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JONAH, NAHUM, AND THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE: A RESPONSE TO JAKOB WÖHRLE

NAHUM, AND THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE: A RESPONSE TO JAKOB WÖHRLE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jakob Wöhrle presents an impressive, but not entirely convincing contribution to the ongoing discussion about the formation of the book of the Twelve. As he himself admits, there are other ways of explaining the repeated correspondences with the words of Exod 34:6–7 than by attributing them to a 'grace-layer.' He leaves open the possibility that these passages were added to the individual books step by step, although in his opinion it is more likely that we are dealing with a single redaction.[1] I question, however, the very idea that we dealing here with additions. Wöhrle's division of the book of Jonah in two redactions is not without problems. There are also good reasons to read the first part of the book of Nahum as a unit and to consider that both Jonah and Nahum were composed in reaction to previous prophecies. This, I believe, is a better approach the process leading to the formation of the book of the Twelve.

In his recent survey of research[2] Aaron Schart is very positive about the progress made in the redaction critical study of the book of the Twelve. He notes a growing consensus about the reconstruction of a number of redactional phases: a 'D-Corpus' consisting of Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah; a hymnic layer with Nahum and Habakkuk; a layer with Joel and Zech. 14; and a final layer adding Jonah and Malachi to complete the book of the Twelve. The theory of Wöhrle is in line with this view. It cannot be denied, however, that it still meets with much opposition.[3] Many scholars nowadays do agree that the books of the Twelve Prophets were not

[1] Wöhrle, see previous article in this collection, p. 10.

[2] A. Schart, "Das Zwölfprophetenbuch als redaktionelle Großeinheit," *ThLZ* 133 (2008), 227–246.

[3] Cf. L. Perlitt, *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja* (ATD 25/1), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2004, XIV–XVI.

simply placed after each other by later scribes. The individual books appear to react to one another and the order in which they are placed seems to convey a certain message.[4] The identification of redactional layers becomes very 'pentateuchal.' It gets more and more complicated[5] and less and less transparent.

2. THE UNITY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

Although Wöhrle can base his division of the book of Jonah into different layers on a thorough redaction critical analysis, this will probably not change the tendency among modern scholars to read this book as a unity.[6] In his reconstruction Wöhrle breaks the coherence of the book which is indicated by the remarkable use of keywords:

רעה in 1: 2, 7, 8; 3: 8, 10 (2x): 4: 1, 2, 6
ירד in 1: 3, 5; 2:6
טול in 1: 4, 5, 12, 15
ירא in 1: 5, 10, 16
אבד in 1: 6, 14; 3:9; 4:10
יהוה אנה in 1:14; 4:2
מנה יהוה\אלהים in 2:1; 4:6, 7, 8
מות in 4:3, 8, 9

and literary building up of the story as a diptych:

YHWH calls Jonah twice (1:1–2; 3:1–2)

Jonah stands up and goes (1:3; 3:3)

Jonah makes a short statement to the shipmen / the Ninivites (1:9; 3:4)

His hearers react as believers, putting their trust in YHWH/God (1:14; 3:5–9)

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[4] See on this, next to the specific studies mentioned by Wöhrle, for instance, also A. Meinhold, *Maleachi* (BK XIV/8), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 2006, 7 (about the adding of Jonah), and K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007, 252–256 (about the adding of Malachi). I have outlined by own views in this matter in an article (in Dutch) on the Minor Prophets read as one book, in: J. Fokkelman, W. Weren (eds), *De Bijbel literair*, Zoetermeer: Meinema 2003, 295–309.

[5] In fact, history here repeats itself, because one can notice the same phenomenon in an earlier phase of the research of the book of the Twelve Prophets, when R. E. Wolfe worked out the original, relatively simple idea of K. Budde (see K. Budde, "Eine folgenschwere Redaktion des Zwölfprophetenbuchs," *ZAW* 39 [1921], 218–229), in his dissertation of 1933 (summarized in his article "The Editing of the Book of the Twelve," *ZAW* 53 [1935], 90–129), in which he distinguishes no less than thirteen redactions.

[6] Cf. the survey of recent research in K. Spronk, "Het boek Jona: Een overzicht van het recente onderzoek," in K. Spronk (ed.), *Jona* (Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese van de Bijbel en zijn Tradities 22), Maastricht: Shaker 2005, 1–22; esp. 6–11.

YHWH calms the sea / God does not destroy the city (1:15; 3:10)

Jonah prays to YHWH (2:2; 4:2)

Jonah quotes the Psalms / Jonah quotes Exodus 34:6 (2:2–7; 4:2)

Jonah thanks YHWH for giving him life out of the grave / Jonah prefers death over life (2:8; 4:8)

YHWH is called a savior / YHWH explains why He saved Nineveh (2:10; 4:11).

The turning point in the story is when YHWH speaks to the fish, which then spits out Jonah (2:11).[7] What Wöhrle sees as irregularities and as indication for a later redaction appear to have a function within the story as a whole. The phrase in 3:10 about YHWH 'relenting from doing evil' is part of the line of thought connected to the word רעה throughout the whole story, ranging from the evil deeds of the people of Nineveh to the anger of Jonah. The quotation from Exodus 34 has a counterpart in the quotations from the Psalms, both within the context of Jonah's praying.

A weak point in Wöhrle's theory about the 'grace-layer' is that he does (can?) not give an explanation for the full quotation of Exodus 34:6 in Jonah 4:2, which seems to contradict his view that the grace-formula was taken up step by step in Jonah 3:10; Micah 7:18–20; Nahum 1:2–3; and Malachi 1:9. Another problem is that the grace formula is found no less than seven times completely and more than twenty times partly in the Old Testament as a whole and appears to be a very old and important tradition related to the praxis of prayer in the cult of Israel.[8] One could easily imagine that the different authors of the books mentioned by Wöhrle referred to this tradition independently from each other.

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[7] This scene has inspired artistic renderings of the prophet, the fish, the relation with Jesus' resurrection, and of particular contextualisations of the story. Cf. the presentation of a number of drawings and paintings in http://www.scribd.com/doc/8952724/How-Jonah-Left-the-Fish. There one sees examples of a sluggish and a fearsome fish, a praying and a terrified prophet, the way Jonah and Jesus are related in the Biblia Pauperum, and a number of modern representations, with among others the intriguing painting 'Jonah in Haifa Port' by Eugene Abeshaus (1979), who pictured Jonah as a Jewish immigrant, having survived the Shoah and now wondering whether he can and shall make the step into a new life. See also K. Spronk, "Hoe Jona uit de vis kwam: Jona 2:11 in de beeldende kunst", in: Spronk, Jona, 91–100, and Y. Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlife. The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, with a discussion of the painting by Abeshaus on pp. 133–4.

[8] Cf. H. Spieckermann, "'Bermherzig und gnädig ist der Herr …'," *ZAW* 102 (1990), 1–18.

THE UNITY OF NAHUM 1:1–7

As has been demonstrated at length in a number of publications[9] the first part of the book of Nahum can be read as a well structured unity, closely knit together by some remarkable literary features:

משא נינוה ספר חזון נחום האלקשי
אל קנוא ונקם יהוה נקם יהוה ובעל חמה
נקם יהוה לצריו ונוטר הוא לאיביו
יהוה ארך אפים וגדול־כח ונקה לא ינקה
יהוה בסופה ובשערה דרכו וענן אבק רגליו

The first letters of the second until the fourth line (that is 1:2–3a, including the reference to the confession about the character of YHWH in Exodus 34), form together with the last letters of the first until the fourth line the well know phrase אני יהוה. In this way the prophet, who hides himself behind the name Nahum[10], puts extra emphasis on YHWH as the author of the words he transmits.

Also the following lines are structured around the name YHWH. In verse 3a the name of YHWH is followed by two words beginning with א namely ארך אפים. In verse 3b: the name of YHWH is followed by two expressions beginning with ב namely בסופה ובשערה. This is the beginning of a partial alphabetic acrostic running until the letter ט in verse 7, where it is combined again with the name of YHWH. The confession 'YHWH is good' in verse 7a constitutes a perfect ending.

In verses 2–3 the divine name occurs six times (including the reference in the acrostic). There is a kind of countdown in the three verse-lines of verse 2–3a: the name of the Lord first appears at the end of the colon, then at the middle and in verse 3 it stands (twice) at the beginning of the verse-line. After six verse-lines with no mention, the seventh occurrence of the divine name appears at verse 7: טוב יהוה, 'good is YHWH'. The coherence of this part of the text is underlined by the structure: from verse 2a until verse 6 the verse-lines are built up in the same way, with the conjunction ו connecting the two parts of the verse-line. The seventh mention of YHWH in verse 7 closes this pattern. [11]

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[9] Cf. most recently K. Spronk, "The Line-Acrostic in Nahum 1: New Evidence from Ancient Greek Manuscripts and from the Literary Analysis of the Hebrew Text'," in: Raymond de Hoop, Marjo C. A. Korpel, Stanley E. Porter (eds), *The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis* (Pericope 7), Leiden: Brill 2009, 228–240.

[10] His name points to his message of 'comfort' to Israel and to judgment upon Nineveh, for whom there shall be no comforter (3:7). Also the place name Elkosh (אלקש) does not refer to an existing town. It should be read as a qualification of YHWH as a 'severe god' (אל קשה).

[11] For a different end of the alphabetic Psalm see P. Guillaume, "Nahum 1: Psalm, Senet and Divination," in E. Ben Zvi, D. Edelman and F. Polak (eds), *Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics and Language in Achaemenid Yehud*

All this strongly pleads against the view that Nahum 1:2–3 or parts of it should be ascribed to a later redactor wishing to add new insights concerning the character of YHWH. We have to look for another explanation for the presence of two references to the famous confession of Exodus 34:6–7 close together, one at the end of the book of Micah and one at the beginning of the book of Nahum.

NAHUM AS A SEQUEL TO MICAH

Instead of assuming a single redaction, the correspondences between Micah and Nahum can be understood as indication that the latter was written with the former in mind. This is illustrated by the reference to Nineveh as a 'city of blood' (עיר דמים) in Nahum 3:1. Next to the later texts of Ezekiel 22:2; 24:6, 9, the clearest parallel to this expression is found in Micah 3:10, where it is said to the leaders of Israel that they 'build Zion with blood' (בדמים). After the judgment upon Zion follows in the book of Micah the message of salvation for Zion. This line is continued in the book of Nahum by describing the judgment upon the greatest enemy of Zion. The connection is made by the common reference to Exodus 34:6–7. Whereas Micah uses the positive part of this confession to convince the Israelites that they could trust in YHWH's grace, Nahum refers to the negative part to comfort those who were suffering under the violence of the Assyrians that YHWH does not leave the guilty unpunished.[12]

It is hardly a coincidence that in both cases the quotation from Exodus 34 is combined with wordplay on names. In Micah the quotation is introduced with a rhetoric question: 'Who is a god like you' (מי־אל כמוך). This unmistakably reminds of the name of the prophet מיכה, which can be translated as 'who is like YH(WH)'. As was already explained, there are also several instances of play with names in the first verses of the book of Nahum, not only with the name of the prophet, but also with the name of the place where he came from and with the name of the one whose word he is speaking. This could very well have been inspired by the pun at the end of the preceding book.

Then, the book of Habakkuk appears written as a sequel to both Nahum and Micah. This is indicated by the following correspondences:

Hab. 1:8–9 // Nah 2:4–5–the swift horses and horsemen of the attackers

Hab. 3:6–10 // Nah 1:4–5–YHWH's coming shakes mountains and threatens waters

Hab. 3:16 // Nah 1:7–comfort in the day of distress (יום צרה)

(Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, forthcoming).

[12] Cf. G. Baumann, *Gottes Gewalt im Wandel: Traditionsgeschichtliche und intertextuelle Studien zu Nahum 1,2-8* (WMANT 108), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 2005, 82–100.

Hab. 2:12 // Nah 3:1 // Mic. 3:10–a city built with blood
Hab. 2:1 // Mic. 7:7–watch closely (צפה) for YHWH
Hab. 2:2 // Nah 1:1–write down a vision
Hab. 3 // Nah 1–a closing and an opening hymn.

From these three books one gets the picture of a prophet formulating his message on the basis of the prophecy of his predecessor, both in form and in contents. In this way they also may have added authority to their own words. Nahum can build upon Micah's announcement that Israel shall be liberated from its boasting enemies. Habakkuk applies Nahum's prophecy against the Assyrians to the new situation of the Babylonian threat.

THE BOOK OF JONAH AS A REACTION TO THE BOOKS OF NAHUM AND JOEL

The relation between Jonah and Nahum can be described in a similar way. Besides Jonah 4:2 and Nahum 1:3, there are formal correspondences at the beginning and at the end of both books:

Jonah 1:2 // Nah 1:1–the prophecy concerns Nineveh
Jonah 1:2 // Nah 3:19–the wickedness (רעה) as characteristic of its inhabitants
Jonah 4:11 // Nah 3:19–a final question.

It is also intriguing that the turn in God's judgment on Nineveh according to the story in the book of Jonah is formulated as God 'repenting over the evil he had said he who do upon them' (Jonah 3:10), using the verb נחם, from which the name of the prophet Nahum is derived.

According to Walter Dietrich Jonah and Nahum are 'in stiller Zwiesprache'[13], but the fact that Jonah's message contradicts the words of Nahum is far from concealed. It forced the Targumist to give an explanation added to the heading of the book of Nahum: 'Previously Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-Hepher, prophesied against her and she repented of her sins; and when she sinned again there prophesied once more against her Nahum of Beth Koshi, as is recorded in this book'.[14] This new sin of Nineveh would have been recorded in Micah 5:4–5 which tells of Assur entering the land of the Israelites.

In spite of the present sequence of the books and in spite of the names of the prophet and of his father that suggest that we are dealing with a person from the eighth century BCE (cf. 2 Kings 14:23–25), it is usually assumed by modern scholars that the book of Jonah was written after the book of Nahum, somewhere between 500 and 200 BCE. This is hard to prove on linguistic grounds.[15] It is more convincingly demonstrated from the absence

[13] W. Dietrich, *TRE* 23 (1994), 741.

[14] Cf. on the relation between the books of Jonah and Nahum according to early Jewish literature H.-J. Fabry, *Nahum* (Herders Theologische Kommentar zum Alten Testament), Freiburg: Herder 2006, 116–118.

[15] Cf. the surveys by T. M. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of*

of references to a previous prophecy about Nineveh in the book of Nahum. The most important argument for the relative dating is the use of Exodus 34:6–7. Here the book of Jonah appears to be influenced in the first place by the book of Joel.[16] Joel 2:12–14 is part of a prophecy addressed to the 'children of Zion' (2:23). It is a call for repentance, motivated by the quotation of the grace formula from Exodus 34:

> Yet now, oracle of YHWH, turn to me with all your heart,
> and with fasting, and with weeping, and with lamentation;
> and rend your heart, and not your garments,
> and turn to YHWH your God;
> for he is gracious and compassionate,
> slow to anger and abundant in mercy,
> and repenting from doing evil.
> Who knows whether he will not turn and repent,
> and leave a blessing behind him,
> even a meal-offering and a drink-offering unto YHWH your God?

As is noted by Wöhrle and many others, Jonah 4:2 also adds the phrase 'and repenting from doing evil' (נחם על־הרעה) to the quoted words from Exodus 34. This was already introduced in the book of Jonah in 3:10: 'And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not'. It is hardly a coincidence that here the phrase is related to another important word from the text of Joel, namely the 'turning' (שוב) to YHWH, mentioned both at the beginning and the end of the oracle in Joel 2:12–14. As a matter of fact, the whole story of Jonah can be read as a narrative working out the oracle of Joel for a different audience. The people of Nineveh are doing exactly what Joel asked from his own people: they start fasting and mourning, to indicate their turning away from evil, hoping that in his turn God will repent (Jonah 3:5–9).

Compared to Wöhrle's proposal, this approach is simpler—and therefore a more attractive—reconstruction of the process of growth of this part of the book of the Twelve. The book of Jonah was probably written as a reaction to a one-sided negative theologi-

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Jonah Re-Examined (JSOTS 236), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1997, 36–38; and Spronk, "Het boek Jona," 4–6. A. Nicacci, "Syntactic Analysis of Jonah," *LASBS* 46 (1996), 9–32, argues that the book's syntax would perfectly fit a date in the eighth century. Cf. also G. M. Landes, A Case for the Sixth-Century BCE Dating of the Book of Jonah," in: P. H. Williams Jr. a.o. (eds), *Realia Dei: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation* (Fs. E. F. Campbell), Atlanta: Scholars Press 1999, 100–116.

[16] Cf. H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 3: Obadja und Jona* (BK XIV/3), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1977, 55: "Es ist ungleich wahrscheinlichter, daß das Jonabuch sich auf Joel bezieht, als umgekehrt." In his article Wöhrle quotes from Wolff's earlier commentary on Joel (BK XIV/2, 2nd ed. 1975), where he states that both passages are dependent on a common source. Apparently Wolff changed his mind.

cal view on foreign peoples, as is found in Joel 4:2 which states that all nations shall be judged because of their enmity against Israel. The writer of the book of Jonah builds his case upon the authoritative text from Exodus 34 as it is cited in Joel 2:13.[17] He also took his inspiration, both in form and contents, from the book of Nahum. For this he had two reasons. First, like the book of Joel the confession from Exodus 34 also takes a central place in the book of Nahum. Secondly, it is the best illustration among the prophetic texts of a purely negative oracle against a foreign nation. The book of Nahum made him decide to use the notorious city of Nineveh as a fitting symbol for all hated foreign nations. It is likely that at that moment the book of Nahum was part of an already existing collection of Minor Prophets. To this collection also belonged the book of Joel, which was probably added not long before the writer of the book of Jonah started his work. There is no compelling reason to assume that the texts he was using differed much from the canonical text. The many correspondences between the individual books of the Twelve Prophets can be explained as indications that the writers reacted to already existing books, using images from predecessors and building upon their authority. The repeated use of Exodus 34:6–7 does not have to be ascribed to a separate layer, but is probably part of this process of one book reacting to the other.

[17] This can be used as an argument against Spieckermann, "Bermherzig und gnädig ist der Herr …,",16, n. 41, who states that Joel is dependent here on Jonah: "Es hat jedoch größere Wahrscheinlichkeit, die literarische Priorität dort anzunehmen, wo das Zitat fester im Kontext verankert ist. Das dürfte aber mit ziemlicher Sicherheit im Jonabuch der Fall sein." Things look different when one assumes that the book of Jonah is built upon this quotation.