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“THE REMNANT OF ZEPHANIAH: IDENTIFYING ‘A PEOPLE HUMBLE AND LOWLY’”

Donald B. Sharp, S.J.

Introduction

The prophet Zephaniah appears to have arisen out of the ashes of the all but forgotten Yahwistic cult of his ancestors. With a dire proclamation he ushers in the rebirth of prophetic activity in the Kingdom of Judah, which had experienced nearly a three-quarters of a century of prophetic silence. According to the Second Book of Kings, this had been a time of religious turmoil, brought about by the reign of Manasseh (687/6-642 B. C. E.). But in spite of Zephaniah's harsh and drastic utterance -- “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord” (Zeph 1 :2 -- he speaks of a remnant, “a people humble and lowly” (3:12). Who was to be this remnant? Judaites who had turned from their erroneous ways or an “underground” worshipping community who had never forsaken their God? This article will explore the possibility that Zephaniah's “remnant” consisted of an underground worshipping community of Mosaic covenant Yahwists, many of whom, perhaps, were descendants of the refugees who fled to the south at the time of the destruction of Samaria.

Historical Setting of the Prophet Zephaniah

The portrait presented by the author of 2 Kings 21 is, needless to say, less than complimentary in respect to the reign of Manasseh. In his break-away from the policies of his father, Hezekiah, who had attempted to restore the Yahwistic worship, there is little disagreement that the religious consequences were monumental. Once again the high places were rebuilt and staffed, alters to Baal were erected, the sacred pole, the *asherah*,¹ was constructed, astral

¹ For a complete discussion on the function of the *asherah* or “sacred pole”, see J. C. de Moor, “*א* *asherah*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 438-44.

cults were practised, the abominable rite of child sacrifice reintroduced, various types of divination allowed, and a carved image of Asherah was set up in the Temple.

Two possible explanations have been offered for Manasseh's reversal of his father's "reformation." The first, that it was, in part, a consequence of his vassal relationship with the successors of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanapal which obligated him to impose upon his subjects the suzerain's system of cultic worship.² Although he might well have been forced to introduced the cults and deities of Assyria, his actions appear to have gone far beyond what was required, resulting in complete "repudiation of the reform party [Hezekiah's] and all its works."³ As a result of his syncretistic efforts, the Yahwism of old all but disappeared. This would have been inevitable. The true identity of Yahwism had become obscured and "was in danger of slipping unawares into outright polytheism."⁴

The second explanation is that the religious chaos of this period was not just the result of Manasseh being forced to accommodate the religious cult of Assyria and the propitiation of her gods,⁵ but the

² See Bernard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall) 362; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981) 312.

³ Bright, 312. See also Anderson, 362f.

⁴ Bright, 312.

⁵ Morton Cogan (*Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974] 60) comments: "Our re-examination of Assyrian imperial organization finds that we must reject conventional statements which view 'the whole organization centered around the worship of Ashur' [A. T. Olmstead, "Oriental Imperialism," *American Historical Review* 23 (1917-18) 758], the deified state and the reigning king fanatically imposing active worship of Assyrian gods upon defeated populations. Assyria distinguished between territories annexed as provinces directly under her control and vassal lands under native rule. The latter were free of any cultic obligations toward their master." See also John McKay, *Religion in Judah under the*

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result of an internal domestic struggle.⁶ Those in support of this hypothesis suggest a conflict between the loyalists of Yahwism and those who were willing to adapt to the non-Israelite customs and cults. The former group would have consisted of prophets, loyalist priests of the temple, and the faithful followers of the true Yahwistic cult; the latter, the royal family, members of the court, apostate priests who undoubtedly presided over the cultic worship of the Baal and Ashtarte and the various astral cults. This latter group of reconciliationists appears to have sought “to create out of the entire population of the country a society characterised by its syncretistic culture.”⁷ As a result, it is plausible that a large segment of the population might well have given up hope that its God was any longer in control of this political and religious crisis, and, under the encouragement of Manasseh, submitted to the seemingly more powerful gods of the foreigners.⁸

Assyrians (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1973) 20-27; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 45.

⁶ See John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, eds., *Israelite and Judean History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) 452-55.

⁷ Hayes and Miller, 453. See also Berlin, 45.

⁸ McKay (27) comments: “the reign of Manasseh was ideally suited to the revival of paganism. As the Assyrians asserted their authority, Judah began to recognize her weakness and the excitement of rebellion died. No doubt, when the people realized there was no real hope of independence in the foreseeable future, their religious fervour was also quenched. Disillusioned once more by the ineffectuality of their national god, many must have turned to the stronger gods of Assyria and to the cults which offered more immediate satisfaction. . . . It does, however, also seem fairly clear that Manasseh himself positively encouraged this revival of heathenism, since he introduced the gods of his intimate allies, permitted both foreign and superstitious religion in the Temple precincts, and attempted to silence opposition.” See also Berlin, 81.

A Time of Persecution

The text of Second Kings implies that this syncretistic movement did not proceed without opposition and that “much innocent blood” (21:16) was shed. It would appear that anyone who opposed Manasseh’s syncretistic inclinations was dealt with harshly, leading to mass executions. Although there is not clear textual evidence that any of the prophets who had resisted these compromises were executed, the long prophetic silence, in a period in which one would naturally expect to hear their protests, suggests that prophetic voices were suppressed.⁹

Whether the abandonment of traditional Yahwism, a movement clearly approved by Manasseh, was due to a forced implementation of a foreign culture and religion or the result of the people’s disenchantment with the apparent ineffectivity of her God, the result was the same: Judah was plunged into the “dark age” of her history.¹⁰ This, in turn, might well have forced the Yahwistic loyalists to “go underground” in order to escape persecution and preserve the “true” Yahwistic cult from extinction.¹¹

The Rebirth of Yahwism and the Prophet Zephaniah

⁹ According to the pseudepigraphal tradition, the prophet Isaiah was sawed in half at the behest of Manasseh. For this account, see *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 5:1-16 in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1985) 163-64. John Gray (*I and II Kings* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970] 709) comments that “...the persecution would not be limited to such outstanding figures [the prophets], but would be directed against many lesser men, who, in representing the true tradition of Israel’s faith in Yahweh, were loyal nationalists, and as such noxious to Manasseh as an Assyrian vassal.” See also Flavius Josephus, *Antig.* 10.3.1.

¹⁰ Anderson, 364.

¹¹ Davie Napier, *Song of the Vineyard*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) 193.

In the midst of the religious chaos brought about by Manasseh, Zephaniah, as the phoenix of mythological fame, suddenly appears out of the ashes of a defunct Yahwism. Who was this prophet? From where did he come? When did he prophesy?¹² All of these questions are neither easily nor satisfactorily answered in today's scholarly circles. What little is known of the prophet himself is to be found in the book's superscription (Zeph 1:1).

Zephaniah: Name and Family

The name "Zephaniah" is generally considered by commentators to mean "YHWH has hidden," "YHWH has treasured," etc. The name is not that unusual in the biblical text, occurring in reference to four different individuals,¹³ and has been found outside of it.¹⁴ It has been suggested that this is not a given name¹⁵ but a chosen name which was intended to reflect the persecution during the reign of

¹² The question of dating the Book of Zephaniah is a very complex matter and goes far beyond the scope of this work. I accept the majority opinion that the prophet was active early in the reign of Josiah, ca. 635-625 B C. Some scholars prefer a post-Josian reform date during the reign of Jehoiakim (e.g., J. Philip Hyatt ("The Date and Background of Zephaniah," *JNES* 7 [1948]: 25-29) and Donald Williams ("The Date of Zephaniah," *JBL* 82 [1963]: 77-88) would place it in the reign of Jehoiakim after the failure of the Josian reform; others, a post-monarchic date (e. g., Louise Smith and Ernest R. Lacheman ("The Authorship of the Book of Zephaniah," *JNES* 9 [1950]: 137-42) and, most recently, Ehud Ben Zvi, (*A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991] 353-56). For the most recent discussion on this topic, see Berlin, 33-43.

¹³ Cf. Jer 21:1, Zech 6:10, and 1 Chr 6:21. In addition to these, the root *spn* also occurs in other biblical names: Elzaphan and Elizaphan (Ex 6:22; Lev 10:4; Num 3:30; 34:25; 1 Chr 15:8; 2 Chr 29:13).

¹⁴ Archaeological excavations at Lachish have unearthed a seal impression from the early sixth-century bearing the name *spnyhw*. Cf *RB* 75 (1968): 401-2.

¹⁵ Milos Bic, *Trois prophètes dans un temps de ténèbres. Sophonie Nahum Habaquq* (Paris: Les Édition du Cerf, 1968) 41

Manasseh.¹⁶ There are also those who read the name as “Zaphoniah,” thus rendering it as “Zaphon is Yah.”¹⁷ If this were the case, one might justifiably trace the prophet’s origins to the Northern Kingdom.

The superscription is unusual in that it traces back Zephaniah’s family line to four generations to a certain “Hezekiah,” often considered to be the Judean king of the late eight-century. For some this appears to be an attempt to give him “credentials.” Since his father is listed as “Cushi,” there existed a possible implication that his origins were from the land of Cush (Ethiopia). This could have cast doubt on his Israelite purity.¹⁸ Clearly, a royal connection to Hezekiah could explain his support for religious reform in the post-Manasseh era: it was rooted in his family history.¹⁹ But this would not necessarily preclude a link to the Northern Kingdom to which his message appears to have an affinity. His oracles resemble more of a Mosaic covenant mentality than that of the Davidic tradition first mentioned in 2 Samuel 7. Although in the theology of Zephaniah Jerusalem was the sacred City, it could be destroyed and the “. . . relationship between God and the people could be dissolved . . .”²⁰

Zephaniah and Deuteronomic Theology

Furthering the possibility that Zephaniah’s theological roots, that is, ‘his ancestors’, originated in the Northern Kingdom is indicated by the similarities of his message and thought with that of Deuteronomic

¹⁶ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Waco: Word, 1984) 120.

¹⁷ E.g., Liudger Sabottka, *Zephanja: Versuch einer Neuübersetzung mit philologischem Kommentar* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972) 1-3; J. M. Powis Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Zephaniah* (Edinburgh: 1912) 184; J. D. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). On the term “Zaphon” see E. Lipinski, *TWAT*, Bd. 6, 1093-1102.

¹⁸ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 140; J. Heller, “Zephanjas Ahnenreihe,” *VT* (1971) 102-04.

¹⁹ Berlin, 65.

²⁰ Anderson, 357.

theology. As has been pointed out by others, "Zephaniah reflects the cultural milieu of the period from Hezekiah to Josiah and many Deuteronomic themes."²¹ The general tenor of Zephaniah's message reflects the theology of the Deuteronomic History. For example, the condemnation of syncretistic practices with foreign cult and customs in Zephaniah 1 is strikingly similar to 2 Kings 23; likewise, the judgement against the nations in Zephaniah 2 could be interpreted as reflecting the prohibition against the Canaanites found in Deuteronomy 7.²²

Not only in the more general ideas and concepts of Zephaniah's theology do we find an affinity with that of the Deuteronomist, but also in the particulars of language and phraseology. Zephaniah's threats of punishment of the coming Day of the Lord speaks of houses built, but not to be lived in and vineyards planted, but their wines would not be drunk (Zeph 1:13). We find a strikingly similar threat in the covenantal curses of Deuteronomy: "... You shall build a house, but not live in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but not enjoy its fruit" (Deut 28:30). Similarly, Zephaniah speaks of the people walking like the blind, the day of darkness, and defeat. Again, we find a parallel in the curses of Deuteronomy: "[Y]ou will grope about at noon as blind people grope in darkness; you shall be unable to find your way; and you shall be continually abused and robbed, without anyone to help" (28:29).

²¹ Berlin, 14. See also Greg A. King, "The Day of the Lord in Zephaniah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151(1994): 26-29; Boadt, 203; Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 279-82; Kapelrud, 56-72; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 25-62.

²² In her commentary on Zeph 2:5-15, Berlin (105) notes that "'Canaan' is the designation for the area in Palestine-Syria under Egyptian control during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E., and, of course, for the promised land to the Israelites in the Bible. Its western and eastern borders are described in Gen 10:19: 'The Canaanite territory extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gemorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha'..."

The similarities which one can find between Zephaniah's theology and that of the Deuteronomist's theological perspective does not necessarily "prove" that he was from Northern "roots." However, they do appear to indicate his understanding and acceptance of Deuteronomic theology. Zephaniah might well have been a true Jerusalemite, but his theological sympathies appear to have favoured the Mosaic understanding of covenant of the former Northern Kingdom. R. Wilson is undoubtedly correct when he comments that " ... in his [Zephaniah's] theology and personal behaviour he synthesises the Jerusalemite and Deuteronomic traditions."²³

The Day of the Lord

Following the superscription (Zeph 1:1), the prophet immediately introduces the first of his oracles of doom, the coming of the Day of the Lord. There has long been recognition of the fact that 1:2-3 alludes to the Flood narrative of Genesis.²⁴ Nevertheless, the "sweeping" of creation and the reversal of it²⁵ would not be the result of flood waters, as in the Genesis account, but an all consuming "fire" (Zeph 1:18; 3:8). Consequently, God's promise to humankind never again to destroy the earth by flood waters (Gen 9:11) remains intact. No doubt the allusion to the Flood narrative was intended to be a prophetic announcement of the coming judgement that would be like a new flood²⁶ from which no one or no thing would escape. However, this statement should not be taken too literally. As R. L.

²³ Wilson, 282.

²⁴ For example, Ben Zvi, 53-57; Michael De Roche, "Zephaniah 1:2-3: The 'Sweeping' of Creation," *VT* (1980): 104-108; Kapelrud, 21; King, "The Day of the Lord in Zephaniah," 23; James D. Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1984) 82; Sabottka, 10-11; R. L. Smith, 127. In this regard, Kapelrud (21) notes that the phrase *me'al pene ha'damah* which occurs twice in Zephaniah (1:2 and 3) also is used in Gen 6:7, 7:4, and 8:8, and comments that "This is more than a coincidence, and the context also has close parallels."

²⁵ DeRoche, 104.

²⁶ Boadt, 209.

Smith notes, "Poetry uses exalted and extravagant languages and should not be pressed literally."²⁷

Although the Flood narrative uses the same language of universal destruction (6:7, 17 and 7:4), one must not forget that Noah, along with his family, was spared -- not to mention the traditional menagerie which entered into the ark two by two (7:7-9). Similarly, following the dire pronouncement of universal judgement and total destruction of Zeph 1:2-3, we are told that a remnant would survive (2:7,9; 3:13). Who would be the "remnant" in Zephaniah? It is to this question we now turn.

The Remnant in Zephaniah

That a remnant of the people will survive is abundantly clear. We find reference to a "remnant" community in five passages.²⁸ Three of these are indicated by the use of a traditional remnant term, *se'erit* (2:7, 9; 3:13). Although two of the above mentioned references to a "remnant" lack the specific terminology of the remnant concept (2:1-3 and 3:14-20), the theological inference is present.²⁹

Zephaniah does not specifically identify the "remnant" in these units, but he does give us a description. In the first of these passages (2:1-3), it appears that those who have forsaken the true worship of Yahwist cult are called to repentance and return to the covenantal worship. This is only illusionary. The use of the verb *qasas* in verse 1 is both ironic and sardonic. The verb appears to be a denominative

²⁷ R. L. Smith, 127. Similarly, J. J. M. Roberts (*Nahum Habakkuk and Zephaniah* [Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1991] 185) comments that "The language is hyperbolic, however, as all language of total judgment or annihilation tends to be, and it was understood as such, for the possibility was still held out that one might survive the judgment, ..."

²⁸ These passages are 2:1-3; 2:4-7:2:8-11; 3:9-13; 3:14-20.

²⁹ On the lack of specific remnant terminology, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), 130. See also King, "The Remnant in Zephaniah," 415.

form of *qas*, “stubble,” which, when used metaphorically, refers to its flammability and quick burning characteristic (Is 5:24, 47:14; Joel 2:5).³⁰ Since this verb is not used for gathering people together, emendations have been proposed like *hitbozesu*, “be ashamed,” or *hitqaddesu*, “consecrate yourselves.”³¹ However, in view of Zeph 1:18, the consummation of the earth by fire, there appears to be no need to emend the text. The inference is clear: the people are to gather themselves together in order to be quickly destroyed by YHWH’s “fire.” This call to “repentance” could well be classified as a “mockery summons.”³²

In contrast to this “mockery summons”, in verse 3 we find not so much a summons to repent, but words of encouragement to persevere in their fidelity addressed to those who had remained faithful to covenant obligations. These are the “humble of the land, who do his commands,” who “perhaps” (*‘ulai*) may be spared on the day of God’s wrath. Although this promise lacks absolute certitude, it appears this is done in order to “stress the graciousness of Yahweh who is not required to deliver anyone...”³³ In 2:7, we are informed that the lands of the inhabitants of the seacoast will be given to the “remnant of the House of Judah”; in 2:9, “the remnant of my people”

³⁰ Berlin, 96. See also K.-M. Beyse, “*gas-*” in *TWAT*, VII, 195-197.

³¹ Berlin, 95.

³² John Walter Hilber (“A Biblical Theology of Zephaniah,” M. A. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984, 15), commenting on this summons notes that “The irony is that no genuine summons to repentance is being given. The connotation is not one of turning to Yahweh, as is the usual case in a summons. Rather the appeal is for the nation to present itself for burning which corresponds to Yahweh’s judgment in Zephaniah 1:18. . . . The nation is exhorted to gather itself only to be gathered in turn by Yahweh for destruction.”

³³ Hilber, 17; see also A. Hunter, *Seek the Lord! A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortation in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Zephaniah* (Baltimore: St. Mary’s Seminary, 1988) 259-71; Marvin A. Sweeney, “A Form-Critical Reassessment of the Book of Zephaniah,” *CBO* 53 (1991): 388-408.

will possess the lands of the Moabites and the Ammonites. Finally, Zephaniah returns to the humble and lowly of his people who “seek refuge in the name of the Lord” (3:12), now referred to as the “remnant of Israel.”³⁴ It is with these last three references to the “remnant” that we do find an unconditional promise of salvation.

The “humble and the lowly” are the remnant, now identified as the “remnant of Israel,” followers of the original understanding of the Mosaic covenant. They are clearly identified as those worshipers of the Lord who have put their trust in him. These stand in stark contrast to the proud and the haughty (3:11) who rely on their own means rather than on the Lord.³⁵ Who were they? Perhaps we can shed some light on this question by looking briefly at the history of the Levites.

The Descendants of Levi

Although the descendants of Levi were a special group who alone were to perform sacred functions, appointed directly by God (Num 1:50), one branch received a guarantee of perpetual priesthood, the branch of Aaron (Ex 29:9, 44; 40:15; Num 3 :4).³⁶ Nonetheless, the role of the Levitical priests was challenged early on. The Book of Numbers indicates the beginning of the downfall of the Levite priesthood: Koran challenges Moses, Aaron and the Levites, claiming that “All the congregation are holy ...” 16:3). Consequently, the idea of the limitation of “priestly rights and privileges to Moses and Aaron and the Levites”³⁷ was called into question.

³⁴ In respect to the distinction between “remnant of the House of Judah” and the “remnant of Israel,” Berlin (136) comments that “The former [‘remnant of the House of Judah’] is a geographical or political concept, while the latter [‘remnant of Israel’] is, in the words of Ben Zvi (234), a ‘religious, ideological concept’.”

³⁵ Ben Zvi, 232.

³⁶ Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961) 360.

³⁷ Napier, 96.

Much confusion surrounds the role of the Levitical priesthood in Jerusalem following the death of David and the ascendancy of Solomon to the throne. It is not within the scope of this article to try and sort out and unravel the “whys” and “whos” of the banishment of David’s high priest, Abiathar, the last chief priest of the line of Eli, to Anathoth, one of the Levitical priestly cities (1 Kings 2:26-27). The end result, however, is clear: Zadok, a supporter of the candidacy of Solomon, was appointed high priest to replace Abiathar. However, his Levitical origins, in spite of a genealogical connection to Aaron (1 Chron 6:50-53), have long been called into question.³⁸ If Zadok and his descendants were not of the tribe of Levi, the role of the Levitical priesthood would have, at least temporarily, come to a halt, leaving the Levite priests, so to speak, “out in the cold.”

Finally, the actions of Jeroboam 1(922 BCE) would have dealt a severe blow to the role of the Levitical priesthood in the Kingdom of Israel. It is clearly stated that, “He ... appointed priests from among all the people who were not Levites” (2 Kings 12:31). Here, too, it would appear that the role of the members of the “official” Levitical priesthood was, for all practical purposes, terminated and the Levite priests were forced to fend for themselves. In the long run, however, this appears to have been to their advantage and that of their faithful followers.

Conclusion

³⁸ For the opinions that he was the high priest at Gibeon (1 Chron 6:1 1ff.), or perhaps priest of the Jebusite sanctuary of Jerusalem and, therefore, heir of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20), see De Vaux, 372-74. See also Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 150-52; Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Trans. J. S. Smith and C. A. Menzies. 1878; repr. Magnolia, MA: 1973) 121ff.; Aelred Cody, O.S.B. “Religious Institutions of Israel,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown, *et. al.* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990)1256-58.

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At the outset we asked, "Who was to be this remnant? Judaites who had turned from their erroneous ways or an 'underground' worshipping community who had never forsaken their God?" The answer, we believe, is the latter group. Let us recreate a possible case scenario.

With an awareness of the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel by King Shalmaneser V of Assyria, those families of the tribe of Levi, who could, undoubtedly fled to their sister kingdom, Judah. There, they were all but forced to live a life of religious obscurity. In light of the Abiathar-Zadok controversy following Solomon's enthronement, it was highly unlikely that, upon their arrival, they played any role in the Davidic Yahwistic cult in the Kingdom of Judah. Consequently, few alternatives were left to the Levitical priests and their faithful community to preserve their understanding and interpretation of religious purity and covenantal fidelity. It appears that, in view of the situation, the only avenue left open to them was to congregate in the solitude and isolation of an underground worshipping community. In this setting, armed with the core of the Book of Deuteronomy (12-26), which would have been brought from the North by the original refugees from Samaria, they were provided with "a powerful standard by which to interpret Israel's national successes and failures: Obedience to the Mosaic Torah ensures prosperity and divine protection; disobedience brings national defeat and death."³⁹ Zephaniah appears to have been associated with this community. Theologically, he had been moulded and guided by the contents of the "Book of the Law" which was found later in the Temple during the initial steps of Josiah's reform.

Finally, with the ascendancy of Babylonia, the power and control of the Assyrians began to wane. For Zephaniah and the rest of the "anonymous devotees"⁴⁰ of the underground community of Mosaic Yahwism, the opportunity now presented itself for a revival of the true cult of YHWH, but with a definite Mosaic interpretation of

³⁹ Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1992) 88.

⁴⁰ Anderson, 364.

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covenantal responsibility. This was the remnant to whom Zephaniah referred: a “people humble and lowly” who had not forsaken the religious heritage received from Moses and who sought refuge in the name of the Lord during the reign of Manasseh.

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