

ZEPHANIAH
How This Book Became Prophecy

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WRITTEN PROPHECY CAME INTO BEING BY “FORTSCHREIBUNG”

The book of Zephaniah, and the first part of it (Zeph 1:1–2:3) in particular, forms a good example of the possibility that a prophetic tradition did not start with the preaching of an individual prophet in a particular historical setting, but that prophecy came into being only in course of the literary growth of a writing, which—moreover—was at first non-prophetic.

Though no more than fifty-three masoretic verses in length, the book reads as an extremely heterogeneous composition. Prophetic speech and divine speech change frequently, and with no obvious reason. There is also a sudden change of addressees, and the themes of the book vary greatly—“a rather remarkable package for so brief a book.”¹

Usually the literary nature of the book is explained as being a collection of short prophetic sayings, composed by the pupils of the prophet or by later editors. The text is seen as built on individual units, comparable to collections like the book of Proverbs or a law-book like the Covenant Code. In collections of proverbs or of law, each short literary unit has its own independent origin. According to this view unity is lacking because the literary entities stem from different situations and from different times addressed by the prophet. If the collection shows a meaningful order (which may be lacking), this is put down to secondary arrangement. However, this model does not fit in explaining the

¹ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 205.

composition of most prophetic books, because the single sayings are closely interwoven.

Recent exegetical research on the book of Zephaniah still holds to a process of three steps: (1) collecting and (2) editing/composing and (3) commenting/annotating. This is true of the studies of Guy Langohr,² the comprehensive investigation of Hubert Irsigler,³ the literary-historical and form-critical outline of the book by Klaus Seybold,⁴ and the thorough study by Ehud Ben Zvi, who concludes: “There is a compositional level, several units that reflect pre-compositional material, and a few additions that are likely to be post-compositional.”⁵ In this way Seybold, taking up the investigations of Langohr and Irsigler, counts fourteen to fifteen pre-compositional prophetic sayings within the book.⁶ For Lothar Peritt it is a matter of course that “at the beginning of the tradition that was collected under the name of Zephaniah there were sayings of YHWH that this man had received and put into words.”⁷

On the other hand, in the book of Zephaniah (as in most prophetic books), many of the individual literary entities are closely linked with each other.

² Guy Langohr, “Le livre de Sophonie et la critique d’authenticité,” *ETL* 52 (1976): 1–27; idem, “Rédaction et composition du livre de Sophonie,” *Museon* 89 (1976): 51–73.

³ Hubert Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag: Die Komposition Zef 1,1–2,3, untersucht auf der Grundlage der Literarkritik des Zefanjabuches* (Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 3; St. Ottilien: EOS, 1977).

⁴ Klaus Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie: Studien zum Buch Zefanja* (SBS 120; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985).

⁵ Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 347. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 2, holds the same view, underlining “that the present form of the book is the product of extensive exilic or postexilic redaction, which added a great deal of material concerned with worldwide eschatological punishment and salvation in an effort to transform the book from one concerned only with the fate of Jerusalem and Judah in the days of king Josiah to one concerned with the fate of the entire world in the Second Temple period and beyond.” See also the most recent investigation by Jakob Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen des Zwölfprophetenbuchs: Entstehung und Komposition* (BZAW 360; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006): (1) Pre-Deuteronomistic stock dating from the seventh century; (2) Deuteronomistic Edition; (3) late additions.

⁶ *Satirische Prophetie*, 83. See also his translation of “the poems of Zephaniah,” 109–12.

⁷ Lothar Peritt, *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zefanja* (ATD 25/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 97.

Sayings frequently react to their literary context in one way or another. There are in fact only a few sayings which can be read as independent units. This observation might be explained in two ways: the one is that the editors reshaped the sayings that came into their hands to put them into their present context; the other is that most of the sayings grew out of the written stock of the book step by step and were written *ad hoc* in regard to their literary context. The first possibility would mean nothing less than that the editors altered the word of God as transmitted by the prophet. This is highly improbable, because in this case the editors would have spoiled the real basis of their work. In fact, form-criticism differentiates between transmitted sayings secondarily framed for their context, and sayings written for their context. The latter are much more frequent. In prophetic books it is even the rule. Walther Zimmerli aptly called this phenomenon *Fortschreibung*, that is “a process of successive development of a kernel element, which has been developed further in new additions at a somewhat later time.”⁸ Zimmerli gained his insights from the book of Ezekiel. However, it is the same as William McKane and Robert Carroll observed in the book of Jeremiah as the “rolling corpus” or “snowball” effect.⁹

If most of the sayings are editorial in this way, we have to look for a nucleus from which the *Fortschreibungen* could have advanced. Most scholars concur that the origin of the book of Zephaniah is to be found in ch. 1, and that chs. 2–3 did not belong to the initial stock. With high probability the oracles to the nations in 2:4–14 and 3:6, 8 as well as the salvation oracles in 3:9–20 are late additions.¹⁰ The same may be true of the sayings against the wicked town in 2:15–3:5, 7, which are interwoven with the oracles against the nations. From this follows a caesura between 2:3 and 2:4.¹¹ This does not exclude the possibility that 1:1–2:3 contains additions which may be as late as 2:4–3:20 or even later. Additionally, this does not exclude the possibility of literary and/or thematic layers which cover the entire book.

⁸ See Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Vol. 1 (trans. Ronald E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 69.

⁹ William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, I–II (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986 and 1996); Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986).

¹⁰ Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 132: “I share the insight of Schwally’s of 1890, that chapter 3 as a whole ‘had its setting in post-exilic times.’” Cf. Friedrich Schwally, “Das Buch Sefanjâ, eine historisch-kritische Untersuchung,” *ZAW* 10 (1890): 165–240 (238).

¹¹ See especially Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag*.

SEVEN MAIN LAYERS IN ZEPH 1:1–2:3

The literary critical analysis of Zeph 1:1–2:3 uncovers seven main written layers which are marked in the following translation by indentation. There are also many intertextual quotations and allusions which are indicated by *italics*, their origin given in parentheses.¹²

(1) A liturgy for the celebration of the theophany on the Day of YHWH-festival (cf. Hab 2:20; Zech 2:17; Ps 97:2–5; 47:6)

(2) is interpreted according to Amos 5:18a, bb, 20b as a prophetic threat

(3) and later used to explain the catastrophe of Jerusalem as predicted (and caused) by YHWH himself: The punishment came because the people and especially the courtiers practised the sin of Manasseh: They behaved as before Josiah's reform.

(4) They did not serve YHWH alone, and did not expect to be punished by him.

(5) In the near future the Day of YHWH shall come again in form of a divine judgment on all beings. A cosmic catastrophe like the flood shall be repeated.

(6) Other than by the flood in primeval times, no one shall escape,

(7) especially not the wicked traders and people like those. But the pious shall survive.

(8) Some more additions.

1.1 The word of YHWH that was unto Zephaniah son of Cushi son of Gedaliah son of Amariah son of Hezekiah, *in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.* (Jer 1:2)

2 I will surely sweep away everything *from upon the face of the ground* (Gen 6:7; 7:4), utterance of YHWH. 3 I will sweep away human and animal; I will sweep away the bird of the heavens, and the fish of the sea.

'I will overthrow'¹³ the wicked.

¹² The translation follows Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, with a few alterations.

¹³ Thus according to the usual emendation *אֶת־הַיָּשָׁרִים*. Having no support by the ancient versions, this reading remains, however, quite unsure. Cf. the discussion by Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 59–60, and by Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 64.

And I will cut off (v. 4) *humanity from upon the face of the ground, utterance of YHWH.* (v. 2)

4 *And I will stretch out my hand against* (Jer 51:25; Ezek 6:14; 14:9, 13; 25:13; 35:3) Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, *and I will cut off from* (Jer 51:25; Ezek 6:14; 14:9, 13; 25:13; 35:3) this place (cf. Jer 19:3 a.o.) the remnant of *Baal* (cf. 2 Kgs 23:4-5; Jer 19:5 a.o.)

and the name of the idolatrous priests (2 Kgs 23:5) [MT + with the priests];

5 and those who prostrate themselves *upon the rooftops to the host of heaven* (Jer 19:13);

and those who prostrate themselves (v. 5a) [who swear] to YHWH and swear by ‘*Milcom*’,¹⁴ (2 Kgs 23:13)

6 and those who turn aside from after YHWH, and who do not seek YHWH and do not inquire of him.

7 Silence! from before my Lord YHWH!

For the Day of YHWH is near; (v. 14)

For YHWH has prepared a sacrifice, he has sanctified his invitees.

8 And it shall come to pass on the day of YHWH’s *sacrifice* (v. 7), and I shall punish the officers and the sons of the king,

and all who are dressed in foreign attire. 9 *And I shall punish* (v.

8) those who leap over the threshold in that day,

who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.

10 And it shall come to pass on that day, utterance of YHWH, sound of a cry from the Fish Gate and wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills.

11 Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar!

Because all the people of Canaan are destroyed, and all who weigh out silver are cut off.

12 And it shall come to pass at that time, I will search out Jerusalem with lamps, *and I shall punish* (v. 8) the people, those who linger over their wine dregs, who say in their heart, YHWH does no good, and he does no evil. 13 And their wealth *shall become booty* (cf. 2 Kgs 21:14), and their houses desolation,

¹⁴ Vocalize *בְּמֶלֶכָם* instead of *בְּמֶלֶכֶם* “by their king.”

and they shall build houses, but they shall not dwell in them, and they shall plant vineyards, but they shall not drink their wine. (Amos 5:11)

14 The great Day of YHWH is near! Near and coming very fast.

The sound of the *Day of YHWH* (v. 14a) is bitter, a warrior cries out there.

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and stress, a day of destruction and devastation, *a day of darkness and gloom*, (Amos 5:18bβ, 20b)

a day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 a day of trumpet blast and cry against the fortified cities and against the high towers.

17 And I shall afflict humankind, and they shall walk like the blind,

because they have sinned against YHWH; and their blood shall be spilled out like dust, and their guts like dung,

18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to save them on the day of *the wrath of YHWH*, (v. 15)

And by the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed because destruction, indeed, sudden devastation, he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

2:1 Assemble yourselves and gather, O worthless nation,¹⁵ 2 before bearing a statute, like chaff a day has passed,¹⁶

before there comes upon you the angry wrath of YHWH, (v. 2bβ)

before there comes upon you *the day of the wrath of YHWH*. (v. 3)

3 Seek YHWH, all you humble of the land who have done his law. Seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you will be hidden *in the day of the wrath of YHWH*. (1:18)

¹⁵ Julius Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten* (4th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963), 152, comments on 2:1: "The wording is not transmitted in a trustworthy state; in any case it cannot be understood."

¹⁶ The reading of v. 2a is difficult, see Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 110.

THE BOOK'S SUPERScription (ZEPH 1:1)

The superscription of the book is obviously editorial. This makes it doubtful whether the information the editors gave may rely on real memory. The definition of prophecy as “word of YHWH” represents a theological concept that was developed in late exilic times only.¹⁷ With high probability the dating to the time of King Josiah is secondary, for it is identical with one of the dates given—additionally—to the book of Jeremiah (Jer 1:2aβ).¹⁸ We therefore cannot exclude that the dating of Zephaniah’s prophecy is an editorial conclusion which grew out of the comparison with the edited form of the book of Jeremiah. Nevertheless the similarities of the book of Zephaniah to the book of Ezekiel and to the Book of the Twelve are even more obvious.

The prophet’s person is only mentioned in the superscription. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the name Zephaniah can be found twice, both among the people around Jeremiah. The second priest according to 2 Kgs 25:18 is called Zephaniah, as well as the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah according to Jer 21:1; 29:25, 29; 37:3. The prophet’s father Cushi shares his name with Ebed-melech, the man who saved Jeremiah from the cistern, for whom it is used as gentilicium (Jer 38:7, 10, 12; 39:16). According to Jer 36:14, a man called Jehudi son of Nethaniah son of Shelemiah son of Cushi read Baruch’s scroll to King Jehoiakim. The name of Zephaniah’s grandfather Gedaliah son of Amariah recalls the name of Gedaliah son of Ahikam Jer 39:14, and the name of Gedaliah son of Pashhur Jer 38:1. Surprisingly enough the chain of forefathers is pursued back four steps to a man called Hezekiah. It is not improbable that this person is to be identified by the reader with the king of that name. In this case the prophet’s genealogy forms a kind of bridge between the two alleged reforms of King Hezekiah on the one hand and of King Josiah on the other. The chain of

¹⁷ See Christoph Levin, “The ‘Word of Yhwh’: A Theological Concept in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* (ed. Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak; LHBOTS 427; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 42–62.

¹⁸ See Christoph Levin, “Noch einmal: Die Anfänge des Propheten Jeremia,” *VT* 31 (1981): 428–40 (430–1); repr. in idem, *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 316; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 217–26 (218–9). The idea that Jeremiah prepared for King Josiah’s reform seemed reasonable in later times. However it causes problems in regard to the coherence of the prophet’s message. Moreover, after his early preaching he must have fallen for decades into a “prophetic hibernation.”

ancestors also prevents identifying the prophet with the Cushites, which are threatened in 2:12.

It is a matter of course that in the Old Testament the mentioning of names does not guarantee historicity.¹⁹ All observations make it highly probable that the superscription of the book of Zephaniah is composed by inner-biblical combination. We may therefore conclude that the book was first transmitted as an anonymous and undated writing. We better read it as a pseudepigraphon. “The book does not claim to be the work of its author; ... The individuality of the author is simply ignored.”²⁰ In any case we are bound by methodological reasons to get the historical coordinates from the content of the book only, not from external evidence—the superscription being always external to some degree.

THE PRESENT BOOK'S MOTTO (ZEPH 1:2–3)

After the superscription the book starts with kind of a motto: “I will surely sweep away everything (כֹּל) from upon the face of the ground, utterance of YHWH.”²¹ It is common that the Hebrew expression מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ “from the face of the ground” is to be understood as an allusion to the story of the flood in its Yahwistic version (see Gen 6:7; 7:4).²² Though relating to the future, this is no prophecy, but an exegetical hint at the flood story of the book of Genesis. It reads as a repetition of YHWH’s prologue to the flood (Gen 6:5–8). Repeated for the future, the memory of primeval times becomes an eschatological vision. This is emphasized by the details: it is “everything” (כֹּל), that should be swept away. In late postexilic times the expectation that the flood of primeval days

¹⁹ Otherwise the book of Chronicles would be historically more reliable than the book of Kings, and the book of Numbers would be one of the best sources for the early history of Israel—which is obviously not the case.

²⁰ Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 347.

²¹ A motto of this kind was also applied to the book of Amos; see Amos 1:2. It is secondary as well, anticipating Amos 3:4, 8.

²² This is all the more true as the use of אֶרֶץ “ground” in the sense of אֲדָמָה “earth” is peculiar to the language of the Yahwistic editor, cf. Christoph Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 399–400. Instances such as Exod 32:12; 33:16; Num 12:3; Deut 6:15; 7:6; 14:2; 2 Sam 14:7; 1 Kgs 13:34; Isa 23:17; Jer 25:26; 28:16; Ezek 38:20; Amos 9:8; Zeph 1:2–3 depend on the Yahwist. Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie*, 23, seeks to save the saying for the prophet: “It is Zephaniah’s own soil ... on which the harvest begins.” This is an obvious mistake.

shall come again at the end of history was wide spread.²³ The motto turns the book of Zephaniah into an eschatological writing.

The reference to Genesis 6–8 becomes even clearer in the second line of the saying: “I will sweep away human and animal; I will sweep away the bird of the heavens, and the fish of the sea.” The expression *אדם ובהמה* “human and animal” is a reminder of the fate all beings suffered from the flood (Gen 6:7; 7:23). “Bird” and “fish” which are explicitly mentioned are those who could escape the former flood. In the cosmic catastrophe to come no one shall be saved. The devastation shall be comprehensive. The same idea is added also in Hos 4:3 for to give the book of Hosea an eschatological focus: “Therefore, the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish [including the beasts of the field and the bird of the heavens {and even the fish of the sea are swept away}].”²⁴

The saying was later expanded by v. 3b, as is to be seen from the resumptive repetition *מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה* “from upon the face of the ground, utterance of YHWH.” The verb *וְהִכַּרְתִּי* “and I will cut off” is probably taken from v. 4. The reason for the expansion may have been to limit the punishment to humankind only—i.e., to correct the threat of vv. 2–3aα—because only humankind is able to be guilty. If God punishes the beast, he would be unjust. Again the tradition of the flood is altered, this time the opposite way as before. In v. 3aα the beasts have been explicitly included into the catastrophe, in v. 3b they are saved from punishment. The emphasis on humankind is also to be found in v. 17aα, b.

Verse 3aβ forms a still later expansion, missing in some part of the Greek textual tradition. “The phrase *והמכשלות את־הרשעים* is commonly considered a gloss.”²⁵ Now the final judgment is restricted to the impious: “I will overthrow [txt. em.] the wicked.” The same idea is to be found in v. 6 and v. 17aβ. In contrast the pious shall get the chance to escape punishment, see 2:3.

²³ Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (1895; trans. K. William Whitney, Jr.; The Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

²⁴ Cf. Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* (ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 62–63 (with reference also to Amos 8:8; 9:5); Gale A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea* (SBLDS 102; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 142–4. Hos 4:3b may be copied from Zeph 1:3aα.

²⁵ Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 58. For the reading see above note 13.

THE SIN OF MANASSEH (ZEPH 1:4-6)

The next unit, 1:4–6 is related to the superscription of the book. This again supports that vv. 2–3 is a later insertion. The sin described in these verses mirrors the situation just before the cultic reform of King Josiah as it is told in 2 Kings 23. Moreover, the matter of the polemics is similar to the sermon, which the editors of the book of Jeremiah inserted into the symbolic action with the broken flask in Jer 19.²⁶ A closer look however shows that the language of the prophetic threat is that of the book of Ezekiel. The two phrases: “and I will stretch out my hand against ...” (Ezek 6:14; 14:9, 13; 16:27; 25:7, 13; 35:3) and “and I will cut off from ...” (Ezek 14:8, 13, 17; 21:8, 9; 25:7, 13; 29:8; 35:7) are frequent in this book. Since the phrases occur in Zephaniah only once, it is obvious that the book of Zephaniah borrowed from the book of Ezekiel, and not vice versa.²⁷ According to Ezek 1:1–2, the prophet’s preaching began in 593, i.e., sixteen years after Josiah’s death in 609, and twenty-nine years after his alleged reform in 622.

Some of the details mentioned in vv. 4–5 are quoted from or at least alluded to Jer 19 and 2 Kgs 23.²⁸ This is true for “the remnant of Baal” (שְׂאֵר הַבַּעַל), i.e. the worshippers of the deity who remained after Josiah had destroyed its cult (v. 4b, cf. 2 Kgs 23:4–5; Jer 19:5). This is true as well of the cult of the host of heavens celebrated on the roofs (v. 5a) which is elsewhere told of in Jer 19:13 exclusively.²⁹ The emphasis on “this place” (הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה) also reminds on Jer 19 (vv. 3–7, 12). It is significant that King Manasseh was accused for the cult of Baal as well as of the host of heavens (2 Kgs 21:3). For the theologians at the second temple who conceived the reform of Josiah as the return to the exclusive worship of YHWH, the sin of Manasseh counted for the main reason why YHWH nevertheless let Jerusalem to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 21:11–12; 23:26; 24:3; Jer 15:4). Zephaniah 1:4–5 maintains that the people of Jerusalem continued sinning like Manasseh contrary to Josiah’s reform. The related texts should not be read as announcement of coming punishment; they are intended to show YHWH’s justice in history.

²⁶ This editorial insertion was first observed by Friedrich Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia* (HK III 2,1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1894), 108–11. Cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 386.

²⁷ The saying starts with a perfect consecutive וַיִּשְׁטֵחַ. This is because of the quotation.

²⁸ Cf. Levin, “Anfänge des Propheten Jeremia,” 224–6.

²⁹ The only further parallel Jer 32:29 is quoting Jer 19:13. 2 Kgs 23:12 tells of altars on the roof without mentioning the deity to whom the cult was addressed.

Later the catalogue of idolatrous details was enlarged in v. 4b β . The false priests (הַכֹּהֲנִים) are added from 2 Kgs 23:5. It is their name (שם), i.e., the memory of them, which shall be destroyed—because they themselves have already been deposed by Josiah. In the Hebrew textual tradition the rare noun³⁰ was later explained by הכהנים “priests.” In v. 5b those who worship YHWH as well as the Milcom (txt. em.)—taken from 2 Kgs 23:13—have been added to those who worship the host of heavens. The supplement is easily recognized by the repeated catchword וְאֵת־הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים “and those who prostrate themselves”³¹ from v. 5a.

In v. 6, which belongs to the latest textual layer, the people practising idolatry are identified with the apostates who do not seek for YHWH, i.e., the members of the Jewish community who do not participate in the temple cult of Jerusalem and not strictly follow the will of God. The different origin of this verse is to be seen from the fact that divine speech changes into speech about YHWH.³² The verse mirrors the conflicts the pious fought with the un-pious in late Persian and Hellenistic times under the threat of the coming final judgment. The terminology is that of late piety, see for בָּקַשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה “to seek YHWH” Isa 51:1; Zeph 2:3; Ps 105:3–4 par. 1 Chr 16:10; Prov 28:5, for דָּרַשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה “to inquire of YHWH” Ps 9:11; 34:11; 105:4 par. 1 Chr 16:11; Ezra 6:21; 1 Chr 22:19; 28:9; 2 Chr 12:14; 14:3, 6; 15:12, 13; 16:12; 20:3; 22:9; 26:5. This addition cannot be earlier than the late Persian era.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE THEOPHANY (ZEPH 1:7)

In v. 7 we come again upon a sudden change of style:

הַסּ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה...
כִּי־הִכִּין יְהוָה זֶבַח הַקָּדִישׁ קָרְבָּנוֹ

Silence! from before my Lord YHWH! ...

For YHWH has prepared a sacrifice; he has sanctified his invitees.

The saying is a liturgical exclamation, with no reference to the threat and the listening of sins in the preceding verses. The double כִּי probably marks an

³⁰ The noun כֹּהֵן is only to be found in 2 Kgs 23:5; Hos 10:5; Zeph 1:4.

³¹ This was enlarged and interpreted still later by הַנִּשְׁבָּעִים “who swear,” which is anticipated from v. 4b β . Septuagint avoids the doublet by deleting הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים. The Greek reading is doubtless secondary.

³² Cf. Bernhard Duhm, *Anmerkungen zu den zwölf Propheten* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1911), 56.

expansion: The first כִּי phrase יוֹם יְהוָה “for the Day of YHWH is near” anticipates v. 14 in order to underline that it is the Day of YHWH that claims for cultic silence.³³ “The call for silence on the one hand and the announcement of the Day of YHWH on the other stem from quite different traditions and are combined this one time only.”³⁴

The unexpanded form of the saying follows a fixed formula, as can be seen from two close parallels:

הַס כָּל־בָּשָׂר מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה
כִּי נִעוֹר מִמְּעוֹן קִדְשׁוֹ

Silence, all flesh, from before YHWH;
for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling (Zech 2:17).

And

וַיְהִי־הָיָה בְּהֵיכַל קִדְשׁוֹ
הַס מִפְּנֵי כָל־הָאֲרֶץ

YHWH is in his holy temple;
silence from before him, all the earth! (Hab 2:20).

“The cry הַס expresses the normative attitude of human beings before the appearance of YHWH.”³⁵ “No doubt the cultic exclamation ... has its *Sitz* in the cultic service and signals the climax of the worship that is the theophany of the almighty.”³⁶ Surprisingly the two other examples are addressed to “all flesh” / “all the earth” which in reality cannot have been participants in worship. This is in accordance with the fact that in Zech 2:17 and Hab 2:20 the temple is described from outside as “his holy dwelling” / “his holy temple,” which would not have been done in the course of the celebration. Therefore Zeph 1:7 seems to be nearest to the original shape of the formula.

The theophany was celebrated by the worshippers with sacrifices, and the invited (cf. Gen 31:54; 1 Sam 9:22; 16:3) had to be consecrated in advance (cf. 1 Sam 9:13; 16:5). The only irregularity in Zeph 1:7 is that YHWH himself is the one who prepares the sacrifices and sanctifies the participants. This is used elsewhere metaphorically to illustrate YHWH’s threat against foreign nations (cf. Isa 34:5; Jer 46:10; Ezek 39:17).

Zephaniah 1:7 has often been explained as directed against the Judeans. However the cultic proclamation is obviously no prophetic saying. It is not the prophet’s task to call for cultic silence. Exegetes concluded that the prophet

³³ See Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie*, 14; Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania*, 107.

³⁴ Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania*, 107.

³⁵ Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 80.

³⁶ Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie*, 24.

imitated and possibly parodied the cultic exclamation. It is supposed that Zephaniah quoted the liturgy in an ironic manner for to couch his prediction of YHWH's punishment.³⁷ However the saying is not transmitted within the prophet's preaching, but as part of a (prophetic) book. The irony—if there is any—goes back not to the prophet but to the editors.

WHY THE CATASTROPHE HAS/SHALL COME (ZEPH 1:8–13)

Scholars usually follow the traditional idea about prophetic preaching, and see the verses 1:8–13 as being original at least in part. “People and conditions accused here are so precisely defined that this must have been said by the prophet himself.”³⁸ “If anywhere in the book the prophet himself is speaking, it is in the details of vv. 8–9, 10–11.”³⁹ But this conclusion is circular. It is only based on the content. “The main question is not whether Zephaniah said these words or not, but whether they are secondary additions to an existent text of Zephaniah ..., or compositional devices used to attach a certain unit to an existent text.”⁴⁰ It is fairly certain from the literary form and the syntax, that all of these verses have been inserted between v. 7 and vv. 14–16.

This can be seen from the connecting formulas וְהָיָה בְּיוֹם זִבְחַת יְהוָה “and it shall come to pass on the day of YHWH's sacrifice” (v. 8), בְּיוֹם הַהוּא “in that day” (v. 9a), וְהָיָה בְּיוֹם הַהוּא נִאֲמַם יְהוָה “and it shall come to pass on that day, utterance of YHWH” (v. 10) and וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַהִיא “and it shall come to pass at that time” (v. 12), which are editorial by nature. It is common to remove these formulas as secondary additions for to get the supposed original shape of the sayings.⁴¹ But this is arbitrary.⁴²

³⁷ Cf. Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag*, 284–5; Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie*, 24.

³⁸ Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 108. Because of this view of the text Perlitt, 107, considers 7 to be a later insertion. See already Karl Marti, *Das Dodekapropheton* (KHC 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904), 363. This is turning the text's growing process upside down.

³⁹ Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 110.

⁴⁰ Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 89.

⁴¹ Thus the apparatus in *BHS* by Karl Elliger; Marti, *Dodekapropheton*, 363–4; Duhm, *Anmerkungen*, 56–57; Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie*, 14–15, and many others. Cf. Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 88 with n. 192.

Verse 8 has grown out of v. 7. This is to be seen from the connecting catchword זָבַח “sacrifice.” The verse already presupposes the announcement of the Day of YHWH that was later added in v. 7b α . The cultic exclamation is now focused so as to become a threat against the Judean courtiers. YHWH announces that he will punish them (וַיִּקְרָאֵנִי , v. 8a β). The reason is to be found in v. 9b, which must have followed immediately: the courtiers have filled their lord’s house (בַּיִת אֲדֹנָיָם) with violence and deceit. The saying gives the impression to have been proclaimed when the kingdom in Judah still existed. But this is not necessarily so. We should not exclude the possibility that the saying wants to explain why YHWH did not avert the dynasty of the Davidides to break off: not the king (Josiah) himself but his entourage committed the deeds YHWH was not ready to forgive anymore.

Later this saying was split off by vv. 8b–9a. This can be seen from the repetition of וְעַל “and against” and $\text{וַיִּקְרָאֵנִי עַל}$ “and I shall punish against” in combination with the connecting formula בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא “in that day.” The sin of the courtly upper class is specified: they clothe themselves in foreign (gentile) garments and use superstitious practices.

The first expansion of vv. 8a, 9b is to be found in vv. 12–13a. Again the supplement is marked by the connecting formula $\text{וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַהִיא}$ “and it shall come to pass at that time” in combination with the repetition $\text{וַיִּקְרָאֵנִי עַל}$ “and I shall punish against.” Again the threat against the inhabitants of Jerusalem is reminiscent of Manasseh, as YHWH announces in 2 Kgs 21:13–14 to punish Jerusalem so that it shall become booty ($\text{וְהָיָה לְמַשְׁסָה}$). The people sinned because they did not expect that the announcement may become true: YHWH will do nothing. The editor may also have had in mind the coming eschatological judgment, the conquest of Jerusalem providing the model. “The way the wicked are characterized is noteworthy. It is reminiscent of the Psalms and the book of Job.”⁴³

Much later the threat was expanded by the futility curse v. 13b which is quoted word for word from Amos 5:11. Now the horizon is definitely eschatological as it is in vv. 2–3a. In the book of Amos the curse is directed against the wicked who oppress the pious poor.⁴⁴ This is true of the book of Zephaniah also, as can be seen from 1:18a α ; 2:3 and 3:12. Verses 10–11 possibly share the level of v. 13b. These two verses certainly came in between later, as

⁴² See Martin Beck, *Der “Tag Yhwhs” im Dodekapropheten: Studien im Spannungsfeld von Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte* (BZAW 356; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 93; Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen*, 203.

⁴³ Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 152.

⁴⁴ Cf. Christoph Levin, “Das Amosbuch der Anawim,” *ZTK* 94 (1997): 407–36 (429), repr. in idem, *Fortschreibungen*, 265–90 (284).

they tear the connection of vv. 8–9 and vv. 12–13a.⁴⁵ The language is borrowed from the book of Jeremiah:⁴⁶ קול צעקה משער הדגים ויללה מן־המִשְׁנָה וְשָׁבַר גְּדוֹל מִהַגְּבֻעוֹת “Sound of a cry from the Fish Gate and wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills” (v.10). The saying’s model is to be found in Jer 51:54: קול צעקה מִבָּבֶל וְשָׁבַר גְּדוֹל מֵאַרְצֵי כַּשְׂדִּים “Sound of a cry from Babylon, and a loud crash from the land of the Chaldeans.” The editor of Zeph 1:10–11 applied the threat against the foreign nation to the inhabitants of the merchant’s quarter of Jerusalem. See also the threat against Moab in Jer 48:3: קול צעקה מִהַרְוֹנַיִם שָׁד וְשָׁבַר גְּדוֹל “Sound of a cry from Horonaim, desolation and a loud crash.” With these sayings the late editors of the book of Jeremiah adapted the prophet’s laments about the enemy from the north (שָׁבַר גְּדוֹל “loud crash” Jer 6:1 [4:6]) to the nations, Babylon or Moab. From this it can be seen that the phrase of Zeph 1:10 had its roots in the book of Jeremiah and not in the book of Zephaniah. The topographical details of Jerusalem given here are witnessed in the Persian era only, see for the “second quarter” (הַמִּשְׁנָה) 2 Kgs 22:14⁴⁷ par. 2 Chr 34:22; Neh 11:9, for the “Fish Gate” (שַׁעַר הַדְּגִים) Neh 3:3; 12:39; 2 Chr 33:14.

THE DAY OF YHWH (ZEPH 1:14–16a)

The original sequence of v. 7 is to be found in v. 14a:

קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל
קָרוֹב וּמָהֵר מְאֹד

The great Day of YHWH is near,
near and coming very fast.

Initially this has been the first instance the motive of the Day of YHWH was mentioned, which is so predominant a theme of the present shape of the book.

⁴⁵ Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen*, 203–4, after Langohr, “Le livre de Sophonie,” 7–10, and idem, “Rédaction et composition,” 57 (who however argued only by the content).

⁴⁶ Cf. Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 105–6.

⁴⁷ The oracle of the prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22:12–20) was secondarily inserted into the report about King Josiah, cf. Christoph Levin, “Josia im Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk,” *ZAW* 96 (1984): 351–71 (364–8); repr. in idem, *Fortschreibungen*, 198–216 (209–13). Its emphasis is on כָּנַע niph. “to humble oneself” which belongs to the favorite theological concepts of the Chronicler.

The text supposes the reader was familiar with what the Day of YHWH was. It tells no more than that the Day of YHWH is great and impending. Whether this is a cause of fear or of joy remains open. גָּדוֹל “great” could also be a positive attribute. Taken the connection with v. 7, we may understand the Day of YHWH as the given date of YHWH’s sacrifice mentioned there. From this follows that the Day of YHWH was an important date in the cultic calendar, probably a regular event; and of course this event can only have been a positive one, very much in contrast to the meaning developed in the book of Zephaniah as it reads today.

We know from the book of Amos that the Israelites originally desired for the Day of YHWH as a positive event. In Amos 5:18–20 there is a woe-oracle against those who expect the Day of YHWH. The original shape of the oracle was as follows:⁴⁸

הַיּוֹם הַמִּתְאַוִּים אֶת-יְהוָה...
הוֹאֵה-חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-אֹרֶךְ... וְאֶפְלַח וְלֹא-נִגְוָה לוֹ

Woe to those who desire the Day of YHWH! ...
It is darkness, and not light, ... and gloom with no brightness in it!
(Amos 5:18a, bβ, 20b)

This is probably the oldest reference to the Day of YHWH preserved in the Old Testament. The negative statement makes it fairly sure that the Israelites expected the day an occasion of joy. There is however no indication in Amos 5 what the original meaning of the event may have been. We are able to fill in this gap by means of Zeph 1:7a, bβ, 14a, 15bγ–16a.

Zeph 1:14b forms a parenthesis relating to the *sound* of the Day of YHWH. Here we find the eschatological concept of the Day of YHWH as it was common in the late tradition: the noise of that day is bitter, so that even the warrior cannot escape (cf. Amos 2:14–16). Because the definition of the Day of YHWH given in v. 15 relates to v. 14a, this part of the verse was added later.

The definition of the Day of YHWH in vv. 15–16a is closely reminiscent of Amos 5:18a, bβ, 20b:

⁴⁸ The saying was later illustrated in 19 by a traditional proverb about the fate of the unlucky. The phrase “Why do you want the Day of YHWH” in 18bα and the introduction כִּי־כַאֲשֶׁר “it is like ...” at the beginning of 19 as well as the resumptive repetition “Is not the Day of YHWH darkness, not light” in 20a serve to connect the insertion with the transmitted oracle. See Reinhard Müller, “Der finstere Tag Jahwes: Zum kultischen Hintergrund von Am 5,18-20,” *ZAW* 122 (2010): 576–92.

יום עֲבָרָה הַיּוֹם הַהוּא יוֹם צָרָה וּמְצוּקָה
 יוֹם שָׂאָה וּמְשׂוּאָה יוֹם חֹשֶׁךְ וְאֹפֶלֶת
 יוֹם עָנָן וְעֶרְפָּל יוֹם שׁוֹפָר וְתְרוּעָה

That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and stress,
 a day of destruction and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and cry.

As in v. 14a, the meaning of the term Day of YHWH is supposed to be familiar to the reader or listener. This makes us wonder why it has been felt necessary to illustrate it explicitly afterwards.

We may suggest that the definition given here is directed against an originally positive understanding—no different than it is done in Amos 5. A close look however shows that the list of paired attributes is not a negative one throughout. Besides חֹשֶׁךְ וְאֹפֶלֶת “darkness and gloom” as in Amos 5:18bβ, 20b, at the end of the list of attributes we read עָנָן וְעֶרְפָּל “clouds and thick darkness” and שׁוֹפָר וְתְרוּעָה “trumpet blast and cry.” These expressions are ambivalent, to say the least. The combination עָנָן וְעֶרְפָּל is to be found in Deut 4:11; 5:22; Joel 2:2; and Ps 97:2. Of these, only Joel 2:2 is to be understood as a threat. This instance is not decisive for the original meaning because it is probably quoting from Zeph 1:15 and Amos 5:18.⁴⁹

The cultic origin of the terminology used in Zeph 1:15 comes out clearly in the core of Ps 97 (vv. 2a, 3–5) which had its *Sitz im Leben* in the temple of Jerusalem, probably at the festival of the new year when YHWH was ascending to his throne:

עָנָן וְעֶרְפָּל סְבִיבוֹ...
 אֵשׁ לְפָנָיו תִּלְהַט סְבִיב צָרָיו
 הָאֵירוּ בְרָקָיו תִּבֵּל רָאֲתָהּ וְתַחַל הָאָרֶץ
 הָרִים כְּדוֹנֵג נֶמְסוּ ... מִלִּפְנֵי אָדוֹן כָּל־הָאָרֶץ

Clouds and thick darkness are round about him.
 Fire goes before him and burns his adversaries round about.
 His lightnings lighten the world; the earth sees and trembles.
 The mountains melt like wax before the Lord of all the earth.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Hermeneia; trans. W. Janzen, S. D. McBride and C. A. Muenchow; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), *sub loco*.

⁵⁰ For the supposed original shape of Ps 97 see Reinhard Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen* (BZAW 387; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 86–102.

The hymnic description of the theophany of the weather-god is close to the Ugaritic myths. The expression אֲדוֹן כָּל־הָאָרֶץ “Lord of all the earth” was also applied to the Baal. It is highly probable that this piece of cultic poetry was used in the pre-exilic temple of Jerusalem besides ancient Psalms like 29 and 93.

The term “clouds and thick darkness” (עָנָן וְעֲרַפָּל) serves as a description of the epiphany of the deity which is performed by a hidden revelation, revealing and veiling the deity at one and the same time. This theophany is ambivalent: terrifying on the one hand, and beneficent on the other, i.e., threatening to the enemies and assisting their own king.

In Zeph 1:15 the ambivalence was originally understood positively. This is shown by the pair of terms that stands at the end: שׁוֹפָר וְתְרוּעָה “trumpet and cry.” The term תְרוּעָה expresses the cry of battle as well as one of joy, especially victory and on occasion of the enthronement of the king or deity. In the psalms we frequently find the root רוע hiph. used in this way, for example in Ps 98:4–6:

הָרִיעוּ לַיהוָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ פָּצְחוּ וְרָנְנוּ וְזָמְרוּ
זָמְרוּ לַיהוָה בְּכִנּוֹר בְּכִנּוֹר וְקוֹל זָמְרָה
בְּחִצְצָרוֹת וְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר הָרִיעוּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה

Cry joyful to YHWH, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!
Sing praises to YHWH with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!
With trumpets and the sound of the Shofar
make a joyful noise before the king YHWH.⁵¹

This hymnic invitation to rejoice has a variation in Ps 100:

הָרִיעוּ לַיהוָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
עֲבָדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה
בְּאוֹר לְפָנָיו בְּרִנְנָה

Cry joyful to YHWH, all the earth,
serve YHWH with gladness,
come before him with singing!

The genre of Psalm 100 is the invitation to participate in the cult.⁵² We can easily see how close it is also to Zeph 1:7. Both texts deal with the cultic presence of YHWH. The shout of the horn (שׁוֹפָר) is also part of the ritual of the enthronement, as can be seen in Ps 98:6 (and relating to human kings in 2 Sam

⁵¹ Cf. Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 168–80.

⁵² This is best seen from the parodistic use of the genre in Amos 4:4–5.

15:10; 1 Kgs 1:39; 2 Kgs 9:13). See also 2 Sam 6:15, which says: “David and the house of Israel brought up the ark of YHWH with joyful cry and with the sound of the horn (בְּתִרְוָעָה וּבְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר).” The best example is probably Ps 47:6: עָלָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתִרְוָעָה יְהוָה בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר “God has gone up with a joyful cry, YHWH with the sound of the horn.” This is very close to Zeph 1:16. “Such language reflects both theophany and holy war traditions—God is present in the natural order and is portrayed as a holy warrior.”⁵³ Such language is no prophecy.

These observations indicate that Zeph 1:14–16a originally read (and was heard!) as follows:

קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל קָרוֹב וּמְהֵרָה מְאֹד
יוֹם עָנָן וְעָרְפָל יוֹם שׁוֹפָר וּתְרוּעָה

The great Day of YHWH is near! Near and coming very fast:
a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and cry.

The announcement that the Day of YHWH is near and coming very fast is a cause of joy. People should hasten to prepare themselves, that is, to consecrate themselves for the sacrificial meal celebrated on that occasion.

PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION (ZEPH 1:15abαβ)

It was in a second step only, that this cultic saying was changed into a prophecy of doom by inserting in v. 15abαβ an allusion to Amos 5:18bβ, 20b:

יוֹם עֲבָרָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְיוֹם צָרָה וּמִצְוָקָה
יוֹם שָׂאָה וּמִשׁוֹאָה יוֹם חֹשֶׁךְ וְאַפְלָה

That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and stress,
a day of destruction and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom.

Now the Day of YHWH is explicitly defined, and in a negative way. Taken as such, the concept of the Day of YHWH served to announce/explain the conquest of Jerusalem.

Exegetes suggested that the prophet Zephaniah himself was quoting the cultic proclamation and using it in an ironical and even satirical way to address his prophetic message to his seventh-century audience.⁵⁴ Of course we cannot exclude this possibility. However we should take in account that the

⁵³ Petersen, *Prophetic Literature*, 204.

⁵⁴ See especially Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie*, 66–72.

interpretation of the Day of YHWH, as it is given here, is dependent on the book of Amos. The author of Zeph 1:15abαβ was no prophet in the proper meaning, but a Bible reader and exegete.

THE PIOUS POOR SHALL BE SAVED IN THE COMING CATASTROPHE (ZEPH 1:16b–2:3)

In the final section of the first part of the book, the eschatological focus given to the book in the motto 1:2–3, is applied to the Day of YHWH. “This unit is best understood as an universal-eschatological interpretation added to the sayings of punishment.”⁵⁵ “The expansion of the catastrophe to ‘all the earth’ is characteristic for the framework which in vv. 2–3 and vv. 17–18 is given to the sayings of Zephaniah.”⁵⁶

The passage is also heterogeneous. Verse 16b applies the threat of punishment to the capture of fortified cities. Probably the editor had in mind the conquest of Jerusalem. Like vv. 8a, 9b and 12–13a this can again be read as announcing the coming disaster as well as justifying the defeat of Judah that occurred in the past.⁵⁷

The next step is formed by v. 18aβγb: Here the Day of YHWH is interpreted as a cosmic catastrophe in the same way as in vv. 2–3αα: “And by the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed because destruction, indeed, sudden devastation, he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.” These are the ideas of late eschatology of doom, as they are to be found, e.g., in the Isaiah-Apocalypse and in the book of Joel. In v. 17αα, b, the same idea as in v. 3b was added: the cosmic catastrophe is restricted to humankind. This addition differs from the rest of the sayings because it is uttered in divine speech: “And I shall afflict humankind, and they shall walk like the blind, and their blood shall be spilled out like dust, and their guts like dung.” Verse 17aβ which returns to prophetic speech, was later inserted in-between. “The glossator did not take into account that in v. 17a YHWH is speaking.”⁵⁸ Here the punishment is restricted to the wicked only—as in v. 3aβ and v. 6. Duhm

⁵⁵ Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag*, 430.

⁵⁶ Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 116.

⁵⁷ Later this application was taken up in Isa 2:15 as part of the poem on the Day of YHWH (Isa 2:12–17). Otto Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja: Kapitel 1–12* (ATD 17; 5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 75: “In terms of religion history the expectation of the coming Last Judgement expressed here does not belong to the eighth century B.C.E. but to the Persian Era.”

⁵⁸ Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 116.

concludes: “This favourite sentence of the glossators must be set back to the margin.”⁵⁹ His conclusion however is not adequate, for in v. 18aa the prophecy against the rich and wicked continues. Finally in 2:3 the positive equivalent follows in form of the admonition of the godly *humble of the land* (עֲנִי הַאֲרֶץ)⁶⁰ to hide themselves and to seek for humility for to be saved in the coming catastrophe.⁶¹ “Here the late post-exilic piety is speaking, that was discernible already in 1:6 and lingers in 3:12: The punishment shall not hit all, in any case not the pious.”⁶² On this level the book of Zephaniah has become an eschatological tractate.

Verses 2:1–2 have been added even later. They take up the admonitions of v. 3 for to vary them in face of the coming day of the wrath of YHWH. The linguistic state of these verses is rather weak.

CONCLUSION: THE GROWING PROCESS OF ZEPH 1:1–2:3

At the beginning of the literary process that produced step for step the first part of the book of Zephaniah, there was a cultic proclamation pronounced on occasion of the celebration of the Day of YHWH:

Silence! from before my Lord YHWH!
 For YHWH has prepared a sacrifice, he has sanctified his invitees.
 The great Day of YHWH is near! Near and coming very fast:
 a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and cry.
 (Zeph 1:7a, bβ, 14a, 15bγ–16a)

Read without the supposed secondary additions, this piece of liturgy is the best example to be found in the Old Testament for the originally positive meaning of the term יוֹם־יְהוָה. The positive meaning is much clearer than in Amos 5:18–20 where it is only to be understood by negation of the negative.

⁵⁹ Duhm, *Anmerkungen*, 57; cf. Marti, *Dodekapropheton*, 366.

⁶⁰ The term occurs also in Isa 11:4; Amos 8:4; Ps 76:10; Job 24:4; cf. Ps 37:11; Prov 30:14. Cf. Levin, “Das Amosbuch der Anawim,” 270–1.

⁶¹ See also Zeph 3:8bβγ, 12a, and cf. Levin, “Das Amosbuch der Anawim,” 411–4 (repr. 268–71); idem, “The Poor in the Old Testament: Some Observations,” *R&T* 8 (2001): 253–73 (259–60); repr. in idem, *Fortschreibungen*, 322–38 (327).

⁶² Perlitt, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 119.

The Day of YHWH is the day of his theophany when he shall ascend to the throne after successfully defeating the powers of chaos. The command to be silent, on the one hand, and the invitation to play the שׁוֹפָר and to shout in joyful cry, on the other, is no contradiction. In religious terms it is the appropriate twofold reaction of humankind in the face of the twofold revelation of the deity as *tremendum et fascinosum*.

The cultic proclamation was later interpreted as a prophecy of doom, quite in line with the description of the Day of YHWH found in the book of Amos. The definition יום עֲבָרָה הַיּוֹם הַהוּא “that day is a day of wrath” was inserted, quoting the negative determination וְאֶפְלָח חֶשֶׁךְ of Amos 5:18bβ, 20b and expanding it with two similar paired terms: צָרָה וּמְצוּקָה “distress and stress” and שְׂאָה וּמְשׂוֹאָה “destruction and devastation.”

There had to be a reason for the announced punishment; finding one was the task of the next editor. He added the *sin of Manasseh*, which in post-exilic times was seen as the main reason why Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians. The details were to be found in the edited form of the book of Jeremiah as well as in the record of 2 Kgs 23. By this revision the book of Zephaniah received its alleged historical setting in the time of King Josiah. However, because the editor depended on the language of the book of Ezekiel, he could not have written in the seventh century.

Later editors attributed to the Day of YHWH the meaning of the eschatological doomsday. No doubt, this was done in postexilic times. The motto 1:2–3 that introduces this thematic layer alludes to the flood story of the Yahwistic source of the Pentateuch. This interpretation formed a framework, vv. 17–18 serving as the backward frame (with an appendix in 2:1–3). The Day of YHWH is given the meaning of the final judgment: “The sound of the Day of YHWH is bitter, a warrior cries out there” (v. 14b). The impending dangerous force of the Day of YHWH is stressed. Now it is definitively clear that the sound of the Day of YHWH is not the sound of joy but of grief and fear.

The godly poor shall be saved for their obedience to the Torah. The impious and rich, on the other hand, shall be exterminated by the impending chaos. Thus, in its final shape the book of Zephaniah grew to become the favorite reading of the pious in the Second Temple period. It was this form of the book that served Thomas a Celano in the thirteenth century CE as a model for his famous hymn *Dies irae*: “*quantus tremor est futurus, quando iudex est venturus, cuncta stricte discussurus!*” “What great trembling shall be in those days when the judge will come to investigate strictly all things.” The dimension of apocalypticism cannot be overlooked, and we may easily imagine the religious milieu in which those visions came into being: “I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and

lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of YHWH, for they shall pasture and lie down, and none shall make them afraid” (Zeph 3:12, 13b).⁶³

⁶³ Many thanks to Lester L. Grabbe for improving the English style.