

YHWH'S FUTURE INGATHERING IN ZEPHANIAH 1:2: INTERPRETING אָסַף אָסַף

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Abstract: *Due to a supposed grammatical anomaly, interpreters of Zephaniah have long struggled with the Hebrew verb phrase אָסַף אָסַף 'I will utterly sweep away' (NRSV) that initiates the book. Normally when an infinitive absolute is followed by a yiqtol form, both verbs bear a common verbal root. Most scholars, however, believe that in Zeph 1:2 the phrase אָסַף אָסַף combines a qal infinitive absolute of אָסַף 'to gather' with the hiphil yiqtol of סוּף 'to bring to an end', resulting in the need to generate a conflated translation that highlights God's promise to completely destroy the earth's creatures. In contrast, after assessing the textual tradition, I argue for the likelihood that both forms derive from the root אָסַף, the first being a qal infinitive absolute and the second a hiphil yiqtol. I then support this decision and consider the interpretive significance in light of parallels within the book and from the broader biblical context. The text teaches that God's assembling of all creatures for judicial assessment is distinct from his acts of deliverance and wrath that flow from it, and it also supports the view that the future ingatherings for salvation and punishment are one and the same event (though manifest in various culminating acts).*

Zephaniah 1:2–3 in the MT and NRSV¹

אָסַף אָסַף כָּל מַעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה נְאֻם־יְהוָה	2
אָסַף אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה	3
אָסַף עוֹף־הַשָּׁמַיִם וּדְגַי הַיָּם וְהַמְּכַשְׁלוֹת אֶת־הַרְשָׁעִים	b
וְהִכְרַתִּי אֶת־הָאָדָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה נְאֻם־יְהוָה	c

I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD. I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble. I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says the LORD.

1. Throughout this paper, all translations are the author's unless otherwise noted. I thank my graduate research assistant Joey Karrigan for his editorial help, and I thank Drs. John Beckman, Peter Gentry, and Phillip Marshall for their critical feedback, all of which has made this article better. I dedicate this study to Dr. Duane Garrett, John R. Sampey Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His partnership in the gospel ministry and his careful exegetical and theological studies have served me greatly through the years.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew verb phrase אָסַף אֶסְפֶּה ‘I will utterly sweep away’ (NRSV) that initiates Zephaniah’s sermon in 1:2 has challenged interpreters for centuries because of a supposed grammatical irregularity. In contrast to the normal pattern of using a common verbal root in both the infinitive absolute and the following finite form (whether *qatal* or *yiqtol*), most believe the phrase combines a *qal* infinitive absolute of אָסַף ‘to gather’ with the *hiphil yiqtol* of אָסַף ‘to bring to an end’. They then see the same *hiphil yiqtol* of אָסַף repeated at the head of 1:3ab (cf. Ps 73:19; Isa 66:17; Amos 3:15).

An infinitive absolute regularly preposes a finite verb of the same root to strengthen the modality of the main verb,² and at times the infinitive absolute and the finite verb can be in different stems, as when the *hiphil yiqtol* follows infinitives absolute in the *piel* (1 Sam 2:16) or *qal* (1 Sam 23:22; 2 Sam 15:8[Q]; Jer 8:13).³ The specific challenge in Zeph 1:2 is that to some the verbal roots appear different, though sounding similar, and the normal rules of Hebrew grammar render this unlikely.⁴ Thus many scholars offer various proposals, some of which include emendation, that allow both roots to come from אָסַף ‘to gather’. Still others retain the two-root view, usually echoing Sweeney when he writes that, while abnormal, because a similar pattern with the same roots occurs in Jer 8:13, “the expression אָסַף אֶסְפֶּה [in Zeph 1:2] is an idiom that combines forms of the verbs אָסַף and אָסַף to express complete and utter destruction.”⁵

2. F. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley; 2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §1131–r; B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §35.3.1; C. H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), §20.2.1; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (2nd ed., SubBi 27; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), §123d–q; R. J. Williams and J. C. Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax* (3rd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §205.

3. GKC, §113w.

4. GKC, §113w n.3; G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräischen Grammatik* (29th ed.; Hildesheim: Olms, 1962), 2:64.

5. M. A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary* (ed. P. D. Hanson; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), p. 61; compare J. A. Motyer, “Zephaniah,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. T. E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:911. For an overview of the question, along with interaction with the ancient texts and versions, see I. J. Ball Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1988), pp. 14–17; E. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 51–53; J. Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 57–59; M. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, pp. 58–61. Like a number of others (see below), Sabottka repoints the second form from אָסַף to אָסַף , but he is unique in that he then reads this form as a future indicative *qal* or *hiphil yiqtol* first common singular of אָסַף ‘to add’, following the spelling in Deut 18:16; Hos 9:15; and Ezek 5:16

Most of the ancient versions render all four forms in Zeph 1:2–3 with the same root. Some like 8HevXII gr ([Συ]ναγωγῆ σὺν[αγ- ...] ‘by/with gathering, I am gathering’) and the Vulgate (*congregans congregabo* ‘while gathering, I will gather together’) clearly reflect the Hebrew root קָטַף ‘to gather’, but others like the LXX (Ἐκλείψει ἐκλιπέτω ‘with extinction, let it become extinct’) and Old Latin (*defectione deficiat* ‘failing, let it fail’) could represent the root קָטַף , the root סָוָה , or a combination of both. The Targum of the Prophets alone distinguishes the verbs, but with a different distribution than the MT: the two in 1:2 use the root שִׁיב ‘to complete, finish’, whereas the two in 1:3 employ the root סָוָה ‘to put an end to, annihilate’. With little exception (e.g., CEB), the English translations do not account for a switch in root, but instead attempt what appears to be a blended meaning of קָטַף and סָוָה as “sweep away” (NRSV, WEB, ESV, HCSB, NIV), “consume” (KJV, ASV, NKJV), “remove” (NASB), “destroy” (NET), or “take away” (BEB).⁶ However, had Zephaniah intended any of these meanings, there were forms that he could have chosen—for example, Isa 14:23: “And I will sweep it [הִטֵּאתִיהָ] with a broom of destruction”).

On comparison with the *hiphil yiqtol* third masculine singular יִאָר from the hollow root אָרַר ‘to be light, shine’ in Num 6:25 and Ps 67:1[2], הִטֵּא in Zeph 1:2 could be the *hiphil yiqtol* first common singular of סָוָה ‘to bring to an end’. However, the potential lack of any comparable instances of infinitive absolute plus *yiqtol* of different roots strongly calls this approach into question.⁷ The only legitimate potential comparison is Jer

(L. Sabottka, *Zephanja* [Biblica et Orientalia 25; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972], pp. 6–7; cf. P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar*, p. 179 [§75f]; p. 348 [§114g]). He then asserts that the two verbs operate as homonyms, with the Lord expressing, “I will again....” While possible morphologically and while plausible given the likely allusions to the flood narrative in Zeph 1:2–3, Sabottka’s view does not make explicit the nature of *what* God will again do (e.g., “curse” [*piel* of קָלַל] in Gen 8:21). It also fails to account for the grammatical irregularity of having an infinitive absolute of one root followed by a *yiqtol* of a different root.

6. Both Keil and Gerleman assert that the root meanings of קָטַף ‘to gather’ (in the sense of destroy) and סָוָה ‘to bring to an end’ were near enough to allow for their close association (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Zephaniah,” in *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (vol. 10 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002], part 2:126–127; G. Gerleman, *Zephanja: Textkritisch und Literarisch Untersucht* [Lund: Gleerup, 1942], p. 3). Similarly, Irsigler states that the author intended that we read the root קָטַף with the meaning of the *hiphil* of כָּרַת ‘to exterminate’, thus tying the form closely with the meaning of סָוָה (H. Irsigler, *Zephanja* [HThKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002], p. 98). Neither of these approaches explains the grammatical anomaly noted above. Furthermore, almost always those following the two-root view end up creating a hybrid meaning of the combination of the two verbs that they then carry into the repetition of הִטֵּא in Zeph 1:3.

7. Gesenius observes that the infinitive absolute of another root of like sound occurs only at Isa 28:28; Jer 8:13; and Zeph 1:2 (GKC, §113w n.3). He attributes Isa 28:28 to a mere textual error

8:13, but this text may actually be alluding to Zeph 1:2, and it involves the same challenge, where the *qal* infinitive absolute of קָטַף is followed by a *yiqtol* form that many posit to be a *hiphil* of קָטַף (אָסֶף אֶת־הֵמָּה ‘I wanted to gather them’ [NRSV]).⁸ Very few question that the initial form קָטַף in either Zeph 1:2 or Jer 8:13 is a *qal* infinitive absolute of קָטַף ‘to gather’, so if an explanation exists that allows both the infinitive absolute and the finite verb roots to be from קָטַף , the interpreter should prefer it.

2. ASSESSMENT

With respect to Zeph 1:2, I find at least three proposals that identify the same root behind both initial verbal forms.

2.1. Emend קָטַף to קָטַף , the *Qal Yiqtol* First Common Singular of קָטַף

On analogy with אָמַר ‘I will say’ (e.g., Ps 91:2; Isa 43:6),⁹ many scholars follow Gesenius’ proposal to reposit קָטַף to קָטַף in Zeph 1:2.¹⁰ Recognizably, קָטַף in the *qal* (*way*)*yiqtol* can take *holem* (1 Sam 15:6; 2 Sam 6:1; Mic 4:6) or *seghol* (Mic 2:12) with the preformative, and the pattern of the *qal yiqtol* second masculine singular קָטַף from קָטַף in Ps 104:29 (you will gather) shows the possibility of a *tsere* as the second vowel. As such, this option is possible and would require only a single vowel shift with no consonantal change. However, an option that lets the MT stand would be preferable, for it is clear that the Masoretes had no problem with the present text. Every known extant manuscript with pointed Hebrew includes קָטַף קָטַף in Zeph 1:2, which means that the Masoretes were reading the text as we see it and did not feel compelled to alter it.

(where קָטַף is more properly קָטַף ‘to thresh’) and proposes emendation for the latter two, changing קָטַף in Jer 8:13 to קָטַף and קָטַף in Zeph 1:2 to קָטַף .

8. M. DeRoche, “Contra Creation, Covenant and Conquest (Jer. 8:13),” *VT* 30 (1980): 280–290; compare M. DeRoche, “Zephaniah 1:2–3: The ‘Sweeping’ of Creation,” *VT* 30 (1980): 104–109.

9. The *qal yiqtol* first common singular of אָמַר ‘to say’, wherein the preformative takes a *holem* and the second of two *alefs* drops.

10. GKC, §§72aa, 113w n. 3. Weigl argues soundly for this view, but he fails to account for the other two possible parsings that I suggest below (M. Weigl, *Zefanja und das “Israel der Armen”*: *Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie des Buches Zefanja* [Österreichische Biblische Studien 13; Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994], p. 7).

2.2. Read **קָטַף** as the *Qal Yiqtol* First Common Singular of **קָטַף**

Lipiński suggests that **קָטַף** itself may be a *qal yiqtol*, comparing the *qamets* vowel of the preformative to **וַיִּצְטַל** ‘and he took/reserved’ in Num 11:25 and the *tsere* second vowel to the pattern of **קָטַף** in Ps 104:29.¹¹ While possible, the form in Num 11:25 may actually be a *hiphil*, and I am not aware of any other examples in *qal* non-hollow or non-geminate verbs where the *yiqtol* preformative bears a *qamets*.¹²

Sweeney offers a potentially better proposal for reading **קָטַף** as a *qal yiqtol*, though he prefers the view that **קָטַף קָטַף** represents two different roots. He observes that a number of *qal (way)yiqtol* forms of **קָטַף**, all with suffixes, appear with a double *patakh* under the preformative and initial root consonant of the *alef* (e.g., **תִּקְטְפוּ** ‘you shall gather’ in Josh 2:18; cf. Exod 4:29; Num 11:32; 1 Sam 14:52; 2 Sam 11:27; 2 Chr 29:4; Ps 27:10; Isa 58:8; Hab 1:15). As such, an original **קָטַף** could have dropped the second *alef* and become **קָטַף**, existing alongside the *qal yiqtol* form with preformatives pointed with either *segol* + compositive *shewa* or *holem* (see **קָטַף** in Mic 2:12 and **קָטַף** in Mic 4:6).¹³ The most significant weakness with this view is that the move from **קָטַף** to **קָטַף** is hypothetical, lacking any attestation.

A secondary weakness with both of the above views is that reading **קָטַף** in Zeph 1:2 as a *qal yiqtol* would mean that *three* different *qal yiqtol* first common singular forms of the same verb existed side-by-side in the region of pre-exilic Jerusalem within a single one hundred year period (Micah, ca. 737–690; Zephaniah, ca. 622). While such a phenomenon is not impossible, it would certainly be rare.¹⁴

11. E. Lipiński, review of A. S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, VT 25.3 (1975): 688.

12. For *hiphil*, see GKC, §68i; F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (trans. E. Robinson; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979), s.v., “**קָטַף**.” For *qal*, see H. Bauer, P. Leander, and P. Kahle, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1922), §53t; L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. M. E. J. Richardson; trans. M. E. J. Richardson; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994), s.v. “**קָטַף**.”

13. M. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 59 n. 14.

14. Because, as Garr notes, the Masoretic Hebrew we find in Scripture “does not present one Hebrew dialect but probably a mixture of dialect traditions,” variation in speech patterns is possible (see W. R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008], quote from p. 12; cf. A. Sperber, *A Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew: A Presentation of Problems with Suggestions to Their Solution* [Leiden: Brill, 1966]). The challenge, however, is that the dialectic geography is centered in the region of Jerusalem within a one-hundred-year period.

2.3. Read **הִסֵּא** as a *Hiphil Yiqtol* First Common Singular of **הָסֵא**

A final option that seems most preferable is that **הִסֵּא** in Zeph 1:2 is a *hiphil yiqtol* first common singular of **הָסֵא** ‘to gather’ with the I-*alef* dropped, as is normal in first person *yiqtol* verbs with I-*alef* roots.¹⁵ Similar shortening occurs in the *hiphil yiqtol* first common singular forms like **הִסֵּא** (Job 32:11), **הִסֵּא** (Jer 46:8), and **הִסֵּא** (Hos 11:4).¹⁶ Furthermore, the a-i vowel pattern of **הִסֵּא** in Job 32:11 parallels perfectly **הִסֵּא** in Zeph 1:2, and the simple tone-long *tsere* over a fully spelled vowel (*hireq yod*) is found elsewhere in the *hiphil yiqtol* of weak roots, as in **הִסֵּא** ‘to add, increase’ from the root **הָסֵא** (Deut 18:16; Ezek 5:16). The verb **הִסֵּא** in Jer 8:13 is easily explained in the same way—a *hiphil yiqtol* first common singular of **הָסֵא** with I-*alef* dropped. The original *qamets* in an open and unaccented syllable (seen in Zeph 1:2 **הִסֵּא**) reduced when it became distant due to the addition of the pronominal suffix.¹⁷

The challenge with this view is that Zeph 1:2 and Jer 8:13 would provide the only instances in the biblical text of **הָסֵא** in the *hiphil*. Parallel spelling scenarios exist, however, and its use in these two passages would likely be to stress the divine agency in this move toward judgment.

3. CONTEXTUAL SUPPORT WITHIN ZEPHANIAH

3.1. The Common Meaning of **הָסֵא**

Most scholars believe that very little difference exists in interpretation regardless of one’s conclusions on the forms in Zeph 1:2.¹⁸ This view assumes that the present context of punishment requires that we render **הָסֵא** as “remove, destroy” or the like, thus giving it a meaning similar to **הָסֵא** ‘to bring to an end’. It also assumes that the statement about “cutting off” (**כִּרְתָּ**) in 1:3c “adds nothing to what has already been said in vv. 2. 3a.”¹⁹

15. GKC, §§23f, 68g.

16. GKC, §68g. Just as a form like **הִסֵּא** would derive from an original ***הִסֵּא** (cf. Job 9:16; see also Job 6:11; Isa 48:9; H. Bauer, P. Leander, and P. Kahle, *Historische Grammatik*, §49v), so too **הִסֵּא** would derive from an original ***הִסֵּא**.

17. See the rules in D. A. Garrett and J. S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), p. 24 [§4.B(5)].

18. For example, W. Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah* (KAT 13; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975), 3:261 n. 2; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), p. 167; J. Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, p. 58.

19. J. M. P. Smith, “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Zephaniah,” in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (by

In contrast, I am arguing that **קָטַף קָטַף** in Zeph 1:2 points to a great “ingathering” and not necessarily to “punishment.” Only the language of “cutting off” (**כרת**) in both 1:3–4 points to actual chastisement.

The *qal* form of **קָטַף** can mean “to gather” in the sense of “remove” or “withdraw” (e.g., Gen 30:23; 1 Sam 14:19; 2 Kgs 5:3, 6, 7, 11; Isa 4:1; Jer 16:5; Ps 104:29), and in contexts of punishment, it may even, by extension, connote destruction (e.g., 1 Sam 15:6; Hos 4:3). Nevertheless, the most frequently attested and core meaning of the verb **קָטַף** is to “gather, collect, bring in,” and the Bible regularly uses this term in the context of the harvest, often clearly distinguishing the “ingathering” from the “pruning” or “cutting” that accompanies it. For example, in Jer 8:13, which bears close associations with Zeph 1:2, we read: “I would certainly gather them [**קָטַף קָטַף**]²⁰—the utterance of YHWH. (Yet) there were neither grapes at the vine nor figs at the fig tree. Even their leaf was withered, so I have given to them (attackers); they will pass over them.”

The noun **קָטִיף** ‘ingathering, harvest’ (Exod 23:16; 34:22) functions as an early designation for the Feast of Booths (Deut 16:13), the final harvest festival of the Judean agricultural and cultic calendar (cf. Lev 23:33–43; Num 29:12–38).²⁰ In light of this connection, Gaster, Roberts, and Sweeney have suggested that Zephaniah may have actually preached his sermon during the Feast of Booths, allowing the grape and olive harvest to provide a context for his message, which stressed the end of one era and the beginning of another.²¹ This link would explain Zephaniah’s choice and repetition of the verb.

J. M. P. Smith, W. H. Ward, and J. A. Brewer; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), p. 186. Because he believes Zeph 1:3c contributes nothing additional to the context, Smith views it to be a later gloss. However, such a conclusion fails to explain why a later tradent would add such a statement if it was only repetitious, and it also does not account for the apparent *inclusio* around 1:2–3c, which supports its authenticity: **מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה נִאֲמַרְתָּ הוֹדָה** ‘from on the face of the ground—the utterance of YHWH’.

20. See C. E. Armerding, “Festivals and Feasts,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (ed. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 311–312.

21. T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 679; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 169; M. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, p. 62. Because the Feast of Booths was one of the three main pilgrimage festivals in ancient Israel (Exod 23:14–19; 34:18–26; Deut 16:1–17), it would have provided an ideal time to address the entire nation. The Feast of Booths marked not only the end of one civil calendar year but the beginning of a new one (Exod 23:16; 34:22) (cf. D. J. A. Clines, “The Evidence for an Autumnal New Year in Pre-Exilic Israel,” *JBL* 93 [1974]: 22–40; J. C. VanderKam, “Calendars: Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [ed. D. N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992], 1:814–820). The historical association would have thus added emphasis to Zephaniah’s stress that God was doing away with the old to replace it with the new. Within the book, at least two other potential links with the Feast of Booths are apparent. First, Israel’s roof worship in Zeph 1:5 may link to the autumn New Year Festival for Baal, which coincided with Israel’s Feast of Ingathering (J. C. de Moor and M. J. Mulder,

3.2. אָסַף within the Literary Context of Zephaniah

The immediate context and two other parallels within Zephaniah caution against treating אָסַף in 1:2 as anything other than “to gather.” First, Zeph 1:4a parallels the theme of “ingathering” in 1:2–3ab by mentioning God’s “stretching out” of his strong hand against Judah and Jerusalem. Then 1:4b deals with the divine “excision” of the rebels, using the same verb for “cutting” found in 1:3c. The repetition of the Hebrew verb כָּרַת ‘to cut off’ in 1:3c and 1:4b signals an A-B-A'-B' topical pattern within the unit, with both parts displaying a progression of two divine actions in parallel:

Part 1: “Gathering” (1:2–3ab) → “cutting” (1:3c)
 Part 2: “Stretching out” (1:4a) → “cutting” (1:4b)

Similarly, in Zeph 3:8 אָסַף parallels the verb קָבַץ ‘to assemble’ and refers to God’s worldwide “ingathering” of the wicked for punishment on his day of judicial assessment—“For my decision is to gather [לְאַסֹּף] nations, to assemble [לְקַבֵּץ] kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation.” *In Zeph 3:8 the pouring out of God’s wrath flows out of the “gathering” but is not equated with it.* This is exactly what I see happening in 1:2–3, which distinguish between the “gathering” (1:2–3b) and the “cutting off” punishment (1:3c).

Finally, Zeph 3:18–19 also use a combination of אָסַף and קָבַץ in near context, and again both point to a future “ingathering,” this time of the righteous remnant during the promised second exodus (Isa 11:11, 16; 49:5–6; Jer 16:14–15; John 11:50–52). This ingathering for salvation appears to happen simultaneous with the ingathering for global punishment (Zeph 3:8). That is, “at that time” (בְּעֵת הַהֵיאָ) when YHWH promises to secure complete victory (3:17) and to have “gathered” (אָסַף, 3:18) the tormented remnant, he will deal with his people’s oppressors and “assemble” the banished one (3:19).²² Zephaniah appears to apply both the verbs אָסַף

“בַּעַל” (*ba‘al*),” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* [ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry; 15 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 2:190–191). Second, while only suggestive, the use of מוֹעֵד ‘appoint time/place’ in Zeph 3:18 may refer specifically to a major feast (see e.g., NRSV, ESV).

22. Scholars agree that קָבַץ ‘to assemble’ in Zeph 3:19 points to a future salvation, and I read 3:18 in the same way (cf. E. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, pp. 252–254; NRSV, NASB, ESV). Some, however, read 3:18 negatively, referring not to a future deliverance and second exodus but to the ingathering for punishment already pointed to in 1:2 and 3:8 (e.g., M. H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets: Part 2* [FOTL 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], p. 237; M. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, pp. 203–205; cf. NIV).

‘to gather’ and קבץ ‘to assemble’ to the same future event (Zeph 3:18, 19–20; cf. 3:9–10).²³

While most interpreters treat the “gathering” in Zeph 1:2–3b as the manifestation of God’s wrath on the whole world, I believe it is better to see the global “ingathering” as separate from the punishment, which is then highlighted in 1:3c. The prophet’s point in 1:2–3b is *not* that God will utterly destroy everything in the world but that he will gather everything for judicial assessment and then will punish rebel humanity (1:3c).²⁴

I am arguing that Zephaniah is using אסף in 1:2–3b and 3:8 in the same way. And in 3:8, he parallels the verb with קבץ ‘to assemble’, all in anticipation of the outpouring of God’s wrath (cf. Mic 4:11–12). Nevertheless, because Zephaniah later uses the same two verbs to speak of the global “ingathering” for salvation (Zeph 3:18, 19–20), which will happen “at that time” (Zeph 3:11, 16, 19), it seems very likely that the two portraits of “ingathering” actually relate to a single future event with two purposes, both associated with the day of YHWH (Zeph 1:7, 14; cf. 1:8–10, 15–16, 18; 2:2–3; 3:8, 11, 16).²⁵

“Day” (יום) in the biblical phrase “the day of YHWH” (יום יהוה) seems to mean a discrete yet undefined period that does not necessarily require a twenty-four hour realization.²⁶ Indeed, “day” in Zephaniah “designates not a definite *extent* of time but a definite *event* in time, whose nature is to be determined entirely by the Lord.”²⁷ There is room, therefore, in the

Regardless of how one interprets the verse, the fact that אסף in 3:18 points to an eschatological “ingathering” remains clear.

23. When addressing Zephaniah, Mitchell fails to recognize how the “at that time” (בְּעֵת הַהֵיאָ) statements in Zeph 3:11, 16, 19 identify the “ingathering/assembling” (קבץ/אסף) of the saints at the end of the age *with* the “ingathering/assembling” (קבץ/אסף) of the nations for wrath in 3:8 (D. C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* [JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997], pp. 154–155). I do not deny that the *single* ingathering may have multiple manifestations or happen progressively with escalation, but I am arguing that Zephaniah’s portrait is of single eschatological event that will include both punishment and restoration.

24. Both Zeph 1:18 and 3:8 tell us that “all the earth shall be consumed,” but 1:18 qualifies this by focusing specifically on “all the inhabitants of the earth,” thus aligning with my point here.

25. Compare Zeph 3:9–10; Mic 4:6. Zephaniah 3:18 is filled with interpretive challenges; for my assessment and conclusions, see J. S. DeRouchie, *Zephaniah* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming), s.v. Zeph 3:18.

26. This is true regardless of whether YHWH’s prophets were influenced by the pattern found in ancient royal inscriptions of associating “sovereignty” with “a day of conquest” and asserting that a true sovereign could achieve his victory in the span of a single day (so D. K. Stuart, “The Sovereign’s Day of Conquest: A Possible Ancient Near Eastern Parallel to the Israelite Day of Yahweh,” *BASOR* 221 [1976]: 159–164).

27. E. Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), p. 66. Speaking of Zeph 1:14–18, Patterson states, “The prophecy must be viewed as one vast event. Some matters that [Zephaniah] mentions would soon take place at Jerusalem’s fall in 586 B.C.; others would be repeated in various historical epochs (e.g., A.D. 70) until the whole prophecy finds its ultimate

language of “the day of YHWH” for multiple fulfilments escalating to a climax.²⁸

Zephaniah is one of many YHWH prophets who apply the title “the day of YHWH” (יום יהוה) both to the ultimate day of global recreation/restoration and to the periodic pen-ultimate days that anticipate it.²⁹ The day of the Lord is the climactic future event when God will finally establish his sovereignty, eradicate all evil, and bring lasting peace in the world, but it is also YHWH’s various typological intrusions into space and time

fulfillment eschatologically” (R. D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary* [Minor Prophets Exegetical Commentary; Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2003], pp. 286–287).

28. Similarly, De Vries writes, “It should be apparent that the redactor’s future day cannot always be comprehended within the compass of a single twenty-four hour period. Thus the chronological future, with strict limits of time, is treated as irrelevant. YHWH’s final day is opened up to allow the experience of a variety of eschatological anticipations” (S. J. De Vries, *From Old Revelation to New: A Tradition-Historical and Redaction-Critical Study of Temporal Transitions in Prophetic Prediction* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], p. 60). Similarly, after noting how some texts refer to the day of YHWH as a *past* event (Isa 22:1–14; Jer 46:2–20; Lam 1:12; 2:22; Ezek 13:1–9), Emerson writes, “It is not only appropriate but extremely helpful to speak of a sequence of historical days of Yahweh when speaking of the prophetic interpretation of history” (A. J. Everson, “The Days of Yahweh,” *JBL* 93 [1974]: 331).

29. Over the last century, scholars have defined the core of Israel’s “day of YHWH” tradition in various ways—for example, a vision of YHWH’s enthronement (Mowinckel), anticipations of YHWH’s future work on behalf of Israel (Černý), holy war and conquest (von Rad), treaty curses (Fensham), theophany (Hoffman), or various blendings of these options (Cross, Weiss, Everson). From my perspective, we must take a more eclectic approach to the day of the Lord. For example, Motyer writes, on the one hand, “The Hebrew word *day* (*yôm*) is used idiomatically for a decisive event or series of events, a moment or period in which destiny is settled.... [The day of YHWH is] the climax alike of history, sin, and the purposes of God” (J. A. Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 3:917–918). On the other hand, he indicates that “in some sense the prophets saw significant historical events as the day of the Lord. Isaiah (13:1–6) looked forward to the fall of Babylon; Amos (5:18–27) thought of the captivity of northern Israel. In each case, however, neither in prospect nor in retrospect was the day of the Lord fully realized. The prophets simply had in mind that these were events of such a dire nature that they exemplified a reality that would be fully demonstrated when the day finally came” (J. A. Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 3:918). Compare Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism* (trans. G. W. Anderson; The Biblical Resource Series; Oxford: Blackwell, 1956); L. Černý, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems* (Prague: University of Karlova, 1948); G. von Rad, “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4 (1958): 97–108; F. C. Fensham, “A Possible Origin of the Concept of the Day of the Lord,” in *Biblical Essays: Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgenootskap in Suid-Afrika, and Proceedings of the Second Meeting of Die Nuwe-Testamentiese Werkgenootskap van Suid-Afrika* (ed. A. H. Van Zyl; Stellenbosch: Potchefstroom Herald, 1966), pp. 90–97; Y. Hoffman, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in Prophetic Literature,” *ZAW* 93 (1981): 37–50; F. M. Cross, “The Divine Warrior in Israel’s Early Cult,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 11–30; M. Weiss, “The Origin of the Day of the Lord Reconsidered,” *HUCA* 37 (1966): 29–63; A. J. Everson, “The Days of Yahweh.” For some recent surveys of the issue, see R. H. Hiers, “Day of the Lord,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D. N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:82–83; M. A. LaRocca-Pitts, “The Day of Yahweh as a Rhetorical Strategy among Hebrew Prophets” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000); J. D. Barker, “Day of the Lord,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (ed. M. J. Boda and J. G. McConville; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), pp. 132–143.

to punish wickedness—whether that of Israel (Joel 2:1–11, 31)³⁰ or the nations (Isaiah 13)³¹—and to reconstitute right order in his world.

In speaking of a single “ingathering” associated with the day of YHWH, my point is not to deny multiple fulfilments but to stress that Zephaniah distinguished a future ingathering from the curses or restoration blessings that would follow. Thus the remnant must wait for the Lord *because* (כי) his decision was to gather nations to punish them and *because* (כי) at that same time transformed worshippers from these nations would also gather to the Lord (Zeph 3:8–10).

4. COMPARISONS TO OTHER PASSAGES IN THE LITERARY PROPHETS³²

Like Zephaniah, many of the other literary prophets used forms of the verb *קָטַף* in relation to both future punishment and hope. At times, the occurrences relate to YHWH's great second exodus-“ingathering” of the faithful remnant for the purpose of restoration. For example, after the prophet asserts that YHWH “will extend his hand a second time to purchase a remnant of his people” (Isa 11:11), we read “*And he will gather [קָטַף] the banished ones of Israel, and the scattered ones of Judah he will assemble from the four corners of the earth*” (11:12; cf. Ezek 11:17; Mic 2:12; 4:6).³³ Similarly, the royal and suffering figure in Isa 49:5 describes YHWH as “he who formed me from the womb to be a servant for him to return Jacob to him—even Israel for him *he will gather [קָטַף]*.” The text goes on to highlight that the captives from around the globe will come to the Lord (Isa 49:12; cf. 43:5–7), imagery that is reminiscent of both Isa 2:2–4 and 11:10–16. In contrast, other instances in the Prophets refer to God's eschatological “ingathering” of the world's rabble for both battle (Zech 14:2) and punishment, as when Isaiah declares of the enemies of God among the host of the heights and the kings of the earth, “*And a*

30. Compare Ezek 13:5; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5 [3:23].

31. Compare Isa 2:6–19; Jer 46:10–12; Ezek 30:1–9; Joel 3:9–16; Obad 15.

32. For a more developed overview of the theme of ingathering in the literary prophets with somewhat different conclusions, see D. C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, pp. 128–165, 351–358. I agree with Mitchell that the literary prophets bore a complementary eschatological vision, but I disagree with some of his exegetical conclusions. For my brief critique of his approach to Zephaniah, see footnote 23 above.

33. Each of these texts parallel *קָטַף* with *קָבַץ*. For comparable texts using *קָבַץ*, see Deut 30:3; 1 Chr 16:35; Neh 1:9; Ps 106:47; 107:3; Isa 11:12; 40:11; 43:5; 54:7; 56:8; Jer 23:3; 29:14; 31:8, 10; 32:37; Ezek 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 29:13 [of the Egyptians]; 34:13; 36:13, 24; 37:21; 39:27; Mic 2:12; 4:6; Zech 10:8, 10. For an intriguing parallel in the New Testament, see John 11:51–52.

gathering *will be gathered* [וְאִסְפוּ] as a prisoner over a pit” (Isa 24:22).³⁴ Similarly, Hosea 4:3, 6 states, “Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells in it will languish; with the beast of the field and with the bird of the air, and even the fish of the sea they will be gathered [וְאִסְפוּ, *niphal yiqtol* third masculine plural of אָסַף].... Ruined are my people from lack of knowledge.” Hosea declares that God will gather all inhabitants of the earth along with “animal [חַיָּה] ... bird [עוֹף] ... fish [דָּג]”—statements that parallel closely YHWH’s assertion in Zeph 1:3, “I will gather human and beast [בְּהֵמָה]; I will gather the bird [עוֹף] of the heavens and the fish [דָּג] of the sea.”

Zechariah 14 provides one parallel that brings together images of future punishment and salvation within a context of harvest that significantly echoes Zephaniah’s context. As background, I noted above that Zephaniah’s frequent use of the root אָסַף ‘to gather’ (1:2–3; 3:8, 18) along with his portrayal of the day of YHWH as the end of one era and the beginning of a new one associates the prophet’s message with the Feast of Booths (or “Ingathering”; cf. Lev 23:33–43; Num 29:12–38; Deut 16:13–15), which likely provided a context for his oracle. As the final feast of Judah’s harvest year (Exod 23:16; 34:22), the Feast of Booths reminded the people “to look forward as well as back,”³⁵ and it is this reality that appears to have gripped Zechariah, who explicitly associates this particular feast with the day of the Lord as “ingathering.” He writes:

Behold, a day is coming for YHWH, when your spoil will be divided in your midst, and I will *gather* [וְאִסְפוּ] all the nations toward Jerusalem for the battle, and the city will be taken.... And it shall come about with respect to all who remain from all the nations who came against Jerusalem that they will go up year after year to bow before the King, YHWH of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. (Zech 14:1–3, 16)

In Zechariah, the day of the Lord includes an ingathering for the great war at the end of the age (cf. Rev 11:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8), when YHWH puts an end to all hostility and restores right-order in his world. In that day, the ingathering will result in a perpetual celebration of the Feast of Booths by the remnant from the nations to commemorate the victory of God and the new creational beginning he has established. The prophet viewed the Feast of Booths as the culmination of YHWH’s kingship over

34. Comparable texts with קָבַץ are sparse: Ezek 22:19–20 (cf. Hos 8:10).

35. C. E. Armerding, “Festivals and Feasts,” p. 312.

all.³⁶ The feast came to stand for YHWH's complete destruction of his enemies and his full reestablishment of global order—a reality Armerding captures as “the full flowering of God's promises, through Israel, to all the nations.”³⁷ The literary prophets of Zephaniah and Zechariah were both hoping in the same future universal “ingathering.”

Furthermore, outside of Zeph 1:2, there are four other significant texts in the Hebrew Bible that potentially use two forms of the root קסא side-by-side: 2 Sam 17:11; Isa 24:22; Jer 8:13; Mic 2:12. All of these texts inform our reading of Zeph 1:2. The latter two contain the only other instances of the *qal* infinitive absolute form קסא .

First, in accordance with YHWH's purposes to bring evil on Absalom (2 Sam 17:14), Hushai counters Ahithophel's counsel in 2 Sam 17:11 by asserting to Absalom, “For I have counseled, ‘All Israel will surely be gathered [$\text{קסא} \text{קסא}$] unto you, from Dan even unto Beersheba.” Here a *niphal* infinitive absolute of קסא precedes a *niphal yiqtol* third masculine singular of קסא (= קסא), and the absolute strengthens the modality of the main verbal action.

Second, in a context very similar to Zephaniah's that focuses on the day of YHWH, Isaiah declares:

And it shall come about in that day that YHWH will visit against the host of the heights in the heights, and against the kings of the ground on the ground, and a gathering will be gathered [$\text{קסא} \text{קסא}$] as a prisoner over a pit, and they will be shut up in a dungeon. And from/after a multitude of days they will be visited. (Isa 24:21–22)

Here the main verb is a *pual weqatal* third masculine plural of קסא , and it is followed by its subject, the noun קסא , a potential bi-form of קסא ‘gathering, collection’ (cf. Eccl 12:11). Significantly, Isaiah mentions that “a multitude of days” separates the “gathering” of the horde from the actual punishment. This accords with my assertion that both Zeph 1:2–3 and 3:8 distinguish God's act of “gathering” from his “punishing.”

Third, Mic 2:12 reads, “I will surely gather [$\text{קסא} \text{קסא}$] all of you, O Jacob; I will surely assemble [$\text{קסא} \text{קסא}$] the remnant of Israel; together I will place him like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture.” Here Micah

36. Sweeney observes, “In that the conclusion of the harvest marks the completion of YHWH's provision of food for the nation, the festival celebrates YHWH's kingship in the world and serves as a means for the legitimation of the institution that represents YHWH's kingship and care for the nation, the temple, and the monarchy” (M. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, p. 108).

37. C. E. Armerding, “Festivals and Feasts,” p. 312.

uses the same verb that Zephaniah employs in the context of coming punishment in 1:2 and 3:8 to speak of the great eschatological second exodus that will result in the salvation and transformation of God's remnant (cf. Mic 4:6; Zeph 3:18). Apparently because Micah uses קָטַף in relation to salvation, Ben Zvi asserts that "the meaning conveyed by the expression in Mic 2:12 is totally opposed to the meaning conveyed in Zeph 1:2 and Jer 8:13."³⁸ However, many prophetic texts treat God's promised future punishment and deliverance as part of *the same* future event.

For example, in Ezek 24:20, 22 we read, "Behold, as for me, I will judge between fat sheep and lean sheep.... And I will work deliverance for my flock, with the result that they will no longer be prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep." Similarly, with explicit connection to the day of YHWH, Malachi asserted:

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all arrogant ones and all doers of wickedness will become stubble. And the day that is coming will set them ablaze.... But for you who fear my name, a sun of righteousness will rise for you, even with healing in its wings. And you will go out and gallop as calves from a stall. (Mal 4:1–2 [3:19–20]; cf. Joel 3:12–16 [4:12–16])

While these texts do not employ קָטַף , their language does suggest that the biblical prophets envisioned the day of YHWH to include a *single* worldwide "ingathering" for the purpose of divine judicial assessment, all in order to ultimately separate the wheat from the chaff and the sheep from the goats. This means that, even though Mic 2:12 uses קָטַף positively in the context of deliverance, he is likely still speaking of the same future ingathering that Zephaniah addressed in 1:2–3 in relation to the wicked of the earth.

Fourth, Jer 8:13 bears the most formal parallels with Zeph 1:2 and may have even been directly influenced by it.³⁹ The verse reads, "I will certainly gather them [אֶקְטֹף אֶתְכֶם]⁴⁰—the utterance of YHWH. There are neither grapes at the vine nor figs at the fig tree. Even their leaf has withered, so I have given to them [attackers]; they will pass over them." As a result of YHWH's declaration, the people assert, "Why are we sitting? Be gathered [אֶקְטֹף אֶתְכֶם], and let us go to the fortified cities and perish there" (Jer

38. E. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, p. 53.

39. See M. DeRoche, "Contra Creation," pp. 281–284.

8:14). קָטַף in Jer 8:13 is a *qal* infinitive absolute from קָטַף , and I have argued above that $\text{קָטַף$ is most likely a *hiphil yiqtol* first common singular plus suffix also of קָטַף . This text is the fourth in Jeremiah that uses vine imagery. Earlier, in Jer 2:21, YHWH declared that he planted Israel as a choice vine but that they had become degenerate and wild. Following the call in 5:1 to “seek in the plazas [of Jerusalem] whether you will find a man—if there is one doing justice, who seeks faithfulness, so that I may pardon her,” 5:10 asserts: “Go up through her (vineyard) rows and destroy, but do not perform a complete destruction. Turn aside her branches, for they are not for YHWH.” In 6:9 we are then told that gleaners would go out to find the remnant of Israel as one gathers grapes (cf. 5:1). Yet 8:13 declares that no grapes or figs could be found. Nevertheless, YHWH promises to “gather,” and in 8:14 we read that people, as objects of God’s wrath, calling one another to do just this only so that they could enter the fortified cities and perish there. Significantly, their destruction is not equal to their being gathered; rather they will die after having been gathered.

Of these passages, those in the Latter Prophets are most significant. Isaiah 24:22 distinguishes a future ingathering for punishment from the destruction itself, just as Zeph 3:8 explicitly distinguishes YHWH’s assembling of sinners for judicial assessment (using the root קָטַף) from the outpouring of his wrath. Micah 2:12 envisions a comparable ingathering at the end of the age that will be for the purpose of preservation; this vision of a future divine assembling likely parallels Zephaniah’s use of קָטַף in 3:18, which also appears to speak of the great second exodus-redemption of God’s people from slavery to sin that is accomplished on the same “day” (Zeph 3:16; cf. 3:9–10, 19–20; Mic 4:6). Finally, Jer 8:13 has YHWH promising to gather the unproductive rabble from Judah, and only after this is accomplished will they perish.

In all likelihood, these various ingatherings are one and the same event, which Zeph 1:2–3 also points to in the context of punishment. Jeremiah’s potential allusion to Zeph 1:2–3 suggests that Zephaniah viewed the great “ingathering” through the lens of a grape or fig harvest, which, when matched with unfruitfulness, is accompanied by a pruning judgment: “I will cut off!” (Zeph 1:3–4). At harvest time, the gardener sets out to collect fruit, but a secondary intent remains—to remove all unproductivity. This secondary purpose stands at the forefront in 1:2–3b and 3:8, whereas 3:18 and its parallels in 3:9–10, 19–20 highlight the primary purpose of redemption.

5. SUPPORT FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

A final support for maintaining that $\eta\sigma\kappa \eta\sigma\kappa$ in Zeph 1:2 means “I will surely gather” comes from a series of New Testament texts that speak of the final judgment in harvest terms: Matt 3:12; 13:30, 40–42; 25:32. In each of these texts, the prophetic language and imagery at least echoes and likely intentionally alludes to Zephaniah’s portrayal in 1:2–3.

First, in a context announcing the intrusion of the day of the Lord (Matt 3:11 with Isa 4:2–4; Mal 3:1–3; 4:5–6 [3:23–24]), the gospel writer records John the Baptist declaring of Jesus, “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather [$\sigmaυνάξει$] his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12). The Baptist’s words portray a single future harvest, wherein the grain is “gathered up” (using $\sigmaυνάγω$), and the wheat is separated from the chaff. The LXX version 8HebXII gr uses $\sigmaυνάγω$ at Zeph 1:2–3b for the future ingathering of the wicked, and Matthew declares that the same ingathering will include both wheat and chaff. While Zephaniah does not mention “fire” in 1:2–3b, he employs the language in 1:18 and 3:8 after introducing in 1:7–8 the sacrificial nature of YHWH’s day of wrath. Matthew and Zephaniah are likely speaking of the same event.⁴⁰

Second, while comparing the kingdom of heaven to a field mixed with wheat and weeds (Matt 13:24–30), Matthew records Jesus stressing how both must “grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘Gather [$\sigmaυλλέξατε$] the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather [$\sigmaυναγάγετε$] the wheat into my barn’” (Matt 13:30). Later, in his explanation of the parable to the disciples, Jesus said:

Just as the weeds are gathered [$\sigmaυλλέγεται$] and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather [$\sigmaυλλέξουσιν$] out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers [$\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha \tau\grave{\alpha} \sigma\kappa\acute{\alpha}\nu\delta\alpha\lambda\alpha \kappa\alpha\iota \tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \pi\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\acute{\nu}\tau\alpha\varsigma \tau\eta\grave{\nu} \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\mu\iota\acute{\alpha}\nu$], and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 13:40–42)

Clearly parallel with our passage is the theme of “ingathering,” which Matthew describes through the verbs $\sigmaυλλέγω$ ‘to gather by plucking or picking’ and $\sigmaυνάγω$ ‘to gather up’, both of which are fine free renderings of the Hebrew $\eta\sigma\kappa$ in Zeph 1:2–3b (cf. 1 Kgs 10:26; Deut 16:13) but the

40. I could find no Matthew scholars who mentioned Zeph 1:2–3 in relation to Matt 3:11. However, as we will see, many interpreters point to it in relation to the parallel in 13:30, 40–42.

latter of which is found in 8HebXII gr at this point. In light of the apostle's vocabulary, Buchanan directly asserts that "Matthew evidently understood ah-sáhf to mean 'gather,' the most normal meaning for the word.... According to Matthew, Zephaniah thought God promised to gather everything from the face of the ground...that he might destroy them by burning."⁴¹ The second parallel with the Hebrew text of Zeph 1:3 is the mention of the *σκάνδαλα* 'stumbling blocks' (ESV = "causes of sin") and the *ἀνομίαν* 'lawless'. While the LXX does not render Zephaniah's phrase "the stumbling blocks with the wicked" in 1:3, Symmachus did, using the wooden *τα σκανδαλα συν [τοις] ασεβεσι* 'the stumbling blocks with the wicked'. It seems very likely that the character of Jesus is alluding to the Hebrew text, identifying the great future ingathering of which he spoke with that of Zephaniah.⁴²

Third, in Matt 25:32 we learn that when the Son of Man comes in his glory with the angels and sits on his glorious throne, "before him will be gathered [*συναχθήσονται*] all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." As in the previous two passages, Matthew's Jesus employs the verb *συνάγω* to speak of the great ingathering of the nations at the end of the age, the same verb employed in 8HebXII gr of Zeph 1:2 to render the Hebrew verb *קָוַם* 'to gather' (cf. Deut 16:13).⁴³ God will gather all peoples together for a single judgment during which he will differentiate the righteous from the

41. G. W. Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew* (2 vols.; Lewiston: Mellen, 1996), 1:616.

42. So too J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 226; F. V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (2nd ed.; London: Black, 1971), p. 163; E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (trans. D. E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), p. 308; D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 235–237; O. P. Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 259–260; D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993), p. 394; W. Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "σκάνδαλον"; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 536; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew–Mark* (2nd ed.; Expositor's Bible Commentary 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p. 374; compare W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2:430. Luz explicitly affirms the link between Matt 13:41 and Zeph 1:3 when discussing Matt 7:22–23 (U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7* [ed. H. Koester; trans. J. E. Crouch; 2nd ed.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], p. 380), but he is less forthright in his comments on Matt 13:41 itself (U. Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary on Matthew 8–20* [ed. H. Koester; trans. J. E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001], p. 269 nn. 23–24).

43. Davies and Allison rightly cite Zeph 3:8 as a possible backdrop to Matt 25:32, but they fail to identify the link between Zeph 3:8 and 1:2–3 (W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 3:422).

wicked. The latter “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46).

In all three of these texts, Matthew’s Jesus not only refers to a single ingathering that would be followed by both curse and restoration blessing, but he also appears to do so with Zephaniah in mind. This supports my reading for Zeph 1:2.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that both forms in the verb phrase אָסַף אֶסְפוּ in Zeph 1:2 are properly parsed as deriving from the common root אָסַף ‘to gather’ and that the phrase itself grows out of the context of harvest and means “I will surely gather.” The future ingathering that the prophet envisioned points ultimately to the end-time period when YHWH will assemble all the earth for judicial assessment, distinguishing in that single event the righteous and wicked, the former whom he will save and the latter whom he will punish.

Retaining the same root for both forms accords with normal Hebrew grammar, and this reading finds much support within Zephaniah, which elsewhere uses the root אָסַף in relation to the day of YHWH both with respect to punishment (Zeph 3:8) and salvation (3:18). With this, other Latter Prophets use אָסַף when speaking of both a future second exodus-ingathering for salvation (Isa 11:12; Ezek 11:17; Mic 2:12) and a future ingathering for punishment (Isa 24:22; Hos 4:3; Zech 14:2). Furthermore, not only do a number of prophetic texts associate both punishment and salvation with the day of YHWH (e.g., Joel 3:12–16 [4:12–16]; Mal 4:1–2 [3:19–20]; cf. Ezek 24:20, 22), but three texts also displaying dual uses of אָסַף bear strong grammatical and semantic parallels with Zephaniah and support the differentiation between the ingathering and the punishment or salvation that follows (Isa 24:21–22; Mic 2:12; Jer 8:13). Finally, three texts from the New Testament that likely allude to Zeph 1:2–3 identify a single future ingathering for both punishment and deliverance (Matt 3:12; 13:30, 40–42; 25:32).

Zephaniah 1:2–3 differentiate the “ingathering” of the world (אָסַף) from the act of “cutting off” humanity (כָּרַת) just as Zeph 1:4 distinguishes the “stretching out” of YHWH’s hand against Judah (נִטָּה) from his act of “cutting off” its inhabitants (כָּרַת). The phrase אָסַף אֶסְפוּ in Zeph 1:2 speaks only of YHWH’s future ingathering of the world for judicial assessment and does not by itself insinuate a global destruction like the flood.

Matthew's recorded words of Jesus in 13:40–43 highlight the lasting significance of my conclusions:

Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!