Where Does My Hope Come From? Theodicy and the Character of God in Allusions to Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve

Introduction:

The question of God’s character inevitably arises in moments of crisis. The experience of pain and the perseverance of evil naturally threaten pious assertions of divine sovereignty and benevolence. Exploring this tension is the purview of theodicy, which calls interpreters to seek resolutions that preserve faith while grappling honestly with evidence of suffering and turmoil. In their extensive survey, Laato and de Moor identify four fundamental premises of theodicy in the biblical world: i) there is one God; ii) this God is the source of goodness and justice; iii) this God has authority in the world; and iv) evil and suffering exist.¹ In this context, the greatest disjunction comes as the biblical writers wrestle with the reality of the fourth premise, while maintaining the first three. In a similar vein, Crenshaw defines theodicy as “an articulate [italics his] response to the anomie of existence, once that goes beyond silence, submission, and rebellion to thoughtful justification of the deity in the face of apparently contradictory evidence.”² Theodicy thus encompasses the responses of biblical writers to situations that challenge the idealized nature of both God’s character and God’s authority in view of the crises faced by God’s people.³

The literary trajectory of the Hebrew Bible allows significant opportunity to explore theodicy since the crises of Israel’s existence prompt reflection on the relationship between YHWH and his people. This concern permeates prophetic literature since the prophet, as an intermediary between YHWH and the people of God, has the freedom to explore questions

concerning the divine nature and its relationship with humanity. Crenshaw identifies five categories of theodicy in prophetic literature: i) personal affront; ii) the divine character; iii) interpretation of history; iv) liturgical readings of historical events; and v) the natural order of things. Through these categories, the prophets struggle with their calling (Jer 15:18; 20:7–14), wrestle with challenges to YHWH’s justice (Ezek 18:25–29), and search for signs of God’s presence in the midst of foreign oppression (Hab 1:2–5). These categories also are reflected in the Book of the Twelve as the prophets affirm YHWH’s justice over and against human perfidy (Zeph 3:1–5), suggest that disaster should motivate repentance (Amos 4:6–12), and mediate the people’s questioning of YHWH’s commitment to justice (Mal 2:17; 3:13–15). These passages offer windows through which the Book of the Twelve invites its audiences to consider the nature of YHWH amidst the trauma of human experience.

This paper focuses its discussion on the nature of theodicy and hope in the Book of the Twelve through elements of its portrayal of the nature of YHWH, which is the second of the categories identified by Crenshaw. Examining the presentation of YHWH’s character is essential to exploring theodicy since it reflects the way in which the text conceives of YHWH’s responsibility in the midst of crisis. Several passages in the Book of the Twelve invoke YHWH’s character through the credo of Exod 34:6–7, in response to challenges presented by the situation evoked by the prophetic message. The diversity of these uses makes it worth considering what it reveals about the nature of theodicy and the possibility of hope in the Book of the Twelve.

In its original setting, Exod 34:6–7 declares YHWH’s nature as part of the covenant renewal after the Golden Calf episode. In the aftermath of Israel’s great transgression, YHWH reveals the essence of the divine character to Moses. The text reads:

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4 Crenshaw, “Theodicy and Prophetic Literature,” 244–46.
5 Examples here are drawn from Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 183–91.
Echoes of this text are found throughout the Hebrew Bible in literary contexts ranging from narrative (Num 14:17–19), sermon (Deut 5:9–10; 7:9–13), psalm (Ps 86:5, 15; 103:8–12; 145:8–9), prophecy (Joel 2:12–14; Jonah 3:10–4:4; Mic 7:18–20; Nah 1:2–3), and corporate confession (Neh 9:17–19, 31–32). Exploring the reuse of this pivotal text within the Book of the Twelve will reveal the range of circumstances evoked by this description of YHWH’s character.

Exodus 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve

Exodus 34:6–7 has already taken on a prominent status in discussions of the formation of the Book of the Twelve. In his discussion of the reuse of Exod 34:6–7 throughout the Hebrew Bible, Spieckermann refers to it as the Gnadenformel (“Grace-Formula”), a title that captures the essence of YHWH’s action in the aftermath of the Golden Calf episode. Some have argued that the reuse of this passage provides evidence of sapiential influence on the final form of the Book of Twelve, with Dentan arguing that it reflects a universalizing vision of who can receive God’s

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6 The identity of the speaker is ambiguous since both Moses and YHWH could be the subject of this verb. Interestingly, when this formula appears in Num 14:17, Moses attributes it to YHWH, seeking to remind YHWH of his self-declaration. As Fishbane notes, however, this is not conclusive evidence since Numbers could be modifying the tradition it has received. Regardless of the speaker, these verses clearly intend to provide a normative description of what Israel should think about the character of YHWH. See Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (New York: Clarendon, 1985), 335.


grace, while van Leeuwen sees it as providing an explanation for the experience of exile and offering hope for the future.\textsuperscript{9}

More recently, Wöhrle has put forward the argument that there is a distinct layer of redactional activity oriented around the reuse of Exod 34:6–7 in five passages that span the range of the Book of the Twelve (Joel 2:12–14; Jonah 3:9, 4:2; Mic 7:18–20; Nah 1:2b–3a; and Mal 1:9a).\textsuperscript{10} For him, the distribution of these potential references suggests a deliberate strategy of evoking these descriptions of YHWH’s character throughout the entirety of the corpus. He finds further evidence of a deliberate redactional strategy in different manners in which these texts invoke YHWH’s character. Joel and Jonah cite a significant portion of Exod 34:6–7a, omitting the statement concerning YHWH’s judgment (and inserting a phrase from Exod 32:12–14 to conclude the citation), while the other three examples have more limited connections.\textsuperscript{11} Wöhrle then argues that Micah, Nahum, and Malachi each employ different elements of the “Grace-formula.” Micah 7:18–20 contains the keywords “steadfast love” (гранич) and compassion (יְרַחֲמֵנוּ), while Nahum uses the phrase “slow to anger” (דָּאַפַּיִם אֶרֶכּ), and Malachi refers to God’s graciousness (וִיחָנֵנוּ). His contention is that the use of different elements reflects a concerted strategy to weave this passage throughout the latter half of the Book of the Twelve.\textsuperscript{12}

The idea of a “grace-layer” in the redaction of the Book of Twelve has also received a significant measure of warranted criticism. Spronk comments on the frequent appearance of


\textsuperscript{11} I will address Joel and Jonah’s adaptations of Exod 32:12–14 and 34:6–7 below.

Exod 34:6–7 in the Hebrew Bible, arguing that it is equally possible that the authors of each book referred to the tradition independently. Boda suggests that the allusions to Exod 34:6–7 are “far too general” to bear the weight of an intentional redactional layer, suggesting instead that the allusions in Joel and Jonah are part of the broader orientation in the Book of the Twelve towards penitence. Schart pushes this critique further when he notes differences in the form of the shared vocabulary. Exodus 34:6–7 uses the adjectives “gracious and compassionate” (רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן), while Mic 7:19 (יְרַחֲמֵנוּ) and Mal 1:9 (וִיחָנֵנוּ) use verbal forms of these roots. He then notes numerous passages within the Book of the Twelve that use these roots, weakening the uniqueness of their supposed connection to Exod 34:6–7 (cf. Hos 12:5; Amos 5:15 for רַחוּם, and Hos 1:6, 7; 2:3, 6, 25; 9:14; 14:4; Hab 3:2; Zech 1:12; 10:6 for רַחֲמן). These critiques pose serious difficulties for the theory of an intentional redactional layer, however, the ongoing discussion surrounding the nature and purpose of the links between Exod 34:6–7 and the Book of the Twelve invites further exploration.

Methodological Considerations: The Question of Allusion

Discussing the function of references to Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve necessitates a conversation to determine the criteria should be used to suggest such an interrelationship. This provides a foundation for identifying the body of literature that we can use to explore the nature of theodicy related to the character of YHWH. At the heart of the issue is the need to determine criteria to establish points of connection between texts. One of the

foundational contributions to this discussion is Fishbane’s work on “inner-biblical exegesis.”

Adopting vocabulary from tradition historical studies, Fishbane seeks to categorize the ways in which the interpreters can shape the *traditum* that they have been bequeathed. He argues that the reuse of the biblical text can reveal something of the concerns of the later interpreter who shape the text to meet their situations.\(^{16}\) This approach requires detailed diachronic analysis since it is necessary to determine which text supplies the *traditum* that the second text modifies. Meek summarizes this approach well, noting that “[i]nner-biblical exegesis seeks to isolate texts and examine texts that have in some way revised previous texts.”\(^{17}\)

Lyle Eslinger seizes upon the difficulties inherent in diachronic analysis to cast doubt on the wisdom of Fishbane’s project, suggesting the question of historical precedence cannot be resolved as definitively as is necessary.\(^{18}\) He notes the danger of this approach, claiming “[i]f the model of the Bible’s literary history is wrong, the analyses of inner-biblical exegeses can only compound the fallacy.”\(^{19}\) In its place, Eslinger suggests his particular understanding of “inner-biblical allusion,” in which the plot vector of biblical narrative can be used to establish the direction of dependence, even if that does not necessary align with the presumed time of composition of each passage. He suggests that inner-biblical allusion should bracket out or reject historical concerns and simply focus on the chain of the relationship.\(^{20}\)

\(^{16}\) Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 37. “For there is no doubt that the technical competence involved in copyist activities made biblical scribes—individually and as members of schools—more than mere passive tradents. They were, in fact, both students of and even believers in the materials which they transmitted, and so were far from simply bystanders in matters relating to their clarity, implication, or application.”


\(^{18}\) Lyle M. Eslinger, “Inner-Biblical Exegesis and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Question of Category,” *VT* 42 (1992): 54. For example, Eslinger challenges Fishbane’s analysis of which “Wife-Sister” story influences the others, commenting “where his literary-historical endeavour requires hard evidence and a demonstrable vector of precedence, he can only offer a ‘strong impression.’”

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 52.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 57–58.
Eslinger’s attempt to define inner-biblical allusion as an ahistorical phenomenon has been challenged. Sommer argues that although it may not be possible to identify every time one text interprets another, there are occasions which suggest a direction of dependency. In the case of Jeremiah, he suggests that seeing how Jeremiah interacts with authoritative material “provides insight into the prophet’s artistry, literary method, and wit.” Further, Leonard suggests that the very phenomenon of biblical texts interacting with each other should permit interpreters to move beyond the historical minimalism that Eslinger requires. Instead, inner-biblical allusion can be understood as a process in which it is possible to suggest that there is a source and receptor text, and that the receptor text is consciously evoking the source text. The distinction between this and inner-biblical exegesis is that in inner-biblical allusion, the receptor text is not necessarily attempting to modify the meaning of the source text.

Eslinger’s attempt to remove diachronic concerns from inner-biblical allusion actually places him further on the spectrum towards the literary study of intertextuality. Sommer notes that intertextuality is oriented towards readers and the matrices of associations they create between texts. Consequently, intertextual studies are less concerned with questions of source and direction of influence, but rather examine the correspondences between texts without raising diachronic concerns. This process certainly has value in exploring the ways in which interpreters can draw together different texts and identify shared themes, vocabulary, and ideas.

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22 Ibid., 483.
but eliminating diachronic concerns is a difficult step for those who have commitments to the
text as a witness to the relationship between YHWH and his covenant community.\textsuperscript{26}

Building off of these considerations, the approach adopted in this paper is not purely
intertextual, but draws more from the vocabulary and considerations of inner-biblical allusion.\textsuperscript{27}
Consequently, it is important to discuss the purpose and function of literary allusions. Ziva Ben-
Porat provides incredibly thoughtful work on this subject.\textsuperscript{28} She articulates a process of four
stages by which a reader recognizes the allusion and uses it to interpret the alluding text.\textsuperscript{29} In the
first stage, the reader notes a \textit{marker} or signal that the allusion is occurring. This could be a
citation of a selection of text, a wordplay on a known text, borrowing a motif, a grammatical
pattern, or poetic structure. The leads to the \textit{identification} of the evoked text, which is often
obvious, but this stage acknowledges the reality that one can recognize that an allusion is
occurring, but not recognize its origin. The third stage occurs when the reader considers the ways
in which the evoked text influences the interpretation of the alluding text, drawing upon the
meaning of the evoked text in order to shape understanding of the alluding text. In the fourth
stage, the reader may cast a broader net and find further connections between the texts that are
not explicitly marked, but may be activated now that there is an evident link between them. This
process provides a foundation for discussing elements of inner-biblical allusion.

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\textsuperscript{26} Leonard, “Identifying,” 272. Leonard refers to a purely synchronic approach as a “last refuge of sorts for the study
of textual connections.”

\textsuperscript{27} For a more explicitly intertextual study of Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve, see Ruth Scoralick, \textit{Gottes
Güte Und Gottes Zorn: Die Gottesprädikationen in Exodus 34.6f Und Ihre Intertextuellen Beziehungen Zum
Zwölfprophetenbuch.}, Herders Biblische Studien 33 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002). Scoralick identifies the same four
passages I discuss as the most striking examples of references to Exod 34:6–7, but she greatly expands  the pool of
references by including passages that may share only a single word in common, or may address similar themes and
motifs. See especially Ibid., 142–43.

\textsuperscript{28} Sommer, \textit{Prophet}, 11.; See also Marko Jauhiainen, \textit{The Use of Zechariah in Revelation}, WUNT 2/199 (Tubingen:
Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 29–32.

\textsuperscript{29} She describes these four stages in Ziva Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” \textit{PTL} 1 (1976): 110–11.
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Ben-Porat succinctly defines literary allusion as “a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts.”\(^{30}\) This is somewhat limiting since it is possible for a text to allude to more than one other text, even within the same reference. For example, it would be limiting to say that Jonah 4:2–4 alludes only to Exod 34:6–7 without acknowledging its relationship with Joel 2:12–14. Nogalski defines allusion as a device “whose appearance intends to elicit the reader’s recollection of another text (or texts) for a specific purpose (italics his).”\(^{31}\) The idea that there is a purpose behind allusion is significant, indicating that the reader’s familiarity with the evoked text will provide useful information for understanding the alluding text. This also requires establishing a degree of intentionality behind the allusion that pushes beyond coincidental reuse of lexemes or simply discussing a common theme from a slightly different perspective. Importantly, this process does not require quite the same criteria as inner-biblical exegesis, which suggests that the alluding text in some way modifies the meaning of the evoked text.

*Passages for Consideration*

For the purposes of this paper, I argue that it is most helpful to consider those passages in the Book of the Twelve that most clearly make use of Exod 34:6–7, fitting into the category of inner-biblical allusion.\(^{32}\) This means that I will focus on those passages that have significant markers of their allusion, such as the reuse of vocabulary and style from Exod 34:6–7. To borrow Ben-Porat’s terminology, this paper focuses on finding signals in the texts that suggests that they

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 107.


\(^{32}\) I am following the overwhelming majority of scholarship here that posits that Exod 34:6–7 or its traditions were available to be used in the Book of the Twelve (get details in here).
intend to activate the context of Exod 34:6–7 in order to adapt it for their own purposes. These purposes vary, but they share the intention to use the character of YHWH to explain the situations and crises that are unfolding in each literary context. Sommer suggests that the argument for allusion is cumulative one: criteria including overlap in vocabulary and literary style, the ability to identify a purpose for the apparent borrowing, and the probability that a text would allude to the alleged source-text make it possible to suggest that allusion is occurring.\(^{33}\) Leonard offers similar criteria, focusing on the presence of shared lexemes and phrases, especially if they accumulate or if the shared language is relatively rare.\(^{34}\)

Of the passages that Wöhrle identifies for his redactional layer, I argue that Joel 2:12–14; Jonah 4:1–4; Mic 7:18–20; and Nah 1:2–3 meet the standard for inner-biblical allusion.\(^{35}\) The relationship with Mal 1:9, however, is tenuous. Wöhrle identifies two points of contact: the use of אֵל for God, and appearance of the root חנן (used as an adjective in Exod 34:6, and as a verb in Mal 1:9).\(^{36}\) The use of a different form of חנן and the fact that both חנָן and אֵל are sufficiently common lexemes that it is a stretch to insist that they activate the context of Exod 34:6–7.\(^{37}\)

\(^{33}\) Sommer, “Exegesis,” 485.

\(^{34}\) Leonard, “Identifying,” 246. These principles include: i) shared language as the most important factor; ii) shared language overriding the presence of non-shared language; iii) the significance of shared rare or distinctive language; iv) shared phrases being stronger than shared individual worlds; v) accumulation of shared language strengthening the case for a connection; vi) similar contexts strengthening the value of shared language; vii) shared language not being dependent on shared ideology; and viii) shared language is not required to have exactly the same form to count as “shared.”

\(^{35}\) I will discuss the criteria for determining an allusion in each of these passages in detail below. Nathan Lane identifies the same four passages in his canonical analysis of Exod 34:6–7, but he does not reveal his method for selecting them, commenting only that “Readers find four major parallels of Exod 34:6–7 in the Twelve.” See Nathan C. Lane, The Compassionate but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6-7 (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 68.


\(^{37}\) See Sommer, “Exegesis,” 484. Interesting, Weyde suggests that better textual connections for Mal 1:9 are found in Gen 32:31 and 33:10, where Jacob entreating and finding favour with his brother Esau is reflected in Malachi’s call for the priests to entreat and find favour with YHWH. See Karl William Weyde, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation: Methodological Reflections on the Relationship between Texts in the Hebrew Bible,” \textit{SEA} 70 (2005): 293.
A similar critique is applicable to attempts to find an allusion to Exod 34:6–7 in Hos 1:6. This verse contains the name לא רֻחָמָה and the verb אֲרַחֵם, which both come from the same root as the adjective רַחוּם in Exod 34:6. Hosea 1:6 also employs the verbal phrase נָשֹׂא אֶשָּׂא, which uses the same root as the participle נֹשֵׂא in Exod 34:7. Again, however, the relative frequency of these lexemes and the fact that commonalities between these passages consist only of shared roots rather than exact words or phrases render the possibility of an intentional allusion less plausible. The literary context also does not suggest an intentional linkage since the prophetic sign-act of naming one of Hosea’s children does not contain sufficient explicit clues to activate the context of the divine character credo.

Nogalski also includes Joel 4:19–21 in his list of passages alluding to Exod 34:6–7, on the basis of a double occurrence of the verb נָשֹׂא in both Exod 34:7 and Joel 4:21. He also notes Joel’s promise that Jerusalem will be inhabited for generations, which may correspond to the idea of YHWH’s punishment of sin that endures for multiple generations. He view this passage as corresponding to Nahum’s use of Exod 34:7, in that they both announce judgment on foreign peoples. The evidence for an intentional allusion here is strained, which Nogalski acknowledges by noting that it might not be apparent without the clear allusion in Joel 2:13. Joel 4:21 has also been the subject of numerous text-critical suggestions which would eliminate the dual occurrence of the same root. Even if this lexical connection is maintained, the allusion to Exod 34:6–7 is not obvious. Exodus 34:7 uses these lexemes in a singular expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה, that abruptly makes the shift from YHWH’s compassion to YHWH’s judgment in Exod 34:7. Joel 4:21 uses

40 Ibid.
41 For a summary of these proposals, see Joel Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel*, Siphrut 11 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 256–57. Essentially, the LXX suggests that the first lexeme should be נקם rather than נקה.
two independent verbal clauses separated by the word דָּמָם ("their blood"). This discrepancy is not sufficient to rule out a deliberate allusion but it is worth noting. The less persuasive factor is appeal to multiple generations. In Exod 34:7, the third and fourth generations are those who experience YHWH’s enduring judgment, whereas in Joel 4:20, the generations that will inhabit Zion under YHWH’s protection are innumerable. Further, there is no lexical connection here since Exod 34:7 elides any term for “generation.” This tenuous nature of these connections make it difficult to sustain the argument for an allusion in Joel 4:21.

The approach to reading these texts in this paper also is worth comment. I will examine these passages in their canonical order for two reasons. First, while it is true that the Twelve is perhaps described as a “thematized anthology” of individual prophetic books with their own signs of aperture and closure, synchronic approaches typically read the collection from beginning to end as one would expect with a literary work. Secondly, Joel and Jonah contain the strongest literary connections to Exod 34:6–7, which makes it reasonable to begin the discussion there. All of these passages wrestle with the nature of God against the backdrop of crisis, which allows them to speak to the nature of theodicy in the Book of the Twelve.

Theodicy through Allusions to Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve

Joel 2:12–17

Evidence for Joel’s allusion to the divine character credo of Exod 34:6–7 is quite strong. Joel 2:12 summons Judah to return to YHWH through fasting, weeping, and mourning, while the

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Joel 2:13 supplies the rationale. Judah should follow this command because “he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (כִּי והוֹצֵה הוּא אַרְצָךְ אֶפְסֵי אֱרֵבֶים). This is almost identical to a portion of to Exod 34:6, although Joel inverts the adjectives חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם, while inserting an introductory כִּי and the personal pronoun הוּא. This degree of lexical repetition is a strong marker that suggests an intentional connection.

Joel’s use of Exod 34:6–7 is deeply rooted in the question of theodicy. Just prior to this allusion, Joel 2:1–11 establishes the lowest point of the book, portraying an invading army rampaging through Zion, the sanctuary whose security should be guaranteed by YHWH’s presence. However, the situation is even worse than divine absence. Joel 2:10–11 announces that none other than YHWH is at the head of this invading army and the day of YHWH is about to be unleashed against the Judahite community. This revelation puts into question the foundational premise of YHWH as the source of goodness and justice, especially in light of the Joel’s silence regarding specific sins for which YHWH is punishing Judah. Simkins captures the ambiguity of the situation, comparing interpreters who try to establish Judah’s guilt to Job’s friends, commenting “if Joel calls the people to return to Yahweh, surely they had sinned! Like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, we must search out and identify that sin.” 43 In contrast, it is possible to suggest that guilt is present in Joel 2:12–17 since the situation facing Joel’s audience (locusts, droughts, invasion) looks like the activation of covenant curses (Deut 28:32, 42). In particular, Solomon’s dedicatory prayer in 1 Kgs 8:37–39 calls upon Israel to use these calamities as reasons to reflect on their potential misdeed and to return to YHWH. 44

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44 John Strazicich, Joel’s Use of Scripture and Scripture’s Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity, BINS 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 150. Others try to import guilt into Joel through intertextual links with Hosea activated either by keywords (Nogalski), or the narrative shape of the Book of the Twelve (House). See James Nogalski, Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve (Berlin: Walter de
certainly infuses the literary context of Exod 34:6–7. Whether or not that guilt ought to imported into Joel’s citation is another question, but at the very least, activating a text associated with the Golden Calf is suggestive.

The ambiguity of Judah’s guilt places Joel’s use of Exod 34:6–7 into even sharper relief. Joel does not address the idea that Judah could be suffering unjustly, but rather puts forward a respond rooted in the positive elements of YHWH’s character highlighted in Exod 34:6–7. Joel’s instruction to the community is for them to turn to YHWH with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Significantly, Joel emphasizes that this cannot be an outward show; rather the audience ought to “rend your hearts, not your garments” (Joel 2:13a). Whether or not these actions confirm Judah’s guilt is unknown, but these actions place the focus back on YHWH. If the Judahite audience turns back to YHWH in the midst of their suffering, will YHWH turn back to them? If YHWH is the source of goodness and justice in the world, will he put those characteristics into action in the midst of a crisis threatening his people?

In response to these questions, Joel appeals to the divine character credo to inspire hope. Notably, Joel does not directly address the threat of YHWH leading an army against Zion, but rather shifts the focus to YHWH’s compassion and mercy, suggesting that it is possible to activate those elements of the divine character, even as a crisis unfolds around them. Joel calls his audience to reflect on characteristics of YHWH since he is, “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13). These should encourage confidence in Joel’s call to turn.45 Even though there is potential ambiguity in the divine character, Joel’s strategy is for his audience to act as though they trusted in YHWH’s ability and desire to restore them. This may also explain why Joel does not complete the citation by mentioning the

45 Jason T. LeCureux, The Thematic Unity of the Twelve, HBM 41 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 125.
punishment that YHWH visits upon the wicked. Instead, Joel seeks to communicate that YHWH, who is the agent of destruction in Joel 2:1–11, remains the only possible agent of deliverance.

Following Joel’s citation of part of the divine character credo, the prophet tries to strengthen his case for appealing to the positive elements of YHWH’s character through a further allusion. The final clause of Joel 2:13 reads, “he relents over disaster” (ﬠַלְוַהשָׁלַךְ), which is not part of Exod 34:6–7. Instead, this phrase most likely draws from Moses’ interactions with YHWH in Exod 32, where Joel implores YHWH to relent in v. 12 (ﬠַלְוַהשָׁלַךְ), which v. 14 then declares that YHWH will do (ﬠַלְוַהשָׁלַךְ). Moses successfully mediates between YHWH and Israel on the basis of YHWH’s reputation among the nations (Exod 32:12), which prefigures Joel’s upcoming rhetorical strategy (Joel 2:17). Consequently, Joel’s announcement that YHWH relents from sending disaster recalls a pivotal moment in Israel’s history while buttressing his claims that YHWH’s mercy and compassion can be activated in this context.

Joel 2:14 moves on from these allusions asks “who knows?” (מִי יוֹדֵא) whether YHWH will turn from judgment and instead bring restoration in the form of grain and drink offerings. Asking “who knows?” grapples with the freedom of YHWH, opening the door to a potential positive response without guaranteeing it (2 Sam 12:22; Jon 3:9; Ps 90:11; Esth 4:14). The reality of divine freedom in response to this question is evident when YHWH does not heed David’s request in 2 Sam 12:22 to save the child born out of adultery. In the case of Joel, the specificity of the blessing and the fact YHWH’s prophet is the one posing the question, however,

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47 James L. Crenshaw, “The Expression MÎ YÔDĒA in the Hebrew Bible,” VT 36 (1986): 274–77. Crenshaw also notes that this question occurs in Prov 24:22; Ecc 2:19; 3:21; 6:12; and 8:1, where the response to “who knows?” is a denial that it is possible to know. In contrast, Jeremias see this question as a “sign of firm personal conviction” (italics his) that YHWH will act salvifically. See Jörg Jeremias, “The Function of the Book of Joel for Reading the Twelve,” in Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations -- Redactional Processes -- Historical Insights, ed. Rainer Albertz, James D. Nogalski, and Jakob Wührle, BZAW 433 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 82. While Jeremias’ interpretation matches the following cues that YHWH will respond positively, the other uses of this question do suggest that it focuses on divine freedom,
seems to suggest that YHWH’s turn toward mercy is likely, if the audience heeds Joel’s call.\textsuperscript{48} YHWH’s response to Jonah’s use of the question will provide another layer of insight into the presentation of the divine character since it is put in the voice of Nineveh’s ruler.

Joel’s call to return, rooted in his portrayal of the character of God is then put to the test in his call to action in 2:15–17. Joel calls his audience to assemble and cry out to YHWH, reminding him that they are YHWH’s people and that his reputation is at stake if it appears that he cannot preserve them. Joel’s proposed appeal ends with yet another rhetorical question, calling upon YHWH to preclude the nations from asking “where is their God?” Essentially, this question assumes the description of YHWH’s goodness and justice brought in through the allusion to Exod 34:6–7, while now shifting the grounds to YHWH’s ability to put the divine character into action. Joel urges his audience to ask for evidence of YHWH’s character. In the middle of their suffering, which Joel earlier attributes to YHWH, the prophet tries to find hope in the positive elements of the divine character that he suggests can be activated if the audience turns back to him.

In summary, Joel addresses the crisis faced by his audience by focusing on YHWH’s gracious and compassionate nature. This is a hopeful stance in the face of contravening evidence since thus far YHWH has not displayed these characteristics, but rather threatens to unleash the day of YHWH on the covenant community. Joel’s use Exod 34:6–7 is part of a plan that calls upon the audience to cry out to YHWH in the hope of activating his grace and compassion. Joel’s response to crisis, even a crisis he attributes to divine agency, is thus to affirm that YHWH is the source of compassion and justice who will respond to the suffering of his people. The prophet’s cry of “Who knows?” and the appeal to Exod 34:6–7 reflects the questions of theodicy

since they bring together YHWH’s compassionate nature and the current suffering of his people. Interestingly, Joel 2:18–4:21 strongly suggests a positive response to this crisis of theodicy, indicating that YHWH will respond and replace the threat of the day of YHWH with confident assertions of divine presence.

**Jonah 4:1–4**

While Joel looks to God’s character to find hope in the midst of crisis, Jonah takes the exploration of theodicy in a direction that questions divine justice. In this case, it is the absence of calamity that prompts Jonah to question YHWH. In the flow of the narrative, Jonah’s prophecy of judgment leads to the shockingly swift repentance of Nineveh, averting YHWH’s punishment (Jon 3:4–5). This prompts Jonah to question YHWH and wrestle with what it means when seemingly-merited divine judgment is held in abeyance. Joel and Jonah are closely linked since both Joel 2:13 and Jon 4:2 use the same form of Exod 34:6–7, while also adding in the statement that YHWH relents from sending disaster (דָּהuniץכּE2שּׂaltדַּל־הָרָuniץכּE2שּׂaltוְנִחָם). The reason for this additional statement is even more evident in Jonah since it follows the narrator’s declaration in Jon 3:10 that YHWH did relent, using the same lexemes (וַיִּנָּחֶם הָאֱ). Much ink has been spilled attempting to identify the direction of dependence between these texts, with little resolution given the intractable issues surrounding the date of composition for both Joel and Jonah. 49 Consequently, this paper not attempt to resolve the question of dependency, but focuses on the challenges that each passage poses for an understanding of divine compassion and justice.

These questions are at the core of theodicy in Jonah as the prophet challenges the second fundamental premise listed in the introduction: YHWH as the source of goodness and justice. Crenshaw asks, “[w]here is the justice in letting guilty people escape the recompense due them? Who wants to live in a world devoid of justice, one in which evildoers can sin with impunity?”

It also evokes a further comparison with Joel, who promises divine retribution against the nations who have harmed the people of God (Joel 4:1–21). It is discordant to read YHWH’s announcement of judgment against comparatively lesser foes such as Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom, while also seeing judgment averted for the nation that would carry Israel into exile. The reality of evil and suffering in a world which is supposedly subject to divine sovereignty would suggest that those responsible for this suffering should face divine judgment. YHWH’s refusal to enact it here prompts understandable reflection on what it means for YHWH to act justly.

Jonah’s theodicy comes as a result of his challenge to YHWH for an explanation in the wake of YHWH’s failure to execute the prophesied judgment against Nineveh. This is a singular occasion in which Exod 34:6–7 is reused in the context of a complaint, which heightens its dramatic value since it requires the reader to envision divine compassion and mercy in a negative light. Jonah’s commission begins in 1:2 with YHWH’s command to go speak against it on account of its evil (דָּתָם). However, within the narrative there are warning signals that challenge this mechanistic construction. First, Jonah’s response to the commission introduces a level of ambiguity left

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50 Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 188.

unresolved until his dialogue with YHWH in chapter 4.\textsuperscript{52} Secondly, Fretheim notes three occasions in which human speakers acknowledge YHWH’s freedom to respond without constraints (Jon 1:6, 14; 3:9).\textsuperscript{53} In Jonah 1:6, the captain employs the adverb אֲוָלַי (“perhaps”), while the sailors in 1:14 refers to YHWH doing what pleases him (כִּי־אַתָּה יהוה כַּאֲשֶׁר חָפַצְתָּ). Nineveh’s ruler then uses the question “who knows?” (דַּמִי יֹדֵא) in Jon 3:9, which mirrors its use in Joel 2:14 as a question that legitimately opens up the possibility of a positive response.\textsuperscript{54} In all three cases, the non-Israelite speaker leaves open YHWH’s freedom to act, which places them in in sharp contrast to Jonah’s attempt to announce judgment without the possibility of reprieve (Jon 3:4).

The focus on divine freedom prevents YHWH’s responses from being reduced to a formula where the repentance of Nineveh necessitates YHWH’s forgiveness. However, YHWH’s freedom to judge also provides the grounds for Jonah to challenge YHWH. What is most difficult for Jonah to accept is the application of YHWH’s self-declared qualities when dealing with foreigners.\textsuperscript{55} Neither Exod 34:6–7 nor the passages that cite it expressly limit its application to Israelites, but its motivating context is a breach of the covenant between YHWH and Israel. Consequently, Jonah’s application of the divine character to a city of foreigners is an innovation.\textsuperscript{56} Even though Jonah is speaking directly to YHWH here, in the context of the book he gives voice to the objections of the Judahite audience to this revelation of YHWH’s character. Jonah’s objections to YHWH’s compassion reveal an unsettling element to the idea of divine sovereignty: YHWH’s own inclination of when the time for judgment has come may not agree

\textsuperscript{54} Crenshaw, “MÎ YÔDÉA,” 276.
with that of his people, who may have to deal with consequences of YHWH’s deferred judgment.

In sum, the juxtaposition of Joel and Jonah reveals how the same aspects of the divine character can evoke very different responses, both of which can be explored through the lens of theodicy. In Joel, YHWH’s grace and compassion provide hope for a Judahite audience facing the wrath of the day of YHWH. In Jonah, these characteristics also provide a more universalizing hope when YHWH demonstrates his sovereignty over the world in a manner that causes consternation among his people. The people of YHWH must grapple with the nature of divine sovereignty which does not follow the pattern that they might desire, exemplified through the character of Jonah. Essentially, Jonah’s expansion of Exod 34:6–7 creates a crisis among the people of YHWH who now have to consider the possibility that YHWH’s concern expands beyond their own well-being. The book of Jonah pushes its audience to broaden its perspective on just who can find hope in their response to YHWH. It delays the prospect of retribution, revealing that the scope of YHWH’s compassion is wider than its audience could imagine. In this case, Jonah’s juxtaposition of divine justice and the problem of evil reveals that YHWH alone can determine which elements of the divine character to invoke.

**Micah 7:18–20**

Micah’s allusion to Exod 34:6–7 is signaled differently than those in Joel and Jonah. Micah does not maintain a similar structure and phrasing to Exod 34:6–7, but rather borrows a significant number of key words and lexemes throughout these three verses. It is worth citing this selection fully in order to see the frequency of the lexical overlap. These verses read:

מִרְכָּל מְנוֹחַ נַעְפָּה עֲשָׂא עִלְּפָּשָׁה לְשָׂאֵרִית גְּנֶקֶת
לָא הֵחִזֶּק לָהֶם לְשָׂאֵרִית גְּנֶקֶת
לָא הֵחִזֶּק לָהֶם לְשָׂאֵרִית גְּנֶקֶת
לָא הֵחִזֶּק לָהֶם לְשָׂאֵרִית גְּנֶקֶת
לָא הֵחִזֶּק לָהֶם לְשָׂאֵרִית גְּנֶקֶת
לָא HHOHO

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“18: Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of a remnant of your inheritance?

He does not strengthen his anger forever, for he delights in steadfast love.

19: He will return, he will have compassion on us, he will tread down our iniquities. You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins.

20. You will show faithfulness to Jacob, steadfast love to Abraham as you swore to our forefathers from ancient days.”

Micah celebrates that YHWH is one who pardons iniquity (נשה נשא), passes over transgression (פשע פשע), while not retaining his anger (אף אפ). Because of his delight in his steadfast love (חמס חמס).

Further, YHWH will have compassion (ירחמנ), demonstrated when he treads down iniquities (עונות עונות) and casts sins (חטאות חטאות) into the sea. All of this reveals YHWH’s enduring faithfulness (אמת אמת) and steadfast love (חמס חמס). According to Bosman’s chart, Mic 7:18–20 uses five out of the six lexemes of Exod 34:6–7 that point to YHWH’s mercy and forgiveness, while using three of three lexemes for sin. This amount of lexical overlap is unlikely to be coincidental and it provides a governing structure to a series of verses that oscillate back and forth between second and third person addresses to YHWH. This strongly suggests that Micah uses these lexemes to signal an intentional evocation of the divine character credo.

Micah’s use of this passage is somewhat surprising in the context of a prophecy that has been highly critical of Israel and Judah, culminating in YHWH’s lawsuit against Israel (6:1–8) and the announcement of judgment and exile (6:9–16). This external punishment is mirrored by a

57 Bosman, “Paradoxical,” 238.
58 Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 349. Fishbane writes, “[t]here can be little doubt that in vv. 18–19 the prophet Micah has readapted the language of Exod. 34:6–7 into a catena of hope and thanksgiving.”
sense of futility in Mic 7:1–6 as the speaker catalogues a societal downward spiral that sees the flourishing of bloodshed, injustice, and familial discord. Micah, however, turns to a confession of trust in 7:7, which then looks forward to a future restoration that will remove the threats of the nations and restore the relationship with YHWH in 7:8–20. Sweeney sees in these verses the fulfillment of “the rhetorical goal of the book in that the punishment that the people currently suffer will turn to forgiveness and restoration in the future.” Even though Israel’s guilt may justify their suffering, Micah invokes YHWH’s character to offer hope that the situation is not hopeless. The lexical borrowing from Exod 34:6–7 covers seven clauses that focus on YHWH’s commitment to forgive iniquity and put aside divine anger.

The connection between Mic 7:18–20 and theodicy comes from the interplay of the fundamental premises listed above. Micah depends on YHWH as the source of goodness and justice, while attributing Israel’s suffering to the unfolding of YHWH’s judgment upon their sins. However, by appealing to Exod 34:6, the text reveals that YHWH’s nature does not demand that punishment has the final word. At the end, Micah celebrates YHWH’s willingness to put compassion over judgment as a unique divine attribute. This offers a positive appropriation of Jonah’s difficulty in grappling with the nature of YHWH’s compassion. The same divine commitment to compassion and mercy that caused YHWH to be concerned for the great city of Nineveh applies to YHWH’s own people, who can look forward to a hopeful future, guaranteed by YHWH’s faithfulness that Micah traces all the way back to Abraham. The combination of allusion to the Golden Calf experience and to the patriarchs demonstrate YHWH’s commitment to his covenant throughout Israel’s history and in spite of its failures that Micah has compiled.

59 Marvin A. Sweeney, The Twelve Prophets: Volume Two, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2000), 413.
60 Philip Peter Jenson, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary, LHBOTS 496 (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 187.
Nahum 1:2b–3a

In the Masoretic order of the Book of the Twelve, Nahum’s allusion to Exod 34:6–7 immediately follows its use at the very end of Micah, providing an extra signal of its presence. Nahum also provides a sharp contrast in its use of Exod 34:6–7 since Micah focuses on the compassionate elements of YHWH’s character, while Nahum emphasizes YHWH’s wrath and judgment while announcing Nineveh’s downfall. Nahum’s allusion occurs within a theophanic introduction covering Nah 1:2–8. These verses reflect the reverberations of the natural world when YHWH judges enemies. It begins with a threefold use of the verb “avenge” (נָקַם) in 1:2 with YHWH as its subject on each occasion. The allusion in Nah 1:3a is activated by the phrases “slow to anger” (דּ אַפַּ uni) and “he will not leave [the guilty] unpunished” (וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה), which derive directly from Exod 34:7. The remaining verses then celebrate YHWH’s ability to avenge and judge through the control YHWH exerts over the natural world. The allusion to Exod 34:7 may reflect a redactional insertion into a partial acrostic in Nah 1:2–8 (aleph–kaph), but the existence of this acrostic continues to be debated.63

Nahum reflects a unique use of Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve. Whereas the other examples focus on the ramifications of YHWH’s compassion, Nahum stresses YHWH’s authority to judge.64 Nahum’s minor modification of Exod 34:7 confirms this perspective. The phrases of Exod 34:7 that Nahum borrows are separated by the expression “great in power”

63 Ibid., 610–11. Tremper Longman III, “Nahum,” in The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 773–75. Nogalski assumes the existence of the acrostic, while Longman helpfully points out features like missing dalet and zayin lines that make the identification of an acrostic more challenging. Spronk suggests the possibility of a different kind of acrostic based on the first letters of v. 1b, 2a, and 2b, and the last letters of v. 1a, 1b, 2a, 1b. This spells יהוהאנ which would put the focus on the divine author of judgment against Nineveh. See Klaas Spronk, “The Line Acrostic in Nahum 1: New Evidence from Ancient Greek Manuscripts and from the Literary Analysis of the Hebrew Text,” in The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis, Pericope 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 229–30.
64 Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 190.
which may reflect an intentional reworking of “great in steadfast love” (חֶסֶד) which follows אַפַּיִם in Exod 34:6–7. The change from “steadfast love” to “power” signifies that Nahum is focusing on divine judgment rather than divine compassion. The fact that YHWH is “slow to anger” takes on threatening overtones in this context since anger deferred is not the same as anger averted. The time has come for YHWH’s wrath to be unleashed.

In considering theodicy and hope in Nahum, it appears that Nahum complements Jonah’s view of the character of YHWH. Nahum provides hope for the people of YHWH that there will be a divine response to the existence of evil. While Jonah explores what it means for YHWH to be willing to extend forgiveness to foreigners who repent, Nahum exults in God’s eventual judgment of Nineveh. For Nahum, divine judgment is the only available option under the circumstances, and YHWH’s authority here indicates that he is able to accomplish the announced judgment. At the heart of both Jonah and Nahum is the acknowledgement that the decision to judge rests with YHWH alone. This causes tremendous consternation for Jonah, but is essential to Nahum’s exultation in the downfall of Nineveh. Nahum, then, uses the judicial nature of YHWH as a sign for hope for his audience. Rhetorically, the direct referents in Nahum oscillate between Judah (1:12–13, 15) and Nineveh (1:9–11, 14; 2:1, 13; 3:5–19) but the intended audience of Nahum’s proclamation is the people of YHWH who hear this proclamation of judgment as a sign of vindication. As a result, Nahum’s announcement of divine judgment against an oppressor begins to resolve the dilemma found in Jonah.

Nahum also resembles Jonah in its use of Exod 34:6–7 since it takes a declaration of YHWH’s character meant for Israel alone and extends it to cover the relationship between

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65 There is a BHS text note here suggesting a reading of חֶסֶד, but this has no textual support.
66 Clark, The Word Hesed, 252.
67 Wendland, Prophetic Rhetoric, 158.
YHWH, Israel, and foreign nations. The addition of the nations this formula again necessitates reflection since YHWH’s claim of authority over the nations opens up many questions regarding how the nations treat of YHWH’s people. If YHWH has the capability to judge the nations and to take vengeance on those who afflict his people, then why do Israel and Judah suffer at their hands? There is no explicit answer in the allusion to Exod 34:7, but YHWH’s declarations in Nah 1:12–13 provide a clue. Nahum 1:12 poses significant translation problems, but the final clause is “I will not afflict you again” which most likely refers to Lady Zion. In Nah 1:13, YHWH declares his intention to break the yoke from upon her, which suggests that YHWH’s changed perspective brings an end to foreign oppression. Consequently, just as Israel’s affliction can be attributed to YHWH, so can its hope for deliverance. YHWH’s authority is maintained since YHWH alone determines the timing of this answer to the evils of Nineveh.

Conclusion

The reuse of Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve provides an excellent opportunity to explore the nature of YHWH against the backdrop of theodicy and hope. These passages wrestle with the reality of YHWH’s grace and compassion while seeking to understand various crises that are unfolding around them. These selections also reveal the rhetorical creativity of literary

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69 Nogalski, Micah-Malachi, 615. Nogalski has an extended discussion on this issue, attempting to grapple with the apparent contradictions in Nah 1:12b, which reads יִשָּׁנָה אֲלֵךְ לֶאֱזָרְבֵּךְ (Lit. “I have afflicted you. I will not afflict you again”). Most English translations and commentators insert a word like “although” in front of this half-verse, which is not present in the text in order to suggest that YHWH is turning from affliction to restoration for Zion (see for example Sweeney, Twelve: Vol. 2, 432; Longman III, “Nahum,” 794–98.). Nogalski favours having different antecedents for the 2fs pronominal suffixes, suggesting that the first refers to Lady Nineveh while the second refers to Lady Zion. Consequently, Nah 1:12b makes a transition in referents that continues through the following verse, when YHWH provides hope for Lady Zion. This reading makes it less obvious that YHWH is responsible for his people’s afflictions, but the promise “I will not afflict you [Lady Zion] again” in the broader context of a theophany where YHWH judges the nations still carries the idea that YHWH has permitted the affliction that he is now removing.
allusion since these different texts bring Exod 34:6–7 to bear on dissimilar situations. Bosman makes the apt observation that the use of Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve points to its ambiguity and theological multivalence, which makes it a fruitful text to bring to bear in widely varying contexts. What ties these allusions together is their shared concern to explore YHWH’s character and authority in a world where YHWH’s people face numerous persistent threats. In these texts, however, theodicy eventually meets hope rooted in the divine character.

An exploration of these texts reveals that while Joel does not directly address the situation of the day of YHWH unfolding against Judah in 2:1–11, he appeals to the audience to focus on YHWH’s grace and compassion, arguing that turning to YHWH can activate those attributes. The prospect of hope in Jonah is more ambiguous, but ultimately the exploration of the extent of YHWH’s character requires Israel to expand its notion of divine grace and compassion. Micah concludes with a hopeful claim of restoration, in spite of earlier rhetoric focusing on sin, judgment, and the prospect of exile. Nahum envisions a time when foreign oppressors will face the wrath of YHWH, which will bring an end to Israel’s afflictions. When the Book of the Twelve wrestles with theodicy and the prospect of hope, in certain significant occasions it returns to a key expression of YHWH’s character, leveraging both divine compassion and divine justice to better understand the world that YHWH governs.

Bibliography


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