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Chapter 8

REMNANT MOTIF IN AMOS, MICAH AND ZEPHANIAH

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‘Remnant’ is one of the significant motifs in the Minor Prophets. This essay will examine the remnant motif in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah, seeking to find out the commonality of this concept between these three pre-exilic books.

In order to facilitate this study, finding the remnant terminology¹ helps us locate the remnant passages. In Amos the term שארית is used with reference to Israel, i.e. the ‘remnant of Joseph’ (Amos 5.15). It also refers to other peoples, like the remnant of the Philistines (Amos 1.8) and Edomites (Amos 9.12). The term שארית is used five times in Micah (Mic. 2.12; 4.7; 5.6, 7 [7, 8]; 7.18) and another term יתר ‘the rest/remainder/remnant’ appears once in Mic. 5.2 [5.3]. In Zephaniah, the term שאר (1.4), which is translated as ‘remnant’ in many English versions, does not refer to the same concept of remnant as the rest of the book, but rather ‘the last vestige of Baal’ (NAB translation).² The term שארית occurs three times (Zeph. 2.7, 9; 3.13), יתר once in Zeph. 2.9; and the verb השארתי only in Zeph. 3.12. Some passages which are closely related to the remnant motif will also be studied despite the fact that there is a lack of specific remnant terminology there.

According to Meyer, a remnant is the left-over of a community, who survive the calamity of judgment.³ This term contains both negative and positive connotations. Negatively a remnant has to first undergo a catastrophe, but positively a remnant can survive that dreadful time. House rightly states, ‘Judgment creates

1. יתר, פליטה, שריד, שאר, and שארית are the common terms related to the remnant idea. These Hebrew words are often used interchangeably. E.W. Conrad, ‘Remnant’, in K. Doob Sakenfeld (ed.), *NIDB* (vol. 4; Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 761–62.

2. The ESV version is used in this essay unless it is noted otherwise.

3. L.V. Meyer, ‘Remnant’, in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *ABD*; vol. 5; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 669–70.

the remnant as distinctly as it removes the rebellious'.⁴ This essay, therefore, first addresses the issue of judgment in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah before examining the concept of remnant in these books.

1. *Judgment in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah*

Amos, Micah and Zephaniah all point out that sin is the reason for God's judgment upon His people. As shown in the table below, this can be seen through the repetition of the words פשע 'transgression', חטא 'sin', עון 'iniquity' and עולה 'wrongdoing', all of which are more general terms designating punishable offences.

פשע 'transgression'	Amos	1.3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2.1, 4, 6; 3.14; 4.4 x2; 5.12
	Micah	1.5 x2; 1.13; 3.8; 6.7; 7.18
	Zephaniah	3.11
חטא 'sin'	Amos	5.12; 9.10
	Micah	1.5, 13; 3.8; 6.7, 13; 7.9, 19
	Zephaniah	1.17
עון 'iniquity'	Amos	3.2
	Micah	7.18, 19
עולה 'wrongdoing'	Micah	3.10
	Zephaniah	3.5, 13

The terms listed above indicate the problems of God's people, which justify God's intervention.

1.1 *Specific Reasons for Judgment*

Sin takes many specific forms, which are quite similar between Amos, Micah and Zephaniah. They include religious malpractice, pride and complacency, social injustice and oppression, corrupt leadership (religious, official, royal and judicial), and corruption in the marketplace and high society in the table that follows:

4. P.R. House, 'Dramatic Coherence in Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah', in J.W. Watts and P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 204.

	<i>Amos</i>	<i>Micah</i>	<i>Zephaniah</i>
Religious practices	4.4-5; 5.21-24, 26; 8.14	1.7; 5.12-13 [13-14]	1.4-6
Pride and complacency	5.18; 6.1, 8; 9.10	2.6; 3.11	1.12; 3.11
Social injustice and oppression	2.6-8; 4.1; 5.10-12; 8.3, 6	2.2; 3.1-3	1.9; 3.1-3
Religious leaders	7.10-17	3.5-7, 11	3.4
Official, royal, judicial leaders	7.11; 5.12	3.1-3, 9-11a; 7.3	1.8; 3.3
Marketplaces	8.5-6	6.11	1.10-11
Rich people	3.10, 12, 15; 4.1-3; 6.4-7	6.12	1.11, 18

In face of the great sins of God's people, Amos proclaims, 'The end has come upon my people Israel' (Amos 8.2). Micah announces, 'All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel' (Mic. 1.5). Zephaniah utters repeatedly, 'In the fire of His jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed' (Zeph. 1.18; 3.8). These prophets all proclaim that on the Day(s) of the LORD⁵ (Amos 5.18-20; 8.1-3, 9; Mic. 5.9-14 [10-15]; Zeph. 1.4-6) God will pour out His punishment, with a combination of military defeat (Amos 2.13-16; 3.11; 4.1-3; 5.3; Mic. 5.9-10 [10-11]; Zeph. 1.10, 13-14, 16), exile (Amos 4.2-3; 5.5, 27; 6.7; 7.11, 17; Mic. 1.16; Zeph. 3.10), disasters (Amos 2.13; 4.6-10; 9.1; Mic. 6.13-7.1; Zeph. 1.2-3, 18), death (Amos 5.3, 16-17; 6.9-10; 7.17; 8.3; 9.1, 4, 10; Mic. 2.5; Zeph. 1.2-3, 17, 18, 3.8) and desolation (Amos 7.9; 9.11; Mic. 3.12; 6.13, 16; Zeph. 1.13⁶).

1.2 *Totality and Inescapability of Judgment*

The judgment announced by Amos, Micah and Zephaniah is sheer and inescapable. Regarding the fate of Israel, Amos says, 'As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed' (3.12). The remains of the prey in the simile prove that 'rescue came too late

5. Here the concept of the Day of the LORD is not confined to the precise phrase יוֹם יְהוָה, but it includes other terms like 'on that day', 'at that time' and so on. See J.D. Nogalski, 'The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve', in P.L. Redditt and A. Schart (eds.), *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 192-93.

6. Most of the 'desolation' punishments declared by Zephaniah are directed against the nations. These passages include Zeph. 2.4, 13, 15; 3.6.

– surely an ironic thrust!⁷ Mockingly the total loss of the nation is the reality. The Samaritan women in high society are also singled out for accusation. Even ‘the last’ (אַחֲרִית) of them will be deported to exile (Amos 4.2). Their dead bodies will be taken out of the city through the breaches and cast into Harmon (Amos 4.3). The judgment is again absolute. Amos 6.9-10 points out that ‘if ten men remain in one house, they shall die’. The single survivor will be fearful of God’s anger falling on him. Hasel rightly states, ‘Amos leaves open the possibility of a remnant being left in a house, but he emphasizes the utter ineffectiveness and hopelessness of this remnant’.⁸

Amos vividly describes how the people of Israel cannot escape the Day of Yahweh. Their situation is ‘as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him’ (Amos 5.19). The inescapability of judgment is once again pinpointed by the fact that ‘those who escape the initial onslaught will be hunted down one by one’ (Amos 9.1-4).⁹ The stunning reality is ‘not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape’ (9.1); and ‘All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword’ (9.10). The above passages contain allusions to the remnant concept, ironically bringing out the message that ‘[o]nly a remnant of Israel will remain but not Israel as a remnant’.¹⁰

Micah points to Israel as a model for the fate of Judah and Jerusalem (1.5),¹¹ and it looks towards the Babylonian exile (3.12; cf. 1.16; 4.9-10a) from the perspective of the Assyrian period (1.6). The fourfold repetition of ‘I will cut off’ (כרת) in Mic. 5.9-12 [10-13], says Mays, ‘sketches a programme of the eradication and removal of things offensive to Yahweh’s sovereignty’¹² – horses, chariots and strongholds (vv. 9-10 [10-11]), sorceries and fortune tellers (v. 11 [12]), carved images and pillars (v. 12 [13]). His people will be utterly devastated (2.4) and the guilty land-grabbers will have no descendants to claim their heritage in the congregation of Yahweh (2.5). There is no resting place because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction (2.10). Total desolation will become a reality because ‘Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height’ (3.12).

The sheer scale of God’s punishment is revealed in Zephaniah’s warning that

7. J.L. Mays, *Amos* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1969), 67.

8. G.F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972), 184.

9. Meyer, ‘Remnant’, 669.

10. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 189.

11. Regarding the function of Mic. 1.5, see J.D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 131-37.

12. J.L. Mays, *Micah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 125.

God will utterly sweep away everything 'from the face of the earth', including man and other living creatures (1.2-3); all the earth will be consumed in the fire of His jealousy (1.18; 3.8); and Yahweh will suddenly and completely destroy all the inhabitants of the earth (1.18). This is a 'reversal of creation'.¹³ Ball establishes that the exact Hebrew phrase מעל פני האדמה 'from the face of the earth' is used 13 times in the MT, all of them except Gen. 8.8 involving punishment.¹⁴ People can hardly hide and escape as God will search Jerusalem with lamps (1.12).

1.3 *Yahweh's Personal Intervention*

Amos, Micah and Zephaniah portray Yahweh as a god who is personally involved in human affairs. They cite Yahweh in the first person when He proclaims the planned judgment upon His people. Regarding the book of Amos, Wolff rightly observes, 'At least two thirds of the announcements of punishment attribute the impending end to Yahweh's own intervention, always using the first person of the messenger speech'.¹⁵ Take Amos 8.9-11 for instance. Yahweh declares, 'I will make the sun go down at noon'; 'I will turn your feasts into mourning'; 'I will bring sackcloth on every waist'; 'I will make it like the mourning for an only son'; and 'I will send a famine'. Similarly in Mic. 5.9-14 [10-15], Yahweh's first person announcement of judgment is quoted: 'I will cut off'; 'I will destroy'; 'I will throw down'; 'I will root out'; and 'I will execute vengeance'. In Zephaniah, God's relentless personal involvement in judgment is also clearly seen: 'I will sweep away' (1.2-3); 'I will cut off' (1.3, 4); 'I will stretch out My hand' (1.4); 'I will punish' (1.8-9, 12); 'I will search' (1.12); and 'I will bring distress' (1.17). Unequivocally, these three prophets all underscore that 'Yahweh is the agent of judgment, the driving force behind it'.¹⁶

God's personal involvement in His judgment in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah ironically contradicts the belief of some people. The sinners in Amos' time say, 'Disaster shall not overtake or meet us' (Amos 9.10). The land-grabbers, who stop Micah from preaching the doom message, say that 'disgrace will not overtake us' (Mic. 2.6). The peace prophets preach, 'Is not the LORD in the

13. M. DeRoche, 'Zephaniah I 2-3: The "Sweeping" of Creation', *VT* 30 (1980), 104-109 (106).

14. The 13 occurrences are: Gen. 4.14; 6.7; 7.4; 8.8; Exod. 32.12; Deut. 6.15; 1 Sam. 20.15; 1 Kgs 9.7; 13.34; Jer. 28.16; Amos 9.8; Zeph. 1.2, 3 (I.J. Ball, *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* [Berkeley: Bibal, 1988], 46).

15. Wolff lists God's first-person declarations, highlighting His personal intervention in judgment. See H.W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (trans. W. Janzen, S.D. McBride, Jr., and C.A. Muenchow, Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 102-103.

16. G.A. King, 'The Message of Zephaniah: An Urgent Echo', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32 (1996), 211-22 (215).

midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us' (Mic. 3.11). In Zephaniah the Jerusalemites' pride is well reflected by what they say in their hearts – 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill' (Zeph. 1.12), which Achtemeier regards as the central indictment in the book.¹⁷ Instead of being passive and detached, God takes an active role in cleansing the evil. However, God did not stop thereafter removing the wicked ones. More importantly, this purging of impurities gives birth to a remnant. The next section proceeds to investigate the common characteristics of remnant in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah.

2. *Remnant in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah*

Inevitably, the investigation of the remnant idea will have to tackle some important interpretative issues in the course of discussion, such as: the tension between total destruction and salvation; the tension between a remnant's vulnerability and strength; and the tension between human deeds and divine grace. First, we will examine the issue of total annihilation and salvation.

2.1 *Tension between Total Annihilation and Salvation*

Earlier in the essay, the totality of judgment in Amos, Micah and Zephaniah has been examined. It begs the question how a remnant can arise amidst total destruction. Take Amos as an example. In the face of the destruction of the sanctuary, Amos claims that no one can escape the calamity (Amos 9.1-6). Unexpectedly the juxtaposition of Amos 9.8b-10 with 9.1-6, 7-8a oddly, displays a tension between the totality of punishment and the salvation of survivors. Some key verses are singled out to demonstrate the dilemma:

not one of them shall flee away;
not one of them shall escape. (9.1b)

'Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom,
and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, (9.8a)

except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,' declares
the Lord.

'For behold, I will command, and shake the house of Israel
among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve,
but no pebble shall fall to the earth.

All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword,
who say, "Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.'" (9.8b-10)

17. E. Achtemeier, *Nahum – Malachi* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 69.

Nogalski rightly comments that Amos 9.8b-10 serves as an 'interpretative correction' to 9.7-8a. He further points out:

It [Amos 9.8b-10] seeks to explain the existence of survivors in light of an authoritative text which 'on the surface' appears to say there would be no survivors. By subtly altering the perspective through the use of a sieve metaphor, the author is able to keep the totality of judgment (all experience great upheaval), while at the same time limiting and accentuating the idea of the total destruction of those who paid no heed.¹⁸

That is to say, Amos 9.7-8a 'applies the message of judgment in its radical form' while Amos 9.8b-10 'qualifies the idea of total destruction' in 9.1-6, 7-8a 'by allowing the existence of a remnant and attempting an explanation for those who did not escape the fate of judgment'.¹⁹ Therefore, the sieve metaphor is skillfully used to unlock the dilemma between total destruction and the survival of the remnant.

In Micah the childbirth metaphor vividly exhibits the tension between the wailing pain of distress and great joy of salvation, which are juxtaposed in Micah 4.9-10. The writhing and groaning pain of deportation and exile is compared to the pains of a woman in labour (4.9-10a). However, the dilemma is resolved as Smith points out, 'The pains in childbirth can be excruciating but they normally conclude with a new life'.²⁰ Then there comes God's deliverance from the hands of the enemies (4.10b). It gives birth to a remnant. The totality of punishment is again implied as no one can escape such great pain.

Zephaniah desperately exhorts Judah, 'Gather (קָשַׁשׁ) together, yes, gather (קָשַׁשׁ), O shameless nation' (2.1). The Hebrew verb קָשַׁשׁ 'gather' is generally used in the sense of gathering straw or sticks, instead of gathering people.²¹ Here the straw metaphor is used to echo the preceding verse (1.18), which tells us that God's wrath will consume the world like fire. Now Judah is like straw, quickly burned. In Zeph. 2.3, however, the shelter/refuge metaphor is used and points out the possibility that a humble and righteous remnant might be 'hidden' (Niphal of סָתַר) and thus spared on the day of Yahweh's wrath. As Berlin comments, '[t]he totality and finality of the prophecy of destruction is moderated by

18. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors*, 103-104.

19. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors*, 121.

20. R.L. Smith, *Micah - Malachi* (WBC, 32; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 40.

21. F. Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs, *BDB* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 905; A. Berlin, *Zephaniah* (AB, 25A; New Heaven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), 95-96; M.A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 114-15.

a ray of last-minute hope'.²² The certainty of the remnant's salvation is affirmed later in 3.12, where the shelter metaphor is once again used, stating that God will leave (שאר) a humble and lowly people, who shall 'seek refuge' (חסה) in the name of the LORD. On the one hand, the shelter metaphor qualifies the total destruction announced by Zephaniah (1.2-3, 18; 2.1; 3.8), but on the other it explains the existence of a remnant.

Throughout Amos, Micah and Zephaniah, the totality of God's judgment seems to contradict His salvation at first glance. However, the use of different metaphors in these books serves to explain such a paradox.

2.2 *Tension between the Remnant's Vulnerability and Strength*

The remnant is described as both weak and strong. Picking up some points from both Amos and Micah, Zephaniah brings such a stark contrast to a fuller expression. In His future plan, Yahweh has a special purpose for them – a people with special characteristics.

2.2.1 Powerlessness

Regarding the characteristics of a remnant, both Zephaniah and Micah identify this group of survivors as 'the lame' (הצלעה; Mic. 4.7; Zeph. 3.19) and 'the outcast' (הנהלאה; Mic. 4.7; הנדחה; Zeph. 3.19) who have gone into exile and are dispersed over different places. The Lord will assemble and bring them back to their homeland (Mic. 2.12-13; 4.6; 7.12; Zeph. 3.18-20; cf. Isa. 11.11-16). They are afflicted and taunted by their oppressors (Mic. 7.10; Zeph. 2.8, 10; 3.15, 19). Zephaniah gives a fuller description of this remnant: they suffer without appointed feasts because they cannot worship in Jerusalem during the diaspora (Zeph. 3.18); they are depicted as 'all the humble of the earth' (כל־ענוי הארץ), who 'seek humility' in Zeph. 2.3, and 'a people humble and lowly/poor' (עמי עני ודל) in Zeph. 3.12 (cf. Isa. 2.11-12; 3.16-4.4). A summary of this section shows that Yahweh is the defender of the humble, poor and needy.

2.2.2 Spiritual Strength

As Anderson points out, the concept of remnant must be understood in a positive instead of a negative sense. They are not survivors, who represent the doom of the disaster.²³ Instead, they are survivors of past punishment, who exemplify the quality of the people of God, which will constitute a purified community. Both Amos and Zephaniah imply that the remnant is a people, who respond

22. Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 100.

23. G.W. Anderson, 'The Idea of the Remnant in the Book of Zephaniah', *ASTI* 11 (1977-78), 11-14; idem, 'Some Observations on the Old Testament Doctrine of the Remnant', *TGUOS* 23 (1969-70), 1-10.

positively to the prophets' exhortation to seek Yahweh (בקש Zeph. 2.3; דרש Amos 5.4-6). They do justice (משפט Amos 5.15; Zeph. 2.3), seek righteousness (צדקה Amos 5.24; צדק Zeph. 2.3) and humility (Zeph. 2.3; 3.12). They hate evil and love good (Amos 5.14-15). Specifically they exhibit justice and righteousness in their treatment of others: doing no injustice (עולה), speaking no lies and refraining from deceitful tongue (Zeph. 3.13).

Even though Micah does not explicitly tell us the spiritual qualities of a remnant as Amos and Zephaniah do, he does spell out what God requires of His people: 'He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice (משפט), and to love kindness (חסד), and to walk humbly (הצנע לכת) with your God?' (Mic. 6.8). Micah implies that a remnant who truly repents is presumably willing to live up to this expectation. 'The characteristics of the remnant mark them as the true people of God. They are in a right relationship with their Lord, being deeply committed to Him.'²⁴

2.3 God's Transformation to the Remnant

Apart from the distinct characteristics discussed above, the remnant will be further transformed by God to be a strong and glorious nation. Before addressing how Yahweh transforms them, it is important to recognize who this Transformer is.

2.3.1 Yahweh as King of kings

The theme of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom is stressed in both Amos and Micah. On that day Yahweh will raise up, repair, and rebuild the 'booth of David', which is fallen (Amos 9.11). Here the 'booth of David' refers to the 'united Israel' instead of the house 'in the sense of dynastic lineage'.²⁵ The fallen 'booth of David' refers to the division of the united monarchy after the death of Solomon. Not only does the remnant enjoy the restoration of the Davidic kingdom (9.11), but also they enjoy peace and security (9.15), which is bestowed by Yahweh God of Hosts (יהוה אלהי צבאות). The variant forms of יהוה אלהי צבאות occur 9 times in Amos (3.13; 4.13; 5.14, 15, 16, 27; 6.8; 6.14; 9.5).²⁶ This divine epithet 'designates the enthroned, powerful god in his majesty'.²⁷

24. G.A. King, 'The Remnant in Zephaniah', *BS* 151 (1994), 414-27 (420).

25. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 210.

26. The variant expressions are: יהוה אלהי הצבאות (3.13); אלהי הצבאות (6.14); and אדני יהוה הצבאות (9.5).

27. S. Kreuzer, 'Zebaoth – Der Thronende', *VT* 56 (2006), 347-62 (362). See also J.P. Ross, 'Jahweh Seba'ot in Samuel and Psalms', *VT* 17 (1967), 76-92; E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (vol. 2; trans. M.E. Biddle; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 1045.

Yahweh is the majestic God-King, who is able to judge all nations and restore the Davidic rule and the remnant.

Micah parallels Amos in highlighting God's restoration of the Davidic kingdom (Mic. 5.1-4a [2-5a]). A king will emerge from Bethlehem Ephrathah. Both Bethlehem and Ephrathah are related to David in terms of 'geographical location and family identification'²⁸ – low status, small size, no power and influence (cf. Ruth 1.2; 1 Sam. 17.12; Ps. 132.6). God chooses someone, who is considered as the most impossible candidate to carry out His mission. God says that this new ruler will come forth 'for me' (5.1 [2]) and he will find strength and authority in the Lord to stand and feed his flock (5.3 [4]). The new ruler's submission to God – the True King of Israel – is vividly indicated here. With his total subordination to God, he brings peace to his people ('the remnant', 5.4a [5a]), who can dwell securely (5.3 [4]). He will become great among the nations (5.3 [4]).

Both Micah and Zephaniah portray Yahweh as the King who will rule over the restored community and personally dwell in their midst. Micah proclaims, 'The LORD will reign over them (the remnant) in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore' (Mic. 4.7). Not only does Yahweh appoint a new king (Mic. 5.1-4a [2-5a]), but also He will be the King among the restored in Mount Zion (Mic. 4.7). No wonder they become a strong and secure nation (4.7; 5.3 [4]). Without mentioning the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom, Zephaniah in turn echoes Micah, announcing 'The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst' (Zeph. 3.15c; cf. 3.17). Because of the presence of their God-King the restored remnant shall never again fear evil (Zeph. 3.15d).

This analysis reveals that Yahweh, who appoints the new ruler of the Davidic kingdom, is the True King of Israel. He is actually the King of kings, who brings true security and peace to His people. How this Transformer will transform His people is discussed below.

2.3.2 Victory over the Enemies

The identification of a remnant as 'the lame', 'the outcast', 'the sufferer' and 'the oppressed' seems to highlight the lowliness, vulnerability and weakness of this people. However, this is not the whole picture of the remnant. Actually the Lord will transform them into a strong nation.

The remnant's victory over their enemies is reiterated throughout the book of Micah. God clearly states that He will turn the remnant into 'a strong nation' (4.7; גוי עצום), which contrasts sharply with the present image of 'powerlessness'

28. D.J. Simundson, 'The Book of Micah', in L.E. Keck (ed.), *NIB* (vol. 7; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 570.

in 4.6,²⁹ where the 'lame female' (הַצִּלְעָה) metaphor is used to depict the remnant as an afflicted woman being driven away. Then Zion will repossess her former dominion and have their king again (4.8). When God gathers the nations to punish Zion, she suffers like a woman in labour pain (4.9-10a). However, God will redeem His people from the hand of the enemies (4.10b). Instead of being like a woman in labour, Zion now becomes like a mighty threshing cow with iron horns and bronze hoofs, beating many peoples (like sheaves) into pieces (4.12-13). Again, the remnant's defeat of their enemies is vividly portrayed when God promises them: 'Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off' (5.8 [9]; cf. 5.5b-6) and 'in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey' (5.14 [15]).

Micah 7.7-10 highlights that God will vindicate Zion by shaming her enemy,³⁰ who is rejoicing over Jerusalem's defeat (7.8) and taunting her by asking: 'Where is the LORD your God?' (7.10a). But when God brings justice to Zion, calamity and humiliation will in turn befall her enemy (7.10b). The situation will be reversed, even though the enemy is now enjoying the upper hand. Further vindication is promised in Mic. 7.11-13.³¹ People from all nations will come to Jerusalem, from Assyria and Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain (7.12; cf. 4.1-2). And the rest of the earth will become desolate (7.13).

In the oracles against the nations (Zeph. 2.4-15), God declares His punishment upon: a) Judah's smaller neighbouring rivals, i.e. Philistia in the *west* (2.4-7), Moab and Ammon in the *east* (2.8-11), the Ethiopians/Cushites in the *south* (2.12); and b) larger distant superpowers, i.e. Assyria in the *north* (2.13-15). Floyd rightly states that the two geopolitical categories of nations and their four cardinal directions 'represent the totality of the world situation viewed from Judah's perspective'.³² God's intervention in punishing the nations paves the way to Judah's possession of their enemies' land, which will be discussed in the next section.

29. For the discussion of the contrast, see E. Ben Zvi, *Micah* (FOTL, 21B; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 112.

30. In this section the speaker and enemy are not identified, but both are female. They may refer to two countries or cities. Zion is most probably the speaker. D.N. Freedman, *Micah* (AB, 24E; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 576.

31. Here it is a different voice (a priest or a prophet) asserting the congregation about God's future acts for them. Zion (feminine pronominal suffix) now shifts from speaker to addressee (Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 175-76).

32. M.H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets II* (FOTL, 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 204.

2.3.3 Territorial Extension

Amos, Micah and Zephaniah all speak of the remnant's territorial expansion. Apart from enjoying their own land, the remnant even extends their borders by defeating their former enemies and possessing their territories.

Amos 9.12 points out that in the restoration they will 'possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name'. Israel and Edom have a long history of rivalry, which dates back to the time of the Exodus and Israel's journey to Canaan (Exod. 15.15; Num. 20.14-21; Judg. 11.17-18; 1 Sam. 14.47; 2 Sam. 8.13-14; 1 Kgs 11.15-16; 2 Kgs 8.20-22; 14.7-10; 2 Chron. 25.11-12; 28.16-18, etc.). Edom may well represent Israel's enemies throughout the Israelite history. Now God promises that Edom and all other nations will be in the remnant's control.

The theme of territorial extension appears in Micah too. On that day, Jerusalem's broken city walls will be rebuilt. Such a rebuilding points to the restoration of the nation's fortune. Not only will she restore the domination of her territory, but her border will also be far extended (ירחקהק, Mic. 7.11).

In Zephaniah God not only cuts off the nations (Zeph. 2.4-15; 3.6) and clears away the remnant's enemies (Zeph. 3.15), He even allows the remnant of Judah to possess the former territories of Philistia, Moab and Ammon (Zeph. 2.7a, 9b). The seacoast (Philistia) belongs to the remnant of Judah, who will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon in the evening (Zeph. 2.7a) because God will be mindful of them and restore (פקד) their fortunes (Zeph. 2.7b). The verb פקד is usually used in contexts where God will 'visit' or 'punish' (e.g. Zeph. 1.8, 9, 12; 3.7). However, in Zeph. 2.7b, פקד connotes a positive meaning of 'restore' instead of a negative sense of punishment.³³ Because of their arrogance and taunt against God's people, Moab and Ammon will be laid waste like Sodom and Gomorrah (Zeph. 2.8-9a). The remnant of Yahweh's people shall plunder them and possess their land (Zeph. 2.9b).

2.3.4 Complete Security

After describing how God deals with the people's enemies, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah all describe the restored remnant enjoying the complete security with nothing to fear (Amos 9.15; Mic. 5.3-4 [4-5]; Zeph. 3.13). The metaphor of planting is employed in Amos 9.15 to assure Yahweh's promises of security to Israel. Yahweh will plant Israelites upon their own land and never again pluck them up (Amos 9.15; cf. Jer. 1.10; 18.7; 31.28) when the Davidic Rule is restored (Amos 9.11).

Micah 5.3-4 [4-5] uses the metaphor of a shepherd to highlight the Davidic Ruler's protection over the remnant, as a shepherd watching over his flock.

33. For the diametrically different meanings of פקד, see Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 131.

Israel will dwell securely (5.3b [4b]) when the new monarch is established and it shall be recognized until the ends of the earth. And this will be peace to them (5.4 [5]).

In Zeph. 3.13 the remnant of Yahweh's people, as sheep, shall 'pasture/graze' (רעה) and 'lie down' (רבוץ) in their land (cf. Zeph. 2.7; Hos. 2.20 [18]; Ps. 23.1-2) with none to disturb them (cf. Ps. 23.4). The image of Israel as sheep indicates that 'the enemies of the remnant of Israel, both external and internal, are no longer present to endanger God's flock'.³⁴ Echoing Amos and Micah, Zephaniah also underscores the complete peace and security that the remnant will enjoy.

2.3.5 Remnant's Elevation among the Nations

Micah and Zephaniah travel beyond Amos regarding God's raising the remnant over the nations. In Micah the remnant's relationship to the nations is first described as 'dew' or 'rain', giving life to the natural world (5.6 [7]). They are then portrayed as a 'lion', threatening its prey (5.7 [8]). The remnant of Jacob, as Waltke says, 'will be at the same time a source of benediction and a fomenter of misfortune; a channel of salvation and a cause of punishment; an instrument of hope and tragedy'.³⁵ Their relationship to the nations can be both beneficial and threatening.

In addition to God's gathering the exiles and delivering them from the oppressors, God also promises the remnant in Zeph. 3.19, 'I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth'. Then He reiterates the same point in the next verse, 'Indeed I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes' (Zeph. 3.20). The 'praise' and 'renown' of the remnant among the nations will 'provide a basis by which Yahweh will be praised and recognized throughout the entire world', as Sweeney comments.³⁶

2.4 *Tension between Human Repentance and Divine Sovereignty*

House rightly points out that 'the Twelve argues for the need of repentance'.³⁷ Regarding the survival of the remnant, repentance is required in each of the three books under consideration. In Amos the significance of repentance is

34. Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 137.

35. B.K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 317.

36. M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (vol. 2; Berit Olam; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 524.

37. P.R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (JSOTSup, 97; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 88.

showed by God's fivefold repetition of 'yet you did not return to me' (4.6, 8, 9, 10, 11), which is uttered after each of the past punishments – famine (4.6), drought (4.7-8), agricultural disaster (4.9), pestilence and war (4.10) and the fates of the cities of the plain (4.11). Obviously the Israelites did not return to God despite the divine judgment. Therefore, the worst is yet to come (4.12). In this context Amos exhorts the Israelites in 5.4, 'Seek (דרש) Yahweh, then you shall live (חיה)'.

The second imperative 'live' (חיה) states the result of the first imperative 'seek' (דרש).³⁸ Amos warns against the seeking of the sanctuaries (Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba) in 5.5. The Israelites are challenged to choose between God Himself and mere cultic activities (e.g. feasts, solemn assemblies, burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings and songs in 5.21-23). 'Their sanctuaries will be destroyed; their Saviour will not.'³⁹ Amos 5.6 and 5.14-15 serve as an 'interpretation' of 5.4-5.⁴⁰ 'Seek God' is the way to avoid the fate of death (5.6). 'Seek God' (5.4) is to 'seek good, and not evil' (5.14) and to 'hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate' (5.15a). 'Perhaps' (אולי) Yahweh will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (5.15b).

Amos reiterates the need for turning to God. However, the adverb 'perhaps' (אולי) indicates that good deeds cannot guarantee God's deliverance on the day of Yahweh. It is all from His grace. The flickering possibility of salvation is finally assured in Amos 9.8: 'Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, *except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob.*' It is only until God promises the restoration of the Davidic kingdom (9.11-15) that the salvation of the remnant is further affirmed. After all, the remnant cannot owe their salvation to their good deeds.

Micah also stresses the need of repentance for both Israelites and the nations. The sins of Judah have reached the climax in the final chapter when the speaker of the lament points out that 'the godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind' (Mic. 7.2). Sin infects everyone, from the leaders (7.3) to the individuals among the neighbours, friends and family members (7.5-6). The personified Zion confesses her sin on behalf of her people (7.9). Smith makes a good observation, 'For the first time in Micah we read of the people's confession of sin'.⁴¹ More importantly, such a confession serves as

38. The first imperative carries the sense of a condition, whereas the second functions as a telic clause. H.F.W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch and A.E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 1910), § 110-11.

39. D. Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah* (WBC, 31; Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 346.

40. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 240, 250.

41. Smith, *Micah – Malachi*, 58.

a bridge between all the sins in the preceding contexts (6.9–7.6) and the final conclusion (7.18–20). They must confess their sins if they are to be forgiven (7.18–20). House states, ‘Even the hopeful conclusion to Micah (7.18–20) is based on a confession of sin and plea for pardon’.⁴² When the hymn of doxology spells out, ‘Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?’ (7.18a), it shows clearly that the remnant must confess their sins. It is God’s own nature – slowness to anger, steadfast love, compassion and faithfulness – that He treads our iniquities under foot and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (7.18b–20). Confession of sin is no doubt necessary, but forgiveness of sin is mainly because of God’s grace and mercy. So no human deeds can earn salvation.

In face of the impending threat posed by the Day of Yahweh, Zephaniah addresses the humble, who do God’s commands and who seek (בקש) Yahweh, righteousness and humility (Zeph. 2.3). This verse contrasts with 1.6: ‘Those who do not seek the LORD’. The verb בקש usually refers to oracular divination or cultic inquiry. Sweeney rightly points out that ‘the present context requires only that it functions in its general sense of seeking or turning to Yahweh’.⁴³ Actually, Zephaniah’s exhortation is a call to repentance. Similarly to Amos 5.15b, ‘perhaps’ (אולי) is used to highlight the possibility of being sheltered from the day of Yahweh’s wrath. Smith makes the following comment:

The word ‘perhaps’ speaks volumes. The prophet would not presume on the prerogative of Yahweh to determine who would or would not be hidden. Zephaniah, like Amos (cf. 5.15), knew that not even righteousness nor humility could guarantee a person’s safety. That was all in the hand of Yahweh.⁴⁴

Human repentance is significant, but it cannot manipulate God. People may hope for His forgiveness and compassion, but they cannot command it. The note of ‘perhaps’ (אולי) ‘preserves the absolute sovereignty and freedom of Yahweh’.⁴⁵ The LXX in turn removes the ambiguity of אולי in both Amos 5.15 and Zeph. 2.3 by employing ὅπως (‘in order that’ in English translation) to give a sense of certainty as to the remnant’s deliverance on the Day of Yahweh if they follow the prophets’ instructions.⁴⁶

The existence of a remnant is affirmed in Zephaniah when God promises that the remnant will possess the deserted Philistine territory (2.7) and disinherit the

42. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 87.

43. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 119.

44. Smith, *Micah – Malachi*, 132.

45. King, ‘The Remnant in Zephaniah’, 421.

46. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 119–20.

land of Moab and Ammon (2.9). The assurance of the remnant's deliverance has become crystal clear when God unequivocally utters: 'But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD' (3.12). Zephaniah demonstrates a gradual movement from a doubtful uncertainty (2.3) to a full assurance (3.12) regarding God's saving the remnant.

To sum up, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah all stress the need of repentance. By using the adverb 'perhaps' (Amos 5.5; Zeph. 2.3) both Amos and Zephaniah 'do not compel Yahweh's decision to save a remnant'.⁴⁷ However, they both affirm the existence of a remnant later in the books (Amos 9.11-15; Zeph. 2.7, 9; 3.12). Micah highlights God's nature of compassion, faithfulness, slowness to anger and forgiveness (7.18-20), which cannot substitute human repentance (7.9). The balance between human deeds and divine sovereignty is appropriately concluded by Hasel's statement:

Human action cannot be a substitute for God's action nor can God's action be a substitute for human action. Each has its proper sphere. There will be no remnant without God's grace just as little as there will be a remnant without man's return to God.⁴⁸

2.5 *Equalization between Israel and the Nations*

Amos, Micah and Zephaniah all point out that Yahweh is the universal God, who treats Israel and the nations equally. Amos uses the oracles against the foreign nations (Amos 1.1-2.3) to engage the Israelites in their own violation of God's commands. The accusations directed against the nations, with which Israel agrees, in turn point against the Israelites themselves. Amos tries to make his audience admit thoroughly that they are transgressors, like other nations. The equal status between Israel and the foreign nations is well expressed by the following rhetorical questions:

Pass over to Calneh, and see,
and from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?
Or is their territory greater than your territory? (Amos 6.2)
Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people
of Israel?

47. King, 'The Message of Zephaniah', 217.

48. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 206.

Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Captor and the Syrians from Kir? (Amos 9.7)

Israel is no better and no worse than other nations (Amos 6.2). God saved Israel from Egypt, in the same manner that He saved the Philistines from Captor and the Syrians from Kir (Amos 9.7). Overall, Amos emphasizes more God's equal treatment to both Israel and the nations regarding His judgment. Wolff aptly remarks, 'The most surprising consequence is therefore the equalization of the nations with Israel and of Israel with the nations; the nations stand, just as does Israel, under Yahweh's guidance'.⁴⁹ Despite a brief declaration about God's salvation of a remnant of His people (Amos 5.4-6, 14-15; 9.8-15), Amos does not mention anything about the nations' future restoration, to which more weight is given by both Micah and Zephaniah.

Like Amos, both Micah and Zephaniah target foreign nations for punishment (Zeph. 2.4-15; 3.6-8; Mic. 5.14 [15]; 7.13). Unlike Amos, Micah and Zephaniah take God's salvation of the nations into account. Alongside the future restoration of the remnant of all Israel in Zion (Mic. 4.6-7), Micah sketches a picture of worldwide peace in which the nations will stream to Zion to learn the law of Yahweh and to walk in His way (Mic. 4.2). Peace is made possible because Yahweh shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far off. Their military weapons will become agricultural tools. There will be no more war and threat between the nations (Mic. 4.3-4). 'This universal empire will be ruled by Yahweh'⁵⁰ and Zion will be the centre of the universal worship, to which the remnant's restoration is closely tied.

Like Amos (1.3-2.3), Zephaniah deals with specific foreign nations (2.4-15). Zephaniah proclaims that Moab and Ammon will be like Sodom and Gomorrah because of their pride (Zeph. 2.10) and Nineveh will be destroyed because of her sense of invincibility (Zeph. 2.15a). Yahweh will pour out upon the nations His indignation and consume all the earth in the fire of His jealousy (Zeph. 3.6-8). However, '[God's] punishment of all nations is intended to bring about a transformation of human nature'.⁵¹ Like Micah (4.1-4), Zephaniah speaks of the nations' future conversion and their universal worship. Yahweh will change the speech (שפה) of the peoples to a pure speech, so that all of them may call upon Yahweh's name and serve Him with one accord (Zeph. 3.9-10). The story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) is reversed. God restores 'precisely the capacity that was lost when Yahweh disrupted humanity's unified attempt to build a towering city, confused their "speech" (שפה, Gen. 11.9a), and scattered

49. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 106.

50. Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 105.

51. Floyd, *Minor Prophets II*, 209.

them over the face of the earth', as Floyd maintains.⁵² The transformation of the nations (Zeph. 3.10) is brought out side by side with the restoration of the remnant of Israel (Zeph. 3.11-20).

Overall, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah all point out the equalization between Israel and the nations with their different foci. God treats both Israel and the nations equally in terms of their punishment and salvation.

2.6 Yahweh's Joy over His People's Salvation

It is worth noting that the description 'He [Yahweh] will rejoice over you with gladness; he will be silent in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing' in Zeph. 3.17 adds a unique nuance to the concept of remnant.⁵³ The Hebrew clause יחריש באהבתו in Zeph. 3.17 is rendered differently among scholars. The translation varies from 'he will renew you in his love' (NRSV) to 'he will quiet you with his love' (NIV). However, the literal sense 'He will be silent in his love' is preferred here. Explaining Yahweh's silence, Keil remarks: 'Silence in His love is an expression used to denote love deeply felt, which is absorbed in its object with thoughtfulness and admiration'.⁵⁴ King's comment resonates with Keil's:

Perhaps the greatest difficulty with this understanding of the word is how to conceive of Yahweh having such great love for His people. The thought of Yahweh being so enraptured in His affection for the remnant that He lapses into silence is almost unfathomable for some people. But regardless of the reason for Yahweh's silence, though He may be initially mute in His immense love for the remnant, He cannot remain that way. His joy over the remnant is so great that He cannot contain it. He bursts into joyful cheers, cheers that echo those the remnant shouted when they were delivered (Zeph. 3.14).⁵⁵

Zephaniah's most thrilling description of Yahweh's joy over the remnant's salvation has contributed to our understanding of His unfathomable love and passion for His people.

52. Floyd, *Minor Prophets II*, 209.

53. King, 'The Message of Zephaniah', 221, n.22.

54. C.F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (vol. 2; Commentaries on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 161.

55. King, 'The Remnant in Zephaniah', 424.

3. Summary

In Amos, Micah and Zephaniah the remnant witnesses to both judgment and salvation. 'As this concept was deepened by the prophets it expressed no facile optimism, but a faith purged in the fire.'⁵⁶ The remnant is made up of those who are lowly, lame and outcast. However, they witness how God transforms them into a strong people and how He takes care of the needy and vulnerable. In addition, the remnant well demonstrates the quality of the true people of God – faith, humility, righteousness, goodness and so on. However; they cannot owe their salvation to this good quality because it is only by God's grace that they are able to survive. That is to say, 'the remnant witnesses to the grace of God'.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the remnant witnesses to the conversion of the nations, to world peace and to universal worship at Zion. The remnant people witness to the universal God, who reigns over all nations and equalizes Israel with the nations. Most thrillingly, they witness to a god who rejoices over their salvation with loud singing. From Him, a remnant receives 'true security', 'real peace', 'genuine love' and 'lasting hope'.⁵⁸

56. D.M. Warne, 'The Origin, Development and Significance of the Concept of the Remnant in the Old Testament' (unpublished doctoral dissertation; University of Edinburgh, 1958), 144.

57. Warne, 'The Origin, Development and Significance', 145.

58. Hasel, 'The Remnant', 403.