

Re-examining the Theological Functions of “Seek the Lord” (*bāqqaš ’ādōnāy*) in Zephaniah 2:1-3, for Contemporary Society

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Abstract

Zephaniah 2:1-3 is a theological delight and a translational crux for exegetes and theologians. It reaches its climax with three imperatival parallel exhortation, “Seek the Lord” (*bāqqašū ’ādōnāy*), “Seek righteousness” (*bāqqašū tsaddiq*) and “Seek humility,” (*bāqqašū ’ānāvāh*). Using “hermeneutics of faith,” this essay examines the addressee as well the theological function of these phrases. It argues that the shameless nations, (v. 1) and the poor of the land (v.3) are the theological recipients of Zephaniah’s prophecy. And concludes that the theological and ethical functions of Zephaniah 2:1-3 are primarily exhortative and salvific for the faithful remnants of every age, time and culture.

I. Introduction

The prophecy of Zephaniah (2:1-3) captures the nature of God’s relationship with Israel. It is a relationship that demands obedience and total repentance from idolatries, to a witness of God’s mercy, love and generosity. This unit (Zeph 2:1-3) has always been a theological delight and a translational crux for many exegetes.¹ An invitation to “seek the Lord” (*bāqqašū ’ādōnāy*), “righteousness” (*bāqqašū tsaddiq*) and “humility” (*bāqqašū ’ānāvāh*) forms its exhortative and ethical climax. Who are the addressees and what are the ethical intentions or the theological functions of these imperatival statements? These are recurring questions which this study intends to theologially reappraise, but with the help of faith hermeneutics.²

This is the harmony of faith and reason, biblical exegesis and systematic theology.³ It is a “scientific” reading with an “explanatory power,” from the heart of the Church.⁴ This approach has a twofold unifying power: (1) the power to hold fast the entire testimony of the sources, comprehend their nuances and pluriformity, (2) the power to transcend the differences of cultures, divisions, times and peoples, civilization and their values.⁵ Hermeneutic of faith also represents a reverent listening, a seeking after the living voice of God who in his gracious love speaks to us in the human words of the biblical texts.⁶ It is a dialogue in faith with God who speaks to the human person in every culture the living experience of the people of God, the Church.⁷

With this approach this study translates the text and maintains in its exegesis the links between our unit of focus (Zeph 2:1-3) and the past prophetic traditions, particularly the remaining passages of Zephaniah, which emphasizes divine judgment (1:2-18) and salvation for those who repent in Judah and in other nations (2:4; 3:1-20). In other words, the shameless nations (v.1), and the humble of the land (v.3), in this essay represent the

particular and universal recipients of these prophetic words. Besides the universal salvific elements of this unit (Zeph 2:1-3), its theological functions are dynamic and fundamentally exhortative for faithfulness.

II. Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Zephaniah 2:1-3

In Zephaniah (2:1-3) we read:

BHS ⁸	My Provisional Translation
<i>hithqôš^esû wāqôšsû</i> (v.1a)	Gather, and gather yourselves together
<i>haggôy lo' nikh^sāph</i> (v.1b)	O shameless nation not longing for
<i>b^eterem ledeth choq k^emots 'ābhar yôm</i> (v.2a)	Before you are driven away like the chaff in the day
<i>b^eterem lo'-yābô' 'ālêkhem chārôn 'aph- 'ādōnāy</i> (v.2b)	Before the fierce anger of the Lord comes to you
<i>b^eterem lo'-yābô' 'ālêkhem chārôn 'aph- 'ādōnāy</i> (v.2c)	Before the Day of the Lord's anger comes upon you
<i>bāqqašû'eth- 'ādōnāy kol-'an^evê hā'ārets,</i> (v.3a)	Seek the Lord all you humble of the land
<i>'āsher misheppātô pā'ālû</i> (v.3b)	Who do his commands
<i>bāqqašû tsaddiq bāqqašû 'ānāvāh</i> (v.3c)	Seek righteousness, seek humility
<i>'ūlay tissātherû b^eyôm 'aph- 'ādōnāy</i> (v.3d)	Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's anger

This *pericope* many scholars would agree poses a translational crux such that “any translation and interpretation must be highly tentative.”⁹ It contains an ambiguous expressions and rare words, whose meaning is problematic and sometimes unclear, even in its context.¹⁰ Ben Zvi, however, considers these words and expressions as characteristic and typical of Zephaniah.¹¹

The difficulties begin right away with the initial verse (v.1a) where we meet a double imperatival usage of *hithpolel* (*hithqôš^esû*) and *qal* (*wāqôšsû*). Many theologians agree that these double imperatives share a common root verb *qšš*, derived from the noun *qš* (“stubble” or “straw”).¹² Questions have been raised whether these imperatives in Zephaniah 2: 1-3 were used with the intended meaning of gathering straw or stubble.¹³ John Gray, for instance in “A Metaphor from Building in Zephaniah II, I”, argues that, although *qšš* is the identifiable root verb, it is not derived from the noun *qš*. Rather, he contends that it is related to the verb *qšh* “to be hard, severe.” He then translates this prime verse (v.1a) as “stiffen yourselves and stand firm.”¹⁴ However, I would argue along Ben Zvi’s line that the use of *hithpolel* and *qal* of *qšš*, here seems to fit well into Zephaniah’s creative style of employing rare terms not common in other OT passages. We find some exceptions in the Book of Exodus where the *poel* form of the verb is used

to characterize Israelites who are subjected by Pharaoh's order to gathering their own straw (Exod 57-12; cf. Num 15:32-33; 1 Kings 17:10-12).¹⁵

Modern biblical versions and translators have also grappled with the meaning of this prime verse of the prophet Zephaniah (v.1a).¹⁶ Theologically, Széles sees in this text, particularly on the bases of RSV's translation "come together," a moral or spiritual implication of pulling oneself together, or returning to one's consciousness or state of life.¹⁷ Berlin views the specific sense of "gather like straw" as figurative in order to highlight the vulnerability of disobedient Judean and other nations to God's fire of anger (v.1b).¹⁸ These modern commentaries and translations, including mine, undoubtedly bear the imprint of the generalized meaning given to this text by ancient versions as "assembling oneself."

In the LXX, for instance, we have "*sunachthēte kai sundethēte*" ("be gathered together and unite together," closely followed by the Vulgate's *convenite congregamini* (assemble, be gathered). Similar translations are found in Symmachus, Targums and in the Talmud.¹⁹ Granted the difficulties the translation of these prophetic words (Zeph 2:1a) may pose to ancient and modern scholars the sense of "gather and gathering of oneself," for me, is theologically more appealing for few reasons. The first, Zephaniah, if I may reiterate is known for using rare and difficult words to communicate his prophecy. Secondly, this sense of "gathering" of Israel is repeatedly in different forms throughout the entire text of Zephaniah. For example we read two verbs *'āsēph*, (*hiphil* imperfect) signifying "annihilate" or "sweep," and *'āsoph* (infinitive absolute), with the basic meaning of "to gather together" (Zeph 1:1-3). Again in the last chapter of Zephaniah we have *qābats* in the infinitives and *piel* imperfect forms (Zeph 3:8, 19, 20), with similar meanings of "gather" or "assemble."²⁰

In addition the *niphal* verb *nikh^sāph* (Zeph 2:1b) has its own translational challenges. *Kāsaph* means different things in different contexts. For example in the same text of Zephaniah *kseseph* means "silver" or "money" (Zeph 1:18). This has made some to associate the *kāsaph* ("long for") in Zephaniah 2:1b with the semetic root word "money" or "silver."²¹ For me this is not very convincing. There two other texts in the OT that can help shed light on the meaning of the use of *kāsaph* in our specific unit of investigation (Zeph 2:1-3).

The first is the episode where Laban says to Jacob, his son in-law "now that you had to leave because you were really longing for (*kāsaph*) your father's house, why did you steal my gods" (Gen 31:30). The second is the song "my soul longs and pines for (*kāsaph*) the courts of the Lord, my heart and flesh cry out for the living God" (Ps 84:3). In these two texts we notice the verb *kāsaph* occurs in *niphal* but with the active meaning "to long for" or "to desire."²² It is probably in this sense of "desire" or "long for," as suggested by Hunter, that *kāsaph* is used in our text (Zeph 2:1b).²³

In addition, since the proposition "for" is not deployed in Zephaniah, Kapelrud suggests that *nikh^sāph* be given passive translation "O nation which is not desired."²⁴

This seems to resonate with the Vulgate's "*gens non amabilis*" (O nation that is not loved or undesirable nation). Similarly, in the LXX we have "*to ethnos to apaideuton*" (undisciplined, unchastened or unruly nation). Yet many believe it has been influenced by Aramaic tradition which translates *nikh^esāph* as "be ashamed."²⁵ My conclusion to all these is that whether *nikh^esāph* is used in the passive or active sense, the basic meaning of a nation not seeking or longing for the Lord, or that has lost God's favor theologically stands out.

Verse 2 of our (Zeph 2:1-3) unit also presents some translational difficulties for theologians. The MT attests "*b^eterem ledeth choq k^emots 'ābhar yôm*" ("before giving birth or delivering a statue/decreed or chaff or wild flower has crossover as a day"), throwing the door open for varieties of interpretation.²⁶ Similarly, the LXX attests "*pro tou genesthai humas hōs anthos paraporeuomenon*" (before you become like the flower that passes over). Comparing these two attestations, *genesthai* ("to become") of the LXX translates the *ledeth* ("beget" or "born") of the MT and also logically fits the latter's emendation of *b^eterem ledeth choq* (before the birth of statue) to *b^eterem lo'tiddāchqū* (before you are not driven away). This position seems acceptable by many scholars. And therefore makes sense in the overall context of Zephaniah's message of judgment to idolaters and moral teachings to those who resist seeking the Lord.²⁷ It is an invitation to be faithful to the Lord.

Besides this overwhelming divine invitation to seek the Lord the significance of the double negative or superfluous *lo'* (not) in verses 2bc, which is surprisingly absent in verse 2a, deserves a brief comment. It is attributed to scribal editing.²⁸ In fact the expression "before you are not driven away" can also be theologically seen within the overall context of Zephaniah as pointing to God's divine initiative. From the beginning God entered into a loving relationship of peace, love and forgiveness with Israel, particularly those addressed in verse 3. God preserves the remnant of Israel shall not be driven away forever. This brings us to the question of the addressee.

III. The Question of the Addressee

The "shameless nation" (*haggōy lo' nikh^esāph*, v.1) and the "humble of the land" (*'an^evê hā'ārets*, v.3) clearly are the two groups addressed by the prophet Zephaniah. But this question of the identity of the recipients of this theological message indirectly takes us back to Zephaniah's background and his original settings, evident in the superscription (Zeph 1: 1). Based on this superscription, many have argued that message Zephaniah (2: 1-3) goes back to the time of the reforms of King Josiah (640-609 BCE).²⁹

Prior to this reform Israel and Judah witnessed struggles and rivalries among the super powers (Egypt, Assyria and Babylon). The negative impact of these struggles were felt politically, socially and economically by the people. In addition to these external threats, the internal practice of idolatry in Judah, presided over by the idolatrous kings,

like Manasseh (686-642 BCE) and Ammon (642-640 BCE) was also detrimental to Judean citizens. It is to these nation[s] (*haggôy*) and the citizens, particularly the poor of the land (*'anêvê hā'ārets*) that Zephaniah's prophecy is directed.

It is also debatable whether these two designations, "nation" (*haggôy*) and "the poor of the land" (*'anêvê hā'ārets*) refer to the same or different nations, including the four Philistine cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron (v.4). Széles thinks that "nation" is a restricted reference to the "chosen people and its leaders, the priests, the court officials, the army officers, the merchants, the financiers, the aristocratic rich, the self-satisfied, the apathetic citizens of the capital city," but does not comment on the poor of the land.³⁰ Others specifically contend that both audiences are the same (nation and the poor of the land). They argue that verses 1-2 with its pejorative characterization of the nation as shameless people, serve to alert the recipient community to be attentive to Zephaniah's exhortation in verses 1-3.³¹ Wilhelm Rudolf, in particular, argues that the addressees are those to be blamed for the judgment but through haplography (v.3) the proposition *kî* ("as" or "like") has dropped out before the *kol-'anêvê hā'ārets* (all you humble of the land).³² Otherwise the verse 3a would read, "Seek the Lord as all the humble of the land."³³ According to Rudolf, the humble of the land are models of or complete opposite of the disobedient and unfaithful ones addressed in the entire text.

On the other hand, Hunter moves beyond this. He thinks the nation and the humble of the land point to two audiences. The first had to do with the people who have incurred the fierce anger of the Lord (vv.1-2), while the second deals with the poor and small humble group of less influential believers, who trust God and stand the chance of salvation (v.3). Zephaniah, he stresses ironically uses reflexive imperatives (*hithpoel*) to impress on the audience, what the Day of the Lord will bring to the disobedient ones (v. 2c).³⁴

In alternative to preceding opinions of Rudolf, Hunter and Széles, I embrace faith hermeneutic, which strives beyond time and culture. With it, I propose that Zephaniah 2:1-3 revolves around the threats of the "Day of the Lord" (v. 2bc). This concept was adapted from antecedent prophetic traditions (e.g. Amos 5: 18-20). Zephaniah uses it to paint the picture of God who loves, judges and punishes (Zeph 1:14-18). He also rewards and restores the remnants (Zeph 3:14-20). Zephaniah's theology is addressed particularly to Judah (Zeph 1:4-10) and universally to other nations outside Jerusalem, beginning with human beings to all divine creation (Zeph 1: 2-3, 18; 2: 4-15; 3: 8-11).³⁵

Zephaniah's invitation of the humble of the land to seek the Lord" (*bāqqašû'eth-ādōnāy*, v.3) also opposes those, within and outside Judah, who did not seek the Lord (Zeph 1: 6; 2:1). Just as the concept of Day of the Lord was theologically adapted from earlier texts (e.g. Amos 5:4-6, 4-15),³⁶ the notion of the poor and humble members of the society, or the addressee (Zeph 2:1-3) were given priority place by earlier prophets like Amos (2:7; 5:10; 8:4) and Micah (6:8). Zephaniah was never a stranger to these concepts nor their implications, which was not restricted to time and context.³⁷ In other words, in

each of these texts, particularly in Zephaniah, the humble of the land (*an^evê hā'ārets*) must be viewed within the proximate and broader contexts of the earlier texts. The prophets Amos, Micah and Isaiah, in particular view the humble of the land as the lower economic classes of the society who were faithful to God's commandments (v. 3b).³⁸

They were truly righteous. They represent the very opposite of the reckless, politically prideful, and economically selfish and religiously vain whom the prophet condemns (Zeph 2:4-15). With this message, Zephaniah promotes a new religious and ethical behavior, including righteousness and humility.³⁹ He offers hope for salvation for those who respond to this promotion. Zephaniah's divine hope is introduced by the expression *'ûlay tissāth^erû b^eyôm'aph- 'ădōnāy* ("perhaps you will be hidden on the Day of the Lord's anger" v.3d).

IV. Theological Function of Zephaniah 2:1-3

Establishing the addressee in the foregoing section serves as a transitional bridge to further outline of the theological and ethical functions of this text (Zeph 2:1-3). In my own judgment, this text sheds clearer light on the intention of the overall prophecy of Zephaniah. It is an intention traceable to the much and already discussed *Sitz im Leben* of the prophet, his living experience, setting and time which hermeneutic of faith unequivocally seeks to promote.

Faced with rampant idolatries, syncretism and corruption among leaders including religious officers in Jerusalem (Zeph 1:4-10), and the influence of foreign nations that were imported to Judah (1:8-13). In his response Zephaniah reminds the nations and Jerusalem of the God of Israel, and the everlasting covenant relationship that exists between them. Obedience and faithfulness to God are consistently important ingredients for this relationship. Zephaniah 2:1-3 functions to promote this cause. It is an exhortation to nations and an encouragement to the rich and the poor in Judah to seek the Lord. It warns against the Day of the Lord (1:18-20). It functions exhortatively but particularly and universally to inspire repentance, humility, faith, hope and righteousness.

Sweeney takes particular interest and note in the LXX's reading of the MT as *ûbāqqašû tsaddiq bāqqašû û 'ănāvāh* ("and seek righteousness and seek humility," v.3) in order to strengthen the exhortative function of this text.⁴⁰ Here, "seeking the Lord" stands in parallelism with seeking righteousness (*tsaddiq*) and humility (*'ănāvāh*), and with doing his commands (*mishppātō*).⁴¹ If earlier prophets like Amos and Hosea, upon whom Zephaniah depended, could point to an expansion of "seeking God" beyond the ceremonial and external realms to an internal and ethical level, Zephaniah 2:3 according to Siegfried Wagner "seems to express this idea more clearly."⁴² Amos 5 for instance condemns injustices committed against the poor and the humble of the society. Verses 4-6 particularly stress the need of "seeking the Lord" (*dārash*) and not just the external Bethel; while verses 21-27 compare righteousness (*tsaddiq*) with a constantly following

stream in the wadi.⁴³ Hosea 5:6, 15 also extends similar invitation for ethical responsibility to his contemporaries, since those who dare go to seek the Lord (*bāqqash*) with flocks and herds without reparation will not find him.⁴⁴

V. Zephaniah 2:1-3, Beyond Prophetic Tradition

With faith hermeneutics, the theological function of the content of Zephaniah 2:1-3 obviously is felt beyond the corridors of prophetic traditions and biblical exegetes to systematic theologians. Without delving into a major digression, let me briefly demonstrate this. In the Psalter, for example, Israel is encouraged to seek the Lord, his presence in praise and prayer, based on what God has done for them in history.⁴⁵ Claus Westermann calls it “call to praise” and presents Psalm 103 as a typical example. Patrick D. Miller rightly identifies in Psalms 9 and 10 other genres such as lament, prayer for the hope of the poor.⁴⁶ In Psalm 105 similar imperatival forces *darashu/baqqashu* (you seek) as in the prophets are exhortatively employed (vv 4-5).

Several passages in the New Testament also lay exhortative emphasis on seeking the Lord (*zēteō*) by all, especially by the humble of the land, the poor (cf. Matt 6–7).⁴⁷ The Evangelist says, “but strive (“seek”) first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33).⁴⁸ The imperative here (“seek”) which is in the present implies a continuous obligation of the disciples towards God’s kingdom and his righteousness, rather than toward “idols” of this world.⁴⁹ France insists we can deduce the primary theological emphasis here which “is on submission to God’s sovereignty and obedience to his will.”⁵⁰

In addition, when Matthean Jesus says to his disciples “take my yoke, upon you and learn from me; for I am humble of heart and you will find rest for your soul,” (Matt 11:29) he is not only offering one of his qualities which he invites his disciples to seek or imitate but a contrast is drawn between true discipleship and the arrogance of “the shameless nations,” who do not seek the Lord (Zeph 1:6). These “words echo the description of God’s servant in Isaiah 42:2-3; 53:1-2 as well as in Zechariah in 9:9, which Matthew will pick up again in 21:4-5.”⁵¹ Noticeably, the same Greek word *tapeinos* (poor, lowly, humble; downcast) used in the LXX translation of *‘anvê hā’ārets* in (Zeph 2:3) is found and contextualized in passages of the New Testament (Matthew 11:29; Luke 1: 46-52; Rom 12:9-16; 2 Cor 7:7; James 1:9).⁵²

Beyond the NT, the expression “seek the Lord” is also a delight of the Fathers of the Church. St. Augustine, in one of his famous works, *Confessions*, displays his extraordinary life in search and praise of God.⁵³ In Book One Augustine says, “can any praise be worthy of the Lord’s majesty? How magnificent his strength.... Those who look (“seek”) for the Lord will cry out in praise of him, because all who look (“seek”) for him shall find him, and when they find him they will praise him.”⁵⁴ Augustine insists, “I shall

look (seek) for you, Lord, by praying to you and as I pray I shall believe in you, because we have had preachers to tell us about you. It is my faith that calls to you.”⁵⁵

St. Anselm affirms this faith through his many contributions particularly his famous definition of theology as “*fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding.”⁵⁶ In *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, Louis-Marie Chauvet sheds further light on Anselm’s proposal. This include the fact that “theology is not just a believer’s task, but faith is at the beginning of this task....To make an act of faith does not mean simply either to believe that God exists... but to believe in.”⁵⁷ According to Chauvet this is never the product of a merely intellectual reasoning but it belongs to a relational order. And “desire” holds a decisive place in such a relationship.”⁵⁸ In other words, theology is not just a passive faith-discourse about God but an active search for and response to God who is the object of faith, addressed by Aquinas in his teaching on theological and cardinal virtues.⁵⁹

At worship or in the sacramental liturgy of the Church these theological virtues are tied to prayer which is nothing else than seeking the face of God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* repeats this relationship of prayer with seeking God at worship by stating unequivocally that, “one enters into prayer as one enters into liturgy: by the narrow gate of faith. Through the signs of this presence, it is the face of the Lord that we seek and desire; it is his Word that we want to hear and keep.”⁶⁰ Drawn from Isaiah 55:6-9, a tradition also known to Zephaniah, Roc O’Connor reinforces this exhortative theme in the song:

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call to him while he is still near. Today is the day and now the proper hour to forsake our sinful lives and to turn to the lord. As high as the sky is above the earth, so high above our ways, the ways of the Lord. Finding the Lord, let us cling to him. His words, his ways lead us to life. Some day we’ll in the house of God; gaze on his face and praise his name.⁶¹

In addition to this, H. Richard Niebuhr in his work, *The Responsible Self*, emphasizes these relational and responsible dimensions of seeking God. For Niebuhr, this ethics of responsibility is found in the contexts within which we are invited to respond to God, who is in fact, the ultimate source of value. We are *homo dialogicus* on a journey seeking, an understanding of self and an inquiry into the meaning of Christian faith for ethical life.⁶²

VI. Conclusion

It is evidence in the foregoing discussion that Zephaniah 2:1-3 functions not only to exhort Judah and every nation to repentance. It ethically invites all to seek the Lord, humility, and righteousness with sincerity of heart. It also breeds faith and hope for the

salvation of the poor of the land in every culture and time. The text does not function on its own. It is related to the notion of the Day of the Lord (vv.1-2), central in the entire book of Zephaniah and prominent in the rest of the prophetic tradition.

With hermeneutic of faith Zephaniah 2:1-3 is a delight for theologians and worshippers of all contexts. This is true as well, even for those who hold rigidly or limit the addressees and the theological functions of this text to the confines of Judah. If Zephaniah could adapt older prophetic messages to the needs of his contemporaries, modern society, theologians of all contexts and culture can also faithfully relate today's problems and challenges to Zephaniah's salvific exhortation. His message of divine invitation, judgment, and hope remain relevant to modern culture.

¹ Scholars in the past who have considered Zephaniah 2:1-3 as both a structurally distinct unit and as a translational crux with different meanings include Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), pp. 27–32 who has extensively argued for the unity of Zephaniah 1:7; 2:3 with a list of others who strictly view Zephaniah 2:1-3 as independent literary unit; A. Vanlier Hunter, *Seek the Lord: A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortation in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah* (Baltimore, MD: St. Mary's Seminary and University, 1982), pp. 259–260 and Hubert Irsigler, *Gottesgreicht und Jahwetag. Die Komposition Zef 1,1–2,3 untersucht auf der Grundlage de Literarkritik des Zefanjabuches* (ATSAT 3; St. Otilien: EOS Verlag, 1977), pp. 113–318; Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 295–298. Others who have argued that v. 4 be added to the unit since the literary syntax of vv. 1-3 points to it as an *inclusio*, include Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25A; New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 95–102 and Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 111–123.

² See Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Behold the Pierced One: an Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (trans. Graham Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 42–62, where Benedict explains that interpretation of scriptures today should not be restricted to historical method. It should be done from the standpoint of science that does not interfere with the integrity of the text. He stresses, “From a purely scientific point of view, the legitimacy of an interpretation depends on its power to explain things...the less it needs to interfere with the sources, the more it respects the corpus as given and is able to show it to be intelligible from within, by its own logic, the more opposite such an interpretation is. Conversely, the more it interferes with the sources, the more it feels obliged to excise and throw doubt on things found there, the more alien to the subject it is. To that extent, its explanatory power is also its ability to maintain inner unity of the corpus in question. It involves the ability to unify, to achieve a synthesis, which is the reverse of superficial harmonization...only faith hermeneutic is sufficient to measure up to these criteria.”

³Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), pp. 41–62. See also the recent work of Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges: the Bible and People on the Move* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 13–23. Here Ruiz joins Benedicts, Krister Stenddahl, Bernard Lonergan, Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, Fernando F. Segovia and many others in inviting exegetes and systematic theologians to be “good neighbors.” He adds that, If Scripture is to be the Soul of Theology or “while the increasing inter and intradisciplinary specialization is surely here to stay, good fences make for good neighbors only when well maintained gates grants easy access of each to the other side. Responsible biblical scholarship and responsible theological research call for—and call each other to transparency and accountability.”

⁴ Hahn, *Covenant*, pp. 45–62.

⁵ Ratzinger, *Pierced*, p. 45.

⁶ Hahn, *Covenant*, pp. 46–47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸ I take this as a provisional or working translation from the Masoretic Text (MT) of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), acceptable by many as the most reliable extant textual witness of the Hebrew Old Testament.

⁹ Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, p. 260. See also Maria. E. Széles, *Wrath And Mercy: A Commentary on the Books Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (trans. G. A. F. Knight; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 90.

¹⁰ Kaperlud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, p. 31.

¹¹ Ben Zvi, *Book of Zephaniah*, p. 297.

¹² Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, 31, Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, p. 260 and Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 110. See also K.- M. Beyse, “vq qaš, vvq qšš”, *TDOT XIII*, pp. 180–182 where a detailed explanation for qaš, “straw, stubble”, primarily a noun, is further made. And “it is not found outside the domain of Hebrew and Aramaic, so that its use appears to have been restricted to Palestine”.

¹³ For some of these questionings, see Berlin, *Zephaniah*, p. 95. See also Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, p. 262 for list of scholars who agree to this basic meaning.

¹⁴ John Gray, “A Metaphor from Building in Zephaniah II, I”, *VT 3* (1953), pp. 404–407.

¹⁵ Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, 31, Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, p. 260.

¹⁶ See for instance, *NRSV*, “gather together gather”, *NAB*, “gather, gather yourselves together”, *JPS*, “gather together, gather”, *Santa Biblia:Version Popular* (New York: Sociedades Biblicas Unidas, 1979), “reúnanse, júntense ustedes,” *Parola Del Signore: La Bibbia in Lingua Corrente* (Roma: Alleanza Biblica Univesale, 1985), “radunatevi, raccoglietevi”, *La Sainte Bible* (Paris: Société Biblique Française, 1980), “rassemblez- vous et recueillez-vous”

¹⁷ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 90.

¹⁸ Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 96. See also Beyse, “vq qaš, vvq qšš”, *TDOT XIII*, p. 181 for this figurative usage.

¹⁹ See Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, 31, Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, p. 110 and Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 90.

²⁰ See Ben Zvi, *Book of Zephaniah*, pp. 271–272 ; Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 75 and P. Mommer, “#bq qbsi *TDOT XII*, pp. 486–491 for extensive discussion of this verb and its synonymous usages especially with *’āsēph* (e.g., Gen 49:2; Isa 11:12; Ezek 11:17; Joel 2:16; Mic 2:12; Hab 2:5 and Zeph 3:8).

²¹ This is particularly found in Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 90. See also G. Mayer, “šs, κ. kesep”, *TODT VII*, pp. 270–282, for further extensive discussion this word, and how it is used in different contexts.

²² See also Ps 17:12 (like a lion longing for prey, like a young lion lurking in ambush) and Job 14: 15 (when you call, I will answer you; and you would long for the work of your hands). Here again *kāsaph* shows up in *qal* form in the sense of “desire”, “long for”, or “eagerness”.

²³ See Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, p. 263 lists of scholars who support this position.

²⁴ Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, p. 31.

²⁵ For these debates see Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, p. 31; Berlin, *Zephaniah*, p. 96 and Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, p. 110.

²⁶ See Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 91 who argues that, “the accomplishment of the judgment is given us in a clear picture of *ledet hoq*, “the birth of the decree.”

²⁷ Cf. Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, p. 32 and Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, pp. 263–264 for list of these scholars which I find it unnecessary to recycle here.

²⁸ Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, p. 32.

²⁹ Cf. Michael U. Udoekpo, *Re-thinking the Day of YHWH and Restoration of Fortunes in the Prophet Zephaniah* (Das Alte Testament im Dialog= an outline of an Old Testament Dialogue 2, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 86–97, where I have already discussed at length opinion of these authors on the socio-historical context of Zephaniah’s prophecy. Note worthy in particular are, H. Ferguson, “The Historical Testimony of the Prophet,” *JBL 3* (1883), pp. 42–59; Donald L. Williams, “The Date of Zephaniah,” *JBL 82* (1963), pp. 77–88; Kalperud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, pp. 41–44; G. Langhor, “Le Livre de Sophonie et la critique de l’authenticité”, *ETL 52* (1976), pp. 1–27; C. Stuhlmueller, *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk* (Collegeville Bible Commentary, OT 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), pp. 96–97; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1991), pp. 163–164; Ben Zvi, *Zephaniah*, pp. 325–357; Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary; Chicago 1991), pp. 275–278; James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 173–215; Berlin, *Zephaniah*, pp. 33–42; J. Vlandingerbroek, *Zephaniah* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp.

13–17 and G. Savoca, *Abdia-Naum, Abacuc-Sofonia, introduzione e commento* (ILBPT 18; Milano: Paoline Editoriale, 2006), pp. 148–150.

³⁰ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 91.

³¹ See Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, pp. 265 for names of those authors who subscribe to this view.

³² By haplography here Rudolf is meant to suggest that it is possible that during the hand copying of the manuscript text of Zephaniah the scribes may have accidentally omitted identical letters, in this case the *kī*.

³³ Wilhelm Rudolf, *Micha-Nahum-Habakuk-Zephanja* (KAT XIII/3; Gütersloh 1975), pp. 273–274.

³⁴ Hunter, *Seek the Lord*, p. 267.

³⁵ See Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, pp. 23–28, 197–234 for detailed discussion on this concept, in Zephaniah, in the OT and particularly in the prophetic traditions.

³⁶ Additionally, some of these texts are; Amos 4:14; Isa 1:6-20; 7:3-9; 28:12-16; 30:15-16; Hos 2:4-5; 4:15; 6:6; 10:12; 12:6-7; 14:2-4 and Mic 6:6-8. See also S. Wanger, “vQeBi biqqēsh; hv'Q'B; baqqāshāh”, *TDOT* II, 229-241 for different and synonymous ways this notion is used especially in biblical theology.

³⁷ See Kapelrud, *Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*, p.32.

³⁸ Berlin, *Zephaniah*, p.98.

³⁹ Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, p. 92.

⁴⁰ Clearly in the MT we have as in my translation: *bāqqašū'eth- 'ādōnāy kol- 'an'vē hā'ārets, 'āsher misheppātō pā'ālū bāqqašū tsaddiq bāqqašū 'ānāvāh 'ūlay tissāth'ērū b'ōm'aph- 'ādōnāy*, rendered in the LXX as *zētēsate ton kurion pantes tapeinoi gēs krima ergazesthe kai disaiosunēn zētēsate kai apokrinesthe auta hopōs skepasthē en hēmera orgēs kuriou* (“seek the Lord all you poor of the land, who have carried out the work of the law and seek righteousness and answer to them”) where “to seek” *zēteō* is repeated twice in the aorist imperative 2nd person plural and not thrice as in MT. Cf. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, p. 111.

⁴¹ See Abraham A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harperperennial, 2001), pp. 256-257 for additional explanation of how these concepts could sometimes be used interchangeably.

⁴² Wagner, “vQeBi biqqēsh; hv'Q'B; baqqāshāh,” p. 239.

⁴³ Some significant studies on this chapter, Amos 5 include, E. Würthwein, “Amos 5:21-27”, *ThLZ* 72 (1947), pp. 143–152; R. Hetscheke, *Die Stellung der vorexilischen Schriftpropheten zum Kultus* (BZAW 75; Berlin 1957); M. Skine, “Das Problem der Kultpolemik ber den Propheten“, *EvTh* 28 (1968), pp. 605-609; Larry J. Rector, “Israel’s Rejected Worship: An Exegesis of Amos 5”, *Restoration Quarterly* 21(1978), pp. 161-175; H. M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2, 7B-8; 4, 1-3; 5, 1-27; 6, 4-7; 8, 14* (Leiden 1984), pp. 4–10.

⁴⁴ Wagner, “vQeBi biqqēsh; hv'Q'B; baqqāshāh,” pp. 239

⁴⁵ See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans., Keith Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 11-15 for extensive discussion on the significance of “Israel in the presence of Yhwh.” Metaphorically, “presence” (*pānah*), literally “face” especially in the Psalter refers to seeking God’s help, blessings, his love and recognizing his sovereignty and how limited we are as God’s creatures.

⁴⁶ Patrick D. Miller, *The Way of the Lord: Essays in the Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 168–169.

⁴⁷ See also Colossians 3:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 3:5 and Hebrews 11:5-6.

⁴⁸ Notice the Greek NT translation with similar noun (*dikaiosunēn dikaiosunēn*, *nhn/tsaddiq*=righteousness) and imperative forms found in the MT (*biqqeshu*=piel imperative masculine plural), and LXX texts of Zephaniah 2:3, LXX (*zētēsate* =2 person plural aorist imperative) and *zēteite*=2nd person plural present imperative in the NT), “*zēteite de proton tēn basileian (tou Theou) kai tēn dikaiosunēn autou, kai tauta panta prostethēsetai humin*”

⁴⁹ See R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p.141.

⁵⁰ France, *Matthew*, p.141.

⁵¹ France, *Matthew*, p. 201.

⁵² In Luke 1:46-52 Mary's Song of Praise the "magnificat" captures well those addressed in Zephaniah 2:3. And no wonder this text is read along side Zephaniah 3:14-18a and Romans 12:9-16 in the catholic liturgy of the Feast of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth celebrated on every May 31 each year.

⁵³ Benedict XVI, *The Fathers* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008) 176. See also Kevin Knight, "Augustine of Hippo," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm> accessed May 29, 2012, where his life and work is praised thus, "The great St. Augustine's life is unfolded to us in documents of unrivaled richness, and of no great character of ancient times have we information comparable to that contained in the "Confessions", which relate the touching story of his *soul*, the "Retractations," which give the history of his mind, and the "Life of Augustine," written by his friend Possidius, telling of the saint's apostolate."

⁵⁴ See *Augustine Confessions* (trans., R. S. Pine-Coffin; New York: Penguin, 1961) 21. See also *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*; Book I-X (trans., F. J. Sheed; Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1942) 3. The word in bracket (seek) is mine. In fact, it is found in another translation, that of F. J. Sheed.

⁵⁵ Pine-Coffin, *Confessions*. p. 21.

⁵⁶ See the analysis of this in Thomas P. Rausch, "Theology and Its Method," in *The College Student's Introduction to Theology* (ed. Thomas P. Rausch; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 12.

⁵⁷ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), p. ix

⁵⁸ Chauvet, *Word of God*, p. ix.

⁵⁹ See Edward J. Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Society of St. Paul, 1985) 143-204 were faith (2a2ae.1-16), hope (2a2ae.17-22), charity (2a2ae.23-46), as well as prudence (2a2ae.47-56), justice (2a2ae.57-122), fortitude and temperance (2a2ae.123-170) are discussed in detail.

⁶⁰ See *Catechism of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), nos.2656-2658.

⁶¹ See "Seek the Lord, 540" in *Ritual Song; A hymnal and Service Book for Roman Catholics* (Chicago: Gia Publications, 1996).

⁶² See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: an Essay in Christian Philosophy* (Intro., James M. Gustafson and Foreword, William Schweiker; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), p. ix.