

THE MESSAGE OF ZEPHANIAH: AN URGENT ECHO

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It is a privilege to dedicate this article to the memory of my colleague, mentor, and friend, Gerhard Hasel. When I think of my deceased friend, I recall the words of John the Revelator, "Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them'" (Rev 14:13, NRSV).

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the phenomenon of intertextuality. A number of scholars have attempted to identify places where later biblical writers have made use of earlier texts and have also tried to show just how they have used them. Such intertextual investigations have taken place both within the Old Testament¹ and in relationship to the use various sections of the New Testament make of the Old.²

The book of Zephaniah is deserving of such an intertextual investigation. While it is true that a number of scholars, those from an earlier generation as well as contemporary ones, have made mention of Zephaniah's reliance on previous prophets,³ no one has fully

¹For intertextuality within the Old Testament as a whole, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); and Danna Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). For intertextuality in relationship to a specific book within the Old Testament, see Alice Bach, "Intertextuality and the Book of Jeremiah: Animadversions on Text and Theory," in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. Clines (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

²For the parallels between the synoptic Gospels and the Old Testament, see Willard M. Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels: Story Shaping Story* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994). On the Apostle Paul's use of the Old Testament, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1989).

³For example, the Protestant reformer Martin Bucer, quoted in Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 460, called Zephaniah "a 'compendium' of prophet teaching." Recently, J.J.M. Roberts observed that Zephaniah's "message has much in common with the earlier prophetic tradition" (*Nahum*,

documented the many places at which this reliance is exhibited. In fact, sometimes a heavy dependence on the part of Zephaniah is merely asserted with little evidence offered in support of the assertion.⁴ On the other hand, there are those who highlight the originality or individuality of Zephaniah.⁵

In light of these diverse perspectives, several questions arise: What are the parallels between the words and message of Zephaniah and prior prophetic books? What is Zephaniah's degree of indebtedness? Is the message of Zephaniah basically an echo, a reformulation of earlier prophetic material? What, if any, originality does Zephaniah evince? These questions will be addressed in the course of this article, the main part of which consists of a delineation of thematic and verbal parallels between the book of Zephaniah, who exercised his prophetic ministry sometime around the year 622 B.C.,⁶ and the books of the eighth-century prophets, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah.⁷ As will be shown, the

Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1991], 164).

⁴Larry L. Walker states: "In many ways Zephaniah linked his prophecy to those of the earlier prophets, both in subject matter and expression" ["Zephaniah," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:539]. J. Alec Motyer bluntly asserts that "Theologically, Zephaniah is noninnovative" ("Zephaniah," *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Thomas McComiskey [Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming]). However, they offer only limited support for these sweeping statements.

⁵For example, Rex Mason speaks of the "marked individuality" of Zephaniah's presentation (*Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel*, Old Testament Guides [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994], 55). Similarly, D. A. Schneider speaks of the "new and distinctive word" brought by Zephaniah ("Zephaniah, Book of," *ISBE*, rev. ed., 4:1190).

⁶The exact dating of Zephaniah is a matter of debate. Most scholars feel that the wickedness and idolatry described in Zephaniah suggest that the prophet ministered prior to the rooting out of these evils by the Josianic reformation that was spurred on by the discovery of the book of the law in the temple in 622 B.C. However, O. Palmer Robertson has recently maintained that the echoes of Deuteronomy in Zephaniah indicated that the prophet arose in the days immediately following the discovery of the law book, to help further the cause of the reformation (*The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 254-256). It is probably impossible to speak with complete certainty on this matter.

⁷I will use the final form of both the book of Zephaniah and the books of the eighth-century prophets for this comparison. Of course, I am aware that the dating of certain units within each of these books has been disputed, particularly those promising future blessing and salvation. However, a number of recent scholars with a strong interest in a literary approach to Scripture have considered these books holistically, that is, in their entirety as literary units. Also, other contemporary interpreters have offered persuasive evidence supporting the position that the entire contents of the prophetic books dealt with in this study are best understood as originating from the historical context and the social setting of the prophet himself and need not be assigned to a later

parallels are numerous and sometimes striking.

Parallels in Proclamation of Judgment

The central theme of the book of Zephaniah is the Day of the Lord.⁸ Zephaniah elucidates two major aspects of this central theme, judgment and restoration, and in both of these aspects Zephaniah evinces many parallels to the books of the eighth-century prophets. First of all, Zephaniah, like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, proclaims that the Day of the Lord brings the outpouring of God's judgment on the prophet's own nation (Zeph 1:4-6; see Amos 8:1-3; Hos 1:4; Isa 4:4; Mic 5:10-11).⁹ Zephaniah also echoes several of the eighth-century prophets in singling out specific groups within the nation as targets of divine judgment. Like Isaiah, Zephaniah announces punishment, particularly on the leadership of the nation (Zeph 1:8; see Isa 3:1-3).

Another group especially targeted for judgment could be classified as the complacent. Although Zephaniah does not use the same terminology as Amos, there is a thematic connection between the two prophetic books on this point. Just as Amos announces that the people "who are at ease," those "who feel secure," are slated for punishment (Amos 6:1), so Zephaniah quotes Yahweh as declaring, "I will punish the people, those who are thickening upon their lees, those who are saying in their hearts, 'Yahweh will not do good, nor will he do evil'" (Zeph 1:12).¹⁰ In other words, both prophets describe people who feel

editor. Thus, from both a literary and a historical point of view, it is best to take these prophetic books *in toto* in order to make this comparison between Zephaniah and the eighth-century prophets.

The following scholars are among those who have recently taken a holistic position with respect to either Zephaniah or one or more of the eighth-century prophetic books: Ivan J. Ball, Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1988); Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*; Shalom Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24a (New York: Doubleday, 1989); Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993); Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

⁸David W. Baker correctly observes that this theme is the center of Zephaniah's prophecy and unites the book both structurally and theologically (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 23b [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988], 84).

⁹For the purposes of this comparison, I am considering the prophets to be talking about the Day of the Lord whenever they use either the precise phrase "the Day of the Lord" or a temporal phrase such as "on that day," "at that time," when the Day of the Lord is the referent of the temporal phrase.

¹⁰On the background and meaning of the phrase "thickening upon their lees" in Zeph 1:12, see David J. Clark, "Wine on the Lees (Zeph 1:12 and Jer 48:11)," *BT* 32 (1981): 241.

at ease, unthreatened by Yahweh's judgment. In both cases these are the very people headed for punishment.

Zephaniah also reflects his predecessors in the reasons given for the coming judgment. Like all four of the eighth-century prophets, Zephaniah indicates that one of the sins inviting divine judgment is social injustice and oppression among Yahweh's people (Zeph 1:9; 3:1-3; see Amos 2:6-7; 8:6; Hos 4:2; Isa 3:15; Mic 2:2). For these prophets, a primary cause for such injustice is the failure of the nation's leadership. Zephaniah follows Micah in declaring that the governmental, judicial, and religious leaders are all corrupt and perverse (Zeph 3:3-4; see Mic 3:1-3, 9-11). When such leaders rule, oppression follows. According to these prophets, God finds the violence and injustice directed toward the poor intolerable, and he will judge the oppressors on the Day of the Lord.

Moreover, Zephaniah follows his four predecessors in pointing to idolatry among the people as another reason for the coming judgment. Like them he indicates that those who worship anyone or anything besides Yahweh will suffer punishment on Yahweh's day (Zeph 1:4-6; see Amos 8:13-14; Hos 1:2; 2:18-19 [ET16-17]; Isa 2:8, 20; 17:7-8; 30:22; Mic 5:14-15).

Zephaniah echoes Isaiah in proclaiming that another rationale for judgment is human pride and arrogance. According to Isaiah, those who are proud and haughty are responsible for and will suffer from the coming punishment (Isa 2:11, 17; 3:16). In fact, the Day of the Lord is specified as "a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high" (Isa 2:12). In the same vein, Zephaniah declares that Yahweh will purge the proud, exultant ones from Judah (Zeph 3:11), suggesting that he finds these traits particularly offensive. And for Zephaniah it is not only the people of Judah whose arrogance prompts divine judgment. Moab and Ammon will also receive judgment because of their pride (Zeph 2:8-10). Nineveh will merit severe punishment because of its haughtiness and self-exaltation (Zeph 2:13-15). For both Zephaniah and Isaiah pride seems to be among the foremost sins inviting divine judgment.

The fact that Zephaniah follows his eighth-century predecessors in reciting a litany of sins which provoke divine judgment emphasizes that for all of these prophets the Day of the Lord is a time of accountability to Yahweh. Yahweh's people will be brought before his bar of judgment and will there receive punishment for their wickedness.

As to the nature of the coming judgment, Zephaniah parallels all of his predecessors in suggesting that the judgment comes in the form of a military defeat (Zeph 1:10, 13-14, 16; see Amos 2:13-16; 4:1-3; Hos 1:5;

10:14; Isa 3:25; Mic 5:10-11). Zephaniah echoes Amos and Isaiah in describing a terrible loss of life. As Amos announces, "The dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place" (Amos 8:3), so Zephaniah warns, "Their bodies will be poured out like dirt and their intestines like manure" (Zeph 1:17; see also Isa 3:25-4:1). Also, Zephaniah and Amos both use vivid and unusual word pictures to indicate that this coming judgment is unrelenting and inescapable (Zeph 1:12; see Amos 5:18-20).

Regarding the identity of the one primarily responsible for the punishment inflicted on the Day of the Lord, Zephaniah echoes each of his predecessors in proclaiming that Yahweh is the agent of judgment, the driving force behind it. Each of these prophets cites Yahweh in the first person as pledging to punish the covenant people (Am 8:9-11; Hos 5:14; Isa 13:11, 13; Mic 5:10-15; Zeph 1:2-4). A more precise parallel is seen in the verbal connection between Zephaniah and several of his predecessors which emphasizes Yahweh's personal involvement in the judgment. Zephaniah uses the same word as Hosea and Isaiah when quoting Yahweh's first-person announcement of his planned judgment, the verb *pāqadî* (Zeph 1:8, 9, 12; see Isa 13:11; Hos 1:4; 2:15 [ET13]; 4:9).¹¹ This word connotes Yahweh's personal visit or intervention.¹² As I have argued elsewhere, it is the single word that most clearly expresses the essence of Zephaniah's proclamation regarding the Day of the Lord.¹³ The fact that this judgment involves a personal encounter with Yahweh is further underscored by the fact that Zephaniah, paralleling Isaiah, indicates that a theophany takes place on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 1:15; see Isa 2:10, 21).¹⁴

Zephaniah echoes several of his predecessors in indicating that the

¹¹In addition to the texts listed from Zephaniah, Isaiah, and Hosea, Amos 3:14 uses the verbal root *pqd* in a first person-announcement of judgment, but it appears in the infinitive-construct form with a first-person suffix.

¹²Carl A. Keller captures the personal involvement by Yahweh implied by this word when he states that *pqd* "signifies simply to inspect, to verify (emphasis his) and if need be, to intervene in one manner or another in order to reestablish the order" (*Michée, Nahoum, Habacuc, Sophonie*, 2d ed., Carl A. Keller and René Vuilleumier, CAT 11b [Paris: Cerf, 1990], 193).

¹³Greg A. King, "The Theological Coherence of the Book of Zephaniah" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1996), 92.

¹⁴It is possible that the terms "darkness" and "gloom" in Amos 5:20 imply that Amos proclaimed a theophany on the Day of the Lord also. Although Paul (*Amos*, 185) holds that these terms simply "emphasize the doom and calamity in store for Israel" on the Day of the Lord, Ralph W. Klein ("The Day of the Lord," *CTM* 39 [1968]: 518) points out that "darkness' is also a theophanic term." In any case, it is true that the Hebrew roots for both of these words found in Amos' description of the Day of the Lord are also part of Zephaniah's expression of the same event (*hške* and *'pl*; see Zeph 1:15).

prophet's own nation and certain groups within it are not the only recipients of punishment on the Day of the Lord. As do Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, Zephaniah speaks of a judgment which spreads beyond the boundaries of Judah and Israel, punishing other nations as well. As do Amos and Isaiah, Zephaniah targets specific foreign nations for punishment (Zeph 2:4-15; see Amos 1:13-15; Isa 10:20-27; 19:1-16; 34:5-8).¹⁵ But for several of these prophets, the list does not stop with the neighboring nations. Rather, they depict the judgment on the Day of the Lord as one of worldwide proportions. In a similar vein to Isaiah, who proclaims that Yahweh intends "to destroy the whole earth" (Isa 13:9), Zephaniah quotes Yahweh as announcing, "I will completely destroy everything on the face of the earth" (Zeph 1:2; see also Isa 13:9; Mic 5:15; 7:13).

As to the question of when the Day of the Lord will occur, Zephaniah parallels Hosea and Isaiah in proclaiming the imminence of the event. In fact, the announcements of Zephaniah and Isaiah are quite close in wording. Isaiah exclaims, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near" (Isa 13:6), while Zephaniah declares, "Be silent before Lord Yahweh, because the day of Yahweh is near" (Zeph 1:7; see also Zeph 1:14 and Hos 1:4). The nearness of this event causes these prophets to sound a strong note of urgency in their proclamation of the Day of the Lord.

Parallels in Proclamation of Salvation

Judgment is not the only aspect of the Day of the Lord in which Zephaniah echoes the eighth-century prophets. He also follows several of his predecessors in his description of a restoration, an era of blessing beyond the judgment. This era of blessing should not be viewed as disconnected from the era of judgment. In fact, for Zephaniah and his predecessors, the latter helps prepare the way for the former because the judgment is purging in nature. Zephaniah resembles Isaiah in stating that the judgment erases the blot of wickedness by removing those who perpetrate it (Zeph 3:11-12; see Isa 3:16-4:4, also Amos 9:10). But for Zephaniah as well as the eighth-century prophets, judgment is not God's

¹⁵Although I have only referred to units in Amos and Isaiah which contain temporal terminology referring to the Day of the Lord, there is some evidence to favor taking the entire sections containing the oracles against the nations in Amos and Isaiah as part of their respective teachings regarding the Day of the Lord (Amos 1:3-2:3; Isa 13-23). The verbal and thematic similarities between the units which do not contain the Day-of-the-Lord terminology and those that do imply that they should be considered part of the same continuum of events. The comment of Cathcart ("Day of Yahweh," *ABD* 2:84) is congruent with this position as well. He suggests that the oracles against the nations in the prophetic books "may well be linked to the concept of the Day of Yahweh." This possibility deserves more attention than it has received.

final word. Instead, it is a gateway of hope for both a remnant from the covenant people as well as those who worship Yahweh from all the nations.

This restoration-and-blessing aspect of the Day of the Lord is not immediately obvious in either Zephaniah or some of his predecessors. Just as Amos proclaims an apparently complete judgment constituting "the end" for Israel (Amos 2:13-16; 8:2), so Zephaniah announces a total and thorough judgment which threatens all of the covenant people (Zeph 1:4-6). But these two prophets make it clear that judgment does not bring obliteration. As does Amos, Zephaniah reveals the presence of some people who emerge from the judgment and enjoy restoration and blessing at the hands of Yahweh (Zeph 2:7, 9; 3:11-20; see Amos 9:8, 11-15).

Salvation for the Remnant

It should be emphasized that according to Zephaniah and his prophetic predecessors, the era of blessing and restoration will not be enjoyed by all of the covenant people. Rather, the blessings of the restoration are for a group of survivors called the remnant (Zeph 3:11-13; see Isa 11:11-16; Mic 4:6-7), further identified by both Zephaniah and Micah as the lame and the outcast (Zeph 3:19; Mic 4:7).

According to the prophets, this remnant is composed of people who demonstrate certain spiritual characteristics. First, Zephaniah, like Amos, implies that the remnant is made up of people who decide to respond positively to the prophetic exhortation to seek Yahweh (Zeph 2:3; see Amos 5:4-6). The other characteristics are closely related to this decision to concentrate their energies on seeking the Lord and probably grow out of it. For both Zephaniah and Isaiah, this remnant is said to be formed of humble people (Zeph 3:11-12; see Isa 2:11-12; 3:16-4:4). This remnant is composed of those who find their strength and security in Yahweh alone and not in any human source (Zeph 3:12; see Isa 10:20). Moreover, Zephaniah parallels Amos by indicating that they are those who live ethically, exhibiting justice and righteousness in their treatment of others (Zeph 2:3; 3:13; see Amos 5:14-15). So for Zephaniah and his predecessors, this remnant is a group of righteous people who are devoted to Yahweh and obedient to Him.

These characteristics are undoubtedly important, but Zephaniah and Amos suggest that they do not compel Yahweh's decision to save a remnant. Rather, both prophets make a point of protecting divine sovereignty and freedom, indicating that his preservation of a remnant proceeds from his grace.¹⁶ This is apparent in the verbal parallel between

¹⁶Gerhard F. Hasel gives a most accurate expression of the balance between divine

the two prophets found in the proclamation, "Perhaps" you will be delivered (Zeph 2:3; see Amos 5:15). However, both prophets later clear up any uncertainty as to whether a group will survive by unequivocally affirming the existence of a remnant (Zeph 2:7, 9; Amos 9:11-15).¹⁷

Regarding the blessings of the restoration that will be experienced by this remnant, again Zephaniah closely resembles his prophetic predecessors. Zephaniah echoes Isaiah and Micah when he states that Yahweh will assemble his people and bring them back to their home (Zeph 3:20; see Isa 11:11-16; Mic 4:6; 7:12), and he parallels Amos and Hosea in describing these restored people enjoying their own land in complete security with nothing to fear (Zeph 3:13; see Hos 2:20 [ET18]; Amos 9:15). Not only do they enjoy their own land, but Zephaniah joins Amos, Isaiah, and Micah in speaking of territorial expansion for the remnant. The territorial borders of the restored people are expanded into formerly hostile territory with the defeat of their enemies. Interestingly, both Zephaniah and Isaiah specifically mention the conquest of the Philistines, Moabites, and Ammonites (Zeph 2:7,9; see Isa 11:14; Amos 9:12; Mic 7:11).

It is no surprise that those who are restored enjoy peace and security, for Zephaniah parallels Micah in portraying Yahweh as their king, reigning over them and personally dwelling in their midst. Even as Micah announces concerning the restored community, "The Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore" (Mic 4:7), so Zephaniah promises, "The king of Israel, Yahweh, is in your midst" (Zeph 3:15). Such wonderful blessings deserve a response of gratitude on behalf of the remnant. Zephaniah, paralleling Isaiah, calls these people to rejoice exuberantly, to give thanks for the presence of Yahweh and

grace and human conduct in the preservation of the remnant when he avers, "In the sense that the remnant has its basis in God's grace it is the result of God's action for man. At the same time it has its basis in the justice and righteousness of man, in his return to Yahweh, in his doing good. . . . Human action cannot be a substitute for God's action nor can God's action be a substitute for human action. Each has its proper sphere. There will be no remnant without God's grace just as little as there will be a remnant without man's return to God" (*The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 3d ed., Andrews University Monographs: Studies in Religion 5 [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980], 206).

¹⁷W. Rudolph maintains that the uncertainty indicated by the word "perhaps" cannot be explained by fluctuations in the mood of the prophets. Rather, through this 'perhaps' "the absolute sovereignty and freedom of Yahweh is guaranteed" In other words, "it is completely up to Yahweh whether he wants to show mercy or not." (*Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, KAT 13/2 [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971], 193). Hertrich opines that the "perhaps" of Amos 5:14-15 rules out the misunderstanding "that human conduct is the norm for deliverance" ("The 'Remnant' in the Old Testament," *TDNT* 4:206). Such seems to be the case in Zephaniah as well.

the salvation they have received (Zeph 3:14-15; Isa 25:9).

One statement found in the last verse of Zephaniah is inclusive of all the blessings that Yahweh plans to bestow on this remnant. It also shows a striking parallel with one of Zephaniah's predecessors. Zephaniah's citation of Yahweh's statement, "When I restore your fortunes before your eyes" (Zeph 3:20; see also Zeph 2:7), resembles the promise from the mouth of Yahweh near the conclusion of Amos, "I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel" (Amos 9:14). It is clear from this that Zephaniah, like all four of his eighth-century predecessors, describes Yahweh as the active agent in the era of blessing and promise. Just as Yahweh brought judgment, so he now brings restoration. He is the prime mover and initiator in both aspects of the Day of the Lord (Zeph 3:11-20; see Amos 9:11-15; Hos 2:19-21 [ET17-19]; Isa 11:11-16; Mic 4:6-7).

Salvation for the Nations

However, the remnant of Israel are not the only recipients of future blessings, for like Isaiah and Micah, Zephaniah speaks of a future conversion of the nations to the worship of Yahweh (Zeph 3:9-10; see Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-4).¹⁸ Zephaniah especially parallels Isaiah in several facets of this future metamorphosis of the nations. As does Isaiah, he refers to a transformation of lip or language of foreigners, a transformation that enables them to express their devotion and allegiance to Yahweh (Zeph 3:9; see Isa 19:18).¹⁹ As does Isaiah, he foresees foreigners showing their veneration of Yahweh by bringing him offerings (Zeph 3:10; see Isa 19:21).²⁰

And though his terminology is different from that of Isaiah, he

¹⁸Andersen and Freedman contend that Amos also speaks of a conversion of the nations. It is their contention that the phrase "all the nations" is the subject of the clause in Amos 9:12, and that thus this is a reference to a positive future for these nations instead of an indication of judgment on these same nations, as the verse is commonly understood. To be specific, they maintain that in this verse the nations "are those that are converted to the true faith and that they will participate with the rebuilt Davidic kingdom in driving out or destroying" (*Amos*, 903-904, 906, 918). However, this does not appear to be the most likely understanding of Amos 9:12.

¹⁹Zeph 3:9 and Isa 19:18 use the same Hebrew nominal root (*šph*) to denote the "lip" or language of foreigners which is transformed. The opinion of some commentators, such as John D. W. Watts, that Isa 19:18 is a reference to Jewish colonies in Egypt like those mentioned in Jer 44:1 or the Elephantine papyri, is not convincing (*Isaiah* 1:33, WBC 24 [Waco, TX.: Word, 1985], 258). Rather, as John N. Oswalt observes, this passage "is not talking about Jewish colonists in Egypt, but a turning of Egypt to God" (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986]).

²⁰In fact, both prophets refer to foreigners worshipping Yahweh with a *minḥah* offering (Zeph 3:10; Isa 19:21).

also joins him in indicating that this Yahweh worship takes place by foreigners while in their own country, with the clear implication that their worship is accepted (Zeph 2:11; see Isa 19:19). According to both of these prophets, Yahweh is God of the nations as well as of Israel, for he claims other people as his own also (Zeph 3:10; Isa 19:25).

For Zephaniah, as for Isaiah and Micah, the worship of Yahweh spans the globe. Recognition of Yahweh and service to him are worldwide (Zeph 3:9-10; Mic 4:1-4; Isa 11:10). Such a transformation takes place only after the meting out of divine judgment. It is clear from each of these prophets that Yahweh's judgment on the nations, like his judgment on the covenant people, is a purging judgment that gives birth to a hopeful future (Zeph 3:8-10; Isa 19:22). To be more precise, according to Zephaniah and Micah, it is the display of Yahweh's awesome power that results in the worship of Yahweh by the nations (Zeph 2:11; Mic 7:12-17).²¹

Thus for Zephaniah, as for his predecessors, judgment is not God's last word for either the covenant people or the nations. Although Zephaniah parallels them in devoting the majority of his oracles to announcing the coming judgment, he also joins several of them in concluding his book with a stirring concatenation of restoration promises (Zeph 3:11-20; see Amos 9:11-15; Hos 14:4-9; Mic 7:11-20). Ultimately, for Zephaniah as well as his predecessors, the lingering aroma of the Day of the Lord is not the stench of doom but the fragrance of hope.

Summary and Conclusion

To summarize, in Zephaniah's description of his central theme of the Day of the Lord, the prophet largely echoes his eighth-century predecessors. In Zephaniah's portrayal of this day as a time of judgment in which Yahweh punishes the covenant nation, and certain especially wicked groups within it, through a military defeat, the prophet follows the contours of one or more of his predecessors. He also follows them in his indication that this punishment comes on account of their oppression of the poor and lack of social justice, their arrogance and human pride, and their idolatry. The parallels continue with Zephaniah's announcement that the punishment overwhelms the entire world and in his ringing declaration that the day is near at hand.

And the parallels do not stop with the description of judgment, for

²¹Speaking of the nexus between the nations' conversion and the display of Yahweh's awesome power, Ralph L. Smith observes: "Their total capitulation before Yahweh has made possible their worship of him" (*Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 [Waco, TX: Word, 1984], 59).

Zephaniah also echoes his predecessors with his portrayal of a dramatic reversal of fortunes following the punishment. As does Amos, he first refers to this reversal as a mere possibility with the word "perhaps." As does one or more of his predecessors, he clarifies this possibility by speaking definitively of a remnant from the covenant people who seek Yahweh and therefore survive the punishment, and who are gathered by Yahweh and brought back to their home with nothing to fear for the future because Yahweh is present with them, reigning as their king. Like them he speaks of foreigners, people from other nations, whose lips and worship habits have been transformed, and who worship the Lord while at home and bring offerings to him from afar.

It seems evident that in all the major aspects of Zephaniah's theological presentation, as well as in quite a number of specific themes, emphases, nuances, and terms, Zephaniah contains parallels to the writings of the eighth-century prophets. In light of these extensive parallels, the question as to whether the message of Zephaniah is largely an echo or a reformulation of the messages of earlier prophetic books must be answered in the affirmative.

It is true that the specific configuration of Zephaniah's message is distinctive to his book. It is also the case that several nuances found in Zephaniah do not appear elsewhere.²² But even when the book of Zephaniah shows creativity with a certain emphasis or manner of expression, there is still a fundamental theological continuity with earlier prophetic material. As shown above, all of the major aspects as well as many minor ones of Zephaniah's message can be found in the prophetic books that emerged from the eighth century.

This conclusion gives rise to some questions that cannot be pursued in detail in this study. Among these are the following: Why did the prophet Zephaniah basically provide a restatement of earlier prophetic material for another generation? Was it simply his purpose to emphasize old truths for a new day? Or was his generation largely ignorant of earlier prophetic material and thus did not consider it repetitious? Was he bound by a prophetic orthodoxy that prevented him from going much beyond what had already been said? Was his voice one of the few in his time that was in harmony with the genuine prophetic traditions and this explains why it was preserved?

It seems most likely that Zephaniah felt compelled to bring

²²Among these distinctive nuances are the identification of Judah as the sacrificial victim on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 1:7-8; but see Isa 34:6 for a similar description, albeit with a different nation), the picture of Yahweh searching for the guilty with lamps (Zeph 1:12), the reference to the starvation of the idols (Zeph 2:11), and the description of Yahweh singing over his restored people (Zeph 3:17).

together the most important themes and emphases of his predecessors regarding the Day of the Lord and reformulate them into a single coherent proclamation, announcing the soon onset of this Day for his own contemporaries.²³ This may have been done because the prophet felt that Yahweh's day, spoken of by the prophets some years ago, really was now imminent. The time was at hand, and judgment would no longer be delayed. It also may have been done in an attempt to further the Josianic reformation. These and other issues connected with Zephaniah await and deserve further attention.

²³In fact, the distinctiveness of Zephaniah in the prophetic corpus may reside primarily in his unremitting focus on a single concept, the Day of the Lord (although compare a similar feature in Joel). As Arvid S. Kapelrud observes, "He is the prophet who speaks in the most concentrated manner about the Day" (*The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* [Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975], 80).