

LOCUST IMAGERY AND THE PROBLEM OF GENRE IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the locust imagery in the book of Joel to suggest a more helpful way to classify the text. Scholars classify Joel as either prophetic, proto-apocalyptic, or apocalyptic literature based on different approaches to the text. This thesis will argue that Joel should be seen as part of the body of prophetic literature based on the usage of locust imagery within the text. The thesis begins by reviewing past scholarship focused on questions of the book's date and unity and argues that Joel is an essentially unified text. The thesis also examines the characteristics of—and problems associated with—the terms prophetic, apocalyptic, and proto-apocalyptic literature. These terms will be shown to be representative of collections of literature with similar eschatological views instead of meaningful designations of genre. The thesis then examines the terms for locust found within Joel, along with the usage of locust imagery in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East. Finally, the thesis argues that the author of Joel utilizes locust imagery to describe a literal locust plague, which best fits with a prophetic eschatological outlook on the world. This demonstrates that Joel should be classified as prophetic literature, not proto-apocalyptic or apocalyptic literature.

CHAPTER ONE

The book of Joel has always been considered one of the more enigmatic texts found in the Hebrew Bible. From the rise of critical scholarship on the Bible, interpreters of Joel have debated various aspects of the book, including the unity of the text, its date of composition, and the role of the locusts in the narrative. The book continues to pose problems for modern interpreters. This can be seen in “the bewildering variety of scholarly interpretations of the book” that exist even today.¹ A scan of the literature that focuses the book of Joel will substantiate this claim.

Barton believes that “the reason for such confusions is clear enough: there is simply too little evidence for most of these issues to be resolved definitively.”² He cautions modern students of Joel to read the book with humility, because any individual reading of the book “represents only a best guess” at a “reasonable and defensible hypothesis” that lacks “any kind of certainty.”³ With that said, there are several topics important to the study of Joel that have reached some measure of consensus among scholars, however tenuous that consensus may be at the present.

This chapter will present a review of previous scholarship focused on the book of Joel. The chapter will focus this review of scholarship around two questions central to the interpretation of the book: the date of the book’s composition and the unity of the text. Many scholars continue to find these questions important enough to treat in articles and commentaries on Joel. These questions are important to any study focused on the locust imagery of Joel and its relationship to the problem of genre in the text. This chapter will

¹ Rex Mason, *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel*, Old Testament Guides, ed. R. N. Whybray (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 98.

² John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, eds. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 3.

³ Barton, 3.

focus primarily on sources from the past fifty years that have explored the questions of date and/or unity. After reviewing past scholarship, this chapter will offer conclusions on the dating and unity of the text upon which the remaining chapters will build.

The Date of Joel

One of the more vexing problems related to the study of Joel is determining the date the text was written. Interpreters of Joel have dated the text anywhere “from the ninth to the second centuries BCE.”⁴ Interpreters of the book assign such a wide variety of dates to the text because “nothing in the book of Joel offers a decisive clue in determining its actual historical context.”⁵ The superscription of the book is unique among the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible because it “does not place [Joel’s] ministry during the reigns of any specific kings.”⁶ As this review will show, interpreters have relied on various methods of analysis in order to offer suggestions about Joel’s date. This review will examine scholarly work that has dated the book to the pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic periods before offering some suggestions about the date of the text.

Ancient interpreters of Joel assumed the book was written around the same time as Hosea and Amos, which situate themselves in the period before the Babylonian Exile in 587 BCE, based on the position of Joel between them in the Masoretic Text.⁷ This date

⁴ Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 8, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore, Steven J. Land (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 19. Perhaps the most exhaustive treatment of relevant literature on the date of Joel written before the last fifty or sixty years is found in Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 19-25.

⁵ James L. Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 24C, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 21.

⁶ Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 119.

⁷ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, eds. Frank Moore Cross, Jr. et al (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1977), where he notes the presupposition of Jerome that “in those [cases] where the time [of the prophet] is not stated in the title [of his book], they prophesied under

for Joel is based on the assumption that canonical order is inherently meaningful. Furthermore, this view “presupposes that chronological criteria were determinative for the arrangement of the Twelve Prophets, not only in a general way but in the case of each book.”⁸ Joel, however, is placed between Micah and Obadiah in the Septuagint. This argument for a pre-exilic date is therefore unconvincing, because it assumes the priority of the Masoretic Text over the Septuagint without justifying this assumption.

For the most part, the pre-exilic dating of Joel has not found much support in recent decades. Mayhue does not specifically offer a date for Joel in his article focusing on the Day of Yahweh, but he seems to assume a pre-exilic date for the text based upon his assumption that prophetic literature “was writing before the fact of judgment, not after it occurred.”⁹ Based on this assumption, Mayhue believes the locust plague described in Joel 2:1-17 describes “the future destruction caused by an invading human army,” which “could refer specifically either to the Assyrians in 701 B.C. or the Babylonians in 605 B.C., or it could refer generally to both.”¹⁰ This view is unconvincing for several reasons. First, it is not clear that the locust plague described in Joel 2:1-17 symbolically refers to a human invasion.¹¹ Even if that interpretation of Joel 2:1-17 is granted, there is nothing in the text that necessitates those references being about the Assyrian or Babylonian conquests of Israel and Judah. The author could just as well be reflecting back on the

those kings under whom also had prophesied those [prophets] whose [books] preceding theirs have titles” (3 n. 2).

⁸ Wolff, 3.

⁹ Richard L. Mayhue, “The Prophet’s Watchword: Day of the Lord,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (1985): 234. He says this specifically in reference to the book of Obadiah, which he believes to contain the earliest reference to the Day of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, but this methodological assumption also guides his reading of Joel and other prophetic texts that reference the Day of Yahweh. Mayhue writes for a consciously evangelical Christian publication that takes a pre-critical view of the text.

¹⁰ Mayhue, 237.

¹¹ Indeed, a later chapter will argue that the image of an invading army in Joel 2:1-11 functions as a symbolic representation of the locust plague.

experience of exile, or warning against a similar type of invasion by the Persians or Greeks. If the author intended this description to refer to a human invasion, he would make sure to include references that apply the description to a specific invasion. In addition, this view does not take seriously historical references and linguistic evidence that suggest an exilic or post-exilic date for Joel.

Since the middle of the 1800s, the scholarly consensus seems to be that the text of Joel belongs to the post-exilic period. Indeed, for the most part an examination of recent introductory texts on the Hebrew Bible or prophetic and apocalyptic literature seems to demonstrate this consensus. Blenkinsopp, for example, dates the text to “the Persian period...some time after 515 B.C.E.” based on the author’s concern for “the impact of the disaster on the temple economy (1:9-10, 13, 16; 2:14).”¹² In a later text focused on how to best introduce the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, Seitz places Joel in the post-exilic period, noting in passing that Joel is now seen as the last prophetic text composed.¹³ In his introductory textbook on prophetic literature, Redditt also assigns Joel “a postexilic date...somewhere between the completion of the second temple in Jerusalem ca. 515 and the coming of Nehemiah in 445” based on “the conditions described in the collection.”¹⁴ A notable exception to this rule is the recent introduction to prophetic literature written by Stulman and Kim, who refuse to offer a date for Joel because the text “does not contain any specific indications of its historical setting, thereby

¹² Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, rev. ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 224.

¹³ Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets*, Studies in Theological Interpretation, eds. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 82.

¹⁴ Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 229.

making it possible for later readers to consider multiple settings and apply its meaning to their own changing situations.”¹⁵

Other scholarly works dealing with Joel highlight the consensus nature of its post-exilic date in scholarship today. Several articles treating various facets of Joel seem to assume the post-exilic dating of the text without offering much engagement of this question. For example, Ogden simply states that “Joel seems to have borrowed freely from other exilic/post-exilic writers” in his discussion of the relationship between Joel 3:1-21 [4:1-21 in Hebrew] and the laments found in Joel 1:1-2:32 [1:1-3:5], implying an acceptance of the post-exilic consensus.¹⁶ In a recent article, Bakon begins his discussion of the Day of Yahweh depicted as a day of judgment in Joel by stating that “modern scholarship assigns [Joel’s] ministry to the fifth century.”¹⁷ In a recent article on Joel 3:1 [4:1], Schreiber argues that the description of the Day of Yahweh, which “will presumably arrive when the scattered *children of Judah* (4:19) return to their land and *Judah will dwell forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation* (4:20)... strongly suggest[s] that Joel is post-exilic, and should be dated no earlier than the fifth century BCE.”¹⁸ Schreiber, however, does not engage the matter of Joel’s date further or offer any evidence to support his statement. Lyons, in perhaps the most recent article published

¹⁵ Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2010), 187. This refusal to offer a date for Joel makes sense in light of their goal to read the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible as “meaning-making literature for communities under siege,” though this reading of Joel need not prevent modern interpreters of the book from thinking through the question of its date (see 9-23).

¹⁶ Graham S. Ogden, “Joel 4 and Prophetic Responses to National Laments,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8:26 (1983): 100.

¹⁷ Shimon Bakon, “The Day of the Lord,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38:3 (2010): 150.

¹⁸ Mordecai Schreiber, “‘I Will Pour Out My Spirit on All Flesh’ (Joel 3:1),” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41:2 (2013): 124, emphasis original.

on Joel, notes that “it is widely accepted that Joel, like Jonah and Malachi, are dated late amongst the Twelve” without defending or challenging that consensus.¹⁹

The post-exilic dating of Joel has been defended by scholars since the mid-1800s.²⁰ Nogalski notes that “evidence for dating Joel [to the post-exilic period] essentially stems from five lines of reasoning: the lack of a king, the presence of a functioning temple, the citation of other texts, the reference to Jerusalem’s physical structures, and the depiction of political constellations.”²¹ For the most part, modern interpreters rely on clues in the narrative of Joel to help them attempt to situate the text in a specific time period, but the features of the text utilized to help determine its date differ among scholars. This leads to very different dates among scholars that advocate the post-exilic dating of Joel, causing more cautious interpreters like Birch to point out that “it is not possible to single out a more precise date” beyond “the late sixth and the early fourth centuries B.C.”²² Sweeney likewise notes the tendency of scholars to date Joel between “the fifth or fourth century B.C.E.,” but cautions that even this broad dating of the book “is by no means a secure date” because “the absence of historical references in Joel makes it extremely difficult to place the book or the prophet historically.”²³

Despite the inability to form a consensus about a more specific post-exilic date for Joel, modern interpreters of the text continue to offer relatively precise dates for Joel.

Treves, for example, argues that

¹⁹ Thomas Lyons, “Interpretation and Structure in Joel,” *The Journal of Inductive Bible Studies* 1:1 (2014): 70.

²⁰ See Allen, 20-25.

²¹ James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 18A, eds. R. Scott Nash et al (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2011), 201.

²² Bruce C. Birch, *Hosea, Joel, and Amos*, Westminster Bible Companion, eds. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 126.

²³ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry, ed. David. W. Cotter (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 149-150.

Joel flourished in the days of Ptolemy the son of Lagus, who ruled Egypt from 323 to 285 B.C., when the Northern tribes had disappeared, the Jews were scattered among the nations, the Temple was functioning, Mount Zion was the only holy mountain, the wall was standing, the priests ruled Jerusalem, the Jews had no armies, Egypt oppressed Judea, and the Greeks bought Jewish slaves.²⁴

Treves critically analyzes eighteen features in the narrative of Joel that help him narrow down the date of Joel to this time period. While many of his points are valid and support a post-exilic date for Joel, several do not withstand closer scrutiny. For example, Treves bases several points on his interpretation of Joel 3:17 [4:17], which states: “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.” Treves argues that this text “implies that a foreign invasion has just taken place.”²⁵ Because the author exclaims “never again,” Treves assumes that the text must refer to a foreign invader who was not liked by the people. He therefore argues that “we can rule out Cyrus, who was greeted as a liberator, and Alexander who respected the holy city.”²⁶ In his view, the only possible choice left is “Ptolemy Soter, who captured Jerusalem and ruled it harshly.”²⁷ Wolff and Barton point out problems with basing a date on this verse. Wolff argues that this passage utilizes language that “belongs to the traditional description of the sacred character of the city” of Jerusalem, which in Joel is considered “Yahweh’s inalienable possession” because Yahweh dwells “in the sanctuary of Zion.”²⁸ This includes the “never again” central to the interpretation of the passage by Treves. Thus, for Wolff, Joel 3:17 [4:17] primarily serves to highlight “the salvific effect of the judgment on the nations.”²⁹

²⁴ Marco Treves, “The Date of Joel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 7:2 (1957): 155.

²⁵ Treves, 153.

²⁶ Treves, 153.

²⁷ Treves, 153.

²⁸ Wolff, 82.

²⁹ Wolff, 82.

Though Barton notes that the date offered by Treves is possible, he agrees that this text provides “a slim basis for dating” Joel with any specificity.³⁰ He points out that “the most obvious reference” in Joel 3:17 [4:17] “would be to the Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C.E., which indelibly marked the Jewish consciousness and made the whole idea of foreigners in Jerusalem a fraught issue.”³¹ These arguments seem to support Wolff’s contention that Joel 3:17 [4:17] “lacks sufficient historical specificity” to help date Joel to the late-fourth or early third-century BCE, and thus the date offered by Treves does not seem convincing.³²

In what is perhaps the most interesting article proposing a date for Joel, Stephenson argues that the text “must be a product of the middle of the fourth century B.C. or later.”³³ He bases this argument on a literal reading of Joel 2:31 [3:4], which states: “The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.” He argues that this statement “clearly alludes to total lunar and solar eclipses,” which “Joel himself witnessed” and that make his use of astral imagery unique.³⁴ Stephenson acknowledges that lunar eclipses “are very frequent” and take place “on average about one every three years at any given place,” and are thus not helpful for determining Joel’s date.³⁵ However, he contends that “total eclipses of the sun, because of their extreme rarity in any one region, are very useful for chronological purposes.”³⁶ Based on “astronomical calculations,” Stephenson argues that “only two eclipses of the sun could cause the sun to be ‘turned into darkness’ in Judah” between the

³⁰ Barton, 108.

³¹ Barton, 108.

³² Wolff, 4.

³³ F. R. Stephenson, “The Date of the Book of Joel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 19:2 (1969): 229.

³⁴ Stephenson, 224, 228.

³⁵ Stephenson, 228.

³⁶ Stephenson, 224.

dates 1130 and 310 BCE.³⁷ These total solar eclipses occurred on February 29, 357 BCE and July 4, 336 BCE, and both solar eclipses had total lunar eclipses occur “within two years of each event.”³⁸ Barton notes the basic problem with this line of reasoning—it is based on an assumption “that stereotyped language about heavenly portents is to be taken to refer to an actual event, a position for which there is no evidence.”³⁹ Allen also notes that “more probably Joel is echoing traditional material” in this passage instead of describing an actual eclipse that he has witnessed.⁴⁰ Stephenson does not take seriously the symbolic nature of this passage, and his treatment of this passage leads Mason to “wish that some scholars would spend a little more time reading poetry!”⁴¹ Stephenson’s reading of Joel 2:31 [3:4] is not convincing and thus does not effectively support his argument for dating Joel to the mid-fourth century BCE.

No scholars have recently defended the notion that Joel belongs to the mid-fourth or late-third century BCE. Nogalski notes that most attempts by modern interpreters at narrowing down the date for Joel in the post-exilic period center around two different possibilities: “toward the end of the sixth century or near the beginning of the fourth century.”⁴² The rest of this section will examine articles and commentaries written on Joel that support a post-exilic date, noting the shift in scholarly views between the sixth century and fourth century throughout time.

Watts advocates for a date close to the end of the sixth century BCE for the text of Joel. He begins by cautioning the reader that a “precise dating for the book is

³⁷ Stephenson, 229.

³⁸ Stephenson, 229.

³⁹ Barton, 17.

⁴⁰ Allen, 23 n. 7.

⁴¹ Mason, 114.

⁴² Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 201.

impossible.”⁴³ Watts does not treat this question in detail. Instead, he simply suggests that “the most appropriate time for [the date of Joel] is the first half of the fifth century B.C.,” or “the period of the second temple between the revival of Haggai and Zechariah and the reforms of Ezra.”⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Watts provides no rationale for this date.

Allen also argues for a date near the end of the sixth century BCE, though he provides a useful discussion of the history of scholarly opinion on Joel’s date in his treatment of the text. Allen dates the text between 520 and 500 BCE. He does not put forth his own argument in defense of his date. Instead, he claims that “the similar positions of Myers and Ahlström appear to do most justice to the evidence.”⁴⁵ Myers dates the text of Joel to “the period of Haggai and Zechariah,” or approximately 520 BCE, based on “the implications of the mention of Greek traders” in Joel 3 [4].⁴⁶ Ahlström “dates the prophet between 515 and 500 B.C.,” based on many of the arguments of Myers and on the idea that “the threat to Edom in 3:19 must antedate the reference to the recent destruction of Edom in Mal. 1:3f.; and so Joel must have preceded Nehemiah.”⁴⁷ Allen also bases his date for Joel on Joel 2:32 [3:5], which he argues “is an explicit quotation of Obad. 17,” thereby meaning that Joel must follow Obadiah in date, which “is to be assigned to the early postexilic period.”⁴⁸

Wolff does not follow the basic conclusions of Watts and Allen in his commentary on Joel. Instead, he argues for a date near the beginning of the fourth century. He dates the text to “the century between 445 and 343” BCE based on an

⁴³ John D. W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, eds. P. R. Ackroyd, A. R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 13.

⁴⁴ Watts, 13.

⁴⁵ Allen, 24.

⁴⁶ Allen, 22-23.

⁴⁷ Allen, 23.

⁴⁸ Allen, 24.

examination of the text's content.⁴⁹ Wolff argues for this dating on the basis of two major pieces of evidence. First, Wolff argues that "the existence of the Temple, rebuilt in the years following 515, is something the prophet takes quite for granted," as is "the wall of Jerusalem," which "was only accomplished in 445 under Nehemiah's direction" and Wolff argues is casually referred to in Joel 2:7, 9.⁵⁰ He acknowledges that "the references to the wall in vv 7a and 9a need not in themselves necessarily point to the time after Nehemiah's building of the wall," but the repetition of these references within a few lines "surely presupposes its self-evident existence."⁵¹ He also argues that "the commercial association of the Phoenician cities Tyre and Sidon with the Philistine cities, assumed in 4:4, points to the close of the Persian period," as the city of Sidon "was no longer closely associated with Tyre in 343," when it was "destroyed by Artaxerxes III."⁵² While the *terminus post quem* of Wolff fits within the majority view on Joel's date, other references found around Joel 3:4 [4:4] seem to caution against seeing 343 BCE as the *terminus ante quem*. For example, Crenshaw notes that "the allusion to collaboration between Philistines and Phoenicians in selling Jews to Sabeans, who then traded them to Greeks, could indicate any time from the seventh to fifth centuries."⁵³ While Crenshaw notes that the references in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] could refer to a time "perhaps even later" than the fifth century BCE, this seems unlikely considering the "Sabeans lost their lucrative trade routes to Mineans after the sixth century" and the "sale of Jews to Greeks could easily have taken place in the sixth and fifth centuries, when Judah lay exposed to marauders."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Wolff, 5.

⁵⁰ Wolff, 4.

⁵¹ Wolff, 43.

⁵² Wolff, 4, 77.

⁵³ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 25.

⁵⁴ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 25.

Good provides one of the more interesting defenses of the post-exilic date of Joel in his article on the concept of just war in ancient Israel. He argues that the book of Joel “belongs to the period of the Second Commonwealth.”⁵⁵ Good bases this conclusion on his analysis of 1-2 Chronicles, which he argues demonstrates that “an ideology of war construing war as a justiciable dispute...was not limited to the prophets and reveals that it existed after the exile,” even if Joel was not familiar with 1-2 Chronicles.⁵⁶ Thus it is “unnecessary to derive Joel’s vision of war from a minimal implication of Amos’s judgment speeches and related preexilic texts” because “Joel’s ideology of war can be situated comfortably in postexilic thought.”⁵⁷ Good does not develop this point further to offer a more definitive date for the text of Joel, as it is outside the scope of his article.

In an article on peripheral prophecy in the text of Joel, Redditt provides an in-depth discussion of the text’s date. He argues for late sixth or even early fifth century date for Joel. He cautions against accepting the much smaller windows of composition accepted by Albright and Ahlström, who date the book between 522 and 517 and between 515 and 500 respectively, but concludes that “one can probably date Joel between 515 and 445, i.e., between the rebuilding of the temple and the time of Nehemiah.”⁵⁸ He centers his arguments around Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8], which he believes to be the latest portion of the book written. He builds off of the work of Myers, who “cites archaeological data showing trade between Greece and Palestine from the seventh or sixth century onward” and argues that “the sale of Judahites by the merchants of Tyre,

⁵⁵ Robert M. Good, “The Just War in Ancient Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104:3 (1985): 392.

⁵⁶ Good, 394.

⁵⁷ Good, 392.

⁵⁸ Paul L. Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48:2 (1986): 235.

Sidon, and Philistia probably occurred in the mid-sixth century.”⁵⁹ Redditt also notes the hole in Wolff’s argument concerning the Sabeans, who “even Wolff admits...declined severely after the mid-fifth century.”⁶⁰ Because of this decline, “the threat to sell Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia to the Sabeans” in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] is “more likely dated from a time when the threat was realistic”—i.e., “before 400 B.C.”⁶¹ This “is the latest probable date for 4:4-8,” which Redditt argues “ought to be dated earlier rather than later within the period of 515 to 400 B.C., with the rest of the Book of Joel dated still earlier.”⁶²

In an important commentary on Joel, Crenshaw cautions interpreters of the text against forming solid conclusions on the question of Joel’s date. He points out that “nothing in the book of Joel offers a decisive clue in determining its actual historical context.”⁶³ In addition, he notes that “to some extent such endeavors to establish a historical context for a biblical book constitute exercises in futility” because “much of the argument moves in the realm of probability.”⁶⁴ Despite this, Crenshaw seems to favor a date around the end of the sixth or beginning of the fifth century BCE. Crenshaw centers his arguments on two points. First, he notes that “internal evidence, although inconclusive, favors a late-dating of the book, perhaps fifth century.”⁶⁵ He refers to many of the same pieces of evidence found in previous discussions of Joel’s date—for example, the “functioning cult in Jerusalem” which “excludes the period from 586 to 516,” the common “identification of Judah and Israel as one and the same” in Joel 2:27; 3:2, 16 [4:2, 16], and “the allusion to collaboration between Philistines and Phoenicians in selling

⁵⁹ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 234.

⁶⁰ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 235.

⁶¹ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 235.

⁶² Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 235.

⁶³ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 21.

⁶⁴ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 28.

⁶⁵ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 23.

Jews to Sabeans, who then traded them to Greeks” which could have easily “taken place in the sixth and fifth centuries.”⁶⁶ Second, Crenshaw points to linguistic evidence for a late sixth century or fifth century date for Joel. Crenshaw notes that “Joel uses a few words that occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in the latest books”—for example, *haššelah* in Joel 2:8, *hûsâ* in Joel 2:17, and *sahanâ* in Joel 2:20.⁶⁷ In addition, Crenshaw argues that the presence of “some rare words” (e.g., *‘ābešû*, *perudôt*, *megrepôtêhem*, and *mammegurôt* in Joel 1:17) which do not occur “elsewhere in the Bible” point to a late date for the text.⁶⁸

McQueen, who offers an in-depth study of Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5] in light of Pentecostal hermeneutics, dates the text of Joel “around 500 to 450 BCE.”⁶⁹ He largely follows the analysis of Joel 3:1-8 [4:1-8] by Wolff to support this assertion.⁷⁰ He cautions against some of Wolff’s analysis of Joel 2:7, 9 by pointing out that these passages do “not necessarily point to the completed wall of Jerusalem,” as “large portions of the wall were probably standing before Nehemiah’s restoration” in 445 BCE.⁷¹ He bases a more precise dating of Joel to his reading of Joel 3:19 [4:19], which he argues must come before “the description of Edom’s destruction in Malachi 1,” a text he speculates is likely “dated around or before the time of Nehemiah in 445 BCE.”⁷²

While the majority of interpreters from the 1970s through the late 1990s have suggested that Joel be dated to the late sixth or early fifth centuries BCE, more scholars

⁶⁶ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 23-25.

⁶⁷ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 26. Crenshaw utilizes much of the same linguistic evidence as Wolff, who argues that this linguistic evidence suggests “a date between 445 and 343 B.C.E.” instead of the late sixth or fifth century date offered by Crenshaw (26 n. 27; cf. Wolff, 5).

⁶⁸ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 26.

⁶⁹ McQueen, 20.

⁷⁰ McQueen, 19.

⁷¹ McQueen, 20.

⁷² McQueen, 20.

within the last decade or so have argued for a date in the middle to late fifth or early fourth centuries BCE. For example, Barton believes “that the mid-Persian period, somewhere in the 400s, is probably the likeliest date for Joel as we now have it, though the original core of 1:2-2:27 could be somewhat earlier but still probably postexilic.”⁷³ He bases this date on many of the same references found in previous works on Joel. For example, he notes that the narrative contains “no mention of a king, as there is in the books of the preexilic prophets,” which argues for an exilic or post-exilic date.⁷⁴ In addition, he argues that readers of the text “are likely to gain an impression of a rather small community gathered around the Temple and ruled by priests and, perhaps elders,” which “seems to fit a time no earlier than the Second Temple period,” or the 400s BCE.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Barton points to the numerous quotes from older texts found in Joel to establish its date in the middle to latter part of the fifth century BCE.⁷⁶

Simundson offers a slightly later date for the text than Barton, concluding that the prophet “lived and wrote sometime around 400 B.C.E., give or take fifty years before or after that date” based on clues “found within the text itself.”⁷⁷ Simundson notes the rebuilding of the temple in 515 BCE means “Joel must be written after that date,” while the role of priests as “leaders of the community (1:13-16)” further narrows the date of the text to “after the return from Persian exile.”⁷⁸ In addition, the potential to date “references to the wall in 2:7, 9” shortly after 445 BCE and the necessity to date the text “before the destruction of Tyre and Sidon (3:4-8) by the Greeks in 343 B.C.E.” cause Simundson to

⁷³ Barton, 17.

⁷⁴ Barton, 15.

⁷⁵ Barton, 16.

⁷⁶ Barton, 16, 22-27.

⁷⁷ Simundson, 122-123.

⁷⁸ Simundson, 123.

offer a fifty-year window around 400 BCE as the date for the text.⁷⁹ Thus he believes the text could have been written anywhere from approximately 450 to 350 BCE.

Baker follows Crenshaw and dates Joel to the end of the sixth century or beginning of the fifth century BCE. Baker utilizes circumstantial evidence found within the text to support this date. For example, he notes that the “reference to an existing ‘house of the LORD’ or the temple where people minister before him (1:9, 13, 14, 16; 2:17)...rules out the period from 586-516/515 B.C.”⁸⁰ Though he does not believe references to Edom or the capture of Jewish children in Joel 3:2, 19 [4:2, 19] are compelling points “for an exilic or postexilic date,” he acknowledges that “they do allow it,” and ultimately concludes that “a time period around 500 B.C. well fits the evidence” found in Joel’s “frequent use of material from other prophets,” several of which are clearly post-exilic compositions.⁸¹

Nogalski, however, dates the text of Joel “near the beginning of the fourth century” based on several factors, the most important one being his reading of Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8].⁸² Nogalski points out that “the book never mentions a king, or any member of a royal family, despite the fact that Joel 1 calls virtually every other level of society to the temple to fast and lament” and that the book “presumes the functioning presence of the temple in Jerusalem.”⁸³ These observations rule out a pre-exilic or exilic date for the composition of Joel. In addition, Nogalski argues that “the political constellation depicted in Joel 3:4-8 (MT 4:4-8) corresponds best to the period near the beginning of the fourth

⁷⁹ Simundson, 123.

⁸⁰ David W. Baker, *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 2006), 25.

⁸¹ Baker, 25-26.

⁸² Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 203.

⁸³ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 202.

century,” because “the roles of the Greeks and the Sabeans are not equal in the rhetoric of the passage.”⁸⁴ He asserts that Joel “presumes the thriving economic power of the Greeks” and treats “the Sabeans (who still existed as a political entity)...as a foil for poetic justice.”⁸⁵ If his analysis of this passage is correct, it makes more sense to see this situation as a product of the fourth century than an earlier date.

One recent voice of dissent from the post-exilic consensus about Joel’s dating is Assis, who wrote a recent article proposing “that Joel lived during the exilic period, between 587 and 538 BCE.”⁸⁶ Assis builds his argument in two ways. First, he challenges the interpretation of common passages in Joel that scholars believe point to a post-exilic setting. For example, he argues that the reference to a wall in Joel 2:7, 9 “is not an allusion to the period after Nehemiah’s repair of the wall of Jerusalem...since the destruction of the city did not necessarily involve the complete demolition of its walls.”⁸⁷ In addition, he argues that “references to Edom, Egypt, Tyre, Sidon and Philistia can be ascribed to various periods,” not just the post-exilic period as is argued by most scholars.⁸⁸ Assis also argues that ideology of the book is best understood if Joel is considered an exilic text. For example, he states that references to the Temple in the text of Joel do “not necessarily preclude the period before the Temple had been rebuilt” because “it is not likely that after the destruction of the Temple, the people ceased calling the Temple area ‘the House of the Lord.’”⁸⁹ In addition, Assis believes the lack of rebuke in the text makes more sense “in the exilic period, when it would not have been

⁸⁴ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 202.

⁸⁵ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 202.

⁸⁶ Elie Assis, “The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 61:2 (2011): 164.

⁸⁷ Assis, 164.

⁸⁸ Assis, 167.

⁸⁹ Assis, 168.

appropriate to rebuke and criticize the people, who were in a state of deep despair.”⁹⁰ The “assurance of the Divine presence” found in the book also makes more sense in the exilic period, “when the people were in despair and saw in the events their abandonment by God.”⁹¹ Thus, according to Assis, the prophet writes to call on “the people to renew their connection with the Lord after [the Temple’s] destruction (2:13) and to focus the people’s attention on the Temple, which, although physically ruined, had not lost its religious significance.”⁹² While Assis raises valid points on the interpretation of Joel 2:7, 9, many of his other claims do not withstand closer scrutiny. For example, the references to foreign nations in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] make more sense in a post-exilic context, especially if the role of the Greeks in the text presumes their “thriving economic power,” which is clearly more in line with the post-exilic period than the Babylonian Exile.⁹³ In addition, explicit references to the Temple in Joel imply a date after the Temple was rebuilt in 515 BCE, because the Temple sacrifices were important to the community of Joel. The prophet advises priests to “pass the night in sackcloth” because “grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of” Yahweh.⁹⁴ Assis is correct to point out that Joel nowhere demands “that the people offer sacrifices, or even improve the quality of their sacrifices” as a part of their lament to God.⁹⁵ This does not, however, necessitate the view that the Temple has not yet been rebuilt at the time of Joel’s writing, because it is unlikely that Joel would call on the people to offer sacrifices when they lacked the necessary items to sacrifice due to the devastation of the locust plague. While Assis’

⁹⁰ Assis, 173.

⁹¹ Assis, 174.

⁹² Assis, 180.

⁹³ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 202.

⁹⁴ Joel 1:13.

⁹⁵ Assis, 179.

explanation for the lack of rebuke in Joel is plausible, nothing in the text demands this interpretation. The same is true of his treatment of the assurance of Yahweh's presence within the text of Joel. Overall, the arguments offered for an exilic date by Assis do not seem as compelling as other arguments for a post-exilic date.

In recent years, more interpreters of Joel have refused to propose a date for the book's composition. For example, Garrett simply states that "the date of the book's composition...remains in doubt" in his analysis of the structure of Joel.⁹⁶ Mason offers a useful discussion of previous scholarship focusing on the date of Joel and concludes that "the date of the book of Joel remains a mystery."⁹⁷ Coggins offers a similar perspective, concluding "that the book does not offer any precise historical criteria for proposing a date."⁹⁸ In a recent article on teaching the Book of the Twelve, Jones simply states that "there is hardly any evidence that allows for a definitive date for the book of Joel" before noting that most scholars "agree that it is post-exilic."⁹⁹

The variety of perspectives on the date of Joel among modern interpreters is discouraging, and lends support to the notion that attempting to come to any conclusion regarding the date of Joel constitutes an exercise in futility.¹⁰⁰ Despite this, it is important to attempt to understand the historical context surrounding the composition of the book, especially in a larger discussion about the locust imagery of the text and its relation to the problem of genre. In addition, as Allen notes, a "closer examination of the evidence and

⁹⁶ Duane A. Garrett, "The Structure of Joel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28:3 (1985): 289.

⁹⁷ Mason, 116.

⁹⁸ Richard James Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, The New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 16.

⁹⁹ Barry A. Jones, "The One and the Many: A Strategy for Teaching the Twelve Prophets," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36:3 (2009): 314.

¹⁰⁰ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 28.

its interpretation creates a suspicion that certain arguments are weak” and thus interpreters of Joel can come to some conclusions regarding the date of the text.¹⁰¹

As we have seen, arguments for a pre-exilic and late post-exilic (343 to 285 BCE or later) date for Joel are unconvincing. These views fail to offer an alternative explanation of the textual and linguistic pieces of evidence that suggest a date between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. The lack of a reference to a king in Joel would suggest a date later than the pre-exilic period, and the nations referenced in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] seem to suggest a time period before 343 BCE. The exilic date proposed by Assis offers a stronger argument than other proposals; however, as we have seen, many facets of his argument are based upon conjectures that are possible but not necessitated by the text, and his treatment of the clear references to the Temple in Joel is unpersuasive.

A post-exilic date for Joel is therefore most likely, though it must be repeated that this assertion is offered without “any kind of certainty” due to the complex and ambiguous nature of the book.¹⁰² As Coggins suggests, perhaps “the most reliable pointer to dating seems...to be found...in the fact that Joel almost certainly quotes from and alludes to other prophetic texts.”¹⁰³ While it is not clear in every case whether Joel is quoting another text or whether that text quotes him, “in the majority of cases it seems likely that Joel was quoting rather than being quoted, and must therefore be later than the other works concerned.”¹⁰⁴ Baker offers perhaps the most comprehensive list of these quotations in Joel, several of which are significant in helping us date the text of Joel. Baker argues that Joel 2:6 quotes Nahum 2:10, while Joel 3:16 [4:16] quotes Amos 1:2

¹⁰¹ Allen, 23.

¹⁰² Barton, 3.

¹⁰³ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 16.

and Joel 3:18 [4:18] quotes Amos 9:13.¹⁰⁵ Birch notes that “the opening verse of the book dates Amos’s preaching during the reigns of Uzziah (783-742 B.C.)...and Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.),” and places Amos’s “preaching in the decade after 760 B.C.”¹⁰⁶ This narrows possible dates for Joel to after the eighth century BCE. Watts notes that Nahum “was written at least a century and a half” before the book of Jonah, which he dates between “the return from exile (537 B.C.) and not later than Ezra’s reform at the end of the fifth century.”¹⁰⁷ In addition, other texts quoted or alluded to by Joel “include some rather late postexilic entries, particularly Obadiah and Malachi.”¹⁰⁸ This means that Joel must have been written no earlier than the middle of the sixth century BCE, and quite possibly later if he is quoting from Obadiah and Malachi, but not later than the middle of the fourth century BCE. While it is possible that some of these allusions and quotations occur because different authors “may be drawing on traditional prophetic material,” this does not seem likely with many of the quotations in Joel.¹⁰⁹ For example, when Joel 2:32 [3:5] quotes “Obadiah 17a, Joel uses the quotation formula ‘as the LORD has said,’” which clearly demonstrates the direction in which borrowing takes place between Joel and Obadiah.¹¹⁰

While offering any date more specific than the generic post-exilic date between the rebuilding of the Temple in 515 BCE and the fall of Sidon in 343 BCE is more speculation than firm conclusion, it is more likely that Joel dates to the late fifth or early fourth century BCE. This is primarily due to two factors: the quotations of other post-

¹⁰⁵ Baker, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Birch, 166-167.

¹⁰⁷ Watts, 74, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Mason, 115.

¹¹⁰ Baker, 26.

exilic texts like Obadiah and the geopolitical context assumed by the reference to other nations in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8]. Sweeney notes that “most scholars identify Obadiah as an exilic or post-exilic book because of its focus on the punishment of Edom for its betrayal of Israel and Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasions.”¹¹¹ This is therefore a suitable *terminus post quem* for the text. Though “finding a *terminus ante quem* is harder,” the geopolitical situation described in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] seems to provide a suitable latest possible point for Joel.¹¹² Here the text refers to “Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia,” which implies a “time when the coastal region functioned more or less cohesively,” which can be no later than 343 BCE.¹¹³ While, as Crenshaw notes, this situation “could indicate any time from the seventh” century BCE on, the dates for Amos, Nahum, and Obadiah make it more likely that this situation is referring to the late fifth or early fourth centuries BCE.¹¹⁴ Thus the following chapters will build off of the conclusion that the text of Joel should be dated between the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, approximately around the turn of the century.

The Unity of Joel

Perhaps a more difficult problem faced by modern interpreters of Joel regards the composition of the text. The thematic differences that exist between Joel 1-2:27 and Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] pose problems for interpreters of the book. These problems do not have obvious solutions, and the ambiguous nature of the textual evidence has resulted in a variety of interpretations that bear on the nature of Joel’s composition. While the majority of modern scholars accept the basic unified nature of the text, this view does not

¹¹¹ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 281.

¹¹² Barton, 16.

¹¹³ Joel 3:4; Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 202.

¹¹⁴ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 25.

have the consensus that a post-exilic dating of Joel has among scholars. This can be seen in a survey of relevant introductory textbooks on prophetic and apocalyptic literature. Blenkinsopp, for example, argues that Joel 2:30-32 [3:3-5] “seems to be related to an earlier saying (2:10) about the effect of divine judgment on the earth and the heavenly bodies,” and offers a reinterpretation of “these cosmic events...as signs of the final judgment.”¹¹⁵ He thus concludes “that the nucleus of the book has been expanded by a commentator closely familiar with the prophetic heritage,” though he does not go into further detail about what this process of expansion looks like.¹¹⁶ Redditt offers similar comments in his introductory book on prophetic literature. He asserts that “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that 2:18-27 was written with 1:5-20 (if not 1:2-2:17) in hand,” though he does acknowledge that “it is also possible to posit a sociological unity” for the text of Joel.¹¹⁷ Stulman and Kim do not address the composition of the text in their introductory book on prophetic literature.¹¹⁸ This review will examine scholarly work that focuses on the composition of the text of Joel, before offering some suggestions about the text’s unity.

Despite the problems associated with the text of Joel, the basic unified nature of the composition seems to be the majority position today. In fact, “if such matters were to be settled by numbers of protagonists to be found on each side, its unity could probably be guaranteed” due to the number of scholars that argue for the unity of Joel in various articles and commentaries.¹¹⁹ It will be helpful to first define what we mean when we

¹¹⁵ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 230.

¹¹⁶ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 230.

¹¹⁷ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 230-231. His more in-depth treatment of this question will be discussed later in this section.

¹¹⁸ See Stulman and Kim, 193-197.

¹¹⁹ Mason, 107.

describe Joel as a unified composition. John Barton, who actually argues for a complex, multi-layered compositional history behind the text of Joel, provides a comprehensive definition of this idea: “defenders of the book’s essential unity are ready, in most cases, to see evidence of secondary additions and redactional interpolations, but it can be said that Joel is now most commonly seen as *essentially the work of one author, not a compilation from diverse materials.*”¹²⁰ McQueen offers a similar definition, though he defines the unity of the text as “single authorship by the historical prophet Joel.”¹²¹ This goes too far, as it is possible that the use of first person pronouns in the text “is simply a literary device.”¹²² Barton’s definition is adequate, and with his definition in mind, it is possible to proceed to scholarly arguments used to support seeing Joel as a unified composition.

Joel was largely assumed to be a unified composition until “the end of the nineteenth century,” when Vernes and Duhm began “to question that the entire book derived from a single author.”¹²³ Decades later, Treves still takes for granted the unified nature of Joel in his article dealing with the date of the text. He begins his study by stating: “I see no reason for questioning the unity and integrity of the book.”¹²⁴ He provides no support for this assertion, simply noting that “the poems appear to be by one author...and the prose section may be either by the same or by a contemporary editor.”¹²⁵ Hosch also assumes the unity of Joel in his article focusing on the issue of time within the

¹²⁰ Barton, 7, emphasis mine.

¹²¹ McQueen, 16, 19.

¹²² Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 12.

¹²³ McQueen, 16. See Allen, 25-29 for a more exhaustive history of scholarship relating to the unity of the text written before the last fifty or sixty years.

¹²⁴ Treves, 150.

¹²⁵ Treves, 150.

text. He begins his study by stating “that Joel is indeed the author of this book,” and he does not offer any more engagement of this question throughout the rest of his work.¹²⁶

Since the rise of arguments questioning the unity of Joel, few scholars have taken the text’s unity for granted, and many arguments have been put forth in defense of the essential unity of the book. Allen, for example, reviews previous scholarship on the question and concludes that those studies have “set on a firmer foundation its essential unity.”¹²⁷ He builds upon previous scholarship by tackling the relationship between Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] and the rest of Joel 3 [4]. This portion of the text “is considered by many scholars to be a later insertion.”¹²⁸ Allen argues that “3:1-12 corresponds to the earlier section 2:18-27, and 3:4-8 is the structural counterpart of 2:21-23” by appealing to similarities between the two sections.¹²⁹ He notes that both texts are “a break from the surrounding context” and points to the presence of “*sh-b*...through the whole section.”¹³⁰ He does not minimize tensions within the text of Joel, acknowledging that “Joel is no consistent eschatologist,” but he concludes that the author uses “a variety of motifs from Judah’s eschatological repertoire...without constructing a systematic synthesis.”¹³¹

Wolff also provides a defense of the unity of Joel in his commentary. His main argument for the unity of the book is the way that “the portions of the book on either side of this midpoint [2:17-18] form an almost perfect symmetry.”¹³² He supports this argument by appealing to the way “the lament over the current scarcity of provisions

¹²⁶ Harold Hosch, “The Concept of Prophetic Time in the Book of Joel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15:1 (1972): 31.

¹²⁷ Allen, 27.

¹²⁸ Allen, 27. This is even the case for many scholars who otherwise argue for the basic unity of the text of Joel—see the discussion on Wolff below.

¹²⁹ Allen, 28.

¹³⁰ Allen, 28.

¹³¹ Allen, 29.

¹³² Wolff, 7.

(1:4-20) is balanced by the promise that this calamity will be reversed (2:21-27)” and the way “the announcement of the eschatological catastrophe imminent for Jerusalem (2:1-11) is balanced by the promise that Jerusalem’s fortunes too will be reversed (4:1-3, 9-17).”¹³³ While this “almost perfect symmetry” breaks down with Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8], which Wolff acknowledges to be “an addition by a secondary hand,” the “identity of major catchwords and word groups between chaps. 1-2 and 3-4 further attest to their common authorship.”¹³⁴ For example, Wolff notes the use of יהוה יום יקרוב (“for the Day of Yahweh is near”) in “1:15 and 2:1bβ-2aα with 4:14” and the use of ויכבבו אספו נגהם (“the sun and the moon are darkened and the brightness of the stars is extinguished”) in “2:10b and 4:15.”¹³⁵ These reasons lead Wolff to conclude that “the basic construction of the four chapters derives from a single author.”¹³⁶

In an article focusing on Joel 3 [4] as a response to a national lament, Ogden offers a reading of Joel as lament poetry that exhibits a basic unified nature. Ogden argues that “the entire book centres about a lament ritual.”¹³⁷ Thus “a definable relationship exists between the later chapters and what precedes in terms of the ritual of lamentation.”¹³⁸ To support this argument, Ogden draws on connections between the four oracles of Joel 3 [4] and the text of Joel 1:1-2:32 [1:1-3:5]. For example, Ogden notes the presence of “the theme of ‘reversing’” in “all four oracles” of lament in Joel 3 [4] “as well as 2.18-27.”¹³⁹ In addition, he points to the “reflection of the theme from ch. 1 in which the nation’s crisis is spoken of under the imagery of drought and famine” in Joel

¹³³ Wolff, 7.

¹³⁴ Wolff, 8.

¹³⁵ Wolff, 8.

¹³⁶ Wolff, 8.

¹³⁷ Ogden, 104.

¹³⁸ Ogden, 98.

¹³⁹ Ogden, 98.

3:9-18 [4:9-18], where the author includes a “specific response to the language used in the opening call to lament.”¹⁴⁰ Thus Ogden concludes that “ch. 4 is replete with terminology and concepts which arise in the context of lamentation over the fate of the nation,” which is detailed in the opening chapters of Joel, suggesting “a direct connection” between “the foreign nation oracles of Joel 4” and “the material of chs 1-2.”¹⁴¹ Ogden also supports his argument that “the work is an essential unity” by appealing to the “thematic connections throughout, such as the ‘Day of the Lord’, the war theme (2.5, 7; 4.9),” and “the trembling of the heavens (2.10; 4.16),” though he does not provide extensive support for these thematic connections.¹⁴²

Garrett offers a defense of the unity of Joel based on the “structural unity” of the text, which he believes is “more profound than that described by Wolff” and “strongly argues against dividing the text.”¹⁴³ Garrett argues that Joel consists of two interlocking chiasmi which span the two halves of the book. The first chiasmus spans 1:1-2:27, while the second spans 2:20-3:21 [2:20-4:21]. In the first chiasmus, “2:21-27, in abbreviated form, reverses the sequence of chap. 1,” 2:20 brings about the destruction of “the apocalyptic army” in 2:1-11,” while 2:12-19 serves as a transitional passage introducing “Yahweh’s oracular response.”¹⁴⁴ In the second chiasmus, 2:20 and 3:1-21 [4:1-21] both offer similar descriptions of “the judgment on an enemy nation,” while Garrett argues that a link exists “between the material prosperity of a bountiful harvest (2:21-27) and the spiritual benefits of the presence of the Spirit and the word of the Lord (3:1-5).”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Ogden, 101.

¹⁴¹ Ogden, 102-103.

¹⁴² Ogden, 97-98.

¹⁴³ Garrett, 291.

¹⁴⁴ Garrett, 295-296.

¹⁴⁵ Garrett, 296.

Because the two interlocking chiasmi structurally bind together the two centers of the book, Garrett concludes that “the text does not readily yield itself to any theory of bifurcation,” and when this observation is “combined with the linguistic evidence brought to light by Wolff, one can hardly continue to insist that this unity is only redactional.”¹⁴⁶

Marcus offers a defense of the unity of Joel based on the occurrence of non-recurring doublets throughout the text. Marcus defines non-recurring doublets as “words or phrases which occur only twice in the entire book.”¹⁴⁷ These non-recurring doublets are “a repetitive device expressing the book’s message by emphasizing complementary ideas, by illustrating reversals, and by linking sections through allusion.”¹⁴⁸ Because this is an intentional rhetorical device, the presence of this phenomenon throughout a text suggests its unity. Marcus points to several examples to illustrate the prevalence of this rhetorical device throughout the text: “‘Valley of Jehoshaphat,’ in 4:2 and 4:12,” “the heavens shake with fear” in 2:10 and 3:16 [4:16], and the filling “of the granaries and the overflowing of the wine vats” in 2:24 and 3:13 [4:13].¹⁴⁹ He also notes shared doublets involving the two parts of the book, asserting that “all together, chaps. 1 and 2 have eighteen doublets in common with chaps. 3 and 4.”¹⁵⁰ He thus concludes that “all four chapters are interconnected with nonrecurring doublets,” which “greatly strengthen[s]” the “likelihood that the book is a unity, the work of one hand.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Garrett, 297.

¹⁴⁷ David Marcus, “Nonrecurring Doublets in the Book of Joel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56:1 (1994): 57.

¹⁴⁸ Marcus, 60.

¹⁴⁹ Marcus, 61-63.

¹⁵⁰ Marcus, 65.

¹⁵¹ Marcus, 65.

McQueen offers a survey of scholarly arguments for and against the unity of Joel and concludes that “no consensus has been reached” on this issue.¹⁵² He follows the arguments of Garrett and Prinsloo, who “demonstrate the unity of the book of Joel at the literary level.”¹⁵³ McQueen thus assumes that “the literary unity of the book points to single authorship by the historical prophet Joel,” but he does not offer a more in-depth defense for a historical Joel.¹⁵⁴ Contrary to other recent interpreters, who seem to downplay the question of Joel’s unity, McQueen argues that the question is worth considering, because “no portion of the text of Joel may be viewed as ‘secondary’” if the text can be demonstrated to be an essentially unified composition that stems from one author.¹⁵⁵

Baker also argues in favor of the unity of the text in his commentary on Joel. Baker bases his argument on the common vocabulary that “is repeated within the book, often more than once” and the “themes or motifs” that are “reused” in the two halves of the book.¹⁵⁶ He does not offer any examples to illustrate this assertion. Moreover, he argues that this repetition is a sign of the text’s unity, though he stops short of arguing for a single author behind the text. He acknowledges that “one cannot say at what stage this unity is achieved, or whether it is the work of a single author or of a redactor of originally separate units.”¹⁵⁷ Ultimately, the present form of the book is what he emphasizes in his treatment of the text.

¹⁵² McQueen, 18.

¹⁵³ McQueen, 17.

¹⁵⁴ McQueen, 17; cf. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 12.

¹⁵⁵ McQueen, 20. Indeed, this observation is important for the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁵⁶ Baker, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Baker, 28.

Lyons offers a similar perspective in what is perhaps the most recent defense of Joel's unity. He argues that Joel possesses "a fundamental narrative movement" that is exhibited in "a unified two-part structure."¹⁵⁸ He supports this unified structure by appealing to the grammar, literary markers, and structural relationships present within the text. For example, Lyons notes how the term יום יהוה ("Day of Yahweh") seems to be used often in "places where the content and the focus of the text shifts," such as 2:1 and 2:11.¹⁵⁹ He also offers an explanation for the shift in voice that takes place between the two halves of the book. Lyons argues that the "shift in voice from modal imperatives and jussives in the first half of the book to the first person declarative statements of the future in the second half of the book" is a natural progression of the narrative from a national lament to a "larger first person response" from God to the people.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, Lyons employs structural relationships to highlight the unity of the text. He argues that "positive cruciality," which involves "a 'change of direction' centered on a pivot where elements on each side of the pivot differ from elements on the opposite side," is "the primary governing semantic structure for Joel" and can be seen "in the negative direction of Joel's lament in 1:2-2:17 followed by...the ensuing positive expansion and red redefinition of the יום יהוה throughout 2:19b-4:21."¹⁶¹ Lyons also sees support for the text's unity in the way "climax appears to be governing the subunits within the first and second halves of Joel."¹⁶² He argues that the first half of the book climaxes "in the three rhetorical questions in 2:11, 2:14 and 2:17," while the second half "climaxes at 4:18-21."¹⁶³ Though

¹⁵⁸ Lyons, 70, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Lyons, 65.

¹⁶⁰ Lyons, 67.

¹⁶¹ Lyons, 69.

¹⁶² Lyons, 70.

¹⁶³ Lyons, 70.

he argues for a unified text, Lyons acknowledges that by seeing Joel as a “unified whole” he is “not definitively suggesting that it was the work of a single author but rather that the final form was at least the composition of a single redactor and as a whole is intelligently arranged.”¹⁶⁴ It is not clear if he actually thinks the book underwent a process of literary expansion and redaction, but he ultimately ends up emphasizing the unified nature of the text.

While many scholars argue that the text of Joel is a unified composition with perhaps only minor redactions or interpolations, there are interpreters who disagree. This can be seen in the work of several scholars who deal with other aspects of Joel. For example, Hanson describes Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] as a text that “belongs to the Isaiah group of early apocalyptic writings.”¹⁶⁵ While he does not go into further detail, this implies that 1:1-2:27 does not belong in this group with the rest of Joel, and thus the text is not a unified composition. Douglas Watson also does not directly address the unity of Joel in his article on the portrayal of Yahweh within the text. He does, however, offer some clues that imply he sees the text as a multi-layered composition. For example, he notes that an analysis of “the motif of divine judgment” in the text “leads to a surprising conclusion: the oracles in Joel 4 serve as the divine response to a lament that the people have not uttered.”¹⁶⁶ The fact that this lament was “not in view in Joel 1-2 suggests that ch. 4 serves as a mis-reading, or re-interpretation of the preceding lament” in which “the author/redactor of Joel 4 provides an updated version of the divine response” that

¹⁶⁴ Lyons, 53 n. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Paul D. Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, Interpreting Biblical Texts, eds. Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr. and Victor P. Furnish (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1987), 36-37.

¹⁶⁶ Douglas Watson, “Divine Attributes in the Book of Joel,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37:1 (2012): 127-128.

adequately addresses “the unexpressed concern with Judah’s enemies.”¹⁶⁷ This implies that he likely views Joel as a multi-layered composition that has undergone expansion over time, though he does not provide a detailed argument for this position.

Nogalski offers a slightly different take on the question of Joel’s unity in his commentary on Joel. He acknowledges that “great strides have been made in recognizing and understanding the unifying elements of the book,” but he also points out that “tensions complicate the fluidity” of the book and must be taken seriously if we are going to interpret the text.¹⁶⁸ Nogalski does not appeal to linguistic or thematic differences between the two halves of the book to argue against its unity. Instead he argues that Joel should be read as “a book compiled for its location in the Book of the Twelve,” because this view “takes seriously both the unity and diversity of Joel as a composition utilizing preexisting elements designed from the outset to fit between Hosea and Amos.”¹⁶⁹ Thus it seems that he views the text as a multi-layered composition that underwent literary expansion and redaction over time. Of course, Nogalski’s views on any individual book are complicated by his argument on the unitary purpose of the Book of the Twelve.

Other interpreters have offered more extensive arguments to support the view that Joel is a complex, multi-layered composition that has undergone notable expansion and redaction over time. For example, Redditt engages in “form and redaction criticism to see how the book achieved its present form” in order to explore “the relationship of the prophet Joel and his book to the temple in Jerusalem.”¹⁷⁰ Redditt argues that “the first two chapters appear to be a redacted whole, not all of which (specifically not 1:1-4 and

¹⁶⁷ Watson, 128.

¹⁶⁸ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 203.

¹⁶⁹ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 204.

¹⁷⁰ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 225.

2:18-27) may have come from Joel.”¹⁷¹ He supports this argument by appealing to the difference between the order of locusts mentioned in Joel 1:4 and Joel 2:25, concluding “that 1:4 is dependent on 2:25 and was written later,” and since Joel 1:4 belongs to a larger section that “is separate form-critically from what follows, one may well conclude that 1:1-4 was written later than 2:25.”¹⁷² He also argues that “2:12-17 responds to 2:1-11,” though he admits this redaction “probably was written by the prophet himself,” while 2:18-27 was likely “a response primarily to 1:5-20,” because in it “eight (and perhaps as many as ten) circumstances described in 1:4-20 and 2:17 are reversed.”¹⁷³ He also argues that “4:1-3, 9-21 follows 2:18-27 better than it does 3:1-5,” and thus 2:28-32 [3:1-5] was a latter addition to Joel.¹⁷⁴ These arguments are not convincing, because it is just as likely that the author intended 2:18-27 to serve as a reversal of the material destruction caused by the locust plague in 1:4-20 in order to construct a message of hope for his community in the face of death and destruction. Thus the difference in tone need not imply, as Redditt argues, “that 2:12-17 and 2:18-27 were written at different times,” and instead should be seen as an important part of the narrative.¹⁷⁵ The placement of 2:28-32 [3:1-5] before 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] need not imply redaction, as 2:28-32 [3:1-5] balances out “the call to return to Yahweh as the necessity of the moment” in 2:12-17, while 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] balances out “the announcement of the eschatological catastrophe imminent for Jerusalem” in 2:1-11.¹⁷⁶ In other words, this

¹⁷¹ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 239.

¹⁷² Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 227-228.

¹⁷³ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 228.

¹⁷⁴ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 231.

¹⁷⁵ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 229.

¹⁷⁶ Wolff, 7.

section fits within the larger narrative of Joel and need not be seen as an addition from another hand.

Barton offers a more recent argument in defense of the notion that Joel is a multi-layered composition. He focuses heavily on “the difference in tone between the two halves of Joel,” which necessitates an explanation.¹⁷⁷ He concludes that “the two halves” of the book “come from different situations in postexilic Judaism,” and even refers to the second half of the book as “Deutero-Joel.”¹⁷⁸ He notes the parallel nature of the prophecies concerning locusts in 1:2-20 and 2:1-17, as each describes “the parlous state of the country and then call[s] the hearers to a liturgical lamentation.”¹⁷⁹ He assumes that the existence of two parallel descriptions of a locust plague implies a composite nature for 1:2-2:17, but this need not be the case. Furthermore, Barton bases a large part of his view on the composition of Joel to the differences in nature between Joel 1:2-2:27 and Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21]. He contrasts the “well ordered” and “well structured” nature of the first half of the book with the second half of the book, which he believes “is a rather miscellaneous collection of oracles, assembled in no particular order at all.”¹⁸⁰ While he is correct to point out that seeing an “almost perfect symmetry” in the entirety of Joel necessitates reorganizing “the material so that 2:28-32 follows chapter 3,” it is hardly the case that the second half of the book exhibits “no particular order at all.”¹⁸¹ In fact, as Baker argues, the phrases “those days” and “that time” refer to “the period described in 2:28-32,” and thus Joel 3 [4] consciously builds off of 2:28-32 [3:1-5].¹⁸² In addition,

¹⁷⁷ Barton, 7.

¹⁷⁸ Barton, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Barton, 8.

¹⁸⁰ Barton, 13-14.

¹⁸¹ Barton, 11.

¹⁸² Baker, 116.

Lyons demonstrates that “the second half of the text is organized by parallel sequential perfect plus *waw*-consecutive וַיִּבְרַח clauses in 3:1 and 4:18,” which are situated near “reiterated statements of God dwelling or being in the midst of his people.”¹⁸³ The material in 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] thus reads as a coherent section on its own and makes sense as the natural progression following 1:2-2:27.

In the last twenty years, more interpreters of Joel have refused to put forth arguments for or against the unity of the text. In fact, this group of scholars seems to be as large as the group arguing for the unity of the text, which has led Coggins to claim that “it is unlikely that discussion of the unity or otherwise of the book will become a main current in Joel studies.”¹⁸⁴ Perhaps one of the first scholars to ignore this question was Watts, who offered no answer to the question, simply stating that the book of Joel “was preserved and edited to be read.”¹⁸⁵ Watts offers no clues as to what this editing constitutes, so it is unclear if this means large scale expansions to the text or small additions like the superscription in Joel 1:1. Mason cautions that viewing “the divine oracles of 2.28-3.21” as “oracular answers to the laments and prayers of chs. 1-2 does not necessarily imply that the whole book was the product of one person at one time,” but otherwise offers no conclusive view on the unity of the text.¹⁸⁶ Crenshaw offers an extensive discussion of the different views on the unity of Joel, even noting that “contemporary scholars generally accept the unity of the book,” though he seems to stop short of offering his own perspective on the matter.¹⁸⁷ Birch also does not take a stand on this issue, though he sees merits in interpretations of 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] that view this

¹⁸³ Lyons, 167.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Coggins, “Joel,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 2:1 (2003): 94.

¹⁸⁵ Watts, 12.

¹⁸⁶ Mason, 111.

¹⁸⁷ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 30.

material as an addition “to the book at a time later than the locust crisis” or as the envisioning of “God’s final day of salvation” prompted by “the experience of God’s salvation in a present crisis.”¹⁸⁸ Sweeney avoids the question of Joel’s unity, only saying that “the present form of the book constitutes a coherent literary entity despite the potential history of its composition.”¹⁸⁹ Coggins likewise alerts the reader of his commentary that he will follow an approach that wishes “to stress [Joel’s] unity in the form in which it has come down to us.”¹⁹⁰ Simundson follows Birch and argues that “it seems best to read” Joel 1:2-2:27 “together as a unit about the plague of locusts,” though he does not address the larger issue of the relationship between the two halves of the book.¹⁹¹ Assis does not directly address the issue of Joel’s unity in his recent defense of an exilic date for the text, simply stating that “scholars today are aware of the many connections between these two parts” of the book.¹⁹²

The lack of scholarly consensus regarding the unity of Joel can be discouraging, especially in light of the different pieces of evidence that can be interpreted in different ways by readers of the text. However, the question is still important for any reading of Joel, especially in a larger discussion about the locust imagery and its relation to the problem of genre. With that in mind, this review will seek to offer a defense of the unity of Joel, though with the understanding that this conclusion is offered with some measure of reservation.

As we have seen, the arguments of Redditt regarding the redacted nature of 1:2-2:17 are unpersuasive, especially as Redditt himself admits that any major redaction

¹⁸⁸ Birch, 127.

¹⁸⁹ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 151.

¹⁹⁰ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 19.

¹⁹¹ Simundson, 122.

¹⁹² Assis, 170.

“probably was written by the prophet himself.”¹⁹³ In addition, even if Redditt’s premise that Joel 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] follows Joel 2:18-27 better than Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5] does, this does not necessitate seeing Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5] as a later addition to the book, because Joel 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] makes sense in its current position behind Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5] as well. The transition that occurs between Joel 1:2-2:27 and Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] is more difficult to explain, but it can be explained without postulating secondary expansions by a later editorial hand. While the focus does seem to shift, the latter half of Joel reads as an intentionally ordered narrative that builds on the previous material in the first half of the book. This is even acknowledged by some modern interpreters who do not necessarily support the unity of the text.¹⁹⁴

While many different arguments have been proposed to defend Joel’s essential unity, not all of these arguments are persuasive. For example, Watson points out basic problems with Ogden’s defense of Joel’s unity by pointing out that the lament responded to in Joel 3 [4] is not the lament offered by the people in Joel 1-2.¹⁹⁵ In addition, the two chiasmi proposed by Garrett need not imply one author if we accept his outline of the text. Garrett’s argument is plausible, but it is also possible that a redactor skillfully pieced together two sources and utilized this structure to form one larger, coherent narrative. The use of non-recurring doublets to support a unified text of Joel is also plausible, but it is ultimately unpersuasive because it is just as possible that a redactor inserted these non-recurring doublets into the text in order to form a more coherent narrative from multiple sources. Thus many of the arguments here may be conceivable, but they are by no means

¹⁹³ Redditt, “The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy,” 228.

¹⁹⁴ For example, Sweeney’s statement that “the present form of the book constitutes a coherent literary entity despite the potential history of its composition” (Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 151).

¹⁹⁵ Watson, 127-128.

definitive due to their inability to necessitate one author behind the entirety of the text. The cumulative weight of these arguments does, however, make a reading of Joel as a unified composition more compelling.

Perhaps the most effective way to demonstrate the unity of Joel is through an analysis of its message. Wolff's organization of the text of Joel provides a helpful starting point. Wolff argues for an "almost perfect symmetry" that is formed on either side of 2:17-18, though Barton correctly points out that a "perfect symmetry" using Wolff's reading of the text would necessitate rearranging the material by placing 3:1-3, 9-17 [4:1-3, 9-17] before 2:28-32 [3:1-5].¹⁹⁶ The book does, however, exhibit symmetry in the two halves of the book, though a close look at the text will show that the symmetry is perhaps better than Wolff originally thought. Wolff is correct to point out that "the lament over the current scarcity of provisions (1:4-20) is balanced by the promise that this calamity will be reversed (2:21-27)."¹⁹⁷ His divisions of the text break down at this point though. While he is correct to note the thematic connections between 2:12-16 and 2:28-32 [3:1-5], he goes too far by dividing 2:1-11 from what follows in 2:12-16. Wolff bases this division on the assumption that the army of locusts led by Yahweh symbolically represents an actual army, but the call to "rend your hearts and not your clothing" makes no sense outside the context of what comes before it with the description of the locust army.¹⁹⁸ The people call out directly to the only one who can save them from the locust army—the very person leading the army against them. It is interesting that in Joel 2:13 the people refer to Yahweh as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." This language echoes the descriptions of Yahweh in Exodus 34:6 and

¹⁹⁶ Wolff, 7; cf. Barton, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Wolff, 7.

¹⁹⁸ Joel 2:13.

Numbers 11:18. In both of these cases, the descriptions of Yahweh connect his mercy and graciousness to sin: Exodus 34:7 describes God as “forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” while Numbers 11:18 describes him as “forgiving iniquity and transgression.” This implies that the punishment the people wish for God to relent from inflicting upon them is connected to some sort of iniquity or transgression. While the nature of that sin is not made clear in the text, it is obvious that it prevents the people from truly experiencing the relationship with God that comes from being his chosen people. Thus 2:1-16 parallels 2:28-32 [3:1-5], where God proves himself “gracious and merciful” by pouring out his spirit on those lamenting in 2:1-16. Furthermore, 2:17 parallels 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21], as both texts focus on the role of the nations in the narrative. In 2:17, the nations mock Yahweh following the locust plague, questioning his presence in light of the destruction that has happened to his people. This mockery is balanced by the destruction of the nations that Yahweh executes on the Day of Yahweh in 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21]. Ultimately Yahweh answers the taunt of the nations in 2:17—he “dwells in Zion,” and from there he will “gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat” in order to “enter into judgment with them there.”¹⁹⁹ This analysis and the observations of Baker and Wolff regarding the common catchwords and word groups found connecting the two halves of the book lead to the conclusion that the text of Joel is a unified composition that likely stems from a single author. The plausibility of less persuasive arguments using non-recurring doublets and positive cruciality, while not definitive, lend more weight to this conclusion.

¹⁹⁹ Joel, 3:2, 21 [4:2, 21].

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to provide a review of scholarship focusing on the date of Joel and the unity of the text. It began by reviewing scholarship from the past fifty years that focuses on the date of Joel, offering a critique of arguments where appropriate. The chapter then made some observations and drew on past arguments to demonstrate that the text was composed between the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, around the turn of the century. It then reviewed scholarship from the past fifty or sixty years that focuses on whether or not Joel should be considered a unified composition written by one author, offering a critique of arguments where appropriate. The chapter then made some observations and refined past arguments to argue for a unified text that was written by one author. These conclusions will be an important foundation upon which the rest of the study can proceed.

CHAPTER TWO

The book of Joel is, in many respects, an enigmatic book, as can be seen by the various readings of the text proposed by scholars. Questions of the book's date and unity are an important foundation to any proposed study that seeks to explore the locust imagery of the text and its relationship to the problem of genre. Now a further examination of the characteristics and social contexts behind the different labels assigned to Joel is needed before any conclusions can be made. This close examination is important because understanding the genre of the text helps with the task of interpretation. Collins, for example, argues that "there can be no understanding without at least an implicit notion of genre," because "an interpreter always begins with an assumption about the genre of a text."¹ Collins does urge caution, however, by noting that this focus on genre "is not intended to construct a metaphysical entity...in any sense independent of the actual texts."² While determining the genre of a text can aid in its interpretation, it is important to note that the notion of genre is at best a constructed label designed to help scholars today make sense of difficult texts like Joel.

There seems to be no consensus among scholars as to the genre to be assigned to Joel. As Barton notes, "Joel has been thought of as a prophet like the preexilic prophets, with a message of imminent divine intervention, but also as a purely literary compilation of stock eschatological themes with no message of immediate relevance to anyone."³

¹ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd. ed., The Biblical Resource Series, eds. Astrid B. Beck and David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 8.

² Collins, 8.

³ Barton, 3. It is unclear which modern scholars, if any, Barton believes treat Joel as a work of prophetic literature similar to other pre-exilic texts because he does not offer any examples. While Simundson notes that "Joel is clearly in the line of classical prophets," he also argues that the prophet "moves in ways that sometimes differ from his predecessors" and interprets Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] as a discussion of "the distant future," which he defines as "the end time when no more earthly threats from either nature or human

Many modern interpreters of the book of Joel do not treat this issue.⁴ The majority of scholars that do deal with the issue describe Joel as a work of proto-apocalyptic literature.⁵ Towner classifies Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] as a “relatively early proto-apocalyptic” work along with Isaiah 24-27.⁶ Hanson agrees, though he uses the term “early apocalyptic,” which he defines as “a transitional stage between prophecy and apocalyptic,” to describe Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21]; Isaiah 24-27, 56-66; Zechariah 12-14; and Ezekiel 38-39.⁷ Sweeney argues that the book tends to be seen this way because it “lacks specific historical referents and emphasizes elements of nature.”⁸ Other scholars see the book as a work of apocalyptic literature.⁹ Berry classifies Joel 3 [4] as an apocalyptic text, arguing that it comes after other apocalyptic passages in the Hebrew Bible such as Isaiah 14:4b-21; Ezekiel 20; 28:2-19; 31; 38:1-39.¹⁰ In his study on

enemies will remain (121, 139-140). This implies that he likely views at least Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] as proto-apocalyptic or apocalyptic literature. Schreiber, however, may subscribe to this view, though it is unclear. He describes Joel as coming “at the end of the prophetic period,” and interprets Joel 2:28 [3:1] in a decidedly non-apocalyptic manner, arguing that the prophet tells “us that true prophecy is latent in every human being” when he describes the pouring out of the spirit in the text (124, 128). Richard D. Patterson, “Wonders in the Heavens and on the Earth: Apocalyptic Imagery in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (2000), may be another scholar who takes this view. He notes the differences between the Exodus imagery used in texts like Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21], where it “considered Israel’s fate relative to its being in the midst of other nations,” with its use in apocalyptic texts, where “the apocalyptic spirit widened to view Israel and the nations” in “a more universal and terminal outlook (e.g., Isa 60:19-20; Dan 7:18, 23-27)” (393). It is unclear, however, if he thinks Joel should be classified as prophetic literature or proto-apocalyptic literature.

⁴ E.g., Willem S. Prinsloo, “The Unity of the Book of Joel,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104:1 (1992); Baker; Watts; Coggins, *Joel and Amos*; Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*. Barton does treat the issue in his commentary on Joel, though he does not offer a conclusion on this question. Instead, he prefers to emphasize the “concern for theodicy” rather than the “bated-breath expectations of imminent divine salvation for the righteous in Israel” found in apocalyptic literature (31).

⁵ For example, David E. Aune, “Understanding Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic,” *Word & World* 25:3 (2005): 239; Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 25; Wolff, 14; Mason, 123-124.

⁶ W. Sibley Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 6:2 (1984): 3.

⁷ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 35-37.

⁸ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature*, Interpreting Biblical Texts, ed. Gene M. Tucker (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 180.

⁹ For example, S. B. Frost, “Eschatology and Myth,” *Vetus Testamentum* 2:1 (1952): 78-80; Hosch, 34-35.

¹⁰ George Ricker Berry, “The Apocalyptic Literature of the Old Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 62:1 (1943): 13.

apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible and in Akkadian texts, Daniel Bodi treats Joel 3:18-21 [4:18-21] as apocalyptic literature, though it is unclear as to what other portions the text—if any—he would classify as apocalyptic literature.¹¹

This chapter will thus explore the basic features of prophetic literature, proto-apocalyptic literature, and apocalyptic literature in order to provide a foundation upon which the locust imagery in Joel may be examined in order to draw conclusions about the nature of the text. This chapter will focus on the problems inherent in defining genre, and will seek to situate these types of literature in their social and historical contexts. In addition, this chapter will seek to offer definitions of each term that take into account their basic characteristics and purpose, utilizing examples to illustrate these points.

Prophetic Literature

The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible is a diverse and complicated set of texts that have been influential for centuries. As Petersen notes, “the phrase, ‘the prophetic literature,’ ha[s] proven to be surprisingly ambiguous over the centuries,” and it has been used to describe “everything in the Hebrew Bible other than the Pentateuch or to ‘just’ the former and latter prophets,” or perhaps “books titled with a prophet’s name,” or “narratives embedded in the deuteronomistic history”¹² Scholars have provided very different takes on prophecy and prophetic literature, leading Grabbe to describe the situation as a “scholarly thicket” that needs to be cleared in order to come to a better

¹¹ Daniel Bodi, “Les Apocalypses Akkadiennes et Bibliques: Quelques Points Communs,” *Revue des études juives* 169:1-2 (2010): 30-31. Bodi does note that Joel 3:18-21 is situated in a larger context of the “annonce du drame final pour Israël et la description apocalyptique du ‘jour de YHWH,’” which implies that he likely views the rest of Joel 3 [4], and perhaps even Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5], as apocalyptic literature along with 3:18-21 [4:18-21], though this is not explicitly stated (30).

¹² David L. Petersen, “Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature,” in *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship*, ed. Yehoshua Gitay, The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 23.

understanding of this portion of the Hebrew Bible.¹³ Petersen argues that this situation exists because “biblical scholars, both present and past, have created different definitions of what it means to be a prophet.”¹⁴ This section seeks to provide some clarity to what the term prophetic literature means, as well as what features characterize prophetic literature.

The earliest prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, Hosea and Amos, are typically dated to sometime during the reign of Jeroboam II, who ruled between 786-746 BCE, shortly before the conquest of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 BCE.¹⁵ The latest prophetic books to be included in the Hebrew Bible are likely Obadiah or Jonah, which were written during the post-exilic period, probably sometime between the fifth and fourth century BCE.¹⁶ Thus the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible was composed within a span of approximately four hundred years.

This means that the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible was composed during a wide variety of historical, social, and cultural contexts. The book of Hosea, for

¹³ Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995), 99. For a comprehensive review of scholarly research focused on prophecy and the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, see Gene M. Tucker, “Prophecy and the Prophetic Literature,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker, *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1985), 325-368; Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 16-26; James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 124, ed. Georg Fohrer (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 5-22; Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1967), 13-89, especially 13-80.

¹⁴ David L. Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” in *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 13, ed. Christopher R. Matthews (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 33.

¹⁵ Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, simply dates Hosea to “approximately the third quarter of the eighth century” (213), while J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), dates the text to “the mid- and later part of the 8th century B.C.” (3). Wolff dates Amos to approximately 760 BCE (89), while Jörg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, The Old Testament Library, eds. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), dates the text to “the decade between 760 and 750 B.C.E.,” while noting that “no more precise determination is possible” (2).

¹⁶ Allen, for example, assigns Jonah “to the fifth or fourth century B.C.” (188). Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, assigns Obadiah to a time “no earlier than the mid-fifth century,” and argues that Jonah is likely “the latest complete book added to the Book of the Twelve” (367, 402).

example, was composed during the divided monarchy, before the northern kingdom was taken off into exile by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. The book of Jonah, however, was written after the Judeans came back from exile in Babylon, rebuilt the Temple, and rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem in the fifth century BCE. The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible was thus composed in both times of relative peace and security and during times of crisis and oppression. As Blenkinsopp notes, the “situations of social, political, and military stress” that the Israelites and Judeans faced from the Philistines, Syrians, Assyrians, and Babylonians led to the preponderance of prophetic literature found in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷ The varied social and political situations that lie behind the world of these texts cause us to see prophetic literature as a tradition that “follows different lines and involves different kinds of prophetic roles and personalities.”¹⁸ While these texts were written to speak to many specific situations over the years, Nissinen argues that the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible were composed and circulated with a special authority in order to help the people “overcome the socioreligious crises caused by the destruction and the rebuilding of Jerusalem” in the post-exilic period.¹⁹ The wide range of historical and social contexts influencing prophetic literature lead to the problematic nature of categorizing this body of literature as a distinct literary genre.

As Blenkinsopp notes, the earliest written prophetic works seem to be “aware of a prophetic tradition already in place and refer explicitly to prophetic predecessors.”²⁰ The writers or compilers of these early prophetic texts build their works primarily from two

¹⁷ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 37.

¹⁸ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 3.

¹⁹ Martti Nissinen, “How Prophecy Became Literature,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 19:2 (2005): 157.

²⁰ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 49. Blenkinsopp also points out that this prophetic tradition “extend[s] back over some three centuries” before Hosea and Amos and “had by their time reached a fairly mature stage of consolidation” (2).

major sources. The first source is the oral preaching and teaching of various prophetic figures. Nissinen acknowledges that the “original” communication situation of prophetic literature stems from “the oral performances” of a prophet, though he argues that this “original” communication is contained “in the initial stages of” the composition and “fade[s] into the background,” thus making it nearly impossible to “be recognized in the text” in its final form.²¹ Goldsmith argues that “prophetic texts retain the character of a performance that strikes its point in a few words” regardless of “whether ancient prophets spoke first and wrote later, or carefully composed a speech and delivered it.”²² In order to demonstrate this, Goldsmith analyzes four prophetic texts (Hosea 7:3-9, Habakkuk 1:9-12, Isaiah 2:4/Micah 4:3/Joel 3:10 [4:10], and Zechariah 2:5 [2:9]). For example, in Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3, and Joel 3:10 [4:10], the prophets utilized similar agricultural imagery in order to discuss a larger vision of peace. Joel reverses the imagery used in Isaiah and Micah, utilizing the imagery as a call to the nations to prepare for war on the Day of Yahweh. Goldsmith argues that the common language in each text stems from “a property of oral tradition which cohered through the sound of words” and which relies on “a traditional form for mustering rural militia” that “was crafted differently to serve the message of each prophet” in their own historical and political contexts.²³ For Goldsmith, the use of agricultural imagery in Joel constitutes an “extremely effective [example] of ancient Israelite rhetoric which certainly [was] delivered orally” to an audience of “non-

²¹ Nissinen, 161.

²² Galen L. Goldsmith, “The Cutting Edge of Prophetic Imagery,” *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 3 (2011): 3.

²³ Goldsmith, 14. He also notes that the language used in this passage is an example of something with “which most people had first-hand experience” and “that would be easily understood by non-literate listeners on the first proclamation” (18). In addition, it was “so well known that it could even be reversed and still be recognizable” to the audience (14).

literate listeners” who would understand it “on the first proclamation.”²⁴ Goldsmith thus concludes that, in some prophetic texts at least, the “literary composition is more the servant than the primary vehicle of oracular utterances.”²⁵ Westermann argues that this oral preaching of the prophets was collected in “the eighth and seventh centuries” because “the prophetic speeches as such have become so intensely historical that they are collected and form the matrix of the prophetic books” that were composed during this time.²⁶ This made it harder for prophetic speeches to be included in the Deuteronomistic History or Chronicles, as they were in the past.

The second source that influenced and informed the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible is the prophetic texts of surrounding nations in the Ancient Near East. As Petersen notes, “the Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts are important for understanding the formation of prophetic literature” in the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ Many of these texts come well before the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible. The twenty eight letters from Mari are dated “from the mid-third millennium to” the destruction of the city “in 1762 B.C.E.,” while a text entitled “The Journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia” is dated around 1100 BCE and contains “the oldest literary reference to prophets in Canaan.”²⁸ These texts portray prophetic figures that function in many similar ways to the prophets in the Hebrew Bible.²⁹ For example, many texts in the Mari archives provide “messages for the

²⁴ Goldsmith, 18.

²⁵ Goldsmith, 18.

²⁶ Westermann, 92.

²⁷ Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” 43.

²⁸ Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 2-3.

²⁹ Hans M. Barstad, “*Comparare necesse est?* Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy in a Comparative Perspective,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 13, ed. Christopher R. Matthews (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), however, cautions against comparative studies between the prophetic texts at Mari/other locations in the Ancient Near East and the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible due to several problems of comparison that often come up in

king, warning him of danger, instructing him what to do, and promising divine blessings if he followed the directions.”³⁰ In addition, many newer discoveries at Mari highlight the “bold, assertive actions by the prophets” as they attempt to communicate their message to their audience, including “very dramatic, even flamboyant, symbolic acts.”³¹ While there are some important differences between the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible and other prophetic texts in the Ancient Near East (for example, the monotheistic focus found in the Hebrew Bible), these “texts show that Israel emerged in a context where persons could divine the will of the gods and even experience possession by them.”³² This context led people to put into writing the prophetic speeches, oracles, prayers, and exhortations of prophetic figures that delivered messages in Israel and Judah.

The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible is a diverse group of writings, and as such these writings cannot easily be placed into a homogenous category without doing a disservice to the body of literature. Nevertheless, many prophetic books contain common characteristics that help differentiate these books from other types of writing. First of all, the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible rely heavily on various forms of speech:

such studies. He notes problems in both “historical” and “typological” comparisons: he argues that “historical” comparisons that are “too interested in questions of origins or in whether a particular phenomenon results from cultural diffusionism... will, as a rule, be too speculative to be fruitful,” while “typological” comparisons often lead to situations where it is “very difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether a parallel phenomenon in two different but historically related cultures should be classified as ‘historical’ or ‘typological’” (6-7). Barstad also cautions that “there should be a reason for making comparisons” (8). In light of this, it must be said here that the comparison between prophetic literature at places like Mari and the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible is made in order to demonstrate the larger social and historical context of prophetic literature that influenced the Hebrew Bible, not to argue for any specific direction of influence or to argue for a direct evolution between the texts at Mari and those in the Hebrew Bible.

³⁰ Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 2. See, for example, Isaiah 7 for a similar example among prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible.

³¹ Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Expansion of Prophecy in the Mari Archives: New Texts, New Readings, New Information,” in *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship*, ed. Yehoshua Gitay, The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 17. See, for example, Ezekiel 4:1-5:4 and Isaiah 20:2-6 for similar examples from the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible.

³² Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 3-4.

accounts, prophetic speeches, and prayers or supplications made directly to Yahweh.³³ These prophetic speeches are words from God directed to specific communities for different reasons. According to Westermann, these prophetic speeches typically come in three forms: “Judgment-speeches to the prophet’s own nation,” “Judgment-speeches to foreign nations,” and “Salvation-speeches to the prophet’s own nation.”³⁴ Each form of prophetic speech includes its own unique characteristics, and these characteristics can be adapted or intentionally altered/discarded to meet the changing needs of the community.³⁵ While there are some differences between prophetic texts that use speeches, almost all seem to include an announcement of some kind (either of judgment or salvation).³⁶ In addition, many prophetic texts directed to individuals within the nation include exhortations and warnings, along with a summons to listen and a specific accusation.³⁷ Prophetic speeches to nations also include a more developed rationale justifying the accusation.³⁸ The importance of prophetic speech forms is understandable considering the oral background of prophecy and prophetic literature.

Prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible also includes a form of writing known as the disputation. Murray notes that “the forms which disputation may take, and the strategies adopted to resolve” the disputation “vary quite markedly,” though this form of writing contains some “essential constituents...whose viability can be tested against a

³³ Westermann, 90. Westermann notes that these forms of prophetic speech “are distributed very differently in the prophetic books:”—for example, some books “do not contain any accounts; Jonah consists only of an account,” and “the prophecy before Amos is passed down only in accounts” (90).

³⁴ Westermann, 95. Examples of judgment-speeches to Israel or Judah can be found in Jeremiah 20-23, examples of judgment-speeches to foreign nations can be found in Amos and Isaiah, and examples of salvation-speeches to Israel or Judah can be found in Jeremiah 30-33 and Ezekiel 33-39 (95-96).

³⁵ For an in-depth treatment of the alterations and modifications to the basic forms of prophetic speech found in the Hebrew Bible, see Westermann, 189-194, 199-209.

³⁶ Westermann, 96-98.

³⁷ Westermann, 98, 131. For an example of this, see Amos 7:10-17.

³⁸ Westermann, 170-171. For an example of this from the Hebrew Bible, see Amos 2:1.

varied selection of examples of prophetic disputations.”³⁹ Perhaps the standard example of a prophetic disputation is found in Isaiah 49:14-21.⁴⁰ Murray sees three main elements “which are constitutive of disputation in general” and which are “its necessary and sufficient condition: thesis, counter-thesis, dispute,” though he notes that these three elements can often appear in a different order and can employ different rhetorical strategies as it suits the specific social and historical context.⁴¹

The prophetic disputations found in the Hebrew Bible are likely a result of conflicts between different prophets that occurred from time to time. Prophetic conflict can be seen frequently throughout the Hebrew Bible.⁴² When two or more prophets came with different, often contradictory, messages, people were faced with the difficult task of determining who to listen to and who to ignore. This concern can be seen in the text of Deuteronomy, where the author cautions the people to ignore prophets who encourage the people to “‘follow other gods’ (whom [the people of Israel] have not known),” even if “the omens and the portents declared by them take place.”⁴³ In addition, the text tells the people that they can recognize false prophets “if a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh but the thing does not take place or prove true.”⁴⁴ As Crenshaw notes, this criterion used to differentiate true from false prophets is not helpful, in large part because “it can be

³⁹ D. F. Murray, “The Rhetoric of Disputation: Re-examination of a Prophetic Genre,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12:38 (1987): 97.

⁴⁰ Murray, 104-106. Murray also lists Ezekiel 33:23-29 and Isaiah 10:5-15 as examples of the prophetic disputation (103, 105-110), while Westermann adds passages such as Jeremiah 2:23-25 and Amos 5:18-20 (201).

⁴¹ Murray, 99.

⁴² One of the more famous examples is the conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jeremiah 27-28.

⁴³ Deuteronomy 13:1-3.

⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

effectively used only in retrospect.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the presence of prophetic conflict led to the use of the prophetic disputation in many parts of the Hebrew Bible.

The prophetic literature found in the Hebrew Bible also includes parables and laments as a means of inducing “the other party to assent to the verdict of God” or as a way to formulate “an announcement of judgment” at the hands of God.⁴⁶ These two forms of writing are not as common in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps the most well-known parable to be found among prophetic literature is Isaiah 5:1-7, where the author utilizes a parable focusing on a complaint by the owner of a vineyard to convey the punishment of Israel and Judah at the hands of Yahweh. In this parable, the “Lord of hosts is the owner” of the vineyard, while “Israel and Judah are his vineyard” and thus will be those judged for their “bloodshed” and “iniquity.”⁴⁷ Westermann argues that all of the parts of the judgment-speeches against foreign nations “can be recognized beneath its present wording,” so this form of prophetic writing seems to be an adaptation of the more common judgment-speech.⁴⁸

Lament poetry is found in several prophetic texts, for example Amos 5:1-3 and Jeremiah 9:16-21. The idea of a communal lament is central to the text of Joel, where the prophet calls on the people to lament in light of the locust plague that has brought

⁴⁵ Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion*, 50. Crenshaw also notes that other criteria used to differentiate true prophets from false ones prove unable to adequately address the problem. These criteria include the “promise of weal or woe” commonly associated with prophetic utterances, the “manner in which the revelation was received” by the prophet, and the prophet’s “allegiance to Yahweh or Baal” (52-56). Crenshaw also sees problems with criteria which focus upon the individual prophet, such as his relationship to the “prophetic office” of the temple cult, his personal integrity and moral conduct, and whether or not he possesses a conviction to serve as prophet (56-60). Crenshaw ultimately argues that these deficiencies in handling the prophetic conflict that would naturally arise led to the failure of prophetic literature and the rise of other forms of literature (e.g., wisdom and apocalyptic literature) thought better able to “validat[e] a message claimed to be of divine origin” (103-109).

⁴⁶ Westermann, 201-202.

⁴⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, eds. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 45.

⁴⁸ Westermann, 201.

destruction to the land. In these cases, the use of lament poetry is effective as a means to announce judgment because it “powerfully depicts the moment of the irrevocable when judgment is proclaimed over” the land of Israel or Judah.⁴⁹ These laments can come from God or from the prophet, and they can focus on the nation as a whole or over a specific city, such as Jerusalem.⁵⁰ At the heart of the lament is still the announcement of judgment found in the judgment-speeches of other prophetic passages.

As Westermann pointed out, central to the various forms of prophetic speech is the idea of judgment.⁵¹ This can be seen in the reproaches found in many prophetic texts. Reproaches are common among different prophetic texts, but these texts utilize this type of judgment-speech in different ways. For example, in Amos 2:9-16 the prophet utilizes a “bipartite contrast-statement followed by a verdict” in order to convey a message of judgment against the people of Israel.⁵² Thus the prophet contrasts the actions of Yahweh against the Amorites and the Egyptians with the actions of the people, who “made the nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy,’” before issuing the judgment, in which Yahweh “will press [the people] down in [their] place.”⁵³ While some prophetic texts do not utilize the structured tripartite reproach, this reproach structure occurs in many other prophetic texts, especially in Jeremiah.⁵⁴ This reproach also includes other elements common to many forms of prophetic speech: the introductory messenger formula, the accusation, and a concluding element (in this case, a verdict of judgment).⁵⁵ Because of the common nature of this literary form, Blenkinsopp

⁴⁹ Westermann, 202.

⁵⁰ Westermann, 202-203.

⁵¹ Westermann, 96-98.

⁵² Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Prophetic Reproach,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90:3 (1971): 267.

⁵³ Amos 2:12-13.

⁵⁴ See Blenkinsopp, “The Prophetic Reproach,” 268-271.

⁵⁵ Blenkinsopp, “The Prophetic Reproach,” 267; Westermann, 96-98.

argues that the tripartite prophetic reproach should be taken “as a distinct literary structure or at least sub-structure” that can have its development traced over time.”⁵⁶

Blenkinsopp also argues that this form, used in early prophetic texts like Amos and Hosea, “was eventually absorbed into the longer prophetic discourse, though it is still found, sometimes in a quite formulaic way, in some post-exilic prophetic collections.”⁵⁷

Prophetic literature became popular and was eventually seen as sacred scripture by various communities due to the relevance of its message to different groups of people dealing with unique social and political situations. The messages of prophets were written down because they utilized relevant imagery that helped convey a message of urgency to their audience.⁵⁸ This message of urgency helped to spur the people to act in a manner that would bring about a favorable response from Yahweh in their time of need.

One of the more common metaphoric concepts utilized in prophetic literature is the Day of Yahweh. This concept occurs in many different prophetic texts, including Joel, and has been described as “a central theme in prophetic thought about the future.”⁵⁹ This concept is also utilized in different ways in prophetic texts. For example, in seven texts which utilize this concept, “prophetic writers speak of future or cosmic events,” while writers use the concept “to emphasize the imminence of the anticipated event” in six other passages.⁶⁰ The phrase יהוה יום is even used in five texts “to describe and interpret past historical events.”⁶¹ The earliest passage to utilize this phrase is Amos 5:18-

⁵⁶ Blenkinsopp, “The Prophetic Reproach,” 274.

⁵⁷ Blenkinsopp, “The Prophetic Reproach,” 276.

⁵⁸ See Goldsmith, where he discusses “four extremely effective examples of ancient Israelite rhetoric” that include “metaphors of which most people had first-hand experience to create sayings that would be easily understood by non-literate listeners on the first proclamation” (18).

⁵⁹ A. Joseph Everson, “The Days of Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93:3 (1974): 329.

⁶⁰ Everson, 330-331.

⁶¹ Everson, 331.

20, where the prophet chastises people for desiring the approach of this day.⁶² The concept of a Day of Yahweh must have been familiar with the audience, who viewed the day as a joyful event to be desired because it signaled “the appearance of God in an act of salvation,” which Hoffmann believes is “neither at ‘the end of days’ nor in an annual event...but during the current stream of history.”⁶³ Amos, however, utilizes terms that “both underscore the magnitude and the dreadful nature of ‘the day of the Lord.’”⁶⁴ Thus Amos contends that “the appearance of God would be ‘darkness and not light’” in order to push back against the popular notion of the people and call them to lives of holiness and social justice in the present.⁶⁵ The next use of the term occurs in Zephaniah 1:1-18, where the prophet utilizes this term in “a description of universal doom.”⁶⁶ Here the concept becomes a more “definite term” that includes “an eschatological nuance” with its use of “motifs of finality and extinction.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, in this passage, as well as in other later prophetic passages which utilize Day of Yahweh rhetoric, the prophet relies on “language related to military conquest.”⁶⁸ This type of language is influenced by other literature in the Ancient Near East, in which “a truly great king or sovereign possessed such universal power and authority that he could complete a military campaign, or even an entire war of conquest against his enemies in a single day.”⁶⁹ In many later passages,

⁶² Yair Hoffmann, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93:1 (1981): 39.

⁶³ Hoffmann, 42.

⁶⁴ Dana M. Pike, “‘The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord’: The Anatomy of an Expression,” *BYU Studies* 41:2 (2002): 151.

⁶⁵ Hoffmann, 42.

⁶⁶ Hoffmann, 46.

⁶⁷ Hoffmann, 42.

⁶⁸ Douglas Stuart, “The Sovereign’s Day of Conquest,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 221 (1976): 159.

⁶⁹ Stuart, 159, 161-163. Stuart argues that this connotation of the Day of Yahweh is present in Amos 5:18-20, though he bases that on the surrounding context of Amos 6, where the description of the Day of Yahweh in Amos 5:18-20 “is continued and broadened” by contrasting the “exile and grief (vs. 7) and the deliverance of the fortified city of Samaria and its strongholds (vs. 8),” which Stuart sees as “a punishment

the Day of Yahweh is used to signify a more universal form of judgment at the hands of Yahweh. These two passages, and the passages which utilize the Day of Yahweh as a means to interpret the past, highlight the flexibility of this terminology in prophetic literature. Everson argues that texts which utilize the Day of Yahweh to interpret past events demonstrate “that the Day of Yahweh was not viewed in the pre-exilic and exilic eras of Israel’s history as a singular, universal, or exclusively future event of world judgment.”⁷⁰ This can be confirmed by Hoffmann’s exegesis of Amos 5:18-20, where he concludes that “Amos’s words do not reveal any sign of an eschatological interpretation of the concept nor of an historic-universalistic one.”⁷¹ Instead, this term “was a powerful concept available to the prophets for their use in interpreting various momentous events” and helping the people discern “with particular clarity the awesome presence of Yahweh in the world in his ongoing activity of judgment or rescue.”⁷²

The use of the Day of Yahweh and other concepts regarding the future in prophetic literature bring up one of the more important questions relating to prophetic literature: What is the role of the future in prophetic texts? Freedman argues that “prophets in the Bible claim to be both foretellers and forthtellers,” or people who function as those that predict the future and who call on people to act righteously in the present.⁷³ Carroll, furthermore, notes that if the term “eschatology is limited to a consideration of the ‘last things,’ or ‘final things,’ or even ‘ultimate things’ then prophecy had no eschatology,” and thus prophetic literature should be seen as non-

by enemies in war” (160). While this interpretation is possible, it is not likely based on a close reading of Amos 5:18-20 as a singular unit.

⁷⁰ Everson, 335.

⁷¹ Hoffmann, 43.

⁷² Everson, 335, 337.

⁷³ David Noel Freedman, “Between God and Man: Prophets in Ancient Israel,” in *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship*, ed. Yehoshua Gitay, The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 57.

eschatological literature.⁷⁴ Prophetic texts do, however, often contain the notion of “future hope” that distinguishes them from apocalyptic literature, which relies heavily on an eschatological framework.⁷⁵ This future hope expressed by prophetic texts can refer to the immediate future, or can refer to a future that is farther out and that relies on a delay before the realization of that hope. Texts like Joel 2-3 [2-4] include “possible imitations of delay” in the realization of future hope, though this text tends “to stress imminence and expectation rather than delay.”⁷⁶ Texts like Haggai 1:1-11, however, show “an awareness of something lacking in the community...which explains why the expected prosperity has not been experienced” at the present moment.⁷⁷ Thus the notion of the future is important to the prophet, though different prophetic texts have different attitudes toward the short-term and long-term future.

Prophetic literature serves two important functions in the life of Israel and Judah which led to its popularity. First of all, the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible functions as resistance literature. The prophets conveyed messages of hope and deliverance to groups that felt the weight of those in charge on a daily basis. This could be against foreign powers such as Assyria or Babylon, or it could be against the Temple cult and the monarchies of Israel and Judah. Brueggemann sees in prophetic literature the outworking of the example of Moses, who many scholars consider to be “the unique model of a prophet in the Hebrew Bible.”⁷⁸ Brueggemann argues that “Moses was mainly

⁷⁴ Robert P. Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94:1 (1982): 48.

⁷⁵ Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 48.

⁷⁶ Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 49, 57.

⁷⁷ Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 56.

⁷⁸ Freedman, 71.

concerned with the formation of a countercommunity with a counterconsciousness.”⁷⁹ This can be seen in the way Moses confronts the Egyptians over their treatment of the Israelites. Moses calls on Pharaoh to let Yahweh’s “people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to [Yahweh] in the wilderness” and encourages the Israelites with the notion of freedom from the oppression of the Egyptians, though they do not listen “because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.”⁸⁰ Thus Moses conveys a message that is “a radical break with the social reality of Pharaoh’s Egypt,” including both its “religion of static triumphalism and the politics of oppression and exploitation.”⁸¹ This can also be seen in Jeremiah, who criticized the people of Judah, who knew “not the ordinance of” Yahweh.⁸² This ignorance of Yahweh’s commands led to a numbness among the people which “prevented any new movement either from God or toward God in Judah” and thus prevented the true liberation of the people.⁸³ Other prophetic texts utilize more positive images of amazement that energize the people to action by offering hope. Second Isaiah in particular utilizes this rhetoric. In this text, the prophet offers an image of a future in which those “who wait for [Yahweh] shall renew their strength,” and “shall run and not be weary” and “walk and not faint.”⁸⁴ The prophet offers the people hope for a new society—a hope that has God as its “only serious source of energy” and that “the royal consciousness—either of Solomon or Nebuchadnezzar—cannot give” to the people.⁸⁵ Thus the prophet calls for a radical break from the current state of society. This radical break enables the community to hope in the total dismantling of the regime in power “in

⁷⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 21.

⁸⁰ Exodus 5:1; 6:9.

⁸¹ Brueggemann, 5-6.

⁸² Jeremiah 8:7.

⁸³ Brueggemann, 56.

⁸⁴ Isaiah 40:30-31.

⁸⁵ Brueggemann, 78.

order to permit a new reality to appear.”⁸⁶ This reality will be characterized by the justice and mercy of Yahweh upon his people.

Prophetic literature can also be thought of as crisis literature. While this is different than seeing prophetic literature as resistance literature, it need not be in conflict with that conception. In fact, the notion of prophetic literature as crisis literature can be connected with the conception of prophetic literature as resistance literature designed to critique the ruling authorities. Many prophetic texts became so influential because they enabled communities to deal with situations of extreme crisis. Stulman and Kim in particular conceptualize prophetic texts as “survival literature for postwar communities living through monstrous events.”⁸⁷ This notion of prophetic literature as survival literature could also be applied to the aftermath of a natural disaster, and need not be confined solely to situations of war and political oppression. While Stulman and Kim acknowledge the role of oral prophecy as a means “to bring about fundamental changes in social arrangements, often before the collapse of long-standing and cherished structures,” they recognize that prophetic writings are taken in a different way, as they are compiled and read by communities many years after any oral prophecies were proclaimed.⁸⁸ Thus they argue that prophetic literature “converts prewar *oracles* into postwar *texts*.”⁸⁹ Prophetic literature therefore becomes an important way to make meaning out of situations of destruction and chaos.

Prophetic texts do this in a variety of ways. For example, prophetic texts conduct meaning-making by destabilizing and deconstructing the status quo with rhetorical

⁸⁶ Brueggemann, 21.

⁸⁷ Stulman and Kim, 11.

⁸⁸ Stulman and Kim, 10.

⁸⁹ Stulman and Kim, 10, emphasis original.

devices like the “accusation, disputation,” and “covenant lawsuit.”⁹⁰ In addition, prophetic texts create meaning out of crisis situations by exerting the sovereignty of Yahweh over other people groups and situations.⁹¹ This can be seen in texts like Joel and Obadiah, where the prophet offers hope to his audience that Yahweh will defeat the surrounding nations and establish his people in security on Mount Zion.⁹² Prophetic texts also make meaning out of disaster situations by using them as an impetus to call “for action rather than resignation or passivity” in helping bring about “a better life in the future.”⁹³ Prophetic literature thus enables communities in situations of crisis and disaster to live with the hope that there is a purpose behind their struggle and that Yahweh will deliver them in the future.

The wide variety of motifs and speech forms utilized within the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible make it difficult to easily define this term. First of all, it is not clear whether or not this form of literature should be seen as a singular genre or a type of literature composed of different genres. Murray, for example, notes the two major dangers of attempting to categorize literature into genres: (1) creating “so vague a definition that quite disparate material can be comprehended within its range” or (2) creating “so strict a definition that material with real similarities of structure and content cannot be accommodated by it.”⁹⁴ Throughout his treatment of the prophetic disputation, Murray seems to regard the disputation as a separate genre.⁹⁵ Petersen notes the different roles of prophets throughout the Hebrew Bible and concludes that “it is appropriate to

⁹⁰ Stulman and Kim, 14, see also 16.

⁹¹ Stulman and Kim, 14-15.

⁹² See, for example, Joel 3:9-21 [4:9-21] and Obadiah 17-21.

⁹³ Stulman and Kim, 16-17.

⁹⁴ Murray, 95.

⁹⁵ See, for example, where Murray refers to it as the “disputation genre” (96).

think that differing kinds of prophetic activity normally resulted in different kinds of literature,” though it is unclear as to whether he would constitute these varying forms of prophetic literature as unique genres or parts of a larger genre.⁹⁶

Perhaps the best way to define prophetic literature is to think of prophetic literature as a reflection of what it means to be a prophet. Different terms can be used to describe the prophet in the Hebrew Bible, and because of this the function of the prophet can be thought of in different ways. For example, prophets can be seen as people that “had distinctive, usually private, experiences in which the deity was revealed to them.”⁹⁷ Prophets can also be seen as people who possessed “distinctive personal qualities, for example, charisma.”⁹⁸ These notions of what a prophet is lead to narrow views of prophecy and prophetic literature, and would discount many prophetic texts found in the Hebrew Bible.

With this in mind, perhaps the most compelling picture of the prophet is as an intermediary. This explains the emphasis on the calling and commissioning of the prophet, who was “supposed to respond positively, or at least acquiesce in his role as messenger/agent of the deity.”⁹⁹ In addition, the importance in discerning whether or not a prophet is true is wrapped up in the depiction of the prophet as an intermediary. People needed to determine whether or not a prophetic judgment was true because the prophetic judgment was ultimately depicted as a judgment coming from God through the prophet. The prophet serves as a figure relaying messages of judgment or salvation from Yahweh to the people, who do not have direct access in the same way the prophet does.

⁹⁶ Petersen, “Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature,” 24.

⁹⁷ Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” 33.

⁹⁸ Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” 36.

⁹⁹ Freedman, 60.

Furthermore, many prophetic texts depict the prophet as an “intercessor on behalf of the people.”¹⁰⁰ This can be seen in the example of Amos, who calls on God to relent and not bring about “a shower of fire” to eat “up the land.”¹⁰¹ Amos is actually successful, and “twice God repents and suspends the threatened judgment” against the nation.¹⁰² This suggests a more positive view toward the future as well, as the prophet is able to effect change for the community in this world in the immediate future. Thus “the notion of prophet as intermediary seems comprehensive enough to help understand prophets throughout the ancient Near East.”¹⁰³

This suggests that prophetic literature should be defined primarily in relation to the role of the prophet as an intermediary. Thus prophetic literature can be defined as any writing that includes the actions or messages of a prophetic figure acting as an intermediary and that includes a positive view of the present world and Yahweh’s ability to bring about restoration within it. It is therefore probably not helpful to think of prophetic literature as a particular genre of literature. Prophetic literature should be thought of as a collection of writings focused on the intermediation of a prophetic figure between the people and God. This collection of writings can include various genres, such as the disputation or the lament. This definition of prophetic literature solves the problem of biblical scholarship that refuses to recognize the “fundamentally diverse forms of prophetic literature” that are a reflection of the “various forms of intermediation in ancient Israel.”¹⁰⁴ This definition is comprehensive enough to encompass the variety of prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible, though it is meaningless as a designation of genre.

¹⁰⁰ Freedman, 70.

¹⁰¹ Amos 7:4.

¹⁰² Freedman, 71.

¹⁰³ Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” 39.

¹⁰⁴ Petersen, “Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature,” 35.

Each prophetic text of the Hebrew Bible will have to be analyzed closely to determine the genre or genres that constitute that writing.

Apocalyptic Literature

The apocalyptic literature of the Ancient Near East contains some of the most fascinating texts written. These texts utilize fanciful language and colorful imagery in order to convey messages of hope to communities in need, and for this reason have remained influential even today. Despite the popularity of apocalyptic texts, classifying these texts has not been without its difficulties. This is due to the nature of the terminology used in studies of apocalyptic literature.¹⁰⁵ Traditionally, scholars have used the term ‘apocalyptic’ as a noun that helps describe a certain type of literature. However, as Webb notes, the term “‘apocalyptic’ is a very slippery term and requires careful delineation,” because “an author might use ‘apocalyptic’ to refer to a particular literary work, a literary genre, a single idea, a set of motifs, an ideology, a sociological phenomenon, or something else.”¹⁰⁶ This free use of the term ‘apocalyptic’ led to much confusion among scholars, which inhibited the progress of scholarly research on apocalyptic texts, because, as Hanson notes, “a term is only as useful as the clarity with which it is defined and the precision with which it is applied.”¹⁰⁷ For these reasons the use of ‘apocalyptic’ as a noun has fallen out of favor in recent years. Most scholars today use this term as an adjective—i.e., apocalyptic literature, apocalyptic eschatology, or apocalyptic movement.

¹⁰⁵ For a comprehensive review of recent scholarly research on apocalyptic literature, see Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker, *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1985) and Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1975), 50-67.

¹⁰⁶ Robert L. Webb, “‘Apocalyptic’: Observations on a Slippery Term,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49:2 (1990): 115.

¹⁰⁷ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 25.

In recent years, scholars have attempted to differentiate the various aspects of apocalyptic literature by using more careful language. Tigchelaar likewise differentiates between ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘apocalypse,’ because “usually nouns indicate genres, adjectives modes.”¹⁰⁸ Thus he uses the noun ‘apocalypse’ as a designation of genre, while he uses the adjective ‘apocalyptic’ to describe a “mode of thought” that “need not be confined to apocalypses” and that “has no substance of its own.”¹⁰⁹ Aune utilizes the terms ‘apocalypse,’ ‘apocalyptic eschatology,’ and ‘apocalypticism’ instead of ‘apocalyptic’ because he believes “apocalyptic or apocalypticism is a slippery term used in at least three different ways: (1) as a type of literature, (2) as a type of eschatology, and (3) as a type of collective behavior.”¹¹⁰ Collins also makes this three-fold distinction, using ‘apocalypse’ to describe a literary genre, ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ to describe the eschatological outlook of these texts, and ‘apocalypticism’ to describe a movement that shares “the conceptual framework of the genre” and that endorses “a worldview in which supernatural revelation, the heavenly world, and eschatological judgment played essential parts.”¹¹¹ Webb also sees the need to use more specific language in place of the term ‘apocalyptic;’ however, he takes issue with the term ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ and thinks ‘millenarian movement’ is a more suitable term than ‘apocalyptic movement,’ because many of the groups that are designated by the term ‘apocalyptic movement’ produced few apocalypses.¹¹² While the difference in terminology is important, this study will be

¹⁰⁸ Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and The Day of the End: Zechariah, The Book of Watchers and Apocalyptic*, Oudtestamentische Studiën 35, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1996), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Tigchelaar, 6.

¹¹⁰ Aune, 234.

¹¹¹ Collins, 4-5, 11, 13.

¹¹² Webb, 116-117. He notes in particular the “two well-known movements which are usually characterized as ‘apocalyptic movements’: Qumran and early Christianity,” which he points out cannot “be characterized as apocalypse-producing movements” because “Qumran produced none and early Christianity only one”

confined to an examination of the characteristics associated with the genre apocalypse and apocalyptic literature.

The term ‘apocalyptic literature’ is not without its problems. As Patterson notes, the “isolation of a distinct apocalyptic genre and the question as to what properly constitutes an apocalypse has not met with universal consensus.”¹¹³ Scholars have thus offered several different definitions for these terms in recent years. These definitions typically follow one of three lines of argumentation. The first defines apocalyptic literature “by providing lists or descriptions of traits which include literary characteristics, eschatological motifs, and sometimes psychological characteristics.”¹¹⁴ Aune, for example, defines an apocalypse as “a type of supernatural visionary literature depicting the imminent and catastrophic end of the world.”¹¹⁵ Hanson falls into this category as well, as he defines apocalyptic literature, focusing specifically on the apocalyptic literature of the Hebrew Bible, as follows:

A group of writings concerned with the renewal of faith and the reordering of life on the basis of a vision of a prototypical heavenly order revealed to a religious community through a seer. The author tends to relativize the significance of existing realities by depicting how they are about to be superseded by God’s universal reign in an eschatological event that can neither be hastened nor thwarted by human efforts, but which will unfold, true to an eternal plan, as the result of divine action.¹¹⁶

(117). While this criticism is valid, it is not persuasive. Tigchelaar, for example, points out that “the apocalyptic mode of thought need not be confined to apocalypses,” and thus a group can rightfully be thought of as an ‘apocalyptic movement’ without producing numerous apocalypses (6). Furthermore, the earliest Christian communities and the community at Qumran relied heavily on apocalyptic texts that were already written (e.g., Daniel, Revelation), and also came up with apocalyptic interpretations of other texts already considered sacred scripture by their respective communities (e.g., 1QpHab), which further demonstrates the apocalyptic nature of these movements.

¹¹³ Patterson, 385.

¹¹⁴ Webb, 118.

¹¹⁵ Aune, 234.

¹¹⁶ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 27-28.

The next method for defining apocalyptic literature focuses primarily on “the literary form of an apocalypse,” which it argues “is its distinguishing and defining characteristic.”¹¹⁷ This method of defining apocalyptic literature responds to some of the perceived weaknesses of the traditional approach to defining apocalyptic literature.¹¹⁸ This way of categorizing apocalyptic literature thus sees apocalyptic literature as a form of literature centered around “revelation, that is, the direct unveiling and communicating of God’s esoteric truth to man.”¹¹⁹ A variation of this methodology can be seen in the definition of apocalyptic literature offered by Sacchi, who seeks to define apocalyptic literature by the literary problem that underlies the oldest apocalypse and that informs the rest of the genre—the problem of the origin of evil.¹²⁰

The third method used to provide a comprehensive definition of apocalyptic literature is the “essentialist” definition provided by Sanders. In this methodology, Sanders defines apocalyptic literature “as a combination of the themes of *revelation* and *reversal* (of the fortunes of a group, either Israel or the righteous).”¹²¹ Sanders thus sees these two features as the essential elements of the genre. These elements facilitate the

¹¹⁷ Webb, 120.

¹¹⁸ Webb identifies three central problems associated with the traditional approach: (1) “it neglects other ideas and motifs which are prominent in certain apocalypses;” (2) it “implies that the eschatological material contained in the apocalypses presents a basically unified view of apocalyptic eschatology,” which “is simply not the case;” and (3) “no apocalypse contains all the eschatological traits usually given in such a list,” which makes it an oversimplification “to define the content of the apocalyptic genre with a list of eschatological traits” (119).

¹¹⁹ Webb, 120.

¹²⁰ Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*, trans. William J. Short, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 20, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Lester L. Grabbe (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990). Collins points out the major weakness of this method, noting that “the genre cannot be identified with a single motif or theme, and the early Enoch literature, important though it is, cannot be regarded as normative for all apocalypses” (11).

¹²¹ Collins, 9; E. P. Sanders, “The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 447-459.

proposal of apocalyptic literature as the “literature of the oppressed,” which serves a role in the social world of oppressed communities.¹²²

In his study of the term ‘apocalyptic,’ Webb notes problems with all three basic approaches to offering a comprehensive definition of apocalyptic literature. Webb advocates for an approach that he terms “the eclectic approach,” which he argues is characterized by “comprehensive diversity” and attempts “to develop a heuristic definition which both identifies recurring features and highlights distinctive features” in apocalyptic texts.¹²³ Perhaps the standard definition based upon the eclectic approach is offered by Collins, who defines the genre apocalypse as follows:

A genre of revelatory literature with a framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹²⁴

This approach to defining apocalyptic literature is more compelling than the approaches offered by Sacchi and Sanders because it draws on the strengths of those approaches and because it avoids problems associated with some of those methodologies. For example, the eclectic approach of Collins “recognizes the importance of revelation in understanding the form,” which is “an emphasis in the literary-form and essential definitions.”¹²⁵ However, the eclectic approach “recognizes the great diversity of the eschatological material and avoids implying that all characteristics are in all apocalypses,” which was a major problem in the more traditional approach.¹²⁶

¹²² Collins, 9. He notes two major disadvantages to this method for defining apocalyptic literature: (1) “the combined themes of revelation and reversal are characteristic of the whole tradition of biblical prophecy,” and (2) “it takes no account at all of the cosmological and mystical tendencies in the apocalypses” (9-10).

¹²³ Webb, 121.

¹²⁴ Collins, 5.

¹²⁵ Webb, 123.

¹²⁶ Webb, 123.

In recent years there has developed a consensus as to the earliest apocalyptic texts written, but this was not always the case. Berry argues that “among the earliest passages which should probably be classed as apocalyptic are three messages of doom addressed to foreign nations; Is 14 4b-21, against Babylon; Ez 28 2-19, against Tyre; and Ez 31, against Egypt.”¹²⁷ According to Berry, these texts were likely redactions to prophetic books that “may have been the work of editors,” and are “doubtless to be dated from about 300 B.C. to 165 B.C.”¹²⁸ Collins, however, argues convincingly that *I Enoch* contains “the earliest apocalypses” as defined by his eclectic approach.¹²⁹ Milik notes that fragments from *I Enoch*, including the Book of the Watchers (*I Enoch* 1-36) and the Astronomical Book (*I Enoch* 72-82), have been found at Qumran and date to the late third or early second century BCE.¹³⁰ The earliest apocalypse found in the Hebrew Bible is contained in Daniel 7-12, which Towner dates “to the first third of the second century B.C.”¹³¹ This is the “only full-blown example of apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible,” as later apocalypses were not included within the Hebrew Bible.¹³² Future apocalyptic works continued to grow and build off the works of *I Enoch* and Daniel, which were influential texts to the genre.

¹²⁷ Berry, 13.

¹²⁸ Berry, 12.

¹²⁹ Collins, 25.

¹³⁰ J. T. Milik, with the collaboration of Matthew Black, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1976), 5-7.

¹³¹ W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1984), 5.

¹³² Collins, 85. Schmithals argues that the book of Daniel “gained admission into the Old Testament...not because of, but in spite of, the apocalyptic passages in this book, because people placed the prophetic author in the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and rightly understood extensive passages of the book in which preapocalyptic traditions were incorporated as expressions of orthodox Jewish piety” (71-72). This suggestion seems likely, as Collins also notes that “there is even now the agonized attempt to disassociate the canonical book from the rest of the (disreputable) genre” of apocalyptic literature (85). Collins also develops a similar point regarding the New Testament book of Revelation (see 269).

Determining the end point of apocalyptic literature is a more difficult endeavor. Many scholars who focus on the Hebrew Bible and New Testament choose to see the book of Revelation and related Christian texts from the first century CE as the final apocalyptic works. Collins, however, argues that “despite frequent assertions to the contrary, the genre did not die out at the end of the first century C.E.”¹³³ Instead, Collins points to “the Hekalot literature” and to the “messianic and eschatological expectation” of “messianic and apocalyptic movements” found in Judaism to demonstrate the continuity of apocalyptic literature after the first century.¹³⁴ He also points to Christian apocalypses which “proliferated from the second century on,” as well as modern day apocalyptic movements as evidence of the continued relevance of apocalyptic texts.¹³⁵ This chapter will focus on apocalyptic literature insofar as it relates to the Hebrew Bible, and thus will not consider later examples of apocalyptic literature after the second century CE.

Like the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, apocalyptic texts were composed throughout a wide variety of historical, social, and cultural contexts. For example, the Book of the Watchers (*1 Enoch* 1-36) likely uses “the crisis of the fallen angels” as “an allegory for some crisis in the Hellenistic age,” though Collins acknowledges that “we cannot determine precisely what crisis it was that generated the Book of the Watchers,” including whether or not this crisis involved “religious persecution” specifically or something “of a rather general nature, such as the spread of Hellenistic culture in the East.”¹³⁶ Daniel can more specifically be situated in “the reign

¹³³ Collins, 281. It should be noted that Collins does not cite specific scholars to support this assertion.

¹³⁴ Collins, 281.

¹³⁵ Collins, 282.

¹³⁶ Collins, 59.

of the Syrian king Antiochus IV ('Epiphanes'; 175-163 B.C.)”¹³⁷ This period of time was characterized by the suppression and persecution of the Jewish people by Antiochus, who instituted a program of Hellenization designed to homogenize his kingdom. Daniel was likely “written soon after the desecration of the temple (167), but before the death of Antiochus (163),” and thus deals with oppression at the hands of a foreign power.¹³⁸ Later apocalyptic texts, such as the book of Revelation, were written in similar social situations. Revelation is typically dated around 95 CE, which situates the text in the reign of the emperor Domitian, who ruled the Roman Empire from 81-96 CE.¹³⁹ During this portion of Domitian’s reign, “there was more chaos in the cultural and social spheres of the Empire...than at any prior time,” and many members of the Christian community lived under the threat of persecution and punishment by the Roman authorities.¹⁴⁰ These situations of persecution at the hands of more powerful empires provide the central question that undergirds apocalyptic texts: “How are the faithful to remain true to their confession of the sole sovereignty of God in a world dominated by awesome powers yoked to pagan deities and hostile toward the traditional beliefs and practices of the Jewish people?”¹⁴¹ These texts thus serve to encourage “the Jews in the midst of their

¹³⁷ Schmithals, 189.

¹³⁸ Schmithals, 141.

¹³⁹ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library, eds. C. Clifton Black, M. Eugene Boring, and John T. Carroll (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 8.

¹⁴⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 5. Aune does note, however, that this situation was “a *perceived* (in contrast to *real*) crisis,” as the “pressure exerted against Christians in Roman Asia toward the end of the first and the beginning of the second century C.E. is now recognized as having been random, local, and sporadic” (236, emphasis original). Regardless, this does not make the feeling of persecution and oppression at the hands of the Roman Empire any less real to members of this community, and the real or perceived nature of this persecution does not take away from the influence this situation has on the writings of that community.

¹⁴¹ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 122.

difficult conditions, so that they might not lose heart, but might continue to believe in the bright destiny of their nation” in times of social and political uncertainty and upheaval.¹⁴²

The origin of apocalyptic literature is one of the more difficult questions related to the study of apocalyptic texts in the Ancient Near East. Aune notes difficulties in tracing the origins of apocalyptic literature without offering his own perspective on the matter.¹⁴³ Tigchelaar agrees, and describes apocalyptic texts as part of “a highly complex genre” that “cannot be thought of as having only one origin,” and thus “the search really must be for origins, instead of the origin” of apocalyptic literature.¹⁴⁴ Collins cautions against using “the quest for sources” as a way “to view apocalypticism as a derivative phenomenon, a product of something other than itself” that is “inherently inferior to the prophets” or to other forms of literature common in the Ancient Near East.¹⁴⁵ Collins is correct to point out that the search for the “origins of apocalyptic” is “misdirected and counterproductive” in many respects, as “any given apocalypse combines allusions to a wide range of sources.”¹⁴⁶ The discussion in this chapter will not seek to uncover the “origins of apocalyptic literature,” and will instead seek to describe the sources that helped to influence apocalyptic texts.

Many scholars note the influence that the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible had on apocalyptic literature, and some even argue that apocalyptic texts were the natural outgrowth of these prophetic texts. Sweeney defends this assertion by noting “the appearance of a number of proto-apocalyptic texts within the context of larger prophetic books, i.e., Isaiah 24-27; 34-35; 56-66; Ezekiel 38-39, or proto-apocalyptic prophetic

¹⁴² Berry, 10.

¹⁴³ Aune, 238-239.

¹⁴⁴ Tigchelaar, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Collins, 20.

¹⁴⁶ Collins, 20.

books that appear within the larger corpus of prophetic literature, i.e., Zechariah and Joel.”¹⁴⁷ Hanson defends this thesis as well by noting the continuity that exists between prophetic literature and later apocalyptic texts. For example, he demonstrates that there was an “unbroken development leading from prophetic eschatology to apocalyptic eschatology,” which can be seen in the “gradual shift of emphasis away from this world toward the heavenly world.”¹⁴⁸ Hanson specifically argues that this can be seen in what he terms “examples of early apocalyptic,” such as Isaiah 56-66, which he believes constitutes “a transitional stage between prophecy and apocalyptic.”¹⁴⁹ This collection of texts retains many features common to prophetic literature, while at the same time utilizing several “features of apocalyptic eschatology,” namely “the doctrine of a *universal* judgment” and the inauguration of “a new age radically different from the present age...by a new act of creation.”¹⁵⁰ Schmithals suggests that Jewish groups began writing apocalyptic texts because of “the still-delayed fulfillment of the prophetic predictions,” which in some cases had not yet come true.¹⁵¹ This caused these

¹⁴⁷ Marvin A. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 45, eds. Bernd Janowski, Mark S. Smith, and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 239 n. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 33.

¹⁴⁹ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 35, 37.

¹⁵⁰ Richard J. Bauckham, “The Rise of Apocalyptic,” *Themelios* 3:2 (1978): 12, emphasis original. Bauckham appeals to texts such as Isaiah 63:6; 65:17-25; and 66:16 to support this assertion.

¹⁵¹ Schmithals, 135. While Schmithals goes on to argue that the “two understandings of existence” found in prophetic and apocalyptic literature “cannot be brought into agreement with each other,” and “even stand in direct opposition to each other,” he does acknowledge that it is probable to draw “a somewhat continuous line of development from prophecy to apocalyptic,” though he sees apocalyptic literature as arguing against the perspective found in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible to a certain degree (138). This perspective does not change the conclusion that prophetic literature largely influenced later apocalyptic writings. Tigchelaar, however, argues that it is problematic to attempt to find the origins of apocalyptic literature or thought in prophecy and wisdom, because “all three of these terms are used to describe different things,” which makes it pointless to compare “apocalyptic to prophecy, when at the same time one states that exilic and post-exilic prophecy are closer to apocalyptic than to pre-exilic prophecy” (10). While he acknowledges that “modes of thought and world views can be regarded as cultural fabrics,” he does acknowledge some level of importance to studies on the origins of apocalyptic literature, as “real understanding can only be obtained by studying why and how features from different origins came to be

communities to incorporate a more universalistic attitude toward the future in order to cope with real or perceived threats from groups in power.

It is clear that the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible exerted an important influence on the apocalyptic texts that would later develop. Hanson also argues that it is “clear that many of the apocalyptic writings, especially the so-called pseudepigraphic ones, were influenced by the wisdom tradition.”¹⁵² Collins notes differences between the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and apocalyptic literature though he does agree that “apocalypses do indeed present a kind of wisdom insofar as they, first, offer an understanding of the structure of the universe and of history, and, second, see right understanding as the precondition of right action.”¹⁵³ Collins points in particular to the Wisdom of Solomon as “the biblical wisdom book that shows most correspondence with the apocalypses.”¹⁵⁴ Although Johnson argues that the book of Job, largely considered a wisdom text, “is more closely related to apocalypse than wisdom,” and thus should be classified as “a nascent form of ‘apocalypse’” like other proto-apocalyptic texts, his analysis of the correspondences that exist between the content of Job and the characteristics of apocalyptic literature (as specifically defined by the eclectic approach of Collins) may suggest a stronger link between wisdom literature and apocalyptic literature than previously thought, especially if he is incorrect in his assertion that Job is closer to apocalyptic literature than wisdom literature.¹⁵⁵ While it is unclear exactly what the relationship between wisdom literature and apocalyptic literature is, these studies

put together” (11). In order to do this type of critical work, first an understanding of those origins that influence the literature is necessary.

¹⁵² Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 33.

¹⁵³ Collins, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Collins, 21.

¹⁵⁵ Timothy Jay Johnson, *Now My Eye Sees You: Unveiling an Apocalyptic Job*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 24 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 2, 67, 76-77, 158.

demonstrate that apocalyptic texts drew upon motifs and language common to wisdom literature in order to offer messages of hope to communities facing real or perceived threats from other groups in power.

An examination of other literature found in the Ancient Near East demonstrates that “Jewish apocalypses are not a totally unique phenomenon” and “that all adjacent cultures have contributed one or more mites to the rise of apocalyptic forms and thoughts” in the Hebrew Bible and later apocalyptic texts.¹⁵⁶ Collins, for example, sees the influence of “the ‘mantic wisdom’ of the Chaldeans” in the book of Daniel.¹⁵⁷ This can be seen in Daniel 1-6, which consists of court tales that portray Daniel “as a Babylonian wise man, skilled in the interpretation of dreams,” though Collins notes that Daniel 7-12 and *I Enoch* “are quite different from the literature of divination and omen collections” from Babylon and thus the Babylonian texts do not provide “a complete or sufficient matrix for the apocalyptic genre.”¹⁵⁸ Hanson also sees correspondences between the “ancient mythological traditions” such as “the Ugaritic texts of the fourteenth century B.C.E.” and apocalyptic texts.¹⁵⁹ Hanson points in particular to the “striking similarities to many of the mythic motifs appearing in the apocalyptic writings” that can be found in these texts.¹⁶⁰ Collins also sees correspondences between the apocalyptic texts and Persian texts like the *Bahman Yasht*, which “contains all the key features of an apocalypse of the historical type” by combining “the apocalyptic manner of revelation with the elaborate periodization of history and eschatology.”¹⁶¹ Though the

¹⁵⁶ Tigchelaar, 11.

¹⁵⁷ Collins, 26

¹⁵⁸ Collins, 26-28.

¹⁵⁹ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 33-34.

¹⁶⁰ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 34.

¹⁶¹ Collins, 30-31.

dating of many Persian sources is uncertain, Collins notes that it is likely “that several key features of the historical apocalypses were paralleled in Persian writings already in the Hellenistic age.”¹⁶² While it cannot be demonstrated that apocalyptic texts borrowed from Persian sources—or vice versa—Schmithals is correct to point out that “the proximity of these ideas to Jewish apocalyptic cannot be overlooked.”¹⁶³ It is likely that some of these texts from surrounding nations also influenced the apocalyptic texts written by Jewish communities during the Hellenistic period and beyond.

While apocalyptic literature consists of a diverse group of writings written over a large period of time, apocalyptic texts do contain some common characteristics that help differentiate them from other types of literature common to the Ancient Near East. First of all, it is important to distinguish between the two major types of apocalypses: historical apocalypses and apocalypses that contain otherworldly journeys. Historical apocalypses, such as Daniel, “contain an elaborate review of history, presented in the form of a prophecy and culminating in a time of crisis and eschatological upheaval.”¹⁶⁴ As Schmithals notes, “the apocalypticist’s thought is intensively *historical*, that is, he very strongly conceives of himself as a historical being who finds himself only when he comprehends *when* he is living.”¹⁶⁵ Thus *ex eventu* prophecy is an important feature of the historical apocalypses, and can often be used to help date these texts and shed light on their *Sitz im Leben*. Apocalyptic texts like 2 *Enoch* contain otherworldly journeys and “devote most of their text to accounts of the regions traversed in the otherworldly

¹⁶² Collins, 32.

¹⁶³ Schmithals, 117.

¹⁶⁴ Collins, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Schmithals, 35, emphasis original.

journey.”¹⁶⁶ In these texts visions are very important, while *ex eventu* prophecy is only found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.¹⁶⁷ The otherworldly visions of these apocalypses do not contradict the historical nature of apocalyptic thought. Instead, the otherworldly apocalypses utilize otherworldly journeys as a means to envision a better world in the community’s own immediate context.

While historical and otherworldly apocalyptic writings contain important differences, there are also many similarities between the two different strands of apocalypse. For example, all “extant Jewish apocalypses are pseudonymous” and were attributed “to such figures as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Ezra, and Baruch.”¹⁶⁸ As Collins notes, “pseudonymity was very widespread in the Hellenistic age,” and found “in Babylonian, Persian, and Egyptian prophecy.”¹⁶⁹ Only the New Testament book of Revelation and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written about the same time, included the name of their actual authors.¹⁷⁰ Apocalyptic texts likely used pseudonyms in order “to insure that people would read their books at a time when there was stiff competition from the books that wound up in the Hebrew canon of Scripture.”¹⁷¹ By using the name of a famous figure from the community’s past, the author was able to gain a sense of legitimacy he would not have if he attempted to circulate his writings in his own name. In addition, this form of anonymity “allows a subversive message to circulate

¹⁶⁶ Collins, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Collins, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Aune, 235.

¹⁶⁹ Collins, 39.

¹⁷⁰ Schmithals, 168. He actually argues against seeing Revelation as an apocalypse based in large part due to “the very fact that it was not written anonymously,” because, as he argues, “the traditional apocalyptic materials in the Book of Revelation tie the eschatological events to history, without thereby adopting the apocalyptic understanding of existence at all” (168-169). This treatment of Revelation is unpersuasive, as it assumes that the apocalyptic view of the world and a “Christian interpretation of reality, which interprets the Christ-event as salvation-event and views the present as a time of salvation” are incompatible notions, which need not be the case (170).

¹⁷¹ Aune, 235.

more freely,” as it becomes harder for political authorities to find the author of a potentially revolutionary text and deal with the threat.¹⁷²

Mediation is an important aspect of apocalyptic literature, and is seen manifested in apocalyptic literature in several ways. Hanson argues that “at the heart of every apocalyptic writing is ‘a vision of a prototypical heavenly order.’”¹⁷³ This vision needs to be conveyed to the community by someone qualified to receive a word of revelation from God. Thus the author behind the text often acts as an intermediary between the people and God. This can be seen in Revelation, which opens by referring to itself as “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”¹⁷⁴ Here the author functions much like a prophet, entrusted with the task of delivering the divine revelation to the people. Daniel, however, does not act as an intermediary figure between the people and God when he receives his revelation, as he is told to “seal up the vision” he received, “for it refers to many days from now.”¹⁷⁵ In addition, the revelation from God “is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient.”¹⁷⁶ In Revelation, the prophet hears a voice from heaven that calls down and says: “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”¹⁷⁷ The text of Daniel is more specific, naming Gabriel as the angelic intermediary who mediates the revelation from God to Daniel by interpreting Daniel’s visions.¹⁷⁸ In *1 Enoch*, Enoch engages on an otherworldly journey “guided by angels,” who show him “the extremities of this world” that are not accessible to other

¹⁷² Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 40.

¹⁷³ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 28.

¹⁷⁴ Revelation 1:1.

¹⁷⁵ Daniel 8:26.

¹⁷⁶ Collins, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Revelation 4:1.

¹⁷⁸ Daniel 8:15-19.

human beings.¹⁷⁹ Hanson suggests that these revelations mediated through otherworldly beings to a prophet—and ultimately a larger community of people—were “critical in the process by which certain groups within the larger Jewish community defined their identity” and expressed their “social, political, and religious ideologies and beliefs” against the ruling authorities.¹⁸⁰ By acting as the conduit through which God spoke a word of deliverance to the community, the author of an apocalypse could inspire hope and perseverance in the midst of troubling times for his audience.

Apocalyptic texts can be differentiated from other texts by the unique blending of myth and eschatology that occurs in these texts. Frost argues that “eschatology was in origin distinct from and indeed opposed to the original nature of myth and its expression in the cult,” but that eschatology “took on its mythological dress at the time of the Exile.”¹⁸¹ This can be seen in texts like Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, which use “the Dragon Myth to refer to the events of the Exodus” and refer to “Tiamat or Rahab, Behemoth or Leviathan” by the name of Gog.¹⁸² The text of *I Enoch* likewise utilizes the myth of the Watchers in the construction of its narrative. As Tigchelaar notes, the text of *I Enoch* 6-11 and 12-16 contains “two relatively independent sections which presume the same traditions” and therefore inform the eschatological outlook of the text.¹⁸³ Collins also notes parallels between “the Canaanite-Ugaritic myths” and Daniel, which suggests that the author of Daniel is relying on a common mythical “tradition that is largely lost”

¹⁷⁹ Collins, 55. See also *I Enoch* 17-32.

¹⁸⁰ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 29.

¹⁸¹ Frost, 80. While the term ‘myth’ has been used in a variety of ways by scholars over the years, Collins provides a suitable definition of the term: “the religious stories of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world” (18). He also points out that “mythological allusions in the apocalyptic literature” refer “to motifs and patterns that are ultimately derived from these sources” (18).

¹⁸² Frost, 79.

¹⁸³ Tigchelaar, 183.

to us today in the construction of his narrative.¹⁸⁴ While Towner seeks to minimize the role myth plays in the apocalyptic eschatology by basing his “hermeneutic upon an apocalyptic tradition rooted deeply in Old Testament prophetism,” he does acknowledge the importance of myth in the formation of apocalyptic eschatology by noting that “the mythic narrative framework” should be seen “simply as a vehicle” by which the apocalyptic eschatology is conveyed to audiences.¹⁸⁵

With the focus on otherworldly journeys and visions that utilize mythical motifs from the past, apocalyptic texts stress the supernatural nature of the world. Apocalyptic texts often include supernatural beings—like Satan and Belial—that function as mythical adversaries and rivals to God.¹⁸⁶ In addition, apocalyptic texts include angelic beings that serve as emissaries of God. These angelic beings function in a variety of ways. As noted above, the revelation delivered from God to the prophet “is not intelligible without supernatural aid,” which comes from an angelic being.¹⁸⁷ In addition, angelic beings often fought alongside God in apocalyptic texts. This can be seen in Daniel, where the angelic being tells Daniel that “the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed [him] for twenty-one days,” where he left Michael “there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia...to help [Daniel] understand what is to happen...at the end of days.”¹⁸⁸ The community at Qumran developed the idea that the angelic beings fought alongside the members of the community against their human enemies and Belial in the War Scroll.¹⁸⁹ This idea is based upon the community’s insistence that the structures of the world were

¹⁸⁴ Collins, 19.

¹⁸⁵ Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic,” 21.

¹⁸⁶ Schmithals, 22-23.

¹⁸⁷ Collins, 5-6.

¹⁸⁸ Daniel 10:13-14.

¹⁸⁹ Collins, 154. See, for example, 1QM 1.

mirror images of what occurred in the celestial realm. Hanson argues that the focus on the evidence of a supernatural world in apocalyptic texts tended “to relativize the significance of existing realities” by denying “negative realities...any ultimate validity.”¹⁹⁰ The author thus utilizes supernatural imagery to instill hope in his audience.

Like the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, apocalyptic writings also focus on the theme of judgment and destruction. Good argues that the assertion that war represented “a legal punishment from Yahweh” and was “the result of a judgment of God” was an important contributing element “to the development and elaboration of apocalyptic and thus formed an important legacy in the later literatures of the Jewish and Christian communities.”¹⁹¹ Berry argues that this theme of “the destruction of individual nations or groups of nations hostile to Israel” was a prominent feature of apocalyptic literature.¹⁹² This can be seen in Daniel, where the prophet describes the “destruction of allegorical beasts (Dan 7:1-12).”¹⁹³ It can also be seen in the War Scroll, where the Sons of Darkness face final judgment and destruction at the hands of the Sons of Light.¹⁹⁴ While the emphasis on “the supernatural world and the judgment to come, can also be found in works that...are not technically apocalypses,” the usage of this rhetoric serves a different purpose in apocalyptic texts.¹⁹⁵ Here “the announcement of impending divine judgment is a gracious word which gives to the persecuted righteous hope that their cause will be vindicated.”¹⁹⁶ This announcement is wrapped up in the theological notion that God will create a new heaven and new earth constituted by fairness and that shows favor

¹⁹⁰ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 30.

¹⁹¹ Good, 390.

¹⁹² Berry, 10.

¹⁹³ Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic,” 20.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, 1QM 1:1-16.

¹⁹⁵ Collins, 9.

¹⁹⁶ Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic,” 20.

to those who are members of the community. As Schmithals points out, “the birth pangs of the new time are sorrowfully intermingled with the death struggle of the old world.”¹⁹⁷ This struggle can most clearly be seen in the judgment and destruction that often comes at the final battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

Apocalyptic texts also rely heavily on imagery to convey messages of hope to communities in need, much like prophetic texts. One of the more common forms of imagery used in apocalyptic texts is animal imagery. Patterson points out that the use of animal imagery comes from ancient Mesopotamian sources like the *summa izbu* texts, which begin in “the middle Assyrian period and flowed down through the first millennium BC.”¹⁹⁸ This can be seen in texts like the Animal Apocalypse of *1 Enoch* 85-91, where the author constructs “a complex allegory” where “the figures of biblical history are represented by animals,” with Adam represented by a white bull, Cain and Abel with “black and red bullocks,” and Seth’s descendants with white bulls.¹⁹⁹ The text goes on to use rams and sheep to represent the historical factors relating “to the crisis that led to the Maccabean revolt.”²⁰⁰ Daniel likewise uses similar imagery to describe the historical context that influences his own situation in the Hellenistic period. In one of his visions, he describes a ram that charged “westwards and northwards and southwards” as other “beasts were powerless to withstand it,” before it was defeated by “a male goat...from the west.”²⁰¹ Revelation also utilizes animal imagery, describing Jesus as

¹⁹⁷ Schmithals, 25.

¹⁹⁸ Patterson, 398-399. He does note that while “Daniel need not necessarily have borrowed the concept of animals = kings from these texts, Daniel’s use of them would be well understood by his audience” (399). Patterson also connects these parallels to the date of Daniel, and notes they may weaken the late date assigned to Daniel (399). This is likely an overstatement, however, as linguistic analyses of the text of Daniel and the prevalence of *ex eventu* prophecy help solidify the late date for Daniel.

¹⁹⁹ Collins, 68.

²⁰⁰ Collins, 70.

²⁰¹ Daniel 8:4-5.

“the Lamb that was slaughtered” and Satan as a “great dragon” and “ancient serpent” that will be “thrown down to the earth” along with the forces of darkness at the final battle.²⁰²

The use of animal imagery is an effective rhetorical strategy to communicate hope to a community facing persecution at the hands of governments which often act more like unruly beasts than benevolent institutions looking out for the good of their subjects.

Apocalyptic texts, like prophetic texts found in the Hebrew Bible, share a common concern with the future, though this concern is manifested throughout apocalyptic texts in a very different manner. In apocalyptic texts, the author “hopes for a new world beyond this created world,” where God’s people will live in peace and security and their enemies will face the punishment they deserve.²⁰³ Because they do not believe this justice can occur in the present historical age, apocalyptic texts must look elsewhere for justice.²⁰⁴ Apocalyptic texts thus “involve a transcendent eschatology that looks for retribution beyond the bounds of history” in order to solve this problem.²⁰⁵ This often involves a judgment that occurs after death. This occurs, for example, in Daniel, where the prophet is told that “there shall be a time of anguish,” when “everyone who is found written in the book” will be saved from the final punishment.²⁰⁶ In addition, the author follows the depiction of a final judgment with the notion of resurrection, when “many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life,

²⁰² Revelation 12:9.

²⁰³ Schmithals, 79. Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic,” argues that “the biblical writers did not look upon the cataclysm with eager anticipation,” instead accepting “the necessity of it” as they “sought divine help to endure it, because the purified and reconciled community of *shalom* which lay beyond the Day of Yahweh was so infinitely desirable” (4). This is likely not the case, as many apocalyptic texts seem to enjoy the prospect of their enemies and oppressors facing judgment at the hands of God (e.g., Revelation 6:9-11).

²⁰⁴ In Revelation, for example, this can be seen in the testimony of “the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God,” who cry out to God: “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?” (6:9-10). These martyrs are “told to rest a little longer” before their enemies face punishment at the hands of the Lamb (Revelation 6:11).

²⁰⁵ Collins, 11.

²⁰⁶ Daniel 12:1.

and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”²⁰⁷ This helps confirm the “assertion that pessimism toward the whole of historically experienced reality is the basic experience of apocalyptic and the heart of the apocalyptic understanding of existence.”²⁰⁸ Thus the community of the faithful believed it would be avenged at the end of time. This judgment will also affect their enemies that may have died natural deaths in peace before the time of the end. The presence of this punishment after death and the notion of an afterlife found here serve to offer comfort to communities facing oppression from foreign governments. They can hope in the fact that God will offer complete justice at the unfolding of the *eschaton*.

The apocalyptic literature extant serves similar purposes to the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible. First of all, apocalyptic literature can be thought of as ‘protest literature’ or ‘resistance literature.’ As Aune notes, these texts “typically represent the perspective of an oppressed minority.”²⁰⁹ Portier-Young argues convincingly that apocalyptic texts are occasioned by situations of hegemony and domination, in which a foreign power utilizes both violent and non-violent means to assert “as normative and universal what are in fact particular and contingent ways of perceiving the world.”²¹⁰ This serves to limit “the range of thought and action” and thereby exert power over minority groups.²¹¹ Apocalyptic texts utilize “resistant counterdiscourse” to “articulate and serve as counterdiscourse” that can resist hegemony and domination.²¹² Thus a text

²⁰⁷ Daniel 12:2.

²⁰⁸ Schmithals, 88.

²⁰⁹ Aune, 235.

²¹⁰ Portier-Young, 12.

²¹¹ Portier-Young, 12. She connects this to Bourdieu’s concept of the *doxa*, which is an “invisible logic” which consists of “the sum total of the theses tacitly posited on the hither side of all inquiry”—cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 16, eds. Ernest Gellner et al (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168.

²¹² Portier-Young, 13.

like Daniel speaks out on behalf of the community by including “a blatantly political and nationalistic agenda which it conveys with religious language concerning divine action on behalf of the righteous at the end of time.”²¹³ This can be done with the historical review in the form of *ex eventu* prophecy common to apocalyptic texts. Portier-Young calls this “a key discursive strategy of resistance,” as it “interprets past and present, asserts the transience and finitude of temporal powers, affirms God’s governance of time and the outworking of God’s plan in history, and gives hope for a transformed future.”²¹⁴ The pseudonymous nature of apocalyptic texts also helps communities form resistant counterdiscourse, as pseudonymity “signals participation in an existing discourse” in which the author utilizes a narrative to struggle “in the textual bid for power.”²¹⁵ Writers of apocalyptic texts utilize rhetorical strategies of resistance throughout their narratives in order to voice protest to real or perceived injustices and to call for a form of resistance to unjust and oppressive regimes.

Apocalyptic literature can also be thought of as crisis literature. Hanson primarily thinks of apocalyptic literature in this way, and notes that “it arises out of, and addresses humans who are experiencing, the collapse of the structures that previously have upheld the life of the community and the individual.”²¹⁶ This conceptualization of apocalyptic literature need not contradict the previous depiction of apocalyptic literature as resistance literature, as resistance and crisis often go hand in hand. The “actual distresses” that influence the apocalyptic texts written “may be of various kinds,” either persecution at

²¹³ Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, 249.

²¹⁴ Portier-Young, 27.

²¹⁵ Portier-Young, 41.

²¹⁶ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 75.

the hands of foreign powers or even divisions within a particular community.²¹⁷ Texts like Daniel simultaneously act as discursive resistance while at the same time acting as a means by which people can cope with the oppression experienced at the hands of foreign powers. Apocalyptic literature is a powerful tool to help people make sense out of their historical context and encourage them to persevere in faith when situations seem bleak.

Despite the many areas where scholars of apocalyptic literature agree, defining the term ‘apocalyptic literature’ is surprisingly difficult in some aspects. This largely has to do with the imprecise way scholars used the term ‘apocalyptic’ in the past, but it is also due to the fact that many “efforts to define it primarily by recourse to literary criteria” end up “limiting the apocalyptic corpus to writings that conform to a literary genre designated ‘apocalypse,’” which “excludes many writings that for other reasons seem to give expression to an apocalyptic view of reality.”²¹⁸ Indeed, as Tigchelaar points out, “the apocalyptic mode of thought need not be confined to apocalypses.”²¹⁹ For this reason, Hanson begins his definition of apocalyptic literature by referring to “a group of writings,” which “is intentionally vague, since reference solely to those writings that conform to the literary type of the apocalypse would be too restrictive.”²²⁰ Thus it seems clear that the apocalyptic literature cannot be synonymous with the term ‘apocalypse.’

In light of this, perhaps the most suitable definition for the label apocalyptic literature can be found by focusing on the apocalyptic worldviews that flourished

²¹⁷ Collins, 38.

²¹⁸ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 25-26. This can be seen in the definition offered by Collins above, which he specifically applies to the term ‘apocalypse’ (4-5). Interestingly enough, Collins does go on to note that “the conceptual structure indicated by the genre, which emphasizes the supernatural world and the judgment to come, can also be found in works that are not revelation accounts, and so are not technically apocalypses” (9).

²¹⁹ Tigchelaar, 6. This can be demonstrated through an analysis of many texts found in the New Testament.

²²⁰ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 27-28.

beginning in the post-exilic period and on into the Hellenistic and Roman periods.²²¹ Thus apocalyptic literature can be defined as a collection of writings that contain characteristics common to many apocalyptic worldviews, which is demonstrated through their apocalyptic eschatology and “conceptual framework” that endorses “a worldview in which supernatural revelation, the heavenly world, and eschatological judgment played essential parts.”²²² This includes apocalypses, but also other texts that demonstrate a clearly apocalyptic eschatology and thought pattern. Such a definition solves the problem of definitions that were too restrictive and that did not include clearly apocalyptic texts (e.g., the War Scroll), while at the same time not creating so vague a definition that the term becomes meaningless for scholarly use. Thus scholars can rightfully speak of apocalypses (as defined by Collins) and texts like the War Scroll and Hebrews as works of apocalyptic literature.

Proto-Apocalyptic Literature

In contrast to the concrete definitions offered for prophetic and apocalyptic literature, texts classified as ‘proto-apocalyptic’ by scholars are typically defined in relation to the other two groups of literature. For example, Hanson defines proto-apocalyptic literature (or “early apocalyptic,” as he calls it) simply as “a transitional stage between prophecy and apocalyptic.”²²³ This definition is vague, and as such, scholars do not always agree on what texts should be considered a part of this body of writings.

Sweeney includes Joel, Zechariah, Ezekiel 38-39, and Isaiah 24-27; 56-66 in his

²²¹ As with terms like ‘Judaism’ or ‘Christianity,’ it is imprecise to speak of one ‘apocalyptic movement’ or ‘apocalyptic worldview.’ There were, in fact, many apocalyptic groups that often disagreed with one another in important ways. It is therefore more precise to speak of apocalyptic worldviews in the plural.

²²² Collins, 12-13. This broadening of the eclectic approach taken by Collins aligns closely with the definition of apocalyptic literature offered by Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 27-28.

²²³ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 35.

discussion of the most important proto-apocalyptic texts.²²⁴ Aune includes a similar set of texts in his list: Zechariah 1-6, 9-14, Isaiah 24-27, 56-66, and Joel.²²⁵ Towner likewise includes Isaiah 24-27, Zechariah 9-14, and Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] in his list of proto-apocalyptic works.²²⁶ Tigchelaar provides a more complete list, noting that “the texts mostly referred to” by the label ‘proto-apocalyptic literature’ “are Isa. 24-27 (the ‘Isaiah-apocalypse’), Deutero-Isaiah, Trito-Isaiah, Ezek. 38-39, Ezek. 40-48, Joel, Zech. 1-6 and Zech. 9-14.”²²⁷ He notes that “some of these texts...are seen as forerunners of the genre apocalypse on account of their formal features,” while other proto-apocalyptic texts include “impulses towards the apocalyptic mode of thought” that “warrant the label protoapocalyptic.”²²⁸ Hanson defines two larger groups of proto-apocalyptic literature: the Isaiah group, which consists of Isaiah 24-27, 56-66, Ezekiel 38-39, Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21], and Zechariah 12-14; and the Zechariah group, which consists of Zechariah 1-6 and Malachi.²²⁹ Johnson does not offer a complete listing of proto-apocalyptic works, though he argues for the inclusion of Job in this list.²³⁰ While there is some disagreement as to what books belong in the group of proto-apocalyptic literature, all of these scholars include Isaiah 24-27, Zechariah 12-14, and Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] in their lists.²³¹

²²⁴ Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, 240.

²²⁵ Aune, 239.

²²⁶ Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic,” 3, 15.

²²⁷ Tigchelaar, 13.

²²⁸ Tigchelaar, 13.

²²⁹ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 35-38. It should be noted that, among the Isaiah group of proto-apocalyptic writings, Hanson points out that some scholars treat “Isaiah 40-55 and perhaps 34-35” as proto-apocalyptic texts, though he does not offer his own position on this assertion (36). In addition, Hanson qualifies his inclusion of Ezekiel 38-39 in this list, noting that it belongs in the Isaiah group of proto-apocalyptic writings “to a certain degree,” though he does not elaborate on this (37). Bauckham follows Hanson’s list closely in his article that focuses on the rise of apocalyptic literature (see 10-11).

²³⁰ Johnson, 2, 76-77, 158.

²³¹ In another chapter, this thesis will seek to argue that Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] should not be included in this list of proto-apocalyptic literature.

The proto-apocalyptic texts share similar dates to the later prophetic and earlier apocalyptic texts. The earliest works considered proto-apocalyptic date to the post-exilic period. Sweeney notes that Isaiah 24-27 is a “late- or postexilic composition,” though he does not offer a more specific date for the text.²³² In the review of literature regarding the date of Joel we have seen that a post-exilic date somewhere around 400 BCE is likely. Scholars have likewise had a difficult time dating Zechariah 12-14, based in large part on the lack of clear historical references in the text.²³³ Person dates Zechariah 9-14, which he argues is a unified composition, to “sometime between Hag-Zech 1-8 (520 BCE) and Ezra (458 BCE).”²³⁴ Blenkinsopp notes that Zechariah 12-14 can be dated as late as “around the beginning of the second century B.C.E.”²³⁵ Thus the latest proto-apocalyptic books are dated close to the time of *I Enoch* and Daniel.

Depending upon the dating of several of texts classified as proto-apocalyptic literature, the body of writings comes from the same post-exilic context common to later prophetic texts and perhaps the earliest apocalyptic ones. A thorough examination of the social and historical contexts that influence proto-apocalyptic literature need not be repeated here, as it has been covered in the above sections. The question of why authors would begin to write proto-apocalyptic literature in the same social and historical context

²³² Marvin A. Sweeney, “Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27: Toward an Understanding of the Redactional Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107:1 (1998): 39. Childs likewise notes that the “consistently vague and stylized” historical references make dating the text difficult, and scholars have therefore offered dates anywhere “from the eighth to the second centuries” BCE with no consensus emerging yet (172).

²³³ See, for example, Paul L. Redditt, “Nehemiah’s First Mission and the Date of Zechariah 9-14,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56:4 (1994), where he notes critical problems with alleged historical allusions in Zechariah 9-14 and concludes that “the results of the efforts to date Zechariah 9-14 on the basis of historical allusions in 9:1-8, 11:8, and 12:10 have been so discouraging that scholars have abandoned the project or else sought other methods” (669, see also 664-669).

²³⁴ Raymond F. Person, *Second Zechariah and the Deuteronomistic School*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 167, eds. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 18. For a discussion of other dating options, see 16-18.

²³⁵ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 233.

of post-exilic prophecy will be taken up later in this section in a discussion regarding the purpose and function of proto-apocalyptic literature.

It is widely acknowledged that proto-apocalyptic literature was, in some capacity, an outgrowth of prophetic literature. As Sweeney points out, “a number of proto-apocalyptic texts” are found “within the context of larger prophetic books, i.e., Isaiah 24-27; 34-35; 56-66; Ezekiel 38-39.”²³⁶ This suggests a connection between the two bodies of literature. Carroll also points to “Isaiah’s vision of Yahweh the king in the temple” and the “vision of Yahweh standing by the altar” in Amos as evidence that “many of the images in eighth century prophecy are as mythic as anything in proto-apocalyptic prophecy.”²³⁷ Berry appeals to “the progress of thought in postexilic times” as a means to connect prophetic literature to the later apocalyptic literature.²³⁸ While Berry describes many of the texts commonly thought to be proto-apocalyptic as apocalyptic works, this progress occurs in texts like Isaiah 24-27 and Zechariah 12-14. Isaiah 24-27, for example, depicts a “new order that will be inaugurated when God destroys the wicked (symbolized by Moab) and removes sorrow and death from the faithful forever (25:6-12),” which builds off of other prophetic texts that focus on the punishment of foreign nations that occurs at the hand of Yahweh.²³⁹ Collins argues that the language used here “is metaphorical for the restoration of Israel,” and even “suggests an underlying mythology that is more elaborate than anything expressed in the texts.”²⁴⁰ This text, like other proto-

²³⁶ Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, 239.

²³⁷ Robert P. Carroll, “Twilight of Prophecy or Dawn of Apocalyptic?,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 4:14 (1979): 20. Carroll also notes that this fact problematizes the reconstruction of the origins of apocalyptic literature that is offered by Hanson. He asserts that Hanson’s argument “is a highly debatable point and one that requires a good deal more argumentation than Hanson provides” (20). The exact relationship between the two forms of literature will be discussed further below.

²³⁸ Berry, 12.

²³⁹ Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 37.

²⁴⁰ Collins, 25.

apocalyptic texts, “shares some significant features of the apocalypses” while still lacking “the generic framework of apocalyptic thought.”²⁴¹ Patterson also demonstrates that the proto-apocalyptic (or “quasi-apocalyptic,” as he calls it) literature found in the Hebrew Bible utilizes much of the same Exodus imagery that can be found in prophetic literature.²⁴² He concludes that these texts can be differentiated because “they express a greater degree of universality, finality, and figurative excess than standard kingdom oracles,” though otherwise they contain much of the same features as prophetic kingdom oracles.²⁴³ For the most part, it seems that proto-apocalyptic texts rely on the same eschatological outlook of earlier prophetic texts found in the Hebrew Bible.

Fewer scholars in recent years have sought to demonstrate that wisdom literature is an important source influencing proto-apocalyptic texts. This is likely due to the problematic nature of classifying wisdom literature. Tigchelaar argues that “there is no sufficient evidence for attributing the so-called wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon) to a distinct class of ‘wise men’ or some kind of ‘wisdom doctrine.’”²⁴⁴ He instead prefers to see “what we call ‘wisdom’” as “an approach to reality common to all Israel,” which means that the “supposed opposition between ‘prophecy’ and ‘wisdom’ would break down.”²⁴⁵ Johnson, however, seeks to further explore the relationship between wisdom literature and proto-apocalyptic—as well as apocalyptic—literature. As stated above, Johnson classifies the book of Job as “a nascent form of ‘apocalypse,’” along the lines of Isaiah 24-27 or

²⁴¹ Collins, 24.

²⁴² Patterson, 393-395.

²⁴³ Patterson, 395.

²⁴⁴ Tigchelaar, 11.

²⁴⁵ Tigchelaar, 11.

Zechariah 12-14.²⁴⁶ In order to support this claim, Johnson compares the content of Job to the characteristics of apocalyptic literature, using the ‘Master Paradigm’ used by Collins and the Society of Biblical Literature Apocalypse Group as a guide. Johnson appeals to the presence of otherworldly beings and the importance of the mediator throughout the narrative to support this interpretation of Job as proto-apocalyptic literature.²⁴⁷ He also notes “the specific reference to Job’s resurrection in the LXX,” which he argues is not “a Christian ‘addition,’” as well as other “eschatological references” present in “various Jewish versions of Job” to highlight the connection between Job and apocalyptic literature.²⁴⁸ This text is also influenced by the wisdom tradition in clear ways. Crenshaw notes problems with defining wisdom literature, but suggests that Job 31 “is a good text to use” despite being perhaps “the most problematic in the wisdom literary corpus.”²⁴⁹ Crenshaw argues that it is possible “to include Job 31 within sapiential ethics,” despite the presence of many features in this text which may be found in non-wisdom texts, because it functions as a “reasoned search for specific ways to assure well-being” and involves “the implementation of those discoveries in daily existence.”²⁵⁰ This helps to explain the focus of Job’s friends on whether or not he has sinned, and the insistence of his wife that he curse God and die.²⁵¹ While it is unclear exactly how wisdom literature influenced other proto-apocalyptic texts, if Johnson is correct to see Job as a proto-apocalyptic text, then perhaps the connection between wisdom literature and proto-apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic literature is stronger than previously thought.

²⁴⁶ Johnson, 2, 76-77, 158.

²⁴⁷ Johnson, 49-50, 59-61. See also Job 1:6; 4:17-21.

²⁴⁸ Johnson, 84-88, 104.

²⁴⁹ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 8.

²⁵⁰ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 10, 16.

²⁵¹ See, for example, Job 2:9; 4-5.

Authors began to write proto-apocalyptic literature in the post-exilic period in large part due to similar reasons that underlie the writing of apocalyptic literature. Crenshaw argues that prophetic literature “was shown to be incapable of bearing the burden of history, unable to validate itself in the present, and unwilling to deal with the problem of evil save in apodictic fashion,” which led to a major void that needed to be filled.²⁵² As Carroll notes, “prior to the exile prophecy could ignore the grave defects of its social analysis but after the exile its analysis had to change,” which ultimately led to the rise of proto-apocalyptic literature and full blown apocalyptic texts like *I Enoch* and *Daniel*.²⁵³ Proto-apocalyptic literature began to be written alongside later prophetic texts “after the loss of national independence and royal patronage” that occurred “in the postdisaster period” of the Babylonian exile and the Persian period return from exile.²⁵⁴

The new situation of the community necessitated new ways to make sense of history. In an analysis of inner-biblical quotation in proto-apocalyptic literature, Sweeney argues that proto-apocalyptic texts served to maintain the notion

that the Jerusalemite priesthood provided the social matrix for the reading and reinterpretation of earlier prophetic and pentateuchal texts and traditions that was intended to point to the restoration of the Temple at the center of creation as the goal for the scenarios of punishment and restoration

²⁵² Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion*, 106.

²⁵³ Carroll, “Twilight of Prophecy or Dawn of Apocalyptic?,” 20.

²⁵⁴ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 227. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Will the Prophetic Texts from the Hellenistic Period Stand Up, Please!,” in *Judah Between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400-200 BCE)*, eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Oded Lipschits (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), notes that, at the present moment, “we lack knowledge as to whether” the development of proto-apocalyptic literature and eschatology “was linear or whether proto-apocalyptic eschatology was composed alongside prophetic eschatology” (263). It seems likely that the development of proto-apocalyptic literature would occur alongside the production of later prophetic texts, especially if we are to think of proto-apocalyptic literature as a transitional body of literature informed by prophetic and wisdom literature that ultimately paves the way for the rise of apocalyptic literature.

found within these texts.²⁵⁵ Thus proto-apocalyptic literature serves to provide stability to the community in a time of need. In addition, proto-apocalyptic literature began to fill the void others noticed in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible. Proto-apocalyptic texts began to build on previous texts that highlighted “God’s withdrawal from the arena of history” with descriptions of “the progressive deterioration of society, as evidenced by the prosperity of the wicked and poverty of the righteous.”²⁵⁶ Other proto-apocalyptic works began to take seriously the cognitive dissonance that occurred when their expected salvation failed to occur. This idea began to be seen in proto-apocalyptic texts that sought to offer explanations behind the eschatological delay of Yahweh’s salvation—for example, Isaiah 59, where the prophet explains this eschatological delay as a product of “human corruption” and “the sins of the community.”²⁵⁷ In addition, texts like Isaiah 24-27 began to incorporate themes found in later apocalyptic works in order to offer hope to the community in ways that prophetic literature no longer could. Thus Isaiah 24-27 “foresees the destruction of heavenly and earthly powers and the establishment of God’s kingdom in Zion as adumbrated in the Sinai covenant.”²⁵⁸ With the increasingly pessimistic outlook on the world that occurred as a result of the harsh realities of post-exilic life, the “postexilic Old Testament eschatology” that “hopes for the perfecting of the creation” found in prophetic literature was no longer convincing.²⁵⁹ New perspectives that began to stress the sovereignty of Yahweh and the hope of a new world began to take hold and offer people the hope necessary to cope with foreign domination.

²⁵⁵ Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, 240.

²⁵⁶ Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion*, 106.

²⁵⁷ Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 56.

²⁵⁸ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 238.

²⁵⁹ Schmithals, 79.

Determining exactly what texts should be classified as proto-apocalyptic literature is a difficult proposition, and there are no easy answers. This is especially difficult when it is considered that some texts, like Ezekiel 40-48 and Zechariah 1-6, “are seen as forerunners of the genre apocalypse on account of their formal features, in particular the visionary reports,” while other texts are considered proto-apocalyptic texts due to their “impulses towards the apocalyptic mode of thought.”²⁶⁰ The extent which a text must articulate apocalyptic eschatology before it is considered a proto-apocalyptic work is difficult to discern, as is the dividing line between what constitutes a proto-apocalyptic text and an apocalyptic one. It is also not clear how exactly to approach this problem: Do scholars work backwards from an understanding of apocalyptic literature before seeking to define proto-apocalyptic literature, or should scholars work forward from prophetic (and wisdom?) literature to proto-apocalyptic literature? Is proto-apocalyptic literature even a useful term to employ in scholarly research and discussion? More research will be required to offer satisfying answers to these important questions.

While there seems to be no completely satisfying definition for the term ‘proto-apocalyptic literature’ at the present time, a working definition will be useful for the purpose of this thesis. Here proto-apocalyptic literature will be defined as a transitional body of literature from the post-exilic and later periods that begins to articulate an apocalyptic understanding of history to varying degrees and in various ways. In addition, this body of literature seeks to offer hope to a community on the periphery of society within a post-exilic context of foreign hegemony and domination. This definition allows for a variety of texts to be seen as proto-apocalyptic literature, including wisdom texts like Job, which makes sense considering the wide variety of texts drawn upon by

²⁶⁰ Tigchelaar, 13.

apocalyptic texts in the construction of apocalyptic narratives. This definition is vague, like most discussions of proto-apocalyptic literature, but it helps to make sense of the evolution that occurs in proto-apocalyptic literature as it begins to look more like apocalyptic texts such as *I Enoch* and Daniel.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an introduction to prophetic literature, proto-apocalyptic literature, and apocalyptic literature which takes into consideration theoretical concerns of definition and offers working definitions for all three terms based on the examination of important literary and thematic characteristics. The investigation in this chapter is important because it provides a foundation for the discussion of the locust imagery and how it relates to the problem of genre in Joel. The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible and apocalyptic literature are similar in many ways, which is due to the fact that they are related to one another in some capacity, as has been previously explored. For example, they both function as resistance literature and crisis literature, both rely heavily on intermediation between God and the community, and both arose in similar social contexts in the post-exilic period.

Therefore, by way of conclusion it may be useful to contrast prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature in order to more clearly delineate how both collections of writings are different. As Berry points out, the “fundamental outlook” of the two bodies of literature is different: “Prophecy is the work of men whose feet were on the earth, who saw real conditions, and who expected coming events to be brought about through human

agencies, working out the plan of God.”²⁶¹ Apocalyptic literature, however, was written by “men whose heads were in the clouds, who expected the future to come not as a development of existing conditions, but as something entirely new, brought about by God himself...intervening directly and catastrophically.”²⁶² Aune likewise finds the distinguishing factor between the two collections of literature in the distinction “made between ‘prophetic eschatology’ and ‘apocalyptic eschatology.’”²⁶³ Aune argues that ‘prophetic eschatology’ is “an optimistic perspective” on the future restoration of the world, while ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ is “pessimistic about the fate of the righteous in the present world order,” and thus “anticipates a cataclysmic divine intervention” in the future.²⁶⁴ The differences between the two eschatological perspectives found in prophetic and apocalyptic literature highlight the different rhetorical strategies available to communities on the periphery of society who were attempting to create a counterdiscourse against oppressive governments.

²⁶¹ Berry, 9.

²⁶² Berry, 9.

²⁶³ Aune, 237.

²⁶⁴ Aune, 237.

CHAPTER THREE

While modern interpreters offer a variety of interpretations of Joel, all seem to agree that the locust plague described in the first two chapters of the book is important to one's understanding of the text. Pablo R. Andiñach argues that "from Joel 1:4 until the end of the book, the interpretation of Joel depends upon a decision about the identity of the locusts."¹ His assessment seems persuasive, especially if Joel is to be treated as a unified composition. Andiñach lists three ways scholars may understand locust imagery throughout the text of Joel: "(1) to read the passage as a description of a locust plague; (2) to read the passage taking the locusts as a symbol of the eschatological army of God; (3) to understand the passage as a description of a foreign military invasion."² The majority of scholars take the first or the third option.³ A case could be made that Frost and Wolff take the second option, but their interpretations of the locusts in Joel could also be understood as a metaphorical description of a foreign military invasion.⁴

This chapter will present an investigation of locusts and locust imagery in the Hebrew Bible and related literature from the Ancient Near East in order to provide a background for the later discussion of locust imagery and its relationship to the problem

¹ Pablo R. Andiñach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," *Vetus Testamentum* 42:4 (1992): 433.

² Andiñach, 433-434.

³ Allen; Barton; Blenkinsopp, "The Prophetic Reproach;" Harold Brodsky, "'An Enormous Horde Arrayed for Battle': Locusts in the Book of Joel," *Bible Review* 6:4 (1990); Everson; David Fleer, "Exegesis of Joel 2:1-11," *Restoration Quarterly* 26:3 (1983); Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II's Hymn to Nanaya," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112:4 (1993); Ronald T. Hyman, "The Prophecy of Joel: The Prophet's Message, Beliefs, and Prophetic Style," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39:4 (2011); Berel Dov Lerner, "Timid Grasshoppers and Fierce Locusts: An Ironic Pair of Biblical Metaphors," *Vetus Testamentum* 49:4 (1999); Ronald Simkins, "The Day of the Locusts: The Environment in the Book of Joel," *Bible Today* 33:1 (1995); Simundson; John A. Thompson, "Joel's Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14:1 (1955); and Treves read the passage as a description of a literal locust plague, while Andiñach and Stulman and Kim argue that the locust imagery serves to metaphorically describe a foreign military invasion. Thompson, "Joel's Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels" and Hosch note arguments for and against all three views in their treatment of the issue.

⁴ See Frost, 78; Wolff, 42.

of genre in Joel. Locust plagues rarely occur in the United States today, so an understanding of locusts and locust imagery will aid modern interpreters of Joel.⁵ This chapter will provide background information on locusts, focusing specifically on species of locust that occur in Israel and the surrounding area. In addition, the chapter will provide a close examination of the four Hebrew terms used to describe locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25. Finally, the chapter will investigate the use of locust imagery in the Hebrew Bible and other literature from the Ancient Near East, focusing also on symbolic ways locust imagery is used throughout texts.

Background Information on Locusts

Locust plagues have been known to occur in many different regions of the world—for example, Africa, the Middle East, India, and China.⁶ These plagues have “confronted man since the earliest beginnings of agriculture” in antiquity.⁷ While locust plagues are much less common today than in antiquity due to eradication methods that help control large swarms, major locust plagues have still been known to occur. For example, heavy rains feeding into Australia’s Darling River led to an anticipated locust swarm of the Australian plague locust (*Chortoicetes terminifera*) that went on to

⁵ Brodsky, 33. This concern can also be seen, for example, in Simundson’s commentary on the text of Joel, where he includes the question “Why is a locust invasion of such significance?” in his section entitled “Key Issues” (119). Interestingly, Cecil Roth, “The Teacher of Righteousness and the Prophecy of Joel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 13:1 (1963), argues that the community at Qumran interpreted the locust plague described in Joel in an apocalyptic fashion because, “in the view of the covenanters of Qumran (and the same was to be the case with other pious interpreters later on), it was obviously inconceivable that the store of inspiration conveyed by the Prophet should be devoted to something so transitory and so trivial as a plague of locusts” (93). This view is speculation, and likely betrays the author’s own lack of understanding regarding locust plagues than it does the view of the community at Qumran. Similarly, Andiañach argues that the effects of a locust plague would “be overcome in a relatively short period of time, and will be forgotten after several seasons” in Judah and Jerusalem, “which has relatively fertile soil and enough rainfall in the winter season” (435). Despite this statement, he at least acknowledges that the “effects of a locust plague” would be “initially terrible for the economy of the region” (435).

⁶ Brodsky, 38. See also B. P. Uvarov, “The Locust Plague,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 91:4631 (1943): 109-110. Brodsky goes on to note characteristics of the different ceremonies used “for driving the locust away” in some of the communities found in these locations (38).

⁷ Uvarov, 109.

seriously threaten the rice industry in Australia and cost the country billions of dollars in damage in 2010.⁸ A serious locust swarm of the desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) also struck Israel in 2013, causing potato farmers near the village of Kmehin to complain “that their fields were being ruined” as the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture fought the swarms with pesticides and opened “up a hot line for swarm sightings” to combat the locusts.⁹ A major locust plague also hit Madagascar in 2013, wiping out approximately 25 percent of the nation’s food overnight and threatening “the food security and livelihoods of 13 million people,” or approximately “60% of the island’s population.”¹⁰ Even today, locust plagues can be catastrophic events that destroy crops and threaten the livelihood of many people.

There are many varieties of locusts that occur in different parts of the world, but, as Bodenheimer notes, “the important locusts of the Middle East are the Moroccan locust (*Dociostaurus maroccanus*),” which occurs “within the northern part of the area at irregular intervals,” and “the desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) which invades the southern parts of the area at fairly regular intervals.”¹¹ This section will discuss the characteristics associated with the desert locust, which seems to be the locust referred to in the Hebrew Bible. This is likely the case because the Moroccan locust is “smaller and not eaten by man” and is primarily mentioned in Assyrian enamel inscriptions as the

⁸ Ray Brindal, “Australia Fears Locust Plague,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company (26 Apr. 2010); Paul Rodgers, “Australia Faces Worst Plague of Locusts in 75 Years,” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media (26 Sept. 2010).

⁹ Isabel Kershner, “A Locust Plague, Shy of Biblical Proportions, in Israel,” *The New York Times*, The New York Times (6 Mar. 2013). This locust plague did not reach Jerusalem. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, notes that “the last very severe attack to have affected Jerusalem is said to have taken place in 1915” (27). For more on this locust plague, see Ovid R. Sellers, “Stages of Locust in Joel,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52:2 (1936): 82.

¹⁰ Mark Tran, “Madagascar Battling Worst Locust Plague since 1950s,” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media (13 July 2013).

¹¹ F. S. Bodenheimer, *Animal and Man in Bible Lands*, Collection de Travaux de l’Académie Internationale d’Histoire des Sciences 10 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1960), 77.

destroyer of cereal fields.¹² The desert locust, in contrast, was portrayed frequently in Egyptian inscriptions and literature, and was often considered a source of food for humans.¹³ This seems to fit with texts in the Hebrew Bible, where “Leviticus 11 allows the consumption of four different kinds of ‘leaping’ insects,” several of which are terms that seem to describe locusts.¹⁴ In addition, there are “many references in the Old Testament” that “vividly describe how locusts confronted humans in those early days,” which implies the consistent frequency associated with the desert locust.¹⁵

Locusts are closely related to grasshoppers, and “morphologically it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate these two insects.”¹⁶ This can be seen in Semitic languages like Hebrew, where there are an “abundance of names for locusts,” some of which “refer to different stages, size and colour phases of locusts,” while “a few may indicate grasshoppers.”¹⁷ Locusts can be distinguished from grasshoppers by their “migratory and gregarious” nature, as they “tend to react to and are stimulated by other locusts so that they congregate in large groups,” while grasshoppers are non-migratory and do not congregate in large groups.¹⁸ Whether or not a locust acts on its gregarious and migratory nature depends on “contact, olfactory, and visual cues”—without these cues, which occur

¹² Bodenheimer, 77.

¹³ Bodenheimer, 77.

¹⁴ James A. Kelhoffer, “Did John the Baptist Eat Like a Former Essene? Locust-Eating in the Ancient Near East and at Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11:3 (2004): 297. One of the terms used here—ארבה—is a generic term for ‘locust’ that is also found in Joel 1:4; 2:25 (298-299). The other terms found in Leviticus 11 are “difficult if not impossible to identify precisely” (299). These terms may therefore refer to different creatures entirely or perhaps to the different stages of the locust’s life cycle, this remains unclear.

¹⁵ John E. Porter, *Bugs of the Bible: The Magnificence of God’s Creation as Seen through a Microscope* (Bloomington, Indiana: CrossBooks, 2012), 24.

¹⁶ Porter, 25. Uvarov actually speaks of the locust as “nothing but a species of grasshopper, but usually larger in size and characterized mainly by gregarious habit” (111). Brodsky, however, notes that “not all species of grasshoppers can exhibit” the type of “behavioral transformation” that occurs when locusts begin to swarm (34).

¹⁷ Bodenheimer, 77. He goes on to provide a list of names used for locusts and grasshoppers in Sumerian and Akkadian (113).

¹⁸ Porter, 25.

when nymphs are in a relatively dense population, locusts “will spread and begin their ‘solitariness.’”¹⁹ Locusts that exhibit a migratory and gregarious nature stay in large groups and travel long distances in search of food and water.

The desert locust develops “a wingspan of about 4 inches, and a body length of about 3 inches” when fully grown.²⁰ Mature locusts “have front wings, which are leathery, elongate, and narrow,” as well as hind wings that “are membranous, broad, and folded fanlike beneath the front wings.”²¹ The desert locust makes good use of these wings, often traveling “as many as 60 miles” in one day at altitudes of nearly 5,000 feet while in a swarm.²² Wolff also points out that locusts have “a wing structure in the earliest larva stage,” though they are not able to use these wings at this point in their development.²³ In addition, locusts possess “well-developed chewing mouthparts” with which they devour plant growth.²⁴ Wolff notes that young locusts possess well-developed mouths just like mature locusts, and they are “already able to devour tree fruits and to strip twigs and shoots” in their earliest stages.²⁵ Desert locusts also contain short antennae, “a short ovipositor and three segmented tarsi.”²⁶

The life cycle of the desert locust is relatively short in comparison to that of other animals. The cycle begins when locusts deposit their eggs into soil with favorable conditions. Ideally, the eggs will be placed into moist soil, and when this is the case

¹⁹ Moshe Guershon and Amir Ayali, “Innate Phase Behavior in the Desert Locust, *Schistocerca gregaria*,” *Insect Science* 19:6 (2012): 654. They go on to suggest that this process is easier than originally thought, as “upon hatching, there may be no ‘strong predisposition to avoid other locusts,’” which means that locusts swarms likely form “through the innate aggregation tendency of newly emerged nymphs, independently of their parents experience or phase status” (655).

²⁰ Brodsky, 34. According to Bodenheimer, many people in the ancient world believed that there were locusts up to “three feet long” in India, whose legs were “used as saws, after being thoroughly dried” (138).

²¹ Porter, 26.

²² Brodsky, 34-35.

²³ Wolff, 27.

²⁴ Porter, 26.

²⁵ Wolff, 27.

²⁶ Porter, 26.

“millions of them are laid.”²⁷ The eggs are placed in the soil by the female, who thrusts “into the soil the thorn or stick through which the eggs come,” typically in relatively large groups.²⁸ This typically takes place “in the winter or early spring,” though in some areas it can also take place in the autumn.²⁹ In colder locations, the locust “eggs lie dormant throughout this season,” while in warmer locations “the eggs may hatch in 2-3 weeks, if there is rain or moisture.”³⁰ The eggs tend to hatch in the spring, when more favorable conditions exist.³¹

After the eggs hatch, the hatchlings, which “look somewhat like ants or tiny roaches” and are often known as “hoppers,” emerge from the soil.³² These hatchlings “are pink, turning brown and then bright yellow at maturity.”³³ They molt “several times over a period of about a month” before they become fully developed.³⁴ This period is characterized by “rapid growth, stimulated by voracious feeding on green vegetation” that enables the hopper to mature into the adult locust.³⁵ As hoppers develop, they “form gregarious marching bands” that are “up to ten miles wide and ten miles long” and “move forward at a slow cadence, perhaps no more than 250 feet per hour” at this point.³⁶ These bands of locusts “are not stopped by obstacles, even by water,” though their movement

²⁷ Watts, 16.

²⁸ Bodenheimer, 138. The number of eggs deposited by a female differs among scholars, though all give similar quantities. Uvarov, for example, estimates that female locusts deposit 30-100 eggs at a time (111). Brodsky estimates that females lay approximately 80 eggs at a time (35). Porter estimates that female locusts lay between 30-80 eggs each time (26). Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, estimates that females deposit 20-100 eggs at a time (90).

²⁹ Brodsky, 35. Cf. Bodenheimer, 138.

³⁰ Uvarov, 111. See also Brodsky, 35.

³¹ Simkins, 24. Bodenheimer notes that this occurs “late in the spring” (138).

³² Brodsky, 35.

³³ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 90.

³⁴ Brodsky, 35. Porter gives a more specific time frame for this process, noting that “with optimum temperatures, it takes up to forty-five days for the cycle from eggs to adults with fully developed wings to be completed” (27).

³⁵ Uvarov, 112.

³⁶ Brodsky, 35.

does depend “largely on temperature and occurs only on sufficiently hot days.”³⁷ Bands of marching hoppers have even been known to make their way inside houses and buildings through windows and doors.³⁸

Soon hoppers develop larger wings and “begin to migrate on the winds as a swarm in search of food.”³⁹ After fully maturing, locusts have a normal life span of “about seventy-five days,” with that being slightly shorter for females, which mature faster but have a shorter life span as a result.⁴⁰ Mature locusts utilize the winds to migrate because their “downwind flight behavior directs the insects to those areas where rain is most likely to occur.”⁴¹ The locust’s use of the wind to travel often means that locust plagues are “sporadic and unpredictable,” due to the wind patterns that change from year to year in the Middle East.⁴² In addition, locust swarms can often “reach great size and contain fantastic numbers of individuals,” with some locust swarms on record “estimated to consist of a million million locusts.”⁴³ Locust swarms can travel great distances, sometimes traveling “as much as 1000 miles in search of food,” though they do not typically travel during the evening.⁴⁴ The desert locust mentioned in the Hebrew Bible generally sweeps “through north Africa, the Sinai peninsula, and on into Israel itself.”⁴⁵ Locust swarms can also “enter Palestine *from the north*, i.e., from Assyria,” though this is

³⁷ Uvarov, 112.

³⁸ Wolff, 28.

³⁹ Birch, 134.

⁴⁰ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 90.

⁴¹ Porter, 25-26. Though he makes this comment about the African migratory locust (*Locusta migratoria* L.), it is easily applicable to the desert locust as well, especially considering the importance of water for locust eggs and the need for water to survive once the locusts reach maturity. Furthermore, Uvarov points out that wind is not the only determining factor in the path taken by locust swarms, as it “is initiated, directed, and interrupted by various weather factors” (112).

⁴² Brodsky, 37.

⁴³ Uvarov, 112.

⁴⁴ Watts, 16; Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 90.

⁴⁵ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 155.

not as common.⁴⁶ When the life cycle of a mature locust swarm ends, as many as several million locusts may die around the same time. This can lead to “diseases such as typhus,” which occur due to “the desiccation of the millions of dead insect bodies.”⁴⁷

Locust typically eat almost any form of vegetation that comes across their path. Their well-developed mouths enable them to effectively strip trees and bushes of any vegetation. Locusts swarms will eat “any blade of grass, grain of wheat, leaf or bark of a tree” possible in their search for sustenance.⁴⁸ The efficiency and speed associated with locust plagues mean that they can quickly diminish “the potential harvest to nil” for a community.⁴⁹ The more globally interconnected economy that exists today enables countries affected by locust swarms to receive aid and provide food for their populations. This was not true to the same extent in antiquity. As a result, a locust plague in the Second Temple period was “a total economic crisis,” and caused much hardship and suffering for the majority of people in a community.⁵⁰ A locust plague often meant the onset of starvation, and the lack of green vegetation in the wake of a locust plague made it more likely for wildfires to develop and spread quickly.

An Examination of the Hebrew Terms for Locust Found in Joel

The different texts of the Hebrew Bible utilize a variety of words to signify the locust or the grasshopper, though the translation of many of these words are uncertain.

⁴⁶ Kelhoffer, 297 n. 14, emphasis original.

⁴⁷ Birch, 135.

⁴⁸ Simundson, 127. Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, does note that locusts do not prefer “leaves and twigs from date and olive trees,” though they will eat them—as well as other locusts!—as a last resort (90).

⁴⁹ Allen, 49. Interestingly, many people in the Ancient Near East actually utilized locusts as a food source. For example, locusts are considered kosher to consume in Leviticus 11:20-23. Brodsky provides a common locust recipe and notes the nutritional value of locusts, which are high in protein and “contain many vitamins and minerals” (38). He also notes that many African communities considered locust swarms “a blessing, not a plague” due to the food they provide for the community (38).

⁵⁰ Wolff, 26.

Porter mentions nine different Hebrew words used to signify the locust.⁵¹ Of the nine possible words, the author of Joel utilizes only four.⁵² He uses the same four (ארבה, גזם, חסיל, ילק), though they occur in slightly different orders in the two places they are mentioned.⁵³ Several of the terms used for locusts in Joel are quite rare, which Baker argues “is one cause of the confusion” that exists as to how to translate and understand these terms in the text.⁵⁴ For the moment, it seems that there is no scholarly consensus on the question of “what difference, if any, there is between the four terms,” as well as the question of “whether they refer to four different species of locust or to four stages in the development of the insect.”⁵⁵ This section will closely investigate the four terms used for locusts in Joel, and attempt to offer some conclusions as to their translation in the text.

The first term used for locust in Joel 1:4 (and the last term used in the list in Joel 2:25) is גזם. The term is found in only three locations in the Hebrew Bible: Joel 1:4; 2:25; and Amos 4:9.⁵⁶ As Coggins notes, in Amos the term “is simply translated ‘locust,’”

⁵¹ Porter, 23. He lists *arbeh*, *chagab*, *chargol*, *chasil*, *gazam*, *geb*, *gob*, *solam*, *tselatsal*, and *yeleq*. Of this list, *chargol* is actually translated ‘beetle’ in Leviticus 11:22, which leaves nine remaining terms.

⁵² Allen, 49.

⁵³ Joel 1:4; cf. 2:25. Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, notes that some explain the order in 2:25 as beginning with “the mature locust” and then naming “the various stages of insects that combine to make up the mature locust swarm...in proper order,” though he points out that this makes a similar interpretation of Joel 1:4, which begins with the last stage before mature locust adulthood, “highly dubious” at best (89). Sellers notices this problem, and argues for a textual emendation. He argues that “a change in the text of Joel 1:4 is necessary to put the four stages, as we now can identify them on the basis of etymology, in the correct order,” and therefore proposes that the order in Joel 1:4 be changed to agree with Joel 2:25 (82). As Wolff points out, this textual emendation “cannot be justified by knowledge of the developmental stages, since identification of the Hebrew names with developmental stages represents no more than hypothesis” (27).

⁵⁴ Baker, 42.

⁵⁵ Barton, 42. For an exhaustive list of how the terms are translated by various commentators and interpreters of Joel, see Josef Lossel, “When is a Locust Just a Locust? Patristic Exegesis of Joel 1:4 in the Light of Ancient Literary Theory,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 55:2 (2004): 584-585; Baker, 41-42. For a review of the various translations offered for these four terms in older commentaries from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Sellers, 81-82.

⁵⁶ Porter, 23. He actually translates this term as “palmerworm,” “caterpillar,” or “creeping locust,” though he provides no etymological defense of these terms (23). These designations for גזם seem unlikely in light of the discussion that follows.

without any words characterizing the type of locust or its actions.⁵⁷ The term גזם is typically taken to mean two different things by scholars. First, many scholars associate the word גזם with “cutting” or “clipping.” Baker, for example, argues that the term is “related to Aramaic, Ethiopic, and Arabic” terms meaning “to cut” or to “clip.”⁵⁸ Allen likewise notes that “the Semitic root word” for גזם “signifies ‘cut off,’” and likely “refers to the destructive activity of the migratory locust, *Schistocerca gregaria*.”⁵⁹ Brodsky argues that the term “*gazam* means to prune or clip branches of a tree,” which makes sense given the locust’s ability “to attack tree branches with its powerful mandibles” at this stage.⁶⁰ Sellers also translates the term “clipper,” based on his understanding of Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic roots, all of which signifying “to cut.”⁶¹ Aharoni offers a similar understanding of גזם, choosing to translate it as “the pruner.”⁶² Though these interpreters utilize slightly different translations for גזם, they share at their root the idea of cutting or clipping. Wolff also agrees that the root (in Arabic: *gzm*) “always means ‘to cut,’” and though he translates the term “biter.”⁶³ Sweeney offers a similar take on the matter, arguing that גזם is “literally, ‘biter, chewer.’”⁶⁴ Crenshaw also takes the term to mean “chewer,” as it is related to “the verb *gzm*,” which “refers to a biting

⁵⁷ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 27.

⁵⁸ Baker, 42.

⁵⁹ Allen, 49 n. 19.

⁶⁰ Brodsky, 36.

⁶¹ Sellers, 84.

⁶² I. Aharoni, “On Some Animals Mentioned in the Bible,” *Osiris* 5 (1938): 475.

⁶³ Wolff, 27. He acknowledges that “it is also possible that גזם is a different designation, alongside ארבה (‘locust’), for the fully grown insect” (27). Because of this, he argues that it is possible גזם “might mean the indigenous, solitary locust, and ארבה the gregarious creature that has flown in from elsewhere” (27). This seems to be speculation, as Wolff does not offer any textual evidence to back up this assertion. It seems more likely that גזם is another term that refers to the desert locust known to attack Judah from the south.

⁶⁴ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 156.

activity (cf. Amos 4:9).”⁶⁵ Thus Crenshaw clarifies that the type of cutting referred to in Joel refers to the cutting involved in chewing food.

According to Aharoni, the word גזם corresponds to “the third larval degree” of the locust life cycle.⁶⁶ As Brodsky notes, “at this stage the *gazam* is large enough to attack tree branches with its powerful mandibles.”⁶⁷ Wolff also argues that the term “may well refer to the penultimate stage,” where “the insects are winged, but as yet have not undertaken migratory flight.”⁶⁸ Sellers points out that at this time “the locust just arrived at the adult stage and for the first time” is “ready to fly.”⁶⁹ Soon locusts at this stage will form into swarms and travel great distances to find vegetation to eat. It seems that the best translation of this term is “chewing locust.” While the word גזם comes from a root that means “to cut,” it is clear based on context that the cutting relates to the consumption of vegetation by locust swarms. The jaws of the locust are the item that cuts, and the leaves and fruit hanging on trees are the items that are cut. Translating גזם as “chewing locust” best elucidates that aspect of the text.

The next term used for locust in Joel 1:4 (and the first term used in the list in Joel 2:25) is ארבה. This term is the most common one used for locusts in the Hebrew Bible, and it “occurs twenty-four times in the Old Testament.”⁷⁰ This is the designation used for locusts in perhaps the most famous passage to describe a locust swarm in the Hebrew

⁶⁵ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 88.

⁶⁶ Aharoni, 475.

⁶⁷ Brodsky, 36.

⁶⁸ Wolff, 27.

⁶⁹ Sellers, 84.

⁷⁰ Baker, 42. Porter offers an exhaustive list of the texts that use this term: Exodus 10:4, 12, 13, 14, 19; Leviticus 11:22; Deuteronomy 28:38; Judges 6:5; 7:1, 2 [it should actually be 7:12, this is likely a typographical error]; 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chronicles 6:28; Job 39:20; Psalms 78:46; 105:34; 109:23; Proverbs 30:27; Jeremiah 46:23; Joel 1:4; 2:25 (23).

Bible—the description of the locust plague that occurs in the Exodus narrative.⁷¹ As Baker points out, ארבה is used for locusts seven times in Exodus 10:1-20, where the locusts cover “the land and [eat] all plants and tree fruit.”⁷² As such, this is the general term used for locusts throughout the Hebrew Bible.⁷³

The term ארבה is used in three related ways that suggest a relatively uniform understanding of the term and its etymology by interpreters of Joel. Baker, for example, argues that “an etymological suggestion is that the term derives from the Hebrew root *rbh* (‘to be many’).”⁷⁴ Allen argues for the same etymology, and argues that the term’s relation “to the Heb. Root *rābâ*, ‘be many,’ refer[s] to the well-known gregarious habit of the locust.”⁷⁵ Wolff offers a similar analysis of ארבה, noting the presence “of the root רב (‘great’)” in the word.⁷⁶ Crenshaw also argues that ארבה “probably derives from *rbh*, with addition of a prosthetic ‘aleph’ to the root.”⁷⁷ Sweeney prefers to literally translate ארבה as “multiplier,” and also believes the term designates “the locust in full maturity.”⁷⁸ Brodsky likewise prefers a term that focuses on multiplying, arguing that “the term *arbeh* is close to the Hebrew word for multiplication,” which is “exactly what the *arbeh* attempts to do.”⁷⁹ Interestingly, Sellers offers a different approach to ארבה. He argues that the term may trace its roots back to the Akkadian word “*arabu*, ‘to destroy.’”⁸⁰ While this could be true, Allen seems correct when he says “it is more probably to be related” to the

⁷¹ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 28.

⁷² Baker, 42.

⁷³ Allen, 49 n. 19. Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, clarifies this by arguing that this term is “the general term for *mature* locusts” (88, emphasis mine).

⁷⁴ Baker, 42.

⁷⁵ Allen, 49 n. 19.

⁷⁶ Wolff, 27.

⁷⁷ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 88.

⁷⁸ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 156.

⁷⁹ Brodsky, 36.

⁸⁰ Sellers, 82. Interestingly enough, the mature locusts that form dense swarms and fly destroy many crops in their search for food, so his understanding of the term highlights the destruction and doom inherently associated with locusts in the Ancient Near East.

Hebrew term for ‘great’ or ‘many.’⁸¹ The etymological link between ארבה and רבה seems to be clearer.

Each of these three common analyses of the term (deriving from “to be many,” “great,” or “multiplication”) offer similar insights into how the term is understood. The term ארבה seems to signify “the great number of insects associated with a crop infestation.”⁸² It refers to adult locusts that gather in dense groupings and travel in search of food and to lay eggs in order to propagate their genes. As such, ארבה seems to give off the connotation of a dense swarm, which is what locusts do in favorable environmental conditions.⁸³ According to Aharoni, this characterization of the locust corresponds to the final stage in the locust’s life cycle: “the adult, the winged, the flying one,” after which females deposit eggs that eventually become the next generation.⁸⁴ As such, it seems that the best translation of ארבה in Joel 1:4; 2:25 is “adult locust” or “mature locust.” This translation highlights both the mature nature of this locust as the flying locust associated with swarms and the role the adult locust plays in producing offspring that will provide another generation of desert locusts.

The next term used for locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25 is ילק. This term occurs in fewer texts than ארבה. Coggins points in particular to Psalm 105:34 and Nahum 3:16, where the term ילק is used “in parallel with ‘*arbeh* to describe the Egyptian locust plague” or “as part of the cry of vengeance against Nineveh...in parallel with fire and sword.”⁸⁵

Scholars primarily understand ילק in two ways. First of all, the term is understood to

⁸¹ Allen, 49 n. 19.

⁸² Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 88.

⁸³ Wolff, 27; Baker, 42.

⁸⁴ Aharoni, 475-476.

⁸⁵ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 28. Porter also notes that the term occurs in Jeremiah 51:14, 27 and Nahum 3:15, though he also translates the term “cankerworm” or “hedge chafer” (23). Porter does not offer a defense of the translations, which seem based off of the KJV, which understands the four terms used for locust in Joel 1:4; 2:25 to refer to four different creatures entirely.

convey the idea of hopping or jumping. Wolff, for example, translates the term “hopper,” though he does not trace this understanding back to a Semitic root or loan word.⁸⁶

Aharoni also thinks of לָקַץ in terms of hopping, arguing that “the etymology of ‘yelek’ is the same as ‘walaka’ in Arabic,” and means “to move on by hopping.”⁸⁷ Sweeney offers a similar understanding, noting that לָקַץ “probably” means “jumping.”⁸⁸ Crenshaw likewise understands it “in the sense of ‘jumping,’” due to its possible connection with the “Akkadian *ilqitu*...or Arabic *walaqa*,” which convey jumping.⁸⁹ Sellers also connects לָקַץ to the Akkadian word *ilqitu*, which he argues signifies “the leaping gait of the camel,” and so connects to the idea of jumping.⁹⁰

The second understanding scholars have of לָקַץ relates to the idea of licking. Baker simply notes in his commentary on Joel that לָקַץ possesses “a derivation from which a word for ‘lick’ has been suggested.”⁹¹ Allen notes that this derivation likely stems from the root *lqq*, which he understands as “lick” or “lap,” as in lapping up water with one’s tongue.⁹² Brodsky also notes that the term “*yelek* is connected to the Hebrew ‘to lick up,’” though he does not offer more discussion of the word’s etymology.⁹³ This translation seems less likely, especially considering the context related to locust swarms. The image of locusts lapping up or licking water does not seem as natural as the image of locusts hopping in long lines over land. This is especially true when it is considered that

⁸⁶ Wolff, 27.

⁸⁷ Aharoni, 475.

⁸⁸ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 156.

⁸⁹ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 88. He also notes that the possible Akkadian and Arabic roots could convey the connotation of “quickness,” and points to Nahum 3:16 and Jeremiah 51:27 as passages that use the term this way (88).

⁹⁰ Sellers, 83. Allen follows this interpretation without much differentiation (49 n. 19).

⁹¹ Baker, 42.

⁹² Allen, 49 n. 19.

⁹³ Brodsky, 36.

locusts are primarily known for the destruction they wreak on communities after they chew the vegetation in their path.

According to Aharoni, the term ילק corresponds to the first larval stage in the life cycle of the locust.⁹⁴ This is “the tiny hopper stage, when the locust can eat only tender ground vegetation.”⁹⁵ This is because this locust has “just hatched from the egg, with wing structures still invisible” and unavailable for use.⁹⁶ Coggins offers a slightly different perspective on conceptualizing ילק as the “hopping locust,” arguing that “we probably need not concern ourselves too much” the exact translation of the term, which he considers a bit of a misnomer, because “all locusts can be pictured as moving in that way.”⁹⁷ Coggins is correct to point out that all locusts can move by hopping, but it is important to distinguish the use of ילק from terms like ארבה because at certain stages in the life cycle of the desert locust the locust is unable to fly and can only move through hopping or jumping in bands. This makes it possible that ילק refers to a larval stage of locust unable to fly. As such, perhaps the best translation of ילק is “jumping locust” or “hopping locust.” This translation highlights the distinct connotation of jumping or hopping that is associated with this term without forcing the term to fit into the stages of a locust’s life cycle, though this interpretation seems likely.

The final word used for locust in Joel 1:4; 2:25 is חסיל. This term is also rare, and occurs in six passages in the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁸ As Coggins notes, the usage of חסיל in Psalm 78:46 provides another instance of the term being “used in one of the descriptions

⁹⁴ Aharoni, 475.

⁹⁵ Brodsky, 36.

⁹⁶ Wolff, 27.

⁹⁷ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 28.

⁹⁸ Porter, 23. He lists 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chronicles 6:28; Psalm 78:46; Isaiah 33:4; Joel 1:4; 2:25. Baker, interestingly enough, leaves out Joel 1:4 in his list of places where the term occurs, only listing the five other locations mentioned by Porter (42). This is likely a typographical error or oversight.

of the plagues of Egypt found in the Psalms,” much like ילק.⁹⁹ Modern interpreters of Joel tend to understand הסיל in two different ways, though there are other perspectives on the term as well. First of all, many scholars understand the term to signify “finishing” or “bringing to an end.” Allen, for example, treats this word as “the cognate verb” of גזם, and argues that it could mean “finish off” based on its use in Deuteronomy 28:38.¹⁰⁰ Sweeney likewise argues that הסיל “probably” means “finishing.”¹⁰¹ Crenshaw also appeals to the verbal form of הסיל in Deuteronomy 28:38, “where the locusts thoroughly consume the harvest,” to argue that the term “seems to mean ‘finisher.’”¹⁰² Baker offers a similar translation of הסיל, connecting it with “an Aramaic verb for ‘come/bring to an end.’”¹⁰³ Brodsky also emphasizes this aspect of the term, arguing that it “has the Hebrew meaning of ‘near completion.’”¹⁰⁴

Another way scholars understand הסיל relates to the consumption of food. For example, Allen notes one of the translations of הסיל could be “consume.”¹⁰⁵ Porter also notes that the term can refer to “a devourer” in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁶ Sellers likewise connects the word with Arabic words for “peel” or “decorticate,” in which the peeling action is related to food consumption (i.e., the peeling of vegetation off of trees).¹⁰⁷ This understanding connects with the translation of הסיל as “finisher” or “one who brings to an end,” as this is exactly what happens when the locust swarm devours and consumes all of

⁹⁹ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Allen, 49 n. 19.

¹⁰¹ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 156.

¹⁰² Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 88.

¹⁰³ Baker, 42.

¹⁰⁴ Brodsky, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, 49 n. 19.

¹⁰⁶ Porter, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Sellers, 83.

the vegetation in a given community. The locusts both finish consuming all vegetation and bring viable economies and livelihoods to an end with their actions.

There are other understandings of this term that do not fit with the previous two described above. For instance, Aharoni connects חסיל with “hassal,” or “to browse.”¹⁰⁸ Wolff understands it to mean “jumper,” while Porter also notes that it could be taken to signify the caterpillar.¹⁰⁹ These translations of חסיל are not as persuasive. Connecting the word with “browse” does not help elucidate the role of the locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25. The actions of the locusts in these passages do not seem like those of a group merely browsing—they signify bold actions taken by a group relentless in its search of fresh vegetation. In addition, it does not make sense to translate חסיל as “jumper” here if ילק is to be understood as “hopper.” The different terms used for locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25 work to produce “a chain indicating successive swarms of locusts” precisely because terms with different connotations are used.¹¹⁰ This better indicates “a complete destruction” in the text in a way that using synonymous terms could not.¹¹¹

According to Aharoni, חסיל corresponds to “the second larval stage” of the locust that follows the initial larval stage.¹¹² During this stage, the locust possesses “wing structures” that “are still folded together and enclosed in a sack, but are nevertheless clearly recognizable.”¹¹³ The jaws of the desert locust “are already pretty well developed” at this stage, and they allow the locust to complete “the destruction of the tender

¹⁰⁸ Aharoni, 475.

¹⁰⁹ Wolff, 27; Porter, 23.

¹¹⁰ John A. Thompson, “The Use of Repetition in the Prophecy of Joel,” in *On Language, Culture, and Religion: In Honor of Eugene A. Nida*, eds. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley, *Approaches to Semiotics* 56, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Paris, France: Mouton Press, 1974), 107.

¹¹¹ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 88.

¹¹² Aharoni, 475.

¹¹³ Wolff, 27.

vegetation as it grows bigger and develops broader dietary preferences.”¹¹⁴ In light of this investigation, it seems that the best translation for *הסיל* is “finishing locust.” This translation best highlights the total destruction caused by locusts as they travel throughout the land and consume all of the fresh vegetation available.

Locust Imagery in the Hebrew Bible and Related Literature

In light of the prevalence of locust plagues and the destruction they brought in antiquity, locust imagery is common throughout the Hebrew Bible and the other related texts of the Ancient Near East. This makes sense, as the concept of a locust plague was familiar to the wide variety of audiences envisioned by the various authors of texts in the Hebrew Bible. These texts utilize locust imagery in a variety of ways. Lerner argues that “the image of the grasshopper/locust may be employed to symbolize either cringing puniness or overwhelming strength” in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹⁵ Thus the idea of the locust plague becomes a way to help people make sense of judgment and destruction, and becomes a tool by which the author can call the people to make changes in their lives. This is, of course, in addition to the possibility that an author may be referring literally to a swarm of locusts that brings destruction to a particular community.

There are several places in the Hebrew Bible that utilize locust imagery to convey the idea of weakness. Lerner, for example, argues that this idea is present in Numbers 13. In this passage, twelve spies come back from surveying the land before the Israelites are to go and take possession.¹¹⁶ Despite the objections of Caleb, the rest of the men caution the people of Israel against attempting to take the land, because, according to them, “all the people that we saw in it are of great size...and to ourselves we seemed like

¹¹⁴ Aharoni, 475; Brodsky, 36.

¹¹⁵ Lerner, 547.

¹¹⁶ Numbers 13:1-25.

grasshoppers.”¹¹⁷ The term used here for ‘grasshoppers’ is *הגב*, and Lerner acknowledges “that the *complete* identification of the grasshopper (*hgb*) with the locust (*rbh*) is not certain,” in part because “Lev. xi 21-22 lists them as separate subgroups” of insects considered kosher and Joel 1:4; 2:25 fails to utilize this term in its description of the destruction of the land.¹¹⁸ However, as Lerner points out, *הגב* is identified with locusts in 2 Chronicles 7:13, where God answers Solomon’s prayer and references commanding “the locust (*hgb*) to devour the land.”¹¹⁹ This makes it likely that *הגב* here refers to the locust. If this is true, then it seems likely that “the spies’ choice of the grasshopper” is deliberate, in part because the insect is considered “the epitome of puny helplessness.”¹²⁰ By comparing themselves to the *הגב* the spies convey to the people that they are too weak and powerless to drive the nations around them out of their Promised Land. Psalm 109 is a clearer example of a text that utilizes locust imagery to symbolize weakness. In this text, the psalmist implores God to “act on [his] behalf,” because he is “gone like a shadow at evening” and is “shaken off like a locust,” with “knees weak through fasting.”¹²¹ The term for locust here is *ארבה*, the term found in both Joel 1:4; 2:25, where the term is connected with strength and destruction. Here, however, the locust is nothing more than “an insect settling on someone’s arm; one shake, and it is gone.”¹²² In this context, the locust seems to be anything but the feared creature found in other texts. This

¹¹⁷ Numbers 13:33-34.

¹¹⁸ Lerner, 546.

¹¹⁹ Lerner, 546; 2 Chronicles 7:13. He also uses evidence from the Mishnah to demonstrate that *הגב* refers to locusts (546; cf. Baba Metzia 9:6).

¹²⁰ Lerner, 546. He goes on to argue, interestingly enough, that the ability of *הגב* to refer to grasshoppers and locusts means that “the grasshopper simile is shot-through with ironic tension,” because “while the individual insect may fairly represent weakness and timidity, grasshoppers massed together become perhaps the most terrible natural destructive force known in biblical times, i.e., the locust swarm (546). Perhaps this ironic tension deliberately foreshadows the eventual conquering of the land that takes place in the narrative of Joshua.

¹²¹ Psalm 109:21, 23-24.

¹²² John Goldingjay, *Psalms 90-150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, ed. Tremper Longman, III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 286.

demonstrates the flexibility with which locust imagery can be used throughout the Hebrew Bible, though it is much less common to utilize locust imagery to convey weakness rather than strength.

There are numerous texts within the Hebrew Bible that use locusts to symbolize strength and power. Often this is done by emphasizing the massive amount of locusts contained within a swarm.¹²³ An example of this can be seen in Judges, where the author describes the Midianites, who oppressed the people of Israel for seven years.¹²⁴ In the description, the author notes that “they and their livestock would come up” against the people of Israel to fight them, “and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts.”¹²⁵ Later in the narrative, the author notes that “the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley as thick as locusts.”¹²⁶ As Niditch notes, “the image of the invading enemy as numerous as locusts is common” in the Hebrew Bible.¹²⁷ The author utilizes a metaphor with locusts here to draw upon the dense nature of a locust swarm and thus to emphasize the great size of the armies that fought against the people of Israel. This implies that the foreign armies are to be feared due to their size and might. In at least the larger context of the example from Judges, this is necessary in order to construct a narrative that points to the “manifestation of God’s glory” and emphasizes the sovereignty of God in overcoming the threat.¹²⁸ A similar

¹²³ Lerner actually argues that the “rhetorical equation ‘threatening mass of people = locust swarm’ is read both backwards and forwards in the Hebrew scriptures,” though this is based upon the assumption that the locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25 symbolize a “threatening mass of people” (546). This issue will be taken up in the next chapter, which will seek to argue that the locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25 reference a literal locust plague.

¹²⁴ Judges 6:1.

¹²⁵ Judges 6:5. The term for ‘locust’ here is ארבה.

¹²⁶ Judges 7:12.

¹²⁷ Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, eds. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 87. She notes that it also occurs in Joel 1:4; 2:25 and Nahum 3:15 (87).

¹²⁸ Niditch, 97.

point is also made in Jeremiah, where the prophet tells Egypt that people “shall cut down her forest...because they are more numerous than locusts; they are without number.”¹²⁹ Here, however, the metaphor is used to pronounce divine judgment upon a foreign nation, as the forces like locusts are sent by God as an agent of his wrath.

Texts can also utilize the idea that locusts symbolize strength by referring to the destructive activities associated with locust swarms. This can be seen in Nahum, where the prophet utilizes locust imagery while delivering a message of death and destruction to the people of Nineveh. Here the prophet tells the people they “will go into hiding” and “will seek a refuge from the enemy,” whose “sword will cut you off” and “will devour you like the locust.”¹³⁰ Again, here a “threatening mass of people = locust swarm.”¹³¹ This rhetorical device serves to further emphasize the sovereignty of Yahweh, who “will devour Nineveh ‘completely’...no matter how noncombustible she appears to be (cf. 1:10).”¹³² In this instance, the “devouring” takes place through the mediation of a human army, which serves to execute Yahweh’s wrath upon the people of Nineveh.

While the destructive activities of locust swarms are used to highlight the destructive nature of human armies in the Hebrew Bible, in many other texts Yahweh directly employs locusts in the execution of his wrath and justice upon Israel and/or foreign nations. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurs in the Exodus narrative.¹³³ Here Moses petitions Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave and worship

¹²⁹ Jeremiah 46:23.

¹³⁰ Nahum 3:11, 15. The word for ‘locust’ here is קָלָי.

¹³¹ Lerner, 546.

¹³² Duane L. Christensen, *Nahum: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible 24F, ed. John J. Collins (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2009), 381. He also notes the effective nature of the locust imagery in this narrative with the rhetorical question: “What better image to choose to emphasize this point than that of a locust plague?” (381).

¹³³ It can also be found in the psalms that recount the Exodus story—see Psalm 78:46; 105:34-35.

Yahweh, threatening a locust plague if Pharaoh does not comply.¹³⁴ Pharaoh refuses to let the people go, and shortly thereafter Yahweh “brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night” carrying locusts, who “came upon all the land of Egypt” in “such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again...and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left.”¹³⁵ The strength of the locusts—as well as the fear communities have of locust swarms—can be seen in Pharaoh’s response. He “hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron” and confessed that he “sinned against [Yahweh]” and begged to have Yahweh remove the locusts from the land.¹³⁶ This can also be seen in Amos, where Yahweh chastises the people for not returning to him even after he “struck [them] with blight and mildew,” “laid waste [their] gardens,” and was the reason “the locust devoured [their] fig trees.”¹³⁷ Here “it is taken for granted that Yahweh controls the success or failure of the crops,” and Yahweh sends the locusts to destroy “fig trees and olive trees,” which Coggins points out are “a regular symbol of agricultural prosperity.”¹³⁸ Thus Yahweh is depicted as enlisting locusts to execute his wrath and judgments on different communities due to the strength and power commonly associated with locusts.

In texts in which locusts represent symbols of strength and power, locust imagery is utilized in connection with the ideas of divine judgment and destruction. In a primarily agricultural society, a locust plague was a “grave threat to the order of creation as well as to ecological stability and community sustainability” that was perhaps “more serious than the dispossession of religious and political autonomy, including even the loss of dynasty

¹³⁴ Exodus 10:3-6.

¹³⁵ Exodus 10:13-15.

¹³⁶ Exodus 10:16.

¹³⁷ Amos 4:9.

¹³⁸ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 119.

and temple.”¹³⁹ Specifically to Joel, Baker argues that regardless of how the locusts are understood, “their arrival always means devastation and despair.”¹⁴⁰ For a group of people who believed that Yahweh was in control of the world, including their agricultural viability, a locust plague was an event that required explanation. Often the event was explained as divine judgment from Yahweh due to the sins of the community. This connection is explicitly made in Deuteronomy. In the text, Moses instructs the people to gather together on two mountains—Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal—in order to review the blessings associated with upholding the covenant agreed upon with Yahweh and the curses associated with failing to live up to their end of the covenant.¹⁴¹ In the list of curses, Yahweh threatens to “send upon [the people of Israel] disaster, panic, and frustration...until [they] are destroyed and perish quickly” if they fail to uphold their end of the covenant.¹⁴² In the midst of a long list of curses brought about by Yahweh, the people are told that they “shall carry much seed into the field but shall gather little in, for the locust shall consume it.”¹⁴³ In this case, the destructive capabilities of the locust swarm are considered a judgment brought on a group of people that deserve it. This can also be seen in the narrative about the dedication of the Temple by Solomon. He offers a prayer to Yahweh where he acknowledges that the people will inevitably fail to live up to their special covenant with Yahweh, and he calls on Yahweh to “hear in heaven,” “forgive,” and “act” to help end the suffering “if there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar” due to their sins.¹⁴⁴ Here the fact that a

¹³⁹ Stulman and Kim, 193.

¹⁴⁰ Baker, 43.

¹⁴¹ Deuteronomy 27:11-13. According to Joshua, the people of Israel—led by Joshua—later follow the instructions of Moses closely and read the blessings and curses from the two mountains (Joshua 8:30-35).

¹⁴² Deuteronomy 28:20.

¹⁴³ Deuteronomy 28:38.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Kings 8:37, 39.

locust plague is considered a judgment from Yahweh is taken for granted and serves to further develop a “two-pronged appeal to divine faithfulness with respect to covenants” in this text.¹⁴⁵ In both texts locusts are considered a judgment to be avoided by fidelity to Yahweh’s covenant.

While there are many texts in the Hebrew Bible that utilize locust imagery to convey weakness or strength, several important texts connect the locust swarm with Yahweh’s destruction and judgment by appealing to the natural phenomenon of a locust plague. This should not be surprising, as locust plagues were well-attested in the Ancient Near East. There are many features of the locust plagues described in the Hebrew Bible that correspond to recent descriptions of actual locust plagues. For example, the locusts in the Exodus narrative “cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land” and “devour every tree...that grows in the field.”¹⁴⁶ This could be a viable description of locusts hopping about in “gregarious marching bands up to ten miles wide and ten miles long,” slowly traveling and consuming “virtually every tender blade of grass or legume” in their way.¹⁴⁷ It could also describe the dense swarm of locusts flying about in search of new vegetation. The text also notes that “the land was black” when the locusts came, which may imply that the sun was blotted out from view.¹⁴⁸ If this is so, it corresponds nicely to descriptions of the locust plague that hit Jerusalem in 1915, where there was a “sudden darkening of the bright sunshine” and “clouds...so dense as to appear quite black.”¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, in Joel’s description of a particularly devastating

¹⁴⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, Westminster Bible Companion, eds. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 49.

¹⁴⁶ Exodus 10:5.

¹⁴⁷ Brodsky, 35.

¹⁴⁸ Exodus 10:15.

¹⁴⁹ Brodsky, 34.

locust plague, the prophet states: “Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall,” all the while “they do not swerve from their paths.”¹⁵⁰ This corresponds to a description of the locust plague that hit Jerusalem in 1915, where “they cover[ed] the walls of houses” and penetrated “to the inside through doors and windows.”¹⁵¹ The text in Judges that compares the density of Midianites and Amalekites to a locust swarm seems to adequately convey the nature of a locust swarm, in which “over a billion creatures” can congregate and “together...weigh over three million pounds.”¹⁵² It seems that, in some cases, actual locust plagues lay behind the locust imagery used in texts. Descriptions that match actual locust plagues occur in some texts because the author seeks to explain why such a destructive natural phenomenon could happen to God’s chosen people.

Locust imagery is also prevalent in other texts found in the Ancient Near East. This makes sense, because “locust plagues are a universal and eternal phenomenon affecting widely scattered areas.”¹⁵³ In fact, there is “an Egyptian text” that mentions “locusts as an agricultural plague” when it warns people about “the sorrows of a farmer’s life.”¹⁵⁴ It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that locust imagery found in other texts in the Ancient Near East would function in similar ways to the locust imagery found in the Hebrew Bible. This is manifested, for example, in the variety of terms used for locusts in the Ancient Near East. Bodenheimer offers an extensive list of Sumerian and

¹⁵⁰ Joel 2:7.

¹⁵¹ Wolff, 28. For another description, see Brodsky, 34.

¹⁵² Brodsky, 35; Judges 6:5; 7:12.

¹⁵³ Hurowitz, 601. He goes on to add “in identical manners” to this statement, though this is to some extent an overstatement of the matter (601). As similar as the experience of a locust plague may be to people in similar regions of the world—or even to people in different regions—no two groups experience locust plagues in the same way, especially when the unpredictable nature of locust swarms is considered. It therefore seems more reasonable to only suggest that locust plagues affect widely scattered areas in a *similar* manner.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 53.

Akkadian terms for locust, and observes that this phenomenon “is nothing unusual.”¹⁵⁵ Thompson also attests to this phenomenon, arguing that “other Near Eastern languages have names for the stages of the locust,” though he offers no textual evidence to support this argument.¹⁵⁶ Hurowitz offers more concrete textual evidence for this, appealing to an Assyrian prayer for relief that “mentions two types of locusts, the *erebu* and the *zirziru*,” which probably represent “distinct species and not different stages in the” locust’s life cycle and are used as a merismus to convey the idea of “locusts of all sizes.”¹⁵⁷

Literary works in the Ancient Near East also reference the eating of locusts in various societies. While there are very few texts in the Hebrew Bible that elaborate on this phenomenon, the practice is widely attested in other literature. For example, Kelhoffer argues that the practice is common by appealing to several Assyrian texts that demonstrate “the eating of locusts during a time of hardship...following military defeat.”¹⁵⁸ However, locusts were not just considered acceptable sources of food for the poor or those experiencing hardship. Kelhoffer argues that “both rich and poor people ate locusts in a variety of rural and (comparatively more) urban locations in the Ancient Near East.”¹⁵⁹ This is the case because, as Bodenheimer points out, “we find locust-bearers among the food-bearers of the great royal banquet in the palace of Senaherib.”¹⁶⁰ Several Assyrian texts “point to orders from individuals of some wealth who *desired this*

¹⁵⁵ Bodenheimer, 113.

¹⁵⁶ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 54. He also takes for granted that the different terms for locust correspond to stages in the life cycle of the locust, though this assumption is by no means certain either.

¹⁵⁷ Hurowitz, 599.

¹⁵⁸ Kelhoffer, 295, 302.

¹⁵⁹ Kelhoffer, 302.

¹⁶⁰ Bodenheimer, 77. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980), likewise calls our attention to “a royal banquet scene from the palace of Ashurbanipal (c. 669-627 BC)” that “depicted servants bringing locusts on sticks for the guests to eat” (129). This helps demonstrate Kelhoffer’s conclusion that “locusts routinely comprised the chosen cuisine of the wealthy” (302).

particular food.”¹⁶¹ For example, one letter from Mari consists of a person who writes to a king to tell the king that he has sent “all the locusts that were taken” to the king.¹⁶² The multiple texts and inscriptions referencing locust eating by nobles and kings suggest a “wide-spread and well-attested delight in eating such insects in the Ancient Near East.”¹⁶³

Texts from the Ancient Near East also use locusts to symbolically convey weakness and strength. Thompson notes that in Egyptian inscriptions made by Ramses II and Merneptah “it is usually the defeated enemies who are compared with locusts,” which thus uses locust imagery to convey the weakness of defeated armies.¹⁶⁴ Conversely, the Ugaritic *Legend of King Keret* and the Akkadian text *The Curse of Agade* compare locusts with armies approaching their enemies and “destroy[ing] cities and fields” in order to convey the strength of their forces in battle.¹⁶⁵ As Thompson points out, “both Egyptian and Assyrian texts have the element of multitude in the comparisons of armies to locusts,” with the Egyptians emphasizing “the weakness of the locust” and the Assyrians emphasizing “its destructiveness.”¹⁶⁶ As with the Hebrew Bible, locust imagery in the Ancient Near East can be flexible enough to meet a variety of rhetorical needs for a community.

The locust imagery in extra-biblical texts from the Ancient Near East primarily functions to emphasize the idea of destruction. Texts that compare locusts to armies highlight the destruction of war—either by comparing the victorious army with the destructive aftermath of a locust plague or by comparing the massive amount of enemies

¹⁶¹ Kelhoffer, 302, emphasis original.

¹⁶² Kelhoffer, 302.

¹⁶³ Kelhoffer, 300. He suggests that this desire for locusts as food “may well lie behind the partial prescription” allowing the people of Israel to eat some varieties of locusts found in Leviticus 11:20-23 (300).

¹⁶⁴ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 52.

¹⁶⁵ Andiañach, 438.

¹⁶⁶ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 53.

defeated in battle to a large mass of locusts without emphasizing their destructive capabilities. This can also be seen in the many texts and inscriptions that beg the gods to end the destruction caused by a locust plague. Hurowitz points to a hymn for the goddess Nanaya, where the person describes the locust as “the evil locust which destroys the crop/grain” (“*sennu erebu muhalliq aina[n]*”) and requests that “it be turned into nothing” (“*ina qibitiki limmani zaqiqig*”).¹⁶⁷ Thompson also points to “an enameled orthostate from Assur of the time of Sargon II” that depicts “a dignitary with a locust above his head before the god Shamash,” again, probably to pray “for the removal of a locust plague.”¹⁶⁸ As Hurowitz notes, it is highly likely that these requests stem from “an actual locust plague that afflicted Assyria during the time of Sargon.”¹⁶⁹ It can be seen here that the usage of locust imagery in the Ancient Near East parallels its usage in the Hebrew Bible. This need not necessarily imply that texts in the Hebrew Bible borrowed these texts, but that is certainly possible. It is more likely that the common features of texts that discuss locusts and locust plagues in the Hebrew Bible and wider Near East come from shared experiences and shared fears regarding the destructive power of locusts.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explore in depth the locust imagery found in the Hebrew Bible and wider Near East. The chapter has provided background information on the characteristics and habits of locusts, including the stages in a locust’s life cycle and information on why locust swarms develop and cause destruction to many parts of the world. This background information is necessary in order to make texts that reference the

¹⁶⁷ Hurowitz, 598. He acknowledges that, “to the best of [his] knowledge,” this request “is without parallel in Mesopotamian literature,” though he believes it closely parallels “the promise to rid the land of the locust plague central to Joel 2:18-27” (598, 601).

¹⁶⁸ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 55.

¹⁶⁹ Hurowitz, 599.

destructive power of locusts more understandable to readers that live in portions of the world that rarely experience locust swarms. The chapter also sought to provide translations for the four Hebrew terms used to describe the locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25. Finally, the chapter sought to show the variety of ways locust imagery can be employed in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East.

The locust imagery found in these texts has at its center the idea of destruction and judgment. By utilizing locust imagery in a text, an author can adapt the idea of destruction to serve a variety of needs for a particular community or nation. The author can use locust imagery to threaten the people with future judgment if they do not change how they live, or the author can use the description of a locust plague to emphasize the judgment already experienced by the community. This imagery can also be used to offer the people hope for the imminent justice of God, when the enemies of the community will be defeated by forces as numerous as a swarm of locusts.

CHAPTER FOUR

The previous three chapters have provided a suitable background to explore the central question of this thesis: What type of text is the book of Joel and how do we make sense of its message? It has been noted before that there seems to be no consensus among scholars as to how to classify Joel. John Barton notes that “Joel has been thought of as a prophet like the preexilic prophets, with a message of imminent divine intervention, but also as a purely literary compilation of stock eschatological themes with no message of immediate relevance to anyone.”¹ This chapter seeks to weigh in on this difficult issue and offer some insights on the problems associated with classifying the text of Joel. The chapter will ultimately argue that the use of locust imagery throughout Joel demonstrates the prophetic eschatology assumed throughout the text, and therefore the book should be classified within the collection of writings known as prophetic literature.

This chapter will begin by reviewing conclusions offered in the discussion of Joel’s date and unity, highlighting their importance to the rest of the argument. With this foundation, the chapter will then examine the function of the locust imagery in Joel, arguing that the author utilizes locust imagery to refer to a literal locust plague. Next, this chapter will demonstrate that the use of locust imagery in Joel best fits with the prophetic eschatological outlook on the world characteristic of the works contained within the body of prophetic literature. Finally, the chapter will suggest some conclusions and explore their implications for the way we understand the message of Joel.

The Date and Unity of Joel

While there are a variety of perspectives on the date of Joel among modern interpreters, we have seen that arguments for a pre-exilic and late post-exilic (343 to 285

¹ Barton, 3.

BCE or later) date are not convincing, in part because they do not offer an alternative explanation for the textual and linguistic pieces of evidence that suggest a date between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. Furthermore, they fail to adequately explain the lack of references to a king in the narrative. The use of quotations from and allusions to other texts in Joel aid in dating the text, as “in the majority of cases it seems likely that Joel was quoting rather than being quoted, and must therefore be later than the other works concerned.”² Thus quotations from Amos (e.g., Joel 3:16//Amos 1:2; Joel 3:18//Amos 9:13) mean Joel must be dated after Amos, which is typically dated around “760 and 750 B.C.E.”³ Quotations from books like Obadiah (e.g., Joel 2:32//Obadiah 17a) mean Joel must date to the late fifth or early fourth century BCE, as Obadiah is largely considered an exilic or post-exilic text.⁴ Furthermore, the geopolitical situation described in Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8] seems to suggest that the book can be dated no later than 343 BCE, which is the latest “time when the coastal region functioned more or less cohesively.”⁵

Thus Joel should be dated between the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, perhaps around the turn of the century. This suggested date is significant for the larger question of the problem of genre associated with the text. This proposed date for Joel falls comfortably within the period of time in which prophetic and proto-apocalyptic texts were written. However, this date suggests that the text cannot be classified within the body of apocalyptic literature, as this literature did not begin to be composed until the late third or early second century BCE with *I Enoch* and the early second century BCE with

² Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 16.

³ Jeremias, 2; Baker, 26.

⁴ Baker, 26; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 281.

⁵ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 202.

Daniel.⁶ Thus it seems that the most likely solution would be to consider Joel within the body of prophetic literature or within the body of proto-apocalyptic literature.

We have also seen that there is a lack of scholarly consensus on the debate regarding the unity of Joel. Despite this lack of consensus, we have seen that many of the arguments offered are unpersuasive. Arguments that seek to highlight elements of redaction within Joel 1:2-2:17 and postulate that Joel 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] follows Joel 2:18-27 better than Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5] do not necessitate redaction and later addition to the book, as acknowledged by even those who do not necessarily argue for Joel's unity.⁷ In addition, we have seen that the structural composition of Joel seems to demonstrate the unity of the text. While Wolff does this in a way that necessitates a rearrangement of the text, this need not be done. The first portion of the text, the description of the locust plague and the lament offered in Joel 1:2-20 is balanced by the reversal of this situation in Joel 2:18-27.⁸ The next pericope—Joel 2:1-16—is balanced by Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5], where God reverses the punishment for iniquity in Joel 2:1-16 and restores his proper relationship with the people by pouring out his spirit on those lamenting in Joel 2:1-16. The text of Joel 2:17, in which the nations mock Yahweh following the locust plague, is balanced by Joel 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21], where Yahweh responds to the taunt and demonstrates his power by bringing judgment down upon the foreign nations that mocked him before. This structural analysis, as well as the plausibility of less convincing arguments, help further solidify the conclusion that Joel is a unified text.

⁶ Milik, 5-7; Towner, *Daniel*, 5.

⁷ See, for example, Redditt, "The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy," 228; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 151.

⁸ Wolff, 7.

This conclusion is significant for the classification of the text within a body of literature. This means it is not possible to treat Joel 1:1-2:17 (or 1:1-2:27 depending on the scholar) as prophetic literature similar to the pre-exilic prophets and Joel 2:18-3:21 [2:18-4:21] (or 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21]) as either proto-apocalyptic or apocalyptic literature.⁹ If Joel is an essential unity composed by one hand then the entirety of the text must be considered when dealing with the problem of genre.

This means that it is important to determine the primary motifs and imagery used throughout Joel in order to best deal with the problem of genre within the text. Stracizich argues that “the most important” motif throughout Joel is “the phrase *the Day of the Lord*, which is used 5 times (1:15, 2:1, 11, 3:4, 4:14),” throughout “all sections of the book,” with “those in the second half of the book com[ing] as a response to the call to repentance” in the first half of the book.¹⁰ While the phrase יום יהוה is utilized more frequently in the book, it seems more likely that the use of locust imagery within Joel is the primary motif governing the text. While locusts are only explicitly mentioned in Joel 1:4; 2:25, the description of their destruction comprises the majority of Joel 1:1-2:17. Furthermore, the restoration that takes place in the second half of the book reverses the effects of the locust plague that occurs in Joel 1:1-2:17. Even the judgment on the nations found in Joel 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] comes as a response to taunts offered to the Jewish people after their land was destroyed by a locust swarm. The use of locust imagery thus

⁹ Cf. Towner, “Tribulation and Peace: The Fate of Shalom in Jewish Apocalyptic;” Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*; Berry; and Bodi, who do this in their analyses of prophetic and apocalyptic literature. The implication of Joel’s unity thus urges a reappraisal of the questions with which they engage insofar as they relate to Joel.

¹⁰ John Stracizich, *Joel’s Use of Scripture and the Scripture’s Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, Biblical Interpretation Series 82, eds. R. Alan Culpepper and Ellen van Wolde (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 47, emphasis original. See also Allen, 36; Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 47-48; Wolff, 12.

pervades the text as much as—if not more so than—the Day of Yahweh. This seems to imply that the use of locust imagery throughout the text is as important as the use of the Day of Yahweh motif in the text, if not more so.

Even if it is granted that the Day of Yahweh is the central theme around which the book revolves, the understanding of this theme is mediated through how one understands the use of locust imagery in Joel. Allen acknowledges that “the first part of the book is concerned with a devastating plague of locusts.”¹¹ Wolff builds upon this and argues that this concern “provides [the prophet] with a relevant starting point” to discuss “his major theme...the Day of Yahweh.”¹² Either way, it is clear that “the locusts in Joel (1:4; 2:25) represent a real catastrophe which, perhaps, has been the propelling power for the message and composition of the book.”¹³ Thus the unity of Joel and the importance of locust imagery throughout the text suggest that how we understand the purpose and function of this locust imagery throughout Joel determines how we understand the message of the text and how we classify the book.

Locust Imagery in the Book of Joel

As has been noted before, there are three primary ways scholars understand the identity of the locusts found in Joel 1:4; 2:25: “(1) to read the passage as a description of a locust plague; (2) to read the passage taking the locusts as a symbol of the eschatological army of God; (3) to understand the passage as a description of a foreign

¹¹ Allen, 29.

¹² Wolff, 12-13.

¹³ G. W. Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 21, eds. G. W. Anderson et al (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1971), 62.

military invasion.”¹⁴ This section will explore the three ways of identifying the locusts in Joel in order to offer a suggestion about how these locusts function within the text.

Of the three views found in scholarship, perhaps the least common view is the second view, which argues that the locusts function as a symbol of the eschatological army of God in Joel. It is possible that Wolff and Frost hold this interpretation. Wolff argues that “the predicted enemy” in Joel 2:1-17 “must be seen as an apocalyptic army” based on differences between the description of locust plague in Joel 1:4-20 and the enemy invasion announced in Joel 2:1-17.¹⁵ Frost likewise argues that “the plague of locusts” and “the drought and the prairie fire” are “a mere detail of the really significant event, which is of course the *eschaton* itself.”¹⁶ Frost seems to indicate that he sees the locusts as an eschatological army of sorts, though he does not treat the issue in more depth. Andiñach also points to two pieces of textual evidence that are used to support the identification of the locusts with the eschatological army of Yahweh: (1) “the book explicitly refers to an army” in Joel 2:11, 25, even calling the army Yahweh’s “great army” and (2) the “many comparisons” of the army in Joel 2:4-5, 7 with “horses, sound of chariots, crackling of a flame of fire, horsemen,” all of which seems to be military imagery, with no similar comparison “saying that ‘the army is like...’ locusts.”¹⁷

In his commentary, Wolff offers several more in-depth arguments for the identification of the locusts in Joel with an eschatological army of Yahweh. He asserts that “chap. 1 focuses upon a catastrophe that has already set in,” while “chap. 2 stands under the aegis of the alarm cry-warning of the enemy who has set out on his way” with

¹⁴ Andiñach, 433-434.

¹⁵ Wolff, 42.

¹⁶ Frost, 78.

¹⁷ Andiñach, 436.

an army that “is *still* approaching.”¹⁸ Furthermore, Wolff points out that “locusts are not mentioned at all in 2:1-17,” whereas the author uses a variety of names to describe locusts in Joel 1:4.¹⁹ In addition, Yahweh is described as “commander-in-chief of the approaching enemy army” in Joel 2:11, while it is not said that “he leads the locusts” in Joel 1:4-20.²⁰ He also points to differences in the announcement of disaster in the two texts. The first description of the locust plague asks: “Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your ancestors?”²¹ However, the description in Joel 2:1-17 describes the event as including a powerful army the likes of which “has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.”²² Wolff argues that this means “the locust disaster was *unusual*, but the new distress to be brought on by the enemy will be *unique*.”²³ While Wolff describes this enemy in Joel 2:1-17 as “an apocalyptic army,” he also argues that it refers to “the overwhelming enemy from afar (or from the north) expected by prophecy.”²⁴ Thus Wolff may interpret the locusts as an eschatological army or as a foreign military invasion that brings the apocalyptic destruction of the people.

Many scholars interpret the locusts in Joel as a metaphoric representation of a foreign military invasion. Andiñach, for example, points out two textual problems that he believes suggest that the locust imagery in Joel metaphorically describes a foreign military invasion. He argues that “the reading of the locusts as real locusts or as eschatological army requires two textual emendations.”²⁵ The first reverses “the position of the two words” *’et-haššānîm* (“the years”) in Joel 2:25 to read *šēnayim ’et* (“the double

¹⁸ Wolff, 41, emphasis original.

¹⁹ Wolff, 42.

²⁰ Wolff, 42.

²¹ Joel 1:2.

²² Joel 2:2.

²³ Wolff, 42, emphasis original.

²⁴ Wolff, 42.

²⁵ Andiñach, 437.

of”) in order to avoid “the contradiction between the text and devastation by locusts.”²⁶ The second occurs in Joel 2:17, where “the phrase *limšol-bām gôyīm* is often translated ‘a byword among the nations,’ whereas the literal meaning is ‘to rule over them [Judah] the nations.’”²⁷ Andiñach argues that “the meaning ‘to mock’ is not the main meaning of the root *mšl*,” and therefore translators have intentionally “chosen a secondary meaning of this particular word” to better “reconcile the idea of real locusts and this root” in Joel.²⁸

In addition, Andiñach argues that the idea that locusts symbolically represent human armies is common in other literature in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East. He appeals to Judges 6:3-5; 7:12, where “the Midianites and Amalekites, and all the people of the East [were] like locusts for multitude,” and Nahum 3:15-16, where “the soldiers who are destroying Nineveh” are compared to locusts.²⁹ Andiñach also notes similar tendencies in the Ugaritic *Legend of King Keret*.³⁰ This can also be seen in Egyptian inscriptions that reference defeated enemies as locusts.³¹ Andiñach thus concludes that “the use of locust as a metaphor for human armies was widespread in the ancient literature” and “the language and imagery in Joel is remarkably like that of military attacks described in other prophetic books,” which advances “the idea that Joel, when referring to locusts, was describing a human invasion.”³²

Hosch also notes that many people argue that the locusts found in Joel refer to a foreign army invading the land due to the reference to “the northern army” or “the northerner” in Joel 2:20. As he notes, for “those who consider the book of Joel to be a

²⁶ Andiñach, 437.

²⁷ Andiñach, 437.

²⁸ Andiñach, 437.

²⁹ Andiñach, 439.

³⁰ Andiñach, 438.

³¹ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 52.

³² Andiñach, 440.

single unit of time, and those who consider verses one through eleven of chapter two to be eschatological while understanding chapter one to be historical, the ‘northerner’...must refer to an army whose residence has been in the north yet were to move south with the invasion of Judah in view.”³³ Stulman and Kim likewise argue that “the imagery of locusts represents military invasion” due to the use of “specific terms such as ‘nation’ (1:6), ‘northern army’ (2:20), and ‘great army’ (2:25).”³⁴ They also suggest that “the metaphors of ‘fire’ and ‘flames’” found in passages like Joel 1:19 “work as well with the horror of war as they do with natural disaster.”³⁵ According to Stulman and Kim, this makes it more likely that the imagery used in the description of the locust plague further serves to describe a foreign military invasion of Judah.

Upon closer analysis, many of the arguments used to support the interpretation that the locusts in Joel function as a representation of an eschatological army or a foreign military force invading the land are not convincing. First of all, the comparison of locusts with human armies that occurs in many texts within the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East need not necessitate the same function for the locust imagery in Joel. As Barton notes, if “we think that the locusts have the same meaning in chapters 1 and 2, the description in chapter 2 seems...difficult to reconcile with the idea that they stand for an army,” because “they are *compared* with an army in 2:4-9.”³⁶ Furthermore, Thompson demonstrates that in texts from the Ancient Near East, “armies are compared with locusts or locusts with armies, but locusts are never *symbols* of armies.”³⁷ The argument that the description of the locust plague in Joel 2:1-17 refers to a foreign military invasion only

³³ Hosch, 33.

³⁴ Stulman and Kim, 194.

³⁵ Stulman and Kim, 194.

³⁶ Barton, 44, emphasis original.

³⁷ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 52, emphasis mine.

makes sense if “one is very incompetent in using metaphors, which the Old Testament prophets certainly were not.”³⁸ Allen likewise describes the conception “of figurative locusts who are like the soldiers they are supposed to represent” as “a torturous and improbable interpretation” that does not seem persuasive.³⁹ Treves further notes that such a use of “similes within a simile” is “awkward and confusing and would defeat the very purposes of allegory.”⁴⁰ In addition, Thompson notes that many parallels from Egypt—including “an Egyptian locust amulet with a lion’s face”—seem “more florid than Joel’s language” and help to “support the position that the prophet is also not describing supernatural insects with his poetic figures.”⁴¹ Thus arguments that attempt to identify the locusts as an eschatological army or a symbolic representation of a foreign military invasion based on their description in Joel are not convincing.

Furthermore, Wolff’s assertion that Joel 2:1-17 serves as a warning of future judgment need not be necessitated by the text. Wolff translates the two relevant passages in Joel 1:1-2:17 thus: (1) Joel 1:15: “for the Day of Yahweh is near” and (2) Joel 2:1: “for the Day of Yahweh is coming.”⁴² Watts, however, translates the relevant passages in each chapter differently. He translates Joel 1:15: “the day is near, the day of [Yahweh:] it comes,” while he translates Joel 2:1: “for the day of [Yahweh] has come.”⁴³ Watts notes difficulties with rendering the action in these passages into temporal terms. He points out that “tenses in English are clearly past, present, or future,” while “those in Hebrew represent completed or incompleting [*sic*] acts, each of which may be thought of in past,

³⁸ Barton, 44.

³⁹ Allen, 29.

⁴⁰ Treves, 149.

⁴¹ Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” 53.

⁴² Wolff, 19, 37. The NRSV offers almost the exact same translation, as does Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2-3.

⁴³ Watts, 18, 23. His translation follows the NEB.

present, or future contexts without changing the form of the verb.”⁴⁴ Understandably this “forces the translator to decide in each case from the context whether a particular Hebrew verb should be put into an English past, present, or future tense though the Hebrew could possibly be any or all of these.”⁴⁵ Crenshaw also draws attention to “the ambiguity with regard to the actual time involved,” which he argues “is heightened by the predicate adjective *qarob* (2:1),” though he seems to think this question may have a multi-faceted answer that sees the Day of Yahweh as a past action against the people and a future action against the nations.⁴⁶ Thus other arguments must be used to more definitively demonstrate that the locusts in Joel refer to an eschatological army.

In addition, the textual arguments offered by Andiñach fail to necessitate the identification of the locusts within Joel with a foreign military invasion or the eschatological army of Yahweh. First of all, the reference to “the years that the swarming locust has eaten” does not need to be textually emended to refer to a locust plague.⁴⁷ As Brodsky notes, here it seems “more likely” that the prophet “was referring to more than one cycle” of locust swarms, as “a locust plague may recur year after year in the same general area.”⁴⁸ This is especially true if environmental conditions are favorable for the laying of eggs in the fall or winter and the hatching of those eggs in the subsequent spring. In addition, Andiñach’s analysis of Joel 2:17 fails to take into account the immediate context following the use of “mockery” or “byword” in the text, where the author then asks: “Why should it be said among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”⁴⁹ As

⁴⁴ Watts, 22.

⁴⁵ Watts, 22.

⁴⁶ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 49-50.

⁴⁷ Joel 2:25.

⁴⁸ Brodsky, 36.

⁴⁹ Joel 2:17.

Baker notes, this “last sentence in Joel 2:17 is found almost verbatim in Psalm 79:10; 115:2.”⁵⁰ In both of these contexts, the use of this phrase seems to fit within a context of foreign domination at the hands of an invading military force. For example, the psalmist states that “the nations have come into [Yahweh’s] inheritance,” defiled Yahweh’s “holy temple,” and “laid Jerusalem in ruins,” which is a clear depiction of a foreign military invasion.⁵¹ This seems to lend credence to Andiñach’s interpretation of the locusts in Joel. However, as Coggins points out, there seems to be “more than a hint of blackmail in the terms of the prayer” offered by the people, who argue that “if God does not act, not only will his heritage become a mockery, but observers will put his inaction down to inadequacy.”⁵² Thus the question “Where is their God?” in the text “is clearly envisaged as a mocking question.”⁵³ While this critique of Andiñach is certainly necessary to defend the literal interpretation of locust imagery in Joel, it also seems more plausible than Andiñach’s argument even if the locust imagery in the text functions to symbolically refer to a foreign military invasion. It would not be unreasonable for a conquering army to mock Yahweh in light of his inability to protect his people from defeat in battle.

Another argument that fails to demonstrate that the locusts in Joel symbolize a foreign army is the use of the phrase “the northern army” or “the northerner” in the description of restoration that occurs in Joel 2:20. Hosch argues that here “the ‘northerner’ may simply be a reference to the phenomenon of locust sweeping over the land from the north.”⁵⁴ As Kelhoffer notes, the interpretation of “the northerner” as a symbolic way of referring to a foreign military invasion “is sometimes based on the

⁵⁰ Baker, 84.

⁵¹ Psalm 79:1.

⁵² Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 45.

⁵³ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 45.

⁵⁴ Hosch, 33.

mistaken assumption that locusts would never enter Palestine from the north, i.e., from Assyria.”⁵⁵ Thus “the northerner” must be a military force that attacks the land from the north. Bodenheimer, however, points out that the Moroccan locust (*Doclostaurus maroccanus*) increases “within the northern part of the area at irregular intervals” and is depicted frequently on “Assyrian enamel work... as destroyers of the cereal fields.”⁵⁶ Kelhoffer also notes that “migrations of ‘gregarious’ locusts” like the desert locust “from Africa as far north as England and even to North America” have been documented, which makes it likely “that locusts could enter Assyria first and then subsequently into Palestine.”⁵⁷ Thus it is not out of the realm of possibility for the desert locust to occasionally enter the land from the north as well.

While it has been shown that the arguments offered against understanding the locusts in Joel 1:4; 2:25 in a literal fashion are weak, it will also be useful to lay out a positive argument in favor of this interpretation. Perhaps the best argument revolves around a comparison of the text of Joel with actual characteristics associated with locusts and locust swarms. Allen notes that “the description of the locusts’ attacks corresponds remarkably with historical reports of their appearance and effect, and gives an impression of firsthand observation of locusts at work” by the author of Joel.⁵⁸ Even Wolff acknowledges that “the manner of appearance and the character of the enemy show clear analogies to the locusts” mentioned in Joel 1:4.⁵⁹ This can be seen, for example, in the association of the arrival of this enemy with “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of

⁵⁵ Kelhoffer, 297 n. 14.

⁵⁶ Bodenheimer, 77.

⁵⁷ Kelhoffer, 297 n. 14.

⁵⁸ Allen, 30.

⁵⁹ Wolff, 42.

clouds and thick darkness.”⁶⁰ This parallels the descriptions of the locust plague that hit Jerusalem in 1915, which witnesses describe as a “sudden darkening of the bright sunshine” and “clouds...so dense as to appear quite black.”⁶¹ Furthermore, the text describes the locust swarm as leaping “on the tops of the mountains” and “upon the city,” where “they run up the walls,” “climb up into the houses,” and “enter through the windows like a thief.”⁶² This sounds like a pretty accurate description of the hopping abilities of locusts, who have been known to “cover the walls of houses” and penetrate “to the inside through doors and windows” as they travel in search of fresh vegetation.⁶³ Furthermore, the description of locusts keeping “to [their] own course” and refusing to “swerve from their paths,” with each keeping “to its own track” parallels the description of locusts hopping about in “gregarious marching bands up to ten miles wide and ten miles long.”⁶⁴ Thus the description of the locusts in Joel seems to suggest a literal interpretation of the locust imagery of the text.

In addition, Allen notes that “it is significant that the locusts behave in a literal manner: they ravage fields, trees, and fruit, but do not kill or plunder, or take prisoners of war.”⁶⁵ You would expect this type of behavior if the locust swarm was symbolic for a foreign military invasion or the eschatological army of Yahweh. An example of this occurs in Revelation, where the author describes locusts who come upon the earth and are “given authority like the authority of scorpions” to injure “those people who do not have

⁶⁰ Joel 2:2.

⁶¹ Brodsky, 34.

⁶² Joel 2:5, 9.

⁶³ Wolff, 28.

⁶⁴ Joel 2:7-8; Brodsky, 35.

⁶⁵ Allen, 29.

the seal of God on their foreheads” for five months.⁶⁶ However, nothing similar occurs in Joel’s locust plague. Instead, the prophet describes the locust swarm as “powerful and innumerable,” which fits with descriptions of locust swarms that contain “over a billion creatures” that together “weigh over three million pounds” and stretch out “for some tens of square miles” at altitudes up to 5000 feet.⁶⁷ In addition, the description of the removal of “the northern army” to “a parched and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its rear into the western sea” seems to correspond to actual occurrences associated with locust swarms.⁶⁸ As Brodsky notes, “sudden or unusual shifts” in wind patterns “may cause the locust to move into an area quickly, and just as suddenly and mysteriously, take wing again with a changing wind,” even being blown out to sea to subsequently die.⁶⁹

The prophet also provides an accurate description of the effects of a locust plague. For example, he mentions that “the fields are devastated” and “the grain is destroyed,” as are “all the trees of the field.”⁷⁰ This would seem the natural consequence of a locust swarm in which the insects methodically eat “virtually every tender blade of grass or legume” that stands in their way.⁷¹ For this reason the prophet states that “before them the land is like the garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them.”⁷² In addition, another effect from the destruction of crops would be the inability to continue offering “the grain offering and the drink offering” at the Temple.⁷³

Furthermore, such a threat of the nation’s food supply would cause seeds to shrivel

⁶⁶ Revelation 9:3-5. Ironically enough, in this passage the locusts “were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree” as they brought about destruction and punishment to the entire world (9:4).

⁶⁷ Joel 1:6; Brodsky, 35.

⁶⁸ Joel 2:20.

⁶⁹ Brodsky, 37-38.

⁷⁰ Joel 1:10-12.

⁷¹ Brodsky, 35.

⁷² Joel 2:3.

⁷³ Joel 1:9, 13.

“under the clods” and the desolation of storehouses.⁷⁴ Eventually this would affect animals—both domesticated animals on farms and wild animals in the fields—causing them to “wander about because there is no pasture for them” and seek out relief from the drying up of the watercourses throughout the land.⁷⁵ In addition, the references to the withering of vines and the drying up of water sources suggest the presence of drought-like conditions, “which intensifies locust ravages” on the land.⁷⁶ In situations of drought, it is only natural that locusts become more desperate to find sources of food and thus travel longer distances in the search for sustenance.

In light of the destruction associated with locust swarms in antiquity, the reaction of the people in Joel makes sense. The people “call a solemn assembly” to fast and cry out to God, even requiring the presence of “infants at the breast” and recently married brides and bridegrooms.⁷⁷ This reaction demonstrates “the extremity of the need” for the community, as they include groups normally not required to attend functions at the Temple.⁷⁸ While this reaction makes sense in light of a foreign military invasion, it also seems plausible given the severity of damage done by locust swarms. Moreover, the specific groups targeted for the communal lament—drunkards and wine-drinkers, priests and ministers, farmers and vinedressers, and elders and inhabitants of the land—demonstrate that the event necessitating the communal lament is likely agricultural in nature.⁷⁹ All of the groups instructed to lament rely on agricultural produce to some extent, whether fields and trees provide them with their sustenance or their livelihood.

⁷⁴ Joel 1:17.

⁷⁵ Joel 1:18, 20.

⁷⁶ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 111.

⁷⁷ Joel 2:15-16.

⁷⁸ Barton, 82.

⁷⁹ Joel 1:5, 9, 11, 13-14.

While the agricultural viability of the land can be called into question during a foreign military invasion, the effects upon the land are not nearly as extreme as they are during a major locust swarm. The gravity of the situation here thus seems to make more sense if we interpret the locusts in Joel in a literal fashion.

The cumulative weight of the evidence thus seems to strongly suggest that the locust imagery contained within Joel should be interpreted as referring to a literal locust plague. This perspective is the most natural way of reading the text and it accounts for problems associated with interpreting the locusts as the symbolic representation of an eschatological army of Yahweh or a foreign military invasion. Barton notes, however, that “when we have said that the locusts are intended literally, in the sense that they are not simply a metaphor for an army, we have still not resolved all the questions about their interpretation” because “it may be asked whether Joel is thinking of a real locust plague or is using the language of an invasion by locusts simply as a vivid way of talking about divine judgment.”⁸⁰ Space does not permit an in-depth response to this issue; however, it can be said here that it seems as if Joel is referring to a real locust plague. First of all, it has been noted before that the vivid imagery used in the text gives “an impression of firsthand observation of locusts at work.”⁸¹ This knowledge of locusts likely came from firsthand experience, which would not be implausible, as locust plagues occurred in this region frequently. In addition, the use of locust imagery does not seem to refer to divine judgment that occurs in the future, because the locust plague has already occurred before the start of the book.⁸² In fact, it seems clear that the locust plague is a *byproduct* of divine judgment in the narrative, not a vivid way of referring to the judgment of Yahweh.

⁸⁰ Barton, 45.

⁸¹ Allen, 30.

⁸² Cf. Joel 1:2-4.

This is true even if “the assignment of blame is not at all clear” in the text, which lacks “an assignment of blame or, perhaps more crucially, a confession of sin.”⁸³ This corresponds to other texts in the Hebrew Bible where the deity directly employs locusts in the execution of his wrath and justice upon Israel and/or foreign nations.⁸⁴

Joel seems to utilize locust imagery in a literal fashion in order to talk about a real invasion of locusts upon the land that he associates with the punishment of Yahweh. Regardless of whether locust imagery refers to a real locust plague or functions as a literal description designed to provide a vivid way of talking about the judgment of Yahweh, understanding the locusts to function in a literal manner throughout Joel is significant for the classification of the text. If the locust plague is meant literally, then this strengthens the likelihood that the locust plague does not symbolize a future judgment that occurs in the far-distant future or *eschaton*, nor is the locust plague a harbinger for such a future universal judgment. If the locust plague is understood to be symbolizing an eschatological army or a foreign military invasion, then this increases the flexibility with which this imagery is used, meaning that it most likely functions to symbolically depict the final judgment of the people of God and foreign nations at the hands of Yahweh. Again, a literal locust plague seems to rule out classifying the book of Joel as proto-apocalyptic or apocalyptic literature.

The Locust Plague and Prophetic Eschatology

While a literal interpretation of the locust imagery found in Joel suggests classifying the book within the larger body of prophetic literature, an analysis of the locust imagery further solidifies this position. If the locust imagery used throughout the

⁸³ Watson, 121-122.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Exodus 10:3-16; Amos 4:9.

book is indeed the central motif of the text, then it only seems logical that the eschatological outlook implied by the locust imagery will be perhaps the most effective way of categorizing the text. As we have seen before, the “fundamental outlook” of prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature are different.⁸⁵ This section will attempt to investigate the locust imagery of Joel and highlight elements within the narrative that correspond to or differ from a prophetic or apocalyptic eschatological outlook. Before this discussion begins, it will be helpful to review basic definitions for ‘prophetic eschatology’ and ‘apocalyptic eschatology.’ Aune defines ‘prophetic eschatology’ as “an optimistic perspective” on the future restoration of the world, whereas ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ is “pessimistic about the fate of the righteous in the present world order,” and thus “anticipates a cataclysmic divine intervention” in the future.⁸⁶ These definitions will provide the basis upon which this analysis of the locust imagery in Joel will proceed.

Scholars who argue that Joel should be considered proto-apocalyptic literature or apocalyptic literature tend to focus their arguments on Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21], because they see “the unusual locust invasion in 1:4ff” as “both harbinger and model” for the destruction that occurs in the latter half of the text.⁸⁷ Sweeney, for example, argues that the text’s “portrayal of the portents in heaven and earth at the ‘Day of YHWH,’ i.e., the darkened sun and stars, a moon turned to blood, and the pouring out of the divine ‘spirit’ on ‘all flesh’ prior to the judgment of the nations suggests an apocalyptic scenario.”⁸⁸ These elements, as well as the description of the Day of Yahweh as “great and terrible,”

⁸⁵ Berry, 9.

⁸⁶ Aune, 237.

⁸⁷ Wolff, 42.

⁸⁸ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 150.

suggest an event more catastrophic than a locust swarm.⁸⁹ Some of the elements described in this description—for example the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars and “portents in the heavens”—seem to imply “international and cosmic repercussions” at the Day of Yahweh.⁹⁰ Andiñach argues that “the effects of a locust plague” are “overcome in a relatively short period of time, and will be forgotten after several seasons,” which makes it “difficult to think that the author of Joel would have thought that such a natural event would have caused the havoc described in this book.”⁹¹ Thus the Day of Yahweh brought to our attention through the use of locust imagery serves as the “cataclysmic divine intervention” associated with an apocalyptic eschatological outlook on the world.

In addition, the latter half of Joel focuses on the restoration of the people of Judah and their land to prosperity, which is often interpreted to fit within an apocalyptic eschatology. Ahlström notes that many scholars believe “this part of the prophecy” seems to describe “the picture of the ideal future...without any shortcomings,” where Yahweh “will restore everything, and no enemies will ever again trouble his people.”⁹² Barton picks up on this theme, and believes that the text contains “what may be called eschatological predictions, whose fulfillment lies in a distant or at least undateable future and which give[s] hope more by [its] assurance that God is ultimately in control of the world’s fate than by any immediate prospect of fulfillment” within a clearly definable temporal scheme.⁹³ Furthermore, Prinsloo notes the presence of paradisiacal eschatological

⁸⁹ Joel 2:31 [3:4].

⁹⁰ Willem S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 163, ed. Otto Kaiser (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 124.

⁹¹ Andiñach, 435.

⁹² Ahlström, 88, 95.

⁹³ Barton, 92. While Barton does not argue for the unity of Joel, he does note that this assessment of the “future-oriented material will be bound to influence how we read 1:2-2:27,” which leads him to argue that, “taken as a whole Joel is a book about the end time, of which the locust invasion and its resolution are harbingers” (93). He reaches this conclusion in part based on his assumption that the Day of Yahweh is the

themes that describe “the end-time...in terms reminiscent of paradise,” such as “the hyperbolic image of mountains oozing with sweet wine and hills flowing with it” and “the stream of life flowing from the temple” in Joel 3:18 [4:18].⁹⁴ This description of the future judgment as seemingly outside the realm of natural history therefore highlights the pessimistic view of the world characteristic of an apocalyptic eschatology. According to this analysis, the only hope for justice is the far off judgment of the nations by Yahweh—there will be no justice and restoration in the current order of things. According to this interpretation of the latter half of the book, the restoration that occurs after the Day of Yahweh suggests an apocalyptic eschatology at work in the text.

While many of these arguments could be plausible, even when the unity of the text is assumed or the locusts are understood to refer to a literal swarm, they do not bear the weight of closer scrutiny and are often not the best reading of the text. For example, the vivid imagery Sweeney draws upon to argue that the Day of Yahweh suggests an apocalyptic scenario need not necessitate an apocalyptic eschatology for Joel. First of all, Fler points out that “a comparison of locusts with animals” as found in Joel 1:6; 2:4 “is not limited to apocalyptic literature” based on an analysis of other texts that describe locusts as possessing the “breasts of a lion” and the “head and mouth of a horse,” among other characteristics.⁹⁵ Thus “the enlargement of an insect’s physical features does not require a supernatural model.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, the use of language describing the darkening of celestial bodies and the turning of the moon to blood need not necessitate an

primary motif in the text. Because he interprets the Day of Yahweh in accordance with an apocalyptic eschatology, he then reads that eschatological outlook back on the description of the locust plague in Joel 1:1-2:17.

⁹⁴ Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 118.

⁹⁵ Fler, 150.

⁹⁶ Fler, 150.

apocalyptic scenario or an apocalyptic eschatological outlook on the world. Patterson notes the prevalence of much of this imagery in the Exodus narrative, where the darkening of celestial bodies and turning of water to blood is utilized in a decidedly non-apocalyptic manner.⁹⁷ The Exodus account includes references to “three days of darkness” and a locust invasion, and the text goes on to describe an earthquake that “occurred as Israel encamped at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16, 18).”⁹⁸ While much of this same Exodus imagery is found throughout texts that do include an apocalyptic eschatology, this language alone cannot be enough evidence to claim the text has in mind an apocalyptic scenario influenced by apocalyptic eschatology.⁹⁹ Thus the “portents in the heavens” and the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars could plausibly be interpreted as vivid imagery designed to describe the locust plague and highlight the severity of the situation for the community. Again, much of this imagery accurately describes important characteristics of a locust swarm, such as its density and destructiveness. Furthermore, we have seen before that locust swarms can eat large quantities of food with such speed and efficiency as to quickly diminish “the potential harvest to nil” for a community.¹⁰⁰ This often led to the onset of starvation and increased the likelihood of wildfires developing and spreading quickly. Wolff thus accurately characterizes a locust plague in antiquity as “a total economic crisis” that often took years to fully overcome.¹⁰¹ Andinach’s assertion that the locust imagery must refer to something more substantial than a locust plague to warrant the vivid description of destruction and havoc found in Joel therefore need not be true. The description of death and destruction associated with

⁹⁷ Patterson, 387-393.

⁹⁸ Patterson, 387-388, 390; cf. Joel 2:1-2, 10-11, 31 [3:4].

⁹⁹ See Patterson, 393-399.

¹⁰⁰ Allen, 49.

¹⁰¹ Wolff, 26.

the locust plague and the Day of Yahweh in Joel could plausibly be connected to a natural disaster as feared as a locust swarm.

Furthermore, arguments that focus on the restoration that takes place in the latter half of Joel do not necessarily require an apocalyptic eschatology. For example, Ahlström notes “that there is almost no eschatology at all in the prophetic books,” as prophetic writings refer to “an ideal future for Yahweh’s own people in the land that he has given them.”¹⁰² This can be seen in the conclusion of Joel, where Yahweh will “dwell in Zion, [his] holy mountain” with his people, who will inhabit Judah “forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.”¹⁰³ While this could possibly refer to a future after the end of the world, the text seems to imply that foreign nations will exist after Yahweh’s judgment, though they will “never again pass through” the land of Judah or the city of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴ Thus the restoration that occurs here likely occurs within the current world, not in some post-apocalyptic age of paradise that occurs at the end of time. The fanciful descriptions of mountains dripping “sweet wine” and hills flowing “with milk” can therefore be explained as poetic language designed to further emphasize the complete restoration of the land instead of a hearkening to a post-end of the world paradise.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, the predictions that occur in the second half of the book regarding the restoration of the land after the locust plague and the execution of God’s justice against foreign nations must not necessarily be characterized as “eschatological predictions” that assume an apocalyptic eschatology. While it is clear that these

¹⁰² Ahlström, 89. Here he defines “eschatology” as “a doctrine concerning the end of the worldly era,” which seems to correspond to the idea of “apocalyptic eschatology” as defined by Aune (89; cf. Aune, 237). Ahlström does note that if “eschatology” refers to “a future *in* this world,” then it would be possible to say that Joel contains an eschatological outlook, which would correspond to Aune’s definition of “prophetic eschatology” (89, emphasis mine; cf. Aune, 237).

¹⁰³ Joel 3:17, 20 [4:17, 20].

¹⁰⁴ Joel 3:17 [4:17].

¹⁰⁵ Joel 3:18 [4:18].

predictions are meant to apply to the future, it is not clear how near or distant that future is according to the author. Several aspects of the text seem to imply the expectation of a relatively immediate fulfillment. For example, Yahweh responds to the communal lament of the people and tells them that he is “sending [them] grain, wine, and oil” in order to “no more make [the people of Judah] a mockery among the nations.”¹⁰⁶ However, the timetable for the predictions that begin at Joel 2:28 [3:1] and 3:1 [4:1] is more ambiguous. Carroll notes that eschatological “delay presupposes some form of timetable or schedule,” whereas “prophetic eschatology...never indicates anything even vaguely like a schedule.”¹⁰⁷ While the prophet utilizes the phrases “then afterward” and “in those days and at that time” in his text, there is nothing remotely close to the “time, two times, and half a time;” “seventy weeks;” or the “one thousand two hundred ninety days” found in Daniel, the only fully apocalyptic text contained within the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁸ While the lack of historical references in Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] could indicate that Yahweh’s judgment against the foreign nations occurs in the distant future at the end of the world, it is just as likely that the prophet genuinely thought this prediction would soon come to pass and was mistaken. As Carroll notes, “there can be wrongly entertained expectations that the events are nearer than things turn out to be” on the part of prophets.¹⁰⁹ Here it seems that this is the case, though it still seems likely that the prophet possessed a positive view of this world and hoped for the imminent intervention of God to bring about justice for his people. Again, while an apocalyptic eschatology could plausibly be at work here, it is by no means necessitated upon a closer examination of the text.

¹⁰⁶ Joel 2:19.

¹⁰⁷ Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 55.

¹⁰⁸ Joel 2:28 [3:1]; 3:1 [4:1]; cf. Daniel 7:25; 9:24; 12:11.

¹⁰⁹ Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 55.

In addition to noting problems with some of the arguments used to interpret the locust imagery found in Joel in accordance with an apocalyptic eschatology, it is also possible to offer arguments in favor of interpreting the locust imagery within a prophetic eschatological outlook. It seems likely that the text exhibits the “optimistic perspective” associated with the future restoration of the world characteristic of a prophetic eschatology. For example, the prophet asks the question: “Who knows whether [Yahweh] will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?”¹¹⁰ At first glance this text seems to portray a negative outlook on the potential for restoration in the near future. Crenshaw, for example, notes that “the rhetorical question, ‘who knows?’ contains an implicit negative response: ‘nobody knows.’”¹¹¹ However, Barton argues that the phrase “does not express perplexity but tentative confidence” in the ability of Yahweh to respond to the pleas of his people.¹¹² In addition, the prophet describes Yahweh as “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.”¹¹³ Because the prophet describes God with these attributes, he instructs the people to “call a solemn assembly” in order to cry out to God to save his people and protect his name among the nations.¹¹⁴ This helps establish that at least the prophet believes “there is reason to hope for God’s gracious restoration.”¹¹⁵ It seems more likely that the prophet expects this restoration to happen sooner than later; otherwise, it would not make sense to call a sacred assembly following a locust plague when the expected restoration takes place at the end of the world.

¹¹⁰ Joel 2:14.

¹¹¹ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 138.

¹¹² Barton, 81.

¹¹³ Joel 2:13.

¹¹⁴ Joel 2:15-17.

¹¹⁵ Baker, 82.

A closer analysis of the restoration contained within the second half of Joel also demonstrates that the author wrote with a prophetic eschatological outlook on the world and Yahweh's involvement within it. In this portion of the text, "we have...a new start" that provides "an answer to the preceding lament" offered up by the people.¹¹⁶ The fact that the prophet would even predict the complete restoration of the land seems to suggest that he believed Yahweh would respond to the communal lament offered by the people quickly. As previously noted, the prophet balances each aspect of the locust plague and its consequences with a suitable reversal in the second half of the book. Thus the material effects of the locust plague described in Joel 1:4-20; 2:1-11 find their reversal in Joel 2:18-27; the implied spiritual infidelity that brought about the locust plague and created a rift between the people and Yahweh in Joel 2:12-17 finds its reversal in Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5], where Yahweh pours out his spirit; and the nations that mock Yahweh in Joel 2:17 face judgment in Joel 3:1-21 [4:1-21]. This rhetorical strategy makes more sense if the prophet expects this reversal to occur within the lifetimes of the people who experienced the locust plague. In addition, when Yahweh tells the people that he "will repay [them] for the years that the" locusts have taken and they "shall eat in plenty and be satisfied," he is speaking to the same audience that is encouraged to offer up lament to Yahweh and beg for relief and restoration.¹¹⁷ An interpretation of this restoration that finds its fulfillment in the distant future makes no sense if Yahweh's speech is directed to a community that is experiencing the effects of a literal locust plague.

Furthermore, the ambiguity of the phrase "in those days and at that time" means that it is plausible that the judgment of the nations that occurs in response to their

¹¹⁶ Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 45.

¹¹⁷ Joel 2:25-26.

mocking of Yahweh earlier in the text was expected to happen shortly.¹¹⁸ While it is not possible to determine if the material restoration of the people predicted in Joel 2:18-27 actually occurred, it seems likely that the judgment against foreign nations predicted in Joel 3:1-3, 9-21 [4:1-3, 9-21] did not happen in the way that the author thought it would. In addition, it should be noted that the judgment which occurs here considers “Israel’s fate relative to its being *in the midst of* other nations,” and does not exhibit an important characteristic of an apocalyptic eschatology, which views “Israel *and* the nations” as the subjects of the final judgment.¹¹⁹ This suggests that the universalistic interpretation of the rhetoric and imagery found within Joel 2:28-3:21 [3:1-4:21] seems less likely than an interpretation which focuses on the immediate geopolitical context of the community and its relationships to those around it. Thus texts which mention the future judgment of other nations seem to exhibit a perspective that is compatible with a prophetic eschatological outlook on the world. The text of Joel does not exhibit the pessimistic view of the present world or the expectation of a cataclysmic intervention found in apocalyptic texts.

Conclusion

This survey of the use of locust imagery within Joel has demonstrated that the text of Joel should be classified with the other writings considered a part of the body of prophetic literature. The unity of Joel suggests that the locust imagery used throughout the text serves as the guiding motif by which the message of the text can be understood, and, by extension, the primary means by which the text can be classified. An analysis of the locust imagery in Joel revealed that the prophet utilized this imagery to depict an actual locust plague and the destruction it caused, which suggests that this imagery did

¹¹⁸ Joel 3:1 [4:1].

¹¹⁹ Patterson, 393, emphasis mine.

not function as a harbinger of future judgment that would occur at the end of the world. In addition, the use of locust imagery within Joel highlights the prophetic eschatology of the text. The prophet expects Yahweh to hear the communal lament of the people and respond in the near future with blessing and restoration of the land and his own name.

This investigation has several implications for the study of Joel. First, it suggests that Joel should not be considered a proto-apocalyptic or apocalyptic text because the use of locust imagery throughout the text does not seem to demonstrate an apocalyptic eschatology. Many features of the text make more sense if the text is thought to possess a prophetic eschatological outlook. In addition, this study suggests a different reading of Joel than commonly found among scholarship today. If Joel exhibits a prophetic eschatology and the primary motif throughout the text is a locust plague, then it seems likely that the entirety of the book is pointing back to the locust plague described in Joel 1:1-2:17. Thus the prophet describes a locust plague that has happened in the recent past, noting the destruction and suffering experienced by the people. The prophet then encourages the people to lament, and suggests that if they turn toward Yahweh and follow his commands he will bring restoration to the land and protect his name. The prophet then predicts that Yahweh will answer the people in full, restoring their vegetation, pouring out his spirit upon the land, and punishing the nations for mocking him. This reading of the text suggests that prophetic literature may have more flexibility than previously thought. Here the prophet serves as a “foreteller,” offering a prediction of blessing to be experienced soon. However, perhaps more importantly, the prophet also serves as a person who explains the present or immediate past to the people. The entirety of the book thus serves as a response to—or explanation of—the locust plague that

occurred at the beginning of the text. Perhaps in light of this Joel may be considered a form of theodicy.¹²⁰

The use of locust imagery throughout Joel thus becomes a powerful rhetorical device when considered within a prophetic eschatological outlook on the world. The prophet is not merely using a locust plague as an object lesson pointing to a future Day of Judgment that will be experienced if the people do not return to Yahweh, the prophet is constructing survival literature designed to help a community in crisis deal with the extremity of their situation. The prophet “rehearses the loss of land and food yield required for basic daily needs,” and joins in with the people in expressing the pain of their suffering in the midst of this “disaster of cosmic proportions.”¹²¹ This enables the prophet to offer hope to the community in the form of the fast approaching restoration from Yahweh. Joel thus becomes an important text by which a community facing an ecological disaster can make meaning out of this situation of destruction and chaos. The prophet suggests that Yahweh is sovereign over the situation and in control despite the immediate negative effects of the locust plague, and that there is a purpose behind their current struggle to survive. The people can thus hope that their lives will get better sooner rather than later, because God will hear the cries of his people and “repay [them] for the years that the swarming locust has eaten.”¹²²

¹²⁰ Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, suggests this in relation to the mocking of foreign nations in Joel 2:17. He argues that, “like so many troubling ruminations surrounding the fundamental issue of theodicy, the doubting thought is thus articulated safely by attributing it to persons outside the elect community” (143). This interpretation is likely, though not necessitated in the text. Either way, it is interesting that Crenshaw has also seen connections between aspects of the text of Joel and theodicy.

¹²¹ Stulman and Kim, 193.

¹²² Joel 2:25.

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