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GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

Willem Th. van Peursen

Introduction

One of the challenges of biblical theology relates to the way in which God is present in the text of the Bible. One might expect that in God's word, God is omnipresent in the text, but in biblical narratives there is much speaking and acting by people without any indication of God's presence. Sometimes He enters the scene only halfway, as in the Tower of Babel story, where the people have been executing their building activities for quite some time before God 'comes down to see the city' (Gen 11:6).

Even if God's absence, or seeming absence, is acknowledged for narrative sections, one might be inclined to assume God's presence more prominently in prophetic texts. When prophets are conceived as God's spokesmen, their messages are messages from God. However, when we start to read concrete texts, the situation is more complex. God's presence may be hidden or implicit, and when He is not mentioned, we should be careful not to superimpose his presence in the text. The passages in which God is introduced as speaking are sometimes only a relatively small part of a prophetic book, and his actions are often only latent or even absent.

God's punishment?

Our current investigation deals with the Book of Joel, in which we read about disaster. This story deals with disaster, locusts, enemies, fasting, mourning, God's compassion, the pouring out of God's spirit, and judgment over the nations who had scattered God's people. Readers have often interpreted this book as a message of sin, punishment, and future salvation, all orchestrated by God. Thus according to John Calvin, the book tells the story of the people who were 'severely smitten by God', who were 'insensible under all their punishments', and who are exhorted to repentance because 'they had not lightly offended God, but by their perverseness provoked him to bring on them utter ruin'.¹ Likewise, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary unequivocally indicates the divine actor behind those locusts in Joel 1 and his divine intentions:

Armies of insects were coming upon the land to eat the fruits of it. It is expressed so as to apply also to the destruction of the country by a foreign enemy, and seems to refer to the devastations of the

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*. Vol. 2: *Joel, Amos Obadiah* (transl. John Owen), Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classical Ethereal Library, <https://ccl.org/ccl/calvin/calcom27/calcom27.i.html> (accessed 25 November 2022).

Chaldeans. God is Lord of hosts, has every creature at his command, and, when he pleases, can humble and mortify a proud, rebellious people, by the weakest and most contemptible creatures.²

Such observations about the Book of Joel are not restricted to classic commentaries from the Reformed tradition. Even in a much more recent commentary, Douglas Stuart describes ‘the basic points’ of Joel’s message as follows:

The covenant’s curses must come as a result of national disobedience; but after a period of chastisement, God will restore his people and bless them in ways they had not yet experienced.³

Joel 1-2 and Deuteronomy 32

Douglas Stuart, just like Calvin and Henry, considers the disasters described in Joel’s first chapters as God’s punishment over the disobedient people. His reference to ‘the covenant’s curses’ in the quotation at the end of the preceding section is in his view supported by the parallels between Joel 1:1-2:27 and Deuteronomy 32. Following a list of those parallels Stuart concludes that both Joel 1:1-2:27 and Deuteronomy 32 agree in reflecting the basic covenantal themes of curse and restoration in many of their varieties of expression, and shows also Joel’s dependence, like that of the other prophets, on covenantal sanctions established already in the Mosaic era.⁴

Douglas Stuart’s comparison between Joel 1:1-2:27 and Deuteronomy 32 provides a good starting point for a more careful analysis. Indeed, in both passages there are similar descriptions of harm, famine, and destructive fire, partly expressed with the same words. However, there are also many words used in Deuteronomy 32 that are not used in Joel. This applies to the words used in the Deuteronomy chapter to indicate the people’s wrongdoing, such as the verbs *זָחַח* pi. ‘to behave corruptly’ (v. 5), *נָטַשׁ* ‘to abandon’ (v. 15), *כָּעַס* pi. ‘to irritate’ (v. 21), or the adjectives that are used to characterize the people such as *עִקְוֹשׁ* ‘crooked’ (v. 5) and *נָבָל* ‘stupid’ (v. 6) as well as the typically Deuteronomistic⁵ noun *תּוֹעֵבָה* ‘abomination’ (v. 16) and other nouns such as *כָּעַס* ‘grief’ (v. 19), and *הִבָּל* ‘foolish idols’ (v. 21). The same applies to God’s response to the people’s evil deeds in terms of *אַף* ‘anger’ (v. 22), *סָפָה* ‘to sweep away’ (v. 23), *כִּלָּה* pi. ‘to bring to an end’ or *סָגַר* hi. ‘to deliver to’ (v. 30).

Admittedly, the absence of certain words from Deuteronomy 32 in Joel 1:1-2:27 is statistically a weak argument because of the relatively small size of the two sections compared, but our observations can be extended to almost all phrases and idioms that are considered as

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classical Ethereal Library, <https://ccel.org/ccel/h/henry/mhcc/cache/mhcc.pdf> p. 1372 (accessed 25 November 2022).

³ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jona* (WBC, 31), Grand Rapids, MI 1987, 228.

⁴ Stuart, *Hosea–Jona*, 228.

⁵ Cf. Samuel Rolles Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (9th rev. ed.), Edinburgh 1913, 102; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, Oxford 1972, 323.

typically Deuteronomic or Deuteronomistic.⁶ Moreover, we can go one step further, beyond the observation of words and expressions, and look at the grammatical forms and their subjects: in the description of the misfortune of God's people in Deuteronomy 32, there are many verbs of which God is the grammatical subject, whereas, as we shall see below, in Joel the situation is completely different and God is almost completely absent in Joel 1:1-2:17.

These observations should warn us not to superimpose a 'Deuteronomistic' pattern of judgment, repentance, and salvation⁷ on the Book of Joel, which unfortunately, is often done in Bible translations and commentaries.⁸ As Eep Talstra noted: 'Joel has words for shame, fasting, turning and compassion, but no words for sin, guilt or forgiving.'⁹ The division of Joel into three parts, corresponding to the Deuteronomistic pattern of judgment (1:1-2:16), repentance (2:12-17), and salvation (2:18-end), has led to the notorious mistranslation of יהוה יִקְנֵא 'and the LORD became zealous' in 2:18 as a future tense (thus in the *New International Version*: 'And the LORD will be jealous').¹⁰

We can conclude preliminarily that there is a repository of words and idioms describing harm, famine, and all kinds of misfortunes, which both Deuteronomy 32 and Joel 1-2 share, but that the evidence does not suggest that the two passages share the same theological reflection on the situation described. Unlike Deuteronomy 32, Joel 1-2 does not present the plagues and disasters that befall the people as the result of God's punishment, and we should not introduce this understanding from Deuteronomy into our interpretation of Joel. Moreover, when we search for parallels to Joel's description of harm, famine, and locusts, we should not only look at Deuteronomy. As we shall see below, in Joel this description is interwoven with idioms and motifs that are typical of traditions about the Day of the LORD found in other prophetic literature.¹¹

⁶ For lists of Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic expressions see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 320-365; Driver, *Introduction*, 99-102.

⁷ For this pattern in the Deuteronomistic History see H.N. Rösel, 'Does a Comprehensive "Leitmotiv" Exist in the Deuteronomistic History?', in: T. Römer (ed.), *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (BETL, 147), Leuven 2000, 195-211, esp. 196-203.

⁸ Wido van Peursen, "'This is What Was Spoken by the Prophet Joel': The Latter Rain in Joel's Prophecies and in Dutch Pentecostalism', in: M. Klaver *et al.* (eds), *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority* (Amsterdam Studies in Theology and Religion, 6), Amsterdam 2016, 271-285, esp. 282.

⁹ Eep Talstra, 'Text, Tradition, Theology: The Example of the Book of Joel', in: E. Van der Borgh and P. van Geest (eds), *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth* (Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek) (SRT, 22), Leiden 2011, 309-327, esp. 312, note 3.

¹⁰ Talstra, 'Text, Tradition, Theology', 311; Van Peursen, 'This is What Was Spoken', 278-280. The future tense is also found in the Dutch *Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (NBV), but corrected into a past tense in the revised version (NBV21).

¹¹ Cf. Talstra, 'Text, Tradition, Theology', 315-316: 'Different from what people might expect (Amos 5:18ff), YHWH's presence is dangerous, a threat to Jerusalem. In Joel the expression is not used to qualify what happens as a punishment, but as a disaster'.

God in Joel

Our discussions in the previous sections set the stage for our current investigation. We should not introduce God as an actor if He is not in the text. Nor should we consider Him as the speaker, as long as He is not speaking and only mentioned in third-person references. This brings us to a basic interpretative key, common to both the linguistic syntactic approach developed at the Vrije Universiteit since the 1970s at the Werkgroep Informatica Vrije Universiteit (WIVU), in 2013 rebaptized to the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer (ETCBC) and the *Amsterdamse School*, with representatives such as Dirk Monshouwer, after whom Joep Dubbink's endowed chair was named: the priority of the text. Or, as Dubbink aptly puts it in the title of his nice booklet on Karel Deurloo: *De tekst mag het zeggen*.¹² This means that if we want to investigate God in Joel, we should avoid superimposing theological notions on the text and start from the text itself. Where is God mentioned, what is said about Him, where does He appear as object or complement, and where is He an actor?

This investigation starts with some simple queries to see where יהוה or אלהים occurs in the Book of Joel. For this, we use the online SHEBANQ tool, which is based on the ETCBC database.¹³ A first inventory shows that tetragrammaton occurs thirty-three times in the Book of Joel.¹⁴ The word אלהים occurs eleven times,¹⁵ of which seven times in the combination יהוה אלהיכם. Hence, יהוה is more frequent than אלהים, which occurs only four times without a preceding יהוה.

Following a construct noun

When we have a closer look at the occurrences of יהוה and אלהים, especially to address the question as to what extent the YHWH/God is an actor in the Book of Joel, we see that almost half of the occurrences are part of a combination in which יהוה or אלהים follows a construct noun. This means that in these cases YHWH/God is not a participant, but rather related to another entity such as the day of the LORD or the house of the LORD.¹⁶ In fourteen cases יהוה follows a construct noun in combinations such as יהוה יום 'the day of the LORD' or בית יהוה 'the house of the LORD' (see Table 1).¹⁷

¹² Joep Dubbink, *De tekst mag het zeggen: Bijbellezen volgens Karel Deurloo*, Utrecht 2020.

¹³ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org>.

¹⁴ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5660>.

¹⁵ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5661>.

¹⁶ Admittedly, the relation between construct chain phrases and participants is sometimes more complex than described here. Thus in constructions with כל, as in Joel 1:2 כל יושבי הארץ 'all inhabitants of the land', the first *nomen regens* is כל, but we can still see יושבי הארץ as the participants. For the challenges related to the identification of participants in complex phrases see Christian Canu Højgaard, *Roles and Relations in Biblical Law: A Study of Participant Tracking, Semantic Roles, and Social Networks in Leviticus 17–26* (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit), Amsterdam 2021, 52-55.

¹⁷ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5653>.

| Phrase | Gloss | Reference | Frequency |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| יום יהוה | the LORD's day | 1:15; 2:1,11; 3:4; 4:14 | 5 |
| בית יהוה | the LORD's house | 1:9,14; 4:18 | 3 |
| מִשְׁרָתֵי יְהוָה | the LORD's servants | 1:9; 2:17 | 2 |
| שֵׁם יְהוָה | the LORD's name | 2:26; 3:5 | 2 |
| דְּבַר יְהוָה | the LORD's word | 1:1 | 1 |
| נְאֻם יְהוָה | the LORD's oracle | 2:12 | 1 |
| <i>Total number:</i> | | | 14 |

Table 1: יהוה as second part of a construct chain

Of the four cases that אלהים occurs independently, that is to say, not as an apposition to יהוה, it occurs three times as a *nomen rectum* following a construct noun (see Table 2).¹⁸ The fourth occurrence is in 2:17 אֵיזָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם ‘where is their God?’, which is part of a hypothetical question of the nations.

| Phrase | Gloss | Reference | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| מִשְׁרָתֵי אֱלֹהֵי | servants of my God | 1:13 | 1 |
| בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיכֶם | the house of your God | 1:13 | 1 |
| בֵּית אֱלֹהֵינוּ | the house of our God | 1:16 | 1 |
| <i>Total number:</i> | | | 3 |

Table 2: אלהים as second part of a construct chain

When we look at the phrases listed in Tables 1 and 2 to see where they occur outside the Book of Joel, we can observe that the most frequent phrase, יום יהוה, which occurs five times in Joel, occurs eleven times in other books (Isa 13:6,9; Ezek 13:5; Amos 5:18,20; Obad 1:15; Zeph 1:7,14; Mal 3:23).¹⁹ The exact phrase of Joel 1:15 בּוֹא יְהוָה וְקָשָׁד מִשְׁדֵּי יְבוֹא ‘For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes’ occurs also in Isaiah 13:6. We find בּוֹא יְהוָה ‘for the day of the LORD is near’ (Joel 1:15; cf. 2:1) also in Obadiah 1:15 and Zephaniah 1:7,14; and יום יהוה as the subject of the verb בּוֹא ‘to come’ (as in Joel 1:15 and 2:1) occurs further in Isaiah 13:9 and Malachi 3:23. The phrase יום יהוה הגדול והנורא ‘the great and terrible day of the LORD’ (Joel 3:4; cf. 2:11 where גדול ‘great’ and נורא ‘terrible’ occur in the predicative complement to the subject יום יהוה) is also attested in Malachi 3:23.

The second phrase in Table 1, בית יהוה, which occurs three times in Joel, is frequent throughout the Bible. This expression occurs 255 times, especially in the historical books (169 times in Kings and Chronicles).²⁰ The phrase מִשְׁרָתֵי יְהוָה does not occur elsewhere, but is implied in Isaiah 61:6 מִשְׁרָתֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (parallel to כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה ‘the priests of the LORD’; cf. הַכֹּהֲנִים מִשְׁרָתֵי יְהוָה ‘the priests, the LORD's servants’ in Joel 2:7) with אלהים as in מִשְׁרָתֵי אֱלֹהֵי in Joel 1:13. The phrase is further implied in cases with a first-person reference referring to the LORD in Jeremiah 33:21,

¹⁸ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5654>.

¹⁹ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5664>.

²⁰ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5665>.

22; and with third-person references referring to the LORD as in Psalm 103:21 בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה כָּל־עֲבָדָיו 'Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his servants', and in Psalm 104:4 (except for this last example, where 'his servants' refers to the winds, all these examples refer to priests or other people ministering in the temple).²¹

The two phrases that occur only once in Joel, דָּבַר יְהוָה and נֹאֵם יְהוָה occur most frequently in prophetic books, דָּבַר יְהוָה in Jeremiah and Ezekiel²² and נֹאֵם יְהוָה in Jeremiah.²³

Not preceded by a nomen regens

The observations in the preceding section are helpful for exploring 'God in Joel'. The parallels outside Joel lead us to various parts of the Bible, such as other prophetic books (cf. references to יוֹם יְהוָה and the phrases דָּבַר יְהוָה and נֹאֵם יְהוָה), and, to a lesser extent, to the historical books (cf., e.g., בַּיִת יְהוָה) and the Psalms (cf. מְשַׁרְתֵי יְהוָה). Any particular relationship with Deuteronomy has not been established.

We need to go one step further: to see where God acts as a participant in Joel, we should look at those cases where יְהוָה or אֱלֹהִים occurs without a preceding construct noun. In these cases, we find יְהוָה (rather than אֱלֹהִים; see above) functioning as subject, vocative, object, or complement.²⁴ To explore the LORD's role as an actor, the first two categories are the most interesting: cases in which יְהוָה is the subject are most likely the cases in which He is an actor²⁵ and cases in which יְהוָה occurs as a vocative show where He is participant in a conversation. There are ten cases in which יְהוָה serves as the explicit subject of the clause (2:11,18,19,21; 3:5bis; 4:8,16bis,21).²⁶ The number of verbs of which יְהוָה is the subject is higher if we include cases in which יְהוָה is the implied subject of a following clause, as in 4:16 וַיְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן יִשָּׁעַג 'And the LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem' (RSV) (for details see Table 3; these cases are listed under '2nd verb').

²¹ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5666>.

²² <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5667>.

²³ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5668>.

²⁴ Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that a certain word (in this case יְהוָה) functions as a subject, vocative etc., because the latter are phrase functions, rather than word functions. So, in reality we are referring to phrases that contain the lexeme יְהוָה (or, in the ETCBC data structure, which is based on a distinction between objects, features and values: an *object* with object type word, which has the *value* JHWH/ for the word *feature* 'lexeme'); cf. Bas Meeuse, *SHEBANQ tutorial 2021*, available online at <https://github.com/ETCBC/Tutorials/blob/master/SHEBANQ%20tutorial%202021.pdf> (accessed 4 January 2023). For the sake of brevity, we use the shorter expression in the main text.

²⁵ The grammatical subject and the logical subject do not coincide by definition. Thus, in passive constructions there may be a discrepancy between the grammatical and the logical subject. However, those cases in Joel in which יְהוָה functions as the grammatical subject all concern active verbs, and hence there is no discrepancy.

²⁶ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5655>.

| Reference | Verb | Gloss | 2 nd verb | Gloss |
|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| 2:11 | נתן (+ קולו) | raise one's voice | | |
| 2:18 | קנא (pi.) | be zealous | חמל | have compassion |
| 2:19 | ענה | answer | אמר | say |
| 2:21 | לעשות (+ הגדיל) | act greatly | | |
| 3:5 | אמר | say | | |
| 3:5 | קרא | call | | |
| 4:8 | דבר (pi.) | speak | | |
| 4:16 | שאג | roar | נתן (+ קולו) | raise one's voice |
| 4:21 | שכן | dwell | | |
| | Predicative Complement | | 2nd Predicative Complement | |
| 4:16 | מחסה | refuge | מָעוֹז | stronghold |

Table 3: יהוה as subject

We can observe that the first occurrence of יהוה as a subject of a verb comes not earlier than halfway through the book, in 2:11. This observation argues against the view that God is the main actor in the disasters that fall upon the people in chapter 1. Since the list of clauses in which יהוה occurs as a subject includes cases in which He is the subject of a *verbum dicendi*, this also implies that the LORD does not speak earlier than in 2:12. One could tentatively argue that the introduction of the book in 1:1 בְּרִאשֵׁית דְּבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל־יֹאֵל בֶּן־פֶּתוּאֵל ‘the word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel’ is ambiguous as to the implied speaker of the following verses, but the references to God in the third person and the absence of any speech formula that attributes these words to God show that it is ‘the prophet’ rather than God who is speaking in the first part of the book.

As Vocative

In a number of cases, יהוה is not the speaker but rather the addressee, appearing in a vocative. This occurs three times (see Table 4).²⁷

| Clause with vocative ²⁸ | Gloss | Reference |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----------|
|------------------------------------|-------|-----------|

²⁷ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5656>. The same query with אלהים instead of יהוה does not yield any results.

²⁸ Vocatives are not part of the clause in which they occur, but rather clause atoms by themselves that may interrupt other clauses; cf. Cody Kingham ‘ETCBC Data Creation’, <http://www.etcbc.nl/datacreation> (accessed 4 January 2022; last update 2018); for the notion of ‘atoms’ in the ETCBC data structure see E. Talstra & C.J. Sikkels, ‘Genese und Kategorienentwicklung der WIVU-Datenbank oder: ein Versuch, dem Computer Hebräisch beizubringen’, in: C. Hardmeier *et al.* (eds), *Ad Fontes! Quellen erfassen – lesen – deuten: Was ist Computerphilologie? Ansatzpunkte und Methodologie – Instrument und Praxis* (Applicatio, 15), Amsterdam 2000, 33-68 esp. 47-48.

| | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|
| אֶלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֶקְרָא | Unto you, O LORD, I cry! | 1:19 |
| חֲסֵהּ יְהוָה עַל־עַמָּךְ | Spare, O LORD, your people! | 2:17 |
| הַנְּחֵת יְהוָה גְּבוּרָיִךְ | Bring down, O LORD, your warriors! | 4:11 |

Table 4: יהוה as vocative

We see that in the last two verses of chapter 1 (vv. 19–20), the speaker, who earlier in the chapter spoke *about* God (אֱלֹהֵי ‘my God’ in 1:13), addresses the LORD. In 2:17 the LORD is not addressed directly, but the vocative is part of a quote in an exhortation (‘Let them say...’). In 4:11 the direct address of the LORD is part of a lively description of the gathering of fighting nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Those cases in which יהוה occurs as a vocative put some sections of the book in the form of a dialogue in which the speaker(s) address the LORD. This alternates with other speeches, in which not God but people or other entities are addressed. Compare, for example, all the vocatives occurring in Joel (Table 5; excluded are the three references given in Table 4).²⁹

| Vocative | Gloss | Reference |
|--|---|--------------------|
| הַזְקֵנִים | elders | 1:2 |
| כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ | all inhabitants of land | 1:2 |
| שָׁכוּרִים | drunkards | 1:5 |
| כָּל־שְׂתֵי יַיִן | all drinkers of wine | 1:5 |
| אֹפְרַיִם | farmers | 1:11 ³⁰ |
| כַּרְמִים | vine growers | 1:11 |
| הַכֹּהֲנִים | priests | 1:13 |
| מִשְׁרְתֵי מִזְבֵּחַ | servants of the altar | 1:13 |
| מִשְׁרְתֵי אֱלֹהֵי | servants of my God | 1:13 |
| אֲדָמָה | land | 2:21 |
| בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי | beasts of the field | 2:22 |
| בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן | people of Zion | 2:23 |
| צֹר וְצִידוֹן וְכָל גְּלִילוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים | Tyre and Sidon and all regions of Philistia | 4:4 |
| כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם מְסָבִיב | all nations from around | 4:11 |

Table 5: Vocatives in Joel

We see that all kinds of people and entities are addressed, most often by the implied prophet. As indicated above, all the vocatives in chapter 1 are not in utterances spoken by God, but rather by ‘the prophet’ (or perhaps more cautiously, the ‘I’ person who speaks about God and at the end of chapter 1 addresses God). In chapter 2, God becomes more involved in the direct speech sections, but the verses in which the vocatives occur in 2:21-23 are part of a section in which the domain in which God is speaking in the first person is interrupted by a domain that speaks

²⁹ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5663>.

³⁰ The two vocatives in 1:11 do not show up in the query results because in the ETCBC database the verb forms הִבִּישׁוּ and הִלִּילוּ are taken as perfects rather than imperatives.

about Him in the third person.³¹ In 4:7 כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר ‘because the LORD has spoken’, another divine speech ends, and after third-person references to the LORD in the following section till 4:16, we find a final divine speech section in 4:17. Accordingly, the only vocative that occurs in a direct speech section of which God is the speaker is ‘Tyre and Sidon and all regions of Philistia’ in 4:4.

Again, it is illuminating to see where these vocatives occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The most frequent one is יהוה, which occurs 347 times in the Bible, of which 206 times in the Psalms.³² As this vocative is used to address the LORD, it is strongly associated with the language of prayer. The elders (זְקֵנִים; Joel 1:2) are part of a vocative in Psalm 148:2³³, and the inhabitants of the land (יְשׁוּבֵי הָאָרֶץ; Joel 1:2) are addressed in Ezekiel 7:7 (cf. Isaiah 18:3; 21:14). The priests (כֹּהֲנִים; Joel 1:13) are also part of a vocative in Hosea 5:1 and Malachi 1:6; 2:1. We do not find an exact parallel to the vocative ‘servants of my God’ (מְשָׁרְתַי אֲלֵהֶי), but we can compare the vocative מְשָׁרְתָיו ‘his servants’ in Psalm 103:21 (cf. above). Nowhere else do we find the vocative בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי ‘beasts of the field’ (Joel 2:22), but we can compare the vocatives בְּהֵמָה ‘beast’ in Psalm 148:11 and חַיְתוֹ שָׂדֵי ‘animals of the field’ in Isaiah 56:9. The vocative בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן ‘sons of Zion’ is also unique, but the daughters of Zion (בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן) are addressed in Song of Songs 3:11. The vocative צֹר וְצִידוֹן וְכָל גְּלִילוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים ‘Tyre and Sidon and all regions of Philistia’ (Joel 4:4) as such does not occur elsewhere, but צֹר ‘Tyre’ is addressed in Ezekiel 26:3; 27:3,8; צִידוֹן ‘Sidon’ in Isaiah 23:4 (cf. 23:12) and Ezekiel 28:23 and פְּלִשְׁתִּים ‘Philistia’ in Isaiah 14:29, 31 and Psalms 60:10. Finally, we do not find an exact parallel to the vocative כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם מְסָבִיב ‘all nations from around’ (Joel 4:11), but we find the vocative כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם in Jeremiah 6:18 and גּוֹיִם (without article) in Deuteronomy 32:43; Isaiah 34:1; and Jeremiah 31:10.

These vocatives lead us to parallels between Joel and other prophetic books (e.g., when other nations are addressed) and, to a lesser extent, to the Psalms (e.g., addressing all the people or animals, besides the most frequent vocative, addressing the LORD).

Prepositional phrases

In addition to those cases where יהוה follows a construct noun such as בַּיַּת or יוֹם and the cases where it occurs at the beginning of a phrase (ten times subject, three times vocative), there are four cases where it is part of a prepositional phrase: 1:14; 2:13,14,23.³⁴ In three cases, it is part of a verbal complement, namely of the verbs זָעַק (+ אֶל) ‘to cry’ (1:14), שׁוּב (+ אֶל) ‘to return’ (2:13) and שָׂמַח (+ בְּ) ‘to rejoice’ (2:23). In the fourth case, in 2:14, the prepositional phrase לַיהוָה ‘to the LORD your God’ modifies the nouns מִנְחָה וְנֹסֶף ‘a cereal offering and a drink

³¹ Talstra, ‘Text, Tradition, Theology’, 322–324.

³² <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5674>.

³³ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5669>. We checked all vocatives listed in the Table 5 with a similarly query, just changing the lexeme (and occasionally adding other word features such as number, gender and person).

³⁴ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5659>.

offering'. Looking at parallels in other parts of the Bible, we see some parallels with historical books and with the Psalms. Thus $\text{זַעַק} + \text{אֵל} + \text{יְהוָה}$ occurs ten times in the books of Judges (3:9,15; 6:6,7; 10:10) and 1 Samuel (7:8,9; 12:8,10; 15:11), three times in the Psalms (107:13,19; 142:2) and further in Micah 3:4 and Nehemiah 9:4.³⁵ Apart from two cases where Moses returns to God in Egypt and at Mount Sinai (Exod 5:22; 32:31), the construction $\text{אֵל} + \text{יְהוָה} + \text{שׁוּב}$ occurs three times in Hosea (6:1; 7:10; 14:3), twice in 2 Chronicles (30:6; 26:13) and further in Deuteronomy 30:10; 2 Kings 23:25; Isaiah 55:7; Psalm 22:28. To $\text{יְהוָה} + \text{בָּ} + \text{שׁוּב}$, there are four parallels, all in the Psalms (32:11; 64:11; 97:12; 104:34, note also the same construction with אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 63:12).³⁶

Finally, יְהוָה occurs without preceding element as predicative complement in the clause $\text{אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם}$ (2:27; 4:17).³⁷ This exact phrase occurs thirty-three times elsewhere in the Bible, of which twenty-one times in Leviticus.³⁸

Conclusion

Our explorations could easily be expanded in various directions. Thus, it would be interesting to look where else in the Bible יְהוָה is the subject of the verbs found in Table 3, or where we find similar clusters of words related to disaster such as the locusts, lion's teeth, darkness, sackcloth, and mourning in the Bible.

Those further investigations are beyond the scope of the present contribution. However, our preliminary investigations about 'God in the Book of Joel' yield some interesting results. Methodologically, we showed how Deurloo's adagium in Dubbink's book title *De tekst mag het zeggen*, can be translated in a textual analysis that starts with observable phenomena in the text and avoids superimposing a theological framework on the text. In this study, our starting point consisted of the concrete references to the LORD/God in Joel.

Perhaps the most striking observation is God's absence in some parts of the book that are often considered as describing God's intervention in the people's lives, his punishment for the sins, and his chastisements to bring them back to Him. Especially if we realize that almost half of the mentions of the LORD/God occur in references to the day of the LORD or the house of the LORD, we see that God's role as a speaker or as an actor in Joel is more limited than what is usually suggested. The Book of Joel is not a long direct speech of God to the people of Judah. It contains direct speech with various speakers and addressees, including sections in which an 'I' (a prophet?) addresses various groups of inhabitants of the land, including drunkards, farmers, and priests. It gives a lively depiction of disasters that fell upon the people, but nowhere is this described as a punishment that is the consequence of 'sin'. Even in chapter 2, where God starts speaking, the domains in which He speaks in the first person alternate with sections in

³⁵ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5672>.

³⁶ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5671>.

³⁷ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5657>.

³⁸ <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=5670>. The other occurrences are in Exod 6:7; 16:12; Num 10:10; 15:41*bis*; Deut 29:5; Jdg 6:10; Ezek 20:5,7,19,20.

which God is spoken about in the third person. When God speaks at some points, the addressee seems to be the people (as the implied reference of the second person forms in 2:12), but He also speaks about Judah and Jerusalem in the third rather than the second person. (thus, e.g., 4:3).

When halfway through the book God's intervention is described, it is not a promise of future salvation but a story of something that happened in the past (cf. the 'narrative tense' in 2:18), and this story has to be reported to the next generations, as it is stated in the opening verses of the book: 'Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation' (1:3). This story deals with disaster, fasting, and mourning, but also with God, who was zealous with his people and had compassion for them.³⁹

At several points our search for parallels led us to the other prophetic books, the Psalms, or the historical books. Even in the case of parallels in Judges, Samuel, and Kings, an association with Deuteronomy or the Deuteronomistic History cannot be established. The parallels with so many other parts of the Bible confirm the view that Joel has strong intertextual ties with many other biblical books. In the words of Talstra: 'In the book of Joel one finds a relatively large amount of expressions that actually appear to be a reapplication of sayings known from other, mainly prophetic books'.⁴⁰

³⁹ Cf. Talstra, 'Text, Tradition, Theology', 318.

⁴⁰ Talstra, 'Text, Tradition, Theology', 315; cf. Van Peursen, 'This is What Was Spoken', 283.