



Zephaniah

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Introduction to Zephaniah

Historical Context

Setting

Though an occasional voice of protest has been heard,⁶⁴⁸ few scholars have failed to accept the information in the superscription that the book's author prophesied during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) as indicative of the setting of this short prophecy.⁶⁴⁹ Rather, discussion concerning the date and background of the book has centered chiefly on the specific period within Josiah's reign. The moral and spiritual conditions mentioned by Zephaniah have been taken by many to refer to Judah's persistent apostasy and immorality despite the Josianic reform that began in earnest after the finding of the Book of the Law ([2 Kings 22:8](#)) in 621 B.C. (e.g., A. R. Fausset, C. L. Feinberg, J. Hannah, C. F. Keil, V. Reid, L. Walker). Others, however, believe that such matters as Zephaniah denounces could only be true of the earlier portion of Josiah's reign, either when the boy king was yet unable to deal with the longstanding effects of the wickedness of Judah's two previous kings, Manasseh and Amon, or when his reformation had only recently got underway (e.g., J. A. Bewer, C. H. Bullock, P. C. Craigie, F. C. Eiselen, O. Eissfeldt, H. Freeman, H. Hailey, R. K. Harrison, H. Hummel, A. S. Kapelrud, T. Laetsch, G. A. Larue, E. B. Pusey, T. H. Robinson, G. A. Smith, J. M. P. Smith, C. von Orelli).⁶⁵⁰

With capable scholars on both sides of the question, one is at first tempted to conclude with D. A. Schneider that "the evidence is insufficient to decide this debate."⁶⁵¹ In examining the internal data, however, several conclusions seem to favor the earlier period in Josiah's reign: (1) religious practices in Judah were still plagued with Canaanite syncretistic rites such as characterized the era of Manasseh (1:4-5, 9); (2) many failed to worship Yahweh at all (1:6); (3) royalty were enamored with wearing the clothing of foreign merchants (1:8) who had extensive business enterprises in Jerusalem (1:10-11); and (4) Judahite society was beset by socio-economic ills (1:12-13, 18) and political and religious corruption (3:1-4, 7, 11). All this sounds like the same sort of wickedness that weighed heavily on the heart of Habakkuk. Moreover, several of the specific sins (e.g., 1:4-5, 9; 3:4) would have been corrected in Josiah's reforms. Accordingly, I am inclined to side with those who prefer a date before 621 B.C.⁶⁵²

But how much before? Some have suggested that the political situation brought about by a Scythian raid (c. 630 B.C.)⁶⁵³ occasioned both Zephaniah's response to God's call and his urgent message concerning God's impending judgment of the world.⁶⁵⁴ However, because the evidence of such an invasion is now considered to be tenuous at best, "the Scythian hypothesis has now been almost universally abandoned."⁶⁵⁵ Thus the search for a precise date for Zephaniah cannot be pressed too far. Nevertheless the conditions denounced by Zephaniah do seem to echo the social and religious ills decryed by Habakkuk, so that if Habakkuk ministered in the mid-seventh century B.C. (see Introduction to Habakkuk) a date earlier in Josiah's reign is plausible. If so, Pusey may be on the right track:

The foreground of the prophecy of Zephaniah remarkably coincides with that of Habakkuk. Zephaniah presupposes that prophecy and fills it up. Habakkuk had prophesied the great wasting and destruction through the Chaldaeans, and then their destruction.... Zephaniah ... brings before Judah the other side, the agency of God Himself. God would not have them forget Himself in His instruments. Hence all is attributed to God.⁶⁵⁶

"The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty."
- Proverbs 21:5

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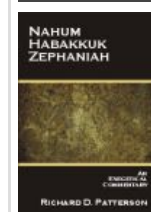
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When one considers that Josiah was only eight years old when he ascended the throne in 640 B.C. dependent upon royal officials of questionable integrity (cf. 3:3), the cause for Zephaniah's alarm is apparent. Further, that Josiah's reforms were not instituted until the twelfth year of his reign (628 B.C.) years after his initial spiritual awakening ([2 Chron. 34:3](#)), suggests that Zephaniah's prophetic activity have had a salutary effect in the reformation of that era. Thus a date of 635-630 B.C. is not unlikely.

Accepting such a date means that the historical setting has advanced little beyond that of Nahum and Habakkuk. Externally the Pax Assyriaca held sway. Of that great era W. W. Hallo observes that, in addition to the Assyrian rulers' attention to administrative matters and details relative to extensive building projects,

literature and learning too came into their own, and the vast library assembled by Assurbanipal at Nineveh is only the most dramatic expression of the new leisure. In spite of their protestations to the contrary, the later Sargonid kings were inclined to sit back and enjoy the fruits of empire.⁶⁵⁷

Yet it is somewhat ironic that Ashurbanipal, who had already reigned some thirty years by the time of Zephaniah and under whom the zenith of Assyrian affluence and culture was achieved, was possessed by a personal weakness that would be mirrored in the Assyrian state itself.

It was a defect of Ashurbanipal as a king that he had nothing in him of the great strategist, statesman, or soldier. He was as barren in political insight as he was rich in vindictiveness. It was his misfortune that he was called to be king when by inclination he was a scholastic.⁶⁵⁸

Because Ashurbanipal was preoccupied with the *belles lettres* that inspired him to collect the ancient texts, particularly those dealing with traditional wisdom and religious matters,⁶⁵⁹ affairs in the empire began to show signs of the decay that would hasten its demise a scant generation after his death in 626 B.C.⁶⁶⁰ Indeed, already by Zephaniah's day "an uneasy consciousness of impending disaster overhung the court, and not all the claims of a less and less honest history could conceal the danger on every side."⁶⁶¹

Under such conditions it is small wonder that Josiah was increasingly free to pursue his reform policies, extending them even to the northern kingdom ([2 Kings 23:1-25](#); [2 Chron. 34:32-35:19](#)).⁶⁶² In addition, Judah could know a political and economic resurgence that it had not experienced since the days of Hezekiah.

The time was ripe for national self-assertion expressed in the progressive steps of Josiah's reformation.... So Judah saw the dawning of the day of freedom, though Josiah proceeded cautiously step by step before venturing into the Assyrian province of Samaria.⁶⁶³

Leon Wood remarks:

The three decades of Josiah's reign were among the happiest in Judah's experience. They were characterized by peace, prosperity, and reform. No outside enemies made war, the people could concentrate on constructive activity, and Josiah himself sought to please God by reinstating matters commanded in the Mosaic Law.⁶⁶⁴

Zephaniah therefore lived in a critical time of transition. Externally, the Assyrian ship of state began to show the stress of age and, creaking and groaning in all its timbers and joints, floundered in the seas of economic and political adversity. The ancient Near East was in the grip of climactic change, for "the whole balance of power in the Near Eastern world shifted radically from what it had been for almost three hundred years.

Assyria was in its death throes."⁶⁶⁵ Internally, the relaxing of Assyrian pressure allowed Judah and its king the liberty to pursue the cause of righteousness without fear. It was an exciting and pivotal age in which to live. Zephaniah was to prove equal to its challenges. Indeed, he may well have been the Lord's catalyst for the great reformation that would sweep across the land.

Authorship

Although some concern has been raised with regard to many passages in the book that bears his name, Zephaniah has generally been accepted as the author of a substantial core of the material of the book, particularly its first part (1:1-2:3; see under Literary Features). As for the prophet himself, Zephaniah traces his patrilineage four generations to a certain Hezekiah. Jewish (e.g., Ibn Ezra, Kimchi) and Christian commentators alike have commonly identified this Hezekiah with the king by that name. Although Laetsch is doubtless correct in stating that "Zephaniah's royal descent cannot be proved,"⁶⁶⁶ the unusual notice concerning four generations of family lineage indicates at the very least that Zephaniah came from a distinguished family. Perhaps he was of royal descent, but current scholarship rightly prefers to be cautious. L. Walker explains:

It has been commonly accepted that this Hezekiah was no less than the famous Judean king. This is not at all certain, however; and we have no other proof of any royal status for Zephaniah, despite the unusual mention of his great-great grandfather. Although genealogies are frequent in the OT, only Zephaniah among the prophetic books exhibits a lengthy genealogical note about the author. On the other hand, some scholars argue that since the words "king of Judah" are not added to Hezekiah's name, the reference is not to King Hezekiah. Others explain this omission on the ground that "king of Judah" follows immediately after Josiah's name. We simply lack conclusive evidence to this interesting question.⁶⁶⁷

Some scholars (e.g., Archer) have suggested that the time span between the birth of Hezekiah's old Manasseh (c. 710 B.C.), and the birth of Josiah (c. 648 B.C.) is too short to allow four full generations. Others (e.g., Kapelrud) point out that Hezekiah was a common name in Judah (cf. [1 Chron. 3:23](#); [Ezra 7:21](#)).

In fairness to those who believe that Zephaniah was of royal descent, however, none of these objections is conclusive. Perhaps the title "king of Judah" was omitted after Hezekiah's name out of respect for the king, Josiah, to whose name it is appended. The compressed time frame may not be significant in light of the ancient custom of marriage at an early age. The argument that Hezekiah was a common biblical name is misleading in that only two other Hezekiahs are mentioned, both from the postexilic period.

Further, a case can be made for Zephaniah's royal descent. Wood observes that

Zephaniah is unusual in tracing his lineage over four generations. Since he is the only prophet that does this, there must be a reason, and that reason apparently lies in the identity of the fourth person mentioned. The name given is Hizkiah. The significance of this may well be that King Hezekiah is in mind.... The lineage he gives is Hezekiah, Amariah, Gedaliah, Cushi, and Zephaniah. Comparing this with the line of Judah's kings, the following results: King Manasseh and Amariah were brothers, King Amon and Gedaliah were first cousins, King Josiah and Cushi were second cousins, and the three sons of Josiah, all of whom ruled (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah), were third cousins of Zephaniah.⁶⁶⁸

In support of Wood's position it could be suggested that, if Hezekiah's son Amariah was born of a member of the king's harem, perhaps no legal recognition was accorded him,⁶⁶⁹ so that he could have been older than Manasseh, a possibility allowing an expanded time frame from Hezekiah to Zephaniah's day. Amariah could also have been born to one of Hezekiah's daughters, who would remain unmentioned in the genealogies, and could have been older than Manasseh. Indeed, it is unlikely that Hezekiah, born in 741/40 B.C., had no children before 710 B.C. Under either scenario Zephaniah's mentioning of Hezekiah would merely indicate his justifiable pride in his descent from the great king whose memory was held in high esteem ([2 Kings 18:5](#)).⁶⁷⁰

In fairness to those who dispute Zephaniah's royal lineage, none of the arguments in favor of his descent from Hezekiah is conclusive. As Bullock remarks: "However appealing the identification of *Hizkiyyah* with King Hezekiah, it cannot be substantiated."⁶⁷¹

Whatever Zephaniah's family associations might have been, he was thoroughly at home in Jerusalem and aware of conditions there (1:10-13). A man of keen spiritual sensitivity and moral perception, he decried the apostate and immoral hearts of the people, especially those who were in positions of leadership (1:4-6, 9, 17; 3:1-4, 7, 11). T. H. Robinson remarks:

Princes, judges, prophets, priests—all alike are faithless to their true vocation and function. It is the business of the princes to protect people—instead, they use their strength to pounce on and destroy men. It is the duty of the judges to assign property to its rightful owner—instead they cling to their causes till they have appropriated in bribes or fees all that is in question. It is the task of the Prophets to assure themselves that the oracles which they deliver are the genuine word of Yahweh—instead, they recklessly pour out unauthenticated "oracles" which can only deceive men. It is the work of the priests to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and to see that the true Divine instruction is given to the worshipper—instead, they have confused all religious distinctions and criminally distorted the revelation of Yahweh.⁶⁷²

Zephaniah denounced the materialism and greed that exploited the poor (1:8, 10-13, 18). He also was aware of world conditions and announced God's judgment on the nations for their sins (2:4-15). Above all, God's prophet had a deep concern for God's reputation (1:6; 3:7) and for the well-being of all who humbly trust in Him (2:3; 3:9, 12-13).

Zephaniah was a man for his times. He had a lively expectation of Israel's future felicity in the land of promise (3:10, 14-20). If he was a man of social prominence and therefore had the ear of Judah's leadership, it reminds all of us who read his messages that God uses people of all social strata. Zephaniah's life and ministry are a testimony that one man, yielded wholly to God, can effect great things.

Literary Context

Literary Features

Zephaniah writes to inform his readers of the coming Day of the Lord. His message is twofold: (1) this day is a judgment upon all nations and peoples, including God's own covenant people, due to their sins against God and mankind; and (2) it is a day of purification for sin, when the redeemed of all nations shall join a regathered Israel in serving God and experiencing His blessings.⁶⁷³ This basic theme of judgment and its consequences is developed in two distinctive portions, the first of which serves notice of the judgment and furnishes a description of its severity (1:2-2:3) and the second of which depicts the extent and purposes of the judgment (2:4-3:20).

The early portion of Zephaniah begins with an announcement of God's intention to bring judgment upon the whole earth (1:2-3), including apostate Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-6). Thus people are urged to "be silent before the Sovereign LORD" (1:7, NIV) who, as the divine host at a sacrificial meal, has invited His guests (the nations) to partake of the sacrifice (Judah) He has prepared (1:7-9). Those who in their godless greed

have taken advantage of others are warned that they will lament over their lost material gain (1:10-13). The first half of the book comes to a climactic close with a powerful description of the coming Day of the Lord and all its attendant terrors (1:14-18) and then urges its readers to assemble before the Lord and seek help in leading a humble and righteous life (2:1-3).

Zephaniah initiates the latter portion of his prophecy with a series of divine pronouncements against peoples who had plagued God's people: Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Egyptians, Assyrians (2:4-7). He then denounces Jerusalem, whose people have strayed from God to follow debased and corrupt leaders (3:1-7). Once again he issues a warning: His people must listen carefully to God's message, for His judgment is imminent and assured (3:8). The prophecy concludes by supplying the reason for the coming judgment. God will pour out His wrath not just for the sake of justice but that mankind might experience His cleansing (3:9). At a future time God will return His purified people to Jerusalem to serve Him in truth and sincerity (3:10-13). A redeemed and regathered Israel will rejoice in God and enjoy Him in everlasting felicity (3:14-20).

Thus Zephaniah, like several other OT books, is arranged as a bifid.⁶⁷⁴ This conclusion is reinforced by considering its structural components. (1) The section 1:1-2:3 forms an inclusio by means of the bookending theme of God's dealing with the earth (1:2, 3; 2:2). A similar reference to the earth closes the second section (3:20). (2) The two halves of Zephaniah are arranged in complementary fashion: (a) pronouncements of judgment (1:2-6; 2:4-3:7) on the nations/earth (1:2-3; 2:4-15) and on Judah/Jerusalem (1:4-6; 3:1-7); (b) exhortations and warnings (1:7-13; 3:8); and (c) teachings concerning the Day of the Lord (1:14-2:3; 3:9-20), each of which is closed by admonitions (2:1-3; 3:14-20).

This bifid structure is accomplished by means of distinctive stitch-words. In the first portion of the book, the first stanza is linked to the second via the careful employment of the Tetragrammaton, while the second stanza is linked to the third by reference to the Day of the Lord. In the second portion of the book, judgment (3:5, 8) and the nations (3:6, 8) provide stitching between the pronouncement section (2:4-3:7) and the following exhortation (3:8); כִּי (ki, "because/for") links the exhortation to the added teachings concerning the Day of the Lord (3:9-13, 14-20).

Each subunit likewise displays careful stitching. Thus the pronouncement against the earth (1:2-3) is linked to that against Judah/Jerusalem by the repetition of the phrase "cut off" (1:3, 4). One may also note the use of the Tetragrammaton and themes related to the Day of the Lord throughout the second and third stanzas (1:7-13; 1:14-2:3). In the second portion of the book, the pronouncement against the nations (2:4-15) is linked to that against Judah/Jerusalem via the employment of the word "woe" (2:5; 3:1), and the two strophes (3:9-13, 14-20) of the teaching stanza are stitched together with such ideas as "scattered" (3:10, 19) and "afraid/fear" (3:13, 16) as well as the phrase "in that day" (3:11, 16).⁶⁷⁵ The structural design is schematized in the chart on page 284.

Although Zephaniah does not display the literary genius of Nahum, several literary features are noteworthy. In keeping with his twofold purpose, two prophetic genres are evident: (1) positive prophetic sayings of hope (2:1-3; 3:9-13, 14-20); and (2) threats (judgment

Structure of Zephaniah

I		II
Declaration of the Day of the Lord's Judgment		Details Concerning the Day of the Lord's Judgment
(1:2-2:3)		(2:4-3:20)
<i>Subject Matter</i>	<i>Stitching</i>	<i>Stanza</i>
Pronouncements	<--A-->	Pronouncements
On the Earth (1:2-3)	"cut off"	On the Nations (2:4-15)
On Judah/Jerusalem (1:4-6)		On Judah/Jerusalem (3:1-7)
		"woe"

	יהוה			"nations"
Exhortation (1:7-13)	(near is)	<--B-->	Exhortation (3:8)	nation/peoples
The Day				
Teachings		<--C-->	Teachings	
	of			
Information (1:14-18)	the		Information (3:9-13)	"scattered/ afraid"
Instruction (2:1-3)	Lord		Instruction (3:14-20)	

oracles), whether to individuals (3:1-7), Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-6, 7-13), or the nations of the world (1:2-4; 2:4-15). Zephaniah makes use of exhortations (1:7-13; 3:8), two instructional admonitions (2:1-3; 3:14-20, the latter of which is almost hymnic in nature), lament (1:10-11), woes (2:4-7; 3:1-7), and pronouncements (1:2-3, 4-6; 2:4-15). Two narrative discourses giving detailed information are also present (1:14-18; 3:9-13).

In addition, Zephaniah utilizes metaphor and simile (1:7, 11, 12; 2:1, 2, 4-7, 9; 3:3, 8, 13, 16), literary/historical allusions (1:3; 2:4, 9; 3:9-10, 18), personification (1:14; 3:14-15, 16), anthropopocia (1:4, 12-13; 3:7, 8, 15), irony (1:11; 2:12), merismus (1:12), synecdoche (1:16; 2:11, 13, 14; 3:6), enallage (3:7), hendiadys (3:7, 19), chiasmus (3:19), alliteration and paronomasia (1:2, 15, 17; 2:1, 4, 7, 12(?); 3:10(?), 20), enjambment (1:9-12; 2:2, 3, 14; 3:3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 18, 19, 20), and repetition and refrain (1:2, 3, 14, 15-16, 18; 2:2, 3; 3:14-15). Several key words punctuate the prophetic material: יום (yo,m, "day"), 21 times; קרוב (qa,,ro,b, "near"), 10 times; אסף (áa,,sap, "gather"), ארץ (áeres£, "earth"), and שם (s£e,,m, "name"), 5 times each; שפט (s£Ea,,pat£, "judge"), 4 times; פקד (pa,,qad, "punish/visit") and קבץ (qa,,bas£, "gather/assemble"), 3 times each.

Some have suggested that Zephaniah made use of apocalyptic genre in his teachings concerning the Day of the Lord (e.g., Freeman, R. Smith). Thus G. A. Smith remarks:

From this flash upon the concrete, he returns to a vague terror, in which earthly armies merge in heavenly; battle, siege, storm, and darkness are mingled, and destruction is spread upon the whole earth. The shades of Apocalypse are upon us.⁶⁷⁶

Distinguishing between apocalyptic literature and prophetic eschatology is sometimes difficult, however. Thus P. D. Hanson emphasizes that though differences exist between prophetic eschatology and the eschatological material of apocalypse, there is also a strong element of continuity:

Definitions attempt to specify the essential difference between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology: the prophets, affirming the historical realm as a suitable context for divine activity, understood it as their task to translate the vision of divine activity from the cosmic level to the level of the politico-historical realm of everyday life. The visionaries, disillusioned with the historical realm, disclosed their vision in a manner of growing indifference to and independence from the contingencies of the politico-historical realm, thereby leaving the language increasingly in the idiom of the cosmic realm of the divine warrior and his council. Despite this difference in the form of prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology, it must be emphasized that the essential vision of restoration persists in both, the vision of Yahweh's people restored as a holy community in a glorified Zion. It is this basic continuity which compels us to speak of one unbroken strand extending throughout the history of prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology.⁶⁷⁷

Despite the overlap and continuity between prophetic eschatology and the eschatology of apocalypse, as Hanson acknowledges, some differences do exist. Most scholars add to the above distinction by noting in the apocalyptic writers attention to such matters as details of cataclysmic changes in the physical world, cosmic settings and events, and the universal resolution of all things—particularly good and evil—in the distant future. Moreover, all such details are usually related in a series of episodic happenings. Leon Morris follows A. S. Peake in adding further that "speaking generally, the prophets foretold the future that should arise out of the present, while the apocalypticists foretold the future that should break into the present."⁶⁷⁸

Restraint is called for in affirming that [Zeph. 1:14-18](#) is an apocalypse, even though some characteristics of apocalyptic language are present. It does not suit the definition of apocalypse given by John J. Collins:

*A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural (italics his).*⁶⁷⁹

Thus while [Zeph. 1:14-18](#) contains material of a sort that would one day become prominent in apocalyptic literature, it is not an apocalypse as such. Rather, it displays themes that are found in prophetic esc

In harmony with other OT prophets who spoke of the Day of the Lord, Zephaniah sees that time as one of fearful darkness and gloominess (1:15; cf. [Isa. 13:6-16](#); [Joel 1:15; 2:2, 10](#)), awesome earthly and celestial phenomena (1:15; cf. [Isa. 13:9, 10, 13](#); [Joel 2:30, 31](#); 3:14, 15 [HB 3:3, 4; 4:14, 15]; [Amos 5:20](#); [Zech. 14:1-7](#); [2 Pet. 3:10](#)), and a divine wrath that brings destruction, devastation, and death (1:14-18; cf. [Isa. 13:15, 16](#); [Obad. 15, 16](#); [Zech. 14:1-3](#)). Zephaniah's closing messages of hope (3:9-20) are likewise in keeping with other prophecies concerning the Day of the Lord as a time of salvation and righteousness ([Joel 2:32; 3:17](#) [HB 3:5; 4:17]; [Zech. 14:2, 3](#)) and the return of the Messiah ([Zech. 14:4-7](#)) to effect a worldwide climate of peace, prosperity, and everlasting joy ([Joel 3:18, 20](#) [HB 4:18, 20]; [Zech. 14:4-10](#)). Zephaniah's prediction of warfare (1:16-18) is likewise mirrored in the other prophets (e.g., [Isa. 27](#); [Ezek. 38-39](#); [Joel 3:9-17](#) [HB 4:9-17]; [Zech. 14:1-3](#); cf. [Rev. 19:11-21](#)).⁶⁸⁰

To the extent that Zephaniah utilizes cosmic themes and extreme language he thereby anticipates later apocalyptic thought. With Zephaniah, however, we are removed from the fervor characteristic of later Jewish apocalyptic literature such as 2 Enoch, 3 Baruch, and the fragmentary apocalyptic pieces attributed to Zephaniah.⁶⁸¹ Indeed, Zephaniah is not so much concerned with a future that breaks into the present as he is with the unfolding of God's sovereign and ordered arrangement of history so as to bring it to its intended culmination. As Craigie observes,

The apocalyptic aspects of the prophet's message are not so much predictions of what must happen in a future world as they are projections into the future of the potential that lies always within the human race. Insofar as Zephaniah is one of the pioneers of apocalyptic thought, we can learn from his writings. He was not, as are some modern representatives of the apocalyptic tradition, one who sat back waiting for the divine pattern of the future to unroll in a pre-ordained fashion. He perceived that the future was shaped in the present, that the horrors of apocalyptic dimensions that seem always to hover on the horizon of human history lay within the ever-present human capacity for evil, pursued to its ultimate climax. Zephaniah balanced this bleak view of human nature with a faith in God's love (3:17), by which he was able to affirm a future of hope beyond the cataclysm.⁶⁸²

Perhaps it is most appropriate to speak of [Zeph. 1:14-18](#) as "emergent apocalyptic."⁶⁸³

As for Zephaniah's poetic style and skill, although some have attempted to discern in the book *qinah* meter or the like, all such attempts are less than convincing. The most distinctive trait in Zephaniah's style is his penchant for repetition and wordplay, both of which are utilized extensively throughout. Accordingly Zephaniah's style is at times monotonously predictable. Nevertheless, his straightforward manner and forceful delivery capture the attention of his readers, so that J. M. P. Smith can affirm that

Zephaniah can hardly be considered great as a poet. He does not rank with Isaiah, nor even with Hosea in this particular.... He had an imperative message to deliver and proceeded in the most direct and forceful way to discharge his responsibility. What he lacked in grace and charm, he in some measure atoned for by the vigour and clarity of his speech. He realised the approaching terror so keenly that he was able to present it vividly and convincingly to his hearers. No prophet has made the picture of the day of Yahweh more real.⁶⁸⁴

Great poet or not, Zephaniah is nonetheless to be commended for his powerful pronouncements, carefully contrived puns (e.g., 2:4-7) and striking imagery. Concerning the last point, Crenshaw calls attention to Zephaniah's "especially vivid description of the Deity wandering through the streets of Jerusalem, lamp in hand, searching for those who are overcome by a false sense of security" (1:12).⁶⁸⁵

Zephaniah will be best remembered for his teaching concerning the Day of the Lord. The awful effects of that message are reflected in the medieval hymn *Dies irae, dies illa*, which has been widely translated. E. P. Mackrell observes that "there are not less than 160 English and 90 German translations of this ancient Latin hymn."⁶⁸⁶ Perhaps the most famous is the version in the *Sarum Hymnal*:

Day of Wrath! O Day of mourning!

See the Son's dread Sign returning;

Heaven and earth in ashes burning.

Oh! what fear the sinner rendeth,

When from heaven the Judge descendeth

On Whose sentence all dependeth.⁶⁸⁷

H. Hummel laments concerning the almost total abandonment of Zephaniah's timeless message that

its neglect parallels the neglect of not only end of the church year themes, but much of the Old T (especially the prophets) as well, and ultimately neglect of themes of Law, judgment, retribution, general. Thus our "Gospel" readily becomes "another Gospel."⁶⁸⁸

Outline

Superscription (1:1)

I. The Announcement of the Day of the Lord (1:2-2:3)

A. Pronouncements of Judgment (1:2-6)

1. On all the earth (1:2-3)

2. On Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-6)

B. Exhortations Based on Judgment (1:7-13)

C. Teachings Concerning the Day of the Lord (1:14-2:3)

1. Information concerning that day (1:14-18)

2. Instructions in the light of that day (2:1-3)

II. Additional Details Concerning the Day of the Lord (2:4-3:20)

A. Further Pronouncements of Judgment (2:4-3:7)

1. On the nations (2:4-15)

a. Philistia (2:4-7)

b. Moab and Ammon (2:8-11)

c. Cush (2:12)

d. Assyria (2:13-15)

2. On Jerusalem (3:1-7)

B. An Exhortation Based on Judgment (3:8)

C. Additional Teachings Concerning the Day of the Lord (3:9-20)

1. Information concerning that day (3:9-13)

2. Instructions in the light of that day (3:14-20)

Unity

Although the first half of Zephaniah has generally been acknowledged as genuine, critical scholarship has largely impugned the authenticity and unity of the latter half. The results of critical inquiry, however, have often been diverse, so that "literary criticism of Zephaniah has been quite checkered and is not easy to summarize."⁶⁸⁹

Those who deny the authorial integrity of the book do so largely on stylistic and thematic grounds. Given portions are said to be contrary to the spirit of the Zephaniah who prophesied dire punishment or reflective of the viewpoint of a subsequent generation. Few critics are as extreme in their denial of the unity of Zephaniah as L. P. Smith and E. R. Lacheman, who consider the book to be a third-century B.C. pseudepigraphic production.⁶⁹⁰ Most commonly it is the third chapter that has come under fire, largely due to its subject matter. Although past scholars often tended to deny the entire third chapter to the prophet (e.g., Beer, Duhm, Marti, Schwally, Stade), recent scholarship has been moderate, fixing its concerns on verses 9-20. Thus Larue remarks:

Attempts to include oracles of restoration and healing in the collection of authentic pronouncements of Zephaniah are not convincing, for not only do these additions remove the force of the prophetic promise of destruction, but they reflect the mood, setting and hopes of the late Exilic period.⁶⁹¹

Indeed these verses have come under almost universal attack, with vv. 9-10 and 14-20 being consigned to exilic or postexilic times.⁶⁹² Even Eissfeldt, who holds largely to the unity and authenticity of the book, has serious doubts as to these verses: "Perhaps we should therefore deny to Zephaniah not only the oracle of salvation which begins afresh in vv. 18-20, but also vv. 14-17, and regard the latter as an exilic or post-exilic addition."⁶⁹³

If the third chapter has suffered at the hands of its critics, the second has fared little better. Every verse has been rejected by one scholar or another, although critical focus has centered on 2:4-15. The conclusions reached have often been confusing and contradictory. Although most have admitted the authenticity of 2:1-3, Beer questions even this, and Zephaniah's writing of parts or all of 2:3 is impugned by Duhm, Marti,

Nowach, and Stade.⁶⁹⁴ Other verses and their critics include 4-15 (Budde), 5-12 (Schwally, Sellin a Forher), 6b-c (Duhm), 7a, e (Nowach), 7a-10 (Beer), 7b-11 (S. R. Driver), 8-10 (G. A. Smith), 8-11 (Marti, J. M. P. Smith), 8-12 (Nowach), 11 (Stade), 13-15 (Eichhorn), and 15 (Beer, Duhm, Marti, Sel Fohrer). Such a catalog of opinion illustrates D. A. Schneider's contention that "although many schc judged that Zephaniah underwent later editing, there has been no convincing convergence of their \ any large number of verses."⁶⁹⁵

Probably because of the great divergence in the end product of such research

recent critics have been more cautious, and usually prefer to think of mere amplifications of a genuine core. They point out, rightly, that the "remnant" theme was at least as early as Amos, and the frequent use of the "prophetic perfect" in Zephaniah's eschatological oracles is no more problematic than elsewhere.⁶⁹⁶

Indeed, the supposed exilic or postexilic point of view in chap. 3, where hope for Israel's restoration and blessing is expressed, existed side by side with pronouncements of judgment throughout the prophets. Thus R. K. Harrison has shown that "other prophecies of woe commonly concluded with an expectation of restoration and final felicity, such as are found in Amos, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk."⁶⁹⁷ Moreover, as B. K. Waltke points out, the view that the themes of judgment and hope cannot come from the same era

is inconsistent with the form of parallel prophecies in the ancient Near E. H. Gressmann wrote: "The numerous old Egyptian oracles attest to the formal unity of threat and promise as the original form.... Now that we are acquainted with the Egyptian oracle, it is no longer doubtful that the literary-critical school was on the wrong path" ("Prophetische Gattungen," *Der Messias*, Book II [1929], 73). The same phenomenon is attested in the Mari letters.⁶⁹⁸

As for the disputed portions in chap. 2, while individual details may at present render these verses difficult to reconcile with a pre-621 B.C. date, one needs to keep in mind not only the general nature of the prophecies involved (most suggested specific applications are hazardous at best) but also that the limited sources for the recovery of precise data relative to the historical situation in any given period in the ancient Near East make dismissal of the accuracy of 2:4-15 premature.⁶⁹⁹ The basic problem with the critical position on chaps. 2 and 3 of Zephaniah may come down, as Bullock suggests, to a presuppositional point of view:

What we are dealing with here is a whole set of presuppositions espoused by critical scholarship, which not only disavows a strongly predictive element in the prophets, but also confidently sorts the material on the basis of vocabulary that is thought to be confined to specific periods.⁷⁰⁰

In light of the diversity of critical views and the demonstrated literary integrity of the book, I suggest that the case for the unity of Zephaniah is strong. Accordingly "there is no sufficient reason for denying to Zephaniah any portion of his prophecy."⁷⁰¹

Occasion And Purpose

Granted the conclusions reached above, the occasion for Zephaniah's prophecy lies in the deplorable spiritual and moral condition of Judahite society in the early days of Josiah's reign. Despite Manasseh's repentance and attempts at spiritual renewal in his latter years ([2 Chron. 33:10-20](#)), things took a turn for the worse during the short reign of his wicked son Amon ([2 Kings 21:19-26](#)). Accordingly, after the assassination of his father Amon, eight-year-old Josiah found himself the head of an apostate and immoral society.

The religious indifference and eclecticism on the one hand, and the materialistic selfishness and injustice on the other, were a natural reaction from the exalted ideas and ideals of the previous generation. The expectations and high hopes of Isaiah and his contemporaries had failed to materialize. Yahweh's people were still under the heel of the oppressor. The yoke of Assyria was as heavy and as galling as ever. In despair of deliverance through Yahweh, his followers were seeking to supplement his weakness by having recourse to other gods in conjunction with him, or were abandoning him altogether.⁷⁰² Fortunately for Judah, Josiah was not like his father and would soon establish an unblemished record of faithfulness to God and His law ([2 Kings 23:25](#)). Even as a young man he was sensitive to spiritual matters, and the Chronicler reports that a definite spiritual commitment at age twelve was followed by introducing thoroughgoing reform throughout the land a scant four years later ([2 Chron. 34:3-7](#)). Zephaniah may have had a part in this; his prophecies concerning the great Day of the Lord perhaps were even instrumental in the king's spiritual activities.

According to this understanding, Zephaniah's prophesying came during those early years of spiritual and social wickedness that attended the onset of Josiah's reign.

The Book of Zeph, the early discourses of Jer, and 2 K 21-23 furnish a vivid picture of the social, moral, and religious conditions in Judah at the time Zephaniah prophesied. Social injustice and moral corruption were widespread (3 1.3.7). Luxury and extravagance might be seen on every hand; fortunes were heaped up by oppressing the poor (1 8.9). The religious situation was equally bad.⁷⁰³

Cognizant of the loss of the spiritual gains that had been made before Amon's rule and faced with conditions that would surely spell the end of Judah itself ([2 Kings 23:26-27](#)), Zephaniah speaks out for God and against wickedness. He writes to inform and warn his people of God's coming judgment not only against all the world (1:2-3), especially the nations that had oppressed God's people (2:4-15), but also against Judah and

Jerusalem (1:4-6; 3:1-7). In so doing he exposes (1) the false worship practices that included the ve of Baal and the astral deities and the syncretistic rites that emerged from attempting to blend their v with that of Yahweh (1:4-6, 9; 3:2, 4) and (2) the corruption of Judahite society (3:1, 3, 5), especially leaders and merchants (1:8, 10-13, 18; 3:5).⁷⁰⁴

Zephaniah also writes to give the people details of God's future program. On the one hand, he tells fearsome events of the Day of the Lord (1:14-16) that must come because of men's sins (1:17-18) ; the other, of the Lord's undying concern (3:5, 7) for His people, especially those who are of a humble and contrite heart (2:3; 3:12). He predicts that in a future day Jerusalem will be avenged (3:19) and purified (3:11-13), its scattered people will be restored to the land (3:9-10, 19), and God's faithful ones will rejoice in the everlasting felicity that He alone provides (3:14-20).

In consideration of all that must happen in the future, Zephaniah writes to exhort and admonish the people to surrender to God (1:7) and to repent and seek Him (1:10; 2:1-3), not only to avoid the force of the Lord's fiery blast but also in anticipation of that glorious time when a redeemed and purified people will rejoice in the salvation and delights of God's love (3:14-17).

Text And Canonicity

Although critical concern has been expressed as to the authenticity of Zephaniah, its canonicity has never been called into question.⁷⁰⁵ It was known to the author of the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (Frag. B7), accepted by Philo and Josephus, and included in the early church canonical lists. Our Lord appears to have drawn upon [Zeph. 1:3](#) in His parable concerning the end of the age ([Matt. 13:41](#)), as did John (cf. [Rev. 6:17](#) with [Zeph. 1:14-18](#); [Rev. 14:5](#) with [Zeph. 3:13](#); [Rev. 16:1](#) with [Zeph. 3:8](#)). In addition, the Talmud (T. B. Sanhedrin 98a) and early Christian Fathers (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Augustine) cited Zephaniah as authoritative in their condemnation of man's pride and idolatry.

As for the text of Zephaniah, R. K. Harrison observes: "The Hebrew text of the prophecy has been quite well preserved, and it is only on fairly rare occasions, as for example in [Zephaniah 2:2, 14; 3:7](#), that the LXX version is able to throw some light on the text."⁷⁰⁶ This does not minimize the fact that the received text will be difficult to understand in places (e.g., 1:2, 14; 2:14). Nevertheless, it may be safely affirmed that "the MT is the best form of the text available, and it is probably the basis of all the versions."⁷⁰⁷

Theological Context

Zephaniah is best remembered for his presentation of God as the sovereign judge of all (1:2-3, 7, 14-18; 3:8). It is He who punishes the wickedness of men (1:8-9, 17; 3:7, 11) and nations (2:4-15; 3:6), particularly those who have opposed His people (2:8, 10). Thus G. von Rad remarks that "*Zephaniah* ... is chiefly concerned with the imminent advent of Yahweh and a universal battle against the nations on this day: but with him very much more emphasis is laid upon the resulting judgment of Jerusalem and threats against the complacent."⁷⁰⁸ Zephaniah also shows that God is not only righteous (3:5) but also a God of love (3:17) and concern who deals justly with all (3:5b). D. A. Schneider points out that

the book persistently portrays the holiness and grace of God. God's holiness appears in the contrasts between Him and the proud sinners: they pretend to rule, but God judges with inexorable power; they hold office, but the Lord gives unfailing justice (3:1-5). God's grace appears chiefly in the two passages (2:1-3; 3:11-20) that offer hope and salvation to a nation (and possibly even Gentiles) that has just been rightly condemned to complete desolation.⁷⁰⁹

Zephaniah also reveals a great deal concerning man's condition:

He saw that God cannot brook haughtiness and that people's only hope lay in recognizing their own frailty. Pride is a problem rooted in human nature, and neither Judah (2:3), Ammon, Moab (v. 10), nor Nineveh is exempt. Nineveh is made to epitomize insolence, boasting "I am and there is none else" (v. 15). Such rebellion, the declaration of spiritual independence from God, is the most heinous of sins.⁷¹⁰

Zephaniah focuses on the spirit of wickedness in people (1:3-6, 17; 3:1, 4). Such individuals reason that God does not intervene in human affairs (1:12) and so go on in their violence and deceit (1:9). Further, their greed occasions the oppression of those around them (1:10-11, 13, 18; 13). C. Lehman observes that "this book has gone to greatest depths in its exposure of sin and man's sinfulness."⁷¹¹

Nevertheless, Zephaniah holds out the hope that God will be receptive to everyone who repentantly surrenders to Him (2:1-2). Such spiritual virtues as righteousness, humility, faith, and truth receive commendation and reward from Zephaniah (2:3; 3:12-13). The Lord has a plan for the humble and faithful remnant of His people (2:2-3, 9; 3:11-13).⁷¹² He will purify them (3:9-10), regather and restore them (3:10) to their land (3:20), and give them victory over their enemies (2:7, 9). Jerusalem will be a blissful place (3:11, 18), for Israel's saving God (3:17) will bless His people (3:14-17) and in turn make them a channel of blessing to all (3:19-20).

1

The Announcement of the Day of the Lord **(Zephaniah 1:1-2:3)**

Zephaniah begins his prophecy with notices of his reception of the word of the Lord, his patrilineage time of his ministry (1:1). He then announces the coming of God's worldwide judgment (1:2-6) and exhortations to his hearers to humble themselves before that day overtakes them (1:7-13). He closes the first major part of his prophecy by supplying important details concerning the devastation of that coming Day of the Lord (1:14-18) and admonishes those who hear him to seek the Lord (2:1-3).

From a literary standpoint this section is marked by prophetic pronouncements (1:2-3, 4-6), a narrative with vivid descriptive detail (1:14-18), and warnings and admonitions (1:7-13; 2:1-3). It displays such literary features as alliteration and paronomasia (1:2), chiasmus and hyperbole (1:2-3), literary allusions (1:3), anthropopoeia (1:4, 12-13), metaphor and simile (1:7, 12; 2:1), lament (1:10-11), irony (1:11), merismus (1:12), personification (1:14), synecdoche (1:16), and especially a widespread use of repetition (1:2, 3, 14, 15-16, 18; 2:2, 3).

Superscription (1:1)

Translation

The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon the king of Judah.

Exegesis and Exposition

The implications of the unusual recording of four generations of Zephaniah's patrilineage were discussed in the introduction (see under Setting). If Zephaniah descended from King Hezekiah, he would have had access to the royal court accorded few other prophets, an entree that might account for Josiah's early attention to Judah's spiritual condition.

Zephaniah had, however, an even higher relationship. He declares that what he is about to deliver is not the message of man but the word of the Lord (cf. [Hos. 1:1](#); [Joel 1:1](#); [Mic. 1:1](#); [Hag. 1:1](#); [Zech. 1:1](#)). Therefore, what he had to say was of supreme significance and ought to be heeded all the more earnestly.

Additional Notes

1:1 G. Gerleman suggests that in the prophetic books "the Word of the Lord" becomes a "technical term for the prophetic word of revelation."⁷¹³ He notes this usage in 225 of the 242 occurrences of the phrase in the OT. It not only identifies the source and authority of Zephaniah's prophecy but also authenticates him as God's spokesman. Because of the nature of God's Word (cf. [Ps. 119](#)) it is to be received and believed and in turn is to be mastered and allowed to master the hearts of those who receive it.

זְפַנְיָהּ ("Zephaniah"): The meaning of the prophet's name is usually traced to either of the two senses of the root (1) זָפַן "hide," hence "he whom the Lord hides," "the Lord hides," or "hidden of the Lord" (e.g., Feinberg, Keil) or (2) "treasure," hence "Yahweh has treasured" (e.g., Opperwall-Galluch). Building on the former meaning, J. M. P. Smith proposes "Yahweh is protector." Smith suggests further that the frequent use of זָפַן in biblical ([Ex. 6:22](#); [Lev. 10:4](#); [Num. 34:25](#); [2 Kings 25:18](#); [1 Chron. 6:21](#); [Jer. 21:1](#); [29:24-25](#), 29; 37:3; 52:24; [Zech. 6:10, 14](#)) and extrabiblical names (e.g., in the Elephantine Papyri, on a Hebrew gem in the British Museum, and in Carthaginian and Assyrian inscriptions) points to the idea that it was the name of a Semitic god.⁷¹⁴ The form of the name *Zephaniah*, however, makes this proposal unlikely. Nor is there any demonstrable designed correspondence between the prophet's name and the message of the book (against Pusey). Whichever of the senses of the root is intended in the name (I am inclined to the first), the truth contained in the name is sufficient reason for its frequent appearance.

A. Pronouncements Of Judgment (1:2-6)

In language and figures drawn from the creation and Flood accounts God's prophet warns of a universal judgment that will one day descend upon the earth and all that is on it (1:2-3). He amplifies the announcement of that judgment by applying it to God's covenant people. Because of their idolatry and apostasy, Judah and Jerusalem will find God's hand of chastisement stretched out against them (1:4-6).

1. On All The Earth (1:2-3)

Translation

"I will utterly sweep away* everything
from the face of the earth"

—the declaration of the LORD.

³I will sweep away man and beast;

I will sweep away the birds of the air, (and) the fish of the sea,
and the things that cause the wicked to stumble*;

and I will cut off man

from the face of the earth

—the declaration of the LORD.

Exegesis and Exposition

Zephaniah begins his messages with God's doubly reinforced declaration: God will destroy everythi the face of the earth, sweeping away all life before Him whether on land, in the air, or in the water, including especially mankind and all that pertains to him. The pronouncement is solemn, its phraseology reminiscent of the Noahic flood (cf. [Gen. 6:17; 7:21-23](#)). The disaster envisioned here, however, is more cataclysmic, for although every living thing that dwelled on the land or inhabited the air died at that time the fish remained.

Zephaniah alludes also to the creation. His catalog of death is arranged in inverse order to God's creative work: man, beast, the creatures of the air, those of the sea (cf. [Gen. 1:20-27](#)). The order of creation found its climax in man, who was made in God's image and appointed as His representative. The coming destruction will begin with man, who has denied his Creator (1:6) and involved in his sin all that is under his domain. Man's sin is thus weighty, involving not only himself but his total environment (1:2-3b).

The judgment that begins with man also concludes with man. All that alienates him from his Creator and Lord will be swept away, and he will be left alone to face his God. Last of all, man himself will be cut off from the land that has given him sustenance. The chiasitic arrangement of the paronomasia is striking: The [הַיָּדָא](#) (*áa,da,ma,*, "ground") had given [אָדָם](#) (*áa,da,m,* "man") life; now the man is cut off from the life-giving ground. This wordplay, combined with the alliteration of the letters *aleph* and *mem* (both employed 12 times), makes the literary allusion all the more effective. Though the language is hyperbolic, it emphasizes the seriousness of man's sin and the universal extent of God's judgment.

Additional Notes

1:2 † [הִסֵּף הִסֵּף](#) ("I will utterly sweep away"): The MT puts together two verbs from different roots, [הִסֵּף](#) being an infinitive absolute from [הִסֵּף](#) ("gather/remove") and [הִסֵּף](#) a hiphil prefix conjugation verb from [הִסֵּף](#) ("come to an end," hence here = "sweep away"). All suggested repointings of the MT are attempts to smooth out this seeming incongruity. Thus the majority of scholars tend to read two words from the root [הִסֵּף](#) (i.e., [הִסֵּף הִסֵּף](#)—e.g. *BHS*, Gesenius, G. A. Smith; cf. NJB).⁷¹⁵ Kapelrud suggests [הִסֵּף הִסֵּף](#) ("completely/fully gather/assemble"; cf. *Vg congregans congregabo*), whereas Sabotka prefers to emend the first form to a hiphil from [הִסֵּף](#) ("add/do again"): [הִסֵּף הִסֵּף](#) ("I will again sweep away").⁷¹⁶

Two arguments in defense of the MT are as follows: (1) the use of mixed roots is attested elsewhere (e.g., [Isa. 28:28; Jer. 8:13](#)⁷¹⁷); and (2) the skilled Masoretic scribes would hardly make such a "blunder" if it were unintelligible. Not only does the difficulty of the MT argue for its retention,⁷¹⁸ but the LXX already recognized the incongruity, rendering the phrase [ἐκλείψει ἐκλιπέτω](#) (lit. "It will give out, let it fail"—hence, "Let there be a complete failure"). Moreover, as Keil points out, the two verbs have a "kindred meaning," the compatibility of the ideas of "gathering up things" so as to "put an end to them" being obvious.⁷¹⁹ The translation given above follows the MT, translating *ad sensum* and giving primary force to [הִסֵּף](#), which is repeated twice in v. 3 (cf. NIV).

As noted in the Exegesis and Exposition, these verses allude to the Flood and creation accounts. The relation to the first is underscored by Zephaniah's utilization of "from the face of the earth" (cf. [Gen. 6:7; 7:4; 8:8](#)); [כֹּל](#) ("all," "every[thing]"; cf. [Gen. 6:17; 7:4; 8:19](#)), and [הָאָרֶץ](#) ("ground/land"; cf. [Gen. 6:7, 20; 7:4, 8, 23; 8:8, 13, 21](#)). Thus he may be giving a divine qualification of the promise to Noah that God would never again "curse the ground because of man" or "destroy all living creatures" ([Gen. 8:21](#), NIV). Of course the Noahic Covenant has to do with a universal flood (cf. [Gen. 9:11-16](#)) and so may not preclude another type of universal destruction (cf. [2 Pet. 3:10](#)). Further, the promise itself contains a qualification. Thus G. Vos remarks concerning [Gen. 8:20-22](#): "The regularity of nature in its great fundamental processes will henceforth continue. There is, however, added to this a qualification: 'while the earth remaineth.' This pertains to the eschatological background of the deluge (cp. [1 Pet. 3:20, 21; 2 Pet. 2:5](#))."⁷²⁰ Still further, numerous passages seem to refer to the passing away or transforming of the present earth (e.g., [Job 14:12; Ps. 102:26](#) [HB 102:27]; [Isa. 24:23; 34:6; 51:6; 54:10; Hag. 2:6, 21; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; Heb. 1:10-12; 12:26-27; Rev. 21:1](#)). Zephaniah, however, does not appear to intend replacing the promise of [Gen. 8:21](#)⁷²¹ but rather to qualify it by demonstrating its limitations. He uses the fact and limitations of the promise as an argument a fortiori. If God intends to judge the whole world, how much more should Judah and Jerusalem expect to be judged (cf. vv. 4-6)? God's people ought not to misunderstand (cf. v. 12) the old promise as indicating that God cannot again intervene to judge mankind.⁷²²

Zephaniah's dependence on the creation account may be seen in his list of the objects of divine judgment in inverse order to their creation ([Gen. 1:20-26](#)) and the literary allusions to man and ground ([אָדָם](#) and [הָאָרֶץ](#)). It seems unlikely, however, that either reversing the creative order to pre-creation conditions or canceling man's dominion over the lower creatures is being announced.⁷²³ Indeed, the order of creation with man at its head is fixed by God and guaranteed in perpetuity (cf. [Ps. 8:5-9](#) [HB 8:6-10]), a reality ultimately realized in Christ ([Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 2:5-9](#)). Rather, the creation account is employed by Zephaniah to remind his hearers of the continued importance of mankind.

Zephaniah draws upon both biblical sources, then, as literary precedents to underscore not only the fact of the universality of God's judgment as a principle to be applied in Judah's case but also the central place of

man as a moral agent in great measure responsible for world conditions. This conclusion is reinforced by the syntax of vv. 2-6, the prefix-conjugation verbs of vv. 2-3c declaring God's resolve being continued by suffix-conjugation verbs of vv. 3d-6 detailing the consequences of the divine purpose. Cutting off sin in general is thus declared along with judging God's covenant nation in particular. Indeed, the judgment of God's people is the focus of the pronouncement.

1:3 † הַמְּקַשְׁלוֹת (“the things that cause to stumble”): The consonantal text has traditionally been under a noun: “ruins” (NASB), “heaps of rubble” (NIV), “stumbling blocks” (Pesh.; cf. KJV, NKJV). The following particle וְ must then be viewed not as the marker of the definite direct object but as the preposition “with,” hence “with the wicked” (NASB).

As Sabottka remarks, the word in question has been “for translators a true stone of stumbling.”⁷²⁴ The translation suggested here takes the MT consonantal text as a hiphil fem. pl. participle, the thought being that in God's judicial “clean sweep” not only man and his physical environment but every false religious practice that has occasioned his falling will be destroyed.⁷²⁵ The idea is parallel to Jeremiah's complaint (where the hiphil participle of קָשַׁל also occurs) that God's people “burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways” ([Jer. 18:15](#), NIV). The line thus anticipates the condemnation of Judah's false religion recorded in vv. 4-6. Since man's religious practices inevitably affect his total life situation, the word may imply even more. Laetsch suggests that the term

describes the ruined state of every social and political institution, whether of divine or human origin.... Every divine institution for man's welfare, matrimony ([Gen. 2:18-25](#)), government ([Rom. 13:1-7](#)), has been defiled and crippled by human sin and wickedness. Every human civilization, the product of sinful man, for that very reason carries within itself the germ of decay and death. When it has run its tragic downward course (cp. [Rom. 1:18-32](#)), it will collapse and bury beneath its ruins all that in proud self-exaltation had relied on it as the salvation of the nation and the world.⁷²⁶

2. On Judah And Jerusalem (1:4-6)

Translation

“And I will stretch out My hand against Judah
and against all who dwell in Jerusalem.
And I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal
—the (very) names* of the pagan priests*
together with the priests
⁵and those who bow down* upon the roofs
to the hosts of heaven
and those who bow down and swear to the LORD
and swear by their king*
⁶and those who turn back from following the LORD
who neither seek the LORD nor inquire of Him.”

Exegesis and Exposition

God's announced purpose to sweep away everything so that man may receive his just judgment is continued with an indication of God's ultimate intentions. He will stretch out His hand of chastisement against Judah and Jerusalem. The motif of the outstretched hand of God emphasizes God's omnipotence ([Jer. 32:17](#)) and is also used in connection with His creative power and sovereign disposition of the course of history ([Isa. 14:26-27](#); [Jer. 27:5](#)). It is specially used of God's relations with Israel, whether in deliverance ([Ex. 6:6](#); [Deut. 4:34](#); [5:15](#); [7:19](#); [9:29](#); [26:8](#); [2 Kings 17:36](#); [Jer. 32:21](#); [Ezek. 20:33-34](#)) or in judgment ([Isa. 5:25](#); [9:12](#), [17](#), [21](#) [HB 9:11, 16, 20]; [10:4](#); [Jer. 21:5](#)). It is the last of these that is in view here. God's people needed to be reminded that the God of the universe and of all individuals and nations is Israel's God in particular. To Him she owed her allegiance. When such was not forthcoming, when sin and apostasy set in, Israel could expect God's outstretched hand of judgment.

The cause and course for Israel's judgment are detailed next. Zephaniah declares that God will cut off the remnant of Baalism that plagued Judah. The activities of Baal, the chief deity of ancient Canaan, are well documented in the literature of Ugarit.⁷²⁷ Baal was a god associated with the storm and fertility; his veneration together with its licentious worship rites was a constant source of temptation to Israel (cf. [Num. 25:1-5](#); [Judg. 2:13](#); [1 Kings 16:30-32](#); [18:19](#), [21](#); [Hos. 13:1](#)). Fascination with Baal had been a prime reason for the fall of the Northern Kingdom ([2 Kings 17:16-18](#); [Hos. 2:8](#) [HB 2:10]) and would prove to be so for Judah as well ([2 Kings 17:18-20](#); [Jer. 11:13](#), [17](#); [19:5-9](#)).⁷²⁸ Although Zephaniah's denunciation of those who worship the hosts of heaven on the rooftops is a further indication of the turn that the worship of Baal often took, the adoration of Baal and the stars was a besetting sin in Judah when Josiah came to the throne (cf. [2](#)

Kings 21:2-3 with 2 Kings 23:4-5, 10-14; Jer. 19:3-13). Because Baal was called Baal Shamem (Ba [the] Heaven[s]) in ancient Canaan,⁷²⁹ it was inevitable that features of stellar worship would be fused practices associated with Baal.

Although Israel's preoccupation with Baal was denounced by her prophets (1 Kings 18:20-21; Jer. 2:11-13, 17; 32:35; Hos. 2:13 [HB 2:15]; 11:2), the people continued in his worship, developing a dual of Yahweh and Baal that was compromising and syncretistic (Jer. 7:9; 23:25-29). Zephaniah's mention of pagan priests and regular priests shows that such worship practices were also characteristic of the religious scene of Josiah's early reign. But the day of reckoning was near, and Judah's punishment would be severe. The last vestige of Baalism will be eradicated. Indeed, the very names of the various types of priests will be erased forever.

The priests of Judah and the devotees of compromise would be punished. Zephaniah goes on to condemn those who feign allegiance to the Lord while swearing by the name of Baal their king. The prophet also singles out still a third group—those who have drawn back* from any pretense of worshipping the Lord. They seek* God neither in personal prayer nor in formal worship. They have no interest or concern for the Lord who redeemed His people (cf. Jer. 2:13, 32-35; 3:6-10; 5:2-13; etc.).

Additional Notes

1:4 † הַקְּמָרִים (“the pagan priests”): The Vg renders the term “temple guardians,” but the Pesh. transliterates the word and the LXX omits it altogether. The English versions have handled it variously: “idolrous priests” (NASB, NKJV, RSV), “the pagan ... priests” (NIV), “priests” (NJB), “Chemarims” (KJV). The term occurs only twice elsewhere in the OT: (1) in Hos. 10:5 of priests who officiated in the calf worship at Bethel⁷³⁰; and (2) in 2 Kings 22:5 of priests who led in rites associated with Baal and stellar worship, priests who had been appointed by the past kings of Judah but whose offices were done away with in the reforms of Josiah. In all three cases, then, the term refers to priests outside the established priesthood of Israel and has special connection with Baalism.⁷³¹ Despite the widespread occurrence of the word in other Semitic languages, its etymology is uncertain.⁷³²

† אֲשֵׁם . . . אֶת־שֵׁם (“the names ... with the priests”): Because the deletion of a *waw* coordinator in such a compound would be unusual, the phrase should probably be construed as apposition for emphatic amplification—even the names of the officiating priests connected with Baalism and the other false religions will be cut off.⁷³³

1:5 † הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים (“those who bow down”): The existence of this root in Ugaritic makes certain that the form is a hishtaphel participle from הָהָה (“bow down”) and not, as formerly thought, from the later Hebrew root שָׁחַח (“bend/bow”; hithpael = “prostrate oneself”).⁷³⁴ The action connected with the word

may be performed before persons as a greeting or as a token of respect or submission, before Yahweh in the context of prayer or sacrifice, i.e., as a cultic action, or even (usually in the context of accusation, prohibition, or ridicule) before other gods, in which case it simply stands for (cultic) “worship.”⁷³⁵

The twice occurring הַמְשַׁבְּעִים is differently constructed in each instance, the first with ל and the second with ב. Keil explains the distinction as follows: “The difference between the two expressions answers exactly to the religious attitude of the men in question, who pretended to be worshippers of Jehovah, and yet with every asseveration took the name of Baal into their mouth.”⁷³⁶

† מֶלֶכִּים (“their king”): The MT has been repointed to read Milcom (the detested Ammonite deity; cf. 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13) by the Vg, Pesh., NASB, RSV, NKJV, and NJB and the familiar Molech by the NIV. The commentators are divided, with scholars attested for each suggestion.⁷³⁷ The NIV's proposal has the advantage of isolating one of the sins of Judah, whose rites were combated by Josiah (2 Kings 23:10) along with the other practices that Zephaniah mentions here (cf. vv. 4-5 with 2 Kings 23:4-5, 12).⁷³⁸ Despite the widespread endorsement of Milcom here, a reference to his worship in the Judah of Josiah's day seems unlikely. Although he was one of many gods who held a fascination for the early Israelites (Judg. 10:6), his popularity does not seem to have continued after the days of Solomon (1 Kings 11:5, 33), possibly due to the hostility between Ammonites and Israelites (cf. 2 Chron. 20:1-26; 27:5; Isa. 11:14; Jer. 49:1-6; Amos 1:13-15) and the overshadowing presence of Baalism and the fertility religion of Canaan (cf. 2 Kings 17:16-17).

The reading of the MT has much to commend it. It is followed in Rahlfs's edition of the LXX and favored by the fact that the term “king” was applied to Baal.⁷³⁹ Further, the context pits the worship of Yahweh against Baal and the false rites associated with him, including the syncretistic blending of Baalism with the worship of Israel's God.

1:6 הַנִּסְוִיָּה (“those who turn back”): Although this root is used of natural movement (cf. Arabic *sa,`aja*, “go and come”), the Hebrew verb is commonly employed of vacillating or faithless behavior toward people (Jer. 38:22) or God (Ps. 53:3 [HB 53:4]). When it occurs in the niphal, it denotes a willful turning of oneself away or back from someone or something. When that someone is God (cf. Isa. 59:12-13), it is a deadly condition.

וְלֹא־יִבְקְשׁוּ . . . לֹא־יִבְקְשׁוּ (“they do not seek ... they do not inquire of him”): The first verb lays stress on personal emotion in seeking or asking someone; the latter emphasizes the person's concern in the inquiry and hence is often used in prophetic encouragements to repentance (cf. Amos 5:4-6). וְדָרַשׁ is also used of inquiring of

God or consulting an oracle. The two verbs occur in parallel elsewhere in contexts dealing with seek
Lord (e.g., [Deut. 4:29](#); [2 Chron. 20:3, 4](#); [Ps. 105:4](#)).⁷⁴⁰

B. Exhortations Based On Judgment (1:7-13)

In the light of the pronouncements of judgment, Zephaniah issued exhortations to Judah. Since the
of judgment was certain, it was time for them to examine their spiritual condition. Judah's spiritual leaders
and Jerusalem's leading citizens, those most responsible for the direction of God's people, ought to take
particular note. In their pride and avarice they have ignored and blasphemed God. It was a time for solemn
silence and sincere repentance.

The unit is made up of two strophes, each introduced by an imperative (vv. 7, 11) followed by a motive
clause begun by כִּי (ki, for/because/indeed," vv. 7b-d, 11b-c), and continued by an introductory phrase ("and
it shall come to pass") giving additional details (vv. 8-9 and vv. 12-13).⁷⁴¹ Because the second imperative (v.
11) is expressed in irony concerning the grief of Judah's merchants in the future time of judgment rather than
intended for the contemporary populace, vv. 11-13 continue the details of Jerusalem's punishment for which
she is to "be silent" (v. 7). Accordingly v. 10 is a hinge verse that proceeds on the basis of the time
framework of vv. 8-9 and predicts the lamentation of the merchants upon which the following call for wailing
(v. 11) is issued. Since v. 10 partakes of the portions that precede and follow it, the section may be
schematized structurally as follows:

AA call for silence (vv. 7-9)

A.B A report of lamentation (v. 10)

B A call for sorrow (vv. 11-13).

Translation

Be silent* in the presence of the sovereign LORD,

for the Day of the LORD is near;

yes, the LORD has prepared a sacrifice;

He has consecrated His guests.

⁸And it shall come to pass on the day of Yahweh's sacrifice*

that I will punish* the nobles*,

and the king's sons,

and all those clothed

in foreign clothing.

⁹And in that day I will punish all those

who leap over the threshold*,

those who fill the houses of their masters

by violence and deceit."

¹⁰"And on that day"—the declaration of the LORD—

"a cry will go out from the Fish Gate,

and a wailing from the Second Quarter*,

and a great crash from the hills."

¹¹Wail, you who live in the market district,

for all the people of Canaan will be silent,

all who weigh out the silver will be cut off.

¹²And it shall come to pass at that time

that I will search Jerusalem with lamps.

and I will punish the men

who are indifferent*,

those who say in their hearts,

'The LORD will do neither good nor evil.'

¹³And their wealth shall become a plunder,
and their houses a desolation.

They shall build houses

but not live in them;

they shall plant vineyards

but not drink their wine."

Exegesis and Exposition

Having delivered God's pronouncement of judgment against all mankind and especially His covenant people, Zephaniah turns to exhortations. In view of the certainty and severity of coming judgment, God's prophet has some advice: "Be silent!" "Hush!" It is a call for submission, fear, and consecration.

While Yahweh is Judah's God, He is also the master of her destiny. Judah has perpetuated Israel's sin ([2 Kings 17:18-20](#)) in following Baal and other pagan practices. Accordingly the worship of Baal must have seemed a contradiction to Zephaniah. Certainly it would appear to be so to Jeremiah ([Jer. 3:14](#)), who finds in Judah's pursuit of Baal a denial of her relation to Yahweh. Thus Jeremiah condemns Judah's syncretism by playing on the word בַּאָל (ba'al) itself.

As a verb, ba,`aal means basically to "possess." It can also be translated "rule over" ([1 Chron. 4:22](#)) or "marry" ([Deut. 24:1](#); [Prov. 30:23](#); [Isa. 62:4](#)). As a noun, ba'al may refer to an owner ([Ex. 22:7](#); [Job 31:39](#)), master ([Isa. 13](#)), ruler ([Isa. 16:8](#)), or husband ([Deut. 24:4](#)). Theologically the root is used of God as Israel's redeemer and husband ([Isa. 54:5](#)). The covenant between God and Israel is described as a marriage in which Israel had become unfaithful ([Jer. 31:32](#)).

Building on these ideas, having pictured the covenant between God and Israel under the figure of a marriage relationship that Judah, as a wicked wife, had broken ([Jer. 2:1-3:10](#)), Jeremiah pleads with Judah to repent ([Jer. 3:12-14](#)) in order to receive God's blessing ([Jer. 3:15-18](#)). In so doing, he uses a wordplay ([Jer. 3:14](#)): "Turn (שׁוּבוּ, s(Eo,ba,`bim), O backsliding (שׁוֹבְבִים, s(Eo,ba,`bim) children, says the Lord; for I am married to you." Did Judah chase after Baal? Her real "Baal"—that is, her divine owner and Lord—is the only true God, her husband. Why should she seek a false master?

Zephaniah probably intends a similar wordplay in juxtaposing the denunciation of Baal with אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה (áa(Edo,`na,y YHWH, "sovereign LORD"). Judah had forsaken her rightful master (áa,do,n) to follow another master (Baal). The folly of such conduct was now apparent. Judah's true master was about to demonstrate the powerlessness of him who was no master at all. The last remnants of Baalism would be cut off. Therefore Judah and Jerusalem should "be silent." Laetsch puts it well:

Jehovah is the Covenant God. As such He is Lord, the supreme God, who has the right to demand what He will, and the power to enforce His will. Hush! Silence before Him! This is a call to the people of Judah to cease every manner of opposition to God's word and will, to bow down in submissive obedience, in unconditional surrender, in loving service, to their Covenant God.⁷⁴²

A further cause for fear lay in the realization that God's people stood "in the presence of" the living God whose all-seeing eye ([Jer. 32:19](#)) observes all their evil deeds and rewards them ([Job 24:22-24](#); [34:21-22](#); [Ps. 66:7](#); [Amos 9:8](#)). Judah's idolatry was loathsome in His eyes ([Jer. 16:17](#)). They had strayed far from the truth that, because Israel's God was the unseen observer not only on occasions of religious ceremony but also in every activity of life, their lives were to reflect His holy character (cf. [Lev. 19:1](#); [20:7](#), [22-24](#)).⁷⁴³ Contrary to their foolish thinking that God either does not see their wickedness or will not intervene, His day of judgment was at hand.

The motive for Zephaniah's call for silence follows (v. 7b): the "Day of the Lord." As employed by the prophets, the Day of the Lord is that time when for His glory and in accordance with His purposes God intervenes in human affairs in judgment against sin or for the deliverance of His own.⁷⁴⁴ That time could be in the present ([Joel 1:15](#)), lie in the near future ([Isa. 2:12-22](#); [Jer. 46:10](#); [Ezek. 13:5](#); [Joel 2:1, 11](#); [Amos 5:18-20](#)), be future-eschatological ([Isa. 13:6, 9](#); [Ezek. 30:2-3](#); [Mal. 4:1-6](#) [HB 3:19-24]),⁷⁴⁵ or be primarily eschatological ([Joel 3:14-15](#) [HB 4:14-15]; [Zech. 14:1-21](#); cf. [1 Thess. 5:1-11](#); [2 Thess. 2:2](#); [2 Pet. 3:10-13](#)). Zephaniah's urgent warning here is in view of imminent judgment.

Although Zephaniah delays his description of the terrors of the Day of the Lord until the next section (1: 14-18), the seriousness of that time is underscored in a dramatic metaphor that adds a further motive for Judah's silence: The coming day of judgment is a sacrifice. Although the specific sacrifice is not mentioned, it was probably a type of fellowship offering ([Lev. 7:11-21](#)).⁷⁴⁶ Instances of such sacrificial feasts to which guests were invited are [1 Sam. 9:22](#); [2 Sam. 15:11](#); [1 Kings 1:9-10](#), [24-25](#); cf. [Deut. 12:18](#); [33:19](#). The stipulations for such sacrificial meals are significant for [Zeph. 1:7](#):

The cultic celebration takes place liphne, yhv: the worshippers sacrifice (zabach, 1 S. 11:15), eat (Dt. 12:7), and rejoice (Dt. 12:12) "before Yahweh," i.e., within the temple precincts and in the presence of the

deity. "Eating in the presence of Yahweh" means being Yahweh's guest (semantic parallels: 2 S K. 1:25): God is the hestia, "Host." Fellowship with Yahweh presupposes the removal of uncleanness (Lev. 7:20; 2 Ch. 30:17; Jub. 49:9), continence (1 S. 16:5; 21:5f.[4f.]), and if necessary fasting (c 20:26), moral uprightness (Prov. 15:8; Hos. 8:13), and careful observance of the ritual (Lev. 7:1ff; 22:31f.). Only so will the sacrifice and the worshipper be acceptable to Yahweh (Ezk. 20:41; 43:1-2).

As in the case of vv. 2-3, so here one ought not to push the identification of the various parts of the banquet too far. The verse announces the conquest of Judah and Jerusalem under the metaphor of the sacrificial banquet. The sacrifice itself is Judah and Jerusalem. But who are the guests? If one sees in the metaphor a second reason for the call for silence, the guests could have been the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem. Thus the call for silence (= submission to the Lord) is issued (1) because of the awesome day of the Lord's judgment and (2) because that day can be survived only by genuine believers in Yahweh. The metaphor of the banquet (v. 7c-d) also strengthens the previous two lines while giving unity to the whole verse. The sacrifice was to be held in the presence of Yahweh (v. 7a), was at hand (v. 7b), was hosted by Yahweh himself (v. 7c), and was to be attended by His guests (v. 7d).

So construed, the metaphor of the sacrificial banquet reinforces the announcement of the Day of the Lord and provides a ray of hope in the clouds of doom. As guests called to a sacrificial feast were to come with their uncleanness removed, so the Judahites are urged to respond to the invitation of Yahweh their host. Although judgment was coming, there was still time. By acknowledging God as their master and by responding in fear to the prospect of judgment in repentance from sin and repudiation of idolatry, God's people could join a believing remnant in coming to the feast as guests acceptable to Him. There was yet hope.

The figure of the sacrificial banquet, however, also entailed a further word of caution. The alternative of being unfit for attendance carried with it an ironic twist. Guests who remained unrepentant, and hence unclean, would be disqualified and would, like those in Jehu's day (2 Kings 10:18-28), discover that they were not only invited guests* but also victims. God had summoned others (the Chaldeans) who would destroy both Judah and Jerusalem and the unrepentant people who inhabited them (vv. 8-13).

Zephaniah gives a further message with regard to that coming day (v. 8). In connection with its being a time of sacrifice hosted by Yahweh, He will visit Judah and Jerusalem, a visitation designed for chastisement. Thus the disqualified guests will be punished. Indeed, in their self-centeredness and preoccupation with the gods and goods of other nations, Israel's leadership had adopted a foreign lifestyle, including its dress. There may be a veiled threat here. Did they prefer foreign attire? They would soon see the specter of foreign uniforms throughout the land. The threat was literally carried out (2 Kings 23:31-35; 24:10-16; 25:1-21; Jer. 39:1-10; 52:4-30; cf. 2 Chron. 36:2-4, 9-10, 15-21). The verse is a vivid reminder of the responsibilities of leadership (cf. Jer. 22:1-23:39; Luke 12:47-48).

Additional charges follow (v. 9), this time leveled against all the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem. They perpetuated the custom of avoiding contact with the threshold of a temple by leaping over it. The practice had originated among the priests of Dagon during the incident of the collapse of his statue before the Ark of the Lord (1 Sam. 5:1-4). Because of the contact of Dagon's statue with the threshold, "to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold" (1 Sam. 5:5, NIV).⁷⁴⁸ Since many superstitious beliefs revolve around thresholds, customs similar to this may have been practiced in connection with pagan worship elsewhere in Canaan, even in Judah and Jerusalem.

An alternative view suggests that the leaping over the threshold has to do with

a violent and sudden rushing into houses to steal the property of strangers ... so that the allusion is to 'dishonourable servants of the king, who thought that they best serve their master by extorting treasures from their dependents by violence and fraud' (Ewald).⁷⁴⁹

This position, however, is forced to view the culprits as the leaders of v. 8 and to take the word "masters" (v. 9) as a plural of majesty to be translated as the singular "master" (i.e., the king). Not only is this understanding a less natural interpretation of the form, but it proposes that the vicious behavior of Judah's leadership is tied to the righteous king Josiah—an unlikely suggestion. Further, it must be demonstrated that a purely religious custom gave rise to a proverbial saying that could be applied to other situations. But the syntax favors the thought that v. 9 is an additional charge to that of v. 8.⁷⁵⁰

The view adopted here thus understands that the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem have been influenced to follow their leaders, adopting pagan customs in their worship.⁷⁵¹ The verse goes on to report that in the socio-economic sphere the desire to please their leaders has caused the citizenry to perpetrate deeds of violence* and deceit against the less fortunate in order to achieve their ambitions.

Further information concerning the day of the Lord's sacrifice is in v. 10. Although lamentation will come from all parts of the city, Jerusalem's greedy merchants will particularly be affected. From the Fish Gate in Jerusalem's northern wall,⁷⁵² down through the Tyropoeon Valley and the Second Quarter, areas of commercial activity, will come a great cry. Jerusalem's hills also will reverberate, filled with the horrifying clamor of havoc and destruction:

The entire city will be filled with the noise of cries, of pitiful howling and shrieking, intermingled with the triumphant shouts of slaying, plundering enemies; while from all the hills on which Jerusalem was built

will resound the crash of houses and walls and palaces and the Temple, as they are being ruthlessly smashed.⁷⁵³

Therefore Zephaniah tells the merchants to wail (v. 11). Their wealth will be taken away. Though one might hope for the lamenting that leads to repentance, such was unlikely. Rather, these people will lament their wealth. In irony Zephaniah tells them to go ahead and wail, for such will suit their lot.

The money-loving merchants are also labeled for what they are: Canaanites* and money-grubbers. The metaphor is an apt one, for like their Canaanite precursors they worshiped pagan gods and spent their lives trafficking in commercial pursuits. The merchants of Judah were no better than those of Israel (cf. [Ezek. 16:29](#); [Hos. 12:7](#)), and both betrayed their Canaanite ancestry ([Ezek. 16:3](#)). Jesus would also warn of the perils of the pursuit of wealth ([Matt. 6:24](#); [Luke 16:19-31](#)), and Paul would caution the church's leadership against being lovers of money ([1 Tim. 3:3](#)). Lamentably, the temptation to make merchandise of the ministry must be mastered in every generation (cf. [2 Cor. 2:17](#)). Whereas money and wealth can be a useful resource for the advancement of the Lord's work and the rightful enjoyment of life, it must never become an end in itself ([1 Tim. 6:10](#); [Heb. 13:16](#)) lest a grasping Canaanite bent become a snare ([James 5:1-6](#)).

Zephaniah concludes the subunit that begins in v. 11 with details concerning the coming time of wailing for Jerusalem's merchants and leaders (vv. 12-13). He reports that God's judgment will be thorough. In a brilliant figure that combines anthropopoeia and simile, the Lord is likened to a man who takes a lamp to make a diligent search* (cf. [Isa. 45:3](#); [Luke 15:8](#)). In like manner God's instruments of invasion will seek out every corner of Jerusalem in carrying away its treasures. The prophecy of the destruction and looting of the city would come to pass in the days of Josiah's son Zedekiah (2 King 25:13-17; [2 Chron. 36:17-19](#); [Jer. 52:17-23](#); cf. Josephus *Ant.* 10.9.5).

The main target of God's searching judgment is now revealed. God will punish those whose greed and self-satisfaction had grown into a settled indifference toward God and His standards.⁷⁵⁴ The MT says literally that those who were complacent had "thickened upon their lees." Like wine left on its dregs too long and that has thus become sickeningly sweet and then spoiled,⁷⁵⁵ so many of Jerusalem's citizens had remained in their apostate lifestyle so long that they had become satisfied with it and then grown indifferent to genuine piety. In their callous unconcern for anything but themselves, Judah had become "a nation hardened in iniquity equaling and surpassing the Gentiles in moral impurities, shameless vices, and self-satisfied lip service. It had become unpalatable to God, unfit for its purpose, ready to be poured away."⁷⁵⁶

If not in theory, at least in practice, the people of Judah behaved like full-fledged pagans. They proclaimed that God does neither good nor harm to individuals or society (cf. [Isa. 41:23](#); [Jer. 10:5](#)).⁷⁵⁷ To their surprise, God will demonstrate His intervention into the affairs of men. No absentee God, He will send an invading force that will search out and plunder Jerusalem. The implementation of the Lord's proclamation will come so quickly that all who have lived in pursuit of ill-gotten gain will not survive to enjoy their wealth. All that for which they have labored so hard and long will fall into the hands of others. In their preoccupation with self and riches they will lose them both (cf. [Luke 12:16-21](#)). Thus God's righteous standards will be upheld ([Lev. 26:27-33](#); [Deut. 28:30, 39](#)). As they had been applied to Israel (cf. [Amos 5:11](#); [Mic. 6:15](#)), so they will be applied to Judah and Jerusalem.

Whereas today's believer may applaud Zephaniah's warning to his fellow countrymen as well taken due to the apostasy, immorality, and injustice of that time, it is perhaps another matter for him to apply them to himself. But such conduct is no less culpable now than it was then. Indeed, a far more insidious danger lurks today. Apathy and inactivity abound, and these will ultimately take their toll. Craigie's warning is timeless and to the point: "Sometimes it is the apathetic and indifferent who are more responsible for a nation's moral collapse than those who are actively engaged in evil, or those who have failed in the responsibilities of leadership."⁷⁵⁸

Additional Notes

1:7 †For הָם ("be silent"), see the additional note on [Hab. 2:20](#).

קְבָאֵי ("his guests"): Though the explanation adopted in the Exegesis and Exposition differs from the usual understanding of the guests as solely the Babylonians who are bidden to the sacrificial meal (Judah),⁷⁵⁹ it has the advantage of supplying an implied plea for repentance and consecration to God. Moreover, the presence of Chaldeans alone as consecrated guests at a Judahite feast would be strange. Indeed, like Jehu's soldiers they might be there as executioners. The frequent reference (e.g., Keil, Walker) to [Isa. 13:3](#), where the Lord's destroyers of Babylon are called "holy ones," probably has reference not to a sacrificial feast but to a consecration for holy warfare and thus has no bearing here.

1:8 †בְּיוֹם זִבְחַת יְהוָה ("on the day of Yahweh's sacrifice"): Since the Lord Himself serves as the divine host, the Tetragrammaton has been rendered by the more personal "Yahweh" rather than translating it as the customary "LORD."

†וַיִּקְרָא ("I will punish"): Though often translated "visit," the verb must be contextually nuanced.⁷⁶⁰ In many cases it is employed where a superior takes action for or against his subordinates, in hostile contexts connoting "punish" ([Jer. 11:22](#); [Hos. 1:4](#); [Amos 3:2, 14](#)).

†שְׂרָיִם ("nobles"): The word refers to officials at various levels, frequently coming from leading tribal families and forming powerful advisory groups throughout Israel's history (cf. [Ex. 18:13-26](#); [1 Kings 4:2-6](#); [2 Kings](#)

[24:12](#); [2 Chron. 35:8](#)). The term may designate the chieftains of Israel ([Num. 21:18](#)), court officials ([22:17](#)), district supervisors ([1 Kings 20:14-15](#)), city officials ([Judg. 8:6](#)), military leaders ([1 Kings 2:5](#); [1:9-14](#); [5:1](#); [25:23, 26](#)), or even religious leaders ([Ezra 8:24](#)).

The importance of the nobles in Zephaniah's day is underscored not only in their mention before the members of the royal family here but also in their prominence in the enumeration of the levels of Ju society during the reign of Josiah ([Jer. 1:18](#); [2:26](#); 4:9). Jeremiah emphasizes their importance and responsibility, using the term more than three dozen times. As for the princes mentioned in the parallel passage, if the date for Zephaniah adopted in the introduction is correct, the reference must be principally to the sons of the deceased King Amon.⁷⁶¹

1:9 † תַּפְּחֵתָּהּ ("the threshold"): Something akin to this traditional meaning is demanded by its use elsewhere ([1 Sam. 5:4-5](#); [Ezek. 9:3](#); [10:4](#), [18](#); [46:2](#); [47:1](#)).⁷⁶²

For הָרָסָה ("violence"), see the additional note on [Hab. 1:2-3](#).

1:10 † הַמְּשָׁנָה ("the second quarter") has been translated by some (NIV, NJB) in accordance with its being understood as a second or newer district of the city, perhaps as an addition to the upper Tyropoeon Valley. John Gray observes that it

probably developed as a residential area for palace and Temple personnel after the building of the Temple. At the time of Josiah it would be located west of the palace and Temple over the depression of the upper Tyropoeon Valley.⁷⁶³

The translation "second quarter" is also given by the KJV, NKJV, NASB, and RSV (cf. LXX, Vg).

1:11 † Like הַמְּכֻתָּהּ, הַמְּשָׁנָה ("the market district") has been variously understood. Among the ancient versions, the LXX tradition renders it in three different ways, the Vg translates it "pillars," the Pesh. transliterates it as a proper noun, and the *Tg. Neb.* identifies it as the Brook Kidron. Among modern versions, one may find "mortar" (NASB, RSV, *La Sacra Bibbia*), "hollow" (NJB), "market district" (NIV), "mill" (*Die Heilige Schrift*), or simple transliteration (KJV, Soncino, *La Sainte Bible*).

Due to its derivation from פָּתַשׁ ("pound"), it has been understood as a hollow or a place pounded out and related to a commercial district, probably in "the hollow ... between the western and eastern hills, or the upper part of the Tyropoeon."⁷⁶⁴ Keil suggests that the name may have been coined by Zephaniah "to point to the fate of the merchants and men of money who lived there."⁷⁶⁵ The translation adopted here follows the NIV in giving the word a functional rendering rather than attempting a geographical or etymological identification.

קַנְיָנוּ ("Canaan"): BDB (pp. 488-89) points out that this Hebrew noun, like קַנְיָנִי ("Canaanite"), may often be translated "merchant," due to the Canaanites' (especially the Phoenicians') established reputation as traders.

1:12 † הַקָּפְאִים עַל־שִׁמְרֵיהֶם ("the men who are indifferent"): Because קָפָא denotes "thicken/condense/congeal" and שִׁמְרִים is used of the dregs of wine (cf. [Isa. 25:6](#); [Jer. 48:11](#)), the phrase can be translated literally as "settled on their lees" (KJV). Most modern translations, however, have rendered it according to the image it portrays. Thus the NIV reads "those who are complacent," the NASB "who are stagnant in spirit," and the NJB "the men stagnating over the remains of their wine." The translation adopted here views the sin involved as one of indifference that goes beyond the smug self-satisfaction suggested by the word "complacency" to an attitude that has hardened into deliberate disregard for the Lord and His standards.⁷⁶⁶

J. M. P. Smith likens God's diligent *searching* of Jerusalem to that of Diogenes equipped with a lantern in his quest for truth. This is not a search for truth, however. Smith is on target when he goes on to observe that

the figure expresses the thought of the impossibility of escape from the avenging eye of Yahweh.... The figure is probably borrowed from the custom of the night-watchman carrying his lamp and may involve also the thought of the diligent search of Jerusalem that will be made by her conquerors in their quest for spoil.⁷⁶⁷

1:13 John T. Willis calls attention to Zephaniah's use of ABA'B' parallelism here in emphasizing that "divine punishment is able to thwart the apparent prevalence of human achievements (cf. [Ezek. 27:33](#); [28:9](#); [Amos 5:11](#))."⁷⁶⁸

C. Teachings Concerning The Day Of The Lord (1:14-2:3)

Zephaniah's exhortations based on the surety of the coming day of judgment are amplified with further information concerning the Day of the Lord (1:14-18). In language bordering on the later apocalyptic genre (see introduction), he tells of the coming of frightful conditions in the natural world and terrible destruction throughout the whole earth. In light of the further revelations concerning that time, Zephaniah issues instructions designed to achieve the safety and deliverance of those who repent and put their trust in the Lord (2:1-3).

1. Information Concerning That Day (1:14-18)

Translation

The great Day of the LORD is near—

near and coming quickly*.

Listen! The Day of the LORD!

Bitter* is the cry of the warrior.

¹⁵A day of wrath is that day—

a day of distress and anguish,

a day of devastation and desolation,

a day of darkness and gloom,

a day of clouds and blackness,

¹⁶a day of trumpet and battle cry

against the fortified cities

and against the corner towers.

¹⁷And I will bring distress to mankind

so that they will proceed like blind men,

for they have sinned against the LORD.

Their blood will be poured out* like dust

and their flesh* like dung.”

¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold

will be able to save them

in the day of the LORD’S wrath.

In the fire of His jealousy

the whole earth shall be consumed;

yea, He shall make a terrifying end*

of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Exegesis and Exposition

Once more (cf. 1:7) Zephaniah declares that the Day of the Lord is near. He previously used that fact to provide grounds for submission to the Lord. Now he supplies added details to provide a further reason for the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem to repent and submit to God. The day is near and coming quickly.

In the description that follows Zephaniah describes conditions that will exist primarily in the final stages of the Day of the Lord. But the prophecy must be viewed as one vast event. Some matters that he mentions would soon take place at Jerusalem’s fall in 586 B.C.; others would be repeated in various historical epochs (e.g., A.D. 70) until the whole prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment eschatologically. Such prophecies (cf. [Joel 2:28-32](#) [HB 3:1-5] with [Acts 2:17-36](#)) are progressively fulfilled, their individual segments termed fulfillment without consummation.⁷⁶⁹ Keeping such distinctions in mind enables one to keep a clear perspective as to both the meaning of the text and the effect the prophecy must have had upon Zephaniah’s hearers. However much the events detailed here may have full reference only to the final phase of the Day of the Lord, they were an integral part of the prophecy and could occur anywhere along the series. For the people of Zephaniah’s time the Day of the Lord was near—very near*—and the catastrophic conditions were capable of being soon applied with tragic consequences.

In describing that time Zephaniah uses apocalypticlike themes and subject matter that occur elsewhere in prophetic passages and also utilizes a vocabulary frequently associated with them:

v. 14 קָרוֹב (qa.,ro,b, “near”; cf. [Isa. 13:6, 22](#); [Ezek. 7:7](#); [30:7](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1](#); [3:14](#) [HB 4:14]; [Obad. 15](#)),

יּוֹם גָּדוֹל (yo,m ga.,do,l, “great day”; cf. [Joel 2:11, 31](#) [HB 3:4]), מָר (mar, “bitter”; cf. [Amos 8:10](#))

v. 15 עֶבְרָה (’ebra, “wrath”; cf. [Isa. 13:9, 13](#); [Ezek. 7:19](#); [38:19](#)),

צָרָה (sʕa.,ra., "distress"; cf. [Isa. 30:6](#); [Jer. 30:7](#); [Dan. 12:1](#)),

שָׂדָה (sʕo.,áa., "destruction"; cf. [Ezek. 38:9](#)),

חֹשֶׁךְ (hʕo.,sʕek, "darkness"; cf. [Joel 2:2, 31](#) [HB 3:4]; [Amos 5:18, 20](#)),

אֶפְלָה (áaʔpe.,la., "gloom"; cf. [Joel 2:2](#)),

עָנָן (áa.,na.,n, "clouds"; cf. [Ezek. 30:3, 18](#); [38:9, 10](#); [Joel 2:2](#)),

עֲרֵפֶל (áaʕra.,pel, "blackness"; cf. [Ezek. 34:12](#); [Joel 2:2](#))

v. 16 שׁוֹפָר (sʕo.,pa.,r, "trumpet"; cf. [Isa. 27:13](#); [Jer. 4:5, 19, 21](#); [Joel 2:1, 15](#); [Zech. 9:14](#)),

תְּרוּעָה (teʔru.,áa., "battle cry/blast"; cf. [Jer. 4:19](#))

v. 18 בְּאֵשׁ קִנְיָתוֹ (beʔáe.,sʕE qináa.,to., "in the fire of his jealousy"; cf. [Ezek. 36:5, 6](#); [38:19](#)),

כָּלָה (ka.,la., "end/complete"; cf. [Jer. 4:27](#)),

יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ (yo.,sʕEʕEbe, ha.,áa.,resʕ, "the inhabitants of the earth"; cf. [Jer. 24:6](#); [26:9, 18](#); [Joel 2:1](#); see also [Rev. 3:10](#))

In composing his catalog of conditions that will characterize the Day of the Lord Zephaniah has drawn upon themes and vocabulary employed by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel, but he is particularly indebted to [Joel 2:1-11](#):

<i>Subject Matter</i>	Zeph. 1:14-18	Joel 2:1-11
The Day of the Lord is near	14	1
It is a great day	14	11h
A day of darkness and gloom	15	2
A day of clouds and blackness	15	2
A day of sounding trumpet	16	1
All the inhabitants of the earth	18	1 770

Nevertheless, Zephaniah's list of characteristic features of the Day of the Lord is no mere gathering from others. It is augmented by additions such as מְצַרָה (meʕʕsʕu.,qa., "anguish," v. 15) and מְשׁוּדָה (meʕʕsʕo.,áa., "desolation," v. 15) and filled out with new material in the latter half.⁷⁷¹ In sum, although Zephaniah is led by God to reiterate and recombine many thoughts concerning that day of judgment, he is also led to add fresh features. He does so with consummate literary artistry, and the effect is staggering.

What a day the Day of the Lord will be!⁷⁷² So horrifying will be the conditions (vv. 14-15) that the bravest hero will shriek bitterly.⁷⁷³ This is understandable, because it is the time of God's great wrath. The term for "wrath" here is suggestive of the overwhelming nature of the divine anger against sin:

The term *ʾēbra*, when used in relation to God ... adds the nuance of the fierceness of God's wrath ([78:49](#)) expressed in an overwhelming and complete demonstration ([Isa 13:9](#)). God's wrath burns; overflows, sweeps away everything before it ([Ezk 22:21, 31](#)). Thus on the day of the Lord's *ʾēbra*; nothing stands before it. When the day of judgment is spoken of, the reference is to God's wrath overflowing, burning, consuming all that has displeased or opposed him.⁷⁷⁴

Because of wrath against sin, the earth will experience great distress and anguish. Other prophets ... that so severe will be the testing of the eschatological day that it will be called the time of Jacob's trouble ([Jer. 30:7](#); cf. [Dan. 12:1](#)). Zephaniah makes a similar prediction and adds that the day will bring great anguish to all who experience it. This picture of the terror that will come upon people who have defied God may have been drawn from [Job 15:23-25](#), where terms and themes relative to the day of darkness and the sinner's defiance of God appear together.⁷⁷⁵ Particularly instructive are the words "distress" and "anguish" common to both passages. Ironically, Eliphaz's misdirected words against Job perhaps find a better home in criticism of the willful citizens of Zephaniah's day. Their following of paganism (1:4-6) and a self-indulgent lifestyle (1:8-13) were in open defiance of God and His standards so that they might well expect that a time of "distress and anguish" would fill them "with terror." The realization that their sin had occasioned the outpouring of God's wrath would doubtless bring anguish of soul to God's people.

Zephaniah goes on to describe conditions in the land and in nature (v. 15). Destruction will dot the landscape; everything will be a desolate waste. Once again Zephaniah draws upon phraseology employed by Job in describing a wasteland ([Job 38:27](#)) in which none can find sustenance ([Job 30:3](#)).⁷⁷⁶ Adding to the scene of misery are conditions in the natural world. All nature is covered with clouds that form an impenetrable darkness. Although such darkness had not gripped the world of God's covenant people since early days, it will come with heavy hand upon the objects of divine wrath in the great Day of the Lord (cf. [Joel 2:2](#)).⁷⁷⁷ It is a bleak picture at best: "No star of hope is to be seen; only 'clouds and thick darkness,' the black thunderclouds, from which flash forth the lightning bolts of the Lord's fierce wrath."⁷⁷⁸

From the physical world, Zephaniah turns once again to the socio-political realm (v. 16). That day will be a time of great warfare. Von Rad remarks concerning this aspect of the Day of the Lord that "the prophets expect the day of Yahweh to bring war in its train. Now the widespread employment of this concept in the prophets suggests that we are dealing with a well-established component part of eschatological tradition."⁷⁷⁹ Out of the distance comes the sound of the trumpet and the shout of battle cry (cf. [Josh. 6:5](#); [Jer. 4:5](#)). Then follows the charge of the enemy army pushing into the towns of Judah (cf. [Deut. 28:49-52](#)). Not even the most stoutly fortified city will be able to withstand the advance of these agents of the Lord's judgment.⁷⁸⁰

Zephaniah concludes by observing the tragic cost in human life and experience that all this will effect (vv. 17-18). In accordance with His judicial purposes God will bring distress not only to Judah but also to all mankind.⁷⁸¹ There is a play here on words and ideas in v. 15. Because it is a day of distress and anguish, God will cause distress to man. So intense will be the conditions that people will grope like blind men. How appropriate the punishment! Because they are blind ethically and spiritually (cf. [Ex. 23:8](#); [Matt. 15:14](#); [Rom. 2:19](#); [11:25](#); [Eph. 4:18](#); [1 John 2:11](#)) and have sinned against God and His commandments, God's people will incur the just penalties of the covenant ([Deut. 28:28-29](#)).⁷⁸² As Keil remarks, "This distress God sends, because they have sinned against Him, by falling away from Him through idolatry and the transgression of His commandments, as already shown in vers. 4-12. But the punishment will be terrible."⁷⁸³

The effect of these tragic conditions is further heightened in similes that liken the carnage of that day to blood poured out like worthless dust (cf. [1 Kings 20:10](#); [2 Kings 13:7](#); [23:12](#)) and flesh treated like dung (cf. [1 Kings 14:10](#); [2 Kings 9:37](#); [Jer. 8:1-3](#); [Lam. 4:5](#)). Human life (flesh and blood) is thus reduced to a thing of no value, with even corpses being treated as despicable refuse (cf. [Jer. 9:20-22](#); [16:1-4](#); [25:32-33](#)). The warfare* connected with the Day of the Lord will thus be both extensive and bloody.

The chapter closes (v. 18) with a reiteration of two prominent themes: (1) the self-indulgent greed of the godless wealthy and (2) the certain judgment of all men and nations. As for the former, the wealthy have heaped up their riches at the expense of their fellow citizens in pursuit of material gain. However, it will all soon come to an end; no amount of silver or gold will be able to buy off their despoilers. Their attempt to achieve deliverance will fail (cf. [2 Kings 15:16-20](#); [16:17-19](#); [18:13-16](#)). With regard to the latter theme, the judgment that always hangs over mankind will one day descend with sudden swiftness, and the world and all who dwell in it will experience the wrath of God. Time is running out. "The world, which had begun with such promise in creation, had gone too far; God would make an end of it all. Such was Zephaniah's vision of the *dies irae*."⁷⁸⁴

Though the full weight of Zephaniah's prophecy bears ultimately on the *eschaton*, because the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem was an integral part of the process, God's people might expect judgment at any time. If a godless world and its inhabitants will ultimately perish, could God's faithless nation expect any less? Hardly. No one and nothing will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. "The destruction had been determined by Jehovah and there would be no escaping the judgment against their sins."⁷⁸⁵

Additional Notes

1:14 † קָרוֹב וְיָבֵר קֵאֵד ("near and coming very quickly"): The traditional understanding of the MT of the approach of the Day of the Lord, perhaps personified as a swift messenger or fierce soldier rushing into battle, is improved upon little by recent attempts to relate the phrase to an Egypto-Semitic term for

soldier.⁷⁸⁶ The repetition of the idea of nearness is not redundant; rather, the intentional emphasis underscores both the fact and the impending arrival of the Day of the Lord.⁷⁸⁷

The hermeneutical problem of multiple versus single fulfillment and the related identification of prop that are deemed to be telescoped, generic, or progressively fulfilled is complex.⁷⁸⁸ From a NT pers the Greek verb ἀνασχεῖν may at times refer to a literal, real, and necessary relationship between an C context and the NT so that the NT text *fulfills* completely the OT meaning. More commonly, however, writer cites an OT passage to establish an analogy or comparison between the OT and NT contexts, thus *filling* out more *fully* the OT context.

† קול ("listen!") is taken here as an interjection (cf. Soncino). Keil calls attention to a similar employment of קול in [Isa. 13:4](#), likewise a "Day of the Lord" passage.⁷⁸⁹

† מר . . . גבור ("bitter . . . warrior"): מר has been taken by some with the previous clause, "the Day of the Lord is bitter" (LXX, Vg, NIV, NJB, NKJV, RSV), and by others with the last clause of the verse (KJV, NASB).⁷⁹⁰ In the latter case it is usually taken as an adverb "bitterly" (so Soncino)⁷⁹¹ but can also be viewed in its normal adjectival function (lit. "bitter is he who cries, the hero"). The translation suggested here follows the MT accent in taking מר with the last clause but points the next word as a substantive צרה ("shriek/cry/battle cry").⁷⁹² In addition I view the following שם not as the adverbial particle "there" but as the relative particle ש and assign the final *mem* to the following גבור as the prefixed preposition, thus yielding "from/of the warrior."⁷⁹³

A proposal by C. F. Whitley is also attractive.⁷⁹⁴ Noting the unsuitability of the normal use of שם here, he suggests treating it as an emphatic particle ("yea/indeed"), while taking מר with the previous clause (but relating it to Ugaritic *mrr*, "be strong"). He paraphrases the whole: "The sound of the day of Yahweh is overwhelming, even the strong man cries aloud with fear." Although Whitley and I have handled matters differently, the resultant perspective is the same.

1:17-18 Von Rad suggests that the concept of the *warfare* of the eschatological Day of the Lord is an outgrowth of earlier Yahwistic traditions related to holy warfare, now extended to a universalistic perspective:

The concepts connected with the Day of Yahweh are, therefore, in no way eschatological *per se*, but were familiar to the prophets in all their details from the old Yahwistic tradition. The prophets . . . believed that Yahweh's final uprising against his foes would take the same form as it had done in the days of old. It is beyond question that the prophetic vision of the concept of Yahweh's intervention in war became greatly intensified; for the war was now to affect all nations, even the fixed orders of creation, and even Israel herself. The event has been expanded into a phenomenon of cosmic significance.⁷⁹⁵

1:17 † שפך ("poured out"): Although Sabottka insists that the lack of examples of this verb in the piel necessitates viewing the form here as a qal passive, the presence of a hithpael elsewhere ([Job 30:16](#); [Lam. 2:12](#); 4:1), attesting the use of the D-stem in classical Hebrew, makes his pronouncement tenuous.⁷⁹⁶

† לֶחֶמָם ("their flesh"): I take the form not as "their intestines" (Soncino; cf. NIV "entrails") but according to the Arabic lahām ("meat/flesh"; cf. [Job 20:23](#)).⁷⁹⁷

1:18 † קלה ("end") is commonly employed of divinely initiated destruction (cf. Neh. 9:31; [Jer. 4:27](#)). It is construed here as in [Nah. 1:8](#) (q.v.) as part of a double accusative. The syntax of this verse is like that of [Isa. 10:23](#), in each case the object noun being modified by affixing a niphal participle:

[Isaiah 10:23](#)

כִּי קֵלָה וְנִקְרָצָה

"for a complete end,

and that decreed"

(= "a determined end")

[Zephaniah 1:18](#)

כִּי־קֵלָה אֶרֶץ־יְבִהֵלָה

"for a complete end,

yea a terrifying one"

(= "a determined end")

For the blending of the ideas of wrath, jealousy, and fire, see [Ezek. 38:19](#) and the Exegesis and Exposition and Additional Notes on [Nah. 1:2, 6](#).

2. Instructions in The Light Of that Day (2:1-3)

Translation

Gather together and assemble yourselves,

O wayward* nation,

²before the decree takes effect*

or the day passes like chaff,

before there comes upon you

the burning anger of the LORD,

before there comes upon you

the day of the LORD's anger.

³Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth,

who do His commandments;

seek righteousness, seek humility;

perhaps you will be delivered*

in the day of the LORD's anger.

Exegesis and Exposition

In light of the horrifying spectacle of the judgment of the Day of the Lord, Zephaniah presses his fellow countrymen to gather together in repentance and humility before God. Utilizing images drawn from the process of separating straw from chaff, Zephaniah gives them a spiritual setting. He uses straw and its collection (v. 1a) to symbolize the assembling of people for the purpose of collectively repenting and thus escaping the coming destruction (i.e., to be straw, not chaff). He employs the concept of threshing (v. 1b) to point to the necessity of being broken before God rather than going on in self-indulgent waywardness. He uses the idea of chaff in connection with the speed and ease with which it is blown away: like chaff, the day of judgment was rapidly approaching (v. 2b); like chaff, wayward sinners would be destroyed in the Day of the Lord.

The word for “assemble” is related to the word for straw and its gathering. Zephaniah’s hearers are told to be straw gatherers—those who are “whole grain,” being of humble heart before God. Up to now they have been a wayward people (cf. 1:7-13, 18). They were not threshed;* their hearts were unbroken and had no longing for God. Thus they could not survive the coming judgment, but like chaff they would soon be swept away in the winds of God’s winnowing judgment. The threat of exile was before them.⁷⁹⁸

Gathering together meant coming together in genuine repentance and submission to the will of God. Zephaniah’s advice is akin to that of [Joel 2:1-11](#), noted in the previous section dealing with the Day of the Lord. Joel also follows his description with a call for national repentance ([Joel 2:12-14](#)) in the fond hope (as here) that destruction may be averted.⁷⁹⁹

Zephaniah’s plea is urgent, for God’s decree was settled and would soon be put into effect. Moreover, as Zephaniah had already indicated (1:7-18), its implementation would bring with it the “burning anger of the Lord”*. Yet even here Zephaniah retains the hope that complete destruction (1:18) could be avoided. The construction “before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord” is unique: לא (lo, “not”) is inserted before the verb and after the temporal particle בְּעַתָּה (be’et’et’em, “not yet”). Though the double negative construction is best rendered in English “before,” the intended effect may have been to add a note of hope to the certainty of the coming judgment. Although the judgment is even now descending, a proper response on the people’s part could perhaps ameliorate or even avert the threatened disaster—and that while the burning anger of the Lord “not yet had not come” upon them (i.e., before it could arrive).⁸⁰⁰

Building on this glimmer of hope, Zephaniah urges his hearers to seek the Lord.⁸⁰¹ He calls primarily upon those most likely to respond—the poor, those victimized by the wealthy leaders and merchants of Judah and Jerusalem. In addition, they have kept God’s commandments. Doubtless, however, Zephaniah intends all who will respond with poverty of soul in humility and submission to God.⁸⁰² He urges them to react to his pleas with the two qualities necessary for spiritual productivity: righteousness and humility*. By the first is meant those spiritual and ethical standards that reflect the nature and will of God, by the second submission to and dependence on God.⁸⁰³

To all such, then, Zephaniah holds out a ray of hope:

The word אָיִן “perhaps” speaks volumes. The prophet would not presume on the prerogative of Yahweh to determine who would or would not be hidden. Zephaniah, like Amos (cf. 5:15), knew that not even righteousness nor humility could guarantee a person’s safety. That was all in the hand of Yahweh.⁸⁰⁴

Whereas Zephaniah would not presume on the divine prerogative, he brings the thought of deliverance into a lively hope. Probably this reflected his confidence that He who helps the needy will hear the prayer of the repentant and submissive ([Ps. 10:12-17](#)). “Perhaps” God will graciously deliver them as His wrath descends in judgment.

Additional Notes

2:1 הִתְקוּשׁוּ וְקוּשׁוּ ("gather together and assemble yourselves"): The translation suggested here is *ad* Some attempt to read the MT as is; others seek to emend it. Thus J. M. P. Smith observes: "Various renderings have been proposed.... But none of these finds adequate support either in the Hebrew u this root, or in the related dialects, or in the Vrss. Several scholars abandon as hopeless the attempt interpret."⁸⁰⁵

Because the ancient versions uniformly support the MT, it seems advisable to deal with the text as it stands. Zephaniah has utilized these denominative verbs to produce a play on ideas, their apparent derivation from שָׂבַע ("straw/stubble") accounting for their selection. They anticipate the reference to chaff blown away in line two of v. 2 (as well as the figure of threshing) and provide an image that can be adapted to the socio-political and religious needs of the community. The metaphor is of judgment likened to winnowing. As one gathers the straw left from the threshing sledge and separates the grain from the chaff in the winnowing process, so the people of God will be divided into believers (straw) and unbelievers (chaff) in the coming winds of divine judgment. It was a time of spiritual harvest, and Zephaniah's countrymen needed to assemble and "gather straw."⁸⁰⁶ In genuine repentance they needed to entreat God to save them.

לֹא נִכְסָה ("wayward"): Two etymologies have been suggested: (1) Akkadian *kasa*,pu("break off") and (2) Arabic *kasafa* ("cut out," thence in derived stems "disappoint," "put to shame"; cf. the Aramaic נִכְסָה, "lose color," "be ashamed"). The second etymology has usually been assumed to lie behind the occurrences in [Gen. 31:30](#); [Job 14:15](#); Pss. 17:12; 84:2 (HB 84:3), where, however, the meaning uniformly is "long for/desire."⁸⁰⁷

Whether two or more different roots lie behind the verb or whether one root has taken on dialectal and contextual variation, its normal OT significance is difficult to apply here (although the Vg translates it "not lovable"). The proposed translation ("*threshed*") relies on the Akkadian cognate and relates the phrase to the agricultural symbolism of the context. As grain must be broken off (threshed) into small pieces in preparation for winnowing, so a man must be broken spiritually (cf. Pss. 34:18) [HB 34:19]; 51:18 [HB 51:19]; 147:3⁸⁰⁸ in submission to God if he is to be delivered. The people of Zephaniah's day, however, were "not broken." Rather, as the LXX and Pesh. suggest, they were "undisciplined/uninstructed." They displayed a willful disregard for God and his standards and sought their own path. Because a wayward person has no longing for the things of God, "wayward" seems to fit the needs of etymology and context.⁸⁰⁹ It is also not incompatible with the use of the root elsewhere in the OT.

If the agricultural orientation is the proper one for these verses, Zephaniah has furnished an excellent example of a case where the figure itself carries the meaning for the context.⁸¹⁰ Zephaniah means that "get straw for yourself, get straw, O unbroken nation, before the decree is born or the day sweeps by like chaff (before the wind)" is to be understood as "gather yourselves in an assembly of repentance, O wayward nation, before the decree concerning the Day of the Lord takes effect, before that speedily approaching day overtakes you and like chaff you are carried away before the winds of God's judgment."

2:2 † בְּטֹרֶם לֵדַת הַדֵּק ("before the birth of the decree," i.e., "before the decree takes effect"): For suggested emendations, see the *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 5:374-75. The metaphor here likens the time for the inception of divine judgment to that of pregnancy. Thus M. O'Connor translates "Before the womb comes to term" and explains: "The line refers to a natural term for the prophet's threat."⁸¹¹

For the phrase "*the burning anger of the Lord*," found some thirty-three times in the OT, see the additional note on [Nah. 1:6](#). J. T. Willis notes Zephaniah's use of ABA'B' parallelism in the closing lines of the verse to emphasize the imminence of divine punishment that urgently called for repentance.

2:3 הִנְנֶה ("*humility*") occurs elsewhere only in [2 Sam. 22:36](#) where it is used of God's condescension on behalf of His people and in [Prov. 15:33](#); [18:12](#); [22:4](#), which emphasize the importance of the fear of the Lord and lowliness of spirit as preconditions to greatness. Its derivation from הִנְנֶה ("be afflicted/bowed down") and association with other words derived from this root reveal that inward affliction of soul and outward circumstances of affliction play a vital part in developing true humility (cf. [Deut. 8:2-3](#); [Ps. 34:6](#) [HB 34:7]; [Prov. 16:19](#)).⁸¹²

† תִּקְרָיו ("you will be delivered"): I take the verb as an infixed-*f* form from סָר ("turn aside") in the sense of "turn oneself aside," hence "escape," "be delivered." Many examples of infixed-*t* forms have been suggested elsewhere (e.g., [Prov. 22:3](#); [27:12](#)).⁸¹³ The traditional association of the word with קָתַר ("hide") is reflected in the English versions: "be sheltered" (NIV), "find shelter" (NJB), "be hidden" (NASB).

2

Additional Details Concerning the Day of the Lord, Part One ([Zephaniah 2:4-3:7](#))

The second portion of Zephaniah's prophecies (2:4-3:20) likewise is made up of pronouncements (2:4-3:7), an exhortation (3:8), and teachings (3:9-20). After his preoccupation primarily with the fate of his people in the first part of the book, Zephaniah turns his attention to the foreign nations (2:4-15). He had begun the first major portion of his prophecy by similarly considering all nations (1:2-3). Here he deals with specific nations that were mostly tied to Judah's situation geographically and politically as representatives of God's relations

with the world. When he has completed his oracles against these nations, as in the first portion (1:4 turns to a consideration of Judah and Jerusalem (3:1-7).

The messages against the nations are made up of the usual elements contained in such prophetic i invective (2:5a; 3:1), threat (2:4, 5b-7, 9, 12), pronouncement (2:11, 13), taunt (2:15b), and reasons threatened punishment (2:8, 10, 15a; 3:2-4, 5-7).⁸¹⁴ This portion also contains such literary feature: metaphor and simile (2:4-7, 9; 3:3), irony (2:12), synecdoche (2:13; 3:6), thematic repetition (3:1), a use of paronomasia (2:4, 7, 12[?]), hendiadys (3:7), enallage (3:7), and literary allusions (2:4, 9).

A. Further Pronouncements Of Judgment (2:4-3:7)

1. On The Nations (2:4-15)

Zephaniah begins his pronouncements against the nations by turning to the people on Judah's west, the Philistines (vv. 4-7), then going to those on the east, Moab and Ammon (vv. 8-11), and finally considering those on the south and north, singling out Cush (v. 12) and Assyria (vv. 13-15).

Zephaniah's prophecy against the nations is four dimensional, a convention that is, as Ronald Youngblood points out (in private communication), "in the same grand tradition of oracles against foreign nations as are [Amos 1-2](#), [Isaiah 13-23](#), [Jeremiah 46-51](#), and [Ezekiel 25-32](#)." Certainly Youngblood's point is well taken. Not only is divine judgment often presented in a fourfold manner (see the additional note at 2:4), but the objects of Zephaniah's condemnation are commonly met in the other texts: Philistia ([Isa. 14:28-32](#); [Jer. 47](#); [Ezek. 25:15-17](#); [Amos 1:6-8](#)), Transjordan (Moab, Ammon, Edom—[Isa. 15-16](#); [Jer. 48:1-49:22](#); [Ezek. 25:1-14](#); [35](#); [Amos 1:11-2:3](#)), Cush and/or Egypt ([Isa. 18-20](#); [Jer. 46](#); [Ezek. 29-32](#)), and Assyria and/or Babylonia ([Isa. 13:1-14:27](#); [21:1-10](#); [Jer. 50-51](#)).

Interesting, too, is the fact that some of the prophets, as does Zephaniah, utilize a four-directional arrangement for their prophecies. Jeremiah's geographic arrangement falls into two main sections: (1) The nations adjacent to Israel (south: Egypt, chap. 46; west: Philistia, chap. 47; east: Transjordan, 48:1—49:22; north: Damascus/Aram, 49:23-27) and (2) the nations around Babylon (southwest: Kedar and Hazor, 49:28-33; east: Elam, 49:34-39; and Babylon itself, chaps. 50-51). Ezekiel inverts Zephaniah's geographic order, considering Israel's neighbors in crisscross fashion moving from east (Transjordan, 25:1-14), west (Philistia, 25:15-17), and north (Phoenicia, chaps. 26-28) to south (Egypt, chaps. 29-32). Though other principles are at work in the case of Isaiah and Amos, Amos's prophecies do move in a geographic fashion, crisscrossing the twin kingdoms diagonally from north/northeast (Aram, 1:3-5) to southwest (Philistia, 1:6-8), and northwest (Phoenicia, 1:9-10) to east/southeast (Transjordan, 1:11-2:3) before turning to Judah and Israel themselves.⁸¹⁵ Daniel's use of the number four to depict the fate of the coming kingdoms of the world (2, 7) also is instructive and reflects a known literary schema that is widely attested in the ancient Mediterranean cultures since the early part of the first millennium B.C.

a. Philistia (2:4-7)

Translation

For Gaza will be forsaken/abandoned,

and Ashkelon will become a desolation;

Ashdod, they will drive her out at midday,

and Ekron will be uprooted.

⁵Woe, you who inhabit the seacoast,

the nations of the Kerethites;

the word of the LORD is against you,

Canaan, land of the Philistines:

"I will destroy you to the last inhabitant."

⁶And the seacoast will be a pasture land,

shepherds' caves and sheepfolds.

⁷And the coastlands will belong

to the remnant of the house of Judah;

they will find pasture on them;

among the houses of Ashkelon

they will lie down in the evening.

For the LORD their God will care for them

and restore their fortunes.

Exegesis and Exposition

Zephaniah begins his messages concerning the foreign nations with words for Judah's perennial enemy—the Philistines. Philistine presence in Canaan had been reported since the days of the patriarchs ([Gen. 21:32](#)) and the era of the Exodus and Conquest ([Ex. 13:17](#); [Josh. 13:2-3](#)). The Philistines were a constant threat during the time of the judges ([Judg. 3:3-4](#); [13-16](#)) and the early monarchy (cf. [1 Sam. 4:1-11](#); [7:1-14](#)). Although they were defeated by David in the tenth century B.C. ([2 Sam. 5:17-25](#); [1 Chron. 20:4-5](#)), they remained a constant thorn in the side of the Israelites throughout the days of Solomon and the period of the divided monarchy (cf. [1 Kings 15:27-28](#); [16:15-19](#); [2 Chron. 21:16-17](#); [Isa. 14:28-32](#); [28:16-21](#); [Amos 1:6-8](#)). Though they had become vassals of Assyria in the eighth century B.C., they nonetheless enjoyed a measure of independence so that they continued to be a source of danger and irritation to the people of God (cf. [2 Kings 18:5-8](#); [2 Chron. 26:6-8](#)). Even as late as the closing days of the Southern Kingdom, the Philistines were being condemned by Judah's prophets ([Jer. 47:1-7](#); [Ezek. 25:15-17](#)).⁸¹⁶ Accordingly Zephaniah's words of condemnation and judgment were neither unprecedented nor unexpected and doubtless would have been well received by the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem.

Adopting the literary style of Micah before him ([Mic. 1:10-15](#)), Zephaniah uses wordplay to begin his prophetic threats against the Philistine cities.⁸¹⁷ In the case of the first and last cities, a pun between the name of the city and the fact of its judgment is intended: Gaza (gaza) will be abandoned (gaza) and Ekron (ekron) will be uprooted (ekron); in the other two instances, a play on the s sounds in the names of the cities adds a harsh note that heightens the fact of their coming destruction and desolation: Ashdod (ashdod) and Ashkelon (ashkelon). These four noteworthy cities are doubtless also representative of the total destruction of Philistine territory. Likewise, the mention of their specific fate may be characteristic of the various forms that the judgment of the Philistines would take: defeat, destruction, deportation, and abandonment of cities. The reference to Ashdod's invasion at noon,* a time for rest from the midday sun, may indicate a surprise attack: "In hot countries, work is suspended during the hottest hours of the day; therefore for anything to happen then is unexpected. The prophet means that Ashdod will fall by a surprise attack (cf. Jer. XV.8)."⁸¹⁸

Each of the cities experienced the horrors of invasion. Gaza was taken by Nebuchadnezzar and became a deserted city.⁸¹⁹ Ashkelon was also taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C., but it recovered and eventually became famous as a Hellenistic city and as the birthplace of Herod the Great. Ashdod and Ekron⁸²⁰ likewise fell to the same Neo-Babylonian conqueror, but both are mentioned in the literature of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, which reflects Ashdod's changing fortunes and Ekron's persistence into the time of Eusebius in the fourth century A.D. As for the main fact of Zephaniah's prophecy, the capture and destruction of the cities and territory of the Philistines, there can be little doubt. Thus Nebuchadnezzar boasts:

In the first year of Nebuchadnezzar in the month of Sivan he mustered his army and went to the Hatti-territory, ...

All the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute.

He marched to the city of Ashkelon and captured it in the month of Kislev.

He captured its king and plundered it and carried off [spoils from it.....]

He turned the city into a mound and heaps of ruins and then in the month of Sebat he marched back to Babylon.⁸²¹

Kitchen concludes:

Ashkelon sought to resist the Neo-Babylonian advance in 604 B.C.; Nebuchadnezzar II subdued it and exiled its king in Babylon, where his sons appear in the ration-tablets along with Jehoiachin of Judah and his relations. These, with mentions of kings of Gaza and Ashdod at the Babylonian court, are the last traces of Philistia as an entity, before her final disappearance as a political unit.⁸²²

There may also be a clever literary play at work here. Robert Gordis,⁸²³ building upon a suggestion of Lawrence Zalcman,⁸²⁴ detects the metaphor of a deserted woman. Both scholars propose that the reason for the absence of paronomasia and the presence of, at best, weak assonance in the pronouncements against Ashkelon and Ashdod is because no verb could be found that was suitable for the needed assonance and paronomasia and that carried with it the double entendre of a woman and a city. Faced with a choice of proceeding with the metaphor or the constraints of assonance, Zephaniah chose the former. Thus the verse contains four stitches that "present an ascending scale of suffering, thus heightening the pathos of the passage" and are "to be understood as follows:

Indeed, Gaza shall be deserted (like a betrothed woman),

And Ashkelon will be desolate (like a deserted wife);

Ashdod will be driven out in broad daylight (like a divorced woman),

And Ekron will be uprooted (like a barren woman).⁸²⁵

Although there may be some hesitation in adopting the suggestion of a metaphor in which the cities hated Philistines are compared to a woman, this solution to understanding the literary problems of the middle lines and the flow of thought in the whole verse is brilliant. Certainly it is in keeping with not only scriptural precedent (cf. [Isa. 54:6](#); [60:15](#); [62:4](#); [Jer. 4:29](#); etc.) but also Zephaniah's penchant for the literary allusions (cf. 1:2-3).

Zephaniah's announcement of judgment turns to invective as he pronounces a woe against those who live along the seacoast.⁸²⁶ Though the term may suggest the more densely occupied portions of Philistia, J. M. P. Smith is probably correct in pointing out that it is "a fitting designation of Philistia, which lay along the Maritime Plain."⁸²⁷ In making his denunciations Zephaniah calls these Philistine settlers Kerethites,* a term that reflects their Cretan origins, and their territory Canaan,* a name that indicates not only a geographic location but implies their land's similar fate of depopulation and disenfranchisement. Philistia will be judged "till there are no inhabitants left" (NJB), never again to be a threat:

Time and again these cities were destroyed during the many wars that ravaged Palestine in the centuries following this prophecy. Pharaoh Necho devastated Philistia ([Jer. 47:1-7](#)); Alexander the Great depopulated Gaza and repopulated it from the neighborhood (Arrian, *Anabasis* II, 27). Later, Philistia became a Syrian province and in the Maccabean wars was raided and ravaged repeatedly by the Jews (1 Macc. 5:68; 10:67-89; 11:60ff.; 13:43ff.).⁸²⁸

Whatever future hope the region had lay in its relation to the Philistines' perennial enemies, the Israelites. The prosperous seacoast district will become pastureland dotted with caves for Israelite shepherds and folds for their flocks. It will belong to the remnant* of Judah, "the object of the love and providential concern of the Lord their God who cares for and restores His people."⁸²⁹

Additional Notes

2:4 Although the mention of only four Philistine cities has been taken by some⁸³⁰ as merely a suitable vehicle to represent the judgment of all of Philistia, since the prophets customarily employ groups of four to indicate totality of judgment (e.g., [Jer. 15:3](#); [Ezek. 14:21](#); [Joel 1:2-4](#)),⁸³¹ a technique that Zephaniah utilizes here in the wider context (2:4-15), such may not be the case. The fact that the prophets often proclaim judgment in groups of more than four cities or countries (e.g., [Isa. 13-23](#); [Jer. 46-51](#); [Ezek. 25-32](#); [Amos 1:3-2:5](#)), as well as the disappearance of Gath from both biblical and nonbiblical accounts by this period, may indicate its unavailability for Zephaniah. The prophecy against the four Philistine cities may thus be intended to be understood both individually and representatively.

Several commentators have noted the occurrence elsewhere in the OT of the root *s(E)dd* (which can be isolated in the sound of the name Ashdod) with the name Ashdod (e.g., [Jer. 15:8](#); [Ps. 91:6](#)). Thus Lawrence Zalcman cites the comments of the Jewish scholars Rashi and Kimchi:

"Ashdod is her name, and at noon when destruction devastates they will drive her [inhabitants] out and she will be devastated". Here the reference to Ps. xci 6 is unmistakable. Qimhî is even more explicit: ... Ashdod means "devastation" [*s(E)dd*], and thus it is, as it were, paronomasia.⁸³²

2:5 הָיָם הַיָּם (the seacoast, or "the line of the sea"); הַיָּם means basically "rope/cord" and is related to an Akkadian word (*eblu*) with the same meaning. It also was utilized in contexts dealing with the use of a measuring line ([2 Sam. 8:2](#)) and to indicate a unit of measured area, "district/region" ([Deut. 3:4](#), [13](#), [14](#); [Josh. 19:9](#)). Although its employment with *ים* is unique to Zephaniah (the usual term for "seacoast" is הָיָם הַיָּם; cf. [Jer. 47:7](#)), the resultant term is clear. The association of the Philistines with coastal areas is mentioned also by Ezekiel ([Ezek. 25:16](#)).⁸³³

כִּרְתִּים ("Kerethites"): Apparently related to the name Crete, with which Philistine origins are partially linked,⁸³⁴ its precise significance is unclear. Kerethites were included in David's bodyguard ([2 Sam. 8:18](#); [15:18](#); [20:7](#); [20:1](#); [1 Kings 1:38](#); [44:1](#); [1 Chron. 18:17](#)). The Kerethites have been considered by some to be a tribe of the Philistines,⁸³⁵ by others as Cretans who first settled in Canaan during the Davidic era.⁸³⁶ In any case, their close association with the Philistines is assumed both here and in [Ezek. 25:16](#), where they are also linked with the seacoast.⁸³⁷

The term "Canaan," which designates geographically the land west of the Jordan (including Philistia) northward through Syria to Lebo Hamath (modern Lebweh), is probably used with the further implication of indicating "that Philistia is to share the lot of Canaan, and lose its inhabitants by extermination."⁸³⁸ Canaan is thus not conterminous with Philistia, nor is Philistia identical with the modern term Palestine (except etymologically).

2:6 קְדֹת ("caves"): The word is variously rendered in the versions as "Crete" (LXX), "Kerethites" (NIV), "Kereth" (NEB), "resting place" (Vg), "shelters" (NKJV), "cottages" (KJV), "meadows" (RSV; cf. Soncino), "caves" (NASB). The last suggestion has been followed here, taking the root to be קָדָה ("dig"). This seems to make the best sense in context. Whether the caves in view are "natural, dug by nature, or artificial, man-made," they are "used by shepherds and their flocks as a shelter at night or in stormy weather."⁸³⁹

2:7 שְׁאֵרִית ("remnant"): Zephaniah had spoken earlier of destroying the "remnant of Baal" (1:4), and predicted that the "remnant of the Philistines" would perish ([Amos 1:8](#)). Here God leaves a remnant people, which He, the Good Shepherd, will care for (Heb. ⁸⁴⁰רֹעֵי) and restore to prosperity.⁸⁴¹ Elsev prophets predict that God will preserve a remnant of His people, which He will regather to the land, they will turn to their Messiah and be blessed with everlasting felicity ([Isa. 10:20-23; 11:11-16; Jer. 2 31:11-14, 27-37; Ezek. 11:13-20; 34:20-31; 37:15-28; Amos 5:15; Mic. 2:12-13; 4:1-8; 5:7-8](#) [HB 5:6 20; [Zech. 8:6-8](#); cf. [Zeph. 3:9-20](#)]).⁸⁴²

Because the pronoun on יָם עַל is masc. pl., BHS suggests a transposition of consonants so as to read יָם עַל ("on the sea[coast]"), thus paralleling הַיָּם in the previous line. The effect is to propose that the full territory mentioned in v. 6 is here being treated in its component parts. The masc. plurals in יָרְעוּן and יִרְבְּצוּן are construed *ad sensum*, the subject being viewed either as the shepherds of v. 6 or the individual members of the remnant presented metaphorically here as sheep (cf. [Jer. 23:1-4; Ezek. 34:11-16, 20-31; 37:24-28](#); etc.). Thus J. M. P. Smith remarks: "The closing scene shows the former marts of trade and busy hives of men given over to the undisturbed possession of well-fed sheep, going in and out of the vacant houses at will, 'with none to make them afraid.'"⁸⁴³

b. Moab and Ammon (2:8-11)

Translation

"I have heard the insults* of Moab

and the revilings of the Ammonites,

who insulted My people

and violated* their borders.

⁹Therefore, as I live,"

declares the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel,

"surely Moab will be like Sodom

and the Ammonites like Gomorrah—

overrun* with weeds and salt pits,

and a perpetual desolation.

The remnant of My people will despoil them,

and the remainder of My nation will inherit them."

¹⁰This will happen to them in return for their pride,

for they have been insulting and arrogant

against the people of the LORD of Hosts.

¹¹The LORD will be terrifying among them,

because He will make lean* all the gods of the earth,

and the nations on every shore* will bow down to Him,

each from his own place*.

Exegesis and Exposition

Zephaniah's pronouncements of judgment turn to Judah's eastern neighbors, the Transjordanian nations of Moab and Ammon. Like the Philistines, these nations were numbered among Israel's traditional foes. Both were descended through Lot ([Gen. 19:30-38](#)) and eventually settled east of the Jordan River ([Num. 21:11, 13-15, 24; Deut. 1:15; 2:8-9, 18, 21, 37; 3:11, 16; 29:1; 32:49](#)). Although the Lord commanded Israel to leave the Ammonites alone during the days of the wilderness wanderings ([Deut. 2:19](#)) and Israel did its best to avoid conflict with the Moabites, Israel was often forced to campaign in the area (cf. [Num. 21:21-35](#)). The Ammonites joined the Moabites in hiring Balam to curse the Israelites ([Num. 22-25](#)), and the incident was remembered down into NT times (cf. [2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14](#)). Both nations harassed the Israelites in the days of the judges ([Judg. 3:12-30; 11:1-40](#)), and Saul and David fought against them ([1 Sam. 11:1-11; 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:2, 11-12, 10:1-19; 12:26-31; 1 Chron. 20:1-3](#)).

Although relations were better during Solomon's reign so that Solomon even had Moabite and Ammonite women in his harem ([1 Kings 11:1](#)), a situation that contributed to his spiritual decline and Israel's apostasy ([1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33](#)), both nations remained antagonists of God's people. Accordingly the Israelites fought them frequently ([2 Kings 1:1; 3:1-27; 2 Chron. 20:1-30; 24:26; 26:8; 27:5](#)). Indeed, they would remain Israel's enemies to the very end ([2 Kings 25:25; Jer. 40:11-14](#)).

Both nations had been denounced by God's prophets before Zephaniah's day ([Isa. 15:1-16:14](#); [25:1-5](#); [Amos 1:13-15](#); [2:1-5](#)) and would be again soon afterward ([Jer. 48:1-47](#); [49:1-6](#); [Ezek. 21:20](#); [25:1-7](#)). Therefore, no particular incident of provocation needs to be sought as the occasion for Zephaniah's prophecy, even though the activities of these nations are now known to be commensurate with the charges brought against them by Zephaniah.⁸⁴⁴ Rather, as Keil points out, "the charge refers to the hostile attitude assumed by both tribes at all times towards the nation of God, which they manifested both in word and deed, as often as the latter was brought into trouble and distress."⁸⁴⁵

Zephaniah condemns both nations for their pride (cf. [Isa. 16:6](#); [25:10-11](#); [Jer. 48:29](#); [49:4](#)), their blasphemous insults against God and His people (cf. [Jer. 48:26-27](#); [49:1](#)), and their atrocities and incursions against Israelite territory ([Amos 1:13-2:5](#)).⁸⁴⁶ Not only for their vicious actions but also for gloating over their seeming successes against the Israelites, Zephaniah predicts that both nations, who often have worked together, will be treated like another well-known pair: Sodom and Gomorrah. The fertile Transjordanian steppe lands will be devastated so as to resemble the fate of the notorious ancient cities along the southeastern coast of the Dead Sea.⁸⁴⁷ When God's judgment has been accomplished, the whole area will be turned into a perpetual wasteland, overrun with weeds and pocked by salt pits, whereas its inhabitants will be taken into captivity.

The reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of God's severe judgment of sin was familiar already by Zephaniah's day (cf. [Deut. 29:23](#); [Isa. 1:9](#); [13:19](#); [Amos 4:11](#)) and would persist (cf. [Jer. 23:14](#); [49:14](#); [50:40](#); [Lam. 4:6](#)) into NT times ([Mark 10:15](#); [Luke 10:12](#); [Rom. 9:29](#); [2 Pet. 2:6](#)). Doubtless the story was well known to the Moabites and the Ammonites, who were also familiar with the wasteland that encompassed those once thriving cities. Indeed, the effect upon visitors to the area in modern times is still an awesome one.⁸⁴⁸

The very thought of weeds and salt* pits brings up visions of worthlessness and desolation. Yet Ammon and Moab, who took such pride in themselves and their land and who had insulted the people of God and violated their lands, would find the source of their pride cut off and turned into just such a devastation. They who had so often taken advantage of Israel and mistreated her people would have the tables turned as the principle of appropriate divine justice was applied to their case (cf. [Jer. 50:29](#); [Obad. 15-16](#)).

Beyond the specific judgment of Moab and Ammon lies the application of their punishment to all nations who similarly mistreat God's people and vaunt themselves against the God of the universe (cf. [Gen. 12:1-3](#); [1 Sam. 17:26](#), [36](#), [45](#); [2 Kings 19:21-28](#); [Ps. 2](#); [Jer. 48:26](#); [Joel 3:1-3](#) [HB 4:1-3]; [Matt. 25:40](#)). To such as oppose Him will come a final time of reckoning when the sovereign and omnipotent God ([Deut. 10:17](#); [Ps. 47:7-8](#) [HB 47:8-9]), whose awesomeness ([Ps. 47:2](#) [HB 47:3]) is beyond measure ([Ps. 89:7](#) [HB 89:8]) and whose strength ([Ps. 89:8-13](#) [HB 89:9-14]) makes Him mighty in battle ([Ps. 24:8](#)), will show Himself fearsome ([Ps. 76:12](#) [HB 76:13]) to all ([Isa. 66:14-16](#); [Ezek. 39:17-22](#); [Joel 3:9-16](#) [HB 4:9-16]). Then men will learn that Israel's God alone is the one and only true God ([Deut. 6:4](#); [Isa. 42:8](#); [46:9](#)). The false gods, who are no gods ([Isa. 41:24](#)), like the nations, cities, and people with whom they are identified, shall be subdued (cf. [Isa. 43:11-13](#); [44:17-20](#); [46:1-2](#); [Jer. 50:2-3](#); [Zech. 14:9](#)), and God alone shall be worshiped everywhere and by all ([Ps. 66:1-4](#) [HB 66:2-5]; [Isa. 2:1-5](#); [66:19-21](#); [Mic. 4:1-5](#); [Zech. 14:16-21](#)).

Additional Notes

2:8 † הַרְפָּהּ ("insult/reproach") is used of slanderous speech ([Mic. 6:16](#)) that one person uses against another ([2 Chron. 32:17](#)) or especially the disgrace that one party gives to another ([Gen. 30:23](#); [Isa. 4:1](#)). It is often used of reproach placed upon a nation (e.g., [1 Sam. 17:26](#); [Isa. 25:8](#); [Jer. 31:19](#); [Lam. 5:1](#); [Ezek. 36:30](#)).

The etymology of the parallel term in the second line, גְּדוּפִים ("revilings"), denotes the act of throwing, hence idiomatically of hurling insults at one another. The two nouns are in parallel in [Isa. 51:7](#), whereas the fem. noun גְּדוּפָה occurs with הַרְפָּהּ in [Ezek. 5:15](#) and the two verbal roots are juxtaposed in [2 Kings 19:22](#); [Isa. 37:23](#). Taken together, these two word groups form a picture of slanderous taunting that has as its object a hurtful vilifying of another.

† וַיִּגְדְּלוּ ("and [they] violated"): In the hiphil stem גָּדַל customarily is transitive, "i.e., the subject of the action and the subject of the process being brought about, viz., bringing the greatness into operation and effectiveness, are the same.... The intrinsically transitive hiphil of *gd* always means 'to set oneself forth as great illegally, presumptuously, and arrogantly, to boast, to triumph over (āal) others.'"⁸⁴⁹ Accordingly it is used in contexts of judgment against the nations for mocking Israel (e.g., [Jer. 48:26](#), [42](#); [Ezek. 35:13](#)). The sense here probably also carries with it not only the repeated arrogant thrusts of the Transjordanian nations into Israelite territory but also their gloating over their successes (cf. [Amos 1:13](#)).⁸⁵⁰ Some suggest that the verb signifies the enlarging of Transjordanian borders at Israel's expense (e.g., R. Smith), while others (cf. NJB) propose that these nations boasted about their own territories.

2:9 † הָרִוּל מִמְּשָׁק: The first word is a *hapax legomenon* usually taken as coming from the root מִשַׁק and assumed to mean something like "possess," due to the contextual understanding assigned to the derived noun מִשְׁק ("possession") in [Gen. 15:2](#).⁸⁵¹ Nevertheless, that meaning is somewhat difficult here, so that J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, pp. 226-27) laments concerning the whole phrase: "These two Hebrew words are obscure in meaning. The first one is found nowhere else in Hebrew, nor is any light thrown upon it by the Vrss. or the cognate languages." The usual proposal may prove to be correct, but it is also possible to view the form as an instance of enclitic *mem*, the first *mem* being attached to the previous word and the resultant

form being understood as a hiphil participle from שָׁקַף, meaning “overflowing,” hence “overrun.”⁸⁵² C certainly provides good sense here and may not be an impossible understanding of the posited root

Although Keil (*Minor Prophets*, 2:143) affirms that the noun הָרִיחַ means “stinging nettle,” J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 227) is probably correct in observing that from its use in the OT the most likely near “weeds.”

Salt sometimes symbolized ruinous waste ([Deut. 29:29](#); [Job 39:6](#); [Ps. 107:34](#); [Jer. 17:6](#)). Sowing the earth with salt was a mark of permanent judgment (cf. [Judg. 9:45](#)), a practice that continued into Roman times, as witnessed in the Roman sack of Carthage.⁸⁵³ For the term “LORD (Yahweh) of Hosts,” see the exposition of [Nah. 2:13](#) and my note on [1 Kings 18:15](#).⁸⁵⁴

2:11 †Suggestions for the sense of נָהַךְ (“grow lean”) here include “destroy” (LXX, Pesh., OL, NIV, Luther, *Le Sainte Bible*, *La Sacra Biblia*), “attend to” (Vg), “starve/famish” (NASB, RSV, KJV, Soncino), “reduce to nothing” (NKJV) and “scatter” (NJB). The commentators are likewise divided, usually following one of the suggested meanings.

Sabottka, however, breaks new ground in postulating a relation to a late Jewish-Aramaic root meaning “be strong/hard,” and hence the personal name Raziel means “God Rules.” He thus translates [Zeph. 2:11](#) “he (Yahweh) will rule over the gods of the earth.” The same verb in derived stems also means “throw/come against with force,” a meaning that might fit the context here by taking נָהַךְ as a piel. A homomorphic verb (known also in Syriac) means “take secret action against,” perhaps as good a conjecture as some of those proposed above.

My translation follows the use of the root elsewhere in the OT. This meaning, however, masks an allusion that now eludes us, perhaps that of impotence or death due to starvation, the idea of either being a serious affront to the nature gods of Canaan.⁸⁵⁵ The form itself should probably be read with *BHS* as an imperfect piel. If the ם of the previous נָהַךְ is a double-duty letter, no change in the consonantal text is required.⁸⁵⁶

†The translation of אֵי הַגּוֹיִם אֵי as “the nations on every shore” follows the NIV. מִמְּקוֹמוֹ (“from his place”) has been understood as each nation serving God in/from the standpoint of his own land/place (e.g., J. M. P. Smith, Laetsch) or going from his place to Jerusalem (e.g., Keil).

c. *Cush* (2:12)

Translation

“So also you, Cushites,

are* pierced through by My sword.”

Exegesis and Exposition

Zephaniah’s news for the southern regions is an addendum to his message for the eastern nations represented by Moab and Ammon, whose judgment (vv. 8-10) anticipated that of all the nations (v. 11). Building on the concept of universal judgment in the preceding verse, Zephaniah tacks on the notice that the judgment of Cush, too, is part of the punishment that will overtake all peoples. Although according to [Ezek. 29:10](#) Egypt’s southern boundary bordered on Cush, the term could have wider implications. Therefore, as Laetsch correctly points out, by Cush is meant “what is now known as the Eastern, or Egyptian, Sudan, together with Ethiopia, Somaliland, and Eritrea. Zephaniah speaks of rivers of Cush (3:10, cf. [Is. 18:1](#)), referring to the White and the Blue Nile and their many tributaries.”⁸⁵⁷

A touch of irony probably is intended, because doubtless Egypt is uppermost in Zephaniah’s thinking here. Egypt had been defeated by its southern neighbors, and a Cushite royal house (Egypt’s twenty-fifth dynasty) reigned over Egypt for more than half a century (c. 715-655 B.C.).⁸⁵⁸ At least four of its kings ruled over all Egypt (Shabako [716-701 B.C.], Shebitku [701-690 B.C.], Taharqa [690-664 B.C.], and Tanwetamani [663 B.C.]), and their stranglehold on Egypt was broken only by the victories of Esarhaddon at Memphis in 671 B.C. and Ashurbanipal at Thebes in 663 B.C. Following the permanent withdrawal of the Cushite (or Nubian) forces, under the protection of Assyria, Egypt gradually was able to form a new dynasty (the twenty-sixth or Saite dynasty), which was to last for more than a century (c. 663-525 B.C.) and be Egypt’s last flourishing kingdom.

By the time of Josiah and Zephaniah this dynasty was already in power with Pharaoh Psamtik I (c. 663-609 B.C.) at its head. Accordingly Zephaniah’s use of the term “Cushites” probably served several functions: (1) that Zephaniah does not use a finite verb in denouncing the Cushites may point to the reality of their defeat—they are already slain by the sword; (2) the “sword” is actually “My sword,” the Lord’s own sword (cf. [Josh. 5:13](#); [Judg. 7:20](#); [Isa. 27:1](#); [34:5](#); [66:16](#); [Jer. 25:33](#); [Ezek. 21:9, 13-17](#), [28-32](#); [30:24-25](#)) moving through the earth in divine judgment;⁸⁵⁹ (3) the term may also be a veiled reminder to the proud Egyptians of their own earlier defeat at the hands of their southern neighbors, a fact that therefore could signal the possibility of a future reversal of their present fortunes; (4) the use of “Cushites” may also have avoided providing an occasion of direct antagonism with the Egyptians, with whom the political affairs of Israel ([2 Kings 21:3-5](#)) and Judah ([2 Kings 23:29-35](#)) were traditionally bound, at a time when Judah was relatively weak and its suzerain state, Assyria, was already in decline.

By Cushites, then, probably is meant the better-known Egypt (cf. [Ezek. 30:1-9](#)). As the Cushite dynasty passed, so also would Egypt (cf. [Jer. 46](#); [Ezek. 29-32](#)) and, one day, all earthly powers that stand in opposition to the Lord (cf. [Ezek. 32:17-32](#)).

Additional Notes

2:12 † אֲנִי (“are”) has been much discussed. Although it is true that change of persons (enallage) is characteristic of Hebrew style,⁸⁶⁰ so that one could translate the verse “You, too, Cushites, they are (the) slain of my sword,” it seems simplest to take the pronoun in its later Hebrew employment as a copula, a use that, though rare, is not unknown (cf. [2 Sam. 7:28](#); [Ps. 44:4](#) [HB 44:5]; [Isa. 37:16](#)[?]).⁸⁶¹

The choice of “Cushites” here (as well as in 3:10) may also reflect a conscious literary touch, constituting paronomasia on the name of Zephaniah’s father (1:1). Whether “Cushite” reflects an African element in Zephaniah’s patrilineage (note the similar problem in [Jer. 36:14](#)), as several have suggested, remains uncertain.

d. Assyria (2:13-15)

Translation

And He will stretch out His hand against the north

and destroy Assyria;

and He will make Nineveh a desolation*,

dry* as the wilderness.

¹⁴And flocks will lie down in her midst,

creatures of every kind*.

The desert owl* and the screech owl*

will lodge in the tops of her columns.

Listen!* (There is) singing in the window

(but) rubble* on the threshold,

for He will lay bare the cedar work.

¹⁵This was the exultant city

that dwelled in safety,

that said to herself, “I am and there is no one else*.”

What* a desolation she has become,

a resting place for beasts!

Everyone who passes by will hiss

and wave his hand*.

Exegesis and Exposition

Zephaniah’s fourth message against the foreign powers swings around to the north. The order of his prophecies is doubtless climactic. He had delivered his messages against Judah’s perennial enemies to the west and east; then he inserted a word against a traditional foe to the south. He now brings the series to a head by turning to the nation that had so long been the dominant power in the ancient Near East.

Like Nahum before him, Zephaniah announces Assyria’s soon demise. God will stretch out His hand and destroy her.⁸⁶² Her capital city, Nineveh, will be rendered desolate, fit only for animals. Zephaniah urges his readers to visualize the scene with him. Inside the once impregnable walls one encounters no longer the broad streets, impressive gateways, magnificent temples and palaces, or lovely parks and gardens that once adorned the well-planned city. Only ruins and rubble remain. Signs of destruction and devastation lie all around. Where is Sennacherib’s mighty palace, “which has no equal”? Where is the water that once flowed from Nineveh’s aqueduct and many canals, providing the city with an ample supply and making it luxurious? Both have disappeared, leaving behind only a mound of debris and a desertlike dryness.⁸⁶³

The proud royal city, once so busy and bustling with people, now houses only a creaturely kingdom. Casting his eye upward, one can see on the tops of Nineveh’s many pillars not stately structures but owls—owls of every sort screeching through the lonely nights. With the morning light one is confronted with the strangest of paradoxes: from the windows of razed and gutted buildings comes the song of birds, while below them

lies only the rubble of collapsed walls, fallen timbers, and broken bits of once-treasured possession strips of cedar paneling.

It is an eerie spectacle. The deceased metropolis is populated only by creatures and ghosts of deep grandeur. Here is the once proud and festive city whose power and wealth were beyond measure, and was once approached with eager anticipation, respect, and fear. Now she is devoid of citizenry or visitors and those who pass by viewing the devastation give only a sneering hiss (cf. [Jer. 19:8](#); [Mic. 6:16](#)) or wave.⁸⁶⁴

Like Nahum, then, Zephaniah sees no future either for Assyria or its capital. Their doom is certain and irreversible ([Nah. 1:14](#); [2:13](#); [3:19](#)). What a contrast both prophecies form with that of Jonah! If the traditional mid-eighth century B.C. date for Jonah is correct, things were vastly different in Nineveh at that time. Not only was it a weak and superstitious Ashur-Dan III who likely received Jonah's message, but a series of natural occurrences (plagues in 763 and 759 B.C. and a total eclipse in 763 B.C.) probably played a great part in securing the religious attention of the people. Their repentance at Jonah's preaching ([Matt. 12:41](#)) only confirmed God's proper concern for them.

However, conditions had changed radically. Assyria's rapacity, pride, and cruelty ([Nah. 2:11-13](#); [3:8-19](#)) demanded her destruction ([Zeph. 2:13-15](#)). Assyria had forfeited her place of divine service and turned against the Lord ([Nah. 1:11-14](#)). Although Jonah may have missed the Lord's intention for the Nineveh of his day ([Jonah 4:1-3](#)), Nahum and Zephaniah would not do so as they announced her certain and total demise.

This latter fact may reinforce the suggestion of Branson Woodard⁸⁶⁵ that from a literary standpoint Jonah was in many ways a tragic figure. Woodard's proposal to treat Jonah from the perspective of tragedy rather than the more traditional stance of satire may be viewed all the more poignantly if one extends the tragic note to the verdict of history. Rather than being a city/nation for whom God is greatly concerned, Nineveh/Assyria is now viewed as one of the Lord's enemies ([Nah. 1:2, 14](#); [3:5](#); [Zeph. 2:13](#)) whose hostility toward God has earned for her the forfeiture of divine privilege. Accordingly, whereas the situation in Jonah's day was not particularly appropriate for the vehicle of satire, Nahum can with due propriety apply satire to Nineveh's case (2:11-13; 3:8-13, 14-19). In contrast to Nahum, Zephaniah does not use satire but like Jonah announces Assyria's doom. Unlike the situation in Jonah's day, however, there is little hope of repentance at this message of judgment.

Zephaniah's prophetic pronouncement of Nineveh's doom is characteristically picturesque. He had compared the judgment of the cities of Philistia to the misery of the rejected woman and the destruction of Moab and Ammon to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Once again his message is delivered in highly descriptive language. None who heard or read it could miss its force. God was about to bring down the loftiest empire the world had yet known and reduce its grand capital to rubble. Something of the reason for the demise of Assyria in general and of Nineveh in particular is given in v. 15. Nineveh has been a carefree city; unrivaled in power and unmatched in beauty, it rejoiced in its vast wealth and basked in its assurance of safety. How haughty she was! "I am—that is all there is." She needed no one and nothing else.⁸⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Nineveh would learn, as had one of her mightiest monarchs, that blasphemy and pride will be reprimanded by one who is mightier than she (cf. [2 Kings 19:22](#)). Like that earlier king, when judgment has come full term she herself will be rewarded with the wages of her iniquity (cf. [2 Kings 19:37](#); [Nah. 1:14b](#)). Nineveh was once the gem of the Tigris, the crown jewel of the world's mightiest empire. So magnificent and beautiful were its buildings and grounds that "Nineveh's rivals were few in the ancient world."⁸⁶⁷ Writers of another day, however, were unable to ascertain its location:

About 200 years after its devastation, Xenophon passed by its site without realizing that the ruins were the remains of haughty Nineveh (*Anabasis* III, 4, 10-12). He calls the territory Mespila. Lucian (*Charon*, c. 23) declares: "Nineveh has perished, and there is no trace left where it once was."⁸⁶⁸

Sic transit gloria mundi!

Additional Notes

2:13 † שְׁמִינָה ... מְדִבָּר ("desolation" ... "wilderness"): Although considerable difference of opinion exists as to the meaning of the latter term, its use in the OT indicates a wide semantic range. "Wilderness," "wasteland," "desert," and "steppeland" can each describe the author's intent in a given context. E. S. Kalland proposes three basic understandings for the type of topography involved: "Pastureland ([Josh 2:22](#); [Ps 65:12](#) [H 13]; [Jer 23:10](#)), uninhabited land ([Deut 32:10](#); [Job 38:26](#); [Prov 21:19](#); [Jer 9:1](#)), and large areas of land in which oases or cities and towns exist here and there."⁸⁶⁹ In the present case Nineveh's destruction will leave it uninhabited except as a refuge for animals and birds, and hence "wilderness" seems most appropriate.

The former term is one of several words drawn from the root שָׁמַם ("be desolate"). Zephaniah employs another of this word group in v. 15: שְׁמִינָה ("desolation"). H. J. Austel observes that "in *shy'ma*, the stress is usually on the desolation itself, while in *shamma*, the emphasis is on the *spectacle* of the desolation, the reaction it causes."⁸⁷⁰

Both מְדִבָּר and שְׁמִינָה appear to be drawn from [Joel 2:3](#) where they are used in describing conditions after a severe locust invasion, צָרָה ("dry") adds dramatically to Zephaniah's picture of desolation. It occurs elsewhere with מְדִבָּר and/or שְׁמִינָה to describe a waterless waste (e.g., [Isa. 35:1](#)), especially after divine judgment by means of an enemy invasion (e.g., [Jer. 50:12-13](#); [51:43](#); [Hos. 2:3](#) [HB 2:5]; [Joel 2:20](#)).⁸⁷¹

2:14 † בְּלִיַּיִתּוֹ גֵּוֹי ("creatures of every kind"): The phrase has been greatly debated.⁸⁷² While it may mean something like "every creature of the nation," Zephaniah's point appears to be that in contrast to the Assyrian nation that once lived in Nineveh, the nation that will inhabit the fallen city will be made up of sort of creature. The word גֵּוֹי ("nation") is used in [Joel 1:6](#) of a great army of locusts.

† קֶאֱת is included in the list of forbidden unclean birds ([Lev. 11:18](#); [Deut. 14:17](#)). It occurs in [Ps. 102:7](#) in parallel with כּוֹס ("owl") and in [Isa. 34:11](#) where, as here, it is employed in combination with well as with the raven and the נְשׂוּן, also considered to be a type of owl.

In addition to [Isa. 34:11](#), קֶפּוֹד is found in [Isa. 14:23](#), where it forms part of the divine sentence in turning Babylon into a swampland. Suggested cognates in Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic all tend to indicate a porcupine (hedgohog) as the animal named here (cf. LXX), but such an identification is difficult on the basis of the words associated with swampland in [Isa. 14:23](#) and with the list of birds in [Isa. 34:11](#). The proposed translation "bittern" (Hitzig, G. A. Smith, Soncino) lacks support in either the ancient versions or the cognate languages.

Contemporary scholarship tends to favor a type of owl for both words.⁸⁷³ The translation tentatively followed here is that of the NIV.

† יְשׁוּרְר קוֹל: The phrase is variously translated in the English versions that follow the MT: "their calls will echo" (NIV), "birds will sing" (NASB), "their voice shall sing" (KJV, NKJV). Keil insists that the phrase

cannot be rendered "a voice sings," for שׁוֹרְר, to sing, is not used for tuning or resounding; but יְשׁוּרְר is to be taken relatively, and as subordinate to קוֹל, the voice of him that sings will be heard in the window. Jerome gives it correctly: *vox canentis in fenestra*.⁸⁷⁴

My translation takes קוֹל as an interjection (cf. [Zeph. 1:14](#)) and understands the writer to be calling attention to the strange contrast between the sound of birds singing in the windows and the ruin encountered in the rubble along the threshold. If Keil's dictum is to be followed, it may be translated, "Listen! (There is) one who is singing." On the whole, however, the proposed translation appears simplest.

† הֶרֶב ("rubble"): In addition to the alternative reading עֶרֶב ("raven") noted above, other suggestions include הֶרֶב ("sword"—Aquila, Symmachus, Pesh.; "axe"—Sabotka) and הֶרֶב ("bustard"—NEB).

The final line of the verse has fared little better. Indeed, at first sight the statement does not seem to fit the previous lines well. J. M. P. Smith declares that it "has no relation to the immediate context."⁸⁷⁵ The MT, however, makes tolerable sense as it stands; the action of stripping bare the cedar work helps to account for the previously mentioned accumulation of debris. כִּי is best understood causally, although it could be taken as an asseverative particle;⁸⁷⁶ אֶרְבָּה ("cedar work") may be understood as a collective noun;⁸⁷⁷ and עָרָה ("he will lay bare") is to be viewed as a verb in the piel stem employed as a prophetic perfect in the sense of "stripping off."⁸⁷⁸

2:15 † עוֹד וְאֶפְסִי ("and there is no one else"): The final וְאֶפְסִי is probably not a 1st com. sing. suffix, hence "besides me" as has often been proposed (NASB, KJV, NKJV), a meaning the form bears nowhere else, but is an example of *hiriq compaginis* or *paragogic yodh*.⁸⁷⁹ אֶפְסִי is frequently found in negative sentences; it also occurs elsewhere with עוֹד (e.g., [2 Sam. 9:3](#)).

† אֵיךְ ("what!"): H. Wolf reports that this word is usually used in rhetorical questions to indicate either reproach ([Judg. 16:15](#)), despair ([1 Sam. 1:19](#)), amazement ([Isa. 14:4](#)), horror ([Ps. 73:19](#)), or desire ([Jer. 3:19](#)).⁸⁸⁰ Several of these senses could fit here.

† יָדוֹ יַנִּיב ("he will wave his hand"): The gesture is one of contempt, but the translation "shake his fist" (NKJV; cf. NIV, R. Smith, J. M. P. Smith) may be too explicit.

2. On Jerusalem (3:1-7)

Zephaniah concludes his messages on judgment by turning to his own nation and to the holy city in particular. *chitra*

Translation

Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
the oppressive city!

²She is not obedient;

she does not receive correction*;

she does not trust in the LORD;

she does not draw near to her God.

³Her officials* in her midst are roaring lions;

her judges* are wolves in the evening who leave nothing for the morning.

⁴Her prophets are arrogant,
(they are) treacherous men*;

her priests profane the sanctuary,
they violate the law.

⁵The LORD is righteous in her midst;
He does no injustice.

Morning by morning He brings His justice to light,
He/it does not fail;
yet the unrighteous know no shame.

⁶I have cut off nations;
their strongholds* are destroyed.

I have made their streets desolate,
with no one passing through;
their cities are devastated,
with no one left—not a single inhabitant.

⁷I said, 'Surely you will fear Me,
you will receive correction';
therefore her dwelling* will not be cut off
with all that I have appointed for her.

However,* they eagerly remained corrupt*
in all their deeds."

Exegesis and Exposition

In delivering his pronouncement against Jerusalem, Zephaniah utilizes the form of the woe oracle, including invective (v. 1), reason (criticism) for Judah's punishment (vv. 2-4), and implied threat (vv. 5-7).

The invective begins with a woe* in which Zephaniah calls Judah's capital a "rebellious" and "defiled" city where "oppression" is the order of the day. The three terms describe a lifestyle and social structure at variance with the character and laws of God. Each is amplified in the criticism that follows.

Invective (v. 1) Criticism (vv. 2-4)

Woe to Jerusalem:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. The rebellious city | It accepts neither God's law nor His Person (v. 2) |
| 2. The defiled city | Its religious leaders profane God's standards (v. 4) |
| 3. The tyrannical city | Its civic leaders oppress the people (v. 3) |

(1) Jerusalem is rebellious.* The Hebrew word is employed by the prophets of the rebellion of God's people against Him and His commandments (cf. [Isa. 3:8](#); [63:10](#); [Lam. 1:18](#)). Thus Jeremiah charges that the people are stubborn and rebellious ([Jer. 4:17](#)) and that their leaders have kept them from fearing God, thereby causing them to turn away from God so as to miss His good purpose for them ([Jer. 5:23-25](#)). The nation has neither obeyed God nor responded to His correction ([Jer. 7:21-28](#); cf. 11:6-8; 22:21). Ezekiel reminds his hearers of Israel's penchant for impiety ([Ezek. 20:8, 13, 20](#)). Because that sin was perpetuated in their day, it would bring God's outstretched arm and outpoured wrath against them ([Ezek. 20:30-38](#)). Zephaniah's point

is much the same. He charges God's people with refusing to obey God's commandments and with unwillingness to learn from chastisement (v. 2).

Zephaniah goes to the heart of the problem by noting the cause of Jerusalem's willfulness. She has concern nor time for God and His standards. As J. M. P. Smith points out, "The implication is that Je has had recourse to everything and everybody but Yahweh."⁸⁸¹ P. C. Craigie adds: "The city's arroç was such that it would listen to no advice and accept no words of correction.... It had abandoned tru very God that gave the city its raison dà e,tre."⁸⁸²

The seriousness of Jerusalem's spiritual condition is underscored by Zephaniah's choice of word order (MT): "In the Lord she does not trust; unto her God she does not draw near." Jerusalem needed to get her priorities in order, for misplaced trust in self is no trust at all. She needed to trust in God and let Him be the focus of her life (cf. [Deut. 4:5-7](#); Pss. 84:12 [HB 84:13]; 119:169; 125:1; [Prov. 3:5-6](#); [Isa. 26:3-4](#)).

(2) Jerusalem is a defiled city. Zephaniah points an accusing finger at Jerusalem's religious leadership, those most responsible for the spiritual and moral fiber of the populace (v. 4). Her prophets, who should be God's spokesmen, are nonprophets (cf. [Jer. 23:9-39](#)). Their arrogance knows no bounds. Carried away by selfish conceit and personal ambition, they produce pompous pronouncements filled with idle boasting, platitudes, and lies. Craigie observes that such men abandon "the sanctity of their task ... prostrating it to their personal ends."⁸⁸³

The priests are no better (cf. [Jer. 2:8](#); [5:31](#); [6:13](#); 23:11). They who were charged with the purity of God's house and the sanctity of His law ([1 Chron. 23:28](#); [Deut. 31:9-13](#)) have violated both. Ezekiel ([Ezek. 22:26](#)) will repeat the same charges, pointing out that conditions in his day have only worsened, for the priests willfully profane all that is sacred. As Feinberg remarks,

Instead of teaching and upholding the law of God, they made it their business to blot out every God-given distinction between profane and holy. They belied their calling in particular after particular with the result that, instead of being magnified in His holy requirements, the Lord was profaned among them.⁸⁸⁴

(3) Jerusalem is a city filled with oppression.* Its source is the civic and social leadership (v. 3). With bold metaphors Zephaniah exposes Jerusalem's leaders for what they are. The nobles who serve as her officials and judges have betrayed their privileged positions. They who should be fair and impartial have become like ravenous beasts—roaring lions (cf. [Prov. 28:15](#); [Ezek. 22:25](#); [Nah. 2:12](#)) who take as their prey the possessions of the poor and the lives of the citizens, and wolves that prowl about in the evening gobbling up their unsuspecting prey and crushing them so thoroughly that none of their bones is left in the morning.⁸⁸⁵ Thus justice is perverted in the insatiable greed of Jerusalem's leadership. Concerning these two groups of officials Craigie points out:

The officials ... used the power of their positions to gain their own ends, wielding their government office to satisfy their perpetual craving for wealth and power.... The only interest the judges had in the law was in the profit it could be made to bring them.⁸⁸⁶

In those dire days when Josiah was yet too young to deal effectively with a corrupt officialdom, the situation looked bleak indeed. With the passing of that king, who knew no peer in his concern for the law of God ([2 Kings 23:25](#)), an entrenched leadership would prevail and hasten the demise of the nation (cf. [Jer. 23:1-4](#), 11-12; [Ezek. 22:23-29](#)). Everything rises or falls with leadership. When a nation is governed by godly individuals, their leadership provides benefits that are as welcome as a warming sun that rises at the start of a new day or comes out after a refreshing shower (cf. [2 Sam. 23:3-4](#)). But the ship of state that is piloted by a corrupt captain is a danger to itself and all those aboard it.

Zephaniah reminds his hearers of Him who is ultimately Judah's leader (vv. 5-7; cf. [Jer. 23:1-8](#)). In contrast to Jerusalem's corrupt leadership, the Lord is righteous* altogether. Unlike the wicked who know no shame, He does no iniquity. With the light of each new day He brings evidence of His unfailing justice, not only in His kindly acts of providence but, as Keil suggests, "by causing His law and justice to be proclaimed to the nation daily by prophets," who serve Him faithfully and call the nation to repentance.⁸⁸⁷

Something of God's righteousness may also be seen in His merciful dealings with His people in attempting to woo them back to Himself (vv. 6-7). If Judah were but to look about her, she would see the evidence. God has cut off nation after nation, not only for their sins but also on behalf of the needs of His own people. Nations and cities with their massive defenses have been destroyed and left destitute.

Doubtless Zephaniah could have pointed to many such examples (cf. [Nah. 3:8](#)). Even the Northern Kingdom of Israel had suffered such a judgment. Surely it could be expected that Judah would observe all of this and learn a lesson (cf. [2 Chron. 36:15-16](#)). But such had not proved to be the case (cf. [2 Kings 17:6-20](#); [Jer. 3:6-10](#); [Ezek. 23](#)). Rather than demonstrating a desire for repentance, Judah and Jerusalem displayed only an increased bent for shameless corruption.

The word translated "eagerly" reveals something of the degradation of late-seventh-century B.C. Judahite society. The Hebrew verb [שָׁכַם](#) (s(Ea),kam, always appearing in the hiphil) is generally conceded to be a denominative from a noun meaning "shoulder." Although older translators rendered the verb "start, rise early" (e.g., BDB), more recent translators tend to favor a derived nuance such as "eagerness," "diligence," "continuity." Doubtless this is the basic idea of the verb. Nevertheless, the more traditional understanding remains helpful. Jeremiah employs the verb 11 times to picture God's eagerness to meet with His people.

He rose, as it were, to be on hand at the beginning of each day, longing to meet with them—but to r Zephaniah reports that the people were eager, “rose early,” only to corrupt their ways further. It is sr wonder that Judah’s end would not be long in coming. Perhaps those who claim God as king in our generation would be well advised to “make an early start” in meeting with Him who “rises early” to n His people.⁸⁸⁸

Although this section of the book, with its attention to the judgment of the nations and the pronounc woe upon Jerusalem, has not been encouraging, Zephaniah’s prophesying is not yet complete. Before the final word has been said, his readers will come to understand that the day of the Lord’s judgment, dark though it will be, is but the path to a brighter day.

Additional Notes

3:1 As the pronouncement against Assyria centered on Nineveh, so the message against Judah has its focus on Jerusalem. “City” (2:15; 3:1) thus serves as the stitch-word between the foreign nations prophecies (2:4-15) and the prophecy against God’s people (3:1-7).

For the use of woe oracles, see the additional note on [Nah. 3:1](#).

Victor Hamilton demonstrates that the Hebrew root for “*rebellious*” (מָרָד) is used in all but five cases of Israel’s rebellion against God or His commandments, whether in word or deed. Since a word is often known by the company it keeps, Hamilton’s list of Hebrew words that are used in conjunction with מָרָד is instructive: so,ר,ע, “stubborn”; א,א,ס,פ,ב, “to hurt/grieve”; מ,א,א,ע,נ, “to refuse”; פ,א,ס,ע,א, “to rebel/transgress”; נ,א,א,א,ס,פ, “to scorn”; ח,פ,א,ט,א, “to sin”; נ,א,ס,א, “to test”; מ,א,ר,א,ד, “to rebel”; מ,א,א,א,ס, “to reject”; ח,פ,א,ל,ל, “to profane.”⁸⁸⁹

As for Judah’s second unsavory quality, that of being *defiled*, though the Hebrew root may be employed of defilement in general ([Isa. 63:3](#)), it is used often of religious defilement or disqualification ([Ezra 2:62](#); [Neh. 7:64](#); [Mal. 1:7](#)), particularly of the misdeeds of Israel’s priesthood ([Neh. 13:29](#)).

The third charge against Judah is that of *oppression*. The Hebrew word שָׁפַט (“oppress”) is utilized in a variety of ways but most frequently of intolerance toward or the suppression of the rights and privileges of others. It especially characterizes the rich and influential members of society who take advantage of the less fortunate (cf. [Ex. 22:21](#) [HB 22:20]; [Lev. 19:23](#); [Deut. 23:16](#) [HB 23:17]).

3:2 †By מוֹכַר (“chastisement”) is meant the several instances of affliction and rebuke that God sends into the lives of His own to accomplish their correction and spiritual growth ([Prov. 1:7-8](#); [3:11-12](#)). Like Zephaniah, Jeremiah laments the people’s failure to profit from God’s chastening ([Jer. 5:3](#); 7:28).

3:3 †For שָׂרִים (“officials/nobles”), see the additional note on 1:8. The term שָׁפַט (“judge”) was used of those leaders of Israel to whom were entrusted civic as well as judicial responsibilities. In time the latter sense became the dominant one, especially from Samuel onward (cf. [1 Sam. 7:15-17](#); [8:1-2](#)).⁸⁹⁰ These two terms, along with the mentioning of prophets and priests in v. 4, served as the focal point for Ezekiel’s adaptation of [Zeph. 3:3-4](#) for his denunciation of God’s people and land ([Ezek. 22:25-28](#)).⁸⁹¹

3:4 †פְּתוּיִם (“arrogant”): Conrad von Orelli observes that the Hebrew root means “to overcook”; hence, the prophets are those who boil over with personal desire.⁸⁹² Jeremiah ([Jer. 23:32](#)) uses the root to describe the prophets’ deceit. He charges them with falsehood of every kind ([Jer. 23:30-32](#)).

†בְּגֵדוֹת (“treacherous”): The word carries with it not only an indication of the lying deceit of Jerusalem’s prophets (cf. [Jer. 28:1-17](#); [29:21-23](#)) but the implication that such activity stems from a wanton disregard for God and His truth. As Keil points out, the root itself is “the classical word for faithless adultery or apostasy from God.”⁸⁹³

3:5 For the concept “*righteous*” (or “just”), see the Excursus on [Habakkuk 2:4](#). The term מִשְׁפָּט (“justice”) used in a following line is a wordplay on שֹׁפְטֵיהָ (“her judges”) in v. 3. Keil observes that the term involves more than rendering a righteous verdict; it includes “a righteous state of things.”⁸⁹⁴ For עֲוֹנוֹת (“injustice”), see the additional note on [Hab. 2:12](#).

3:6 †צִבּוֹת (“strongholds”) was rendered “corner towers” in 1:16 and, as the key point in the defensive wall, may be the best understanding here also. The translation above takes the term as a synecdoche and follows the NIV.

3:7 †מְעוֹנָה (“her dwelling”): Another case of enallage occurs here, the shift being from 2d fem. sing. to 3d fem. sing. as the sentence moves from direct to indirect address. The LXX and Pesh. apparently repointed to מֵעֵינֶיהָ (“from her eyes/sight”), a reading followed by G. A. Smith and J. M. P. Smith (cf. *BHS*; *NJB*; *RSV*). Such an understanding forces one to take the following פָּקַד in the sense of “visit” or “instruct/charge.”⁸⁹⁵ The MT, however, makes good sense as it stands. God’s concern was for Jerusalem’s repentance so that in the coming judgment total destruction could be avoided.

†אֲבָן (“however”): This strong asseverative particle sometimes is employed to indicate emphatic contrast, “*but indeed, but in fact*, esp. after אָמַרְתִּי *I said or thought*, expressing the reality, in opp. to what had been wrongly imagined.”⁸⁹⁶ Although God had made no mistake in His evaluation, looking at things from a human perspective one could have hoped that all of God’s actions would have occasioned Jerusalem’s repentance.

The opposite had proved to be the case. The following two verbs should be taken as hendiadys: “The more) eagerly corrupted (remained corrupt in) all their deeds.”

3

Additional Details Concerning the Day of the Lord, Part Two (Zephaniah 3:8-20)

Based on the long series of pronouncements concerning the foreign nations (2:4-15) and the city of Jerusalem (3:1-7), Zephaniah again has a strong exhortation for his people. They should wait patiently and trustingly for God to effect His worldwide judgment (3:8). The prophet goes on to give further teachings concerning the Day of the Lord, whose coming he had so vividly portrayed (1:14-18). The judgment was but part of God’s plan to secure an obedient and purified people for Himself (3:9-13) who can rejoice in their divine Redeemer and sing His praises to the ends of the earth (3:14-20).

Structurally, 3:8-13 could be viewed as forming one unit, the imperative of v. 8 being continued by two motive clauses introduced by the particle כִּי (ki, “for/because,” vv. 8, 9). The first would provide a negative reason for waiting for the Lord, the second a positive one. But the close correspondence between vv. 9-13 and 14-18 with relation to future matters, signaled by the phrase “in that day” (vv. 11, 16), argues for the transitional nature of v. 8 as a hinge verse that picks up the theme of judgment of the previous section (note מִשְׁפָּחָה, mis(E)pa.t, in vv. 5, 8) and provides the basis for the encouraging teaching in vv. 9-13 (note the stitching effect of the particle כִּי, ki, “for” in vv. 8, 9). The closing verses of the book are accomplished with striking examples of the prophet’s use of repetition and refrain (vv. 14-15) and personification (vv. 14-16) designed to magnify the glad conditions associated with Zion’s regathering and revivication (vv. 14-20).

B. An Exhortation Based On Judgment (3:8)

Translation

“Therefore wait for Me,” declares the LORD,

“for the day when I rise up as a witness*.

For My decision* is to gather the nations,

to assemble the kingdoms,

(and) to pour out My indignation* upon them—all My burning anger*.

Yes, in the fire of My jealousy*

all the earth will be consumed.”

Exegesis and Exposition

In light of the waves of certain judgment that will flow over the nations and wash away Jerusalem in their wake, God exhorts His people: “Wait for me.” In a vivid and varied metaphor the prophet portrays a courtroom scene in which God rises first as witness (cf. [Deut. 8:19](#); [1 Sam. 12:5](#); [Job 16:19](#); [Ps. 50:7](#); [Jer. 29:23](#); [Mic. 1:2](#); [Mal. 3:5](#); [Heb. 6:13](#)) on His own behalf and before the assemblage, and then presides as judge (cf. [Gen. 18:25](#); [Judg. 11:27](#); [1 Sam. 2:10](#); [1 Chron. 16:33](#); [Job 9:15](#); Pss. 7:11 [HB 7:12]; 50:6; 75:7 [HB 75:8]; [Isa. 33:2](#)) to deliver His righteous sentence (cf. Pss. 72:2; 75:2 [HB 75:3]).

The motif of God as judge is a familiar one in the OT. Indeed, God’s coming to judge the earth is often declared (e.g., [1 Chron. 16:33](#); Pss. 9:8 [HB 9:9]; 50:4; 96:13; 98:9; 110:6; cf. [Isa. 2:4](#); 11:34; [Mic. 4:3](#)). The language in Zephaniah is reminiscent of Pss. 82:8; 94:2. Here God confirms His decision to assemble all nations and peoples for judgment (cf. [Isa. 13:9-11](#); [66:16](#); [Jer. 25:31-33](#); [Ezek. 36:5](#); [38:1-39:24](#); [Joel 3:9-16](#) [HB 4:9-16]; [Zech. 14:2-20](#)).

God’s intentions are here called His “indignation,” His “burning anger,” and “the fire of [His] jealousy,” terms describing His righteous hatred of sin and concern for His holy name and reputation and for His people (cf. [Isa. 66:13-16](#)). And herein lay a message of hope. Because God’s judgment of the nations was so often linked with His concern for the salvation of His people, the righteous citizens of Jerusalem could take comfort. God’s justice would avenge them; could it not also mean the possibility of intervention on their behalf? In light of God’s great promises (cf. [Isa. 30:18-33](#); [33:22](#); [64:4](#) [HB 64:3]), even the exhortation “wait for me” carried a note of hope. It was “only used for waiting in a believing attitude for the Lord and His help (Ps. xxxiii.20; Isa. viii.17, xxx.18, lxi.3).”⁸⁹⁷ It was just such a hope that Zephaniah would deliver in the sections that follow.

Additional Notes

3:8 According to the Masora, this is the only verse in the OT that contains all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, including the final forms. However, ם is not considered a separate grapheme from ם.

† לְעֵד (lit. “as a witness,” lit. “for a prey/booty”; so NASB, KJV; cf. NKJV): The translation adopted here follows the LXX, the Pesh., and many scholars and versions (e.g., RSV, NEB; cf. *BHS*) in repointing the MT to read לְעֵד. In a similar vein the NIV suggests “to testify” and the NJB translates “as accuser.”⁸⁹⁸ Sabottka also

repoints the MT, rendering it לְיָדִי and translating “from my throne.”⁸⁹⁹ In this he has followed M. Dahood who compare Ugaritic ʾd “throne-(room).”⁹⁰⁰ This proposal necessitates understanding the preposition ל as “from,” a meaning often found in Ugaritic.⁹⁰¹

At first blush this latter suggestion seems attractive. Nevertheless, however good a case may be made for the meaning “throne” for Hebrew, נִי none of the examples proposed by Dahood contains the required phrase לְיָדִי. Further, the meaning “from” for ל must depend on more than supposed examples of the יָדִי interchange between ל and other prepositions with the same semantic range or evidence based upon proposed contextual solutions.⁹⁰² The word for “throne” in the OT is כִּסֵּא, and the act of rising from or going down from the throne is expressed by the preposition מִן (e.g., [Isa. 14:9](#); [Jer. 3:6](#)) or מִן in combination with יָרָד (e.g., [Judg. 3:20](#); [Ezek. 26:16](#)).

In sum, however tolerable a sense “rise from the throne” may yield here, it does not find support either in normal OT usage or in the employment of the throne motif. An interesting theological translation is reflected in the Vg, which, while retaining the MT, goes off in still another direction: “in my resurrection in the future.”

† מִן־עֵצִי (“my decision,” lit. “my judgment”) serves as a stitch-word with the previous section. For עֵצִי (“indignation”), see the additional note on [Hab. 3:12](#); for הַרְוֵן (“burning anger”), see the additional note on 22. The phrase “the fire of My jealousy” occurs in 1:18. “Jealousy” often expresses God’s being moved to action on behalf of His own (cf. [Joel 2:18](#)), and hence the LXX and Vg translate “My zeal” here. See also the additional note on [Nah. 1:2](#).

C. Additional Teachings Concerning The Day Of The Lord (3:9-20)

Verses 9-20 have been traditionally considered as a distinctive unit. So construed, this section falls into two portions (vv. 9-13, 14-20) linked together by the phrase “in that day” (vv. 11, 16) and the ideas of scattering (vv. 10, 19) and being afraid/fearing (vv. 13, 16). Such a view likewise finds support from the first half of the book, which is also closed by information concerning the Day of the Lord (1:14-18) and instructions based upon it (2:1-3).

1. Information Concerning That Day (3:9-13)

Translation

“For then will I give* to the people pure lips,

in order that all of them may call on the name of the LORD

(and) serve Him shoulder to shoulder*.

¹⁰From beyond the rivers of Cush*

My worshipers* shall bring My scattered ones* as My tribute*.

¹¹In that day you will not be put to shame*

by all your wrongdoings that you have done to Me.

For then I will remove from your midst

your proud boasters*,

and you will never again be haughty

on My holy mountain.

¹²But I will leave within you

a humble and lowly people,

and they will trust in the name of the LORD.

¹³The remnant of Israel will do no injustice;

neither will they speak a lie,

nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths.

Yes,* they will feed and lie down,

and no one will make them afraid.”

Exegesis and Exposition

Structurally, vv. 9-13 provide a further reason for the exhortation to wait for the Lord (v. 8). The first reason (found in v. 8) had to do with God’s determination to gather the nations for the long-awaited judgment. The second now deals with the promises of God to a humble and purified future remnant. Both reasons are

introduced by the particle כִּי (kî, "because/for"), the one in v. 9 being supplemented by the temporal אָז (âa,z, "then").⁹⁰³ This section thus carries the author's thoughts to information concerning a future that will provide the grounds for the closing admonitions of the book (3:14-20).

Zephaniah's goal in vv. 9-13 is didactic. He will provide additional information concerning the fate of people in the coming Day of the Lord. It is a message of hope. As indicated previously, critical scholars at times denied the authenticity of these verses (and all of vv. 9-20) due to their strong emphasis on hope. Verses 9-10 have seemed particularly troublesome. Thus J. M. P. Smith remarks:

Vv. 9, 10 constitute a disturbing element within this oracle. They seem to be foreign to, if not also later than, their present context; ... they manifest a totally different attitude toward the nations from that of v.8. In the latter, the nations are destined to be destroyed; here they are to be converted.... Still further, the elimination of vv. 9, 10 leaves a good connection between vv. 9 and 11.⁹⁰⁴

Despite the critical objections, judgment and hope are often twin themes. Certainly such is the case in our seventh-century B.C. minor prophets. All three have strong words of judgment (Nah. 1:1-6, 8-10; 2:1-10, 11-13; 3:1-7, 8-13, 14-19; Hab. 1:5-11; 2:6-20; 3:3-7, 8-15; Zeph. 1:2-6, 7-13, 14-18; 2:4-15; 3:17-18) but also of hope and reassurance (Nah. 1:7; Hab. 2:4-5, 3:16-19; Zeph. 2:1-3; 3:9-20). Even more significantly, all three prophets demonstrate that because judgment is an integral part of God's teleological program designed to bless His people and His world, it is in a sense a veiled hope.

Thus Nahum's predictions against Nineveh indicated that her judgment was a means of deliverance for Judah (Nah. 1:11-15); the news of Nineveh's fall was an indication of better things to come for all people (Nah. 1:15; 2:13; 3:7, 19). Habakkuk's prophecies of the judgment upon both Judah (Hab. 1:5-11) and Babylon (Hab. 2:6-20) were part of God's process of allowing the character of all people to be fully displayed (Hab. 2:4-5), while God Himself was declared in control of the disposition of the ages and every individual (Hab. 2:20; 3:3-15). Indeed, it is He who works out the salvation and blessing of His people (Hab. 3:12-13) and all who know Him (Hab. 2:14) through the drama of earth's history. Likewise, Zephaniah points out that judgment can bring hope and assurance to God's people (Zeph. 2:6-7, 9-11). The double emphasis on judgment and hope is prominent in Zeph. 3:9-20.

Judgment and hope, then, rather than being irreconcilable themes, are two aspects of one divine perspective. Both are designed and intertwined to accomplish God's purposes. Zephaniah's concluding verses, far from being out of place, are neither unexpected nor contextually inappropriate. As P. C. Craigie observes,

the prophet Zephaniah thus gives us a view of the future which is part despair, part hope.... The source of the prophet's despair was to be found in his understanding of human nature and human states; the source of his hope was to be found in God.⁹⁰⁵

In these verses Zephaniah turns from judgment to its outcome—God's blessing of the people of the world. God's goal is to effect change in the hearts and lives of all. Such indeed will take place—but not just for Israel; rather, all people shall be transformed so as to call on the Lord (cf. Isa. 55:5) and serve Him as one (cf. 2 Chron. 14:16-17; Isa. 59:19-21).⁹⁰⁶ To "call on the name of the Lord" means to invoke his name in belief, submission, and supplication (cf. Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 2 Kings 5:11).⁹⁰⁷ All of this God's worshipers will do, and that with "pure lips." Their desire will be to serve Him in sincere devotion as one—"shoulder to shoulder." T. Laetsch observes:

As the lips of Isaiah, the sinful member of a sinful people, had been purified by the fiery coal from the altar typifying the Cross of Calvary, so the Lord will change the impure lips of Gentile nations by the preaching of this Cross.... All will put their shoulder to His service in joyful gratitude for His salvation.⁹⁰⁸

As proof of their new love for God, the Gentiles will bring to Him His covenant people (Isa. 66:20). From the farthest reaches of the world, wherever they have been scattered in judgment (Deut. 28:64-68), God's people will be returned to the land of promise (Deut. 4:27-31; Isa. 11:11-16) and enjoy God's richest blessings (Isa. 66:7-14). Further, all people shall know God (Hab. 2:14) and enjoy His everlasting beneficence (Isa. 2:1-4; 11:1-10; Mic. 4:1-5). Here again Zephaniah has called on earlier Canaanite literature, drawing from a context set in the contest between Yamm and Baal. In this instance, Baal was to be handed over to Yamm and sent to him as tribute:

"Thy slave is Baal, O Yamm,

Thy slave is Baal [for eve],

Dagon's Son is thy captive;

He shall be brought as thy tribute.

For the gods bring [thy gift],

The holy ones are thy tributaries."⁹⁰⁹

The literary allusion here is rendered certain by the concatenation of words taken from that text: אֲבֵד (âbed, "servant/slave"); בָּרַךְ (yâ,ba, "bring"); מִנְחָה (minhâ, "tribute/offering").

The awareness of this literary setting provides the clue to solving the debate as to whether the word עֲתָרָי (ʿāṯaṯaṯay, bat-pu, sḥay, “my worshipers, my scattered ones”) should be taken as referring to the group and what is the proper subject of “bring.” According to one commonly held view, God’s dispersed people are represented here as bringing an offering to God. Such is the verdict of the English version; it has the support of some expositors.⁹¹⁰ Other scholars (e.g., Fausset, Feinberg, Keil, Laetsch) suggest, however, that what is in view is an embassy of converted Gentiles bringing the Jews to God as an offering. In both views “my scattered ones” is taken to be in apposition to “my worshipers.”

Based on the literary parallel, the scriptural indications concerning the conversion of the Gentiles, and the context, I propose that “my worshipers” is the subject of the verb “bring,” “my scattered ones” is its object, and “my tribute” is a second accusative to be translated “as my tribute.”⁹¹¹ Thus, just as Baal was to be Yamm’s servant and sent as tribute to him, so converted Gentiles who “call upon the name of the Lord” and “serve Him shoulder to shoulder” will be “My worshipers” who will “bring My scattered ones” (the Jews) as “My tribute.”

Zephaniah elaborates on all this by reporting that in that day* Jerusalem’s shameful acts against God in the past will not be repeated. By then those who have done such things will have been removed, and with their departure the spirit of haughtiness will disappear. In their place God will leave* those who in true humility trust in Him⁹¹² and will remove injustice and deception. With the godly remnant God will doubtless be well pleased, for He, as their good shepherd, will give them sustenance, serenity, and security (vv. 11-13).

Additional Notes

3:9 † אֶהְפֹּךְ (“I will give,” lit. “I will [over]turn”): Known throughout the Semitic family,⁹¹³ this verb is used in the OT transitively of turning someone or something (2 Kings 21:13), overthrowing a city (Gen. 19:21, 25, 29), or transforming/changing a thing/person (Ps. 105:25). Intransitively it is employed of turning back or into something (Lev. 13:3-4; 2 Kings 5:26). Here used transitively, it takes its place in a series of statements relative to God’s transforming work with regard to people (1 Sam. 10:6, 9; Ps. 105:25; Jer. 31:13; Hos. 11:8). The sentence is elliptical, the point being that the impure lips of the people will be changed to pure lips. As Keil points out, the syntax is not unlike that of 1 Sam. 10:9.⁹¹⁴ The translation above is *ad sensum*. The *Living Bible*’s “I will change the speech of my returning people to pure Hebrew” misses the point of the passage. The stress here is on spiritual purity, not singleness of language.

†The phrase אֶחָד שְׂכָם (lit. “[with] one shoulder”) is best taken as a figurative expression for unanimity of action or purpose (cf. RSV, NKJV, KJV: “with one accord/consent”), hence the thought “shoulder to shoulder” (NASB, NIV, NJB).⁹¹⁵

3:10 †By the “rivers of Cush” is meant the distant headwaters of the Nile and its tributaries. Thus J. M. P. Smith points out that “the rivers referred to are the branches of the Nile that traverse the most southern portion of the region; viz. the Atbara, the Astasobas, the Astapus or Blue Nile, and the Bahr-el-Abjadh or White Nile; cf. Is. 18:1-7.”⁹¹⁶ The phrase is a synecdoche, those of that distant region representing the farthest people of the earth.⁹¹⁷

†בת־פְּרֻצֵי עֲתָרָי (“my worshipers,” “my scattered ones”): These words are omitted in the LXX* and the Pesh., and accordingly some suggest that they are a gloss here. However, their inclusion by the Vg and the difficulty in understanding them argue against their omission or the conjecture of a gloss. Although J. M. P. Smith declares the MT “quite ... unintelligible,”⁹¹⁸ the English versions have made tolerable sense of the text: “my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed (ones)” (RSV, KJV; cf. NKJV; so also the Vg); “my worshipers, my dispersed ones/scattered people” (NASB, NIV).

Although עֲתָר (“worshiper”) is a *hapax legomenon*, the verb עָתַר (“pray/supplicate”) is attested. The form could also be construed as a participle: “those who worship me.”⁹¹⁹ Adding to the difficulty is the fact that the phrase בת־פְּרֻצֵי is without precedent. The usual sense of “daughter” in such cases is as a stereotyped title with a nationalistic emphasis such as “(virgin) daughter of X” (Jerusalem, Zion, etc.),⁹²⁰ whereas the passive participle of פָּרַץ occurs nowhere else. Nevertheless, the phrase is not totally unintelligible as an extension of its usual understanding. It can be taken to mean “the crowd or congregation consisting of the dispersed of the Lord, the members of the Israelitish congregation of God scattered about in all the world.”⁹²¹ It is also possible to read the consonantal text of the first word of the phrase as בֵּית (“house of”), hence “my scattered house”—that is, the dispersed Israelites viewed as God’s covenantal remnant (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11).⁹²² Most probably the phrase is elliptical for בת־עַמֵּי הַפְּרֻצִים (“my scattered people”), the sense being supplied from the עַמִּים of v. 9. The phrase עַמֵּי בֵּית occurs often in Jeremiah.

†מִנְתָּתַי (“my tribute”): מִנְתָּה has been understood here as “sacrifices” (LXX; cf. Vg), “an offering made to God of any kind” (BDB), or the meal offering (Keil). The meaning “tribute” (cf. NJB, O’Connor, Sabottka) comes from the Ugaritic cognate, which is parallel to *argmn* (“tribute”).⁹²³ Although the suffix has been taken as a dative, “to me” (LXX, Vg, Sabottka), such is not necessary. The tribute will be considered to be God’s proper due.

3:11 Phrases such as הַיּוֹם הַהוּא (“in that day”) can be used as formulae to introduce strophes or stanzas (cf. Joel 3:1 [HB. 4:1]; Amos 8:13; 9:11; Mic. 4:6; 5:9 [HB. 5:10]; 7:11-12; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:10; 8:23; etc.). The changed emphasis and subject matter, as well as the literary hook כִּי אֶזְכֹּר, render it certain that the phrase introduces a subunit in this section. It also forms a linking device with the following section (cf. v. 16).

† תבושי לא ("you will not be put to shame"): Since the verb form is fem. sing., doubtless Jerusalem is addressed. The verb can be taken in a subjective sense with the meaning "feel shame" (NASB) or in objective sense meaning "be put to shame" (NIV, NKJV). The former emphasizes the forgetting of p shameful deeds against the Lord; the latter lays stress on the unlikely prospect of feeling shame ev since its cause is removed. The latter course has been followed here because the context undersc fact that in that future day the shameful acts perpetrated against God will no longer be practiced, fo who did such things have been removed. Although O'Connor takes לא as an emphatic particle ("you ashamed"),⁹²⁴ the force of the context and the presence of לא in its normal negative usage in the same verse (לֹא-תִתְחַסְּפוּ) make the suggestion of a rare miswriting for לוֹ tenuous.⁹²⁵

† גִּאוּתְךָ עֲלֵיךָ ("your proud boasters," lit. "the exultations of/in your pride"): The phrase is composed of a genitive of attribute and a 2d fem. sing. possessive suffix.⁹²⁶ Keil observes that the phrase "is taken from Isa. xiii.3, where it denotes the heroes called by Jehovah, who exult with pride caused by the intoxication of victory; whereas here the reference is to the haughty judges, priests, and prophets (vers. 3 and 4), who exult in their sinful ways."⁹²⁷ M. Dahood calls attention to the occurrence of פָּשַׁע and גִּאוּת in close proximity as reflecting Ugaritic usage also.⁹²⁸

3:12 וְהִשְׁאַרְתִּי ("and I will leave"): Invaders customarily deported the leaders and skilled craftsmen of the lands they had conquered, leaving only the poor (2 Kings 24:14; 25:12). So God's invasion of Jerusalem leaves the הָלֵל וְעָנִי ("humble and lowly," lit. "afflicted and poor"; cf. Job 34:28; Isa. 26:6). With regard to the first word, L. Coppes remarks: "The āa,ni, although frequently in synonymous parallelism with áebyo,n and dal, differs from both in that it connotes some kind of disability or distress."⁹²⁹ Concerning the latter he observes: "This root occurs most frequently in the adjectival form. Unlike āa,ni, dal does not emphasize pain or oppression; unlike áebyo,n, it does not primarily emphasize need, and unlike ra,sh, it represents those who lack rather than the destitute."⁹³⁰ Together they emphasize those who made up the lower stratum of society and who were plagued by physical difficulties and social and mental torment (cf. Prov. 22:22). Here, however, these words are qualified by the statement that "they trust in the name of the Lord."

Zephaniah intends the remnant left in Jerusalem to be understood as made up of more than just the materially and socially needy. Rather, they are those who, unlike the arrogant boasters who trusted only in themselves, their accomplishments, and their possessions for which God had removed them from the midst of Jerusalem (v. 11), "recognize Yahweh as their only but all-sufficient source of strength."⁹³¹ Keil adds: "The leading characteristic of those who are bowed down will be trust in the Lord, the spiritual stamp of genuine piety."⁹³²

Thus the terms used here take on a theological importance that recognizes that the saved of the world are those whose qualities of heart and mind enable them to submit to God. More than just being poor in this world's goods, they are poor in spirit (Isa. 66:2; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 5:3). It is a godly remnant unencumbered by pride and committed to the Savior. Concerning the force of these words in vv. 11-13 G. W. Anderson remarks:

Here there are drawn together some of the themes mentioned above as linking Zephaniah with his great predecessor, Isaiah: *hybris* as the sin which particularly calls down divine judgment, humble faith as its antithesis, the creation by Yahweh of a righteous remnant which will be the recipient of Yahweh's blessing, and Zion, glorified and protected by Yahweh when he has purified and renewed her.⁹³³

3:13 The ethical qualities predicated for the godly remnant of Israel would be those that characterize the Messiah Himself (Isa. 42:1-4; 53:3, 7-9; Zech. 9:9; cf. Matt. 11:28-30; 12:15-21; Phil. 2:1-8).

† מִתְּרִיד וְאֵין . . . כִּי ("Yes, . . . and none shall make them afraid"): The כִּי is asseverative, as in the closing statement of 3:8. The blessings promised here are assured to those who faithfully keep God's commandments (Ps. 1:1-3; Ezek. 34:25-31; Mic. 4:4-5; 7:14). See also the additional note on 3:20.

2. Instructions In The Light Of That Day (3:14-20)

Translation

Sing for joy, O daughter of Zion,

shout aloud, O Israel;

be glad and rejoice with all your heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵The LORD has turned aside* your judgment,

He has turned away* your enemy.

The LORD, the King of Israel, is in your midst;

you will not fear* evil* anymore.

¹⁶In that day it will be said to Jerusalem,

"Fear not, O Zion,

let not your hands hang limp;

¹⁷the LORD your God is in your midst,

a warrior who saves*.

He will exult over you with gladness,

He will renew* you in his love,

He will rejoice over you with singing."

¹⁸"I will gather* those who have been driven*

from your appointed feasts;

(although) they were a tribute* from you,

(they were) a reproach upon her (Jerusalem).

¹⁹Behold I will deal* at that time

with all who oppress you;

I will rescue the lame

and gather the outcast.

I will turn their shame* to praise

and honor in all the earth.

²⁰At that time I will lead you,

even at the time I gather you;

I will surely* give you honor and praise

among all the peoples of the earth

when I restore your fortunes

before your eyes," says the LORD.

Exegesis and Exposition

Verses 14-20 form a closing unit of instructions concerning the Day of the Lord. The section falls into two subunits, the first constituting joyous imperatives of encouragement (vv. 14-17) based on the predictive assurances He has just given (vv. 9-13), the second providing further reasons for rejoicing given in God's own words (vv. 18-20).⁹³⁴

For Jerusalem, faced with the divine sentence against her, Zephaniah has words of instruction that will doubtless be carried out: sing for joy*; shout aloud*; be glad and rejoice*. The commands are happy ones, heaped up to underscore the great expectation of the joyous times that lay beyond the immediate punishment. As Laetsch remarks, "Jerusalem is to be glad and rejoice 'with all the heart,' with joy flowing from the very seat of life, true, sincere, living joy."⁹³⁵ In that coming day there will be singing and shouting, together with joy and rejoicing such as had never been known before. Although the command is aimed at the future Jerusalem, no doubt the message would not be lost on the godly worshipers of Zephaniah's own day.

The immediate reason for that renewed felicity is revealed. It is twofold: (1) externally, God will have ended the period of Jerusalem's judgment by defeating all her enemies; (2) internally, God Himself will be in her midst as the everlasting King.⁹³⁶ The Lord, Israel's righteous judge, deems her punishment completed and Jerusalem's correction accomplished. Accordingly, the judicial sentence may be commuted and God can now deal with His agents of chastisement. He will turn them away from His city and people and will judge them for their sins. Moreover, Yahweh, Israel's King (*Isa. 44:6*), will dwell in His royal city. Cleansed by long ages of corrective judgment, Jerusalem will now be made permanently holy by the presence of the Holy One of Israel (cf. *Isa. 54:4-8; 57:14-19; 62:10-12; Ezek. 48:35; Joel 3:17, 21* [HB 4:17, 21]).⁹³⁷

The promise of release from fear is accompanied by words of encouragement not to let either fright or anxiety grip their hearts (vv. 16-17). Zion's citizens will at last be free of the all-too-common fear that left their hands hanging limp* in despondency, paralyzed from terror. Each will remind the other of God's abiding presence. He, the sovereign Lord of the universe and Israel's heavenly warrior*, has delivered them from their enemies, effected their redemption, and now lives among them in glory.

Such assurances form a striking contrast with Zephaniah's earlier prophecy that the Day of the Lord be filled with such horror that even the bravest of warriors would cry out bitterly (1:14). Unlike those limit of strength and courage will be reached, Israel's champion and Redeemer will prove to be a "victorious warrior" (NASB) who shows Himself "mighty to save" (NIV). Such a one is Israel's defender in her ranks alone. Such a thought is so awe-inspiring that it bears repeating (cf. v. 15). What inexpressible happiness and rejoicing (cf. v. 14) that will bring!

Adding to the scene of jubilation is the fact that God will exult over His redeemed people with hymns of gladness (cf. [Isa. 54:7-17](#)). Therefore, His people will bask in the glow of His love (cf. [Isa. 54:1-6](#)). It is a grand prospect for Israel and one that should be a source of encouragement for all people: "Though the promise belongs to the literal Israel, it also belongs to the spiritual. And it should cause the fearful believer to take courage, and 'lift up the hands that hang down.'"⁹³⁸

When I was in Israel shortly after the Six-Day War of 1967, I was told repeatedly by those I met that their watchword was "No fear." In a far greater way, Zephaniah prophesies of a coming day when, with God in her midst, Israel will never again fear any harm.

In a climactic finish to all that he has prophesied, Zephaniah reveals the personal promises of Israel's Redeemer. Though from a literary standpoint vv. 18-20 provide a further reason for the commands concerning rejoicing in v. 14, their force must not be missed: God Himself is speaking. What an encouragement these words must have been to the beleaguered remnant of Zephaniah's day! "He wanted to place a strong hope before the believing remnant ... since His judgment was imminent and His restoration mercies remote. The prophet, in spite of dark days, wanted the repentant to grasp firmly God's promises for comfort and strength."⁹³⁹

The Lord's opening assurance (v. 18) stands in stark contrast to His pronouncements at the beginning of the book. Unlike that earlier announcement of God's gathering of the nations together so as to sweep them from the face of the earth (1:2-4), the Lord will gather up those who have been driven away from Jerusalem and therefore from the opportunity to partake of Israel's periods of festivity. In God's providence His sinning people had been punished by being carried away into exile as booty to their conquerors. This had been a shameful reproach to God's name and to that of the holy city. Now, however, judgment has given way to hope. God will regather His chastised and cleansed people in order to lead them home. Herbert Marks appropriately calls attention to the effective use of wordplay here:

The Hebrew stem *ásf* has two nearly antithetical senses, on the one hand "ingathering," on the other "removal" or "destruction," and the prophet's message, like the fate of Judah, is suspended between them. The promises of salvation culminate in the "ingathering" in 3:18 ... but this is only the merciful counterpart of the threatened decreation with which the opening doom on Judah began.⁹⁴⁰

A threefold promise follows in v. 19: (1) God will now deal with Israel's enemies, for their time of judgment has come (cf. [Isa. 54:17-21](#); [66:15-16](#)); (2) He will rescue and gather up His helpless and dispersed people; (3) He will turn Israel's former shame into praise and honor that will fill the whole earth (cf. [Deut. 26:19](#); [Isa. 62:7](#); [Mic. 4:6-8](#)). So great are these latter two thoughts that Zephaniah repeats them in v. 20, at the same time emphasizing Israel's own festive future: "Verse 20 is generally regarded as a repetitious gloss, but perhaps Zephaniah, like other preachers, found the repetition of a particularly exciting truth too tempting to avoid!"⁹⁴¹

The certainty of Israel's newly acquired felicity is assured: the Lord gathers up His scattered people and brings them home. The metaphor is that of the good shepherd. It is a familiar figure in the OT, one that Zephaniah had utilized previously (cf. 2:6-7; 3:13). Indeed, God revealed himself to be Israel's shepherd ([Gen. 48:15](#); Pss. 23:1; 80:1 [HB 80:2]) who sees to her daily provision ([Ps. 23:3](#); [Amos 3:11](#)) and rescues her in time of need ([Ezek. 34:11-16](#); [Zech. 9:15-16](#)). He guides His sheep in the way they should go ([Isa. 40:11](#)).

Likewise, Israel's Messiah will shepherd Israel as His flock ([Ezek. 34:22-24](#)). Though He must suffer for the sheep ([Zech. 13:7](#); cf. [Isa. 52:13-53:12](#)), He will ultimately triumph ([Zech. 14:1-8](#)) and reign over His regathered people in fulfillment of all the covenant promises made to them (cf. [Gen. 12:1-7](#); [13:14-17](#); [15:7-21](#); [17:1-8](#); [2 Sam. 7:16-19](#); Pss. 2:6-9; 89:3-4, 20-37 [HB 89:4-5, 21-38]; 110:1-6; [Isa. 9:6-7](#); [11:1-12:6](#); [54:10](#); [Jer. 23:5-8](#); [31:31-34](#); [33:14-26](#); [Ezek. 37:22-28](#); etc.).

It is no surprise, then, that Christ would later affirm that He was the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for the sheep ([John 10:11-18](#)). Subsequently the NT writers would teach that Jesus is the Great Shepherd, who both sees to the maturity and well-being of His sheep ([Heb. 13:20-21](#); [1 Pet. 2:25](#)) and, as the Chief Shepherd, will come again for His flock ([1 Pet. 5:4](#)).⁹⁴²

Zephaniah closes his prophecy on the highest of notes. Not only is that which he has just recorded (vv. 18-20) "the word of the Lord" but the whole prophecy is as well (1:1; cf. 1:2, 3, 10; 2:9; 3:8). God himself has spoken. The hymn writer's response reflects what is in the heart of every believer:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,

Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!

What more can He say than to you He hath said,

To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?⁹⁴³

Additional Notes

3:14 וְשִׂמְחוּ . . . הִרְעוּ . . . רְנְנוּ ("Sing for joy ... shout aloud . . . be glad and rejoice"): L. Walker ca attention to the piling up of verbs of similar meaning here as an expression of strong emphasis.⁹⁴⁴ future scene of God's blessing will be one of boundless joy. הִרְעוּ is in the masc. pl. because Israel is considered with regard to its individual citizens; the city and state, personified as a woman, is appropriately addressed with the fem. sing. imperative. The term "daughter of Zion/Jerusalem," familiar as a stereotyped phrase with nationalistic emphasis,⁹⁴⁵ probably gives the idea of representing Zion and Jerusalem as the author of the community of the faithful. The use of personification, anthropopoeia, and metaphor in vv. 14-16 is striking.

3:15 הִסִּיר . . . פָּנָה ("turned aside ... turned away") constitutes a play on ideas.⁹⁴⁶ While the first verb indicates the removal of the source of stress, the second emphasizes their being sent away. Since the objects of the verbs are "judgment" and "enemy" respectively, the scene may be that of a courtroom where God the judge has overturned the sentence against His people and sent away their enemies. Such an understanding does away with critical conjecture that since the parallelism of the passage demands a word for a person to balance the noun "enemy," one should probably read מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ ("your judges/rulers").⁹⁴⁷

Zephaniah has previously brought up the themes of judgment and justice (2:3; 3:5, 8), so their presence here is not without precedent. God has served as witness against all the world and also as its judge (3:8). He is Jerusalem's righteous judge (3:5) who will deliver those who humbly practice His judgments and statutes (2:3). Now that there is a purified and humble remnant in the city, He may freely terminate her sentence and remove those He had sent to execute her punishment. In keeping with the forensic tone of the context, Israel's many enemies are viewed collectively as one adversary. Therefore, אֲבִיךָ is acceptable as it stands in the MT without resorting to the widely suggested change to אֲבִיךָ.⁹⁴⁸

לֹא-תִירָא ("you will not fear"): Some Hebrew MSS, followed by the LXX and Pesh. (cf. BHS, KJV, NKJV), read לֹא תִרְאֵהּ ("you will not see"). But the weight of Hebrew manuscripts favors the MT, a reading reflected in the Vg. Accordingly most newer translations follow the MT (cf. NIV, NASB, NJB).⁹⁴⁹ "Fear" also provides a play on the notion of Israel's failure to demonstrate proper fear in the midst of God's chastisement (cf. 3:7). The message concerning fear also anticipates the emphases of the next two verses.

רָע ("evil"): Any disaster, injury, or adverse circumstance—even God's judicial punishment—could be considered as evil by those who experienced it. The word also has been translated in the English versions as "disaster" (NASB, NKJV) and "harm" (NIV).

3:16 אֲלֵי-יָדַי ("let not [your hands] hang limp"): Although the Hebrew root means basically "be slack," it is used in a wide variety of situations and contexts. As a verb it is employed idiomatically with "hands" several times. Twice it appears with the idea of the alleviation or cessation of divine judgment (2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15), once of failing to help (or abandoning) another (Josh. 10:6), and several times of losing one's courage or of being discouraged (e.g., 2 Sam. 4:1; 2 Chron. 15:7; Jer. 38:4). In some cases discouragement turns to fear (Neh. 6:9; Ezek. 21:7 [HB 21:12]) with the result that the prophets often speak of hands hanging limp in fear (Isa. 13:7-8; Jer. 6:24-25; 50:43; Ezek. 7:17-18). That is the understanding here, as the parallel with the vetitive "do not be afraid" ("fear not") makes clear.

3:17 גִּבּוֹר ("warrior"): In the OT גִּבּוֹר is employed most frequently "in connection with military activities, especially as a designation for a warrior, either a man who is eligible for military service or is able to bear arms, or one who has actually fought in combat, who has already distinguished himself by performing heroic deeds."⁹⁵⁰ God is called El Gibbor, "The Mighty God" (Isa. 10:21),⁹⁵¹ and, as Israel's hero and warrior par excellence, He gains the victory (Ps. 24:8-10; Isa. 42:13; Hab. 3:8-15) and delivers His people (Ex. 15:2; Ps. 68:17-20 [HB 68:18-21]). Although Israel was saved by the Lord (Deut. 33:29), their physical deliverance was an outward sign of God's spiritual relation to them (Ezek. 37:20-28).

†Although I have rendered the hiphil prefix-conjugation form יוֹשִׁיעַ according to its normal imperfect usage (here functioning after "warrior" in an elliptical construction to form a relative clause with adjectival force⁹⁵²), it could be construed as an unusual transitive so that the whole phrase is translated "a hero/warrior, he saves."⁹⁵³

†The MT יִהְיֶה שָׁמֵט ("he will quiet [you]") has been explained variously as (1) keeping silent about or covering up people's sins (Henderson, Maurer, Rashi), (2) God's silence due to the overwhelming depths of His love (A. B. Davidson, Fausset, Feinberg, Keil, von Orelli), (3) God's preoccupation with planning Israel's good (Graetz, Nowack), (4) God's resting in His love (Laetsch, R. Smith), (5) a means for the believer to cultivate in his heart peace and silence (Luther, L. Walker), and (6) God's singing out of the joy of His loving concern (O'Connor). In addition, a relation to the Akkadian ere,,sEu ("to desire/crave") might be suggested.⁹⁵⁴

Though one is always hesitant to abandon the MT reading,⁹⁵⁵ the incompatibility of the thought of the clause thus formed by יִהְיֶה שָׁמֵט with the two parallel clauses that surround it makes attractive the search for alternative possibilities. Among the many proposed alternative readings,⁹⁵⁶ perhaps the best is that of BHS to read יִהְיֶה שָׁמֵט ("he will renew [you]"). This involves a simple consonantal change of ר to ד. In accepting a change from *r* to *d* it would also be possible to redivide the words in the clause to read: יִהְיֶה אֶהְבֵּתוּ יֵשֵׁב יְהוָה ("let the one who inhabits

his love rejoice," i.e., "let him whom God loves rejoice").⁹⁵⁷ The verb הִרְדֵּי ("rejoice") would then be the other clauses of the verse. Moreover, Zephaniah has employed the participial form of יָשַׁב in a singular relationship previously (2:15).⁹⁵⁸ So construed the phrase would constitute Zephaniah's parenthetical remark, a prophetic technique attested elsewhere (e.g., [Joel 3:11](#) [HB 4:11]).⁹⁵⁹ Final is wanting here. I have followed the lead of several ancient (LXX, Pesh.) and modern (NJB, RSV) versions and many scholars (e.g., Buhl, S. R. Driver, Duhamel, Hitzig, G. A. Smith) in reading הִרְדֵּי־שׁ J. M. P. Smith also adopts this reading, observes that there are many different interpretations of what this means, such as

he will do new things (cf. [Is. 43:19](#)) the like of which have not heretofore been known; or, he renews his love; or, he renews himself in his love; or, ... through the manifestations of favour inspired by his love for thee, he will restore thee to pristine vigour and glory, giving thee newness of life.⁹⁶⁰

Although the renewing of God's love toward His people appears to be more harmonious with the ideas of God's delighting in and rejoicing over Israel, found in the parallel lines of v. 17, it must be admitted that the MT reading is not altogether inappropriate, the thought of quieting being perhaps related to Israel's fear in v. 16.

הִרְדֵּי ("with singing") is positioned last in the clause and in the verse so as to form an inclusio with הִרְדֵּי in v. 14. Verses 14-17 thus compose a strophe within the final stanza. The second strophe to follow is marked by a shift to first-person address and the presence of the temporal marker הָיָה בְּעֵת ("at that time," vv. 19, 20) rather than the הָיָה בַּיּוֹם ("in that day," v. 16) of the first strophe.

3:18 הִרְדֵּי־שׁ מִמְּוֵדָה בְּיָמֵי־נִיִּי has generally been taken to be a niph'al participle from הִדָּה ("to suffer," "be grieved") with attenuation of הִ to הֵ, here meaning "sorrows."⁹⁶¹ However, J. M. P. Smith follows a widely suggested emendation in reading הִרְדֵּי־שׁ and joining the full phrase to v. 17: "He will exult over thee with shouting as in the days of a festival."⁹⁶² Those who accept the MT propose something like "the sorrows of the appointed feasts" ("I will remove from you").⁹⁶³ This makes tolerable sense, but the phrase and whole clause must also be related to the full verse. This has proved to be no easy task, with some declaring the rest of the verse "unintelligible."⁹⁶⁴ Even so conservative a scholar as Keil admits, "Every clause of ver. 18 is difficult."⁹⁶⁵ Small wonder, then, that the verse has received widely differing textual, lexical, and syntactical treatment from the ancient and modern versions and the commentators.

The solution proposed here is built around two pivotal points: (1) the verb under consideration must be understood in the sense of "depart" or "drive out/take away"; (2) the noun מִשְׁעָבָה in the succeeding clause should be rendered "tribute/payment." Validation of the former point comes from one of two lines of evidence. (1) If the verb is from the root הִדָּה, its meaning should be related to one found in the hiphil stem, "drive/thrust out," and hence here in the niph'al participle, "those driven out."⁹⁶⁶ (2) The verb in question may really be הִדָּה ("depart"), a verb attested in the Ugaritic Keret Epic:

wng mlk lbtj And depart, O king, from my house;

rh.fq krt withdraw, O Keret, from my
lh.fz.fry court.⁹⁶⁷

Evidence for the latter point also falls along two lines: (1) the meaning "tribute/payment" is well known in other examples in Northwest Semitic literature;⁹⁶⁸ (2) such a meaning is also found in the OT:

Therefore, because you have imposed a tax⁹⁶⁹ עַל־דָּל בְּוַשְׁקֶם יַעַן לֵבָן
upon the poor (man)

and taken a tribute of grain from him מִמֶּנּוּ תִקְחוּ וּמִשְׁעָבָה־בָּר (Amos
5:11)

Utilizing these data it is possible to make good sense of the MT, as it stands, as constituting a further divine promise. God will regather those who, due to Jerusalem's sin, were carried away as booty for the Chaldean army, a fact that stands as a reproach upon the holy city. As for מוֹעֵד ("appointed feasts"), Jack Lewis remarks:

... mo.æ.e,d must be thought of in a wide usage for all religious assemblies. Jerusalem became the city of assemblies ([Isa 33:20](#); cf. [Ezk 36:38](#)) which were characterized by great rejoicing and were deeply missed during times of exile ([Zeph 3:18](#); [Lam 1:4](#)).⁹⁷⁰

3:19 הִנֵּה הִנֵּה עֲשֵׂה ("behold I will deal"): The construction הִנֵּה with the participle in future contexts lays stress on the certainty and immediacy of the action.⁹⁷¹ At that future time envisioned here, God will deal vigorously and swiftly with those who afflict His people. The verb עֲשֵׂה ("do/make") followed by the particle הִנֵּה is often

used in the sense of “deal with” (e.g., [Jer. 21:2](#); [Ezek. 22:14](#); [23:25](#), 29). Zephaniah used this verb פָּרַע in proclaiming the speedy end of the world in the Day of the Lord (1:18). God’s effective power is underscored both there and here.

פָּרַע־שָׁמָיִם (“their shame”): The syntactical relation of the form is disputed.⁹⁷² Because the preceding prepositional phrase “in all the earth” contains a definite article, it would be grammatically anomalous of that construction (i.e., “In all the land of their shame”; but cf. the Vg). Some (e.g., NASB, RSV) have solved the difficulty by seeing a case of enjambment and relating פָּרַע־שָׁמָיִם to the controlling verb of the clause: “I will turn their shame (into praise and renown).”⁹⁷³ Others have viewed the form relatively: “Whose shame hath been in all the earth” (Soncino; cf. Ewald) or “In every land where they were put to shame” (NKJV; cf. KJV, von Orelli).

Among other proposals have been (1) that of Keil to treat פָּרַע־שָׁמָיִם as epexegetical, “i.e. of their shame,”⁹⁷⁴ (2) that of the LXX to view the form as a verb, a procedure that involves a restructuring of the text that relates the material involved to v. 20, “And they shall be ashamed at the time when I deal kindly with you,” and (3) that of M. Dahood to take the form as the object of the verb but to view the final *mem* on the verbal form as a type of *dativus commodi*, “And for them I shall transform their humiliation.”⁹⁷⁵ Because of the grammatical difficulties here, some simply omit the form (Pesh.) or treat it as a corrupt dittography occasioned by the פָּרַע־שָׁמָיִם of v. 20 (BHS, NJB).

On the whole, the difficulty seems best solved by relating the phrase to the controlling verb, “I will turn their shame to praise and honor.” This view has the advantage of recognizing the presence of the phrase in some ancient texts. It also finds further support in the juxtaposition of the ideas of “name” and “shame” in the same Ugaritic epic material noted in the problem at [Zeph. 3:10-11](#):

bsEm tgarm à ttrt tg’rm Athirat rebuked him by name,
ttrt

b 1 laliyn b[äl] “Be ashamed, O Aliyan Ba’al,

b 1 lrbk àrpt Be ashamed, O Rider on the
Clouds.⁹⁷⁶

The primary thrust, then, appears to be that the Lord will change His people’s shame to a name (i.e., honor) and praise. By separating the twin objects of the verb so widely, the author emphasizes the inclusive nature of the Lord’s action: Both they and their shame will be transformed to objects of honor and praise.

3:20 For $\text{בְּעֵת אֲבִיא הַיְהִי אֲדֹנָי}$ (“at that time I will lead”), J. M. P. Smith follows Buhl in suggesting an emendation to $\text{בְּעֵת הַיְהִי אֲדֹנָי}$ (“in the time when I do good [to you]”; cf. LXX, Duhm).⁹⁷⁷ The LXX reading, however, may depend on its own handling of the relationship of vv. 19 and 20 (see previous note). In any case, other textual data do not support it, nor does the context necessitate it.

†The translation of $\text{אֲתִקְבֹּץ קְבֻצֵי יְהוּדָה}$ as “even at the time I gather you” takes the *waw* as explicative.⁹⁷⁸ The use of בְּעֵת with the infinitive construct (here followed by an accusative complement) rather than a verb to express a temporal clause may be explained on the analogy of similarly formed nominal clauses used as a genitive (cf. [Gen. 2:17](#); [Jer. 2:7](#); Neh. 9:27). Thus, “at the time of my gathering you” becomes “at the time (when) I gather you.” The clause could also be an instance in which בְּעֵת functions as a compound preposition followed by an infinitive construct with a pronominal suffix to express a temporal clause: “at the time (when) I shall gather you” (cf. NASB, NJB, RSV).⁹⁷⁹ Thus, there is no need to view the construction here as a case of ellipsis, the eliding of the הַיְהִי after בְּעֵת occasioning the change of the imperfect אֲקָבֵץ to the infinitive קְבֻצֵי (cf. BHS). As J. M. P. Smith remarks, “It is difficult to see how so easy and natural a reading as this ... one could have given way to the rarer idiom suggested by the MT, which bears the stamp of originality.”⁹⁸⁰

כִּי (“surely”): The Hebrew particle is emphatic here as in vv. 8 and 13.⁹⁸¹ For the phrase “when I restore your fortunes,” see the note at 2:7. The singular שְׂבוּתְךָ , read by the LXX, Pesh., Vg and fourteen Hebrew MSS for the MT plural, is widely accepted by OT scholars (cf. BHS).

⁶⁴⁸ See, e.g., L. P. Smith and E. R. Lacheman, “The Authorship of the Book of Zephaniah,” JNES 9 (1950): 137-42. The authors see Zephaniah as the work of an apocalypticist and opt for a date of c. 200 B.C. Donald L. Williams (“The Date of Zephaniah,” JBL 82 [1963]: 83-85) decides for a setting during the reign of Jehoiaquim (608-597 B.C.), as does J. P. Hyatt, *Zephaniah*, PCB (London: Nelson, 1962), p. 642.

⁶⁴⁹ Many have suggested that individual sayings and sections may have been composed later and inserted into the final edition.

⁶⁵⁰ A good discussion of the setting of the book is given by F. C. Fensham, “Book of Zephaniah,” IDBSup, pp. 983-84. Fensham also favors a date for Zephaniah early in Josiah’s reign.

⁶⁵¹ D. A. Schneider, "Book of Zephaniah," *ISBE* 4:1189.

⁶⁵² If M. de Roche ("Contra Creation, Covenant and Conquest: Jer viii 13," *VT* 30 [1980]: 280-90) is in finding an allusion to [Zeph. 1:2-3](#) in the Jeremianic passage, the case for a Josianic date is further strengthened.

⁶⁵³ According to Herodotus (1.41.103-6) the Scythians had plundered Ashkelon during a raid again: (which ended when Psamtik I bought them off). Herodotus does not mention any invasion against Judah.

⁶⁵⁴ See, e.g., E. A. Leslie, "Book of Zephaniah," *IDB* 4:951-53; G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1929), p. 40.

⁶⁵⁵ Fensham, "Zephaniah," p. 983. For a defense of the Scythian hypothesis, see CAH 3:295 where the somewhat fantastic elements of Herodotus's account are duly recognized as well as the probability that the supposed Scythian sack of Ashdod was as much an Egyptian enterprise as Scythian. See also R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 940.

⁶⁵⁶ E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 2:226. For the reform measures of Josiah, see R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:281-88. Other scholars who decide for a date early in the reign of Josiah include C. H. Bullock, P. C. Craigie, F. C. Fensham, and C. von Orelli. Duane L. Christensen ("[Zephaniah 2:4-15](#): A Theological Basis for Josiah's Program of Political Expansion," *CBQ* 46 [1984]: 678) affixes a precise date of 628 B.C. for [Zeph. 2:4-15](#) and declares: "In its original form [Zeph 2:4-15](#) presents a theological basis for Josiah's program of political expansion at the expense of Assyria, particularly in Philistia and Transjordan."

⁶⁵⁷ W. W. Hallo and W. K. Simpson, *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 141.

⁶⁵⁸ H. W. F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), p. 116.

⁶⁵⁹ One must not assume, however, that Ashurbanipal's interests were not much more diverse. Indeed, his famed library probably held texts representative of every type of Akkadian literature, as well as business and administrative documents and correspondence. Ashurbanipal also gave attention to great building projects and the *beaux arts*. See further A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1968), pp. 489-503.

⁶⁶⁰ Some ancient sources indicate that Ashurbanipal himself grew increasingly degenerate; see W. Maier, *The Book of Nahum* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 129.

⁶⁶¹ Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, p. 488.

⁶⁶² For the general historical situation in the latter half of the seventh century B.C., see the Introduction to Nahum.

⁶⁶³ John Gray, *I and II Kings*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p. 720.

⁶⁶⁴ Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 366.

⁶⁶⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 441.

⁶⁶⁶ T. Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia: 1956), p. 254.

⁶⁶⁷ L. Walker, "Zephaniah," in *EBC*, 7:537.

⁶⁶⁸ Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 321.

⁶⁶⁹ See R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), pp. 53-54.

⁶⁷⁰ S. M. Lehrman ("Zephaniah," in *The Twelve Prophets*, Soncino Books of the Bible, 12th ed., ed. A. Cohen [New York: Soncino, 1985], p. 231) points out that the name *Hezekiah* was given to several persons in the later period, doubtless due to the fame of the godly king.

⁶⁷¹ C. H. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), p. 166.

⁶⁷² T. H. Robinson, *Prophecy and the Prophets*, 2d ed. (London: Duckworth, 1953), p. 111.

⁶⁷³ See the helpful remarks of H. E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), p. 232.

⁶⁷⁴ For details as to bifid structure, see R. D. Patterson and M. E. Travers, "Literary Analysis and the Unity of Nahum," *GTJ* 9 (1988): 48-50. For bifid structure in Jeremiah, see R. D. Patterson, "Of Bookends, Hinges, and Hooks: Literary Clues to the Arrangement of Jeremiah's Prophecies," *WTJ* 51 (1989): 109-31. The suggestion of bifid structure here stands in contrast with the interesting discussion of B. Renaud, "Le Livre de Sophonie. La Thème de YHWH structurant de la Synthèse rédactionnelle," *RevScRel* 60 (1986): 1-33.

Renaud finds a doublet at 1:18 and 3:8 and theorizes that these are seams that indicate a threefold of the book in which the theme of the Day of the Lord (1:2-18) moves to a consideration of the remembrance (3:8) and on to a picture of the day of Israel's purification, conversion, and happiness (3:9-20).

⁶⁷⁵ Zephaniah's use of structural techniques extends to smaller units. Thus the two strophes of the stanza of the book (3:9-20) are themselves composed of subunits, each formed according to known compositional methods. In the first strophe (3:9-13) the subunits (vv. 9-10, 11-13) are linked by יָרָא in the second strophe (3:14-20) they (vv. 14-17, 18-20) are delineated by such distinctive devices as bookending ("sing/singing," vv. 14, 17) and threading via first-person address (vv. 18-20).

⁶⁷⁶ G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, p. 54.

⁶⁷⁷ P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 12. The aspect of continuity is also underscored by Ronald Youngblood, "A Holistic Typology of Prophecy and Apocalyptic," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), pp. 213-21.

⁶⁷⁸ Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 62. A similar dichotomy between teleological process and eschatological redemption versus pessimism as to the course of historical events and hence the need for esoteric knowledge and sudden sovereign interposition is emphasized by John H. Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), pp. 383-89.

⁶⁷⁹ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 4. P. D. Hanson (*Old Testament Apocalyptic* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1987], p. 32) likewise stresses that in an apocalypse "(1) a revelation is given by God, (2) through a mediator ... (3) to a seer concerning (4) future events" (italics his).

⁶⁸⁰ For a similar concentration of apocalyptic themes in [Isaiah 24-27](#), see Youngblood, "A Holistic Typology," pp. 216-18. See also the discussion concerning the Day of the Lord by Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," in *EBC*, 7:690-92.

⁶⁸¹ For details, see M. Rist, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah," *IDB* 4:951; N. J. Oppenwall-Galluch, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah," *ISBE* 4:1189; and O. S. Wintermute, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1:499-507.

⁶⁸² P. C. Craigie, *The Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), pp. 200-201.

⁶⁸³ Christensen ("[Zephaniah 2:4-15](#)," p. 682) likewise sees the beginning of later apocalyptic in Zephaniah: "For Zephaniah ... the day of Yhwh is trans-historical.... The focus of attention in Zephaniah is not the judgment of Israel per se, but the vindication of Yhwh and the restoration of a righteous remnant as the true people of Yhwh (3:12-13). Zephaniah has moved beyond the events of history, in the sense of the here and now, to eschatology.... A number of the themes of subsequent apocalyptic literature have already begun to emerge as early as the time of Josiah, having their origin within so-called holy war traditions associated with the 'day of Yhwh,' which may well have been a rather specific setting within the cultic and political life of preexilic Israel." D. S. Russell (*The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964], pp. 90-91) also speaks of a growing apocalyptic tendency from the time of Ezekiel onward, noting Zephaniah as one such case.

⁶⁸⁴ J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Zephaniah and Nahum*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1911), p. 176.

⁶⁸⁵ James L. Crenshaw, *Story and Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 277.

⁶⁸⁶ E. P. Mackrell, ed., *Hymns of the Christian Centuries* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1903), p. 67.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶⁸⁸ H. D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), p. 354.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 353. For details as to the critical view of the unity of Zephaniah, see Harrison, *Introduction*, pp. 941-43; J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, pp. 172-74; G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, pp. 40-44.

⁶⁹⁰ L. P. Smith and E. R. Lacheman, "The Authorship," pp. 137-42.

⁶⁹¹ Gerald A. Larue, *Old Testament Life and Literature* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), p. 238.

⁶⁹² Such was the earlier verdict of Budde, S. R. Driver, and J. M. P. Smith, and it has been perpetuated in recent times by Leslie, "Zephaniah," pp. 952-53; J. A. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (New York: Columbia U., 1962), pp. 146-47. Manfred Oeming ("Gericht Gottes und Geschichte der Völker nach Zef 3, 1-13," *TQ* 167 [1987]: 289-300) has isolated what he considers to be revisions in 3:8 and 3:10 that betray a pro-Jewish nationalistic outlook reflecting later times.

⁶⁹³ Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 425.

- ⁶⁹⁴ Recently Klaus Seybold ("Text und Auslegung in Zef 2, 1-3," *Biblische Notizen* 25 [1984]: 49-54) decided against the authenticity of 2:2b-3 while maintaining that 2:1-2a has the true ring of the prop concern for the poor.
- ⁶⁹⁵ Schneider, "Zephaniah," p. 1189.
- ⁶⁹⁶ Hummel, *The Word*, p. 353.
- ⁶⁹⁷ Harrison, *Introduction*, p. 942.
- ⁶⁹⁸ B. Waltke, "Book of Zephaniah," *ZPEB* 5:1051.
- ⁶⁹⁹ For the general (as opposed to specific) nature of Zephaniah's prophecies, see C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, COT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 2:123-24.
- ⁷⁰⁰ Bullock, *Old Testament Prophetic Books*, p. 170.
- ⁷⁰¹ E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 266.
- ⁷⁰² J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 177.
- ⁷⁰³ F. C. Eiselen, "Book of Zephaniah," *ISBE-1* 5:3145.
- ⁷⁰⁴ Many have seen in Zephaniah's condemnation of the rich a special concern for the poor. Not only are some materially poor, according to this theory, but also poor in spirit and hence shut up by faith to the provision of God, whereas the proud rich have cut themselves off from Israel's covenantal benefits. See, e.g., S. M. Gozzo, "Il profeta Sofonia e la dottrina teologica del suo libro," *Antoniano* 52 (1977): 3-37; C. Stuhlmueeller, "Justice toward the Poor," *TBT* 24 (1986): 385-90; Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 146. N. Lohfink ("Zefanja und das Israel der Armen," *BK* 39 [1984]: 100-108), however, separates Zephaniah's concern for the poor from any spiritual equation of them with the Lord's redeemed.
- ⁷⁰⁵ See Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 71-80; R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 180-91.
- ⁷⁰⁶ Harrison, *Introduction*, p. 943.
- ⁷⁰⁷ Schneider, "Zephaniah," p. 1190.
- ⁷⁰⁸ G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 160.
- ⁷⁰⁹ Schneider, "Zephaniah," pp. 1190-91.
- ⁷¹⁰ W. S. LaSor, D. A. Hubbard and F. W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 437.
- ⁷¹¹ C. K. Lehman, *Biblical Theology: Old Testament* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1971), p. 346.
- ⁷¹² G. W. Anderson ("The Idea of the Remnant in the Book of Zephaniah," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 11 [1977-78]: 11-14) points out that the remnant motif can logically exist only in a context of judgment so that doom and hope are not incompatible prophetic elements. He stresses the fact that the idea of a remnant means more than mere existence; it is a "promise that those who by the mercy of God survive the judgment will by their very existence be a pledge of restoration and of God's continuing purpose of good for his people."
- ⁷¹³ G. Gerleman, "דָּבָר," *THAT* 1:439.
- ⁷¹⁴ J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Zephaniah and Nahum*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1911), p. 184.
- ⁷¹⁵ For details, see *ibid.*, p. 191.
- ⁷¹⁶ See A. S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah* (Oslo-Bergen-Troms: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), pp. 21-22; L. Sabottka, *Zephanja* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972), pp. 5-7. Sabottka's proposal has the advantage of similarity to [Gen. 8:21](#) (אֶסְרָא לֹא ... הָאָרֶץ, "I will not again" curse "the ground").
- ⁷¹⁷ GKC, par. 113w n. 3, however, lists both cases, as well as [Zeph. 1:2](#), as textual errors.
- ⁷¹⁸ See E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 113-19; C. E. Armerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 126.
- ⁷¹⁹ C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, COT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 2:126-27.
- ⁷²⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 63.

- ⁷²¹ See J. D. Watts, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, CNEB (Cambridge: Cambridge U., 1975), p. 156, for a dissenting opinion.
- ⁷²² Some biblical scholars, however, relate Zephaniah's prophecy to a nearer historical fulfillment in B.C. See, e.g., J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973 440-41).
- ⁷²³ See M. De Roche, "Zephaniah I 2-3: The 'Sweeping' of Creation," *VT* 30 (1980): 104-9; John D. Hannah, "Zephaniah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1985), 1:1525.
- ⁷²⁴ Sabottka, *Zephanja*, p. 8. Sabottka's own suggestion of a compound form of mkk/ mu,k ("be low," "sink," "give way") and ks(El ("fall/stumble"), hence "I will plunge the world into ruins," is less than convincing. The LXX omits the whole phrase.
- ⁷²⁵ See also the *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 5:372.
- ⁷²⁶ Theodore Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), p. 355.
- ⁷²⁷ See P. C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 61-66; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U., 1973), 145-215.
- ⁷²⁸ The biblical evidence for the persistent problem of paganism in general and Baalism in particular in ancient Israel is strong. Nor is extrabiblical evidence wanting, as demonstrated in the Samaria ostraca, although some now minimize the evidence of pagan influence in such cases. See, e.g., Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions*, HSS 31 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986). For Baal and the OT, see K. G. Jung, "Baal," *ISBE* 1:377-79.
- ⁷²⁹ See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp. 7-8; Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, pp. 356-57; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:128-29.
- ⁷³⁰ For the equation of Bethaven with Bethel in [Hos. 4:15](#); [5:8](#); [10:5](#), see Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea an Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, JSOTSup 28 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), pp. 124-38.
- ⁷³¹ Kimchi and Ibn Ezra identify the term as referring to "ancillary priests who ministered to Baal." See S. M. Lehrman, "Zephaniah," in *The Twelve Prophets*, Soncino Books of the Bible, ed. A. Cohen, 12th ed. (London: Soncino, 1985), p. 235. W. F. Albright (*From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2d ed. [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957], p. 234) suggests that the word designates eunuch priests whose condition, according to the Mosaic law, disqualified them from service in the regular cultus. See further R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 345.
- ⁷³² See KB-3 2:459; J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 192. For an older proposal, see A. R. Fausset, "Zephaniah," in R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 4:638-39.
- ⁷³³ See GKC, par. 154 n. 1(a).
- ⁷³⁴ Cyrus Gordon (*UT*, p. 395) suggests that the root is Egypto-Semitic.
- ⁷³⁵ H. D. Preuss, "חֹהַ," *TDOT* 4:249.
- ⁷³⁶ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:129.
- ⁷³⁷ See Alan Cooper, "Divine Names and Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts," *RSP*, 3:450.
- ⁷³⁸ For the identity and nature of Molech worship, see my note on [2 Kings 16:3](#) in R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 4:245-46.
- ⁷³⁹ See Sabottka, *Zephanja*, p. 24; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:129; A. R. Hulst, *Old Testament Translation Problems* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), p. 253. See also M. Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and Its Background," *UF* 4 (1972): 133-54.
- ⁷⁴⁰ For details, see G. Gerleman and E. Ruprecht, "דַּרֵּשׁ," *THAT* 1:459-67; S. Wagner, "בִּקֵּשׁ," *TDOT* 2:229-41, and "פָּרַשׁ" *TDOT* 3:293-307. See also the note on [Nah. 3:7](#).
- ⁷⁴¹ For a similar employment of this structure in the prophetic literature, see R. D. Patterson, "Joel," in *EBC*, 7:233-34.
- ⁷⁴² Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 358.
- ⁷⁴³ For a discussion of Israel's life viewed as being in the presence of God, see the excellent discussion of G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 16-18. The challenge to

"do that which is right/good in the eyes of the Lord" is an often recurring theme in Deuteronomy (e.g. [6:18](#); [12:25](#), [28](#); 13:18; 21:9).

⁷⁴⁴ See further Patterson, "Joel," in *EBC*, 7:256-57; K. Barker, "Zechariah," in *EBC*, 7:619-20.

⁷⁴⁵ Some prophecies that seem to have a primary orientation in the future blend almost imperceptibly the eschatological complex. They often telescope disconnected but related future events into one perspective. For details, see J. B. Payne, *Biblical Prophecy*, pp. 134-40. Prophecies often have an unfolding fulfillment that covers wide expanses of time so that their fulfillments are only progressively realized. The term *progressive fulfillment* may be used for such cases. Thus Kenneth Barker ("Progressive Fulfillment of Prophecy," paper presented at the spring meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society eastern section, April 7, 1989) demonstrates the applicability of the idea of progressive fulfillment to [Joel 2:28-32](#) ([Heb. 3:1-5](#)) in its NT and future fulfillments. This paper is part of Barker's chapter, "The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope," in the forthcoming *Israel and the Church: Essays in Contemporary Dispensational Thought*, ed. C. Blaising and D. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan).

⁷⁴⁶ For details, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 427-28; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, TOTC (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980), pp. 78-80. C. R. Erdman (*The Book of Leviticus* [New York: Revell, 1951], p. 29) observes that the eating of the sacrificial feast by the offerer and his family and friends "seems to have been the supreme significance of this sacrifice." W. Eichrodt ("Prophet and Covenant: Observations on the Exegesis of Isaiah," in *Proclamation and Presence*, ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter [Macon, Ga.: Mercer U., 1983], pp. 181-82) connects this verse with [Isa. 30:33](#), which he identifies as the covenant sacrifice at the Feast of Tabernacles.

⁷⁴⁷ B. Lang, "חֲבֵטָה," *TDOT* 4:25-26. The imagery of the sacrificial feast is also utilized by other prophets in predicting the fall of nations. Isaiah (34:6) had already depicted the judgment of Edom in similar language, while Jeremiah (46:10) will draw upon Isaiah and Zephaniah in relating the coming day of the Lord's judgments of Egypt through the Chaldeans as the Lord's sacrifice. Ezekiel (39:17-20) will mention the bidding of guests (birds, beasts) to the sacrificial slaughter in the Valley of Hamon Gog.

⁷⁴⁸ The LXX adds, "Instead they leap over it." P. K. McCarter, Jr. (*I Samuel*, AB, p. 122) remarks: "The Philistine custom seems to have survived, at least in Gaza, into the first centuries A.D."

⁷⁴⁹ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:132. See also the discussion in H. Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), p. 231.

⁷⁵⁰ If the people involved in the details of v. 9 were the same as those in v. 8, a simpler and more certain identification could have been given by writing [הַמְקַטְּוּ עַל הַדְלָיִים](#) "who leap over the threshold ... and fill (etc.)."

⁷⁵¹ For support of the view adopted here, see Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, pp. 360-61. P. C. Craigie (*Twelve Prophets* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985], 2:113) adds the caution that "when the path of paganism is pursued by government officials, the people may be expected to follow."

⁷⁵² See W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 126.

⁷⁵³ Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 361. The merismus consists of mentioning selected parts of Jerusalem to represent the clamor and lamenting that will occur throughout Judah and Jerusalem by all who complain about their lost wealth. Accordingly, Zephaniah in irony tells them to go ahead and wail, for such would be their lot. Verse 10 draws the earlier charges against Judah's leadership to a close and shifts attention to its merchant class.

⁷⁵⁴ Irresponsibility not only has a damaging effect on men and nations but also ultimately takes its toll in divine judgment. G. Adam Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, rev. ed. [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1929], 2:53) well remarks: "None of us shall escape because we have said, 'I will go with the crowd,' or 'I am a common man and have no right to thrust myself forward.' We shall be followed and judged, each of us for his and her personal attitude to the movements of our time."

⁷⁵⁵ See further David J. Clark, "Wine on the Lees ([Zeph 1.12](#) and [Jer 48.11](#))," *BT* 32 (1981): 241-43.

⁷⁵⁶ Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 362.

⁷⁵⁷ J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 202) observes: "Just as wine left too long in such a condition thickens and loses strength, so these men have sunk into weak self-indulgence, having lost all interest in and concern for the higher things of life and being solicitous only for their own bodily comfort and slothful ease."

⁷⁵⁸ Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:114. He concludes: "Zephaniah's words on indifference touch the conscience of multitudes, those who are not guilty of unbelief, but are equally never overwhelmed by belief.... The way things are is partly because that is the way we have allowed them to become. We can sit back, smug and somnolent in a desperate world, but we cannot at the same time absolve ourselves from all responsibility, and we shall eventually be caught in the very chaos we permit."

⁷⁵⁹ See, e.g., the comments by Hannah, "Zephaniah," p. 1526; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:130; Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, pp. 358-59; L. Walker, "Zephaniah," in *EBC*, 7:546-47. For alternative viewpoints as to the guests

intended, see J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 195. Smith believes that “the only essential feature of it is the picture of Judah as a sacrificial victim about to experience the punitive wrath of Yahweh. The remaining features are but accessory circumstances, necessary to the rounding out of the view, but intended to be taken literally.” The view adopted here was suggested earlier by H. Gressmann and put forward recently by Victor A. S. Reid, “Zephaniah,” in *The International Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. by F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 953. The view that the guests are likewise the victims held by T. H. Gaster (*Thespis* [New York: Harper, 1966], pp. 232-34) who, however, connects the inclusion with cultic themes of annual renewal that have been adopted and recast in an eschatological setting.

⁷⁶⁰ See W. Schottruff, “פִּקֵּד,” *THAT* 2:466-86; J. Scharbert, “Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments,” *BZ* 4 (1960): 207-27; and the informative dissertation by J. B. van Hooser, “The Meaning of the Hebrew Root פִּקֵּד in the Old Testament” (Harvard U., 1962).

⁷⁶¹ For the distinction between the officials and the royal sons given here, see André Lemaire, “Note sur le titre BN HMLK dans l’ancien Israel,” *Sem* 29 (1979): 62. According to BDB (p. 978), the sons of the king “are never called (שָׂרִיִּם) שֶׁ.” J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 196) rightly points out that “the reference here cannot be to the sons of Josiah, the eldest of whom was not born until six years after Josiah assumed the crown (2 K. 23:36-22:1) and was not old enough to have wielded any influence until well toward the close of Josiah’s long reign.

⁷⁶² מַתְּקוֹ is defined by KB-3 as a “podium of an idol.” Compounding the problem is that the more common word for threshold is שָׁרֵף; see R. D. Patterson, “שָׁרֵף,” *TWOT* 2:631-32. The LXX apparently did not know what to do with the whole phrase: “And I will punish publicly before the gates.” For additional details on the various views, see H. Donner, “Die Schwellenhüpfen: Beobachtungen zu Zephania 1, 8f.,” *JSS* 15 (1970): 42-55; J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, pp. 197-98; Sabotka, *Zephaniah*, pp. 41-42; M. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p. 244.

⁷⁶³ John Gray, *I and II Kings*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp. 726-27. See also the note on Neh. 11:9 in *The NIV Study Bible*.

⁷⁶⁴ G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:56; see also Gray, *Kings*, p. 727. Note, however, that Barry Beitzel (*The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* [Chicago: Moody, 1985], p. 159) locates the *maktesh* in the lower Tyropoeon Valley.

⁷⁶⁵ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:133.

⁷⁶⁶ M. Rose (“‘Atheismus’ als Wohlstanderscheinung? [*Zeph* 1, 12],” *TZ* 37 [1981]: 193-208) proposes that the affluent class had become so entrenched in its wealth that it assumed God must be supportive of its lifestyle. Thus wealth was a sign of divine favor.

⁷⁶⁷ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 201.

⁷⁶⁸ John T. Willis, “Alternating (ABA’B’) Parallelism in the Old Testament Psalms and Prophetic Literature,” in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOTSup 40, ed. Elaine R. Follis (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p. 74.

⁷⁶⁹ See further R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), pp. 160-62; see also nn. 33 and 76 in this chapter. For a brief introduction to the problems of author-centered, text-centered, and reader-centered theories of rhetorical criticism as applied to biblical studies, see Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 19-41.

⁷⁷⁰ The date of Joel is a matter of dispute. The tendency for most lists to be comprehensive and drawn from many sources, combined with the close correspondence in order and point of view, tends to favor the idea of Zephaniah’s adapting of material from Joel rather than vice versa. (See R. D. Patterson, “Joel,” in *EBC*, 7:231-33. For more details concerning the dating dispute and a different conclusion, see Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, WEC, ed. Kenneth Barker [Chicago: Moody, 1990], pp. 2-9.) Conversely the demonstrably later date of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as their utilization of Zephaniah’s list in different settings relative to the Day of the Lord, show their dependence upon Zephaniah. C. von Orelli (*The Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. J. S. Banks [Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1977 reprint], p. 267) remarks concerning the relation of this passage and Joel: “The close of the chapter (vv. 14-18) also depicts, with plain allusion to Joel, this day of retribution as one coming on all the children of men.” For Zephaniah’s apparent dependence on Joel elsewhere, see the note on [Zeph. 2:13](#).

⁷⁷¹ Both additions are apparently adapted from Job, the first from 15:2, 24 and the second from 30:3; 38:27.

⁷⁷² Although cataclysmic events are common in apocalypses, one must not assume that such details are always constituent parts of all apocalypticists’ literary artistry, as some suggest. See, e.g., M. S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypses* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), pp. 11-23. In the case of biblical prophecies that contain apocalyptic elements, it seems certain that the prophet was attempting to portray desperate changes that would take place in the physical and socio-political realms so that however much he may have utilized literary figures, one must affirm that something remarkable was going to take place. Indeed, the presence of such matters in biblical prophecy may provide a point of reference for their later application in apocalyptic.

⁷⁷³ Some (e.g., Sabottka, *Zephania*, pp. 52-54) have suggested that the hero here is God Himself. warriors in the eschatological Day of the Lord, see [Joel 3:9-11](#) (HB 4:9-11) and Finley's (*Joel, Amos Obadiah*, WEC, pp. 95-96) comments.

⁷⁷⁴ G. van Groningen, "עִבְרָה", *TWOT* 2:643. For the employment of this term with other words for div and for its prophetic application, see G. Sauer, "עִבְרָה", *THAT* 2:205-6; for the utilization of the under verbal root in divine holy warfare, see G. von Rad, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1965), pp. 68-75.

⁷⁷⁵ See further É. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 218-19.

⁷⁷⁶ The paronomasia is obvious here, the second term for devastation reinforcing the first so as to depict total desolation (cf. [Isa. 6:11](#)). For the Hebrew phrase שָׂאָה וְיָשׁוּבָהּ used here and in Job, see John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 396 n. 3.

⁷⁷⁷ All four pairs occur in the same order in [Joel 2:2](#) (see, e.g., Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, WEC, pp. 43-44). The first, third, and fourth were used in the scene depicting the children of Israel's encampment at Mount Sinai ([Deut. 4:11](#)), the second in the portrayal of the ninth plague against Egypt ([Ex. 10:21-22](#)).

⁷⁷⁸ Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 364.

⁷⁷⁹ G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 98.

⁷⁸⁰ The synecdoche of citing towns and towers for the devastation of all cities and lands is an effective one. If the strongest defenses will collapse, everything will be laid waste.

⁷⁸¹ Although some have doubted the authenticity of such universalistic pronouncements by Zephaniah, the passage is properly defended by A. S. Kapelrud, *Prophet Zephaniah*, p. 31. Von Rad (*Message of the Prophets*, p. 99) observes that "the war was now to affect all nations, even the fixed orders of creation, and even Israel herself. The event has been expanded into a phenomenon of cosmic significance."

⁷⁸² For other examples of divine judicial blinding, see [Gen. 19:11](#); [2 Kings 6:18](#). O. P. Robertson (*The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], pp. 254-56) rightly points out Zephaniah's abundant use of phraseology drawn from Deuteronomy.

⁷⁸³ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:136.

⁷⁸⁴ Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:116.

⁷⁸⁵ Hailey, *Minor Prophets*, p. 233.

⁷⁸⁶ For good discussions, see Sabottka, *Zephaniah*, pp. 50-52; R. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), p. 129. For details as to the term itself, see B. Couroyer, "Trois épithètes de Ramsès II," *Or* 33 (1964): 443-53; A. F. Rainey, "The Soldier Scribe in Papyrus Anastasi I," *JNES* 26 (1967): 58-60; A. R. Schulman, "Mhr and Mskb. Two Egyptian Military Titles of Semitic Origin," *Zeitschrift für die Aegyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 93 (1966): 123-32; Gordon, UT, p. 431. Sabottka calls attention to the Phoenician/Punic personal names mhrbāl and bālmhr, which he understands as "(soldier) hero of Baal" and "Baal is the hero" respectively.

⁷⁸⁷ See W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp. 278-79.

⁷⁸⁸ Among important contributions in the vast literature on the subject may be cited Payne, *Biblical Prophecy*, pp. 121-40; M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2d ed. (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), pp. 493-99; Patrick Fairbairn, *Hermeneutical Manual* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1858), pp. 129-36; *Prophecy* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 177-96; *The Typology of Scripture* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 1:368-95; C. von Orelli, *The Old Testament Prophecy of the Consummation of God's Kingdom*, trans. J. S. Banks (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1889), pp. 31-62; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), pp. 61-76.

⁷⁸⁹ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:135. Such a use of this word is common in the OT; see KB-3, p. 1015; S. Amsler, "קָוָה," *THAT* 2:631.

⁷⁹⁰ See further the *Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 5:350. The NEB follows an emended text and translates "No runner fast as (that day), or raiding band so swift" (cf. *BHS*). קָוָה is clearly read by the MT, however, and is supported by the ancient versions and the use of the word in other Day of the Lord passages (e.g., [Amos 8:10](#)).

⁷⁹¹ See Hulst, *Translation Problems*, p. 253.

⁷⁹² The existence of this noun has been postulated as well for [Jer. 4:31](#) and [Ezek. 21:27](#); see at KB-3, p. 987. Similarly the NJB translates קָוָה here as "cry of war."

⁷⁹³ For a parallel case where *w* occurs before a preposition, see [Judg. 7:12](#). This relative particle, w common in Akkadian, Amorite, and Phoenician, is attested in older (particularly northern) Hebrew. *A* was not often employed in standard classical Hebrew, it reappeared in later Hebrew (possibly through influence of Phoenician), where it has remained with some modification until modern times. See E. Kutschera, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutschera (Leiden: Brill, 1982), p. 32; S. M. An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964), pp. 113-14; Z. S. Harris, *Development of the Canaanite Dialects* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1939), pp. 69-70.

⁷⁹⁴ C. F. Whitley, "Has the Particle *w* an Asseverative Force?" *Bib* 55 (1974): 394-98. Whitley points out other possible instances of such a use of *w* in [Isa. 48:16](#); [Hos. 6:10](#); [Eccles. 3:17](#).

⁷⁹⁵ Von Rad, *Message of the Prophets*, p. 99; see also *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:122-25.

⁷⁹⁶ See Sabottka, *Zephaniah*, p. 55; see also R. J. Williams, "The Passive *Qal* Theme in Hebrew," in *Essays on the Ancient Semitic World*, ed. J. W. Wevers and D. B. Redford (Toronto: University Press, 1970), p. 47.

⁷⁹⁷ See also Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:136. The MT form may be related to the Arabic plural *luhfūm*. The LXX and the Pesh. also read "their flesh" (cf. NASB), while the Vg suggests "their bodies" (cf. NJB "their corpses").

⁷⁹⁸ J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 213) correctly points out that "everywhere that reference is made to chaff, except possibly in [Is. 41:15](#), it is as a simile of scattering (e.g., [Is. 17:13](#) [Hos. 1:33](#) [Jb. 21:18](#) [Ps. 14](#))." If Zephaniah's point is the same, the primary force of the judgment is on the coming exile and dispersion of God's people (cf. [Deut. 28:64-68](#)).

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. Finley's comments in *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, WEC, pp. 51-55. The note of hope suggested in the Exegesis and Exposition of [Zeph. 2:1-3](#) stands in contrast to many who see in the context primarily doom with little hope of deliverance. Thus G. A. Smith (*Twelve Prophets*, p. 58) remarks: "Upon this vision of absolute doom there follows a qualification for the meek and righteous. They may be hidden on the day of the Lord's anger; but even for them escape is only a possibility. Note the absence of mention of the Divine mercy. Zephaniah has no gospel of that kind."

⁸⁰⁰ Although *lā* could be viewed as written for the asseverative particle *lā* ("indeed"; see GKC par. 23i), it is best taken as the usual negative. Laetsch (*Minor Prophets*, p. 365) explains: "To the second and third בְּטָרְחָם, *lā* is added; an example of mingling of two constructions. A, before it bring forth; B, that it may not bring forth; C, before it may not bring forth."

⁸⁰¹ For *baqqā* ("seek"), see the additional note on [Nah. 3:7](#).

⁸⁰² For "poor" as a theological term for those dependent on God, see Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Justice toward the Poor," *The Bible Today* 24 (1986): 385-90. Stuhlmueller notes its primary socio-economic reference here but sees a shift in perspective in [Zeph. 3:12](#).

⁸⁰³ For righteousness, see the Excursus on [Habakkuk 2:4](#); for humility, see R. Martin Achard, "עֲנָה," *THAT* 2:346-50; Leonard J. Coppes, "עֲנָה," *TWOT* 2:682-84.

⁸⁰⁴ R. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, p. 132.

⁸⁰⁵ In an extensive note J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, pp. 221-222) provides a detailed discussion of these proposals and concludes that "none of these is more than a barren conjecture, providing no suitable meaning."

⁸⁰⁶ Laetsch (*Minor Prophets*, p. 365) calls attention to such English denominative verbs as "to berry" or "to nut."

⁸⁰⁷ See KB-3, pp. 467-68.

⁸⁰⁸ The Hebrew root in all three cases is *šbr* ("break [in pieces]").

⁸⁰⁹ The NASB marginal reading is "without longing." An interesting twist for understanding the negative here is supplied by Sabottka (*Zephaniah*, pp. 62-63) who considers it a title for Baal and translates "O people that long for the Nothing."

⁸¹⁰ For the statement that metaphor, as an example of a trope, constitutes meaning, see Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1979), pp. 141-57. Ricoeur's thesis is that metaphor creates meaning rather than embellishing it.

⁸¹¹ O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, p. 248.

⁸¹² W. Bauder ("πρᾶξις," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 2:257) points out that *āa*,*ni*, and particularly *āa*,*na*,*w* change their

meaning from those who are materially poor to what becomes the self-chosen religious title of those deep need and difficulty humbly seek help from Yahweh alone, or have found it there. See also F. H. S. Schulz, “*πρᾶν ὄψις, πρᾶν ὄψις*,” *TDNT* 6:645-49, who emphasize that the humble man is “one who before he is a servant in relation to God and who subjects himself to Him quietly and without resistance.” See further the additional note on [Zeph. 3:12](#).

⁸¹³ See M. Baldacci, “Alcuni nuovi esempi di *taw infisso* nell’ebraico biblico,” *Biblia e Oriente* 24 (1992): 14; M. Dahood, *Psalms*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 3:388-89. For *וָרָוּחַ*, see R. D. Patterson, “*וָרָוּחַ*,” *TWOT* 2:620-21.

⁸¹⁴ R. Smith (*Micah-Malachi*, WBC [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984], p. 135) follows C. Westermann in suggesting that the oracles concerning the foreign nations are a disguised salvation speech in that they imply salvation for Israel in contrast to or as a result of the judgment of the other peoples.

⁸¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of Amos’s prophetic arrangement, see Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, WEC, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1990), pp. 133-36.

⁸¹⁶ See further K. A. Kitchen, “The Philistines,” in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), pp. 53-78; E. E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971); W. S. LaSor, “Philistines, Philistia,” *ISBE* 3:841-46; T. Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale U., 1982); “What We Know About the Philistines,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8 (1982): 20-44.

⁸¹⁷ Only four Philistine cities are mentioned here. In the eighth century B.C. Gath was defeated by Uzziah, who destroyed its walls ([2 Chron. 11:8: 26:6](#)). It may have lain in ruins as early as Amos’s day (cf. [Amos 6:2](#)) and perhaps experienced final destruction as a result of an Assyrian invasion (cf. [Mic. 1:10](#)).

⁸¹⁸ S. M. Lehrman, “Zephaniah,” in *The Twelve Prophets*, Soncino Books of the Bible, ed. A. Cohen, 12th ed. (London: Soncino, 1985), pp. 241-42. Some (e.g., Davidson, G. A. Smith) have seen in Esarhaddon’s capture of Memphis “in half a day” (*AR* 2:227) a reflection of a victory at midday; the expression may have relevance here. Conversely H. E. Freeman (*Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1973], p. 72) proposes: “The stronghold of the Philistines, a fortress in strength, would become so defenseless that there will be no need for a surprise attack after dark by the enemy forces, but she can be overthrown at noon, in broad daylight. An attack at noon implies contempt for Ashdod’s reputation as a formidable city.” For biblical parallels, see [1 Kings 20:16](#); [Jer. 6:4](#).

⁸¹⁹ Although there was a Gaza in NT times (cf. [Acts 8:26](#)), it appears to have been located on a different site nearer the coast.

⁸²⁰ For Ashdod, see M. Dothan, “Ashdod of the Philistines,” in *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology*, ed. D. N. Freedman and J. C. Greenfield (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 17-27; J. E. Jennings, “Ashdod,” in *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 73-74. For Ekron, see S. Gitin and T. Dothan, “The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines: Recent Excavations at an Urban Border Site,” *BA* 50 (1987): 197-222.

⁸²¹ D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), p. 69.

⁸²² Kitchen, “Philistines,” p. 67.

⁸²³ Robert Gordis, “A Rising Tide of Misery: A Note on Zephaniah II 4,” *VT* 37 (1987): 487-90.

⁸²⁴ L. Zalcman, “Ambiguity and Assonance at Zephaniah II 4,” *VT* 36 (1986): 365-71.

⁸²⁵ Gordis, “Rising Tide,” p. 489.

⁸²⁶ For *וָוּחַ* (“woe”), see the additional note on [Nah. 3:1](#); for its use in invective in Habakkuk’s extended section of taunt songs, see the exposition of [Hab. 2:6-20](#).

⁸²⁷ J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Zephaniah and Nahum*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1911), p. 216.

⁸²⁸ Theo. Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), p. 368.

⁸²⁹ J. D. Hannah, “Zephaniah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1985), 1:1530.

⁸³⁰ See, e.g., C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, COT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 2:139-40; L. Walker, “Zephaniah,” in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:552.

⁸³¹ Cf. also Amos’s use of the number four in 3/4 ladder parallelism ([Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6](#)).

⁸³² Zalcman, “Ambiguity and Assonance,” p. 366.

⁸³³ See further H.-J. Fabry, “הבֵּל,” *TDOT* 4:172-79.

⁸³⁴ Amos links the Philistines with Caphtor, traditionally associated with Crete. Some evidence, however, suggests a possible relationship with southern Asia Minor; see A. Wainwright, “Caphtor-Cappodicia. (1956): 199-210; “Early Philistine History,” *VT* 9 (1959): 73-84.

⁸³⁵ See, e.g., A. van Selms, “Cherethites,” *ISBE* 1:641.

⁸³⁶ M. Delcor, “Les kerethim et les cretois,” *VT* 28 (1978): 409-22. See also C. Gordon, *Before the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 171.

⁸³⁷ The problematic “Negev of the Cherethites” ([1 Sam. 30:14](#)), as N. K. Sandars (*The Sea Peoples* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1978], p. 166) suggests, “may have lain in the hinterland of Gaza.”

⁸³⁸ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:141.

⁸³⁹ Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 367ⁿ. So construed, there is a paronomasia involving the root *krt*. Thus, the land of the Kerethites (כְּרֶתִים v. 5) will become a place marked by shepherds’ caves (כְּרוּתָה v. 6). A similar case of paronomasia occurs in [Ezek. 25:16](#) where the root *krt* is used of “cutting off the Kerethites” (וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֶת-כְּרוּתֵיהֶם).

Among those who prefer a reference to a proper name here, C. Gordon (*Ugarit and Minoan Crete* [New York: Norton, 1966], p. 28) proposes a reference to the Ugaritic hero “Kret ... the eponymous ancestor of the Cretans or the Philistines in [Zephaniah 2:6](#).” The root כְּרָה apparently lies behind the decision of the *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 5:375-76, to translate the form as “wells.” J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 218) omits the word as a “corrupt dittograph of the immediately preceding word.”

⁸⁴⁰ See the additional note on [Nah. 1:8](#).

⁸⁴¹ For the phrase “restore their fortunes,” see R. D. Patterson, “Joel,” in *EBC*, 7:259.

⁸⁴² For the remnant theme, see R. de Vaux, “The ‘Remnant of Israel’ According to the Prophets,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, trans. Damian McHugh (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), p. 28; G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews U., 1974).

⁸⁴³ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 219.

⁸⁴⁴ See Duane L. Christensen, “[Zephaniah 2:4-15](#): A Theological Basis for Josiah’s Program of Political Expansion,” *CBQ* 46 (1984): 681.

⁸⁴⁵ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:143.

⁸⁴⁶ Moab’s hostility toward Israel is illustrated in the well-known Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone); see D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 195-99. For the text itself, see H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 1:33.

⁸⁴⁷ For light on the possible locations of Sodom and Gomorrah, see E. B. Smick, *Archaeology of the Jordan Valley* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), pp. 47-51; W. C. van Hatten, “Once Again: Sodom and Gomorrah,” *BA* 44 (1981): 87-92; James E. Jennings, “Bab Edh-dhra,” *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 84-85.

⁸⁴⁸ Despite a recent resurgence, the area is still marked by its austere surroundings. See Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 204-6.

⁸⁴⁹ J. Bergman, H. Ringgren, and R. Mosis, “הַדָּל” *TDOT* 2:404-5.

⁸⁵⁰ The idea of arrogant boasting is ably defended by J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 226; L. Sabottka, *Zephania* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972), pp. 84-85.

⁸⁵¹ For details, see E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 111-12.

⁸⁵² J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 227) suggests similarly “overgrown.” For enclitic *mem*, see H. D. Hummel, “Enclitic *MEM* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 85-107; M. Pope, “Ugaritic Enclitic *-m*,” *JCS* 5 (1951): 123-28; M. Dahood, *Psalms*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 3:408-9. The use of enclitic *mem* with proper nouns is attested elsewhere and may have been employed here for metrical reasons.

⁸⁵³ See B. H. Warmington, *Carthage* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 255.

⁸⁵⁴ See R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, “1, 2 Kings,” in *EBC*, 4:142-43.

⁸⁵⁵ J. M. P. Smith (*Zephaniah*, p. 229) reasons that “if the text is correct, the point of the figure lies in the thought that by destroying the nations Yahweh will enfeeble their gods, whose existence is bound with that of the nations worshipping them; or in the fact that in earlier times, sacrificial offerings were upon as the ‘food of the gods’ (cf. [Ez. 44:7](#)); hence, by causing the offerings to cease, Yahweh will do the gods of their means of support.”

⁸⁵⁶ For double-duty consonants, see I. O. Lehman, “A Forgotten Principle of Biblical Textual Tradition Rediscovered,” *JNES* 26 (1967): 93-101; M. Dahood, *Psalms*, 2:81; 3:371-72.

⁸⁵⁷ Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 371. See further the helpful discussions of W. LaSor, “Cush,” *ISBE* 1:839, and R. F. Youngblood, “Ethiopia,” *ISBE* 2:193-94.

⁸⁵⁸ For details on Egypt’s twenty-fifth (or Nubian) dynasty, see A. H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), pp. 340-52; K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973), pp. 148-73.

⁸⁵⁹ Some suggest that the י in יהוה is an abbreviation for יהוה and hence understand here “the sword of Yahweh.” See G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1929), 2:63 n. 7; see also BHS; J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 236n; M. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p. 253.

⁸⁶⁰ See M. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 303-4. Keil (*Minor Prophets*, 2:146) calls attention to similar instances in [Ezek. 28:22](#); [Zeph. 3:18](#); [Zech. 3:8](#).

⁸⁶¹ Such use is common in Aramaic/Syriac; see A. F. Johns, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs: Andrews U. 1972), p. 12; T. H. Robinson, *Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 15. An alternative possibility would be to view this as an instance in which the pronoun has been attracted to כְּשֵׁיבָם: “The Cushites ... they are the slain of my sword.” The הֵמָּה would thus be a resumptive pronoun.

⁸⁶² For the motif of the outstretched hand of God, see the exposition of 1:4-6. For Zephaniah’s perspective on the political crises that marked the latter half of the seventh century B.C., see Christensen, “[Zephaniah 2:4-15](#),” pp. 669-82; P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 2:121-22.

⁸⁶³ Nahum predicts that Nineveh’s shortage of water would be felt already at the time of its siege; see the exposition of [Nah. 3:14](#).

⁸⁶⁴ Nahum prophesies that those who learn of Nineveh’s demise will not lament her passing (3:7) but will rejoice and clap their hands (3:19).

⁸⁶⁵ See his article “Death in Life: The Book of Jonah and OT Tragedy,” *GTJ* 11 (1990).

⁸⁶⁶ Note Isaiah’s similar condemnation of Babylon (47:8-10). See also the exposition of [Nah. 2:8-10](#), 11-13.

⁸⁶⁷ M. R. Wilson, “Nineveh,” in *Major Cities of the Biblical World*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), p. 186. See also *CAH* 3:76-79; A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1951), pp. 326-36; H. W. F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), pp. 98-99, 187-93; W. A. Maier, *The Book of Nahum* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), pp. 93-98.

⁸⁶⁸ Maier, *Nahum*, p. 135. For similar prophetic messages of total judgment, see [Isa. 13:19-22](#); [14:22-23](#); [34:10-15](#); [Jer. 49:18, 33](#); 51:29, 36-37, 43.

⁸⁶⁹ E. S. Kalland, “דָּבָר,” *TWOT* 1:181.

⁸⁷⁰ H. J. Austel, “שָׁמָּה,” *TWOT* 2:937.

⁸⁷¹ For Zephaniah’s indebtedness to Joel elsewhere, see the additional note on 1:18. J. P. J. Olivier (“A Possible Interpretation of the Word שַׁיְיָ, in [Zeph. 2](#), 13,” *JNSL* 8 [1980]: 96) suggests on the basis of ancient Near Eastern malediction formulae that הָיָה may be a technical term for “a ruined city inhabited only by wild beasts.”

⁸⁷² For details, see J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 233; *Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 5:378. The construct chain here retains its old case marker (cf. [Num. 23:18](#); [24:3, 15](#)), apparently as a frozen form often occurring with הָיָה (cf. [Gen. 1:24](#); Pss. 50:10; 79:2; 104:11; [Isa. 56:9](#)).

⁸⁷³ See the helpful discussion by Sabotcka (*Zephanja*, pp. 96-97), who terms them “screech owl” and “owl” respectively. See also David Clark, “Of Beasts and Birds: [Zephaniah 2](#), 14,” *BT* 34 (1982): 243-46.

⁸⁷⁴ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:148.

⁸⁷⁵ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 234; G. A. Smith (*Twelve Prophets*, 2:64) omits the words altogether (cf. *BHS*).

- ⁸⁷⁶ So Sabottka (*Zephanja*, pp. 97-98) who, however, finds in the words בַּסֶּף עֵרְבָה אֶרְזָה כִּי an idiomatic expression of the extent of the destruction: "from the threshold right up to the cedar beams."
- ⁸⁷⁷ Some suggest reading אֶרְזָה here, thus "her cedar work" (RSV; G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:6)
- ⁸⁷⁸ The form עֵרְבָה apparently lies behind the translation "will be laid bare" (RSV; cf. NJB).
- ⁸⁷⁹ See GKC, par. 90 1; 152s; cf. [Isa. 47:8, 10](#).
- ⁸⁸⁰ See H. Wolf, "אֶרְזָה," *TWOT* 1:35 under the discussion of *āe.k*.
- ⁸⁸¹ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 238.
- ⁸⁸² P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:123.
- ⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2:125. Craigie goes on to remark: "In Zephaniah's time, just as in our own, there were those persons engaged in the 'ministry of the Word' who had seen and exploited its possibilities for personal gain."
- ⁸⁸⁴ C. L. Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p. 129.
- ⁸⁸⁵ For a discussion of the term "wolves of the evening," see K. Elliger, "Das Ende der 'Abendwolfe' [Zeph 3, 3](#), [Hab 1, 8](#)," in *Festschrift A. Bertholet*, ed. W. Baumgartner (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), pp. 158-74; Sabottka, *Zephanja*, pp. 104-5.
- ⁸⁸⁶ Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, p. 174.
- ⁸⁸⁷ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:151.
- ⁸⁸⁸ The morning hour is often commended as an ideal time for meeting with God to find direction and strength for the day (e.g., Pss. 5:3 [HB 5:4]; 88:13 [HB 88:14]; 92:1-2 [HB 92:2-3]; 143:8; [Mark 1:35](#)).
- ⁸⁸⁹ See Victor Hamilton, "מִרְיָה," *TWOT* 1:526; see further R. Knierim, "מִרְיָה," *THAT* 1:928-30.
- ⁸⁹⁰ For a discussion of the West Semitic root behind the term, see A. Marzal, "The Provincial Governor at Mari: His Title and Appointment," *JNES* 30 (1971): 186-94; see also P. Fronzaroli, "S(Ā)pit(ā) 'una autorità tribale, con funzioni di giudice ma non esclusivamente,'" *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* 45 (1960): 51-54. For excellent discussions of the root שָׁפַט and the judicial system in earliest Israel, see R. D. Culver, *Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), pp. 138-50. See also G. Liedke, "שָׁפַט," *THAT* 2:999-1009; L. J. Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 4-6.
- ⁸⁹¹ Michael Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985], p. 463) singles out Ezekiel's use of Zephaniah as a classic case of inner biblical exegesis: "For in this case reacting to the iniquity of his time, the inspired prophet drew upon a fixed form and phraseology—learned and studied in the schools—and added to them older and idiosyncratic verbal elements which seemed to suit the situation and more exactly specify the general imagery used. By this exegetical *traditio* and older *traditum* derived from Zephaniah's prophecies came a new *traditum* in Ezekiel's hands. And by virtue of this *traditio* which wove into [Zeph. 3:3-4](#) various authoritative phrases from legal and prophetic sources, the denunciations in [Ezek. 22:25-28](#) acquire a double force."
- ⁸⁹² Conrad von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. J. S. Banks (reprint, Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1977), p. 274.
- ⁸⁹³ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:150. See further M. A. Klopfenstein, "בָּגַד," *THAT* 1:262-63; S. Erlandsson, "בָּגַד," *TDOT* 1:470-73.
- ⁸⁹⁴ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:57.
- ⁸⁹⁵ See A. R. Hulst, *Old Testament Translation Problems* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), p. 255.
- ⁸⁹⁶ BDB, p. 38.
- ⁸⁹⁷ C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, COT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 2:153; cf. [Hab. 2:3](#); [3:16-18](#).
- ⁸⁹⁸ My colleague Brent Sandy reports to me that this is one of 196 times that the LXX reading is taken over the MT by the NIV.
- ⁸⁹⁹ L. Sabottka, *Zephanja* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972), pp. 113-14.
- ⁹⁰⁰ M. Dahood, *Psalms*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 2:81-82; 3:113; see also "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography VII," *Bib* 50 (1969): 347. For Ugaritic *ād*, C. Gordon (*UT*, p. 453) proposes the meaning "throne room."

- ⁹⁰¹ See Dahood, *Psalms*, 3:394-95; C. F. Whitley, "Some Functions of the Hebrew Particles *Beth* and *Lamedh*," *JQR* 62 (1972): 205-6.
- ⁹⁰² For a cautious appraisal of the relation of the Hebrew prepositions, see M. D. Futato, "The Prep 'Beth' in the Hebrew Psalter," *WTJ* 41 (1978): 68-81.
- ⁹⁰³ The close relation of vv. 8 and 9 is also indicated by the words בְּיָד (v. 8) and בְּיָד (v. 9) that often juxtaposition. See M. Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," *RSP* 1:326.
- ⁹⁰⁴ J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Zephaniah and Nahum*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1911), p. 252n. See also the discussion in the introduction under Unity.
- ⁹⁰⁵ P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 2:129-30. Although W. Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], 1:379ⁿ⁻²) rightly cautions that the reality of Israel's hope in no way minimized the seriousness and severity of her imminent judgment, it is hope through judgment that gives full force to Zephaniah's instructions to his people. From a literary standpoint, 3:9-20 forms the necessary corollary to the book's opening announcement of judgment, and taken together both passages illustrate Zephaniah's penchant for the employment of reversal as a literary technique.
- ⁹⁰⁶ For the Pauline perspective on the completion of the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, see the remarks of C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1979), 2:572-88. For the universal hope of salvation for all people as a basic tenet of OT teaching, see P. E. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 61-62; J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 188-94.
- ⁹⁰⁷ See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, COT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:119-20.
- ⁹⁰⁸ Theo. Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), p. 377.
- ⁹⁰⁹ *ANET*, p. 130. For the Ugaritic text itself, see *UT*, pp. 197-98, Text 137, lines 36-38. See further Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," *RSP* 3:119-20; Sabottka, *Zephanja*, pp. 121-22.
- ⁹¹⁰ See, e.g., C. von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. J. S. Banks (reprint, Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1977), p. 277; E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 2:284-85.
- ⁹¹¹ See GKC par. 117cc, ff.
- ⁹¹² G. A. Smith (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, rev. ed. [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1929], 2:71) wisely points out: "Where Churches have large ambitions for themselves, how necessary to hear that the future is destined for a *poor folk*, the meek and the honest. Where men boast that their religion—Bible, Creed or Church—has undertaken to save them, *vaunting themselves on the Mount of My Holiness*, how needful to hear salvation placed upon character and trust in God."
- ⁹¹³ See K. Seybold, " הַפְּרֵךְ ," *TDOT* 3:423-27.
- ⁹¹⁴ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:156.
- ⁹¹⁵ The LXX translates the line picturesquely "under one yoke."
- ⁹¹⁶ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 249.
- ⁹¹⁷ C. L. Feinberg (*The Minor Prophets* [Chicago: Moody, 1976], p. 234), however, suggests that the literal Ethiopia is meant. He goes on to observe that "there are some who suggest that the ones meant by the suppliants are Jews dispersed in Ethiopia. They point to the west of Abyssinia where the well-known Falashas (the word is from the same Semitic root as Philistine, meaning emigrant) live. They are said to trace their origin to Palestine and the Jewish religion. It is thought that the Abyssinian Christians were originally in part Hebrew believers. We prefer with others to understand the words 'my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed' as the object of the verb and not the subject. In other words, the Lord's people dispersed in Ethiopia will be brought by the Gentiles to their homeland as an offering to the Lord." (See also the additional note on 2:12.)
- ⁹¹⁸ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 249. Smith emends the text to read "*The princes(?) of the daughter of Put(?)*." Sabottka (*Zephanja*, pp. 119-21) adopts a suggestion of Dahood to understand בָּנֵי as "woven garment," emends בְּיָדֵי בְּנֵי to בְּיָדֵי בְּנֵי , and translates the phrase "garments of byssos" (i.e., fine linen garments).
- ⁹¹⁹ Note the suggested translation in the *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 5:382-83: "those who pray to me."
- ⁹²⁰ See the additional note on 3:14. See further my note on [2 Kings 19:21](#) in R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 4:269.
- ⁹²¹ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:156.

⁹²² Thus Jeremiah speaks often of “the house of Israel,” or “the house of Judah,” and reports that G His people “my house” ([Jer. 12:7](#)).

⁹²³ See *UT*, p. 198, Text 137, lines 37-38.

⁹²⁴ M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p. 259.

⁹²⁵ For proposed examples of אָ written for אִ, see D. Rudolf Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), 2:173, par. 86.4; see also the comments of B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 211-12.

⁹²⁶ For the genitive of attribute or quality, see A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), par. 24c, Rem. 2.

⁹²⁷ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:158.

⁹²⁸ Dahood, “Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs,” *RSP* 1:317-18.

⁹²⁹ L. Coppes, “אָּ,” *TWOT* 2:683.

⁹³⁰ L. Coppes, “אִ,” *TWOT* 1:190.

⁹³¹ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, pp. 251-52; see also Carroll Stuhlmueller, “Justice Toward the Poor,” *The Bible Today* 24 (1986): 387.

⁹³² Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:159.

⁹³³ G. W. Anderson, “The Idea of the Remnant in the Book of Zephaniah,” *ASTI* 11 (1977-78): 387; see also the additional note on 2:7. R. L. Smith (*Micah-Malachi*, WBC [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984], p. 142) points out that, “although the idea of God saying only the humble is magnified in the post OT era, the concept is an old one.” Smith provides several examples from the Psalms and prophets that antedate Zephaniah.

⁹³⁴ For literary keys to the structure of vv. 14-20, see the additional note on 3:17.

⁹³⁵ Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p. 380.

⁹³⁶ For the universal and local aspects of the divine title “King,” see Daniel Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series No. 2 (Jackson: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988), pp. 47-52.

⁹³⁷ Subsequent revelation makes clear that this will be realized when the Messiah reigns in His everlasting glory ([Jer. 23:5-8](#); [33:14-26](#); [Ezek. 34:21-31](#); [36:22-38](#); [37:21-28](#); [Zech. 2:10-13](#) [HB 2:14-17]; 14:1-11; cf. [Phil. 2:9-11](#); [Rev. 11:15](#); [19:6-16](#); [21:2-3](#)).

⁹³⁸ A. R. Fausset, “Zephaniah,” in R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 4:650.

⁹³⁹ J. D. Hannah, “Zephaniah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1985), 1:1534.

⁹⁴⁰ Herbert Marks, “The Twelve Prophets,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard U., 1987), p. 216.

⁹⁴¹ Victor A. S. Reid, “Zephaniah,” in *The International Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 957.

⁹⁴² For a standard premillennial interpretation of [Zeph. 3:20](#), see H. E. Freeman, *Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1973), pp. 89-90. For poetic sentiment concerning Christ’s triumphant return, one may note the words of Thomas Kelly (“Look, Ye Saints, the Sight Is Glorious!” in *Immanuel Hymnal* [New York: Macmillan, 1939], No. 188):

Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious!

See the Man of Sorrows now,

From the fight returned victorious!

Every knee to Him shall bow: Crown Him!

Crowns become the Victor’s brow!

⁹⁴³ The text of this hymn is listed as “K” in Rippon’s *Section of Hymns*, 1787. For a contemporary hymn setting, see *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, ed. Tom Fettke and Ken Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986), No. 275.

⁹⁴⁴ L. Walker, "Zephaniah," in EBC, 7:564ⁿ. See also the interesting study of Ihromi, "Die Häufung c Verben des Jubelns in Zephania iii 14f., 16-18: mn, rwā, sĀmhf, ālz, sĀwsĀ und gi,l," VT 33 (1983):

⁹⁴⁵ See H. Haag, "בִּיק," TDOT 2:334-35.

⁹⁴⁶ For the verb סוּר, see R. D. Patterson, "סוּר," TWOT 2:620-21. The verb פָּנָה may have been chosen as a deliberate echo of the earlier פָּנּוּהוּ ("strongholds") in Zeph. 1:16; 3:6; for the verb itself, cf. Arabic fani, "send away") and Geez fānnāwā ("send away").

⁹⁴⁷ See the Tg. Neb.; cf. BHS. For a full discussion, see J. M. P. Smith, Zephaniah, pp. 256, 261ⁿ.

⁹⁴⁸ See the LXX, Vg, Pesh., Tg. Neb., BHS. For אֹיֵב as an adversary at law, see Job 9:15; 13:24; 33:10; cf. 1 Kings 21:20. For the term itself, see E. Jenni, "אֹיֵב," THAT 1:118-22; H. Ringgren, "אֹיֵב," TDOT 1:212-18. It remains to be asked only whether the adversary here could be God Himself (cf. Isa. 63:10; Lam. 2:4-5).

⁹⁴⁹ Among modern foreign-language Bibles taking a similar position may be cited Die Heilige Schrift and La Sacra Biblia.

⁹⁵⁰ H. Kosmala, "גָּבַר," TDOT 2:374; see also J. Kuhlewein, "גָּבַר," THAT 1:400.

⁹⁵¹ For this title applied to Israel's Messiah, see Isa. 9:6 (Heb. 9:5).

⁹⁵² See Davidson, Syntax, par. 44b, Rem. 3.

⁹⁵³ For such hiphil transitives, see GKC, par. 53d, e, f.

⁹⁵⁴ Still other ideas have been proposed. Thus, Sabottka (Zephania, pp. 132-34) follows Dahood in taking חָרַשׁ in the sense of "devise artfully," "improvise," "compose"; see further R. Smith, Micah—Malachi, p. 143^{n.17a}.

⁹⁵⁵ See E. Würthwein, The Text of the Old Testament, 4th ed., trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 111-19.

⁹⁵⁶ See the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 5:384. Note that some suggest dropping the phrase entirely (e.g., Buhl, Marti).

⁹⁵⁷ Confusion between ד and ר is a source of frequent textual corruption; see Würthwein, Text of the Old Testament, p. 106. For the jussive of חָרַשׁ, see Job 3:6; GKC, par. 75r.

⁹⁵⁸ יִשָּׁב is used elsewhere in the OT with similar emphases, e.g., "(You are) the one who inhabits the praises of Israel" (Ps. 22:3 [HB 22:4]; cf. NIV, however, which follows BHS in construing the participle with the first colon).

⁹⁵⁹ See my comments on Joel 3:11 (HB 4:11) in R. D. Patterson, "Joel," in EBC, 7:262.

⁹⁶⁰ J. M. P. Smith, Zephaniah, p. 257. For still other suggestions among those who adopt this reading, see Walker, "Zephaniah," in EBC, 7:563.

⁹⁶¹ See GKC, par. 69t; cf. Lam. 1:4.

⁹⁶² J. M. P. Smith, Zephaniah, p. 257; see also pp. 258, 262. See further the LXX, Pesh. and Tg. Neb.; cf. NJB, RSV.

⁹⁶³ NIV; cf. NASB, NKJV, KJV.

⁹⁶⁴ So J. M. P. Smith, Zephaniah, p. 258.

⁹⁶⁵ Keil, Minor Prophets, 2:162. For full details, see the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 5:384-86; J. M. P. Smith, Zephaniah, pp. 262-63.

⁹⁶⁶ This possibility is acknowledged by G. A. Smith, Twelve Prophets, p. 73^{n.4}.

⁹⁶⁷ UT, 251, KRT, lines 131-33.

⁹⁶⁸ For details see KAI, 2:84; 3:15.

⁹⁶⁹ The verb here may be שָׁבַע; see H. R. Cohen, Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978), pp. 49, 95-96ⁿⁿ²⁶⁵⁻⁶⁸.

⁹⁷⁰ Jack Lewis, "יָעַד," TWOT 1:389. A verb יָעַד with the meaning "drive out/depart" also fits well the case of Lam. 1:4 where the MT נִגְוֹת בְּתוּלֵתֶיהָ is rendered by the LXX αἱ παρθένοι αὐτῆς ἀγόμεναι ("her virgins are led away"). For the use of מוֹעֵד as either "appointed time" or "place," see G. Sauer, "יעד," THAT 1:743-44.

⁹⁷¹ See GKC, par. 116m, p.

⁹⁷² For details, see the *Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 5:386.

⁹⁷³ Such a procedure involves taking the final *mem* on the verb as an enclitic. For details, see Sabc *Zephanja*, p. 139. For ׀ with the meaning "turn/change/transform," see M. Dahood, "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography X," *Bib* 53 (1972): 399-400.

⁹⁷⁴ Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:163.

⁹⁷⁵ Dahood, "Lexicography X," 399-400; for this employment of the pronominal suffix with verbs, see GKC, par. 117x; Davidson, *Syntax*, par. 73, Rem. 4.

⁹⁷⁶ *UT*, p. 180, Text 68, lines 28-29. For the term "rider on the clouds," see R. D. Patterson, "A Multiplex Approach to [Psalm 45](#)," *GTJ* 6 (1985): 37ⁿ.³⁵ See also Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," RSP 3:308-9; Dahood draws attention to a similar problem in [Ezek. 34:29](#).

⁹⁷⁷ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 263.

⁹⁷⁸ For *waw* explicative, see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 2d ed. (Toronto: U. of Toronto, 1976), p. 71, par. 434; D. W. Baker, "Further Examples of the WAW EXPLICATIVUM," *VT* 30 (1980): 129-36; Dahood, *Psalms*, 3:402.

⁹⁷⁹ Note the similar function of ׀ with the infinitive construct to mean "as often as" (lit. "out of the abundance of"); see BDB, p. 191.

⁹⁸⁰ J. M. P. Smith, *Zephaniah*, p. 263.

⁹⁸¹ For emphatic ׀ see R. Gordis, "The Asseverative Kaph in Ugaritic and Hebrew," *JAOS* 63 (1943): 176-78; Dahood, *Psalms*, 3:402-6; Williams, *Syntax*, par. 261, 449; Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 670.

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