The twelve, one or many books? A theological proposal.

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The Book of the Twelve – One Book or Many?

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The Twelve, one or many Books? A Theological Proposal

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I. Introduction

In exegetical studies the search for the unity in and between biblical texts is and has been very often underestimated. Whether unity exists between the writings that comprise the Book of the Twelve is a disputata and vexata quaestio. At the core of the present discussion about the Book of the Twelve certain important questions are addressed on this matter, some of which distinguish the predominant schools of thinking, namely: how should we read the material in the book? Does it contain twelve prophetical writings or is it one book? Can the Twelve be considered only a collection of disparate writings that have coincidentally found themselves together? Is it a compilation or an anthology with some common themes brought together but without unity? Or, can it be considered a unified whole, and if this is the case, what is the nature of its unity? Is it a literary unity and, if it is, can this be discerned through specific themes and linguistic markers, or only through a redactional unity in which different stages can be identified?

Today these and other questions are present in the exegetical debate about the Book of the Twelve, and different answers have been given by scholars who have dedicated their research to this issue; in fact, the discussion is ongoing and a consensus is far from being reached, as is evident by the present Conference and by other important meetings. The aim of this paper is to propose that the Book of the Twelve is neither an anthology nor a collection of texts coincidentally ordered in the form we have today, but one book, if considered from an editorial point of view, in which certain theological themes can be identified, and which are relevant for the interpretation of the whole.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first is methodological: the hermeneutical assumptions underlying the present investigation are stated, and also certain methodological considerations are proposed; in the second, the frame of the Book of the Twelve is taken into consideration; in the third, one of the most important, evident and frequently studied examples of intertextuality in the

1 The International Congress "Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense" in July 2016 has been dedicated to the Book of the Twelve.
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Book of the Twelve; the quotation of Ex 34:6–7, is explored, which offers certain theological considerations.

II. Hermeneutical Presuppositions and Methodological Considerations in the Context of the actual research on the Book of the Twelve

1. The main approaches to the Book of the Twelve

The intention here is not to reconstruct the status quaestionis of research that has developed around the Book of the Twelve, both because it has already been the subject of numerous publications, and because it has been widely discussed within the present volume. Therefore, this paper limits itself to propose considerations, which are based on the reading and analysis of the literature about the Twelve, with the aim to better contextualize the hermeneutical presuppositions that guide our research and that are the basis of the methodological considerations that will be discussed later.

Research on the Book of the Twelve is relatively new, although there were some pioneers who were interested, in the past, to this question. Starting from the House’s study, an extensive and articulated research has developed that, from a methodological point of view, can be grouped into three main approaches.

The first is redactional and is linked to the now considered authoritative studies of James Nogalski, who proposed a possible unified reading of the Book of the Twelve studying the editorial process that led to the formation of this text. The approach of this author is literary in the sense that he endeavored to identify the catchwords, which are the signs of the editorial process that had as its goal...
the stitching together of the various writings by giving them a unit that is in fact recognized by the ancient sources. In addition to these catchwords, Nogalski attracted the attention to other literary phenomena, for example, allusions, themes, quotes, and titles, which confirmed, in his view, the existence of an editorial process that led to the writing of the Book of the Twelve. Nogalski finally studied the intertextuality, which he considers very developed in the book, a phenomenon which, while confirming the editorial work mentioned above, however, develops at a synchronic not diachronical level. The important pioneering work of Nogalski was followed by many other authors who have produced significant publications relating to various aspects of the redaction of the Book of the Twelve.

The second main methodology is of synchronic nature, such as the “Reader-Oriented” approach proposed by Ehud Ben Zvi, which identifies a number of indicators of a literary nature that require an individual reading of the writings that are found in the Book of the Twelve. According to Ben Zvi, the introductions and conclusions of individual writings, and their titles, make the various writings specific and particular, and they are, in his opinion, clearer than the catchwords that ancient translations like the LXX, the Vulgate, and others, have not recognized or transmitted. Ben Zvi also considers very important the way the community, for which the text was originally written, read various writings and believes that the book itself indicates the ideal community of readers who have read and re-read a book; in the case of the Twelve, he believes that it is rooted in Persian Yehud and in Jerusalem.

In the same context, i.e., using a synchronic methodology, other authors understand the Twelve as an anthology, because of recurrent linguistic characteristics, themes and motifs: “Like so many threads... particularly noticeable at the many points of juncture, namely the end of one section and the beginning of another.” Independently of Nogalski, Terence Collins, for example, noted the importance of the catchwords, but without using that term, and without assuming the existence of the extensive editorial intervention that characterizes No-

6 To pursue the matter, I refer to the Nogalski’s article, “The Twelve Is Not a Hypothesis”, in this volume.
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11 Collins finds at least eight main themes in the Book of the Twelve: election-alliance, (in) fidelity, (in) fertility, return, mercy/justice, divine sovereignty, temple of Jerusalem/Mount Zion, nations as enemies/allied.


16 I will later return on this point. See Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy"; R. Scoralick, Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn. Die Gottespredikationen in Exodus 34,6f. und ihre intertextuellen Beziehungen zum Zwölfprophetenbuch (HBS 33; Freiburg: Herder, 2002).


To sum up, it can be said that beyond the undoubted diversity of opinions and assessments of recent exegesis that has emerged on the subject, it is clear that the prophetic collection is increasingly perceived by experts as not an "anthology" of writings different and disconnected from each other, without an organizational and theological logic behind it, but as a "collection" duly structured, which asks the reader to perceive it on these terms and retain meaningful the study of each component within this hermeneutic framework. Particularly promising in this field proved to be the authors who use some kind of redactional methodologies, which seek to identify any textual peculiarities, which can be taken as reliable indicators of the editorial process involved in the collection and that led to its current form: Moreover, substantial consensus among exegetes concerned with the redaction of the Minor Prophets receives the idea that elements literary, thematic, and structural order are shown in the collection, witnesses of a past of composition, where the dominant intention was to give it unity and to offer readers important suggestions for its correct interpretation. Both those who adopt a synchronic and diachronic approach, literary or editorial methodology, oriented to the reader or to the history of the text, all authors are united by recognizing the presence of allusions, motifs, themes and other elements of intertextual nature, on the interpretation of which, however, differences emerge. The extensive study realized to date allows, secondly, to those who approach the theme of the Book of the Twelve to elaborate a proposal that builds on the work of eminent colleagues and this undoubtedly promotes further research and clarification especially at the methodological level. In this regard, I think that despite the attempt to organize research around (at least) three basic guidelines, we have noticed the presence of some methodological overlaps. In addition, mainly even if not exclusively thematic approaches are, in the author's view, weaker, as insufficiently supported by rigorous exegetical analysis, while the only redactional ones are excessively hypothetical. Some methodological positions appear to be incompatible, for example, those of Nogalski and Ben Zvi, because, in our view, the same elements are interpreted and evaluated differently.

While Nogalski, applying a diachronic methodology, looks for textual indicators of editorial activity, Ben Zvi, using a synchronic perspective, finds literary indicators that support an individual and particular reading to the twelve prophetic writings. To add another instance, even the authors who attach specific importance to the readers of the book, interpret this category differently: Ben Zvi refers to the community of readers to whom the book was originally intended, while Seitz broadens the concept of readers to be all-encompassing to include every community of reader that has ever approaches the Book.
2. Hermeneutical Presuppositions and Methodological Considerations

After having reconstructed, fairly briefly and in a rather schematic way, the horizon's research, I specify now the hermeneutical and methodological assumptions which guide this work:

1. The Book of the Twelve is a collection of different texts that have come together over time, and can be attributed to various authors or editors. Today, however, I am not going to enter into this discussion, the nature of which is and remains highly hypothetical and conjectural, as is illustrated by a comparison between the various hypotheses that have been developed by scholars who have reconstructed the genetic process from which we arrive at the text we have before us today.

2. I read the final text of the Book of the Twelve canonically, adopting a synchronic method. Moreover, I use the adjective "canonical" in a different sense from that used, for example, by Seitz. Here I refer instead to the canonical reading concept developed by Brevard S. Childs, who asked that the final form of the text of the biblical books and the message related to them are only considered. The final form, which the historical-critical method considered the result of chance, appears instead to a canonical reading to be the product of forces that have consciously elaborated it, often with an evident theological intention. For Childs, it is normative the final text of Scripture, which, for the Old Testament, is represented by the contents of the Hebrew Bible. I also believe that the final text and the canon are linked to specific communities of faith, therefore I do not adhere to Childs's thesis according to which the "canonical context" was formed by the totality of the two Testaments. In considering the final text, there are reasons to take into account the unity of the Book, in which the individual parts retain their autonomy, which consents, of course, to the study of the individual prophets therein too;

3. As occurs, however, also in the case of other biblical books, such as the Psalms or the Book of Proverbs, which appear fragmentary at first reading, composed of heterogeneous pieces and whose overall organization has created, therefore, a problem for scholars, so the Twelve can be considered, at the level of the final text, a unified whole;

19 Or by P.R. House who defines "canonical": "Analysis that is God-centered, intertextually oriented, authority-conscious, historically sensitive, and devoted to the wholeness of the Old Testament message," "The Character of God in the Book of the Twelve", in Reading and Hearing, 125–45, 127.
20 "The canonical approach is concerned to understand the nature of the theological shape of the text," ibid., 74.
21 From this point of view, I also disagree from the concept of canonical reading proposed by Seitz.
22 I studied this problem with special attention to the Book of Psalms: D. Scala, "Una cosa ha detto Dio, due ne ho udite": Fenomeni di composizione appaiata nel Salterio Masoretico (Città del Vaticano: Urbaniana University Press, 2002).
4. I do not intend to present comprehensively all the arguments that could be advanced in support of the formulated hypothesis, both because it would be a mission impossible, and because this goal would widely go beyond the limits of space assigned to this contribution. Here I intend to verify the plausibility of the hypothesis set out above, focusing only on two points: the frame of the Book of the Twelve and the quotation of Ex 34:6–7;

5. Narrowing the field even further, I add that from a methodological point of view, particular importance is here attributed to the position in which a text appears and to the phenomenon of repetition. In doing so, I refer to the fundamental premises of rhetorical analysis\(^{23}\) that are as follows: first, biblical texts are intentionally composed; second, there is a specific biblical rhetoric, different from the greek – roman; third, consequently, we must give credit to the biblical text as it is, because it has its own internal logic. As Roland Meynet has said: “The biblical texts are composed well, if they are analyzed according to the laws of biblical rhetoric, and the study of their composition enables one to understand them better, as far as the analysis brings to light their inner logic”.\(^{24}\)

In the rhetorical analysis’s method, therefore, the concepts of repetition and position are considered significant; for the composition what is more relevant is the strategic location of the elements in a set than the material repetition of words.

III. The Frame of the Book of the Twelve

Other papers during this Conference have already been dedicated to both Hosea and to Malachi,\(^{25}\) so now I would like to touch on a few considerations of a theological nature, enhancing the position of the two writings which open and close the Book of the Twelve.\(^{26}\) Both Hos 1–3 and Malachi speak of God’s love for Israel using metaphors drawn from the ambit of family relations. It is useful

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\(^{23}\) G. Benzi used this method in writing his paper in this book ("Rhetorical Analysis, Interpretation, and Location of Hosea 1–3 in its Relation to the Twelve Prophets Scroll").


\(^{26}\) Some authors, for example, I. Himbaza in this book ("Les themes theologiques de Malachie et le concept du livre des XII Prophetes"), do not recognize the relationship between Hos 1–3 and Malachi, but, on this point, I disagree with him. I mention also M. Leuchter, "Another Look
to remember that the word “love” occurs in approximately thirty times in the Twelve, but only in Hos 3:1; 9:15; 11:1, 4; 14:5 and Mal 1:2 (three times) the term is used to speak of God’s love for his people.

I. The Beginning of the Book: Hosea

Hosea addresses the issue of love by using the image of Israel which he describes as an unfaithful wife of the Prophet/YHWH. The fact that it is placed at the beginning of the book the order: “Go, take for yourself a wife prostitute,” is very important for us to understand what happens in respect of the children that follow (Hos 1:3-9). It is important, in fact, to put forward an act of love, a stable gesture of loyalty, in order to tell the children something that seems to express “not love”. It is possible to accept this word of not love about Israel only if it is supported by an act of love that will be unfalling. Hos 2 describes the rib God brings against Israel, represented as the adulterous wife, who repeatedly refers to her “lovers” (2:7.9.12.14.15). Hos 3, then, tells the same story though considered from the point of view of the prophet, using, therefore, the first person singular.

In chapters 2–3, the word “love” is used both to indicate the love that a husband has for his unfaithful wife as that which she experienced towards her lovers (3:1). As is well known, Hosea seems to be the first prophet to use the spousal metaphor to describe the alliance between God and his people. In the text, many repetitions of the word “love” are used to stigmatize the sin of the people who have broken their covenant with God.

Hosea’s message is to try to hold together that God is faithful to Israel, but that loyalty goes through an outward manifestation of non-love. The difficulty is to articulate the original promise of God with the history of a people’s sin, showing what comes about from this relationship.

at the Hosea/Malachi framework in the Twelve,” VT 64 (2014): 1–17, who develops on this topic an argumentation different from mine.

27 For the analysis of the text of Hos 1–3, I refer to the Benz’s paper in this book.

28 In this context, I do not deep the different meanings that the term can take: a prostitute by profession, a woman began sexually to the shrine, a woman “light”, etc.

29 I cannot here enter into the literary genre of the bilateral dispute; the rib, so I will only mention that the charge brought by the injured party, in this case, the husband /God, stems from the desire to be reconciled with each other, not by a desire for revenge or vengeance. Because God has already forgiven Israel, he accuses her, trying to raise awareness to the people of sin committed so that the relationship between the Lord and his people can be re-established in the truth.

For the bibliography about this theme, see, for example; P. Bovati, “Cost parla il Signore”. Studi sul profetismo biblico (Bologna: EDB, 2008); id., I rib profetici. Corso di teologia biblica (Notes for students; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2012).

30 In Hos 3 the verb “to love” appears four times, three of which related to the husband/God and once to his wife/unfaithful Israel.
Malachi talks about the relationship between YHWH and Israel using domestic relations in 1:2–3:6 and 2:10, which refers to the crisis in the relationship between father and son, as does Hos 11. Malachi also mentions marriages with foreigners and divorce in Israel (2:11, 14–16). Within this general context, I would like to briefly explore two texts: Mal 1:2–3 and 3:6. Mal 1:2–3 says:

"I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated; and made his mountains a desolation: and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness."

This text seems to be an ideal continuation of Hos 3. The divine statement raises the question of the interlocutors: "How have you loved us?" The expectation of a glorious renewal of the nation's life after returning from exile was frustrated. Judah is in fact still under Persian rule (1:8). This questioning of the love of God presupposes a situation where it has become extremely difficult for the people to believe in the capacity of the Lord to intervene in their favor.

Mal 3:6 contains a key assertion interpreting concisely the relationship between YHWH and his people in a period from the eighth to the fifth century: "Yes/certainly I YHWH, and do not change / But you, sons of Jacob, are not at the end."

The verse can be translated in several ways. In the first place, the translation of the initial "ב" is discussed, which can have an emphatic value, which I prefer, but which could also introduce a causal proposition, thus connecting the verse 6 to the previous passage. Second, the translation of the verb בָּשׁוּר is controversial. Two possible translations of the word in this context have been suggested, either "cease," "get to the end;" or "be destroyed," "be consumed." In connection with the first translation, the meaning of the phrase can be twofold: first, the children of Jacob have not ceased to be the sons of Jacob, which suggest that they continued to sin; second, Jacob's sons have not yet reached the end of their sinful ways. In both cases, the reference point of the speech is that neither God nor the descendants of Jacob have changed. The antithetical parallelism, highlighted by personal pronouns I – you in emphatic positions, accentuates the goodness of God. The other translation, which seems preferable, emphasizes the fact that no change in God is the reason for the current existence of Israel. Because there was no change in the Lord's love for the people (1:2–5), the descendants of Jacob have not yet been destroyed. The persistence of Israel is due to the love of God who does not change, even though the people instead continue to sin as written in verse 5. The key phrase in verse 7 is: "Return to me, and I will return to you and / but you say, 'How (why) shall we return?" Perhaps it is not really necessary to choose between the two possible translations of verse 6, because in the light of verse 7 it seems clear that the sons of Jacob, that is, the Jewish community contemporary to Malachi, still imitate the duplicity of its founding father and then continue to sin, but it is also true that the descendants of Jacob have not been
destroyed as perhaps they should have because they are not better than Esau, precisely because the Lord has not changed.

Given the theological synthesis of verse 6, the question in verse 7 in which the community asks: "But compared to what, we should go back, that is, to repent?" is somewhat surprising. The protest of innocence of the post-exilic community does nothing but emphasize his guilty obstinacy when committing evil.

3: What is the Effect of the Frame on the Book of the Twelve?

The effect of the frame on the Book of the Twelve is rather obvious: the frame, developing the theme of God's love, gives the Book a specific aspect. Hosea has a theoretical approach, and as many authors acknowledge, can be considered a kind of theological synthesis premised to the whole book, while the exhortations and accusations of Malachi are very realistic and close to the situation of the Jews of the time. Both Hosea and Malachi, however, insist that the love and compassion of God for his people has not changed, despite the fact that history intervened between Hosea and Malachi has shown that both Israel and Judah have experienced the judgment of God. Then God who chooses Israel and loves her, is also the God of justice, and, in fact, Mal 3:5-7 shows that the Jews have not yet abandoned their evil ways. Much has obviously changed between 8th and 5th century: people have lost their independence; there is no longer a king; many Jews are living outside the country and only a small remnant lives in Jerusalem and its surroundings, and this could explain the question of Mal 3:2: "How have you loved us?". Mal 3:6, while insisting on the unchangeable nature of God, also places the emphasis on the actual sins of the people pointing out; however, the possibility of distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked, and to treat them accordingly (Mal 3:19-20). Both Hosea and Malachi affirm the need to be loyal and to observe the Torah and to do what is right. Those who do not act according to the Torah cannot be considered to belong to the people of God. The theme takes in Malachi applications clearly post-exilic; but it appears that the problem enunciated by Hosea is still relevant. The frame thus presents both positive and negative aspects, because it speaks of the uninterrupted love of Yhwh in the face of the continuous, and repeated disobedience of Israel. If this is true, Mal 3:6 ("I am the Lord, I do not change") is the central statement. Yhwh, who has chosen and loved Israel, is also the God of justice, and Malachi points out that the Jews have not changed their behavior (3:5-7). But the other side of the divine nature explains the survival of Israel (3:6b). The frame suggests that we should read the Book of the Twelve in the world of Malachi, and not in that of Hosea, to whom, however, Malachi responds. To the overall picture presented by Hosea, the most precise description of the community of Malachi, facing through perhaps somewhat more limited, but concrete problems, replies. Hosea and Malachi create an envelope that interprets the period from the eighth to the
fifth century, showing how the alliance proposed by YHWH has been repeatedly rejected by the people.

The Twelve repeatedly ponders whether God has changed or not by comparing the historical situation in which they lived with the profession of faith expressed in the emblematic text of Ex 34:6–7. This formula is repeated in many biblical texts, or in the form of a quote (Num 14:18; Psa 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17), or in that of a simple allusion (Jer 30:11; 32:18–19; 46:28; Dan 9:4). In the Book of the Twelve, then, the quotation appears twice in its entirety, in Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2, and twice more in partial form31: Mi 7:18–20; Na 1:2–3a. Here I mention briefly the broader context within which the quote is inserted.32 It belongs to the set consisting of Ex 32–34 in which the “original” sin of Israel is described; the people make a golden calf, even while Moses is on Mount Sinai before God who is dictating to him the words of the law. This paradigmatic narrative, moreover, is inserted between Ex 25–31, in which in an analytical way the designing of the sanctuary is described, and Ex 35–40, where it is said that the shrine was actually built by following the indications given previously. At the heart of the most sacred and sacral part of the Book of Exodus, you might say, lurks the sin of the people who defeat the purpose of the experience of liberation and demonstrates in practice a refusal of God’s face which was revealed during that experience: Inserted in this context, the formula for the name of God acquires a special meaning especially when one reflects on the fact that in it there are two elements, or attributes, namely God’s mercy and justice, which still have a different weight. In fact, in the formula ample space is given to the positive aspect of God’s name, while the inevitable punishment of evil is actually moderately emphasized and is limited: “The sins of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children unto the third and fourth generation.”

On the contrary, benevolence of the Lord extends to a thousand generations, a hyperbolic expression that alludes to an infinite number. In Joel 2:12 there is a call to react to the present situation with fasting, weeping and wailing: “And now—says the Lord—back to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and wailing,” and the reason given, in verse 13, comes from Ex 34:6. Comparing the two texts, however, the attributes “pretty” (נָתַן) and “merciful” (בְּנֵחַ) appear in reverse order and, unlike Ex 34:6, Joel 2:13 does not end with a reference to the sins of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children unto the third and fourth generation.

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31 Some scholars add also Mal 1:9a and Hos 1:6, 9.
"truth"; but with the statement that God repents of evil. In Jonah 4:23 there is a quote of Ex 34:6 that has the same variations observed in Joel 2:13.44 Jonah, in fact, first mentions the grace and mercy of God and then ends with the statement that God repents of evil. The importance of this connection is clear when it is noticed that nowhere in the Old Testament are the four divine attributes "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love (רומאיה וּכְנֶשֶׁת, אֲמִיתָה, חָסְדָּא, רָצוֹן, וּמְכָנָה, מְכָנָה, מְכָנָה, מְכָנָה) with the addition of the phrase "who repents of evil" (נַעֲשֶׁת וּרְאָשָׁה, נוֹבֵעָה), which is a literal quotation of Ex 32:12,14; appear together.45

Joel 2:14 and Jonah 4:2, moreover, are further united in their question that resonates in Joel 2:14 ("Who knows that [God] does not change and mend his ways?") and Jonah 3:9 ("Who knows God does not change; mend his ways?")

The link between these two writings is strongly emphasized, as was shown in the above analysis, and to which I now add an additional element of reflection. The quote of Ex 34:6 in Joel regards the sin of Israel that the prophet hopes will be forgiven by God. Instead in Jonah the prophet complains to the Lord because He has forgiven the sin of Nineveh. The parallel is obvious, and its function is to indicate, in a complementary way, that both Israel and the hated city of Nineveh are united by the same sinful behavior, and that God shows himself to be gracious in both cases, even if he should rather act with justice, punishing the evil committed.

The points of contact between Joel and Jonah increase when the broader context consisting of Joel 2:1-17 and Jonah 3:1-4:11 is taken into consideration: first, both prophets receive a threatening word from YHWH: Joel must announce the punishment for Judah (2:1-11), while Jonah proclaims the imminent destruction of Nineveh (3:1-2); second, both prophets speak a message of judgment (Joel 2:1-11; Jonah 3:4); third, both Judah and Nineveh are invited to repent not only in the traditional forms of fasting and sack (Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:8), but also by changing their moral attitude: Judah must change his heart, and the people of Nineveh have to convert from their violent conduct (Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:8); lastly, and in keeping with the whole context of both texts, there are references to God's grace and mercy.

33 We remind the C. Lichtert's text on this topic in this book ("Entre rappels et renversements: les particularités littéraires et théologiques du récit de Jonas").


35 We also add that the phrase in Jonah 3:9, addressed to God, "turn from his fierce anger" (nuṣab miḥārōn 'appid), recalls the prayer that Moses directed to God in Ex 32:12: "Turn from your anger! (nuṣab miḥārōn 'appid)."

36 This is recognized by many authors, for example, by R. L. Schultz who says: "The linkage between Joel and Jonah is signalled through the parallel expanded Exodus formula and the parallel 'Who knows ... ?' Question."

37 In both texts the Hebrew reads miṣ 'ārāl: yäsib 'ārāhām. The only difference is that in Jonah 3:9 is calling the name of God that is understood in Joel 2:13, which also uses the verb imperfect Niphal while Jonah 3:9 is a participle of the same conjugation.

in both cases, finally, the life of the community of the covenant is linked to that of the nations through mercy (Joel 2:17; Jonah 4:10-11).

The other quotations in the Book of the Twelve take up again certain elements of the formula of Ex 34:6. For example, in Mi 7:18-20 the “mercy” of God is mentioned, using both הֵנָא, that the root זָרָה, and God is called הָו (Mi 7:18; Ex 34:6). The text is important both for its location at the center of the Book of the Twelve, and because it appears at the end of the writing of Micah. Finally, Nah 1:2-3a reminds us that God is slow to anger (רָעָה רְעָה), but insists on the punishment. I would like at this point to note that the writings which contain the quote of Ex 34:6, both in the partial or full form, are strategically located within the Book of the Twelve. Joel, in fact, in the TM, appears at the beginning, right after Hosea, while Malachi is the last writing of the collection (both in the TM and in the LXX). At the center, according to the arrangement of the TM, that is, in Jonah – Micah and Nahum (which are the fifth, sixth, seventh), reappears the quotation of Ex 34:6. This can hardly be accidental, and it could also resolve certain problems arising from the position that occupies Joel at the beginning of the collection, as well as provide a reason for the inclusion of Jonah which is also problematic.

While the center of the Book of the Twelve refers to the terrible wars of the 8th–6th centuries, a section of it deals with the question of the relationship between God and his people: What happened to the election? Is it still valid considering present circumstances? Hos 1–3 and Malachi address these issues by finding answers based on the Torah, as Joel and Jonah do too. Hosea and Malachi say that God’s love is unchanged, and this explains the survival of the people. Both prophets, however, also stress the need to observe the Torah, do justice, and repent of sins (Joel – Jonah). The articulation between historical discernment and article of faith challenges theodicy, one of the theological issues most frequently noted by scholars. It is valid to ask what is the originality of the Book of the Twelve, and amongst the many answers that could be given, I will mention just one: the writings that make up the book are presented as a history of prophecy that unfolds over centuries, at least between the 8th and 5th. Within a historical context that changes dramatically, and in which nothing is as it was before, for example, the twelve tribes, an independent state nor a king are existing any longer, causing a radical question about the meaning of the election, the alliance and the meaningfulness of God’s approval, the frame of the Book declares that God has not changed, and therefore the profession of faith in Ex 34:6–7 remains still valid. The

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30 It is used in both texts the verb הָו, which appears only here in the Twelve.
God of mercy is also the God of justice, who punishes sin, and therefore requires the active practice of justice, just as is written in the Tôrâh. Those who do not act this way, cannot be part of God's people, bringing into discussion the principle of belonging to the community of the alliance on purely ethnic grounds.