suggest this is one well-rounded section of the book of Joel.

E. Call to lament and turning to the Lord 2:12-13a

¹² Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing.

The next section, in my opinion, is formed by the (first) divine speech that can be found within the book of Joel. The short speech starts in verse 2:12 and ends with verse 2:13a. Although most scholars acknowledge the divine speech found within these verses, they do not see reason to divide the book of Joel at this point. They rather see a division at verse 2:15, or between verses 2:17 and 2:18.¹⁷⁸ My main reason to separate the book of Joel at this point, is the switch in narrator starting with verse 2:12 and ending with verse 2:13a. It seems that at this point the Lord himself, is summoning the people to turn to

¹⁷⁴ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 115-128.

¹⁷⁵ Compare to Prinsloo, who also argued for an theme of the day of the Lord, around a content of army (Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 39-40).

¹⁷⁶ Bourke, “Le jour de Yahvé,” 5-31. Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 44.

¹⁷⁷ Rudolph, *Joel*, 50-60.

¹⁷⁸ See below for explication.

him: “Yet even now,” says the Lord, “return to me with all your heart.”” The narrator changes again in verse 2:13b, with the prophet repeating the summons of the Lord, emphasizing the importance of the ‘turn’ in the sequential verses, until verse 2:17. Therefore, I would argue that here we have a short section, in which the Lord speaks to his people, set apart by the change of narrator, as well as the repetition found in the sequential verses, which explicate the message of this section.

Prinsloo, although pleading for a section starting with 2:12 and ending with 2:17, separates these verses into three sub sections: 2:12-14, 15-16b, 16c-17. The pericope, he states, should be seen as a unity since there is a focus on cultus, made clear by the use of certain terminology. The frequent use of imperatives (in 2:12b-17b) suggests in his opinion the unity of this part of the book of Joel as well.¹⁷⁹ In contrast to this division into three parts, Prinsloo argues that he observes several structures within this section, which differ from his division of the text. For example the connection between verse 2:12 and 2:13a, because a ‘Gottesrede’ can be found in these verses, in which the Lord speaks in the first person.¹⁸⁰ In Prinsloo’s opinion, the Gottesrede in 2:12a is connected to verses 2:12b and 2:13a, verses concerned with an explication of the Gottesrede.¹⁸¹ Verse 2:12, as Kapelrud states, is special, since this is the only occasion in the book of Joel in which we hear the direct words of the Lord. According to Prinsloo, this is a sign of hope.¹⁸² Barton, who sees a unity in verses 2:12-17a which he titles a ‘call to lament’, also emphasizes the use of the first person speech of the Lord in verse 2:12a. As he states, this is a formula common at the end of oracles, occurring only once in the book of Joel.¹⁸³ Barton argues further that here we find an offer of salvation, provided by the Lord himself.¹⁸⁴ Rudolph is similar to Barton and Prinsloo in emphasizing the importance of the ‘God speech’. He addresses 2:12-14 as ‘Der Bussruf’ (the call to repentance), in which Joel provides his people with an opportunity for a ‘way out’, from all the disasters described in the previous verses.¹⁸⁵ Wolff argues that starting with verse 2:13b the talk about the Lord is in the third person. This, as Wolff

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 49.

¹⁸⁰ According to Prinsloo, this is demonstrated by the formula *ne’um yhwah* (‘says the Lord), indicating that the words are indeed uttered by the Lord.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 50.

¹⁸² Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 59; Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 81.

¹⁸³ Cf. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 77. Barton refers here to Friedrich Baumgärtel, “Die Formel *ne’um jahwe*,” *ZAW* 73 (1961): 277-290.

¹⁸⁴ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 77.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Rudolph, *Joel*, 58. Interestingly Rudolph states that at the beginning of verse 13 the Gottesrede has come to an end.

states, is the consequence of the fact that 2:12-13a is a citation, as used in biblical tradition.¹⁸⁶

According to Crenshaw the divine speech and the sentence ‘return to me’, suggest a closeness between the Lord and his people. Crenshaw pleads that the people are invited to turn to the Lord, since the Lord has demonstrated his mercy at previous occasions, as an essence of his character.¹⁸⁷ Crenshaw also states that the *athnach* in verse 2:12 separates the call to turn to the Lord from the following verses, but at the same time focuses the attention to the short description on how this turning should be executed (2:12b).¹⁸⁸ The focus on inner turning as described in verse 2:12b, he states, is continued in verse 2:13, but combined with a remark to external symbols of remorse.¹⁸⁹ According to Crenshaw, this verse is divided as well at a crucial point between the Lord and the people.¹⁹⁰

There are scholars who argue that verse 2:12 cannot be separated completely from the previous verse. According to Van Leeuwen, the term *wegam attā* (yet even now) can only appear in direct speech and suggests a turn in the story. Here in 2:12, as Van Leeuwen states, we see a turn from imminent threat to possible restoration.¹⁹¹ This is emphasized by Barton as well, who argues that the phrase ‘yet even now’ indicates that the final moment for judgment has not yet arrived, and can even be averted.¹⁹² Crenshaw agrees that this sentence marks a *sharp antithesis*, but also suggests a late hour: the day of Yahweh might be prevented, but is undoubtedly near.¹⁹³ The argument of Van Leeuwen, seeing both verse 2:12 and the previous verses connected because of

¹⁸⁶ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 57.

¹⁸⁷ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 144.

¹⁸⁸ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 145. Crenshaw denotes this as a crucial division between God and the people, which can be found in verse thirteen as well.

¹⁸⁹ This interplay between internal and external aspects can be found in the argument of Rudolph as well, albeit with a different emphasis: he argues that Joel is not solely concerned with cultic measures, but accentuates the inner turning to the Lord, the turning with the heart. Rudolph, *Joel*, 59. The argument of Weiser is a bit more firm than Rudolph's argument. He states that Joel opposes the idea of inner and outer remorse, and that he ‘legt alleiniges Gewicht auf die innere Wandlung des Herzens’ (Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, 115). This, according to Weiser, is comparable to Jeremiah 4:4.

¹⁹⁰ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 145.

¹⁹¹ C. Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 97. Therefore, both the section with verses 2:1-11 and this section belong together to some extent.

¹⁹² Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 77. According to Barton an example of this diversion of disaster can be found with Amos 5:14-15.

¹⁹³ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 133, following the argument of Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, 81. Prinsloo (*Theology of Joel*, 49) uses the same argument, based upon Kapelrud and Sellin.

this antithesis, is not convincing in my opinion. Indeed the fact that this is an antithesis suggest two parts, parts of one story that should be separated since they are opposites.¹⁹⁴

Scholars further discussed the concept of ‘turning to the Lord’ that can be found in both 2:12a and 2:13b. According to Barton, this was a common cultural assumption during Joel’s era: in times of *national* disaster, a turning to the *national* Lord would possibly lead to salvation.¹⁹⁵ Wolff argues that in deuteronomistic vocabulary this turning to the Lord should be understood as a ‘willingness to hear the word of YHWH’.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, he states that the turning to the Lord is a common cultural method, known by various authors of the Old Testament.¹⁹⁷ Rudolph is similar to Wolff in stating that the notion of turning to the Lord is not a new concept in the book of Joel. Rudolph describes this as a prophetic tradition, but according to him this tradition cannot only be found with the prophets, but as well within Deuteronomy and the deuteronomists.¹⁹⁸ Ahlström, to conclude, indicates that the emphasize in verse 2:12a should be on ‘me’: Return to *me* (and not to other Gods).¹⁹⁹

F. Specification of method ‘turning to the Lord’ 2:13b-17

- ¹³ Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.
- ¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
for the LORD, your God?
- ¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
- ¹⁶ gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;

¹⁹⁴ Following Crenshaw, who argues that *wegam-‘attā* links verse 12 to the previous, but at the same time sets it apart (*Joel*, 143).

¹⁹⁵ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 77. Barton warns us that the translation of the word *sûb* should be approached carefully. According to him, it should be translated as ‘return’ not as ‘repent’.

¹⁹⁶ Hans W. Wolff, “Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks,” *ZAW* 73 (1961):171-186.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 57: Amos 4:6; Hosea 3:5, 14:2. Comparable to Jeremiah 3:10, 24:7. Wolff states also that the linkage between the ‘return’ and the day of the Lord is not a new concept of Joel. He sees this as well in Zephaniah 2:3 and Malachi 3:1ff.

¹⁹⁸ According to Rudolph the possibility of turning to the Lord can be found in: Amos 4:6; Hosea 14:2; Jeremiah 3:21, 4:14, 18:7, 24:7, 36:3,7; Deuteronomy 4:29, 30:10; 1 Samuel 7:3; 1 Judges 8:48. Rudolph, *Joel*, 58.

¹⁹⁹ Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 26.

gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.

¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
Let them say, 'Spare your people, O LORD,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
"Where is their God?"'

The sixth part in my structure starts with the words of Joel in verse 2:13b, which read: 'return to the Lord, *your* God'. In this sentence, the Lord is the subject of speech, addressed most probably by Joel.²⁰⁰ This sentence forms the start of an explanation by Joel on the why and what concerning the repentance by the people: why do they have to return to the Lord – for he is compassionate, patient, – and what exactly do they have to do to make the Lord repent from punishment. This part starts with a description of the character of the Lord, in a standard formula.²⁰¹ Then, in the fourteenth verse, one can read the *possibility* of the turning around of the Lord: 'Who knows whether he turns around'. Subsequent verses are concerned with a call to various people to come together – with specifications on the manner in which to repent –, as well as a call to the priests, the servants of the Lord, to plea to the Lord. The final verse of this section forms the wording of the prayer that should be spoken by the priests. The next part starts in my opinion with verse eighteen, with which an answer from the Lord to the penitence of his people commences.²⁰²

Prinsloo's argument is similar to mine. According to him, the words of the Lord end in verse 2:13a, but are specified by the prophet as a *second witness*, who again calls the people to penitence, in this way "reinforcing its seriousness".²⁰³ In contrast to my reasoning, however, Prinsloo argues for the start of a new subsection within Joel at verse fifteen. This is rectified in his opinion by the connection between verse 2:13b/c and 2:14a, implied by the double use of the word *niham*, which in both verses describes the actions of the Lord. In verse 2:15, Prinsloo argues, the people are summoned to come to the Lord. Which people and what they have to do are specified in the ensuing

²⁰⁰ An expanded explanation can be found with D.

²⁰¹ See paragraph 3.2.2.

²⁰² One could argue here, in my opinion to start this section with verse 19b in which we hear the 'real' answer of God. Since verse 18 starts with 'then' it denotes a separate part from the previous verses, and all are the words by Joel: "then the Lord will" etc. See further my explanation at F.

²⁰³ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 59.

verses. Therefore, Prinsloo states, this (2:12-15) is a separate sub section within the unit consisting of verses 2:12-17, but not a defined distinct part.²⁰⁴ The end of the section is clear according to Prinsloo, because in the eighteenth verse there is a change of subject.²⁰⁵ The argument of Prinsloo, concerned with separating verses 2:15-17 from the rest of the unit (2:12-17) is comparable to the arguments of several scholars. Wolff for example understands verses 2:15-17 as a summons to national lament, reflecting the prophetic admonition found in 2:12-14.²⁰⁶ Müllers argument is similar to that of Wolff and Prinsloo, although he separates the summons to national lament in two parts: (a) the imperatives in 2:15 and 2:16 to all people and (b) a cited lament in verse 2:17.²⁰⁷ However, there are some scholars who do not separate 2:15-17 from the other verses. They understand the message of verse 2:12-17 as one liturgy or call for (national) repentance.²⁰⁸

In contrast to this consensus among many scholars, there are some scholars who plead for different divisions in the second chapter. There is for example the argument by Barton, who separates verse 2:17b from the rest of the section 2:12-17. He denotes this part as ‘the lament’ as a reaction to the call to lament in the previous verses. The lament found in 2:17b is not the full lament according to Barton, but in his opinion, the textual form shows that this lament was part of a standard lament, as can be found in the psalms.²⁰⁹ Other authors argue that the eighteenth verse of chapter two is connected to 2:17 and therefore they should not be separated.²¹⁰ Van Leeuwen suggests a different demarcation: following the example of Jewish scholars who applied a *petucha* after 2:14,²¹¹ Van Leeuwen argues for a separate unit starting at verse 2:15, continuing until

²⁰⁴ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 50-60.

²⁰⁵ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 48.

²⁰⁶ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 59-60. Cf. Allen, *the Books*, 83.

²⁰⁷ Müller, *Prophetie und Apokalyptik bei Joel*, 238.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Deden, *De kleine profeten* (BOT; Roermond: Romen, 1953), 98; Thompson, *The Book of Joel* (IB 6; New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 747. Important to note here, is the notion of traditional liturgy. According to Childs, from verse fifteen till seventeen we find the “idiom and form of traditional liturgy” (*Introduction to the Old Testament as liturgy*, 391), which stands in line with Deden, who sees a liturgy from verse 2:12-17. Robinson sees only verse 12-14 as a liturgy of repentance (Theodore H. Robinson, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964).

²⁰⁹ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 83. Allen argues as well that in 17b there are specific elements to be found which are common for a collective lament (*The Books*, 83).

²¹⁰ Cf. Robinson, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, 63. Müller argues that the summons to lament is still in order in verse 18a (*Prophetie*, 238). Budde sees an “Umschwung” after verse 18 (“Der Umschwung in Joël, *OLZ* 22 (1919): 104-110). Bič sees verse 2:18 as part of the preceding prayer, and starts a new pericope at verse 2:19 (*Das Buch Joel*, 65-66).

²¹¹ Cf. Willem van der Meer, *Oude woorden worden nieuw*, 167. This *petucha* has led Jacob ben Chayyim to start the second chapter of Joel at 2:15 in his Bombergiana (Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 109).

verse 2:27.²¹² This would imply that the ‘turn to blessing’ starts with the gathering of the people as described in 2:15.²¹³ Crenshaw, although arguing for a division at verse 2:18, sees some support for dividing the chapter at verse 2:15. According to him, the *setuma* after verse 2:14 divides the chapter in two reasonable equal parts, of which both parts start with the imperative *tiq'û*.²¹⁴ Garrett, sees a shift in the book of Joel starting from verse 2:12, and continuing until verse 2:19. This section he denotes as: ‘Transition, Repentance’ with 2:18-19 being an introduction to Yahweh’s oracular response.²¹⁵

In sum one could say the scholars are indecisive on the correct division of this chapter. Although several do agree upon either 2:15 or 2:18 of a new section, various alternative starting points have been suggested.

G. The Lord’s answer. 2:18-20e

- ¹⁸ Then the LORD became jealous for his land,
and had pity on his people.
- ¹⁹ In response to his people the LORD said:
I am sending you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a mockery among the nations.
- ²⁰ I will remove the northern army far from you,
and drive it into a parched and desolate land,
its front into the eastern sea,
and its rear into the western sea;
its stench and foul smell will rise up.

Following the prayer in verse 2:17, the prophet informs his audience that the Lord will answer his people and will take care of them again. In verses 2:18-20e the pity the Lord got for his people and what he said in response to their prayer is presented. Starting with verse 2:19b one can read the Lord’s answer to the prayer of the priests (found in 2:17). Verses 2:18 until 2:19a form part of this answer, although it is not the answer yet. I set this part (2:18-20e) apart from the rest, since its content is clearly different from the previous part. Instead of lament and disaster, here we read a promise of restoration and

²¹² Cf. Bewer, who starts his new section at 2:15 as well. Bewer, *Commentary on Joel*, 107ff.

²¹³ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 109.

²¹⁴ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 161.

²¹⁵ Garrett, “The Structure of Joel,” 295. According to Garrett, this transition is part of a chiasm: A: (chap 1): Punishment, the locust plague; B (2:1-11): Punishment, apocalyptic army; C (2:12-19): transition; B’ (2:20): Forgiveness, apocalyptic army destroyed; A’ (2:21-27): locust ravaged land restored. This chiasm should be seen without the verses 18-19.

salvation. Therefore included in this part is the prophets introduction to the answer of the Lord (comparable to what we read in 2:12: ‘says the Lord’). The position of the eighteenth verse is much debated among scholars, but focussing on the content of this part, it clearly belongs to the promise of restoration as given by the Lord. The indirect speech of the Lord starts in verse 2:19b and continues in verse 2:20, in which he tells his people that he will free them from their enemy from the north. Starting with verse 2:20f the narrator shifts again from the indirect speech of the Lord to the prophet, who praises the Lord in the form of a hymn. Therefore, in contrast to the arguments of various scholars, I divide verse 2:20 in two parts. Placing the last sentence of the verse with the next section.

As stated above, there has been much discussion on the function and position of the eighteenth verse of this chapter. The classic theory, first proposed by Duhm in 1911,²¹⁶ suggests the centrality of the eighteenth verse: this is the verse which brings promise and restoration and forms the turning point in the whole book of Joel. Many scholars have followed this theory by Duhm, for example Ahlström who separates the book into two parts: 1:1-2:17 and 2:18-4:21²¹⁷ and Wolff who argues that 2:18 brings an ‘Umschwung’ to the book of Joel.²¹⁸ Prinsloo does not follow this ‘traditional’ consensus. He argues that the hope for restoration is already uttered in verse 2:14, where there is a reference to the mercy of the Lord. Prinsloo therefore feels that in verse 2:18ff we find an expansion of the fourteenth verse. He states: “2.18 is in fact the fulfilment of the hope raised in the preceding pericope.”²¹⁹ He does argue for the start of a new pericope with verse 2:18 based upon a change in subject, but does not follow the theory of a fierce breach between the seventeenth and eighteenth verse.²²⁰ This opinion is shared by Rudolph, he defends the connection between verses 2:18 and 2:19 based upon subject and word repetition, but suggests that in these verses the ‘maybe’ found in verse 2:14 is positively answered.²²¹

Other scholars have suggested another separation, combining verse 2:18 with the previous verses and starting a new pericope with 2:19. According to Childs there is evidence for a different author writing or editing the second part of the book of Joel,

²¹⁶ B. Duhm, *ZAW* 31 (1911), 187.

²¹⁷ Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult*, 132.

²¹⁸ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 67.

²¹⁹ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 64.

²²⁰ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 63.

²²¹ Rudolph, *Joel*, 62-63. Crenshaw (161) argues as well that there is not a clear breach between verse seventeen and eighteen, since the lament leads up to a divine answer.

starting with 2:18. Childs describes this as a “remarkable shift into narrative style, in which the hand of an editor is visible.”²²² Childs argues nevertheless that starting with verse 2:19 there is a new prophetic word of *divine forgiveness and promise*.²²³ A second example is Merx, who regards verse 2:18ff as a continuation of the priestly prayer in verse 2:17, reading *waw* copulative instead of *waw* consecutive verbs. According to him, the second part of the book of Joel consists of one long priestly prayer, starting with 2:17. In contrast to his own argument however, Merx does suggest a breach within the book beginning with verse 2:19.²²⁴ His theory has been opposed by various scholars, for example by Crenshaw who argues that Merx ignores the Masoretic vocalisation.²²⁵ However, other scholars, like Barton, have the same problem with regarding verse eighteen as something happening in reality. He suggests that this verse still might be part of the prophetic vision.²²⁶ Bič also suggests that verse 2:18 forms part of the priestly prayer which begins at 2:17.²²⁷

Another discussion has surrounded the twentieth verse of the second chapter. In 1882 Smith raised the question whether or not this verse sprang from the hand of Joel or whether it had been added by a later author or editor.²²⁸ There have been scholars who have followed Smith’s theory, suggesting that verse 2:20 has been a later edition.²²⁹ In contrast, Budde argues that omitting 2:20 would result in eliminating one of the most important aspects in the book of Joel: the destruction of the locust plague.²³⁰

Scholars regard verses 2:18-20 often as part of a bigger pericope, regularly ending it with verse 2:27.²³¹ Scholars do see various sub sections or strophes within this pericope, most often: 18-20, 21-24, 25-27. The first strophe (2:18-20) is mostly understood as the divine speech or answer by the Lord.²³² Van Leeuwen states that in

²²² Childs, *Introduction*, 391.

²²³ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

²²⁴ A. Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel*, 16 and 90ff.

²²⁵ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 161.

²²⁶ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 87. He does note an abrupt transition from verse seventeen to verse eighteen and argues for a turning point starting with verse eighteen, introducing a promise of divine answer.

²²⁷ Bič, *Das Buch Joel*, 65-66.

²²⁸ William Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black 1882).

²²⁹ Robinson and Mowinkel (as argued by Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 127). Also scholars standing in line with Duhms argument for a different (apocalyptic) author starting with verse eighteen, implicitly agree with this argument by Smith.

²³⁰ Budde, “Der Umschwung in Joel,” 104-110.

²³¹ One scholar who does not agree with this is Wolff, who argues for a continuation of the pericope until 3:5 (Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 67).

²³² Cf Prinsloo, Van Leeuwen, Crenshaw. Also Keller, who argues that verses 18-27 form an antiphonistic chant between YHWH and the prophet: introduction (prophet), answer (God), hymn (prophet), promise of salvation (God). Keller, *Joël*, 133-134).

verse 2:18 we read in narrative style the answer by the Lord to the peoples prayer, a style which is continued to 2:19a, until *waya'an yhwh* (and YHWH answered). According to Van Leeuwen this is a formula which demonstrates that the following words sprang from the Lord.²³³ Comparable to his argument are the arguments by Prinsloo and Rudolph, who see a divine speech and oracle starting with verse 2:19.²³⁴ According to Rudolph in liturgical tradition this divine oracle is supposed to follow a prayer for salvation.²³⁵ Additionally he states that in these verses we read the same words that were uttered in the prayer, and therefore this really answers the prayer of the people and priests.²³⁶ Wolff describes the whole pericope²³⁷ as an 'Erhörungsanspruch,' in which there is an interplay between narrator and addressees. This first part he describes as a 'first answer to prayer'.²³⁸

When all opinions are combined, we see that there is a common agreement among scholars, that verses 2:18-20 are connected with the divine answer to the prayer heard in 2:17. However, there are discussions upon the question whether 2:18 should belong to this part of the structure. Notable is the fact that no scholar doubts the position of verse 2:20f, which I would position with the following section.

H. A praise song for the Lord 2:20f-24

- 21 Surely he has done great things!
Do not fear, O soil;
be glad and rejoice,
for the Lord has done great things!
- 22 Do not fear, you animals of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;
the tree bears its fruit,
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.
- 23 O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the Lord your God;
for he has given the early rain for your vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.
- 24 The threshing-floors shall be full of grain,
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

²³³ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 123-125.

²³⁴ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 67-71; Rudolph, *Joel*, 63.

²³⁵ Rudolph, *Joel*, 63. He refers for more information to Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen. Die Gattungen der Religiösen Lyrik Israels*. (HKAT II; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 137.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ In Wolffs opinion lasting until 3:5.

²³⁸ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 68.

In my opinion the next part starts with verse 2:20f, where we see that there is a shift from a speech by the Lord, to a song of praise that has the Lord as its subject. In this section one can read the words of the prophet who summons the land and the animals to ‘be not afraid’, and the people to praise the Lord, because the Lord has restored the land. In these verses the disasters described in chapter one and the first half of the second chapter seem to be reversed, instead of a threat of disaster now there is a description of wealth and restoration. Starting with verse 2:25 one can find the direct words by the Lord again. Therefore in my opinion this section ends with verse 2:24.

There has been some discussion on the position of this part of the book of Joel, comparable to the debate concerning the function of verse 2:20. There are various authors who argue that verses 2:21-23(/24a) are inserted by a later author or editor. These authors argue that either verse 2:24 or 2:24b should follow directly upon verse 2:20.²³⁹ Other scholars have argued for the (partly) omission of verse 2:23.²⁴⁰ Additionally, the function of verse 2:24 has been disputed. Rudolph for example, argues that starting with this verse, and continuing until verse 2:27 there is a new promise of salvation.²⁴¹ The argument of Bewer is comparable to Rudolph’s reasoning, according to Bewer 2:24 forms the start of a new sub section, concerned with a new promise of restoration.²⁴² Sellin has argued that verses 2:25-27 should be placed before verses 2:21-24, since they are the continuation of the ‘Gottesrede’, therefore ending the pericope with verse 2:24.²⁴³

The content of this section has not been disputed much. Most scholars describe the unit as ‘praise song’, ‘psalm of grace’ or ‘hymn of salvation’. Wolff denotes these verses as a part of the ‘Erhörungsanspruch,’ focusing on the theme ‘do not fear’. This theme, in his opinion, is commonly explicated with elements of hymns and a call to praise.²⁴⁴ Both Wolff and Rudolph refer to the tradition of the priestly oracle of salvation, described by Begrich in 1934.²⁴⁵ Especially the double summon ‘fear not’ is denoted as highly characteristic to these oracles.²⁴⁶ Other scholars also refer to the phrase ‘do not fear’ as either part of the theophany or common in the world of

²³⁹ Bewer refers to verses 21-24a as a poetical insertion (*The book of Joel*, 113). Similar is the argument of Budde who argues that verses 21-23 do not form part of the original text.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*.

²⁴¹ Rudolph, 67. He does argue for the connectedness between verse 21-24, but sees 24 as part of the following verses as well.

²⁴² Bewer, *Commentary on Joel*.

²⁴³ Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*.

²⁴⁴ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 68.

²⁴⁵ Joachim Begrich, “Das Priesterliche Heilsorakel” *ZAW* 53 (1934): 81-92, esp. 88.

²⁴⁶ Rudolph, *Joel*, 65.

‘Königsansprache’.²⁴⁷ Prinsloo argues that the whole section has a clear theocentric emphasis. In his opinion this unit highlights the deeds of the Lord: those are the reason to rejoice. Prinsloo also points to the fact that the whole cosmos is summoned to rejoice: land, animals, and people, with an emphasis on the children of Zion in the 23rd verse.²⁴⁸ The summons to rejoicing found in this sub section have been seen as the counterpart of the summons to lament in the first chapter.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, there has been much discussion on the meaning of the word *môrah* in verse 2:23: the question is whether it refers to rain or might it refer to a teacher, and can it be that by this teacher the same teacher is meant as the teacher of righteousness described in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls?²⁵⁰

I. Promise of restoration and shelter 2:25-3:5

- ²⁵ I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent against you.
- ²⁶ You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.
- ²⁷ You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.
- ²⁸ Then afterwards
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
- ²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.
- ³⁰ I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth,
blood and fire and columns of smoke.
- ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness,
and the moon to blood,
before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.

²⁴⁷ Weiser, *zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, 118; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 89.

²⁴⁸ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 77-78. According to his theory, the emphasis of this verse is on summoning the children of Zion to rejoice (70).

²⁴⁹ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 134; Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 77.

²⁵⁰ It takes too far to insert the discussion on this subject, for a detailed description, see L.H. van der Meiden, “De Vertaling van het woord môreh in Joël 2:23,” *GTT* 51 (1951): 136-139.

³² Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved;
for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape,
as the LORD has said,
and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

With verse 25 a new section starts, which can be described as (indirect) divine speech. Comparable to verse 2:18-20, this section is concerned with a promise of salvation, and a restoration of the harm that has been done by the locusts and army. Additionally, in this section one can read the expectation of the Lord that the people will praise His name, since his deed of salvation must have showed them that ‘I the Lord, am your God, and there is no other.’ (2:27). Although many scholars state that this verse should form the end of the section concerned with a promise of salvation (most scholars starting this section with verse 2:18), I would argue that these three verses are connected to the following five, in which the Lord explains what will happen to his people when they are restored, and where there is again a promise of restoration (3:5). Reasons to argue in favor of this connection between the verses, are the continued divine speech, as well as the continuation of the subject (Israel)²⁵¹, and a continuation of theme: the future of the people of Israel. One problem with dividing the chapter accordingly, is the reference to the Lord in the third person in verse 3:5. This verse seems to be a (partial) interruption of the divine speech, in which the prophet reassures the people that all what is said, is ‘as the Lord has promised’. I would argue that this insertion is comparable to the insertions in 2:12a: “says the Lord” and 2:19a’: ‘this is the Lord’s answer’. As Wolff argues, this last part is not a ‘Gottesrede’ anymore, therefore the prophet uses a ‘Jahweswort’ to indicate that this still forms part of the same promise.²⁵² Prinsloo argues that verse five does belong to the same unit, since it refers to verse 2:27.²⁵³ Because there is a clear change of subject at the first verse of chapter four, and since there are reasons to connect the fifth verse to the previous verses, I kept these verses together, in contrast to what several scholars might argue.

Starting with verse 2:25 and lasting until 2:27, many scholars agree, one finds a divine speech, promising salvation to (most probably) the people of the land. As

²⁵¹ There has been some dispute on whether Israel is the sole subject of this ‘all’ or if all people are subject here. For example Barton, believes that this ‘all’ refers to all people, and therefore argues that this ‘universalistic’ part cannot be written by Joel, but is a later addition by another author (Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 96). This in contrast to Van Leeuwen who believes that the pouring out of Gods spirit is meant solely for the people of Israel (*Joël*, 149).

²⁵² Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 81.

²⁵³ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 83. Although he see this reference as a reason to keep verse five connected to the previous verses, he does argue for a separation between 2:27 and 3:1. This seems a bit contradictory in my opinion.

presented in the previous section, some scholars argue that 2:25-27 should be directly connected to the divine speech in verses 2:19-20, as a continuation of divine speech.²⁵⁴ Other scholars argue that verses 2:25-27 comprise a new answer, affirming that the promise described in 2:21-24 is true and will be fulfilled.²⁵⁵ Unlike other scholars, Barton has suggested that verse 2:25 is a later addition to the original text of the book of Joel. According to him there cannot have been *several* years of a plague, as described in 2:25. This led to his theory that this might be a later insertion, directly referring to verse 1:4. Secondly, Barton argues that verses 2:26-27 answer verse 2:24, an additional argument in his opinion which demonstrates that 2:25 is no original part of the book of Joel.²⁵⁶ Van Leeuwen, in contrast, states that verses 2:25-26 are the counterpart of verses 2:19-20, placing them in a concentric structure with verse 2:23 as centre.²⁵⁷ According to Prinsloo, a description of the actions of the Lord can be found in verses 2:25a/b, followed by a description of the consequences of these actions in 2:26-27. In his opinion, verses 2:18-27 are the counterpart of 2:1-14 and therefore the pericope should end with 2:27. Following Wolff, Prinsloo states that in 2:25-27 we find an ‘Erkenntnisformel’ of the Lord.²⁵⁸ This formula, “That I the Lord, am Your God”,²⁵⁹ has caused various scholars to suggest that verse 2:27 should be seen as the last verse of a pericope. According to them, this forms a perfect climax to the events (disasters and salvation) described in the first two chapters.²⁶⁰

Analyzing the arguments of scholars who argue for a separate pericope that starts with verse 3:1, there seem to be two main arguments. One is an argument based upon content combined with addressee, the second argument is based upon the formula with which verse 3.1 starts. As presented in the first indention explaining this section, there has been discussion on the so called addressee of this third chapter: Israel, or all the people.²⁶¹ This change in addressee has formed an (added) reason for scholars to argue for a separation between these verses and the previous ones. The argument of

²⁵⁴ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 71, argues that this part is a direct continuation of verse nineteen and twenty.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Rudolph, *Joel*, 68.

²⁵⁶ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 90.

²⁵⁷ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 122. According to him, this means that there is a central position for ‘the teacher’ in this section (See discussion on the meaning of *môreh* in the previous section).

²⁵⁸ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 72-78.

²⁵⁹ A formula, which can be found in other places as well, e.g. Exodus 20:2; Isaiah 45:5, 48:17; 1 Kings 20:13; Ezekiel 39:28. Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *Erkenntnis Gottes zum Buch Ezeiel: Eine Theologische Studie* (AThANT 27. Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1954), 30-32. Wolff has argued that the addition ‘and no other’ shows as well that Joel based his words upon Deutero Isaiah tradition, since this sentence formed part of the Deutero Isaiah *Erhörungswort*. (Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 71-81).

²⁶⁰ Cf. Barton who argues that this (covenantal) verses are a fitting end to Joel’s prophecy, and suggest a probable reference to monotheism in this sentence (*Joel and Obadiah*, 90).

²⁶¹ See note 251.

content has been advanced by various scholars, Rudolph for example states that the verses 3:1-5 came to be part of the book of Joel, since still an explanation was needed for what happened to this day of the Lord.²⁶² In his opinion the third chapter is concerned with the portents of the day, whilst in the fourth chapter there is a description of the actual day. Because the third chapter gives an explanation of the day of the Lord, its theme is different to the previous verses (concerned with a promise of restoration).

Garrett argues strongly to separate the book of Joel at 3:1, he states that the cycle on the locust plague has ended with 2:27, and that with 3:1 a new subject is introduced: the judgment of the nations.²⁶³ Van Leeuwen theorizes that in verse 3:1-5 finally an answer is given to the people's questions about the day of the Lord, demonstrating that he too argues for the beginning of a new subject with chapter three. In contrast, he does state that these verses can be titled: Promises of salvation on the future of Israel. In his opinion this theme might be introduced by the last sentence of 2:27. Similarly Van Leeuwen argues that 3:1-5 might be seen as a continuation of the answer to the priestly prayer of 2:17. Nevertheless, the new subject, in combination with the division of the Hebrew text, who places a *setuma* in between 2:27 and 3:1 has led him to divide the pericope at this point.²⁶⁴ Other scholars have argued to start a new pericope with 3:1 based upon the fact that this verse starts with a standard introductory formula: *wěhājāh āhārê-ken*. According to Barton this is a frequently used phrase, introducing 'afterthoughts'. He argues that these verses are a later edition to the prophecy of Joel, which supports his theory that these verses are an afterthought.²⁶⁵ Prinsloo argues for the beginning of a new pericope at verse 3:1 based upon this introductory formula as well. Combined with the change of subject, he reasons that this clearly forms the start of a new pericope.²⁶⁶

There are some scholars however, who do see a continuing line from verse 2:27 to 3:1. For example Crenshaw, although arguing for a new section at 3:1, who presents to his reader the case of Ezekiel 38:28-29 in which the acknowledgment of a 'God who is God' is followed by a pouring out of the spirits upon the people. Crenshaw adds to this that this suggests that the end of 2:27 does not offer closure, but is a reference to the future.²⁶⁷ Van Leeuwen states as well that 3:1 forms the continuation of the answer of

²⁶² He argues that the people of Israel avoided being harmed by this day, but this day still had to come.

²⁶³ Garrett, "Structure of Joel," 296.

²⁶⁴ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 148-149.

²⁶⁵ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 94.

²⁶⁶ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 80.

²⁶⁷ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 160.

the Lord, which started in 2:19, and therefore sees this in some sense as one section.²⁶⁸ Prinsloo, who did argue for a separate unit starting with 3:1, does acknowledge that this formula is different to other formulas, in that it also reflects upon what happened before. Therefore this and the previous section are connected in his opinion.²⁶⁹ Finally, Wolff argues for the connectedness between verses 2:27 and 3:1ff. His argument is based upon the same introductory formula and, as Prinsloo states, the reference to the previous verses are proof of the link between the verses, which implies that they should form part of the same pericope. Additionally, Wolff argues for the unity of this pericope based upon the ‘Erhörungsanspruch,’ a form which according to him can be found until 3:5. In his opinion, the closure of the unit is made clear by the phrase ‘as the Lord has promised’.²⁷⁰

J. Warning to foreign nations 4:1-8

¹For then, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ²I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations. They have divided my land, ³and cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine, and drunk it down.

⁴ 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, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily. ⁵For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. ⁶You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. ⁷But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you have sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. ⁸I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for the LORD has spoken.

The first verse of the fourth chapter introduces a new section of my structure. Although this section starts with the phrase ‘for then, in those days and at that time’, which could be seen as a reference to the same period as described in the previous section, and although these are still the words of the Lord, this chapter starts with a new subject which leads me to arguing for the start of a separate unit. Instead of dealing with the future and restoration of Israel, in this part, the Lord is concerned with other nations and their judgment. Starting with a general explanation on the reason why the Lord wants to judge the nations and where he intends to take them, verses 4:4-8 concern a

²⁶⁸ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 148.

²⁶⁹ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 80.

²⁷⁰ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 71.

specification of this general explanation. Three nations which have done harm to the people of Israel, are warned by the Lord: ‘whatever you have done to my people, I will do the same to you.’ The end of this section is indicated by the words ‘for the Lord has spoken’, after which we find a new section: a divine summons to gather the people.

Scholars generally agree upon the start of a new pericope with the first verse of the fourth chapter. The extension of this pericope has been subject to more discussion, however the consensus is that the first three verses are undoubtedly connected to each other. One of the most disputed parts of the book of Joel are verses 4:4-8. Many scholars have questioned whether these verses are a later insertion to the book of Joel. The main reason to suggest this, is the change in literal form: instead of poetry this part is most often regarded as prose.²⁷¹ Another reason to treat this part as a later insertion, is the interruption of the divine speech to all nations, which can be found in verses 4:1-3 as well as 4:9ff. Scholars base their argument upon the change in subject (from all nations to a specification). Crenshaw for example argues that 4:4-8 is a later addition, and bases his argument upon a difference between universality in the first verses and a specification in verses 4:4-8. He states that the differences between verses 4:1-3, 4:9ff and 4:4-8 clearly demonstrate that verses 4:4-8 were not a part of the original text of the book of Joel.²⁷²

In contrast, other scholars do argue for a cohesion between the first verses and the fourth till eight verses. For example Prinsloo, who follows the poetic translation suggested by the BHS. According to Prinsloo the pericope starts, with a standard (conventional) formula: *ki hinne bājjamîm haheṣmah*²⁷³ and ends with verse 4:17.²⁷⁴ Prinsloo argues for the connectedness between the first eight verses based upon the continuation of the direct speech, as well as a continuation of the third person plural suffix which refers to the subject. Another reason for keeping the verses together, in his opinion, is the development of the word *makeru*, which can be found in 4:3b and is transformed into a ‘Leitwort’ in 4:6a, 7a, 8a and 8b. According to Prinsloo, verses 4:4-8 form the start of a lawsuit against the nations, that has opened with verses 4:1-3. He argues that in 4:4-8 we find a clearer definition of the general term *gôjim* found in

²⁷¹ Although most scholars argue for a prose form of this part, Thompson has made a case to regard these verses as prose as well (*The Book of Joel*, 755). In the BHS these verses are depicted as poetry as well.

²⁷² Crenshaw, *Joel*, 172-173, 184. Other scholars who argue for a later insertion of 4:4-8 are Van Leeuwen (*Joël*, 181-182), Wolff (*Joel und Amos*, 89), and Rudolph (*Joel*, 75).

²⁷³ Cf. also: Jeremiah 50:4, 20; 33:15.

²⁷⁴ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 92.

verses 4:1-3.²⁷⁵ Garrett argues that verses 4:4-8 do not differ so severely from the rest of the book of Joel as scholars often think. According to him, these verses fit within the normal theological liturgy of Joel.²⁷⁶ Van Leeuwen offers further proof for the connection between the first eight verses. He refers to the Masoretic translation in which a *setuma* is placed after the eighth verse.²⁷⁷

K. Summons to gather the people 4:9-13

- ⁹ Proclaim this among the nations:
Prepare war,
 stir up the warriors.
Let all the soldiers draw near,
 let them come up.
- ¹⁰ Beat your ploughshares into swords,
 and your pruning-hooks into spears;
let the weakling say, 'I am a warrior.'
- ¹¹ Come quickly,
 all you nations all around,
 gather yourselves there.
Bring down your warriors, O LORD.
- ¹² Let the nations rouse themselves,
 and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat;
for there I will sit to judge
 all the neighboring nations.
- ¹³ Put in the sickle,
 for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
 for the wine press is full.
The vats overflow,
 for their wickedness is great.

A new pericope starts with verse nine of the fourth chapter. As argued in the previous section, verse 4:8 concludes with the words: 'For the Lord has spoken,' which suggests the end of a certain section, comparable to verse 3:5 which ends with the phrase 'as the Lord has promised.' Additional reasons to argue for the start of a new section at this point, is the change in addressee, as well as the shift in style: this section consists of a summon to either the prophet or, as suggested by various scholars, to the heavenly watchmen. In this unit, someone is summoned to tell the nations to prepare for battle, to make them come to the valley of Jehoshaphat where they will be judged. Within this

²⁷⁵ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 94-95.

²⁷⁶ Garrett, "Structure of Joel," 295-297.

²⁷⁷ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 170.

section a sentence occurs which has initiated some discussion among scholars: verse 4:11b, which the NRSV translated as ‘Bring down your warriors oh Lord’. Although this sentence might cause reason to suggest an extra division based upon narrator, I would argue that the verses surrounding this sentence do belong together. Sentence 4:11b will be treated as a short prayer, either spoken by the prophet in the original prophecy, or possibly inserted by a later copyist.²⁷⁸ Since verse 4:14 introduces a new narrator, and therefore forms an end to the divine speech as found in the previous verses, I would argue to end this section with verse 4:13.

As presented in the previous section, several scholars argue that verses 4:9ff form part of the divine speech that started in verse 4:1 and ended with 4:3. Therefore there seems to be a consensus on describing verse 4:9 as separate to verse 4:8, supporting my argument for the start of a new section with verse 4:9. The end of this section has been subject to more discussion. Scholars end their unit with either verse 4:12, 13, 14, 15, 16 or 17. For example, Barton argues that this section probably ends with verse 4:12, since this verse encompasses the judgment of the people of other nations, and secondly because verse 4:13 can be regarded as a separate fragment. Nonetheless, according to Barton this section could also end with verse 4:15, understanding the term ‘valley of decision’ as another term describing the valley of Jehoshaphat.²⁷⁹ Other scholars argue for the end of the complete section with 4:17, but divide this section in two separate announcements of judgment. The first starting with verse 4:9 and ending either with verse 4:13 (Van Leeuwen) or 4:14 (Bergler) and the second starting with either verse 4:14 or 4:15, ending with verse 4:17.²⁸⁰ Other scholars argue for the end of the section with verse 4:16, as for example Crenshaw, who argues that in verses 4:14-16 some anxious thoughts on the day of the Lord can be found, combined with reassurance to the people of Israel.²⁸¹ However, in line with my argument, there are some scholars who argue for the end of this section with verse 4:13, based upon reasons of content and narrator. Bach, for instance, has denoted verses 4:9-13 as ‘Aufforderung zum Kampf.’²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Further on I will discuss this sentence more extensively.

²⁷⁹ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 103.

²⁸⁰ Siegfried Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testament Und der antiken Judentums 16; Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 101. Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 192-196.

²⁸¹ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 187.

²⁸² Robert Bach, *Aufforderungen zur Flucht und zum Kampf im alttestamentlichen Prophetenspruch* (WMANT 9, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962), 102.

As already mentioned above, verse 4:11b has initiated the most discussion among scholars when deciding upon function and translation of this verse and section. Questions concerning the correct translation have been particularly introduced by the Vulgate and the LXX. The Hebrew translation upon which the Vulgate has been based, the word *hanḥat* is substituted by *wěyāniaḥ*. This results in an alternative translation: ‘The Lord will make your mighty ones lie down’. The LXX offers yet another translation, understanding 4:11b as similar to 4:10b: ‘and let the weakling say: “I am a warrior”’. Translating 4:11b in this manner, results in the continuation of the divine speech, uninterrupted by the words of a second narrator. Various scholars have argued for this last alternative, for example Allen, Bewer and Sellin. Other scholars focused their attention to the function of the sentence, rather than the correct translation. Crenshaw has argued for example that 4:11b is a later insertion by a copyist who intended to reactivate the ancient promise. He compares this sentence in Joel with a prayer in Sirach 36:6, in which there is a comparable call to the people, followed by a general prayer.²⁸³ A second example is the theory of Prinsloo, who describes 4:11b as a *parenthetic prayer*; a short moment in which the prophet prays to the Lord.²⁸⁴ The argument by Van Leeuwen is similar to this, he states that the prophet is overcome by his emotions concerning the other people and therefore suddenly calls to the Lord.²⁸⁵

L. Day of the Lord 4:14-16

- ¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes,
in the valley of decision!
For the day of the LORD is near
in the valley of decision.
- ¹⁵ The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.
- ¹⁶ The LORD roars from Zion,
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,
and the heavens and the earth shake.
But the LORD is a refuge for his people,
a stronghold for the people of Israel.

The fourteenth verse opens with a shift of narrator, changing from the Lord to the prophet. The prophet describes in this and the following verses the day of the Lord, its portents and function. Additionally he offers a description of the Lord: ‘he roars from

²⁸³ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 189.

²⁸⁴ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 98.

²⁸⁵ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 196.

Sion', a description that can be similarly found in Jeremiah 25:30, and Amos 1:2.²⁸⁶ In the last verse (4:16b), the rather threatening words spoken by the prophet in 4:14-16a are softened for the people of Israel: they do not have to be afraid, to them the Lord will be a refuge and he will protect them. The day of the Lord forms no threat to them (anymore). It appears that in this section the prophet ensures his people once more that the Lord will take care of them, turning the threats of the day upon the other nations, and making sure that the people of Israel will live for generations in Jerusalem. With verse 4:16 I see the final shift to restoration and blessing within the book of Joel. In the final verses we hear this promise once more in the words of the Lord, however, this is the final reassurance of the prophet. I end this section with the statement of reassurance in 4:16, after which verse 4:17 introduces a promise of blessing.

The shift from divine speech to a comment of the prophet in verse 4:14 has been noted by most scholars. There are some scholars, though, who argue that the words of the prophet solely appear in verse 4:14 and 4:16, denoting these verses and verse 4:11b as short insertions by the prophet, interrupting the divine speech found throughout the fourth chapter. This has been argued for example by Prinsloo, who states that a divine speech starts with verse 4:12, and ends with 4:17. According to him, the words of the prophet that can be found in 4:11b, 14b, 16a and 16b, are either a parenthetical prayer (4:11b) or "conventional forms that are perfectly admissible in an address by Yahweh".²⁸⁷ The change of content within these verses (4:12-17) has been noted by Prinsloo as well, who argues for treating verse 4:14 as a transitional verse, leading to the description of the day of the Lord. According to Prinsloo, the sub section 4:14-17 should be understood as a promise of salvation, and secondly as an occurrence of the 'day of the Lord tradition'.²⁸⁸

Crenshaw argues for a switch in narrator, starting with verse 4:14 and ending with 4:16. In his opinion this narrator might be either the prophet, or a messenger of the Lord, depending upon one's interpretation of addressee in the verses 4:9-11.²⁸⁹ Likewise, Van Leeuwen starts a new subsection with verse 4:14. According to him, this verse introduces a description of the day of the Lord, similar to descriptions found in the second and third chapter (2:10, 3:4).²⁹⁰ Van Leeuwen states that in verses 4:14-16 we find reflections of the prophet himself, using ancient traditions to present them to his

²⁸⁶ Cf. Hosea 10:11 as well: 'the Lord roars like a lion'.

²⁸⁷ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 101.

²⁸⁸ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 103.

²⁸⁹ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 195.

²⁹⁰ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 199.

audience. He connects 4:17 with these verses, in his opinion an elucidation by the Lord of the words by the prophet in verse 4:16.²⁹¹ Bergler argues that in verses 4:14-17 we find an explication of 3:3-5.²⁹² As described in the previous section, Barton argues for a connection between the verses 4:14-15 and verse 4:13. According to him, verse 4:16 introduces a new section, based upon an opposition between the Lord who ‘sits to judge’ in the preceding verses and a Lord who ‘roars’ in this verse. The fact that a similar description of a Lord who roars can similarly be found in the book of Amos, leads Barton to suggest that this description of the Lord formed a floating tradition, presumably a liturgical formula.²⁹³ Rudolph argues that in 4:14-16 we find the words of the prophet, who stands in ancient tradition.²⁹⁴

M. Promise of blessing 4:17-21

- ¹⁷ So you shall know that I, the LORD your God,
 dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be holy,
 and strangers shall never again pass through it.
- ¹⁸ On that day
 the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
 the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah
 shall flow with water;
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
 and water the Wadi Shittim.
- ¹⁹ Egypt shall become a desolation
 and Edom a desolate wilderness,
because of the violence done to the people of Judah,
 in whose land they have shed innocent blood.
- ²⁰ But Judah shall be inhabited forever,
 and Jerusalem to all generations.
- ²¹ I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty,
 for the LORD dwells in Zion.

The final section of the book of Joel starts in my opinion with the seventeenth verse of chapter four, in which once again the Lord speaks to his people, promising salvation and restoration. The first verse of this section opens with the same description of the Lord as

²⁹¹ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 202-203.

²⁹² Bergler, *Joel als Schriftinterpret*, 105.

²⁹³ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 106.

²⁹⁴ Rudolph, *Joel*, 84-85. In particular the reference to the shaking of heaven and earth, and the Lord roaring in Zion.

found in 4:16.²⁹⁵ In verse 4:17 the Lord himself promises that Jerusalem will be a holy and safe city once more. Starting with 4:18 there is a further description of the wonderful things that will happen to the people of Israel: they will have wine and milk, water for their fields, their enemies will be conquered and Jerusalem inhabited forever. The last verse (4:21) is once again a claim of the Lord that he reigns in Zion and will take revenge for his people. I would argue for the start of this new section with verse 4:17, since this is a divine speech. One might even argue for the connection between the end of the last divine speech (4:12) and this verse, in which the Lord shows what the result is of his divine judgment. Although verse 4:18 contains a formula which might introduce a new pericope, this verse is connected to 4:17 by the continuation of the divine speech as well as the continuation of the content: the promise of salvation to the people of Israel. The final verse ends with the sentence ‘for the Lord dwells in Zion’. This appears to be the conclusion of the book of Joel: whatever happens, the Lord will be there for the people, at Zion.

Many scholars feel that the first verse of this section, verse 4:17, is tightly connected to the previous verses, and are therefore reluctant to set it apart. For example Prinsloo argues that 4:17 is connected to the previous verses because it illustrates what the Lords actions should lead up to: the acknowledgment by his people.²⁹⁶ According to Prinsloo, 4:17 forms the climax of the whole pericope (4:9-17) and should therefore be seen as the completion of this section.²⁹⁷ Van Leeuwen argues that verse 4:17 should belong to the previous section, based upon the similarities between this sentence and the concluding sentence of the prophecy in 2:27. Both sections then end with the phrase ‘For I am the Lord.’²⁹⁸ Both scholars do acknowledge, however, some evidence for the connection between verse 4:17 and the following verses. Prinsloo sees a dramatic change within 4:17, since the Lord suddenly addresses his people directly,²⁹⁹ and Van Leeuwen argues: “The end of the previous pericope (4:17) is simultaneously the starting point of the new pericope.”³⁰⁰ According to Van Leeuwen there is a concentric scheme to be found in the verses 4:17-21, and therefore the connection between these verses is demonstrated.³⁰¹ Crenshaw argues that verse 4:17 should be part of the final section, but

²⁹⁵ “the Lord who lives in Zion.”

²⁹⁶ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 99.

²⁹⁷ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 112.

²⁹⁸ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 167.

²⁹⁹ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 112.

³⁰⁰ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 206.

³⁰¹ Ibid. Prinsloo argues for a symmetry found in the verse 18-21, with a central position for verse 19ab: 18bcd, 19ab, 20/21.

states that the function of this verse is disputable, since many scholars place the verse with the previous ones. According to him, the verse could be seen as a *transitional verse*. In which there is a demarcation of the end of the section concerned with the Lords judgment, but meanwhile an introduction of the section concerned with the promise of salvation of the people.³⁰²

Barton offers an alternative theory, he states that verse 4:17 should be separated from both verse 4:16 and 4:18. In his opinion verse 4:17 is written by an external author, and might have been part of a different promise of salvation. Reasons to regard this verse as an insertion, are the contrast between the uncertainty of the people with which the second part of the book of Joel is concerned, and the promise of long term stability of the future, promised in this verse.³⁰³ I would argue however, that the contrast between uncertainty and promise of a stable and fortunate future is not as ‘new’ in verse 4:17 as Barton argues. For example in verse 3:5, as well as in 4:16 there are promises of a hopeful future for the people of Israel.

Additionally, there has been some discussion on the authenticity of the final three verses. Although Wolff argues strongly for the unity of the book of Joel, he assumes that the last three verses are a later insertion, and were not part of the original text of the book of Joel. In his opinion these verses (as well as verses 4:4-8) differ from the other, although the basic form is similar to the rest of the book. His main reason to argue for a later insertion, is the formula with which these verses (4:21-24) start. According to Wolff this formula occurs only once within the book of Joel and therefore this section should be set apart.³⁰⁴ Other scholars have mainly discussed the authenticity of verse 4:21a, since it makes little sense to scholars as it stands. One solution to solve this problem, is to treat the first sentence as a question, the second as its response.³⁰⁵ Another solution is to follow the translation of the Vulgate, in which the problematic verb in this verse is translated with ‘to cleanse’.³⁰⁶ A third solution is to translate the verb as ‘poured out’ based upon similarities with the Akkadian verb *niqū*.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Crenshaw, *Joel*, 196.

³⁰³ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 107.

³⁰⁴ Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 90. In his opinion this section might be written by the same person who wrote 4:4-8, and written by a person who knew the metric and vocabulary of Joel. This leads Wolff to suggest that these parts might be written by Joel himself, but at a later time. NB I would argue that this undermines his previous reasons to set the section apart.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Allen, *The Books*, 117.

³⁰⁶ Prinsloo, *Theology of Joel*, 113.

³⁰⁷ Rudolph, “Ein Beitrag zum hebräischen Lexikon aus dem Joelbuch,” in SVT 16 (1967): 244-250.

In contrast to Wolff there are many scholars who do agree upon the fact that the final part of the book of Joel fits within the composition of the other verses. Van Leeuwen argues that these final words reverse various concepts described negatively in previous verses, within 4:17-21 they are turned into a blessing of the people.³⁰⁸ Crenshaw states that the final verses are concerned with the promising future of Israel, dependent upon the fate of the enemy.³⁰⁹ Garrett, in conclusion, argues that the book of Joel is a tightly bound unit, of which these final verses form part as well. In his opinion the whole book, no verses excepted leads up to this final conclusion of the book of Joel: the Lord opens to all the security of Zion.³¹⁰

In conclusion

Comparing my structure of the book of Joel with structures of various scholars, as well as arguments to divide the book according to this structure, it appears that my division is comparable to that of several scholars. Several arguments were offered by these scholars to substantiate my arguments for the structure outlined above. However, as expected – there were some differences between my structure and those of the analysed scholars. First, although scholars acknowledged the divine speech in 12-13a, according to them, it did not constitute an argument to set this verse apart. Second I proposed to divide verse 2:20 in 2:20a-d and 2:20e, which has not been mooted by any of the analyzed scholars. Third, in contrast to several scholars, I saw no proof for insertions by an editor in later times. I would argue that the book of Joel has been written (or orally transmitted) as a whole, by a prophet named Joel. Whether he was or was not a cult prophet cannot be deduced by the text and its structural division.

When turning to the question of central theme in the book of Joel based upon my structural analysis of the book of Joel, the central part of the book are verses 18-20e of the second chapter. These are the verses in which the Lord answers to the prayer of the priest, or the call for restoration by the people. These verses include a promise of restoration by the Lord, a promise that he will save his people and that their future will be full of hope, their enemies defeated. When arguing for the theory that the central message of a text can be found at its centre, one could state that the book of Joel is concerned with the continuous promise of the Lord to take care of his people. A central theme concerned with the promise of a hopeful future.

³⁰⁸ Van Leeuwen, *Joël*, 207.

³⁰⁹ Crenshaw, *Joel*, 203.

³¹⁰ Garrett, “*Structure of Joel*,” 296.

However, as demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, there are several other possibilities to structure the book of Joel, resulting in other verses at the centre of the structure. Therefore, a different method of finding the central theme will be applied to the book of Joel in the next paragraph, in order to discover whether this method results in similar conclusions.

4.1.2 Content analysis

Content analysis, or textual analysis as it has been described as well, is concerned with the analysis of written, visual and verbal human communication. It is focused mostly upon the analysis of texts and (biblical) books, but can be applied to paintings or songs (lyrics) as well. Applying the method of content analysis, scholars search for the author and authenticity of a form of communication, as well as the meaning of the analysed unit.³¹¹ The aim of content analysis is to make replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, in order to provide knowledge or new insights. The content of a text will be described and analysed, with a purpose to find (reoccurring) concepts and categories within the text, to find a pattern of words or sentences.³¹² One might summarize content analysis in the definition of Holsti as: “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages”.³¹³ Content analysis has been part of biblical exegesis, although it is often described as ‘semantic analysis’, a form of analysis in which words are researched, not only based upon etymology but as well in their textual context. Based upon semantic analysis various scholars refer to the theology or message of the book of Joel, by stating that, for example, the day of the Lord is a term that recurs several times. In their opinion this demonstrates the preoccupation of the prophet with this day, and shows therefore that Joel’s theology and message circled around this day of the Lord.³¹⁴

Within the book of Joel however, there are several words and expressions that occur at various instances across the four chapters.³¹⁵ There is for example the notion of fire, which occurs in the first three chapters,³¹⁶ and the notion of wine, which is apparent

³¹¹ Frank L. Cole, “Content Analysis: Process and Application,” *Clinical Nurse Specialist* 2:1 (1988): 53-57.

³¹² Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1980).

³¹³ Ole R. Holsti, *Content analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Boston, Addison-Wesley, 1969).

³¹⁴ Cf. Bourke, “Le Jour de Yahvé dans Joël,” 5-31.

³¹⁵ For a complete review (in Dutch), see attachment 1.

³¹⁶ Joel 1:19, 1:20, 2:3, 2:5, 3:3.

in the first, second and fourth chapter.³¹⁷ Mentions of the day of the Lord can be found across all four chapters.³¹⁸ The limit of this reappearing of sentences or words, is that there might be ideas displayed within the book that reoccur several times, but are described with various words or sentences, or are implicit in the way they are described. I would argue that one of the ideas underlying the book of Joel, is the promise of restoration. Not only within the second chapter do we find this promise,³¹⁹ the same promise occurs in the third (verse 3:5) and fourth chapter, and forms even the conclusion of the book of Joel.³²⁰ Therefore, I would suggest that this promise of salvation forms the theme of the book of Joel, a theme that is connected to the notion of the day of the Lord, but which is more important and more prominent since it forms the conclusion of the book. This hypothesis will be explored in paragraph 4.2.

Although I would argue for a notion of forgiveness in verse 2:13 of the book of Joel, based upon the results of the various methods, applied to denote the central theme and message of Joel, I would claim that forgiveness is not the central message of the book of Joel. The notion of forgiveness appears solely within verse 2:13 and can therefore not be seen as a recurrent theme within the book. Also it does not appear to be the centre of the text. As presented in the preceding paragraph, based upon structural analysis the central theme would be concerned with a promise of restoration, secondly, based upon content analysis the central theme might be the day of the Lord or, as I suggested, a promise of restoration. In the next paragraph I will explore the idea of ‘a promise of restoration’ in itself, as well as connected to the themes of vengeance and the coming day of the Lord.

4.2 The Promise of Restoration

The promise of restoration seems a reoccurring theme within the book of Joel, although the first chapter is concerned with describing the eminent threat of the day of the Lord, and the disaster that follows a plague of locusts. Starting with the second half of the second chapter (2:12), the book of Joel seems more focused upon a promise of salvation and restoration that follows upon this disaster, and – although stated implicitly – upon the turning around of the people of Israel.

³¹⁷ Joel 1:5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; 2:14, 19, 22, 24; 4:3, 13, 18.

³¹⁸ Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2:11, 3:4, 4:14.

³¹⁹ Within the second chapter this promise of restoration can be found several times: 2:18-20, 2:25-27.

³²⁰ 4:1, 4:16-18, 4:20-21.

The first aspect of this promise, can be found within 2:14, in which the prophet reasons with his people, that when they turn around to the Lord, he might turn and repent, and he might *leave a blessing behind*. Although this is not yet a promise of blessing, the prophet's faith is displayed: he believes that this promise remains a possibility, perhaps keeping in mind the blessings of the Lord in previous periods. The first actual promise of restoration and salvation occurs in verses 2:18-20e. In these verses the prophet presents the words of the Lord, who addresses his people. These verses portray a Lord whom will *take care of his people*, providing them with food and wine, and protecting them against their enemies. Ensuing a praise song to the Lord, heralding this promise of food, wine and protection, the Lord promises that he will *restore what the people had lost* to the swarm of locusts, the big army which the Lord had sent upon this people (2:25-27). The third chapter of the book of Joel is mainly concerned with the apocalyptic imagery, the prophetic visions of young and old, free and enslaved people. However, it concludes with a promise of the Lord, in the words of the prophet: *anyone who calls upon the Lord will be safe* at Zion, in Jerusalem. This statement is followed by words of the Lord, who states that after he *has restored the prosperity* of the people of Judah and Jerusalem, he will turn his judgment to the people of foreign nations (4:1). Preceded by the assembling and judgment of the nations and a description of the day of the Lord, the fourth chapter concludes with a final promise of salvation and restoration. Starting with verse 4:16, the prophet speaks of the Lord *a refuge for his people*. Then in verses 4:17, 18, 20 and 21, the Lord promises the people that *Jerusalem will be a holy city* where strangers will not enter, another promise of *prosperity* is given, and finally the promise that *Judah and Jerusalem will be inhabited forever*.

The promise of prosperity and generations to live in Judah and Jerusalem, is a promise that runs throughout the whole Hebrew Bible, occurring in many places, expressed during various times and contexts. One can find for example a promise of prosperity in the promise made to Abraham:

¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies,¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.' (Genesis 22:17-18)

A similar promise, although placed in a completely different context, appears in the story of Moses,³²¹ and is given as well to king David.³²² Similar to the promise found to the people, as written down in the book of Joel, these promises seem to be conditional. When the people do not obey the rules, repercussions are the consequence. This is made clear for example to Moses:

⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.' (NRSV, Exodus 19:5-6).

I would argue that, although made in a different time and appearing in another context the promise found in Joel is similar in construct to the promises described above. It can be read in verse 2:12-14, that the people have to turn to the Lord, internally and externally, which might lead to the Lord having mercy upon his people. Only the people who have turned to the Lord and called upon him will find shelter at Zion. The promise made to the people in the book of Joel might therefore not encompass the same meaning in essence and might be written in the wake of a largely different context, but the construct is similar to the promises made in various other times.

Within the books of the prophets, there are many examples to be found in which the promise of the Lord is called to the attention of the people of Israel. There are for example the words of Nehemiah who calls upon the Lord (9:32): 'O God, our God, how great you are! How terrifying, how powerful! You faithfully keep your covenant promises.' Within the book of Amos, the Lord refers to the house of David, and promises to restore it in full glory (9:11). In Isaiah 51 the Lord repeats the promise to Abraham, in order to reassure his people of their positive future. This occurs within the book of Micah as well, here the Lord refers to the good things he has done for his people: leading Moses out of Egypt (6:4). Similar to what can be found in other Old Testament books, this promise of prosperity, is dependent upon the people following the rules laid down by the Lord. When the people do not follow the rules of the Lord, bad things will happen to them. This is made very clear in the book of Jeremiah:

³You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant,⁴ which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, ⁵that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, 'So be it, Lord.' (NRSV, Jeremiah 11:3-5).

³²¹ Deuteronomy 30:9-10.

³²² 2 Samuel 7:12-14.

The examples given above are exactly what they are said to be: examples. Within the Dodekapropheton and the books of the major prophets, there are many more examples to be found, in which the Lord promises his people a hopeful future, as well as referring to the covenant and the conditions which the people of Israel had to fulfill. Within the book of Joel we find words and imagery which are similar to various prophets. The promise of restoration for example, can be found in similar words within the book of Amos (9:13-15), the turning to the Lord can be found in Hosea 3:5, as well as in Zechariah 1:3. These examples show, that Joel stood in an ancient tradition. A tradition to remind the people of Israel of the promise made of a positive future, as well as the bond they had with the Lord. The aspect of the turning of the people to the Lord, suggests that at the point of writing, the future of the people of Israel either seemed not really positive, or just turned positive again. The prophet might want to remind the people that they have to turn to the Lord, in order to create a better future, or the prophet has written his prophecy, in order to thank the Lord for the hopeful future, and reminds his people at the same time, that this future is there, because of their relationship with the Lord.

4.3 Vengeance, the Day of the Lord and the Promise of Restoration

There is one aspect, however, that changes at a certain point in this ancient tradition. That is the mentioning of the day of the Lord and the threat this imposes upon the people of Israel. With the (minor) prophets a new aspect becomes connected to the promise of restoration, throughout the books of the prophets mentions of the day of the Lord can be found, a day which either was or will be violent and will destroy the people, both of Israel and other nations, and which is caused by the people who won't listen to the Lord. The day of the Lord, as described by the various prophets, is dark, threatening, and will be the cause of the destruction of many people. As described in the third chapter of this thesis, the day of the Lord as a concept appears 47 times within the Old Testament, across Major and Minor prophets. The concept of the day of the Lord is, within some of the prophetic books, directly connected to a promise of restoration. For example within Zechariah, where we find the story of a day when the Lord will intervene and will judge Jerusalem. According to this prophecy, half of the people of Jerusalem will be sent into exile, but the other half will remain, and Jerusalem will be inhabited and will be a safe place forever (14:1-12). In other verses, one can find a connection between the turning of the people to the Lord which might avert the threat of

the day of the Lord. For example within Zephaniah, who summons his people to seek the Lord, to seek humility and righteousness in order to be spared upon the day of the Lord. Additionally, in the words of the prophet Zechariah we read an utterance by the Lord: “Return to me, and I will return to you” (1:3).

Interestingly, within the book of Joel, these two separate aspects, are combined. In Joel we find that in order to avert the threat of the day of the Lord, the people have to turn to the Lord, as we find in Zephaniah and as well in Amos (4:14-18). The consequence of this turning to the Lord within Joel, is not only the averting of the threat, but also a renewal of the promise of restoration, as had been given to Moses and king David. The day of the Lord and this promise of restoration are closely connected within the book of Joel, not only in the second chapter, where we find this turning to the Lord, but also in the fourth chapter where the threat is imposed upon the enemies of the people of Israel, and actually forms part of the promise of restoration. Therefore, the day of the Lord is not a dreadful event anymore for the people of Israel, but something to look forward to, since it implies that their enemies will be judged and they will live again in a safe country or city.

The connection between vengeance of the Lord and the day of the Lord is relatively easy to be made: the anger of the Lord addressed to the people, is displayed by the dreadful day of the Lord, a day when the people will be judged according to their behavior and obedience to the Lord. Within Isaiah 34:8 the connection between the vengeance and the day of the Lord has been described most clearly: ‘for the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication by Zion’. However, this vengeful day of the Lord is not by definition directed at the people of Israel, for example within Isaiah 61:2, in which the day of vengeance is aimed at the enemies of the people of Israel, comparable to the fourth chapter of Joel. The connection between vengeance is comparable to the connection between the day of the Lord and the promise of restoration. In the book of Joel, it appears that the vengeance of the Lord is connected to the day of the Lord, therefore the Lord first aims his anger to the people of Israel before directing it to the foreign nations. In this last case, averting the anger of the Lord, as well as having it directed to the enemies of Israel, is connected to the promise of restoration.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the question: *to what extent does the theme of forgiveness shape the content and structure of the book of Joel, in relationship to the themes of vengeance and the coming of the day of the Lord?* In order to answer this question, I first offered an overview of the research in the context and theology of the book of Joel. The results of this research have been presented in the second chapter. I showed the various theories and hypotheses concerning the context and theology of the book of Joel. With regard to the theology of the book of Joel, one might distinguish two main positions: a theology concerned either with the threat of the day of the Lord, or with the relationship between the Lord and his people. These positions form the frame in which I place my main conclusion.

Secondly I answered the question: *What can be said about 'forgiveness' in the Old Testament, can we find a conceptual clarification and how can this concept be related to the themes of vengeance and the day of the Lord that is coming?* As described in the third chapter of this thesis, I chose to work with a concept of forgiveness as 'one of the many possible responses to harm, which includes a decision to step away from anger and revenge.' Forgiveness in the Old Testament can be found in a direct manner, when looking at the occurrences of the word '*salach*', the Hebrew word for forgiveness, but can be found as a concept as well, for example when offering a characterization of the Lord. Finally, I have discussed the possibility of using the word '*nicham*' as a substitute for the word *salach*. I concluded that this is only possible, when the description of a Lord who repents from evil, is combined with the formula of characterization of the Lord (as merciful and loving), and combined to a forgiving act, as well as concerned with the promise of a hopeful future: a combination which can only be found within the book of Joel.

The fourth chapter of this thesis was concerned with the question whether forgiveness was a central theme to the book of Joel, and to what extent this notion of forgiveness is connected to the themes of vengeance and the day of the Lord. Based upon structural and content analysis I would argue that the notion of forgiveness, as found within Joel 2:13, is not the central theme of the book of Joel. While it can be argued that this verse is indeed, concerned with the concept of forgiveness, it appeared that this is the only occurrence of this concept. Secondly, verse 2:13 appeared not to be the central part in my structure of the book of Joel. Therefore on both accounts, forgiveness has no central position. Therefore, the first answer to my research question

is quite simple: the theme of forgiveness does not shape the content and structure of the book of Joel.

In contrast, a notion of a promise of salvation and restoration was found throughout the whole book. Moreover, the central part of my structure of the book of Joel was concerned with this promise of salvation (Joel 2:18-20e):

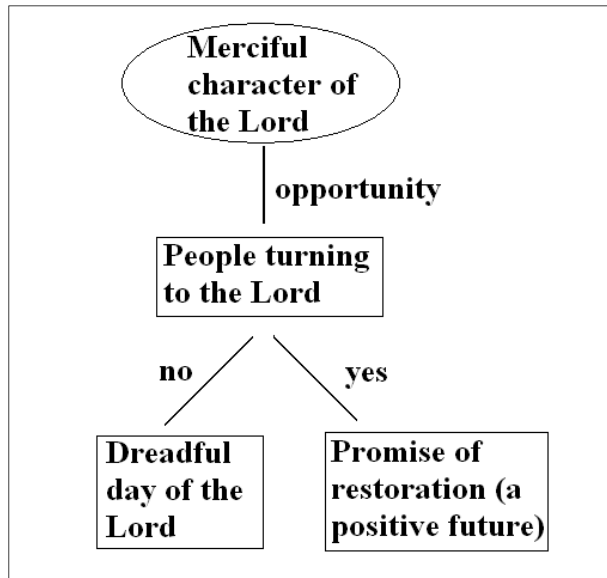
- ¹⁸ Then the LORD became jealous for his land,
and had pity on his people.
- ¹⁹ In response to his people the LORD said:
I am sending you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a mockery among the nations.
- ²⁰ I will remove the northern army far from you,
and drive it into a parched and desolate land,
its front into the eastern sea,
and its rear into the western sea;
its stench and foul smell will rise up.

Although the concept of a promise of restoration differed from the notion of forgiveness, it still opposed the theory that the day of the Lord formed the central theme of the book of Joel. Therefore I examined whether this notion shaped the content and structure of the book of Joel, in relationship to the notion of the day of the Lord and vengeance. It appeared that both the promise of restoration and the day of the Lord are reoccurring themes throughout the Bible, especially within the books of the prophets. Both are occasionally combined to the notion of turning to the Lord as a condition of averting the destruction following the day of the Lord. Most noteworthy is the fact that only within the book of Joel, all three notions (promise of restoration, the day of the Lord, turning to the Lord as a condition) appear together, as directly linked to each other.

In the book of Joel the three notions appear as a three phased action plan: 1. The people have transgressed the laws of the Lord, and therefore he warns them with the threat of his wrath on the day of the Lord. 2. The people can avert this wrath by turning to the Lord externally and internally. 3. Because the Lord is a merciful God, he will avert the threat and promises restoration and salvation. One could therefore conclude that in the book of Joel the future of the people is, to some extent, put into their own hands. Second, that it is only thanks to the character of the Lord – as described in Joel 2:13 – that the opportunity to turn their future around arises. Third we find that the book of Joel seems an opposition between a threat and a promise: the threat of the day of the Lord and the promise of a bright future. Fitting these conclusions into one scheme, to

offer the central message of the book of Joel, I would argue for a schematic representation as demonstrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: Schematic representation of the central message book of Joel



My main conclusion is accordingly, that the content and structure of the book of Joel are shaped by the opposition between the dreadful day of the Lord, and the promise of restoration; a time in which there will be wine and grain in abundance and the people of Israel will be safe. This opposition, as demonstrated in figure 2, is dependent upon the people turning around to the Lord. The fact that the people of Israel are offered this opportunity of turning around, is due to the merciful (forgiving) character of the Lord.

My hypothesis, that divine forgiveness shaped the content and structure of the book of Joel has been proven incorrect. However it appears that the merciful (forgiving) character of the Lord does form part of the central message. Without this divine characterization, there would be no opportunity for the people to avert the day of the Lord, and a positive future would be impossible. Thus, the central theme of the book of Joel, in my opinion, is the opposition between a threat and a promise, and the encouragement of the prophet to the people, to turn around to the Lord. This central theme has, however, one requirement: the merciful character of the Lord.

6. Discussion, translating *nḥm* as ‘ready to forgive’

As described in my introduction, this thesis started with the statement by the online youth bible of the Dutch New Bible Translation, that the central theme of Joel was forgiveness and guilt. This led me to the question whether it could be true that the book of Joel did not circle around the coming day of the Lord, as is often offered as the theology of the book of Joel in literature and sermons, but that it had a more positive message. Interestingly, when I approached the Dutch Bible Association and asked them for the reason to translate *nḥm* in this verse with the phrase *ready to forgive* instead of *to repent from evil*, it turned out that this was a translation mistake.³²³ The same held true for the NBV translation of Jonah 4:2 and Manasseh’s Prayer 1:7. In both instances *nḥm* was translated as ready to forgive instead of repenting from evil. This made me wonder whether this was a common fault, whether other translators felt that the meaning of this word could be ready to forgive, or whether it was a onetime fault that only occurred within the NBV.

Analyzing various Bible translations, it appeared that there are some Bible translations in which *nḥm* is translated as *ready to forgive* in Joel 2:13 as well.³²⁴ Additionally, the Douay-Rheims Bible translates *nḥm* once with ready to forgive, although this happens only with the formula found in Jonah 4:2. Which is, as explained, equal to the formula found in Joel 2:13. In the book of Joel, the phrase is translated equal to most translations, with repenting from evil. The prayer of Manasseh is not to be found in the canon of Douay Rheims.³²⁵

In my opinion this ‘doubt’ on how *nḥm* should be translated, whether with forgiveness or repenting of evil, shows the theological discussion I presented in the third chapter, the question whether *nḥm* can be understood as an act of forgiveness. These Bible translations seem to suggest that in a certain way it is. On the other hand, in discussion with a translator of the Dutch Bible Association, he came to the conclusion that the formula had been translated incorrectly. In the end I do feel that the translation does not have really influential consequences upon the structure of the book of Joel. Whether repenting from evil is understood as an act of forgiveness or merely an act before forgiveness leads to similar conclusions. As seen in the chapters above, I would argue that forgiveness is not the central theme of Joel, but a promise of restoration,

³²³ This conversation with a representative of the Dutch Bible Association, has led to the promise that the phrase will be adjusted in the next version of the NBV.

³²⁴ See for a complete review attachment 2.

³²⁵ Douay Rheims Bible. Jonah 4:2. Online: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/rhe/>

which is connected in this book to the eschatological theme of the day of the Lord. Based upon the connection between the repenting of evil, the promise of restoration and the day of the Lord, I would say that translating *nħm* with ‘ready to forgive’ is not incorrect, since the promise shows in a way that the people are forgiven. However, stating that the central theme of Joel is forgiveness, seems to take this a step too far.

For the theological understanding of the figure ‘God’, of course there is a consequence for translation. A forgiving Lord is a different Lord than a Lord who is still angry, but decides to repent from the evil he intended to do. Here though, I would like to refer to the third chapter of this thesis. It all comes down to the question: is repenting from evil understood as an act of forgiveness? As indicated in the previous chapter, I would argue that this is true solely, when the act of repenting is connected to the formula of the Lord as merciful, and compassionate and the acts of a Lord who is willing to restore his people in their glory. Therefore, I would state that the translation of the formula in Joel, and Jonah in the NBV, as well as in the other translations I found, is correct and does not lead to a different (fault) understanding of the figure ‘God’. Denoting the theme of Joel as ‘forgiveness’ however, is a bridge too far, and might lead people to think that the whole book of Joel is concerned with a Lord who is forgiving. Since the book of Joel seems more focused upon a connection between threat, and a promise of restoration based upon the turnaround of the people, this would be a fault conclusion.

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8. Appendix: Translating *n̄hm* as *Ready to Forgive*³²⁶

Bible	Joel 2:13
God's Word Translation	Tear your hearts, not your clothes. Return to the Lord your God. He is merciful and compassionate, patient, and always ready to forgive and to change his plans about disaster.
Common English Bible	Tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive.
Good News Bible	Let your broken heart show your sorrow; tearing your clothes is not enough." Come back to the Lord your God. He is kind and full of mercy; he is patient and keeps his promise; he is always ready to forgive and not punish.
Wycliff Bible	And carve ye your hearts, and not your clothes, and be ye turned again to your Lord God, for he is benign, and merciful, patient, and much of mercy, and abiding, <i>either forgiving</i> , on malice.
Hofnung für alle	Ja, kehrt von ganzem Herzen zu mir um! Zerreißt nicht nur eure Kleider als Zeichen der Trauer!" Kommt zurück zum Herrn, eurem Gott, denn er ist gnädig und barmherzig, seine Geduld ist groß und seine Liebe grenzenlos. Er ist bereit, euch zu vergeben und euch nicht zu bestrafen
Traducción en lenguaje actual	¡Arrepiéntanse y vuelvan a mí, pero háganlo de todo corazón, y no sólo de palabra! Yo soy tierno y bondadoso, y no me enojo fácilmente; yo los amo mucho y estoy dispuesto a perdonarlos".

³²⁶ This table is based upon an examination of the translations as offered in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Portugese, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Dutch in Bibleworks and Bible gateway.