

Who Knows?
The Gospel according to the King of Nineveh in Joel

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Abstract

The iconic ancient Neo-Assyrian rulers have a sustained afterlife in ancient visual royal propaganda of later empires as well as literary representation in the scriptures. Both the enduring symbols of the Assyrian rulers' pride and their larger-than-life self-images provide ironic connotations for Joel's message to Zion. Joel 2:13–14 repurposes the message of the king of Nineveh and the angry prophet embedded in the satirical Jonah narrative (Jonah 3:9; 4:2; cf. Exod 32:12, 14; 34:6). The hopeful message of the king of Nineveh is epitomized in his question "Who knows?" Joel leverages this unlikely resource into a message of hope for Zion in their own time of distress.

Introduction

Joel repurposes the question "Who knows?" from the king of Nineveh to call the congregation of Zion to repent. Joel excels at ironic repurposing. If the king of Nineveh seems an unlikely gospel preacher, his setting makes his message even more unlikely. Joel borrows the message of the Ninevite monarch from the satirical narrative of Jonah.

Scriptural prophets and narrators have no trouble discerning the message of Israel's God on the lips of unlikely royal messengers. Isaiah refers to Cyrus as Yahweh's messiah who will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."¹ The Chronicler presents Necho's message to Josiah: "God says I need to hurry. Stop interfering with God who is with me so that he does not destroy you."² Joel uses the words of the king of Nineveh in much more daring ways. He repurposes the king's message. This raises issues of the use of Neo-Assyrian rulers by scriptural prophets and narrators which fits as a subset of the more general area of the reuse of royal ideology within the ancient Near East.

Joel is a prophets' prophet. Jeremiah favors Deuteronomy, Ezekiel prefers Leviticus, and Malachi uses Torah. Joel makes his allusions to prophetic traditions rather than Torah. The evidence shows that Joel exegetically alludes to Amos, Isaiah or Micah, Jonah, Obadiah, and probably Ezekiel as well as many lesser allusions to prophetic traditions.³ Joel's exegetical allusions feature considerable irony. In many ways Joel repurposes and adapts prophetic traditions to the needs of his message. The evidence gives good reason to think Joel is not working with oral traditions but with prophetic writings like those that came to be housed in the

¹ Isa 44:28. Also see 2 Chr 36:22–23//Ezra 1:1–4 (Cyrus). Unless stated otherwise all translation of *Biblia Hebraica* (*BHS/BHQ*) are mine. When versing differs in Hebrew it is noted in brackets.

² 2 Chr 35:21.

³ See Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 373–84.

Latter Prophets.⁴ The crucial issue for the present study hinges on the way Joel repurposes the message of the king of Nineveh and the prayer of the irate prophet both housed in the satirical Jonah narrative.

To get at the difficulties of Joel's message—borrowed from the king of Nineveh and an angry prophet of Yahweh—requires three considerations handled in the next sections. First, the ancient reuse of royal ideology from Assyria can help show what sets apart Joel's ironic repurposing of the king of Nineveh. Second, Joel's tendencies to ironically repurpose messages from the prophetic traditions of Israel and Judah shows a hermeneutical pattern for the way he handles the message of the king of Nineveh. Third, Joel ironically repurposes and thoroughly integrates the question of the king of Nineveh (Jonah 3:9) and the language of the prophet Jonah (4:2) into his message calling the congregation of Zion to repent before Yahweh (Joel 2:13–14).

This study focuses on the central part of Joel 2. The chapter's two parts both begin with trumpet blasts (Joel 2:1, 15). The first trumpet signals the danger of the invading host led by Yahweh himself (v. 11). The day of Yahweh here refers to the impending doom of Yahweh's interventions (vv. 1–2, 11). I tend to see Joel's use of judgment imagery smoothly transitioning between acts of God—clouds of military-like locusts causing economic depression (vv. 4, 5, 7)—and acts of humans—locust-like military predators (vv. 2, 3, 9).⁵ The use of transposable imagery referring as easily to natural and militaristic threats fits with the transgenerational framing of the prophetic collection. Joel says: “Tell your children about it, and your children to their children, and their children to the next generation” (1:3). Attempts to align an interpretation of Joel to a particular historical circumstance essentially reads against the transgenerational framing of the collection.⁶ The nature of the threat, whether economic depression or military or both, does not affect the present investigation and does not need to be decided here. The second trumpet (2:15) calls Zion to repent which seems to work since it leads to a great reversal (vv. 18–27).⁷ In sum of the structure, Joel 2 presents: impending doom of Zion (vv. 1–11), a call to repent (vv. 12–14), the congregation of Zion repents (vv. 15–17), and a great reversal (vv. 18–27).

The central panel of Joel 2 is a call to repentance in verses 12–17 between the threat and the reversal (vv. 1–11, 18–27). Joel says: “Even now,” says Yahweh, “turn to me with all your heart, with fasting and with weeping and with mourning.” Tear your heart and not your clothing (2:12–13a). The turning includes the fourfold use of “with” (בְּ)—“with all your heart, with

⁴ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 11. *Contra* Coggins who sees the parallels as coincidental stemming from a shared cultic setting. See Richard Coggins, “Interbiblical Quotations in Joel,” in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason*, ed. by John Barton and David J. Reimer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 81–84 [75–84]. Coggins' somewhat broad suggestions fail to deal with extensive verbal parallels in some cases drawn from different parts of the donor scrolls.

⁵ Notice the use of the preposition of simile (בְּ) in Joel connoting a range from something like to exactly like (Joüon §133g; GKC §118s; *IBHS* 11.2.9b). The imagery of locust terrors and locust-like invading armies both enjoy biblical antecedents (Exod 10:4–6, 12–15; Judg 6:5). For a view of locusts in Joel 1 and a military force in Joel 2, see Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 57–59; Raymond Bryan Dillard, “Joel,” *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 1, *A Commentary on Hosea, Joel, Amos*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 278 [239–313]. Dillard, however, wonders if the debate stems from deliberate ambiguity in composing the book to transcend the original occasion of the oracles. Meanwhile Chisholm acknowledges literary parallels between Joel 1 and 2 (58).

⁶ So also Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 393.

⁷ The dominant use of *wci* (*vayyiqtol*) and *pf* (*qatal*) verb forms in Joel 2:18–27 most naturally indicates Yahweh has responded with deliverance. See Chisholm, *Minor Prophets*, 61; idem, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 368, n. 63; Ronald L. Troxel, “The Problem of Time in Joel,” *JBL* 132.1 (2013): 82–83 [77–95]. For a survey of the history of interpretation of the shift of verb forms to *wci* in 2:18, see Christopher R. Seitz, *Joel*, International Theological Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 170–75.

fasting and *with weeping and with mourning*” (v. 12b, emphasis added). And in common with Torah and the prophetic traditions, Joel emphasizes that acts of repentance must signify internal realities of humility—“*Tear your heart and not your clothing*” (v. 13a).⁸

This study focuses on the expressions of motivating rationale within Joel’s call to repentance in verses 12–14. The motivating rationale comes from a set of repurposed prophetic traditions from the Jonah narrative. These include the angry prophet’s accusations against Yahweh’s mercy and the Ninevite king’s hopeful question to fuel motives for repentance: “Who knows?” (v. 14). Joel’s call for repentance succeeds and results in blowing the trumpet for a collective fast (v. 15). Though more subtle, it seems like extremes of infants repenting (v. 16) aligns with the over-the-top repentance mandated in Jonah 3. The details of Joel’s use of the Jonah narrative require close attention that will be applied in the third section below.

Before moving on it may help to confess that I accept the integrity of Joel. The widespread use of nonrecurring doublets in Joel corroborates the cohesion enacted by references to the day of Yahweh in the key places of both halves of Joel.⁹ Nonrecurring doublets refers to forty-seven sayings used only twice in Joel. The nonrecurring doublets of this pervasive system of internal cross references have several functions including emphasis, reversal, and connection.¹⁰ The inclusion of seven halves of nonrecurring doublets in 2:12–17 speaks to its native fit within Joel.¹¹

The next sections deal successively with repurposing ancient Assyrian ideology in the succeeding empires and in scripture, repurposing prophets in Joel, and repurposing Jonah’s king of Nineveh in Joel. This study will conclude by identifying implications of Joel’s repurposing the question of the king of Nineveh. The implications relate both to repurposing royal ideology from a long-gone ruler of Nineveh and to the significance of treating a satirical prophetic narrative as authoritative.

Repurposing Ancient Assyrian Royal Ideology in the Empires and in Scripture

This section briefly considers select cases of repurposing ancient Assyrian royal ideology in the empires and in scripture.¹² For the broad purposes of this study the empires refer to the series of

⁸ See Lev 26:40–41; Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; cf. Matt 5:21–48; Rom 2:25–29. Also see Seitz, *Joel*, 163.

⁹ The day of Yahweh (יום יהוה) provides one of the running images that unifies Joel’s collection of messages (Joel 1:15; 2:1–2, 11, 29, 31[3:2, 4]; 3:1, 14, 18[4:1, 14, 18]). In most cases Joel uses day of Yahweh as a day of doom and darkness akin to Amos 5:18. For Joel the source of darkness may be the clouds of locusts and/or locust-like military hordes (2:2, 10). On the day of Yahweh, see Chisholm, *Minor Prophets*, 56, 58, 66–67, 92, 117; idem, *Handbook*, 370.

¹⁰ See David Marcus, “Nonrecurring Doublets in the Book of Joel,” *CBQ* 56.1 (1994): 56–67. For a summary of Marcus’ research with examples, see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 374, 383–84.

¹¹ See the verbal parallels in Hebrew, twice each, in Joel 2:12//2:13 (“return ... with all your heart”; “tear your heart ... and return”); 1:14//2:15 (“make a holy fast, call an assembly”; “make a holy fast, call an assembly”); 2:1//2:15 (“blow a trumpet in Zion”; “blow a trumpet in Zion”); 1:9//2:17 (“the priests, ministers of Yahweh”; “the priests, ministers of Yahweh”); 2:17//2:19 (“not make ... a mockery ... among the nations”; “I will make ... a mockery among the nations”); 2:17//3:2[4:2] (“your people ... your inheritance”; “my people and my inheritance”) (see Marcus, “Nonrecurring Doublets,” 66–67; nos. 5, 9, 15, 30, 31, 32). Some approaches ignore the system of nonrecurring doublets in Joel while arguing the prophetic collection resulted from compiling originally unrelated sources. These approaches do not deal with the evidence of unity in the form of nonrecurring doublets that extends across every part of Joel; see, e.g., Rebecca W. Poe Hays, “Divine Exhortation and Mashal as a Polysemic Pivot: The Strategy of Complaint in Joel 2:12–17,” *Perspective in Religious Studies* 42.2 (2015): 359 [357–70].

¹² I am grateful for research suggestions and feedback from Robert Kashow regarding ancient Assyrian reliefs of royal lion hunts. Some of the research in this section is based on reading the sources cited in Robert C. Kashow, “Representations of Violence in Functionalist Perspective: The Royal Lion Hunt Relief of Ashurnasirpal II as a Test

Mesopotamian empires (Neo-Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, and Achaemenid) from the perspective of biblical Israel. The ways Assyrian royal ideology gets repurposed can offer a vantage point for evaluating the use of the message of the king of Nineveh in Joel 2.

Anyone who passes between the colossal winged sphinxes that guard the entrance to the reconstructed throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) in the Metropolitan Museum of New York can get a sense of the power of this ancient ruler.¹³ The reliefs in the reconstructed throne room make visible the normally invisible winged attendants who tend to the ruler while he seeks blessing from the gods.¹⁴ Though the reliefs contain both “real” and “ideal” details, Ashurnasirpal describes one throne room depiction as a “royal image *like* (resembling) my (own) features.”¹⁵ It is easy to understand why later rulers of Assyria and later empires would have their artisans recreate similar images in their own honor.

An untrained eye can see the mimicked iconographic conventions, both religious and royal, from one ancient Near Eastern kingdom to the next.¹⁶ Scholarship affirms the deep and intentional dependence of Persian royal art upon Neo-Assyrian royal propaganda.¹⁷ The reasons for reproducing conventions may range from the practicality of ancient artisans copying what works as well as rulers imaging how their own image might be cast when observing graphic ideology of competing kingdoms during diplomatic visits. The concern at present does not relate to explaining why the same kinds of graphic depictions get repeated across ancient Near Eastern empires. It is enough to note that they do. The significance for constituents of biblical Israel pivots on how repurposed royal ideology of Neo-Assyrian rulers continues to signify through many political upheavals of the empires.

The artisans of Darius and Xerxes crafted sets of reliefs of Darius (522–486 BCE) in the palace doorways of Persepolis after the likeness of Neo-Assyrian royal reliefs.¹⁸ Winged sphinx guardians flank the entrance of the palace much like those of Assyrian rulers now on display in

Case,” unpublished conference paper, European Association for Biblical Studies, Helsinki, 2017. It should be noted that the scope, focus, and outcomes of Kashow’s argument are entirely different than what is pursued here. I also benefited by Kashow’s extensive and pointed feedback on the cases of biblical dependence discussed below.

¹³ See James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. with Supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), nos. 646–47 (hereafter cited as *ANEP*). The pair in the Met match the pair in the British Museum pictured in *ANEP*.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, nos. 614, 617, 656.

¹⁵ Cited in Irene J. Winter, “Art in Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology,” in *Assyria: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, eds. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 369 [359–81].

¹⁶ The posture of Baal with raised right arm brandishing a club and lowered left arm holding a stylized spear can be seen many times over in Egyptian reliefs of slavedrivers and the like (see *ibid.*, nos. 490, 296, 312; cf. 481, 484, 494, 827). Astarte stands naked upon a lion holding up symbols of fertility in both hands looking much like the counterpart Egyptian goddesses down to the same hairstyle as well as both sharing kindred features with Ishtar (nos. 470–76, 522, 830).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Javier Álvarez-Mon, “The Golden Griffin from Arjan,” in *Elam and Persia*, eds. Javier Álvarez-Mon and Mark B. Garrison (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 359 [299–73]; Mark B. Garrison, “The Seal of ‘Kuraš the Anzanite, Son of Šešpeš’ (Teispes), PFS 93*: Susa—Anšan—Persepolis,” in *Elam and Persia*, 390–91 [375–405]. Some of the evidence points to more complex influences and indebtedness from Elam to Neo-Assyria before Achaemenid adaptations. See Margaret Cool Root, “Elam in the Imperial Imagination: From Nineveh to Persepolis,” in *Elam and Persia*, 445–50 [419–74].

¹⁸ See Pierfrancesco, “Ideological Aspects of Persian Art and Architecture as Seen from Persepolis, in a Historical Perspective,” in *Stones, Tablets, and Scrolls: Periods of the Formation of the Bible*, eds. Peter Dubovský and Federico Giuntoli (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 319, 332 [315–40]; Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, *Acta Iranica* 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 304; Dorothy G. Shepherd, “An Achaemenid Sculpture in Lapis Lazuli,” *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 48.2 (1961): 18–19 [18–25].

the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum.¹⁹ Another doorway relief depicts Darius holding a lion after the manner of the well-known late eighth century Assyrian relief that has often been associated with Gilgamesh in the palace of Sargon II (722–705; see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Lion in Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Reliefs‡



‡ Sketch by Gary Edward Schnittjer after “Gilgamesh” relief in the Louvre. See *ANEP*, no. 615; Root, *King*, plate LXXII; Shepherd, “Achaemenid Sculpture,” 20.



‡ Sketch by Gary Edward Schnittjer after reliefs of Darius in doorway of Persepolis. See Root, *King*, plate XVI; idem “Elam,” 458; Shepherd, “Achaemenid Sculpture,” 21.

Other doorway reliefs depict Darius killing a horned lion akin to the relief of Ashurbanipal (668–631) finishing off an angry lion during a royal lion hunt (see Figure 2).²⁰ In this case, the artisans likely do not depend directly on the palace relief. The iconic image is likely mediated by the widely disseminated seal of an Assyrian ruler killing a lion standing erect on his back paws (see below).

Figure 2: Royal Lion Kill in Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Reliefs

¹⁹ For Achaemenid guardians at Persepolis, see Rémy Boucharlat, “Susa in Iranian and Oriental Architecture,” in *The Palace of Darius at Susa: The Great Royal Residence of Achaemenid Persia*, ed. Jean Perrot, trans. Gérard Collon (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 421 [409–33]; Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 583; Donald N. Wilber, *Persepolis: The Archaeology of Parsa, Seat of the Persian Kings* (New York: Thomas Y. Comwell Company, 1969), 11.

²⁰ For Ashurbanipal’s lion-kill relief, see, e.g., Julian Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, 2nd ed. (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 79; Simon Sherwin, “1 Chronicles,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 3:247 [220–85]. On the reliefs of Darius’ lion-wrangling and lion-like mythic creatures, see Root, *King*, 303–8.



Sketch by Gary Edward Schnittjer after Ashurbanipal's lion hunt relief in the British Museum. See Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, 79; Root, *King*, plate LV; Sherwin, "1 Chronicles," 3:247.



Sketch by Gary Edward Schnittjer after reliefs of Darius in doorways of Persepolis. See Kuhrt, *Persian Empire*, 564; Wilber, *Persepolis*, 40; Root, *King*, plate XVI.

Among multiple versions of Ashurbanipal's lion hunt relief sequences, the moment of slaying the lion with a spear from behind a shield gets swapped out.²¹ Instead, the moment of killing the lion does not include armor on his arms. Ashurbanipal grabs the lion by the throat and runs him through with a long dagger (see Figure 2). Julian Reade suggests the artisans depict the king's barehanded killing of the lion with his dagger by borrowing it from the long-time royal seal (see Figure 3).²²

The official royal seal for several centuries (at least late ninth century to late seventh century BCE) is an Assyrian ruler grabbing an attacking lion by the ears with the left hand and stabbing the lion through with a long dagger with his right hand. The lion stands on his hind legs with an angry open mouth and his front paws poised to maul the ruler. At least four versions of the seal have been found scattered widely across the Near East. It would seem that the large-size reliefs of Ashurbanipal and Darius killing the lion with a dagger were both likely mediated by the ubiquitous royal seal. The seal was apparently used to mark tribute from vassals for the Assyrian palace.²³

²¹ For images of the less dramatic kill, see R. D. Barnett, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1970), plate XX [p. 66 though unnumbered]; Julian E. Reade, et al., *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*, eds. J. E. Curtis and J. E. Reade (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 86 (upper left register). For summaries of the sequential lion hunt reliefs of Ashurbanipal, see Reade, *Art and Empire*, 87; Barnett, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 31–32.

²² Reade says, "The lion is standing on its hindlegs at this moment: it is the symbolic act of the royal seal translated into reality" (*Assyrian Sculpture*), 77. Also see Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Fribourg: Academic Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 171.

²³ On the royal seal, see D. Collon in *Art and Empire*, 188; A. J. Sachs, "The Late Assyrian Royal-Seal Type," *Iraq* 15.2 (1953): 167–70, including many images (168 as well as Plates XVII–XIX); Barbara Parker, "Seals and Seal Impressions from the Nimrud Excavations, 1955–58," *Iraq* 24.1 (1962): 38, including image (plate XXI, no. 1) [26–40]; A. R. Millard, "The Assyrian Royal Seal Type Again," *Iraq* 27.1 (1965): 12–16, including images (13); idem, "The Assyrian Royal Seal: An Addendum," *Iraq* 40.1 (1978): 70–71, including images (71); Elnathan Weissert, "Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurbanipal (82-5-22,2)," *Assyria 1995 Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, eds. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Project, 1997), 339 [339–58]; Pauline Albenda, "Ashurnasirpal II Lion Hunt Relief BM124534," *JNES* 31.3 (1972): 178, n. 42 [167–78]; Chikako Esther Watanabe, "Symbolism of the Royal Lion Hunt in Assyria," in *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at*

The influence of the royal seal of a Neo-Assyrian royal figure killing a lion upon Achaemenid propaganda goes beyond the doorway relief in Figure 2. Darius' own seals include one with "Assyrianizing iconographic" heroics from his twenty-second year (500 BCE). Darius' seal features his bare-handed wrestling two lions at one time with both standing erect on their back paws poised to maul him. The pair of lions closely follow the one on the Assyrian seals down to the curled tail on the lions (cf. Figure 3).²⁴

The interpretation of the Neo-Assyrian royal lion hunts vary widely: pleasure, sport, religious devotion, protection, and so on.²⁵ The common denominator of all interpretations is the boastful prowess of the Assyrian rulers. The larger-than-life self-image of ancient Assyrian rulers spread far and wide for centuries by means of the royal seals. The self-indulgent pride depicted in the image is adequate for the broad point under consideration in the present argument.

For the present purposes, the identity of the image on the left side of Figure 1 as Gilgamesh or some other hero is beside the point. It is enough that the Achaemenid artisans depicted Darius like a legendary figure as well as depicting him after old-time Neo-Assyrian rulers like Ashurbanipal. The broadly distributed seals of Assyrian rulers killing a lion marked tribute at least as far away as Samaria where one was found.²⁶ And that is really the point. The iconic Neo-Assyrian rulers of old remained as symbols of pride, power, and lore across the far-flung versions of the empire including lands inhabited by the people of ancient Israel (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Neo-Assyrian Royal Figure Killing a Lion on the Royal Seal[‡]



[‡] Sketch by Gary Edward Schnittjer after royal seal of Sargon from Nineveh (715 BCE). See Collon, *Art and Empire*, 188. Also see Sachs, "Late Assyrian Royal-Seal," plate XVIII, no. 1; Garrison, "Seals," 9.

the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale Prague, July 1–5, 1996, ed. Jiří Prosecký (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1998), 444 [439–50].

²⁴ See M. B. Garrison, "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis: Some Observations on Early Achaemenid Persian Art," *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991): 9 [1–29], including figures of seals of Sargon and Darius (figs. 11, 12, 13, p. 9). For a description of three additional similar seals of Darius and Xerxes, see Root, *King*, 121–22. Root goes on to explain the relationship between the palace doorjamb and seal reliefs in some detail (303–7).

²⁵ See Weissert, "Royal Hunt," 342–43; Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?* 163–70; Watanabe, "Symbolism of the Royal Lion Hunt," 439–50; Albenda, "Ashurnasipal," 167–78; Root, *King*, 307–8. Weissert's own suggestion that the hunt in the plain reenacts Ashur's footsteps in the New Year's myth and of Ishtar of Arbela (during her earlier *akītu*) is based on comparing multiple Neo-Assyrian hunting inscriptions within various settings as well as comparing defeating enemies (344–45, 352–53). Weissert's comparative layout of the texts offers helpful insight on the parallels between the ruler's equal prowess against lions and enemies, whether or not Weissert's conjecture is accepted. On the relief of the lion kill by Darius as displaying power to protect the kingdom from evil, see Callieri, "Ideological Aspects," 321, 323.

²⁶ See Millard, "Assyrian Royal Seal Type," 15.

The widely diffused cultural memories of long-gone Neo-Assyrian rulers continued to signify over-the-top power easily transposable with figures of legends. The imagery of Neo-Assyrian rulers of yesteryear served Achaemenid rulers by projecting Darius' political power over foreign dignitaries dispatched to bring tribute to Persepolis as well as over his own courtiers. Ancient unnamed Neo-Assyrian regimes likewise symbolized political dominion to the constituents of exilic and restoration scriptural traditions. Two examples will suffice to make the broad point at hand.

Ezekiel goes on at some length in an allegorical scenario about the garden of Eden being cast into Sheol in an oracle against Egypt (Ezek 31:1–18). Assyria is the greatest tree ever in the Edenic scenario (v. 3). Yahweh had Assyria chopped down and cast into the underworld because of its great pride (v. 10). The elaborate scenario speaks against the arrogance of the Egyptians (vv. 2, 18).

Ninety-three years after the original return from captivity, the prayer of the Levitical intercessors dramatically redefines the restoration assembly (Neh 9). Up to that point the Yahwistic assembly had defined their identity according to the exile. But being back in their ancestors' homeland for generations with other Judeans permanently settled in the diaspora had begun to displace exile as the center of gravity. The Levitical intercessors redefine the identity of the homeland Yahwistic assembly in a sub-province of the empire as slavery on the analogy of loss of sovereignty to the Neo-Assyrians in the First Commonwealth. Notice how the exile becomes demoted to one of the hardships going back to days of vassalage to unnamed rulers of Assyria.

Do not take lightly all of the hardship that has found us, our kings, our rulers, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people *from the days of the kings of Assyria* until this day. (9:32b, emphasis added)

The Levitical intercessors suggest their slavery began when Menahem of Israel and Ahaz of Judah became vassals of Pul/Tiglath-pileser III (745–722; 2 Kgs 15:19–20; 16:7–9). This shift in identity no longer looks at the benevolent Persian rulers as caring for Judah (cf. Ezra 1:1; 5:5; 6:14; 7:9, 27–28; Neh 2:8). Instead, the Persian overlords have enslaved the restoration assembly as a tax-paying sub-province (Neh 9:36). The restoration assembly needs deliverance in their own homeland from Assyrian-like oppression of the current version of the empire.

This evidence suggests the political power of Neo-Assyrian rulers casts a long shadow extending across the exile and into the restoration. What the Assyrian rulers had accomplished centuries before retained its power as a symbol for prophets and intercessors of Israel.

How and why did Neo-Assyrian kings continue to project political power for centuries? In science fiction Morpheus explains to Neo that he sees himself in the shared imagination of the Matrix as residual self-image—the mental projection of one's digital self. The residual depicted image of Neo-Assyrian rulers in visual and literary media enabled the memory of their political power to be re-projected upon new regimes or for other purposes. In Achaemenid propaganda Darius could take on Assyrian ruler-like proportions to enhance his self-aggrandizement. In biblical prophetic and narrative literature the Assyrians could represent the measuring stick of greatness for other empires or the loss of sovereignty for Israel.

The residual power of the depicted image of the Neo-Assyrians explains why the message of a long-dead king of Nineveh had currency among Joel's constituents. Since the message of the king of Nineveh was refracted through a prophetic narrative (Jonah 3), it is necessary to consider how Joel uses other prophets before getting to Joel 2.

Repurposing Prophets in Joel

This section observes common patterns of irony in Joel's use of prophetic traditions. As is well-known Joel lacks decisive evidence to connect his ministry to external historical reference points except the temple.²⁷ But deciding that Joel ministers during either the time of Solomon's temple or the second temple does not help much. However, five cases of Joel's use of scriptural prophetic traditions feature the right kind of evidence to determine direction of dependence.²⁸ In all five cases Joel depends on earlier prophetic traditions (Isaiah or Micah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah).²⁹ This evidence offers insight into Joel's interpretive agenda.

Since detailed analysis of Joel's use of prophetic traditions can be found elsewhere, the present section merely summarizes what these cases say about Joel's exegetical tendencies.³⁰ Several of Joel's exegetical interventions with earlier prophets are interrelated requiring treating some of these together. Joel's use of Jonah will be skipped for now since it is the focus of the next section. The cumulative evidence of Joel's use of earlier prophetic traditions demonstrates his penchant for irony as well as a decidedly universal outlook.

Joel uses Obadiah 17 twice. In the case of Joel 2:32[3:5] he overtly marks the citation with "as Yahweh has said" which strongly indicates Joel as the receptor text. Overt marking indicates self-consciousness of authority for author and constituents. The emerging canonical consciousness of the prophetic traditions makes up one of the reasons why a later prophet like Joel made significant investment in studying the earlier prophets. The enduring significance of the earlier prophets partially explains why later prophets often use the messages of their predecessors to address new challenges of their congregation.³¹

While Joel 2:32[3:5] universalizes one part of Obadiah 17, the exegetical intervention in Joel 3:17[4:17] deduces a boundary of protection from another part of the same verse. It will help to compare both contexts of Joel though attention needs to be given to one at a time (italics and bold signify verbal parallels in Hebrew and broken underlining signifies marking).

But *on Mount Zion will be deliverance*. It **will be holy**. The house of Jacob will possess those who dispossessed them. (Obad 17)

Everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved. For *on Mount Zion* and in Jerusalem *there will be deliverance*, as Yahweh has said, even among the survivors whom Yahweh calls. (Joel 2:32[3:5])

Then you will know that I, Yahweh your God, dwell in **Zion**, my holy hill. Jerusalem **will be holy**, and strangers will never again pass through it. (3:17[4:17])

For the present purposes it is sufficient to observe the universalizing of Mount Zion as a place of deliverance in Joel. Obadiah retains his focus on the fortunes of the house of David in the

²⁷ Elie Assis, "The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel," *VT* 61.2 (2011): 165 [163–83]; Chisholm, *Minor Prophets*, 51; Dillard, "Joel," 240; W. Neil, "Joel, Book of," *IBD* 2:928 [926–29]; Wolf, *Joel*, 4.

²⁸ For a detailed explanation of evaluating the evidence necessary to determine direction of dependence, see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, xxviii–xxxiv.

²⁹ This evidence only helps with relative sequencing between these prophetic collections not absolute dating. This limitation has no effect on the scope and aims of the present study.

³⁰ See Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 375–82.

³¹ For acknowledgment of unoriginality due to depending on earlier prophets, see Jer 25:3–7; Zech 1:4–6; 7:12.

aftermath of their troubles marked by the tenfold use of “day” in verses 11–14. Meanwhile Joel opens the promised salvation to a collective based on reciprocal “calling” between Yahweh and his people: “Everyone who *calls* on the name of Yahweh . . . even among the survivors whom Yahweh *calls*” (2:32[3:5], emphasis added).

The situation in Joel 3:16–17[4:16–17] requires close attention. This context houses an interpretive blend of Amos 1:2 and Obadiah 17.³² Notice the way Joel’s interpretive intervention works from both contexts (*italics and bold signify verbal parallels in Hebrew and broken underlining signifies the recognition formula shared with Joel 2:27*).³³

He said: “*Yahweh roars from Zion and sends out his voice from Jerusalem*. The pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.” (Amos 1:2)

But on Mount **Zion** will be deliverance. It **will be holy**. The house of Jacob will possess those who dispossessed them. (Obad 17)

Yahweh roars from Zion and sends out his voice from Jerusalem. The earth and the heavens will shake. But Yahweh is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. Then you will know that I, Yahweh your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem **will be holy**, and strangers will never again pass through it. (Joel 3:16–17[4:16–17])

The imagery in Amos 1:2 sets up the oracles against the nations that follow (Amos 1–2). The sense of Carmel in the B line should be taken as a remote place that cannot hide rebels from Yahweh (9:3). Instead of this outward focus Joel uses the imagery with an inward focus. Joel speaks of the protection in Zion.³⁴

At first it may seem challenging to make sense of excluding strangers from Jerusalem after Joel previously spoke of everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved (Joel 2:32[3:5]; cf. 3:17[4:17]). The Hebrew term “stranger” (רֵץ) possesses a relative sense rather than an absolute referent. Elsewhere the term signifies Israelite laity disallowed to enter into the holy place of the tabernacle (Num 18:4; cf. 22:10). The term with the sense of forbidden stranger even refers to Levites who may not enter the inner courts of the tabernacle where the priests serve (18:7).³⁵ When Joel says, “*strangers* (רֵץ) will never again pass through it” (Joel 3:16[4:16], emphasis added) he does not have in mind ethnic “foreigners” generically (*contra* NIV), but

³² Michael Fishbane coined the helpful expression “legal blend” to refer to cases in which the citing text interprets one law in the light of another (see *Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1985], 110–19, 134–36). Legal blends work exactly like interpretive blends in other genres and are actually a subset of the commonplace phenomenon appearing across all genres of the Christian Bible.

³³ On the repeated recognition formula in Joel 2:27; 3:17[4:17], see Marcus, “Nonrecurring Doublets,” 67 (no. 38).

³⁴ Approaches that see the parallel between Amos 1:2 and Joel 3:16[4:16] as an editorial insertion to create connections between the books of the Twelve Prophets fail to adequately handle the native contextual fit of the passages in Joel and Amos respectively. See Nicholas R. Warse, “Joel, Catchwords, and Its Place in the Book of the Twelve,” *ZAW* 131.4 (2019): 549–62. Warse speaks of editors adding the language of Joel to Amos 9:11–15 (553). In one place Nogalski speaks of parallels between Joel 3:18[4:18] and Amos 9:13 and in another of Amos 9:14 as inserted in exilic or postexilic times. See James D. Nogalski, “Reading the Book of the Twelve Theologically,” *Interpretation* 61.2 (2007): 119 [115–22]; idem, “The Problematic Suffixes of Amos IX 11,” *VT* 43.3 (1993): 416–17 [411–18]. These proposals do not work in light of four verbs in identical order reused in Amos 5:11b and 9:14b demonstrating the native fit of the ending of Amos (see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 383).

³⁵ See Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I, The Encroacher and the Levite: The Term ‘Aboda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 32. Also see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 341, Figure Ezk7.

more like “conquering armies” (so NET). Joel uses “stranger” much like Obadiah when he accuses Edom, “On the day you stood by while *strangers* (רַ) carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and they cast lots for Jerusalem, even you were like one of them” (Obad 11, emphasis added). Joel qualifies both those that call upon Yahweh from all flesh (Joel 2:32[3:5]) and excluded others as strangers (3:16[4:16]).

In sum of Joel’s use of Amos and Obadiah, he does not quote these prophets verbatim with an identical sense. Joel alludes with sufficient parallel language to identify the donor contexts. Yet, Joel repurposes Amos’ report of Yahweh roaring to inspire fear among the nations by redirecting the roar to encourage fortitude within Zion. Joel extends Obadiah’s affirmation of deliverance. In Joel deliverance prevents further molestation by strangers.

Joel’s use of Ezekiel includes even the selection of an unusual expression. Almost always when Ezekiel speaks positively of the spirit it is the object of the verb “give” (נתן) (Ezek 11:19; 36:26, 27; 37:14). The one exception is when Ezekiel speaks of “pouring out” the spirit near the close of the Gog oracles. Elsewhere “pouring out” is a favorite verb of Ezekiel’s to speak with a negative connotation of pour out wrath and the like.³⁶ Thus, even Joel’s selection of Ezekiel’s unusual turn of a phrase says something about Joel’s interpretive tendencies. Notice the way Joel uses Ezekiel’s memorable expression with irony as one of its preexisting conditions (bold marks verbal parallels in Hebrew).

I will never again hide my face from them, for **I will pour out my spirit** on the people of Israel, declares the Lord Yahweh. (Ezek 39:29)

And afterward, **I will pour out my spirit** on all flesh. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on male and female servants, in those days, **I will pour out my spirit**. (Joel 2:28–29[3:1–2])

As elsewhere so too in the case of his use of Ezekiel, Joel universalizes the sense of the donor text. Instead of pouring out the spirit positively (!) on Israel, Joel speaks of pouring out the spirit on all flesh.

Joel makes two exegetical interventions with the imagery of the vision of the mountain of Yahweh from Isaiah or Micah.³⁷ First, Joel reverses the direction of the transformation of the implements. In Joel the farming equipment gets refashioned into weapons for war. In this way the prophetic traditions of the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem for peaceful instruction gets transformed into a military campaign.³⁸ Notice the inversion of the imagery (emphases mark verbal parallels in Hebrew).

³⁶ “Pour out” (שָׁפַךְ), with different negative senses, appears repeatedly. See: Ezek 4:2; 7:8; 9:8; 14:19; 16:15, 36, 38; 17:17; 18:10; 20:8, 13, 21, 33–34; 21:22, 31[27, 36]; 22:3–4, 6, 9, 12, 22, 27, 31; 23:8, 45; 24:7; 26:8; 30:15; 33:25; 36:18. See “שָׁפַךְ” Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer Publishing House, 1990), 1200–1 [Hebrew] (hereafter cited as Even-Shoshan). The only four places “pour out” takes “spirit” as the object are Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29[3:1, 2]; and Zech 12:10, the latter of which is likely derivative of the other contexts (see *ibid.*, near the end of the first set of collocations).

³⁷ The evidence for direction of dependence in this case comes from a quasi-Aramaism by switching to a different term for “spears.” See S. R. Driver, *The Books of Joel and Amos*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1897), 22, 73; “רִמָּח” BDB 942; *HALOT* 2:1243.

³⁸ See Wolff, *Joel*, 80.

They will beat their swords into plowshares **and** their spears (חַנִּית) **into pruning hooks.** (Isa 2:4/Mic 4:3b)

Beat your plowshares into swords **and** your **pruning hooks** into spears (חַנִּית). Let the weak say, “I am strong!” (Joel 3:10[4:10])

Second, when the nations bring their armies against Yahweh’s people he calls in the harvesters.³⁹ “Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the winepress is full. The wine vats overflow because their wickedness is great” (3:13[4:13]). Though the farming equipment was refashioned into weapons, Joel frames the one-sided battle as a great harvest. Both of these exegetical moves betray considerable irony.

In sum, Joel’s use of earlier prophetic traditions shows a penchant for universalizing referents and ironic use of imagery. Both of these tendencies correspond to Joel’s use of Jonah.

Repurposing Jonah’s King of Nineveh in Joel

The purpose of this section is to evaluate Joel’s repurposing of the Jonah narrative with special attention to the question of the king of Nineveh: “Who knows?” As noted in the introduction above, the heart of Joel 2 offers a call to repentance by reconfiguring several elements from Jonah.

The extensive shared language between Exodus 32, 34, Jonah 3, 4, and Joel 2 have long provoked debates on indirect versus direct dependence along with competing views of direction of dependence. Before scholarship on the scriptural use of the scriptures came into its own many scholars based their views of direction of dependence on elements of conjectured dating rather than the evidence of dependence itself.

Wolff suggests that Joel depends on Jonah.⁴⁰ Allen contends that Jonah uses Joel.⁴¹ Nogalski sees Joel and the author of Jonah as independently drawing on Exodus 34:6–7.⁴² Dozeman argues for a more complex relationship of mutual interdependence between Joel and Jonah as they rely on Exodus.⁴³ Seitz goes even further conjecturing that Joel and Jonah know each other and both write their respective books in the light of the what the other would write as well as taking into account the emerging final form of the book of the Twelve Prophets.⁴⁴ Sasson decides there is no way to know but sees Jonah’s theology as more developed.⁴⁵ Walker denies the possibility of knowing the direction of dependence and claims the parallels create “productive theological tensions.”⁴⁶ In one place Crenshaw says it is not possible to know who

³⁹ Though the language is different, Wolff notes a similar use of harvesting imagery in Mic 4:13 (ibid.).

⁴⁰ See ibid., 49.

⁴¹ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 228.

⁴² See James D. Nogalski, “Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve: Creating Points of Contact for Theological Reading,” *Interpretation* 61 (2007): 132–33 [125–36].

⁴³ See Thomas B. Dozeman, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh’s Gracious and Compassionate Character,” *JBL* 108.2 (1989): 207–23.

⁴⁴ Seitz, *Joel*, 38, 65–66, 175–77. Seitz’s argument seems to be entirely circular, built on a series of increasingly unlikely conjectural reconstructions, and without evidence. Seitz says: “Joel and Jonah ‘know one another’ and whichever is ‘first’ and whichever ‘second,’ they assume that they will co-exist in a single, complicated portrayal—because such is the theological truth of the matter” (65).

⁴⁵ Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 283.

⁴⁶ Alyssa Walker, “Jonah’s Genocidal and Suicidal Attitude—and God’s Rebuke,” *Kairos Evangelical Journal of Theology* 9.1 (2015): 24 [7–29]. In this context Walker is also considering an allusion to Exod 34 in Nahum 1. For a

borrowed from whom.⁴⁷ Elsewhere Crenshaw proposes the similarities are a coincidence because of the widely disseminated attribute formula of Exodus 34, much like people say “I have a dream” without ever having read the speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴⁸ All of these approaches fail to evaluate the evidence of the scriptural use of scripture itself.

The parallels between Exodus 32–34, Jonah, and Joel provide the evidence necessary to triangulate and determine a sequence of dependence.⁴⁹ After summarizing the evidence, it will be presented in context and then the key elements that demonstrate dependence will be isolated and re-presented with brief notes.

To summarize the evidence: Since the allusions include both the context of the rebellion with the golden calf and the attribute formula, the author of Jonah must be working with something like the canonical form of Exodus. The evidence cannot be adequately explained by appeals to penitential prayer language or the like because the extensive verbatim parallels include both narrative and embedded discourse. Jonah 3:9 uses the longer phrase from Exodus 32:12b “God may turn and relent from his fierce anger” while Joel 2:14 says more concisely “he may turn and relent.” Meanwhile Joel uses the question “Who knows?” followed immediately by “may turn and relent” with the exactly language used by the king of Nineveh in Jonah—a question that does not appear in Torah. When these pieces are brought together, Jonah needs to be borrowing directly from the traditions appearing Exodus rather than borrowing from Joel. And Joel needs to be using the Jonah narrative. The extensive verbatim parallel language from remote parts of Exodus in Jonah and extensive verbatim parallel language from remote parts of Jonah in Joel make sequence of dependence nearly certain. Note the set of parallels in context (emphases signify verbal parallels in Hebrew).

[Moses said:] “**Turn from your fierce anger and relent** concerning the punishment of your people.” ... Then Yahweh relented concerning the disaster that he had threatened upon his people. ... Yahweh passed before him and proclaimed: “Yahweh, Yahweh a God of compassion and grace, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty and faithfulness.” (Exod 32:12b, 14; 34:6)

When the message [of Jonah] reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne and removed his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in the ashes.⁷ He issued a proclamation: “By decree of the king and his nobles: ‘No human or animal, no cattle or flock shall taste

similar view focusing on a handful of allusions to Exod 34:6–7 in the Twelve, see J. P. Bosman, “The Paradoxical Presence of Exodus 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve,” *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 242 [233–43].

⁴⁷ See James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, AYB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 137.

⁴⁸ See James L. Crenshaw, “Who Knows What YHWH Will Do?: The Character of God in the Book of Joel,” in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by Astrid B. Beck, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 192–93 [185–96]. It is easy to agree that many cases of the attribute formula in scripture come from the lyrical diffusion of Israel’s worship (see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 877). However, the extensive verbal parallels from multiple contexts of Exodus in Jonah, including both prayers and frame narratives, and from multiple contexts of Jonah in Joel eliminate coincidence in this case (see below).

⁴⁹ Many scholars have observed and discussed these parallels. See G. Buchanan Gray, “The Parallel Passages in ‘Joel’ in Their Bearing on the Question of Date,” *Expositor* 8 (1893): 217 [208–25]; Driver, *Joel*, 23; Nathan C. Lane, II, “Exodus 34:6–7: A Canonical Analysis,” Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 2007, 108, n. 55. The most thoroughgoing in terms of clarifying direction of dependence is Joseph Ryan Kelly, “Joel, Jonah, and the Yhwh Creed: Determining the Trajectory of the Literary Influence,” *JBL* 132.4 (2013): 805–26. My discussion here is indebted to many of Kelly’s observations. However, none of the studies cited above in this note, including the one by Kelly, observes the parallel between Exod 32:14 and Jonah 3:10 which further confirms the author of Jonah as using these scriptural traditions from something akin the canonical form of Exodus. For further discussion, see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 375–77, 404–7.

anything. They shall not graze, and they shall not drink water.⁸ Humans and animals shall put on sackcloth. They shall cry out strenuously to God. Let them turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.⁹ **Who knows?** God **may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger** so that we do not perish.” When God saw what they did, that they turned from their evil ways, then God relented concerning the disaster that he had threatened upon them and he did not do it...

He [Jonah] prayed to Yahweh, “O Yahweh, is not this what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish. For I know that you are a God of grace and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty, and who relents from punishment.” (Jonah 3:6–10; 4:2)⁵⁰

“Even now,” says Yahweh, “turn to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”¹³ Tear your heart and not your clothing. Turn to Yahweh your God for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty, and who relents from punishment.¹⁴ **Who knows?** He **may turn and relent** and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering to Yahweh your God. (Joel 2:12–14)

It is necessary to pause for a moment and look at three key elements of the evidence piece by piece before moving on. First, the evidence goes beyond shared prayer language. The verbatim parallels include both direct discourse (see second point below) and the frame narratives of Exodus and Jonah. This eliminates passing off these parallels as coincidence based on shared themes from second temple penitential prayer traditions.⁵¹ Consider the shared frame narratives in isolation:

וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוָה עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ

“Then Yahweh relented concerning the disaster that he had threatened upon his people.” (Exod 32:14)

וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם

“Then God relented concerning the disaster that he had threatened upon them.” (Jonah 3:10)⁵²

⁵⁰ The translation of Jonah 3:9 does not follow the Masoretic phrasing with its strong disjunctive accent (zaqef qaton) on “he will return” (יָשׁוּב). Such a move makes the sense: “*He who knows will turn back, then God will have pity ...*” (emphasis added). This observation and translation based on Masoretic accenting adapted from Sasson, *Jonah*, 261. Instead, the translation of v. 9 here follows the Masoretic punctuation on the same phrase in Joel 2:14 (see *BHQ* on Joel 2:14a//Jonah 3:9a).

⁵¹ On penitential prayer traditions, see, e.g., Mark J. Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9*, *BZAW* 277 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 84–85, *et passim*; Richard J. Bauckham, *Developments in Genre between Post-Exilic Penitential Prayers and the Psalms of Communal Lament* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 20–21, 113, *et passim*. Detailed interaction with sorting out stock phrases and liturgical idiom from direct dependence in the case of second temple collective prayers of repentance appears elsewhere. See Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Historical Books (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming), on Neh 9; idem, *OT Use of OT*, 216–17, 474, 896 (on lyrical diffusion), and see 671, n. 82. Also see Gary Edward Schnittjer, “The Bad Ending of Ezra-Nehemiah,” *BSac* 173 (2016): 52 [32–56].

⁵² It is easy to imagine the author of Jonah reading “Yahweh” in the donor text but writing “God” in the frame narrative (Jonah 3:10). Elsewhere the frame narrative freely interchanges יהוה and אֱלֹהִים with the same verb (cf. 4:4, 9).

Second, in addition to the frame narrative the king of Nineveh and the prophet Jonah respectively reuse verbatim the prayer of Moses and the revelation of Yahweh, respectively. Notice the shared language in isolation:

שוב מחרון אַפַּי וְהִנַּחֵם

[Moses] “**Turn from your fierce anger and relent.**” (Exod 32:12b)

יָשׁוּב וְנִחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחַרְוֹן אַפּוֹ

[King of Nineveh] “God **may turn and relent** and turn **from his fierce anger.**” (Jonah 3:9)

יְהוָה יְהוּה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת

[Yahweh] “Yahweh, Yahweh a God of compassion and grace, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty and faithfulness.” (Exod 34:6)

אֲתָהּ אֱלֹהֵי-חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנִחַם עַל־הָרָעָה

[Jonah] “You are a God of grace and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty, and who relents from punishment.” (Jonah 4:2)

So many verbatim parallels from remote contexts provide a high likelihood of direct dependence between traditions exactly like those that appear in the final forms of Exodus and Jonah.

Third, the verbatim parallels from remote parts of Jonah in Joel include elements not shared with Exodus or any of the other biblical uses of the attribute formula.⁵³ This evidence includes the question “Who knows?” that does not appear in Torah. Further, the king of Nineveh and Joel both say “Who knows? God/he may turn and relent.” The extensive shared verbatim parallels between Jonah and Joel—but not Exodus or other biblical appearances of the attribute formula—make dependence between Jonah of Joel nearly certain. And because Jonah depends on Exodus (see first and second points above), Joel must depend on Jonah in something virtually identical to its canonical form. Note the verbal parallels in isolation:

מִי־יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחַרְוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֹאכַד

[King of Nineveh] “**Who knows?** God **may turn and relent and turn from his wrath** so that we do not perish.” (Jonah 3:9)

כִּי יִדְעָתִי כִּי אֲתָהּ אֱלֹהֵי-חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנִחַם עַל־הָרָעָה

[Jonah] “For I know that you are a God of grace and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty, and who relents from punishment.” (4:2)

הוּא אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנִחַם עַל־הָרָעָה: מִי תוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחַם

[Joel] “He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty, and who relents from punishment.¹⁴ **Who knows?** He **may turn and relent.**” (Joel 2:13b–14a)

The term “know” (יָדַע) marked with broken underlining apparently provided a catchword for Joel to bring together the question of the king of Nineveh and the answer of the prophet Jonah (see further below).

In sum of the evidence of dependence, the evidence points to Joel 2 using Jonah 3 and 4, and Jonah 3 and 4 using Exodus 32 and 34. Jonah needs to be using Exodus 32–34 or a source

⁵³ For a comparison of many biblical citations of the attribute formula, see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 375–76, 877.

identical to it because of the verbatim parallels inclusive of narrative and embedded discourse. Joel cannot be using Exodus since he shares with Jonah a longer form of the phrase hoping God relents than Exodus. The evidence of extensive verbatim parallels unique to Jonah and Joel makes it almost certain that Joel used Jonah or a source exactly like it.

Twice the embedded speeches in Jonah invert the language of the donor text: “turn and relent and turn from his wrath” and “grace and compassion” (Jonah 3:9; 4:2). The purpose of the common habit of inverting quotations among biblical authors seems to be to gain an extra moment of consideration from auditors.⁵⁴

In spite of the commonness of the terms, the constructions shared by Jonah and Joel are rather rare. The exact phrase “and who relents from punishment” (וְנָחַם עַל־הַרְעָה) only appears in Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2, while similar expressions appear eight other times including Exodus 32:14 and Jonah 3:10.⁵⁵ The question “Who knows?” appears seven times in scripture but only three times with the sense of contingency of outcomes (2 Sam 12:22; Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9).⁵⁶

Jonah typifies a long-running view that the people of Nineveh deserve judgment. For at least a century the biblical prophets testify of judgment to fall upon Assyria (Isa 10:12; Nah 2:8[9]; 3:5–8; Zeph 2:13). And Jonah’s desire to see Nineveh judged continues to characterize the outlook of Israel well into the second temple period (Tob 14:15).

Part of the irony of the Jonah narrative comes from its timing. The irony stems from Jonah’s ministry in 2 Kings 14:25, just a few columns of the scroll before Israel and Judah would each become vassals of Assyria (2 Kgs 15:19; 16:7–9). If Jonah had successfully prevented the word of Yahweh from reaching Nineveh, Israel may have been spared.⁵⁷ Readers and auditors of the Jonah narrative realize the prophet’s message preserved the Assyrian tyrants to later come against Israel and Judah.

The depth of irony gets compounded in this case. The Jonah narrative depicts the sailors, the people, the king, and even the animals of Nineveh as pleading for God’s mercy. This leads to Jonah’s angry prayer. His fury stems from his view that Yahweh’s mercy is excessive. Jonah knows this from his forgiveness of Israel after their rebellion with the golden calf. Joel blends together these ironic embedded speeches from the king of Nineveh and the prophet Jonah in his call for Zion’s repentance. The extent of the irony leads one commentator to deny the possibility of Joel’s praise of Yahweh depending on Jonah’s criticism of Yahweh—he considers it

⁵⁴ See Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Discovering a New Path of Intertextuality: Inverted Quotations and Their Dynamics,” in L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman, eds., *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 49 [31–49]. Inverted citations are often referred to as Seidel’s theory after a scholar who identified this practice. See Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 899.

⁵⁵ See “נָחַם עַל־” in first collocation of “נָחַם” Even-Shoshan, 754; cf. 2 Sam 24:16//1 Chr 21:15; Jer 8:6; 18:8; 26:19; Ezek 14:22.

⁵⁶ *Contra* “מִי” Even-Shoshan, 648 (nos. 45, 73, 78, 385, 388) only listing five occurrences in the first set of collocations (מִי יִדְעַע, missing nos. 99, 105). Two of the other uses of the question function as a superlative: “*Who knows* the power of your anger?” (Ps 90:11a) and “*Who knows* what ruin the two of them [Yahweh and king] can bring?” (Prov 24:22b). While the last two make the point that no one knows: “*Who knows* (if) the human spirit rises and it goes upward, and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” (Eccles 3:21) and “For *who knows* what good is in a person’s life, the number of days of life is fleeting and like a shadow? Who can tell persons what will be after them under the sun?” (6:12, emphasis added in all quotations). Notice the parallel idiom “Who can tell” underlined in the last example.

⁵⁷ See Jason Staples, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 130; Walker, “Jonah’s Genocidal and Suicidal Attitude” 17.

“unthinkable.”⁵⁸ Though the evidence contradicts the commentator’s judgment, his skepticism shows the depth of the irony of Joel’s daring interpretive blend.

When the king of Nineveh asks “Who knows?” he rhetorically expresses a possibility beyond any human. Crenshaw answers the question: “No one knows how the deity will react.”⁵⁹ He points out one case where this question appears in which even fasting and weeping could not turn Yahweh from judgment (2 Sam 12:22).⁶⁰

The term “know” in the question “Who knows?” creates a literary connection within the Jonah narrative. Jonah complains that “I *know* that you are a God of grace and compassion . . . who relents from punishment” (Jonah 4:2, emphasis added). Jonah knows this from Exodus. The king of Nineveh is exactly correct. No one knows what God may be willing to do. But Jonah is also correct for he knows the kind of God Yahweh is from how he forgave Israel after their rebellion.

The catchword “know” provides the point at which Joel connects together an interpretive blend of the king’s question and the prophet’s complaint (see broken underlining above).⁶¹ Notice how the term “know” conjoins these ironic statements to give voice to Joel’s call for repentance (as above underlining signifies verbal parallels in Hebrew between Jonah and Joel, bold signifies verbal parallels in Hebrew between the king of Nineveh and Joel, and broken underlining signifies a catchword shared by all three).

Turn to Yahweh your God for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenantal loyalty, and who relents from punishment.¹⁴ **Who knows?** He **may turn and relent.** (Joel 2:14)

The donor texts each function with irony in the Jonah narrative. The resultant message of the interpretive blend in Joel of itself harbors no irony. Joel transforms the ironic donor contexts of the king of Nineveh and an angry prophet of Yahweh into a theological rationale to motivate repentance.

The residual irony in Joel clings only to the source of the message. The king of Nineveh comes from an elite class of self-promoters. The spectacular egotistical propaganda stemming from the political power of the old-time Assyrian rulers lingers into the empire’s culture in the days of Joel’s constituents and even unto the next generations as he would have it (cf. 1:3)—irrespective of when Joel is dated. The king of Nineveh does not boast in the Jonah narrative. But like the residual memory of depicted Neo-Assyrian rulers, he is prone to excess making even the animals repent. He is, after all, the king of Nineveh. But his chaste message stands out starkly against the proud political propaganda familiar to anyone in later days of the empire. The immediate, startling humility of the king of Nineveh strengthens his message. That he is the one who says it makes all the difference.

The significance of the king of Nineveh and the prophet Jonah as the sources used in the interpretive blend of Joel 2:13–14 goes further than irony. The subtleties of exegetical reuse of these particular sources need to be closely evaluated.

⁵⁸ See Uriel Simon, *Jonah*, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), xxxix. Based on this philosophical conundrum, Simon insists that either the author of Jonah and Joel draw from a common source or Jonah borrows from Joel. Simon does not consider the evidence of the parallels themselves that definitively point in the opposite direction (see above).

⁵⁹ Crenshaw, “Who Knows?” 194.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, 190. Crenshaw’s larger argument pivots on the inherent ambiguity in Joel that stems from a lack of relationship between repentance and divine causality (185–96, esp. 186, 196).

⁶¹ Seitz recognizes the relationship between the question “Who knows?” by the king of Nineveh and Joel versus Jonah’s “privileged knowledge,” but he does not develop the implications (*Joel*, 64).

The question “Who knows?” in Joel retains the same deference as the question had coming out of the mouth of the king of Nineveh in the Jonah narrative. Forgiveness is a divine prerogative hidden in the divine will. But the question also echoes the confident knowledge of the kind of God Yahweh is as the prophet Jonah knew too well. Instead of fueling the angst of the prophet Jonah, in Joel the grace and compassion of Yahweh encourage repentance.

The repentance decreed by the king of Nineveh extended even to the domestic animals.⁶² This fits the pattern of “to the nth degree” running through much of Jonah including the great storm, the great fish, and the great city. When Yahweh confronts Jonah he notes that his pity extends to the infants and children and animals (Jonah 4:11). In a similar manner to the king’s decree, the urgent call to repentance in Joel extends even to infants and supersedes the normal exception of newlyweds from such things as mandatory military service (Joel 2:16; cf. Deut 20:7; 24:5).⁶³

Joel’s exaggeration offers a clue to why he turned to the desperate edict of the king of Nineveh. The king of Nineveh gets it. To forestall the wrath of God will take comprehensive repentance.

Joel upstages the king of Nineveh. Though the king of Nineveh mandated the cattle to join the collective in repentance, Joel goes much farther. Joel interrupts the suckling babe. Joel calls a stop to newlywed nuptials (Joel 2:16). Joel gets it. If Zion hopes to escape Yahweh’s wrath they need to follow after the example of the doomed Ninevites. Yet Joel knows that could never be enough. Zion must repent in solidarity beyond the people of Nineveh. For these reasons Joel weds the desperate message of the king of Nineveh to the theology of the incensed prophet Jonah.

The extensive repentance in Zion in Joel 2 overlaps the expansive tendencies of the prophet’s scriptural exegesis elsewhere. But here the repentance is exclusive to the congregation of Zion. Joel’s expansive plan for repentance gets bounded by the election of the holy assembly.

Why did Joel turn to the message of the king of Nineveh in the time of Zion’s danger? The king of Nineveh asked the right question with its hopeful contingency in a moment when Yahweh’s wrath threatened the great city. “Who knows? He may turn and relent” (Joel 2:14; cf. Jonah 3:9). The question in both Jonah and Joel is connected with fasting and collective repentance.⁶⁴ But there is more to it. Joel shared Jonah’s knowledge of Yahweh’s grace and compassion.

Thus, the reasons Joel looked to the king of Nineveh in the Jonah narrative only partially overlap those of either Persian royal propaganda or biblical prophets and narrators. Joel does not look to the king of Nineveh because he epitomizes political power per se. Rather it is what this powerful ruler says. Joel borrows his message to motivate comprehensive humble repentance. And the repentance needed *within* the congregation needs to be comprehensive.

Joel does not overtly refer to the king of Nineveh or the hot-tempered prophet of the Jonah narrative. Joel simply recasts the king’s message in an interpretive blend with Jonah’s own angry sentiments. Still Joel uses enough verbatim parallels to enable his constituents to identify the donor texts with a high level of confidence.

⁶² Ancient Assyrian records (ninth to eight century BCE) demonstrate royally sponsored public repentance (see example cited in Sasson, *Jonah*, 245). These records do not mention repentant animals.

⁶³ See Dillard, “Joel,” 283; Wolff, *Joel*, 51. Dillard notes that women and nursing children may have been exempt from cultic observances based on 1 Sam 1:21–24; cf. 2 Kgs 11:2–3. Wolff notes that the terms “inner room” (חֲדָר) and “chamber” (חֲפֵי) in Joel 2:16 are associated with marital consummation (cf. Judg 15:1; 2 Sam 13:10; 2 Kgs 9:2; Song 1:4; Ps 19:5[6]).

⁶⁴ See G. W. Ahlström, *Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 28, n. 6.

The showstopper in Joel's appeal to endangered citizens of Zion is a question from the king of Nineveh. The person who seemed to embody arrogance born from power put to words the hopes of the great city of Nineveh when they were under threat from the God of Israel. His question makes the God of Israel the object of his hope even while confessing this God's sovereignty. Who else but a person that symbolized pride and power could speak a question with the humility and hope Zion badly needed?

Before concluding it is worth pausing to consider the closing of Joel's reversal after the people repented. He finishes with the verb "know." Joel mediates Yahweh's word: "Then *you will know* that I am in the midst of Israel. I am Yahweh your God, and there is no other. My people will not be shamed ever again" (Joel 2:27, emphasis added; cf. 2:14; Jonah 3:9; 4:2). The king of Nineveh asks "Who knows?" Joel asks "Who knows?" Jonah knows. And now Zion knows too.

Conclusion

This study has tried to explain how and why Joel packaged his call to repentance in the day of Zion's trouble. The sources of his call to repentance depend on unlikely preachers from the Jonah narrative. He turned to the message of the king of Nineveh and the theology of the prophet Jonah.

Kings of the ancient Neo-Assyrian empire remained multifunctional symbols of power across many centuries and many lands. They function as meaningful symbols echoed in the visual royal propaganda of Persian rulers and in scriptural narrative and prophetic literature. This wide cultural and scriptural symbolic currency serves Joel well.

Joel builds his call to repentance around messages born in humility and anger. The proud king of Nineveh models the contrite attitude that Zion needs in its day of pending doom. The prophet Jonah knows enough of Yahweh's merciful character to make him angry and to offer hope to Joel's constituents. And that is really the trick. God's people need to have confidence in Yahweh's sovereign mercy without taking him for granted. Slighting the deity by presuming he somehow owes mercy to his own is an old, old problem with dire consequences (cf. Deut 29:19[18]). Joel uses the king of Nineveh's question to promote an attitude adjustment in Zion. And it works. This message is exactly what needs to be testified across the generations (Joel 1:3).

Joel's selection of donor texts in his call to repentance has implications for the emerging sense of canonical consciousness in the book of the Twelve. Joel's use of Amos, Isaiah or Micah, Ezekiel, and Obadiah, stand within a long prophetic tradition of accepting the authority of earlier prophets. Among such company the Jonah narrative is an outlier.

Joel does not flinch nor apologize. If asked he might say, "There is nothing to see here." The spectacular subject matter and satirical tone of the Jonah narrative do not lessen its authority. Even the embedded speech of the king of Nineveh and enraged prophetic accusations against Yahweh's mercy provide *kerygmatic* resources for Joel.

In sum, by the days of Joel, whenever that was, the Jonah narrative enjoyed the same kind of authority attached to many other prophetic writings including several among the Twelve Prophets. The canonical consciousness of Joel even extends to using the embedded speech of the king of Nineveh as a resource to speak Yahweh's will to Zion.