

## **Zephaniah’s Macrostructure: A Textlinguistic-Rhetorical Analysis**

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In this study, “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 also assess how they interrelate to communicate an author’s message. My method for determining macrostructure within Old Testament prophetic books like Zephaniah resembles the new form criticism as practiced by Marvin Sweeney and Michael Floyd 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.<sup>2</sup> Like Sweeney, I argue that Zephaniah is a two-part argument with a setting followed by exhortations.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, my exegetical and theological assessments differ at key points from both him and Floyd (at times substantially), and I organize the book differently especially in relation to the structuring function of the imperatival clauses in Zeph 3:8 and 14.

When interpreting prophetic discourse, the present study traces Zephaniah’s argument and thought-flow by carefully assessing discourse features like the following:<sup>4</sup>

1. the use of the coordinate conjunction *waw* to create chains of discourse that we are to read together (i.e., text blocks);
2. the role of asyndeton to signal disjunction due to a fresh beginning, explication, or something else;
3. 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;

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<sup>2</sup> 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, Part 2*, FOTL 22 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 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); Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, eds., *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> In a separate forthcoming paper titled “Perspectives on Zephaniah’s Macrostructure: Critiques and a Proposal,” I evaluate four alternatives to Zephaniah’s macrostructure and thought-flow: (1) a three-part structure related to speech-forms; (2) a prophetic drama with two-character dialogue; (3) a dramatic prophecy with thematic development; (4) a thematic chiasm.

<sup>4</sup> For a further development of my approach to discourse analysis, see chapters 2, 5–6 in Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017).

4. other discourse markers (e.g., וְהָיָה “and it happened that”; הִנֵּה “Look!”);
5. 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);
6. participant tracking through observing explicit subjects and pronominal referents;
7. repetition of phrases and patterns.

Building on these types of features, table 1 shows the book’s organization and argument levels. The 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	(Sing)	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 (Motivation)		3:8–10		11–20 (Motivation)		20c	
	Setting (1:2–18)				Invitation Stage 1 (2:1–3:7)				Invitation Stage 2 (3:8–20b)					

*Table 1. DeRouchie’s Structural Overview of Zephaniah*

## The Superscription to the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (1:1)

Formally, Zephaniah 1:1 is a “superscription” that introduces the book.<sup>5</sup> It contains no sentence but stands as a title at the book’s head. A prophetic word formula (here = דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אָלַי־הָיָה אֵלַי, “YHWH’s word that came to”) makes up the heading, of which variations are common throughout the OT’s prophetic revelatory contexts (e.g., Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jon 1:1; Mic 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1; Mal 1:1).<sup>6</sup> The title consists of a noun phrase and a relative descriptive clause. The noun phrase (“YHWH’s word”) clarifies the book’s nature and source. The relative descriptive clause indicates when the book’s messenger (a black Judean prophet named “Zephaniah”) originally prophesied (i.e., during their reign of King Josiah).

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

Following the superscription in 1:1, the book’s initial section runs from 1:2–18 and provides the motivational setting for the main exhortations that follow in 2:1–3:20.<sup>7</sup> The syntactic disjunction created through the asyndetic imperative “Bind yourselves together” (הִתְקוּשְׁבוּ) in 2:1 shows that 1:18 completes the book’s introduction. Michael Floyd notes: “The point of 1:2–18 is to realize what the nature of the present situation is. Ch. 2 begins to deal with

<sup>5</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 539–40.

<sup>6</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 546.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sweeney, “A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah,” 392–93.

what should then be done and also explains why.”<sup>8</sup> Section one supplies both the context (1:2–6) and content (1:7–18) of a call to revere God in view of his coming day of fury.<sup>9</sup>

The oracle opens in 1:2 with the asyndetic  $\text{אֶסְגֹּף אֶסְגֹּף}$  (“I will surely gather”), using an indicative *yiqtol* in non-first position that announces YHWH’s intent to gather everything in the world for judicial assessment.<sup>10</sup> The *yiqtol* is in turn followed by a chain of *weqatal* clauses, which together indicate Zeph 1:2–6 is anticipatory discourse that announces an impending punishment that will impact the whole world, including Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> The promises of global punishment against humanity’s rebels (1:2–3) and local punishment against Judah’s rebels (1:4–6) each 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.

Verse 7 then designates this time of wrath as “the day of YHWH” ( $\text{יּוֹם יְהוָה}$ ), and the following verses repeat the term “day” ( $\text{יּוֹם}$ , 1:8–10, 14–16, 18), thus signaling the thematic unity of the whole. The use of the onomatopoeic exclamatory Hebrew interjection  $\text{הָה}$  (“Hush!/Silence!”) in 1:7a signals the start of a new unit and shifts the discourse from anticipation to a form of directive speech, urging the audience to revere God. Content and form indicate that the overall unit has two main parts—exhortation (1:7a) and rationale (1:7b–18), the latter of which has two halves, the first addressing the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (1:7b–13) and then second concerning the eschatological punishment of the whole world (1:14–18).<sup>12</sup>

While many scholars treat 1:2–18 as merely a prophetic judgment speech addressing the day of YHWH,<sup>13</sup> Floyd is correct that “this theme ... is completely subordinate to the hortatory elements of the text.”<sup>14</sup> The announcement of coming devastation in 1:2–6 provides a context for the appeal to hushed reverence in 1:7a ( $\text{הָה}$  “Hush!/Silence!”), and the causal conjunction  $\text{כִּי}$

<sup>8</sup> Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 186.

<sup>9</sup> See Jason S. DeRouchie, “Revering God: Punishment on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 1:2–18),” *BSac* (2024): forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup> For a defense that both words in the expression  $\text{אֶסְגֹּף אֶסְגֹּף}$  in Zeph 1:2 derive from  $\sqrt{\text{אסג}}$  (“to gather”), see Jason S. DeRouchie, “YHWH’s Future Ingathering in Zephaniah 1:2: Interpreting  $\text{אֶסְגֹּף אֶסְגֹּף}$ ,” *HS* 59 (2018): 173–91.

<sup>11</sup> Duane A. Garrett and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 312–14; DeRouchie, *How to Understand*; cf. Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph—A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 105–10.

<sup>12</sup> Floyd and Renz disagree with this study’s understanding of 1:7–18’s flow. They parallel the interjection in 1:7a with the potential imperative in 1:11. For Floyd, the whole unit exhorts people to prepare for the day of YHWH as for both a festival day of sacrifice (1:7–10) and a day of solemn lamentation (1:11–18). Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 184–86. Renz treats 1:7–10 and 1:11–18 as successive movements that share the same general structure, portray the coming threat at YHWH’s day, and focus on God as the agent of destruction. Thomas Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 485, 512. Both scholars fail to grasp the full significance of (1) the asyndeton (i.e., lack of connection) marking a fresh beginning at verse 14, (2) the repetition of “the day of YHWH is near” ( $\text{קָרוֹב יּוֹם יְהוָה}$ ) in 1:7b and 1:14a, and (3) the forms of  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (“and it will happen that”) in 1:8a and 12a used as discourse markers to introduce parallel units. They also fail to recognize enough that 1:7a includes an interjection and *not* an imperative and that  $\text{וַיִּלְלוּ$  in 1:11a is more likely an indicative Hiphil *qatal* (“they have wailed”) and not a Hiphil imperative (“Wail!”). Regardless of the latter point, 1:11a is best read as an inner-paragraph comment directly related to what precedes; it does not start of new section.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 185.

(“for/because”) in 1:7b shows that the following announcement of God’s imminent day of punishment serves only to motivate the silent awe for which 1:7a calls.<sup>15</sup>

Following the hortatory appeal in 1:7a (הִשָּׁח), the prophet uses a motive clause (כִּי) to base his call to honor God in the imminence of punishment: “the day of YHWH is near” (קָרוֹב יוֹם יְהוָה, 1:7b). He then describes the divine retribution against Jerusalem (1:7b–13). At both 1:8 and 1:12 the climax marker וְהָיָה (“and it will happen that”) signals development from the motive clause in 1:7b and introduces two discrete paragraphs. Each paragraph includes a divine action plus result—the first addressing YHWH’s punishment on Jerusalem’s political and religious leaders (1:8–11) and the second describing the divine condemnation of all in the city who are complacent (1:12–13).

The lack of conjunction at the head of 1:14 signals disjunction from what precedes. The prophet recalls the wording in 1:7b but now adds “the *great* day of YHWH is near” (קָרוֹב יוֹם לְיְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל), suggesting that 1:14 begins a second reason why Zephaniah’s audience must revere God: the entire world will experience YHWH’s wrath.<sup>16</sup> The prophet graphically describes the characteristics of the coming day (1:14–16) and then develops the effects, noting both humanity’s distress (1:17) and destruction (1:18), all because “against YHWH they have sinned” (1:17c).

Significantly, 1:15–16 contain five of Robert Longacre’s six proposed markers for surface structure peak.<sup>17</sup> By heightening attention to the characteristics of YHWH’s “day,” Zephaniah creates a “zone of turbulence” in the text that further emphasizes the need to revere YHWH (1:7a).

1. *Rhetorical underlining*: The repetition of “day” (יוֹם) seven times in 1:15–16 calls attention to the central place of YHWH’s day in this unit.
2. *Heightened vividness*: The prophet uses five pairs of nouns that graphically and arrestingly develop the portrayal of YHWH’s day of “wrath” (עֲבָרָה) (1:15–16).
3. *Change of pace*: The use of asyndeton along with five pairs of staccato-like outburst in 1:15–16 slows the oracle’s pacing and by this brings tension into the text.
4. *Change of vantage point and/or orientation*: The shift from “the day of YHWH is near” (1:7b) to “the *great* day of YHWH is near” (1:14a) indicates a change in scope from local to global punishment and from immediate to eschatological disaster.

<sup>15</sup> While the interjection הִשָּׁח (“Hush!”) signals that directive speech is the primary discourse-type that governs 1:7–18, the lack of a true imperative distinguishes this material from what follows in 2:1–3:20, wherein imperatives in 2:1, 3 and 3:8, 14 set the section apart as the primary hortatory portion of the oracle. Zephaniah 1:2–18 prepares the reader to hear the book’s main exhortations that follow.

<sup>16</sup> Motyer treats the phrase קָרוֹב יוֹם יְהוָה (“the day of YHWH is near”) in 1:14a as an *inclusio* with 1:7b, seeing the final unit of chapter 1 beginning in 1:14b and running through 1:18. J. Alec Motyer, “Zephaniah,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 917. It is more natural, however, to see both phrases in 1:7b and 14a as *introducing* what follows.

<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer, 1996), 38–48. The feature not included is “concentration of participants.”

5. *Incidence of particles and onomatopoeia*: The presence of prose particles (אֶת־/אֲשֶׁר/הֵ) helps formally distinguish prose from poetry.<sup>18</sup> None of the absolute nouns in the five construct pairs is definite, and this poetic flow draws attention to the brief unit.

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

#### **Does the New Section Begin in 2:1 or 2:4?**

Some scholars propose that the book’s initial section runs from 1:2–2:3 because (1) the theme of the day of YHWH that is so evident in 1:2–18 (see esp. 1:4–6, 8–13) still controls 2:1–3 and (2) the mention of the Philistines in 2:4 signals a topic shift away from judgment on Judah (1:2–2:3) to punishment of the foreign nations (2:4–15).<sup>19</sup> However, numerous factors related to both grammar and content argue for 1:18 ending the book’s introductory section and the oracle’s main hortatory appeals beginning in 2:1.<sup>20</sup>

At least three *grammatical* arguments exist for seeing the first main section running only through 1:18. (1) In the cline of volitional intensity, imperatives mark the highest level of positive rhetorical force in directive speech.<sup>21</sup> Thus, by their very nature, the five imperatives in 2:1, 3 (“Bind yourselves together and become a bundle.... Seek.... Seek ... seek”) stand out from what precedes. (2) The imperative in 2:1a (הִתְקוּשְׁבוּ, “Bind yourselves together”) has no syntactic link with the previous context, and its lack of connection creates a strong disjunction in the text. Disjunction marked by asyndeton usually initiates a new thought unit or explicates what precedes, whether by restating, clarifying, or explaining.<sup>22</sup> The imperative at the head of 2:1 does not explain what precedes. So, it likely marks a fresh beginning in the book that shifts focus away from the announcement of coming punishment (1:2–6) and the demand to revere God (1:7–18) to the beginning of the main exhortations (noted by the use of imperatives).<sup>23</sup> (3) The causal conjunction כִּי (“for”) in 2:4 makes the punishment against the nation that follows inseparable

<sup>18</sup> See Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, “‘Prose Particle’ Counts of the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor, vol. 1 of *American Schools of Oriental Research, Special Volume Series* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 165–83.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 162–63; Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 162–63; Johannes Vlaardingebroek, *Zephaniah*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), v–vi, 25–27.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ivan Jay Ball Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley, CA: BIBAL, 1988), 114–22; Sweeney, “A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah,” 392–93; 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), 283–85; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Longacre, *Joseph*, 121; DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 112–13. cf. Garrett and DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, 331.

<sup>22</sup> See Stephen Graham Dempster, “Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period” (University of Toronto, PhD diss., 1985), 42–47; DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 103–04; 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, Presented to Peter J. Gentry on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Jonathan Kiel, Phillip Marshall, and John Meade, *BET* 115 (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 129–50.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 51, 106, though he fails to recognize the imperative in 3:8 as joining with those in 2:1–3 to capture “the fundamental premise of the entire book.”

from the preceding exhortation in 2:3.<sup>24</sup> This also clarifies why the Masoretes put a closed paragraph marker after 2:4 ( ׀ = *setumah*), noting that 2:4 goes with what precedes.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, seven additional factors related to *content* indicate that a unit ends at 1:18 and 2:1–3 introduces what follows rather than concludes what precedes: (1) The global concerns in 1:2–3 and 1:14–18 provide a literary frame for the initial section,<sup>26</sup> suggesting that all of 1:2–18 shape a literary unit. (2) Judah and the world’s coming punishment (1:2–18) provides only the setting for the book’s main exhortations to seek YHWH together (2:1, 3) and to wait for YHWH (3:8). (3) The vocative address in 2:1, 3 marks the first instances of the prophet explicitly addressing a particular audience (“the nation not longing,” 2:1; “the humble of the land,” 2:3). (4) Whereas Zeph 1:2–18 speaks of YHWH’s day in relation to God’s actions, 2:1–3 brings it up in relation to the people’s needed response.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the explicit use of the “day” (יום) of YHWH language employed in 2:2–3 is only picked up again in 3:8 and then continued in 3:11 and 16. This thematic tie at the two points where the imperatives lie upholds the view that 2:5–3:7 supports the primary line of exhortation. (5) YHWH regularly declares punishment beyond Judah throughout the book, including in 1:2–18 (e.g., 1:2–3, 14–18; 2:4–15; 3:6, 8). Hence, calling 1:2–2:3 “Judgment against Judah and Jerusalem” in distinction from “Oracles against the foreign nations” in 2:4–15 fails to capture Zephaniah’s intent.<sup>28</sup> (6) The parallel units (each beginning with “woe!” [הוֹי] in 2:5 and 3:1) that lament the state and fate of the foreign nations (2:5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7) supply unmarked reasons why Zephaniah’s listeners must seek God together (2:1, 3) and wait for him (3:8). Thus, the foreign nation material in 2:5–15 provides a natural rationale for what precedes and follows. Therefore, strong internal evidence shows that 2:1–3 goes with what follows rather than what precedes.

### **An Overview of the Two-Stage Exhortation in 2:1–3:7 and 3:8–20b**

The strong syntactic disjunction in Zeph 2:1 (through the asyndetic imperative) and the forceful parenetic thrust of the commands in 2:1, 3, and 3:8 mark 2:1–3:20 as the book’s main hortatory core and distinguish it from the preceding setting (1:2–18). The prophetic exhortations come in two stages, which combine to charge the righteous remnant to pursue YHWH together

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 99, 101–02; Ryou, *Zephaniah’s Oracles*, 186–207; Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 215–16; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 111; Ernst R. Wendland and David J. Clark, “Zephaniah: Anatomy and Physiology of a Dramatic Prophetic Text,” *JOTT* 16 (2003): 8; Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 520 n.l. Floyd, Sweeney, and Wendland and Clark believe ׀ grounds all of Zeph 2:1–3. This interpretation is unlikely since (1) the initial imperative in 2:3 lacks syntactic connection with the imperatives in 2:1 and (2) ׀ is an inner-clausal connector that does not normally extend beyond the borders of a sentence. As such, 2:4 gives an initial reason to seek YHWH, with no direct reference to 2:1’s imperatives. Motyer begins a section in 2:4, despite believing it explains “the foregoing proclamation of judgment” (Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 902). Wendland and Clark treat 2:4 as a janus construction that works both directions—rhetorically beginning a new unit but also presenting “a strong motivation for people to heed the preceding divine warning-appeal (2:1–3).” Wendland and Clark, “Zephaniah,” 24 n.8, 36.

<sup>25</sup> The syntax, rhetorical function, and third-person nature of 2:4 support this reading, and no manuscript evidence exists to suggest that 2:4 originally followed 2:5 (so Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 196) or 2:6 (so William L. Holladay, “Reading Zephaniah with a Concordance: Suggestions for a Redaction History,” *JBL* 120 [2001]: 678).

<sup>26</sup> So too Sweeney, “A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah,” 393 n.13.

<sup>27</sup> Sweeney, “A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah,” 393. Sweeney writes, “Whereas 1:2–18 focuses on the actions of Yhwh, 2:1–3 focuses on the actions of the people.”

<sup>28</sup> Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 162.

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 adds a charge to wait for YHWH to enjoy salvation (3:8–20). The listeners must, therefore, look and long, hunger and hope, entreat and trust.<sup>29</sup>

Stages 1 and 2 display a parallel structure, the significance of which I will consider further below:

1. Command(s) (second masculine plural imperative[s]) (2:1, 3 / 3:8a);
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!” [הוי, 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 matched structure comes with the discursive intrusion of 3:14–15, which marks the book’s rhetorical motivational peak.<sup>30</sup>

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

#### ***The Charge to Unite Together before YHWH (2:1–2)***

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 body. The section’s first unit of 2:1–2 opens with two conjoined masculine plural imperatives from the same root (שָׁמַר). Like sheaves to be preserved, Zephaniah charges “the nation not longing” to “*bind yourselves together and become a bundle!*” (הִתְקוּשְׁבוּ וְקוּשְׁבוּ). They must quickly repent before the winds of divine wrath come and blow them away like chaff (2:2). The terminology builds on the earlier ingathering language in 1:2 and stresses that God was ready to begin a new era of salvation history by ending the present one.

#### ***The Charge to Seek YHWH in Righteousness and Humility (2:3–4)***

The second unit in 2:3–4 appears to narrow the addressees to the land’s humble, the faithful remnant who have heeded the earlier calls to revere God (1:7) and unite (2:1) in view of

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<sup>29</sup> For similar approaches to how the charges to seek YHWH together (2:1, 3) and wait for YHWH (3:8) function within Zephaniah, see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 202–203; E. Ray Clendenen, “The Minor Prophets,” in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 377–79.

<sup>30</sup> While recognizing the role of the imperatives in 2:1, 3, Sweeney misses that the imperative in 3:8 is core to Zephaniah’s message and that the לְכֵן (“therefore”) in 3:8 draws an inference from 2:4–3:7 and not just 3:1–7 (Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 111). Both Ryou and Floyd rightly recognize the link between 2:1, 3 and 3:8 (Ryou, *Zephaniah’s Oracles*, 284–85; Floyd, *Minor Prophets: Part 2*, 203). Ryou, however, treats the two texts as an opening and closing frame rather than as parallel beginnings of two stages in an extended argument. Floyd does not carry the exhortation unit begun in 3:8 to its necessary end at 3:20 but instead stops it at 3:13. The parallel “in that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) statements in 3:11 and 3:16 suggest that the unit beginning in 3:8 extends to the end of the book and that the imperatives in 3:14 are part of the overall motivation to wait in 3:8a.

YHWH's coming wrath.<sup>31</sup> Three identical masculine plural Piel imperatives urge this group to pursue YHWH while he may be found (2:3). The initial command “*Seek YHWH*” (בְּקִשׁוּ אֶת־יְהוָה) is asyndetic, marking its independence from the previous commands and highlighting it as the main thrust of the stage 1 exhortation.<sup>32</sup> The next two disconnected imperatives then explicate it: “*Seek righteousness; seek humility!*” (בְּקִשׁוּ־צְדָקָה בְּקִשׁוּ עֲנוּוָה).

The prophet initially motivates this call to pursue YHWH with a hopeful comment: “Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of YHWH's anger” (2:3d). He then immediately grounds (בִּי, “for/because”) the call by predicting Philistia's destruction, which shows that God's fiery wrath is at Judah's doorstep (2:4). Only by fully surrendering to YHWH is there any possibility of escaping his blazing fury (2:3d).<sup>33</sup>

### ***Two Reasons to Seek YHWH Together (2:5–3:7)***

Next, 2:5–3:7 laments the state and fate of the rebels from the foreign nations (2:5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7) and provides a logical ground for the charges in 2:1, 3 and 3:8 that frame it. Zephaniah 2:5 and 3:1 both begin with asyndetic “Woe” (הוֹי) statements, suggesting that they introduce parallel units that clarify two sides of the same outpouring of wrath. As Janzen Waldemar articulates, “The woe of 3:1 represents the transition from the series of foreign nations oracles to prophecies concerning Jerusalem, ... a transition that links the two series more than it divides.... Jerusalem is not contrasted with the foreign nations, but is drawn perhaps editorially, into their list and threatened with the same prospect, namely the Day of the Lord.”<sup>34</sup> At its core, the evil that YHWH is confronting is human pride and oppression. Those in Judah and the surrounding nations elevated themselves over YHWH and those made in his image, and they would soon experience God's wrath.<sup>35</sup>

The asyndetic nature of each “Woe” allows the units they introduce to function rhetorically as a basis for the framing commands, even though causal conjunctions do not formally mark them as such.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, because the units are extensive, the prophet could not

<sup>31</sup> Although ארץ refers to the broad “earth” in most other places in the book (1:18; 2:11; 3:8, 19–20; cf. 2:5b), the emphasis on “the nation” in 2:1b suggests that we should read אֶרֶץ in 2:3a in a more restrictive sense, referring to the “land” of Judah. 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.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed., SubBi 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), §177-ef; Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Call to Covenant Love: Text Grammar and Literary Structure in Deuteronomy 5–11*, Gorgias Dissertations 30 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007), 123.

<sup>33</sup> For more on Zeph 2:1–4, 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.

<sup>34</sup> Cited by Duane L. Christensen, “Zephaniah 2:4–15: A Theological Basis for Josiah's Program of Political Expansion,” *CBQ* 46 (1984): 682 from Janzen Waldemar, “*Ašrê* and *Hoi* in the Old Testament” (Harvard University, PhD diss., 1969), 234. See, too, Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 174; Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 901. Wendland and Clark treat 3:1 as beginning the book's final division of the book but note that “the exclamatory *hōy* ... suggests significant continuity with what has gone before (cf. 2:5).” Wendland and Clark, “Zephaniah,” 12, 28, quote from 28.

<sup>35</sup> See Zeph 2:3ac, 8bc, 10bc, 15a–c; 3:2–4, 11b–12a. For a similar conclusion, see Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 209.

<sup>36</sup> So, too, Ryou, *Zephaniah's Oracles*, 284. הוֹי is preceded by י in only three of its fifty-one occurrences (see Jer 22:18 [2x]; 34:4), and many of the forty-eight asyndetic forms stand in parallel with another הוֹי. E.g., (1) Isa



use the inner-clausal subordinate conjunction כִּי (“for/because”) to signal the rationale. Instead, the asyndeton signals that the unit generally explicates what precedes, leaving one to discern the specific rhetorical function from context. Here, each unit beginning with “Woe!” gives an independent but related reason why the audience should heed the commands in 2:1, 3. First, listeners must seek YHWH together and become part of the preserved remnant (2:7, 9) because God is bringing wrath on all the surrounding nations (2:5–15); this implies that Judah cannot escape. Second, repentance must come because God will indeed judge Jerusalem herself because of her stubborn failure to learn from his discipline (3:1–7).

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

### ***The Charge to Wait for YHWH to Rise (3:8–10)***

In 3:8 the oracle now returns to the primary level of exhortation, as signaled by the reappearance of masculine plural address (cf. 2:1, 3). The inference marker לָכֵן in 3:8 emphasizes that 2:5–3:7 also supplies the reason for heeding the command to “wait.” Because of the encroaching punishment against Judah’s neighbors and Jerusalem, the God-fearing remnant of Judah and other lands must seek YHWH together (2:1, 3) *and* wait for him: “Therefore, wait for me” (לָכֵן חִבּוֹ-לִי, 3:8).

### *The Nature and Basis of the Inference in 3:8*

Scholars do not all affirm this understanding of Zephaniah’s macrostructure, for they disagree regarding the role of the inferential particle “therefore” (לָכֵן) plus imperative “wait” (חִבּוֹ) in Zeph 3:8. OT prophets commonly employ לָכֵן to mark a divine verdict following an accusation of covenant (dis)loyalty (e.g., Zeph 2:9; Hos 2:6; Ezek 5:10–11), like what we see in 3:1–7.<sup>37</sup> Thus, many scholars assume that Zephaniah draws a negative inference from at least part of 3:1–7’s indictments and calls the rebels of Jerusalem to await their coming punishment.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, others rightly recognize that the command in 3:8 likely does not introduce a judgment speech because elsewhere the verbal root in the imperative “wait” (חִבּוֹ) of 3:8 never issues negative threats.<sup>39</sup> Rather, the verb functions either neutrally (e.g., 2 Kgs 7:9; Job 3:24; Hos 6:9) or to urge positive anticipation, like awaiting God’s judgment to pass (Isa 8:17) or his restorative

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5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21; (2) Isa 10:1, 5; (3) Isa 28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; (4) Isa 45:9, 10; (5) Amos 5:18; 6:1; (6) Hab 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Wolff notes, “In the older prophets, לָכֵן almost always marks the transition from the proof of guilt to the threat of punishment.” Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 35–36.

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Wilhelm Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania*, vol. 3 of KAT 13 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975), 289–90; Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, 184, 190; Hubert Irsigler, *Zefanja*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002), 342, 343–44; Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 582–86, 595–97.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 948; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 326; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 215; Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 202–203; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 179–80.

deliverance to come (e.g., Ps 33:20; Isa 64:4; Hab 2:3).<sup>40</sup> Both grammatical and macro-structural features suggest that 3:8 positively calls the remnant to wait for YHWH in hope.

*First*, two grammatical features support reading Zeph 3:8 positively: (1) The imperative “wait” in 3:8 is in second masculine plural, whereas 3:1–7 refers to Jerusalem in third feminine singular (Zeph 3:1–5, 7) and its rebellious inhabitants in third masculine plural (3:7).<sup>41</sup> The book’s only other earlier imperatives (2:1, 3) are all second masculine plural, suggesting 3:8 supplies stage 2 of the Savior’s invitation to satisfaction and addresses not the whole nation but the faithful remnant.<sup>42</sup> As such, 3:8 likely draws an inference (לְכֵן “therefore”) from the state and fate of the rebels from both the surrounding nations and Jerusalem (2:5–15; 3:1–7). The remnant should seek YHWH together (2:1–4) *because* of the impending doom on Judah’s neighbors (2:5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7). And *because* of this coming destruction (2:5–3:7), they must also wait for YHWH to rise as covenant witness (3:8–10).

(2) After the initial imperative “wait!,” YHWH declares two reasons why those he charges should confidently and patiently trust. Both reasons begin with the causal particle כִּי (“for”) and the second can only apply to a hopeful people. The remnant must endure in faith *because* YHWH will punish all the earth’s wicked during his great eschatological ingathering (3:8bc) and *because* at the time of this ingathering (וְכֵן-כִּי “for then”) God will create a body of worshipers from the whole earth (3:9–10).<sup>43</sup>

*Second*, reading 3:8 as a positive appeal and as the introduction to stage 2 of Zephaniah’s invitation to satisfaction manifests remarkable and apparently intentional symmetry within the book’s main exhortation section. As noted in table 2, both stages 1 and 2 follow the same basic pattern: One or more second masculine plural imperatives are grounded in one or more כִּי (“for”) clauses followed by two extended parallel sections (each beginning the same way) that provide unmarked motivation for the command(s). The balance enhances the book’s harmony and justifies reading 3:8 as part of Zephaniah’s central exhortation to the remnant.

1. The Charge to Unite Together before YHWH (2:1–2)	Commands (2mp imperatives)
2. The Charge to Seek YHWH in Righteousness and Humility (2:3–4)	
a. The Charge to Seek YHWH (2:3)	

<sup>40</sup> Some affirm the positive nature of the verb “wait” but believe Zephaniah speaks sarcastically in 3:8. Irsigler, *Zefanja*, 342, 353; Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 598–99.

<sup>41</sup> Both the LXX and Vulgate modified the Hebrew to singular imperatives (Greek = ὑπόμεινόν με; Latin = *expecta me*), likely to link Zeph 3:8 more clearly to the singular forms in 3:1–7. Renz claims the MT’s masculine plural imperative in 3:8 must address the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the end of 3:7. Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 594 n.l.

<sup>42</sup> Floyd recognizes the similarity in form and content between 3:8 and 2:1–3 and also affirms that these texts are “the two main structural poles around which the rest of the material is organized.” Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 203; cf. Ryou, *Zephaniah’s Oracles*, 284–85. For others who link 3:8 and 2:3, see, e.g., Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 210; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 215; 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), 92–93.

<sup>43</sup> For alternative, unsatisfying proposals, see Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, 196; Irsigler, *Zefanja*, 344; Wendland and Clark, “Zephaniah,” 30; Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 607–8. Sweeney is correct that “the expanded particle וְכֵן-כִּי points to vv. 9–10 as the climactic elements in the reasons given for the basic exhortation of the passage in v. 8a, ‘wait for me....’” Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 183.

b. An Initial Reason to Seek YHWH (2:4)	Initial basis fronted with “for” (כִּי)
3. Two Reasons to Seek YHWH Together (2:5–3:7)	Two unmarked reasons, both beginning with “Woe!” (הוֹי)
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)	
1. The Charge to Wait for YHWH to Rise (3:8–10)	Command (2mp imperative)
a. The Charge to Wait for YHWH (3:8a)	
b. Two Reasons to Wait for YHWH (3:8b–10)	Two initial bases, both fronted with “for” (כִּי)
2. Promises to Motivate Waiting for YHWH: The Remnant’s Satisfying Salvation (3:11–20b)	Two unmarked promises, both introduced by “in that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) but separated by the discursive charge.
a. The Promise that YHWH Will Not Shame Jerusalem (3:11–13)	
<b>b. A Discursive Charge to Rejoice (3:14–15)</b>	
c. The Promise that YHWH Will Save Completely (3:16–20b)	

*Table 2. The Balanced Structure of Zephaniah’s Stage 1 and 2 Exhortations*

The imperative’s positive use in 3:8 signals that the unit is directive or parenetic speech.<sup>44</sup> The whole is a “prophetic exhortation,” which often includes varied types of motivations.<sup>45</sup> In sum, (1) the lexical usage of the verb “wait” in Scripture, (2) the unlikelihood that 3:8 draws an inference only from 3:1–7, (3) the link between the second masculine plural imperatives in 2:1, 3 and 3:8, (4) the positive reason for waiting supplied in 3:9, and (5) the symmetry that it supplies Zephaniah’s whole argument all suggest that 3:8 positively charges the remnant rather than negatively warns rebels.

### *The Argument and Function of 3:8–10*

Given this conclusion, we now consider the flow and role of 3:8–10, the first of the two main units (3:8–10, 11–20b) in stage 2 of the Savior’s invitation to satisfaction. Apparent are the main charge to “wait” for YHWH (3:8a) and then two reasons to do so, each beginning with the causal conjunction כִּי (“for,” 3:8bc, 9–10). The first reason has its own basis, also signaled by כִּי, and indicates God’s intent to gather nations to pour out upon them his fury, *for* he has already purposed that his fiery jealousy will consume the earth (3:8bc). The second reason promises that, at the time YHWH rises to judge the earth, he will also generate a transformed community of worshipers who will, with unified heart, call upon his name (3:9). He then expands the details with an asyndetic clause, noting that the remnant will be multi-ethnic and come to serve YHWH from the region of the rivers of Cush, the homeland of Zephaniah’s ancestors (3:10; see “Cushi” in 1:1).

Wendland and Clark note that Zephaniah’s “intensity and salience”<sup>46</sup> in 3:8–10 signal a rhetorical peak in the book. YHWH’s pronounced use of possessive personal pronouns clarifies his extensive sphere of influence. YHWH’s comment regarding “my rising” (3:8a) leads first to the ominous “my judgment,” “my indignation,” “all the fury of my anger,” and “the fire of my

<sup>44</sup> See DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 112–13; cf. Garrett and DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, 330–33.

<sup>45</sup> Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 203, 213, 235; see Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 527.

<sup>46</sup> Wendland and Clark, “Zephaniah,” 31.

jealousy” (3:8bc), which stand against the more positive “my supplicants,” “the daughter of my dispersed ones,” and “my offering” (3:10). The initial grouping references unrepentant objects of his wrath who have sinned against YHWH (1:17–18). The latter grouping concerns those who have sought YHWH and sought righteousness and humility (2:3). These now fear (3:7b) and call (3:9–10) on YHWH, and they take refuge in his name (3:12b). Additionally, Ben Zvi notes that these verses stand out due to 3:8’s many textual links.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, (1) the second masculine plural command to “wait” links with the similar imperatives in 2:1, 3; (2) the language of “ingathering” reaches back to 1:2–4 and anticipates 3:18–20b; (3) the statement in 3:8 “for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed” recalls 1:18; (4) the phrase “the fury of my anger” points back to 2:2; and (5) “my judgment” alludes to both 2:3 and 3:5.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Promises to Motivate Waiting for YHWH: The Remnant’s Satisfying Salvation (3:11–20b)***

After the charge and two reasons to “wait” for YHWH in 3:8–10, the second main unit (3:11–20b) includes three subunits that contain direct and indirect promises to motivate sustained hope in God amidst the present and encroaching global turmoil (3:11–13, 14–15, 16–20b). YHWH’s voice dominates the outer sections. Each begins with the same fronted, asyndetic prepositional phrase “in that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, 3:11, 16), which recalls the future-oriented hope of the “day” of YHWH’s rising (3:8a).<sup>49</sup> God’s initial promise stimulates persevering trust by pledging that he will not shame Jerusalem but will cleanse her and make his holy mountain a place for his transformed people to flourish (3:11–13). In the latter unit, God promises to save Jerusalem completely, gathering his remnant, fighting for them, restoring them, and raising them up as testaments to his greatness (3:16–20b). A discursive charge to rejoice comes between these units, and it treats the future deliverance as if it had already occurred (3:14–15). In these two verses, Zephaniah reaches his rhetorical motivational peak, but his imperatives do not progress his main exhortations (found in 2:1, 3; 3:8) to another stage. Instead, the intrusive material supports his exhortation to “wait” by making the desire for future joy a present delight.<sup>50</sup>

### *Is Zeph 3:11–20 a Unified Whole?*

While scholars generally agree that there are at least minor shifts between the divisions proposed here, many fail to recognize the whole as a discrete unit.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, many features call for reading all of 3:8–20b together—stage 2 of the Savior’s invitation to satisfaction.

1. All of 3:8–20b is tied together by the mention of “the day.” Zephaniah fronts both 3:11 and 16 with the asyndetic prepositional phrases “in that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא), suggesting that

<sup>47</sup> Ben Zvi, *The Book of Zephaniah*, 318.

<sup>48</sup> For more on Zeph 3:8–10, 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.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Waylon Bailey, “Zephaniah,” in *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, by Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, NAC 20 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 487; Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary*, Minor Prophets Exegetical Commentary (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 374.

<sup>50</sup> For more on Zeph 3:11–20, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Rejoicing Then and Now: Pleasures on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 3:11–20),” *BSac* (2024): forthcoming.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 165–66; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 170; Wendland and Clark, “Zephaniah,” 13–14. Some notable exceptions are Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 210–15; Clendenen, “The Minor Prophets,” 377–79; Tachick, *The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, 86–107.

he intended we read the two subunits together.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the “day” to which both phrases refer is “the day of my rising for a witness” (יום קומי לְעֵד) in 3:8.<sup>53</sup>

2. Three of the four imperatives in 3:14 are feminine singular, unlike the masculine plural imperatives in 2:1, 3 and 3:8. This altered pattern suggests that these imperatives function differently than those that precede. The feminine singular nature of the first and third groupings (3:14a, 14cd) signals that the international remnant has become a collective identified with the new, eschatological city of Jerusalem. The masculine plural central imperative (3:14b) then equates the united and restored city with “the remnant of Israel”—the ethnically diverse worshipers who have gathered to YHWH’s presence at “the mountain of my holiness” (3:9–12). Zephaniah envisions God having transformed his people and having dawned salvation history’s consummate era.
3. Zephaniah supports his three-part command in 3:14 by employing in 3:15 two *qatal* verbs that speak of YHWH’s judgment as if it has already happened. But the rest of the book portrays the day of wrath as still future.<sup>54</sup> This implies that 3:14–15 does not function like the imperatives in 2:1, 3 and 3:8. 3:14–15 most likely supplies a rhetorical, celebrative intrusion that supports the call to “wait for me!” in 3:8 by disclosing that YHWH’s future salvation is absolutely secure; his faithful remnant can rejoice now as if he has already fully acted.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the joy of the future creates present satisfaction, as desire gives rise to delight, even in the waiting.
4. Lexical and conceptual correspondences demonstrate that 3:14–15 links to what precedes and follows. With respect to what precedes, table 3 shows that these connections include the use of בַּת (“daughter”), יִשְׂרָאֵל (“Israel”), Hiphil סוּר (“remove”), עלו/עליו (“exultant, to exult”), and קָרַב (“midst”).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Tachick, *The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, 100–101; cf. 95–96; see also Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 325, 327; Bailey, “Zephaniah,” 490, 495. De Vries notes of the “introductory transitions” in Zeph 3:11 and 16 that “the two events are to be interpreted as roughly synchronous with each other,” but he sees them functioning in different ways. Simon 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), 52; cf. 43–44.

<sup>53</sup> Though Wendland and Clark state that “in that day” in 3:11 recalls YHWH’s day from 3:8–9, they fail to note the same is true at 3:16. See Ernst R. Wendland and David J. Clark, “Zephaniah: Anatomy and Physiology of a Dramatic Prophetic Text,” *JOTT* 16 (2003): 31, 33.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Zeph 1:7, 14; 2:2; 3:8, 11, 19. One can say that YHWH’s eschatological destruction has begun *typologically* if indeed Zeph 2:12 refers to Cush’s *past* demise. The disjunctive nature of Zeph 2:12 and its lack of verbal specificity likely signal that the verse function as transitionally and refers to a status that began in the past. Thus, the slaying of the Cushites has already happened and likely refers to the fall of the Twenty-fifth Cushite Dynasty of Egypt in 663 BC, one generation *prior* to Zephaniah’s preaching (see Isa 20:3–6). For this interpretation, see, e.g., Christensen, “Zephaniah 2:4–15,” 681; Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 212–13; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 146; Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 569.

<sup>55</sup> Floyd is close to this perspective (Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 243–45), but he still fails to see how the imperatives in 3:14 function differently than in 2:1, 3 and 3:8 and how 3:14–15 is actually part of the motivation to “wait” in 3:8.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Ben Zvi, *The Book of Zephaniah*, 241; Tachick, *The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, 97 n.65.

Zeph 3:8–13	Zeph 3:14–15
1. “The <i>daughter</i> of my scattered ones” (בַּת־פוּצִי) (3:10a)	1. “O <i>daughter</i> of Zion” (בַּת־צִיּוֹן) (3:14a); “Oh daughter of Jerusalem” (בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם) (3:14d)
2. “The remnant of <i>Israel</i> ” (שְׂאֲרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל) (3:13)	2. “O <i>Israel</i> ” (יִשְׂרָאֵל) (3:14b)
3. “I will <i>remove</i> ... the <i>exultant ones</i> of your pride” (אָסִיר מִקְרֹבָד עֲלֵיזֵי גְאוּתְדָךְ) (3:11b)	3. “And <i>exult</i> with all your heart... YHWH has <i>removed</i> your judgments ... your enemy” (וְעֲלִי וְהִסִיר יְהוָה מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ ... אִיבֹדְךָ) (3:15ab)
4. “I will remove from <i>your midst</i> ... at the mountain of my holiness. And I will leave <i>in your midst</i> a humble and poor people, and they will take refuge in the name <i>YHWH</i> ” (אָסִיר מִקְרֹבָדְךָ ... בְּהַר קְדוֹשֵׁי וְהִשְׁאֲרֵתִי) (3:11bc, 12ab) יהוה יְחַסּוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה (בְּקִרְבְּךָ עִם עַנְי וְדָל וְחָסוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה) (3:11bc, 12ab)	4. “O daughter of Jerusalem ... Israel’s king, <i>YHWH</i> , is <i>in your midst</i> ” (בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם ... מְלֶכְךָ) (3:14d, 15c)
5. “There will be none who cause trembling” (אֵין מִחְרִיד) (3:13f)	5. “Never fear evil again!” (לֹא־תִירָאֵי רַע עוֹד) (3:15d)

Table 3. Lexical and Conceptual Links between Zephaniah 3:14–15 and 3:8–13

With respect to what follows, table 4 show that the lexical links include צִיּוֹן (“Zion”), יְרוּשָׁלַם (“Jerusalem”), רָנָה/רָנָן (“sing aloud/song”), שְׂמֵחָה/שִׂמְחָה (“be merry/merriment”), יִרָא (“to fear”), יְהוָה (“YHWH”), and קְרֹבָד (“midst”).<sup>57</sup>

Zeph 3:14–15	Zeph 3:16–17
1. The mention of <i>Zion</i> (צִיּוֹן) and <i>Jerusalem</i> (יְרוּשָׁלַם) (3:14ad)	1. The mention of <i>Jerusalem</i> (יְרוּשָׁלַם) and <i>Zion</i> (צִיּוֹן) (3:16ac)
2. Three-part command to rejoice in YHWH’s salvation (3:14) with some lexical correspondence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Sing aloud!” (רָנֵי) (3:14a)</li> <li>• “Be merry!” (שְׂמֵחִי) (3:14b)</li> </ul>	2. Three-fold note of YHWH’s rejoicing in his remnant (3:17c–e) with some lexical correspondence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “May he celebrate over you with <i>song</i>” (יְגִיל עֲלֶיךָ בְּרָנָה) (3:17e)</li> <li>• “May he delight over you with <i>merriment</i>” (יִשְׂשֵׁשׂ עֲלֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה) (3:17c)</li> </ul>
3. “Never <i>fear</i> evil again!” (לֹא־תִירָאֵי רַע עוֹד) (3:15d)	3. “Do not <i>fear</i> !” (אַל־תִּירָאֵי) (3:16b)
4. “ <i>YHWH</i> has removed your judgments; he has turned away your enemies. Israel’s king, <i>YHWH</i> , is <i>in your midst</i> ” (הִסִיר יְהוָה מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ פָּנָה אִיבֹדְךָ מְלֶכְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה) (בְּקִרְבְּךָ) (3:15c)	4. “ <i>YHWH</i> your God is <i>in your midst</i> . As a warrior, he will save!” (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּקִרְבְּךָ גִבּוֹר יוֹשִׁיעַ) (3:17a)

Table 4. Lexical and Conceptual Links between Zephaniah 3:14–15 and 3:16–17

All these features disclose that 3:8–20 is an integrated unit of prophecy about *the future*, the whole of which we are to read together. This is so, despite 3:14’s imperatives being grounded in 3:15’s accomplished deliverance (through *qatal* verbs).<sup>58</sup>

#### The Argument and Function of 3:11–20b

The internal structure of the three subunits in 3:11–20b develop in the following way. *First*, 3:11–13 includes two parts: The asyndetic temporal phrase “in that day” introduces the

<sup>57</sup> Floyd notes elements of ##2–4 (Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2*, 243); Ben Zvi along with Wendland and Clark list elements of all four (Ben Zvi, *The Book of Zephaniah*, 246; Wendland and Clark, “Zephaniah,” 13). Cf. Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 450; Tachick, *The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, 99.

<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Ben Zvi, *The Book of Zephaniah*, 246.

details of the promise in 3:11a. Then 3:11b–13 supplies two bases for the promise, the first marked by  $\text{כִּי־אָז}$  (“for then”) and each containing a first-person statement of what God will accomplish (3:11a with *yiqtol*, 12a with *weqatal*) followed by a non-first-person statement of result (3:11b, 12b). The latter is then explicated through three coordinated negative clauses ( $\text{לֹא} \dots \text{לֹא} \dots \text{לֹא}$ ) (3:13abc), the last of which is followed by a three-fold rationale initiated by  $\text{כִּי}$  (“because”) (3:13def).

*Second*, 3:14–15 supplies an intrusive call to joy as part of the motivation to “wait for me!” in 3:8. Zephaniah gives four semantically similar imperatives in three groupings of asyndetic charges to rejoice—the first feminine singular ( $\text{רְנִי}$ , “Rejoice aloud!”), the second masculine plural ( $\text{הִרְרִיעוּ}$ , “Shout aloud!”), and the third and fourth both feminine singular ( $\text{שִׂמְחוּ וְעִלְזוּ}$ , “Be merry and exult!”) (3:14). Following this charge are two asyndetic reasons to rejoice that each includes a statement and explication (15ab, cd).

Scholars rightly emphasize the imperatives in 3:14. Though these volitional forms do not directly build upon the primary exhortations in 2:1, 3 and 3:8, they mark the book’s rhetorical high point and by this provide the highest motivation to heed God’s command “wait for me!” (3:8). Christopher Tachick has noted that 3:14–15 contain Robert Longacre’s six proposed markers for surface structure peak:<sup>59</sup>

1. *Rhetorical underlining*: Zephaniah use of four imperatives in 3:14 is more than in any other verse in the book. The sharp, broken nature of the outbursts suggests that the prophet cannot contain his joy.
2. *Concentration of participants*: In 3:14, the prophet climactically “crowds the stage” by addressing several chief figures related characters appearing elsewhere in the book: “daughter” (3:10), “Zion” (3:16), “Israel” (2:9; 3:13, 15), and “Jerusalem” (1:4, 12; 3:16; cf. 3:1, 11).<sup>60</sup>
3. *Heightened vividness*: Unlike his earlier pattern of repeating verbal roots in 2:1 ( $\text{קָשַׁשׁ}$ , “to bundle”) and 2:3 ( $\text{בָּקַשׁ}$ , “to seek”), Zephaniah colors his call to rejoice by using four imperatives from different roots in 3:14 ( $\text{רָנַן}$ , “to sing aloud”;  $\text{רוּע}$ , “to shout”;  $\text{שִׂמַח}$ , “to be merry”;  $\text{עָלַז}$ , “to exult”). He also vividly changes from masculine plural to feminine singular in three of the four imperatives, thus noting the unity that has come to the transformed, multi-ethnic “Israel.”
4. *Change of pace*: In 2:1, 3 and 3:8, various adverbial particles marked reasons to heed Zephaniah’s imperatives ( $\text{בְּטָרָם}$ , “before,” 3x in 2:2acd;  $\text{כִּי}$ , “because” in 2:4a;  $\text{כִּי}$ , “because” 2x in 3:8b, 9a), but in 3:14 the prophet simply expresses his charges in staccato fashion and then adds an unmarked reason to rejoice in 3:15.
5. *Change of vantage point and/or orientation*: Whereas the book’s initial two-thirds motivates the audience by visions of dread (save the brief statements of hope in 2:7, 9cd, 11c), 3:9–20b inspires patient trust among the remnant by portraying amazing vistas of

<sup>59</sup> Tachick, *The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, 101–107; see Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, 38–48.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 148.

joyous and global salvation.<sup>61</sup> This shift is most pronounced in 3:14's three-fold call to celebrate proleptically because of God's certain deliverance in 3:15. Altering the time perspective from "judgment is coming" in 2:1–4 and 3:8 to "judgment is past" in 3:15 (using *qatal* verbs) highlights 3:14's prophetic outburst calling for joy amidst the waiting.

6. *Incidence of particles and onomatopoeia*: As already noted, the presence of prose particles (אֶת־/אֲשֶׁר/וְ) helps formally to distinguish prose from poetry.<sup>62</sup> 3:11–13 has two such particles (3:11a), and 3:16–20b has ten;<sup>63</sup> 3:14–15 has none. This supports that these verses are more of a didactic intrusion encouraging celebration.

As table 2 reveals, the way 3:14–15 stands out in the book's overall macro-structure further highlights the distinct and elevated rhetorical role these two verses play in Zephaniah's argument. The overall flow of 2:1–3:20b contains a remarkable parallel symmetry between stages 1 and 2 of Zephaniah's exhortation, and the balance is broken only at 3:14–15. Here the discursive directive speech (3:14–15) intrudes between the two motivating promise sections (3:11–13, 16–20b), while in stage 1 the two unmarked reasons stand directly adjacent (2:5–15; 3:1–7).

*Third*, grasping the flow of thought in 3:16–20b is challenged by the difficult Hebrew in 3:18.<sup>64</sup> The subunit likely has two parts (3:16–18, 19–20b), each detailing promises from different perspectives that YHWH will completely save his remnant.

The first section opens with the promise that "in that day" of YHWH's rising, someone will declare to personified Jerusalem that they need not fear. The speech frame occurs in 3:16a, and then 3:16b–18b detail the speech itself. The prohibition not to fear comes in 3:16bc both as charge and explication, and then two unmarked reasons to avoid fear follow (3:17, 18). Some interpreters end the quotation at 3:17 (e.g., CSB). However, the verb אָסַף ("to gather") being in the *qatal* in 3:18 suggests that the future speech treats the ingathering as a past reality. And because God assembling the world's peoples both for punishment (1:2–3; 3:8, using both אָסַף, "to gather," and קָבַץ, "to assemble") and deliverance (3:19–20b, using קָבַץ; cf. 3:10) is still *future* in relation to Zephaniah's present time, the treatment of the ingathering as past in 3:18 indicates that the verse is still part of the citation of what *will be* declared on the day of YHWH.

The second section opens with the arresting הִנְנִי ("Behold, I!"), an asyndetic marker of immediate significance that returns the prophet's argument to his present time (3:19a). What follows treats the deliverance at the day of YHWH as *future*. God first pledges to fully save those he once banished (3:19) and then expounds on this promise in more personal terms (3:20ab).

<sup>61</sup> Achtemeier writes, "The Book of Zephaniah ends in almost unimaginable joy." Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 86. Similarly, Robertson observes that Zephaniah includes at its front "one of the most awesome descriptions of the wrath of God in judgment found anywhere in Scripture" and then at its end "one of the most moving descriptions of the love of God for his people found anywhere in Scripture." Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 334.

<sup>62</sup> See Andersen and Forbes, "'Prose Particle' Counts of the Hebrew Bible," 165–83.

<sup>63</sup> See Zeph 3:16a, 19a [2x], 19bd, 20a [2x], 20b [3x].

<sup>64</sup> Scholars generally view this verse's Hebrew as the book's most difficult: נִגְנִי מִמוֹטֵד אֲסַפְתִּי מִיּוֹם מִשְׁאָת עָלְיָהּ חֲרָפָה. I render the whole, "Those tormented from an appointed time I have gathered. They were away from you; a burden was on her, a reproach." Read in this way, 3:18 gives a second reason YHWH's faithful remnant should be courageous when his day arrives: YHWH will ensure this people's full salvation and rest since he will have fulfilled his promised second exodus ingathering.



Zephaniah 3:11–20b provides the book’s highest-level motivations for jointly seeking and waiting, looking and longing (2:1, 3; 3:8). Each of the three units (3:11–13, 14–15, 16–20b) are dominated by feminine singular forms that refer to the newly transformed city Jerusalem—a city that is no longer “rebellious and defiled” or “oppressive” (contrast 3:1–7) but is now filled with an international “afflicted and needy people” who “will take refuge in the name YHWH” (3:12ab). Zephaniah counts this multi-ethnic community as the new remnant of Israel (3:13, 15; cf. 3:9–10).

In the way that the unit directly supports the command to “wait” in Zeph 3:8, the whole of 3:11–20b is part of the prophetic exhortation. Nevertheless, because the sub-unit is principally focused on future hope of deliverance and accompanied by prohibitions not to fear, the unit itself is a “prophetic announcement of salvation.”<sup>65</sup>

### **The Subscription of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (3:20c)**

Zephaniah closes his book where he began. The superscription to his exhortation declared that what followed was “YHWH’s word that came to Zephaniah” (1:1), and now the book concludes with the prophet indicating that what precedes was fully from God: “YHWH has spoken” (אָמַר יְהוָה). Prophetic oracles commonly end this way.<sup>66</sup> Because the whole book stands as a single oracle, the formula relates to all that precedes.

Connecting the whole book to God in this manner emphasizes the seriousness of the book’s commands, the certainty of its predictions, and the trustworthiness of its promises. The *qatal* form אָמַר (“he said”) suggests that the preceding oracle was received prior to its inscription, and the book only proposes Zephaniah himself as the one who both received and wrote down YHWH’s revelation.<sup>67</sup> Readers must “seek” YHWH together (2:1, 3) and “wait” for him (3:8), relishing already the joy set before them (3:14, 17). Patiently pursuing God together will most certainly result in prolonged pleasures in his presence, all for his glory and great joy. This is the essence of the Savior’s invitation to satisfaction.<sup>68</sup>

**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)

<sup>65</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 531.

<sup>66</sup> E.g., Amos 1:5, 15; 2:3; 5:16; 9:15; cf. Obad 18; Hag 2:23.

<sup>67</sup> This statement does not rule out the use of a scribal amanuensis like Baruch (Jer 36:4, 32) who could have transcribed Zephaniah’s words. However, because Zephaniah was himself part of the royal line and intimately aware of the political scene, Zephaniah himself could have written the oracle since he was part of the royal line and intimately aware of the political scene.

<sup>68</sup> For a short unit-by-unit 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*, ZECOT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

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 Discursive 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 5. The Main Idea and Exegetical Outline of Zephaniah*