MIDWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Spring 2024 (Vol. 23/ No. 1)

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ARTICLES

Perspectives on Zephaniah's Macrostructure: Critiques and a Proposal

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

Research Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology,
Rich and Judy Hastings Endowed Chair of Old Testament Studies,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.
www.jasonderouchie.com

Few ministers preach from Zephaniah today, but Luther declared: "Among the minor prophets, he makes the clearest prophecies about the kingdom of Christ."[1] A book's message is communicated through its argument, and Zephaniah exhibits a purposeful argument with a high level of rhetorical and structural unity.[2] This study seeks to evaluate some of the approaches to the book's overall macrostructure,[3] not addressing redaction-critical approaches that disregard the book's integrity by

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[1] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Zephaniah," in *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea–Malachi*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Richard J. Dinda, vol. 18 of *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 319.

[2] Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 13–14; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 20; Ernst R. Wendland and David J. Clark, "Zephaniah: Anatomy and Physiology of a Dramatic Prophetic Text," *JOTT* 16 (2003): 4.

[3] In this essay, macrostructure refers to a literary work's overall organization and argument––what some linguists call "macro-segmentation." An interpreter must not only identify a book's component parts or segments but must also assess how they interrelate to communicate an author's message.

advancing disjointed later redactions.[4] Six approaches to the book's organization are common: (1) a three-part structure related to speech-forms;[5] (2) a kernel with inclusio representing the whole;[6] (3) a prophetic drama with two-character dialogue;[7] (4) a dramatic prophecy with thematic development;[8] (5) a thematic chiasm;[9] (6) a two-part argument with a setting followed by exhortations.[10] This study will overview and

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[4] E.g., Tchavdar S. Hadjiev, "Survival, Conversion and Restoration: Reflections on the Redaction History of the Book of Zephaniah," *VT* 61.4 (2011): 570–81; Christoph Levin, "Zephaniah: How This Book Became Prophecy," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Martti Nissinen, ANEM 4 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011).

[5] See Wilhelm Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, vol. 3 of *KAT* 13 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975), 255–56; Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*, BZAW 198 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 19; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 162–63; Klaus Seybold, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja* (Zurich: TVZ, 1991), 85–86; Robert A. Bennett, "The Book of Zephaniah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *NIB*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 7:669; J. Alec Motyer, "Zephaniah," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 162–63; Johannes Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), v–vi, 25–27.

[6] Ivan J. Ball Jr., "The Rhetorical Shape of Zephaniah," in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 155–65; Ivan Jay Ball Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley, CA: BIBAL, 1988).

[7] See Paul R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*, JSOTSup 69 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), esp. 105–16.

[8] See Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 15.

[9] See Clint Sheehan, "Kingdom through Covenant: The Structure and Theology of Zephaniah," *BRT/RBT* 6.2 (1996): 7–21; David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 310–14.

[10] Marvin A Sweeney, "A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 388–408; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets,*

evaluate the initial five perspectives of Zephaniah's macrostructure. It will then sketch the sixth approach, supplying a basic overview of the book's message using a textlinguistic-rhetorical methodology. Nevertheless, a more expanded justification for the claims made in the latter proposal requires an additional study.[11]

1. Critiquing Alternative Approaches to Zephaniah's Macrostructure

1.1. Zephaniah as a Three-Part Structure Related to Speech-Forms

Many scholars approaching Zephaniah's structure posit something akin to the tripartite schema that Westermann identified in many prophets: speeches of (1) judgment to the prophet's own nation (Zeph 1:2–2:3); (2) judgment to foreign nations (2:4–15); (3) salvation to the prophet's own nation (3:1–20).[12] While some features in the oracle's

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Part 2, FOTL 22 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 163–250; Jason S. DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, vol. 32 of *ZECOT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming). While Renz is "disinclined to isolate smaller units from the overarching literary context of the book of Zephaniah," he is "not convinced that Zephaniah has an intricate design in which different units clearly correspond to each other in a way that is rhetorically significant." Thomas Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 425, 430. As such, he does not distinguish primary from supportive material (e.g., exhortation from motivation) but chooses instead simply to list in succession ten "clear divisions of the text." Ibid., 431. Zephaniah's rhetorical use of imperatives, repetition, and connectors like וְ ("and"), כִּי ("for, because"), and לָכֵן ("therefore") strongly suggests the prophet is doing more than Renz sees.

[11] See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Zephaniah's Macrostructure: A Textlinguistic-Rhetorical Analysis," a paper to be published from the proceedings of the Macro Analysis of Hebrew Poetic and Prophetic Discourse Conference held at Dallas International University, October 2023. See also the "Structure and Literary Form" sections in DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, forthcoming.

[12] Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 95; cf. Ehud Ben Zvi, "Understanding the Message of the Tripartite Prophetic Books," *ResQ* 35.2 (1993): 93–100. For this approach to Zephaniah, see footnote 5 above.

content align with these categories, many details in the text show that this view of the book's structure is simplistic. Indeed, the tripartite approach fails to appreciate that declarations of punishment on Judah (1:4–13; 3:1–7) are intermixed with those against all nations (1:2–3, 14–18; 2:5–15), that the celebrated salvation includes a remnant from many peoples (3:8–20), and that the promises of dread and hope motivate higher-level exhortations to seek the Lord together (2:1–4) and to wait for him (3:8).[13] Six examples will suffice.

1. In 1:2–18, YHWH declares punishment against not only Judah (1:4–13) but also the whole world (1:2–3, 14–18). Furthermore, the warnings are themselves subordinate to the exclamation 'hush!' in 1:7, which shows that 1:2–18 is a low-level prophetic exhortation designed to provide a setting for the following primary charges.
2. The oracle's shift to high-level prophetic exhortation in 2:1–3 includes five masculine plural imperatives ('bind yourselves together and become a bundle … seek … seek … seek!'). Then, 3:8 builds upon these with another masculine plural imperative ('wait!'). Together, these indicate a major shift from the message's setting (1:2–18) to its main substance (2:1–3:20).
3. The threats against the foreign nations in 2:5–15 parallel the threat to Jerusalem in 3:1–7 (both units beginning with 'Woe!'). Together these threats supply two unmarked reasons why the remnant must seek YHWH together (2:1–3). That is, declarations of judgment against Judah's neighbors are specifically designed to motivate the remnant in Judah and other lands to seek YHWH. The woe statements do not exist independently but function dependently to elevate rhetorically other sections within the overall argument. Thus, the three-part schema over-compartmentalizes the woe statements.

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[13] Some like Rudolph minimizes these differences by treating the misaligned parts of Zephaniah as secondary late additions, but this hypothesis of composition has no material basis and does not address the text as it stands.

4. Because 3:1–7 declares punishment on Judah, scholars affirming the three-part schema are forced to do one of two things: (1) place these verses with what precedes, thus labeling the second of the three-parts more generally as judgment against both foreign nations and Judah (e.g., Motyer, Bennett) or (2) include both punishment and salvation within 3:1–20 (e.g., Ben Zvi, Roberts). Neither option fits neatly within the three-part schema.

5. The inference marker לָכֵן ('therefore') plus masculine plural imperative 'wait!' (חַכּוּ) in 3:8 draws a positive conclusion from the previous statements of punishment against the foreign nations and Jerusalem (2:5–3:7). The inferential marker adds stage two to the exhortations begun in 2:1–3. All the promises related to future salvation that follow motivate the patient waiting for YHWH's decisive action.

6. The salvation speeches to the prophet's own nation address not the nation itself but a remnant from both Judah and the rest of the world who are together the new 'Israel.'[14]

As presented, the common tripartite structure related to generalized prophetic speech forms fails to account sufficiently for the logical flow and rhetorical development of Zephaniah's argument both with respect to content and linguistic features. While some propose modified three-part schemas that at times more closely track the book's rhetorical development, none of these approaches give the imperatives in 2:1, 3 and 3:8 their due weight in distinguishing the setting from the exhortation

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[14] Against Ben Zvi, "Understanding the Message of the Tripartite Prophetic Books," 94; cf. 100. For a defense that the new "Israel" includes the remnant from both ethnic Israelites and foreign nations, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Rejoicing Then and Now: Pleasures on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 3:11–20)," *BSac* (2024): forthcoming. See also the section titled "God Incorporating Enemy Peoples in Its Biblical Context" within "Canonical Significance of 2:5–15" and (2) the commentary at 2:6–7, 9cd; 3:9–10, 12–14, 16 in DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, forthcoming.

section.[15] Concerning the tripartite proposal, Sweeney rightly asserts, "Close attention to the grammar and syntax … generally demonstrates that other organizational principles determine the present form of prophetic books."[16]

1.2. A Kernel with Inclusio Representing the Whole

Ball notes how Zephaniah marks its body by an inclusio of the double use of roots, opening with אָסֹף אָסֵף ("I will surely gather," 1:2)[17] and closing with בְּשׁוּבִי אֶת־שְׁבוּתֵיכֶם ("in my restoring your turnings/circumstances," 3:20).[18] He also sees the same thing happening

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[15] For example, Driver proposed: (1) menace (1:2–18), (2) admonition (2:1–3:7), (3) promise (3:8–20). S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), 341. Similarly, Renaud suggested a three-part schema related to the day of YHWH: (1) YHWH's universal day of wrath (1:2–18), (2) the emergence of an eschatological remnant out of the catastrophe (2:1–3:8), and (3) the day of salvation and restoration (3:9–20). B. Renaud, *Michée, Sophonie, Nahum* (Paris: Gabalda, 1987), 177–78, 196, 217, 245. Finally, Irsigler advanced: (1) the day of judgment centrally over Jerusalem (but expanded to universal final judgment) (1:2–18), (2) the day of the great judgment of the nations (including Judah) (2:1–3:8), (3) the day of purification and salvation (for the nations, Jerusalem, and Israel in the diaspora) (3:9–20). Hubert Irsigler, *Zefanja*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002), 8–11, 40–49.

[16] Marvin A. Sweeney, "Zephaniah: A Paradigm for the Study of the Prophetic Books," *CurBS* 7 (1999): 121; cf. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 234.

[17] Many scholars treat the phrase אָסֹף אָסֵף as a Qal infinitive absolute of אסף ("to gather") with the Hiphil *yiqtol* of סוף ("to bring to an end"). However, grammatical and contextual evidence strongly supports that both forms are indeed from the same root אסף. See Jason S. DeRouchie, "YHWH's Future Ingathering in Zephaniah 1:2: Interpreting אָסֹף אָסֵף," *HS* 59 (2018): 173–91. Intriguingly, Ball views the two forms as distinct roots but still regards them for his argument as if they are the same. Ball, *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah*, 281.

[18] Bracke notes that the phrase "is a technical term indicating a restoration to an earlier time of well-being," whether as "Yahweh's reversal of his judgment" (most common) or, at the very least (as with Job), "the alleviation of affliction and a

in 2:1–7, such that the unit opens with הִתְקוֹשְׁשׁוּ וָקוֹשּׁוּ ("Bind yourselves together and become a bundle," 2:1) and וְשָׁב שְׁבוּתָם ("and he will restore their turning/circumstance," 2:7). This parallel matched by a careful analysis of 2:1–7 in relation to the whole leads him to conclude that 2:1–7 provides in kernel form the message and structure of the entire book of Zephaniah.[19]

The Structure	The Kernel	The Whole
Warning of the Impending Day of YHWH	Zeph 2:1–3	Zeph 1:2–18
Defeat of Judah's Enemies; Oracles against the Nations	Zeph 2:4	Zeph 2:8–15
Woe with Resulting Salvation for the Remnant of Judah	Zeph 2:6–7	Zeph 3:1–20

Table 1. Ball's View of Zephaniah 2:1–7 as Representative of Zephaniah's Message

While intriguing, Ball's proposal fails on many fronts.

1. Ball does not allow 2:1–7 to function *within* the argument of the whole book but instead sees the argument wrapping around the kernel. This results in a disjointed overall argument.
2. Ball states that both 2:1–3 and 1:2–18 are "primarily concerned with the Day of YHWH as a day of judgment and punishment,"[20] but this fails to account for the distinctive use of five imperatives in 2:1, 3, which have no parallel in chapter 1. While 1:7 includes the exclamatory interjection הַס ("silence!"), this low-level exhortation only prepares for and does not compare with the strong exhortations that open chapter 2.
3. While 2:4 predicts punishment against the Philistine cities and 2:8–15 declares judgment against Judah's other neighbors, Ball's interpretation fails to find a rhetorical parallel in 2:8–15 with

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return to a circumstance even more prosperous than … originally enjoyed." John M. Bracke, "*Šûb Šebût*: A Reappraisal," *ZAW* 97.2 (1985): 244, 242.

[19] Ball writes, "Zeph 2:1–7, as a kernel, imitates the structural and thematic shape of the whole" even as "the whole imitates 2:1–7." Ball, "The Rhetorical Shape of Zephaniah," 155; Ball, *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah*, 282–83.

[20] Ball, *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah*, 283.

how 2:4 supplies a marked grammatical reason ("for") to "seek" YHWH in 2:3.

4. Ball's separation of Zephaniah's grief over the state and fate of Philistia (2:5–7) from his declarations of doom on the other foreign nations (2:8–15) makes 2:8 bear an abrupt beginning. Furthermore, it seems more likely that the "Woe" statements in 2:5 and 3:1 introduce parallel statements of punishment on Judah's neighbors (2:5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7),[21] with the former being presented as four compass points surrounding Judah herself: Philistia to the West (2:5–7), Moab and Bene-Ammon to the East (2:8–11), and Cush and Assyria to the South and North (2:12–15).[22]

5. 2:7 mentions divine favor toward the remnant of Judah in the context of YHWH's punishment of Philistia. But this same favor is highlighted again in relation to God's judgment of Moab and Bene-Ammon (2:9), and Ball's model fails to account for this.

6. While both 2:5–7 and 3:1–20 begin with "Woe" and end with a promise of YHWH's restoring the remnant's fortunes, the various units in chapter 3 find no corresponding parts in 2:5–7.[23] 3:1–7 predicts God's judgment of Jerusalem, 3:8–10 charges the remnant of Judah and beyond to "wait" for YHWH to punish and redeem, and 3:9–20 supplies various motivations for this charge.

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[21] So, too, Daniel Hojoon Ryou, *Zephaniah's Oracles against the Nations: A Synchronic and Diachronic Study of Zephaniah 2:1–3:8*, BibInt 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 284.

[22] So, too, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "Zephaniah," in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 10 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 140; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 296; Ryou, *Zephaniah's Oracles against the Nations*, 323–25; Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 204.

[23] A point that Renz also makes. Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 429–30.

1.3. Zephaniah as a Prophetic Drama with Two-Character Dialogue

House argues that Zephaniah is "prophetic drama"[24] and that YHWH and Zephaniah's distinct speeches provide "the key to the book's structure."[25] Specifically, the shifts between first- and third-person address signal seven sets of speeches that shift back and forth between YHWH and his prophet.[26] Here "the characters do not speak directly to one another" but instead "supplement and complement each other's words."[27] The result is that "the two characters work as interchangeable revealers, and the word of the two is shown as one united word."[28]

	Internal Structure	Plot Development
	Act 1. 1:2–17	
1	Scene 1. General Judgment and Explanation (Y) 1:2–6 / (Z) 1:7	Exposition (1:1–7)
2	Scene 2. Judgment of Judah and Explanation (Y) 1:8–13 / (Z) 1:14–16	Complication (1:8–2:11)
3	Scene 3. YHWH's Closing Soliloquy (Y) 1:17 /	
	Act 2. 1:18–3:5	
	Scene 1. Soliloquy of Judgment and Hope (Z) 1:18–2:7	
4	Scene 2. More Judgment and Hope (Y) 2:8–10 / (Z) 2:11	
5	Scene 3. Final Threats (Y) 2:12 / (Z) 2:13–3:5	Climax of Crisis (2:12–3:5)
	Act 3. 3:6–20	
6	Scene 1. Resolution (Y) 3:6–13 / (Z) 3:14–17	Resolution of Crisis (3:6–13) Falling Action and Conclusion (3:14–20)
7	Scene 2. Closing Soliloquy (Y) 3:18–20	

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[24] House, *Zephaniah*, esp. 105–16.

[25] Ibid., 57.

[26] Ibid., 56.

[27] Ibid., 58.

[28] Ibid., 59.

Table 2 (above). House's Schema for the Book of
Zephaniah's Voices and Structure

While the shift in voices is a distinct feature of Zephaniah, House's proposal is problematic.

1. House imprecisely distinguishes YHWH's voice from Zephaniah's. For example, YHWH speaks in 1:2–6, yet the verses refer to YHWH in third person both in the phrase "the utterance of YHWH" (1:2–3) and in the extended description of the remnant of the Baal (1:5–6). Wendland and Clark helpfully conclude: "The occurrence of third-person references to YHWH is not diagnostic of an utterance of the prophet, except when they happen to occur in the subject position."[29]

2. House's third set of speeches appear in different scenes and acts,[30] and he treats the different voices in set six as performing different roles in the plot's development.[31] In short, while he maintains that the character shifts guide the book's organization, he himself recognizes that the book does not consistently allow for this approach.

3. House never considers numerous linguistic features that guide the book's macro-structure. Among these are:
    *   the rhetorical and structural significance of the masculine plural imperatives in 2:1, 3 and 3:8 for establishing the book's main exhortations;
    *   the rhetorical significance of the feminine singular imperatives and masculine plural imperative in 3:14 for shaping the book's motivational climax;
    *   the rhetorical and structural significance of address shifts whether in grammatical person (e.g., 2:4 with 2:5–7) or in grammatical gender and number (e.g., feminine singular in 3:1–7, 11–13, 14a, c–15, 16–19 and masculine plural in 3:8–10, 14b, 20);

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[29] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 6.
[30] House, *Zephaniah*, 64–65, 120–21.
[31] Ibid., 66-67.

- the role of the connector וְ (gloss = "and") in establishing groupings of thought (e.g., 1:14a with 1:17–18; 2:12–14), and the role of asyndeton (i.e., lack of connector) in signaling either a fresh beginning or explication (e.g., 2:1, 5);[32]
- the functional significance of various discourse markers (e.g., וְהָיָה ["and it will happen"] in 1:8 and 1:12; לָכֵן ["therefore"] in 3:8), connecting particles (e.g., גַּם ["also"] in 1:18; 2:12), and subordinate conjunctions (e.g., כִּי ["for, because"] in 2:4 and 3:8–9);
- the structural significance of parallel phrases (e.g., "the [great] day of YHWH is near" in 1:7 and 1:14; "woe" in 2:5 and 3:1; "instruction" in 3:2 and 7; and "in that day" in 3:11 and 16).

The alternating voices add dramatic effect to the book and show the inextricable unity between the words of YHWH and the prophet. Nevertheless, these changes do not organize the book; thematic shifts and formal linguistic features do.[33]

1.4. Zephaniah as a Dramatic Prophecy with Thematic Development

Similar to House, Wendland and Clark label Zephaniah a "dramatic prophecy"[34] and view the whole as "an antiphonal text" with three major

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[32] See Jason S. DeRouchie, "*Waw* and Asyndeton as Guides to Macrostructure in Biblical Hebrew Prose," in *Like Nails Firmly Fixed: Essays on the Text and Language of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures in Honor of Peter J. Gentry*, ed. Jonathan Kiel, Phillip Marshall, and John Meade (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 129–50; cf. Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 103–109.

[33] Similarly, Kapelrud writes, "The division between divine and prophetic speech is irrelevant in Zephaniah. It does not add anything to a better understanding of the message of the prophet." Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, 49.

[34] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 15.

units or "dialogues."[35] However, they offer a more refined approach to distinguishing YHWH's voice from the prophets––namely, third-person references to YHWH only signal Zephaniah's voice when occurring in the subject position.[36] As such, they offer a different schematic of the character's "voices." Table 3 compares my view of the book's "voices" with House's and Wendland and Clark's.[37]

House		Wendland and Clark		DeRouchie	
(Y) 1:2–6	(Z) 1:7	(Y) 1:2–6	(Z) 1:7	(Y) 1:2–6	(Z) 1:7
(Y) 1:8–13	(Z) 1:14–16	(Y) 1:8–10	(Z) 1:11	(Y) 1:8–13	(Z) 1:14–16
(Y) 1:17		(Y) 1:12–13	(Z) 1:14–16	(Y) 1:17	(Z) 1:18
		(Y) 1:17	(Z) 1:18		
	(Z) 1:18–2:7		(Z) 2:1–4		(Z) 2:1–4
(Y) 2:8–10	(Z) 2:11	(Y) 2:5	(Z) 2:6–7	(Y) 2:5	(Z) 2:6–7
(Y) 2:12	(Z) 2:13–3:5	(Y) 2:8–10	(Z) 2:11	(Y) 2:8–10	(Z) 2:11
		(Y) 2:12	(Z) 2:13–15	(Y) 2:12	(Z) 2:13–15
				(Y) 3:1–4	(Z) 3:5
				(Y) 3:6–7d	(Z) 3:7ef
(Y) 3:6–13	(Z) 3:14–17		(Z) 3:1–5	(Y) 3:8–10	
(Y) 3:18–20		(Y) 3:6–7b	(Z) 3:7c	(Y) 3:11–13	(Z) 3:14–15
		(Y) 3:8–13	(Z) 3:14–17	(Y) 3:16–18	
		(Y) 3:18–20		(Y) 3:19–20	

Table 3. The Voices in Zephaniah: A Comparison of Perspectives

My assessment of the speeches of YHWH and Zephaniah in the book differs from Wendland and Clarks at only three major points:

1. Wendland and Clark claim 1:11 is Zephaniah's voice, for they parse הֵילִ֫ילוּ as a masculine plural imperative ("Wail!") and compare it to the prophet's masculine plural imperative plus vocative statements in 2:1, 3 and 3:14.[38] However, YHWH speaks a masculine plural imperative in 3:8, and the switch to the

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[35] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 4-5.

[36] Ibid., 6.

[37] Along with the voices of YHWH and Zephaniah, there are several brief embedded speeches within the book: Zeph 1:12ef; 2:15bc; 3:7bc; 3:16b–18b.

[38] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 7. This pattern is followed more recently by Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 498–99.

prophet in 1:11 would be quite intrusive. Furthermore, הֵילִילוּ is more likely a third common plural *qatal* form ("they have wailed").

2. Wendland and Clark assign 3:1–5 to Zephaniah in light of the third-person use of YHWH as clause subject in 3:5 and because they believe the prophet's speech begun in 2:13 has not been interrupted.[39] However, because the statement of "Woe" in 2:5 is YHWH's speech and because it parallels the "Woe" of 3:1, 3:1–4 are most likely YHWH's words. This conclusion follows the same logic Wendland and Clark use when they attribute 1:14–16 to the prophet in light of the parallel with 1:7.[40]

3. In view of the third-person statement about YHWH in 3:15–17, Wendland and Clark attribute 3:14–17 to Zephaniah.[41] While 3:14–15 contains the prophet's voice, the parallel "in that day" phrase that begins 3:11, 16 suggests a return to YHWH's voice in 3:16–20, which includes an embedded speech in 3:16b–18 that includes his voice and that of an unnamed messenger.[42]

Significantly, though Wendland and Clark identify the different speakers, they organize the book by other means. With respect to unit divisions, they draw two different lines. *First*, they rightly see the imperative plus vocative combination in 2:1 signaling a major unit shift but miss the significance of 3:8.[43] They claim 3:1 starts the third major "dialogue" in the book, simply because there is common ambiguity of the speaker in both 2:1 and 3:1.[44] This approach misses how the "Woe" (הוי) at the head of both 2:5 and 3:1 introduces parallel laments over the state and fate of the rebels from both the neighboring nations (2:5–15) and

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[39] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 11–12.

[40] Ibid., 7.

[41] Ibid., 13.

[42] For a defense that YHWH is the primary speaker of 3:16–20 and that 3:16b–18 is a single embedded speech with voices from both an unnamed prophet and YHWH, see the commentary at 3:16–18 and especially 3:16; 3:16b–18; 3:18.

[43] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 9.

[44] Ibid., 12.

Jerusalem (3:1–7). They recognize that 3:8 marks a shift in the discourse (e.g., by the inference marker לָכֵן ["therefore"] and the masculine plural imperative הַכּוּ ["wait!"] that recalls 2:1, 3).[45] However, they treat 3:8 as the start of a sub-unit rather than the beginning of the book's second main exhortation.

Second, Wendland and Clark see an intermixing of "commendation" (1:2–18), appeal (2:1–3), and motivation (*negative* 2:4–3:8 / *positive* 3:9–20).[46] While these statements downplay the strong appeal in 3:8, they highlight the way negative and positive motivation dominates 2:4–3:7 and 3:8b–20b, respectively. This switch from negative to positive motivation further suggests that 3:8 advances Zephaniah's message more so than 3:1.

In addition to these insights, Wendland and Clark helpfully trace the shifts in tone within the book's argument from the perspective of the remnant audience (or what they term "the idealized 'Judean'").[47] They do this by plotting alterations in three thematic spheres: (1) *positive* expressions of gentle consolation and abundant blessing [+], (2) *neutral* calls to repentance, affirmations of vindication in relation to the enemy, or statements about God's character or deeds [0]; and (3) *negative* declarations of solemn warning and severe punishment [–]. While table 4 adapts their conclusions in minor ways,[48] their work effectively shows

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[45] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 13.

[46] Ibid., 38.

[47] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 38–39. For a comparable adaptation that leaves Wendland and Clark's own plot points, see Christopher S. Tachick, *"King of Israel" and "Do Not Fear, Daughter of Zion": The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, Reformed Academic Dissertations 11 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 106.

[48] Here are my changes: (1) Wendland and Clark (WC) treat all of 1:7 as neutral, but 1:7a uses an exclamation to urge listeners to revere YHWH, whereas 1:7b begins a ground that functions as a warning. (2) WC mark 2:1 as negative, but the imperatives work with those in 2:3 as part of the call to covenant renewal. (3) WC treat 2:4–6, 8, 10–11ab, and 12–15 as neutral, but they are part of a ground that also serves as a warning, just like 3:1–7. (4) WC tag 3:8 as negative, but in it YHWH charges the remnant to wait for him and then motivates them by stressing that he will put an end to all evil. (5) WC treat all of 3:9–20 as

how the book's thematic flow moves from warning and punishment to consolation and blessing. As they assert, "there is a progressive buildup of theological and ethical import through the text, climaxing in chapter 3 to reach a final point of end stress (3:18–20)."[49]
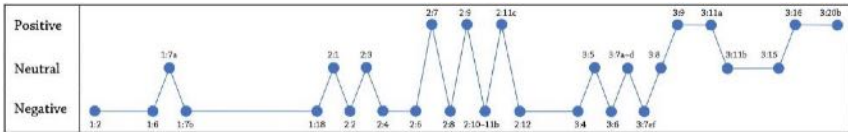

Table 4. Thematic Development in Zephaniah

These thematic shifts mark significant elements in the text's dramatic flow, but they do not highlight the rhetorical argument itself. Although Wendland and Clark claim that the book's hortatory peak is 2:3,[50] they fail to clarify how the imperatives in 2:3 relate to those in 2:1 or how this grouping of five imperatives relate to those in 3:8, 14.

1.5. Zephaniah as a Thematic Chiasm

As Smith notes, a chiasm is "a figure consisting of two panels where the units comprising the first panel correspond inversely to the units comprising the second; an explicit center may or may not be present."[51] Sheehan and Dorsey have proposed different chiastic frameworks for the book. While thorough assessment is not possible here, I will overview their proposals, provide and evaluate some examples, and then present general cautions concerning chiasms.

Sheehan maintains that Zephaniah's structural chiasm is "the key to unlocking the theology of Zephaniah."[52] Table 5 exhibits his proposal.

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positive, but 3:11b–13 clarify the basis for the promise in 3:11a, 3:14 calls for joy, and 3:15 motivates this call for joy by identifying the defeat of every enemy.

[49] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 38.

[50] Wendland and Clark, "Zephaniah," 38.

[51] Craig A. Smith, "Criteria for Biblical Chiasms: Objective Means for Distinguishing Chiasm of Design from Accidental and False Chiasm" (University of Bristol, PhD diss., 2009), 94.

[52] Sheehan, "Kingdom through Covenant," 7–21.

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A    Word of YHWH (1:1a)
  B    Universal Gathering for Judgment (1:2–3)
    C    Judgment of Unfaithful Judah (1:4–6)
      D    Be Silent for Judgment (1:7)
        E    Punishment of Unfaithful Judah (1:8–13)
          F    Judgment of the World (1:14–18)
            G    Judah Called to Repent (2:1–3)
              H    Oracles against the Nations (2:4–10)
                I    God's Kingdom Fully Realized (2:11)
              H'  Oracles against the Nations (2:12–15)
            G'  Judah Warned of Judgment (3:1–8)
          F'   Conversion of the Nations (3:9–10)
        E'   Preservation of Faithful Judah (3:11–13)
      D'  Shout and Sing for Joy! (3:14)
    C'  Blessing of Faithful Judah (3:15–17)
  B'  Universal Gathering for Blessing (3:18–20b)
A'   Says YHWH (3:20c)
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Table 5. Sheehan's Proposed Chiasm in Zephaniah

All parallel themes are antithetical in nature, except in A-A' and H-H', the latter of which surrounds the central verse that captures the book's thesis: "YHWH is fearsome against them, for he has made lean all the gods of the earth, so that all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to him, each from his place" (2:11).[53] The two sides of a level may not only be linked conceptually but also "linguistically through synonyms, antonyms, and repeated words."[54] The following examples highlight weaknesses of Sheehan's approach.

1. In B-B' (1:2–3 / 3:18–20) Sheehan observes three sets of synonymous pairs (אסף "gather" / קבץ "assemble"; אֲדָמָה "ground" / אֶרֶץ "earth"; אָדָם "humanity" / עַם "people") with each side speaking of a universal ingathering including all the world's

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[53] Sheehan, "Kingdom through Covenant," 16.
[54] Ibid., 10.

peoples but for different purposes.[55] Sheehan rightly observes a great reversal in Zephaniah's thought-flow. However, he (1) fails to note how the shift from a *qatal* verb in 3:18 to *yiqtol* verbs in 3:19–20 suggests that 3:18 structurally goes with what precedes rather than what follows; (2) selectively uses data since the same verbs for ingathering occur in 3:8 (Sheehan's G'); and (3) proposes a superficial link since "humanity" in 1:2–3 is all inclusive but the "peoples" of 3:20 are everyone *except the remnant*.

2. With respect to E-E' (1:8–13 / 3:11–13), Sheehan properly notes a shift from the Jerusalemites' unethical behavior in 1:9–11 (e.g., מִרְמָה "deception," 1:9) to the transformed Jerusalemites' ethical behavior in 3:12–13 (e.g., no לְשׁוֹן תַּרְמִית "tongue of deceit," 3:13).[56] He points to the repetition of the phrase "in that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, 1:9–10 / 3:11) as support for this parallel, along with other conceptual links like the wicked's loss of residence (1:13) contrasted to YHWH supplying refuge for the faithful (3:12).[57] However, Sheehan fails to consider that (1) 3:1–7 also highlights Jerusalem's unethical behavior but stands outside his parallel; (2) the lexical link between מִרְמָה and תַּרְמִית is not exact and likely supplies only conceptual recollection to help signal the eschatological reversal; and (3) the phrase "in that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) also occurs in 3:16 (Sheehan's C') setting up 3:11–13 and 3:16–20 as parallel promises to motivate waiting on YHWH (3:8).

3. In G-G' (2:1–3 / 3:1–8) Sheehan helpfully draws together the two main imperatival units of Zephaniah's appeal. However, rather than being complementary calls to pursue YHWH together (2:1, 3) with patient trust (3:8), Sheehan sees them as antithetical–– the first providing a call to repentance and the second a warning of judgment.[58] He reads 3:8 in this way because he thinks it draws an inference only from 3:1–7 instead of all 2:5–3:7. Thus, he fails to address adequately two features of text-grammar and style

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[55] Sheehan, "Kingdom through Covenant," 11.

[56] Ibid., 12.

[57] Ibid., 12-13.

[58] Ibid., 13.

that Zephaniah himself uses to guide the oracle's structure: (1) the inference marker לָכֵן ("therefore") at the head of 3:8; (2) the shift from a feminine singular audience in 3:1–7 (the wicked city Jerusalem) to a masculine plural audience in 3:8 (the faithful remnant); and (3) the parallel uses of "Woe!" (הוֹי) in 2:5 and 3:1 to introduce parallel laments against the state and fate of the foreign nations (2:5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7).[59]

4. Level I (2:11) serves as the center and "climax" of Sheehan's chiasm[60] and is the book's main thesis since it depicts "the realization of the eschatological kingdom of Yahweh."[61] However, at least three reasons make this highly unlikely: (1) The "them" of 2:11a finds its antecedent in Moab and Bene-Ammon of the previous verses, indicating that 2:11 is explicating the punishment against these neighbors (2:9c–11) and part of the support for why the remnant from Judah and other lands should seek YHWH together (2:1, 3). 2:11 cannot be part of the basis for a different main point while also serving as the book's thesis. (2) YHWH's kingship is more explicit in 3:15 than in 2:11. Thus, 3:15 better expresses YHWH's "eschatological kingdom." YHWH as king in 3:15 climactically declares YHWH's kingship by countering the rival "kings/gods" from the book's beginning in 1:5. The statement in 2:11 adds to the vision of 3:15 and not the other way around. (3) Sheehan's proposal misses how the imperatives (e.g., 2:1, 3; 3:8) provide the book's highest-level exhortations and how the book's appeals to YHWH's sovereignty motivate obedience to the imperatives.

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[59] For these features, see the commentary at 3:8a and the "Structure and Literary Form" discussions at 2:5–3:7 and 3:8–10 in DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, ZECOT, forthcoming.

[60] Sheehan, "Kingdom through Covenant," 14.

[61] Ibid., 16.

As seen in Table 6, Dorsey identifies a seven-part symmetry in Zephaniah that places the prophet's call to repentance at the center (Zeph 2:1–3).[62]

A	Coming Judgment upon the Wicked of Jerusalem (1:2–6)
B	Coming Judgment of Corrupt *Leaders* (שָׂרִים) and Rich of Jerusalem (1:7–13)
C	YHWH's Judgement of All Nations: Great and Terrible Day of YHWH (1:14–18)
D	CENTER: Call to Repentance (2:1–3)
C'	YHWH's Judgment of All Nations: Oracles against the Nations (2:4–15)
B'	Coming Judgment of Corrupt Political *Leaders* (including שָׂרִים) and Religious Leaders of Jerusalem (3:1–7)
A'	Coming Restoration of Jerusalem and Its Fortunes (3:8–20)

Table 6. Dorsey's Proposed Chiasm in Zephaniah

This schema has much more to commend, for it rightly recognizes numerous topical correspondences throughout the book and highlights the movement from judgment to restoration made possible by heeding the call to seek the Lord together in 2:1, 3 ('bind yourselves together and become a bundle … seek … seek … seek!'). It also emphasizes the way punishment and restoration serve to motivate the book's hortatory appeals.[63] As for evaluation, the scope of A-A' (1:2–6 // 3:8–20) needs broadening since 1:2–6 includes universal as well as local elements and because 3:9–10 has a remnant of peoples from the world gathering to YHWH in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the repetition of the clause "the [great] day of YHWH is near" (1:7, 14) signals the shift from local to global punishment in B-C (1:7–13, 14–18), whereas the repetition of the particle הוי ("Woe") in 2:5 and 3:1 signals the comparable movement from global to local punishment in C'-B' (2:5–15; 3:1–7).

These elements noted, features of content and grammar caution one from fully embracing Dorsey's proposal.

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[62] Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 310–14.

[63] Dorsey writes, "The placement of the call to repentance at the center of the symmetry underscores its key role for the reversal of Judah's fortunes. And closing the book with encouraging, uplifting units of promise and hope indicates the positive motivational purpose of the book." Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 314.

1. Treating B-C (1:7–13, 14–18) principally as statements of punishment fails to account for the way the interjection הַס ("silence!") in 1:7 makes all 1:7–18 a low-level exhortation to revere God.

2. Dorsey places all 2:4–15 together. However, three factors suggest he has misconstrued the unit division: (a) While 2:4 and 2:5–8 all address divine judgment against the Philistines, 2:4 casts the cities in third person whereas 2:5–8 addresses the peoples in second person. (b) 2:4 opens with the subordinate conjunction כִּי ("for, because"), signaling that the foreseen punishment against Philistia provides a reason for seeking YHWH in 2:3. (c) The parallel uses of "Woe!" (הוי) in 2:4 and 3:1 suggests that the prophet is intentionally paralleling the state and fate of the neighboring nations (2:5–15) with that of Jerusalem (3:1–7).

3. Following the call to repentance through the masculine plural imperatives in 2:1, 3 (D), Dorsey sees three units––C'-B'-A' (2:4–15; 3:1–7, 8–20), which together "provide motivation for returning to Yahweh."[64] He fails to account enough, however, for the rhetorical role of לָכֵן ("therefore") in 3:8 and the comparable masculine plural imperative in 3:8, the latter of which most likely provides a second stage to the prophet's main exhortation.

Thompson and deSilva have noted three recurring problems with proposed chiasms in Scripture, each of which Sheehan's proposal exhibits: (1) creating a chiasm by discounting formal markers, (2) discovering a chiasm by selectively reading key terms, and (3) developing a chiasm by selectively shaping summary statements for major blocks of text.[65] Smith provides the following helpful criteria for distinguishing "chiasm by design" from accidental or false chiasm. Applying these criteria would have strengthened Sheehan's proposal.

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[64] Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 314.

[65] Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, JSNTSup 111 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 30–33; David A. deSilva, "X Marks the Spot? A Critique of the Use of Chiasm in Macro-Structural Analyses of Revelation," *JSNT* 30.3 (2008): 343.

1. *Coherence with other structures:* A true chiasm will complement rather than override the book's macro-structure.[66] In the examples supplied, Dorsey's proposal crossed clearly marked textual boundaries at C' (2:4–15), and Sheehan's proposal did the same in B' (3:18–20) and G' (3:1–8).

2. *Significant correspondences:* At least six levels of potential correspondence exist between units, and the objectivity of these decreases as one moves to the right in the following hierarchy of categories: (1) Verbal; (2) Syntactical; (3) Form; (4) Scene/Setting; (5) Conceptual; (6) Phonetic.[67] Dorsey highlights two verbal parallels: שָׂרִים ("leaders") in 1:8 (B) and 3:4 (B'), and חָמָס ("violence") in 1:9 (B) and חמס ("do violence") in 3:4 (B'). However, most of his proposed symmetry is only conceptual (one of the lowest degrees of objectivity), and the shift from punishment to restoration is natural in the Latter Prophets and not necessarily a sign of structure. Similarly, most of Sheehan's parallels were conceptual, but there were some scene/setting links and verbal parallels (especially synonyms). Neither of the latter, however, were usually limited to the relative units.

3. *Significant symmetry:* A chiasm by design will show a statistically significant degree of symmetry between parts in at least some of these ways: (1) arrangement of units; (2) macro-balance between panels; (3) micro-balance between panels; (4) symmetrical distribution of verbal elements.[68] While Sheehan's proposal highlights at least two of these features, his observations do not account for all the data. (a) In B-B' he sees three uses of an ingathering verb (אסף "gather") in 1:2–3 paralleling ingathering verbs (אסף and קבץ "assemble") in 3:18–20. Yet 3:18 likely goes with what precedes, and the same verbs are in 3:8. (b) Sheehan

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[66] Smith, "Criteria for Biblical Chiasms," 120–49.
[67] Ibid., 150-83.
[68] Ibid., 184-257.

claims Zephaniah promotes "kingdom through covenant" since Zephaniah's chiasm often uses Deuteronomy.[69] Zephaniah does rely on Deuteronomy (though some of Sheehan's proposed links are questionable). Nevertheless, Sheehan's failure to address the strong significance of other books like Genesis and Isaiah taints his conclusions (see below on "Zephaniah's Use of Scripture").

4. *Discernable function:* The chiasm must have a communicative purpose. On a decreasing scale of objectivity, one of at least four functions are possible: (1) Semantic; (2) Rhetorical; (3) Aesthetic; (4) Mnemonic/Organizational.[70] Dorsey's proposal emphasizes the book's shift from punishment to renewal and helpfully elevates the call to repentance in 2:1–3 as one of the book's rhetorical high points and the location of the highest concentration of imperatives. The simplicity of the whole schema would also help people commit it to memory. While Sheehan's chiasm is likely too large to aid memorization, the schema bears an immediate aesthetic quality and the two sides' repetition (often through contrast) highlights Zephaniah's rhetorical movement from judgment to blessing. Sheehan also claims that Zephaniah intended (the semantic category) to highlight YHWH's sovereignty over all things by placing 2:11 at the center. God's kingship through covenant is foundational to the book's argument, but the chiasm fails to consider how Zephaniah's argument progressively and logically encourages loyalty, and this strongly cautions viewing the book as being intentionally chiastic. Additionally, Sheehan fails to note the prophet's principal thrust is *not* to elevate YHWH's greatness but instead to use this reality to urge his believing audience to seek YHWH together (2:1, 3) and to wait for him (3:8).

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[69] Sheehan, "Kingdom through Covenant," 8–9; cf. 19–20.
[70] Smith, "Criteria for Biblical Chiasms," 258–303.

5. *Discernable authorial affinity:* Chiasm by design is more likely in works that have an affinity for this device.[71] As is his pattern, Dorsey suggests several micro-chiasms within each of the seven larger units, some of which include verbal links, yet his proposals rarely account the flow of the argument signaled through the grammar. Sheehan makes no claim that Zephaniah or any other OT prophet frequently uses chiasm.[72]

The above elements seriously call into question the deliberate chiastic design of the text of Zephaniah. The prophet uses repetition and antithesis, but these are incorporated into a greater logical argument associated with the genre of prophetic exhortation.

2. An Overview of Zephaniah as a Two-Part Argument with a Setting Followed by Exhortations in Two Stages

My method for determining macrostructure within Old Testament prophetic books like Zephaniah resembles what Sweeney and Floyd refer to as the new form criticism[73] in that it focuses on the literary structure, coherence, and purpose of larger discourse units and seeks to balance a careful reading of text grammar with the whole rhetorical argument.[74]

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[71] Smith, "Criteria for Biblical Chiasms," 304–19.

[72] Nevertheless, others like Dorsey see chiasm operative throughout the prophets, including Zephaniah. See Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 310–14.

[73] Sweeney, "A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah"; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*; Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 163–250; cf. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

[74] Patterson's *stylistic* analysis of the book is helpful but is only a surface-level, semantic assessment that does not consider textlinguistic features of the text itself: Richard D. Patterson, "A Literary Look at Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah," *GTJ* 11.1 (1990): 17–28; cf. idem, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary*, Minor Prophets Exegetical Commentary (Dallas: Biblical Studies, 2003).

Like Sweeney and similar to Floyd, I argue that Zephaniah is a two-part argument with a setting followed by exhortations. Nevertheless, my exegetical and theological assessments differ at key points from these scholars (at times substantially), and I organize the book differently especially in relation to the structuring function of Zeph 3:8 and 14's imperatival clauses.

When interpreting prophetic discourse, the present study traces Zephaniah's argument and thought-flow by carefully assessing discourse features like the following:

- the use of the coordinate conjunction *waw* to create chains of discourse that we are to read together (i.e., text blocks);
- the role of asyndeton to signal disjunction due to a fresh beginning, explication, or something else;
- the function of other connecting particles (e.g., כִּי "when, because"; לָכֵן "therefore") to convey various semantic/logical relationships, whether coordinate or subordinate, with the latter expressing support by restatement, distinct statement, or contrary statement;
- other discourse markers (e.g., וְהָיָה "and it happened that"; הִנֵּה "Look!");
- verb patterns (e.g., *wayyiqtol/weqatal*, *qatal/yiqtol*, imperative), word order, and the way both generate marked/unmarked and/or topic/focus/dislocated structures within various discourse types (e.g., historical narrative, directive, anticipatory);
- participant tracking through observing explicit subjects and pronoun referent;
- repetition of phrases and patterns.

Building on these types of features, table 7 shows the book's organization and argument levels, the whole of which I can only sketch here.[75] The

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[75] As noted earlier, for a more thoroughly developed argument for Zephaniah's macrostructure, see DeRouchie, "Zephaniah's Macrostructure," forthcoming.

bottom row identifies the book's two main units: the setting (1:2–18) and the body, which includes stage 1 (2:1–3:7) and stage 2 (3:8–20b) of the Savior YHWH's invitation to satisfaction. The next row marks the various units' major sections, and the third row signals those sections' various parts. An exclamation "Hush!" in 1:7 is followed by two parallel reasons to do so. Nevertheless, the main imperatives only come in 2:1–3 ("bundle together!" [2x]; "seek!" [3x]) and 3:8 ("wait!").

		Hush!	For the day of YHWH is near	[For] the great day of YHWH is near	Bundle! Seek!	For	Woe!	Woe!	↓ Wait!	For For	On that day	[change?]	On that day	
1:1	1:2–6	7a	7b–13	14–18	2:1–3	4	5–15	3:1–7	8a	8b–10	11–13	14–15	16–20b	20c
1:1	1:2–6		7–18		2:1–4		2:5–3:7		3:8–10		11–20			20c
	Setting (1:2–18)				Invitation Stage 1 (2:1–3:7)				Invitation Stage 2 (3:8–20b)					

Table 7. Structural Overview of Zephaniah

2.1. The Superscription to the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction (1:1)

The superscription formally introduces the book by highlighting its nature and source (the word of God), its messenger (Zephaniah, a black Judean in the Davidic royal line), and its historical backdrop (the days of Josiah's reformation).

2.2. The Setting for the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction: A Call to Revere YHWH in View of His Coming Day (1:2–18)

The book's body opens without connection (i.e., asyndeton), thus marking its fresh beginning. The setting for the oracle's main hortatory appeals that follow comes in 1:2–18. The unit supplies a call to revere God in view of his coming day of fury, and its two sections are this call's context (1:2–6) and content (1:7–18).[76]

See also the "Structure and Literary Form" sections in DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, forthcoming.

[76] See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Revering God: Punishment on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 1:2–18)," *BSac* (2024): forthcoming.

The connector וְ (gloss = "and") links all the main clauses of the context section, and together they promise global punishment against humanity's rebels (1:2–3) and local punishment against Judah's rebels (1:4–6). Each promise has two halves, the first addressing God's encounter ("gather" / "stretch out my hand") and the second declaring that he would "cut off" the enemies. Destruction will come because of rampant wickedness and idolatrous rebellion.

As a herald readies an audience for an angry king's arrival, Zephaniah next exclaims that his listeners must "Hush before the Sovereign YHWH" (1:7a). This call to revere God is not an imperative but uses the exclamatory particle הַס ("Hush!") that marks the whole section as low-level prophetic exhortation. The audience must revere YHWH because of his judgment day's imminent timing and sacrificial content against Judah (1:7b–13) and the entire earth (1:14–18). The phrase "the day of YHWH is near" (1:7b) announces Judah's imminent destruction, likely in 586 BC. Parallel uses of the discourse marker וְהָיָה ("and it will happen that") introduce two sub-parts wherein YHWH will punish both Jerusalem's leaders (1:8–11) and her complacent people (1:12–13). Then, the phrase "the *great* day of YHWH is near" in 1:14 recalls 1:7b's wording and extends the scope to the world. This day's characteristics (1:14–16) and the punishment's effects (1:17–18) will be horrific, as God carries out his sacrifice (1:18; cf. 1:7) and war (1:15–16) because "against YHWH they have sinned" (1:17c).

2.3. The Substance of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction: Charges to Seek YHWH Together and to Wait (2:1–3:20b)

In view of the call to revere God sparked by YHWH's encroaching day (1:2–18), the book's main exhortation section comes in two stages. These stages combine to charge the righteous remnant to pursue YHWH together patiently. Stage 1 calls the believers in Judah and other lands to seek YHWH together to avoid punishment (2:1–3:7). Stage 2 then charges the same group to wait for YHWH to enjoy salvation (3:8–20b). The second section builds on the first, and both units display a parallel structure:

1. Command(s) (second masculine plural imperative[s]) (2:1, 3 / 3:8a);[77]
2. Initial reason(s) fronted with "for" (כִּי) (2:4 / 3:8b–10);
3. Two unmarked motivations for heeding the command(s) (whether two reasons, both beginning with "Woe!" [הוֹי, 2:5–15; 3:1–7], or two promises, both beginning with "in that day" [בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, 3:11–13; 3:16–20).

The only break in the structure comes with the parenthetical intrusion of 3:14–15, which marks the book's rhetorical motivational peak.

2.3.1. Stage 1: The Appeal to Seek YHWH Together to Avoid Punishment (2:1–3:7)

The lack of connection at the head of 2:1 followed by imperatives plus vocative address marks the start of the book's main hortatory unit. The initial appeal comes in two parts and five imperatives. Those listening must "bundle together" (2:1) before YHWH's day of wrath comes (2:2), and they must "seek" him in righteousness and humility (2:3abc). Only by these means may they "perhaps … be hidden" from God destroying the wicked (2:3d), like those from Philistia (v. 4).

Next, in 2:5–3:7 come two unmarked reasons supporting why the remnant from Judah and other lands must heed the charges to "bundle together … seek" (2:1, 3) and "wait" (3:8). God promises to bring his fury on the rebels from (a) the foreign nations (2:5–15) and (b) Jerusalem (3:1–7). Each reason opens with the term "Woe!" (הוֹי, 2:5; 3:1), suggesting that they are two sides of the same outpouring of wrath.

The first reason for pursuing God relates to the lamentable state and fate of the rebels from the foreign nations (2:5–15). With the call to repentance and loyalty in focus (2:1–4), these verses build a compass of punishment around Judah, announcing God's wrath against the Philistines to the west (vv. 5–7), the Moabites and Ammonites to the east (vv. 8–11), and the Cushites and Assyrians to the south and north, respectively (vv. 12–15). Implied is that the punishment that spans the

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[77] See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Seeking God and Waiting: Hope on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 2:1–4; 3:8–10)," *BSac* (2024): forthcoming.

populated world will reach Judah (cf. Hab 2:16–17) unless they return to YHWH and become part of the preserved remnant (see Zeph 2:7, 9).

The second reason for seeking YHWH concerns the lamentable state and fate of Jerusalem's rebels (3:1–7). These verses unpack the sinful condition and certain punishment of those in Judah's capital city by highlighting their stubborn resistance to learn from God's disciplining hand against them and the foreign nations. YHWH speaks of the city Jerusalem in feminine singular address and notes how he urged her to fear him so that she would not lose him as her Shelter (3:7). Nevertheless, those in the city only increased their corruption.

2.3.2. Stage 2: The Appeal to Wait for YHWH to Enjoy Salvation (3:8–20b)

The oracle now returns to the primary level of exhortation. YHWH calls the remnant not only to seek him together (2:1–3) but also to wait (i.e., patiently trust) for him (3:8). The subordinate conjunction כִּי ("for") then begins two reasons (3:8b, 9–10) supporting this call in 3:8a: YHWH will (1) judge the rebel nations (3:8b) and (2) save a group from these nations, reversing the effects of the tower of Babel (3:9–10; cf. Gen 11:9). Specifically, on the very day YHWH brings judgment as covenant witness (Zeph 3:8), "then" he will bring about a new creation (3:9–10). In this he will transform peoples throughout the world into true worshipers who will call on his name and serve him in unity. Those bringing tribute will include some from Cush, ancient black Africa from which some of Zephaniah's own relatives came (see 1:1).

Two more promises then motivate the remnant to wait on YHWH to destroy his enemies and make a multi-ethnic people centered in a new Jerusalem (3:11–13, 16–20). They both begin with the phrase "in that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) and use feminine singular to address the new Jerusalem.[78]

The first promise is that Jerusalem will never again be ashamed (3:11a). This is because (כִּי) YHWH will remove the proud (3:11bc) yet preserve the humble (3:12). This multi-ethnic "remnant of Israel" will

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[78] See DeRouchie, "Rejoicing Then and Now," forthcoming.

rightly value God and those he made in his image as they rest with lasting protection (3:13).

Imperatival charges to rejoice (3:14) supported by two unmarked reasons (3:15) intrude before the second motivating promise comes. These two verses do not add to the exhortations in 2:1, 3 and 3:8 but instead provide a rhetorical peak of motivation for heeding these injunctions. Three parenthetical calls to rejoice in 3:14 include four imperatives plus vocatives. The first imperative is feminine singular, the second is masculine plural, and the final two are feminine singular and conjoined. The multi-ethnic community that YHWH names "the daughter of my scattered ones" in 3:10 Zephaniah now calls the "daughter of Zion," "Israel," and the "daughter of Jerusalem" (3:14abd). But why should the transformed community rejoice? The unmarked reasons and *qatal* verbs in 3:15 explain: King YHWH has removed the curses (3:15ab) and is near (3:15cd). Here the prophet seeks to motivate the remnant to wait for YHWH to act on their behalf by treating the promised deliverance as if it has already happened. The certainty of future salvation should produce present joy even amidst pain.

YHWH next adds the second promise beginning with the phrase "in that day" (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) to motivate the remnant to obey God's call from 3:8a to endure patiently. He will save his people completely, delivering them, delighting in them, and securing their provision and protection (3:16–20). In 3:16–18 YHWH predicts a future speech, and in 3:19–20b he notes the speech's implications. After predicting that an unnamed prophet will speak on the day of YHWH (3:16a), YHWH gives the speech's contents. The speech prohibits fear (3:16bc) and gives two unmarked reasons not to fear: (1) YHWH, the saving Warrior, is near (3:17), and (2) he has gathered his remnant (3:18). YHWH's day of wrath and new creation will develop in an already-but-not-yet way so those God has redeemed will need to remember that he will completely save.

The book body ends with YHWH promising that he will completely save Jerusalem (3:19) and that all the remnant will participate in this salvation (3:20ab). Whereas 3:19 includes feminine singular address to Jerusalem, YHWH ends the oracle in 3:20 with more personal terms,

returning to the masculine plural address found in the main exhortations of 2:1, 3 and 3:8.

The highest motivation for answering the call to seek YHWH together and to wait for him (2:1–3; 3:8) is the joy set before us––both our joy in God (3:14) and his joy in us (3:17). Hearers should hunger and hope, entreat and trust, look and long. YHWH will completely remove every oppressor, heal the broken, and sing over those he has saved (3:17, 19–20b), and his saving work will ultimately exalt *his* "praise" and *his* "name" in all the earth (3:19d, 20b).

2.4. The Subscription of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction (3:20c)

The book closes recalling 1:1. All that precedes is what God said to Zephaniah and makes up the Savior's invitation to satisfaction (3:20c).[79]

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[79] For a brief verse-by-verse overview of the whole book, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Zephaniah," *TGC Commentary* (2021), https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/zephaniah/. For a more extended commentary, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Zephaniah," in *Daniel–Malachi*, vol. 7 of *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 561–604; and DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, forthcoming.

Zephaniah's Main Idea: In view of his coming day of wrath, Savior YHWH invites his faithful remnant to seek him together to avoid punishment and to wait for him to enjoy salvation.

I. The Superscription of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction (1:1)

II. The Setting of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction: A Call to Revere YHWH in View of His Coming Day (1:2–18)
    A. The Context of the Call to Revere YHWH: Coming Punishment (1:2–6)
    B. The Content of the Call to Revere YHWH (1:7–18)

III. The Substance of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction: Charges to Seek YHWH Together and to Wait (2:1–3:20b)
    A. Stage 1: The Appeal to Seek YHWH Together to Avoid Punishment (2:1–3:7)
       1. The Charge to Unite Together in Submission to YHWH (2:1–2)
       2. The Charge to Seek YHWH in Righteousness and Humility (2:3–4)
          a. The Charge to Seek YHWH (2:3)
          b. An Initial Reason to Seek YHWH: The Devastation of Philistia (2:4)
       3. Further Reasons to Seek YHWH Together (2:5–3:7)
          a. Reason 1: The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels from the Foreign Nations (2:5–15)
          b. Reason 2: The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels from Jerusalem (3:1–7)
    B. Stage 2: The Appeal to Wait for YHWH to Enjoy Salvation (3:8–20)
       1. The Charge to Wait for YHWH to Act (3:8–10)
          a. The Charge to Wait for YHWH (3:8a)
          b. Two Reasons to Wait for YHWH (3:8b–10)
       2. Promises to Motivate Waiting for YHWH: The Remnant's Satisfying Salvation (3:11–20)
          a. The Promise that YHWH Will Not Shame Jerusalem (3:11–13)
          b. A Parenthetical Charge to Rejoice (3:14–15)
          c. The Promise that YHWH Will Save Completely (3:16–20b)

IV. The Subscription of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction (3:20c)

Table 8. Zephaniah's Main Idea and Exegetical Outline

3. Conclusion

Interpreters should engage in exegesis and theology from the bottom up, beginning with a careful eye to the grammatical and rhetorical signals that the biblical author gives us in the inspired text. Proposed structures for a book's message must align with and not disregard such signals. This article has sought to show that all proposals for Zephaniah's structure fail to represent the text rightly if they identify conceptual links but disregard grammar, miss purposeful repetition, ignore discourse markers, or propose discourse units that cross other text boundaries. Outlines that portray the book with a three-part structure, with a kernel representing the whole, with a two-character dialogue, with mere thematic development, or as a chiasm do not allow Zephaniah's own grammatical and rhetorical signals to shape the book's flow-of-thought.

Zephaniah's argument develops in two-parts, with a setting followed by exhortations, the latter of which carry the thrust of his message. YHWH's coming day of judgment, therefore, provides only the setting for

the prophet's sermonic appeals. Zephaniah's dominant text type is prophetic exhortation, and a main idea statement that captures his message is as follows: *In view of his coming day of wrath, Savior YHWH invites the faithful remnant in Judah and other lands to seek him together to avoid punishment and to wait for him to enjoy salvation.*[80] Patiently pursuing God together will result in the redeemed's joy and YHWH's delight and glory.

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[80] For more on Zephaniah's audience, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Addressees in Zephaniah 2:1, 3: Who Should Seek YHWH Together?," *BBR* 30.2 (2020): 183–207.